

### **Research Journal Entry Two**

Looking at Basha Chakrabarti's *It's a Blue World* intrigued me because it went against the readings we had to do for the class. As Aitken and Crane say, "You need to first read through and around the context of your image. It is important to know something about all aspects of the image that pique your interest. (Aitken and Craine 260)" Coming into class, I did not know anything about this artwork. I was unaware of its context and frankly did not like it. It looked like any other "ordinary quilt" to me, with a map stitched into it. Having us interpret the artwork without any context was an intriguing activity because it made us aware of our biases and helped us examine our default frame of reference for looking at this and other artworks in the museum. Our unawareness of the art also made us create wild interpretations based on the visual cues present. If we had known the context and then made to interpret *It's a Blue World*, I feel we would have been less creative as a group. Learning the context of the artwork after creating our interpretations helped us compare and contrast our views and ideas with the artist's. The fact that different people had different perspectives when looking at the same artwork was fascinating and worrying. People of different backgrounds interpret art differently, adding to its natural beauty. These diverse interpretations of visualizations/art can also lead to absurd assumptions and conclusions, which geographers need to be aware of when sharing their fieldwork data and study findings/results with colleagues and people of different backgrounds. Like art, contextual data is essential for the interpretation of visualizations of geographic data by those whose areas of expertise do not lie in the topic of study. Although we misinterpreted multiple aspects of the artwork, our misinterpretations were nonconsequential. Misinterpretation by those in policy-making power, however, would be consequential because of the policy's impacts on human activities and the environment. Hence, when geographers share visualizations of data, contextual data is essential for the audience to understand the study and the data through the visualization appropriately.

Although context is essential for the visual interpretation of an artwork, a complete visual analysis of art is also needed to ensure the viewer/interpreter of the artwork considers all aspects of the art. Upon looking at *It's a Blue World* for the first time, I could identify the different trade routes that the Chakrabarti had mapped from my high school history and civics classes, where I learned about the spice trade and its impact on India. Chakrabarti's map, however, mapped the precolonial and colonial trade routes of indigo globally. One aspect of the trade routes that I did not initially consider was the color of the thread used to represent the route. A

blue thread, which was hard to identify from the indigo and blue backgrounds, represented the precolonial trade route. The artist might have used blue/indigo to map the precolonial route, in contrast to gold for colonial trade routes, because the trade of indigo in these routes was more ethically sourced. This color contrasts the gold used to represent the colonial trade routes of indigo, which transported indigo produced from forced/indentured/slave labor. Someone in class pointed out that the artist used a chain stitch to make the colonial trade routes to represent the binding of natives to exploitive colonial settlers. This artwork reflects reality because it highlights the many details the artist packed into this piece to visualize how interconnected reality is. In this artwork, Chakrabarti highlights colonial trade routes with gold to connect the greed of the traders and the trade routes they used. The interconnectedness can also be seen in the medium used for the art. Many different fabrics of various indigo shades were connected by the artist to form one quilt. Geographers looking to study one aspect of life on Earth often have to look into and understand other interconnected elements. Hence, understanding the interconnectedness and being mindful of the numerous details of things around us would aid a geographer's visual analysis by helping them gain a complete understanding of the topic of study. This awareness is necessary because overlooking details would impact our understanding of the world. In *Visual Methodologies*, Gillian Rose describes the importance of understanding a visualization of data by writing, "To understand a visualization is thus to enquire into its provenance and into the social work that it does. It is to note its principles of inclusion and exclusion," (Rose 11). Geographers, in particular, need to be aware of the power of visualization because of the educative role they play to the general public. Geographers create visual representations of trends from data to share with and educate the public. Thus, choosing what aspects of the data to represent and what to exclude can drastically affect the social work of the visualization. Politicians, whose areas of expertise do not often lie in geography, might use visual representations of geospatial data to aid their decision-making and planning, or the public might develop a skewed perspective that they might not question or study further. In both cases, the environment is ultimately affected by the policies/decisions we make as a society to control our behaviors and interactions with natural resources and environments around us.

One aspect of art is evoking certain emotions in the viewer. In *Ways of Seeing*, Jon Berger says, "We never just look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (Rose 12). This quote highlights the different emotions people experience when looking at the same piece of artwork. For geographers, this quote can increase awareness of their personal biases in their research and studies. When completing visual analyses, geographers need to ensure that their study results are as free as possible from

personal bias. This method of visual analysis helps fairly represent the different topics being studied by the geographer to the public. This awareness would also help the geographer develop neutral visualizations to educate the public on their research areas.

In conclusion, visual analysis is a tool that geographers can use to better understand various topics of their research and study. Like art, contextual geographies are interconnected and highly detailed. By completing a thorough and precise visual analysis, geographers can better understand the connections between the study topic and its context and effectively communicate the results to the public.

#### Works Cited

- Aitken, Stuart C., and James Craine. "Visual Methodologies: What you see is not always what you get." *Affective Geovisualizations*, 2006, pp. 250-269, [https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/60723/pages/reading-1-aitken-and-craine-2013?module\\_item\\_id=685185](https://canvas.dartmouth.edu/courses/60723/pages/reading-1-aitken-and-craine-2013?module_item_id=685185). Accessed 07 October 2023.
- Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies*. Sage Publications, 2001. *Canvas*, [https://dartmouth.instructure.com/courses/60723/pages/reading-1-rose-1994?module\\_item\\_id=685194](https://dartmouth.instructure.com/courses/60723/pages/reading-1-rose-1994?module_item_id=685194). Accessed 08 October 2023.