

Recent shifts to consider visual culture as the basis for art education places more emphasis on teachers and students working together as they incorporate significant life experiences (past and present) in shaping education for the future. Because visual culture is in flux, and not clearly defined (Tavin & Hausman, 2004), art educators should have the flexibility to apply variations of its main components to individual practices.

Some main components of visual culture-oriented art education (VCAE) are (1)allowances to accept and incorporate past practices as noted by Duncum (2002) and Van Camp (2004); (2)analysis, evaluation, and critique of present practices and contemporary culture (Eisner, 2001; Tavin, 2003); (3)deconstruction to incorporate or (re)construct the new (Tavin, 2003); (4)focus on everyday human experiences (Duncum, 2002; Tavin, 2003; Tavin & Hausman, 2004; Van Camp, 2004). A focus on everyday human experiences is the element that holds constant within sources reviewed.

**Visual culture**, according to Tavin (2003) may be “defined at any given moment through its construction and context within specific discursive spaces” (p. 201) and as a “transdisciplinary practice, does not negate or discount all disciplinary areas of inquiry – it merely refuses to remain confined to restricted parameters defined by experts in a given field” (p.208).

**Transdisciplinary** is further defined as “crossing and challenging discipline boundaries in order to provide a useful set of provisional theoretical collaborations” (Tavin, 2003, p.208). Ideas related to transdisciplinary are “interdisciplinary” (p.202), “social relatedness” (p.197), and “interstandings” (p.204): these ideas aim to make connections. Tavin also noted transdisciplinarity to be part of critical pedagogy when dealing with everyday elements.

**Critical pedagogy** is “rooted in a democratic ethos that attends to the practices of teaching and learning and focuses on lived experiences with the intention to disrupt, contest, and transform systems of oppression...focuses on classrooms...as places of production and exchange” (Tavin, 2003, p.198). Critical pedagogy requires investigation, understanding, intervention, and connections.

By reasoning that art should not be “scientific” (Van Camp, 2004, p.36) visual culture should not forgo the human element of **aesthetics** (value judgments and appeals) and art making as valuable components in art education (Duncum, 2002; Van Camp, 2004). Van Camp proposed that art educators can

reframe this shift from aesthetics to social science as one from evaluation to description...whether the value judgments regard in human behavior (ethics) or the arts (aesthetic judgments), the challenge is not to banish those judgments but to confront and understand them. (p. 36)

Past experiences in art education have been connected with ideas “exclusively from the museum realm... [with] culture as a hierarchy” (Tavin, 2003, p.197). Visual culture aims to remove the “exclusivity” of just aesthetics, self-expression, discipline based art education, or formalism (Van Camp, 2004) and replaces it with inclusions, shifts, expansions, and deconstruction: inclusions of art outside of museums, shifts in how teachers learn what to teach, expansions to connect other (cultural, social, etc.) studies, and deconstruction in how learners may view art as visual culture.

According to Eisner (2001), problems with studying visual culture are the affects of (1) politics that may not always be at the root of why educators pursue their careers; and (2) analysis that changes students from artistic producers to analytical spectators. These obstacles may be overcome by allowing the natural tendencies of educators and their students to guide class dynamics. In other words, educators should have the flexibility to apply variations of the main components of visual culture in order to suit the interests of their students. In turn, students’ interests should guide educators in how they teach and what they may gain in learning from their students.

An ideal visual cultural study unit would incorporate the main components and key terms noted, with a focus on the everyday human experiences of life (i.e. the human element). It is up to the educator to make connections to bridge teaching and learning as a two-way communication within the classroom. These bridges should be open to discussion, exploration, and the possibilities within visual culture. Furthermore, in-class relationships should be linked with out-of-class issues relevant to students’ lives, locally and globally: peers/friends, fashion/merchandise, media, communication/language, food/famine, sports/competition, economics/careers, government/politics, community, family, education, health, etc.

Robert Lange and Peter Max are living American artists whose art and careers allow for immediate connections to contemporary and popular visual culture. Lange has been noted to be a hyper-surrealist, with a straightforward approach to fine art when he states, “I paint simple (<http://www.robertlangestudios.com> January 26, 2013).” He exemplifies classical training and production as a professional oil painter, with works that speak of contemporary life. His works are displayed in the quiet setting of the studio he founded and shares with other artists. Max is a well-publicized illustrator and graphic artist whose works have been licensed by corporations, reproduced as merchandise, and featured in magazines and talk shows ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Max\\_January\\_26](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Max_January_26), 2013). His works have been highly visible and available in galleries nationwide (<http://www.petermax.com/> January 26, 2013).

Relating Lange and Max in a (high school) study unit on visual culture would begin with a discussion of art as a career in today’s world. Both painters are professionals in their fields: Lange in the “fine art” world, with the aesthetics of museum-quality art for collectors to purchase; Max in the “commercial art” world, with a global reach in multi-media works. After viewing websites for each artist, students would be asked to analyze the different art worlds, and formulate conclusions as to the success of each artist. What are measures of success: wealth, fame, notoriety, ownership, happiness, contentedness, or other criteria? Who are the viewers for each artist? How does each artist reach his viewers? What is the essence of his art: what particular message(s) are conveyed? What is his artistic background/training? What is his artistic style/medium(s)? Which artist is successful? Is one artist more successful than the other; if so, how? In making a connection to popular culture, Peter Max would also be exemplary with his extensive work in the fields of merchandise and commercial art.



Artist: Peter Max, German/American (1937 - ) Title: Collectible Watch 8 - Year: 1988 - Face Size: 1.63 in. x 1.63 in. (4.13 cm x 4.13 cm) - Price: \$300 ([http://www.rogallery.com/Max\\_peter/Collectibles/max-watch-8.html](http://www.rogallery.com/Max_peter/Collectibles/max-watch-8.html) January 27, 2013).

After discussions, students would brainstorm on the other possibilities of careers in art as they consider the realm of contemporary visual culture. By answering similar questions of themselves, they would formulate future art careers that might fit their training, styles, essences, and viewers. Art production would involve creating a piece of representative work (e.g. painting for the fine artist, cartoon strip for the animator, graphic art for the logo designer) for the anticipated viewer-base (e.g. collector, commercial commissioner, movie producer, public consumer). Finally, students would make predictions on how to pursue art as a career by writing a mock resume, with possible marketing strategies to promote their work.

### **References**

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