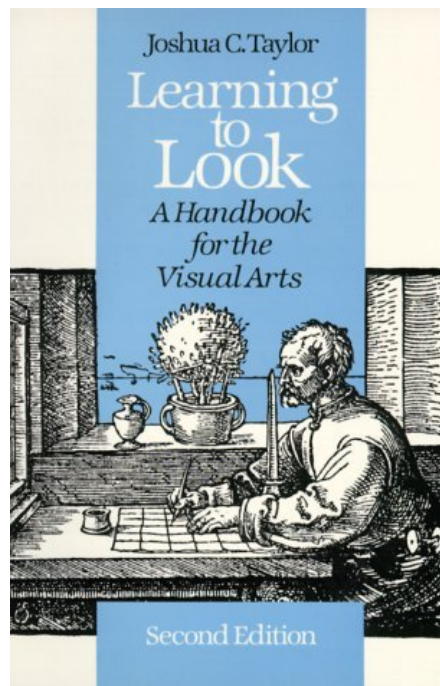




Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts

Joshua C. Taylor

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Sometimes seeing is more difficult for the student of art than believing. Taylor, in a book that has sold more than 300,000 copies since its original publication in 1957, has helped two generations of art students "learn to look."

This handy guide to the visual arts is designed to provide a comprehensive view of art, moving from the analytic study of specific works to a consideration of broad principles and technical matters. Forty-four carefully selected illustrations afford an excellent sampling of the wide range of experience awaiting the explorer.

The second edition of *Learning to Look* includes a new chapter on twentieth-century art. Taylor's thoughtful discussion of pure forms and our responses to them gives the reader a few useful starting points for looking at art that does not reproduce nature and for understanding the distance between contemporary figurative art and reality.

Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts Details

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Gerald says

I don't know why I thought I could race through this skinny little art book. After all, it has a lot of pictures.

But I didn't count on my right brain, which apparently gets used far too little, wanting to stop and puzzle over each example.

You know the saying, dying is easy, comedy is hard? So is art!

Lailatun Nadhirah says

Thanks. This book is really helpful for my course :D

Anthony Tenaglier says

A good intro to art, but what I enjoyed most was reflecting on this passage in the last chapter,

"There is a struggle between what we assume the figure to be and what happens as we look at it. And it is evident that no amount of looking or squinting is going to bring together what the mind recognizes and the eye sees. There is a persistent and lively tension between knowing and seeing that casts a useful doubt on the whole matter of simple perception." (page 152)

Zack says

The material is well-presented, and probably would go well in a first art history course.

Jen says

This is a great book for someone interested in learning more about art history or just becoming better acquainted with the process of creating art. Having just received a degree in the history of art, it was a survey review and somewhat tedious.

Lisa says

Cool book.

KC Comal says

Need paper copy to review and analyse at leisure

Christopher says

This is a straightforward guide to the basics of visual art. It focuses mostly on form, less so on purpose, motivation, or meaning. There are some well done comparisons to help illustrate the various uses of form (lines, coloring, composition, etc.) and the different resulting effects on the viewer. If you've never experienced an introductory art class, this may be a book worth checking out.

Justus says

Nothing mindblowing, just a basic intro to art criticism. Very vanilla, but something that would be good for a freshman art criticism course...which was what it arose from. Covers analyzing a painting/sculpture/building formally, the basic building blocks and techniques of these arts with a closing chapter on more modern art after mainly focusing on older stuff.

I wish I read this as a freshman...when I got it for some art class that I eventually dropped...but I guess 15 years later isn't too bad either....nice book but nothing mindblowing.

Carl Gauger says

I read this book mainly for its teaching on composition and color. It is a good book throughout, but the section of the book that deals with techniques and materials, while of interest, will be less so for the non-artist. The main help to be found here has to do with what to look for in works of art. We all see something, but until we become accustomed to looking for particular things we will likely see much less than is there and appreciate what we do see less than it is possible to do. The applications are not limited to fine art. The principles of composition, color, context, etc, apply to lots of visual mediums--even product and interface design. With the caveat above, I recommend it to anyone wanting a richer experience and understanding of art and visual medium.

Josh Bauder says

Like the created universe, this book has the appearance of age (my copy was published in 1957), and the 32 full-page figures of artistic works dealt with in the text are all black-and-white. But this isn't a serious problem for anyone with wifi. One of the greatest wonders of internet technology is our ability (which would dumbfound every generation before us) to peruse at our leisure high-resolution depictions of virtually all the

great artistic masterpieces, some of which no longer even exist. This is a miraculous, priceless privilege, one that is largely ignored by a culture more interested in viewing itself as oppressed and without advantage.

In the first chapter, Taylor discusses the analysis of art and the use of color and perspective. He wastes no words, driving straight into the central concern of art in the first paragraph of text. An understanding of a painting's subject matter, he writes,

is not sufficient in itself to characterize the particular quality of a work of art. If it were, a verbal description could be the exact equivalent of a painting. Clearly there are other forces in action, affecting our experience and contributing to the specific meaning of the work. These forces are visual and belong appropriately to the visual arts. But how can the visual aspect of a painting in itself have meaning? This is the basic question.

Taylor then launches into a side-by-side analysis of two works with the same subject matter but vastly different expressive content: crucifixion scenes from Perugino and Crivelli.

Taylor discusses the difference in meaning between these two pieces, meanings conveyed through color, saturation, grouping, canvas shape, and line density.

The penultimate chapter, which details artistic materials and techniques, presents an overwhelming survey of practically every artistic medium, from engraving to etching to sketch to woodcut to print, and many more. The same chapter ends with an accessible discussion of architectural fundamentals. Never before had I grasped so clearly the blunt practical problem that all architecture seeks to solve: how to use compression and tension to span and enclose a space for practical use, and how to do so beautifully. Taylor explains post-and-lintel construction, various forms of arch, the development of the dome and ribbed vault, and the use of blueprints and floorplans.

In the final chapter, Taylor seeks to better understand the connection between a particular artist's output and the style of his contemporary cultural milieu. By way of case study, Taylor focuses on the 17th-18th century French painter Jacques Louis David, charting his progression in maturity and clarity of vision as he gradually rejected the conventional aesthetic of his youth in favor of a new, bolder approach. Taylor looks first at "The Combat of Ares and Athena," representative of David's early output, which is organized in a flowery circular motion in vogue at the time of his training. But by 1784, thirteen years later, David was pursuing new methods, and in "The Oath of the Horatii" he depicts valor and patriotism in a style markedly more sparse, grim, fixed, and clear than his earlier work. This style would dominate the rest of his output, especially his famous Revolutionary paintings like "The Death of Marat" and "Napoleon Crossing the Alps."

A great painter, in Taylor's words,

evolves his style, his particular artistic vision, as he evolves his ideas about art, life, and nature, over a period of years, taking from his environment what is serviceable to him and rejecting what is not.

