

Emotional or extra-rational reading of an object

‘From ancient to modern times, theories of aesthetics have emphasised the role of art in evoking, shaping and modifying human feelings’. (Silvia, 2005.)

Below are some useful questions to bear in mind when you are doing an emotional or extra-rational reading of an object. The emotional or extra-rational reading focusses on how an individual’s disciplinary training, cultural background and life experience can drive their response to an object. This exercise requires the reader to be self-aware, explore their inner world and question their habituated responses to objects.

Theme	General area of questioning	Specific questions you can ask of yourself (not all of these will be relevant)	Notes
Personal responses	Emotional response	What is your immediate reaction to this object? Do you like it? Dislike it? Does it make you feel uncomfortable in any way? Or does it make you happy?	
	Physical response	Do you feel stimulated or aroused by your experience of engaging with this object? Can you explore what is going on in your body? Do you feel calm? Or is your heart rate increasing? What about your breathing? What does your bodily reaction reveal about what is going on in your mind.	
Relationship to previous experience	Memory	What does this object remind you of? What else does it make you think of? Does it evoke positive or negative memories? And how does that influence the way you encounter the object?	

	Cultural and social	Can you relate this object to yourself or your life? Or does the object sit outside your experience? What impact does this have on the way you feel about the object?	
	Unconscious bias and habituated responses	If you have had a strong reaction to the object what do you think is driving that response? Dig deep into all the preconceptions you might have around race, gender, culture and identity and try to challenge that thinking.	
Empathy for objects	Imagination	Imagination is an important part of experience. What are you imagining when you see and feel this object? Are you confusing your imaginings with reality? And how does that shape your perception of the object?	
	Feeling and meaning	What might it mean to you to be able to touch and hold this object? Do you think you would feel a connection with the maker or those who have used or viewed the object?	