How do we **LOOK AT ART?**
We start by asking simple questions like: who is the artist, when and where did he or she live and create the artwork, what is the subject matter and what is the medium? Having that as basics we can move on to analyze the work itself according to the art appreciation vocabulary.

**GETTING TO KNOW THE ELEMENTS**
What then is the **LANGUAGE** or **ELEMENTS** of ART? We look at line, shape and mass, light and shade, space, texture and color. Each of these in turn have their own vocabulary:

**LINE**: defines the edge of a shape. It is the path left by a moving point. Line in itself is not found in nature, but it is essential for depicting objects or defining shapes.

**SHAPE** and **MASS**: is the area enclosed by a line. Shape also refers to circles, triangles, squares and rectangles. The mass or volume of a shape can be defined by light falling on the shape.

**LIGHT** and **SHADE**: refers to tonal values. It is the lightness or darkness of an object or area.

**SPACE**: in real life is 3-dimensional. Perspective is used to imitate this real space on a 2-dimensional surface. There is also positive space which is the object and negative space which is the space around the object. Sculpture on the other hand, is 3-dimensional because it has height, width and depth giving us the chance to walk around it.

**TEXTURE**: is the quality of an object through touch (actual, real, tactile texture) or the quality of an object through implementing the elements (implied or visual texture).

**COLOR**: is powerful, complex and appealing. It has three characteristics: **HUE** is the name of the color (red, blue etc). **VALUE** refers to how light or dark a color is. **INTENSITY** describes how bright or dull a color is. Warm colors include yellows and reds. Cool colors include blues and greens. Although color is impressive, many art forms lacks the use of it but are still regarded as powerful works of art; for example black-and-white films, etchings, drawings and sculpture.

**GETTING A GRIP ON COMPOSITION**
The organization of the elements is called **COMPOSITION** or **DESIGN**. Simply put it is where you want to put images within the edges of your paper or canvas. Composition is an integral part of any art-form, be it a visual art piece, a piece of music, a written play or a film. It is the underlaying structure and arrangement of the elements to make a unified and balanced whole. A successful organization of elements is one that creates a wholeness or oneness. Even so freedom of interpretation well integrated within this structure, should be recognizable.

What then do we look for in a **COMPOSITION**? The vocabulary of composition consists of **RHYTHM**, placement of **FOCALPOINT** and **BALANCE**.

**RHYTHM** can be achieved through the use of any of the elements; lines flowing through giving direction, balanced areas of light or dark or color, repetition of shapes and texture. Rhythm determines the path our eyes follow through and around an artwork.

Placement of the **FOCALPOINT** will establish the center of interest. Sometimes there can be more than one such a place of interest.

**BALANCE** include all parts of an artwork, the top, bottom and sides. Keep in mind that unity is the goal, not monotony. Variety within the repetitive pattern and places of interest will create excitement within the unity.

When all is said and done, do keep in mind that “A painting has a life of its own, I try to let it come through” (Jackson Pollock)
Look at the watercolor picture ‘Cooks Bay, Moorea, Tahiti’. Watercolor is a painting medium in which pigment is blended with gum arabic as the binder and water as the solvent. For the best results, watercolors are applied to good quality white paper. Once used only for sketches, watercolor has become a favorite painting medium for serious artworks. Battiss refused to see only the softness and gentleness inherent in watercolor; he frequently used it with boldness.

His undiminished vitality and joie de vivre led him to create his own imaginary island, called Fook Island, complete with real maps, language, animals, coins, stamps, passports etc. After making this ‘concept’ a reality, he visited real islands all over the world. This particular image of Cook’s Bay was used for one of Fook’s stamps.

Does the picture look well organized or did the artist jump into the painting process in a haphazard way? With watercolor as medium, planning is very important. He carefully considered space. Note how small the buildings on the other side of the water are and how the boats vary in size depending on which are near or far. Although the picture contains a lot of information (try and identify at least 10 objects), the artist’s excellent observational ability and superb draftsmanship resulted in a unified design.

He spent a lot of time planning the colors. Note the variations in blue. How many different shades of blue do you recognize? His use of low intensity colors (in spite of its luminosity) creates a mood of tranquility and calmness which is exactly what Battiss experienced. Even though there are people on a rowing boat, the water is calm and the ships seem anchored. The mountains quietly stand guard over this little harbor.
Now look at the oil painting 'Ten people in a Mopipi Tree'. The content of this painting is a tree with a creeper, three birds, two faces, sixteen legs, a blue sky and pale green grass. What is the mood of this picture? Is it cheerful or sad? Do you think the choice of yellow makes a difference in the mood of this picture? What does yellow make you think of? Yellow is the most visible of all colors and vibrates with energy. Look at the clever way in which the yellow color is repeated and leads your eye. The yellow starts in the tree-trunk, follows the beaks of the birds up to the legs, around the top of the tree, down to the one face and again ends in the trunk. It leads your eye in a circle.

This composition is not only balanced by color but also by the direction of the beaks (pointing up), the legs (fluttering around) and the heads (pointing down). Both color and subject matter contribute to the mood as well as the composition. Aren’t people usually on the ground and birds in the trees? How do the legs and faces add up to ten people?

Although the intensity and value of yellow in this picture remain the same, the variation of the greens differs. The background green has a calming effect because of its low intensity. So does the green of the tree. Note the variation in the shape, color and pattern of the leaves which results in a unity that is not monotonous.

Internet snippet: Search for the French painter Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) who also adored Tahiti.