



ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAŃ

Faculty of English

# Understanding the metaphoricity of artworks with MUCADA (Multimodal Critical Analysis of Discourse of Art)

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# A linguist walks into a museum

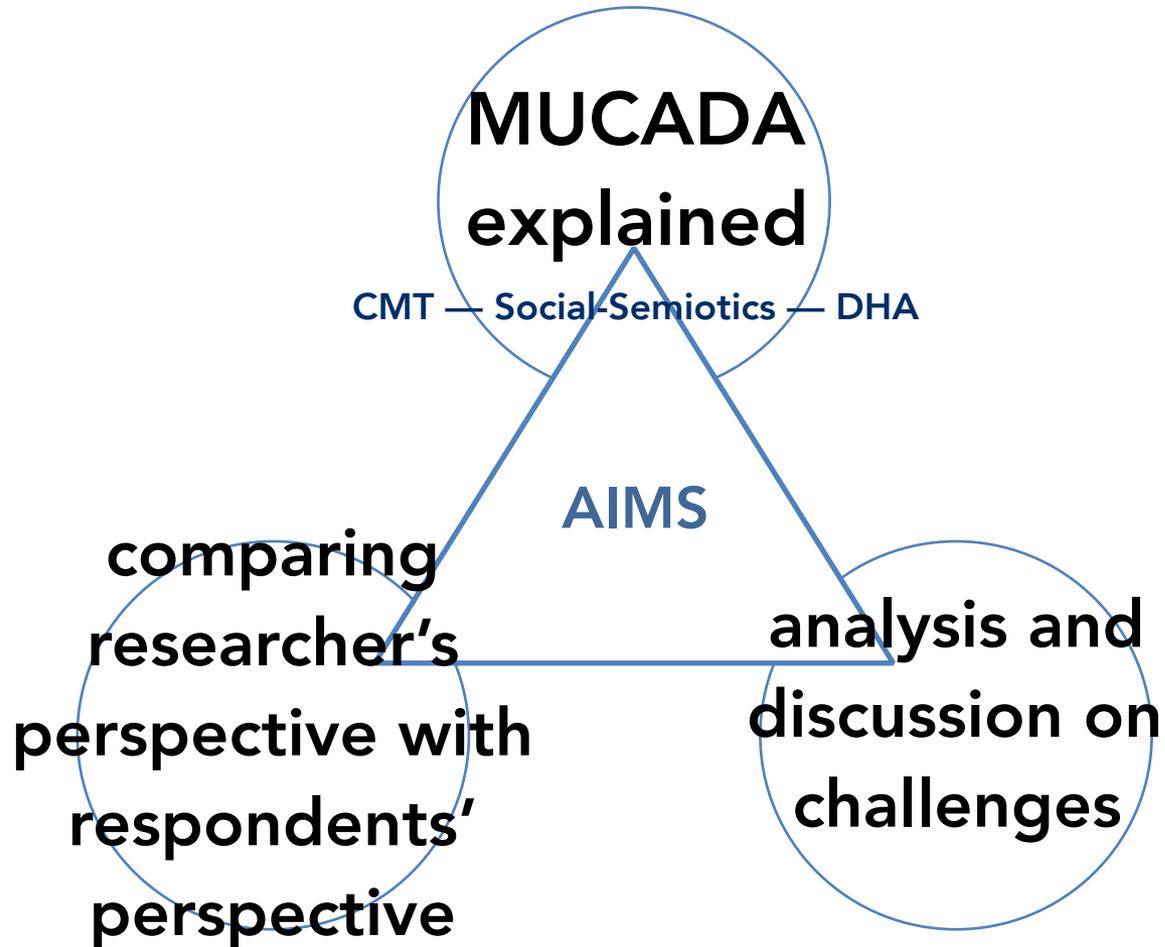
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multimodal  
cognitive  
linguistic  
approach  
towards the  
analysis of  
3D artworks

# Outline

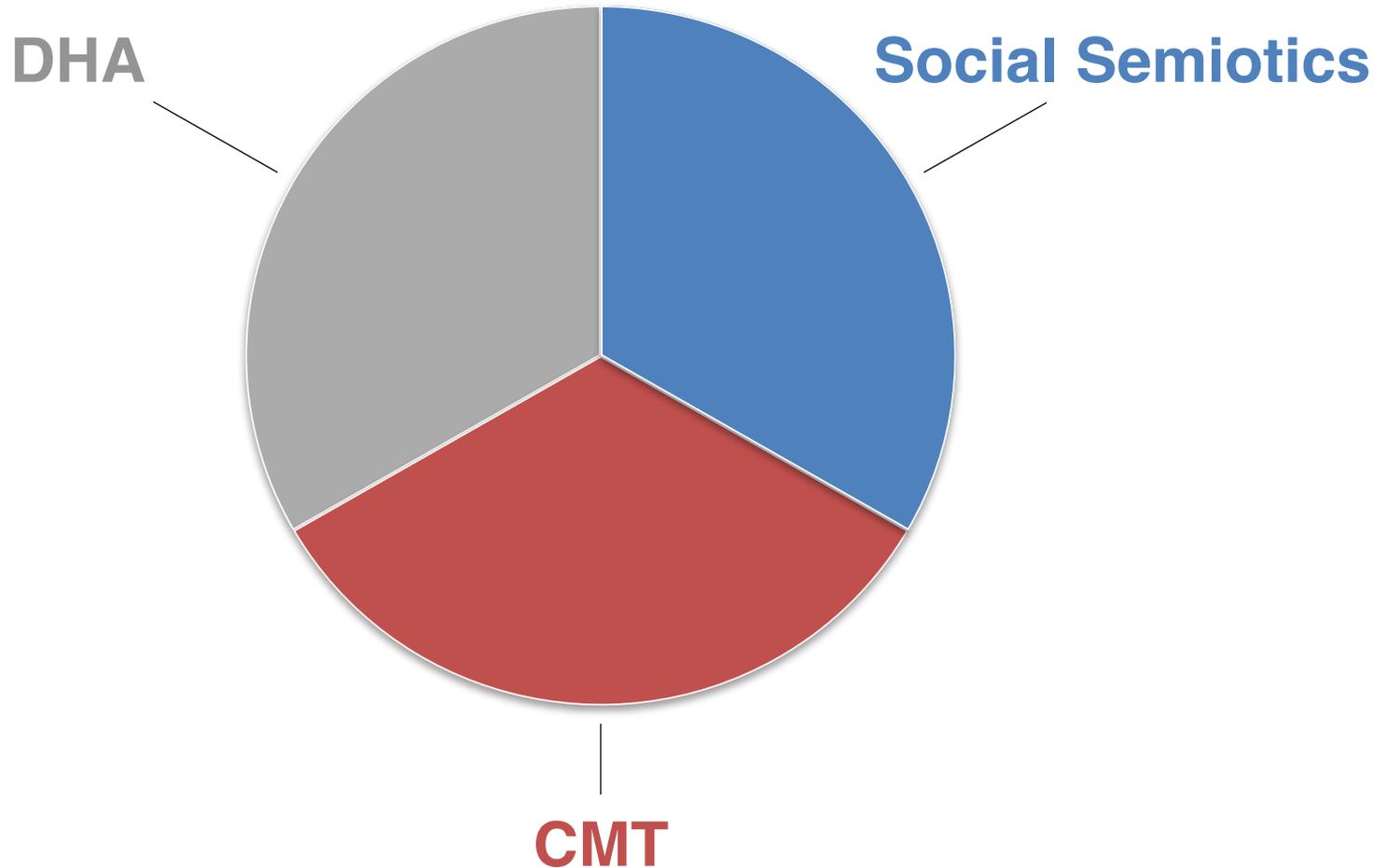
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# MUCADA - Multimodal Critical Analysis of Discourse of Art

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## Art as ...

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“ [a] transindividual semiotic form of social practice that is regulated by social conventions and that is both socially constituted and socially constitutive.”

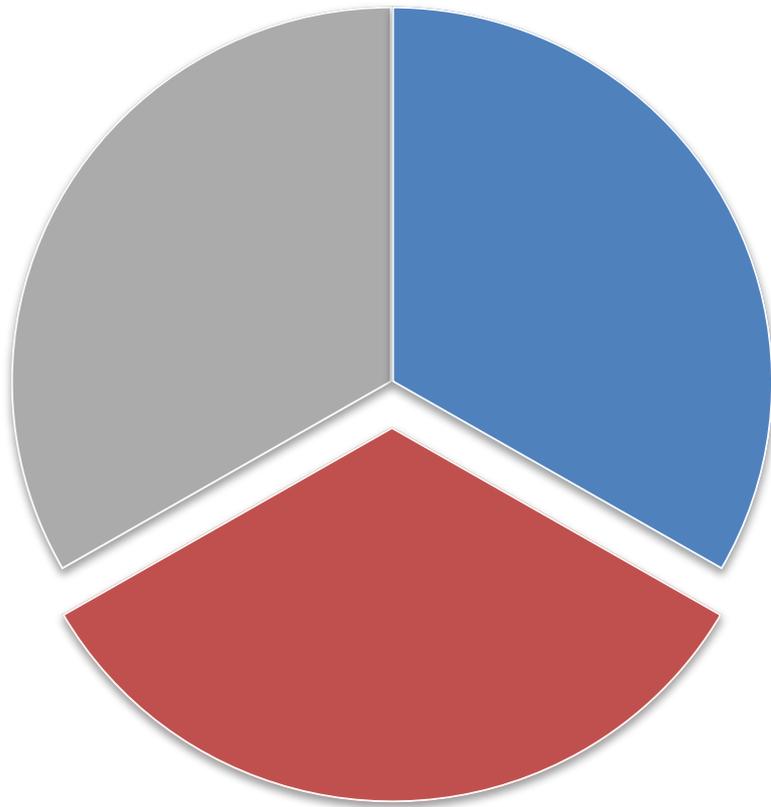
(Fairclough 1993: 63)

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# MUCADA - Conceptual Metaphor Theory

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**CMT**

**analyzing figurativeness of artworks** (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, Dancygier and Sweetser 2014, Forceville 2011, 2013, El Rafaie 2015) **which I examine along 3 levels of figurative meaning-making** (Kwiatkowska 2013)

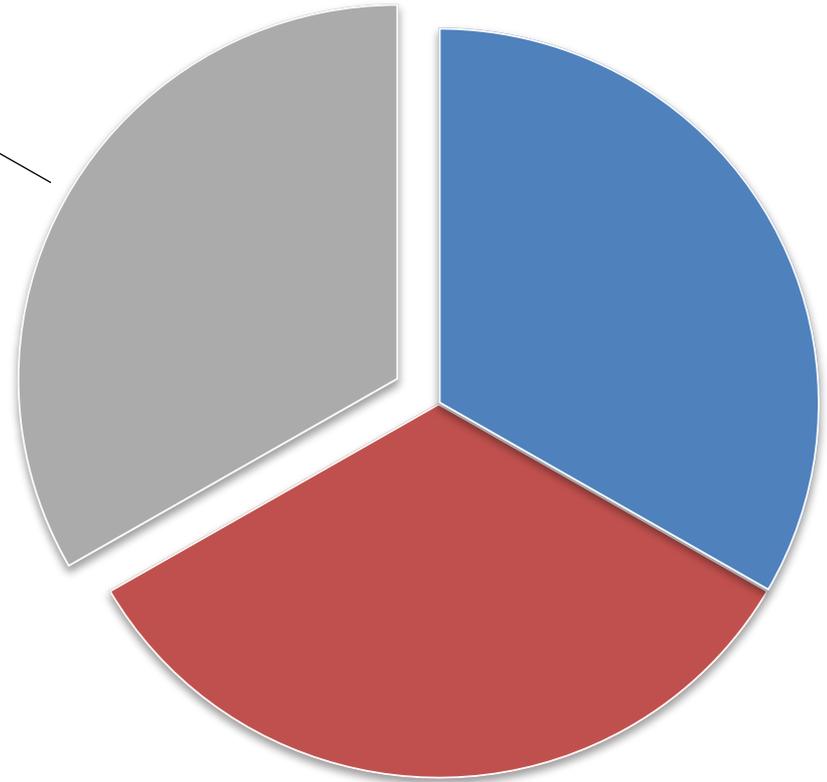


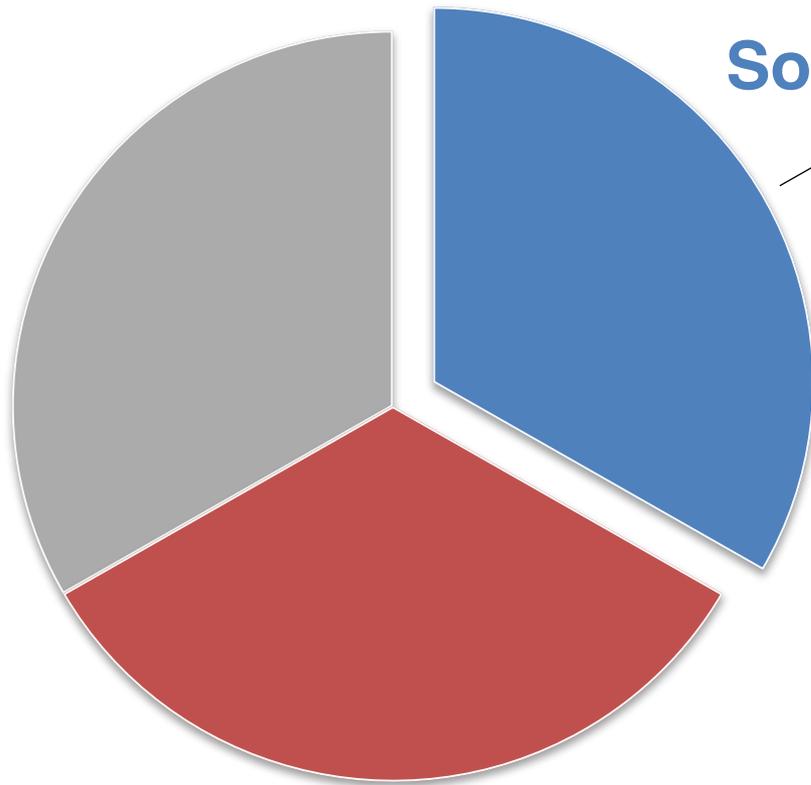
# MUCADA - Discourse Historical Approach

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4 layers of context allow me to analyze the discourse that surrounds the artwork (Reisigl and Wodak 2009)

DHA





**Social Semiotics**

3 meaning making  
functions of artworks  
(O'Toole 2011, O'Halloran  
2008)

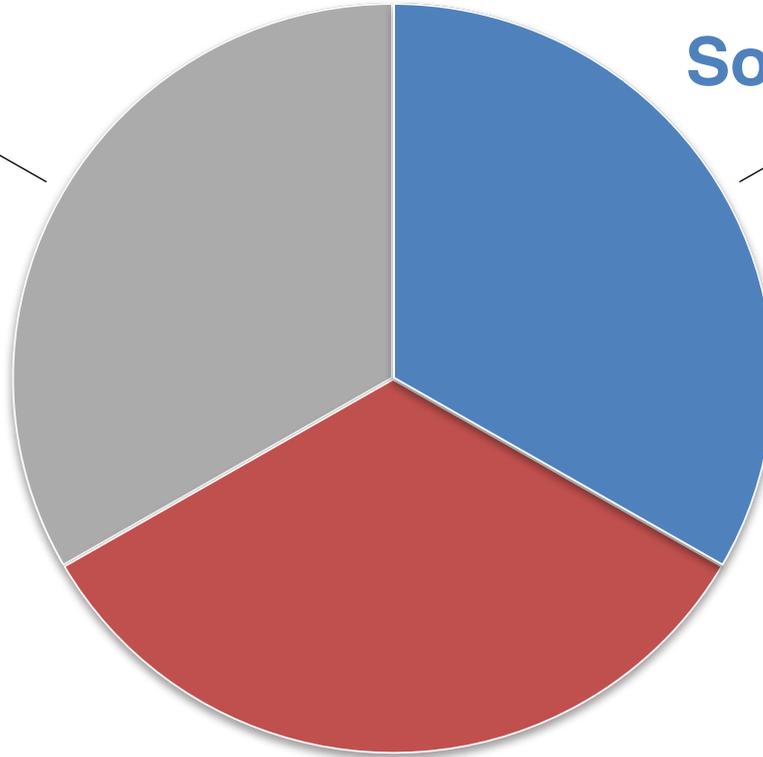


# MUCADA - Multimodal Critical Analysis of Discourse of Art

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**DHA**

4 layers of  
context by  
**Reisigl and  
Wodak 2009**



**Social Semiotics**

3 meaning  
making  
functions of  
artworks  
(**O'Toole  
2011**)

3 levels of figurative  
meaning-making **CMT**  
(**Kwiatkowska 2013**)

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# Kwiatkowska (2013) and 3 levels of figurativeness of verbo-visual metaphor

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- **figurative in general** (artwork + title)
- **figurative in component parts** (artwork + info on dimensions and materials + )
- **figurative in totality** (artwork + expert comment + info from outside the catalog, e.g. biography of the artist)  
(Kwiatkowska 2013: 63-73)

# Kwiatkowska (2013) and 3 levels of figurativeness of verbo-visual metaphor

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Charlie Lucas, 1988

*Old Wheel Don't Roll No More*

Welded found metal (58 x 22 x 17 inches)

"Our ancestors used the great knowledge  
It's up to us to be diggin' and scratchin' to  
bring that knowledge back. Circles and  
wheels were very important to them as  
signs. . . . a lot of people didn't know what  
the heck was going on, but those circles and  
wheels always ended up in my work. A lot of  
roots were planted. It was much deeper than  
people can imagine." —Charlie Lucas

**visual layer of the message**  
(the photo of) an installation

**verbal layer of the message**  
author, title, year, materials,  
expert/artist's note



## Reisigl and Wodak (2009) and 4 layers of context of discourse

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- The linguistic (semiotic) level of co-text
- The intertextual and interdiscursive level
- Social context of the situation (producer-recipient interaction)
- Broad socio-political and historical macro-context (Reisigl and Wodak 2009)



# O'Toole (2011) and 3 functions of meaning making in artworks

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- **Representational function** — abstract or concrete figure, object, place or event, either mythical, historical or contemporary
- **Modal function** — features such as perspective, framing, highlighting that attract viewers
- **Compositional function** — geometrical interplay of pieces vectors within the frame

(O'Toole 2011)



# An example model analysis

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title + author + the  
year of production +  
materials + size

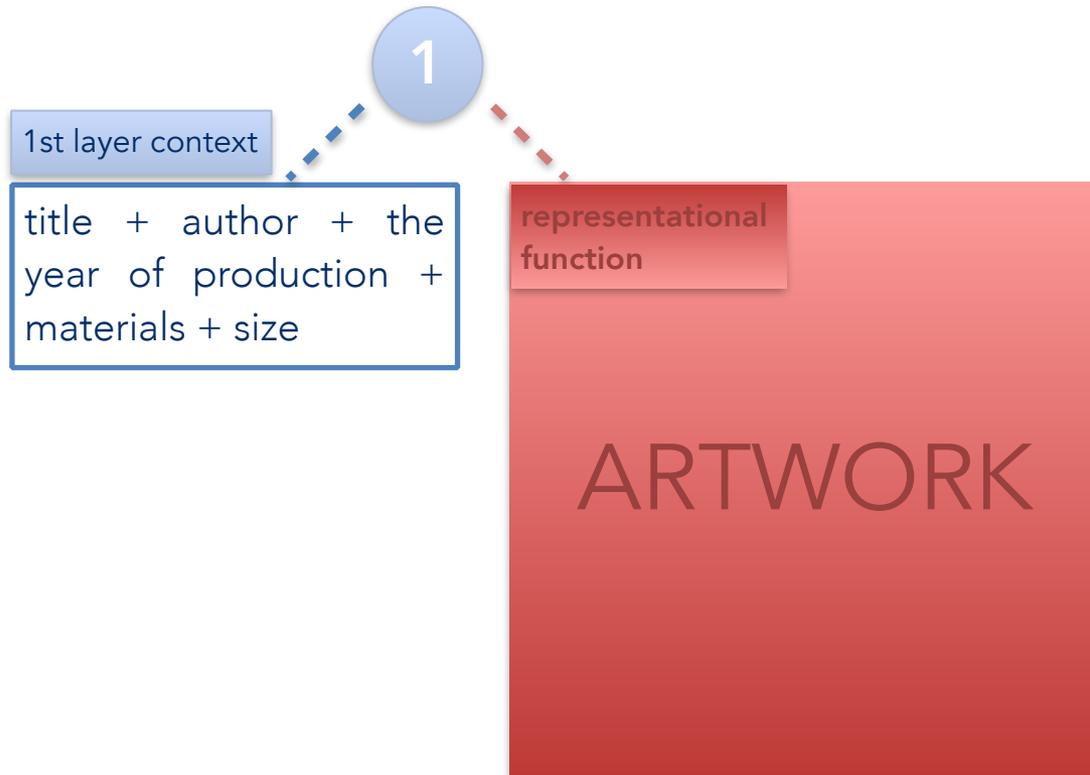
short description of  
the artwork found in a  
museum or exhibition  
catalogue (expert  
comment)

ARTWORK

information  
from outside  
the museum  
or the  
exhibition  
catalog

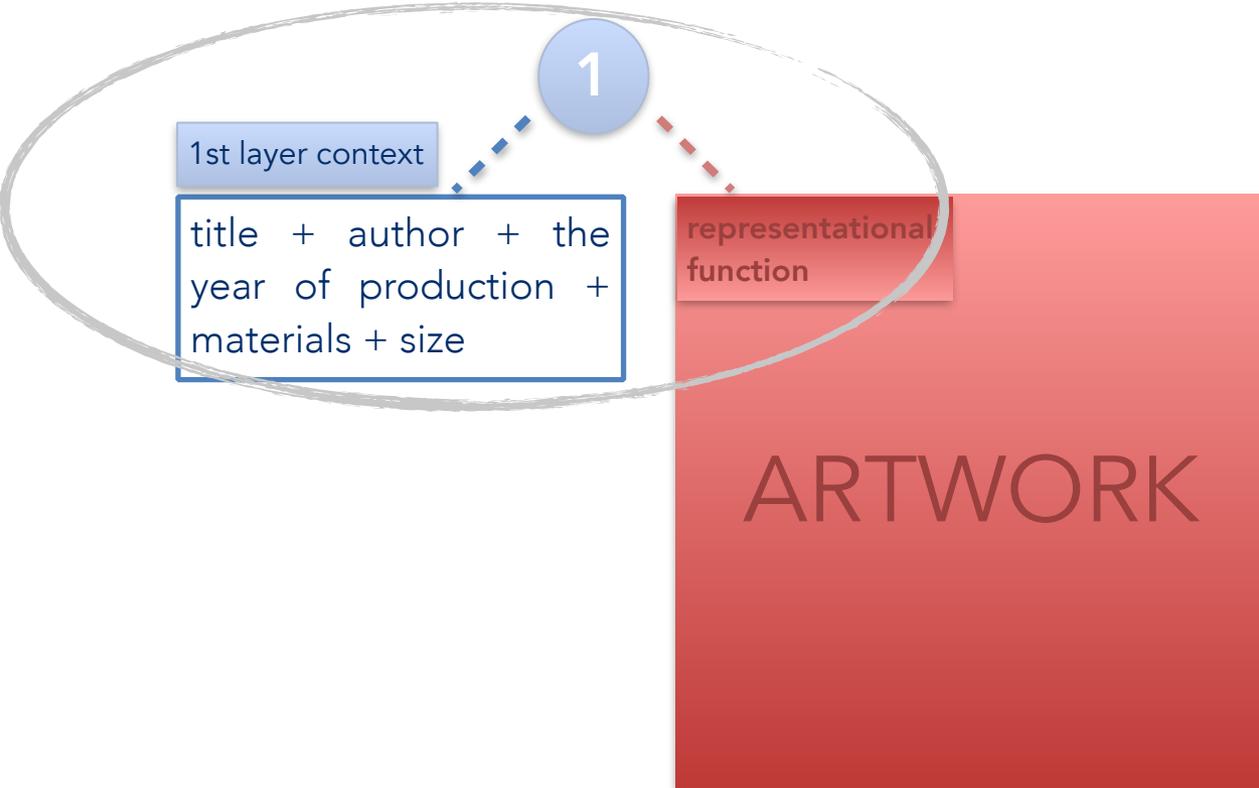
# An example model analysis

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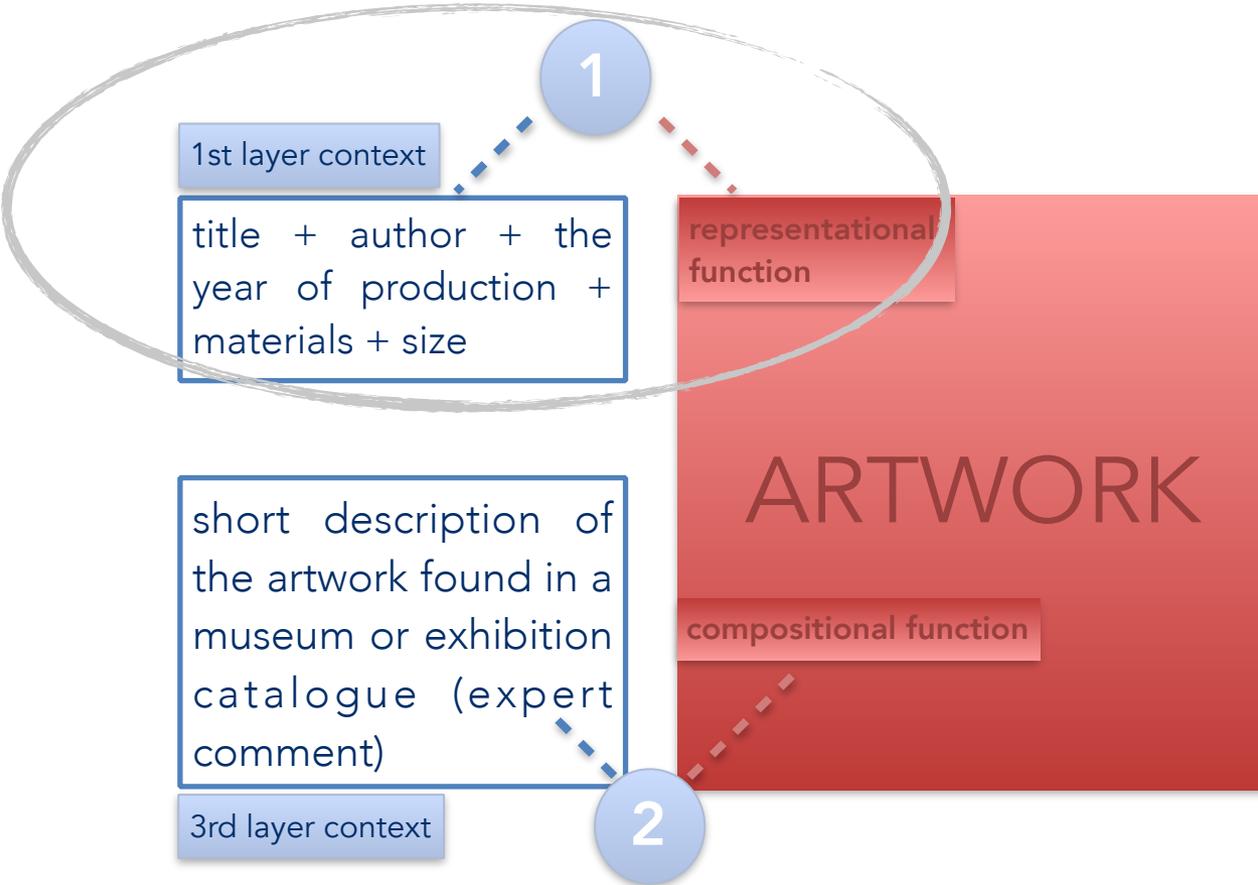




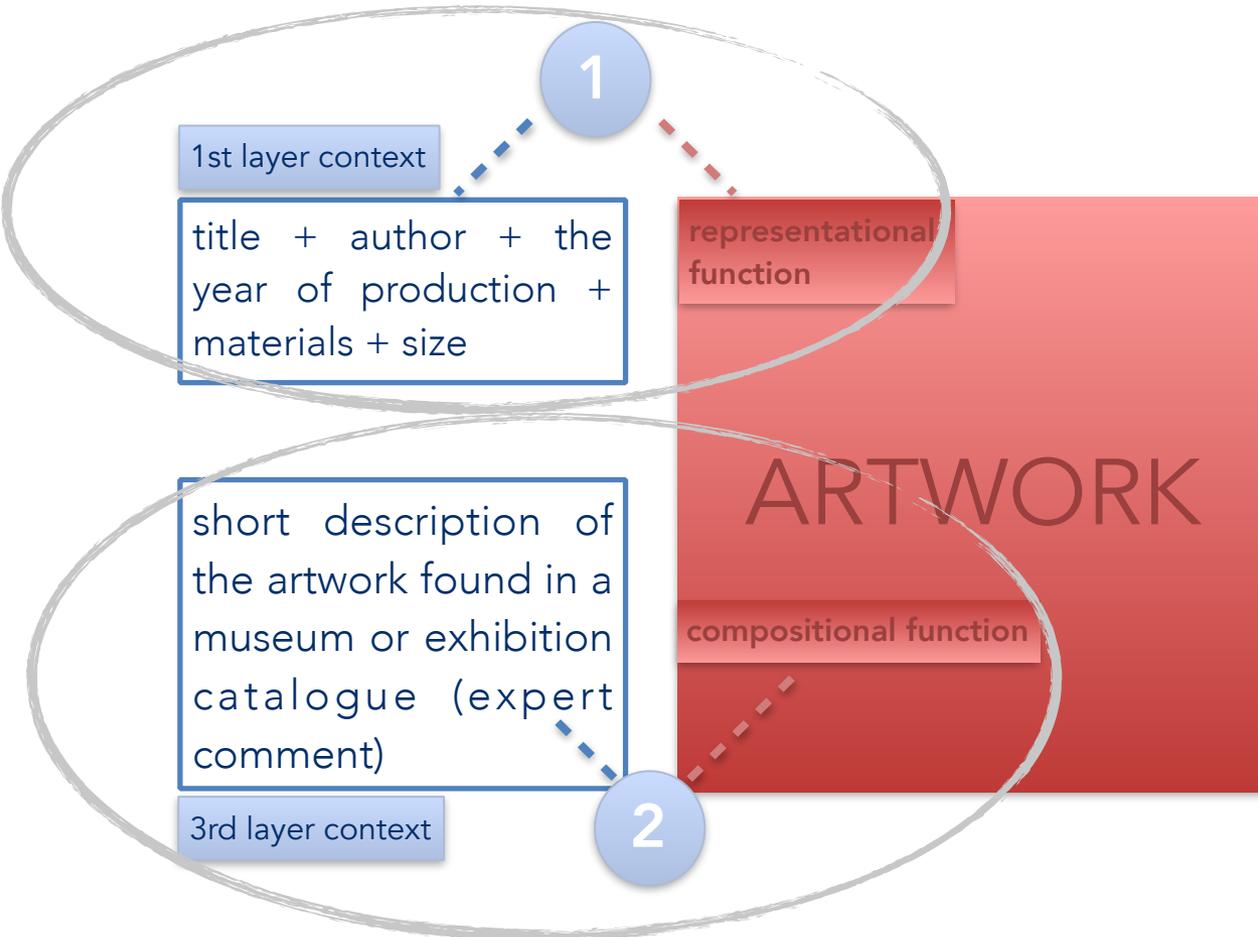
# An example model analysis



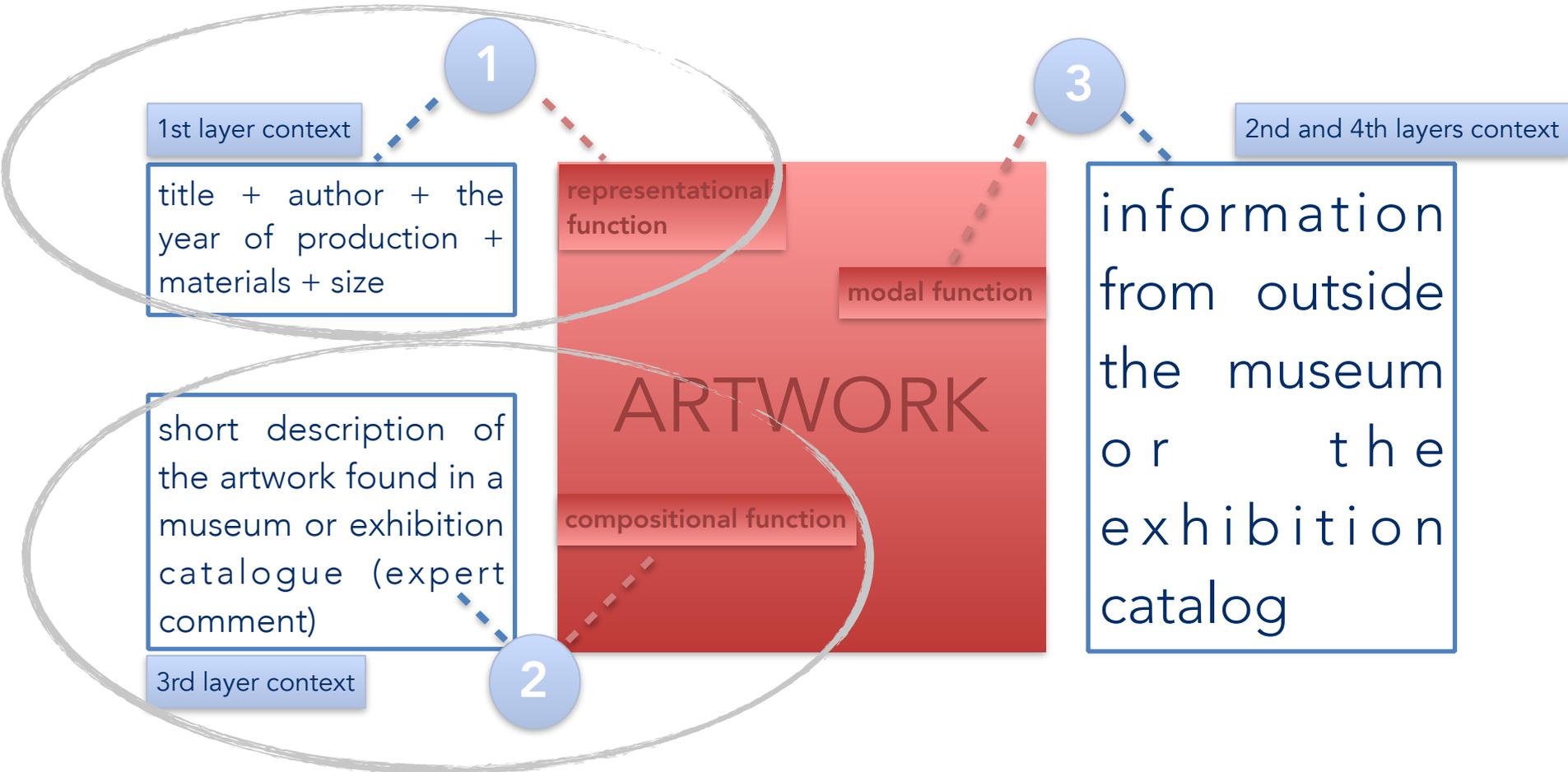
# An example model analysis



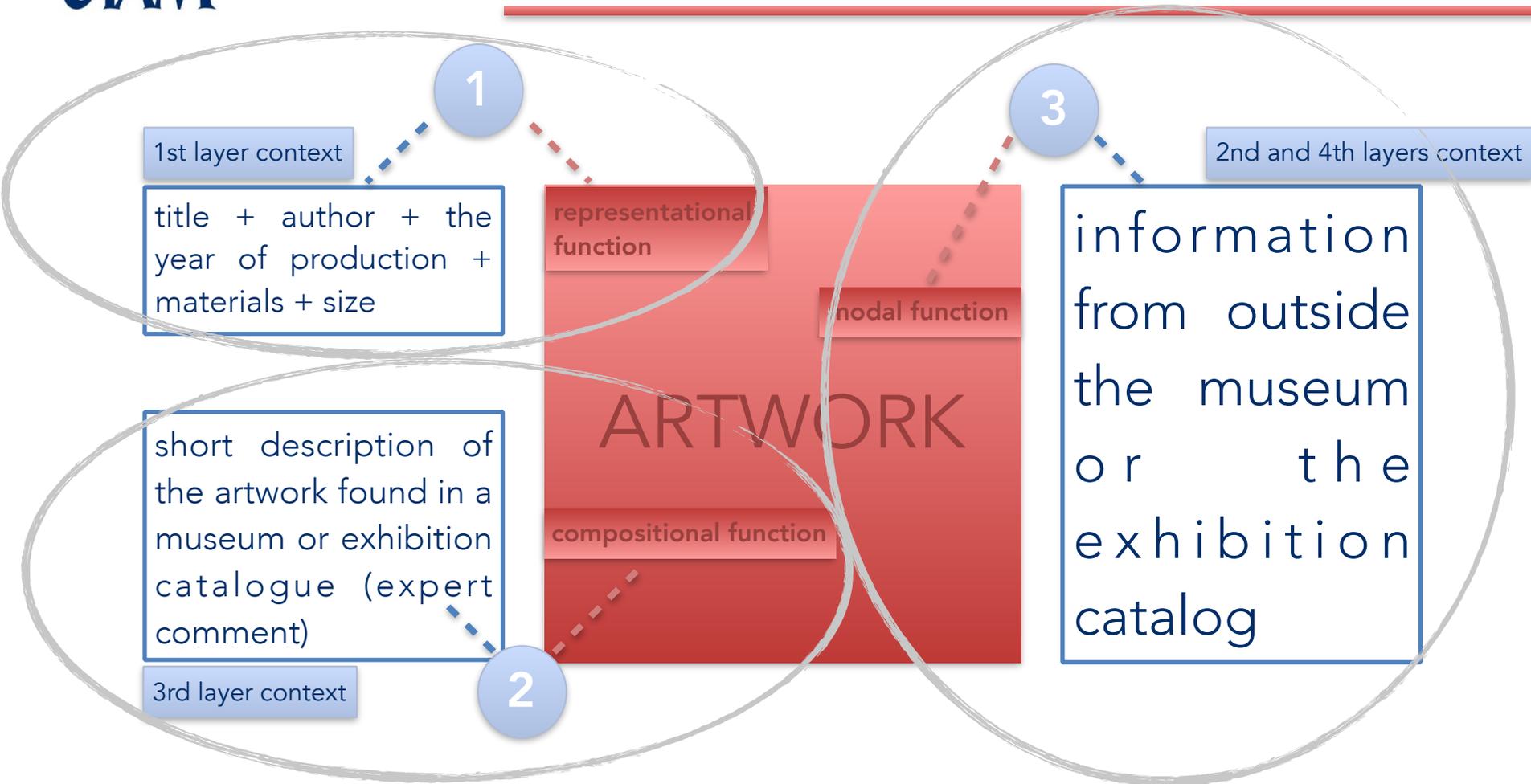
# An example model analysis

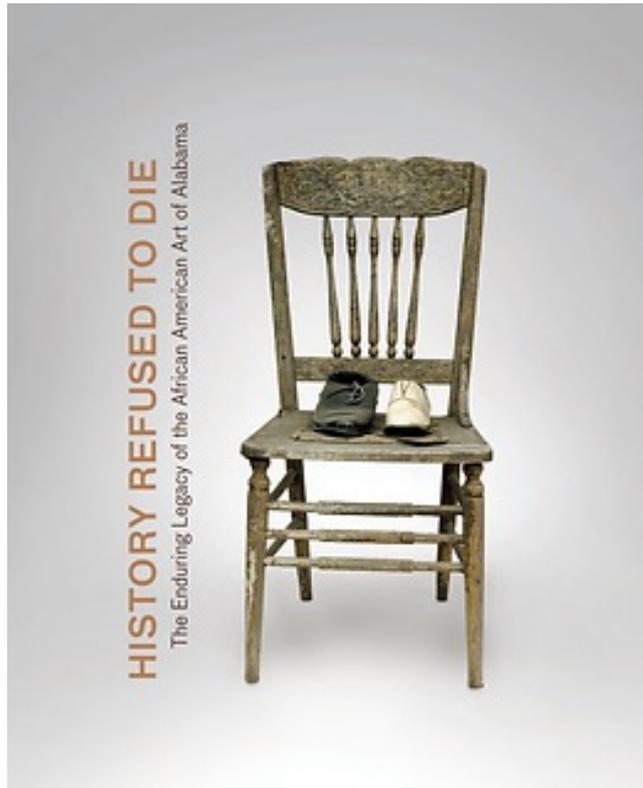


# An example model analysis



# An example model analysis





- The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and Alabama Contemporary Art Center's exhibition (March 14 and May 31, 2015)
- exhibition catalogue *History Refused to Die: The Enduring Legacy of African American Art in Alabama* (2015)



# Reception study

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**Q:** to what extent the model of meaning-making resulting from a semiotic analysis (analyst's perspective) correlates with the meaning as constructed by the visitors to the exhibition (recipient's perspective).

analyst's perspective **VS** recipient's perspective)

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# Reception study

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- 100 respondents
- students of English
- dimensions only
- three questions:
  1. What do you think or feel when you look at the artwork? **MODAL**
  2. What do you think this artwork represents? What makes you think so? **REPRESENTATIONAL**
  3. Which parts of the artwork are the most important according to you? Why? What do they represent?

**COMPOSITIONAL**

*Old Wheel Don't Roll No More* by Charlie Lucas (1988).  
Welded found metal (147 x 56 x 43 cm).



# Reception study - analysis

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"I think that the artwork looks like an **old invention**, which was meant to be used for something a long time ago. The artwork represents **old machinery parts** which were used by people in the past. You can see that there are **old, rusty** elements. It is hard to tell which parts are the most important because **the piece is made of many elements which altogether form a whole**. However, you might say that **the wheel is the most important**. Because it is **the biggest and it catches the attention**. It reminds me of an **old bike wheel**."

MATERIAL  
QUALITIES

RELATION  
TO GESTALT

SCALE AND  
MASS

PARTICIPANT

BASIC  
PHYSICAL  
FORMS

PERIPETEIA

BASIC PHYSICAL FORMS

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# Reception study - analysis

PROCESS

PARTICIPANTS

BASIC  
PHYSICAL  
FORMS

BODY

PARTICIPANT

THEME

POSITION

BASIC  
PHYSICAL  
FORMS

POSITION

SCALE and  
FULNESS OF  
REALIZATION

RELATION  
TO GESTALT

MESSAGE

MATERIAL  
QUALITIES

LINES AND  
CHARACTERI  
ZATION

"I think: **engineering, machines, steampunk, bicycle, screws, parts**, peculiarity. I feel a bit of amusement, sympathy, concern and a bit of anxiety, because of the fact that the installation has a fairly humane shape, but it is built of machine parts. I think it represents a human who tries to lift something up, and that something is a part of him/her, it's attached to him/her and is made of same material. Maybe it represents loss, adherence, work, effort? Maybe this work and effort interpretation is influenced by the parts which remind of a garage. It's hard to keep my eyes off the "**head**" of the piece which has adorable **wholes, like eyes**, which do not express anything special, as if that "person" was not aware and could not care less about what is happening around him/her. What catches my attention is the **rusty** sprocket right at the "**heart**" of the art piece, probably due to its jagged edges which stand out among the smooth lines."



# Reception study - analysis

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THEME

PARTICIPANT

THEME

BASIC  
PHYSICAL  
FORMS

CHARACTERIZATION  
and MESSAGE

"The artwork makes we think **futuristic** thoughts about **robots**. (...) It resembles **a fairly primitive, but accurate, creative and symbolic, a sculpture of a man**. Undoubtedly, it is **the top part of the piece** which is the most important. In my opinion, it symbolizes **the human brain**, which is the most amazing computer on Earth. What points to such reading is the fact that this part reminds me of **some sort of a mechanism**. A horrible fact is that this element seems to be **obsolete**. I really hope that a **human being itself will not be only an obsolete prototype of something else.**"

FULNESS OF  
REALIZATION

PARTICIPANT

PERIPETEIA

BASIC  
PHYSICAL  
FORMS



## Reception study - first takeaway

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**QUESTION:** is step-by-step analysis of MUCADA relevant to the viewers' experience and reflected in their verbalized responses?

**IDEA:** meaning construction takes place through dynamic interaction on all of the described levels simultaneously, where art's functions come together in most diverse configurations.

**CHALLENGE:** how to create such a model of analysis that would resemble the more natural flow of interpretation



# Reception study - analysis

## researcher's perspective:

1. HUMAN IS OBJECT, HUMAN IS MACHINE
2. BODY PARTS ARE MACHINE PARTS, AGING IS RUST, WHEEL IS MOVEMENT
3. DEVELOPMENT IS MOVEMENT, MOTIONLESSNESS IS DECAY, AGING IS USELESSNESS, OLD PERSON IS A BROKEN MACHINE

## respondents' perspective:

1. **HUMAN IS MACHINE, HUMAN IS CONSTRUCTION**, WORK AND EFFORT ARE MACHINE, HUMAN IS MUSICAL INSTRUMENT
2. **HUMAN PARTS ARE MACHINE PARTS**, WORK IS MECHANICAL ELEMENTS, EYES ARE ABILITY TO CHOOSE, **PASSING IS RUST, WHEEL IS MOVEMENT** + series of metonymies : holes for eyes, sprocket for heart, chain for enslavement, chain for human spine, wheels for legs, head for thinking
3. NEW LIFE IS NEW FUNCTIONS, SOCIETY IS MECHANISM, PEOPLE ARE PARTS OF THE MECHANISM, SOCIAL HIERARCHY IS DIFFERENCES IN VOLUME AND PLACEMENT OF PARTS OF A MACHINE, CIVILIZATION IS PROCESSED METAL



# Reception study - second takeaway

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**QUESTION:** does the contextual information that comes from outside the art piece narrow the possible range of meanings?

**IDEA:** personal experience and knowledge, as well as embodied cognition play a crucial role in the interpretation of artworks

**CHALLENGE:** will the viewers narrow down their interpretations when given access to fourth layer of contextual information



# Challenges

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- less prompting, but different kinds of contextual information in experimental research
- more natural flow of the MUCADA
- future respondents should be surveyed for specific information
- study has to be conducted in the museum-setting, in order to account for the compositional function as well as modal function, and avoid the problem of resemiotization



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Thank you

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