

SURFACE

PERCEPTION & ILLUSION

Imagine life without the sense of touch. Numbness is no substitute for feeling, whether that feeling induces pleasure or pain. Imagine art forms void of tactile elements. We need not imagine, for some artists choose to ignore tactile elements either by choice, oversight or out of ignorance.

Vermeer has surely not ignored tactile elements seen in detail here. Our eyes can feel satin, shiny metal, human skin, dog's fur and more as Vermeer renders each with flawless virtuosity. But these varied surfaces are only illusions, for in fact, we have only oil paint on canvas.



Jan Vermeer A Woman At Her Toilet

PAINTING VISUAL ILLUSIONS OF SURFACES

1. How do we perceive different surfaces, such as satin or table cloth?

Ans. Much as we perceive value or color. We all know color wheels and value scales, so let's think of surface in a similar format.

If number 1 on a surface scale is FLAT or DULL and number 10 is a mirror, we could determine where satin might fall on that scale. It is more shiny than the table cloth, but less shiny than a the candelabra or a mirror. HOW WOULD YOU RANK OTHER SURFACES IN THE VERMEER?

2. What tells us that the surface is shiny?

Ans. How a surface absorbs or reflects light determines the degree to which it is seen as dull or shiny. The higher the value contrast, the greater its reflective qualities. Also, see how the satin dress reflects the floor color; more so as folds are closer to the floor.

3. Observe (with extreme care) these four photos and identify the visual clues which describe each surface.

Develop your discovery approach through a line of questions. Example: Why do the checker squares appear black in #3, but black or blue in the other pictures? Where do I see a cast shadow? ETC.

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REFLECTIVE

10	MIRROR
9	
8	
7	
6	
5	
4	
3	
2	
1	VELVET

DULL

