

# SLOW LOOKING GUIDE

## LISTEN



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This short guide invites you to slow down, spend time with one artwork, and notice what happens when you resist the urge to move quickly through the gallery.

We live in a world that encourages us to move quickly—to scroll, glance, register and move on. Slow Looking is an invitation to resist that pace for a moment.

Choose an artwork that catches your attention. It does not have to be the largest work, the most immediately impressive, or the one you think you are supposed to like. It might simply be something that makes you pause.

Spend a little longer with it than you normally would.

There is no single correct or prescribed way to look at art, and you do not need specialist knowledge to begin. You might notice the colours, textures, materials, lines, shapes or repeated motifs. You might follow the movement of a line, focus on a small detail, step closer, or move back to see the work as a whole.

You may not be drawn to its formal qualities at all. Instead, notice how the work makes you feel. What does it remind you of? What thoughts, memories or associations does it provoke? Does it make you curious, unsettled, amused, comforted or confused? Does your response change the longer you remain with it?

The writer and art critic John Berger reminded us that seeing comes before words, and that the relationship between what we see and what we know is never fixed. We do not enter a gallery as neutral observers. We bring our memories, knowledge, expectations and experiences with us. Even the time of day, our mood, the conversation we had before arriving, or something that happened earlier may affect how we respond. We may also have been told what an artwork is supposed to mean, what is important about it, or what we are expected to see.

Try to become aware of these influences without judging them. They are part of the encounter, but they do not have to determine it.

Your response to the artwork belongs to you. You do not need permission to be moved by it, confused by it, resistant to it, or fascinated by something another person might overlook. The artist begins the work, but each viewer brings new associations, questions and meanings to it. In this sense, your act of looking helps to complete the encounter.

Try not to rush towards an explanation. Allow yourself to notice before deciding what the work means. Look at what is actually in front of you, but also remain attentive to what is happening within you.

As part of HEAT's 2026 theme, Ctrl + Z, Slow Looking asks whether we can interrupt habitual ways of seeing. By pausing, looking again and remaining open to what emerges, we create space to reconsider what we thought we already knew.

Your own response is a valuable starting point, but it need not be the end of the experience. You may now wish to read the exhibition text, learn more about the artist and their practice, or discover the circumstances in which the work was made. This knowledge may deepen, complicate or even change what you initially saw.

There is no need to choose between your response and the artist's story. Let them enter into conversation.

Take your time. Trust your attention. Look again. Notice what changes.