



## Visual Intelligence: Sharpen Your Perception, Change Your Life

*Amy E. Herman*

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**Visual Intelligence: Sharpen Your Perception, Change Your Life** Amy E. Herman  
“Sharp and original, this book should alter how readers look at the world.” —*Kirkus*

“This fascinating and beautifully illustrated book will make you see the world more clearly than you ever have before. And that clarity will transform how you deal with the challenges and opportunities you face every day.” — Leonard Mlodinow, author of *Subliminal* and *The Drunkard’s Walk*

How could looking at Monet’s water lily paintings help save a company millions? How can noticing people’s footwear foil a terrorist attack? How can your choice of adjective win an argument, calm your children, or catch a thief?

In her celebrated seminar, The Art of Perception, art historian Amy Herman has trained experts from many fields to perceive and communicate better. By showing people how to look closely at images, she helps them hone their “visual intelligence,” a set of skills we all possess but few of us know how to use effectively. She has spent more than a decade teaching doctors to observe patients instead of their charts, helping police officers separate facts from opinions when investigating a crime, and training professionals from the FBI, the State Department, Fortune 500 companies, and the military to recognize the most pertinent and useful information. Her lessons highlight far more than the physical objects you may be missing; they teach you how to recognize the talents, opportunities, and dangers that surround you every day.

“Herman offers a compelling case for the life-enhancing value—and central importance—of careful observation . . . *Visual Intelligence* is a fascinating book and an important one—and it is a great read.” —Daniel Weiss, president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

## Visual Intelligence: Sharpen Your Perception, Change Your Life Details

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## **From Reader Review Visual Intelligence: Sharpen Your Perception, Change Your Life for online ebook**

### **Adeline says**

Loved this book. BUT four stars out of five for one single reason: a book about visual perception should provide better reproductions of the artworks used for practice. I couldn't help but find it ridiculous to be asked to pay attention to details when the details are lost in small reproductions. Do better.

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### **Dimi says**

Now it needs some tools like neuronation to practice visual intelligence. Chunk the image encode those fragments to decode easily.

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### **Beverly says**

This is my university's first-year read. It took me all summer, in 10 minute increments, to read it. As I feel with so many non-fiction books, this could have been more effective as a longish article. While I am happy to integrate ideas from the book into my class, I'm annoyed by the author's self-congratulatory tone and that my students will be subjected to that tone.

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### **Debbie says**

"Visual Intelligence" is a course on improving your ability to see important details and clearly communicate your observations to others. The book contains full-color art that you study closely as part of the exercises. These exercises help you see what's really there (versus what you expect), see details that you might normally overlook, and recognize what details are most important depending on your goal. After gathering the information and analyzing it, you learn how to effectively communicate this information to others.

The author teaches a class using this material, so she also described how these skills have worked out in the field for her students (police detectives, doctors, social workers, etc.). I found it easy to understand the author and follow her points. I improved at the skills while reading the book, and you can also practice these skills while doing everyday things. I'd highly recommend this book, especially to those with a job where good observational and communication skills are critical.

I received an ebook review copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley.

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### **Nate says**

This is a poignant and perfect book for our day when attention is fleeting and taking time to effectively

analyze a scene or situation is rare. Herman uses fine art as a means for improving our individual insight into our lives and the world around us. By learning how to pay attention to the details, to only the facts that we can see and know, and to push aside our biases, assumptions, and guesswork, we can significantly improve our social awareness, our understanding of the world, and of ourselves. I thought this book was fantastic and will continue to apply the things Herman discusses in my life.

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### **John Steinmetz says**

I have been reading self-help books for many years. I had no idea what to expect from this book, but I have not been very observant to many things in life and felt this would be interesting. I was very impressed with the many areas where being observant is very important. The author wrote with clarity and provided many examples. The book became more and more useful with each chapter. I would rate this book as my favorite non-fiction book. Maybe I'm influenced by being on vacation while finishing the book.

I will go back over the book and take notes, as there are many useful tools to use going forward. One thing that I will share now is the following: "If you speak with emotion, expect emotion coming back." Very succinct. If we want others to process our information using logical reasoning, we should stick to the facts.

To me, this applies to communications with co-workers, spouses, 3 years olds, everyone.

Great, great book (my opinion). Thanks, Amy Herman!

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### **Robin Tierney says**

More reasons that art matters. The author shows how focused study of artworks can improve perception, analysis and decision-making in day-to-day and work activities that otherwise have nothing to do with art. You get better at noticing details and seeing the world more objectively. The author leads "Art of Perception" classes for FBI agents, police, medical personnel and other markets.

The book reminded me of a neat word/important concept: PENTIMENTO. Don't let bad paint dry; comes from Italian for repentance. Whether the offending strokes are painted over or scratched off, do it ASAP so they don't become permanent. (Applies to writing as well.)

This isn't a review -- just random notes:

Visual Intelligence: Sharpen Your Perception, Change Your Life  
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Since I was little, I had seen the art in everything.

Study surroundings like a painting.

See clearly, communicate effectively.

FBI art classes, docs, med tech.... Art of Perception

Flowers in psychiatric hospital - unexpected

Part 1: Assess:

From da Vinci to Steve Jobs: inventing starts with knowing what to see.

Retina is an active part of brain, not a passive pathway. Can learn to better tame the jungle of neurons.

Jan Steen 1669 Dutch partying.

The Goldfinch chained. Look at to increase your brain-processing speed.

Learn to be more facile shifting perspectives.

And situationally aware instead of autopilot.

Distraction lead to IQ loss. Me and FB.

Also, feeling always in a hurry.

And: viewing nearly everything through an LCD screen.

1. Put phone away.

2. Observe, not just see.

3. Decode as many stimuli as possible.

See a man's nationality in face, livelihood on his hands, his story in his gait, mannerisms, watch-chain ornaments and the lint adhering to his clothes.

Ball game: not notice woman with parasol or gorilla suit.

Exercise: look at, then, describe, then draw the painting.

\* 1960s Phila physician Arthur Lintgen could read grooves of LP records, id the piece, how many movements. Studied, so he taught himself to see the bits of info.

At hotel, man shocked at soap replacement when plenty left. Turned into hotel soap recycling company. Impoverished and other cultures cherish it.

A zipperless zipper inspired by burrs in nature changed the fashion industry but also made living and working in space possible. Velcro.

So, transformations.

Subjectivity based on own experiences and beliefs and values.

Perceptual filters

Assumptions: bed in same place, but what if it floated out to sea?

Kenya Nairobi attacks, so little info, and so many assumptions Couldn't discern terrorists.

COBRA -

Camouflaged

one thing at a time (concentrate don't multitask -- like study without checking FB or phone)

break 10 mins every 90 min

realign what seeking and seeing

Ask - another set of eyes

Big picture - visual learners most adept

Inattentional blindness - NYC's Linda Stein (lit agent) murder suspect's pants on inside out

## Part 2: Analyze

Discovery = seeing what everyone else has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought.  
Giuseppe Arcimboldo upside down - see from diff angle.

Japanese Kaizen improvement teams walk around...used in Am health systems, auto factories.

McLean Farmers Market house on fire bkgrd - Chrysler museum of art.

Absence of an object, event, sense is a clue.  
What don't we see, and know.

A key driver: our own priorities.

### 3. Articulate

Objective language as a practice - avoid subjective and assumptive ... always never obviously.

Period or decimal point in wrong place.  
Lightning vs lightning bug.  
Use inclusive language "what if we tried this?"

Saying too much often worse than too little.

Write down only your observations, not assumptions or inferences.

\* Don't let bad paint dry: PENTIMENTO. From the Italian word for repentance. Whether the offending strokes are painted over or scratched off, do it ASAP so they don't become permanent. (Applies to writing as well. Letting bad paint/writing set will skew perception, change meaning, derail communication, etc.) It's critical to add each stroke or sentence with care and intention. (Reminds me of measure twice, cut once.)

John Singer Sargent: when trying to make a name for himself, he painted a 7 ft portrait of an elegant married woman -- with one strap of dress fallen off-shoulder. This was considered scandalous. He attempted to reposition the strap but already this wrecked his reputation in Paris. He eventually sold it to the Met in 1916 with the condition it be named Madame X (and not identify the subject by name).

Repeat, rename, reframe. (Meditation/acceptance/labeling principle! To avoid creating and embedding a false interpretation/story in your mind that will distort your perception, attitude, judgment.)

Repeat: Andy Warhol, soup can, made it unforgettable.

Rename: Harvey Mackay - negotiation. Rename and you can persuade someone to agree to new terms. Such as: instead of contract change, call it contract extension.

Reframe (how you present the information and make it more compelling): ad copywriter changes blind man's sign from "Blind. Please help." to "It's a beautiful day. You can see it, I cannot." (Created empathy/connection.)

Communicate clearly, calmly, objectively during times of stress. (Personal, crime, medical situation....)

People often turn away from or block uncomfortable truths (David Hume).

So we miss info by doing that too.

Denial

Avoid judgment words like trashy, fancy.

Instead be specific: satin...sash.

Hieronymus Bosch The Garden of Earthly Delights 1500-1505

People look away

That's why signs of child abuse are explained away.

Outsmart your emotions. Focus only on what is seen, heard....

Be aware of own emotional triggers, body lang, facial expression.

Visual pollution to one can seem like status quo to another (This is Water)

Reframe: instead of this is wrong, ask did you mean to, do I understand correctly....

I'm sorry there was a miscommunication.

Consider the effect your demeanor, words, expression are having on the situation.

Be neutral.

Adapt:

Be aware of bias: likes, unconscious, jumping to conclusions (such as elder care home stripper).

Assumptions. Stereotypes. Mom mistaken for nanny.

Caravaggio painting

Run by others to check validity of theory

Dark Knight shooting - tv viewers knew more than emergency workers.

Dangerous gray area.

Tylenol poisoning and Denny's discrimination incident - investigate but take fast action to limit fallout: apologize, first priority safety, solve.

Objet trouve: make new art from found objects.

As humans, our brains want to compete things and constantly these days feel pressure to complete things.

Realize that when analyzing and drawing conclusions.

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**Milan says**

great book very practical

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## **Miguel says**

Al principio pensé que podría ser un simple libro de auto ayuda, por lo cual fui gratamente sorprendido, el enfoque con el arte y las implicaciones científicas hicieron dela lectura una buena oportunidad para mucho aprendizaje, quizás hubo una parte que se volvió un poco tediosa pero a esas alturas ya me había dado todo lo que buscaba.

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## **Jordan Limtiaco says**

For anyone who wants to see art or things clearly and easily, this book will help you. Or if you want to look at things objectively like a journalist, the book also provides that.

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## **Dmytro says**

The main premise of this book is that studying art can help one develop the skill of observation in life which is obviously very useful.

Paintings have hundreds of small details, learning to become observant to all of them tends to translate in other areas of life.

It goes on to provide a lot of examples of paintings and how one might go about assessing them.

In terms of framework, the book recommends using a "Who, What, Where, When, Why" framework to fully understand each painting.

Its recommended to focus on objective things in a painting versus subjects.

Example: if someone is holding a cup, it doesn't necessarily mean there is coffee inside it.

In general, this book gave me a deeper appreciation of art

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## **Peter McLoughlin says**

Nice book on perspective and changing it to see the world differently. Keying in on details differently and adopting different frameworks to scan a scene. Most importantly to pay attention to ones immediate environment and try to notice things one usually ignores. Lots of artworks used as case studies to hone these skills.

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## **Allison Hogan says**

Absolutely loved this book. It taught me how to observe situations differently. My favorite chapter is seven, "Seeing What's Missing." Herman describes to help organize data and find the most important elements of any situation, ask three questions:

1. What do I know?
2. What don't I know?
3. If I could get more information, what do I need to know?

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### **Jim says**

I liked this book, it was really useful for my job in software product development. I learned 3 things from this book. The first was increasing the number of things you see in a piece of art (or anything really). The second to separate the objective from the subjective so you are more accurately describing what you see. The third to understand how biases affect what you see.

In separating the objective from subjective, it also gives another tool for dealing with conflict at work and not being emotional.

All in all very useful to help me improve my work which was what I was looking for in a book.

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### **Rhiannon says**

I went to the local library looking for "Quiet" by Susan Cain for a book club, but they didn't have it. So I started glancing through the new arrivals section and after pulling out five books that didn't interest me, I suddenly started and realized this book was right under my nose. It was just what I really needed, a lesson on how to assess, analyze, articulate, and observe the world in new ways. I really like how Amy E. Herman caught my attention immediately with the colorful art, then went on to outline a convincing argument for each process for observing the world. Thanks to this book, I am now into watching the television show Brain Games and I've already noticed a few things I would not have previously. This morning, I even had the courage to tell a complete stranger that he had a dry cleaning tag stuck to the back of his collar. Not a big deal for some, but I think it shows progress. And, halfway through the book, Herman quotes Cain, just adding to the feeling this book was written just for me, even though it's based on a 3-hour course taught to thousands of police, analysts, and healthcare workers over the past ten years or so.

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