

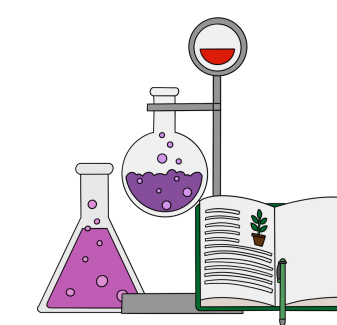
Emotional Captioning - Are ancient visual formulas still readable today?

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This project explores how contemporary museum visitors **interpret emotional expressions** in historical artworks. Starting from the question of whether **visual formulas of emotion** remain **universally readable**, participants analyse gestures and expressive elements in selected artworks and contribute to the creation of emotion-focused interpretative captions ("emotional captions"). The project highlights the **culturally constructed nature of emotional gestures** while exploring the relationship between contemporary non-verbal communication and historical visual formulas. By involving non-expert audiences, it reveals **how memory and cultural conventions shape the interpretation of emotional expressions**.

Research and methods



Emotional Questionnaires



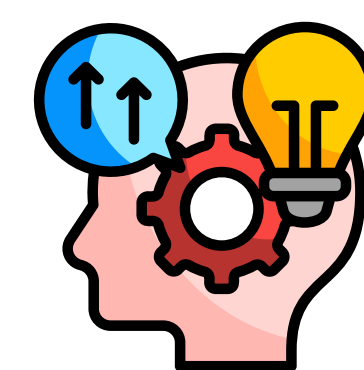
The questionnaires were designed to investigate how museum visitors **recognise and interpret emotions in artworks**. In the initial **open-ended questionnaire**, visitors were invited to identify the artworks that had emotionally affected them most and to describe both their emotional responses and the visual features that had elicited them. The **revised version** adopted a **more guided approach**, presenting images of selected artworks from the museum collection and asking participants to analyse the emotions they perceived through predominantly multiple-choice questions. A **child-friendly version**, using emojis as response options, was also developed to make participation more accessible to younger visitors.

Workshop at Pontevedra Museum



The workshop at the Museo de Pontevedra **combined individual observation with participatory discussion** to investigate how visitors recognize and interpret emotions in artworks. Participants first examined selected paintings, recording the emotions they perceived and the visual cues (gestures, facial expressions, compositional elements) supporting their interpretations. These observations were then collectively discussed with researchers. The workshop concluded with the **co-creation of emotion-focused captions**, emphasizing the visual features that enable emotional recognition rather than traditional art-historical descriptions.

Conclusions



The revised questionnaires demonstrated that **image-based and guided formats can effectively increase public participation** in museum-based citizen science activities. Questionnaire responses and workshop discussions consistently showed that **participants were able to recognise and justify emotions by referring to specific visual cues**, even in historical artworks shaped by distant artistic conventions. These findings suggest a **remarkable continuity in the interpretation of emotional expressions across time** and highlight the **potential of participatory methodologies** to generate valuable research data while fostering meaningful engagement with cultural heritage.

References



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