

Visual Analysis 2

Please choose one of the following essay prompts.

Jacques-Louis David and Francisco Goya present two very different images of warfare in *Oath of the Horatii* (1786) and *Third of May 1808* (1814). Compare and contrast each of these important works being careful to establish the historical context in which each work was created. How do the works differ in regards to approach, intention and style? How are they similar? Discuss how these differences and similarities relate to the artistic movements of Neoclassicism and Romanticism. Why are practitioners of these two styles described at odds with each other? How are the stylistic and personal aims of the artists evidenced in the work?

- or -

Use a feminist approach to compare and contrast a work by a female and a male Baroque artist. Consider who the artist assumes the viewer of the work to be, and from whom's perspective the action or story unfolds. Who is the main subject, and what significance does their gender play in understanding the meaning of the work? What subjects exhibit power in the work, and how is that power understood (for example, logical, rebellious, odd, or conforming)? Do all subjects depicted in the work exhibit agency (power, freedom of choice, action)? Is there a gender division in the display of authority and/or action as depicted? Consider whether the work reinforces or critically evaluates gender stereotypes? Finally, discuss how the work was received, and whether the two works were equally valued in their time.

- or -

Read the first chapter in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*) and answer the following.

Consider Frans Hals' *Regentesses of the Old Men's Alms House* (1664) and *Regents of the Old Men's Alms House* (1664) as they are discussed by Berger. Do you feel that the artist has presented his sitters in a favorable or unfavorable manner? Relate these works to Hals' earlier group portrait, *Officers of the Haarlem Militia Company of Saint Adrian* (1627). How has the artist's approach and intention changed in the later work? What might have motivated the artist to portray his subjects favorably or unfavorably? What is "mystification" and how does it relate to these works?

- or -

Why was Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* (1863) considered so shocking to the French Academy? Use extensive visual analysis to discuss the ways in which Manet breaks with convention in this work. How does the work relate to masterpieces of the past? Identify these predecessors and consider why Manet references these particular works. How does *Luncheon on the Grass* answer Baudelaire's call for new subjects? How is the work relative to the invention of photography and a newly emerging concept of the avant-garde? Alternately, you may ask the same questions of Manet's *Olympia* (1863).

- or -

Attend a professional exhibition that includes works made between the Renaissance and early Modern periods. The Getty Museum, LACMA, the Huntington Museum, the Norton Simon Museum, and the Bowers Museum regularly feature exhibitions of Renaissance to Modern works. Plan ahead by checking museum websites to be sure that relevant works will be on view when you plan to visit. In addition, read Marjorie Munsterberg's, <http://writingaboutart.org/pages/visualdesc.html> for information on visual description and analysis.

Choose one work seen in person and develop a visual analysis. Visual description involves communicating what you see and feel when viewing a work of art to a general reader who may or may not have experienced the work themselves. For the Museum Analysis, assume that your reader has a background in art, but has not seen the work you are discussing in person. Begin your description with the basics - let your reader know the artist's name, the title of the work (being sure to distinguish the title in your text by italicizing or bolding your font), and the date the work was made. Describe what you see, drawing the viewer's attention to key elements (objects, figures, symbols). Discuss the work's subjects. What are the main components, what is represented, who is portrayed, where does the story take place? While you may want to keep your visual description concise, remember that you cannot assume that what you are seeing and experiencing is universal.

Then, craft a persuasive visual description that supports your thesis and that skillfully utilizes pertinent vocabulary. After discussing the denotative meaning of the work (it's literal features), consider the work's connotative meaning by describing the ideas that are suggested and implied by its formal properties. While this may feel descriptive, what you're focusing on in this section are the qualities and characteristics of compositional elements such as *atmospheric* perspective, *asymmetrical* balance, *irregular* rhythm, *organic* shapes, *faint* line work, and *bold* color harmonies. The handouts on design and the elements of art from the Getty Museum may be helpful. Refrain from offering iconographic, biographic, or semiotic analysis as much as possible in this essay.

Finally, connect your visual description, denotative consideration, and connotative read into an overall interpretation of the work. What meaning do the objects, subjects, and symbols suggest? What meaning is conveyed by the work's form and visual elements? What story is told, or view of the world expressed by this work of art? If the exhibition venue, layout, and interpretive materials did their work well, your final interpretation should nicely reflect the exhibition's theme and concepts.

Please include a photograph of yourself at the museum with your essay, and remember to list each contributor (if written collaboratively)