

Visual Analysis 1

Respond to one of the following essay prompts for the first Visual Analysis assignment.

Option 1

Read Erwin Panofsky's *Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait*.

Choose an Early Renaissance painting and consider the artist's use of iconography, a.k.a. "disguised symbolism." Panofsky suggested a three step approach to developing an understanding of a work through its iconology: 1. Consider the practical - the general sense of the painting, where your eye is drawn, and what elements your eye returns to repeatedly; 2. Identify the objects and figures depicted in the painting, and decode their symbolic meaning by comparing them to other cultural sources (for example, paintings by the artist's contemporaries, or literary works); 3. Consider the system of symbols that the artist uses to convey meaning and what that system says about the culture that produced it. Use this three step approach to discuss the general sense of the painting, the painting's symbolic meaning, and what that system of meaning reflects about the culture (place and time period) in which the artist lived and worked. Identify at least five objects depicted in the painting and discuss the connotative and denotative meanings of those symbols. Are there other interpretations, perhaps even contrasting interpretations, of this same work? Does the work fit into a geographic and/or historical tradition, or is it unusual in its imagery? Why?

Option 2

Read Jonathan Jones' *Divine Inspiration*.

During the Renaissance, and after, artists regularly painted self-portraits. Choose two artist self-portraits in any media to compare and contrast, and use a biographic approach, as demonstrated in Jones' article, to understand their meaning. When using biography as a method for interpreting meaning, consider the following: 1. What do the details of the artist's life reveal about the work?; 2. How did the important events of the artist's life influence their choice in subject matter, and the manner in which they expressed their subject?; What associations or themes do we identify in the work that may be associated with this personal context or the artist's biography?

Consider how the artists chose to represent themselves, and what larger meaning is conveyed about their profession through their representational choices. What does this sense of their artistic practice convey about the role that the artist and art plays in shaping culture, responding to philosophical and political concerns, and conveying a sense of a larger world view? Do the two artists agree, or contradict, each other's world view and the cultural significance of art?

Option 3

Compare the three of the four depictions of the Last Supper by Andrea del Castagno (1445 - 1450) Leonardo da Vinci (1495 - 1498), Jacopo Tintoretto (1592 - 1594) and Veronese (1573). How are the paintings similar, and how do they differ? Discuss each work in terms of its composition, use of color/light, and the use (or non-use) of gesture to convey meaning. Discuss elements in each work that reflect the period and place in which they were made. Describe how each artist interprets the story and strategically depicts a large number of figures with cohesion. Consider each artist's interpretation of the Biblical story, the everyday act of eating a meal, and how their work demonstrates the important concerns, ideals, or ambitions of their eras.

Option 4

Compare the sculptural depictions of David by Donatello (1430 - 1440), Michelangelo (1501 - 1504), and Bernini (1623 - 1624). How are the works similar, and how do they differ? Discuss elements in each work that reflect the period and place in which they were made. Describe the part of the story depicted in each work and how that artistic choice demonstrates the important concerns, ideals, or ambitions of the artist's era. How does each statue interact with viewers and the space it occupies? What circumstances or events influenced the artist's choices, and what did the artist wish to convey about this shared subject?