

Visual Analysis 3

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

Option 1

Marxism is the ideological and socioeconomic theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels including the belief that the struggle between social classes is a major force in history and that there should eventually be a society in which there are no classes. The fundamental ideology of communism, it holds that all people are entitled to enjoy the fruits of their labour but are prevented from doing so in a capitalist economic system, which divides society into two classes: non-owning workers and non-working owners. Marx called the resulting situation “alienation,” and he said that when the workers repossessed the fruits of their labour, alienation would be overcome and class divisions would cease. The Marxist theory of history posits class struggle as history's driving force, and sees capitalism as the most recent and most critical historical stage because at this stage the proletariat will at last arise united.

Analyze a work made in the early modern period using a Marxist approach. What socio-economic classes are represented in the work? What visual clues convey this class distinction? Who would the artist have assumed would be the viewer of this work? What social class was the artist? What message would this work have conveyed to the viewer concerning labor, wealth, and socio-economic groups?

Option 2

Why was Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* considered so shocking when it was first displayed? In what ways did Manet break with convention in this work? Compare Manet's work with at least one previous work considering similar subject matter to illustrate and describe the artist's break with the past. Consider how *Luncheon on the Grass* asserts a modern perspective with modern subjects. How is the impulse towards rule breaking in the arts, especially after Manet, related to modernism?

Option 3

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 primary and 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).