

Visual Analysis/Museum Paper

Attend a professional exhibition that includes photographic works. The Getty Museum, LACMA, MoCA, UCR California Museum of Photography, the Annenberg Space for Photography, OCMA, and the Bowers Museum regularly feature exhibitions of photographic 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 explanation of visual description at, <http://writingaboutart.org/pages/visualdesc.html> for information on visual description and analysis.

Choose one photographic 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.

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.

Next, consider how the photograph looks - is it abstract or realistic, in what style is the work created (you may need to look ahead in your textbook to figure this out), what are the qualities of the visual elements like line (implied and actual), contrast (hi or lo), composition, form, and other formal aspects? Consider the materials, techniques, and physical properties of the work - how was it made, what type of photograph is it, what techniques were employed to capture the image? 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 at the end of this packet may be helpful.

Finally, connect your private experience with the work and its visual elements. 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?

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