

Essay 2 **Using Biography or a Feminist Approach**

Read Marjorie Munsterberg's consideration of biography as a tool for understanding works of art at, <http://writingaboutart.org/pages/biography.html> and Laurie Schneider Adam's "Approaches to Art" from *Looking at Art* at, <http://www.theslideprojector.com/pdf/files/approachesart.pdf>.

Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550) established biography as an important tool for understanding an artist's work. While a number of the stories were not researched, and are likely unfounded gossip, the work reinforced the elevated status that Renaissance artists worked to secure, and furthered western connections to intelligence, talent, and impassioned dedication to craft as hallmarks of artistic genius.

Choose an artist from the Age of Enlightenment (the Baroque, Rococo, or Neoclassic periods) and discuss the meaning of two of their works by using either (or both) a biographic or feminist approach.

When using biography as a method for interpreting meaning, consider the following:

- What do the details of the artist's life reveal about the work?
- 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?

When using a feminist approach to understanding a work, consider the following:

- Who is the assumed viewer of the work, and from who's perspective is the action or story told? Who is the main subject and what is their gender?
- What types of subjects exhibit power and how is that power understood (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?
- Does the work reinforce or critically evaluate gender stereotypes?
- Were the artist's contributions valued during their time? Is the artist and this artwork valued today?

Please remember, you are required to make a minimum of two footnote citations in Chicago Manual of Style (no bibliography) from two different, credible sources originating on paper. Do not cite works of art. Use your sources strategically to support your thesis or claim.