

Unit 3 Museum Essay: Critical Analysis of a Work of Art

Objective:

Art criticism is responding to, interpreting meaning, and making critical judgments about specific works of art. For this essay assignment you will visit an **online or in person museum** and choose one work of **Non-Representational Art** and write a critical analysis of the work utilizing the guide and rubric provided below.

Instructions:

Your essay should be 2-3 pages and include a works cited page. It must be turned into the U3 Project dropbox found under the Assessment tab in D2L. When you visit the museum to discover the work of art you want to write about, I have provided you with a "[Art Analysis Check Sheet](#)" to help guide you in your evaluation of the work. It can be found under the content / U3 Museum Essay in D2L. You do not have to turn in the check sheet.

Essay Directions:

A. Formatting:

Follow MLA guidelines for this essay plus works cited page:

- MLA formatted header, which includes your name, class, date and title of essay.
- Double spaced typing
- Your pages should be numbered with your name.
- Include a short works cited page. Here is a link to help for the MLA citation guidelines. [MLA Citation Manager](#). You should have at least two sources for this project, the museum or museum website and at least one other research website. If you include an image of the artwork, you must include the citation for that image as well.

B. There are four paragraphs needed for this essay. Necessary paragraphs:

Description: pure description of the object without value judgments, analysis, or interpretation. (subject matter, medium, form).

1. Includes artist's name
2. Includes name of exhibition
3. Includes medium (and style if pertinent)
4. It answers the question, "What do you see?"
5. The various elements that constitute a description may include:
 - Form of art whether architecture, sculpture, painting or one of the minor arts.
 - Medium of work whether clay, stone, steel, paint, etc., and technique (tools used)
 - Size and scale of work (relationship to person and/or frame and/or context)
 - Elements or general shapes (architectural structural system) within the composition, including building of post-lintel construction or painting with several figures lined up in a row; identification of objects
 - Description of axis whether vertical, diagonal, horizontal, etc.
 - Description of line, including contour as soft, planar, jagged, etc.

- Description of how line describes shape and space (volume); distinguish between lines of objects and lines of composition, e.g., thick, thin, variable, irregular, intermittent, indistinct, etc.
- Relationships between shapes, e.g., large and small, overlapping, etc.
- Description of color and color scheme = palette
- Texture of surface or other comments about execution of work
- Context of object: original location and date.

Formal Analysis: determining what the features suggest and deciding why the artist used such features to convey specific ideas.

6. Includes all principles of design and organization of the elements.
7. Includes how the artist uses the previous two concepts to reveal the subject matter.
8. Includes a discussion of the how the artist's choices of the visual language of art is accomplished.
9. It answers the question, "How did the artist do it?"
10. The various elements that constitute analysis may include:
 - Determination of subject matter through naming iconographic elements, e.g., historical event, allegory, mythology, etc.
 - Selection of most distinctive features or characteristics whether line, shape, color, texture, etc.
 - Analysis of the principles of design or composition, e.g., stable, repetitious, rhythmic, unified, symmetrical, harmonious, geometric, varied, chaotic, horizontal or vertically oriented, etc.
 - Discussion of how elements or structural system contribute to appearance of image or function
 - Analysis of use of light and role of color, e.g., contrasty, shadowy, illogical, warm, cool, symbolic, etc.
 - Treatment of space and landscape, both real and illusionary (including use of perspective), e.g., compact, deep, shallow, naturalistic, random
 - Portrayal of movement and how it is achieved
 - Effect of particular medium(s) used
 - Your perceptions of balance, proportion and scale (relationships of each part of the composition to the whole and to each other part) and your emotional
 - Reaction to object or monument.

Interpretation: What is the subject matter or content? Is there meaning or an idea that the artist strives toward in his/her choices of elements, and principles or media? Establishing the broader context for this type of art.

It answers the question, "Why did the artist create it and what does it mean"

The various elements that constitute interpretation may include:

- Main idea, overall meaning of the work.
- Interpretive Statement: Can I express what I think the artwork is about in one sentence?
- Evidence: What evidence inside or outside the artwork supports my interpretation?

Judgment: Draw a conclusion as to how effectively the artist uses the language of art to create a visual image that is persuasive, creates a sense of unity of form with the subject and/or content with medium chosen. Judging a piece of work means giving it rank in relation to other works and of course considering a very important aspect of the visual arts; its originality.

Is it a good artwork?

Criteria: What criteria do I think are most appropriate for judging the artwork?

Evidence: What evidence inside or outside the artwork relates to each criterion?

Judgment: Based on the criteria and evidence, what is my judgment about the quality of the artwork?

C. Writing Skills:

- Student will employ writing skills that exhibit proper use of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word usage in a manner that is clear and concise.
- Student should consider having his/her paper proofread by someone considered to have good writing skills.
- Student has used MLA format for heading, paper, and works cited page.

Rubric

The essay will be graded on the following rubric

Criteria	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Non-representational museum or gallery artwork selected	5 points Clearly identified example of non-representational art and presence in a museum or gallery.	4 points The artwork selected was not in a museum or gallery	2 points The artwork was not a work of non-representational art.	0 points Artwork selected is inappropriate for this assignment.
Paragraph 1 Description	20 points Essay give complete description and clearly identified elements and principles of design found in the work. Thoroughly answers, "what do you see?"	15 points Essay gives some description and partly answers, "what do you see?"	10 points Essay gives a basic description of the artwork, but leaves out some pertinent information like dimensions or medium.	5 points Essay shows an unclear understanding of the elements and principles of design.

Paragraph 2 Formal Analysis	20 points Essay has all elements of formal analysis addressed thoroughly, including reaction and "how did the artist do it."	15 points Essay has some elements of formal analysis addressed thoroughly, including reaction and "how did the artist do it."	10 points Essay has few elements of formal analysis addressed.	5 points Essay has weakly addressed the formal analysis of the artwork.
Paragraph 3 Interpretation	20 points Essay thoroughly answers "why did the artist create it and what does it mean" by comparing the artwork to researched sources, personal reaction, and/ or formal analysis.	15 points Essay works to answer "why did the artist create it and what does it mean" but does not pull in outside sources or information.	10 points Essay attempts to answer "why did the artist create it and what does it mean."	5 points Essay unsuccessfully answers "why did the artist create it and what does it mean."
Paragraph 4 Judgement	20 points Essay offers judgement on how successful the artwork is, and thoroughly backs up the judgement based on additional research, knowledge of the artist's body of work, and student's personal reaction.	15 points Essay offers judgement on how successful the artwork is, but does not pull in outside sources or information.	10 points Essay may answer "is it a good artwork," but lacks detail or evidence.	5 points Essay does not clearly answer "is it a good artwork?"
Additional research is evident.	5 points Additional research is used excellently to add insight to the analysis of the artwork.	4 points Additional research is evident, examples, references, are used.	2 points Additional research is weak.	0 points Additional research is not evident.

Correct Formatting, Writing Skills Evident	10 points The essay is in correct MLA formatting, there are 2 or fewer grammar mistakes, or there is 1 or fewer citation mistakes.	8 points The essay is in mostly correct MLA formatting, there are 4 or fewer grammar mistakes, or there are 2 or fewer citation mistakes.	5 points The essay follows some MLA formatting, there are 8 or fewer grammar mistakes, or there are 4 or fewer citation mistakes.	2 points The essay is missing important elements of MLA formatting, there are more than 8 grammar mistakes, or there are more than 4 citation mistakes.
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