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Introductory Art History Essay Assignments

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Midterm Essay Assignment

Draft Due: Friday, **March 12th** by Midnight*

Revision Due: Friday, **March 26th** by Midnight*

*Submit your draft and revision via TurnItIn on BlackBoard.

Assignment:

Many of the artworks we have looked at in this course can be analyzed within certain themes. For this assignment, choose one of the themes below to write your essay about. Select works of art discussed in each lecture from weeks 2 through 6 to support your analysis. You can earn extra credit if you also discuss a work of art from lecture 7, which occurs after the draft is due but before its revision. To better understand the expectations for this assignment, please review the Example Essay and Grading Rubric.

Theme 1 - Power and Leadership:

Figures of authority tend to be represented within certain visual conventions. Consider all of the depictions of leaders we have seen in this course. What do their representations have in common? What is different? How do these images convey authority? What symbols, if any, do they use? How are different leadership roles visualized? That is, how might a religious leader's features differ from a king's? How do materials and artistic techniques affect the work's understanding?

From lectures 2 through 6, you might wish to discuss works of art that relate to the following: Mesopotamian rulers (Lecture 2), Egyptian pharaohs (Lecture 3), the Buddha (Lecture 4), Greek warriors, gods, goddesses, or Roman leaders (Lecture 5), a portrait of emperors Constantine or Justinian (Lecture 6). For extra credit, you may consider *The Last Judgment* relief sculpture on the tympanum of St. Lazare from Lecture 7.

Theme 2 - Idealization of the Human Body:

What does it mean for a figural artwork to be idealized? How do works of art convey the aesthetic ideals of the cultures that produced them? Why might the ideal representation for one person be bad for another? What techniques might an artist use to idealize their depiction of the human body? How do size and materials affect the perception of the artwork?

From lectures 2 through 6, you might wish to discuss works of art that relate to the following: paleolithic fertility idols or Mesopotamian rulers (Lecture 2), Egyptian pharaohs or scribes (Lecture 3), the Buddha (Lecture 4), Greek or Roman sculpture (Lecture 5), and Byzantine portraiture (Lecture 6). Extra credit: Medieval sculpture from Lecture 7.

Theme 3 - Architectural Innovations:

What do the types of structures people build tell us about them and their society? You may wish to begin by telling your reader why people didn't start building large structures until

the Neolithic era. What role, if any, does religion have on the design of the structures? What significance do materials and technological advancements have in a work's construction? What, if any, architectural features are shared among different cultures?

From lectures 2 through 6, you could discuss works of art that relate to the following: Neolithic religious structures (Lecture 2), Egyptian pyramids and temples (Lecture 3), Buddhist Stupas (Lecture 4), Greek Parthenon (Lecture 5), and Roman, Byzantine, or Islamic architecture (Lecture 6). Extra credit: Romanesque or Gothic cathedrals from Lecture 7.

Draft requirements:

As a required assignment, the essay draft is worth 7.5% of your final course grade. Submitting a draft gives you the opportunity to review your ideas with your instructor and revise your essay before your final submission. The more you write, the more feedback your instructor can give you to help in the revision of your essay. Take a look at the Example Essay to give yourself a better idea on how to approach this assignment. While perfect essays are not expected for a draft, you should address the following to receive full credit:

1. Choose one of the themes as the topic for your essay.
2. Choose at least one work of art from each lecture in weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 that you will analyze within the theme of your essay. State each work's title, date, culture/period, and artist if known.
3. Describe the formal attributes of each work that exhibit your chosen theme. In other words, explain why the work looks the way it does in relation to the theme. Consider its size and material. What is its content or subject matter? For artworks, consider who or what is depicted. For architecture, consider the structure's function.
4. Discuss important contextual considerations that influenced the development of each work with regard to your chosen theme. What was the historical, political, socioeconomic, religious, and/or cultural setting of the work of art during its creation? Consider what these works of art meant to their original audiences.
5. After looking at the important formal and contextual elements of each work, choose at least 4 or 5 points of comparison to organize your essay in relation to your theme. These might be subject matter, historical context, materials, artistic techniques, etc. The objective here is to identify topics that will help you compare and contrast the works of art within the theme. See the Example Essay for guidance.

Final Score	Criteria
Full Credit (7.5%)	Student addresses all required parts (1-5 above)
Partial Credit (3-5%)	Some but not all of the assignment is addressed
No Credit (0%)	No draft is submitted

Essay Revision:

Your essay revision should be properly formatted as an essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. In addition to addressing the five points required of the essay draft, your revision should incorporate your instructor's feedback. It is expected that your essay will discuss at least 5 works of art from each lecture in weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Use the Example Essay as a model: discuss the artworks together in paragraphs organized by points of comparison, such as subject matter, context, materials, pictorial conventions, etc. In doing so, you will show the various ways in which different cultures address similar themes in their art. Avoid the isolated discussions of single works of art – remember to discuss the works together by comparing and contrasting the features that are related to the theme. Try not to force comparisons – you don't have to discuss every work under each point of comparison.

Format and Submission Guidelines:

- Your essay should be 5 double-spaced typed pages in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins.
- Italicize titles of fine works of art (architecture titles do not require italicization). First introductions to artists and architects should use their full names. Any later references can use their last names and shortened titles.

***A note on Plagiarism:**

This essay does not require research outside of lecture materials and readings. You should be able to write your essay entirely in your own words and without the need to quote from other sources. In fact, I prefer you to do so. That being said, if you copy any information or ideas from other sources, you must cite them in your essay. Failure to properly quote and cite information constitutes plagiarism and will result in a failing grade.

Writing Resources:

- *Writing About Art* by Marjorie Munsterberg is a free, online resource, that includes writing examples: <http://writingaboutart.org/index.html>.
- If you're majoring in Art or Art History, I recommend Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*, 11th Edition (New York: Pearson, 2015).

Campus Resources:

- QCC's [Center for Tutoring and Academic Support \(CTAS\)](#) is available for remote assistance.
- Students may also submit writing assignments to [TigerWrite](#) at any time.
- Students may make appointments with the instructor for video chat consultations, especially during the Midterm period week.

Essay Grading Rubric:

Criteria	Poor	Fair	Good	Total
Opening paragraph: Is theme of the essay clearly stated? Do you tell your reader which works of art you will discuss? Do you identify the works properly with title, date, culture/period, and artist if known?	0-3	4-6	7-10	/10
Formal Analysis: Do you describe the formal attributes of each work that exhibit your chosen theme? In other words, do you explain why the work looks the way it does in relation to the theme? Do you consider its size and material? What is its content or subject matter?	0-9	10-17	18-25	/25
Content and Contextual Analysis: Do you discuss the important contextual considerations that influenced the development of each work with regard to your chosen theme? What was the historical, political, socioeconomic, religious, and/or cultural setting of the work of art during its creation? Do you consider what these works of art meant to their original audiences?	0-9	10-17	18-25	/25
Organization: Does your essay stay focused on the theme? Are your formal and contextual analyses relevant to them? Do you organize your essay with paragraphs based on points of comparison? Are these points of comparison indicated in the paragraphs' topic sentences? Does your essay flow from one idea to the next with the use of transition sentences? Is there a strong introduction and conclusion?	0-7	8-14	15-20	/20
Surface level writing and formatting: Are there grammatical errors? Is the syntax clear? Is the spelling correct? If necessary, are sources of information properly cited?	0-3	4-6	7-10	/10
Terminology: Do you use appropriate vocabulary to analyze the artwork?	0-1	2-3	4-5	/5
Works of art: Do you discuss at least one work of art from each lecture in weeks 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12?	0-1	2-3	4-5	/5
Extra Credit: Do you discuss a work of art from Lecture 13? If so, is your analysis of the work relevant to your chosen them? Does it enrich your essay?	0-3	4-6	7-10	/10
TOTAL of Essay grade:				/100

Final Essay Assignment

Draft Due: Friday, **May 7th** by Midnight*

Revision Due: Friday, **May 21st** by Midnight*

*Submit your draft and revision via TurnItIn on Blackboard.

Assignment:

Similar to the Midterm essay, this Final essay assignment asks you to choose one of the themes below, and, through points of comparison, analyze one work of art from each lecture in weeks 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. You can earn extra credit if you also discuss a work of art from lecture 13, which occurs after the draft is due but before its revision.

Theme 1 – The Power of Art:

Throughout the semester, we have seen how works of art can be used as vehicles for influence and propaganda. Select artworks that exemplify this function. What messages are the works trying to convey and to what purpose? How do the artists achieve this formally? In other words, how do the compositions, styles, and materials convey this message? Consider who commissioned the works and their interests. Are they governmental or religious authorities, or people concerned with social issues?

Theme 2 – Revivals and Avant-Gardes:

In the second half of this semester, we have seen how some periods revived artistic styles of the past, and how others invented new styles. Why did these trends happen and what effect did they have? For the styles that were revived, what changes, if any, occurred that might distinguish them from their predecessors? For those that were invented, what makes them new? Consider how these styles reflect their sociopolitical contexts.

Theme 3 – Shifting Paradigms:

Since the advent of the Modern Era at the end of the middle ages, we have seen how new technologies, discoveries, media, and changing world views have impacted the development of art. Select works of art that embody at least one paradigm shift. What impact did it have upon the artwork, and how is it expressed formally?

Draft requirements:

As a required assignment, the essay draft is worth 7.5% of your final course grade. Submitting a draft gives you the opportunity to review your ideas with your instructor and revise your essay before your final submission. The more you write, the more feedback your instructor can give you to help revise your essay. Take a look at the Example Essay to gain a better idea on how to approach this assignment. While perfect essays are not expected for a draft, you should address the following to receive full credit:

1. Choose one of the themes as the topic for your essay.
2. Choose one work of art from each lecture in weeks 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 that you will analyze within the theme of your essay. Please note, the artworks chosen from each lecture should have been introduced in that lecture and discussed within the lecture's topic. Be mindful of the artworks you choose, and make sure they are appropriate to your chosen theme. Identify each work by its title, date, culture/period, and artist if known.
3. Describe the formal attributes of each work that exhibit your chosen theme. In other words, explain why the work looks the way it does in relation to the theme. Consider its size and material. What is its content or subject matter?
4. Discuss important contextual considerations that influenced the development of each work with regard to your chosen theme. What was the historical, political, socioeconomic, religious, and/or cultural setting of the work of art during its creation? Consider what these works of art meant to their original audiences.
5. After looking at the important formal and contextual elements of each work, choose about 3 - 5 points of comparison to organize your essay in relation to your theme. These might be subject matter, historical context, materials, artistic techniques, etc. The objective here is to identify topics that will help you compare and contrast the works of art within the theme. See the Example Essay for guidance.

Final Score	Criteria
Full Credit (7.5%)	Student addresses all required parts (1-5 above)
Partial Credit (3-5%)	Some but not all of the assignment is addressed
No Credit (0%)	No draft is submitted

Essay Revision:

Your essay revision should be properly formatted as an essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. In addition to addressing the five points required of the essay draft, your revision should incorporate your instructor's feedback. It is expected that your essay will discuss at least 5 works of art from each lecture in weeks 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. Use the Example Essay as a model: discuss the artworks together in paragraphs organized by points of comparison, such as subject matter, context, materials, pictorial conventions, etc. Avoid isolated discussions of single works of art – remember to discuss the works together by comparing and contrasting the features that are related to the theme. However, don't force comparisons if they're not appropriate. You don't have to discuss every work under each point of comparison.

Format and Submission Guidelines:

- Your essay should be 5 double-spaced typed pages in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins.

- Italicize the titles of artworks. First introductions to artists should use their full names. Any later references can use their last names and shortened titles.
- Indent new paragraphs, and do not put extra spaces in between paragraphs

***A note on Plagiarism:**

This essay does not require research outside of lecture materials and readings. You should be able to write your essay entirely in your own words and without the need to quote from other sources. In fact, I prefer you to do so. That being said, if you copy any information or ideas from other sources, you must cite them in your essay. Failure to properly quote and cite information constitutes plagiarism and will result in a failing grade.

Writing Resources:

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Essay Grading Rubric:

Criteria	Poor	Fair	Good	Total
Opening paragraph: Is theme of the essay clearly stated? Do you tell your reader which works of art you will discuss? Do you identify the works properly with title, date, culture/period, and artist if known?	0-3	4-6	7-10	/10
Formal Analysis: Do you describe the formal attributes of each work that exhibit your chosen theme? In other words, do you explain why the work looks the way it does in relation to the theme? Do you consider its size and material? What is its content or subject matter?	0-9	10-17	18-25	/25
Content and Contextual Analysis: Do you discuss the important contextual considerations that influenced the development of each work with regard to your chosen theme? What was the historical, political, socioeconomic, religious, and/or cultural setting of the work of art during its creation? Do you consider what these works of art meant to their original audiences?	0-9	10-17	18-25	/25

Criteria	Poor	Fair	Good	Total
Organization: Does your essay stay focused on the theme? Are your formal and contextual analyses relevant to them? Do you organize your essay with paragraphs based on points of comparison? Are these points of comparison indicated in the paragraphs' topic sentences? Does your essay flow from one idea to the next with the use of transition sentences? Is there a strong introduction and conclusion?	0-7	8-14	15-20	/20
Surface level writing and formatting: Are there grammatical errors? Is the syntax clear? Is the spelling correct? If necessary, are sources of information properly cited?	0-3	4-6	7-10	/10
Terminology: Do you use appropriate vocabulary to analyze the artwork?	0-1	2-3	4-5	/5
Works of art: Do you discuss at least one work of art from each lecture in weeks 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12?	0-1	2-3	4-5	/5
Extra Credit: Do you discuss a work of art from Lecture 13? If so, is your analysis of the work relevant to your chosen them? Does it enrich your essay?	0-3	4-6	7-10	/10
TOTAL of Essay grade:				/100

Essay Example

***Note:** This is a short essay example. Only 3 works of art are analyzed within the theme of “Pictorial Conventions for Animal Representation.” For your essay, you must choose at least 5 works of art, one from each lecture 2 through 6. Please observe how the works of art are discussed together in paragraphs organized by points of comparison: subject matter, context, materials, pictorial conventions, etc.



As humans acquired the ability to paint, they devised pictorial conventions to better convey information to viewers. These have changed over time to reflect the needs and values of the cultures producing the artworks. This essay will analyze three works of art with similar subject matter but from separate historical periods to shed light upon the people who made the works. Specifically, these artworks are the paleolithic *Bison* cave painting from Altamira, Spain (c. 22,000 BCE), the Minoan *Bull-leaping* fresco from the palace at Knossos in Crete, Greece (c. 1450–1400 BCE), and the Roman mosaic copy of the *Battle of Issus*, which was originally painted in Classical Greece by Philoxenos of Eretria (original: 310 BCE, copy: 100 BCE). Despite being made by and for people in completely different contexts, the paintings all depict large, four-legged, hooved animals that were important to human life in each period.

Although the animals in these paintings look alike, those in the *Bison* cave painting and *Bull Leaping* fresco are bovine, whereas those in the *Battle of Issus* are equine, or more simply, horses. The fact that artists made an effort to depict these creatures suggests they had great

value to the people of their time, but it appears as though the animals were valued for different reasons. During the paleolithic period, when humans were hunters and gathers, bison were a very important resource not only for food but also clothing and tools, which could be made from their hides and bones, respectively. *Bull Leaping* depicts some kind of ancient Aegean sport, where young men appear to leap over bulls as a form of entertainment. In the *Battle of Issus*, humans ride the horses to help them in warfare. This particular scene is based on the historical event of Alexander the Great defeating Darius, the King of Persia, in 333 BCE.

The materials and techniques the artists used to create these images also reflect the circumstances of each period. Since paleolithic humans had not yet learned to farm and domesticate animals, they moved around a lot to find their food, and caves offered them shelter. To paint the images of the bison on the cave walls, the artist ground up minerals to make the pigment for the paints, which were diluted with water and applied by hand or with tools that could be easily fashioned from bristles and twigs. Black manganese was used for contour lines, giving the bison shape and definition, which was aided by the artist's strategic incorporation of the surface and formation of the cave wall. The Minoans, on the other hand, knew how to farm and domesticate animals, so they settled and built fixed abodes. To decorate their homes, they developed fresco painting by applying pigment to wet plaster on their walls, as seen in the *Bull Leaping*. This was probably the technique used to make the original Greek classical painting of the *Battle of Issus*. The existing Roman copy is a mosaic made from the arrangement of tesserae, which are generally small pieces of stone and glass.

The pictorial conventions also differ in each painting. The *Bison* in the cave painting and the horses in the *Battle of Issus* are more or less anatomically correct, but the artists used

different perspectives to depict them. The horses are foreshortened, a technique developed in Classical Greece to make painting look more realistic by suggesting three-dimensional space. This is achieved by angling the figures and scenery. The *Bison*, like the *Bull Leaping*, are in strict profile view, capturing the entire animal from its side. Unlike the *Bison*, which are shown laying down and standing in stationary positions, the body of the *Bull Leaping* has been unnaturally elongated to suggest movement in the animal. The human figures in the fresco are also stylized with elongated limbs, pinched waists, and large torsos. Had the artist not used the pictorial convention of depicting men darker than women, it would be hard to distinguish the genders of the figures. This discrepancy might indicate that Minoan men were more often outdoors and exposed to the sun. In the *Battle of Issus*, the human figures look very realistic with individualized features that capture the psychological intensity of the violent moment through expressions of fear and determination. The artist even depicts the reflection of a fallen soldier in a shield. The naturalism in this painting is also heightened by the use of chiaroscuro, or shading, to model the figures as they would appear outdoors and in the daylight.

Arguably, the *Battle of Issus* appears the most realistic out of the three. Standing on a ground line, the figures and horses interact with each other in a scene with spatial depth. Although the *Bull Leaping* and *Bison* paintings lack depth and ground lines, the figures and bull in the fresco are oriented in relation to each other. The bison, on the other hand, float like clouds in a sky, without any sense of arrangement or orientation. The cave painting also lacks pictorial interaction with humans, even though we know that these animals were important to paleolithic people.

Although the pictorial conventions in each painting differ, this is not to say one is better than the other. Artistic styles change over time, and each painting reflects the conditions of their respective cultures. In analyzing these three paintings together, perhaps a correlation can be made between the establishment and expansion of civilization and the complexity of pictorial conventions and human relationships with animals. What is certain is that we can gain great insight into human history by analyzing works of art.