

## First Paper Assignment - Visual Analysis

Due: Monday, February 20, by 5pm to your assigned TA (specific location/directions given in section)

Format: Times New Roman, 12 pt, double spaced, 1-inch margins

Choose **one** artwork from the list below and, in a 4-6 page essay, write a visual analysis of the piece. Your analysis should answer the question of what idea or ideas the artist/artwork is conveying, and how he or she accomplishes this.

Of note: this is **not** a research paper, and you should not consult outside sources on your particular piece. You should not be trying to get the "right" answer; instead, this is an exercise in learning to analyze and write about an artwork. If you look long and carefully enough, you will get something, I assure you.

All artworks are currently on display at SLAM, and **you must visit your object in person** in order to complete the assignment. You may find these artworks in the main galleries, the sculpture garden, or the decorative arts section. Ask a museum associate if you need help finding your object. Pro tip: plan to spend some quality time with the artwork, and even return to see it a second (or third) time. Museum hours are as follows: Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm; Friday, 10:00 am–9:00 pm; Closed Monday

Jacques Lipchitz, *The Bather* (1923-25) (sculpture)

Jean Hélion, *Composition* (1933) (painting)

Mies van der Rohe, *Armchair MR-534* (1927) (furniture)

Margarete Heymann-Marks, *Plate and Covered Serving Dish* (1930) (decorative arts)

Giorgio de Chirico, *The Transformed Dream* (1913) (painting)

Paul Gauguin, *Madame Roulin* (1888) (painting)

Henri Matisse, *Bathers with a Turtle* (1907-8) (painting)

## Visual/Formal Analysis

A visual analysis draws connections between the form and its effects. An analysis makes an argument that an artwork *does* something and it uses specific observations as proof.

### **Elements to Consider:**

#### **Medium/Materials (what the work/object is made of):**

- How has the artist handled the substance that forms the object?
- Can you see marks of pencil, brush, chisel, etc.?
- Is the surface highly polished? Rough or textured?
- If there is a frame or support, is it part of the object?

#### **Size (of the object):**

- How large or small is the work/object?
- What is the relationship to human scale? What effect might this have on the viewer?

#### **Composition (the arrangement of the elements):**

- Is there a focal point? What does the artist emphasize?
- Is the composition sparse, crowded, varied, repetitious?
- If there are figures, how are they grouped or distributed?
- How does your viewpoint as spectator affect your understanding of the work?
- What is the relationship of the various elements to one another?

#### **Space (the methods used to create depth—or lack of it):**

- Does the work suggest depth or flatness? If depth, how is this indicated: linear or atmospheric perspective, overlapping, foreshortening, modeling? If flatness, how is this achieved?
- What is the relationship between figures and ground?
- How does light affect how we comprehend space?
- Is there a single point of view, or are there multiple ones?

#### **Scale (within the object):**

- What is the relative size of elements, both within the work and in relation to the viewer?
- Is scale consistent or variable? Do different scales emphasize or deemphasize certain elements?

#### **Color:**

- What color palette dominates—is it bright, dull, mono/polychromatic? How saturated are the colors?
- Are the colors naturalistic, expressive, arbitrary?
- Is color used to emphasize certain elements, create a rhythm, or direct viewers' attention?

#### **Line**

- Is the artist's line descriptive? Expressive? Decorative? Implied?
- Is the work more linear or more painterly?

#### **Plastic Arts---sculpture, three-dimensional objects, buildings:**

- Mass, Volume
- Texture
- How does the object relate to the space around it, and to its site, if relevant?

Remember to ask yourself: How does the artist use the elements of design (such as line, shape, value, color, space, and texture) to elicit a particular response from you, the viewer? What is the artist trying to persuade you to think or feel?