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?