

## AHIS2010: FORMAL ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENT

### Outline of Assignment

For this assignment we will be combining the analysis of form, experience, and meaning in a single artwork from the 19th century (or any work covered in this course from before the 19th century) except those analyzed for the sake of the assignment. It will involve a sustained investigation into the visual components of a single work. The analysis will also be geared towards helping you think about your final paper topic and can be devised in tandem with the outline, to be completed later. With this in mind, think about what may interest you in the final paper and choose your work accordingly.

### Requirements:

- DUE DATE: Tuesday, Oct 3rd
- Length: minimum 2-3 pages double spaced, 12 pt. font, standard margins, in a standard font (Times, Calibri, Arial, etc.)

### Analysis: Form, Experience, and Meaning

This assignment is meant to advance your understanding of the visual make-up of artworks, as well as to supply you with material which you can use to flesh out your final essay. A formal analysis of an artwork is an expository analysis which articulates the formal characteristics (the visual elements and dimensions) of that work. Formal analysis contrasts with contextual analysis, and so context should be kept to a minimum here

The visual components may include: spatial composition, descriptions of objects, scale, positive and negative space, volume, direction, movement, etc.; the representational elements of the work (figure, ground, etc.); considerations of color and color relationships; as well as considerations of technique, gesture, style, surface, and other visual aspects of the work.

This will lead into an understanding of how these formal elements inform your experience of the work. Experience, in this context, DOES NOT include your personal feelings and opinions about the artwork, rather, it connotes what you see and what its effect may be. For example, the use of intense complementary colors in a painting (say, of red and green next to one another) has a particular effect on your vision and thus affects your sensual experience of the painting. Whether you like it or you don't is not of concern here. Only the aspects of sensation and perception of your experience should be admitted.

Finally, the meaning of the painting can be elaborated, but ONLY as it relates to the formal characteristics of the painting, not to external social, historical, or social context. One example would be the way in which the orientation of the reading of the painting in Jacques Louis David's *Brutus* (from left to right) allows us to read the homicidal tension between civic and family duty, which resulted in the execution of Brutus' sons. While we may not know this result without knowing about Roman history (it is not information we can infer directly from the painting), we can confirm it in the painting and show how the artist developed formal means of expressing this meaning.

Before you choose your artwork for analysis, think about what you may want to write your final paper on (whether it's a topic or an artist/movement or a time period).

**Further Resources on Formal Analysis:**

<https://writingaboutart.org/pages/visualdesc.html>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM2MOyonDsY&ab\\_channel=Smarthistory](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM2MOyonDsY&ab_channel=Smarthistory)