

Writing an Art History Paper

By Maureen Gardely '12

Writing about art is based on the same analytical principles used for literature or history, but it requires a different approach and different observational skills. In an art history paper, we must employ a visual vocabulary and translate our visual impressions into a concrete verbal articulation. While this kind of writing can take many forms, the ultimate goals of any art history paper should be to explain the relationship between the technical form of a work and its impression on the viewer and to articulate how the visual elements work together to convey an overall effect.

There are several basic ways to write about art:

I. Formal Analysis:

A formal analysis is the fundamental form of writing about art and often the first taught in any introductory art history course. In a strict formal analysis, no other information is required besides that which you can see, and while some knowledge of the subject matter helps, your focus should be on the visual elements of a work. A formal analysis focuses on aspects like line, color, composition, and style, and describes the effect of these artistic decisions on the viewer. While any formal analysis must employ a good deal of description, it is important to remember that even a pure formal analysis must always be thesis-driven and each point should tie back to the overall interpretation of the work.

Example of a short formal analysis:

In Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin*, the artist uses one point perspective, balanced composition, and vibrant primary colors to convey a sense of stability and order, thus representing the Christian narrative in the idealized, harmonious aesthetic of the Renaissance. In the foreground, a man and woman stand on either side of a central figure, their adjoining heads creating a focal point which extends back to the doorway on the horizon line. The orthogonal lines created by the tiled pavement move the viewer's eye along the same central path and emphasize the perfect perspective of the scene. The deep tones of yellow and green in the central man's clothing complement the red and blue in the woman's, and form the palette for the rest of the artwork; a simple, pure combination of colors that contributes to the sense of order. The almost perfect symmetry of the scene, as well as the relatively empty middle ground, underscores both the spiritual theme and the aesthetic values of the time.



Note how the writer balances description of the work, using a vocabulary based on knowledge of artistic techniques and visual elements, with analysis of their effect on the viewer. The thesis (in bold) provides a framework for the rest of the paragraph and acts as the driving force behind the descriptive observations.

The example above merely demonstrates the type of writing typically employed in a formal analysis and is therefore shorter and less thorough than most visual analyses. Also

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Art History Research Paper Example:

How to Write Art History Anne D'Alleva, 2006 An invaluable handbook *How to Write Art History* enables students to get the most from their art history course In a clear and engaging style Anne D'Alleva empowers readers to approach their coursework with confidence and energy The book introduces two basic art historical methods formal analysis and contextual analysis revealing how to use these methods in writing papers and in class discussion The common strengths and weaknesses of an art history essay are highlighted by using real examples of written work and at each stage of the writing process D'Alleva offers valuable advice on developing an argument convincingly In addition she explains the most effective methods of note taking and outlines strategies for reviewing images essential tools when preparing for an exam Providing a fascinating view of the study of art history within its historical context this book will be particularly helpful for those considering a career in this rewarding discipline

Fundamentals of Art History Anne D'Alleva, Michael Cothren, 2021-08-05 This invaluable guide enables students to get the most from their art history course Written in an accessible style the book introduces two basic art historical methods formal analysis and contextual analysis In this new edition revising author Michael Cothren has extended the discussion on iconography and iconology as well as adding discussions on the effects of the market and museums on art Greater emphasis is placed on the global and multicultural aspects of art creation and analysis with new images and more case studies There is more step by step guidance on how to use these methods to prepare for exams and write papers

Methods and Theories of Art History Anne D'Alleva, 2005 This is an analysis of complex forms of art history It covers a broad range of approaches presenting individual arguments controversies and divergent perspectives The book begins by introducing the concept of theory and explains why it is important to the practice of art history

Art History Through the Camera's Lens Helene E. Roberts, 2013-09-13 Photography of art has served as a basis for the reconstruction of works of art and as a vehicle for the dissemination and reinterpretation of art This book provides the first definitive treatment of the subject with essays from noted authorities in the fields of art history architecture and photography The essays explore the many meanings of photography as documentation for the art historian inspiration for the artist and as a means of critical interpretation of works of art *Art History Through the Camera's Lens* will be important reading for students historians librarians and curators of the visual arts

The Routledge Companion to Digital Humanities and Art History Kathryn Brown, 2020-04-15 *The Routledge Companion to Digital Humanities and Art History* offers a broad survey of cutting edge intersections between digital technologies and the study of art history museum practices and cultural heritage The volume focuses not only on new computational tools that have been developed for the study of artworks and their histories but also debates the disciplinary opportunities and challenges that have emerged in response to the use of digital resources and methodologies Chapters cover a wide range of technical and conceptual themes that define the current state of the field and outline strategies for future development This book offers a timely perspective

on trans disciplinary developments that are reshaping art historical research conservation and teaching This book will be of interest to scholars in art history historical theory method and historiography and research methods in education

Abstracts of Papers Delivered in Art History Sessions College Art Association of America. Meeting,2000 Digital Art History Anna Bentkowska-Kafel,Trish Cashen,Hazel Gardiner,2005 This book looks at the transformation that Art and Art history is undergoing through engagement with the digital revolution Since its initiation in 1985 CHArt Computers and the History of Art has set out to promote interaction between the rapidly developing new Information Technology and the study and practice of Art It has become increasingly clear in recent years that this interaction has led not just to the provision of new tools for the carrying out of existing practices but to the evolution of unprecedented activities and modes of thought This collection of papers represents the variety innovation and richness of significant presentations made at the CHArt Conferences of 2001 and 2002 Some show new methods of teaching being employed making clear in particular the huge advantages that IT can provide for engaging students in learning and interactive discussion It also shows how much is to be gained from the flexibility of the digital image or could be gained if the road block of copyright is finally overcome Others look at the impact on collections and archives showing exciting ways of using computers to make available information about collections and archives and to provide new accessibility to archives The way such material can now be accessed via the internet has revolutionized the search methods of scholars but it has also made information available to all However the internet is not only about access Some papers here show how it also offers the opportunity of exploring the structure of images and dealing with the fascinating possibilities offered by digitisation for visual analysis searching and reconstruction Another challenging aspect covered here are the possibilities offered by digital media for new art forms One point that emerges is that digital art is not some discreet practice separated from other art forms It is rather an approach that can involve all manner of association with both other art practices and with other forms of presentation and enquiry demonstrating that we are witnessing a revolution that affects all our activities and not one that simply leads to the establishment of a new discipline to set alongside others **Picturing Art History** Ingrid R. Vermeulen,2006 **Hearst's International** ,1902 **The Current Encyclopedia** ,1902 Current Encyclopedia, a Monthly Record of Human Progress ,1901 **The New Larned History for Ready Reference, Reading and Research** Josephus Nelson Larned,1923 The World To-day ,1902 **The History of Ceramic Art in Great Britain** Llewellynn Frederick William Jewitt,1878

Thinking and Writing about Art History Donna K. Reid,2004 For undergraduate courses in Art History Ideal as a reference or supplement Designed to provide students with the tools necessary to launch a successful study of art history this succinct and accessible guide offers a practical introduction to the methodology of art history and an overview of writing in the discipline Helping students to think as art historians this Third Edition teaches how to ask questions and how to answer them and challenges students to seek new insights through their readings discussions and written work Parts of the Art

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,2000 **Inquiry** ,2003 **Guide to the Literature of Art History 2** Max Marmor,Alex Ross,2005 This bibliography
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history ALA 1980 Preface **Directory of M.A. & Ph.D. Programs in Art and Art History** College Art Association of
America,1992

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