

American Art — Museum Assignment 2

due Tuesday 4 December (hard copy in class)

Museum Assignment 2 consists of a comparison/contrast of at least two modern American works at the MFA. Be sure to get and save your museum admission ticket and attach it to your papers when you turn them in.

Themes

Base your comparison on a simple but informative thesis, which you will then support with careful analysis of the works. Here are some suggested themes (but feel free to develop your own if something else grabs you):

- Different ways of painting the city or modern/industrial subjects
- Different ways of painting nature or natural subjects
- Comparison between ways of painting nature and ways of painting the city
- Different ways of using color and/or brushwork in relation to different artistic intents
- Issues of race, social class, and/or gender
- What is American about American modern art?
- How did artists respond to modern technology, living and working conditions?

Choices of works

Because this assignment is about 'modern' art, you should choose works dating to after around 1870 (but before around 1950), and they should not be in the traditional naturalistic style of Copley through Homer, and at least one work should be abstract or near-abstract. For example, for one work you could choose an Impressionist work, a Whistler, Hopper, or Sheeler, all of which are fairly naturalistic but may use color, brushwork, or geometry in non-traditional ways. For the other (more abstract) work, look at the works by Hartley, Dove, Torr, Davis, and most O'Keeffe's, for example, in which it is much more difficult (if not impossible) to identify the subject matter. Feel free to choose more than two works, but be sure to analyze at least two works thoroughly.

The Requirements

It should probably take about 3-4 pages to do a thorough comparison/contrast. Please type with at least 1½ spacing and at least 1 inch margins so I can make comments. And please spell-check and proofread!

You may need to do some minimal research, but this is mostly a looking and thinking project, not a research assignment. Do your own analysis and use your own words. Do not copy or closely paraphrase any outside source such as books, museum labels, catalogs, or the internet. Doing so will result in an automatic zero, and if particularly egregious will be reported to the Dean.

Your grade will be based on the following factors:

- ✓ Your choice of works. Don't choose a work just because you like it: choose works that you can analyze clearly in relation to the major styles and issues we are covering in class.
- ✓ Evidence that you have seen the works in person this semester. This involves (1) turning in the museum admission ticket with your papers, and (2) describing details of the works that can only be seen in person, such as the size/scale of the work, fine details, the brushwork, the surface texture, etc.
- ✓ Your thesis statement. No need to get fancy, but do have one (see the themes above, for example), and do concentrate your entire paper on supporting it.
- ✓ Your analysis of the works, which should be specific, thorough, and directly relevant to your thesis. How do the artists' choices of subject-matter and form/style contribute to the meaning of the works? On the back of this sheet I have listed some issues to consider, but please do not organize your paper as a series of answers to those questions; just use them to be sure you are considering the important points.
- ✓ Your incorporation of the ideas we have talked about in class. As relevant to the work and your thesis, use the terms and concepts you have learned, discuss the historical context, and so forth.
- ✓ Your writing. Without good organization, grammar, and spelling your reader will not understand your ideas. In general, write as though you were explaining the works and ideas to someone who has not taken this class: I will grade the papers based on how well I think such a person would understand the works and ideas from your paper.

Here are some issues to think about:

Of course, depending on your theme and the works you choose these issues will be more or less important, and hopefully you will notice other things than just these, but you should at least consider the following:

- Does the work or artist fit into any of the movements we have been talking about in class, such as Aestheticism, Impressionism, the Ashcan School, Precisionism, Futurism, etc.? How so, if so? What were the general characteristics and aims of these movements, and how does the work fulfill these characteristics and aims?
- Consider the title of the work in relation to the work itself. Does the title help you 'see' subject-matter that you might not have seen? Does it ask you to ignore subject-matter that you do see? Does it help guide how you see the work or what effects you get from the work?
- If there is recognizable subject-matter in the work, would that subject-matter have had a special meaning for the artist or for the public at the time the work was painted? What attitude towards the subject-matter can you detect in the way the artist has presented that subject-matter?
- If there is recognizable subject-matter in the work, how close has the artist kept to its natural appearance? What exactly has been changed and why might the artist have changed it in those specific ways?
- How does the style (brushwork, color, composition, shapes, etc.) relate to the subject-matter of the work (the objects depicted, if any)? How does this style direct your ideas or feelings about the subject-matter?
- Consider the composition closely. Is it obviously organized or not? How is it organized? Is it balanced or unbalanced? Is it flat-looking or does it give an illusion of depth? Is it focused on one area or dispersed all across the surface of the work? Are any colors, shapes, or linear rhythms repeatedly used? Why might the artist have chosen to compose the work in this way?
- What kinds of shapes or lines are used? Geometric, organic, soft, hard, straight, curved, etc? Why?
- Consider the brushwork. Is it smooth or painterly? What adjectives would you use to describe it? Did the artist choose a style of brushwork suited to the objects they were painted? Are the edges between objects or shapes hard and sharp or soft and feathered? Why might the artist have chosen this type of brushwork?
- Consider the use of color. Are few colors used, or many? Are they basic colors (easily named), or subtle, complex colors? Bright colors, pastel colors, dull colors, dark colors, light colors, etc.? Mainly warm colors (like red, orange & yellow) or cool colors (blues & greens)? Harmonious or clashing? Were the colors chosen for their decorative (aesthetic) qualities, their expressive qualities, or simply because they matched the colors of the objects in nature?

Don't hesitate to email me at ccramer@suffolk.edu if you would like to run an idea for a theme or choices of work past me.

Gallery 332 (Lane Galleries)

Sheeler, Fugue
Dove, Spring
Sheeler, On a Shaker Theme
Dove, Sun on the Lake
Dove, Square on the Pond
Dove, Neighborly Attempt at Murder
Sheeler, Ore Into Iron
Davis, Adit, No. 2
Dove, Tree Trunk
Dove, Clouds
Dove, Motorboat
Dove, Dancing Willows
Dove, That Red One
Dove, Rising Moon
Sheeler, View of New York
Dove, The Sea I
Hartley, Arrangement: Hieroglyphics
Hartley, Tinselled Flowers
Hartley, The Hill
Lawren Harris, Northern Painting 25
Davis, Apples and Jug
Davis, Hot Still-Scape for Six Colors
O'Keeffe, Abiquiu Trees VII
O'Keeffe, Shell and Old Shingle I, III, IV, and VII
O'Keeffe, Fishhook from Hawaii No. 2
O'Keeffe, Gray Wash Forms 1936
O'Keeffe, A Sunflower from Maggie
O'Keeffe, Ends of Barns
O'Keeffe, Deer's Skull with Pedernal
O'Keeffe, Patio with Back Door
O'Keeffe, White Rose with Larkspur No. 2

Gallery 326

Norman Lewis, Harlem Jazz Jamboree
Walter Agustus Simon, 715 Washington Street
Dove, George Gershwin
Helen Torr, Evening Sounds
Archibald Motley, Cocktails,
Edward Hopper, Drug Store