Formal Analysis Assignment

Formal Analysis:

Description: A formal analysis includes an analysis of the forms appearing in the work you have chosen. These forms give the work its expression, message, or meaning. A formal analysis assumes a work of art is (1) a constructed object (2) that has been created with a stable meaning (even though it might not be clear to the viewer) (3) that can be ascertained by studying the relationships between the elements of the work. To aid in writing a formal analysis, you should think as if you were describing the work of art to someone who has never seen it before. When your reader finishes reading your analysis, she/he should have a complete mental picture of what the work looks like. Yet, the formal analysis is more than just a description of the work. It should also include a **thesis statement** that reflects your conclusions about the work. The thesis statement may, in general, answer a question like these: What do I think is the meaning of this work? What is the message that this work or artist sends to the viewer? What is this work all about? The thesis statement is an important element. It sets the tone for the entire paper, and sets it apart from being a merely descriptive paper.

It is important to remember that your interest here is strictly formal; NO RESEARCH IS TO BE USED IN THIS PAPER. In other words, you are strictly relying on your ability to visually 'read' a work of art and make interpretations about it based on your analysis of it. Remember too that your analysis should not be just a mechanical, physical description. Please use descriptive language and adjectives to describe your work. Begin with a general description of the work, and then move on to the more specific elements.

Things to consider when writing a formal analysis (in no particular order)**:**

1. Record your first impression(s) of the artwork. What stands out? Is there a focal point (an area to which the artist wants your eye to be drawn)? If so, what formal elements led you to this conclusion? Your impressions can help you reach your thesis.
2. What is the subject of the artwork?
3. Composition: How are the parts of the work arranged? Is there a stable or unstable composition? Is it dynamic? Full of movement? Or is it static?
4. Pose: If the work has figures, are the proportions believable? Realistic? Describe the pose(s). Is the figure active, calm, graceful, stiff, tense, or relaxed? Does the figure convey a mood? If there are several figures, how do they relate to each other (do they interact? not?)?
5. Proportions: Does the whole or even individual parts of the figure(s) or natural objects in the work look natural? Why did you come to this conclusion?
6. Line: Are the outlines (whether perceived or actual) smooth, fuzzy, clear? Are the main lines vertical, horizontal, diagonal, or curved, or a combination of any of these? Are the lines jagged and full of energy? Sketchy? Geometric? Curvilinear? Bold? Subtle?
7. Space: If the artist conveys space, what type of space is used? What is the relation of the main figure to the space around it? Are the main figures entirely within the space (if the artwork is a painting), or are parts of the bodies cut off by the edge of the artwork? Is

the setting illusionistic, as if one could enter the space of the painting, or is it flat and two-dimensional, a space that one could not possibly enter?

8. Texture: If a sculpture, is the surface smooth and polished or rough? Are there several textures conveyed? Where and How? If a painting, is there any texture to the paint surface? Are the brushstrokes invisible? Brushy? Sketchy? Loose and flowing? Or tight and controlled?
9. Light and Shadow: Are shadows visible? Where? Are there dark shadows, light shadows, or both? How do the shadows affect the work?
10. Size: How big is the artwork? Are the figures or objects in the work life-sized, larger or smaller than life? How does the size affect the work?
11. Color: What type of colors are used in the work? Bright? Dull? Complimentary? Does the artist use colors to draw your attention to specific areas of the work? How? If a sculpture, examine the color(s) of the medium and how it affects the work.
12. Mood: Do you sense an overall mood in the artwork? Perhaps several different moods? If so, describe them. How does the mood interpret how you view the work?

Once you have spent some time analyzing your work, notice if your first impression of the work has changed, now that you have taken a closer look? How? If you came up with a thesis statement before doing this in-depth analysis, you may want to change it if your impression of the work has changed. Your thesis statement should reflect your view of the object.