Museum accession numbers

Captions in museums and galleries and in scholarly books often include a number or code. This is the unique accession number assigned to each object when it enters a collection. The number usually includes the date the object was “acces­sioned” (for example, the year 1977 may be cited in full or abbreviated to “77”), followed by other data separated by full stops. These numbers or letters give museum curators and scholars further information, such as which part of the col­lection the object belongs to (for example, African Art or Eu­ropean Ceramics).

Conclusion

I hope this chapter has prov ided you with a better understand­ing of what art history is and how it differs from other aca­demic disciplines. As you advance in the study of art history, in addition to formal and contextual analysis, you’ll learn to use theoretical models, such as psychoanalysis, feminism, and semiotics, that approach interpretation in specialized ways. But for now, thinking in terms of formal and contextual analysis may help you ask a full range of questions when you’re interpreting works of art. The next two chapters will examine these fundamental methods of art history in more depth.

Chapter 2

Formal analysis

Looking isn’t as easy as it looks.
Ad Reinhardt (1913–67), artist

In our culture, we are so constantly bombarded by visual images in television, movies, billboards, books, and magazines that it’s easy to develop habits of lazy looking. We’re often on such visual overload that we don’t take the time to examine images carefully and analyze what we’re seeing. This chapter explains the basic art-historical method of formal analysis, which will help you to look carefully and frame good questions as you interpret works of art.

Formal analysis

Formal analysis doesn’t mean simply describing what you see in a work of art, although description is part of it. It means looking at the work of art and trying to understand what the artist wants to convey. In a sense, there’s no such thing as a pure formal analysis that is totally divorced from contextual analysis. This is because you, the viewer, do provide a kind of context. The way that you interpret things is based on who you are—a person living in your place and time, with your educa­tion and experiences—and that inevitably shapes your inter­pretation. There are certain basic characteristics of works of art that you will focus on in formal analysis, such as color, line, space and mass, and scale. Often, these visual or physical qualities of the work are most effectively discussed in terms of a sliding scale between pairs of opposite qualities, such as linearity vs. painterliness, flatness vs. three-dimensionality, or dark vs. light. You can find brief definitions of a range of
specialized terms used in describing art in the Glossary on pages 170–71.

When you're engaged in formal analysis, remember works of art change with the passage of time. Be sure that you're not ascribing visual or physical characteristics to the work that it didn't have at the time it was made. For example, although we now see the Parthenon as an austere, white marble structure, it was originally decorated with red, blue, and yellow paint, and polished bronze disks. The bright colors revealed when the Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes were cleaned in the 1980s have radically altered our understanding of Michelangelo's work. A wooden mask from New Guinea may have originally borne decorations made of shells, feathers, leaves, or pigments. When you're not sure about changes over time in the work of art, you may want to consult outside sources rather than working purely from your visual experience.

**Formal elements**

**Color**

The first step to undertake in analyzing color is to identify the different hues (red, blue, green, etc.) that an artist uses and see whether she is using a particular range of colors (primary colors, secondary colors; Figure 2.1). You would also look at the characteristics of each color used. If it appears to be a representation of the color in its most vivid form, as it is represented on the color chart, it is highly saturated. If the hue can hardly be distinguished, then it is of low saturation. Value is a term that describes the relative lightness of a color—whether it tends more toward white or more toward black. How would you describe the colors used by Chinese artist Zhang Haiying (b. 1972) in his painting *Anti-Vice Campaign Series 001* (2005) (Figure 2.2) in terms of primary and secondary colors, saturation, and value?

**Line**

Although the concept of line may seem to belong most obviously to painting and graphic arts, it’s also a useful term in thinking about three-dimensional media such as sculpture and architecture. In discussing two-dimensional media, art historians often talk about linearity vs. painterliness, distinguishing between works that emphasize line and linear contours as compared with those that emphasize the play of light and dark (or chiaroscuro, an Italian term meaning “bright-dark”). You might ask whether the line is strong and continuous, or broken up into many small hatches or pieces. For a building or sculpture, ask whether there is a strong sense of silhouette (the outline of the exterior contours) or whether the outline is broken up or blurred. Compare, for example, the sense of line in the sculptures of male and female couples shown in Figures 4.1 and 5.2.
The term "space" indicates whether an image conveys a sense of three-dimensional space. The term "mass" describes the space created by an artwork, indicating whether the artwork conveys a sense of substantial form—as if it had weight or volume. These are actual characteristics of sculpture, architecture, and installations, but illusory characteristics of two-dimensional media such as painting, drawing, printmaking, and photography. The use of linear perspective or atmospheric perspective, for example, can establish a sense of spatial recession in a painting (see Glossary entry "Perspective" on p. 171).

Scale
As part of a formal analysis, you'll want to consider scale, or relative size, both within the work and in relation to the viewer. Determine if there's a consistent scale used within the work, or whether different scales are used to emphasize or de-emphasize certain elements in the image. Figures of gods, for example, are sometimes represented larger than other figures to indicate their divinity. Consider whether the image is monumental, life-size, or miniature in relation to the viewer.

Composition
The term composition is used to describe how an artist puts together all the above elements in the work of art. In a formal analysis, you will ask how these elements—line, color, space and mass, scale—contribute to the work's overall composition and its visual effect.

Initially, you'll be trying to answer some basic questions:

- What does the artist emphasize visually? What first attracts your attention?
- How does the artist emphasize this feature/these features? Through scale, line, color etc?
- Is there an underlying rhythm, pattern, or geometric structure to the composition?
- Does the composition seem unified; that is, do the elements appear integrated or separate and distinct from each other?
- How can the emotion or idea evoked by this piece be described? How is this achieved visually?
- Is the composition large- or small-scale? Is it horizontal or vertical in orientation? How do these characteristics alter the viewer's perception of the work?
- Is the work figurative or abstract (see Glossary entries on p. 170)?

Expanding on these basic questions about composition, I'll provide some specific questions you might ask in analyzing works of art in different media.

Two-dimensional art: painting, graphic arts, photography

A number of questions address the specific qualities of two-dimensional works—that is, works characterized by length and height, such as a painting, but of little depth (or three-dimensional form).
• How is color used? Are colors saturated? Where are the brightest colors? The darkest colors? Is there a wide range of colors or a narrow range of colors? Do the colors contrast or blend? Do the colors create a sense of calm or a sense of drama and excitement? Are they used to emphasize certain forms or elements in the work?

• Can you see the marks of the tools—pencil, brush, burin? Does the work seem highly finished or rough and unfinished? How do these qualities contribute to the overall effect of the work?

• Is there a strong contrast between areas of light and dark? Does this help to create the illusion of three-dimensional forms existing in space? Or do the elements of the painting remain flat, emphasizing the picture plane (the plane occupied by the actual surface of the canvas, sheet of paper, etc)?

• Does the artist try to create an illusion of depth, or does he or she use techniques to make the viewer aware of the picture plane?

• How are forms defined—through line or chiaroscuro (shading)?

• Is there a sense of texture or a smooth surface?

Let’s explore some of these issues of color, surface, and composition in Marilyn (Vanitas) by Audrey Flack (Figure 2.3). Flack used a mechanical airbrush, rather than a conventional bristle brush, to achieve remarkably intense colors and a smooth surface. She employed the full spectrum of primary and secondary colors: yellow, orange, red, green, blue, and purple. Highly saturated colors predominate, although several hues are represented in multiple shades. The saturated red of the cloth in the foreground, for example, is set off by the different shades and hues of pink in the hourglass, rose, and makeup. There is little sense of depth, for the elements of the composition crowd up against the picture plane. Despite this, the elements are not flat; instead, they appear as fully modeled, three-dimensional forms, as if they might pop out of the picture plane. The smoothness of the airbrushed surface enhances these illusionistic effects.

2.3 Audrey Flack, Marilyn (Vanitas), 1977. Oil over acrylic on canvas, 96 x 96 in (244 x 244 cm). University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson.

A formal analysis wouldn’t address the many provocative contextual questions raised by this image. In the tradition of European vanitas imagery, several elements in the painting refer to the passage of time and the inevitability of death, even for the young, beautiful, and rich (watch, calendar, hourglass, candle). The mirror, jewelry, and cosmetics allude to the particular ways that women fight the passage of time.

Although this image first strikes the viewer as a random profusion of brightly colored objects, the composition is tightly constructed in three bands. An array of objects is set against a red cloth in the foreground. The middle is occupied by the black-and-white pages of an open book and three sepia-toned photographs, their starkness relieved by the touches of color provided by a pink rose and pots of cosmetics. The top part of the canvas is occupied by the more muted presence of a purple cloth, green grapes, and buff-colored calendar, which
frame and set off the objects below. While all these elements can be appreciated in a small-scale color reproduction, as here, the impact of the painting's very large size, 8 feet (2.4 meters) square, is lost. Even if you have to rely on a reproduction, however, rather than seeing an artwork "in the flesh," you should check its dimensions in the caption. In the case of Flack's painting, you could ask, "What is the effect of the way this work combines the formal elements of color and composition with a large scale?" Imagine that you are looking at the actual work in a gallery—is it exhilarating, overwhelming, or even slightly threatening?

Now let's explore some of the distinctive compositional effects achieved in printmaking. In The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, Francisco de Goya (1746–1828) used two techniques, etching and aquatint, to achieve both linear and tonal effects (Figure 2.4). The aquatint process, in which powdered resin is sprinkled on the plate before it is placed in an acid bath, produces grainy areas of tone. The etching process, in which the entire plate is coated with resin, and lines are drawn in the resin with needles, produces lines of various width. Goya used these techniques to produce a dramatic, unsettling image full of contrasts of light and shade, tone and line. The aquatint background suggests a murky atmosphere. Bats—rendered with dense, inky black lines—emerge from the gloom. The sleeping figure's back and shoulders, delineated with nervous etched lines, seem to be bathed in a glaring light, created by leaving these areas of paper unprinted (see also the discussion of this work on p. 57).

**Sculpture**

Sculpture can be either freestanding or relief, which means projecting from a surface like a wall or stone slab. There are a number of processes for making sculpture, including additive processes, in which the sculpture is built up, or modeled, from material like clay; subtractive processes, like carving stone or wood, in which material is taken away to create an image; and casting, in which molten metal is poured into a mold. In addition to these traditional processes, many artists, especially from the twentieth century onward, have created sculpture using a huge range of unconventional materials and techniques (Figure 2.5).
Wölfflin and formal analysis

In Principles of Art History (1915), the Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) made a major contribution to systematizing formal analysis through his definition of paired, contrasting terms to describe works of art and to distinguish their stylistic aspects. He defined five basic pairs of characteristics, which he saw as characterizing the Renaissance in contrast to the Baroque: linear/painterly, plane/recession, closed form/open form, multiplicity/unity, absolute clarity/relative clarity.

Wölfflin used the term linear to indicate works that emphasize outlines and that have a special kind of clarity in the spatial separation and relation of objects. Painterly form is more elusive—attention is withdrawn from the edges, outlines are de-emphasized, and form is developed primarily through the use of light and shade. Compare Käthe Kollwitz’s (1867–1945) self-portrait, with its strongly delineated forms, and Rembrandt’s (1606–1669), in which few individual lines stand out against the areas of light and shade used to build the figure (Figures 2.6 and 2.7).

Wölfflin’s second pair is planar vs. recession. In a planar composition, objects are represented parallel to the picture plane. The spatial recession is clear, achieved by a series of planes that are all parallel to the picture plane, as in much fifteenth-century Italian art. In contrast, a work characterized by recession is one in which the planes are not clearly articulated as separate parallel units. Spatial depth is created along diagonals, and the frontal plane is not emphasized. The compositions of Japanese screen paintings are sometimes organized in this way.

2.6 Käthe Kollwitz, Self-portrait, 1921. Etching, 8 ¼ x 10 ½ in (21.5 x 26.7 cm). National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

Closed vs. open forms is Wölfflin’s third major distinction. In a closed form, the depicted contents seem to stand in clear relation to the edge of the image, so that the viewer can establish her position in relation to the image via its edge and has a clear sense of her relationship to it. In an open form, there’s no such clear spatial relationship, either within the work or between the viewer and the work. The elements within the image are not oriented in relation to its edge or surface. The Palazzo Medici-Riccardi by Michelozzo de Bartolommeo (1396–1472) and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Robie House are a good illustration of closed and open forms respectively (Figures 2.8 and 2.9).

Multiplicity vs. unity contrasts works in which the individual parts appear as independent units (even though they are subordinate to a whole), with works that are perceived as a whole, in which the individual elements of the composition do not stand out. Again compare the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi with the Robie House: the clear articulation of the stories and windows of the former contrasts with the latter’s effect of a single horizontal, flowing shape, in which the different stories—even the interior and exterior spaces—are not easily distinguished.

Wölfflin’s final pair, absolute vs. relative clarity, is closely related to the preceding pair. Absolute clarity refers to works with explicit and clearly articulated forms, and relative clarity refers to works with less explicit and less clearly articulated forms.

Although art historians today don’t necessarily use these paired terms, Wölfflin’s comparative method still provides a useful model.
The following basic questions will help you address three-dimensional forms:

- What is the viewpoint suggested by the work? Does the sculpture visually lead the viewer to move around it and view it from different angles, or does it seem to guide the viewer to one position?
- What materials are used? How do they contribute to the work’s form? Do the materials make open spaces within the sculpture possible, or do they require a more block-like form?
- Does the sculpture emphasize a sense of volume, of three-dimensional form, or of flatness?
- Does the sculpture use the play of light over the surface to create a pattern of lights and shadows? Does this emphasize the three-dimensional form or flatness? Does it create a sense of drama or movement?
- If the surface of the sculpture is colored, how does that affect the viewer’s perception of the work? Does color serve to emphasize certain features of the work? Does it make the work seem more or less three-dimensional?
- What is the texture of the surface? Is it smooth or rough, dull or shiny?

Let’s compare two sculptures (Figures 2.10 and 2.11). One is an Aztec stone figure of the goddess Coatlique, the other a bronze figure of Apollo by the Italian Renaissance artist Giovanni da Bologna (1529–1608). Although both portray gods as anthropomorphic figures (figures with human characteristics), they do so in very different ways. (Note this analysis uses a basic piece of contextual information—the identification of each figure—as a starting point for formal interpretation.)

Coatlique is a massive stone sculpture with a frontal orientation, showing bilateral symmetry along a vertical axis. The frontality demands that the viewer stand before the sculpture rather than walk around it or see it from multiple angles. The supernatural nature of Coatlique, the earth goddess, is indicated by the composition of the body. The head is formed of two rattlesnake heads, and the feet have feline claws. She wears a pendant in the form of a human head strung on a necklace of hands and hearts, and a skirt of entwined snakes, further emphasizing her divinity and striking fear in the viewer. In contrast, the figure of Apollo appears godlike through the perfection of his human form. The graceful, rhythmic positioning of Apollo’s limbs, turn of the head, and twist of the torso lead the viewer’s eye around the figure. While the statue of Coatlique is solid and block-like, with few freely carved parts, the Apollo incorporates space within the figure, and the limbs are all separately articulated. The figure of Apollo contrasts smooth stretches of flesh, characterized by a lustrous bronze surface, with intricately detailed and textured areas, such as the hair, the robe draped over the lyre, and the lyre itself. He appears supernaturally elegant, graceful, and energetic.

Students beginning art history often find abstract art challenging, so I’ll briefly discuss an abstract sculpture. Art historians use the word “abstract” for art that does not set out to imitate observed reality, for example art that is based on purely geometric patterns and shapes. You could say that the sculpture of Coatlique does not represent observed reality, but this work would not be described as abstract, since the snakes’ heads, skull, hands, and other forms are stylized representations of real things. In practice, “abstract art” usually means modern sculpture or...
two-dimensional art in which the artist deliberately adopted an abstract approach, as in Three Forms by Barbara Hepworth (1903–75) of 1935 (Figure 2.12). This work incorporates three marble elements of different shapes and sizes. One is spherical and spatially separate from the other two, which are oriented horizontally and rather elongated. These three elements can be seen as perfectly non-representational, a subtle meditation on the interrelation of geometric forms in space. At the same time, they can be interpreted as a distilled landscape, or even a figure (the sphere) in a landscape. Abstraction often exists on a continuum—that is, artworks are often neither completely abstract nor completely figurative. So, when analyzing abstract works, take the time you need to see their more subtle aspects.

**Architecture**

Architecture demands that the viewer take into account both the physical and visual experience of the building and the spaces it creates. In discussing architecture, you may want to talk about the plan (or layout) of a building; an elevation (the side of a building); or the section (an imaginary vertical slice through the building). The following questions will be useful:

- What is the scale of the building in relation to humans?
- What parts of the building seem to be emphasized? Is the system of design readily apparent? Does the building appear to be composed of geometric or more organic (soft and curving) forms?
- Does the building seem accessible to the viewer from the outside? How large and visible are doors and windows?
- Does the building convey a sense of solidity or of the interplay of solids and negative spaces? Do the forms of the building use light and shadow to break up the sense of solidity? Is there a play of light and dark across the surface?
- How are ornaments used on the building? Do the ornaments enhance the viewer’s awareness of three-dimensional form or do they emphasize the building’s surface?
- How does the building fit its environment? Does it seem to be distinct from or part of its surroundings? How does it change the viewer’s perception of those surroundings?
- Is the interior divided into rooms or is it one open space? How does the arrangement of interior spaces either help move the viewer through the building, or hinder the viewer’s movement through the building? Which spaces are readily accessible and which are remote or blocked off?
- Is there a range of large and small spaces within the building? More or less elaborate spaces? Which spaces are most accessible?

Frank Lloyd Wright’s Robie House provides an opportunity to consider some of these questions (see Figure 2.9). The house observes few of the standard conventions of Western architecture. It sits low and seems to hug the earth, an effect enhanced by the strong horizontal lines created by the stone and brick façade. The house does not provide easy access to the viewer—it’s hard to see where the entrance is, and exterior and interior spaces seem to flow together. Even the different stories of the house are hard to distinguish from each other. The overhanging roof lines, and the use of recessed windows,

**Patrick Heron analyzes a painting by Matisse**

Now that you are familiar with the various elements of formal analysis, how do you set about putting them into practice? To help you develop your own ideas, it is useful to read the work of experienced art historians and critics to see how they approach the task. Here is an extract from a magazine review by the British artist and writer Patrick Heron of a major Matisse exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1993. Heron believed that Matisse's greatest achievement was the way he created a sense of space by using color. Not surprisingly, the formal element of color is strongly emphasized in his description of Matisse's *Intérieur rouge: nature morte sur table bleue* (Figure 2.19).

"As your gaze moves endlessly across this picture, from point to point, from color-area to color-area, from textured facet to textured facet, in this painting you savor a different spatial depth each time your eye alights on a feature... in that top section of the open aperture of the window, your eye buzzes and darts up and down the green and blue stabs of brush-drawing which creates the palm tree—and the flower bed. And now you suddenly feel that the whole panel of the outdoor vegetation is swimming in through the open window and enveloping you, hitting you in the face. The sharp detail of a hundred leaves and flower-heads blasts in through the physical hole of the window space, at which moment everything inside the room, all that redness, swims into a sort of shadowed darkness—just as it would do in reality, on a summer day, in a darkened room with a window open onto a brilliant sunlit garden."


Maybe you'll feel that Heron got a bit carried away in his description. But bear in mind that he was writing as an art critic who wanted his readers to share his strong reaction to Matisse's painting, rather than as a more cool-headed art historian. And we're left in no doubt that, as a painter himself, he had looked carefully at every detail of the work to see how Matisse created his effects.

**Conclusion**

Careful looking is one of the two basic tools of art history. The guidelines provided in this chapter will help you examine works of art in a systematic and thorough way, through the process of formal analysis. The next chapter will help you with that other basic tool of art history, contextual analysis.
whether you have any talent—this drawing is a working tool. The process may prompt other insights into the work, so be sure to write these down as well.

It's often helpful to go back on another day and repeat the looking process—especially with a rough draft of your paper in hand. If reality intervenes and you just don't have time, then it's even more important to make sure that you take detailed notes and visually engage with the work in a serious way the first time you see it.

**Structuring your paper**

I'll take a fairly complex work as an example, a freestanding wooden sculpture made by an unknown Dogon artist in Mali (Figure 4.1). This is a challenging artwork to interpret formally because it is composed of two figures. The cross-cultural aspect of the analysis further complicates the process. When working cross-culturally, it's important to try to understand the larger cultural aspects underlying particular aspects of the image, and not label them as "expressive" or "naturalistic" in Western terms when they might not have been intended that way in their original context (see Chapter 3).

![4.1 Seated Couple. Dogon, 19th century or earlier. Wood and metal, height 280 in (73 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.](image)

You can see how the temptation in writing a formal analysis of this work would be to start by describing one figure completely and then proceeding to the other and describing it completely. But that's not a sufficiently interpretive perspective. Instead, the way to go about working with this object is to spend some time studying the two figures both separately and together. After all, there's a reason the artist carved two figures together in this particular way. If you take the time to look carefully, you may develop some insight into this image, even if you don't know all that much about Dogon culture.

During your study of the work, you would notice that the figures are male and female, and that the composition emphasizes their equality, harmony, and connectedness. The figures are the same size, and they are balanced—neither is larger, more impressive, or more powerful than the other. They sit in the same position, and the male figure wraps an arm around the female figure to emphasize their connection. A series of elongated vertical elements—arms, legs, necks—underscores the similarity of the figures and leads the eye around the composition. At this point, some basic contextual information would help you develop your formal analysis; for example, knowing that figures like this appeared on altars and expressed the idea of balanced duality, a central tenet of Dogon religion.

Your formal-analysis paper would be built on this contextual understanding of the work rather than simply by giving an exhaustive description of it. This understanding would form the thesis of your paper, and help you structure an opening paragraph something like this one:

Are men from Mars and women from Venus? Is there really no possibility for the sexes to get along, work together, and understand each other? Although the Jerry Springer Show may leave viewers with this impression, the Metropolitan Museum's Dogon Seated Couple indicates otherwise. This depiction of a seated man and woman emphasizes balance, harmony, and equality. Every visual element of the work stresses these qualities—from the posture of the figures to their size to their complementary elements.
Here's a sample thematic essay question, one that I gave on a final exam:

Images of rulers often seek to connect the ruler with a god or to present the ruler as a deity. Discuss why this is so and analyze how it is accomplished in three works of art, each from a different culture.

This was an open question in which students could pick their own images, and that of course is the first challenge. It's important to choose works of art that both meet the criteria specified (images of rulers from three different cultures) and also give you an opportunity to develop a strong interpretation. In answering this question, a few of my students chose inappropriate images, such as the sculptures from the Parthenon pediments, which don't depict rulers at all. Others chose two or three works from the same culture, which again doesn't meet the specified criteria. Others picked images of rulers for which the issue of relationship with the gods or an aura of divinity isn't central.

One student, for example, picked the Egyptian statue of Menkaure and Khamerernebty (Figure 5.2). There is a case to be made that in their perfect proportions they were presented as godlike, and the statue was intended as a home for their ka spirits, but this is a fairly weak argument compared to those offered by some other images. In an exam situation, you want to pick images that give you a lot to talk about, images you can use to build a strong interpretation—not ones that are a stretch. Here's a good set of images that several students chose for that essay question:

- Stela of Hammurabi, c. 1792–1750 BCE, basalt, Babylon (Figure 5.3)
- Akhenaten and his Family, c. 1348–1336 BCE, painted limestone relief, Egypt (Figure 5.4)
- Colossal statue of Constantine the Great, 325–26 CE, marble, Roman (Figure 5.5).

A strong, clear introductory paragraph is the essential starting point for any exam essay. The example below starts out with some general observations about images of politicians today, to give the reader (and the writer!) a way to identify with the issues at hand. It then shifts the focus of attention to the ancient world, and, specifically, a thesis statement about the reasons why images of rulers were linked with gods or the divine. The paragraph concludes with a simple, straightforward list of the three images to be discussed in the essay. If there were an appropriate reading to use in writing the essay (there wasn't in this case), that would be included here, too.

In this day and age, we see numerous images of politicians every day in newspapers, television, and magazines. However, before the advent of mass media, images of rulers were not so common. In the ancient world, when images of rulers appeared—on coins, statues, or murals—they were the kind of images that stayed in the community for a long time and that had to be crafted to express carefully selected messages about the ruler in question. One way to create impressive images and reinforce the ruler's power was to link the ruler with the gods or to make the ruler appear divine in some way. This conveyed the idea that the ruler had innate authority, and perhaps even a "right" to rule. Three such images are the Stela of Hammurabi (Shumash), the Akhenaten relief, and the colossal statue of Constantine.

The body of the essay then consists of three paragraphs, each focusing primarily on one
Glossary

This is not a comprehensive glossary of art-historical terms, but simply a guide to the specialized terms used in this book. For more in-depth treatment of art-historical terminology, consult James Smith Pierce's From Abuqir to Zeus: A Handbook of Art History (Prentice Hall, 7th ed., 2004) or the Art and Architecture Thesaurus on the Getty Research Center website (www.getty.edu).

Abstract 1. A summary, typically of a book or journal article. 2. A non-figurative image, or one in which the figurative elements are de-emphasized.

Aesthetics A branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of and judgements about beauty.

Baroque A style of European art that flourished in the seventeenth century. In painting and sculpture, it is characterized by dramatic gestures and dynamic compositions, often employed to create powerfully theatrical effects.

Canon A set of standard works (of art, literature, scholarship, etc.), widely recognized for their importance.

Catalogue raisonné The complete catalogue of an artist's work, often including extensive entries on each work, tracing its collection history (provenance) and commenting on its significance.

Chiaroscuro The balance or contrast of light and shade in a work of art, from the Italian words chiaro (light) and oscur (dark).

Composition The structure or arrangement of the elements (form, line, color, etc.) in a work of art.

Connoisseurship The evaluation and valuation of works of art, in terms of both artistic quality and monetary value.

Contextual analysis Interpretation of a work of art in terms of its culture and period.

Contrapposto A pose in which the body is twisted so that the hips, shoulders, and head turn in different directions but balance each other.

Corpus (pl. corpora) From the Latin term for "body," a corpus publishes all the objects of a known type.

Discourse A tradition of discussion on a subject.

Ekphrasis A form of rhetoric that presents a vivid description of works of art, trying to evoke their presence in the mind of the listener or reader.

Elevation A view of the interior and/or exterior of a building from the side.

Endnote A citation that appears at the end of a paper or article, numbered in the text in superscript.

Ephemeral Not enduring, but short-lived, such as artwork made of leaves or flowers.

Figurative Depicting a recognizable form or figure; the opposite of abstract.

Folk art Art made by people with no particular training as artists.

Footnote A citation that appears at the bottom of a page, numbered in the text in superscript.

Formal analysis The interpretation of a work of art through its visual or material aspects, not its context.

Frontality Made to be seen straight on, by a viewer standing in front of the work.

"High" art Art made by extensively trained artists and falling into the categories of painting, sculpture, drawing, or architecture.

Hue A characteristic of color that refers to its position in the spectrum.

Iconography The study of the symbols and motifs in a work of art, by relating their representation in the work to their representation in literature and other works of art.

Iconology The study of the larger philosophical and cultural attitudes informing a work of art.

Illusionism An appearance of reality in a work of art.

Impasto Paint thickly applied to a surface.

Interdisciplinary Involving the perspectives of two or more academic, scientific, or artistic disciplines.

Linear/linearity A composition that emphasizes lines over shading or contouring to create a sense of form.

"Low" art Art made by and for people without specialized artistic training or elite status.

Mass Quality where an artwork conveys a sense of substantial form—as if it has weight and volume.

Mimesis Imitation; a term used by Plato to describe the art of sculpture and painting.

Negative space A defined but empty space in architecture, sculpture, or painting that nonetheless forms an important part of the composition.

Painterly An image in which forms are defined by tone, color, light, and dark, rather than line.

Parenthetical reference A citation in a sentence or paragraph, including, typically, the author's last name, publication date, and page number.

Patron An individual or institution that sponsors the creation of a work of art.

Perspective Systems of representing the illusion of objects in space in a two-dimensional artwork. In linear perspective, orthogonal lines (which run into space at right angles to the picture plane) converge toward one or more vanishing points. In atmospheric or aerial perspective, distant things are depicted with less detail and clarity, and by shifting colors toward blue hues and decreasing their saturation and contrast.

Saturation The intensity, or relative brightness or dullness, of a color.

School A group of artists from a particular period who share similar styles and ideas.

Section An imaginary vertical slice through a building that shows both its exterior silhouette and the internal arrangement of spaces.

Tympanum The area above a doorway in medieval church architecture.

Value The relative lightness or darkness of a color or in a work of art.