

Hum 110 Reading Greek Vases

Listed below are some questions that Art historians usually ask when they are attempting to do a formal analysis of a vase. I would like you to prepare for Wednesday by doing two things. 1) Pretend that you are a contemporary art historian and pick one of the works of art in Sutton's article and provide a one paragraph analysis of the piece which answers as many of the questions as are applicable. 2) Pretend that you are a member of Archaic Greek society looking at the same piece of art. Summarize what you value in art and what you look for (as discussed by the art historians you have read) and critique the piece of art according to those criteria. Do you like this piece of art? What does it mean to you? (Also one paragraph.)

Questions Art Historians Ask About Vases (courtesy of Marcus Verhagen):

1. How would the figure(s) depicted on the vase have been identifiable to its contemporary audience? What are their characteristic features (i.e. make the figures not merely generic men or women)? These features might be related to age, class, history, or mythology.
2. If there are several scenes depicted on the vase, how are they linked (thematically and visually)? What formal features (lines, objects, etc.) are used to separate them? If there are bands, how do the bands relate to one another? Is there a narrative or visual link between the bands?
3. Do any of the figures appear to be moving? What are the pictorial conventions that indicate movement?
4. If there is a battle scene (or another large social gathering), how does the artist convey lots of people even though we only see a few people?
5. What is the relationship between the figures and the background? Does the scene appear three dimensional and if so, how does the artist achieve this effect?
6. How is line used to indicate volume or depth?

Thematic Questions:

1. How do you define pornography? Choose a vase which you believe is pornographic and one which is sexual and yet not pornographic and discuss the difference.
2. How is desire depicted in the scenes? Who desires whom? How do you know? How does the artist arouse our desire?