

Hum 110: Reading Greek Art

Listed below are some questions that Art historians usually ask when they are attempting to analyze a work of art. 1) Pretend that you are a contemporary art historian and pick one of the works of art in Gombrich and provide a one paragraph analysis of the piece which answers as many of the questions as you can. If you are unable to answer a question you should note what problems lacking this information presents. 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 Gombrich) 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 Art in General:

1. *What is my first response to the work?* (Later you may modify or even reject this response, but begin by trying to study it.)
2. *Where and when was the work made?* Does it reveal qualities that the critical articles attribute to the culture? (Don't assume that it does; works of art have a way of eluding easy generalizations.)
3. *Where would the work originally have been seen?* (Surely not in a museum or textbook.)
4. *What purpose did the work serve?* To glorify a god? To immortalize a man? To teach? To delight? Does the work present a likeness, or express a feeling, or illustrate a mystery?
5. *In what condition has the work survived?* Is it exactly as it left the artist's hands, or has it been damaged, repaired, or in some way altered? What evidence of change do I see?
6. *What is the title?* Does it help illuminate the work? Sometimes it is useful to ask yourself, what would I call the work?

(Sylvan Barnet, *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* . Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.: 21-22.)