

Visual Analysis Assignment #1

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AH 112

Prof. Metz

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DESCRIBE

Title of Work: Jupiter and Callisto

Artist: Francois Boucher

Time Period: 1744, Rococo/Late

Baroque painting, mythological

Medium/Technique: oil on canvas

Size: 72 x 98 cm, 2-Dimensional

Current Location: Pushkin Museum,
Moscow, Russia

Link for Info About Work: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/francois-boucher/jupiter-and-callisto-1744> (actual website for where it is located is in Russian)



Boucher was a French painter

during the Late Baroque/Rococo periods of art during the late 17th and 18th centuries. His work often portrayed idealistic compositions concerning the grace and elegance of his figure subjects, with a flirtatious and erotic exploration of beauty. Boucher's more complex take on the Rococo style captured the emergence of the

Enlightenment philosophy full of contradictions that combine traditional styles and beauty with innovative elements of design. This work of art, specifically, portrays a strong composition of mythological concepts for sure, but also strongly emphasizes bright and dark colors, angelic and elongated features, whimsical forms, a somewhat asymmetrical balance of negative and positive space and hyper realism. The composition is filled by figures of cherub angels surrounding the god Jupiter and the nymph Callisto. In this scene, Jupiter had taken the form of the goddess Diana to seduce Callisto. Here, Boucher looked to interpret this traumatic event from ancient mythology into characteristics of Rococo painting to transform the scene to a brighter and more playful view on the subject through graceful and beautiful figures.

ANALYZE:

Considering the elements of art and design that were utilized throughout this work, the most prominent elements seem to be form, light and value, color (including hue and saturation), space and composition. The element of form is used to create each figure by using space and value to visually enhance the idea of three dimensional forms on a two dimensional surface. Here, the viewer sees these forms bounce off a darker composition and landscape, further emphasizing the angelic aspects of these subjects. The element of light and value also generate with the element of form to add dimensional space and to lift the subjects to a space where the eye automatically catches in the center of the image. The surrounding imagery uses darker tones and values to an almost seemingly eerie feel, emphasizing the more serious nature of the situation, while the centered figures have more light casting onto them, emphasizing the most important focal point. Value is used in a very smart way here, as the eye naturally bounces from dark to light and light to dark throughout the entire composition. The variances within the values of color also plays a very important role in this work, as similar saturations and hues of the more prominent colors are used throughout the image as a whole. The element of color is utilized in a very visually pleasing way. The emphasis on primary colors play a prominent role and provide a perfect balance of color, simultaneously putting more emphasis on the centered subjects of this image,

Jupiter and Callisto, as the most vibrant hues of red, yellow and blue are placed surrounding them. Furthermore, as this significance is brought to the centered figures through color and value, it is important to also mention the element of space, as the spacial aspects of this image grant this emphasis. The balance between negative and positive space allow for the eye to bounce back and forth through the composition, replying to the ways in which these techniques were utilized. The placement of subjects also focuses on certain mythological and whirling aspects of Rococo painting as everything in this composition seems to whirl around the centered figures. Considering the entire composition, there are many intelligent placements and techniques used to create this work. All elements work with each other to create a whimsical vibe for the composition and highlight mysterious and eerie undertones of the situation.

Furthermore, the most prominent principles of art and design that seem to work throughout the whole composition are balance, emphasis and subordination, unity and variety, movement and contrast. The balance within this work can be found in the placements and positions of forms and figures, where there is an even number of subjects and all are more centralized to the image, but also asymmetrical as the main subjects are slightly offset to the right and that the cherubs are placed in an uneven manner. There is also a balance within value and color as there are similar amounts of light and dark and a balance of primary colors that draw the eye towards the center. Consequently, the principle of emphasis and subordination creates a dominant role within the composition as vibrant colors and elegant figures are placed around each other in the foreground on a darker, yet also mystical, background. The cherub children, as they are less important to the subject matter, opposed to Jupiter and Callisto, are subordinately placed to surround the main subjects where two of them are directly looking at Jupiter and Callisto, while the other two create subjective directional lines pointing to them as well. These subjective directional lines also create a sense of unity within the composition as everything goes around the image to circle back to the nymph and goddess, enhancing that same whimsical vibe. This also sends compliments back and forth between the foreground and background to create a unified feeling within the variety of different tones, hues and values. Furthermore, these principles of unity and variety go to help generate the movement within this work as

most of the objects and forms are moving with one another to surround the centermost composition of the angelic figures further emphasizing the subject matter. This emphasis is also created through the contrast between spatial principles and through the contrast of values of light and dark. A similar thing can be said for the principle of movement, as the directional lines pointed to Callisto and Jupiter and the whirlwind affect that is happening within the entire composition supports that suggested movement and creates that same feeling of unity. Lastly, the principle of contrast within this work is important to every other element and principle as the contrast between lights and darks of color, between the sizes of forms and between the implied darker emotional undertones against a lighter mythological standpoint all work together to create deeper contrasts within the meaning of the composition and the composition as a whole.

INTERPRET:

Considering the visual structures, styles and subject matter within this artwork, the meaning that can be shared or taken away from this image can come from many points of view. From a mythological viewpoint, this image, though it is visually beautiful, can be somewhat of a disturbing message due to the fact that the God Jupiter took the form of the goddess Diana solely for the fact that he wanted to essentially use the nymph Calypso for his own sexual benefit/advancement. However, if that background knowledge is not already known by its viewer, the meaning of the image completely changes. It may be taken as a strongly spiritual image due to the fact that there are spiritual beings present here, but also as a beautiful mystery for mythology is all but a “myth” of what some may have thought to happen. Nevertheless, there is still some disturbing imagery within the composition as there are arrows on the far left and a dead rabbit and possibly dead birds on the very foreground of the image, which could infer the serious tones of this situation and hint at the fact that something isn’t completely right. Furthermore, this work was probably made to shed light on this situation, but maybe also to note that mythology can be taken into differing subject matter and that every dark situation doesn’t always have to be taken in a dark mindset. It would make sense that Boucher would be trying to communicate the serious nature of this situation by

using darker undertones within a lighter foreground, but it also makes sense that he would be trying to communicate the angelic nature of it all and the beauty that can be seen from deep within the core of each of these spiritual beings. Like mentioned before, the symbols and signs in this work of the dead animals, the arrows and the cherubs all work together to communicate this message. For example, the cherub angels allow for a more playful viewpoint on the message, but contrast the dead animals and the arrows which again hint at the fact that something within this situation isn't exactly right. Considering the time period and the style of Rococo art, much of the artwork created had a very whimsical and majestic setting with darker undertones for contrast and to compliment said aspects; and these signs, that of the cherubs to compliment the majestic vibes of this artwork, and that of the arrows and dead animals to contrast that whimsicality, ultimately work together to create said darker undertones for the image.

EVALUATE:

The style of this artwork is very suggestive of Rococo style and artworks, but uses Greek mythology to enhance similar characteristics of Rococo art. The deep contrasts and seemingly mysterious and magical imagery within this work connects it to the whimsical imagery of Rococo art, but also connects it to mythology as the subjects are of Greek mythology. Considering the history, movement and trends of Rococo art, this work and the stylized subject matter can be easily associated with such. The Rococo style is of a very ornamental nature and would often depict very theatrical imagery to depict an illusion of movement and drama and this piece is exactly that. Historically speaking, this work is connected to the time period of Rococo art because of such theatrical aspects, but socially this work is connected through Greek mythological aspects as during the time that this was made there was a stage of enlightenment that was beginning to emerge within the creative and spiritual people of this time period, and the fact that Boucher used aspects of Greek mythology during the time that he did, this enlightenment really shows through. This makes this work stand out compared to other popular Rococo trends because of the fact that he used older traditional ways of thinking and ways of painting mixed with contemporary

aspects of Rococo painting. The overall significance of this work based upon further evaluations seems to be that Greek mythology has and still does impact many people and that is was not just something of Greek culture. Though it is essentially “myth” it still is relevant to any person or period, especially within the art community and work because at the peak of its time, it generated so many new ways of thinking, subject matter, concepts and ways of doing art in general.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE:

This work recalls the works of ancient Greeks and Greek folklore as this work depicts beings of this subject. It draws back to this timeline and concerns the origin and nature of the world, the lives and activities of divine beings and other mythological creature and the significance of the Greek’s meaning for such subjects. Moving forward, mythological thinking in this way and the worshipping of multiple gods surfaced as an act against the “one true God” of Christian or Catholic ideals and was casted out by many cultures as time progressed. Considering that Boucher used subjects of Greek mythology in this work, he moved to reject that casting out of different points of view and ways of living in general because he proceeded to ignore the sigmas around the division of religion and moved to include something that could be considered a thing of the past, but as he put a new light on the subject, he proved it to indeed be still very current, especially within the age of enlightenment and the newfound ways of thinking that came with it. Furthermore, this new take on Greek subjects introduced a new subject to the history of art by basically saying that this shouldn’t be forgotten and should still be very relevant to anything because Greek mythology is a very important part of western human evolution and culture. This work does contain visual aspects typical of previous artistic periods as the Rococo style did emerge from the Baroque period and style of art, so there are similarities there considering the ornamental aspects and vibrancy of color. However, it is also important to consider that the Rococo style of art took information and inspiration from any earlier period as essentially it is just an evolved process of art from all the

periods before it. This work also tells the viewer about the time period in which it was created because of the fact that there are spiritual aspects present, representing the age of enlightenment, as well as the whimsical and seemingly musical rhythmic ways of painting that are all common within the theatrical Rococo styles of painting.