Visual Analysis

ARH6930: 043H

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12-01-12

Edward Hopper, *Office at Night*, 1940

In this artwork Edward Hopper leaves nothing to chance. The forms are planned, with premeditated colors and structures. By design, Hopper directs the viewer’s attention to the unequal relationship in the room. If this is your thesis, go ahead and tell your reader what you will argue the relationship is.

At first glance the scene is simple. A large window dominates the right, balanced by three wooden panels on the left; the door ajar is the center left panel. Between these large features lie three wooden pieces of furniture triangularly aligned and unified by the stain of the wood. Good. Cutting the plane of this triangle between the chair and desk on the upper right side, two vertical forms rise together: a curvaceous woman overlapping a six-drawer filing cabinet. The woman’s body turns to the cabinet, but she twists at the waist toward the man seated at the desk, in line with the window. The only other notable features appear to be objects on the desks, the green floor with a fallen paper, an umbrella propped by the wooden wall and the dark and light alternation of color above the door. What time period are we in –and does that add anything to your ideas about inequality?

The scene feels barren, absent of unnecessary objects, like a vacuum devoid of warmth. Subtleties inspected begin to reveal the air in the room. The woman is turned to the man in an unnaturally pronounced twist, essential to deepening shadows under the curve of her bottom and breast. Even the divide of her lower backside is highlighted in paint tinted different than her dress. How does her appearance, dress, and actions loop back to your thesis about the unequal-ness between the 2 characters? Although at first appearing to look at him, when zooming in closely, her line of sight is directed more to the letter the man is reading, or the paper fallen on the floor. Her hair, which at a distance appears to be in a bun, is decipherable from the filing cabinet as a loose strand flowing toward the window and perhaps the rest of the hair is actually lifted by the wind from the open window, and swirling behind. The idea of her hair in the wind makes sense of the paper scattered on the chair and floor, just carried out of place by the breeze from the window. The man’s manicured hair and intent focus on reading separate him from the action of the wind and outside circumstances. While the woman seems to notice: the files, the wind, the papers out of place and the man; the man is oblivious to any factors other than what is before him. The woman is all shapely and windblown, but the man is unflappable and unaffected by the wind or the woman’s presence. This is all excellent description, but you should make sure it loops back to your thesis and supports it.

Hopper shows the woman as attentive and affected by the elements and man, while the man is beyond engagement or feeling the expected impact of present factors. Hopper transmits the message that the man is unavailable to the woman and nature despite proximity and attention. Are you sure this is a subconscious act on Hopper’s part, or do you think it was deliberate? Hopper has {left so few clues} to the story that one can feel the clues he does leave are very intentional. Did he really leave no clues? You say in the first paragraph that Hopper left “nothing to chance” in the work, so you seem to be contradicting yourself here. Your job in the essay is to find those clues and help your reader put all them together in a way that supports your main argument. Your descriptions are very eloquent but I am looking for that next deeper step – 13 out of 15.