OBJECT PAPER

Goal: To develop the skills of looking and writing about visual objects, and to explore how modern viewers extract meaning from Renaissance art.

Description:
Due: Friday September 12 at start of class
Details: Papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, 12-point font and 1-inch margins please.
Length: 5 pages.

Topic:
In this paper you will practice using your skills of observation and interpretation on a single work of Renaissance art. This is not a research project: no outside reading is necessary. I am looking for papers that thoughtfully address the “hows” of meaning. You should go about this project in two stages:

I. Look at the object. Your paper will be based upon the information you obtain from the object through visual analysis. The better you know and can describe and analyze your piece, the more effective and relevant your paper will be. You should follow three steps in studying your object, before you begin to write the paper:
   1. Look closely at your chosen object. Figure out how it is put together. Analyze the visual elements one by one (space, form, light, color, composition), as we’ve done in class. This kind of looking provides the raw data on which our interpretations are based.
   2. Using your visual data, consider the “agenda” of the piece, or how it conveys meaning. Think about: How did the artist manipulate the viewer’s experience? What parts are prioritized, in your opinion? What parts are downplayed? Where does the artist focus the viewer’s attention, and how can you tell?
   3. Think about why. What does the artist achieve through his/her creation of a specific visual experience? Consider some of the possibilities of what the meaning of the work might have been. This will be your thesis.

II. Write the paper. Now that you know what you think about the work of art, you can write an effective, thesis-driven analysis of it.
   In your paper you will want to use the tools and terms discussed in class to “explain” the work. The formal elements that make up the work (medium, size, line, shape, color, light, space, composition, etc.) and how these operate visually are your evidence for your thesis. A paper with a thesis has a purpose, because it has an argument to prove, thus tends to be more focused and persuasive, as well as interesting and revealing. A visual analysis paper without a purpose (i.e. pure description) will have no sense of direction, no logical organization, and little to say.
Write your paper to an audience of peers, for example a roommate or friend, understanding that they have a) no familiarity with this work of art and b) little knowledge of art history but c) a keen interest and intelligence.

If you have questions or need help, come talk to me. Refer to the guidelines we’ve talked about in class. I also recommend Sylvan Barnet’s A Short Guide to Writing About Art (on reserve), especially chapter 2.

Choose one of the objects listed below, all found on the Art Department database (http://art1.coloradocollege.edu) within the set “RC-objects”.

Domenico Veneziano. Annunciation, from the St. Lucy Altarpiece. C. 1445 Panel
Giovanni Bellini. St. Francis in Ecstasy. 1470s. Panel. Frick Collection, New York
Rosso Fiorentino. Dead Christ with Angels. C. 1525. Panel
Tintoretto. Last Supper. 1592-94. Canvas. S.Giorgio Maggiore, Venice