

Museum project formal analysis

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ARTH 1001: Museum Formal Analysis Paper The Tiber Muse Winged Victory of the Nike of Samothrace Justinian and Attendants from San Vitale Adrienne Keiser TA- Anna, Tuesday Section April 23rd, 2013 The Tiber Muse, originally discovered in the vicinity of the Tiber River in Rome in 1885, is a product of the Graeco-Roman era and is dated around the 2nd-1st century BCE. This date and other formal qualities of the sculpture such as the pose, drapery and medium suggest that it was produced during the Hellenistic Period of Greece and Asia Minor, and then imported to Rome at a later date.

The importation, copying, and public display of Greek art were common from the start of Roman conquering of Greek territories and throughout the Roman Imperial era. The formal qualities of this piece, to be explored later in this exhibition, are comparable to those of the Nike of Samothrace in that they both exhibit the dramatic, elaborate techniques common of the Hellenistic Period (323-30 BCE) that embrace a range of emotions, providing us with an overpowering, multi-sensory experience as we view these pieces.

The qualities and purpose of art during the Hellenistic Period were quite different from those of the Byzantine Era, to be further explored by comparing these two sculptures with the Justinian and Attendants mosaic from San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy. Through a formal analysis of these three works, the meaning, purpose and values of the culture that produced them will become clear, and we can further understand the historical context of these two very different time periods. The Hellenistic Period is the time between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE and the emergence of the Roman Imperial Empire.

Greek cultural power and influence was at its height, and there was great prosperity and progress with the arts, theatre, literature, music, philosophy, science and architecture. During this period, Greek culture, influence and language was spreading to other parts of the world. This contributed to a wide variety in art, producing complex, individual and idealized works, allowing us to admire them from all angles. Hellenistic art seeks expressibility and a forcefulness of details, focusing on the height of the moment by expressing the violence of movements.

In great statuary, Hellenistic art explores themes such as suffering, sleep, age, victories, and real, intimate moments frozen in time. The Tiber Muse and the Nike of Samothrace both exhibit these qualities in many ways. The Tiber Muse is about four feet high and constructed out of marble. The pose and arm positioning of the subject suggests it is a sculpture of a muse caught in the moment of playing an instrument. Even though she is missing her head, most of her arms and feet/base, her pose is similar to other known muses.

The oval tear (near her right arm) in her garment suggests a rare, iconographic tradition whereby musicians were represented with less restricting clothing on their playing arms. Thus, this tear does not suggest an erotic encounter, but rather a young female bending over a rock, caught in the moment of playing an instrument. This element of sculpture capturing an intimate moment in time is definitely a quality of Hellenistic sculpture. This statue projects into our space, and it is clear one needs to observe it from many different angles to fully understand it.

This is very similar to the Nike of Samothrace, even though it is safe to say the Nike statue projects into our space more intensely than the Tiber Muse. This is because the Nike of Samothrace was originally placed on the front of a ship to commemorate a naval victory, and then turned in to an elaborate fountain structure at the head of the Daru staircase in the Louvre in Paris. The Tiber Muse was meant to be a smaller, more intimate piece that demonstrates the moment of a musician playing, whereas the Nike of Samothrace was sculpted to be a larger-than-life symbol of victory and strength.

Both the Tiber Muse and The Nike of Samothrace show a mastery of form and movement in marble, that creates a deliberate relationship to the space around the statues. In the Nike statue, the wind that has carried her and which she is fighting off, straining to keep steady, is the invisible complement of the figure and the viewer is made to imagine it. The Tiber Muse's pose draws us in to her moment, and forces us to imagine all sensory elements of the space around her—the sound of the music, her motions of playing, and the air around her.

In this way, both statues create this sense of auditory drama as well as a multi-sensory, overpowering experience that encompasses many Hellenistic artworks. These two works both make us a participant while viewing, however, I would argue that the Tiber Muse reflects the range of real emotions and a more realistic view of people than does the Nike statue, because the Nike was used to commemorate a victory and was meant to be more symbolic, honoring a goddess and a sea victory, whereas the muse is nameless and captures a more intimate, real moment.

The Nike depicts a more supernatural experience that blows us away with its incredible deep undercuttings, shadows and Phidian style drapery. While the Tiber Muse also uses similar drapery techniques as well as deep undercuttings and shadowing, the Nike is seen as an iconic depiction of triumphant spirit and the divine momentarily coming face to face with man. The Tiber Muse's use of these techniques was to create an idealized portrait of a muse caught in the moment of playing, rather than to represent a goddess of victory and connection to the divine.

This idea of capturing a raw, realistic moment and the movement from portraying the divine to portraying real people became more apparent later in the Hellenistic period, explaining why these two works differ in their purpose and meaning. Thus, although using similar mediums and sculpting techniques, the original contexts of these two works differ greatly, in that the Nike was meant to be viewed publicly on a grand scale, and the Muse is smaller and was probably meant to be a private display of one's social status and education.

Although the Justinian mosaic in San Vitale is very different from these two statues in medium, time period and display of figures, the idea of connecting man to the divine is alive in this work as well. Here, the purple on the robe of Justinian connects him to the divine, in that purple was considered a Holy color, often shown on representations of Christ. However, the purpose of this connection of Justinian to Christ was of propagandistic use, not to symbolize a great victory and a triumphant spirit, as in the Nike of Samothrace.

During the early Byzantine Era, Justinian ruled from Constantinople, but expanded his rule into the west, making Ravenna a new Western outpost. He

constructed San Vitale and the mosaics on the sides of the nave archade to display his ultimate rule and to portray himself as being above most citizens and having a close relationship to Christ. Some even go as far as to argue that he believed he was a descendant of Christ. The colors in this mosaic and throughout San Vitale were of traditional Byzantine style in that they are meant to disorient you and bring you into a different world.

The method of using glass tesserae to create mosaics is also a creation of the Byzantine times. The portrayal of the figures in this mosaic is what makes this work differ greatly from the other statues explored earlier. The figures are flat, clearly two-dimensional subjects depicted with little difference in size, facial expression and human anatomy. Their only difference between the figures comes from the color of the clothing or what they are holding. There is no clear depiction of human form, using little to no shadowing or drapery.

This is due to the purpose and time period in which it was created. During Byzantine times, this portrait of Justinian and his ensemble was to demonstrate power to the illiterate people about the authority of Justinian Rule, thus making the original purpose of this work truly propagandistic. By exploring, comparing and contrasting formal qualities of the Tiber Muse, the Winged Victory of Nike of Samothrace, and the Justinian mosaic of San Vitale, we can deduce several conclusions about the purpose and historical contexts of each work of art.

Although the two statues examined were from the same stylistic period, each has its own purpose for being. The Nike of Samothrace is a brilliant Hellenistic display of the multi-sensory drama that a great naval victory

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entails by projecting into our space. Its purpose was to symbolize a great victory over struggle and divine help or grace. The Tiber Muse also exhibits those Hellenistic sculpture techniques that the Nike statue has, such as drapery and shadowing, but is a more realistic display of an intimate moment.

Both show intense detail of human anatomy, but the muse doesn't have the "divine" element the Nike has, but rather a sensual element that brings us into her moment of playing music. The purpose of the Justinian mosaic was to demonstrate the fusion of his political and religious power, thus there is little attention to detail or the human form that is so pertinent in the two Hellenistic sculptures. Works Cited: Roberts, Christopher. How to Recognize and Date a Muse: Torn Garments, Marble Types, and the Tiber Muse in the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts.

The Classical Association of the Middle West and South. N. p. , 2005. Web. 21 Apr. 2013. . Images of the Works of Art The Winged Victory of the Nike of Samothrace 220-190 BCE, Hellenistic Period The Tiber Muse 2nd-1st Century BCE, Graeco-Roman or more specifically, the Hellenistic Period Gallery G230, Acquisition Number 56. 12 Justinian and his Attendants from San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy 546 CE, Byzantine Era