

Art history comparison essay samples

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For this essay, I have chosen to formally compare The Crucifixion with the Virgin and St. John the Evangelist at Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey and that which is at the Cathedral of Saint Peter and Paul Naumburg, Germany. These two sculptural art works present the same iconography – one of the most important events in Christian history, which is the crucifixion of the Christ. It will be argued and discussed henceforth that the sculpture in Constantinople presents the event from a more philosophical perspective, while that in Naumburg presents the event on a more emotional perspective. That is, while the former appeals to reasoning the latter appeals to feelings. These differences in perspectives were effectively achieved by the use of different dominant lines, spaces, color, shades, and size in the said art works.

The first difference that I was able to observe on the two art works is that the work from Constantinople used miniaturized size subjects. The sizes of the main figures (The Virgin, John, and the Christ) range from 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". The said art work is hanged on a wall a few feet from the floor. The art work from Constantinople, on the other hand, made use of life-size figures, Christ = 6'1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " tall, Mary and John = 5'8" tall, respectively. It is also important to note that the latter art work is located at the main entrance of the Cathedral, a few feet above the floor, so the main figures are easily reached by the people who enter by the door. Other differences between the two art works are as follows. When it comes to the medium, the former used of ivory and the latter art work, with stones, which allowed the artists to paint it with different colors. Both art works are properly preserved as there are no apparent damages in both of them. The art work in Constantinople is a part

of bigger work of art – it the center of a triptych. That in Naumburg, on the other hand, is a free standing work of art. All the aforementioned affect the overall effect of the two artworks to their respective viewers. Accordingly, due to the size of the art from Constantinople, it does not present as much drama as the work of art from Naumburg. Seeing, an image or a sculpture that is of human size and crucified would have more dramatic or emotional effect than a sculpture that is almost a pendant in size. This same effect is manifested in terms of the positioning of the sculptures.

The art work in Naumburg is easily reached, which somehow creates an impression or emotion of pity and helplessness from the viewer – a man is suffering from a cross, and although you can reach him to release him from his pains, it is impossible for you to do so. In this sense, the artist tries to steer the conscience of the person passing about the figures. The person could actually relate more to the feelings of the two figures placed at both sides of the figure of the Christ, due to the said positioning. The figures are full of emotions. Their carved faces show or convey feelings of distress, pain, love and longing, pity and helplessness – all the feelings that can be associated to a person who cannot do anything for his or her loved-ones but simply watch them die in agony.

Note that the presence of color and shades has the same effect to the sculpture. The colored red blood that seem to drip from the punctured palms and feet of the Christ steers the aforementioned emotions. The additional color – aside from white – adds life to work of art. The art work from Constantinople on the other hand steers rational thinking. It is small, and since it is all made up of ivory, it only has one color – whitish to brown. This

lack or scarcity of color and shades produces the effect that the artwork is devoid of strong emotions or even life, which brings the viewer to a more philosophical or theological relationship with it. Note that the shape of the two artworks also produces the same effects. The shapes of the main figures in the art work from Naumburg mimic those of real humans. The art work from Constantinople on the other hand has lower volume as it is almost flat. There are also more details when it comes to the curves in the faces and in the body and robes of the main figures in the art work from Naumburg. These curves put human emotions suited to the event depicted on the art work. The faces of the main figures in the Constantinople artwork, on the other hand are almost devoid of emotions.

Another interesting difference between the two artworks is the spaces between the three main figures. In the Naumburg art work, there is no vertical distance between the figure at the center (the Christ) and the figures on the sides (the Virgin and John). The only dominant distance or space is the horizontal distance between the two. Through this manner of distancing the figures from each other, the artist conveys that the work of art focuses not on the divinity of the figure at the center, but on the sufferings that he and the other two figures on his sides. That is, it focuses on human feelings rather than heavenly wisdom.

The Constantinople artwork on the other hand, shows the center figure to be slightly elevated – there is a vertical distance between it and the figures on its sides – while there are only minute horizontal spaces between them. These distancing creates an impression of the divinity of the center figure and the lack of significant horizontal distance creates an impression of

understanding or coming into terms with the divinity of the center figure and the significance of the crucifixion. The aspect of divinity is further strengthened by the presence of circular disc on the heads of each of the main figures. These discs are absent in the Naumburg art work.

Lastly, what differentiate the two artworks are the differences in the dominant lines used by their respective artists. In the Naumburg artwork, the dominant lines are curvy lines. These curvy lines create impressions of dynamicity or movement, and movement is one characteristic of life.

Movement also indicates the presence of a disturbance, such as emotional disturbances. In the Constantinople art work, the artist used straight lines as the dominant lines to create an impression of being static or the lack of movement. Being static promotes perceptions of contentment or coming into terms with an event or principle. It could steer feelings of contentment, of divinity, and higher knowledge. Hence, by using different dominant lines, the art work from Naumburg was teeming with life and emotions, while that from Constantinople – with divinity and contentment.