

Visual and contextual analysis of painting



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Formal Analysis:

Despite there being a substantial number of figures in this painting, the largest one immediately attracts the eye. The geometric shapes, specifically triangles, produced from his pose, further enhance the emphasis of his image by giving the viewer a sense of visual strength and structure[1].

Scaled to create contrast, the other two male figures are much smaller in size. While both smaller figures also create geometrical shapes within their poses, these shapes are weaker, both in form and in size.[2]The one on the right is in a more lifelike profile pose.[3]The character on the left, while in a similar composite pose to the more substantial figure, the line of the spear he is holding draws the eye line upwards, further emphasizing the most towering figure.[4]Their poses, as well as the contrast in scale, adds to the emphasis of the larger, more central character.

Contrasting the strong geometric shapes of the human figures are the biomorphic shapes of the animals featured.[5]However, although they themselves are organic shapes, the animal types are grouped into geometrical shapes as well: the birds grouped as a square and the amphibious animals in a line.[6]Adding to the opposing shapes is the contrast in the color palette.[7]The main colors used at the bottom of the piece, blue and orange, complement one another, further intensifying the contrast in elements.[8]This juxtaposition is also seen in the grouping of flying birds, their slender orange legs dangling below the larger blue bodies.

Looking at the painting as a whole piece, it is asymmetrical. The largest character is slightly off-center, and the horizontal line created from the

wooden spear he is holding skews the symmetry downwards.[9]There is also a larger amount of open space on the bottom two-thirds of the piece than at the top. Even with all the large scale asymmetry, this piece is still balanced, though it requires a closer look. Each grouping of animals is palindromic in quantity: five fish swimming, flanked by two animals that live in both water and land, five flying birds, five sitting birds, three men. This unified arrangement of the smaller elements creates balance in the piece, pushing against the asymmetry of the larger components.[10]Looking closer, although the grouping of birds is concentrated in the upper left corner, while the amphibious creatures are spread out across the bottom, they are balanced by the hieroglyphics that take up the space of the upper right corner.

Contextual Analysis:

By looking at all the elements within this piece and comparing them to existing artifacts, the approximate date of creation and point of origin can be assessed. First, the hieroglyphics in the upper right corner were common in Egyptian art, similar to those found in the carvings that create *Stele of The Sculptor Userwer* .[11]These symbols often adorned the walls and columns that were found within Egyptian Tombs of royalty and, sometimes, those of high-status[12]This painting was done to provide the spirit, or ka, with a comfortable living space.[13]These details give the viewer little clues into the beliefs as well as possibly the real life of the interred. Also typical in Egyptian art is the prominence of the profile pose, in both the animals as well as the boat and the overhead view of the water.[14]

Another element that gives context to the overall piece is the central figure. His size is the first thing to notice. In scale, he is much larger than the other two men pictured in the boat. Like Ti is portrayed in *Ti Watching A Hippopotamus Hunt*, the hierarchical scale of this figure infers a person of high status.[15]As was seen with the statue *Khafre*, which portrayed the Egyptian king of the same name, the inclusion of the fake beard, a headdress, and a kilt are further signifiers of a high-status person, possibly even royalty.[16]Adding to that evidence is the portrayal of the two other men. While the central figure shows symbols of wealth and status, the qualities of these two smaller figures indicate a lower social status. Unlike the composite pose that is common with high profile people and of the central character, the figure on the left is shown in profile only, giving the impression of a more lifelike appearance, which was typical when depicting those who were slaves or lower class.[17]Although the small figure on the right appears to be in the composite pose, he lacks the adornments of the central figure. The contrast of the two smaller figures against the larger allows for the belief that the central figure represents someone of importance, possibly even royalty.

The color palette is an additional element that provides essential context, particularly in reference to dating this piece. According to Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Cothren, colors used before the Eighteenth Dynasty only consisted of "black, white, red, yellow, blue, and green." [18]In looking at this painting, all those colors are included. Although it appears to contain orange and brown, these colors could have been distorted due to time as well as from possible restorations, like in the *Bull Leaping Fresco* found in

Crete . [19]Despite these minor discrepancies, this color scheme indicates an origin date of at least pre-c. 1539 BCE.[20]However, given the similarities in appearance between the central figure and those of Ti and Khafre, it is more likely that this painting is from the Fourth or Fifth Dynasty of Egypt, c. 2575-2325 BCE.

Stepping back to look at the painting as a whole allows for evaluation of what meaning all the elements combined. The hieroglyphics at the top tell a story, most likely of a hunt, given the speared fish. This particular depiction was probably used to tell about the bravery of the central figure, whether that was in the face of evil or just over the animals.[21]The pose of the central figure gives an impression of strength, both physical and as a provider for the people.[22]The balance of the painting gives further credence to the central figure's strength as a leader.

Works Cited

- Nichols, Sarah. " Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis." Art History I. 2016. Accessed 02/12/2020. https://ucdenver.instructure.com/courses/426208/pages/learning-to-look-a-short-introduction-to-visual-analysis? module_item_id= 2113986.
- Nichols, Sarah. " Urbanism and Trade in the Aegean: Knossos and Mycenae." Art History I. 2016. Accessed 02/16/2020. https://ucdenver.instructure.com/courses/426208/pages/topic-1-dot-6-urbanism-and-trade-in-the-aegean-knossos-and-mycenae? module_item_id= 2114001
- Stokstad, Marilyn and Michael Cothren. Art History. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2017.

[1]Sarah Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis,” Art History I. 2016. Accessed 02/12/2020. https://ucdenver.instructure.com/courses/426208/pages/learning-to-look-a-short-introduction-to-visual-analysis?module_item_id=2113986.

[2]Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis.”

[3]Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Cothren, *Art History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2017), pg. 54.

[4]Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis.”

[5]Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis.”

[6]Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis.”

[7]Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis.”

[8]Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis.”

[9]Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis.”

[10]Nichols, “ Learning to Look: A Short Introduction to Visual Analysis.”

[11]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 52.

[12]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 52.

[13]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 62.

[14]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 62.

[15]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 63.

<https://assignbuster.com/visual-and-contextual-analysis-of-painting/>

[16]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 59.

[17]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 54.

[18]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 52.

[19]Sarah Nichols, “ Urbanism and Trade in the Aegean: Knossos and Mycenae,” *Art History* I. 2016. Accessed 02/16/2020. https://ucdenver.instructure.com/courses/426208/pages/topic-1-dot-6-urbanism-and-trade-in-the-aegean-knossos-and-mycenae?module_item_id=2114001

[20]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 52.

[21]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 62.

[22]Stokstad and Cothren, *Art History* , pg. 62.