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Graduate Independent Studio Project I

April 13, 2018

"To annihilate itself as medium, to be no longer a sign but the thing itself?" - Roland Barthes

I will be doing a comparative analysis [In this essay, I will compare...] of two painters' works that were both esteemed and admired in their lifetime and continue to hold our attention – Leonardo da Vinci, "Annunciation" (image 1) and Francis Bacon, "Painting 1946" (image 2). I had the opportunity to see both of these paintings in the flesh - "Annunciation" in the spring of 2006 and "Painting 1946" in the summer of 2009. I chose these two works because despite how different they may seem, for me, they share a moment I have been unable to explain. When I viewed these works, they struck me and gave me an experience I wish to understand. I am hoping that by writing about them I may find out more of why these two paintings seem to have made an impression on me.

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The aesthetic differences between these two paintings and painters are prominent [self-evident?]. A few examples of these differences include their skill, subject matter and historical context. Leonardo was a protégé; highly skilled and technical in the execution of his work on panel. Francis Bacon was self-taught and his work shows a deskilling of technique– his paintings would crumble away if it were not for the museums preserving them. [this is interesting. He is considered fairly precise in

the context of 20th century painting. But that's an interesting factoid about the conservation issues. There is also such [a notable contrast?] a contrast in hue and palette in the two paintings. In "Annunciation," da Vinci created a rich glow of light from within, while Bacon's "Painting 1946" is filled with mute or matte colors imitating surface. The subject matter is another clear dissimilarity [distinction?]; one is a biblical scene and the other an unconscious [what do you mean? Nightmarish?] meat market. The difference in historical and cultural context of both works is also understandable [Do you mean their difference is understandable given the difference in their historical and cultural contexts?] given their respective time periods during the High Renaissance vs. Post-WWII Modernism. It is very easy to research and see the polar ends [clarify what you mean. Different ambitions?] of these two works described, while what they share in common is not so evident. [nice]

When analyzing how these painting may relate or connect to one another, I observed their sense of space, composition layout and narratives. The atmospheric depth of the paintings is, seen in both; granted, Leonardo's space recedes deep into the mountains while Bacon's space is more shallow but still present. The technique of layering and overlapping subjects creates depth as well. The use of one-point perspective gives [creates] space and the viewer can see the orthogonal lines from each. Specifically, the table and walls behind Mary in "Annunciation," along with the rug in "Painting 1946," help to push the picture plane back.

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Along with the use of depth, the two compositions also **hold a weight** [not sure what you mean] and balance of symmetry [are symmetrically balanced]. “Annunciation” has [shows] Angel Gabriel and Virgin Mary across from one another balancing and anchoring the composition to the ground. Furthermore “Painting 1946” is symmetrical when split vertically down the center of the image, and the dark figures in the center pronounce a deep void pulling us in.

Finally, while their subject matter may be very different from one another, they both have a strong sense of narrative. Leonardo’s “Annunciation” has a very specific narrative that can be traced and connected to biblical storylines. Although the narrative of, “Painting 1946” is meant to be somewhat unclear and open for interpretation, it **is** still felt from the scene that the creator **is** portraying a very specific viewpoint or story.

Despite locating some visual comparisons that connect the two works, the most prominent similarity between the two paintings is the feeling they evoked in me when I saw them in person, standing in front of them, being in the present of now. I was not thinking about what they **were** [depicted] or what I should know or feel about them. I gave up and allowed myself to experience the work for what they are and not the idea of them. [Do you mean what they were as paintings and not illustrations of a given content? I’d clarify and be more specific.] The two pieces hold [possess?] an enigmatic presence, and I felt the weight of the work wihin me. Was it something intrinsically in the work or was it something I projected on to it? This is an unexplainable alchemy of paint where the work transcends the medium. [great]

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Comment: Look for opportunities to use active verbs. EG: One feels that in this scene, the artist portrays a very specific viewpoint or story.

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Overall, while the two paintings span across the story of art history and are starkly different in so many ways, they both accomplish what I believe to be the ultimate goal in creative work, which is allowing the viewer to move beyond the surface and experience a personal reaction. While this does not appear to be a quantifiable experience, explained by choices of color or placement, it is one that I believe all creators and viewers of art can relate to.

[Marc, this is a strong and compelling paper. You can see my suggestions in terms of clarity and word choice. I share your experience of confronting work that seems to be beyond description and have also asked the question of whether it is the work or I who project its power. I think that working in Barthes more would couch this in a more expanded context. His writing on the punctum and the Third Meaning attempted to really dissect that experience of being magnetized by something. So plugging in some more quotes and discussion would be a plus. I'd also consider the other aspects of painting that come into play. Hal Foster, for instance wrote on the fetishism implicit in Dutch still life and this might be worth researching—it's about projected power. Such treatments also speculate on how the painted mark transcends its material state to become something ineffable and hypnotic. Another text that was a huge influence on me is Adorno's Commitment essay. It discusses politics but has many wonderful insights into how the best art is not the amount of knowledge or content put into it, but sometimes quite the opposite. He also says quite enigmatically that this most advanced form of creation does not give, but takes.]

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Image 1: Leonardo da Vinci, "Annunciation," oil and tempera on panel, 39"x 85"
created 1472-1475, location Uffizi, Florence, Italy

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https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/93/Leonardo_da_Vinci_-_Annunciazione_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg



Image 2: Francis Bacon, "Painting 1946," oil on linen, 78"x 52" created 1946, location Museum of Modern Art collection, New York,

Web: <https://shop.francis-bacon.com/shop/painting-1946/>

Bathes, Roland. "Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography"