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Provo Site

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Hum 1010

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Analysis Paper – *Baby Ruth*

For this “response paper,” I decided to experience and analyze a painting. The painting that I chose was on display in BYUs Museum of Art entitled *Baby Ruth, a painting* by John Curry. I chose to do a painting for my final analysis because I thought that it would be one of the more challenging ones to analyze, and I wanted to stretch myself and experience something that I have never done before. For reference sake, the painting that I analyzed is on the last page of this paper; it may be beneficial for the reader to look at that first so common ground will exist for the later analysis of the painting.

To begin, I will share some of my initial thoughts and reactions that I had after viewing this piece of artwork. At first, I was curious as to what type of painting it was. After studying the painting for some time, I concluded that it was an oil painting. I then moved onto observing the subject matter. I was curious as to what the purpose of the lady was and the connection it had with the sign that says, “Baby Ruth / FAT GIRL.” I made the obvious relation that the sign was describing the girl, but I had not yet discovered why that was. As I began looking at the painting in more depth, I found that I loved the strokes that the painter used to create a feathery effect; this is really apparent in the girls dress. As well, the style of painting, which appeared to be a realism, is something that I really enjoyed about this painting. Next, I started to pay attention to the actual content of the painting. I was curious as to whether this painting was supposed to be a comical or sympathetic. I would say that it is comical in that it portrays a woman who appears to be on “display.” I initially thought this because of how the painting is arranged. More specifically, the woman is sitting on a chair on a small stage with a sign depicting what is happening. This would make it seem that the painter was trying to be mocking. However, the felinity and beauty that the girl possess in the painting suggests that the painter is trying to portray sympathy. As well, the confidence of the woman made me not have a pitiful view towards the situation, but rather made me feel admiration for the woman. These two attitudes seem to be contradicting, which is what made me wonder about the painter’s original intent and life story. Now that I had these questions, I went home and looked up some information about the painting and the painter, John Curry.

As soon as I got home, I looked up some information about the painting and painter. I discovered several things that will be relevant for the analysis of the actual painting. I first learned a couple things about the painting itself including that it was painted in the year 1932. This detail will be significant later. As well, I confirmed that this was indeed an oil on canvas painting. Second, I learned about some of the background information about the painting. Curry, the painter, ran away in the year 1932, the same year be painted it, and joined the circus. There, he came to know Ruth Potinco, a member of the circus he joined, personally and not just out of curiosity as so many people who go to the circus do. In other words, the person in the painting is about someone who Curry came to know quite well and personally, not just out of curiosity. This friendly relationship was confirmed when Ruth said that she loved the painting that Curry had created. Another important thing about Curry was that he was a member of the school of Regionalism. This is important because this school generally teaches their students to be gentle in their art work and compassionate for their works and people who may be in their pieces; in this case Curry was able to use those things that he was taught towards his main subject in this painting, Ruth. As well, this school teaches people to paint with an “American” style of realism. This seems to be the predominant style in this painting. In short, the background information that I was able to obtain lead to me discovering that Curry painted a picture of someone that he came to know and care for with gentleness and with “American” realism. Now that a common ground has been established, further analysis make begin.

The first of Goethe’s questions is, “what is the artist trying to do?” To answer this question, the artist must first be identified. In this case, the artist would be the painter of the artwork, John Curry. The artist seemed to be trying to do several things. First though, several things must be examined. The painting was based on a woman who was part of the circus. The fact that she seems to be on display in the painting reaffirms this idea. Now, the connotation of somebody who is in the circus is generally demeaning in that it is expected for them to not follow social norms. In this case, that would typically mean the painting would be mocking or condensing; but this is not the major theme of the painting that I received as an audience of it. That being said, I think that one of the purposes of this painting was to cultivate a respect and to stay that beauty can be found everywhere that one looks, all that must be done though is to look close and deep enough. In other words, because of the relationship that Curry had with the person in his painting, that being mutual respect for one another, and the connotation that is often times attached with people who are in the circus, it seems reasonable that Curry was trying to help other people to realize that they are humans too who should be respected and, to some extent, have self-confidence and have beauty. In short, Curry seems to be trying to cultivate an attitude of mutual respect and for people to look for beauty wherever it may be. Now that the artist’s intent has been established, we can continue on with our discussion.

The second of Goethe’s questions is, “how well does he do it?” This question aims to help one critically analyze one’s reactions to a play. The first aim of the painting, to cultivate a feeling of mutual respect for all people, was something that I thought was done very well. Although one may have to do some research to find out some of the minute details of the painting, it was very well done. As said before, I thought that if this painting was supposed to be comical or mocking, then I thought that the girl would not be so feminine and represent beauty so well; because this is the case, one may conclude that there are other elements of the painting that make this not so. Some of the other elements that make this painting not only a comical piece, but one that is trying to accomplish a worthy goal, are the fact that the women is both beautiful and appears to have a lot of confidence in herself. In short, because the initial connotative painting of the girl is not presented, but rather an alternative view of the girl who is a member of the circus allows the cultivation of the idea of mutual respect quite well, thus meaning that Curry was able to do it quite well. As well, part of what I think allowed Curry to do such an amazing job with this was the fact that he knew the subject personally and his training that he received at his school of Regionalism.

The third and final of Goethe’s questions is, “was it worth doing?” In the end, I think that Curry’s main aim was worth doing. At the time that this painting was produced, mutual respect was a lot more prevalent; but over the years that concept has become less prevalent in society. This painting helps to reiterate that idea of mutual respect for others and because it is no longer found in society, it becomes even more important. In other words, because the idea of this painting has become a rare occurrence, the painting’s meaning becomes even more important and worth doing in the end. Another reason that I think that this artwork was worth doing is that it shows the ability of humans in their artwork endeavors.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed going beyond my comfort zone and thought that this painting by John Curry was excellent and worth doing in the end. I hope that I will be able to look for the beauty in all things and develop a respectful behavior for everyone that I come into contact with wherever it may be.

Painting

