Art History Learning Journal: Week 1 Reflection

1. Personal Definition of Art

After engaging with the course materials, particularly Belton's "What is Art" section and The Art Assignment's "The Definition of Art" video, I've refined my definition of art:

Art is a form of human expression that communicates ideas, emotions, or experiences through intentional creation, often employing aesthetic means. It encompasses a vast array of mediums and practices, from traditional forms like painting and sculpture to modern and conceptual works, and even extends to areas traditionally labeled as "craft" (Morelli, n.d.). Art has the power to provoke thought, elicit emotions, challenge perceptions, and reflect the cultural, historical, and personal contexts in which it is created. Importantly, as highlighted in "Art Must Be Beautiful," art need not be conventionally beautiful or pleasant; it can be disturbing, thought-provoking, or even seemingly mundane.

This definition attempts to capture the broad and evolving nature of art while acknowledging its subjective character. It recognizes that the boundaries between art and non-art, or between art and craft, are often blurred and continually debated within the field.

2. Anticipated Strengths and Weaknesses in Studying Art History

Strengths:

1. Analytical skills: My ability to analyze and interpret information aligns well with the practice of formal analysis in art history, as demonstrated in the video "How to do visual (formal) analysis in art history" (Smarthistory, 2017).

2. Interest in history and culture: My fascination with different historical periods and cultures will be beneficial in understanding the contextual analysis aspect of art history, as explained in Glass's "Introduction to art historical analysis" (n.d.).

3. Visual literacy: My attention to detail will be crucial in examining artworks, particularly in applying the elements of art as outlined by Belton (n.d.).

4. Writing skills: My comfort with academic writing will be valuable in articulating analyses, similar to the approach used in the video analysis of Goya's "Third of May, 1808" (Harris & Zucker, n.d.).

Weaknesses:

1. Limited prior knowledge: My background in art history is minimal, which means I'll need to work hard to build a foundational understanding of key periods, styles, and artists.

2. Memorization: Remembering numerous dates, names, and stylistic characteristics might be challenging, especially considering the complexities of dating in art history (Harris & Zucker, n.d., "Common questions about dates").

3. Art terminology: I'll need to develop a stronger grasp of specific art terms and concepts to discuss artworks effectively, as evidenced by the specialized vocabulary used in the course materials.

To address these weaknesses, I plan to:

- Practice describing artworks regularly using the formal analysis method outlined by Smarthistory (2017)

- Seek additional resources or ask for clarification when I encounter unfamiliar concepts

- Pay attention to the broader historical and cultural contexts of artworks, not just their formal qualities

As I progress through the course, I'll revisit these strengths and weaknesses to track my development and adjust my study strategies as needed. I'm particularly interested in exploring how my understanding of art and its definition might evolve as I encounter more diverse artworks and perspectives.