Name: Gia Dao

Student ID: 1001747062

FORMAL ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENT

The painting that I decided to choose for my formal analysis assignment is Terrace of a café at night (Place du Forum), a painting created by Vincent van Gogh on September 16th, 1888. The painting depicts a nocturnal landscape of a café on the sidewalk along with some pedestrians standing close to a street corner. The terrace of a café at night displayed an excellent combination of art techniques that van Gogh had used in his creation, from the chosen setting to the composition of contrast colors.

The first notable art element in Van Gogh’s painting is his excellent ability to combine the use of landscape and framed lines. The main lines implied by the street and the terrace divide the painting into two main sections and converge at the end of the street. In addition, the curve line depicting the roof of the café meets with the top of the house at the far end. These two vanishing points used in linear perspective have given the viewers an illusion of depth, in this case, has successfully captured the darkness at the end of the street. Van Gogh also demonstrated his great sense of using atmospheric landscape in his creation. Since Terrace of a café at night (Place du Forum) is an asymmetrical painting, the image of the terrace was constructed with much more firm, strong lines, together with larger, vivid block shapes; meanwhile, the pedestrians and the houses along the street were drawn with blurry and softer outlines. By giving the contradiction of images, Van Gogh was able to draw the viewer’s attention to the main object of his painting, which is the terrace of the café with a clear and detailed depiction. Since the objects mostly used horizontal and vertical straight lines, Van Gogh’s brushwork was also united in this case, by showing only one flows to depict the block shape.

The second remarkable art element is the use of color and lights. For color, there is a stark contradiction in the color Van Gogh has chosen to emphasize the objects. Though the theme of the colors is different; however, it has a powerful effect to make the main object stands out from its surrounding. On the left-hand side, the terrace was depicted with bright and warm yellow, and it gradually turns to light green on the wall. The color shift has successfully depicted the shadow reflected from the light, which generates a real sense for the painting. On the other hand, the houses are drawn with dark blue color, and at the further end of the street, black color has taken place. This sharp contrast in color has further reinforced the impression of the terrace and created a sense of deep three-dimensional space for the painting. For light, Van Gogh mainly focused on the depiction of the terrace of the café, which acts as a source to enhance the appearance of the guests and the pedestrians. Furthermore, the orange light of the base plays a supportive role to make the image of the guests, who were painted with neutral color, became more vivid. One feature that could be uniquely identified in this painting is that the picture of the terrace in bright color, situated between the dark blue pillar and the night of the houses on the street, has enlarged almost two-third of the painting. The size of the emphasized object conveyed a striking effect to attract the viewer’s notice based on its lighting, and at the same time, makes other background objects sync with the contrast that Van Gogh intended to create.

The use of space and scaling proportion in the Terrace of a café at night is also harmonic. In his painting, Van Gogh is limited to depicting only a few pedestrians on the street. The vacancy at the right corner of the painting helps separate two sides of the picture and reflects on the emptiness on the right-hand side. Also, the street acted as a component that differentiate the space of the terrace and blocks of houses. In that case, they would not overlap each other. Van Gogh has utilized the distribution of objects to bring back an illusion of real space as if the viewers were placing themselves in the scenery. Along with the use of space, since the terrace of the café is the main focus component, it’s brought to the foreground. Furthermore, it’s scaled with a precise proportion, therefore, it does not stir up an overwhelming use of space but remains to be the main emphasis of the picture. The enlargement of the terrace helps the viewers to become more perceptive of the distance and space encapsulated in the scenery as if they are standing close to the café. Lastly, the stars were perfectly positioned in the space between the terrace and the houses, on top of the painting. This helps reduce the emptiness of the middle boundary that separates the light and dark side, meanwhile, provides a clear perspective for the viewers.

In Terrace of a café at night, the shape which dominates the painting that viewers can visualize is geometric shapes, used to structure the terrace and the building blocks. Van Gogh has used geometric shapes to make the image of the terrace clearer and stiffer. Also, the terrace acts as the background to enhance the swift motion of the guests, which is created using organic shapes. The uses of geometric shapes also create unity in texture for the painting. The window and the roof of the café were drawn with a smooth line, and also, the street was made up of curvy lines as its main pattern.

Finally, a principle that contributes to the beauty of the Terrace of the café at night painting is the balance and rhythm. As it’s an asymmetrical painting, the focal point can easily be seen and capture the viewers’ interest in it, which is located at the center of the café. Here, Van Gogh used a variety of colors to create a sharp reinforce the appearance of the guests sitting at the table. In addition, the rhythm and repetition of the stones repeated in the street make the viewers look further and deeper into the painting itself.

The painting has conveyed a strong sense of tranquility, but at the same time now and then, there exists the sadness within it one could predict by the way Van Gogh used his color. The terrace of a café at night is a harmonious paint, that has unity and variety at the same time.



