

Paper #1: The Visuality of a Nasher Exhibit

VMS 202D – “Introduction to Visual Culture”

8% of course grade

Due: In discussion sections on **Friday, November 22, 2019**

[No late papers accepted!]

Length: 4 full pages (minimum) -- *All papers must be formatted in 12-point, “Times” or “Times New Roman” font with line spacing set at 1.5. All margins must be 1 inch (1”). No font shenanigans! ☺*

In Practices of Looking, Sturken and Cartwright note that the concept of visuality encompasses *not only* “the politics of the image” but also the power relations that “structure the visual field” (2018: 22). They write: “Visuality includes not only social codes about what can be seen and who is able and permitted to look, but also the construction of built environments in relation to these looking practices” (2018: 22). In this last paper, we ask that you turn your attention to this latter aspect of visuality – not toward specific images but to the structuring of the visual field and the power it exerts over looking practices – as you conduct an analysis of the “Art for a New Understanding” exhibition.

Some questions to consider in your analysis:

- How have the curators and architects at the Nasher structured the visual field for visitors to the “People Get Ready” exhibition?
- What messages do the spatial arrangement of the artworks and the architecture of the gallery convey? Is a visual conversation staged? If so, how? [See *important note* below.]
- How does the exhibition visually organize the looking practices of museum visitors? Does it enable or encourage particular ways of looking and/or moving? Does it limit or constrain in some ways?
- Does the museum exhibition’s visual organization offer a critique of power? In what way?
- Or might it also still be susceptible to an “institutional critique?” [see Sturken & Cartwright (2018: 71) for a central tenet of institutional critique.] For example, are museum visitors expected to conform to particular implicit or explicit social codes of comportment (behavior) while in the gallery space? If so, what elements of the visual field reinforce those norms? How?

You must support your arguments with concrete and specific evidence from the exhibition! Use richly ekphrastic descriptions! Return to the gallery for more observational research.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Your goal in this paper is NOT to perform a close reading of a particular image or set of images in the exhibit. Don’t get sucked into the semiotics of individual artworks! Instead, broaden your observations to consider the spatial interrelationships constructed among the artworks, the architecture of the exhibit space itself, the museum workers, and museum visitors. Pay attention to the arrangement of walls, entrances, artworks, the movement of visitors, museum guards, etc.