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Annotated Sample of Read, Look, Reflect Essay

The following is a student paper from the course ART 188: History of Western Art (Renaissance to Modern). Miami faculty from Art History have inserted comments to indicate and explain disciplinary writing conventions in Art History.

This sample contains 10 comments. These comments appear within the text of the article and are noted with bold text, brackets [], and the word "comment" before the text they refer to. You can also view these annotations and the original paper in a [Google Doc format \(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AuqH9uQWoc3mKwF0JZ9dIstP0yR4KbuEJTlaQjSXkbQ/edit?usp=sharing\)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AuqH9uQWoc3mKwF0JZ9dIstP0yR4KbuEJTlaQjSXkbQ/edit?usp=sharing).

Assignment Context:

As a student in ART 188, you might be asked to write a series of Read, Look, Reflect papers. The following paper is an example of exemplary student work. For this assignment, students are asked to read two sonnets by Michelangelo and look closely at Michelangelo’s sculpture *Awakening Slave*. Then they are asked to reflect on the questions below. This is a paper in which all students referenced the same assigned texts. No outside research was necessary, so footnotes were not required. Only clear references to the specific sonnet being discussed were necessary.

The Essay Prompt:

How does the allusion to the creative process in Michelangelo’s poems help us understand his philosophy of carving sculpture? How is that process visually apparent in the sculpture, *Awakening Slave*?

Annotated Student Essay:

Introduction (3 comments)
<div>Read, Look, Reflect: Michelangelo’s <i>Awakening Slave</i></div> <p>[Comment 1: This introductory paragraph is effective because it begins providing an answer to the essay prompt. The author begins to explain a connection between hand and mind, which suggests a particular approach to the creative process.] [Comment 2: The author also gets straight to the point without making any sweeping historical claims or claims about beauty or greatness of a work of art.] Michelangelo’s sonnets give insight into his beliefs about the mind’s vision and the hand’s product. Using sonnets to discuss the creative process and its resulting translation to Michelangelo’s sculptures is a testament to Michelangelo’s own mental capabilities, for both forms of art are quite difficult to produce well. Poetry and art require excessive refinement and revision on the part of the creator to convey what he or she wants to with a finished product. In the sonnet numbered 151, Michelangelo describes the “hand that obeys the intellect”, [Comment 3: Here’s one place where the author provides an interpretation of a specific quote.] an indication that he believes that the mind is central to sculpting a vision from inspiration before the hand sculpts the stone itself. Further, Michelangelo’s choice of words here shows his reverence for the mind in its central creative role. In this paper, demonstrate how Michelangelo’s sonnets and the sculpture, <i>Awakening Slave</i>, express a tension between idea and execution.</p>
Analysis (7 comments)
<p>With this in mind, Michelangelo’s second sonnet, numbered 152, delves further into the carving process. [Comment 4: The author focuses on a specific part of the poem here.] Michelangelo speaks of a living figure “that grows larger wherever the stone decreases” in this poem, a more direct allusion to what stone is literally subtracted as artistic additions are made to the stone. From there, the sonnet further describes the process of addition, discussing how one cannot see his or her own good in the same way that others can. [Comment 5: The author comes to a thoughtful interpretation of the quote here.] Rather, according to Michelangelo, other people seem to see the good in an individual and can bring it out to the surface in a way that the individual is unable to introspectively. [Comment 6: The</p>

author continues to reflect on the significance of that interpretation to the creative process.] This is a powerful observation both psychologically and artistically, and though Michelangelo is commenting on both, the latter alludes more to the creative process. Artistically, it seems like Michelangelo is alluding to his personal definition of inspiration. When artists like himself create, they seek to bring out qualities worth displaying, whether they be qualities like grace and beauty, or in the case of his sculpture, *Awakening Slave*, a quality like the beauty of struggle.

Because Michelangelo’s sculpture, *Awakening Slave*, is still very much confined to the stone, viewers can see his poetic description of replacing raw stone with a mental vision in artistic practice. It could be argued that the sculpture is either intentionally or accidentally unfinished, but with the information from the sonnets, the former seems to be a more accurate reflection of Michelangelo’s beliefs in this art. For Michelangelo, crafting a seemingly unfinished sculpture can successfully show the struggles of the creative process, especially conflicts with inspiration itself. Conflicts could entail a situation such as if inspiration were to run dry, or a time when the pressure on the creator to produce a fully developed vision becomes too much.

The man who is supposed to be awakening in the sculpture is facing a personal struggle that he cannot escape from. **[Comment 7: The author makes a clear and specific observation about the sculpture.]** It is worth noting that a body is more clearly defined in the sculpture than a head. **[Comment 8: The author suggests a possible interpretation of the observation above.]** This structural observation could mean that the head, and therefore the mind, is the source of the struggle for the man depicted in the stone. **[Comment 9: The author again makes a specific observation in the next sentence and then moves into interpretation for the rest of the paragraph.]** The central parts of the body are more prominent in the stone than the upper and lower regions of the body, giving the sculpture a warped look on the top, but also a little bit on the bottom as well. This further enhances the theme of struggle and the overtaking of the mind by said struggle. The all- consuming nature of struggle is made more powerful and central to the sculpture by that design choice, especially since viewers know that Michelangelo’s anatomical accuracy was part of what has made many of his other works so respected.

[Comment 10: This paragraph does a great job of picking up on the theme of struggle (based on the observations above) and suggesting a greater significance for that. Struggle is argued to be THE creative process for Michelangelo.] Continuing with the assumption that the sculpture is intentionally unfinished, the rugged look to the art can be explained by the artist’s creative process. As the artist, Michelangelo must’ve felt that it was worth showing struggle in a new light. Rather than just showing a figure in turmoil, the more traditional option at the time, he alludes to turmoil on the part of the artist as well because sculpting is about the relationship between the stone and the craftsman. It is difficult to work away and model the stone to achieve the glorious end results famously associated with the name ‘Michelangelo’ today. The challenge of overcoming struggle is inherent in the duties of an artist like Michelangelo; one must produce admirable works of art and continue to please society by showcasing those talents. The struggle of the artist as a creator crosses the mind less because the artist is not what one typically sees when he or she views a work of art. Constructing *Awakening Slave* seems to challenge that thought, as the practice of sculpting highlights the role of the creator more than something like a painting would be able to.

Conclusion (0 comments)

The ability that viewers have to pair Michelangelo’s *Awakening Slave* with written explanations from the artist centuries later undoubtedly adds to one’s interpretation of the art. Michelangelo’s decision to reflect on his own creative process shows that while he was a renowned artist, the talent was accompanied by other highly developed talents, too. In more than one respect, Michelangelo continues to succeed in making critics and common viewers alike understand the complexity of the artistic profession.