

Formal Analysis Questions: Sculpture

Medium, Technique, Materials

What type of sculpture is this?

Relief sculpture, with the sculpted parts still attached to the background and protruding from it

Counter relief, with the forms cut into the background

Sculpture in the round, carved all the way around and freestanding (although perhaps attached to a base)

Was the technique subtractive, additive, or both? Were multiple techniques used across the work?

What materials were used? What is the texture like?

Is the object a solid form, or does it have void spaces?

How does the work interact with the space surrounding it?

Consider the scale of the sculpture and its effect.

Composition and Subject Matter

Is the work representational (with recognizable figures and objects), abstract, or a combination of both?

Does the work suggest a narrative (a story) or a sense of time?

How do the different parts of the composition relate to each other and to the whole scene? Does the composition have unity?

What forms the background, and what is the focus of the scene? Does anything draw your eye into or across the work?

What framing devices are used (aside from the actual pedestal, if there is one)?

If your work is figural

What is the relationship of your gaze to the figure's gaze or figures' gazes (for example, is the figure looking at you)? If there is more than one figure, do they look at each other?

Is the figure (or are the figures) placed in a setting? If so, what is their relationship to that setting? Do the objects or figures share the space evenly, or is more emphasis placed on one figure?

If your work is a sculpted landscape

Do the landscape features share the space evenly, or does one overpower the other? What is the focus of the composition? Is there a suggestion of motion in the landscape?

Are there animals or figures in the landscape? What is their relationship to the landscape?

Light, Color, Perspective

How are shadows created across the sculpture's surface?

Is the sculpture pigmented? If so, are the colors warm, cool, or monochrome? Saturated or muted?

Does the artist convey a sense of perspective? How? Is the space intentionally distorted?

Consider three traditional ways of creating depth in a sculpture: overlapping figures, relative scale, varied depth of carving.

Function and Context

What might be significant about the time period in which the sculpture was created?

If the artist is known, what do we know about his or her training and career?
If the artist is unknown, what kind of person might have created it?
Was the work a commission, or did the artist create the work independently?
What was the original context for the work? How was it used?
Was it a singular object or a multiple?
Was the work well received? How has the public's opinion of the work changed?

Collecting History and Museology

What is the present state or condition of this sculpture? What has led to this state?
What is the museum's title or description of the work? How does it affect your interpretation of the work?
When did the work come into the collection? What is its provenance?
With which area of the collection is it associated?
How is it displayed, and in relation to which other objects? How is it lit?
How are visitors expected to read this object in a museum setting?