

Example Analysis

I have chosen the painting of Ophelia, painted by the British artist Sir John Everett Millais. It was completed between 1851 and 1852 and is held in the Tate Gallery Britain in London.



The first thing that strikes me, is the form of the painting, it has the form of an arch above, suggesting that it has been created to fit in a particular space.

When looking at the formal properties this is what can be noticed:

Scale- this is difficult to judge without information about the real painting, that is the difficulty of images that are reproduced, you don't have a clue about their size, and how this relates to the proportions of an audience. To be sure I would have to do some web research, and spoil my unprejudiced first impression based on very little knowledge of the artist. I do know that Ophelia is a character from a play of Shakespeare. My impression is that it is a big painting, but with very detailed traits, especially the flowers

Material - I think the real painting is oil on canvas, it is hard to say in small digital format

Tonal value - in terms of light and dark, it is clear that all the attention is driven towards Ophelia's face, very light, with the dark water of the pond around her. the flowers and bushes are arranged as a kind of frame around her body, as if she is buried in a grave in a cemetery.

Composition - it is apparently a romantic view of a woman who has drowned in a pond, with very detailed and nicely arranged flowers of all kinds, on the one hand it is gloomy, on the other, it gives the impression of spring and a fairy tale, with a sleeping beauty.

Now I am going to look up some information about the subject matter and the historical context:

Subject matter:

Ophelia by John Everett Millais painted on the Hogsmill River 1851

John Everett Millais' Ophelia, oil on canvas, was painted in 1851 when he was just 22. The painting depicts the drowning of Shakespeare's Ophelia who is the daughter of Polonius, sister of Laertes and a potential wife of Hamlet. As a young, tragic beauty, Ophelia has long been a popular subject of artists but it is Millais' work which has become the iconic image of Ophelia we know so well.

Historical context:

Millais together with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who also studied at the Royal Academy, became founder members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The name, Pre-Raphaelite, is synonymous with romance, nature, exquisite attention to detail, classic pose and the extraordinary use of vibrant, vivid colour. This was painting from the heart without adhering to convention. The Brotherhood looked to classic sources for their inspiration – myths, legend, poetry, strong, statuesque female beauty and of course, in the case of Ophelia, – Shakespeare.

Source from which this was taken: <http://www.kingstononline.co.uk/ophelia-john-everett-millais-painted-hogsmill-river-1851/>

Who was Ophelia in Shakespeare's play Hamlet?

Hamlet murders her father out of fear for competition and she goes mad and drowns herself. Shakespeare seems to have written a very detailed account of where she drowned and the vegetation of that place, which was taken very seriously by Millais.

You can test your understanding of the painting by listening to a weblecture of the Khan academic about it, by the same art historian who presented the Goya painting:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/victorian-art-architecture/pre-raphaelites/v/sir-john-everett-millais-ophelia-1851-52>

N.B. The painting presented on the website does not have an arch form at the top, and is a traditional rectangular shape, so the result of the wiki search for the image should be further checked to find an explanation.