



AP[®] Art History 2003 Sample Student Responses

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B

- Robi House (FLW)
- Pediment sculpture from Parthenon
- Isenheim Altarpiece (Grünewald)

XXX,

Question 9

- Elgin Marbles / Pediment Sculpture
 - had to fit in corner
 - struggle. Hierarchic scale/achieved
 - Archaic
 - Contrapposto, wet drapery
 - REFINEMENT
- Isenheim Altarpiece
 - hospital
 - generous Christ
 - ethereal light, floating
 - contemporary German soldiers

9. In order to understand works of art fully, one must understand their original or intended settings. For example, most works of art in museums have been removed from their original settings. Often a work's original setting has been altered or destroyed or was never completed as planned.

Fully identify two works of art that have been removed from their original settings. Each example must come from different original or intended settings. Discuss how knowledge of the original settings contributes to a more complete understanding of each work. (30 minutes)

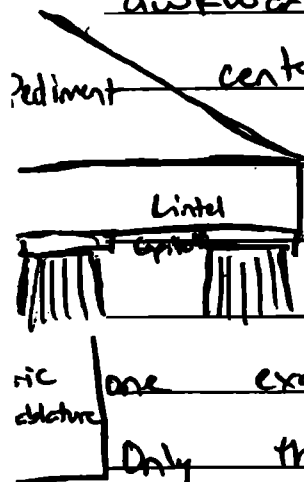
Works do not often stand alone. Supplemental architecture or the original placement itself can have a huge impact upon the artwork itself. In the cases of the Elgin Marbles and the Isenheim Altarpiece, the original placement is key to developing a complete understanding of the artwork.

The name of the Elgin Marbles is in itself deceiving. One can go to the British Museum and conclude that they are an amazing stand alone Greek sculptures. However, this is not the case. In the days of the Greeks and the Athenian Acropolis, these Elgin Marbles were actually the pediment sculpture for the

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Parthenon. For centuries the Greeks struggled with the awkward shape of the pediment. Although large at the center, the triangular shape created odd sculptural groupings at the corners. In the Archaic period hierarchic scale was used, but this was refined in the classic period with sculptural groupings that, in one example, utilized a fallen soldier at the corner (genius!). Only the anatomy was slightly off. Finally, by the time of the Parthenon the Greeks had refined their sculpture to a degree that made the entire sculptural pediment grouping completely natural. The reclining figures of the Parthenon's pediment sculpture epitomize wet drapery on the female figures and contrapposto. Without the understanding of Greek struggle with pediment sculpture, the Elgin Marbles lose the flare they deserve and do not pay respect to Greek ingenuity.



On a very different note, Grünewald developed his Isenheim Altarpiece to put the souls of the suffering at ease. Placed in a hospital for the ill and dying, in a time when the plague claimed thousands upon thousands of lives, this altarpiece connected with patients of the hospital. While closed, as it would be seen in the time of Lent before Easter, one

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sees the gangrenous skin of a crucified Christ, a connection to the patients without doubt. ~~Also, the Christ is~~ Also, the Christ is surrounded by contemporary German soldiers, allowing patients to draw another connection to their country and their situation. Finally, when the altar piece is opened a hopeful Christ surrounded by ethereal light puts the patients at ease. They no longer have to fear death. Without this understanding of the original hospital location one cannot fully appreciate the emotion and suffering Grünewald was capturing, a pain felt by the thousands that were taken to the hospital to pass into a new life.

Both the Elgian Marbles and the Isenheim Altarpiece demonstrate the importance of an understanding of the original surroundings of these pieces. Although they stand alone as amazing works of art, the context of each piece is nearly as profound as the art itself.

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When the mention of "artworks that have been removed from their original setting" arises, one work in particular comes to mind—the Lamasseau (more than likely not spelled correctly). The Lamasseau is a magnificent work of art ~~that~~ was (one of two that originally stood guard on either side of a massive gateway). Part bull, part lion, part eagle, it can be viewed from multiple sides with accuracy due to a "fifth leg". Since it was placed at a gate, it was meant to portray a message of ferocity and power to any who might be entering unauthorized. Now, it stands in a museum, no less grand, but far removed from

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the place where it truly belongs. On entrance to this museum, one would not be able to grasp a full understanding ^{of this work} based on ~~that~~ its ^{initial} ~~first~~ appearance. It is only when one realizes the purpose it was intended to serve that they can truly understand this artwork.

Similarly, Tutankhamen's death mask is out of its element, ^{lying} in a glass museum case. Though still breathtakingly beautiful, it loses some of its mystique when resting in the setting of a modern museum. In ancient Egypt, the tombs of the kings were meant to be sacred and awe-inspiring. ~~It~~ surrounded by opulence to be used in the afterlife, the kings were meant to rest peacefully for all eternity ~~(in the afterlife)~~ beneath their ornate masks. Without the king beneath and the eerie (yet sacred) tomb surrounding it, the mask seems merely a shell. To gain a true appreciation for the boy-king's funeral mask, it is essential that one realizes the ^{cultural} importance and significance of its original setting.

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