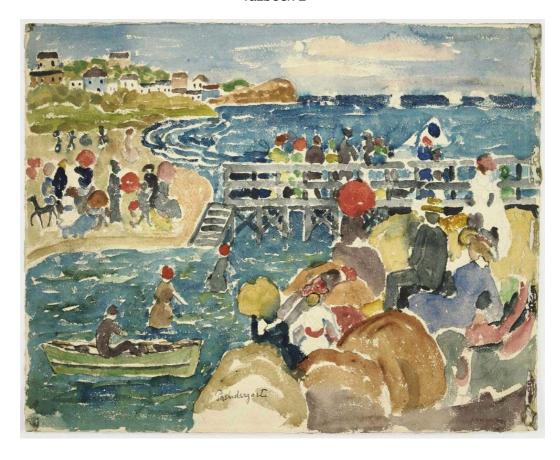George Yazbeck

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Formal Analysis Paper

Introduction: Upon visiting the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (for the first time, I will add), I was taken aback by the diversity of both art and art forms that filled up each and every exhibit. Concentrating on paintings, I took a look at various pieces where one in particular caught my eye. The piece was entitled, "Long Beach" by painter Maurice Brazil Prendergast. What I noticed immediately about the painting was its subject: a beach setting that showed much variety in a number of attributes. More strikingly, I observed that the style of painting (in this case, watercolor) had matched well with the setting portrayed which gave the artwork an established sense of mood, definition and quality. Details regarding these attributes and senses will be further elaborated.

Visual Elements: Analyzing the painting in detail, I can point out each distinct observation in terms of visual elements applied. Lines are easily and visibly seen throughout the painting, whether being straight lines or curved lines. Straight lines, which are used sparingly, make up the outlines of the walkway fence, walkway stair, sea/sky horizon and the roofs of background houses. Curved lines, which make up a majority of the lines in the painting, are used for people and landforms (i.e. rocks, hills, sand) which encompass their shapes. Going into shapes, the ones of the various beach-goers are somewhat inconsistent where like in real life, their sitting and standing postures must be taken into account. Even the shapes of the landscape (which vary) make the painting look like a very realistic interpretation of a beach in art form. Furthermore, the varied color use, where in one sense demonstrates to show differences between similar objects/figures, helps with capturing

diversity as opposed to bland similarity which rarely exists in real life (i.e. having people wear different colored attire).

Regarding the artist's application in texture, a seemingly dynamic environment is depicted as waves and water ripples could be observed in the seashore. Additionally, texture is noted in the sea rocks and background hills which give them a sense of solid feel and typography respectively. Moving on, the artist's use of light in the painting gives it its most appropriate mood: bright/sunny solace. This is evident in how not a single shadow is cast on anyone or anything in the scenery. There also is another mood present in the painting: liveliness and excitement. This is supplemented by the artist's use of space; what little there is in fact. One of the first things a viewer will notice upon glimpsing on the painting is the crowdedness of the beach and surrounding structures. The little spacing between each figure conveys a sense of containment and sharing of basking onto the scene. Noting this characteristic makes this artwork more relatable to those who take the time to appreciate its message, whatever it may be.

Principles of Design: The way I look at "Long Beach," I see both forms of unity and variety. A form of variety is obviously noted in the painting; colors of many types coexist naturally setting-wise while different shapes take on various forms of objects and figures as previously detailed. There is also a form of unity in analyzing the painting holistically; a feeling of oneness can be sensed given the spread-out presence of beach-goers enjoying the day. Even the sea, with its calm waters, and the hillside town in the distance contribute to the painting's unity in tranquility and a lot of it has to do with balance. The balance in this case is thematic; it is defined as the absence of any chaotic/active activity from within. But there also is objective balance. If one splits this painting in half diagonally (either way), it is to be noted

that what one corner has in detail is complemented by something similar in its opposite end, making for balance. For example, the lower right and upper left hand sides contain landforms while the upper right and lower left hand sides contain seas.

Looking on to emphasis and subordination, the painting clearly shows examples of the former and undermines the latter. Emphasis-wise, the artwork strongly depicts its setting in a traditionalist definition. The beach and surrounding areas are crowded with life, as it should be in any real life beach. In addition, colors are emphasized to distinguish change in boundaries and limits of each landform. For example, the sea is dark blue whereas the sky is light blue, marking a horizon. There is also a rock perched by the sea in the distance of which is a different color than its surrounding hills, adding to the emphasis of terrain in the background. And as this painting shows balance between corners and highlights various landforms and figures, there really is no significant subordination to note of. On the subject of scale and proportion, there is one noteworthy detail to elaborate on. When noticed closely, the size of the individuals sitting by the rocks is different from the sizes of those who are standing by the walkway and background beach. This is done deliberately do emphasize distance between close viewing and far viewing elements. In fact, apart from the difference in scale, the designs in the beach-goers are consistent as their body proportions are similar. Finally, to detail on the elements of rhythm and movement, there really is no example of the former as no distinct pattern in the painting is observed. There is indeed movement that is felt especially in the sea where in particular, visible white stretches amidst the blue waters signify waves which are seen approaching the beachfront in the background near the hills and in the foreground where a boat is perched rather calmly.

Conclusion: In all, I really appreciated the effort and quality of the painting "Long Beach." One last comment to make of relates to the artist's use of watercolor paint. Not only was it a great choice but also in some respects, probably the most appropriate choice of style regarding the subject. Envisioning beaches, coasts and resorts, for that matter, in art form always seem to evoke light, blissfulness and abstract colors. Since watercolor paints are suspended in water, their use in transparent washes really capture the feeling of solitude in those settings, at least more effectively than gouache or oil pastels. It is without a doubt that Maurice Brazil Prendergast succeeded in recreating a real life scene through art given the numerous visual elements and design principles implemented.