

AP® ART HISTORY

2011 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 6

On the left is a home designed by Robert Venturi, built between 1961 and 1964. On the right is the Portland Building designed by Michael Graves, built in 1980. Both are examples of Postmodern architecture.

Referring to specific Postmodern architectural elements in each building, discuss how the buildings differ from Modernist architecture. (5 minutes)

Background

This 5-minute question asks students to analyze two examples of Postmodern architecture and discuss how architectural elements in each building differ from Modernist architecture.

In the later 1960s and the 1970s some practitioners, critics and audiences began to perceive Modernist architecture as cold, detached from human needs, and often lacking in comfort or utility. The opposition between Modernist and Postmodernist ideals is often reduced to Mies van der Rohe's statement, "Less is more," versus Robert Venturi's riposte, "Less is a bore." Urbanist architects such as Venturi and his partner, Denise Scott Brown, embraced an eclectic, historicist approach to architectural design. Two key Postmodern texts are *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) by Venturi and *Learning from Las Vegas* by Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour (1972).

Postmodernism actively subverted Modernist notions of purity and uniformity in favor of eclecticism, pluralism and the return of color and ornament. Postmodernists responded to a perceived Modernist (the International Style in particular) disinterest in the siting of structures by exploring how historical and vernacular architecture evoke a sense of place. These buildings by Venturi and Graves show Postmodern reactions against Modernist precepts. Venturi and Graves appropriated a variety of historical forms and concepts to evoke diversity and complexity in their structures.

The discussion of Modernist architecture may include the International Style, Prairie Style or Chicago School. Philip Johnson and Henry Russell-Hitchcock stated that Modern architecture promotes "volume rather than mass . . . regularity rather than symmetry" and an absence of "arbitrary applied decoration." In general, Modernist architecture employs a visible use of new technology and industrial materials, minimal ornamentation, the abstraction of architectural form, the philosophy of "form follows function," and the embrace of design elements such as flat roofs and ribbon fenestration. The best responses are informed by a thorough understanding of Modernist precepts and Postmodernism's rejection of those precepts.

Two Tasks for Students

1. Refer to specific Postmodern architectural elements in each building.
2. Discuss how the buildings differ from Modernist architecture.

Point to Remember

Formal and conceptual elements of Postmodern architecture include an embrace of historical styles, a fascination with ornament and color, an interest in individuality and complexity of design, a certain light-heartedness or playfulness in design, and asymmetry and juxtaposition of disparate forms and materials.

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Question 6 (continued)

Scoring Criteria

4 points

Response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response discusses specific Postmodern architectural elements in each building and **clearly** explains how the buildings differ from Modernist architecture. The discussion may include minor errors that do not have a meaningful impact on the response.

3 points

Response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response discusses at least one specific Postmodern architectural element in each building. The response **sufficiently** explains how both buildings differ from Modernist architecture; however, the discussion may be somewhat general, include minor errors that have some impact on the response, or both.

2 points

Response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response discusses at least one Postmodern architectural element in each building. The response explains with **general** accuracy how the buildings differ from Modernist architecture; however, the response may be vague, be overly general, or contain significant errors.

OR

The response accurately discusses how one of the buildings differs from Modernist architecture.

Note: This is the highest score a response can earn if it discusses only one of the two buildings.

1 point

Response demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of the question.

Although the response demonstrates general familiarity with the issues raised by the question, it is weak, is inaccurate, is purely descriptive, or contains significant errors.

0 points

Response demonstrates no discernible knowledge or understanding of the question.

The student attempts to respond, but the response makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements.

— This is a nonresponse, such as a blank paper, crossed-out words or personal notes.

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Unlike modernist architecture, the home of Robert Venturi and the Portland Building are not strictly uniform and do not follow a specific set of rules for design. The house of Robert Venturi is asymmetrical and possesses references to past architectural styles. For instance, it references old Greek and Roman buildings because the entire form of the front of the house is essentially a pediment, only it's broken down the middle, much like how the AT&T building had a pediment broken by the semicircle in the middle. Also, the entrance appears more like the entrance to a Greek or Etruscan temple with a set-in porch and no visible doorway. The Portland Building also varies from modernist architecture in that it has references to past styles with the inclusion of engaged columns, or ^{references to Colosseum and Roman buildings} pilasters, and the tiny windows. It lacks the uniformity of modernism because each side is different and the palette of colors used isn't monochromatic. The bottom is large, with red pilasters on the cube that rests atop of it. Both buildings are clearly postmodern because they lack the uniformity of modernism and they have references to past styles of architecture (such as Greco-Roman).

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Modernist architecture left nothing but the essentials. Decorative elements and embellishments were seen as derivative in light of the constant maxim of "form follows function." These buildings retain ~~the~~ streamlined nature of Modernist architecture, but incorporate more design elements outside the realm of practicality. The Portland Building incorporates color and decoration, giving it almost the appearance of a jukebox. This reflected the reality of the modern world and presented more personality than did modernist architecture. Venturi's building incorporates abstract shapes in the entrance, a reflection of modern art movements that tended towards basic shape. These are not integral to design, ~~but they were not~~ as a Modernist building would be.

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Although both works have their fair share of modernist elements, they are clearly postmodern for a couple of reasons. Modernist architecture used mainly square and rectangle shapes that would create the structure and both of these have more; such as the triangle shape to to Venturi house and the circles and ribbon look on Graves. Another break from the modern style was the ornamentation. The circles and lines and use of colors and textures on both the home and Portland building are what changed from modern to postmodern styles of architecture.

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2011 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 6

Overview

This 5-minute essay question asked students to analyze two examples of Postmodern architecture and discuss how architectural elements in each building differ from Modernist architecture. The question was essentially a stylistic analysis of 20th-century architecture.

Sample: 6A

Score: 4

The student presents a thorough discussion of how these Postmodern buildings differ from Modernist buildings. The response describes several important aspects of Modernism, including how the movement was guided by “a specific set of rules,” rejected past styles, and desired to achieve uniformity in design. The student offers several specific examples of how both buildings differ from Modernist architecture. The Venturi house is described as containing Postmodern elements such as asymmetry and references to past architectural styles. To support this last observation, the student draws parallels between Venturi’s use of Classical architecture (“the entire form of the front of the house is essentially a pediment, only it’s broken down the middle”) and the similar use in Philip Johnson’s AT&T Building, which also has “a pediment broken by the semicircle in the middle.” The Graves building is described as containing Postmodern elements such as references to past architectural traditions (“engaged columns, or pilasters [*sic*]” such as those found on Roman buildings), a lack of uniformity in its elevations (“each side is different”), and polychromy (“the palette of colors used isn’t monochromatic”). These elements are absent in Modernist architecture.

Sample: 6B

Score: 3

The student demonstrates a clear understanding of Modernist architecture. The Modernist architectural philosophy of “form follows function” is correctly described as linking a reduction of forms (“essentials”) with the negative connotation (“derivative”) assigned to “[d]ecorative elements and embellishments.” Furthermore the response describes two ways that the Portland Building is Postmodern (its “color and decoration” and evocation of a “jukebox”) and connects these Postmodern elements with an overall aesthetic that conveys “more personality” than Modernist architecture. By contrast the discussion of the Venturi building is not sufficiently developed. The description of the “abstract shapes” of the building as “not integral to design” lacks the clarity and analysis needed for a higher score.

Sample: 6C

Score: 2

The student demonstrates a general understanding of Modernist architecture, making reference to how geometry serves as the basis for designing Modernist structures and how such buildings lack ornamentation. Both Postmodern buildings are described as having “more” geometry (“circles and lines”) than Modernist architecture, as well as a different “use of colors and textures.” However, the response lacks specificity in addressing particular architectural elements used on the buildings, such as the colors. There is no substantive discussion of how the geometric forms in Postmodern buildings differ fundamentally from those used in Modernist architecture.