Questioning "Park on Sunday"
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As I slowly walk through Lazar’s Art Gallery on a Monday afternoon, my eyes take in the many different works of art surrounding me. Each one is so interesting in its own way, but there is one in particular that is begging for my attention: "Park on Sunday" by Clyde Singer. It is not the beautiful way he painted the bronze and orange leaves on the massive trees in the background or the way he perfectly made the park-goers blend in with everything else in the painting—it is the woman walking through this park wearing a lime green suit that seems to be waving to me as I pass her by. Her brightness catches my eye, and I begin to examine "Park on Sunday" more closely.

Standing near the opposite wall on which "Park on Sunday" is displayed, I wonder exactly which park this is and what part of the country it is in. Is this park even in America? A giant, dark statue stares down at the people in the park, and I try to remember if this is a famous statue I have seen before. Which statue is it, and does its significance have anything to do with what city this park is located in? Judging by the bright oranges and reds and yellows of the trees, I assume that it is fall, and I wonder if this park is in the northeastern part of the country, perhaps in New York City or Philadelphia. Carefully examining the painting, I notice that almost everything in the painting is somewhat blended together, as though there are no definite borders to anything. I wonder why Singer painted his work this way, and was there a purpose to this style? My eyes are again drawn to the vivid, lime green suit of the woman, and I wonder if she is to be my focal point? Her outfit and bright, blonde hair clearly make her stand out from the rest of the drab colors in the painting, and I wonder why she is so defined rather than blended. Is she to be seen clearer than the rest? Is she meant to stand out? The style of the painting seems to point her out to me, making her appear to be an important, valued person, and I wonder if the artist knew this woman and maybe even loved her. Why did Singer give no color to any of the other Sunday park-goers and why are they all wearing practically the same thing? Their outfits are those of the roaring twenties, and this observation makes me question what year this walk in the park is supposed to be taking place. If it is perhaps from an earlier decade, why is the woman’s style so modern? More and more questions pop into my imagination as I stare at the painting, so I move in for a closer look.

From this view of "Park on Sunday," my attention is drawn more towards the way Singer uses light and contrast in his work. Although it appears to be a dreary, fall day, the sun is subtly featured in the painting. Its rays are shining on the woman and the spot where she is walking. Is this possibly some type of religious metaphor? Does the sun mean anything at all? Looking at the trees, I realize that the sun is also shining on the tops of them as well. Why does everything else in the painting look so dark and foreboding? Using this style of lighting technique, I wonder what Singer is trying to tell his viewer. My imagination is racing with questions about this painting, so I move directly in front of it to examine the painting more closely.

As I stand a foot away from "Park on Sunday," my observations seem to turn more towards how it is painted and exactly who the woman with the green suit is. Standing so close to the painting, I notice that it is even more blended together than when I first saw the work. How did Singer create this effect? Was there a purpose for doing this? Looking at the paint strokes, I can see that some of the objects in the painting are created with short, heavy-painted strokes while others are long, light strokes. Did he specifically choose to paint this way, and if he did, how did he choose which objects to use short strokes for and which for the long strokes? What kind of paint did he use, and what inspired him to paint this setting? Who are the people in it and does he know any of them? Pondering this question for a moment, my mind comes back to the woman. Closely examining her, I can see that she is holding something, although it is not very clear. What is she holding, and where is she taking it? Judging by her outfit, I imagine that she is on her way to work. The expression on her face is unemotional, and I wonder what she is thinking as she is walking through this park. By the way Singer has painted her hair being pushed back by the wind and her posture as she is walking, she looks as though she is in a hurry, and I wonder if she is busy. Perhaps she is a businesswoman or a lawyer, and what she is carrying is a briefcase—maybe she is late for an appointment. Is this portrayal in some way a reflection of Singer’s life? Or is it a portrayal of how he sees everyone else’s life?

Clyde Singer’s "Park on Sunday" is an interesting, creative piece that causes curiosity in its viewers, including myself. The painting catches my eye, first with its bright orange trees, and then again by the mysterious woman in the
green lime suit. Who is she? Where is she going? Questions are conjured in my mind with just a glance at "Park on Sunday." As I stand in front of it, staring, the art work can not help but wonder, "why me?" The painting, I imagine, wonders what it is that draws me in. It is, in fact, not the vivid colors contrasting with the dark. It is not the puzzling woman walking through the park. It is not even the many different types of strokes Singer uses. The one fact that draws me to this particular painting is my effort to avoid what John Berger calls "mystification," the process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident (112). I want to examine this painting because I know nothing about it. I want to question it and figure it out, and I want to do this only for myself. Why should I be told to look at this particular painting? Why should someone else tell me what to think about it? I have a mind of my own and I am able to ask my own questions, and I am therefore able to get my own answers. Mystification is exactly what I was avoiding by visiting Lazar's Gallery and viewing a piece of artwork that I chose myself. Many people can only examine a piece of work through mystification, with others telling them what to see. I refuse to accept mystification as a way for me to look at it- I can decide for myself that a painting is beautiful, and "Park on Sunday" truly is.

Works Cited