Name of Student

Name of Professor

Name of Class)

Day Month Year

**ART ASSIGNMENT**

**Artist:** Jean-Léon Gérôme

**Title:** Turkish “Bashi-Bazouk” Mercenary Soldiers Playing Chess

**Medium:** Oil on Canvas

**Size:** With Frame, 37 X 31 1/4 Inches

**Date:** Circa 1870-1873

**Place of Origin:** France

**Location Art Piece Is Placed At:** New Orleans Museum of Art

The selected art piece is an oil painting that is made by Jean-Leon Gerome and depicts a scenario where Bashi-Bazouk mercenary soldiers are playing chess in a market place. The painting features the particular characters of Bashi-Bazouk soldiers, which were chronologically notorious for their atrocious and brutal practices against civilians. Bashi-Bazouk was irregular ottoman soldiers, recruited during the pandemonium of wartime, and most of them were accumulated from Circassia, Kurds, Albanian, and Bulgarians, as well as other minor ethnic factions. The mercenary soldiers were not mainly governed by any authority, and therefore, they became involved in looting and other unfair brutality and vicious practices against the common public. It was the era of 1868 or 1869 when Gerome visited the near east side and explored the garb style and other attiring approaches of Bashi-Bazouk soldiers. At that time he also painted an individual portrait of a mercenary soldier that is titled “Black Bashi-Bazouk.”

Evidently, unlike regular soldiers, Bashi-Bazouk is not portrayed in painting wearing any specific uniform. It is because all the mercenary soldiers were not used to get paid, and therefore were unable to organize standardized attire for all combatants. Consequently, they adopted a free dressing style and generally observed in different clothing, which was acquired through robbing civilians. That was the underlying reason that the men depicted in the painting are wearing different fabrics and garbs. On the other hand, the notion of chess in the market demonstrates two significant aspects of the history. One of them is the role of Bashi-Bazouk in establishing new rules to the Italian game that in turn made it a chess game. And secondly, the leisure gesture of the soldiers that refers to their detachment to their primary liabilities, they were recruited for.

No painting can be completed without concerning the principles of arts. And similarly the subject painting, “Turkish Bashi-Bazouk Mercenary Soldiers Playing Chess” features basic rules of art that enhance its visual effectiveness. The painting is based on the Orientalism and carries an intense hue of the Eastern world that is explicitly interconnected with the choice of colors. The shades that are used throughout the paintings are mostly natural and earthly warm colors that augment the overall epoch-based feel of the scenario. Moreover, the implied space is utilized to exhibit 3D objects, take the instance of a wooden rod, the hanging textile, and the chandelier; all the objects presenting a three-dimensional look. The principle of unity is also apparent from the organization of the painting’s objects and colors that are portrayed in a perfect synchronized manner. The element of texture can be observed in a myriad of aspects, such as the flow of soldiers’ garbs, feathers of a crow, the brick texture of wall and floor, the rope, and the tufts that are visible on the hanging fabric on the wooden rod above. Figure-ground is also a significant factor in the subject painting because it boosts the visual adaptability of the presented scene. The players are painted in, from right after the edge of the setting, and the spectators are placed in the background, it implies the emphasizing on necessary objects of the art piece. Moreover, the fourth layer of the background shows a wall that ends the room and is festooned with blurry impressions of different weapons.

The painting is a marvelous instance of artistic expertise, and throughout the art piece, Gerome infuses his vision and information to that particular period. This single painting is laden with suffice pieces of information and tells a lot about that era and the practices and lifestyle of Bashi-Bazouk.

**Work Cited**

“Turkish ‘Bashi-Bazouk’ Mercenary Soldiers Playing Chess.” New Orleans Museum of Art, noma.org/collection/turkish-bashi-bazouk-mercenary-soldiers-playing-chess/.

**Appendix**

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