**Art Critique**

**Describe**

In the painting Landscape with Butterflies by Salvador Dali, I see two butterflies, and they are in flight with their wings open. I also see what appears to be the side of a cliff, or a flat wall that has been broken off. It is daytime because the sky is blue, but there is also another light source coming from the right side, creating harsh shadows. The setting appears to be outdoors, because of the sky and because of the vast desert in the distance. The colors are very intense, especially the blue and the orange. There is a strong contrast between light and dark, and overall, the lines are very defined. The viewer is either very close in proximity to the butterflies, or the butterflies are rather large. As the viewer, we appear to be standing in front of this scene, looking straight at it. Even though the subjects of the painting are butterflies, the overall mood of the painting is rather ominous with the play of lights and darks.

**Analyze**

As I view this piece, my eyes are occasionally led over to the left side in the distance, but keep coming back to the focal point around the butterflies. This movement happens largely because of the shadow that the rock casts in that direction. The blue of the sky and the orange of the rock are very intense and bright (highly saturated), and their opposition with each other also contributes to the back and forth motion of our eyes as we view the painting. If the blue color was not as saturated, more focus would be on the right side of the painting. It would then have too much “weight,” and our eyes would linger there more. As a result, the painting’s composition would be less balanced.

Also, because the butterflies appear to be abnormally large (in comparison to what we assume is a rock face or cliff), we do not have a concrete sense of scale or proportion. This creates an interesting sense of ambiguity, and as a viewer we’re not sure if in fact we are very small, or simply lying close to the ground, or if these are mutated giant butterflies next to a huge cliff. Who can be sure? There aren’t even any pebbles on the ground or other recognizable objects in the paintings to give us clues about scale. The repetition of the butterfly shape in both the object and shadow gives the painting a sense of rhythm. The bottom-most butterfly shadow (as well as the butterflies themselves, and the shadow cast by the rock) has a sort of glow around it caused by the lighter orange color surrounding it. This causes the shadow to further “emerge” from the surface it’s supposed to be cast on, making it appear more three-dimensional and adding focus to it. We know that actual, “real-life” shadows do not have this effect, and so it creates an odd, surreal feeling–one of the things Dali’s paintings are most famous for.

**Interpret**

I don’t feel either sad or happy when looking at this…The colors are nice and bright, and butterflies usually make people feel happy, but I mainly feel curious and maybe a bit confused. I’d like to have more details about what’s going on that are not available in the painting. The colors to me feel very cool, and even the oranges and browns have a lot of light “coolness” to them, but the surrounding visuals suggest a desert of some-sort, or somewhere very dry. The butterflies are painted fairly realistically, and are beautiful, but the wings on both are stuck in the same exact position, like they are pinned onto an entomologist’s board. Not to mention their somewhat unrealistic shadows and highlights.

So this is what I think Dali probably did: I think he found some recently dead butterflies and wanted to paint them, like one would paint a still-life with fruit or flowers or something. But to make them less boring than a typical still-life of butterflies pinned to a board, he added an imaginary background to make it into a “landscape” instead. That way, as a viewer, we could have the sense that these creatures are alive and kicking, in their own little colorful world. To me, I think this is a great concept, and a creative way of approaching a painting and making it more intriguing than a plain old still-life. Of course, I have no idea if this is really what Dali intended people to feel when they viewed his painting, but it’s my interpretation.

**Evaluate**

In general, I think this is an interesting and unique artwork. I enjoy the bright colors and appreciate the technical skill it took to create such a painting. I might be inspired to create a painting similar to this in the future, but perhaps with another subject. I certainly recognize the elements of “surrealism” that Dali’s artworks are famous for, and I think it succeeds, representing this category of art fairly well. Dali has used butterflies as subject matter in other paintings, and this is a worthy companion piece to those pieces.