

Audrey Flack, *Marilyn (Vanitas)*, 1977



****First Question First****

What is *your* immediate reaction to this artwork?

Trust it. Write about it. Use the guide sheet for help.

Continue reading for another perspective and journal questions.

Audrey Flack, *Marilyn (Vanitas)*, 1977

Bright shiny objects. Bright shiny faces. Audrey Flack's painting *Marilyn (Vanitas)* lures us in as if knowing our human weaknesses. We are attracted to freshness, newness. Grapes dangle, the peach and orange glisten with nectar. The pears, one hard, one ripe point to the full story. After their peak they will begin to decay. Soon they will all become compost.

We know her as Marilyn, but Flack reminds us that first she was Norma Jean Baker. The black and white photos feel nostalgic, remembering a more innocent time. We may sadly muse, "little does she know what her future holds." The surrounding cosmetics – red lipstick, blush, rouge, perfume – foreshadow her Hollywood transformation from Norma Jean into Marilyn. The paintbrush drips blood red as if underscoring the consequences of her sacrifice.

The vanities of life foretold. No matter how much we try, we cannot stop the clock, calendar, or hourglass. Our candle *will* burn out. When someone we love dies, we grieve for them. We may also find ourselves looking closer into our own mirror. "What's the use!" may float to the surface once in a while. Then time passes. And we are reminded that despair and apathy are transient as well.

Q.) Are you experiencing any sort of "What's the use!" reaction to your loved one's death? Write about this. The process of writing may help you illuminate any darker tones in your sorrow.