

# Art Elements and Principles of Design

## The Art Elements

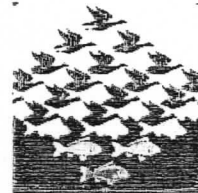
*These are the parts an artist uses to create a composition.*

line      shape      form      value      color      space      texture



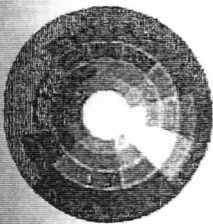
**line** ~ A line is a point that moves in a direction such as a path made with a drawing tool like a pencil. Lines can be real (seen) or implied (objects arranged so that their edges create an imaginary line.) There are types of lines: straight, curved, thick, thin, dotted, wavy, scalloped, horizontal, diagonal, vertical, parallel, etc. Lines can be used to show edges (contour), shapes (outline), and to create patterns and textures.

**shape** ~ A shape is an enclosed space. Geometric shapes are mathematically derived and resemble man-made objects such as squares, triangles, ellipses, etc. Organic shapes are irregularly shaped and resemble objects from nature. Simple shapes can combine to create new, more complex ones. They are flat (2-D) because they have length and width, but no depth. Shapes can be repeated to create patterns.



**form** ~ Forms are 3-D because they have length, width and depth. A cube, cone, sphere, cylinder or an ovoid are examples of simple forms. Simple forms can be combined to create new, more complex forms. Forms, such as statues, can be quite complex. In 2-D art, such as drawings or paintings, artists can create the illusion of depth by shading which makes objects appear "real".

**value** ~ Value is the relative lightness or darkness of an object. An infinite number of values are possible. All colors have a range of possible values. Light colors are called **tints** and dark colors are called **shades**. Artists use value to show depth by applying shadows and highlights. Generally, dark colors appear near and light colors appear distant. **Tone** is another word for value.



**color** ~ Color is another name for **hue**. Colors can be cool, such as blue, blue-green and blue-violet, or **warm**, such as red, orange and yellow. How bright or dull a color is, is called **intensity**. How light or dark a color is, is called **value**. Usually, warm colors appear near, and cool colors appear distant.

**space** ~ Space is the area within the parameters of an artwork. The four sides of the composition define the parameters of a two-dimensional work of art. This area is called the **picture plane**. Space can be **open**, such as an empty areas, which are also known as **negative spaces**. Space can also be **closed**, such as very active, busy areas that attract the eye. This is known as **positive space**. Words like *forward, back, under, behind, over, into* and *out of* indicate action taken in space.





Space can be two dimensional or flat. Space appears very flat when there is little, or no, value and/or color contrast. When depth is added, space becomes three-dimensional. This realm includes volume and mass. Linear and aerial perspective can be used to show depth.

texture ~ Remember the baby book, *Pat the Bunny*?

Tactile texture is the way something actually feels such as a rough-hewn sculpture or a smooth, slippery glass vase. Implied texture is the illusion of texture such as a painting of a rabbit that makes you feel as though the rabbit is very soft and silky or a photograph of an old, weathered wooden fence. The painting and the photograph are both 2-D, but the viewer imagines the how the portrayed objects feel.



*In order to learn how to make art we must learn how an artwork is put together. When we can analyze what makes it work we have an understanding of why some works of art please us more than others. Why do so many people enjoy looking at Vincent van Gogh's sunflower paintings? Why do you like the design of some of your shirts more than the others? What makes some designs more appealing?*

## What is design?

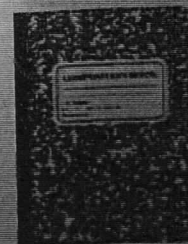
The structure of art, or its visual order, is sometimes called **design**. Design is intentional and has a purpose. The purpose of an advertising design is usually to make you want to buy the product it advertises, therefore it frequently uses photographs of the product with an attractive person. The purpose of graffiti, often, but not always, is to make a statement, therefore its primary type of images are letters, words, and signatures. An important purpose of fine art is to get the viewer to look at things in a different way. The artist portrays her ideas about the world by designing a **composition** made of **lines, shapes, values, colors, three dimensional form, space and texture**. The principles of design help guide artists as to how these art elements can be arranged to create a well thought out design. A design is also called a **composition**.



## What is a composition?



A **composition** is an arrangement. In literature a **composition** is a thought out and ordered arrangement of words, ideas, paragraphs, etc. by the author. In music a composition is an arrangement of the music to be played by the various instruments according to the composer's **design**. An arrangement is a plan of where things should be placed. Photographers arrange everyone in a certain order before taking a group photograph. The arrangement is determined by what the photographer wants to accomplish. If the photographer just wants everyone's face to show, the group will be arranged by height. Wedding photos are often arranged - or you could say composed - according to the sides of the family, or the roles members played in the ceremony, etc. Photographs, sculptures, tapestries, buildings, prints, drawings, and paintings



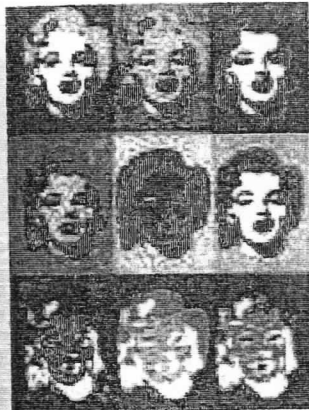
are all compositions because they are planned out. They may express something very profound. Expression made without some type of thought process is empty. Expression created according to a well thought out design is powerful. Therefore the principles of design are important for artists to use when creating art, viewers to understand in order to appreciate art.

## The Principles of Design

These are the guides for how to put the parts (art elements) of the composition together.

unity      contrast      movement      emphasis      pattern      balance

**unity** ~ How the artist uses the art elements to make the composition look like everything goes together is unity. To avoid having parts of the composition that look like they don't belong artists intentionally use a limited number of colors, similar sizes and types of shapes, lines, etc. Look at how Grant Wood repeated the three-pronged motif throughout his painting, *American Gothic*. Although the viewer may not be aware of how the artist repeated elements or motifs to create unity, the viewer will get a sense that the composition works as a whole. Everything in the composition will feel like it belongs.

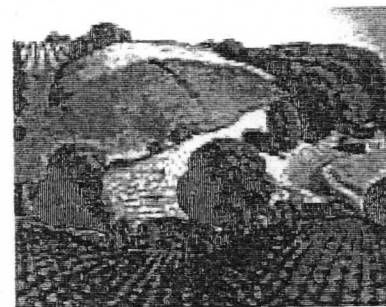


**contrast** ~ Although all the parts of the composition should fit, if everything in the composition is just alike (all the same color, all the same sizes, all the same shapes, etc.) it becomes very boring. A successful composition needs some contrast. Contrast (sometimes called variety) occurs when art elements that are different are placed in the same composition. An example of contrast using the art element color is seen to the left. Sometimes, as in Andy Warhol's print to the left, the artist wants strong contrast and other times little, if any, contrast is desired. It depends on what the artist is trying to communicate. All of the art elements (line, shape, value, color, use of space, texture and form) can be used to create varying degrees of contrast.

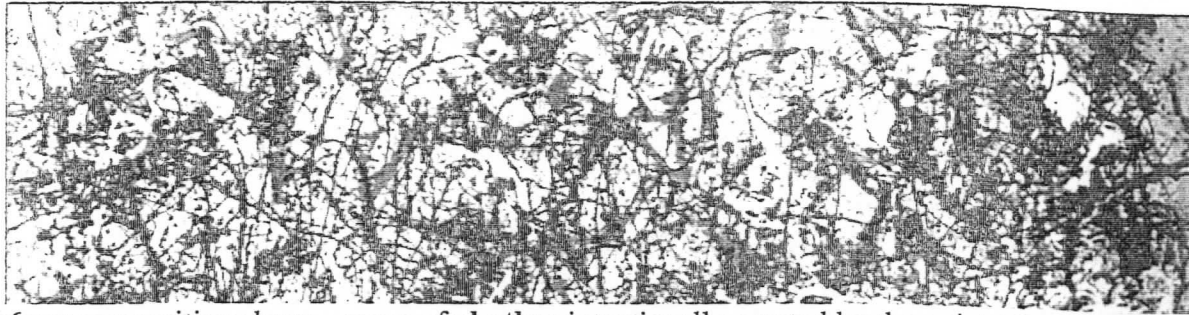
**movement** ~ Artists arrange the elements in a particular way that creates a path for the viewer's eye to travel through the composition. This kind of movement is not about the subject matter moving like a car, waves, or someone dancing. It is about how the viewer's eye moves across the composition. What is the first thing that "grabs your eye"? Where, in the composition, do your eyes move next? Artists sometimes use bright colors to



draw the viewer's eye to certain areas. Some painters use very large, broad sweeping brushstrokes to create a sense of movement. Artists can make most of the lines and shapes in a composition push or point in a particular direction to create strong impression of movement.





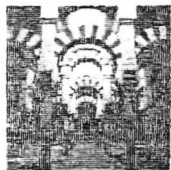


Many compositions have a sense of **rhythm** intentionally created by the artist. Rhythm is the organized repetition of visual movement (created using the art elements). Rhythm can be smooth & flowing or irregular. A regular rhythm is called pattern.

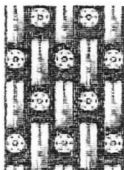


**emphasis** ~ Emphasis is the visual amplification of areas in a work to draw more of a viewer's attention; A focal point is one area that has been emphasized to a greater extent than others in a work. Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* uses linear perspective as a tool for creating a focal point in the center of the work.

**pattern** ~ Patterns are created by repeating lines, shapes, values, colors, forms, space, textures. Each pattern we see has a basic element, or **motif**, that is repeated to produce a pattern. **Motifs** are like the basic themes in music that reoccur to unify the work. A motif may be simply a dot, a line, or a square, or a very complex shape with intricate colors and textures. Motifs can be arranged in numerous ways such as:



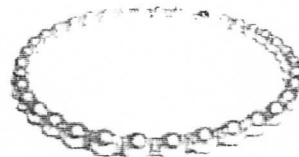
stripes



staggered



alternating

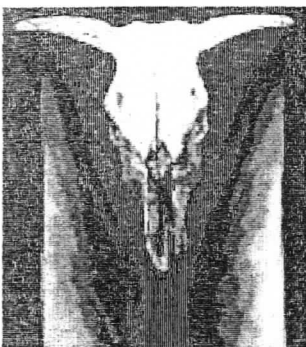


progressive



random

**balance** ~ The distribution of visual weight in a **composition** is referred to as balance. Balance that is equally distributed is called **symmetrical** (or formal). Balance that is not evenly



spread out is called **asymmetrical** (or informal). Usually symmetrical balance appears more stable or conservative and asymmetrical balance appears more **dynamic** and active. Visual balance can be achieved through the distribution of lines, shapes, values, colors, forms, space and/or texture. Sometimes people think of balance as referring to only symmetry, however, asymmetry is also balance, just another type of balance. The artist makes a conscious decision to use one or the other type of balance for each art element.

