

# Visual Elements and Principles of Art

*The language of vision determines, perhaps even more subtly and thoroughly than verbal language, the structures of our consciousness."*

S. I. Hayakawa

**Visual Elements** - the basic parts, components, or building blocks

- Line
- Shape and Form
- Space
- Color
- Value
- Texture

**Principles of Art** - the guidelines for putting the parts together

- Balance
- Emphasis/Contrast
- Harmony/Unity
- Variety
- Gradation
- Movement
- Rhythm
- Proportion

## Visual Elements

### LINE

A continuous mark made on a surface by a moving point.

contour line- outline or silhouette

vertical- strength and stability

horizontal- suggests calm

diagonal- movement, tension

curved- flowing movement

axis line- implied, line

linear

### SHAPE

two-dimensional (height and width)

geometric

organic

### FORM

three-dimensional (height, width and depth)

mass- refers to the outside size

volume- refers to a space within a form

### SPACE

The distance or area between, around, above, below, or within things

plane-2-D

positive

negative

two-dimensional space is given the illusion of depth by:

- overlapping
- relative size: scale, smaller/larger
- foreshortening
- vertical placement or relative position in the field, higher/lower (foreground, middleground, background)
- aerial or atmospheric perspective
- linear perspective

## **VALUE (tone)**

lightness or darkness of an object

black (shade)

white (tint)

## **COLOR**

**Hue**- refers to the name of a color

**Intensity**- saturation, or purity of color

**Value (tone)**- lightness or darkness

## **Color Wheel**

- primary colors: red, yellow and blue
- secondary colors: orange, green and violet
- intermediate or tertiary colors: yellow-orange, blue-green, etc.

complementary colors- colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel

analogous colors- colors that share a hue

cool colors- blue, green, gray, and violet

warm colors- red, orange and yellow

monochromatic- one-color

local color – actual color

optical color – our perceptions of color

## **TEXTURE**

surface quality or feel of an object

real

simulated (illusionary)

## **Principles of Art**

### **BALANCE**

Refers to a way of combining elements to add a feeling of equilibrium or stability to a work of art.

1. symmetrical- formal balance in which two halves are identical
2. asymmetrical- informal balance
3. radial- positioned around a central point

### **EMPHASIS**

Or contrast, stresses the differences between the elements, or creates a center of interest.

### **HARMONY**

Or unity, combines similar elements to accent their similarities.

### **VARIETY**

A way of combining elements in involved ways to create intricate and complicated relationships. It is achieved through diversity and change.

### **GRADATION**

Combines elements by using a series of gradual changes. Refers to an ordered, step-by-step change.

### **MOVEMENT**

The principle of art used to create the look and feeling of action.

### **PROPORTION**

Concerned with the relationships of certain elements to the whole and to each other.

### **RHYTHM**

Created by the careful placement of repeated elements to cause a visual tempo or beat. Related to pattern.

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**Abstraction-** not realistic, though the intention is often based on an actual subject, place, or feeling. Pure abstraction applies to art that looks as if it contains no recognizable forms from the physical world—it is nonobjective, as it has no natural image or subject. Focus is on the elements of art and meaning comes from the sense that can be made of the interactions of the elements. Most art is abstracted to some degree; a painting is only a picture of something, never the real thing.

**Aesthetics-** The science of the “beautiful” from a Greek word referring to a branch of philosophy concerned with the study of beauty. Ancient philosophers determined that a work of art could be studied and judged on the basis of its beauty, or how it pleases the viewer. What “pleases the viewer,” however, clearly differs from one culture to another and changes over time. At present the term is used to refer not so much to beauty as to philosophical questions concerning art, such as, What is beauty? or, What is art?

**Composition-** organization and relationship of the elements to each other and the whole. The organizing principle or plan of a work of art.

**Content-** subject of a work of art or the meaning of an artwork, the non-formal aspects of a work of art.

**Context-** social or historical situation in which something happens. All artists work in a world of values and conventions to which they respond.

**Culture-** describes the human-made world—what it looks and sounds like, what people surround themselves with, what they believe, and what they value. A nation, an ethnic group, a religious community can have its own culture.

**Formal Elements-** visual elements and principles of art.

**Idealization-** to strive for a culture’s concept of perfection.

**Medium-** physical materials from which the art is made. It includes both the working method (technique) and the materials the artists use.

**Naturalism-** a style of depiction that seeks to imitate the appearance of nature, a naturalistic work appears to record the visible world.

**Nonrepresentational Art-** presents visual forms with no specific references to anything out of themselves. Absent of any subject matter. Sometimes called *nonobjective* or *nonfigurative* art.

**Principles of Art-** the guidelines for putting the visual elements together.

**Realism-** first used around 1850 to designate a kind of naturalism with a social or political message; today is often used as synonymous with naturalism.

**Representational Art-** like naturalism or realism, the attempt to depict objects as they appear in the everyday world. Sometimes called *objective* or *figurative* art.

**Resources:**

Patrick Frank, *Preble's Artforms*, eighth edition, Pearson/Prentice Hall

Molly Bang, *Picture This: How Pictures Work*, Seastar Books, 2000

Lois Fichner-Rathus, *Understanding Art*, (10<sup>th</sup> edition) The College of New Jersey, Wadsworth Cengage Learning

Akiyoshi Kitaoka, Department of Psychology, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan-  
website on study of visual perception and optical illusion

<http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/~akitaoka/index-e.html>

YouTube: KQED Art School

Elements of Art: Line| KQED Arts

Elements of Art: Shape | KQED Arts

Elements of Art: Form| KQED Arts

Elements of Art: Texture| KQED Arts

Elements of Art: Value| KQED Arts