

THE ELEMENTS OF ART AND THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- The *Elements of Art* are the components of a work of art that can be isolated and defined.; they are the “building blocks” - or the “ingredients” - used to create a work of art.
- The *Principles of Design* are used to organize the elements of art; they are the “directions,” which help to explain how the elements should interact for specific purpose.
- Together, the Elements and Principles help artists plan their compositions effectively. A good composition makes an impact on the expressive content (meaning) and the viewer’s reaction to the image.
- Understanding the Elements and Principles will help a viewer make sense of and better appreciate a work of art. Analyzing a work of art using the Elements and Principles is a preliminary step to making an informed judgment of a work’s success.

THE ELEMENTS OF ART:

Line - *The path of a moving point through space.* Actual lines are those you can easily see in a drawing or painting, like an outline; Implied lines are those that are suggested; they appear when contrasting values meet. Lines can have expressive qualities - and energy - based on their type (straight, squiggle, zig-zag, etc.), direction (vertical, horizontal, diagonal), and weight.

Shape - *A two-dimensional area that is defined in some way.* Shapes are either geometric (precise, man-made, using a mathematical formula, hard edge, etc.) or organic/free-form (irregular/uneven, from nature). Shapes are 2-dimensional.

Color - *Is derived from reflected light* - we see color because light waves are reflected from objects to our eyes. A red apple looks red because it reflects red waves and absorbs the other colors. Color has 3 properties: HUE (name/pure color), VALUE (darkness or lightness), and INTENSITY or SATURATION (brightness or dullness). Perception of color is affected by the proximity of one color to another - see “ArtTalk” pg. 144 to view examples of Simultaneous Contrast.

Value - *Describes the lightness (tint) or darkness (shade) of a color.* It is often the single most important element in paintings and drawings and allows perception of forms. In other words, it is value and the changing values in pictures that cause the perception of not just shapes, but implied three-dimensional forms.

Form - *Objects having three dimensions.* When depth is added to a shape, a form results. Forms also fall into geometric or organic categories. Forms can be rendered on a 2-dimensional surface by using linear perspective or shading techniques and a range of values. One technique that utilizes value is called chiaroscuro (Italian for “light/dark”).

Texture - *Refers to how things feel, or look as if they might feel.* A 3-dimensional work will have actual or tactile texture - if touched, the texture of the surface can be felt. A drawing or a painting usually relies on visual or implied texture - the “illusion” of texture. Texture can also be simulated (to mimic an actual object’s texture) or invented (to create a texture by repeating a surface pattern without regard to reality).

Space - *Relates to the way that an artist uses the area within a picture plane.* Positive space (also known as figure), is taken up by the actual (in sculpture) or implied objects (drawing, painting, etc.) within a work of art. Negative space (also known as ground) refers to the emptiness or area between, around, above, below, or within objects of a 2D or 3D work of art. *Shapes and forms are defined by the space around them - so “negative space” should not have a bad connotation.* Space can be manipulated to create depth in a variety of ways, including: Overlapping, diminution (changes in scale), placement in fore/middle/background or in relation to a horizon line, changing level of detail and fading color/value (atmospheric perspective), and converging lines (linear perspective).

THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN:

Balance - *Equalizes visual forces, or elements, in a work of art.* Balance makes the viewer feel as though a work of art has been arranged well. Formal Balance = symmetrical. Symmetry utilizes a vertical or a horizontal axis. Approximate Symmetry = primarily a formal balance with a few small differences. Informal Balance = asymmetrical. Asymmetry IS a

form of balance but it uses unlike objects or elements and/or negative space as visual weight. Radial Balance = elements that radiate equally from a central point.

Contrast (*Variety*). *Adds interest to a work of art.* Contrast can easily be created by through opposing elements (shapes, colors, textures, etc.). Big/small. dark/light, thick/thin, etc.

Emphasis - *Makes one part of a work dominant over the other parts.* This way, the artist can control which parts of the work get more/less attention. The focal point is the part of the work that is dominant over the other parts and demands attention - it is the first part of the work to attract the attention of the viewer. Not all art work has a focal point and emphasis can be created by using an overall element such as color.

Rhythm - *Indicates movement by the repetition of elements or objects.* Visual rhythm utilizes beats and rests (as in music) with the repetition of selected elements of art: shapes (positive and negative), colors, lines, values, etc.

Pattern - *Decorative surface design.* The unit that is repeated is a motif (in 2D work) or a module (in 3D work). Patterns can be random - as in fallen leaves - or regular - as in bricks in a wall. When a second motif is introduced, an alternating pattern is created. Flowing rhythms utilize wavy lines and curved shapes. Progressive rhythms incorporate a steady change within the work of art. See "ArtTalk" pp. 200 - 210 for details about Rhythm and Pattern.

Movement - *Creates the look and feeling of action to guide the viewer's eyes throughout the work of art.* This type of implied movement provides continuity. Artists use a variety of Elements and Principles to create the illusion of movement. Kinetic sculpture is art that actually moves - as in a mobile.

Unity - The quality of "wholeness" or "oneness" that is achieved through the effective use of the elements and principles of art/design. It takes a purposeful use of the Elements of Art and the Principles of Design to create a unified (or harmonious) work of art. A good work of art does not need to incorporate every Element and Principle but, even with just a selected few, it should achieve unity.

Please note, the list of Principles of Design will differ from source to source and between disciplines (visual art, graphic design, photography, interior design, etc.)

The following principles are also good to know:

Proportion - *Size relationship of one part of an object to another.* Mathematical formulas have been devised to replicate pleasing proportions. The Golden Mean (section/ratio/etc.) and the Golden Rectangle have been used since ancient times in both art and architecture. Proportion can be used realistically to create pleasing and accurate depictions of people and things. Proportion can also be exaggerated or distorted to convey specific feelings/reactions/ideals in a work of art.

Scale - *Size measured against a standard reference.* Scale can be used to describe the size of a work of art, a 24 foot sculpture for example, or it can be used to describe the way elements within a work of art are illustrated. Hieratic scale is used to describe works of art that show the most important person as **BIG** and the least important person as small (think Egyptian).

Harmony - *Creates UNITY by stressing the similarities of separate but related parts.* As in music, harmony is pleasing because the various tones (in the case of art, selected elements) are complementary to one another in some way. Harmony can be created by just one element pulling many dissimilar elements together.

- The textbook, “Art Talk,” contains detailed information and images to further explain these concepts. If this resource is not made available during class, you may check it out as needed.
- The Internet is filled with helpful resources (just as long as you remember that info. will vary from source to source).
- See <http://www.mosleyart.com/composition.html> for posted information and resources.