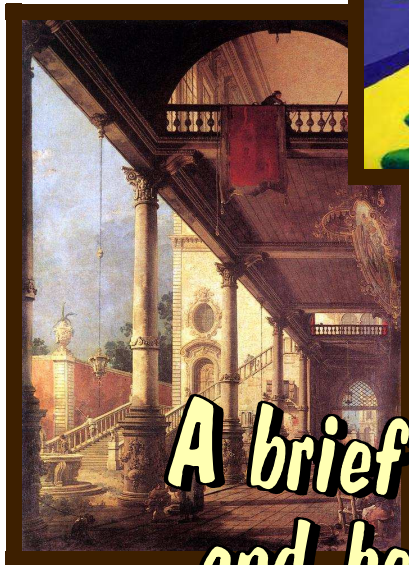


ELEMENTS OF ART, PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN AND THE ILLUSION OF DEPTH



**A brief look at these things
and how they can help you
produce a pleasing painting composition**

Elements of Art

The individual parts that make up the whole of an artwork are referred to as, **“The Elements of Art”**. Not all the elements of art need to be used in a work of art, but most all works have at least some small aspect of each element.

The Elements are: **texture, shape, form, space, color. Value. and line**

Texture: Texture is the element of art that refers to the surface quality of an artwork. It is how things feel, or look as if they might feel if touched. Sometimes the artist uses a real texture and other times the artist creates the illusion of texture. Textures range from smooth and soft, to rough and sharp.

Shape: Shape is two-dimensional and encloses a space. When lines meet, shapes are formed. Shapes are flat. Some shapes are geometric, such as squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, and ovals. Other shapes are organic or irregular. Organic shapes look like things from nature.

Form : Forms are three-dimensional—they have height, width and thickness. Shapes are flat; **forms are not flat.** Examples of geometric form are: box/block, cone, ball, cylinder, etc. Form can also be organic.

Space: Space is the emptiness or area between, around, above, below, or within Objects. It is defined and determined by shapes and forms.

Positive space is the main area or object of focus in an artwork. Positive space is where shapes and forms exist.

Negative space is the empty space around shapes and forms.

Space can be used to make a two-dimensional artwork appear three-dimensional by giving a feeling of depth. Smaller objects in a space seem farther away. Larger objects in a space seem closer.

Color : Color is produced when light strikes an object and reflects back into our eyes. The color of an object depends on how it absorbs and/or reflects light. Some light-waves reflect, while some are absorbed. This causes us to see a variety of colors. For example: If an object absorbs all wavelengths except red, it will look red.

White light consists of all of the colors mixed together. If an object absorbs all of the light wavelengths, it will appear black. If it reflects all of them, it will appear white. In nature, a rainbow is white light that is broken apart by the moisture in the air.

Color has 3 properties:

Hue: refers to the name of a color (red, yellow, blue, etc.)

Intensity: refers to the purity and strength of a color (bright, dull)

Value: refers to the lightness or darkness of a color.

You can get different values of a color by mixing its shades and tints.

Shade: Shades are dark values of a color. One usually makes shades by mixing a color with different amounts of black.

Tint: Tints are light values of a color. One usually makes tints by mixing a color with different amounts of white.

Elements of Art (continued)

Value: Value, or tone, refers to the use of light and dark, shade and highlight, in an artwork. Some people also refer the lightness and darkness in an artwork as tints (light) and shades (dark). Black-and-white photography depends entirely on value to define its subjects. Value is directly related to contrast. Value is the relative degree of lightness in the graphic work of art or painting.

Line: Line is the most basic element of art. You can find lines everywhere you look. **A line is a continuous mark made on a surface** and it can vary in appearance; it can be long, short, thick, thin, etc. Lines can also be used to create textures. There are many different kinds of lines: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, wavy, zigzag, etc. Some lines are subtle, like the edges of an object such as a dog or a box. Some lines are more obvious, just like the black outlines in a coloring book.

The way the **"Elements of Art"** relate to each other and are organized in the artwork are referred to as the:

Principles of Design

The **principles of design** are the rules and guidelines that artists use to organize the elements of art in an artwork. When successfully combined with the elements of art they aid in creating an aesthetically pleasing work of art. Some principles of design that have been identified are:

movement, unity, harmony, variety, balance, contrast, proportion, and pattern/rhythm.

Movement shows actions, or the path the viewer's eye follows throughout an artwork.

Unity is the concept behind the artwork. Unity is how the parts of an artwork build on each other.

Harmony is achieved in a body of work by using similar elements throughout the work, harmony gives an uncomplicated look to a piece of artwork. Color Harmony or Color Theory is also considered a principle through the application of the design element of color.

Variety is the quality or state of having different forms or types, notable use of contrast, emphasis, difference in size and color.

Balance is arranging elements so that no one part of a work overpowers, or seems heavier than any other part. The three different kinds of balance are symmetrical, asymmetrical, and radial.

Contrast is created by using elements that conflict with one another. Often, contrast is created using complementary colors or extremely light and dark values. Contrast creates interest in a piece and often draws the eye to certain areas.

Proportion is a measurement of the size and quantity of elements within a composition.

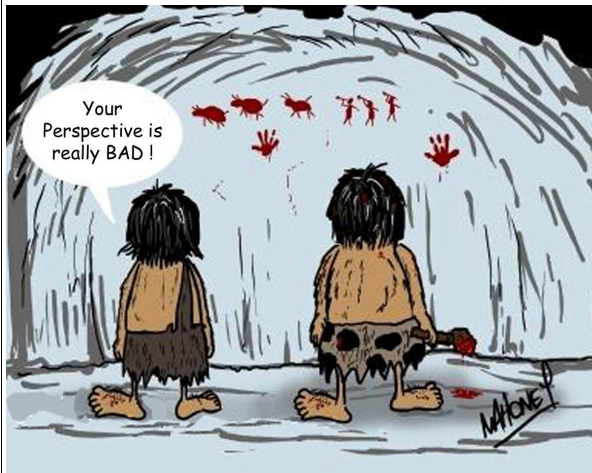
Pattern /Rhythm (also known as repetition) is showing consistency with colors or lines. Putting a red spiral at the bottom left and top right, for example, will cause the eye to move from one spiral, to the other, and everything in between. It is indicating movement by the repetition of elements.

As William Lidwell stated in *Universal Principles of Design*:

The best designers sometimes disregard the principles of design. When they do so, however, there is usually some compensating merit attained at the cost of the violation. Unless you are certain of doing as well, it is best to abide by the principles

Perspective and The Illusion of Depth

Creating the perception of depth in paintings is a challenge that cannot be completely solved. This is because depth is three dimensional, while a painting is two dimensional. Three dimensional depth cannot physically exist in two dimensions. If you look at a crystal clear snapshot of the Grand Canyon, you know that distant cliff and cloud is not really miles away from you. You know it is just an image on the surface of a flat piece of paper.



Over the centuries artists have developed ways to create the illusion of depth in their work. Before these techniques, paintings and sketches lacked any sense of depth. Cave drawings appear primitive as the artists didn't understand the standard concepts of depicting depth. A European painting from 100 AD shows objects in unreal proportions to each other. A mile away person may be the same size as a person two feet away.

I'm not going to get into all of the methods that artists have come up with here, but I will touch on a few of the things that can be used to give paintings, sketches and other 2D art the illusion of depth. These are techniques you can observe in everyday life and incorporate into your own art.

“Linear Perspective” (Using horizontal lines to suggest space and Diagonal lines as diminishing scale) (think train tracks)..

This is probably the most widely used method for showing depth by beginning artists. It should always be in the artist's mind as the painting is planned and it works sometimes by itself, but rarely lends itself to creating a truly interesting composition when used as the only means of showing depth.

Other examples of this method are a straight road that becomes skinnier as it approaches the distant horizon or standing at one end of an empty hallway and watching the lines where the wall and floor meet visually move towards each other as they move to the other end of the hall.



Overlapping- An object appears to be in front of another object when it overlaps it. Larger objects in the foreground overlap objects in the background.

When more than one method of showing depth is used in a painting, overlapping is the strongest indicator of relative distance, overriding all other methods. In this painting, the large tree overlaps the truck, trees and sky in the background.



Scale/Proportion - (Diminishing scale) With things that are believed to be of same or similar size (2 cats or basketballs), the larger appears to be closer than the smaller

In this painting, the viewer assumes that the trees are of similar size, so depth is shown by the size of them diminishing as they recede to the horizon.



Location- Thoughtful placing of objects to suggest space.

Bottom to Top Placement of Ground and Top to Bottom Placement of Ceilings

Barring conflicting information, humans generally perceive what is at the bottom of painting to be in front, and what is at the top to be in the back. This is particularly true when looking outside where there is no 'ceiling.' However, this is NOT always the case.



In the painting at right, the flowers near the girl appear to be closer than the flowers near the top. This is also an example of diminishing scale, with the bottom flowers being larger than the top flowers.

Inside a building, the ceiling can have the opposite effect, with the ceiling area nearest you appearing higher than the ceiling area further away.

In the painting at left, the floor appears to move up the further it gets away from you. The ceiling (which is sort of like an upside down floor) appears to move down. These are both the product of diminishing scale. Linear Prospective also comes into play in this work.



Atmospheric Perspective-

Surface Detail/Haze- Things get hazy and loose surface detail the further away from you they are.

Colors – Though not a set rule, in art humans tend to perceive bright, warm colors like red, orange and yellow as being close, and dark, cool colors like blue and dark purple as being further away. This is particularly true for abstract art.

For landscapes, adding blue will make hills and mountains look more distant. The further away the bluer. This is because the color changes as it goes through more and more atmosphere.



Focus - Things that are in focus tend to be perceived as closer than things that are out of focus. This makes sense, as the words on a road sign are too blurry to read if too far away. You must drive closer to the sign to read them. Similarly, objects that have more intense color, detail and contrast often appear closer than objects that are blurrier, hazier and having less focus.

A major problem in trying to create realistic depth in two dimensions is that the human is designed to detect real depth not a flat representation. Looking at the real back yard, each eye looks at the 3D objects from a different angle, the head and body movement creating even more perspectives. The mind combines these different views into the mind's image. This cannot be done with a two dimensional object. A painting, no matter how clear, shows only one perspective.

The natural signs of depth can also fool us in the real world. Nature itself can give conflicting signs... High in the mountains beyond the haze we are used to, climbers often misjudge distance. The mountain miles away is clear and not hazy and appears much closer than it is. Climbers are often warned of this before the climb, as the illusion can be dangerous ... Things like houses appear larger and further away in heavy fog. It is the abnormal haziness and not being blurry that fools us... A person will appear shorter if photographed standing next to an extremely tall person ... The moon appears larger when it is closer to the horizon ...