

## Ms de Bethune Introduction to Studio Art

### The Elements of Art and Principles of Design:

The visual arts express aspects of our existence in ways that words sometimes can't. But like words, they have a language. When we talk about a work of art, we can talk about the subject, or the story is that the picture is telling. But that doesn't really tell us what the picture, sculpture or object looks like. A work of art is about is more than the subject; how the picture looks is what really tells the story.

To explain how artwork can tell different stories about a subject by making the parts of the image look different, we need to an art or **FORMAL** vocabulary, that is, one that address the FORM; the actual stuff that makes up the art work.

**The Elements of Art** and the **Principles of Design** are the basic elements of this vocabulary. They make up what we see in a work of art.

**The Elements of Art** are like the parts of speech: they are the components that all artwork is made from.

**The Principles of Design** are like the rules of grammar: they describe how those pieces go together.

**The Elements of Art:** Line, shape, form, texture, value, color, space

**Line** is the path of a moving point.

It can be infinitely varied: short, long, straight, curved, looping, thick, thin, tapered, smooth, rough, vertical, horizontal. It can be a boundary, or a direction. Lines can evoke moods.

**Line is one dimensional.** (Yes, it does invariably have a thickness, but the concept of line is that of one direction.)

**Line is the extension of a gesture:** it is what happens when you move your arm and hand against a surface, with a mark making implement like a pencil on a paint brush. Line can also be implied by our eye connecting elements in a sequence.

We tend to read horizontal lines as horizons or restful, vertical lines as figures or active, and diagonal lines as movement and directional.

**Shape** is the area contained in a closed line.

A line that defines the edge of a shape is called a **contour**.

Shapes generally fall into two categories:

**Geometric:** i.e. can be plotted by means of a mathematical formula.

**Organic:** created through a natural process or accident.

**Shape is two dimensional: having height and width.**

We perceive shape because our eye see the border that separates **figure** from **ground**.

**Form**, or mass, is the **three-dimensional** version of shape, and has volume: it takes up space. Form can be **actual**, as in a real three-dimensional object that can be seen from more than one side.

Or it can be the **illusion** of form created in a drawing or painting, for example, by the use of shading or modeling.

**Texture** is the way a surface feels. Texture, like form, can be **actual**, as in something we can sense through touch. Or it can be **implied** in a two-dimensional image, such as a painting or

drawing, which suggests how a surface might feel. The sense memory from touching surfaces helps make the connection between the arrangement of shapes and the idea of texture.

**Value** is the **degree of lightness or darkness** of a tone or hue. It applies to both black and white (tone) and colored images and objects (hue). We can see figure/ground distinctions because of differences in value.

**Color** is how our eyes perceive the spectrum of light waves visible to humans reflected off surfaces. Color is a strictly optical phenomenon; as light changes, color will.

*Color has four important properties:*

**Hue:** the color identity, such as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple

These are known as spectrum colors. White, black, and grey are known as neutrals because they have no hue. Shades of brown result from blending spectrum colors.

**Intensity/saturation:** the brightness or dullness of the color.

**Value:** the degree of lightness or darkness.

Colors lightened with white are called tints. Colors darkened with black are called shades.

(Brightness is NOT lightness. Colors can be dark and bright, dark and dull. Colors can be light and bright, light and dull.)

**Temperature:** how warm or cool the color is. Temperature is determined by how close on the color spectrum the color is to the “**hot spot**”, red-orange, or the “**cool spot**”, blue-green. All colors have a warm and a cool aspect.

**Space** is the area we take up, and how we are situated in relation to what is around us. Space is three dimensional, consisting of height, width and depth.

**We think of space in two ways.** Firstly, the space of the object present: **positive space**. And the space around the object: **negative space**.

We see both at the same time, and can't see one without the other. This is called the **figure/ground** relationship.

**Secondly; the illusion of space.** When creating the feeling of space or depth in a painting or drawing (an illusionistic image), artists use several devices:

**Perspective:** the idea that everything in the space recedes back in sequence to a common “**vanishing point**” on the horizon. Horizon lines are determined by the artist's **eye level**.

Objects get smaller, duller, less detailed and closer to the horizon as they appear to move back in space. Perspective is a system for creating spatial illusions that was rediscovered and developed during the **Renaissance**.

**Overlap:** the idea that if you can see all of one object, and only part of another, that the one that is partially hidden is behind, or further back in space, than the object that is totally visible.

**Relative scale:** placed in the right sequence, objects seem nearer if they are larger, or farther away if they are smaller. Scale needs a point of reference to establish context. Human scale is our main standard.

### **Principles of Design:**

Like rules of grammar, they explain how we organize the elements that we see to most effectively communicate meaning.

**Design** is the intentional organization, or composition, of elements. When you design something, you are making conscious decisions about how the elements should go together to best express your idea. Designs are often called **compositions**.

Elements in the visual arts are **relational**. How we see something is determined by its context. The principles of design help us understand those relationships better.

## **The Principles of Design: Balance; Symmetrical & Asymmetrical; Repetition: Pattern & Rhythm; Contrast; Emphasis; Harmony & Unity: Proportion & Variety**

Every work of art has an area that stands out, and calls our attention to it, known as **the focal point**. Artists use the principles of design to emphasize the focal point in a variety of ways. Some focal points are very obvious, and some are more diffuse or subtle.

**Balance:** the rate of distribution (or equilibrium). We think of it in two ways:

**Symmetry**, when there is an equal distribution of elements on either side of an imaginary vertical midline (**bilateral**) or when all elements proceed from a common midpoint (**radial**). Bilateral symmetry refers to our body's arrangement.

We innately seek a sense of balance, finding it contemplative and direct, but symmetrically balanced imagery can also feel very static and dull.

**Asymmetry**, when there is an unequal distribution of elements on either side of that imaginary vertical midline. Asymmetrically balanced images and objects have more movement, and more dynamic and more complex. Our eye has to work harder to find the focal point and get to the essence in an asymmetrically balanced image. Artists use asymmetry to create tension, excitement and a sense of motion.

**Repetition:** when an art element repeats in a composition. There are two basic ideas to repetition:

**Pattern** is regular, consistent repetition of a series of elements.

**Rhythm** is repetition of the elements with transitions in the nature and order of them. All repetition is seen in contrast to variation. The degree of variation determines pattern or rhythm.

### **Emphasis and Contrast:**

**Emphasis** occurs when one aspect of the design or composition is given central focus, and our eyes are naturally drawn to it.

**Contrast** is the degree of difference between elements. Contrast can be strong and emphatic or subtle.

**Harmony** or **Unity** refers to how a design coheres, or hangs together, in other words, how well it is composed. (A **composition** is a work of art that has been intentionally designed.)

The principles that harmonize are:

**Proportion:** there is a feeling of "agreement" among the elements, and they look like they belong together. It usually implies a relative scale or standard against which the compositional elements are measured, such as the human body, or the "Golden Section" Fibonacci growth ratios. Proportion refers to relative scale; how much of one element in relation to another, or how big an element is in relation to others

**Variety:** the idea that there is enough difference between the art elements that attention can be paid to the whole composition.

Like emphasis and contrast, proportion and variety also need to coexist to work well.