

# ART MASTERPIECE BASICS

## Elements of Art

The Elements of Art are the tools that are used together to create a single effect. They include:

Line  
Shape  
Space  
Form  
Color  
Texture

## Principles of Design

The Principles of Design are how the artist uses the elements to create the effect and support the desired art concept. They are:

Balance  
Movement/Rhythm  
Repetition  
Emphasis  
Unity

## LINE

**Line** – an outline or boundary of a figure or space. Artists almost invariably begin their work with lines. Lines, by themselves, can convey moods and feelings, express ideas like action, joy anger, divide areas or suggest peace, vertical lines indicate growth; diagonal lines indicate change, excitement and movement; horizontal is quiet. Line quality is its thinness or thickness, roughness or smoothness.

**Look for lines in** – railroad tracks, telephone poles, wires.  
Faces, sorrow, strength, laughter.  
Cracks of wood, paint or cement.  
Flowers, leaves, branches.

**Try this** – Use string to make a continuous line design. Experiment with different tools and objects to see what kind of lines they make. Do a fast scribble drawing of someone in action – jumping, bending or dancing. Use sticks and wire to make a three-dimensional line sculpture of an animal.

## SHAPE

**Shape or Form** – An area which stands out from the space next to or around because of a defined boundary (line) or because of a difference of value, color or texture. Two-dimensional shapes exist only in a drawing or painting since the artist draws or paints on the surface only.

**Three-dimensional (actual)** – is employed chiefly in sculpture and architecture.

**Three-dimensional (simulated)** – since the painter works on a flat surface, his creations have no actual depth or third dimension. If he wants a third dimension, he must create it using the technique of perspective.

**Basic Geometric Shapes** – Squares, circles, rectangles, triangles.

**Organic Shapes** – Irregular shapes of freely-developed curves resembling those found in living organisms.

**Abstract Shapes** – created by the artist but derived from actual objects or experiences. Usually involves a simplification.

**Non-Objective Shapes** – entirely personal, imaginative – they are not derived from anything in the artist's environment.

**Look for shapes in** – buildings around you, through a microscope, in a tree trunk, advertisements, pots, pans, knives and forks.

**Discussing shapes in artwork** – What shapes do you see? Has the artist used mostly geometric or organic shapes? Has the artist repeated shapes to create rhythm or patterns?

**Try this** – Use colored tissue paper and experiment with creating shapes by overlapping. Pick one shape, cut it out and repeat it many times on a piece of paper, vary only the size. Project shapes of bolts, nuts, jars or cut out shapes on an overhead projector and rearrange the forms.

## SPACE and FORM

**SPACE** – the element that “surrounds” us. **FORM** has substance and occupies space. This occupied space is called positive space. Unoccupied space is called negative space. Space is continuous, infinite and ever present. Actual space may be two-dimensional (decorative) or three-dimensional (real).

A sculpture or three-dimensional object is a form. They have substance and occupy positive space. The areas between and around the forms create interesting negative space.

In the creation of artwork, the artist will consider the negative space as well as the positive. Negative areas play a part as important to the total design

as the positive space.

**Look at** – the negative space around a sculpture, a tree.  
the form (positive space) of a crumpled piece of paper.  
the buildings, arches, doorways, stairs.

## COLOR

**COLOR** – has three attributes:

**Hue** – another word for color.

**Intensity** – the brightness or dullness of a color.

**Value** – the lightness or darkness of a color.

**Primary Colors** – Red, yellow and blue. The primary colors cannot be produced by mixing any other colors.

**Secondary Colors** – colors that are mixed from two primary colors; orange, green and purple.

**Intermediate Colors** – made by mixing a primary and secondary color. There are six intermediate colors. One is yellow-green.

**Complimentary Colors** – colors that are opposite on the color wheel and contrast with each other. Orange is compliment of blue.

We can change the **value** of a color by adding black or white. When white is added to a color, the result is called a **tint**. When black is added, it is called a **shade**.

We can change the **intensity** of color by adding its opposite or compliment.

Colors are sometimes grouped into warm and cool families:

**Warm Colors** – remind us of warm things; red, yellow and orange.

**Cool Colors** – remind us of cool things; blue, green and violet.

**Look at** – the colors of fruits and vegetables.  
colors that clash or harmonize.  
colors that have weathered.  
the color of morning, rain, dusk, etc.

**Try this** – cut out a bright green from a magazine, look at it for 60 seconds, then

look at a blank piece of white paper. You will see the compliment of green – red. Using one color and white, see how many tints of that color you can mix. Do the same with black to mix shades. This is called a value chart.

## **TEXTURE**

**TEXTURE** – the surface quality of a work of art – smooth, rough, dull, glossy. Texture can be observed visually with our sense of sight as well as our sense of touch.

**Actual Texture** – the natural texture of a surface, the feel of wood, glass or a feather. In painting, pigment laid on thickly and roughly will have a different impact on the eye than one that is laid on smoothly.

**Simulated Texture** – gives the appearance of texture, yet the painting will be smooth to the touch. If you could touch this painting, how would it feel? When creating a simulated texture with pen or pencil, it is usually necessary to repeat the line over and over to create the illusion of texture.

**Look at** – texture in the sky and on the ground, in a woven basket, a feather, wood, shells, clothing.

**Feel** – the smoothness of an apple, silk, glass.  
the dryness of potato skin, popcorn, a piece of burlap.  
the roughness of tree bark, woolen cloth.  
the softness of bread, velvet, cotton balls, fur.

**Try this** – with a crayon, make “rubblings” on various surfaces. Press objects repeatedly into clay to create texture. List as many words as you can think of that describe texture.

## **BALANCE**

Balance is a sense of stability when applied to visual forces. A tightrope walker who is slightly off balance gives us a feeling of uneasiness. We search for balance in art as well as in our environment.

**Symmetrical or formal balance** – A design which is divided in half so that one side of a center line is identical to the opposite side. Where do we see symmetrical balance?

**Asymmetrical or informal** – There is no center line. Design elements are balanced visually but not symmetrically. Most magazine advertisements and signs are asymmetrically balanced.

**Radical balance** – The design elements radiate from a center point as in the spokes of a wheel. What things in nature might have a radial balance?

Balance achieved **informally** creates a more dynamic design. Opposing forces and tensions are balanced for increased interest.

The **position of a shape** helps create balance. Placed in the exact center, a shape has perfect equilibrium and is at rest. Moving it off center will increase its importance and attract more attention.

### **MOVEMENT/RHYTHM**

Motion may be slow or swift, flowing or jerky, ascending or descending, or it may have other qualities. We can call this movement RHYTHM.

The path that our eyes follow as we look at a work of art is known as MOVEMENT. If the artist has created a rhythmic flow, then our eyes are easily led from one place to another.

By arranging the design elements, the artist controls the movement of our eyes and our attention is drawn to the area of greatest interest and then around and through the rest of the work.

### **REPETITION**

Repetition occurs when elements (lines, shapes, colors) are repeated regularly or irregularly. Sometimes this creates rhythm; it can also help unify and create balance.

Repeating identical regular lines and shapes at equal intervals tends to unify a surface, but usually we vary the size or the interval to avoid monotony.

When the same color is repeated in a different area or areas of a picture, its power is increased. If placed strategically, it increases visual balance and unifies elements.

### **EMPHASIS**

Emphasis calls attention to an important area or areas of a design and subdues other elements in the piece. By placing emphasis on certain areas, an artist creates a center of interest and causes our eye to return again and again.

Emphasis can be created by:

1. Bold detail
2. Unusual texture
3. Bright colors
4. Shocking subject
5. Positioning on the paper
6. Size
7. Any combination of these

No matter what is chosen for emphasis, it should never demand all of the attention. Emphasis is necessary, but all elements need to work together for a unified effect.

## **UNITY**

Unity means oneness, consistency or integration. Unity happens when all the elements in a design work together harmoniously.

An artist arrives at unity by the use of imagination, reasoning and design judgments. He is constantly looking at the work while it is in progress. This way he can determine if the design is scattered and confusing or if all the elements are purposeful and work with the whole.

Unity is strongly influenced by the quality of the materials used as well as by the artist's personal vitality.