

Pictures

DRAWING, PAINTING, PRINTMAKING, AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Thinking Critically

1. Compare and contrast the visual properties of watercolors and oils.
2. Characterize art and documentary photography.
3. Outline the elements and principles of composition.
4. Explain the properties of color and how artists can use them in creating works of art.
5. Examine the effects of linear, atmospheric, and shifting perspective.

Pictures of family, friends, rock and sports stars, copies of artistic masterpieces, and original paintings and prints adorn our personal spaces. Dorm rooms, bedrooms, living rooms, and other places where we live seem coldly empty and depersonalized without pictures of some kind in them. Pictures have always been important to us. People who lived in caves 20,000 years ago drew pictures on their walls. In this chapter, we'll learn about the many ways pictures can be made and how artists use two-dimensional qualities to speak to us.

WHAT IS IT?

Pictures such as drawings, paintings, photographs, and prints differ primarily in the technique of their execution. Two dimensional, their subject might be a landscape,

seascape, portrait, religious picture, non-objective (nonrepresentational) or *abstract* (see Glossary) picture, still life, or something else. So, at first glance our response seems to constitute simple and straightforward observation—what we identify as subject matter. That, however, can lead us into a world- and style-wide exploration. For example, were the work a landscape, we might think of the many applications artists have chosen by which to portray outdoor scenes. Corot's *A View Near Volterra* (see Fig. 1.8) contrasts with van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (see Fig. 1.10), and these divergent styles of Western art take distinctly different attitudes than Hiroshige's *Maple Leaves at Mama . . .* (Fig. 2.1). These works certainly differ technically, as we would surmise from the discussion that follows, but they also differ philosophically and culturally in the



Figure 2.1 Ando Hiroshige, *Maple Leaves at Mama, Tekona Shrine and Mama Bridge series, No. 94 c. 1856–1859*. Polychrome wood-block print, 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ " $\times$ 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (35 $\times$ 24 cm).

Source: © Brooklyn Museum/Corbis.

way they regard nature. And yet, they share a generic appellation—landscape. Any of the other seemingly straightforward formal, generic identifications also could lead us toward such complex understandings.

HOW IS IT PUT TOGETHER?

MEDIUM

Our technical level of identification and response entails detailed information, first of all, relative to the medium used by the artist to execute the work.



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Drawing

Drawing, considered the foundation of two-dimensional art, utilizes a wide variety of materials traditionally divided into two groups: dry media and wet media. In the discussion that follows we will note the dry media of chalk, charcoal, graphite, and pastel, and the wet media of pen and ink and wash and brush.

Dry Media

Chalk. Chalk developed as a drawing medium by the middle of the sixteenth century. Artists first used it in its natural state, derived from ocher hematite, white soapstone, and black carbonaceous shale, placing it in a holder and sharpening it to a point. Chalk, a fairly flexible medium, creates a wide variety of tonal areas with extremely subtle transitions between areas. Applied with a heavy or light pressure, chalk can be worked with the fingers once on the paper to create the exact image the artist desires, as exemplified by Alberti Cherubino's (chair-oo-BEE-no) *Prudence* (http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/alberti_cherubino.html).

Charcoal. Charcoal, a burnt wood product (preferably hardwood), like chalk, requires a paper with a relatively rough surface—tooth—for the medium to adhere. Charcoal has a tendency to smudge easily, which dampened its early use as a drawing medium. It found wide use, however, as a means of drawing details, for example, on walls and for murals that were eventually painted or frescoed. Today, resin fixatives sprayed over charcoal drawings eliminate the tendency to smudge, and charcoal has become a popular medium because artists find it extremely expressive. Like chalk, charcoal can achieve a variety of tonalities. The medium can be manufactured in a variety of shapes and densities; for example,

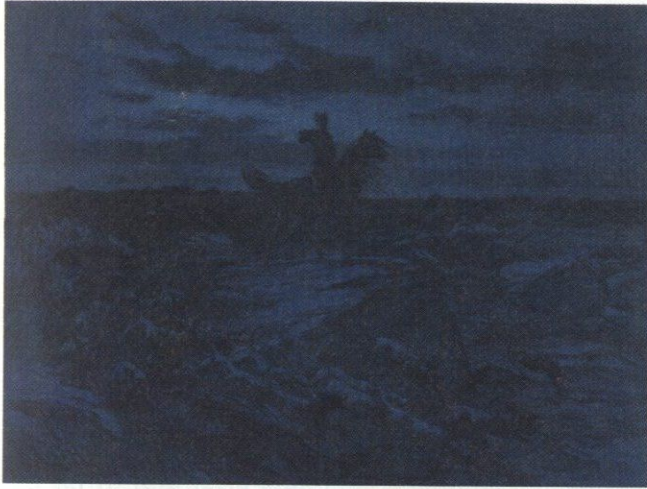


Figure 2.2 Rosa Bonheur, French, 1822–1899. *The Legend of the Wolves*, drawing, colored chalks on blue wove paper. $23\frac{3}{16}'' \times 31\frac{3}{4}''$ (59.9×80.7 cm).

Source: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gift of the Christian Humann Foundation, 1996.128.2.

in sharpened sticks that work like pencils, either hard or soft.

Graphite. Graphite, a form of carbon, like coal, and most familiar as pencil lead, can be manufactured in various degrees of hardness. The harder the lead, the lighter and more delicate its mark, as seen in Oscar F. Bluemner's *Study for a Painting* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=57125).

Pastel. Pastel, essentially a chalk medium in which colored pigment and a nongreasy binder have been combined, typically comes in sticks about the diameter of a finger and with a myriad hardness: soft, medium, hard. Hardness increases by adding more binder, with the result that the harder the stick, the less intense its color. In fact, the name *pastel* implies pale, light colors. Artists find soft pastels quite difficult to work with, although intense colors require soft pastels. A special ribbed paper helps to grab the powdery pastel, and a sprayed fixative holds the powder in place permanently on the paper. Rosa Bonheur's (bahw-NUHR, 1822–1899) *The Legend of the Wolves* (Fig. 2.2) illustrates pastels, and gains increased intensity by the artist's use of a dark paper under the medium.

Liquid Media

Pen and Ink. Pen and ink comprise a fairly flexible medium compared to graphite, for example. Although linear, pen and ink gives the artist the possibility of variation in line and texture. Shading, for example, results from diluting the ink, and the overall quality of the drawing achieves fluidity and expressiveness, as we can see in Rembrandt's *Lot and His Family Leaving Sodom* (<http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/rembrandt/lot-and-his-family-leaving-sodom-1655>).

Wash and Brush. Ink, diluted with water and applied with a brush, creates a wash similar in characteristics to watercolor, which we discuss in the next section on painting media. Difficult to control, wash and brush yields effects nearly impossible to achieve in any other medium. Because it must be worked quickly and freely, it has a spontaneous and appealing quality, as suggested in Zhu Da (zhyoo-dah) (Bada Shanren) *Lotus* (Fig. 2.3).

In addition to the media we have just described (and which may be combined in infinite variety), there exists a wide range of possibilities of an experimental and



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Figure 2.3 Zhu Da (zhyoo-dah) (*Bada Shanren*) (Chinese 1625–1705) *Lotus*, 1705. Brush and Ink, 6½" × 28".

Source: Palmer Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University, 77.15.

innovative nature. These include the computer, which can be used as an electronic sketchpad.

Painting

Like drawing media, painting media each have their own particular characteristics; to

a great extent, this dictates what the artist can or cannot achieve as an end result. In the following section, we will examine five painting media: oils, watercolor, tempera, acrylics, and fresco.

Oils

Oils, perhaps the most popular of the painting media since their development near the beginning of the fifteenth century, gain their popularity principally from the great variety of opportunity they give the painter. Oils offer a wide range of color possibilities; because they dry slowly, they can be re-worked; they present many options for textural manipulation; and they are durable. If we compare two oils, van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (see Fig. 1.10) and Rubens's *The Assumption of the Virgin* (see Fig. 2.34), the medium shows its importance to the final effect of the works. Rubens creates light and shade in the baroque tradition, and his *chiaroscuro* (kee-AHR-oh-SKOO-roh) depends on the capacity of the medium to blend smoothly among color areas. Van Gogh, in contrast, requires a medium that will stand up to form obvious brush strokes. Rubens demands the paint to be flesh and cloth. Van Gogh demands the paint to be paint and to be stars and sky, but also to call attention to itself.

Watercolor

Watercolor is a broad category that includes any color medium that uses water as a thinner. The term, however, has traditionally referred to a transparent paint usually applied to paper. Because watercolors are transparent, artists must be very careful to control them. If one area of color overlaps another, the overlap will show as a third area combining the previous hues. Nonetheless, their transparency gives watercolors



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Figure 2.4 Harrison Begay, *Women Picking Corn*, mid-twentieth century. Watercolor, 15" × 11½" (38.1 × 29.2 cm).

Source: Courtesy, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 236011.000.

a delicacy that cannot be produced in any other medium.

In Figure 2.4 we see the characteristic transparency of the watercolor pigment in Harrison Begay's *Women Picking Corn*. Typical of Native American watercolor of the mid-twentieth century, Begay uses space by keeping the painting on the surface plane and depicts only the important subjects with no background shown. So, only the women and the corn concern the viewer, and Begay adds no spatial environment. He renders the subjects in two dimensions. The only hint of space beyond the frontal plane lies in the diminutive size of the woman on the left. Begay leaves the horizon line (the viewer's eye level) at the bottom of the painting. We see the same qualities in *Salas de Lectura Baguette* (Fig. 2.5) by the Havana-based collective Los

Carpinteros (The Carpenters), who have created some of the most important work to emerge from Cuba in the past decade. Formed in 1991, the trio (consisting of Marco Castillo, Dagoberto Rodríguez, and, until his departure in June 2003, Alexandre Arrechea) adopted their name in 1994, deciding to renounce the notion of individual authorship and refer back to an older guild tradition of artisans and skilled laborers.

Gouache (gwash), also a watercolor medium, adds gum to ground opaque colors mixed with water. Transparent watercolors can be made into gouache by adding Chinese white, a special white, opaque, water-soluble



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Watercolor at myartslab.com



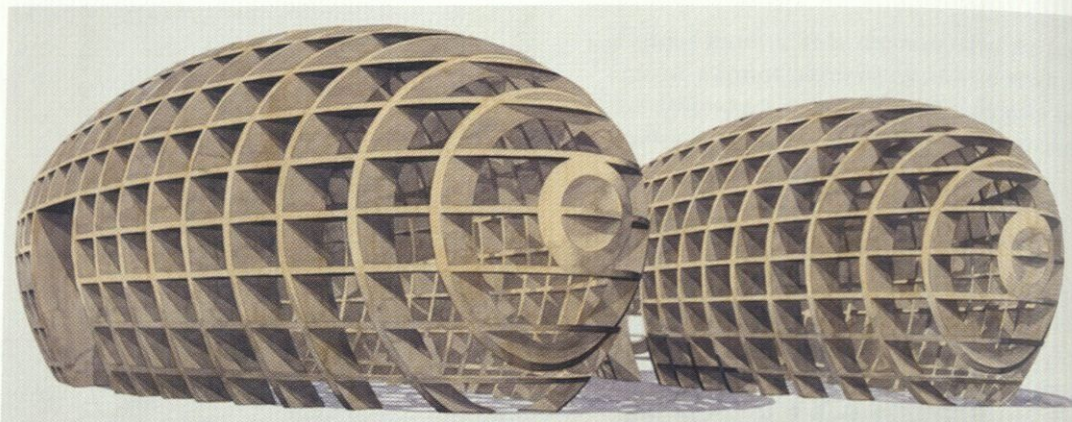


Figure 2.5 *Los Carpinteros, Salas de Lectura Baguette, 2011. Watercolor on paper, 31 $\frac{5}{8}$ " $\times$ 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (80.3 $\times$ 113.7 cm).*

Source: Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

paint that, in contrast to watercolor, creates an opaque paint.

Tempera

Tempera, an opaque watercolor medium, spans recorded history. Employed by the ancient Egyptians, it still finds use today. Tempera comprises ground pigments and their color binders such as gum or glue, but is best known as egg tempera. A fast-drying medium, it virtually eliminates brush strokes and gives extremely sharp and precise detail. Colors in tempera paintings appear almost gemlike in their clarity and brilliance.

Acrylics

Acrylics, in contrast with tempera, constitute modern synthetic products. Most acrylics are water soluble (they dissolve in water), and use an acrylic polymer as a binding agent. Acrylics offer artists a wide range of possibilities in both color and technique. Either opaque or transparent, depending on dilution, acrylics dry fast, thin, and resistant to cracking under temperature and humidity extremes. Perhaps less permanent than

some other media, acrylics adhere to a wider variety of surfaces and will not darken or yellow with age, as will oil.

Fresco

Fresco, a wall painting *technique*, uses pigments suspended in water and applied to fresh wet plaster. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes are the best known examples of this technique. Because the end result becomes part of the plaster wall rather than being painted on it, fresco provides a long-lasting work. However, once the artist applies the pigments, no changes can be made without replastering the entire section of the wall.

Mixed Media

Of course, artists may choose to use a single medium such as those just noted, or they may choose to combine various media in order to create works that allow the artist to transcend the limits of a single medium, as Betye Saar (b. 1926) has done with *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (this painting can be found on numerous sites on the Web). Aunt Jemima was a marketing symbol of surrogate



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View the Closer Look of Fresco on myartslab.com

motherhood applied to pancake flour and syrup. In the immediate years after World War II, Aunt Jemima—an African American woman dressed as “Aunt Jemima,” demonstrating making pancakes with her brand of mix—was a staple at county fairs and public festivals around the country and as recognizable a corporate icon as Ronald McDonald. The work represents the feminist movement, a social, political, and cultural movement seeking equal rights and status for women in all spheres of life. More radically, it pursues a new order in which men no longer constitute the standard against which equality and normality are measured. Feminism consists of a diverse ideology of wide-ranging perspectives on the origin and constitution of gender and sexuality, the historical and structural foundations of male power and women’s subjugation, and the proper means of achieving women’s emancipation.

Prints

Prints generally fall into three main categories based essentially on the nature of the printing surface. The first category is relief printing such as woodcut, wood engraving, collograph, and linoleum cut. The second category consists of intaglio, which includes etching and aquatint. The third category comprises the planographic process, which includes lithography and serigraphy (silk-screen) and other forms of stenciling. In addition, printmakers also use other combinations and processes.

Artists choose to produce an original work of art as a print for two main reasons. The first reason, to obtain a number of identical copies, finds its motivation in a desire to create pictures as multiple images or to reinterpret an original drawing or painting in print form. Prints sell less expensively than unique objects and are, thus, more accessible to individuals who may not normally invest in art. The second reason to choose to produce a print lies in the fact that

each printmaking process produces characteristic visual qualities that are distinctly different from painting and drawing.

Every print has a number called an issue number. On some prints the number may appear as a fraction—for example, 36/100. The denominator indicates how many prints were produced from the plate or block. The numerator indicates where in the series the individual print was produced. If only a single number appears such as 500 (also called an issue number), it simply indicates the total number of prints in the series. Printmakers are beginning to eliminate the former kind of numbering because of the misconception that the relationship of the numerator to the issue total has a bearing on a print’s value, monetarily or qualitatively. The issue number does have some value in comparing, for example, an issue of 25 with one of 500, and usually affects the price of a print. However, the edition number is not the sole factor in determining the value of a print. The quality of the print and the reputation of the artist are more important considerations.

Relief Printing

In relief printing (Fig. 2.6), the image transfers to the paper by elimination of non image areas and inking the remaining surface. Therefore, the image protrudes, in relief, from the block or plate and produces a picture reversed from the image carved by the artist. This reversal characterizes all printmaking media. *Woodcuts* and *wood engravings* are two popular techniques. A woodcut, one of the oldest techniques, utilizes the plank of the grain; a wood



Watch the Video on Studio Technique:
Intaglio Printmaking at myartslab.com



Watch the Video on Studio Technique:
Lithography at myartslab.com



Watch the Video on Studio Technique:
Silkscreen at myartslab.com

A Question of Style

Postimpressionism

Postimpressionism (pohst-ihm-PREHSH-uh-nihz-uhm). In visual art, a diverse style dating to the late nineteenth century that rejects the objective naturalism of impressionism and uses form and color in more personal ways. It reflects an “art for art’s sake” philosophy. Postimpressionism comprises a number of disparate styles. In subject matters, its paintings appear similar to impressionist paintings—landscapes, familiar portraits, groups, and café and nightclub scenes—but the postimpressionists gave their subject matter a complex and profoundly personal significance. As we can see from van Gogh’s *The Starry Night* (Fig. 1.10), a sense of form and structure prevails as well as an interest in the painting as a flat surface carefully composed of shapes, lines, and colors, an idea shared by his fellow postimpressionists, which became the foundation for most of the art movements that followed.

engraving cuts into the butt of the grain (Fig. 2.7). Figure 2.8 illustrates the linear essence of the woodcut and shows the precision and delicacy possible in this medium. On the other hand, wood block printing can also produce flat color areas such as in Hiroshige’s (hee-roh-SHEE-gee) *Maple Leaves at Mama* (see Fig. 2.1). This strongly colored Japanese woodcut from the mid-nineteenth century shows deep space in a novel fashion, using the foreground to “frame” the distance. Hiroshige uses neither linear nor atmospheric perspective (both of which we discuss momentarily) to achieve the illusion of deep space, and yet the portrayal appears rational. He uses a clever manipulation of the aspects of color to keep interest and control, holding our vision stable in the center of the work.

The *collograph* printmaking process glues assorted objects to a board or plate. A collograph represents relief printing when the raised surfaces are inked and printed. When the recessed areas are inked and printed, the collograph becomes an intaglio work.

Intaglio

The intaglio (in-TAHG-lee-oh) process (see Fig. 2.9), the opposite of relief printing,

transfers ink to the paper not from raised areas but rather from grooves cut into a metal plate. *Line engraving*, *etching*, *drypoint*, and *aquatint* comprise some of the methods of intaglio.

Line Engraving. Line engraving involves cutting grooves into the metal plate with special sharp tools. It requires significant muscular control because pressure must be continuous and constant for the grooves to produce the desired image. The line-engraving process produces very sharp and precise images. This form of intaglio, the most difficult and demanding, can be seen

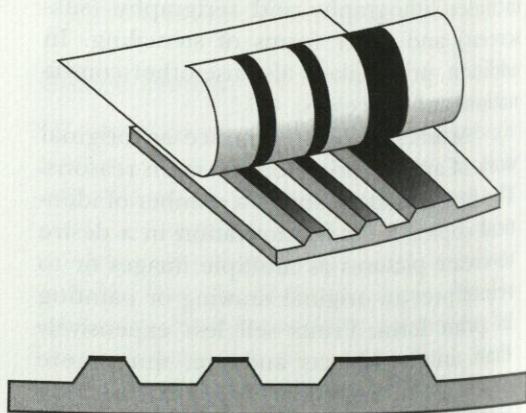


Figure 2.6 Relief printing techniques.

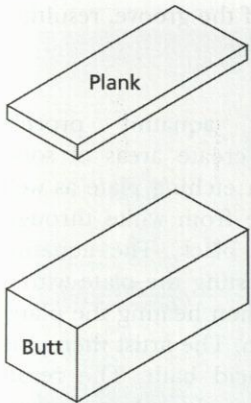
Figure 2.7 Wood plank and butt.

Figure 2.8 Albrecht Dürer, German, 1471–1528. Lamentation, c. 1498–1499, Woodcut, 15½" × 11¼" (39.3 × 28.5 cm).

Source: Palmer Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University, Gifts of the Friends of the Palmer Museum of Art, 75.5.

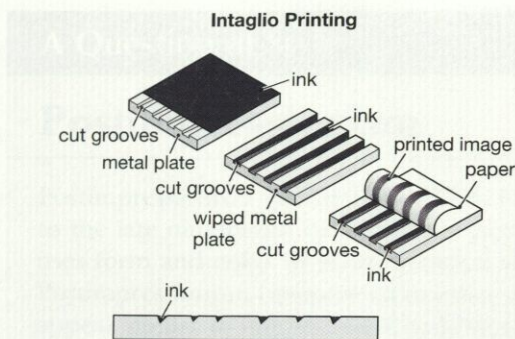


Figure 2.9 Intaglio processes.

in Albrecht Dürer's (DYOO-ruhr) *Angel with the Key to the Bottomless Pit* at <http://www.albrecht-durer.org/Angel-With-The-Key-To-The-Bottomless-Pit.html>.

Etchings. In the etching process, the artist removes the surface of the plate by exposing it to an acid bath. First, the artist covers the plate with a thin waxlike substance called a *ground*, and then scratches away the ground to produce the desired lines. She then immerses the plate in the acid, which burns away the exposed areas of the plate. The longer a plate remains in the acid, the deeper the resulting etches; the deeper the etch, the darker the final image. Artists wishing to produce lines or areas of differing darkness must cover those lines that they do not desire to be more deeply cut before further immersions in the acid. Repetition of the process yields a plate producing a print with the desired differences in light and dark lines. All the details of Bernhard Zaech's *Ruins with Monkeys and an Owl* (Fig. 2.10) consist of individual lines, either single or in combination. The lighter lines required less time in the acid than the darker ones.

Drypoint. The drypoint technique requires scratching the surface of the metal plate with a needle. Unlike line engraving, which results in a clean, sharp line, the drypoint technique leaves a ridge, called a

burr, on either side of the groove, resulting in a somewhat fuzzy line.

Aquatint. The aquatint process enables an artist to create areas of solid nonlinear tone on an etching plate as well as gradations of tone from white through a range of grays to black. The aquatint process consists of dusting the plate with a resin substance and then heating the plate, which affixes the resin. The artist then puts the plate into the acid bath. The result yields a plate with a rough surface texture, like sandpaper, and a print reflecting that texture.

Once the plate is prepared, whether by line engraving, etching, aquatint, drypoint, or a combination of methods, the artist can begin the printing process. He places the plate in a press, laying a special dampened paper over it. Padding is placed on the paper, and then a roller is passed over, forcing the plate and the paper together with great pressure. The ink, which has been carefully applied to the plate and left only in the grooves, transfers as the paper is forced into the grooves by the roller of the press. Even if no ink had been applied to the plate, the paper would still receive an image. This *embossing* effect marks an intaglio process with a very obvious three-dimensional *platemark*.

Planographic Processes

In a planographic process (Fig. 2.11), the artist prints from a plane surface (neither relief nor intaglio). *Lithography* (lith-AHG-rah-fee, the term's literal meaning is "stone writing") rests on the principle that water and grease do not mix. To create a lithograph, artists begin with a stone, usually limestone, and grind one side until absolutely smooth. They then draw an image on the stone with a greasy substance. Artists can vary the darkness of the final image by the amount of grease they use: The more grease

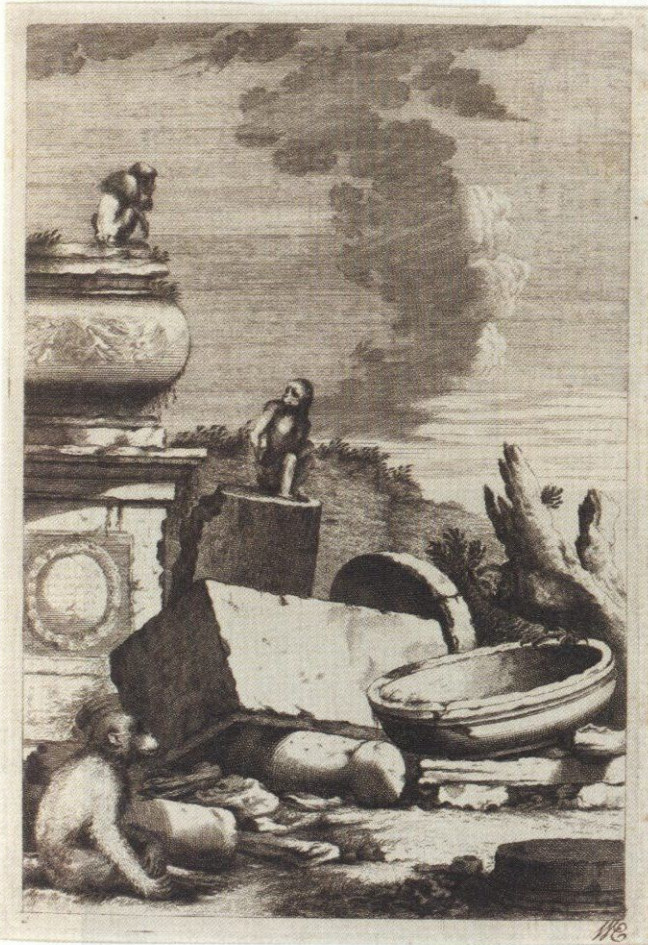


Figure 2.10 Bernhard Zaech
after Jonas Umbach, *Ruins with
Monkeys and an Owl*. Print
(etching), c. 1650, plate:
7⁵/₈" × 5¹/₄".

Source: National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C., Ailsa Mellon Bruce
Fund, 2001.13.1.

applied, the darker the image. After artists have drawn the image, they treat the stone with gum arabic and nitric acid and then rinse it with water. This bath fixes the greasy areas to the surface of the stone. When the artist rinses the stone and fans it dry, the surface appears clean. However, the water, gum, and acid have impressed the grease on the stone; when wetted, the stone absorbs water (limestone being porous) only in those areas previously ungreased. Finally, a grease-based ink is applied to the stone. It, in turn, will not adhere to the water-soaked areas. As a result the stone, with ink adhering only to the areas on which the artist has drawn, can

be placed in a press and the image transferred to the waiting paper. In Figure 2.12, we can see the variety of characteristics possible in the medium of lithography—effects that go beyond the crayon-drawing appearance typically associated with the medium.

The *serigraphic* process (serigraphy, sair-IHG-ruh-fee) or silk-screening, the most common of the planographic stenciling processes, uses a wooden frame covered with a finely meshed silk fabric. The nonimage areas are blocked out with a glue mixture painted directly on the silk fabric or blocked out by a cut paper stencil. The stencil is placed in the frame and ink applied.

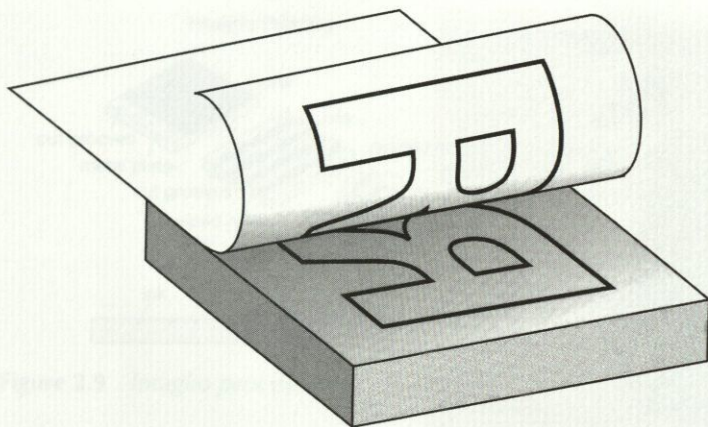


Figure 2.11 Planographic process.



Figure 2.12 L. Prang & Co. after J. O. Davidson, 1886, *The Capture of New Orleans during the Civil War*. Lithograph.
Source: © prang/Corbis.

By means of a rubber instrument called a squeegee, the artist forces ink through the openings of the stencil, through the screen, and onto the paper below. This technique allows the printmaker to achieve large, flat,

uniform color areas. We can see this smooth uniformity of color areas in Figure 2.13.

A *monotype* or *monoprint*, as its name implies, creates a unique impression by applying printing ink to a flat surface and

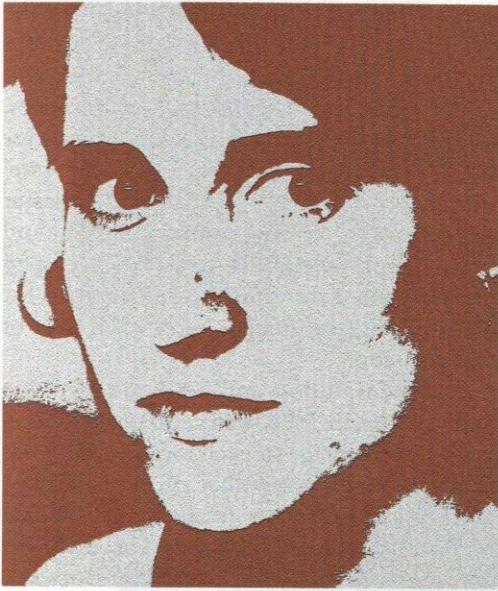


Figure 2.13 Computer-generated silkscreen of a beautiful woman.

Source: © matthiasengelien.com / Alamy.

transferring it to paper. The method, however, excludes one of the usual main purposes of printmaking—obtaining multiple copies of a single image—because a mono-print creates a one-time image only. On the other hand, the marks and textures of

the monotype differ characteristically from those drawn or painted on paper. Mono-print appeals to many artists because it requires no presses or studio equipment.

Looking over the figures in this section, we see how the images of the various prints reflect recognizable differences in technique. Some prints reflect a combination of techniques. However, in seeking the method of execution, we add another layer of potential response to a work.

Photography

Photographic images (and images of photography's subsequent developments—motion pictures and video) provide us, primarily, with information. Cameras (see Fig. 2.14) record the world; in addition, through editing, a photographer can take the camera's image and change the reality of life as we see it to a reality of the imagination. In one small sense, photography constitutes a simplification of reality that substitutes two-dimensional images for the three-dimensional images of life. It can also amplify reality when a photographer takes a snapshot of one moment in time and transforms it by altering the photographic image and or artificially emphasizing one of its parts.

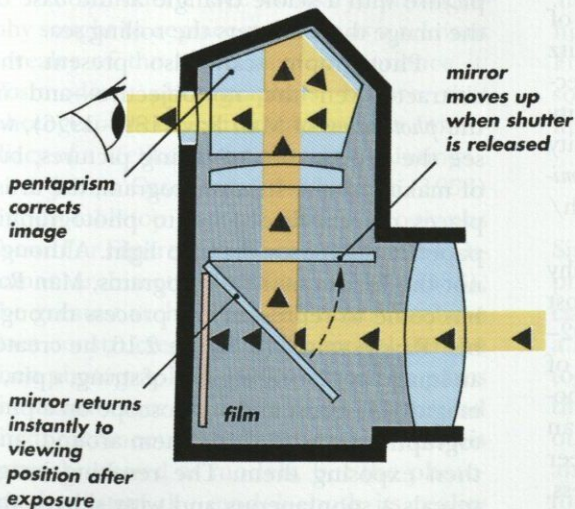


Figure 2.14 The single-lens reflex (SLR) camera.

Art Photography

Photographer Ansel Adams (1902–1984) viewed the photographer as an interpretive artist; he likened a photographic negative to a musical score, and the print to a performance. Thus, despite the choices an artist might make in committing an image to film, these choices comprise only the beginning of the artistic process. A photographer still has the choice of size, texture, and value contrast or tonality.

After World War I, as photography entered its second century, significant aesthetic changes occurred. Early explorations of photography as an art form tended to employ darkroom techniques, tricks, and manipulation that created works that seemed staged and imitative of sentimental, moralistic paintings. The followers of such an aesthetic believed that for photography to be art, it must look like art.

During the early years of the twentieth century, however, a new generation of photographers arose who determined to take photography away from the previous pictorial style and its soft focus and toward a more direct, unmanipulated, and sharply focused approach. Called straight photography, it expressed its adherents' belief in photography's unique vision. The principal American force behind the recognition of photography as a fine art, Alfred Stieglitz (STEEGH-lihts; 1864–1946), gained recognition for his clarity of image and reality shots, especially of clouds and New York City architecture (see Alfred Stieglitz's *The Terminal* at <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/58.577.11>).

The adherents of straight photography found in their ranks perhaps America's most famous photographer, Ansel Adams (1902–1984), who became a recognized leader of modern photography through his sharp, poetic landscape photographs of the American West. A well-known technician and pioneer in the movement to preserve the wilderness,

he did much to elevate photography to the level of art. His work emphasized sharp focus and subtle variety in light and texture, with rich detail and brilliant tonal differences. In 1941, he began making photomurals for the United States Department of the Interior, a project that forced him to master techniques for photographing the light and space of immense landscapes. He developed what he called the zone system, a means for determining the final tone of each part of the landscape.

That tradition and aesthetic continue today. Using an 1898 field camera and shooting only one image of each location, Thomas Joshua Cooper, a member of the Cherokee nation, composes his images, such as *The Mid North Atlantic Ocean* (see Fig. 2.15), so that the scale of the composition does not appear immediately apparent. The printing of the pieces further enhances the intensely emotive nature of his work. Renowned for his technical mastery of the photographic medium, Cooper uses subtly “underpainted” images with selenium and gold, resulting in blue and maroon tones in the photographic printing process. His painterly process ensures the uniqueness of each individual print. Cooper presents an image that comforts the viewer, in this case composing the picture with a stable triangle at the base of the image that counters the roiling sea.

Photography can also present the abstract—even the nonobjective—and in the *photograms* of Man Ray (1890–1976), we see the process not of taking pictures, but of making them. In a photogram, the artist places objects directly onto photographic paper and exposes them to light. Although not the first to make photograms, Man Ray has come to represent the process through his “Rayographs.” In Figure 2.16, he creates an image by placing a piece of string, a pin, a magnifying glass, and a gyroscope on a photographic plate, pushing them around, and then exposing them. The resulting image reveals a spontaneous and witty side to the



Figure 2.15 *Thomas Joshua Cooper, The Mid North Atlantic Ocean, Punta del la Calera; This Isle of La Gomera (The West-most Point of the Island), 2002. The Canary Islands, Spain. (Very probably the last Old World Land site seen by Columbus and crew on their first transatlantic voyage out in search of the New World.)*

Source: Copyright and Photography: Thomas Joshua Cooper. Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

artist and to the styles of Dada and surrealism, which the work also represents.

Postmodern (see Glossary) photography sought to replace painting as a relevant revealer of the world as we experience it. Postmodern photographers believe that photographs can better capture the immediacy of a lifelike image than can paintings.

James Casebere (case-beer; b. 1953) builds tabletop models and photographs them. For Figure 2.17 he researched the Ottoman architecture of Sinan (1489–1588), the greatest architect of the time. Casebere then constructed a complex model that he then photographed. His construction pares the architecture down to essential forms and sheds extraneous detail. Casebere wants his artworks viewed as models, but the photographs distort the model—both its reality

and its unreality. The photographs deceive our eyes, but they do more than that. They also present us with a strong sense of social history and a focus on institutional spaces. Further, they show relationships between social control and social structure, delving into sophisticated levels of interpretation.

Documentary Photography

Since the late nineteenth century, photographers have used photography to document social problems. During the Great Depression, a large-scale program in documentary photography began in the United States. Among the photographers using this approach, Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) helped develop an unsurpassed portrait of the nation. Noted for her ability to make strangers seem like

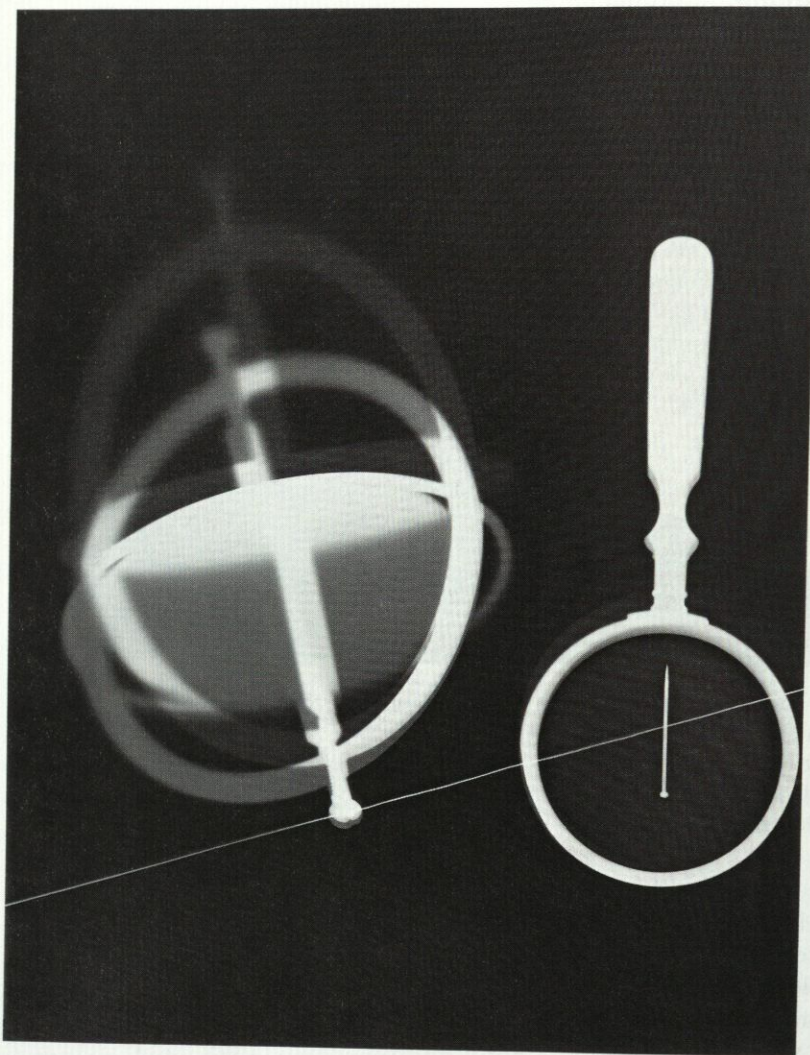


Figure 2.16 Man Ray (1890–1976). Rayograph (gyroscope, magnifying glass, pin). Paris, 1922. Gelatin silver print (photogram), $9\frac{3}{8}'' \times 6\frac{1}{16}''$.

Source: Gift of James Thrall Soby (112.1941). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. © 2013 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY/ADAGP, Paris.

familiar acquaintances, her work for the Farm Security Administration, including *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (Fig. 2.18), graphically detailed the erosion of the land and the people of rural America during the Great Depression. Her work brought the plight of the poor to national attention. Her photographs of California's migrant workers, captioned with their own words, were so effective that the state established migrant worker camps to alleviate the suffering. In this photograph, Florence Thompson,

a thirty-two-year-old widow with several children, looks past the viewer with a pre-occupied, worried expression. With her furrowed brow and prematurely aged face, she captures the fears of an entire population of disenfranchised people. Two of her children lean on her for support, their faces buried disconsolately in their mother's shoulders. Lange consciously avoided including all of



View the **Closer Look** of **Technique: Black-and-White Photography** on myartslab.com



Figure 2.17 James Casebere, *Mosque (After Sinan) #2, 2006*, digital chromogenic print mounted to Plexiglas, III. 75" × 142", Edition of 3; 72" × 91.75".

Source: © James Casebere. Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Thompson's children in the photograph because she did not wish to contribute to the widespread resentment among wealthier people in America regarding overpopulation among the poor. Visit Dorothea Lange's works at http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/lange_dorothea.html.

Photographic Techniques

The word *camera* means "room" in Latin; in the sixteenth century, artists used a darkened room, called a *camera obscura*, to copy nature accurately. Remarkably, the camera obscura utilized the same device used by today's cameras. Specifically, a small hole on one side of the light-free room admitted a ray of light that projected the scene outside onto a semitransparent scrim cloth. The camera obscura illustrated in Figure 2.19 actually has holes in two walls. The early camera obscuras were also portable, which allowed artists to set them up to project any subject matter. Of course, the camera obscura could

not preserve the image it projected, and photography could not emerge until someone solved that technological problem.

The technology of photography began in England in 1839 with the invention of William Henry Fox Talbot, who achieved a process for fixing negative images on a paper coated with light-sensitive chemicals. His process, called a *photogenic drawing*, appeared at about the same time as two French inventors, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (dah-GHAIR) and Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (nee-APE-suh), produced a process in which a positive image could be affixed to a metal plate. Niépce died in 1833, and Daguerre perfected the process, which now bears his name: *daguerreotype* (dah-GHAIR-oh-type).

Unfortunately, the image on the daguerreotype could not be reproduced, whereas the photogenic image, on paper, could. Fox Talbot realized that the negative image of the photogenic drawing could be reversed by covering it with sensitized paper

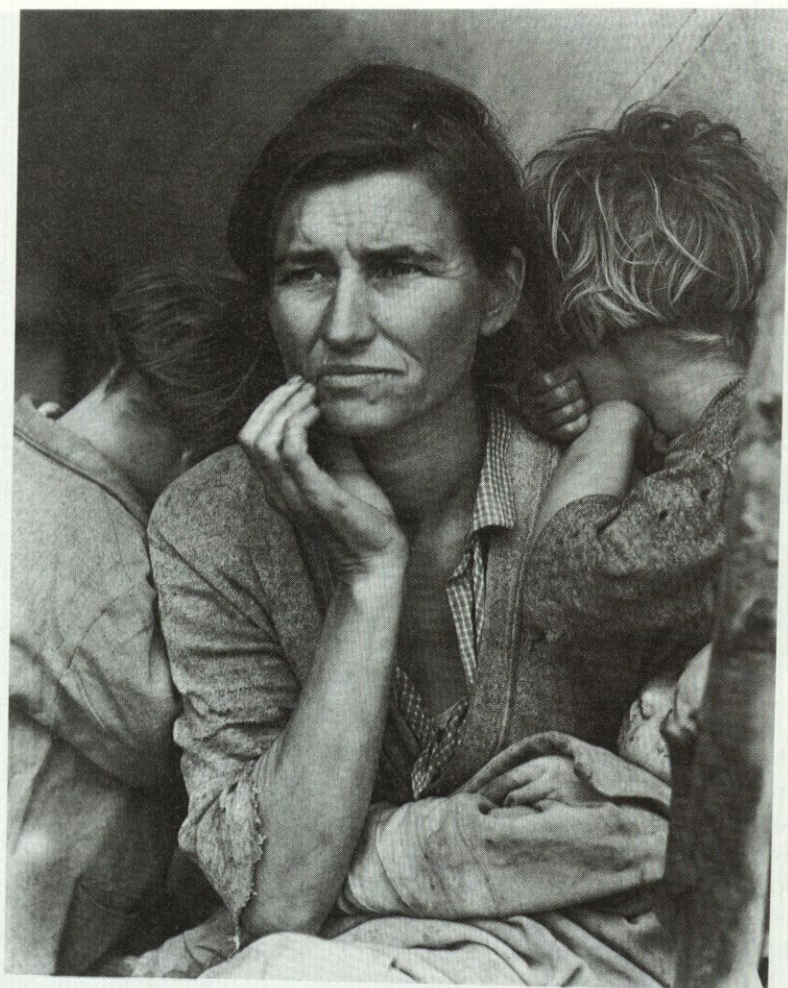


Figure 2.18 *Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California (1936).*
 Source: Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-fsa-8b29516

and exposing the two papers to sunlight. Then the latent image on the second paper was developed by dipping the paper in gallic acid, a process called *calotype*.

The early technical developments of Fox Talbot were followed in 1850 by another Englishman, Frederick Archer, who, in a darkened room, poured a viscous chemical solution, liquid collodion, over a glass plate bathed in silver nitrate. Although the process required preparing, exposing, and developing the plate within a span of fifteen minutes, the results were universally accepted within the next five years, and the wet-plate *collodion* photographic process became standard.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a new technology, color photography, emerged. The availability and inexpensive nature of color processing made color photography very popular. The invention of the Polaroid camera only enhanced the situation. By the early years of the twenty-first century, however, another new technology, digital, has for the most part rendered film obsolete and changed photography into a tremendously plastic (shapeable) medium. With digital technology, photographers can “print” images in excess of 15 feet wide (5 m) and create and control their images to a degree heretofore impossible.

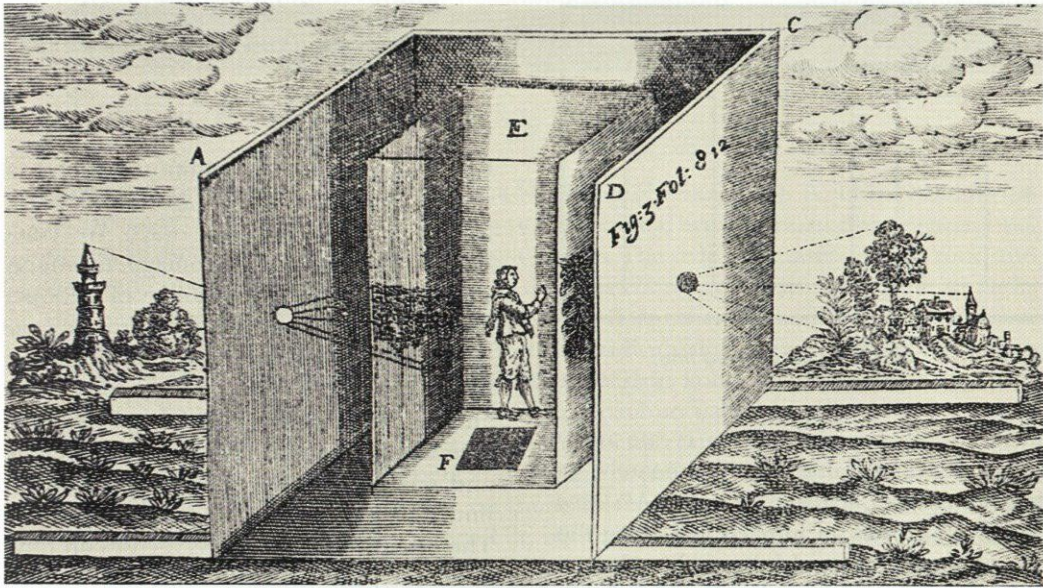


Figure 2.19 Camera obscura. Engraving.

Source: © Bettmann/CORBIS.

COMPOSITION

In this section, we move to the study of some technical elements of which works of art are *composed*. These characteristics may be found in all works of visual art and architecture, and they constitute the building blocks that artists manipulate. In this inclusive concept called “composition,” we will examine five “elements”: (1) line, (2) form, (3) color, (4) mass, and (5) texture—and four “principles”: (1) repetition, (2) balance, (3) unity, and (4) focal area.

Elements

Line

The basic building block of a visual design is line. To most of us, a line is a thin mark: _____. In two-dimensional art, line is defined by its three physical characteristics: (1) a linear form in which length dominates over width, (2) a color edge, and (3) an implication of continued direction. Line as a linear form in which length dominates

over width can be seen in Dürer’s woodcut (see Fig. 2.8) in which the entire composition consists of a buildup of simple lines. Second, as an edge, line defines the place where one object or plane stops and another begins. We see this clearly in *Salas de Lectura Baguette* (see Fig. 2.5).

The third characteristic, implication, appears in Figure 2.20. The three rectangles create a horizontal line that extends across the design. No physical line connects the tops of the forms, but their spatial arrangement creates one by implication. A similar use of line occurs in van Gogh’s *The Starry Night* (see Fig. 1.10), where we can see a definite linear movement from the upper left border through a series of swirls to the right border. Although composed not of a form edge or outline but of a carefully developed relationship of numerous color areas, the implied line emerges quite clearly. This characteristic of line also appears in Jackson Pollock’s *One (Number 31, 1950)* (see Fig. 2.21), although in a much more subtle and sophisticated way. Artists use

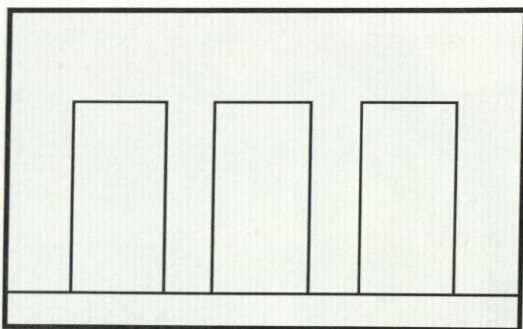


Figure 2.20 Outline and implied line.

line to control our vision, to create unity and emotional value, and ultimately to develop meaning. Raphael's *The Alba Madonna* (Fig. 2.22) creates an implied line along the eyes of Mary, Jesus, and John—a line that establishes one edge of a triangle which forms the compositional basis of the painting.

In pursuing those ends, and by employing the three aforementioned characteristics, artists find that line has one of two simple characteristics: curvedness or straightness. Whether expressed as a length-dominant, linear form, a color edge, or by implication, and whether simple or in combination, a line comprises a derivative of straightness or curvedness.

Some people speculate whether line can also be thick or thin. Certainly that quality helps to describe some works of art. Those who deny that quality, however, have a point difficult to refute in asking. If line can be thick or thin, at what point does it cease to be a line and become a form?

Form

Form relates closely to line in both definition and effect. Form comprises the *shape* of an object within the composition, and *shape* often is used as a synonym for form. Literally, form defines space described by line. A building is a form. So is a tree. We perceive them as buildings or trees, and we also perceive their individual details because of the line

that composes them; form cannot be separated from line in two-dimensional design.

Color

Color constitutes an additional aspect of the composition of an artwork. We can approach color in many ways. We could begin with color as electromagnetic energy; we could discuss the psychology of color perception; and/or we could approach color in terms of how artists use it. The first two provide extremely interesting possibilities, and the physics and psychology of color provide many potential crossovers between art and science and life. Nonetheless, we will limit our discussion to the last of these—use. The discussion that follows focuses on three color components: hue, value, and intensity.

Hue. Hue is a specific color with a measurable wavelength. The visible range of the color spectrum or range of colors we can actually distinguish extends from violet on one end to red on the other (Fig. 2.23). The traditional color spectrum consists of seven basic hues (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet). These are *primary* hues (red, blue, and yellow) and *secondary* hues that are direct derivatives of the primaries. In all (depending on which theory one follows) from ten to twenty-four perceivably different hues exist, including these seven.

Assuming, for the sake of clarity and illustration, twelve basic hues, we can arrange them in a series (Fig. 2.24) or turn them into a “color wheel” (Fig. 2.25). With this visualization, artists’ choices with regard to color become clearer. First, an artist can mix the primary hues of the spectrum two at a time in varying proportions, which creates the other hues of the spectrum. For example, red and yellow in equal proportions make orange, a *secondary* hue. Varying the proportions—adding more red or more yellow—makes yellow-orange or red-orange,

A Question of Style

Abstract Expressionism

Abstract expressionism (ab-STRAKT ehk-SPREH-shuhn-ihz-uhm). A mid-twentieth-century visual art movement characterized by nontraditional brushwork, nonrepresentational subject matter, and expressionist emotional values. The style originated in New York, and it spread rapidly throughout the world on the wings of modern mass communication. Its characteristics, as just noted, freed the artist to reflect inner life and led to the creation of works with high emotional intensity. Absolute individuality of expression and the freedom to pursue irrationality underlie this style. Jackson Pollock (PAH-luhk; 1912–1956; see Fig. 2.21) came upon his characteristic approach to painting only ten years before his death. Although he insisted that he had absolute control, his compositions consist of what appear to be simple dripping and spilling of paint onto huge canvases, which he placed on the floor in order to work on them. His work, often called “action painting,” conveys a sense of tremendous energy. The viewer seems to feel the painter’s motions as he applied the paint.

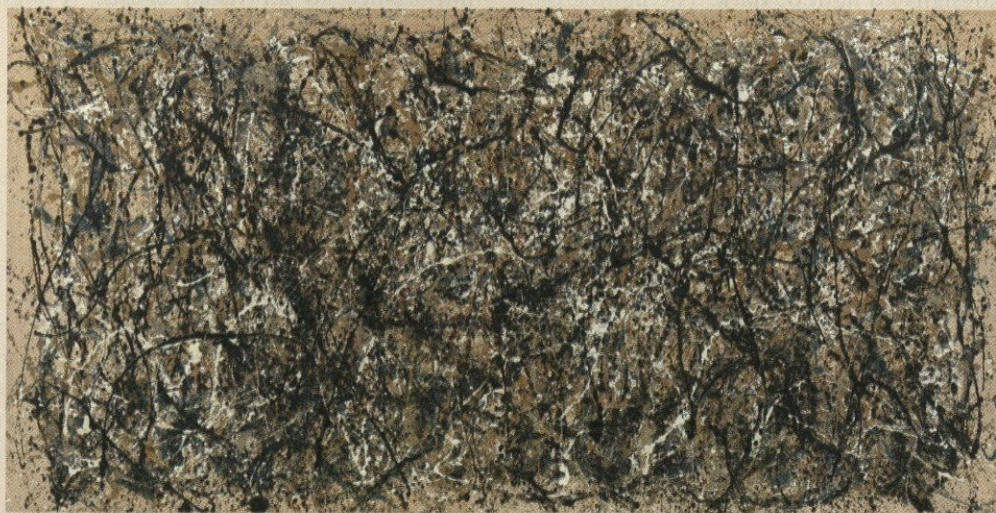


Figure 2.21 Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), *One (Number 31, 1950)*, 1950. Oil and enamel on unprimed canvas, 8' 10" × 17' 5½" (269.5 × 530.8 cm).

Source: Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. Art © 2013 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

A Question to Ask

In what ways does the artist utilize line in this work?

which are *tertiary* (TUHR-shee-air-ee) hues. Yellow and blue make green, and also blue-green and yellow-green. Red and blue make violet, blue-violet, and red-violet. Hues directly opposite each other on the color wheel constitute complementary colors. When mixed together in equal proportions, they produce gray.

Value. Value, sometimes called key, is the relationship of blacks to whites and grays. The range of possibilities from black to white forms the value scale (see Fig. 2.26), which has black at one end, white at the other, and medium gray in the middle. The perceivable tones between black and white are designated light or dark: The lighter, or

whiter, a color, the higher its value. Likewise, the darker a color, the lower its value. For example, light pink has high value while dark red has low value, even though they both have as their base the same primary red. Adding white to a hue (like primary red) creates a tint of that hue. Adding black creates a shade.

Some hues appear intrinsically brighter than others, a factor we will discuss momentarily, but the possibility of a brightness difference in the same color also exists. The brightness may involve a change in value, as just discussed—that is, a pink versus a grayed or dull red. Brightness may also involve surface reflectance, a factor of considerable importance to all visual artists. A highly



Figure 2.22 *Raphael, The Alba Madonna, c. 1510. Oil on panel transferred to canvas, overall (diameter): 37³/₁₆" (94.5 cm), framed: 55" × 53¹/₂" × 5¹/₂" (139.7 × 135.9 × 14 cm). Source: National Gallery of Art. Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.24*

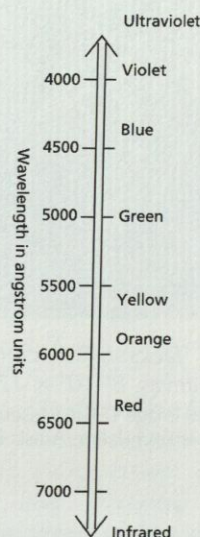


Figure 2.23 *Basic color spectrum.*

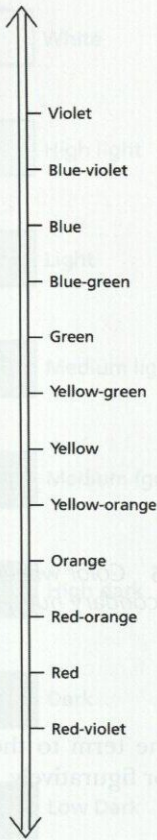


Figure 2.24 Color spectrum of the twelve basic hues.

reflective surface creates a brighter color (and therefore a different response from the viewer) than does a surface of lesser reflectance, all other factors being equal. This represents the difference between high-gloss, semigloss, and flat paints, for example. Probably surface reflectance represents

more a property of texture than of color. Nonetheless, the term *brilliance* is often used to describe not only surface gloss but also characteristics synonymous with value. As just mentioned, some hues are intrinsically darker than others. That situation describes the concept we discuss next: intensity.

Intensity. Intensity, sometimes called chroma and saturation, comprises the degree of purity of a hue. Every hue has its own value; that is, in its pure state, each hue falls somewhere on the value scale, as in Figure 2.27. The color wheel (see Fig. 2.25) illustrates how movement around the wheel can create a change in hue. Movement across the wheel also alters intensity, for example, by adding green to red. When, as in this case, hues reside directly opposite each other on the color wheel, mixing them grays the original hue. Therefore, because graying a hue constitutes a value change, the terms *intensity* and *value* are occasionally used interchangeably. Some sources use the terms independently but state that changing a hue's value automatically changes its intensity. Graying a hue by using its complement differs from graying a hue by adding black (or gray derived from black and white). Gray derived from complementaries, because it has hue, creates a far livelier color than a gray derived from black and white, which does not have hue. The composite, or overall, use of color by an artist constitutes *palette*. An artist's palette can be broad, restricted, or somewhere in between, depending on whether the artist has utilized the full range of the color spectrum and/or

A Question to Ask

Has the artist used a broad or limited palette? How has that affected the composition of the work and my response?

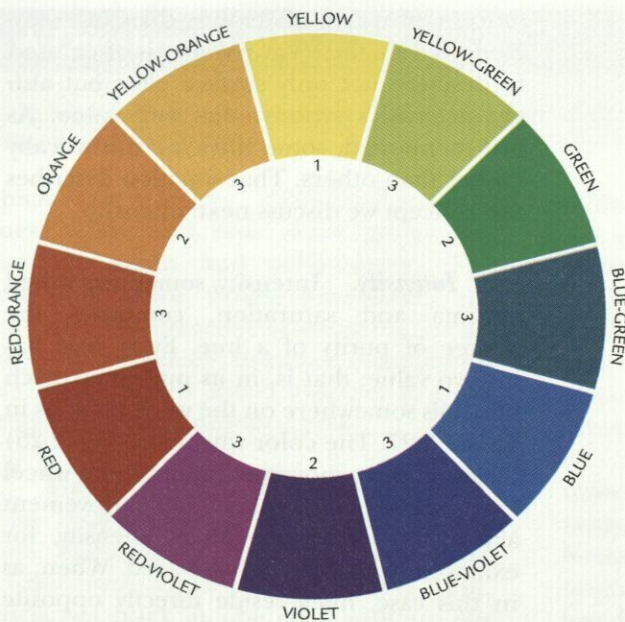


Figure 2.25 Color wheel. 1-primary hues; 2-secondary hues; 3-tertiary hues.

whether he or she explores the full range of *tonalities*—brights and dulls, lights and darks.

Mass (Space)

Only three-dimensional objects have mass—that is, take up space and have density. However, two-dimensional objects give the illusion of mass, *relative* only to the other objects in the picture.

Texture

The texture of a picture is its apparent roughness or smoothness. Texture ranges from the smoothness of a glossy photo to the three-dimensionality of *impasto*, a painting technique with pigment applied thickly with a palette knife to raise areas from the canvas. The texture of a picture resides anywhere within these two extremes. Texture may be illusory in that the surface of a picture may be absolutely flat but the image gives the impression of three-dimensionality. Therefore,

we can apply the term to the pictorial arts either literally or figuratively.

Principles

Repetition

Probably the essence of any design is repetition: how the basic elements in the picture repeat or alternate. In discussing repetition, let's consider three terms: *rhythm*, *harmony*, and *variation*.

Rhythm. Rhythm is the recurrence of elements in a composition. In other words, rhythm is the repetition of lines, shapes, and objects in a picture. If the repeated elements, like the ribs in the forms in Los Carpinteros' *Salas de Lectura Baguette* (see Fig. 2.5) have the same size or importance, then we call their rhythm "regular." If the repeated elements, like the various shapes in the painting by Australian Aboriginal artist Tjapangarti, Wimmitji (Fig. 2.28), have

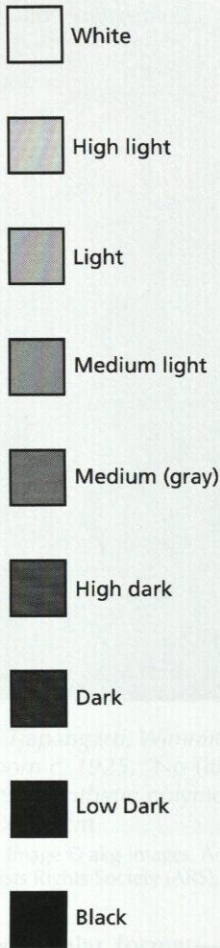


Figure 2.26 Value scale.

differing size and/or importance, then we call their rhythm "irregular."

Harmony. Harmony is the logic of the repetition. Harmonious relationships employ components that appear to join naturally and comfortably as in Zhu Da's (Bada Shanren) *Lotus* (see Fig. 2.3). If an artist employs forms, colors, or other elements that appear incongruous, illogical, or out of sync, then we would use a musical term and say the resulting picture has dissonance; its constituents simply do not go together in the way our cultural conditioning would describe

as natural. We do need to understand here, nevertheless, that ideas and ideals relative to harmonious relationships in color or other elements often reflect cultural conditioning or arbitrary understandings (conventions).

Variation. Variation is the relationship of repeated items to each other, like theme and variation in music. How does an artist take a basic element in the composition and use it again with slight or major changes? In Figure 2.28, Tjapangarti, Wimmitji has taken geometric forms and created a complex painting via repetition. Variation occurs in the colors and differences in size given to these shapes.

Balance

The concept of balance employs certain innate judgments. Looking at a composition, we almost intuitively understand if it does or does not appear balanced. Most individuals have this sense. Determining *how* artists achieve balance in their pictures forms an important aspect of our own response to pictures.

Symmetry. The most mechanical method of achieving balance employs *symmetry*, or, specifically, bilateral symmetry, the balancing of like forms, mass, and colors on opposite sides of the vertical axis of a picture. Symmetry has measurable precision. Works employing absolute symmetry tend to be stable, solid, and without much sense of motion. Many works approach symmetry, but retreat from placing mirror images on opposite sides of the centerline, as do Figures 2.29 and 2.30, both of which are symmetrical.

Asymmetry. *Asymmetrical balance*, sometimes referred to as psychological balance, results from careful placement of unlike items, as in Julie Roberts's *Ann and Margo Frank* (Fig. 2.31). Every painting illustrated in this chapter uses asymmetry.

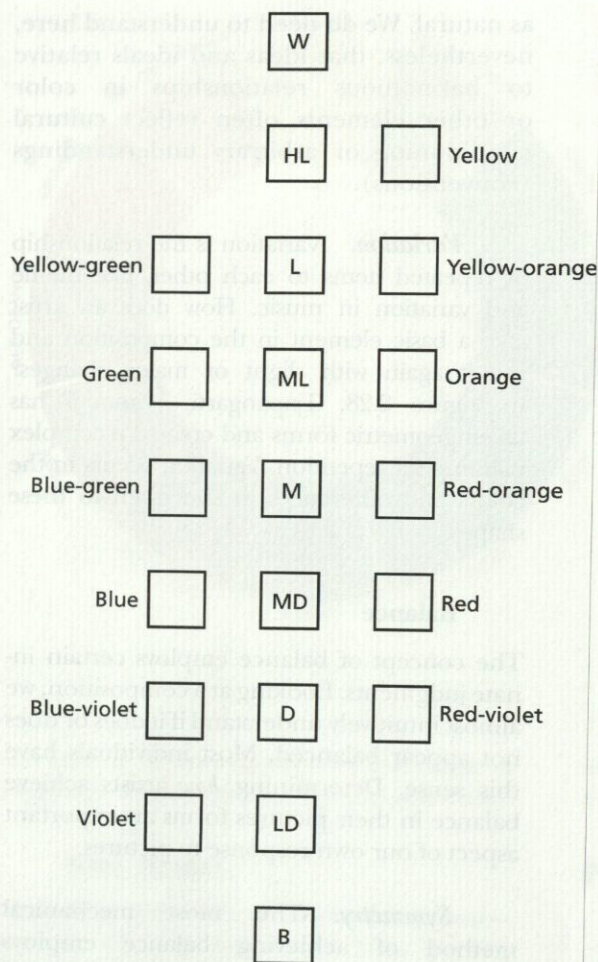


Figure 2.27 Color-value equivalents.

Often color balances line and form. Because some hues, such as yellow, have great eye attraction, they can balance tremendous mass and activity on one side of a painting, by being placed on the other side.

Unity

With a few exceptions, we can say that artists strive for a sense of self-contained completeness in their artworks. Thus, an important characteristic in a work of art constitutes the means by which *unity* is achieved. All the elements of composition work together toward meaning. Often artists juxtapose

compositional elements in unusual or uncouth fashion to achieve a particular effect. Nonetheless, that effect usually comprises a conscious attempt at maintaining or completing a unified statement—that is, a total picture. Critical analysis of the elements of a painting should lead us to a judgment about whether the total statement comprises a unified one.

With regard to unity, we also must consider whether or not the artist allows the composition to *escape the frame*. People occasionally speak of *closed composition*, or composition in which use of line and form always directs the eye into the painting, such



Figure 2.28 Tjapangarti, Wimmitji (Australian Aborigine), born c. 1925, "No Title" (Artist's Country), 1990. Synthetic polymer paints on canvas, 119 × 85 cm.

Source: Digital Image © akg-images. Art © Wimmitji Tjapangarti/Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

as Raphael's circular format—or *tondo* (see Fig. 2.22), as unified, and *open composition*, in which the eye is led or allowed to wander off the canvas, or *escape the frame* as in the Rubens (see Fig. 2.34), as disunified. Such is not the case. Keeping the artwork within the frame is a stylistic device that has an important bearing on the artwork's meaning. For example, painting in the classical style stays within the frame. This illustrates a concern for the self-containment of the artwork and for precise structuring. Anticlassical design, in contrast, often forces the eye to escape the frame, suggesting perhaps a universe outside or the individual's place within an overwhelming cosmos. Therefore, unity can be achieved by keeping the

composition closed, but it is not necessarily lacking when the opposite state exists.

Focal Area

When we look at a picture for the first time, our eye moves around it, pausing briefly at those areas that seem of greatest visual appeal. These are *focal areas*. A painting may have a dominant focal area, such as the blazing ship in Figure 2.12 which draws our eye immediately and from which it will stray only with conscious effort. Or it may have a number of seemingly equal focal points such as the aboriginal painting in Figure 2.28. We might describe a picture of the latter type as "busy": The eye bounces at will from one point to another on the picture, without wanting to rest on a single point.

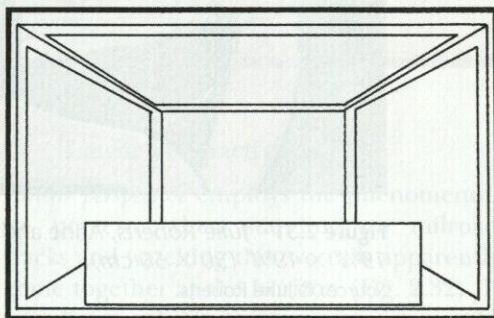


Figure 2.29 Closed composition (composition kept within the frame).

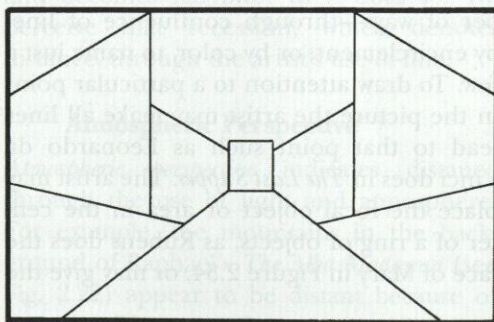


Figure 2.30 Open composition (composition allowed to escape the frame).

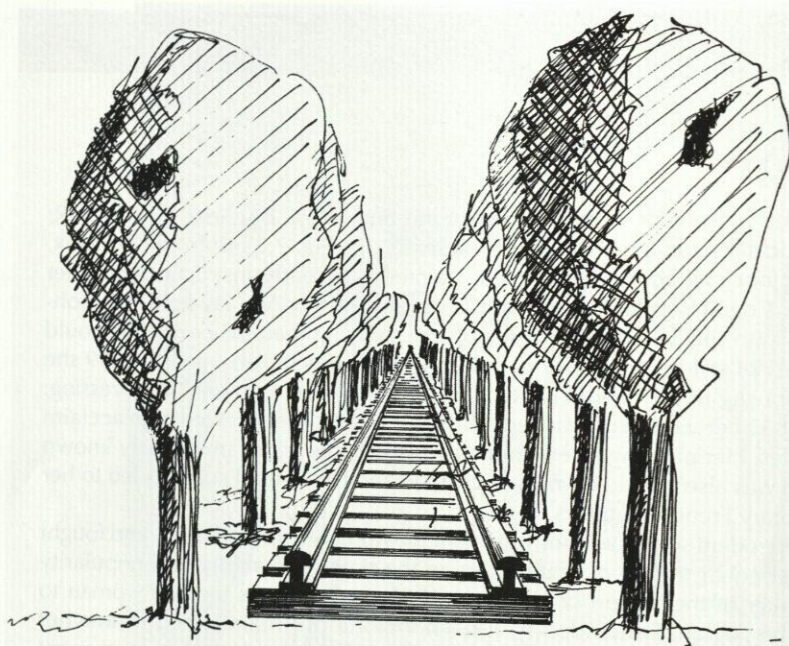


Figure 2.32 Linear perspective.

Shifting Perspective

Shifting perspective appears especially in Chinese landscapes and results from additional factors of culture and convention. The painting by Ma Yuan (1140–1230) *Dancing and Singing—Peasants Returning from Work* (Fig. 2.33), divides the picture into two basic units—foreground and background. The foreground of the painting consists of details reaching back toward the middle ground. At that point a division occurs, so that the background and the foreground stay separate because of an openness in what might have been a deep middle ground. The foreground represents the nearby, and its rich detail causes us to pause and ponder on numerous elements, including the artist's use of brush stroke in creating foliage, rocks, and water. Then, a break appears, and the background looms up, suspended—almost as if a separate entity. Although the foreground gives us a sense of dimension—of

space receding from the front plane of the painting—the background appears flat, a factor that serves to enhance further the sense of height in the mountains. The apparent shift in perspective, however, results from the concept that truth to natural appearance should not occur at the expense of a pictorial examination of how nature works. The painting invites the viewer to enter its spaces and examine them, but not to take a panoramic view from a single position. Rather, the artist reveals each part as though the viewer were walking through the landscape. Shifting perspective allows for a personal journey and for a strong personal, spiritual impact.

Content

We can regard treatment of content as ranging from naturalism to stylization. This includes such concepts as abstract, representational,

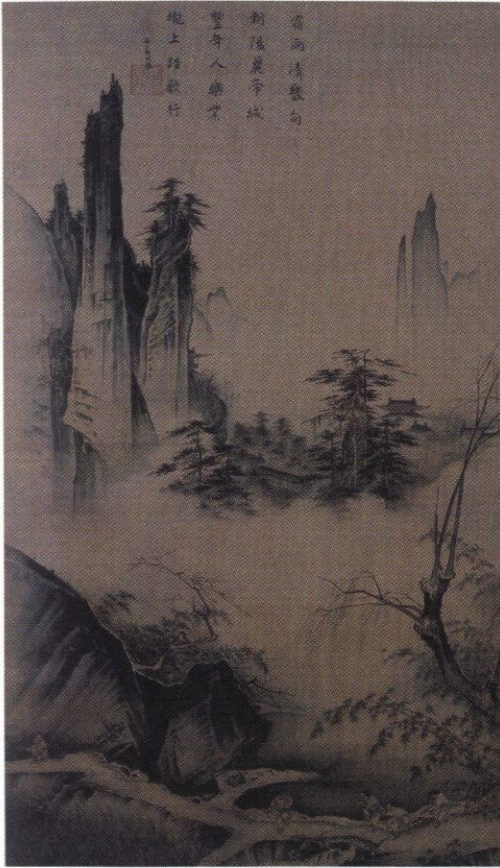


Figure 2.33 *Shifting perspective on picture scroll.* Ma Yuan (1140–1230), *Dancing and Singing—Peasants Returning from Work*, Chinese, Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279). Ink and color on silk, 192.5 × 111 cm.
Source: R. u. S. Michaud / akg-images.

and nonobjective (see Glossary). Arguably, all works of art seek verisimilitude (vair-ih-sih-MIHL-ih-tood), which comes from the Latin, *verisimilitudo*, and it means “plausibility.” Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, insisted that art should reflect nature—for example, even highly idealized representations should possess recognizable qualities and that what is probable should take precedence over what is merely possible. This has come to mean in art that the search for a portrayal of truth can sometimes mean a distortion

of what we observe around us in favor of an image that, while perhaps not lifelike, better speaks to the underlying truth of human existence than mere lifelikeness does. So, the verisimilar, whether lifelike or not, constitutes the acceptable or convincing according to the respondent’s own experience or knowledge. In some cases, this means enticing the respondent into suspending disbelief and accepting improbability within the framework of the work of art.

Chiaroscuro

Chiaroscuro (sometimes called *modeling*; in Italian “light and shade”) is the device used by artists to make their forms appear *plastic* or three-dimensional. The problem of making two-dimensional objects appear three-dimensional rests heavily on an artist’s ability to render highlight and shadow effectively. Without them all forms are two dimensional in appearance.

Use of chiaroscuro gives a picture much of its character. For example, the dynamic and dramatic treatment of light and shade in Rubens’s *The Assumption of the Virgin* (Fig. 2.34) gives this painting a quality quite different from what would have resulted had the artist chosen to give full, flat, front light to the figures. The highlights, falling as they do, create dramatic effects.

In contrast, works that do not employ chiaroscuro have a two-dimensional quality such as in Julie Roberts’s *Ann and Margo Frank* (see Fig. 2.31).

HOW DOES IT STIMULATE THE SENSES?

We do not touch pictures, and so we cannot feel their roughness or their smoothness, their coolness or their warmth. We cannot hear pictures, and we cannot smell them. So, when we conclude that a picture affects our senses in a particular way, we are responding

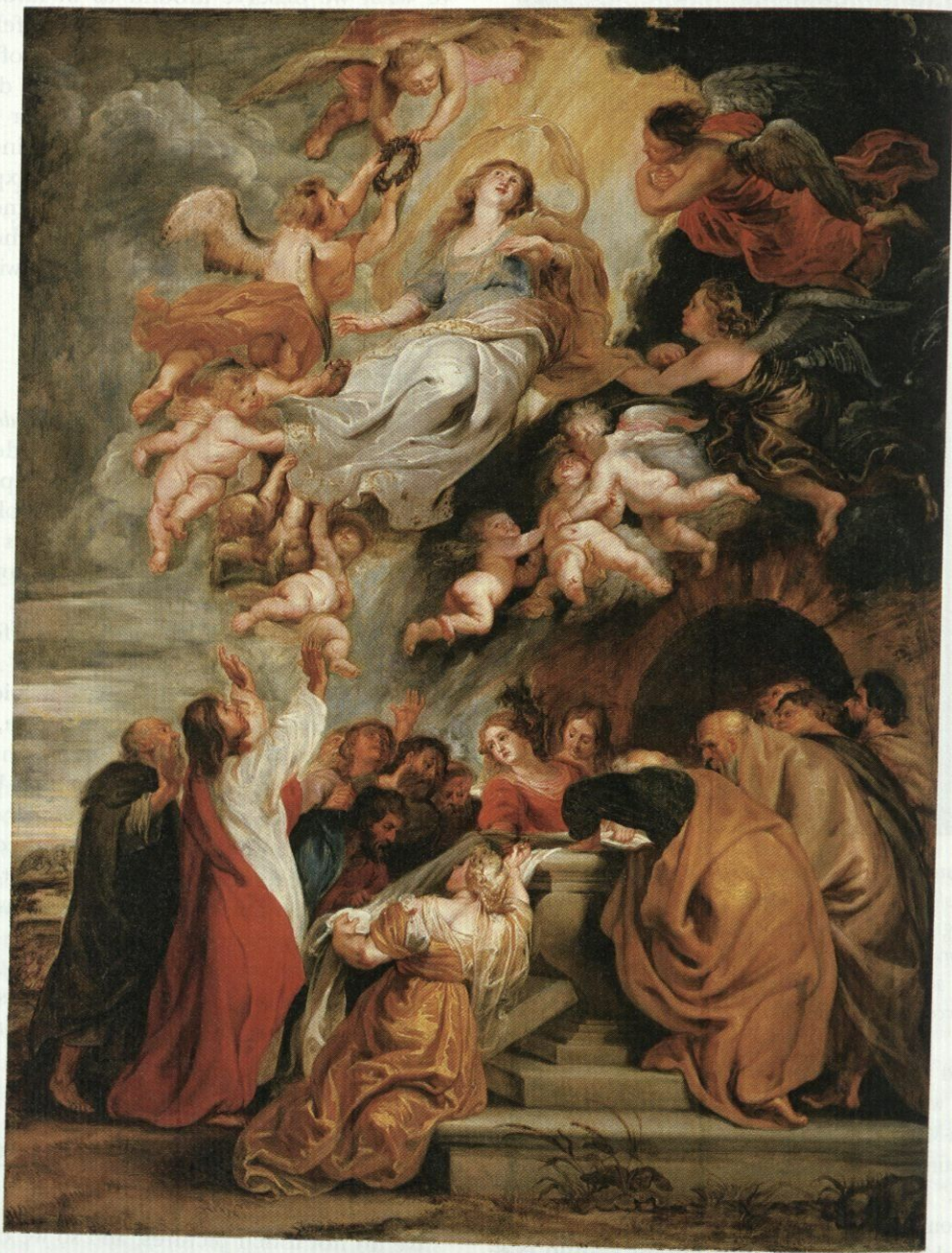


Figure 2.34 Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577–1640), *The Assumption of the Virgin*, c. 1626. Oil on panel, $49\frac{3}{8}" \times 37\frac{1}{8}"$ (125×94 cm); framed: $62" \times 49\frac{1}{2}" \times 3\frac{1}{4}"$ ($157 \times 125.5 \times 8$ cm).

Source: Image Courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection.

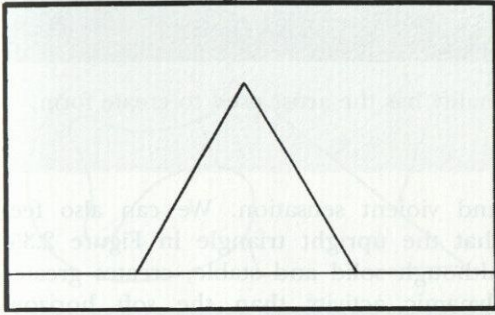


Figure 2.35 Upright-triangular composition.

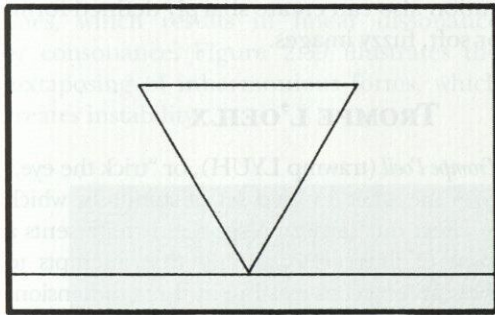


Figure 2.36 Inverted-triangular composition.

in terms of visual stimuli transposed into mental images of touch, taste, sound, and so forth.

CONTRASTS

We refer to the colors of an artist's palette as warm or cool depending on which end of the color spectrum they fall. Reds, oranges, and yellows comprise warm colors: the colors of the sun, which call to mind our primary source of heat. So they carry strong implications of warmth. Colors falling on the opposite end of the spectrum—blues and greens—are cool colors because they imply shade, or lack of light and warmth. As we will notice frequently, this constitutes a mental stimulation that has a physical basis. Tonality and color contrast also affect our senses.

The stark value contrasts of Picasso's *Guernica* (see Fig. 1.9) contribute significantly to the harsh and dynamic qualities of the work. The colorlessness of this monochromatic black, white, and gray work completes its horrifying comment on the tragic bombing of the Spanish city of Guernica. In the opposite vein, the soft, yet dramatic, tonal contrasts of *Dancing and Singing—Peasants Returning from Work* (see Fig. 2.33) bring us a completely different set of stimuli.

Many of the sense-affecting stimuli work in concert. We already have noted some of the effects of chiaroscuro, but one more will serve well. One of the most interesting effects to observe in a picture is the treatment of flesh. Some flesh appears cold and harsh like stone. Other flesh appears soft and true to life. We respond tactilely to whatever treatment has been given—we want to touch, or we believe we know what we would feel if we touched. Chiaroscuro affects essentially how an artist achieves those effects. Harsh shadows and strong contrasts create one set of responses; diffused shadows and subdued contrasts create another. Rubens's *The Assumption of the Virgin* (see Fig. 2.34) presents us with softly modeled flesh whose warmth and softness come from color and chiaroscuro. Highlight and shadow function to create softness, and predominantly red hues warm the composition; our sensual response is heightened dramatically.

DYNAMICS

Although pictures do not contain motion, they can effectively stimulate a sense of movement and activity. They also can create a sense of stable solidity. An artist stimulates these sensations by using certain conventional devices. Principally vertical composition can express, for example, a sense of dignity and grandeur (see *Dancing and Singing—Peasants Returning from Work*, Fig. 2.33). A horizontal picture can elicit a sense of stability and placidity. The triangle constitutes a most interesting form in

A Question to Ask

What degree of chiaroscuro or three-dimensionality has the artist used to create form, and what effect does that have on my response?

engineering because of its structural qualities. It has artistic interest because of its psychological qualities. If we place a triangle so its base forms the bottom of a picture, we create a definite sense of solidarity and immovability (Fig. 2.35). If that triangle were a pyramid sitting on a level plane, it would take a great deal of effort to tip it over. Or, as in the case of *The Alba Madonna* (see Fig. 2.22), we could anchor a circle to keep it from appearing to roll. If we invert the triangle so it balances on its apex, a sensation of extreme instability results (Fig. 2.36). Although we can feel clearly the sensations stimulated by these rather simple geometric forms, we should not conclude that geometric forms used as compositional positional devices are either explicit or limited in communication. Non-verbal communication in the arts is not that simple. Nonetheless, the basic compositional devices do influence our response and impact on our perceptions.

The use of line also affects sense response. Figure 2.37 illustrates how this use of curved line can elicit a sense of relaxation. The broken line in Figure 2.38, in contrast, creates a more dynamic

and violent sensation. We can also feel that the upright triangle in Figure 2.35, although solid and stable, creates greater dynamic activity than the soft horizontals of Figure 2.37 because it uses stronger diagonal line, which tends to stimulate a sense of movement. Precision of linear execution also can create sharply defined forms or soft, fuzzy images.

TROMPE L'OEILX

Trompe l'oeil (trawmp LYUH), or “trick the eye,” gives the artist a varied set of stimuli by which to affect our sensory response. It represents a form of illusionist painting that attempts to show an object as existing in three dimensions at the surface of a painting, accounting also for the point of view of the observer; for example, Masaccio’s *Holy Trinity with the Virgin, Saint John the Evangelist, and Donors* (<http://www.abcgallery.com/M/masaccio/masaccio5.html>).

JUXTAPOSITION

We can also receive sense stimuli from the results of juxtaposing curved and straight

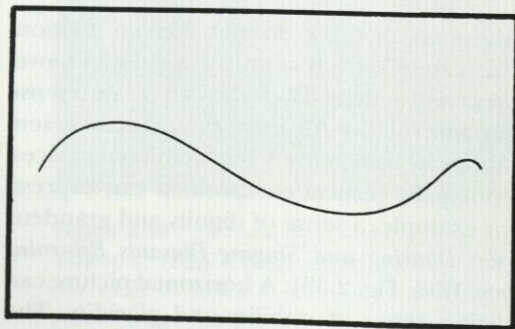


Figure 2.37 Curved line.

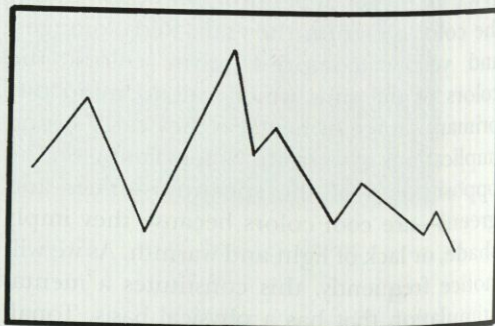


Figure 2.38 Broken line.

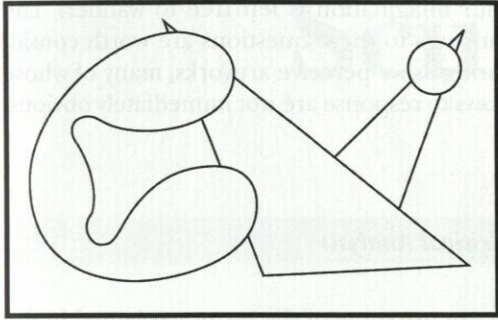


Figure 2.39 *Juxtaposition.*

lines, which results in linear dissonance or consonance. Figure 2.39 illustrates the juxtaposing of inharmonious forms, which creates instability.

CONTENT

Content, which involves any or all of the characteristics we have discussed, gives an artist a powerful device for effecting both sensory responses and more intense, subjective responses. Lifelikeness or nonobjectivity can stimulate individuals, and it would seem logical for individuals to respond intellectually to nonobjective pictures because the subject matter should be neutral, with no inherent expressive stimuli. However, the opposite tends to occur. When asked whether they feel more comfortable with the treatment of subject matter in Anne Vallayer-Coster's *Still Life with Lobster* (Fig. 2.40) or Jackson Pollock's *One* (see Fig. 2.21), most individuals choose the former.



Figure 2.40 Anne Vallayer-Coster, *Still Life with Lobster*, 1781. Oil on canvas, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ " $\times$ 35 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (70.5 $\times$ 89.5 cm).

Source: Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio. Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1968.1A.

Does an explicit appeal cause a more profound response? Or does the stimulation provided by the unfamiliar cause us to think more deeply and respond more fully because

our imagination is left free to wander? The answers to these questions are worth considering as we perceive artworks, many of whose keys to response are not immediately obvious.

Sample Outline and Critical Analysis

The following very brief example illustrates how we can use some of the terms explained in the chapter to form an outline and then develop a critical analysis of a work of art. Here is how that might work regarding Peter Paul Rubens's painting *The Assumption of the Virgin* (see Fig. 2.34).

Outline	Critical Analysis
Subject matter and medium	Rubens's painting <i>The Assumption of the Virgin</i> depicts a Christian religious event in which the Virgin Mary is taken directly to heaven without dying. The painting is done in oil painted on a wooden panel. This is a contrast to oil painting done on canvas. The artist's treatment of his subject matter reflects a high degree of lifelikeness. The people look like real people, flesh looks like real the flesh, the fabrics drape like real fabrics, and the lighting that creates highlight and shadow appears to come from a single source and creates a sense of reality in the work.
Composition Line Shape	The painting is composed so that it seems to have two distinct parts separated by a strong, implied line running on the diagonal from lower left to upper right. The line created by color edges, while shaded naturally, seems to predominate in strongly contrasted transitions from one color area to the next. In addition, the artist has created an intense activity in the painting by using curved lines that make shapes within shapes appear to swirl around. Therefore, the shapes in the painting all seem rounded.
Color	Rubens's use of color stays predominantly on the warm end of the spectrum, with flesh tones, reds, and golds in the majority and contrasting with whites. A few neutral grays and a very limited amount of cool hues make the figures stand out.
Focal areas	The primary focal point of the painting is the Virgin Mary in the top center of the composition. The eye is drawn to her mostly because of the use of encirclement and directional line. Her clothing is far richer and more detailed than the other figures, and that helps give her focus and stature.
Balance deep space and perspective	Rubens uses asymmetrical balance, and although there is linear perspective in the steps, the painting seems to stay on the surface plane, with little concern for deep space.