

# Elements of Art

**Line** is a mark with greater length than width. Lines are used to define shapes, contours, and outlines, and also may suggest mass and volume. A line may be a continuous mark made on a surface with a pointed tool or implied by the edges of shapes and forms. Lines can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal, straight or curved, thick or thin.



**Shape** is a closed line. Shapes can be geometric, like squares and circles; or organic, free formed, natural shapes. Shapes are two-dimensional with height and width but no depth.



**Forms** are three-dimensional shapes, expressing length, width, and depth. Spheres, cylinders, boxes and pyramids are geometric forms.



**Space** is the area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called *negative space*. Space can also refer to a sense of depth. Real depth is three-dimensional; the illusion of depth can be achieved by using *linear perspective*, *atmospheric perspective* (objects near the horizon line are lighter with similar color and tone as the sky), *position* (placing an object higher on the page makes it appear farther back than objects placed lower on the page), *overlapping* (when an object overlaps another object it appears closer to the viewer, and the object behind the object appears farther away), *size variation* (smaller objects look farther away in the distance), or *color variation* (bright colors look like they are closer and neutral colors look like they are farther away).



**Color** is light reflected off objects. Color has three main characteristics: *hue* or its name (red, green, blue, etc.), *value* (the amount of white tint or black shade mixed with a color), and *intensity* (how bright or dull it is). Color wheels are used to organize color. Wheels are made up of *primary* colors (red, yellow, blue) *secondary* colors created by mixing 2 primary colors (violet, orange, green) and *intermediate* colors created by mixing analogous primary and secondary colors. An artist might organize a color scheme by using *complimentary*, *analogous*, *triadic*, *warm*, or *cool* color combinations. A work is *monochromatic* when one color is used throughout, perhaps in different ways.

**Value** is the range of lightness and darkness within a picture. Value is created by a light source that shines on an object creating highlights and shadows. Value creates depth within a picture making an object look three dimensional. With *chiaroscuro* (light & dark), artists use highlights, lights, shadows, reflected light, and cast shadows.



**Texture** is the surface quality that can be seen or felt. Textures can be rough or smooth, soft or hard, silky or prickly, etc. Real texture is the actual texture of an object; *visual texture* is where a two-dimensional piece of art is made to look like a certain texture but remains a smooth piece of paper; for instance, a drawing of a tree trunk may look rough with cross hatched lines, shading and value contrasts, and jagged edges.

# Principles of Design

**Balance** is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, textures, lines, values, and spaces. Balancing elements makes a design feel stable. In *symmetrical balance*, the elements used on one side of the design are very similar to those on the other side; in *asymmetrical balance*, the sides are different but complimentary (one large object might balance with several small objects). A triangular composition is a classic form of asymmetrical balance with three primary objects or areas of interest. In *radial balance*, the elements are arranged around a central point and may be similar (for instance, a flower, a snowflake, or a target has radial balance).



**Emphasis** is the part of the design that catches the viewer's attention, also called center of interest or focal point. Usually the artist will make one area stand out by contrasting it with other areas. The area may be different in size, color, texture, shape, value, etc. Viewers are naturally drawn to depictions of human and animal faces in a work of art, and these areas may or may not be emphasized.



**Movement** is the path the viewer's eye takes through the artwork often to areas of emphasis. Such movement can be directed along linear edges, flowing shapes or analogous colors within the artwork.



**Rhythm** is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of regular or irregular movement. A regular rhythm occurs when the intervals between the elements, and often the elements themselves, are similar in size or length. Variety keeps rhythm exciting and active, and entices the viewer's eyes around the artwork. Rhythm may create a gentle feeling or exuberant mood like music or dance. Rhythm can establish pattern or suggest texture. Pattern is the regular repetition of the same object or symbol all over the artwork or an area of the work.



**Unity** is the feeling of harmony between all parts of the artwork creating a sense of completeness. The repetition of similar elements of art may create unity within the artwork.



**Contrast** is the dramatic effect created by opposites: dark and light, bright and dull, large and small, focused and blurry, busy and static, smooth and rough, etc.

**Proportion** refers to how parts (sizes, amounts, or number) relate with each other. Proportion is the comparison of dimensions or distribution of forms. It is the relationship in scale between one element and another, or between a whole object and one of its parts. Differing proportions within a composition can relate to different kinds of balance or symmetry, and can help establish visual weight and depth. Proportion can be natural and balanced, or exaggerated and distorted.



**Variety** is the use of diverse elements of art to hold the viewer's attention and to guide the viewer's eye through the artwork.

