

Unit 3

The Visual Elements

What are visual elements? Visual elements are the elements that we perceive and respond to when we look at a work's form.

The Eight Visual Elements

- .Line
- .Shape
- .Mass
- .Light
- .Color
- .Texture
- .Space
- .Time and Motion

Line

The purpose of line in art is two-fold:

- .To record the boundaries of form
- .To convey direction and motion.

Types of Line

Lines may be actual or implied. Actual lines include:

Contour Lines: lines used to record the boundaries of form: outlines

Lines formed by Edges: For example, when the edge of an object's contrasts sharply with its background

Linear Forms: Any object that conveys a sense of line, such as an outstretched arm, a light pole, or a tree branch.

Implied lines include:

Broken or Dotted Lines: for example, a row of people waiting in line or a row of plants in a field

Line of Sight: the line created for the viewer to follow when a person (or animal) in a work of art looks or points in a particular direction

Shape

A shape is a two-dimensional form that occupies an area with identifiable boundaries. Shapes fall into two general categories, **organic** and **geometric**, and may be **actual** shapes or **implied** shapes.

When looking at a piece of art, a **figure** is the shape we detach and focus on and the **ground** is the surrounding area. The figure is called the **positive shape** and the ground is called the **negative shape**.

Mass

A mass is a three dimensional form that occupies a volume of space. Actual mass exists in architecture and sculpture. Two-dimensional works may have implied mass, created by an implied light source, which brings us to our next element.

Light

When analyzing a two-dimensional work of art, implied mass and light are often described together. In the real world, light serves to reveal the world around us and help us understand forms and spatial relationships. Light and shadow **model** an object—give it a three-dimensional appearance. The range of lights and darks are referred to as **values**. During the Italian Renaissance, painters learned how to model mass in two dimensions through value, a technique called **chiaroscuro**, literally light-dark.

Color

Color is a function of light. Without light there is no color. No object possesses color in and of itself. White light is made of color, a fact proven by Sir Isaac Newton in 1666. Newton passed white light through a prism and refracted it into the colors of the rainbow. He then recombined the colors by passing them through a second prism. When we look at an object, a red apple for example, the color we see is the red light waves of the spectrum bouncing off the apple. All of the other colors are absorbed.

The color wheel is a circular arrangement of the spectral colors that allows us to see their relationship to each other.

- **Primary Colors:** red, blue and yellow, are called primary because theoretically they cannot be made by a mixture of other colors.
- **Secondary Colors:** Orange, green, and violet, are each made by mixing two of the primary colors.
- **Tertiary Colors:** Are the product of a primary and an adjacent secondary color.

Color Properties

All colors have three properties, **hue**, value, and **intensity**.

- **Hue:** the name of the color according to the categories of the color wheel
- **Value:** the relative lightness or darkness of the color. A color lighter than the hue's normal value is a tint; a color darker than the hue's normal value is a shade,
- **Intensity:** refers to the relative purity of a color. It is also called chroma or saturation. To lower a color's intensity, an artist may add a little gray, or add the color's complement, or opposite on the color wheel.

Color Harmonies

A color harmony, also called a color scheme, is the selective use of two or more colors in a single composition. There are several types:

- **Monochromatic**
- **Complementary**
- **Analogous**
- **Triadic**

Monochromatic harmonies are composed of a color, its tints and shades, and varying levels of intensity.

Complementary harmonies involve colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel.

Analogous harmonies combine colors adjacent to each other on the color wheel.

Triadic harmonies are composed of any three colors equidistant from each other on the color wheel.

Although an artist may choose a specific color harmony for a painting, it is more likely that he or she will speak of working with a **restricted palette**-a limited number of colors, or an **open palette**.

Texture

Texture may be actual, as found in the materials of architecture and sculpture or it may be visual texture, an illusion created by the painter's skill. Naturalistic paintings can reproduce the appearance of various textures in the same way that photography does. Visual texture is also present in the way brushstrokes are handled: rough, loose, smooth or dappled.

Space

Sculpture, architecture, and anything with actual mass exists in three-dimensional space. Architecture is as much about enclosing and shaping space as it is about building a structure.

Two-dimensional art must create implied space on its flat surface, called the **picture plane**. Two simple ways of doing this are to overlap shapes, and to place objects that are closer to the viewer lower in the picture plane.

Space--Linear Perspective

Just as artists of the Italian Renaissance developed the technique of chiaroscuro for modeling rounded forms, they also invented an optically convincing method of creating the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface. This method is called **linear perspective**.

Linear perspective is based on two principles:

- Forms seem to diminish in size as they recede from us.
- Parallel lines receding into the distance seem to converge, until they meet at a point on the horizon where they disappear. This point is called the vanishing point.

Foreshortening

Foreshortening is the visual phenomenon whereby an elongated object projecting toward or away from a viewer appears shorter than its actual length, as though compressed and, in two-dimensional art, the portrayal of this effect.

Atmospheric Perspective

Atmospheric perspective, like linear perspective and chiaroscuro, is a technique developed in the Renaissance for rendering optically convincing images. Atmospheric perspective is based on the observation that objects seen outside appear paler, bluer, and less distinct the further away they are.

Isometric Perspective

In isometric perspective parallel lines don't converge as they recede into the distance (as in linear perspective) but remain parallel. This system is used in Chinese painting, where the viewpoint is mobile and airborne.

Time and Motion

Treated as a single element, time and motion are related in that motion exists in the context of time. Artists use time and motion in a variety of ways: capturing a specific time of day through the use of light, conveying motion through the appearance of blurred movements, and creating sculpture that actually moves, called **kinetic** sculpture.