

# Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

## Elements of Art and Principles of Design

The elements of art and the principles of design are the basic tools of the artist. They can be identified individually, but they do inter-relate and should be considered together. Together they create composition. A good resource for understanding these can be found at: <http://www.artsconnected.org/toolkit/index.html>

### ELEMENTS OF ART

#### LINE

- Line is the path of a moving point. Defines shapes and can change in many ways.

#### SHAPE/FORM

- A shape is any two-dimensional area.
- A form has three dimensions and implies volume or mass and can be viewed from all sides.

#### SPACE

- Physical space – 3-dimensional
- 2-dimensional space – of the picture plane
- Positive space – occupied space in a composition
- Negative space – unoccupied space in a composition

#### VALUE

- Value is the relative lightness or darkness; creates the illusion of depth and form

#### TEXTURE

- Texture is the surface quality of an object. May be actual (tactile – we can touch it) or perceived (visual – we can see or imagine it)

#### COLOR

- Color or hue of an object is the character of surface created by the response of vision to the wavelength of light reflected from the object. The wavelengths of the light reflected are determined by the pigmentation of the surface, which absorbs some color waves and reflects others.
- Primary colors: red, yellow, blue
- Secondary: orange, violet, green
- Tertiary (intermediate): red-orange, yellow-orange, red-violet, blue-violet, blue-green, yellow-green
- Complementary: opposites on the color wheel
- Analogous: neighboring colors on the color wheel.
- Monochromatic: variations on a single color

OVER

## PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

### UNITY

- Unity is achieved when the parts of an art object fit together into a unified whole around the center of interest: harmony; discord.

### RHYTHM

- Rhythm is the flow of a composition.

### REPETITION

- Repetition is a process of emphasizing visual units in a regular or irregular pattern.

### VARIATION

- Variation indicates a change in the elements of composition.

### DIRECTION/MOVEMENT

- Direction encourages eye movement through a composition through a course or line which elements follow. Movement is indicated by eye travel through the visual paths of composition.

### EMPHASIS/FOCAL POINT

- Emphasis is synonymous with center of interest – the controlling part of parts of an artwork. It is the center of interest of a composition, almost never in the center.

### CONTRAST

- Contrast is achieved through the comparison of dissimilar elements, sometimes used together, in a work of art.

### BALANCE

- Balance is the relationship of all parts of a work of art leading to equilibrium.
- Formal balance is identical or symmetrical arrangement.
- Informal balance is unlike or asymmetrical arrangement.
- Radial balance is arranged from a central point.

### PROPORTION

- Proportion deals with the ratio of size, position, and space relationships in a composition.

### HARMONY

- Harmony is a pleasing arrangement of the elements to form a consistent and unified whole. It can be achieved using a combination of the principles of design.