

## 4 Ways to Create the Illusion of Figures in Motion

### 1. Anticipated Motion

Much of implication of movement in art is caused by our memory. We recognize temporary, unstable body positions and realize that change is imminent. We can “see” the action in poses that we recognize as momentary, and thus we anticipate motion. In a process called kinesthetic empathy, we react unconsciously in our own bodies to the actions we see. We simultaneously stretch, push, or lean, though we’re only watching. This also applies to static images in art.

A feeling of movement can be heightened by contrast. By memory we realize that some things move and some don’t. Figures can seem to be more active in their mobile positions because of the contrast with the immobile objects included in the same picture.

- Nicholas Poussin, *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, 1635-1637
- Diego Rivera, *Sugar Cane*, 1931

### 2. Figure Repeated

One of the oldest devices for creating the illusion of motion in art is repeating a figure. The figure appears over and over in different positions and situations. Think of it as a sequence of situations that relate a story. Often the repeated figure, rather than being shown in a sequence of small pictures, merely reappears in one unified composition. Usually a distinctive costume or color identifies the repeated character, so the repetition would be visually obvious.

- Giuseppe Previati, *The Dance of the Hours* (detail of Painting), 1899.
- M. Levi d’ancona A Giovanni De Tedaldo, *Sienne ou Italie Du Nord*, 1468-1528
- Art Spiegleman, *Maus I*
- Dirk Bouts, *Justice of Otto III and Wrongful Execution of the Count*. 1470-1475

### 3. Blurred Outlines

Moving images are frozen in “stop-action”, the figure becomes a blurred image that we read as an indication of the subject’s movement. This is an everyday visual experience. When objects move through our field of vision quickly, we do not get a clear mental picture of them. A car will pass us on the highway so fast that we perceive only a colored blur. Details and edges of the form are lost in the rapidity of the movement.

- Franz Kupka, *Woman picking flowers*, 1910
- Think of sports photography

### 4. Multiple Image

Multiple Image is when we see one figure in an overlapping sequence of movements. Many artists have abstracted the figure into simple geometric forms that repeat diagonally, vertically, or horizontally across the canvas.

- Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1910
- Giacomo Balla, *A Dog on a Leash*. 1912
- Luigi Russolo, *Plastic Synthesis of a Woman's Movements*, 1912
- Eadweard Muybridge, *photography motions studies*, c 1889.
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David A. Lauer and Stephen Pentak, Design Basics, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1981.