

Definitions of Art Elements and Principles of Design

Analyzing and evaluating artwork

ELEMENTS are the basic building blocks artists use when composing a visual work.

COLOR comes from light rays and is broken into the spectrum, or rainbow. In art, color has three properties:

1. **HUE** - the color's name, i.e. red
2. **INTENSITY** - the purity and brightness of a color
3. **VALUE** - the tints, tones, or shades of the color

VALUE is the lightness or darkness in a work, as in the gray scale. (in B&W art)

LINE is a continuous mark made by a moving point; an outline, contour or edge.

TEXTURE is how things feel or how they look like they would feel if you could actually touch them. Some art is very flat and smooth, yet the shapes or things represented have a lot of texture. Uneven repetitions of lines and shapes can create virtual texture.

SHAPE is a two dimensional (2D, height and width) area of color, texture, value, etc. in a flat work.

FORM is a three dimensional (3D) area in artwork that has depth as well as height and width. Sculpture and architecture are examples of art with 3 dimensions.

SPACE is the area of the artwork, often divided into positive and negative space.

Positive refers to the figure or main objects portrayed, negative refers to the background.

PRINCIPLES of visual art are the different guidelines artists use to combine the elements when creating art, and the ways we can analyze how a work was created. The overall principle is **UNITY**, or the sense of completeness or wholeness of the work. **UNITY** is achieved by effective use of the elements and principles, whether these were intentional or subconscious on the part of the artist.

BALANCE is using elements to create equilibrium, a sense that nothing is outweighing or overshadowing the rest. It can be formal (symmetric) or informal (asymmetric).

EMPHASIS is combining elements to stress differences and create centers of interest that catch the eye. These can be color, shape, texture, etc. Rule of thirds is useful.

HARMONY is combining the elements to stress their similarities, often through repetition of one or more element in another area of the artwork.

VARIETY is using different elements in complicated and intricate relationships, often creating depth or layers that draw the viewer into the work.

GRADATION is using a series of similar elements and varying them slightly, as in a row of trees gradually getting smaller, or a color getting brighter or softer, light or dark.

MOVEMENT or **RHYTHM** is combining elements to create the look of action, or to establish a rhythm (pattern of repetition), or to cause the viewer's eye to move around the work

PROPORTION is arranging the elements in relationship to each other and the whole piece so as to create unity, whether harmonious or upsetting. It has to do with size relationships, amounts of color, texture, etc. and where they are put in the work.