

# The Elements of Art

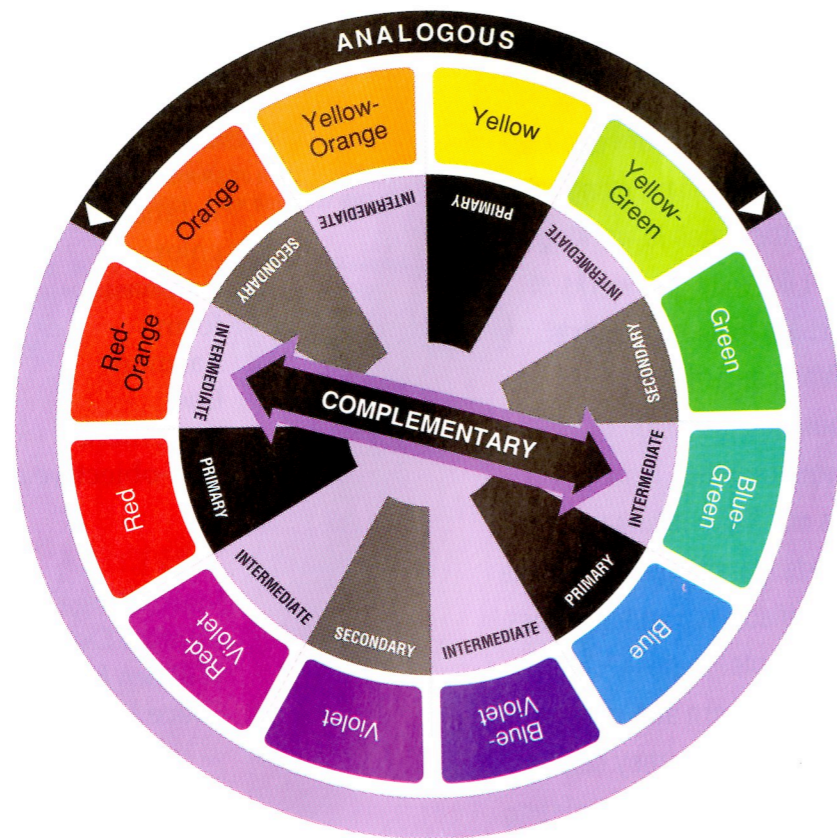
Art is a powerful language. Through it, artists communicate thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Like most languages, the language of art has its own special vocabulary. Unlike other vocabularies, however, the vocabulary of art is not made up of words. Rather, it is made up of visual elements. The visual elements include color, line, shape, form, space, and texture.

## COLOR

Have you ever noticed it is harder to see colors when the light is dim? Color relies on light. In fact, **color** is *what the eyes see when light is reflected off an object*.

Color has three properties, or traits. These are:

- **Hue.** Hue is the name of a color, such as red, blue, or yellow. Hues are arranged in a circular format on a color wheel. Red, yellow, and blue are the primary hues. They are equally spaced on the color wheel. (See Figure 1-1.) Look at the picture in Figure 1-2. How many different hues, or colors, can you find in this work? Which ones can you name?
- **Value.** Value is the lightness or darkness of a hue. The value of a hue can be changed by adding white or black. Can you point out different values of any one color in the picture in Figure 1-2?



► Figure 1-1 Color Wheel.

- **Intensity.** Intensity is the brightness or dullness of a hue. Pure hues are high-intensity colors. Dull hues are low-intensity colors. Which objects in Figure 1-2 would you describe as high in intensity? Which would you describe as low in intensity?

Colors can be combined to produce many interesting and striking results. Artists make use of different types of color schemes to create different effects. Following are some of the color schemes that trained artists use:

- **Monochromatic** (mahn-uh-kroh-mat-ik) **color scheme.** This scheme uses different values of a single hue. For example, dark

green, medium green, and light green make a monochromatic scheme.

- **Analogous** (uh-nal-uh-gus) **color scheme.** This scheme uses colors that are side by side on the color wheel and share a hue. Look at the color wheel in Figure 1-1. What colors share the hue red?
- **Warm or cool color scheme.** Warm color schemes — with red, yellow, and orange colors — remind us of the sun and warmth. Artists use blue, green, and violet — cool color schemes — to make us think of cool items such as ice or grass.



▲ Figure 1-2 Notice how Harnett has captured a realistic scene using the elements of space, form, and texture. Would he have been as successful in showing depth if he had painted a lighter background?

William Michael Harnett. *Munich Still Life*. 1882. Oil on canvas. 62.5 x 76.8 cm (24 5/8 x 30 1/4"). Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas.



## LINE

An element of art that can be used to send different messages to viewers is a line. **Line** is defined as *the path of a moving point through space*. You can draw lines on paper or scratch a line in wet clay with a tool. Lines can be seen in your environment, such as the web of a spider or the railing on a stair.

There are five main kinds of lines:

- Horizontal lines, which run parallel to the ground, appear to be at rest.

- Vertical lines — lines that run up and down — seem to show dignity, formality, and strength.
- Diagonal, or slanting, lines signal action and excitement.
- Zigzag lines, which are made from combined diagonal lines, can create a feeling of confusion or suggest action.
- Curved lines express movement in a graceful, flowing way.



► Figure 1-3 Color, line and shape are successfully combined to create the appearance of a three-dimensional form. Why do you think Chagall has shown the violinist floating?

Marc Chagall. *Green Violinist*. 1923–1924. Oil on canvas. 198 x 108.6 cm (78 x 42¾"). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York. Gift of Solomon R. Guggenheim.

Look again at Figure 1–2 on page 3. How many different lines can you find? In what directions do these lines go?

In art, line quality and line variation influence the viewer's reaction to a work of art. Line quality is the unique character of the line. It can be affected by the tool or medium used to produce the mark or by the particular motion of the artist's hand. Line variation describes the thickness or thinness, lightness or darkness of a line.

## SHAPE AND FORM

Every object — a cloud, a house, a pebble — has a shape. **Shape** is *an element of art that refers to an area clearly set off by one or more of the other elements of art*. Shapes are limited to two dimensions — length and width.

All shapes belong to one of two classes:

- **Geometric** (jee-uh-meh-trik). Geometric shapes look as though they were made with a ruler or drawing tool. The square, the circle, the triangle, the rectangle, and the oval are the five basic geometric shapes. Look at the painting in Figure 1–3. Can you find any geometric shapes?
- **Organic**. Also called free-form, organic shapes are not regular or even. Their outlines may be curved or angular, or they may be a combination of both, to make free-form shapes. Organic shapes, such as clouds and pebbles, are usually found in nature. Can you find any organic shapes in Figure 1–3?

Like shapes, forms have length and width. Forms also have a third dimension, depth. **Form** is *an element of art that refers to an object with three dimensions*. With the forms found in works of art, such as sculpture and architecture, you can actually experience the three dimensions by walking around or into the works.

## SPACE

All objects take up space. **Space** is *an element of art that refers to the distance between, around, above, below, and within things*. Which objects in Figure 1–3 appear closest to you? Which seem to be farther back in space?

In both two- and three-dimensional works of art, the shapes or forms are called the positive area. The empty spaces between the shapes are called negative spaces. The relationship between the positive and negative space will affect how the art work is interpreted.

## TEXTURE

Run your fingers over the top of your desk or work table. You are feeling the surface's texture. **Texture** is *an element of art that refers to the way things feel, or look as though they might feel, if touched*.

Imagine you could touch the objects in the picture in Figure 1–2 on page 3. Which of them do you think would feel smooth? Do any look rough or uneven?

## ✓ CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What are the three properties of color?
2. What message do vertical lines send to a viewer? What message do diagonal lines send?
3. What is the difference between shape and form?
4. What is the difference between the positive area and the negative area in a work of art?
5. Define *texture*.



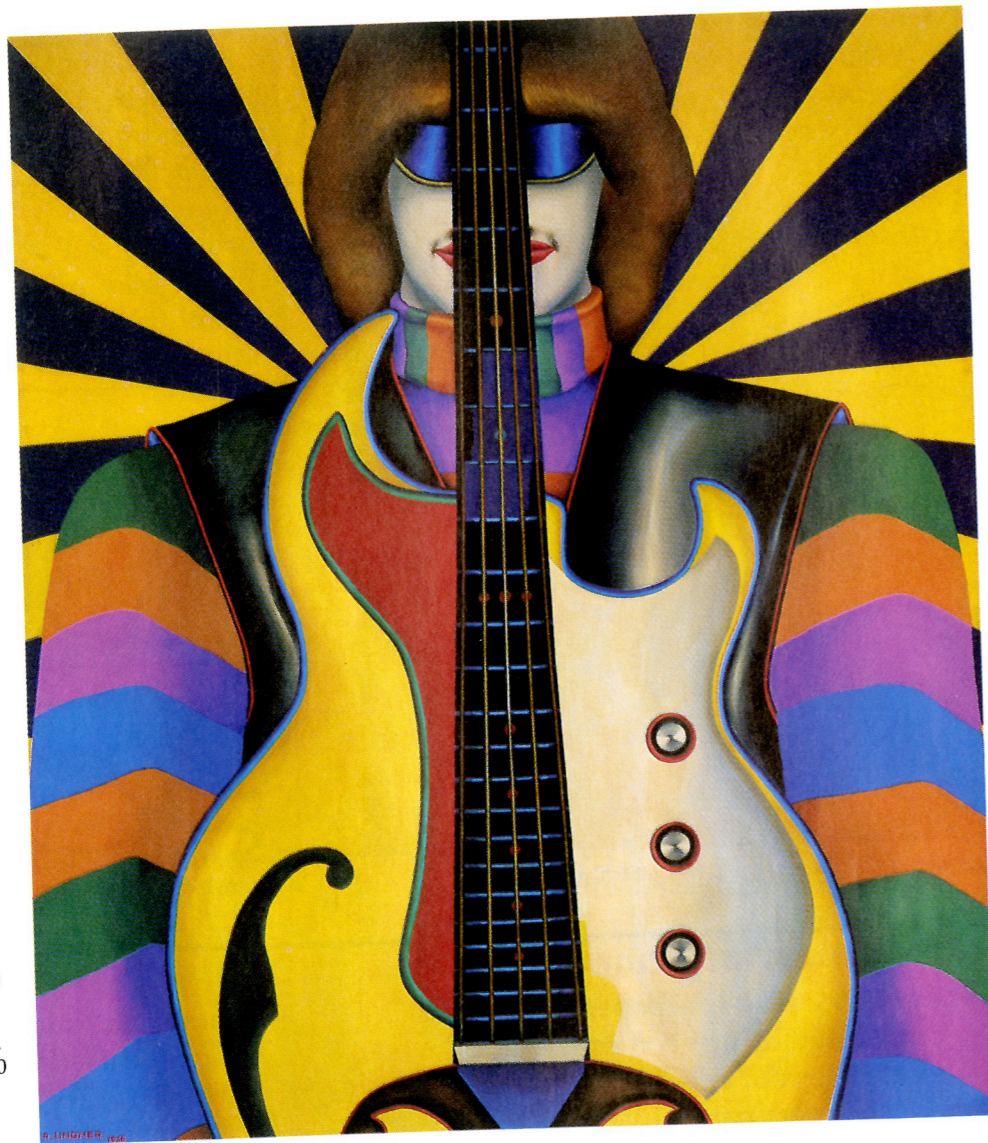
# The Principles of Art

If you want to use a language, knowing the vocabulary is not enough. You must also know how the words go together. You must know the rules of grammar for that language.

The same is true of art. Instead of rules of grammar, the language of art has art princi-

ples. These principles, or guidelines, govern how artists organize the visual elements to create a work of art.

The principles of art include balance, variety, harmony, emphasis, proportion, movement, and rhythm.



► **Figure 1-7** This picture combines familiar images from our modern rock culture. What are some of the images? What do you think the artist is trying to say about this culture?

Richard Lindner. *Rock-Rock*. 1966. Oil on canvas. 177.8 x 152.4 cm (70 x 60"). Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas. Gift of Mr. & Mrs. James H. Clark.

## BALANCE

If you have ever carried a stack of dishes or books, you know the importance of balance. In art, balance is also important. **Balance** is a principle of art concerned with arranging elements so no one part of a work overpowers, or seems heavier than, any other part. In art, balance is seen or felt by the viewer.

In works of art, three kinds of balance are possible. They are formal balance, informal balance, and radial balance. In works of art with formal, or symmetrical (suh-meh-trih-kuhl), balance the two halves are mirror im-

ages. In works with informal, or asymmetrical (ay-suh-meh-trih-kuhl), balance two unlike elements seem to carry equal weight. For example, a small shape painted bright red will balance several larger items painted in duller reds.

Radial balance occurs when elements or objects in an art work are positioned around a central point. Study the art works in Figures 1-7, 1-8, and 1-9. Which uses formal balance? Which uses informal balance? Which uses radial balance?



▲ **Figure 1-8** This painting creates a certain mood or feeling about the girl playing the guitar. How has Renoir combined the element of color and the principle of balance to create a pleasing portrait?

Auguste Renoir. *Young Spanish Woman with a Guitar*. 1898. Canvas. 55.6 x 65.2 cm (21 7/8 x 25 5/8"). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection.





▲ Figure 1-9 Van Gogh has blended many elements and principles of art in this work. Notice how he has used the elements of color and line to create a feeling of movement. How has he created balance?

Vincent van Gogh. *The Starry Night*. 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1 cm (29 x 36¼"). Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss bequest.

## VARIETY

The same routine day after day can become dull. The same color or shape repeated over and over in an art work can become equally dull. To avoid dullness, artists use the principle of variety in their works. **Variety** is a principle of art concerned with combining one or more elements to create interest by adding slight changes. By giving a work variety, the artist heightens the visual appeal of the work.

Look again at the picture in Figure 1-7. How does the artist's use of color add variety to the work? Which other elements are used to add variety?

## HARMONY

If too little variety can become boring, too much variety can create chaos. Artists avoid chaos in their works by using the principle of harmony. **Harmony** is a principle of art concerned with blending elements to create a more calm, restful appearance.

Of the two paintings in Figures 1-7 and 1-8, which has greater harmony? Which elements does the artist use to introduce harmony to the work?

## EMPHASIS

To attract a viewer's attention to important parts of a work, artists use the principle of emphasis. **Emphasis** is making an element in a work stand out. Emphasis can be created by contrast or by extreme changes in an element.

Look once more at Figure 1-8. What has been done to emphasize the face of the young woman?

## PROPORTION

Have you ever tasted a food that was so salty you couldn't eat it? The problem was one of proportion. **Proportion** is the principle of art concerned with the relationship of one part to another and to the whole.

The principle of proportion is not limited to size. Elements such as color can be used in differing proportions to create emphasis. It is used this way in Figure 1-7. Which color is used in greatest proportion?

## MOVEMENT

You may not have realized it, but when you look at a work of art your eye moves from part to part. Artists use the principle of movement to lead the viewer's eyes throughout the work. **Movement** is the principle of art used to create the look and feeling of action and to guide a viewer's eye throughout the work of art.

Study yet again the paintings in Figures 1-7, 1-8, and 1-9. How have the artists used line and shape to move your eyes throughout the works?

## RHYTHM

Often artists seek to make their works seem active. When they do, they call upon the principle of rhythm. **Rhythm** is the principle of art concerned with repeating an element to make a work seem active or to suggest vibration. Sometimes to create rhythm, an artist will repeat not just elements but also the same exact objects over and over. When this is done, a pattern is formed.

Compare the works in Figures 1-7, 1-8, and 1-9. Which uses the principle of rhythm? What element is repeated?

## UNITY IN ART

When you look at works of art, it may be difficult to determine where one part ends and the other begins. Instead, the piece of art works together as a whole. It has unity. **Unity** is the arrangement of elements and principles with media to create a feeling of completeness or wholeness. You will sense this unity as you look at works of art in which artists use the elements and principles with skill, imagination, and sensitivity.

## ✓ CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What are principles of art?
2. Name three kinds of balance. Describe each kind.
3. What principles do artists use to prevent works from being static?
4. How can emphasis be created in a work of art?
5. Define *movement*.



**BUILDING VOCABULARY**

Number a sheet of paper from 1 to 15. After each number, write the term from the box that best matches each description below.

balance	proportion
color	rhythm
emphasis	shape
form	space
harmony	texture
line	unity
movement	variety
non-objective art	

1. What the eyes see when light is reflected off an object.
2. Path of a moving point through space.
3. The way things feel, or look as though they might feel, if touched.
4. An area clearly set off by one or more of the other elements of art.
5. An object with three dimensions.
6. Arranging elements so no one part of a work overpowers, or seems heavier than, any other part.
7. Combining one or more elements to create interest by adding slight changes.
8. Blending elements to create a more calm, restful appearance.
9. Making an element in a work stand out.
10. The repeating of an element to make a work seem active or to suggest vibration.
11. The relationship of one part to another and to the whole.
12. The arrangement of elements and principles with media to create a feeling of completeness or wholeness.
13. The principle of art used to create the look and feeling of action and to guide a viewer's eye throughout the work.
14. Art works in which no objects or subjects can be readily identified.
15. The distance between, around, above, below, and within things.

**REVIEWING ART FACTS**

Number a sheet of paper from 16 to 20. Answer each question in a complete sentence.

16. What are the elements of art?
17. Which of the three properties of color refers to a color's name and place on a color wheel?
18. What are the two different kinds of shapes?
19. What is non-objective art?
20. What is symmetrical balance? What is asymmetrical balance?

**THINKING ABOUT ART**

On a sheet of paper, answer each question in a sentence or two.

1. **Extend.** What kind of lines would you use in creating a picture of an action-packed horse race? What kind of lines would you use in creating a calm, peaceful picture of a lake and trees? Explain your answers.
2. **Analyze.** Which type of shapes, geometric or organic, are you more likely to find in nature? Why do you suppose this to be the case?
3. **Compare and contrast.** What do the elements of shape and form have in common? In what ways are the two different?

**MAKING ART CONNECTIONS**

1. **Science.** Make a list of the elements of art you have learned about in this chapter. Choose an object from nature that shows examples of these elements. Beside each art element listed, write a one- or two-word description of the natural object you chose.
2. **Language Arts.** Writers use words to express ideas. Choose three words from the elements and principles of art and write a paragraph expressing these ideas.

**LOOKING AT THE DETAILS**

The detail shown below is from Gabrielle Münter's *Staffelsee in Autumn*. Study the detail and answer the questions below.

1. Give examples of types of shapes that you see in this work. Are they free-form or geometric shapes?
2. How is color used to create unity?



3. Where is the emphasis in this detail? Look at the entire work on page xviii. Has the emphasis changed? Explain your answer.
4. What does the artist's choice of color communicate about this scene?

Gabriele Münter. *Staffelsee in Autumn*. 1923. Oil on board. (Detail.) 34.9 x 48.9 cm (13 3/4 x 19 1/4"). National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay.