

# How to Talk and Write about Art

or

## Notes on the Vocabulary of Aesthetics

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In order to talk and write about art intelligently, one must be able to identify the **ELEMENTS of DESIGN**. So here they are:

1. **Line**: What is the work's line quality.....is it used as a contour, or to emphasize shape? Is it dark, light, flowing or ridged?
2. **Shape**: (Two –Dimensional) can be irregular, orderly, flat or full of depth. . . . . rhythmic or chaotic.
3. **Form**: (Three-Dimensional) emphasis on mass and volume.  
Forms can be planar, rounded, angular, biomorphic, etc.
4. **Color**: *Hue* = primary, secondary and tertiary colors  
*Value* = tints, tones and shades.  
*Intensity* = quality of brightness, saturation of color, dullness  
*Color schemes* =warm/cool, monochromatic, complementary
5. **Texture**: Surface appearance or quality. . . . rough, smooth, etc.
6. **Value**: Light vs. dark.

*On to the Principles of Design →*

# The Principles of Design

The Principles of Design deal with how the elements are used in a work of art. To use a metaphor . . . . . the elements of design are the **tools** an artist or architect uses to create. **How** an artist or an architect uses those tools is the realm of the principles of design! Here are the principles of design:

1. **Rhythm / Movement**: Action...the physical interaction between figures and or objects.
2. **Balance**: Arrangements of the elements....central axis (formal, symmetrical or informal, asymmetrical), positive/negative spatial relationships.
3. **Proportion**: Scale....the relationship of size.
4. **Contrast**: differences between light and dark, rough and smooth, color and monotone, etc.
5. **Emphasis**: Center of interest.....focal point.....stressed or dominant area. A work may have one, several or no areas of emphasis.
6. **Harmony**: Effective use of the elements and principles of design that achieve wholeness. If unity is lacking, you get confusion and disorganization.
7. **Composition**: The most important of all. . . . how a work is designed. The overall arrangement/organization of the elements and principles of design. Compositions may be orderly, disorderly, open, closed, flat or full of depth, symmetrical or asymmetrical, simple or complex.

*On to the lexicon of design* 

# The Vocabulary of Aesthetics:

## ***A composition can be:***

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| linear                                   | painterly             |
| closed                                   | open                  |
| disordered                               | unified               |
| planimetric (close to the picture plane) | recessional (distant) |
| symmetrical                              | asymmetrical          |
| centrally focused                        | off-center            |
| organized                                | chaotic               |
| static                                   | dynamic               |
| balanced                                 | askew                 |
| restful                                  | agitated              |
| flowing                                  | choppy                |
| minimal                                  | detailed              |
| shallow                                  | deep                  |

## ***Structure / Form can be:***

|                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| weighty                | light              |
| heavy or bulky         | slight or delicate |
| solid                  | ethereal           |
| massive                | modest             |
| volumetric             | wispy              |
| mechanical / geometric | organic            |
| energetic              | passive            |
| angular                | curvilinear        |
| spatially extended     | self-contained     |
| open                   | closed             |
| rigid                  | pliable            |
| rounded or bulbous     | flat or angular    |

## ***Surface/Texture can be:***

smooth  
soft  
tactile  
sharp or crisp  
linear  
uniform or consistent  
repetitive  
sensuous  
flowing

rough  
hard or brittle  
repulsive  
hazy or subdued  
painterly  
undulating or inconsistent  
varied  
harsh  
faceted or broken

## ***Color/Value can be:***

vibrant  
warm  
bright  
harmonious  
bold  
light  
blended  
natural  
harsh

diffused  
cold  
subdued  
dissonant or contrasting  
pale  
dark  
isolated or compartmentalized  
unnatural  
diffused

## ***Architectural forms can be:***

dense  
symmetrical  
uplifting  
vertical  
externally oriented  
contained  
airy  
harmonized with surroundings

light  
asymmetrical  
earthbound  
horizontal  
internally oriented  
sprawling  
oppressive  
placed in contrast with surroundings