

Week 4 Elements of Art Tutorial

Line

Line is defined by three characteristics:

- linear form in which length dominates over width
- a color edge
- an implication of continued direction

Interpreting Line

The Jungle by Wilfredo Lam is an excellent example of line structure in a painting. The figures are composed in a decidedly vertical direction.

In 1929, Lam married Eva Piriz, who died of tuberculosis two years later, as did their young son. This tragic event may have contributed to the dark and brooding appearance of much of Lam's later surrealist work.

Form

Form is the shape of an object within the composition.

The distinction between line and form is that form can be limited to one object within the picture while line tends to be a dominant characteristic.

Interpreting Form

Proun 99 is an example of a painting with both a strong vertical line and a prominent cube shape as its focal point. Lissitzky's *Proun* paintings (which signify "for the new art") attempt to forge a connection between Russian and Western artists. Its use of geometric shapes and lines suggest that Lissitzky's desire to express a "world of physics inspired by modern spiritualist thought."

Color

In art, **color** is the study of several factors.

- **Psychological reaction** – the viewer will inevitably be emotionally and psychologically influenced by the artist's choice of color.
- **Hue** – the shade of color which strongly influences emotional response.
- **Value** – the relationship between the shades of a single color in the work's palette.
- **Intensity** – the degree of purity of the color.

Interpreting Color

Impression, Sunrise demonstrates how a limited palette can achieve stunning results. By limiting his color palette, Monet stressed the value of color and the relationships between various hues, giving the work a serene and soft quality. Considered the father of Impressionism, Monet laid the groundwork for his 19th century contemporaries by expressing the world as only he can see it, a principle which serves as the foundation of the Impressionist movement.

Mass

The **mass** is the density of an object, which is easily discerned in sculpture but in paintings mass is implied.

The viewer may discern mass by examining the relationships among objects and the artist's use of dimension.

Interpreting Mass

Baroque Era paintings evoke mass through the use of light and shade (chiaroscuro) and intense color. Rubens is considered a Baroque master and his work was soon elevated to the likes of Michelangelo and DaVinci. No other Baroque painter could quite match Rubens' stunning attention to detail. Rubens draws the eye to the figures in the foreground by giving the scene in the background an almost two dimensional quality, pulling attention to the subjects in the center.

Repetition

Repetition is the reoccurrence of shapes, objects, colors, etc., and may be described using three terms:

- **Rhythm** – literally the volume repetition within the work.
- **Harmony** – the logic of the repetition.
- **Variation** – the relationship between the repeated objects.

Interpreting Repetition

Portrait of Fritza Reidler relies in a repetition of shape and color throughout to achieve a sense of harmony. The soft grays and white are repeated both in the subject's dress and in the shapes to the lower right of the image. Additionally the repetition of squares on the wall in the background and in the shape surrounding the subjects head give the piece a modern tilt contrasting the subject's Victorian appearance.

Balance

Balance describes the symmetry and cohesiveness of the overall picture.

Balance is essentially the accumulation and arrangement of the elements of the composition to achieve the appearance of unity.

Interpreting Balance

Houses at L'Estaque exemplifies balance through repetition, color, and shape. Cubists such as Braque offered a view of the world in its most reduced geometric shape. It is the even distribution of shape that gives this painting balance. After meeting Picasso, Braque developed an interest in Cubism and helped the movement. Braque believed that each painting should be an autonomous representation of the artist's view of the world.

Perspective

The term **Perspective** describes the spatial relationships among objects. Three types of perspective are discussed in the text:

- **Linear** – most common among perspective drawing which indicates a distinct horizon by creating a vanishing point.
- **Atmospheric** – most often used in landscapes, objects in the background appear to be muted and less detailed, suggesting distance.
- **Shifting** – least often employed, the shifting perspective divides the background and foreground. Details in the foreground reach back toward the middle ground and meet the background. Thus the middle ground appears to be a void of space.

Perspective Samples

Linear

Houses Along a Road, 1818

Paul Cezanne

Impressionism

Atmospheric

Heade's Lake George, 1862

Martin Johnson

Hudson River School

Shifting

Diminishing Perspective

Travelers Amid Streams and Mountains

Fan K'uan

Chinese Song Dynasty

Interpreting Perspective

Edgar Degas often used perspective in his work. **Ecole des Danse** suggests distance by making the dancers in the foreground appear to be larger than those in the background. The gradual move from larger to smaller figures is a method of linear perspective. It is widely debated how Degas, an Impressionist, revered women. Often the subject of this work, Degas rejected the traditional ideals of feminine beauty when he painted women.