

Handout #17

How To Look At Art: Part B

The Tools of the Artists

Artists combine the Elements and Principles of Design in many creative and imaginative ways. Studying composition and style will help you learn even more about artists, the way that they use their materials and what they want to communicate.

- I. Composition – The manner in which the artist presents the subject or subjects in an artwork.
 - A. Focus – how the person, place or thing is shown in the artwork
 1. Point of view – the subject is shown whole or parts are shown; the viewer is looking up, down or straight at the subject.
 2. Pose – the position of a living subject – standing, sitting, from the front or side, quietly or in motion.
 - B. Placement
 1. Grouping – if there is more than one person or object, how are they arranged – in a line, within a triangle, circular, etc.
 2. Proximity – how close or far away are persons or objects to each other
 3. Sight lines – primary orientation of lines and shapes in the artwork
 - a) Horizontal lines – calming
 - b) Vertical lines – formal
 - c) Diagonal lines – movement
 - C. Background or setting
 1. General setting – could be anywhere
 2. Specific or historical – shows a very definite place and/or time
 3. No background or setting is shown
 - D. Lighting
 1. Flat light – the colors are soft and blended; there are no highlights and shadows
 2. Contrasting light – there are many highlights and shadows throughout the artwork.
 3. Dramatic focus – the main subject appears to be in a spotlight
 - E. Use of shapes
 1. Distortion – the size of a person or object is larger or smaller, compared to others in the artwork
 2. Angular – shapes are primarily angular or outlined in straight lines.
 3. Rounded – shapes are primarily rounded and full or outlines are curved lines.

- II. Style – the distinctive way that an artist or group of artists uses the elements and principles of design in their artworks and often their choice of subject(s) for their artworks.
- A. Use of Color
1. Monochromatic – the artist uses only one color with different tints and shades.
 2. Multi-color – the artist uses many colors
 3. High Key – the artist uses primarily light colors, often with many tints
 4. Low Key – the artist uses primarily dark colors, often with many shades
- B. Use of Surface
1. Brushstrokes in paintings
 - a) The colors are smooth and blended; the viewer cannot distinguish the way that the artist applied the paint.
 - b) The colors are almost separated; the viewer can see the brushstrokes the artist used to apply the paint.
 2. Textures in sculpture
 - a) The surface of the sculpture is very smooth and rounded; the viewer cannot see the marks of the artist's tools.
 - b) The surface of the sculpture is rough; the viewer can see the marks the artist made as they carved the wood, stone or clay.
- C. Use of Details
1. Simple, geometric shapes; there are no folds or complex shapes in clothing; few details in grass, trees, fur, etc.
 2. There are some details shown in clothing and objects, giving an idea of how things are made or helping distinguish the type of tree or object.
 3. Highly detailed – it is nearly like a photograph, showing every small fold of clothing, edge of leaf, change in color in a person or object.
 4. Decorative – detailed patterns often multi-colored are shown in clothing or other surfaces
- D. Use of Perspective
1. Linear – lines of buildings, roads, and other objects appear to come together (converge) at a single point on the horizon.
 2. Atmospheric – the artist uses color changes to show what is near to the viewer (darker colors) and what is far away (lighter colors).
 3. Visual – the artist uses the size of the object to show what is near (large) and what is far away (small).
 4. No perspective – there is no sense of depth; everything looks flat

III. A Selection of Styles and Schools of Artists

- A. Abstract Expressionism
- B. Art Nouveau
- C. Byzantine
- D. Classicism
- E. Cubism
- F. Expressionism
- G. Futurism
- H. Gothic or Medieval
- I. The Harlem Renaissance
- J. Hudson River School
- K. Impressionism
- L. Pop Art
- M. Realism
- N. Regionalism
- O. Romanticism
- P. Surrealism
- Q. Western Art

For assignments #18 – 20 you will research an artist from a specific style or school of art. The list above is a partial list taken from the [Artcyclopedia](#) website. Start there with your search for a general description of the style and links to artworks by the many artists who practiced that style.