

Basics of Art

Defining Art

For many people, art is a tangible thing: a painting, sculpture, photograph, dance, poem or play. Art is uniquely human and tied directly to culture. Art can be defined as the "conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects." Yet art is much more than a medium, or words on a page. It is the expression of our experience.

As an expressive medium, it allows us to experience wide ranges of emotion, between joy or sorrow, or confusion and clarity. It gives voice to ideas and feelings, connects us to the past, reflects the present, and anticipates the future.

It takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. It asks questions about who we are, what we value, the meaning of beauty and the human condition. As an expressive medium it allows us to experience sublime joy, deep sorrow, confusion and clarity. It tests our strengths, vulnerabilities and resolve.

Elements of art

The elements of art are sort of like atoms in that both serve as "building blocks" for creating something. Elements of art are building blocks of composition in art. When we analyse any drawing, painting, sculpture or design, we examine these component parts to see how they combine to create the overall effect of the artwork. A work

of art can be analyzed by considering a variety of aspects of it individually. These aspects are often called the elements of art. These are the basic components of art-making. It is impossible to create a work of art without using at least one of the seven elements of art.

A commonly used list of the main elements include line, shape, form, color, value, texture, space.

The Visual Elements have a relationship to one another:

- Most images begin their life as line drawings.
- Lines cross over one another to form shapes.
- Shapes can be filled with tone and color, or repeated to create pattern.
- A shape may be rendered with a rough surface to create a texture.
- A shape may be projected into three dimensions to create form.

Each of the elements may also be used individually to stress their own particular character in an artwork.

Different elements can express qualities such as movement and rhythm, space and depth, growth and structure, harmony and contrast, noise and calm and a wide range

of emotions that make up the subjects of great art.

The 7 Elements of Art

Line

Shape

Form

Color

Value

Texture

Space

Artists manipulate these seven elements, mix them in with principles of design, and compose a piece of art. Not every work of art contains every one of these elements, but at least two are always present.

For example, a sculptor, by default, has to have both form and space in a sculpture, because these elements are three-dimensional. They can also be made to appear in two-dimensional works through the use of perspective and shading.

Line

Line sometimes known as "a moving point" is the foundation of all drawing. It is the first and most versatile of the visual elements of art. Line in an artwork can be used in many different ways. It can be used to suggest shape, pattern, form, structure, growth, depth, distance, rhythm, movement and a range of emotions. While line isn't something found in nature, it is absolutely essential as a concept to

depicting objects and symbols, and defining shapes. Lines and curves are marks that span a distance between two points (or the path of a moving point). As an element of visual art, line is the use of various marks, outlines, and implied lines during artwork and design. A line has a width, direction, and length. A line's width is most times called its "thickness". Lines are sometimes called "strokes", especially when referring to lines in digital artwork.

We have a psychological response to different types of lines:

- **Curved lines** suggest comfort and ease
- **Horizontal lines** suggest distance and calm
- **Vertical lines** suggest height and strength
- **Jagged lines** suggest turmoil and anxiety

Similarly stars in a constellation connected via imaginary lines are a natural example of using lines in a composition.

Shape

Shape refers to a 2-dimensional, enclosed area. Shape can be natural or man-made, regular or irregular, flat (2-dimensional) or solid (3-dimensional), representational or abstract, geometric or organic, transparent or opaque, positive or negative, decorative or symbolic, colored, patterned or textured.

At its most basic, a shape is created when a line is enclosed: a line forms the boundary, and the shape is the form circumscribed by that boundary. Line and shape are two elements in art that are nearly always used together. Three lines are used to create a triangle while four lines can make a square.

Geometric Shapes

Geometric shapes are those that are defined in mathematics and have common names. They have clear edges or boundaries and artists often use tools such as protractors and compasses to create them, to make them mathematically precise. Shapes in this category include circles, squares, rectangles, triangles, polygons, and so forth.

Organic Shapes

While geometric shapes are well-defined, biomorphic or organic shapes are just the opposite. Draw a curving, semi-circular line and connect it where you began and you have an amoeba-like organic, or freeform, shape.

Organic shapes are individual creations of the artists: they have no names, no defined angles, no standards, and no tools that support their creation. They can often be found in nature, where organic shapes can be as amorphous as a cloud or as precise as a leaf.

The Behaviour of Shapes

Shapes can be used to control your feelings in the composition of an artwork:

- Squares and Rectangles can portray strength and stability
- Circles and Ellipses can represent continuous movement
- Triangles can lead the eye in an upward movement
- Inverted Triangles can create a sense of imbalance and tension

Form

The form of a work is its shape, including its volume or perceived volume. A three-dimensional artwork has depth as well as width and height. Three-dimensional form is the basis of sculpture. However, two-dimensional artwork can achieve the illusion of form with the use of perspective and/or shading or modelling techniques.

Texture is another element, like form or space, that can be real (run your fingers over an Oriental rug, or hold an unglazed pot), created (think of van Gogh's lumpy, impasto-ed canvases) or implied (through clever use of shading).

Color

Color is often the whole point for people who are visual learners and thinkers.

Color is the element of art that is produced when light, striking an object, is reflected back to the eye.

There are three properties to color.

- The first is hue, which simply means the name we give to a color (red, yellow, blue, green, etc.).
- The second property is intensity, which refers to the vividness of the color. A color's intensity is sometimes referred to as its "colorfulness", its "saturation", its "purity" or its "strength".
- The third and final property of color is its value, meaning how light or dark it is. The terms shade and tint refer to value changes in colors. In painting, shades are created by adding black to a color, while tints are created by adding white to a color.

Value

Value is the degree of lightness and darkness in a color. The difference in values is called contrast. Value can relate to shades, where a color gets darker by adding black to it, or tints, where a color gets lighter by adding white to it. White is considered the lightest value whereas black is the darkest. The middle value between these extremes is also known as a half-tone, all of which can be found on a value scale.

Space

Space is any conducive area that an artist provides for a particular purpose. Space includes the background, foreground and middle ground, and refers to the distances or area(s) around, between, and within things.

There are two kinds of space: negative space and positive space.

- Negative space is the area in between, around, through or within an object.
- Positive spaces are the areas that are occupied by an object and/or form.

Texture

Texture, another element of art, is used to describe how something feels or looks. A small selection of examples of the descriptions of texture are furry, bumpy, smooth, rough, soft, and hard. There are many forms of texture; the two main forms are actual and visual.

Visual texture is strictly two-dimensional and is perceived by the eye that makes it seem like the texture.

Actual texture (tactile texture) is one not only visible, but can be felt. It rises above the surface transitioning it from two-dimensional to three-dimensional.

Why Are the Elements of Art Important?

The elements of art are important for several reasons. First, and most importantly, a person can't create art without utilizing at least a few of them. No elements, no art.

The elements of art are enables us to:

- describe what an artist has done
- analyze what is going on in a particular piece
- communicate our thoughts and findings using a common language

Difference Between The Elements and Principles of Art

It's easy to get confused when discussing the elements and principles of art and group them all together as one big group of abstract terms. It's much easier to understand when you compare them to cooking.

When you are cooking something, you have a list of ingredients that are organized by the recipe. The elements of art are like the ingredients. If you are a good cook, then you care about quality ingredients. The same is true if you are a good artist. You care about the quality of elements that you chose to put in your artwork.

The lines, shapes, forms, values, colors, textures, and spaces that are incorporated must all work to make your artwork great.

The elements must be used as quality ingredients in an artwork.

So you must spend some time exploring them, understanding them, and learning how to use them together effectively. The same is true of cooking - you cannot just throw a list of great ingredients together and expect to create a great dish. You must follow the recipe.

The recipe is the principles of art. The principles of art are an organized way that the elements of art are arranged in a work of art.

The elements can be arranged in a work to produce balance, harmony, unity, rhythm, proportion, variety, emphasis, and movement. So the principles of art are dependent on the elements. No elements - no principles.

So you must explore the principles as well. Creating good artwork is not just skill. It is definitely not luck or trial and error. It is knowledge.