Chapter Nine: The Principles of Design

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- Balance
- Emphasis and Focal Point
- Scale and Proportion
- Repetition and Rhythm
- Unity and Variety

Works in Progress
Diego Velazquez’s Las Meninas
Judith F. Baca’s Memoria de Nuestra Tierra

The Critical Process
Thinking About the Principles of Design:
Claude Monet’s Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This Chapter Will:
- define and identify the principles of design and demonstrate how artists use them to organize the elements within a composition.
- identify and illustrate the principles of balance (symmetrical, asymmetrical, and radial)
- specify methods used by artists to express emphasis in a composition
- define and distinguish between scale and proportion
- define and illustrate the use of repetition and rhythm in a work of art
- discern the connection between unity and variety in works of art

KEY TERMS

- actual weight
- scale
- visual weight
- proportion
- absolute symmetry
- bilateral symmetry
- Golden Section
- asymmetrical balance
- repetition
- radial balance
- visual rhythm
- emphasis
- visual unity
- focal point
- visual variety
- afocal art
- postmodernism
LECTURE AND DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. The Principles of Design
Discuss the word design as both a verb and a noun, comparing the action of making decisions with the aesthetically pleasing object that results. Compare the way an artist designs a composition to the daily activities a student undertakes. Discuss the decision making process of evaluating choices and creating a whole from many parts. These activities could be included in the comparison: selecting wardrobe choices while shopping for a new outfit; planning a meal at the grocery store; coaching strategies based upon player abilities and position.

Frank Gehry’s house (figs. 228 and 229) can inspire a discussion of architectural design and aesthetic preferences. What design characteristics are evident on campus? What elements are repeated in the buildings that help to unify the campus?

2. Balance
Discuss how artists learn to use the design principles early in their formal training. In an undergraduate art program, instruction in beginning level foundation courses such as two-dimensional and three-dimensional design, teach students specific factors and strategies for creating dynamic compositions. For example, fig. 233 illustrates different methods of creating asymmetrical balance based upon factors of visual weight. This diagram is typical of those found in instructional materials for foundation programs. Would the student find this type of study of interest?

Radial balance creates impact and is often used for emphasis. Locate advertisements with radial balance in the design. A tour of the local grocery store will provide many examples of radial balance in packaging designs.

3. Emphasis and Focal Point
Similar to a “good work of art,” theatrical performances rely upon emphasis and focal points. Describe a dramatic performance, or read from a script, then present a dramatic “reading” of the elements in a painting in order to portray this idea. Conclude the discussion with the similarity between these two forms of art, that both intend to communicate with an audience. Georges de La Tour’s Joseph the Carpenter (fig. 238) and Jacques-Louis David’s The Oath of the Horatii (fig. 239) illustrate this concept well.

There are quite a few portraits in this chapter, from the formal court portrait of Marie-Antoinette with her Children by Marie-Louise-Elizabeth Vigee-Lebrun (fig. 237) to the more informal family portrait of The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit, by John Singer Sargent (fig. 248). Review the role of portraiture in art and discuss how the artists effectively conveyed the subjective interpretations of their sitters by purposely using specific principles of design.

4. Scale and Proportion
Discuss scale and proportion in miniature and monumental sculpture using Charles Simonds’ Dwelling (figs. 249 and 250) and Claes Oldenburg’s Trowel (fig. 247). Stress
how scale affects the viewer immediately. Discuss the intimacy of miniature sculptures and the commanding presence of monumental sculptures. Remind students to notice the size of the works of arts in this textbook to gain a full comprehension of them.

5. Repetition and Rhythm
While discussing Barber Shop (fig. 258) by Jacob Lawrence, show other examples of his works such as the *Migration Series* or *The Harriet Tubman Series*. Relate his various series to the time frames and racial concerns they reflect, evaluating how Lawrence conveyed his political message through the use of design principles. Discuss how the repetition of his imagery provided not only rhythm to the composition, but also an emphasis to his message by repeating it. Discuss whether Lawrence’s abstraction of imagery leads to a more universal understanding of his content, or does the abstraction weaken his content by altering the realism of the imagery.

6. Unity and Variety
Compare sports shoes, also known as sneakers and tennis shoes, to elucidate on the design principles of unity and variety. Just for fun, take a poll of everyone’s preferred brand of shoe. All shoes serve the same purpose and most shoes appear to have the same form and proportions, which unify them. However, the different kinds of materials, shoelaces, soles, treads and logos on each shoe create variety. Using this exercise, an analysis of Jean-Michel Basquiat’s *Untitled* (fig. 261), and the stock photograph of Las Vegas (fig. 262), discuss unity and variety in a postmodern society.

Upon completion of this chapter, evaluate student understanding of the design principles by viewing any artwork in the textbook and verbally testing their ability to identify the elements and principles and describe how they affect the finished composition and contribute to the artist’s message.

CRITICAL THINKING: More Opportunities to Think About Art
Several artworks are detailed in the Critical Thinking and Works in Progress features found in this chapter. In addition, diverse opportunities for studying these works are located on the Companion Website and Companion CD-ROM.

1. Works in Progress: Judith Baca’s *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra*
The activist artist Judith Baca, who painted *La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra* (figs. 252 and 253), was inspired in part by the muralist painter Diego Rivera. Rivera was a revolutionary painter looking to take art to the public. His style was direct and full of social content. Using the link found in the Companion Website for this chapter, examine Diego's mural *Los Explotadores* and then describe what you think is represented. How is the social commentary in Diego's mural similar to Baca's?

2. Works in Progress: Diego Velazquez’s *Las Meninas*
Diego Velazquez’s *Las Meninas* (figs. 242-245) is a wonderful example of manipulating the composition to provide intrigue and interest, both visually and conceptually. An interesting website that dissects the painting and animates the figures to resolve which character in the
painting entered the room when is found at www.evl.uic.edu/chris/MMedia/. In addition, investigate additional works by Velazquez at www.oir.ucf.edu/wm/paint/auth/velazquez/ to further study this master artist’s manipulation of the design principles.

3. Works in Progress: Hokusai’s Great Wave off Kanagawa
Hokusai’s Great Wave off Kanagawa (fig. 251) is an interesting exercise in scale, with the boatsmen and their crafts dwarfed by the scale and the immensity of the sea. In the distance is Mt. Fuji, also dwarfed by the wave. However, as the text tells us, the wave will collapse, while Fuji will remain. This is significant, as it affirms the Japanese view that Mt. Fuji is everlasting, like Japan itself. Using the link found in the Companion Website for this chapter, compare this work to The Inlet of Nobuto by Hokusai. In this image, Mt. Fuji seems void of descriptive information. Are other subjects in this image handled in a similar fashion? In each of these two works, what do you sense is the unifying theme? Is this theme fundamental to Japanese Art? Another activity associated with the Great Wave off Kanagawa is found in the Companion CD-ROM, Hands-On Exercises room in the Scale and Proportion activities. You will have fun altering the scale and proportion of the wave, and consequently changing Hokusai’s composition.

4. Thinking about Claude Monet’s Railroad Bridge at Argenteuil
Chapter 9 ends with The Critical Process, an analysis of Claude Monet’s Railroad Bridge at Argenteuil (fig. 264). In this analysis, the author has identified how the artist employed all of the principles of design. Be sure to refer to the detailed analysis of this work, which answers many of the questions posed, found in the back of the textbook.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
Direct students to their Student Study Guide when assigning Writing Assignments as the following assignments are written as instruction for the student and are contained in the guide as they are here.

1. Monumental Sculpture on Campus
Have students visit A World of Art Companion Website and link to Torn Edges to view an additional work by Claus Oldenburg and Coosie van Bruggen. Search the Internet and research additional works by Oldenburg and van Bruggen. Ask students which sculpture is their favorite? Why? Have students think of an object that the artists have not re-interpreted in their monumental sculptures and would like these collaborating artists to install on their campus. Have students describe why they would choose this object and where they would envision its placement.

2. Using the Principles Means Style
Often, artists repeatedly use a particular design “formula” and it becomes part of their unique style. The asymmetrical compositions of William Merritt Chase, as seen in The Nursery (fig. 234), exemplify how an artist repeats design strategies. Have students prepare a report that analyzes how another artist featured in this textbook repeats their use of specific principles of design, and how they influence the artist’s style. They may need to research an artist’s work via the Internet or library.
3. **Now I Know My Elements and Principles**

As a journal exercise, and study guide, assign students to make an outline of all the elements and principles, and define each one, interpreting the text’s definition of each one in your their words, so they fully understand each one. Have students identify how an artist uses each element and principle by gluing an example of an art form that uses that element or principle next to the definition.

4. **Just What Is Postmodernism?**

Contemporary artists (such as Elizabeth Murray) and architects (Robert Venturi or Frank Gehry) have begun to explore the notion of a new set of principles, based upon the eclectic sum of our modern, complex, visual world of neon signs and fast sound bites. This sense of disjunction, that the parts can never form a unified whole, is what we have come to identify as Postmodernism. In his book, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi asserts that the collision of signs, styles and symbols that mark the "American Strip," in particular Las Vegas, could be seen as a new form of unity. "Disorder," Venturi writes "[is] an order we cannot see..." In the students’ own words, have them define postmodernism and provide examples of where they have see this union of eclectic designs.

**HANDS-ON PROJECTS**

*Direct students to their Student Study Guide when assigning Hands-On Projects as the following assignments are written as instruction for the student and are contained in the guide as they are here. For additional project ideas, remember to investigate the Hands-On Projects found on the Companion Website.*

1. **Historical Series**

   Have students create a series of postcard size drawings or paintings that documents an event in history. Working in the manner of Jacob Lawrence, have them use abstract shapes to represent forms.

2. **Intimate Amulet/Monumental Sculpture**

   Using spirituality as thematic inspiration, have students create a miniature sculpture with polymer clay. Have students consider the sculpture a good luck charm that will assist them in some way, just as the amulet the *Venus of Willendorf* (fig. 595), was considered to bring fertility to those who possessed her. Then, using the same theme, have students draw a diagram for a monumental sculpture of the same form. Consider the large kinetic, fountain sculptures of Nikki de Saint-Phalle such as *Black Venus* (www.nikidesaintphalle.com) as inspiration. Students will include a discussion of the differences in function and perception of the two artworks based upon their scale.

3. **Pastel like Degas**

   Have students use pastels to draw a figure in motion, in an appropriate setting. Ask students to consider how Degas often preferred asymmetrical balance when placing the figure in the composition.
4. My Ideal Self
On an 8 1/2 x 11” piece of paper, assign to students to draw an ideal self-portrait, using the ancient Greek Canon. Remind them that the height of the head needs to be one-eighth of the full figure height, and the shoulders one-fourth of the full figure height. The top of their head should be at the top edge of the paper and the bottom of their feet should be at the bottom of the paper.

5. Afocal Collage
Using colored paper, have students place repetitive shapes on a solid ground of color. Have them consider rhythm in their design, but be conscious to avoid any sense of emphasis or focal point. Ask students what is the point of an afocal composition and how they want viewers to perceive their artwork?

6. A Mural of My Heritage
Working in the manner of Judy Baca, have students design a mural describing their heritage. Have them complete the preliminary drawing using colored pencils on white paper. Find a building or site in the community to paint the mural and have students take a photograph of it. Have students describe why they chose that particular site, whether for its ability to support their composition or whether a specific audience will see it.

RESOURCES

*A World of Art CD-ROM:*

**Balance Activity**
Enter the *Hands-On Exercises* room found in the World of Art Companion CD-ROM and complete the *Balance* activities. The visual demonstrations will further your understanding of how artists use balance effectively to create interest and stability in their artworks.

**Scale and Proportion Activity**
Enter the *Hands-On Exercises* room found in the World of Art Companion CD-ROM and complete the *Scale and Proportion* activities. The visual demonstrations will further your understanding of how artists have historically used both to create interest and realism in their artworks.

*A World of Art Companion Website:*
Remember to direct students to *A World of Art companion website* (www.prenhall.com/sayre) to help further their understanding of the materials discussed in this chapter with ideas for completing hands-on projects and exercises. Self-testing materials are also available and offer students the opportunity to evaluate their understanding of the chapter materials in a variety of formats. In addition, links to
CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS: The Ide Virtual Design Museum: Ettore Sottsass. Ettore Sottsass was born in 1917 and graduated from Turin's prestigious Polytechnic University in 1939. In 1947, he opened his own studio of architecture and design in Milan. His career has included industrial design work at the Olivetti corporation, where he produced some of the most ambitious industrial designs of the day, including the Elea 9000 mainframe computer; the typewriters Praxis, Tekne, and Valentine; and Synthesis office furniture. In 1981 Sottsass founded Memphis, a group that became synonymous with "New Design". NOTE: This site is all in German text, but it is the best site out there! Be sure to click on all the design thumbnails.

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS: "Torn Notebook" Claes Oldenburg is synonymous with the Pop Art movement of the 1960s. He launched his career at a studio that he called "The Store" - essentially a rented storefront in which Oldenburg produced crude plaster replicas of common food items and objects that one could actually buy in a store. Like many of his contemporaries, Oldenburg found the means to make the ordinary extraordinary, however, he consistently did it better, producing 44' giant steel clothespins, or giant lipsticks on train tracks. The link will take you to Torn Notebook in Lincoln, Nebraska, one of the latest works from Oldenburg, done in collaboration with Coosje van Bruggen. Like Giant Trowel (page 168), these works continue to elevate the "common object" to the status of "privileged object." This site includes the 4-meg movie of Torn Notebook's unveiling.

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS: The Dutch De Stijl Movement saw its inception with the publishing of the first copy of De Stijl, a magazine produced and edited by the painter, architect, and writer Theo van Doesberg. A total of 87 editions were published before Van Doesberg's death (1931) and the ideas and images expressed in the publication had a considerable effect on modern art. Artists who contributed to De Stijl included Van Doesberg, J.J.P. Oud, Gerrit Rietveld, and the painter Piet Mondrian. Mondrian left Europe and World War II in 1940 and moved to New York City, where he lived out the last four years of his life. His last masterpiece, Broadway Boogie-Woogie (p. 161), reflects his love for American jazz music, and possesses the vitality and energy that he felt defined America.

There are several sites linked to this segment of the Companion Website, including Mondrian biography and images and the MONDRIMAT described by the creator as “a simple system, which lets you experiment with space, color and visual rhythm in accordance with the theories of Piet Mondrian. For some reason pleasing stimulating, even exciting results seem to occur quite frequently."
Suggested Videos:

Videos and other resources are available for purchase through any of the distributors listed in the Resources section of this manual.

Works in Progress: Judy Baca
Principles of Design
Degas: Beyond Impressionism
Jacob Lawrence: An Intimate Portrait
Monumental Statues: The History Channel
Behind the Scenes with Nancy Graves
John Singer Sargent
Composition
Introduction to the Design Elements
Introduction to the Design Principles