

Principles of Art

The elements and principles of art work together to create art that expresses the artistic message. It is the interaction between the elements and principles that make a work of art worthy.

Line is an element of art which refers to a continuous mark made on some surface by a moving point. It may be two dimensional, like a pencil mark on a paper; it may be three dimensional, like a wire; or implied, as with the edge of a shape or form. Line is expressive in its thickness, direction, and medium.

Shape is an enclosed space defined by other elements of art. Shapes may take on the appearance of 2- or 3-dimensional objects. Shapes can be geometric (e.g., circle, square, triangle, etc.) or organic (e.g., a blob).

Space refers to the distance or area between, around, above or within things. It is often thought of as the empty or negative part.

Color is an element of art with three properties: (1) hue is the name of the color such as yellow, blue, green; (2) intensity is the brightness or dullness of a color made by adding another color to it; and (3) value is the lightness or darkness of a color made by adding black or white to the color.

Texture refers to the surface quality or “feel” of an object, such as the object’s roughness, smoothness, or softness. Actual texture can be felt while simulated textures are implied by the way the artist renders areas of a picture.

Value is the lightness or darkness added to shapes to express volume. It is commonly referred to as “shading” in drawing or painting (see also “color”).

Emphasis refers to developing points of interest to pull the viewer’s eye to important parts of the art.

Balance is a sense of stability or equality in the art. Balance can be created by repeating shapes, colors, or textures to give a feeling of equal weight.

Unity is achieved in art by using similar elements throughout the work. This principle is also often referred to as repetition because it is achieved by repeated elements.

Contrast/Variety refers to the use of different elements within the art. Contrast adds interest to the art.

Adapted from www.projectarticulate.org/principles.php

