

Art Critiques

Art criticism is a process of learning to look at and talk about art. The Feldman method (1970) of formal art criticism is widely used by educators to help learners develop an awareness of the formal elements of art, and how artists use these elements to create an effective composition. The method has four stages: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment.

Description and analysis

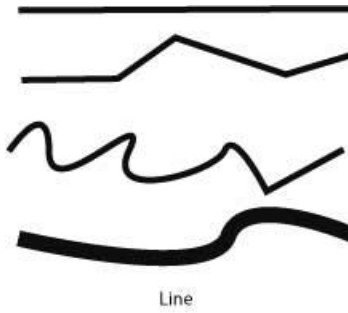
The first two stages, description and analysis, are an objective description of the visual design elements used, and their relationships to one another. An initial reaction to the work may be included (Anderson, 1988), but interpretation of the work's "meaning", and evaluation of the merits of the work, should be delayed until after the description and analysis, have been completed. Gillian Rose calls this approach "the good eye" (2007, p.25). Through careful observation and description of the elements that comprise the work of art, you will notice relationships that may hold the key to your interpretation and evaluation of the work.

Let's take a look at some of the elements of art that can be described and analyzed for these first two stages of your formal critique.

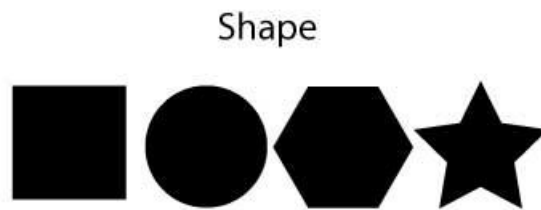
Elements of Art

The elements of art include **shape, line, value, texture, color, space.**

Line: A line is a simple form that is relatively narrow in width and prominent in length (Davis, 2011).

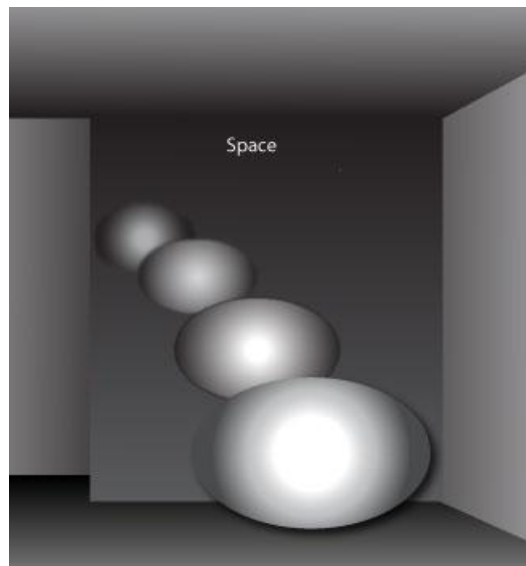


Shape/Form: A shape is a closed two-dimensional figure with a discrete length and width. Also known as *form* (Davis, 2011).

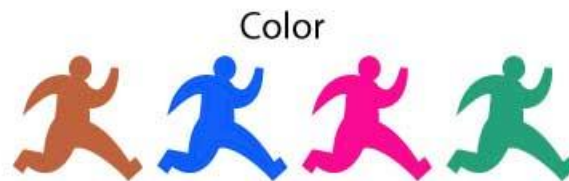


Space: In two-dimensional design, an illusion of space occurs when the composition suggests the existence of a third dimension behind the picture plane. Also known as

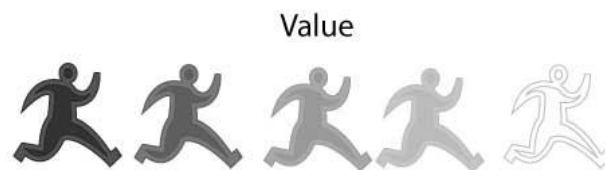
depth (Davis, 2011).



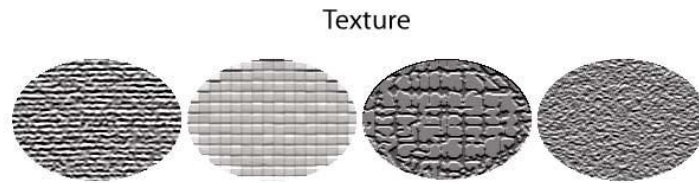
Color: A color is defined by a unique combination of hue, value, and saturation (Davis, 2011).



Value: Value is the relative lightness or darkness of a color (Davis, 2011).



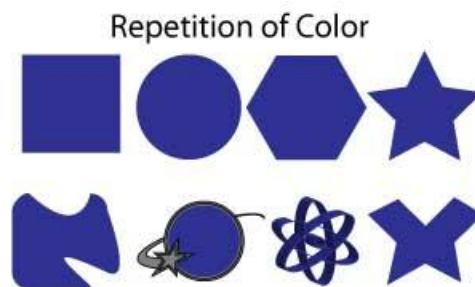
Texture: Texture is defined as the physical surface quality of an object (Davis, 2011).



Artists create relationships between these formal elements of art by either repeating or contrasting them. A good design will balance the contrasting elements of art (things that are different) with the elements that are repeated, to create an image that is visually interesting, without being “busy”, and that is unified, without being boring.

Repetition

Artists can repeat color, value, texture, line quality, shape, size, and so on. Forms that share a similar characteristic, like shape, color, size, texture, etc, will seem connected. Repetition of one or more elements of art throughout the composition will connect things and unify the artwork.



Contrast

Artists can contrast color, value, texture, line quality, shape, and size, and so on to create variety, visual interest and emphasis. The elements with the greatest amount of contrast with other elements in the work will usually grab your attention first. An example might be a group of shapes of similar size, with one much larger shape. The larger shape will stand out.

Contrast of Color



Contrast of Shape



Contrast of Size



Emphasis

The artist uses contrast of size, shape, position, color, or texture to emphasize important areas of the painting. Areas with the greatest contrast will stand out the most. Usually the artist applies the greatest amount of contrast to what she wants the viewer to see and think about. We call this the focal point of the artwork.

Contrast used to create emphasis



Contrast and repetition used together

When an artwork has too much similarity of forms, we may find it dull and uninteresting to look at. When an artwork has too much variety of form, we say the work is busy or cluttered or chaotic. A successful work of art balance repetition and contrast to create a unified composition that has visual interest for the viewer. Repeating a form with some characteristics that are similar, and other characteristics that are different, will create visual interest in a work of art, while retaining a sense of unity.

Unity

When a composition exists as a complete and coherent whole, and becomes greater than the sum of its parts, it is in unity.

References

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- Rose, G. (2007). *Visual Methodologies (2nd ed.)*. Thousands Oaks, CA.: Sage.