

Composition and Design (Handout)

- composition is arrangement of shapes (and values and colors) in the picture (rule of thirds, some basic composition structures)
- think about “eye paths” for the viewer; how will you guide them in their encounter with the painting?

elements and principles of design

elements

= things we can use and manipulate in our paintings

- line
- shape
- size
- texture
- color
- value
- (direction)
- (pattern))

principles

= some handy guidelines that can help us generate the effect we are looking for and guide the viewer’s eyes and reactions (NOT hard-and-fast rules! Not even agreed-upon; you’ll find lists with 5 or 6, or 8 or 12 . . .)

- contrast

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- balance/harmony
- emphasis/dominance
- proportion
- hierarchy/gradation
- repetition (with variation)/rhythm/(pattern)
- negative space
- movement
- variety
- unity

good to scan when you are feeling stuck and not sure what to change; not good to try to use as a “formula”

you can often do just as well by thinking about “attention-getters” and eye paths

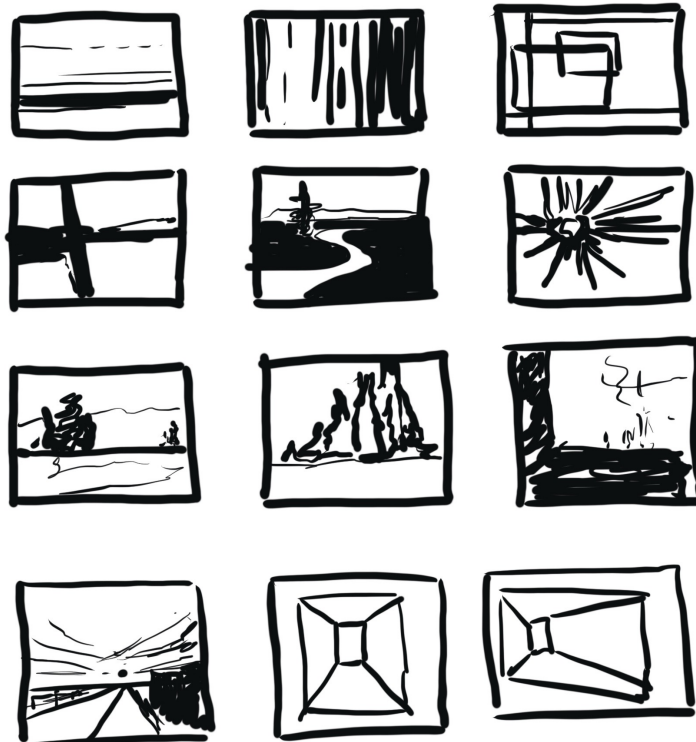
how do you want the viewer’s experience to evolve as their eyes move around the painting?

attention-getters = contrasts that draw the eye

- value (light/dark)
- hue (red v. green)
- intensity of color (bright v. pale or dull)
- color temperature (cool v. warm)
- size
- type of shape (geometric v. organic)
- size (small shape among large shapes)
- variation in repeated elements (one red boat among a bunch of white ones)
- hard edges/sharp boundaries
- directional lines and shapes (one tree in a mostly horizontal landscape or intersections of directional lines and shapes)

Some composition ideas

(names are not standardized, some are more commonly used than others)



Horizontal | Vertical | Frame-in-frame

Cruciform | S-shaped | Radial

Cantilever | Triangular | L-Shaped

Vanishing Point | Perspective Box/Corridor | Offset Perspective Box/Corridor