



Line Color Form

The Language of Art and Design

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CHAPTER 3

Composition

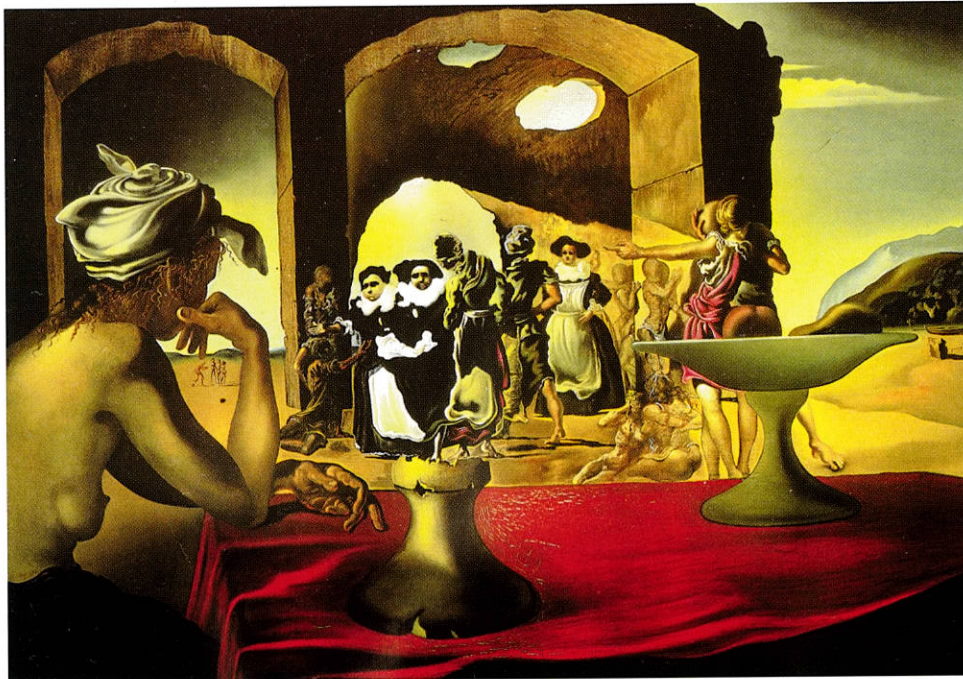
Arranging Space

Composition refers to the way things are put together. In the case of two-dimensional images, it describes the way that different elements are positioned within the frame, with respect to each other and to the viewer, to create a particular impression. The organization of foreground, middle ground, and background; perspective, cropping, movement, and depth; as well as subject placement and body posture, all fall under the umbrella of “composition.” Because it is so nuanced and often very subtle, composition is perhaps the most challenging aspect of art and design to talk about, but this analysis can also be the most beneficial for deepening your understanding of form and function.

Organizing the Frame

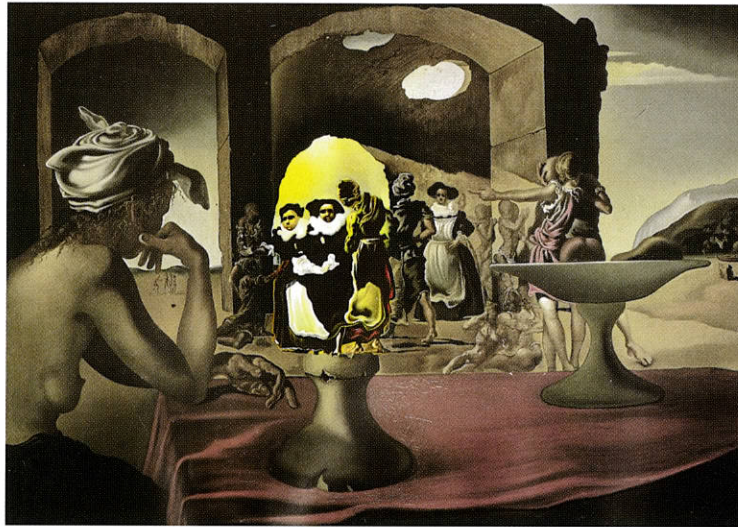
upper left-hand corner; top left corner	top center	upper right-hand corner; top right corner
in the upper left portion of the frame/image	about a third of the way down from the top of the frame	in the upper right portion of the frame/image
on the left-hand side of the image	just/slightly above the center of the frame	on the right-hand side of the image
slightly/just to the left of the center	in the exact center of the image; in the dead center of the image	slightly/just to the right of the center
on the left side of the frame	just/slightly below the center of the image	on the right side of the frame
in the lower left portion of the frame/image	about a third of the way up from the bottom of the frame	in the lower right portion of the frame/image
bottom/lower left-hand corner; bottom left corner	bottom center	bottom/lower right-hand corner; bottom right corner

Linear Perspective



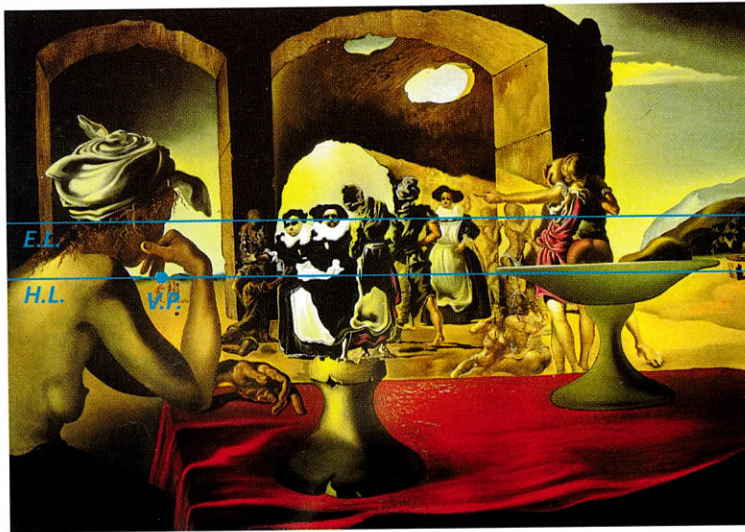
Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire, Salvador Dalí, 1940

Love him or hate him, Salvador Dalí was a genius when it came to composition. Dalí employed rigorously precise perspective techniques to give his surreal images a captivating sense of hyper-reality, as in this 1940 oil painting, *Slave Market with the Disappearing Bust of Voltaire*. The practice of linear perspective, first employed by fifteenth-century Renaissance painters, incorporates a number of strategies that work together to trick the eye into seeing three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface. The following analysis will illustrate the key concepts that make this illusion of depth possible.



center of focus
focal point
picture plane
optical illusion

1. This painting creates the illusion that the viewer is sitting at the table next to the topless woman, watching the bizarre scene of human passion and pain unfold before her. The painting has a distinct **center of focus** in the two warped-looking, black-and-white-clad women. This **focal point** is positioned just left of center, presumably because placing the focus in the exact center usually creates a feeling of artificiality or fakeness. Not only does this area of the **picture plane** draw our attention by being the brightest section with the highest contrast, it is also the conceptual center of interest. It is here that we see the **optical illusion** of the painting: These figures are simultaneously a pair of women and also the face of Voltaire. Framed by the head-shaped arch behind them, the women's faces become the two eyes of the bust and our imagination fills in the blanks, finding nose, neck, and mouth in the women's garments.



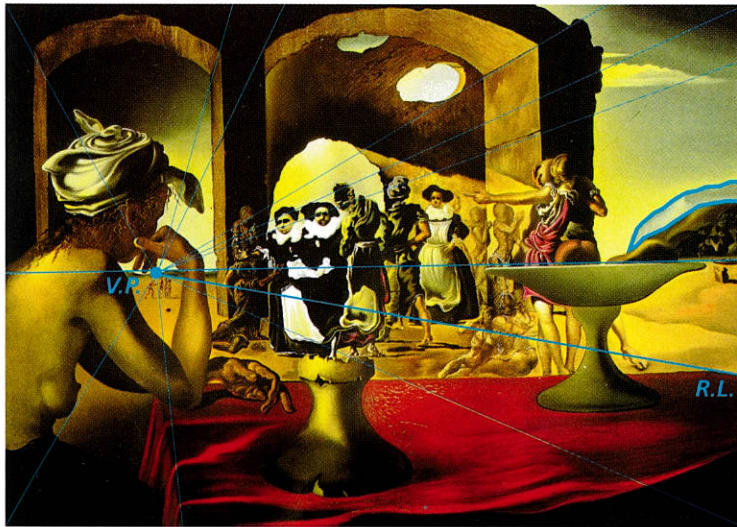
eye level
horizontal axis
horizon line
vanishing point

2. A number of techniques come together to place the viewer of this painting at a specific vantage point. The first is that there is a clear **eye level (E.L.)**. The woman in the foreground's eyes are almost exactly on the same **horizontal axis** as the eyes of the two women in black and white, which are more or less on the same level as the eyes of the smaller figures standing under the archway. This is the same eye level that the viewer feels he or she is on when looking at the image. Other figures' eyes may be somewhat lower or higher, as they are taller, shorter, or perhaps slightly up- or downhill, but nonetheless there is a strong sense of eye level around which everything in the image is based. Additionally there is a clear horizon line, where the hills meet the sky in the distant background. This **horizon line (H.L.)** is just below the eye level line, giving the viewer the impression that he is looking slightly downward on the scene. The point on the horizon line where the viewer's eyes are focused is called the **vanishing point (V.P.)**. In this painting, the vanishing point is located approximately where the shirtless woman's fingers meet the horizon line.



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receding lines
converging lines
aerial perspective

3. On close observation, one will notice that all the lines marking the edges of objects like the red table and the stone columns point toward this vanishing point. If they were to continue, these lines, called **receding lines (R.L.)**, or **converging lines**, would all meet at the vanishing point. All of these careful calculations work together to give the viewer the impression that he is sitting right there, living and breathing, inside Dalí's dream.

4. This image also employs the technique of **aerial perspective**, a term first used by Leonardo da Vinci, which refers to the natural effect that distance has on color. Objects farther in the distance appear to be fainter in color, as seen in the bluish mountains, the objects at the greatest distance from the viewer's vantage point. This subtle touch gives the painting an even greater sense of depth, as if the background truly faded all the way back to an infinitely distant horizon.

Relative Perspective



The Landing of the Southern Barbarians, 16th c. Japanese screen

This sixteenth-century Japanese screen has a unique sense of **perspective**. There is a distinct **foreground**, in which merchants and traders are mingling, and a well-defined **background**, in which a man and a woman observe the scene from a window. The elaborately detailed figures in the foreground are certainly larger than those in the background; however, the painting lacks the gradual **receding** of size and line that we find in the mathematical construction of Renaissance perspective. If anything, the musician and silk merchant in the nearest foreground are slightly smaller than the men in the **middle ground**. The overall effect is not one of three-dimensional space, but rather of separate foreground, middle ground, and background planes.

perspective
foreground
middle ground
background
receding

Movement and Depth



*Tempo-Tempo, Fortschritt, Kulture (Tempo-Tempo, Progress, Culture),
Marianne Brandt, 1927*

This 1927 montage demonstrates several of the modern stylistic two-dimensional graphic design techniques pioneered by Bauhaus designer Marianne Brandt. The image revolves around a powerful but ambiguous machine and the smiling engineer who operates it. Two thin **concentric circles** surround this **focal point**, directing the viewer's attention here immediately. Brandt uses the techniques of **overlapping** and **layering**, as seen in the words radiating out from this center, to create a sense of **depth**. The red lettering is overlapped by the machine, which is in turn overlapped by the white lettering, creating the illusion that some elements are farther away and some are closer. Similar techniques of layering, combined with a sort of aerial perspective, are used to create **movement**. In the upper right portion of the image, lettering is placed on top of, or hidden behind, a vertical black bar, creating the sense that the charcoal gray word "Kulture" is moving away into the background, while the bold black word "Tempo" is moving outward, toward the viewer.

concentric circles

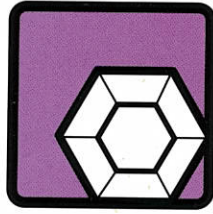
focal point

overlapping

layering

depth

movement



CHAPTER 4

Material

Surface and Structure

A crucial step in every creative process is the choice of material. Material not only affects the aesthetic and physical construction of an object, it also has the power to change the symbolic meaning of a piece. Every creative field, from oil painting to interior decorating, has its own specialized set of materials, and learning how to work with these materials is a fundamental aspect of art and design education. This chapter offers the essential vocabulary needed to call materials by their proper names, as well as adjectives to describe their physical nature, their surface texture, and their state of being, from shiny and pristine to rusty and tarnished.

Hardness and Flexibility



hard
rigid
stiff
firm
supple
soft



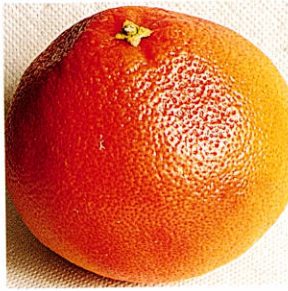
pliable
pliant
bendable
flexible
stretchable
elastic



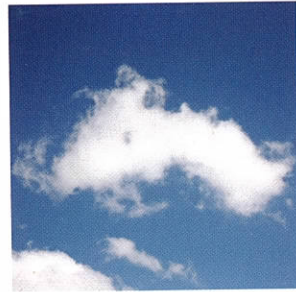
Surface Texture



crinkly



dimpled



fluffy



bumpy



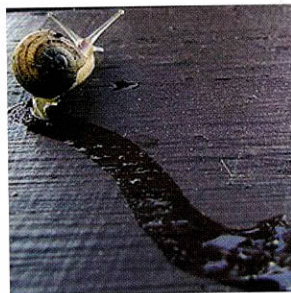
peeling



porous



rough



slimy



spiky



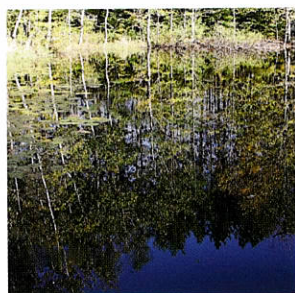
bristly



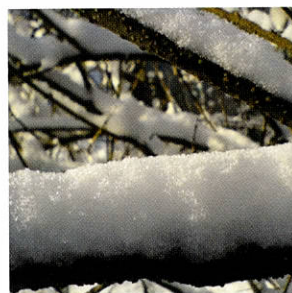
cratered



foamy



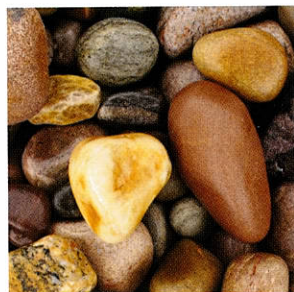
glossy



powdery



shiny



smooth



spongy



sticky

Glass



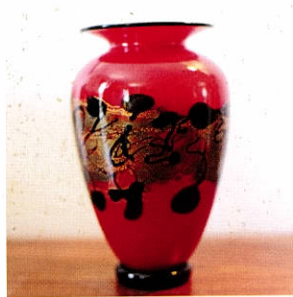
broken mirror



etched glass



glass blocks



hand-blown glass



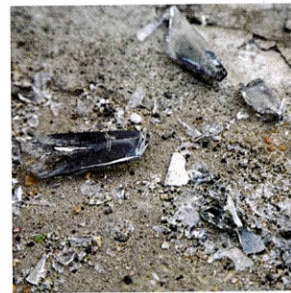
neon glass tubes



plate glass



reinforced glass



shattered glass



stained glass

Wood



bark



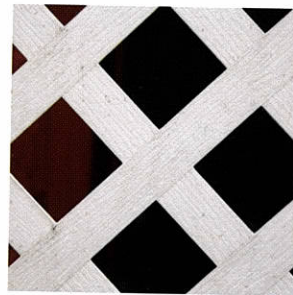
chipped paint



corrugated cardboard



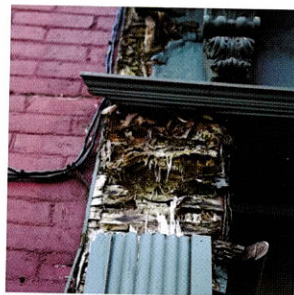
etched presswood



lattice fence



plywood



rotten wood



wicker basket



wood chips

Metal



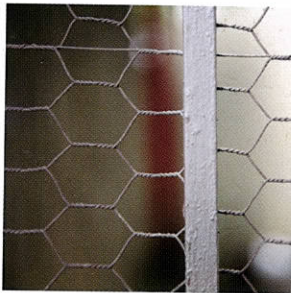
aluminum



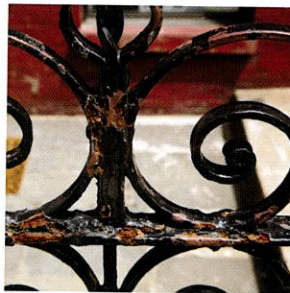
barbed wire fence



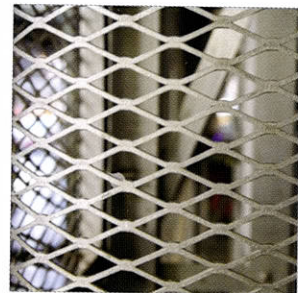
brass



chicken wire



corroded wrought iron



diamond grate



mangled chain-link fence



oxidized steel chain

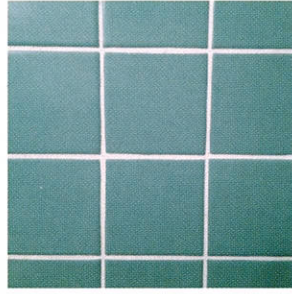


steel screws

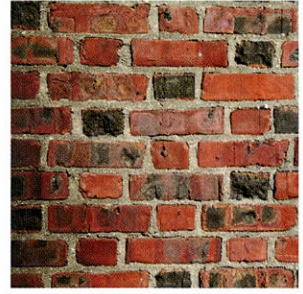
Stone



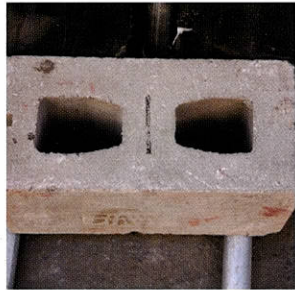
asphalt



bathroom tile with grout



bricks and mortar



cinder block



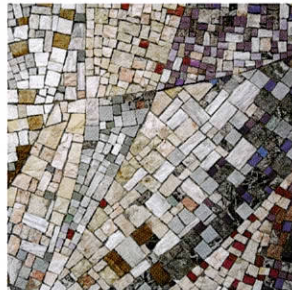
cobblestones



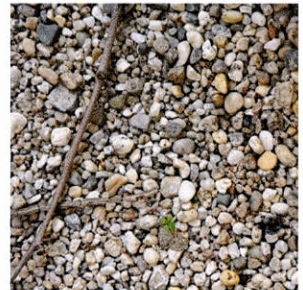
cracked pavement



marble column

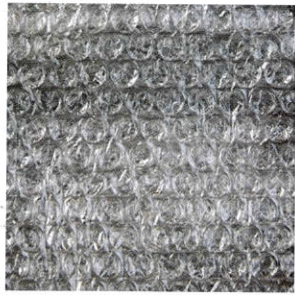


mosaic



pebbles

Plastic



Bubble Wrap



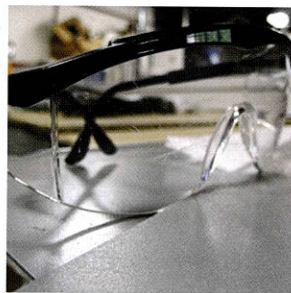
foam board



Formica



nylon twine



Plexiglas



polyethylene



rubber handle

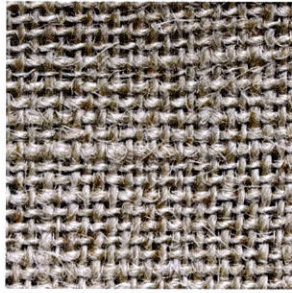


shrink wrap



Styrofoam

Organic



jute burlap



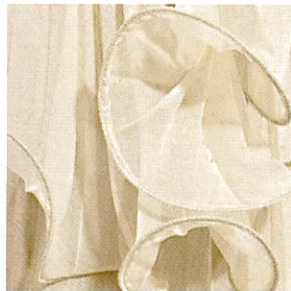
cotton yarn



raw cotton



raw sheep wool



silk chiffon



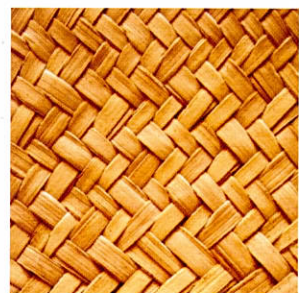
twine



twisted hemp rope



wool yarn



woven straw