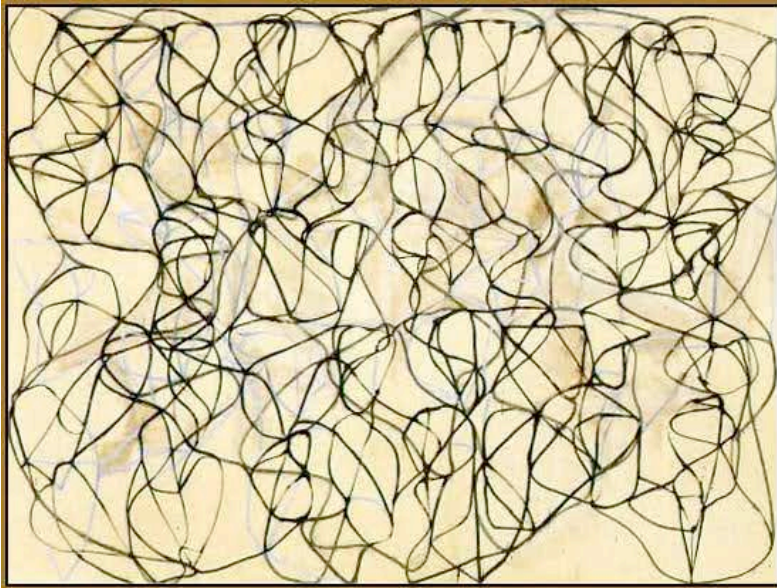


# THE ELEMENTS OF ART

**LINE** is the path of a moving point. Think of a line as the trail left by a pencil or paint brush. Characteristics of line are:

- **Width** - thick, thin, tapering, uneven
- **Length** - long, short, continuous, interrupted
- **Direction** - horizontal, vertical, diagonal, perpendicular, parallel, radial
- **Focus** - sharp versus blurry or fuzzy
- **Feeling** - conveying emotion. An angry line might be sharp or jagged, while a happy or calming line might be smooth and wavy.

Any given line has a combination of these characteristics. For example, you could have a thick, choppy, jagged line. Or, you could have a thin, smooth, diagonal, wavy line.



Brice Marden. *Cold Mountain*, 1989-1991. Oil on canvas.

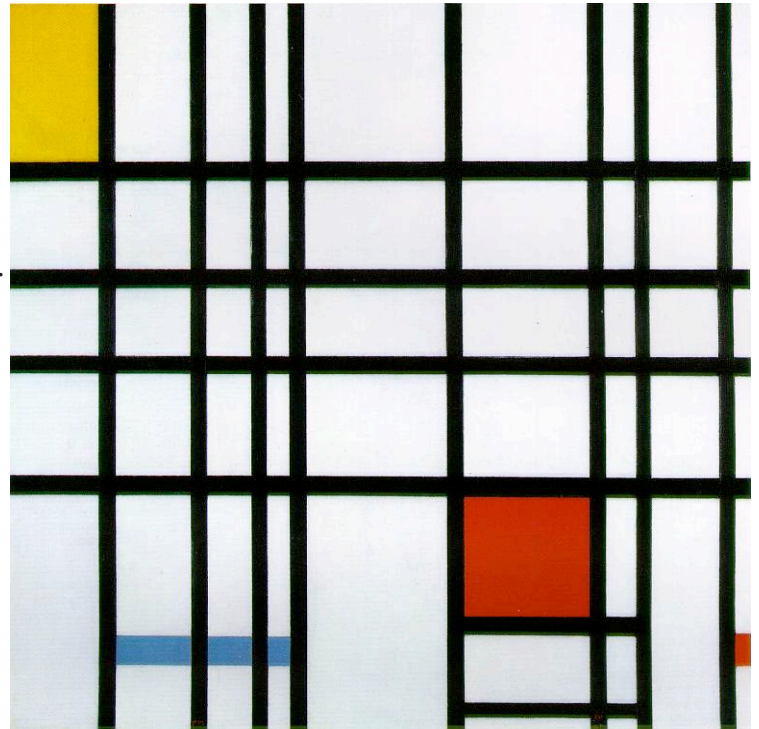


Michael Page. *Godofman 1*, circa 2010. Oil and acrylic on canvas.



Leonardo da Vinci. Self-portrait in red chalk, circa 1512 to 1515.

**Organic lines** are free-form, irregular, or flowing. Notice how the wavy, free-form lines in da Vinci's hair, and in the paintings to the left, seem like they come from nature, not a machine.



Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red*, 1937-42. Oil on canvas.

**Geometric lines** are sharp or crisp, with precise and regular characteristics and edges.

**Lines define the edges of shapes and forms. They are the simplest marks artists can make, so lines are the most fundamental element of art.**

**SHAPE** is what is made when lines join together to enclose an area. Shapes are **flat**, or **two-dimensional**. There are two kinds of shapes: **(1) geometric shapes**, or shapes with names, such as squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, and ovals; and **(2) organic shapes**, or irregular shapes with no names.

### GEOMETRIC SHAPES

have precise straight or curved edges and are easy to describe. They appear carefully designed and measured, as though they came out of a machine.

### ORGANIC SHAPES

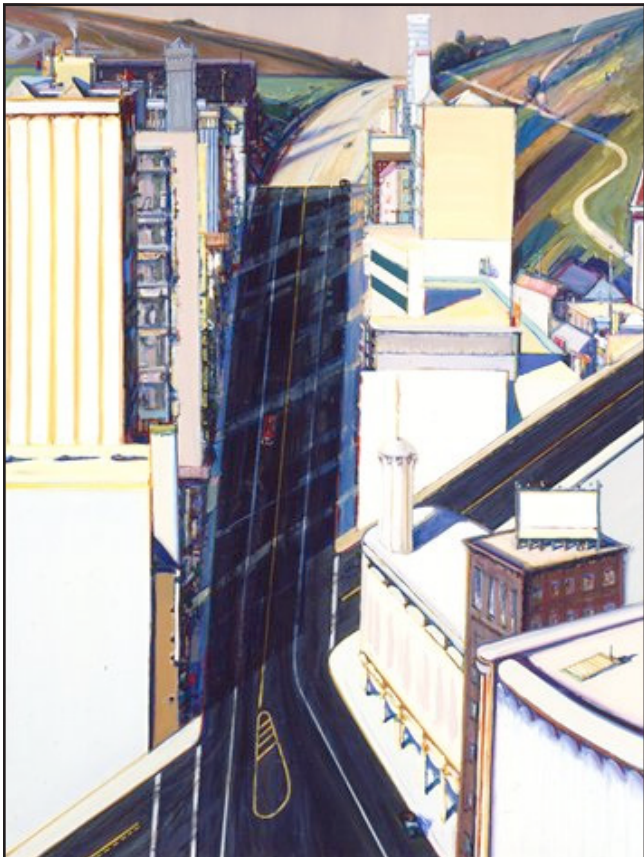
are free-form with irregular edges. They are hard to describe because they have no names. They appear to have come from nature.



Sol LeWitt. *Benziger Print*, 1998.  
Woodblock Print.

Henri Matisse. *La Gerbe*, 1953.  
Gouache and cut paper on paper.

**FORM** is **three-dimensional** – having height, width and thickness. Forms look like they occupy space. Simulated forms in two-dimensional works create an illusion of space. Like shapes, there are two kinds of forms:



Wayne Thiebaud. *Sunset Streets*, 1985.  
Oil on canvas.

### GEOMETRIC FORMS (left)

have names, such as spheres, cubes, cylinders, cones, and pyramids. Their edges are precise and machined.

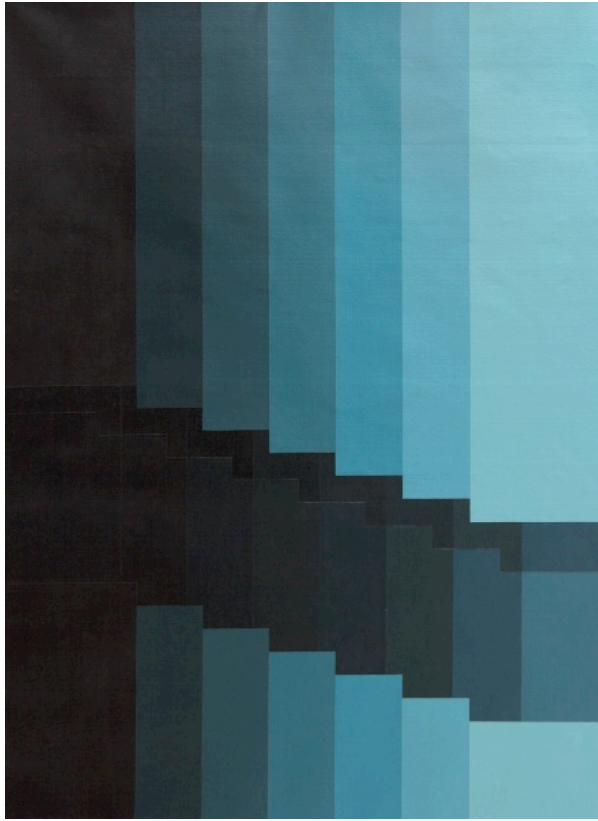
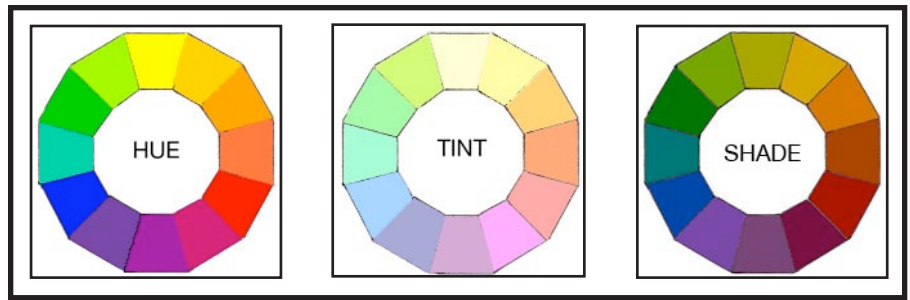


### ORGANIC FORMS (above)

are irregular forms with no names. Their edges are free-form and imprecise. They look like they come from nature.

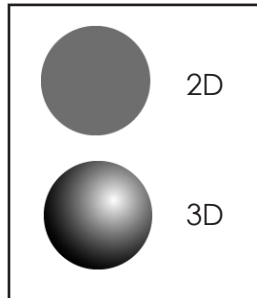
Georgia O'Keeffe. *Petunias*, 1925. Oil on hardboard panel.

**VALUE** is the lightness or darkness of a color or *hue*. Artists create different values by mixing **shades** and **tints**. Shades are a color's dark values; they are typically made by mixing the color with black. Tints are a color's light values; they are typically made by mixing the color with white.



Anthony Michael Sneed. *Untitled*, circa 2010. Acrylic on canvas.

Artists use value to turn shapes into forms. That is, they use shading to make objects or spaces in artworks look **3-dimensional**, thereby creating illusions of space, or **depth** in flat artworks like the paintings to the left and right.



Chuck Close. *Big Self-Portrait*, 1968. Acrylic on canvas. HUGE: almost 9x7 feet!

**Value contrast** is the difference between the shades (dark values) and tints (light values) in a piece of art. With enough value contrast, the piece passes the squint test, is eye-catching, and appears three-dimensional.

**SPACE**, in art, has to do with the placement of subject matter in an artwork, as well as with the illusion of depth on a flat surface.

All works of visual art are made of a combination of positive space and negative space.

**Positive space** is the part of the work that is filled with subject matter – lines, shapes, or objects.

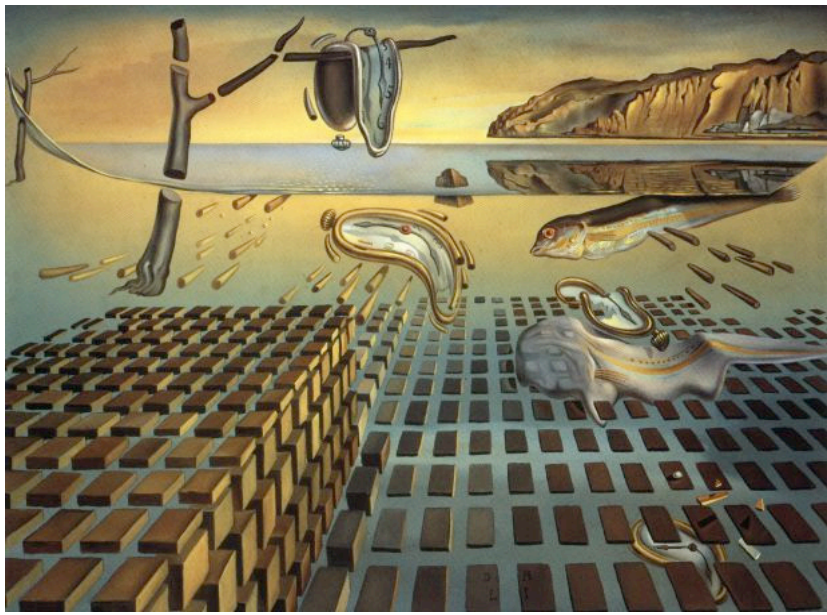
**Negative space** is the empty part of the work around the subject matter.

Because the edges of the positive space are also the edges of the negative space, positive and negative space define each other and are never found one without the other.

Right: Giorgio Morandi. *Natura morta (Still Life)*, 1952. Oil on canvas.

Positive space is the subject matter - vases, cups, and wrapped packages on the table. Negative space is the empty area around the subject matter.





Salvador Dalí. *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*, 1952-1954. Oil on canvas.

**Space** also refers to the illusion an artist creates of objects having depth on the flat surface of the artwork.

In the Dalí painting above, there is a compelling illusion of space - the painting looks like a cavernous valley. This is achieved by his skilled use of linear perspective and shading in the floating bricks, as well as the placement and size of the objects in the piece. For example, the mountains look like they are in the distance because they are very small compared to the other objects in the painting.

**TEXTURE** is the way something feels when you touch it (or how it looks like it might feel). In art, there are two kinds of texture: **(1) real texture** and **(2) implied texture**.

**REAL TEXTURE** can be felt by touch because it is physical and three-dimensional. It is the actual surface quality of the work of art (e.g., chunky paint bumps or glued-on feathers). It is what the piece of art would feel like if you touched it.

Right: Llyn Foulkes. *But I Thought*, circa 2007. Mixed media on canvas.

If you could touch this painting, you would feel the real texture of the bumps in the chunky paint in the man's face and in the skin-colored vertical strip on the right side. You would also feel the Mickey Mouse toy coming out of the man's head.



To create the **illusion of space**, artists use a variety of techniques, both alone and in combination. These are: overlapping, shading, placement and size of objects, and several math- and science-based rules for drawing in linear perspective.



Edward Hopper, *South Carolina Morning*, 1955. Oil on canvas.

It looks like we can walk into the scene in the Hopper painting above due to his use of linear perspective and shading in the building and sidewalk. There is negative space in the sky, though the sidewalk also provides an empty rest area for the viewer's eyes.

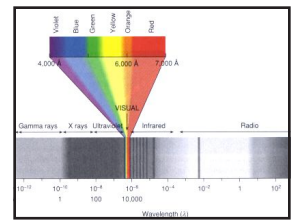
**IMPLIED TEXTURE** is the illusion of texture that artists create in drawings and paintings to simulate the texture of objects, like bricks, leaves, or hair, that are not physically glued to the artwork.

Below: Janet Fish, *Fish Vase*, circa 1995. Oil on canvas.

All of the objects in the painting - fruit, vases, seashells, leaves, trays - look real because of Fish's incredible skill in creating implied textures that mimic what these objects feel like in real life.



**COLOR** is our **perception of light waves** being absorbed and reflected by everything around us. White (plain) light consists of all colors mixed together. The way we see the color of an object depends on how it absorbs and reflects the wavelengths in white light. For example, if an object absorbs all wavelengths except red, we see it as red. Colored art materials, such as paint and markers, use **pigments** (colored powders) to imitate the colors of light.



Right: **Neutral colors**, which are not found on the color wheel, include blacks, whites, grays, and browns.

Right: Margaret Kilgallen. *Pilar* (detail), 1999. Color aquatint with chine collé, 15 x 11 in.

Artists use **the color wheel** to organize visually how our eyes interpret colors when we use them in different combinations. The color wheel shows: **the primary colors** – red, yellow, and blue – which cannot be mixed, **the secondary colors** – orange, green, and purple – which are made by mixing two primary colors, and **the tertiary colors** – colors with hyphenated names that are composed of a primary and a secondary.



Above: **Primary colors** are featured. Roy Lichtenstein. *Crying Girl*, 1964. Enamel on steel, 46 x 46 inches.

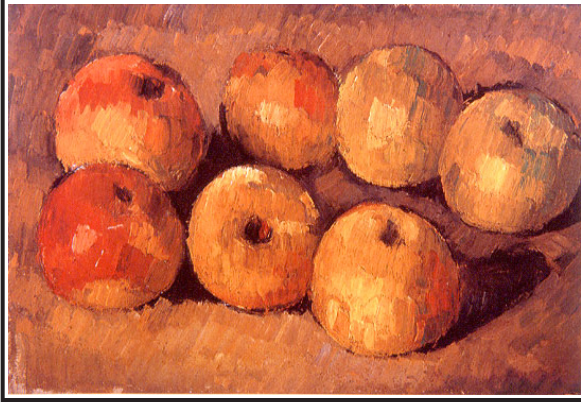


Above: **Cool colors** (green, blue, and purple) are less eye-catching and tend to be associated with cold, and calm or sad moods. In this piece, cool colors are featured to create a somber mood.

Above: Pablo Picasso. *The Visit (Two Sisters)*. 1902. Oil on canvas.

**Warm colors** (red, orange, and yellow) are eye-catching and tend to be associated with heat, and welcoming, passionate, angry, or excited moods. In this piece, warm colors are used to communicate an overall warmth in the painting.

Paul Cézanne. *Still Life with Apples*, circa 1875-1877. Oil on canvas.



Below: **Complementary colors** are the colors opposite each other on the color wheel; these color pairs (in this case, blue and orange) have the most contrast of any color pairing, making the work of art eye-catching.

Below: Vincent Van Gogh. *Mulberry Tree*. 1889. Oil on canvas.



Left: **Complementary colors** - red and green - are featured, making this wall painting almost blindingly bright. Sol Lewitt. *Loopy Doopy*, 1998. Acrylic paint.