

Visual Elements

Line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the location of lines in the composition? Are they along edges of shapes or are they implied between shapes and spaces? Are lines suggested by the direction of a person's glance? Describe the line quality? Are lines active or static, aggressive or passive, thick, thin or varied? Do they disappear in places? Are they jagged or smooth, light or heavy, flowing or rhythmic, regular or irregular? Are directional lines vertical, horizontal or diagonal? Do they suggest motion? Describe how the lines are grouped to depict light and shadow, patterns and textures?
Shape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the relationship between figure and ground, or positive and negative shapes. Are the positive shapes dominant or are they equally important to negative shapes? Did the artist pay adequate attention to the negative shapes? Are they interesting? Are the shapes geometric or organic? Are they the same or different sizes? Are similar shapes used throughout the composition to suggest a pattern or motif?
Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are subjects rendered with value modeling or chiaroscuro? Is there strong dramatic value contrast or tenebrism? Is there a full range of value from light to dark? Did the artist work within a limited value range, such as high-key or low-key? Is the overall composition close in value? Does the use of value evoke a sense of light or contribute to the overall mood? Do the underlying value patterns unify the work from a distance?
Color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the colors that the artist uses. Is there a wide range of hues or just a few colors? Are colors warm or cool? Intense or dull? Light or dark? Are colors analogous or complementary? Are colors monochromatic, achromatic, or neutral? Describe the use of primaries, secondaries and intermediates. Are different hues close in value? Are the colors applied in separate layers or were they mixed into each other wet? Identify and describe any optical color mixing which is used? Do the colors in the negative areas affect the positive colors and shapes? Do the colors advance or recede in space? Do colors naturalistically describe their subjects or are they subjective or expressive? Do colors represent states of feeling such as anger, sexual passion or religious feeling? What mood do they evoke? Are they calm or dramatic?
Texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the surface quality of the work of art (actual texture). Describe how the artist simulated textures in the work of art (implied texture). Are the textures and patterns more noticeable from a distance or from up close? How does the use of texture add richness, depth or complexity to the image? Does the particular use of texture contribute to its expressive power?

Mass and Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the sculpture emphasize its physical bulk or the space it encloses? • Do shapes or figures interact with the space around them (open form)? • Are the shapes or figures self-contained (closed form)? • How does the drawn or painted image simulate mass or volume? • What does the emphasis on mass or volume contribute to the expressive power?
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the implied depth, overlapping, diminishing size and vertical placement. • Describe the atmospheric (or aerial) perspective in the painting, including color intensity, value contrast and detail in areas close and far. • Describe the use of linear (or scientific) perspective in the painting. • Is the vantage point above or below eye level? • Is the image constructed from multiple vantage points (cubism)? • Is there an illusion of great depth or does the image suggest a shallow space? • Is the flatness of the picture plane emphasized (its physicality as an object)? • Does the figure stand out separately from the background? • Do negative ground spaces merge into the figure (open composition)? • Do positive shapes sometimes look like negative shapes (figure-ground reversal)? • Is the space highly structured or is it fluid? • How does the use of space contribute to the meaning or expressive power?
Time and Motion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the artist frozen a moment in time? • Are events which occurred in succession depicted at once (continuous narrative)? • Is the time linear (Western) or cyclical? • Describe how the artist creates a sense of movement in a still image (implied motion). • Is the art object kinetic, using actual motion? • What does the sense of motion contribute to the expressive quality of the art?
Light	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how the artist used chiaroscuro to model form. • Is the light even throughout the composition or is it dramatic (tenebrism)? • Does the image suggest an external or internal light source? • How is color used to suggest different qualities of light, such as warm or cool? • How does light evoke mood in the image? • Has the artist used actual light as in additive color?

Principles of Design

Repetition and Similarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are similar kinds of shapes, colors, lines or textures repeated throughout the artwork? • Are they grouped together or isolated? • Is there a regular recurrence of themes or motifs which creates unity? • Are there similarities in the types of variations seen in the artwork? • Does the repetition of similar shapes, colors, and textures make the image stronger?
Variety and Contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the variety of contrasts of shapes, lines, values, colors and textures. • Are they thick or thin, dark or light, bright or dull, geometric or organic, hard or soft? • How are they varied to create compositional interest? • Are transitions between different areas subtle or abrupt? • Describe the different areas in terms of paint handling or layering. • Does the variety and contrasts of shapes, colors, lines and textures make it stronger?

Emphasis and Subordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which shapes, colors or visual themes are dominant overall? • Which specific passages of the artwork stand out over others? • Do dark shapes stand out from a light composition or vice versa? • Do bright colors stand out from a dull overall composition or vice versa? • Do small shapes stand out from a composition of mostly large shapes? • Do naturalistic subjects stand out from geometric subjects? • Do shapes physically touch in close <i>proximity</i>, or are they isolated to get our attention? • Does the focal point maintain the viewers attention? Is there more than one <i>focal point</i>? • Describe how the artist subordinated or downplayed various parts of the composition.
Balance and Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the balance symmetrical or asymmetrical ? • Explain why different shapes and colors attract your attention equally. • Where are the large and small, the complex and simple shapes? • Where are the light and dark, the bright and dull colors? • Where are the warm and cool colors? Do they advance or recede? • Where are the small or large areas of intense color? Are they balanced somehow? • Are elements balanced from top to bottom (vertical) or from left to right (horizontal)? • Is a large element placed near the center balanced by a smaller item placed on the edge? • Are complex areas and subjects balanced with areas of empty space or rest? • Did the artist seem to use intentional imbalance to evoke discomfort or discord?
Directional forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the “paths” which the eye follows through the work. • Are these paths created by actual or implied lines? • Do adjacent or similar shapes or colors seem to follow a line? • Are the directional axis lines of subjects vertical, horizontal or diagonal? • Does the art object give you a sense of standing still, being at rest, or being in motion? • Does your eye move from left to right, top to bottom, front to back or vice versa?
Rhythm and Pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do themes and motifs recur in regular or irregular patterns (visual rhythms)? • Are they interwoven with others to create a complex design? • Are visual rhythms progressive, moving toward a defined point in the composition? • Do they evoke a dynamic sense of movement or time? • Are they flowing or pulsing?
Scale and Proportion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the size of the artwork in relation to other art or its surroundings? • What is the relation of the size of the artwork to you, the viewer? • Does the overall size make the work seem monumental or imposing? • What is the size relation between internal subjects and the size of the whole? • Does this make the work of art seem personal and intimate or more remote? • Can you identify an unsettling distortion of natural scale (Surrealism)? • Do sudden scale changes in the sizes of subjects surprise you and get your attention? • Can you identify the Golden Section? Does it make the work more beautiful? • Is the scale of figures and objects hierarchical or naturalistic?
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the artwork seem to contain only the most needed visual information? • Do any unnecessary elements distract from the essence of the idea? • Can you imagine making a work of art stronger by eliminating an element? • Did the artist pare away all extraneous details, clarifying the composition? • Are some elements and principles intentionally left out? • Does the art object evoke quiet contemplation or does it seem busy?