

TAKE IT TO ART

NOTES FOR LESSON # 2-- MAY 12, 2021



LESSON 2: INTENTION

For this lesson, you will learn basic guiding principles in art composition and design, and then begin 'editing' your abstract with more intention! This is stage TWO of THREE for this month's adventure!

Though it takes practice to become skilled at developing your own creative style, the guiding principles of art that have stood the test of time are always a good place to start. I always say that it's good to learn the 'rules' so that you can learn how to break them well!

If you have ever decorated a room, or taken beautiful photographs, you already instinctively know what makes something visually pleasing, and you already know what *you specifically* find beautiful. So even if the concepts seem complicated at first, you can trust that you will get there!

"Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist." -Pablo Picasso

Let's get INTENTIONAL!

A HELPFUL ANALOGY FIRST:

Good artwork does the same thing as a good movie. It tells a story. It evokes emotions. It has drama and it has resolution. It inspires us, transports us out of the mundane, and hopefully brings us joy.

Think of your painting this way:

SETTING: The **background**, or first layer of paint we put on the canvas serves as the setting or backdrop on which the drama unfolds. The setting can be integral to the story in a film, or can really be barely noticed. But though it is part of the narrative, it is not the primary focus. It sets the mood. This is the function of the background of your painting... it's there to establish the atmosphere and provide a place for the story to unfold.

STAR: The star of a film is the diva. She steals every scene because of her star quality...her 'IT-factor'. The '*Marilyn Monroe*' of your painting is the **FOCAL POINT**. Just as a movie producer knows that the star of the film can make or break a movie, an artist knows that a painting needs an *eye-candy moment* to be most visually pleasing. There is usually only one, or at least only one primary focal point in a piece of art. Often, it's the place of highest contrasts of the different elements of art (which we will cover in a minute).

SUPPORTING ACTORS: No good movie can have only one actor (unless he's Tom Hanks). They serve to help tell the story, of course; but they always point to and defer to the diva or star of the show! In painting, these are the other eye-catching elements that exist in the work that are not the focal point. Artists are careful to make sure they are more subtle & not too distracting... but they are helpful for directing the viewers eye around the canvas and creating additional interest, while at the same time, pointing to the 'STAR'.



ELEMENTS OF COMPOSITION:

The elements of composition are the things you have at your disposal to tell your 'story'!

COLOUR: The basics... *primary colours* (red, blue, yellow) are used to create other colours and cannot be mixed/created. *Secondary colours* (orange, green, purple) are the shades created by mixing two primary colours.

Beyond that, there are infinite possibilities. Compositionally speaking, it is a good thing often to limit your palette in a painting to a few colours, then mix variations of each of those colours to get a variety of shades--a colour story. But really, colour is a very personal thing.

LINE: The eye naturally follows lines in art, so thinking about where lines lead the viewer is important. Compositionally, it's unwise to have solid lines leading off the canvas unless they are subtle. Lines can be curvy or straight, solid or dotted, thick or thin and can add a lot of character.

VALUE: The value of a colour is how dark or light it is. Compositionally, it is always good to have a variety of values of each colour you are using to add depth and complexity to your work. Also, the lightest lights (or highlights) can bring your work to life.

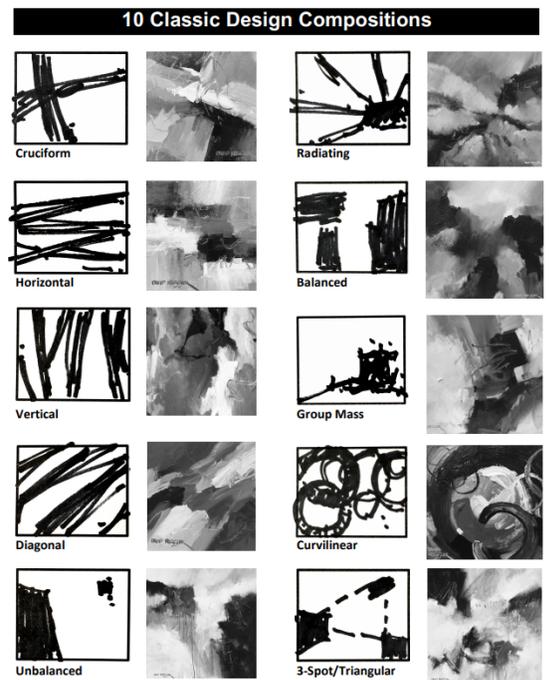
SHAPES: Shapes are... well, shapes! But not merely circles or squares necessarily, but organic free-form shapes are fun as well. Compositional hints: repetition of shapes is good; shading and highlighting shapes can give abstract elements a 3-D appearance; shapes should always vary in size often with the largest being your focal point.

TEXTURE: Texture can be *literal texture* such as thick brush strokes or the use of textured mediums with the paint, or it can refer to *visual texture* which can be created with lines, or dabbing or repetition of elements. Texture is a fascinating element of painting if done tastefully. It can become overwhelming if used everywhere in a painting.

**"Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner, the diverse elements at a painter's command to express his feelings."
--Henri Matisse**

COMPOSITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

BALANCE: Good art is balanced, but not symmetrical. Slight imbalance creates interest. Symmetry can be too 'predictable' or blah; but, too off-balance creates tension and can be upsetting to the viewer. A few 'rules' of thumb. Typically, larger heavy shapes near the edge of a canvas or in the top half create imbalance because they appear 'weighty' as if the image is precarious and about to tip over! Or if you look at colour, unbalanced would be having a lot of a colour on one side only and nowhere else (especially if it's a bright colour). So basically any of the elements of composition can create balance or imbalance.



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DEPTH: Even though an abstract work may not have realistic elements, it still needs depth of field. Blurred/soft edges, neutral colours, and empty/calm spaces tend to recede visually; sharp edges, lighter/darker/intense colours and 'busyer' spaces tend to pop forward. For example, a painting that only has intense colours will have a very 'flat' appearance.

CONTRAST: This is probably one of the most important things to be aware of when editing your painting! When people hear the word 'contrast', they often will think about light and dark. But in painting ANY OF THE ELEMENTS OF DESIGN can serve as a point of contrast. The best way to think about rendering an effective focal point is to make sure there is a strong contrast of one or more elements. For example: lightest light beside darkest dark; sharpest edges on focal point but blurred or 'out of focus' elsewhere; textured focal point but smoother elsewhere... etc.

In the next lesson, "*INTEGRATION*", we will tweak more subtle elements to give your work the extra wow-factor! And we will have a time of feedback and a chance to encourage and learn from one another.