

Elements And Principles Of Design

The design of a painting is its visual format: the arrangement of its lines, shapes, colours, tones, and textures into an expressive [pattern](#). It is the sense of inevitability in this [formal organization](#) that gives a great painting its self-sufficiency and presence. The colours and placing of the principal images in a design may be sometimes largely decided by representational and symbolic considerations. Yet it is the formal interplay of colours and shapes that alone is capable of communicating a particular mood, producing optical sensations of space, volume, movement, and light and creating forces of both [harmony](#) and tension, even when a painting's narrative symbolism is obscure.

Elements of design

Line

Each of the design elements has special expressive qualities. Line, for example, is an intuitive, primeval convention for representing things; the simple linear imagery of young children's drawings and prehistoric rock paintings is universally understood. The formal relationships of thick with thin lines, of broken with continuous, and of sinuous with jagged are forces of contrast and repetition in the design of many paintings in all periods of history. Variations in the painted [contours](#) of images also provide a direct method of describing the volume, weight, spatial position, light, and textural characteristics of things. The finest examples of this pictorial shorthand are found in Japanese ink painting, where an expressive economy and vitality of line is closely linked to a traditional mastery of calligraphy.