ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES OF ART
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• **Elements**: the basic “building blocks” artists use to create an artwork.
  – They are line, shape, form, value, texture, space, and color.

• **Principles**: the tools to help an artist arrange and organize the Elements of Art in an artwork.
  – They are pattern, emphasis, variety, unity, balance, rhythm, and proportion.
ELEMENTS: LINE

• A line is a continuous mark made on a surface with a pointed tool.

• Line is used to define shape, contours, and outlines, and also to suggest mass and volume.

• Can be an actual line defined by the edges of shapes and forms or one that is implied by directional pointers.
ELEMENTS: LINE

Characteristics of Line:

- **Width**: thick, thin, tapering, uneven
- **Length**: long, short, continuous, broken
- **Direction**: horizontal, vertical, diagonal, curving, perpendicular, oblique, parallel, radial, zigzag
- **Focus**: sharp, blurry, fuzzy, choppy
- **Feeling**: sharp, jagged, graceful, smooth
ELEMENTS: SHAPE and FORM

• Shapes are flat and are limited to only two dimensions: length and width.

• Forms have volume and are measured in three dimensions: length, width, and depth.
ELEMENTS: VALUE

• When describing a color, the term value refers to that hue’s lightness or darkness.

• Value changes are often obtained by adding black or white to a particular hue.
ELEMENTS: TEXTURE

- Texture is the Element of Art that refers to the way things feel, or look as if they might feel if touched.
ELEMENTS: TEXTURE

**Physical Texture** is the texture you can actually feel with your hand. The grooves in the build up of paint, the slipperiness of soft pastel, layering of paper on a collage - all the things that change the *feeling* of the work’s surface.

**Visual Texture** is the *illusion* of physical texture created with the materials you use. Paint and pencil can be manipulated to give the impression of texture while the paper surface itself remains smooth and flat.
ELEMENTS: SPACE

• Space can be thought of as the distance or area between, around, above, below, or within things.

• Two types of space:
  – Positive Space: filled with something
  – Negative Space: empty space, a void

Alberto Giacometti, The Cage, 1930-31, Wood
ELEMENTS: SPACE

• Space in art involves an understanding of how to create a sense of 3D depth – objects receding into space – on a 2D surface.

Depth Strategies:
• Overlapping
• Proportion
• Position/placement
• Foreshortening
• Perspective

John Sloan,
South Beach Bathers, 1907-08, Oil on canvas
ELEMENTS: SPACE

• There are two main types of perspective:

  Linear Perspective

  [Image: Dorothea Lange, *The Road West*, 1938, Photograph]

  Aerial Perspective

  [Image: Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with Ruins, Pastoral Figures, and Trees*, 1643/1655]
ELEMENTS: COLOR

• Color comes from light. White light from the sun contains all colors. When the light rays hits an object, our eyes respond to the light that is bounced back and we see that color.

In art, mixing two primary colors (RED, BLUE, and YELLOW) together is the beginning of every other color.
Complementary Colors: Direct opposites on the Color Wheel, when mixed create neutral colors.

Primary Colors: Red, Blue, and Yellow. From these it is possible to mix all other colors.

Secondary Colors: Orange, Green, Violet. The colors obtained by mixing two primary colors.

Hue: A pure color straight from the color wheel.

Warm Colors: Reds, oranges, and yellows. These colors advance towards viewer, are stimulating, and passionate.

Cool Colors: Greens, blues, and violets, recede from viewer, calming and depressive.

Neutral Colors: Browns, blacks, grays, and white, colors not associated with a hue.

Analogous Colors: 3-4 colors next to each other on the color wheel.
THE PRINCIPLES OF ART

- **Principles**: the tools to help an artist arrange and organize the Elements of Art in an artwork.
  - They are pattern, emphasis, variety, unity, balance, rhythm, and proportion.
PRINCIPLES: PATTERN

• Pattern is the repetition of the Elements of Art or anything else (sound, light, etc.).

• Patterns can be created with colors, lines, shapes, etc., or any combination of these things.
PRINCIPLES: EMPHASIS

• Emphasis is a way of combining the Elements of Art to give importance or dominance to some feature (or features) of an artwork.

• Could also be called a “focal point”.

• Compare the focal points of these two pictures.
PRINCIPLES: EMPHASIS

• Contrasting Elements often are used to direct and focus the viewer’s attention on the most important parts of a design.

• Emphasis can be achieved by: increased size, strong color, greater detail, sharp contrast, distorted shape, placement in the composition, movement in the image, and/or pointers leading the eye to a focal point.
PRINCIPLES: VARIETY

• Variety is when dissimilar (or CONTRASTING) Elements are placed together in a way that calls attention to the differences between them.

• Variety creates excitement and interest. Artists use this Principle when they want to increase the visual interest in their works.

• An artwork can have lots of variety and strong (high) contrast, or little variety and subtle (low) contrast.
PRINCIPLES: VARIETY

• High contrast tends towards a more dramatic effect, while low contrast tends towards being soothing and calm.

André Derain

*Charing Cross Bridge*  *The Red Sails*
PRINCIPLES: UNITY

• Unity is when Elements are placed together in a way that minimizes differences and instead accents their similarities.

• Using Elements in a unified or harmonious way gives viewers the feeling that everything in the work of art works together and looks like it “fits”.

PRINCIPLES: UNITY

• Some works are more unified than others.
• For example, compare the use of the color blue in the two artworks below.
• How does the blue create (or not create) unity in each piece?
PRINCIPLES: BALANCE

• Balance refers to a way of combining Elements to add a feeling of visual equilibrium or balance and stability (or imbalance and instability) to a work of art.
PRINCIPLES: BALANCE

• Balance can be one of three kinds:
  – **Symmetrical**: the two halves are identical.
  – **Asymmetrical**: the two halves are different.
  – **Radially symmetric**: objects are positioned symmetrically around a central point.
PRINCIPLES: RHYTHM

• Rhythm is created by the careful placement of repeated Elements in a work of art to cause a visual tempo or beat.
• These repeated Elements invite the viewer’s eye to jump rapidly or glide smoothly from one to the next.
• Closely related to rhythm is movement.
PRINCIPLES: RHYTHM

• Movement refers to creating the look and feeling of action in an artwork.

• It can also refer to guiding the viewer’s eye around the artwork.

• Guiding a viewer’s eye around an artwork is achieved through purposeful placement of Elements so the eye follows a certain path, such as the curve of a line, the contours of form, or the repetition of certain colors, textures, or shapes.
• Consider this work by artist Bernard Stanley-Hoyes.
• Describe the Elements he uses to create a sense of rhythm and movement in this painting.
PRINCIPLES: PROPORTION

- Proportion is the Principle of Art concerned with the size relationship of individual parts to the whole and to each other.

Leonardo da Vinci, *Vitruvian Man*
PRINCIPLES: PROPORTION

• The use of exaggerated proportions may tell about the relative importance of a particular object or symbol in a work of art.  
  – (i.e. we may interpret larger objects as having more significance, depending on the context).

• This “size = importance” relationship is used a lot in ancient art.
PRINCIPLES: PROPORTION

• Why are the three figures on the right larger than everyone else? Who might they be?
PRINCIPLES: PROPORTION

• Other times, proportions may be exaggerated (or diminished) for comedic effect.

• This style of drawing or cartooning is called caricature.
Resources for Further Study:

Project ARTiculate

The Elements & Principles of Design – J. Lovett

The E & P of Visual Language

*NOTE: These resources may contain a slightly different list of Principles.