CHAPTER 3

The Visual Elements
Learning Objectives

1. Describe the visual elements used in the production and analysis of art.

2. Indicate how artists use visual elements to create optical and illusionistic effects.

3. Explain technical devises used to render space and volume in painting.
Learning Objectives

4. Discuss the physical properties and relationships of color.

5. Show how visual elements convey expressive and symbolic meaning in a work of art.

6. Use basic tools of visual analysis to explain a work of art.
• Two-dimensional surface
  ▪ A plane that can be covered with visual elements

• Three-dimensional space
  ▪ Same visual elements, but not confined to a plane, as in sculpture
Introduction

- Richter's *Ooa2*
  - **Lines** depicting **shapes**
  - A **mass** at the center of the work
  - Background **space** of unclear depth
  - Paint drips in passage of **time**
  - Implied **motion** of soldier, left to right
  - Patches of **light** breaking through
  - Bold, distinctive **color**
  - Several zones of **texture**
Oil on linen. 78-3/4" × 106-1/3".
Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles © Daniel Richter. [Fig. 3-1]
Line

- Our primary visual means for recording and symbolizing ideas, observations, and feelings
- Extension of a point wherein length dominates over width
- Paths of action
- Intersection and contrasting paths in Friedlander's *Bismarck, North Dakota*
Photograph.
© the artist, Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco. [Fig. 3-2]
Line

• Characteristics of line
  ▪ Active or static
  ▪ Aggressive or passive
  ▪ Sensual or mechanical
  ▪ Can define boundaries or imply volumes/masses
  ▪ Can be grouped to depict light, shadow, patterns, and textures
Line Variations.

[Fig. 3-3]
• Characteristics of line
  - Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Movement of Colored Lines*
    - Graceful curving of colored lines
  - Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Untitled*
    - Only rigid lines in one color
  - Anselm Reyle, *Untitled*
    - Both straight and bent neon tubes in real space
Sophie Taeuber-Arp.
*Mouvement de lignes en couleurs (Movement of Colored Lines).* 1994.
Colored pencil on cardboard. 14-1/8" × 12-1/2".
Donation Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp e.V, Roldanwerth. © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. [Fig. 3-4]
Pencil on colored paper. 12-1/8" × 8-1/4".
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Gift of an anonymous donor.
Acc. n.: 2452.2001 © 2013. Digital image, MoMA, New York/Scala, Florence © Estate of Alexander Rodchenko/RAO, Moscow/VAGA, New York. [Fig. 3-5]
119 neon tubes, chains, cable, and 13 transformers. 16' 4" × 32' 8" × 26' 4".
Courtesy of the Saatchi Gallery London © the artist. [Fig. 3-6]
Line

• Characteristics of line
  ▪ Fred Sandback, *Untitled*
    • Black yarn suggesting open rectangles
  ▪ Kiki Smith, *Ginzer*
    • Etched a line for each cat hair

• Implied line
  ▪ Suggests visual connections
  ▪ March Chagall, *I and the Village*
    • Circle at the center
Etching, aquatint, and drypoint on mold-made paper.
22-1/2" × 31".
Published by Harlan & Weaver, New York. [Fig. 3-8]

Shape

• The expanse within the outline of a two-dimensional area, or within the outer boundaries of a three-dimensional object

• **Geometric shapes**
  ▪ Precise and regular
  ▪ Common in human-made world

• **Organic shapes**
  ▪ Irregular, often curving or rounded
Shape

• **Biomorphic**
  - Suggests shapes based on natural forms

• **When appearing on a picture plane**
  - Creates second shape out of background area
  - **Figures** or **positive shapes** are dominant
  - **Ground** or **negative shapes** are background
A Shape of Space.
Implied space.
[Fig. 3-10]
Shape

- M.C. Escher, *Sky and Water I*
  - Dark geese on a white background and light fish on a black background
  - **Figure-ground reversal**, or when our awareness shifts between shapes
- Katharina Grosse, *Untitled*
  - Subtle positive and negative spaces
  - Created with stencils and paint drips
Woodcut. 17-1/8" × 17-1/4".
© 2013 The M. C. Escher Company–The Netherlands. All rights reserved.
www.mcescher.com. [Fig. 3-11]

Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica. inv. KG099.

Photo Olaf Bergmann © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. [Fig. 3-12]
Mass

- **Mass**
  - Physical bulk of a solid body of material

- **Volume**
  - When mass encloses space

- **Mass in three dimensions**
  - Inflated legs of Fernando Botero's *The Horse*

  - **Closed form** that does not interact openly with surrounding space
Fernando Botero. *The Horse*. 2008. Bronze. Height 134". Plaza Centenario, Monterrey, Mexico. Photograph: Patrick Frank. [Fig. 3-13]
Mass

• Mass in three dimensions
  ▪ Little solid material suggests more linear form than mass
  ▪ Open form that interacts with surrounding space

• Mass in two dimensions
  ▪ Must be implied
  ▪ Elizabeth Calett, Bread
    • Lines that wrap around and define girl
Bronze. 70-1/2" × 40-3/4" × 16-3/8", at base, 12" × 13-1/4".
Linocut on paper. 15-5/8" × 11-5/8".
Courtesy of the Library of Congress LC-DIG-ppmsca-02388. © Catlett Mora Family Trust/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. [Fig. 3-15]
Space

• The indefinable, general receptacle of all things
  ▪ Seemingly empty

• Space in three dimensions
  ▪ Experiencing space with our bodies
    • Personal space
    • Protected boundaries

• Architecture
  • Changing the character of space
Space

• Space in three dimensions
  ▪ Outside of building as mass in space vs. inside of building as volume
  ▪ Cesar Pelli's design for the North Terminal
    • Offers views of runways, Potomac River, and Washington Monument
  ▪ Doug Wheeler creates feeling of indefinite spaces in his installations
Cesar Pelli and Associates.
Visions of America/Joe Sohm/Getty Images. [Fig. 3-16]
Coved plaster walls, acrylic paint, nylon scrim, white UV and Grolux neon tubing.
216" × 408" × 405".
Space

• Space in two dimensions
  ▪ Seeing the space of the surface all at once
    • Despite boundaries of height and width, many spaces can be implied.
  ▪ Ancient Egyptian paintings
    • Little to no depth
    • Portraying objects from their most easily identifiable angles
      • As in Pool in the Garden
Pool in the Garden. c.1400 BCE.
Paint on dry plaster.
Wall painting from the tomb of Nebamun, Egypt. The British Museum © The Trustees. [Fig. 3-18]
Space

• Implied depth
  ▪ Clues to spatial depth learned in early childhood
  ▪ Methods to imply depth
    • Overlapping
    • Diminishing size

• Vertical placement
  • Objects placed low on the picture appear to be closer to the viewer than objects placed high on the picture.
Clues to Spatial Depth.
[Fig. 3-19]
Space

• Implied depth
  ▪ Artists can emphasize either reality of flat surface or illusion of depth
  • Cézanne, *Still Life with Apples*
    • Horizon line of tabletop
    • Overlapped, vertically-placed fruit
    • Flat space in front of the dish
    • Unclear how much space behind table
    • Suggestions *and* denials of space create an unstable visual experience.
Paul Cézanne. *Still Life with Apples*. c.1890. Oil on canvas. 13-3/4" × 18-1/8". The Hermitage, St. Petersburg/The Bridgeman Art Library. [Fig. 3-20]
Space

• Linear perspective
  ▪ **Perspective** refers to any means of representing three-dimensional objects in space on a two-dimensional surface.
  ▪ **Linear perspective** system
    • Developed during the Italian Renaissance
    • Based on the way we see
    • Lines converge at a **vanishing point**
    • **Horizon line** represents eye level
Space

- Linear perspective
  - **Linear perspective** system
    - Entire picture constructed from a single, fixed position or **vantage point**
  - **One-point perspective**
    - As in Diagram a
    - Parallel sides of the road appear to converge
    - Trees in a row appear smaller the farther away they are
Linear Perspective.
[Fig. 3-21]
Space

• Linear perspective
  ▪ Two-point perspective
    • Two sets of parallel lines appear to converge at two points on the horizon line
  ▪ *The School of Athens*
    • Size of each figure drawn to scale according to distance to viewer
    • One-point perspective, excluding cube
Fresco. Approximately 18' × 26'.
[Fig. 3-22]
Space

- Linear perspective
  - *The School of Athens*
    - Perspective for emphasis
      - Infers Plato and Aristotle as most important figures
    - If figures are removed, attention pulled into infinite space in the middle
    - If background is removed, figures lose hierarchy
Study of *The School of Athens*.
[Fig. 3-23]
Space

• **Atmospheric perspective**
  - Or **aerial** perspective
  - A nonlinear means for giving an illusion of depth
    - Created by color, value, and detail
    - From the visual experience of the real world
      - Increased quantity of air, moisture, and dust
      - Faraway objects bluer, less distinct
Space

• **Atmospheric perspective**
  - Asher Brown Durand, *Kindred Spirits*
    - Infinite space balanced by illuminated foreground details, figures, and portrayal of nearby nature
  - Traditional Chinese landscapes
    - Shen Zhou's *Poet on a Mountaintop*
      - Mountains suggested by washes of ink and color on white paper
      - Poetic symbols of landforms
Oil on canvas. 44" × 36".
Courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.
Photography by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [Fig. 3-24]
Shen Zhou.

*Poet on a Mountaintop* from the series *Landscape Album: Five Leaves.* c.1500.
Ink and watercolor on paper on silk mount. 15-1/4" × 23-3/4" overall.
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 46-51/2. Photo: John Lamberton. [Fig. 3-25]
Time and Motion

• The invisible fourth dimension in which events occur in succession
• The passage of time
  ▪ Cyclic in traditional non-Western cultures
    • Circular, stone Aztec Calendar
  ▪ Linear in Judeo-Christian tradition
    • Progression of St. Anthony in The Meeting of Saint Anthony and Saint Paul
Aztec Calendar Stone. 1479.
Diameter 141".
National Anthropological Museum Mexico. The Art Archive/Alamy. [Fig. 3-26]
Sassetta. *The Meeting of Saint Anthony and Saint Paul*. c.1440. Tempera on panel. 18-5/16" × 13-1/8". The National Gallery of Art, Washington. 1939.1.293.(404) Samuel H. Kress Collection. [Fig. 3-27]
Time and Motion

• The passage of time
  ▪ Comics
    • Frames progress in a linear manner
    • Gary Panter, Back to Nature
  ▪ Film and television
    • Time need not be linear, but can be manipulated
    • Disjunction of passage of clock time
      • Christian Marclay, The Clock
Gary Panter. *Back to Nature*. 2001. Self-published comic. 5" × 3-1/4". Courtesy of the artist. [Fig. 3-28]
Single channel video with stereo sound. 24 hours, looped.
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York © the artist. [Fig. 3-29]
Time and Motion

- Implied motion
  - Movement itself as the subject or central quality of the subject
  - Dancing Krishna
    - Dynamic, energized pose
  - Boccioni, *Dynamism of a Human Body*
    - Futurist movement
    - Outer boundaries of the human form disappear to capture speed, motion
Dancing Krishna. c. 1300.
Bronze. Height 23-5/8".
Honolulu Museum of Art. Partial gift of Mr. and Mrs. Christian H. Aall; partial purchase, The Jhamandas Watumull Family Fund, 1997. (8640.1) Photo by Shuzo Uemoto [Fig. 3-30]
Ink and graphite on paper. 12-3/8" × 9-9/16".
Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Donated by Mr. and Mrs. Edmond R. Ruben, 1995. [Fig. 3-31]
Time and Motion

• Implied motion
  ▪ Jenny Holzer, *Untitled*
    • Light boards populated with sayings of her own invention
    • Sayings seem to progress down the ramp in a continuous flow
      • Lights go on and off at carefully programmed intervals
    • Mimics bombardment of mass media

Extended helical tricolor L.E.D. electronic display signboard. Height 16-1/2", length 162'.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. © 2013 Jenny HolzerArtists Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Fig. 3-32]
Time and Motion

• Actual motion
  ▪ Early moving sculpture through fountains, kites, banners, and flags
  ▪ Alexander Calder, *Untitled*
  • Relies on air movement
  • **Kinetic art**
    • In which actual motion is a major feature of the artwork
National Gallery of Art, Washington. 1977.76.1. Gift of the Collectors Committee. © 2013 Calder Foundation, New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Fig. 3-33]
Light

• Natural light contains all the colors that make up the visible part of the electromagnetic spectrum.

• Seeing light
  ▪ Way light falls on a subject influences how the viewer sees it
  • Daniel Chester French's study of the Lincoln Memorial
Daniel Chester French. Lincoln Memorial (detail). 1911–1922. Photograph (1922) of full-sized plaster model of head (1917–1918). 50-1/2" tall. Chapin Library, Williams College; gift of the National Trust for Historic Preservation Chesterwood Archive. Photographer: De Witt Ward. [Fig. 3-34]
Light

• Seeing light
  ▪ **Value** (tone)
    • Relative lightness and darkness of surfaces
    • From white to grays to black
    • A property of color or independent of color
Light

- Implied light
  - Dark/light relationships diagram
    - Gray value appears to change in relation to the background
  - Rosa Bonheur, *Harvest Season*
    - All values from light to dark
    - Showing volume as mass through shading
      - Chiaroscuro
Dark/Light Relationships. Value scale compared to uniform middle gray.

[Fig. 3-35]
Oil on canvas. 17-1/2" × 33-1/2".
The Haggin Museum, Stockton, California. cat.no 1931.391.26. [Fig. 3-36]
Light

• Light as a medium
  ▪ Artificial light
  ▪ Keith Sonnier, *Motordom*
    • Expresses reality of car culture of Southern Californians
  ▪ Paul Chan, *The 7 Lights*
    • Light projector shows shadows of various objects, literally "light that has been struck out."
Light installation at Caltrans District 7.
Photograph: Roland Halbe © 2013 the artist/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Fig. 3-37]
Digital video projection. 14 minutes.
Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photograph: Jean Vong. [Fig. 3-40]
Forming Art

• Keith Sonnier: Turning Light into Art
  ▪ Draws from experience growing up with electric fences
  ▪ Use of light
    • Viewer becomes participant because the emitted light is part of the work
    • Psychological and physical space
    • Transformers and wiring often visible
  ▪ Human scale of Hartebeest
Keith Sonnier. 2012.
Photograph by Jason Schmidt, courtesy the artist and Pace Gallery. [Fig. 3-38]
Steel, neon paint, neoprene, rubber, and transformer. 10' 2" × 3' 6" × 1' 10".
Photography by Genevieve Hanson, courtesy Pace Gallery. © 2013 the artist/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Fig. 3-39]
Color

- A component of light that affects our thoughts, moods, actions, and even health

- Established cultural customs for color
  - Italian Renaissance and Leonardo da Vinci's representative colors
    - Limited, traditional ways
  - Traditional North India
    - Flat areas of color suggesting moods
Color

• The physics of color
  ▪ Objects that appear to have color are merely reflecting the colors that are present in the light that illuminates them.
  ▪ Different wavelength for each color
    • Red has longest wavelength
      • Travels more rapidly than blue
    • ROY G BIV
White Light Refracted by a Prism.  
[Fig. 3-41]
Color

• Pigments and light
  ▪ Local color
    • The color that appears to our eyes as that of an object
    • Determined by the wavelengths of light being reflected or absorbed.
      • If all wavelengths absorbed, object appears black
      • If all wavelengths reflected, object appears white.
Color

• Pigments and light
  ▪ **Achromatic** (without the property of hue) colors
    • Black, white, and their combination, gray
    • Often referred to as *neutrals*
  ▪ Colors distinguishable from three variables
    • **Hue**
      • Particular wavelength of spectral color; "green"
Color

• Pigments and light
  ▪ Colors distinguishable from three variables
    • Value
      • Relative lightness or darkness
      • Adding black produces a shade
      • Adding white produces a tint
    • Intensity or saturation
      • Purity of a hue or color.
The Three Dimensions of Color.
[Fig. 3-24]
Color

• Pigments and light
  ▪ The three pigment primaries are red, yellow, and blue.
    • Pigment mixtures are called **subtractive color mixtures**
      • Duller and darker as absorptive qualities combine
Pigment Primaries: Subtractive Color Mixture.
[Fig. 3-43]
Color

- Pigments and light
  - The three light primaries are red-orange, green, and blue-violet
    - Produce white light when combined
    - **Additive color mixtures**
Light Primaries: Additive Color Mixture.
[Fig. 3-44]
Color

• Color wheel
  ▪ Concept first developed in 17th century by Isaac Newton
  ▪ Based on 12 pure hues
    • **Primary**: red, yellow, and blue
    • **Secondary**: orange, green, and violet
    • **Intermediate**: red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, and red-violet
Color

• Color wheel
  ▪ Relative warm and cool differences seen in any combination of hues
    • Blue-green side seems psychologically cool
    • Red-orange side seems psychologically warm
  ▪ Color printing separations in the detail of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*
Warm/Cool Colors.
[Fig. 3-45]
Color Printing.
[Fig. 3-46]
Red, Blue, and Green color palettes from Gimp, an image-editing application.  
[Fig. 3-47]
Color

• Color wheel
  ▪ Color pickers or online palettes on computers
    • Color mixtures retaining a high level of brightness

• Color schemes
  ▪ Color groupings that provide distinct color harmonies
Color

• Color schemes
  ▪ Monochromatic
    • Based on variations in the value and intensity of a single hue
    • Represents a certain mood
    • Mary Corse, *Untitled*
  ▪ Analogous
    • Based on colors adjacent on the color wheel containing the same pure hue
Mary Corse. *Untitled (White multiple inner band, beveled)*. 2009. Glass microspheres in acrylic on canvas. 90" × 60". Courtesy of Ace Gallery. [Fig. 3-48]
Color

• Color schemes
  ▪ Analogous
    • Jennifer Bartlett, *Trio*
      • 45 steel plates in various analogous color schemes
  ▪ Complementary
    • Emphasizes two hues directly opposite each other on the color wheel
    • Keith Haring's *Monkey Puzzle*
Enamel over silkscreen grid on baked enamel, steel plates. Overall, 63" × 27'.
Photograph courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery. [Fig. 3-49]
Acrylic on canvas. Diameter 120".
© Keith Haring Foundation. [Fig. 3-50]
Color

- Color schemes
  - **Complementary**
    - Example: red and green
    - Complementary of a primary is the opposite secondary
      - Mix the other two primaries
Texture

- Tactile quality of a surface or visual representations of that quality
- Can be experienced through touching or visual suggestion
  - Actual textures can be felt.
    - As used by sculptors and architects
  - Simulated (implied) textures are created to look like something other than paint.
Texture

- Rude tactile experience within Meret Oppenheim's *Object*
  - Pleasant texture of fur contrasted with the idea of putting it to one's mouth
- Pottery
  - May be taken in one's hands
  - Flask from the Tang dynasty, China
    - Glazes of different chemical composition
    - Incomplete mixing

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Purchase. Acc. n.: 130.1946.a-c. © 2013 Digital image, The MoMA, New York/Scala, Florence. © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ProLitteris, Zurich. [Fig. 3-51]
Flask. Tang dynasty, c. 9th century.
Stoneware with suffused glaze. Height 11-1/2".
China. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John R. Menke. 1972 (1972.274). © 2013. Image copyright MoMA/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 3-52]
Texture

- **Impasto**
  - Technique to create simulated texture using brush strokes of thick paint
  - As seen in van Gogh's *The Starry Night*
- Use of tiny brush strokes to convey richness of material
  - van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*
  - Textures become smoother