MARY STEWART

Launching the Imagination

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO BASIC DESIGN
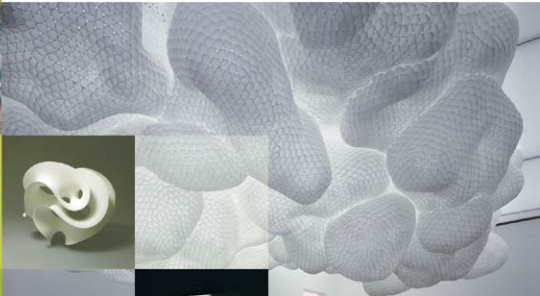
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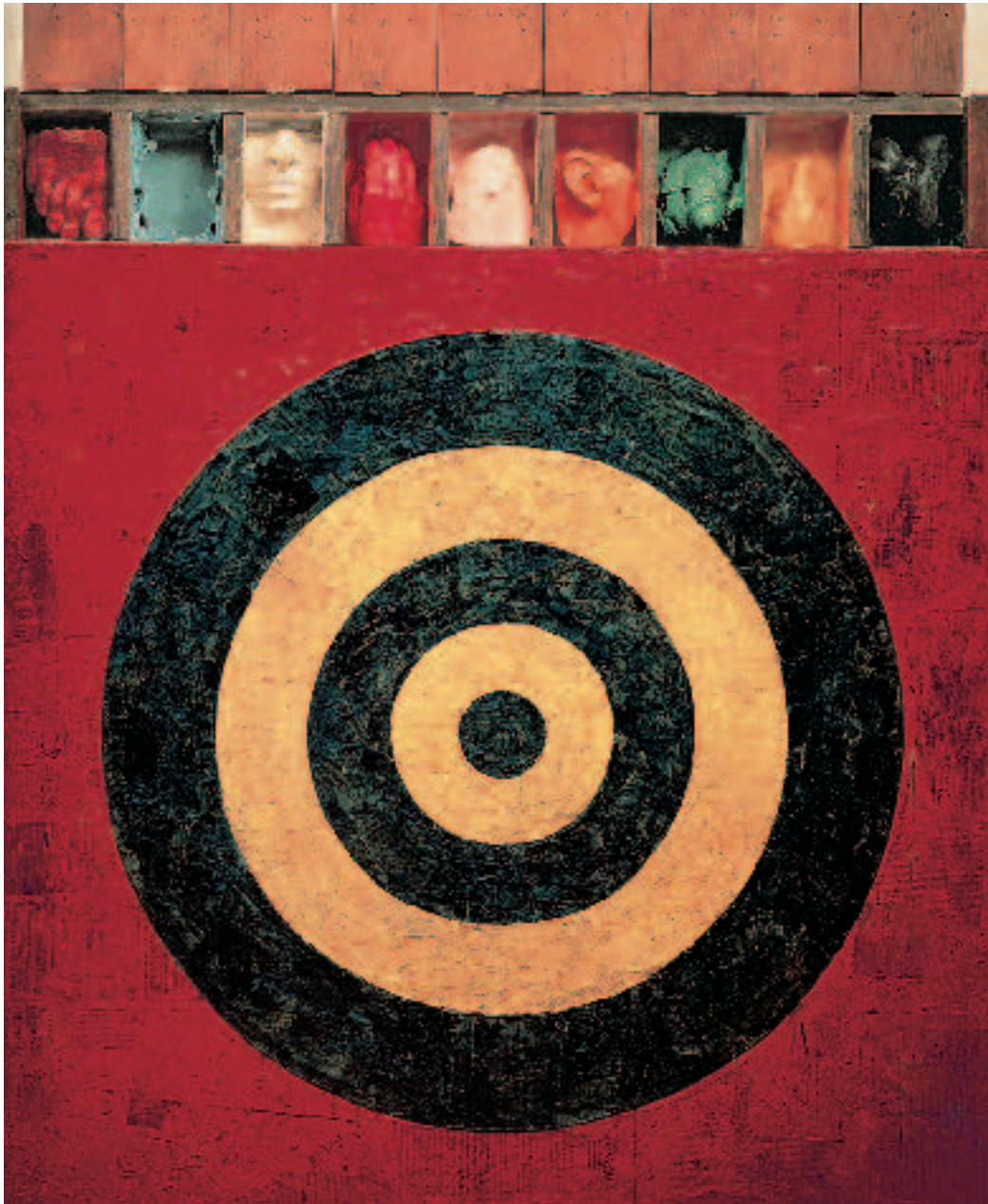
Key Questions

SHAPE

- Experiment with rectilinear, curvilinear, geometric, and organic shapes. Which shape type will best express your idea?
- What happens when you combine flat, solid shapes with gradated shapes? Or fuse negative and positive?
- Contrast adds interest. What happens when two or more shape types are used in a composition?

TEXTURE

The surface quality of a two-dimensional shape or a three-dimensional volume is called **texture.** Texture engages our sense of touch as well as our vision, and it can enhance the visual surface and conceptual meaning of a design.

Types of Texture

Physical texture creates actual variations in a surface. The woven texture of canvas, the bumpy texture of thickly applied paint, and the rough texture

of wood grain are common examples. **Visual texture** is an illusion. It can be created by using multiple marks or through a simulation of physical texture. Albrecht Dürer's *The Knight, Death and the Devil* (1.51) employs both visual and physical texture. The knight's armor, the horse's glossy hide, the dog's furry coat, and other details were created through cross-contours, cross-hatching, and patterns of dots called **stippling.** All are examples of visual texture. Furthermore, this print is an **engraving.** Each dot and line was carefully carved into a thin sheet of copper. Ink was pressed into the grooves, and the surface metal was wiped clean. The plate was then positioned faceup on a printing press, and damp paper was laid over it. Both were cranked through the press, transferring the ink and creating a subtle embossment. As a result, physical texture accentuates the visual texture in this image.

Invented texture is one form of visual texture. Using invented texture, the artist or designer can activate a surface using shapes that have no direct reference to perceptual reality. Bruce Conner used invented textures from many sources to construct his paper collage *Psychedelicatessen Owner* (1.52). Floral patterns, visual gemstones, and cross-contours were combined to create a witty and improbable portrait. By contrast, Brad Holland drew all of the textures in figure 1.53, using pen and ink. As the density of the marks increases, the face dissolves into dark masses of pure energy.

Creating Texture

When creating any type of texture, we must take two basic factors into account.

First, every material has its own inherent textural quality. As shown in figure 1.46, charcoal is characteristically soft and rich, while a linocut, such as Beardsley's *Salomé* (see figure 1.37), creates crisp, distinct edges. It is difficult to create soft, atmospheric textures using linocut or to create crisp textures using charcoal.

Second, the support surface contributes its own texture. This surface may be smooth, as with most photographs, or quite bumpy, as with the canvas and embedded collage Jasper Johns used for his *Target* (see figure 1.50, page 22). Thus, work
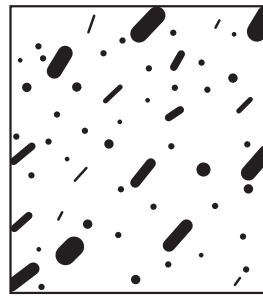

1.51 Albrecht Dürer, *The Knight, Death and the Devil,* 1513. Engraving, 11 × 14 in. (28 × 36 cm).
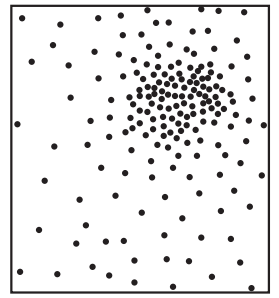

1.52 Bruce Conner, *Psychedelicatessen Owner,* March 31, 1990. Paper collage, 8 × 6 in. (20.32 × 15.24 cm).
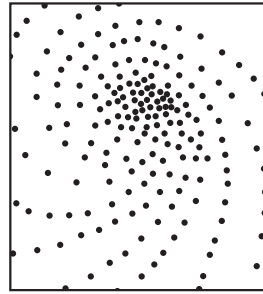
1.53 Brad Holland, *Illustration for Confessions of a Short-Order Artist, Persönlich,* **1997.** Pen and ink.
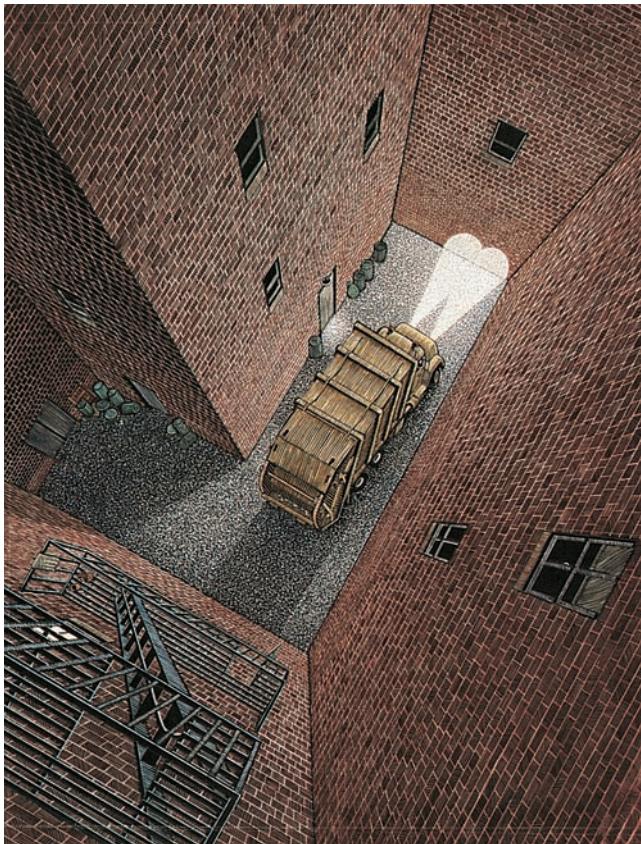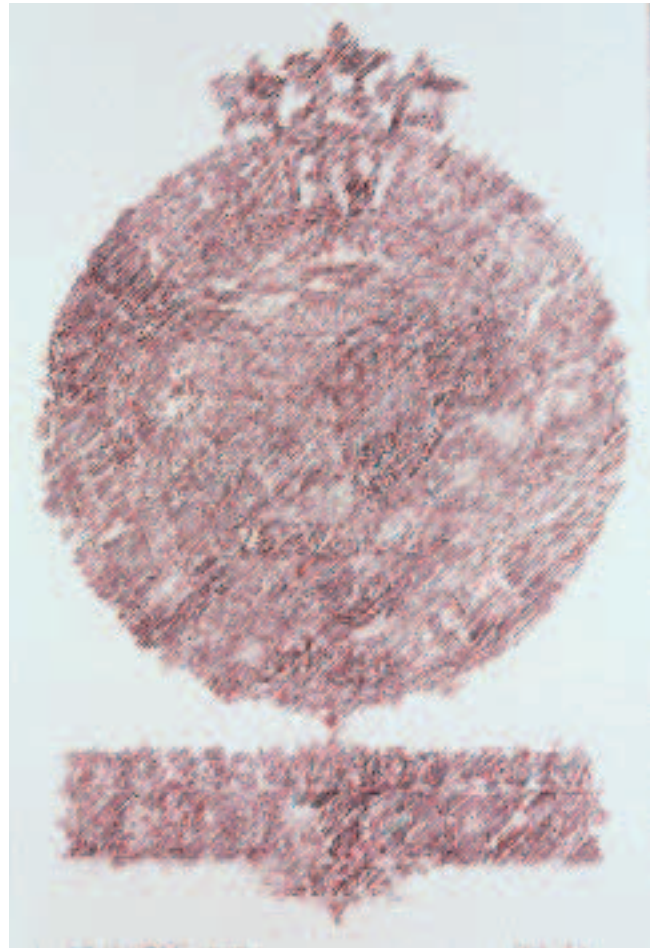

A

B

C

D

1.54A–D Examples of textural size, density, and orientation.

1.55 Douglas Smith, *No Turning,* **1986.** Scratchboard and watercolor, 11¼ × 15 in. (29.2 × 38.1 cm).

1.56 Robert Indiana, *The Great American Dream: New York (The Glory-Star Version),* **1966.** Wax crayon on paper, Sheet: 39¹³⁄₁₆ × 26⅛ in. (101.1 × 66.4 cm).

with texture requires a heightened sensitivity to both the support surface and the medium used to create the design.

Texture and Space

Visual texture is created whenever lines, dots, or other shapes are repeated. Variations in the size, density, and orientation of these marks can produce different spatial effects. Larger and darker marks tend to advance outward (1.54A). Finer marks, tightly packed, tend to pull us inward (1.54B). In figure 1.54C, the marks have been organized into a loose spiral. The overall impact is strongest when size, density, and orientation are combined, as in figure 1.54D.

In figure 1.55, Douglas Smith combined texture and linear perspective to produce a dramatic illusion of space. The lines of mortar between the bricks all point toward the truck in the center, while the bricks themselves diminish in size as the distance increases. The truck at the bottom of the wall of bricks seems to be trapped in a claustrophobic space.

By contrast, Robert Indiana's *The Great American Dream: New York* (1.56) is spatially shallow. Indiana constructed a three-dimensional model of a coin or medallion from layers of cardboard. He then laid his drawing paper on top of the construction and made a rubbing, using colored pencils. This seemingly simple composition can be interpreted in at least three ways. First, creating a design through rubbing can remind us of the coin rubbings we may have made as children. Second, in many cultures, rubbing coins evokes wealth or good luck. Finally, the rubbing itself creates the *illusion* of the coin or medallion, not the reality. Perhaps the Great American Dream is an illusion, ready to dissolve into economic disarray.

Both spatial and flat textures can be created using letters, numbers, or words. Variations in size, density, and orientation can strongly affect the meaning of these verbal textures. In figure 1.57, African-American painter Glenn Ligon repeatedly wrote, "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" on a gallery wall. As the density of the words increases, the words begin to fuse together, creating variations in the visual texture while reducing verbal clarity.

1.57 Glenn Ligon, Untitled *(I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background)*, **1990.** Oilstick and gesso on wood, 6 ft 6 in. × 30 in. (2 m × 76.2 cm).

1.58 Richard Haas, trompe l'oeil mural on Brotherhood Building, Cincinnati, OH.

1.59 Claudio Bravo, Detail of *Package,* 1969. Charcoal, pastel, and sanguine chalk, 30⅞ × 22½ in. (78.42 × 57.15 cm).

Trompe L'Oeil

Taken to an extreme, visual texture can so resemble reality that a deception occurs. This effect is called **trompe l'oeil,** from a French term meaning "to fool the eye." Trompe l'oeil can become a simple exercise in technical virtuosity or can significantly alter our perception of reality. By simulating architectural details, Richard Haas created an amazing dialogue between illusion and reality in figure 1.58. Using the textures of stones, stairs, and smoke, he created a wall-sized trompe l'oeil painting that actually appears to expand architectural space.

Combining Physical and Visual Texture

Each material has a distinctive physical texture, and each drawing method creates a distinctive visual texture. By combining physical and visual textures, we can unify a composition and add another layer of conceptual and compositional energy.

Blended graphite, pastel, or charcoal creates the smooth surface often favored for highly representational images. Claudio Bravo developed the visual textures in *Package* (1.59) using pastel and charcoal. By carefully drawing every fold, he created a convincing simulation of a three-dimensional object.

Cross-hatching creates a more active visual texture. Dugald Stermer's portrait of mathematician Bertrand Russell (1.60) is constructed from a network of vigorous lines. The bumpy texture of the paper adds more energy to this lively drawing.

Physical and visual textures are combined in *Wayland's Song (with Wing)* (1.61). In this myth, a metalsmith named Wayland is captured by the King of Sweden, then crippled and forced to create treasures on demand. In revenge, he murders the king's sons and makes drinking cups from their skulls. He then flees, using wings fashioned from metal sheets. By adding straw and a lead wing to the photographic base image, Anselm Kiefer was able to combine the illusionistic qualities of painting with the physical immediacy of sculpture.

Marks and Meanings

Every textural mark we make can add to or subtract from the composition as a whole. When the texture is random or inappropriate, the composition

becomes cluttered and confused. On the other hand, deliberate use of texture can enhance the illusion of space and increase compositional unity.

For example, each brushstroke in Benjamin Marra's *Self-Portrait* (1.62) describes a different facet of the face. Just as a sculptor carves out a portrait in plaster, so Marra used bold brushstrokes to carve out this portrait in paint. There are no random marks. Using both visual and physical texture, Marra increased the painting's immediacy and dimensionality.

Chuck Close's *Self-Portrait* (1.63) offers a very different interpretation of the head. Working from a photograph, Close methodically reduced the face to a series of squares within a grid. He then painted circles, diamonds, and other simple shapes inside each square. The grid provides structure, while the loosely painted interior shapes create an unexpected invented texture.

In Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (1.64), the texture of oil paint serves three distinct purposes. First, it creates a physical texture, suggesting the actual texture of the trees in the foreground. Second, it brings great energy to every painted shape: we feel the wind; we become mesmerized by the glowing
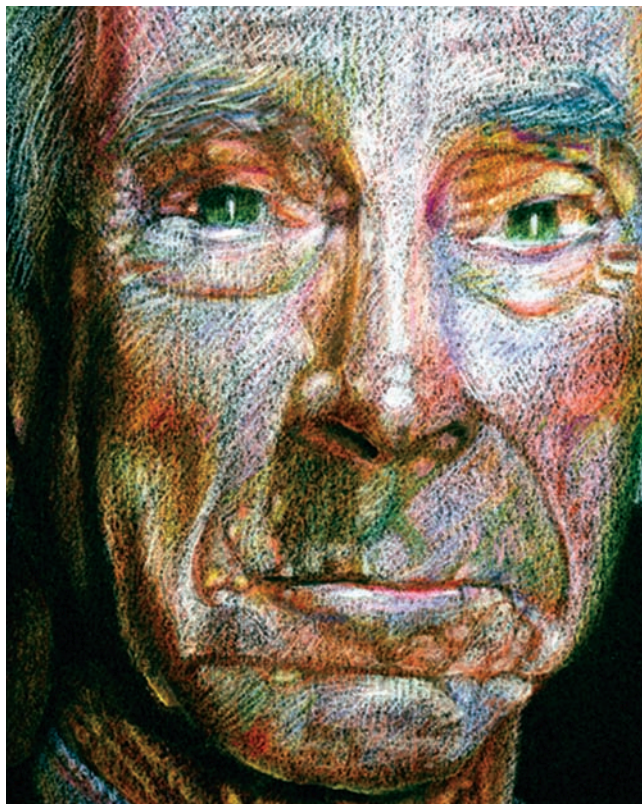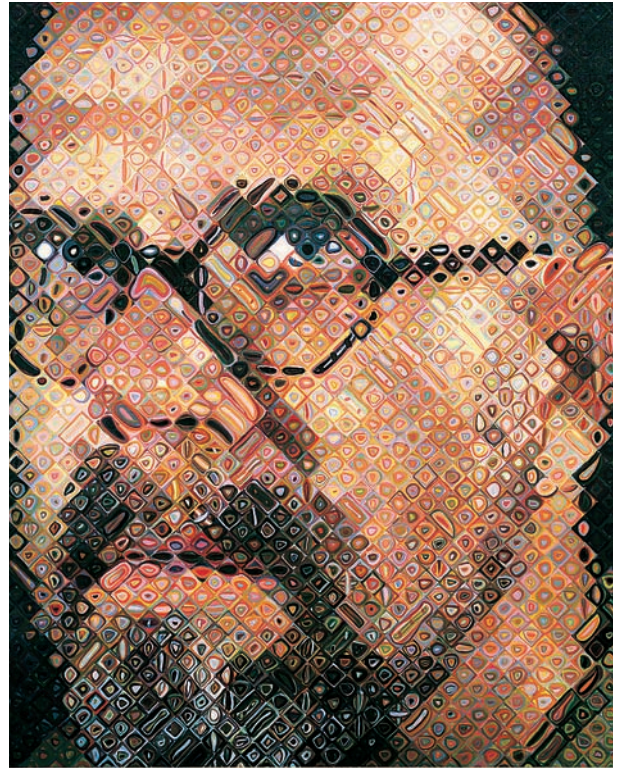

1.60 Dugald Stermer, Detail of Portrait of *Bertrand Russell, for the New York Times Book Review*, 2002. Colored pencil.

1.61 Anselm Kiefer, *Wayland's Song (with Wing),* 1982. Oil, emulsion, straw, and photograph with lead wing, 110¼ × 149⅝ in. (280 × 380 cm).

1.62 Benjamin Marra, *Self-Portrait,* **1998.** Oil, 8½ × 11 in. (21.6 × 28 cm).

1.63 Chuck Close, *Self-Portrait,* **1997.** Oil on canvas, 8 ft 6 in. × 7 ft (2.59 × 2.13 m).

1.64 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Starry Night,* **1889.** Oil on canvas, 29 × 36½ in. (73.7 × 92.1 cm).

whirlpools of light. Finally, we become connected to the artist himself. Van Gogh's hand is clearly evident in every brushstroke he made.

VALUE

Value refers to the relative lightness or darkness of a surface. The word *relative* is significant. The lightness or darkness of a shape is largely determined by its surroundings. For example, on a white surface, a gray square seems stable and imposing (1.65A). The same gray square has less visual weight and seems luminous when it is surrounded by a black ground (1.65B). A **value scale** further demonstrates the importance of context (1.66). The solid gray line appears luminous when it is placed on a black background. As it crosses over the middle grays and into the white area, it seems to darken.

Contrast

Both communication and expression are affected by **value contrast,** or the amount of difference in values. High contrast tends to increase clarity and improve readability (1.67). Low contrast is often used for shapes of secondary importance or when the message is subtle. The same text can be dramatic or incoherent depending on the amount of contrast.

Photographers are especially aware of the importance of contrast. By using a filter, changing the print paper, or adjusting the image digitally, they can quickly modify contrast. High contrast gives the Timberland Ad (1.68) a gritty immediacy. Each word and shape is

1.65A and B Relative value.

1.66 Value scale.
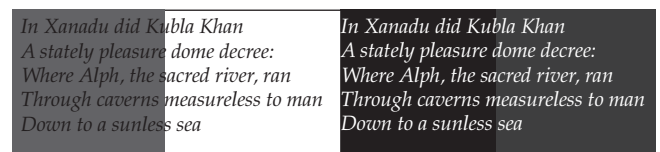
1.67 Contrast affects readability.

1.68 *Advertisement for Timberland Pro.* Winsper Inc.: Steve Bautista, Brian Fandetti, Kevin Cimo, Jim Erickson, Joanne DeCarlo, Caroline Bishop.

1.69 Alfred Stieglitz, *The Terminal,* **c. 1892.** Chloride print, 3½ × 4½ in. (8.8 × 11.3 cm).

1.70 Deborah Remington, *Capra,* **1974.** Oil on canvas, 6 ft 4 in. × 5 ft 7 in. (1.93 × 1.7 m).

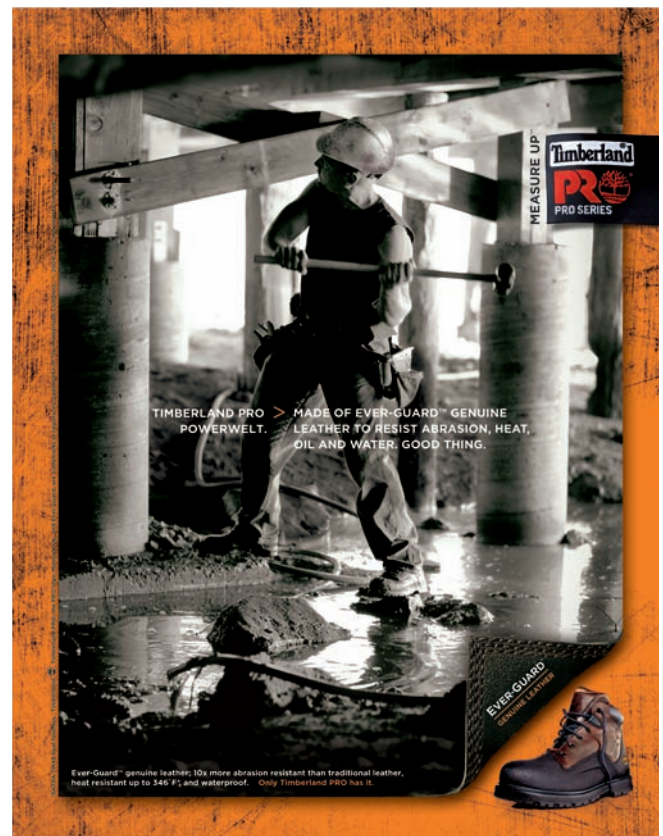clearly defined. The city in Alfred Stieglitz's photograph (1.69) is quieter and more atmospheric. This low-contrast photograph invites the viewer into a pre-industrial world of horses and carriages.

As demonstrated by Deborah Remington's *Capra* (1.70), value gradation can suggest a light source, create a sense of volume, or enhance the illusion of space. Composed from just five dominant shapes, this gradated painting seems to glow.

Value Distribution

Value distribution refers to the proportion and arrangement of lights and darks in a composition. Careful use of value distribution can increase emotional impact. A composition that is 80 percent black simply has a different "feel" than a composition that is 80 percent white.

Darker values are often used to create a sense of mystery or increase dramatic tension. For example, Ray K. Metzker's *Philadelphia* (1.71) is dominated by dark values. Surrounded by somber buildings in a silent city, the commuters huddle together under the brightly lit bus shelter like actors in a play.

Lighter values tend to suggest openness, optimism, and clarity. For example, lighter values dominate the bottom and right edges of Conley Harris's landscape (1.72), creating an expansive effect. The darker values at the center of the composition then pull us inward.

Value and Volume

When a full range of values is used, a two-dimensional shape can seem three-dimensional, or **volumetric.** Figure 1.73 shows the transformation of a circle into a sphere. We begin with a simple outline, then add the **attached shadows,** or values that directly define the basic form. Addition of a **cast shadow** in the third image grounds the sphere. In the fourth drawing, the separation between the shadow and the sphere creates a floating effect.

1.71 Ray K. Metzker, *Philadelphia,* **1963.** Gelatin silver print on paper, 6⅛ × 8¾ in. (15.4 × 22.3 cm).

1.72 Conley Harris, *Doubles/Triples, Italy.* Charcoal drawing, 23 × 30 in. (58.42 × 76.2 cm).

This transformation of shapes through value is so convincing that objects can appear to extend out from a two-dimensional surface. The earliest oil painters often used **grisaille,** or a gray underpainting, to create the illusion of three-dimensionality. Color was then added, using transparent glazes or layers of paint. A detail from Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* (1.74) shows both the grisaille painting and the full-color painting. The two statues in the center were painted using a range of grays, while color has been added to the kneeling figures on the right and left. Variations in value give all of the figures a remarkable dimensionality.

Value and Space

When combined in a composition, very dark, crisp shapes tend to advance spatially, while gray, blurry shapes tend to recede. For example, in Thomas Moran's *Noon-Day Rest in Marble Canyon* (1.75), the dark values in the foreground gradually fade until the cliffs in the background become gray and indistinct. This effect, called **atmospheric perspective,** is one of the simplest ways to create the illusion of space.

1.75 Thomas Moran, *Noon-Day Rest in Marble Canyon,* **from** *Exploration of the Colorado River of the West,* **by J. W. Powell, 1875.** Wood engraving after an original sketch by Thomas Moran, 6½ × 4⅜ in. (16.5 × 11 cm).

1.73 From shape to volume through use of value.

1.74 Jan van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece* **(closed), completed 1432.** Oil on panel, approx. 11 ft 6 in. × 7 ft 7 in. (3.5 × 2.33 m).

Chiaroscuro (literally, "light-dark") is another way to create the illusion of space. A primary light source is used to create six or more values. A dark background is added to increase contrast. In *Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes* by Artemesia Gentileschi (1.76), the highlighted areas are clearly delineated, while darker areas seem to dissolve into the background. The resulting image is as dramatic as a theatrical stage.

Value and Lighting

Filmmakers and set designers are especially aware of the expressive uses of value. Working with a wide range of lights, including sharply defined spotlights and

more diffused floodlights, they can increase or decrease the illusion of space, emphasize an object or an action, and influence our emotional response to a character.

Four common forms of lighting are shown in figure 1.77. As described by Herbert Zettl in *Sight, Sound, Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics,* a key light is the primary source of illumination. Placing this light at a 45-degree angle can enhance the illusion of space. Addition of a backlight separates the actor from the background and adds definition. When a fill light is added, the contrast between light and dark becomes less harsh, and the actor may appear less formidable. In theatrical performances, powerful side lighting is often used to increase drama while enhancing dimensionality.

1.76 Artemesia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes,* **c. 1625.** Oil on canvas, 72½ × 54¾ in. (1.84 × 1.42 m).
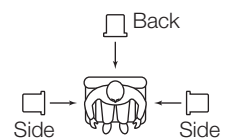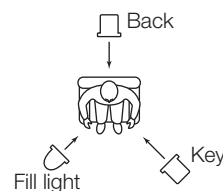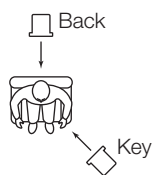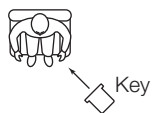
1.77 John Veltri, Lighting Techniques from *Sight, Sound, Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics,* 3rd ed., by Herbert Zettl, 1999.

1.78A

1.78B

1.78C

1.78D

All of these aspects of lighting are used expressively in the film *Casablanca*, directed by Michael Curtiz. The lighting is fairly dark when we first enter Rick's Café Américain, the saloon where most of the action occurs. In this dark and mysterious place, a man will be shot, a seduction will be thwarted, and a romance will be rekindled.

The piano player, Sam, and the audience members closest to the stage are brightly lit as he sings an optimistic song (1.78A). The two villains in the film, Major Strasser and Captain Renault, are often strongly side-lit (1.78B), which makes them appear more formidable and enhances the texture in their faces. By contrast, much softer light is used for the face of the heroine, Ilsa, who is emotionally and politically fragile.

Indeed, value and lighting is used to accentuate Ilsa's emotions throughout the film. When she tries to explain to Rick the reason she left him in Paris two years earlier, Ilsa wears a pure white dress and enters the darkened saloon like a virginal beam of light (1.78C). Later, when she visits Rick in his apartment, shadows cover her face, accentuating her conflicted emotions as she tries to decide whether to remain with her husband, Victor, whom she idealizes, or return to Rick, whom she loves. In the final scene at the airport, diffused lighting again emphasizes Ilsa's vulnerability (1.78D). She and Victor disappear into the foggy night, escaping from Casablanca, while Rick and a reformed Captain Renault stroll away together to join the Foreign Legion.

Key Questions

VALUE

- What is the advantage of a wide value range? What is the advantage of a narrow value range? Which works better in your design?

- What happens when you invert the values—that is, the black areas become white and the white areas become black?

- Would your design benefit from a stronger illusion of space? If so, how can value be used to accomplish this?

SUMMARY

- The elements of two-dimensional design are line, shape, texture, value, and color.

- Lines can contain, define, dissect, and connect. Line networks can be created using hatching, cross-hatching, and cross-contours.

- A shape is created whenever an area is enclosed. The figure is the primary shape, while the ground, or negative shape, provides the surrounding context.

- When figure and ground shapes are equally strong, figure/ground reversal can occur.

- There are many types of shapes, including rectilinear, curvilinear, geometric, organic, representational,

nonrepresentational, and abstract. When gradated, shapes can appear three-dimensional.

- Texture is the visual or physical surface of a shape. Visual texture can be created through multiple marks, while actual variations in the surface create physical texture.

- Relative lightness or darkness in an artwork is called value. Value can be used to create the illusion of space, suggest volume, shift compositional balance, and heighten emotion.

KEY TERMS

abstract shape	definition	low definition	shape
actual line	direction	medium	stippling
atmospheric perspective	elements	negative shape (ground)	texture
attached shadow	engraving	nonobjective shape	trompe l'oeil
calligraphic line	figure/ground reversal	nonrepresentational shape	value
cast shadow	geometric shape	organic shape	value contrast
chiaroscuro	gesture drawing	organizational line	value distribution
closure	gradation (shading)	orientation	value scale
collage	grisaille	physical texture	visual texture
continuity	hatching	positive shape (figure)	volume
contour line	high-definition	pure form	volume summary
cross-contour	implied lines	rectilinear shape	volumetric
cross-hatching	invented texture	representational shape	
curvilinear shape	line		

STUDIO PROJECTS

To apply the concepts from this chapter in the studio, check out the Projects page in the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/stewart4e. The following is a sample of the chapter-related assignments that are described in step-by-step detail.

LINE

Line Inventory. An introduction to the vocabulary and power of line.
Four Lines, Four Times. Sixteen linear compositions.
Line Dynamics. Combining line and balance.

SHAPE

Shape Inventory. Sixteen compositions using shape.
Concealing/Revealing #1. Figure/ground relationships.
Essence/Totality. Exploring abstraction.

TEXTURE

Texture Inventory. Sixteen texture studies.

VALUE

Concealing/Revealing #2. The impact of value on composition and communication.
The World Is a Stage. Light and its emotional impact.

Profile:
Phillia Yi, Printmaker

Energy and Expression Using Woodcut on a Large Scale

Phillia Changhi Yi has revitalized the ancient process of woodcut through her large-scale prints. Drawing directly on luan plywood, Yi cuts away the negative shapes and inks the raised positive shapes to create abstract images that vigorously combine line, color, texture, and movement. Yi has over 20 solo shows and numerous international group shows to her credit. She lectures widely and has taught workshops at Manhattan Graphics Center, Women's Studio Workshop, and the Southern Graphics Council Conference.

MS: The energy in all of your images is impressive. What is its source?

PY: Conflict is my primary source, conceptually and compositionally. As a woman from Korea living in the United States, I find myself caught between cultures. This isolates me in an interesting way and gives me a unique perspective. My work reflects the day-to-day dilemmas and tension of my multi-cultural experience.

Crisis moments often trigger ideas, but historic events are never treated literally. I combine abstract imagery with representational elements in my prints. Both flat and illusory space is created, suggesting an altered sense of time and scale. Static forms are juxtaposed with fluid shapes, and both warm and cool colors are used in opaque and translucent layers. This activates the psychological space and creates a complex, highly charged composition.

MS: Many members of your family are doctors. How did you become an artist?

PY: Getting the right encouragement at the right time gave me the confidence to pursue art. All of my five siblings are talented, I think, but choosing an art career seemed too risky. My father encouraged me to study graphic design, but I found that printmaking was my real passion. My mentor, Professor Romas Viesulas at Tyler School of Art, said that I had the commitment and ability for a career in art. His confidence gave me confidence.

MS: How do you develop your images?

PY: I begin with a month of drawing, usually in charcoal, on 29″ × 41″ sheets of printmaking paper. In the drawings, I work out my images and ideas. Social and political themes dominate. For example, the beating of Rodney King by members of the Los Angeles Police Department and the subsequent burning of Koreatown inspired *Dance.*

The Other Side, shown here, deals with the power of women, who must prevail in a world dominated by men. The whole composition is based on the intersection between these two forces, near the center of the print. In a sense, the large black shape represents the unconscious, while the curving red shape suggests that which is conscious, palpable, and real. I am interested in the uneasy alliance or balance between complex life forces, rather than a simple battle between adversaries. Each corner is treated differently, adding more variety and energy to the print.

MS: The size of this piece is extraordinary. Using eight panels, you have created a print that is 12 feet long!

PY: When I was studying printmaking at SUNY–New Paltz, I was surrounded by printmakers. The size of the press, acid trays, rollers, and other equipment seemed to limit the size of the print. When I went to Tyler in Philadelphia, my roommate, who was a painter, introduced me to her friends. Some were completing a 5′ × 7′ painting a day! I realized that the small size and slow process of printmak-

ing had historically given it a "second-class" status. I was determined to overcome this perception, so I developed a working method that is forceful, spontaneous, and direct. There is still a great deal of deliberation, but the cutting and printing processes are relatively fast.

MS: Some artists work very methodically over a long period of time, while others work in short, intensive bursts. What is your approach?

PY: I adapt my method to my situation. I have obligations as a teacher, a mother, and an administrator, so summer is my only solid block of work time. A regular schedule is best for me. At the beginning of the summer, I go to the studio for a few hours each day. I soon increase this to about 6 hours a day for drawing. When I am cutting the blocks and printing, I often work for 8 to 10 hours a day. I am very consistent.

MS: What is the best work method for your students?
PY: Success is primarily based on commitment.

I would say that art-making is about 5 percent talent and inspiration and 95 percent hard work. A professional or a serious student continues to work despite obstacles. It is important for students to explore ideas and make mistakes: that is the best way to learn.

MS: What is the purpose of your artwork?
PY: Art is expression, not explanation. Artists must be attentive, noticing every detail of experience. Art both reflects and influences society and culture. In that sense, I feel that artists have a responsibility to their generation, not just to create objects of beauty but to create objects of truth—whether they are beautiful or not. My ideas come from my daily life and my personal experience, both good and bad. The most important characteristic is my belief that art should be expressed in terms of human experience. My work is essentially optimistic: I embrace all that the world has to offer.

Phillia Changhi Yi, *The Other Side***, 1993.** Color woodcut, 84 × 120 in. (213 × 305 cm).