CONTRAST AND VARIETY

The design principle of contrast is used to bring a work of art to life. Contrast and variety in composition refer to differences that separate one form from another. This is usually accomplished by contrasts in intensity of hue, the use of complementary colors, or changes in value. "Op" (optical) artists such as Josef Albers, Bridget Riley, and Victor Vasarely used the principle of simultaneous contrast in their compositions. They took advantage of the tendency for the eye to see forms as darker or lighter, or larger or smaller, depending upon the background used.

Definition

Simultaneous contrast: optical illusions caused by size, intensity, and placement of colors

Types of Contrast

Figure/ground	Subdued/intense
Bright/dark	Abstract/realistic
Large/small	Defined/loose
Rough/smooth	Symmetrical/asymmetrical
Monumental/intimate	Wide/narrow
Patterned/plain	Thick/thin
Warm/cool	Bold/delicate
Soft edges/hard edges	Young/old

Drawn from Seated *Odalisque,* 1928, Henri Matisse, 1869–1954.

EMPHASIS

The principle of emphasis is used to focus attention in a composition. It may be an isolated form or the largest, brightest, or darkest area. Attention can be drawn to the focal point by convergence of lines (as in da Vinci's *Last Supper*), textural interest, or contrast between light and shade. In general, a composition is more interesting if the area of emphasis is not in the center, but instead placed to the left or right.

Definitions

Center of interest: the focal point of a composition; often not in the center

Converging lines: lines may be used to direct attention to the focal point

Contrast: the center of interest is indicated by being lighter or darker

Dominant: describes the major element of a composition

Focal point: the first thing the eye sees when viewing an artwork

Isolation: one form is set apart from others

Rule of thirds: an imaginary ticktacktoe grid, with the main subject placed at an intersection

Subordinate: elements repeat or complement the dominant form