

HANDOUT

UNITY

Unity is how the elements of art and principles of design are used in a piece of artwork to produce a unified and interesting end result. It is the consideration of the complete composition, adding color here, simplifying an area there, and considering balance, variety, and emphasis. As artists work, they sort through options, making changes that create an overall harmony. They can create an exaggeration, a push-pull, or visual tension that creates a bond between forms. Placing a form near an edge of the picture plane is one way to create such tension. The use of symmetry is another way to achieve unity or stability. Repetition of form or the regular placement of motifs can create stillness. Asymmetry leads to a livelier organization that can still be harmonious as the eye is led through the composition.

Terms Used to Describe Unity

Symmetry: balancing elements equally

Asymmetry: unequal balance of form

Coherence: all parts coming together in harmony

Dissonance: abrupt changes and apparent disunity

Dominance or subordination: one main element dominates, with others complementary to it

Harmony: combining elements of art to create a restful composition

Proportion: can be normal or exaggerated

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Detail drawn after *Achelous and Hercules*, 1947, Thomas Hart Benton, 1889–1975.

How to Achieve Unity through Use of the Elements and Principles of Art

- Balance the weight of objects
- Cluster small objects together
- Create a variety of forms
- Design a circular or triangular composition
- Focus the eye on one major center of interest
- Isolate important details to emphasize the dominant form
- Limit the variety of shapes, colors, or lines
- Make everything radiate from a central point
- Organize elements through geometry
- Overlap objects or figures
- Simplify the color scheme
- Surround the dominant form with space
- Use convergent lines to direct attention