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ART

Art is the highest task and proper metaphysical activity of this life. *Frederic Nietzsche*

Productiveness is your acceptance of morality, your recognition of the fact that you chose to live, that productive work is the process by which man's consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring new knowledge and shaping matter to fit one's purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one's values, that all work is creative work if done by a thinking mind. *Ayn Rand*

Productive Thinking

Spiritual

At the center of creation is Nature, and man is Nature's highest creation which, like Nature, possesses the ability to create. Additionally, man, an integral part of nature, has the ability to self-reflect on the nature of his being, which is attaining self-awareness. This is the view of philosopher Friedrich Schelling, who also views art as being the highest form of man's creative and reflective abilities, which places the artist at the very summit of existence and the reason why all things exist. I view Schelling's statement as placing an artistic spin on Kant's "the world exists because I exist," and Spinoza's "Natura naturans," nature creating nature. A simple image that comes to mind for these ego spirals is Escher's two hands drawing each other simultaneously. Where all ideas converge is that we don't exist without the cognitive act of creating and reasoning; this the measure and understanding of our being.

In the late 18th through the 19th century, a successive line of philosophers from Kant to Heidegger formed the philosophical heart of the Romanticist Art movement that attempted to mediate the nature of spiritual existence from past to future through the mechanical world of the Industrial Revolution. Philosophy laid the foundation for spirituality to remain at the core of creativity in the arts, making the arts a reaction to and a reflection of the world man was and continues to make, fulfilling the artist's determined function of being nature that has become and is self-aware.

An example of this is Andy Warhol, who reflected the materialism of his time devoid of spiritual meaning, which became the controversy and dialogue concerning his work. Warhol set up a factory and painted soup cans, which are commodities, painted on the surface of other commodities called paintings, that are then sold and traded on the commodities market where their value fluctuates according to market value. Warhol also painted "Super Stars," reducing people to commodities with market value that are bought and sold, reflecting the materialistic society that worships the monetary rewards of success and fame. Interviewers demanded Warhol explain his work and he responded by asking the interviewer to tell him what to say. Warhol's empty and vacant response was again his reflection of a society that would rather be told what to think rather than to think independently. Warhol, who purposely and astutely made his work a reflection of his materialistic society and culture, became spiritually connected to his historical moment in time.

The spiritual in art is man's awareness of his spiritual nature. Visual art becomes present at the first moment when expression can be more than an inner thought of an individual or formless momentary language between individuals. Our first records of man's conscious spiritual awareness are in cave paintings. According to the research of Dr. Nigel Spivey in his documentary film *How Art Made the World*, Dr. Spivey suggests that the earliest artists were spiritualist shamans using ceremonial sensory deprivation rituals to produce strong and swift spirit animals capable of transporting dead souls to the next world.

The fact that we dream, and that our dreams are a separate reality without the material form we experience in conscious reality, allows us to imagine a world and a life beyond physical existence. Spivey hypothesizes that the invention of pictorial images was not from observation and for purposes of decoration but rather a projection from the subconscious mind for the purpose of making visible the eternal spiritual life of the individual.

The Shaman, also the artist, provided the bridge between the two worlds. Throughout religious history the artist has continued to express man's spiritual connectedness to the divine in service to all religions and the human spirit. The Paleolithic cave paintings of Lascaux, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, Matisse's Venice Chapel, Chagall's Jerusalem Windows, and The Rothko Chapel are all expressed in a manner representing their time, culture, and inner spiritual awareness, creating profound spiritual places where man could and can continue to connect with the best qualities of humanity in direct relationship with the spiritual divine and the spiritually divine human nature. When art is politicized and limited to human objectives expressed by the artist, it is stripped of its universal spiritual nature.

The Murals in Picasso's *Chapel of Peace in Vallauris* are void of the best qualities of humanity and serve only as decorations unable to transcend the reality of personal expression and political interests. The murals lack the ability of his earlier painting, *Guernica*, to transcend a specific event into a universal cry for human awareness and for human moral justice for crimes against humanity. A replica of Picasso's *Guernica* that hangs in the UN building was covered to keep it from being viewed when the United States delegation announced its invasion of Iraq, demonstrating that US government representatives understood the implications of announcing war plans that would harm Iraqi citizens alongside Picasso's depiction of fascist aggression and the criminal behavior of war crimes. *Guernica* is a reminder of humanity's destructive nature that has lost its ability to be creative, reflective, and self-aware. The painting becomes an altar-piece of human awareness to injustice.

In *American Gothic*, Grant Wood paints the American myth of the humble agrarian beginnings of a great nation. In the painting, the American Dream is attained through the self-determination of living the simple moral life and achieving spiritual harmony through the honest labors of harvesting God and nature's bountiful gifts. In Gordon Park's black and white photographic rendition of *American Gothic*, a single African American woman with the same look of self-determination stands holding a mop and broom in front of a wall sized American flag. Her determined look challenges the viewer to recognize her as an honest laborer denied the opportunities to share in the American dream by a nation that allows racism and inequality. Both painting and photograph are opposite in narration but both are portraits of the human spirit.

Analytical

Plato believes art is a sensory seduction that creates an emotional attachment holding the individual to the superficial knowledge and desires of the ephemeral being. Art achieves this through the imitations of the ephemeral beauty of nature, blinding us from seeing the underlying reality of things and our true Ideal Existence of the soul, occurring before and after the physical being. Plato's mental asceticism suggests individuals should not desire or be attached to things in real existence and the brief physical life is a preparation for the everlasting Ideal Existence of the soul that exists outside of space and time.

In his documentary *How Art Made the World*, Dr. Nigel Spivey references psychological and behavioral studies by neuroscientists that suggest that human nature is in sharp contrast to Plato's abstract ascetic goals of Ideal Existence. The studies demonstrated it was in our nature to want not only perfection but also an enhanced, more aesthetic reality and more of the things we desire. Among the examples Spivey cites is the progression of Greek sculpture to perfect human representation, which almost immediately changed to an enhanced and more aesthetically pleasing representation of the human figures, as illustrated by the Riace Bronzes. This desire for aesthetic visual pleasure has existed from the time of the Willendorf Venus right up to today's images in advertising and fashion.

It would seem that Plato the poet contradicted his own philosophy. He supported the idea that only poetry is capable of expressing truths, and the more aesthetically pleasing the poetry, the greater the truth being expressed. Poetry is the most artistic, aesthetic, and beautiful compositional form of words, so it would seem the beauty possessed by poeticized words could seduce man into believing ideas were truths. Plato is said to have been very poetic in his expressions, and poetry being the product of non-linear thinking, links him to the category and characteristics of creating minds described in Chapter 2.

What is of interest to artists is Plato's insistence on an underlying reality that is obscured by superficial physical reality. The separation is the difference between what the conscious mind sees and what the subconscious mind perceives; What is perceived is the ideal true form that is unchanging through time. An example is Plato's perception of the solar system being a construction of the mathematically perfect form of the circle. Since the underlying reality is based on the perception of mathematical perfection throughout the universe, then all models must conform to perception and not physical objective reality.

Early Renaissance astronomers, in their obedience to Plato's perception, and based on the perfect circle, constructed some very interesting yet incorrect models of our solar system. What is interesting is that an ideal model had been perceived and the goal became to achieve coherence with the model, not with reality. His Ideal forms became Sacred Geometry, consisting of the circle, triangle, square and the Golden Mean rectangle. The forms are given symbolic meaning. The circle represents eternity, the triangle represents spirituality and the square represents earthly existence. The Golden Mean is the mathematical formula for Nature. The forms of Sacred Geometry become the elements of art that form the underlying reality or structure of a work of art.

Spivey's research indicates that the earliest pictorial images were projections of the subconscious mind, and included in those projections were shapes and patterns. His research further indicated that the brain is hardwired into seeing patterns and shapes, which originate from the subconscious mind. The conclusions of this research might explain why underlying structure, pattern, and pictorial images, which are all projections of the mind and not visual observations, are all present and utilized to form a completed work of art.

In some works, the underlying geometric structure becomes a part of the narrative of the work of art as well. These underlying structures are often obscured by surface pictorial images that imitate the nature of conscious reality we see and experience.

As stated in Chapter 2, the brain can imprint 400 billion bits of information, but most individuals are only conscious of around 2000 bits of information, leaving the vast majority of information in the subconscious mind. Dennett, in *Consciousness Explained*, provides an example of a patient who, in a conscious state, had a visual blind spot. When unconscious under hypnosis, the patient could recall in detail all of the visual information they could not see consciously in the blind spot. The visual information had imprinted upon the patient's brain, but the patient couldn't access the information in a conscious state. All individuals do see the underlying structure of a work of art, but most experience it as a substructure or subliminal imprint in the subconscious mind. No matter how one experiences it, the "underlying structure," is a major contributive factor to the aesthetic wholeness of a work of art. This aesthetic wholeness becomes the basis of perfection that is in our nature to seek, as described in Spivey's documentary.

Composition/Geometric Structure

With greater access to the subconscious mind, artists both see and project in patterns, giving them a double vision capable of seeing both natural reality and underlying structure. The process of making a work of art, in this case a painting, begins with an idea or theme. Next is the compositional structure, which constructs the dialogue the theme will form in the painting, and is followed by pictorial images that match the theme and conform to the structure of the painting. This is the difference between casual seeing of the non-artist and visual seeing and thinking of the artist. The non-artist lacks the visual intelligence and visual thinking skills to construct a work of visual art. The non-artist viewer is capable only of viewing the surface image, while the underlying structure is recognized at the subconscious level of the mind.

This all sounds strikingly similar to Plato's Ideal Existence of seeing the underlying reality of the true form, which is unchanging through time. The underlying reality or structure of art has always remained the same, unchanging, geometrical forms that are the elements of art that originated from the subconscious mind. Below left is an outline of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* and below right is the compositional structure of the *Sistine Madonna*.



Below are the pictorial images placed over the compositional structure. The structural forms of the circle and triangle are not completely filled by the pictorial images, leaving gaps in the triangle and circle that are not filled in or are blank. These gaps form the disagreement between the linear-thinking non-



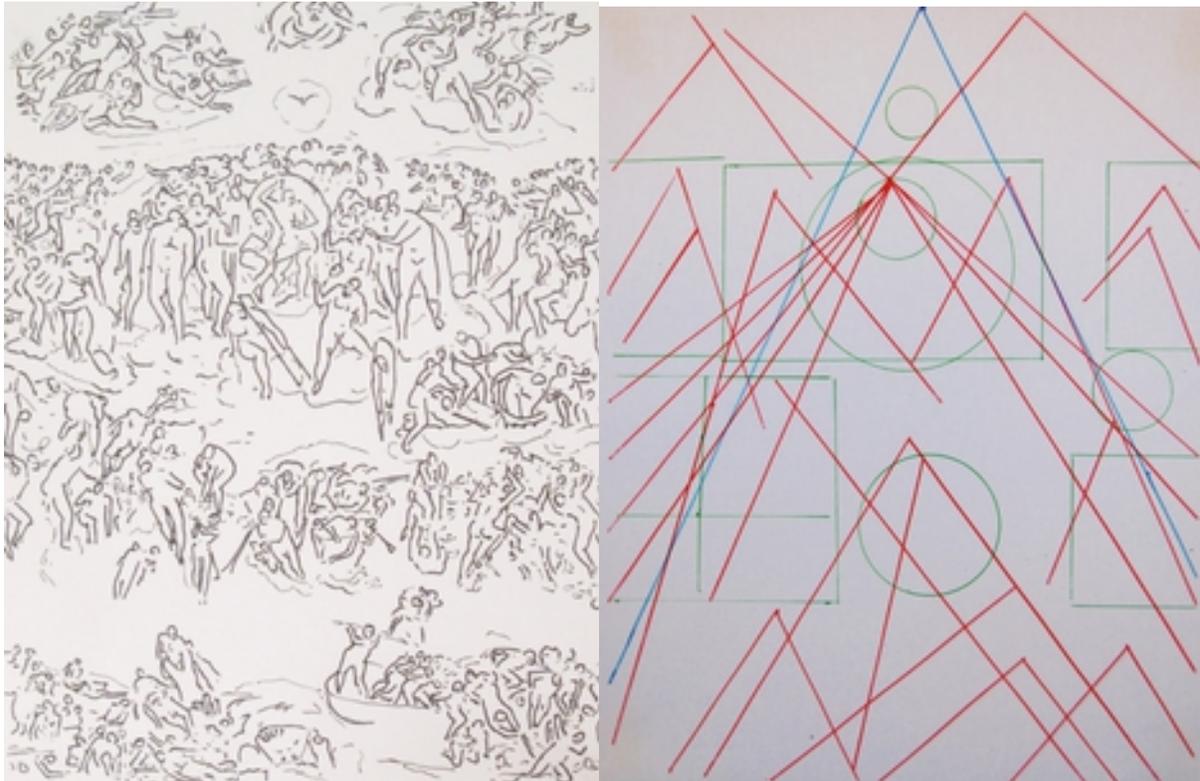
artist and the visual-thinking artist. Since the linear lines of the geometric shapes have gaps, the linear thinker's point of contention is that one cannot assume the artist intended to create a geometric substructure to form the basis of his composition. This argument can be refuted based on examples provided in Dennett's book *Consciousness Explained*. Here he presents numerous visual examples of patterns and unfinished patterns being completed by the mind. This indicates that when visual information that is not complete is presented and the mind has a pre-existing knowledge or reference to the pattern or form, the mind will visually complete the suggested pattern or form. In the *Sistine Madonna*, the roundness of the form created by Madonna and child prompts the mind to see and form a perfect circle; the placement of the figures on the right and left in relation to the Madonna and child form the triangle. Raphael repeatedly used these underlying

structures in his work, which would make the compositional structure of this painting planned and not random.

The compositional structure would have been established first in the mind of the artist and then projected onto the picture plane before the figurative pictorial images were drawn. All of the elements of art are present in the composition. The earthly, which is present in the pairing of opposites in the rectangular shape of the painting, the spiritual, represented by the upward pointing triangle, and the eternal, represented by the circle. The painting could be read by its symbolic geometric structure. When the image is viewed as the relationship between mother and child, it becomes a fertility symbol, the perpetuation of the species and of life that forms the eternity of mortal existence. When viewed as the Madonna and Christ child, it represents the salvation and the everlasting eternal life of the immortal soul. The rectangle represents the earthly, base instincts of human nature, and the bodies of man and woman exist outside of the spiritual triangle's conscious quest for spiritual enlightenment. The triangle pointing upward is the conscious desire to unite the mortal earthly with the divine to insure the immortality of the living soul. Only the heads of the earthly couple are included in the triangle to represent the conscious will of the individual to reject base instinct and seek to attain unity with the divine spirit. The earthly and divine existences are interdependent and form a second larger circle that is implied but not completely formed.

As an artist, when I look at the painting, what I first see is the geometric substructure, because of its strong recognizable pattern. Secondly, I see the figurative pictorial images in relationship to the compositional structure of the geometric forms. Lastly, I combine structure and image to create a narrative meaning to the whole painting. The painting has the sensory seduction that our human nature desires and the intellectual underlying reality of mathematical form that Plato wishes us to perceive.

Below left is a line drawing of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. What I immediately see are a large number of triangles pointing upward, with one major triangle pointing downward just below the Christ figure. What are also noticeable are the vectors radiating from Christ's raised hand and God's outstretched hand. Below right is how my patterned structure vision sees the painting.





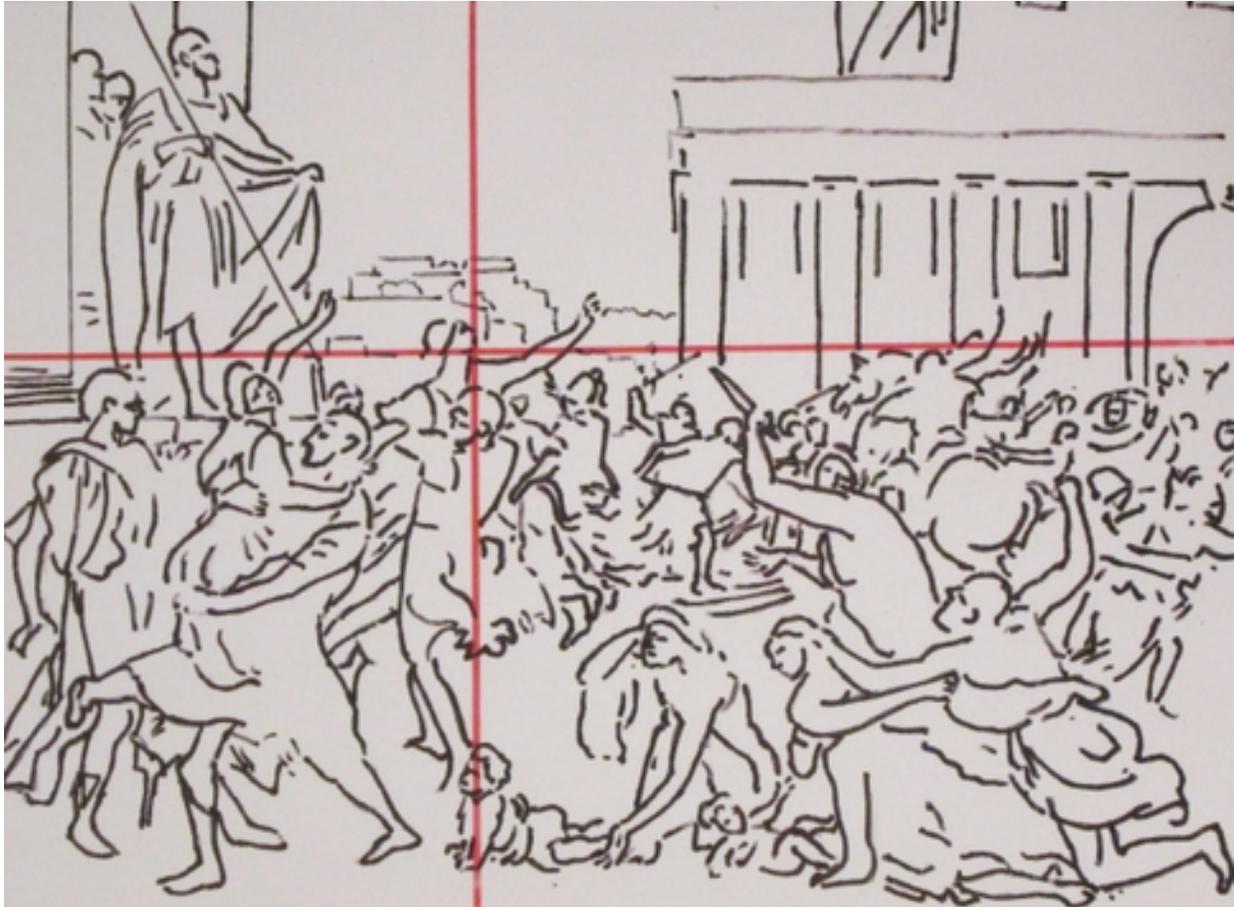
Above are the underlying structural forms with the pictorial images. Combined they reinforce the theme of the painting of Christ casting down the final judgment on humanity, coming from the higher authority of God. Those individuals being cast down from upward pointing triangles indicate they are struggling to achieve a spiritual connection. The jagged triangular structure of the composition, along with the twisting, turning, figures, supports the idea of the tumultuous, chaotic event of the Final Judgment. It is the structural, geometric, compositional elements that give a narrative clarity to the painting while providing a sharp orderly contrast to the mass of twisting figures that create the drama and tension of the depicted moment.

Composition/Golden Mean

Below is a line drawing of Nicolas Poussin's painting *The Rape of the Sabine Women*. The historical conflict is the shortage of women in Rome, which threatened the future existence of the city and resulted in the attack and abduction of the Sabine women.



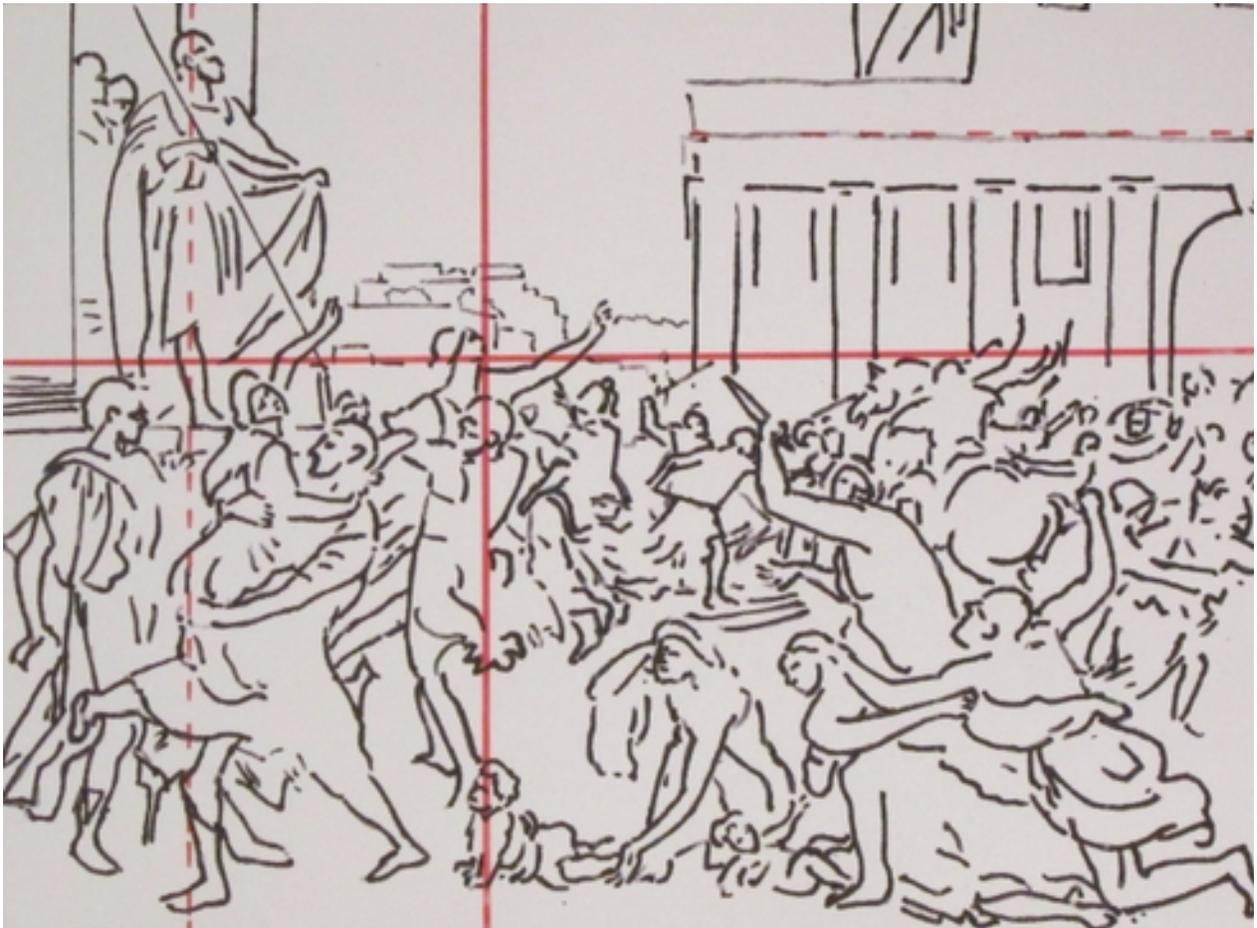
A mass of individuals engaged in conflict in the real, irrational world governed by nature or human nature would be complete and total chaos. Chaos does not lend itself to narration, thus an order must be imposed for the viewer to understand the pictorial images being presented. The order comes from the elements of art, which in this painting are the mathematical formula of the golden mean and the triangle.



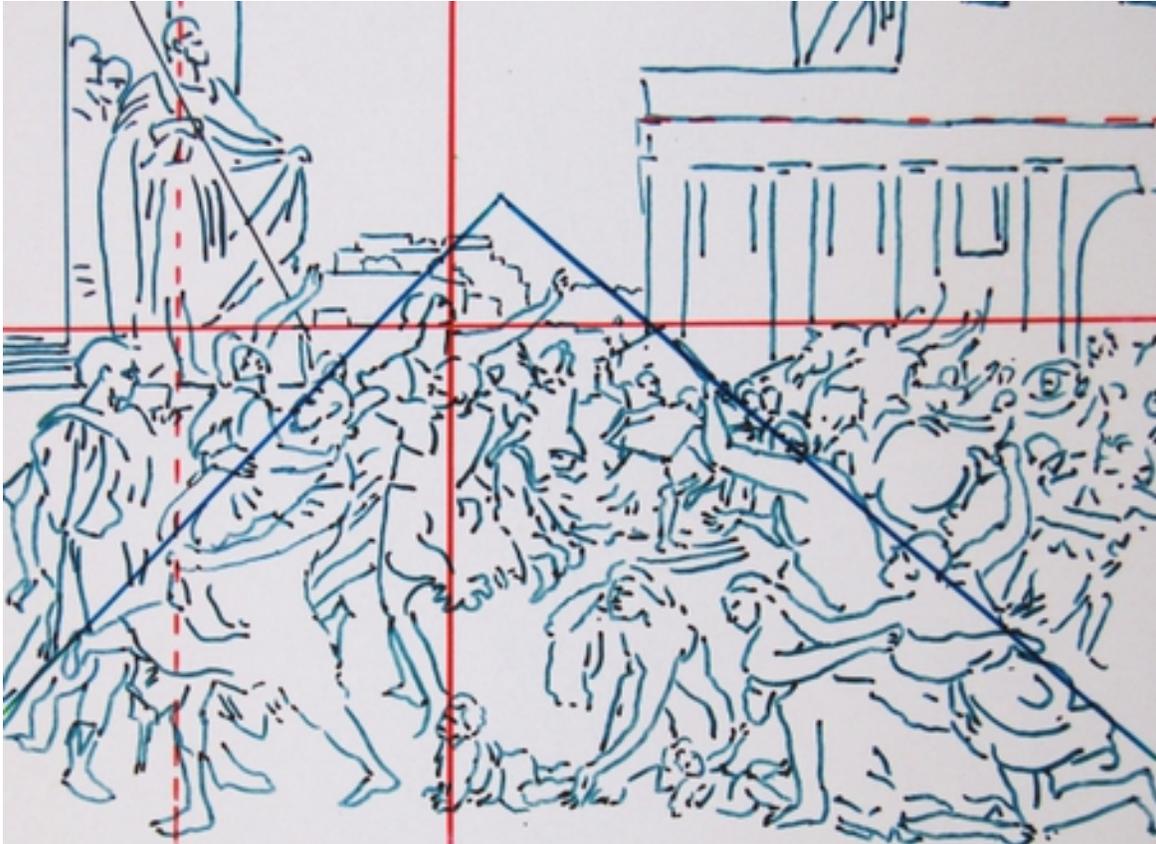
The intersecting red lines in the above drawing are the mathematical formula of the golden mean as applied to the image of the painting. The Golden Mean is a mathematical formula attributed to the Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras. A complete definition, history, and application of the formula can be found easily on the Internet. The formula is 1.618, but for investigative purposes of determining how it was used by the artist in a composition, the formula is .618.

If you take the width of the painting above and multiply it by .618, the answer attained is the red vertical line measured from the right side of the painting. By taking the overall height of the painting and multiplying it by .618 the answer attained is the red horizontal line measured up from the bottom of the painting. These two lines would be the very first lines the artist would have put on the picture plane to start the composition for the painting.

The theory behind using the golden mean is that it is both aesthetically pleasing and it predisposes the viewer to begin looking at the painting in these mathematical locations. The intersection of these two lines become the focal point of the subject narration of the painting. The vertical line is shared by a woman, man, and child. The Sabine woman is being carried away by the Roman Soldier for the purpose of having children to ensure the survival of Rome. The horizontal line further defines the focus of the narration of the painting as being about the Sabine Women with the woman's head resting on the horizontal line at the vertical intersection. The narrative elements Who, What, Why, and How are established by the mathematical formula that places the narration where the viewer would be predisposed to look on the surface of the painting.



If this formula was continued and each divided section was continually divided by the golden mean of the .618, then each pictorial image would be placed according to the formula and would provide a perfectly balanced and aesthetically pleasing whole composition. If the width of the space from the vertical line to the left edge of the picture plane was multiplied by .618, the result would be the dotted red line that extends through the Roman ruler near the top of the painting. If the Golden Mean is applied to the height of the space above the horizontal line and to the right of the vertical line the result would be the red dotted line on the building. The more the space is broken down with the formula the more apparent it becomes that every element of the painting is mathematically placed to create a unified balance.



The narrative is additionally reinforced by the large triangle drawn in blue. On the left diagonal of the triangle, a Roman carrying off the Sabine woman is repeated. On the right diagonal, a Sabine male is depicted in a futile attempt to resist the powerful Roman aggressor who has a woman in tow and a child at his feet. The Roman's sword also points to the Roman ruler, indicating his actions are fulfilling the destiny of the Roman Empire. A well-ordered and complete narrative is placed in a position where the viewer is predisposed to look, and the completeness of the narrative is reinforced by the completeness of the triangular substructure.

The Golden Mean and triangle provide the narrative structure, while another compositional device is used to clarify the purpose of the action in the narration. The Roman Ruler is elevated to the top portion of the painting. In visual compositional balance, anything placed in the upper half of the picture plane carries considerably more visual weight than what is placed in the lower half of the picture plane. The figures placed high on the picture plane create a counterbalance to the action in the bottom half of the painting and the increased visual weight of the monarch helps define the purpose of the narrative action.

A curious feature of the painting is the Herculean figure with the raised sword on the right diagonal. If you look up the painting on the Internet, or view it at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, you will notice that the gold breastplate worn resembles the tight fitting t-shirt of a body builder, rather than protective armor. The perfect golden physique is suggestive of the presence of a god. In Greek and Roman literature and legends, the Gods often came to earth to fight alongside mortals to insure the victory of those forces they favored. The figure in gold becomes a symbol of a god, possibly Mars, the god of war, and with his sword points his allegiance to the Roman leader. However, his sword is turned so it can

strike down the foes of Rome. Mixing Gods, deities, and mortals in historical paintings is not uncommon in Poussin's work.

Composition/Plastic Rhyme

Below left is a drawing of Matisse's painting *The Young Sailor II*. It is a very simple composition with an unusually strong visual appeal. Matisse is more intuitive rather than mathematical in his composition. Below right the Golden Mean has been applied to his painting, which demonstrates that the figure was intuitively and not precisely placed on the picture plane in awareness of the compositional formula the Golden Mean.



Matisse is an artist that relies on the repetition of patterns. As stated earlier by the research of Nigel Spivey, the human brain is hardwired to create and see shapes and patterns; this is a condition or product of the subconscious mind. Creative individuals operate more within the subconscious mind, or Koestler's term of revolving door to the subconscious. At this level of thinking and processing, the creating artist is projecting pattern and structural form over pictorial realism, and in the case of this work, the figure is transformed, closer to geometric shapes than to the realistic representation of a person. In his book *Visual Thinking*, Rudolf Arnheim uses the term *plastic rhyme* to describe the use of repetitious patterns, which help to create compositional unity. The red circle and blue square on the left indicate Matisse's manipulation of the figure to form a geometric compositional structure.

The below left image illustrates Matisse's use of plastic rhyme. Squares and rectangles are filled in with green, with a large square structure colored with yellow. Below right is the plastic rhyme created with triangles that are filled in with green and yellow-green.



Below left is the plastic rhyme created by the repetition of circles, and below right the repetition of curved lines. Matisse's works may look simple, but they are actually complex, taking a long time to develop the visual poetry for which his work is best known. The painting is not an image of a young sailor; it is the rhythmic construction of a young sailor on a picture plane. Matisse's work is about painting and art; the sailor is little more than a vehicle used to create a painting.



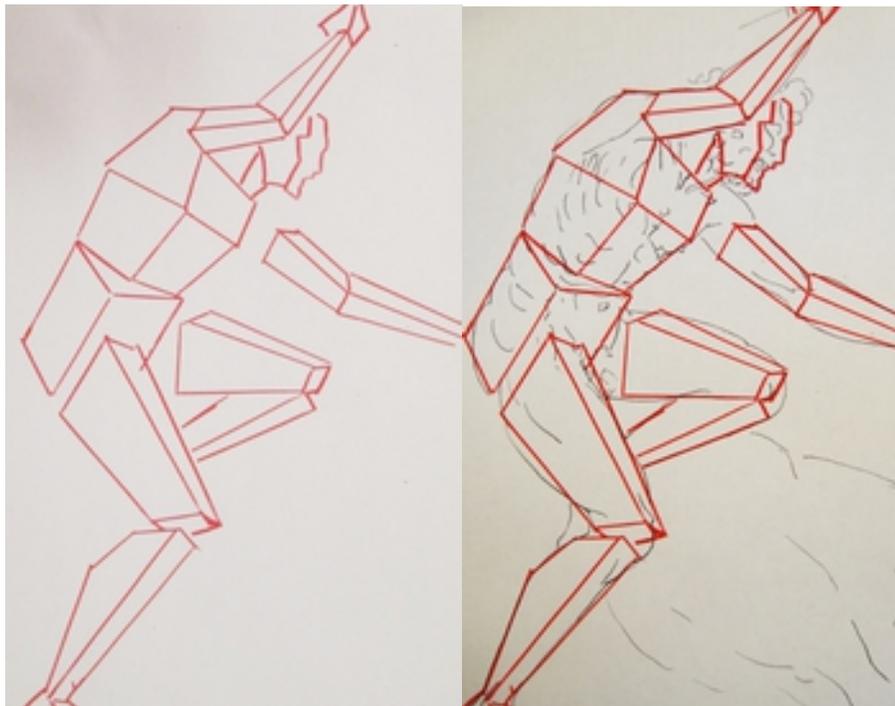


Structure/Planes

Matisse transformed figures into a geometric form with patterns to create a rhythmic composition. This is one example of how the artist sees and visually thinks differently from the non-artist. Matisse wasn't trying to understand or represent actual form. He was creating form with his imagination.

In realistic figurative drawing, the artist must see and structure form differently in a way that is foreign, if not incomprehensible to the non-artist. In the realistic academic figurative drawing, the artist must be able to see all forms geometrically in flat planes, as if viewing cubes.

On the left is a copy of a drawing by Raphael. Here the planes of the body are easily seen, especially in the torso. Below left are the planes of the figure, and below right are the planes over Raphael's drawing. The purpose of the planes in drawing the figure is to insure that proper volume or mass is achieved in all parts of the body, as well as to define the body's directional orientation. For example, the upper torso is turned at a slightly different angle than the hips, and the bottom plane of the figure's right arm extending upward is clearly distinguishable from its side plane. If the figure was drawn with cylinders, it would be more difficult to achieve the proper mass, and the directional turn of the body and limbs would be difficult to distinguish. The idea of the planes applies to all forms, including round and cylindrical forms. Visual artists do not see objects; They see the structure of objects necessary to translate the objects into a visual notation format.



The Viewer

Art begins as a thought that must be translated into a visual symbol and notation system capable of visually communicating to viewers. Once the visual idea has been projected by the artist, the artwork becomes a separate entity with its own reality, existing as an object in real space but outside of real time. If the artwork is to have meaning, it must be experienced and interpreted by viewers. How the artwork is experienced and interpreted varies greatly, depending upon the visual intelligence of the individual viewer.

Visually Entering a Painting

To experience a work of art, viewers must first stop and, while looking, step out of their reality and into the reality of the artwork. For most figurative artworks there are visual devices the artist can employ to draw viewers into the painting. Abstract artworks are more challenging because they often lack a clear point of entry, holding the viewer to the surface of a painting that must be confronted as an object in the viewer's shared space. Below left is a drawing of Het laantje van Middelharnis's painting *Alley at Middelharnis*.



In this landscape painting the artist employs a one-point perspective system to draw the viewer into the painting. In using the one-point perspective system shown below, the artist creates the illusion of three-dimensional space within the picture plane, visually leading the viewer to the vanishing point on the picture's horizon.

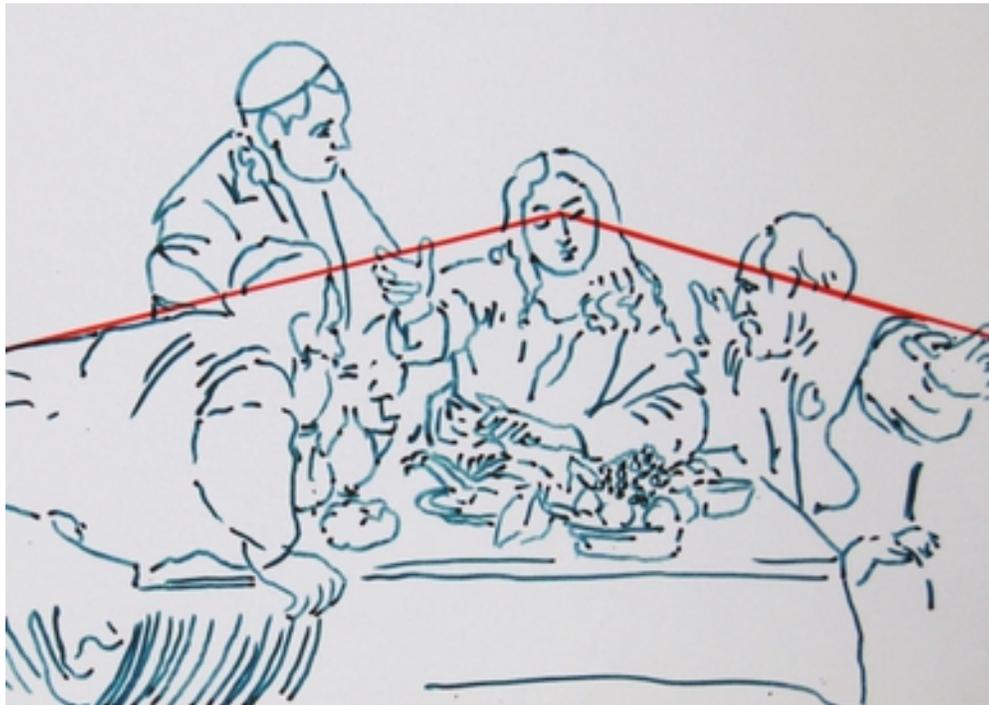


In using the linear perspective vanishing point, the viewer's position in the painting is permanently established, regardless of whether the viewer is viewing the painting from the right or left side. The viewer's position in this painting is always in a vertical line extending downward from the vanishing point, as indicated by the green line in the drawing below. The horizon line represents the eye level of the viewer and the vanishing point represents the position of the viewer's head.





Another example of how the artist draws the viewer into a picture plane is provided by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's painting *The Supper at Emmaus*. In this painting, Caravaggio uses the figures to pull the viewer into the picture plane. The figure on the left is angled, turning inward and to the right, while the figure on the right is angled slightly inward and facing left. Their bodies also create diagonals that extend to the central figure's forehead, leading the viewer directionally in from the outside edges of the painting to the subject of the painting, the disguised Jesus.



Unlike *the Alley at Middleharnis*, there isn't a visible vanishing point to establish the viewer's position or point of entry. In Caravaggio's painting, the figures are angled to allow the viewer to enter the painting from any vantage point. The foreshortening of the outstretched arms of the figure on the right might make standing to the right the optimal position to view the painting, except that it is countered by the back and side view of the figure on the left, which would make standing to the left of the painting the optimal position. Both positions are countered by the twisting and turning of the central Christ and standing figures, which allow the viewer to stand directly in the center of the painting.



The blue planes on the figures would support the viewer's position on the left side of the painting and the orange planes would support the viewer's position on the right side of the painting. Standing in line with the converging diagonal lines of the Christ figure would support all planes. In this painting the viewer is allowed entry from any external position.

Artist/Art Historian

The view of the visual artist will always remain analytical, going beyond the superficial imagery and looking deeply into the many constructed layers of the work of art. The viewing is always an active and learning interaction between artist and art. The artist will never fully experience a complete understanding of an artwork without the scholarly and formalist point of view of the Art Historian. These are the linear thinking, just-the-facts, scholarly researchers that inject biographical and cultural analysis into the work of art, presenting the intentions and productive choices of the artist in relation to the content and pictorial narration of the work of art.

With advances in imaging technology, the scholarly eye can now see beyond the visible layered surface of paintings to the very first visual ideas placed on the substrate. They can also detect the changes the artist made during the production process that reveal the artist's visual thoughts and choices. Art Historians are invaluable because they offer a different way of seeing than the visual artists themselves and they provide a linear history of visual thinking necessary for visual artists to remain intelligently productive within their discipline domain. Productive, creative artists do not operate in an empty vacuum; they build upon the traditions and knowledge of the past.

In my experiences of teaching, which include museum studio art classes, art magnet schools, talented and gifted summer programs, and college studio art classes, I am always surprised to learn how unknowledgeable and disinterested art students are about art history. The uninformed and uneducated art student doesn't realize that without the scholarship of the art historians and the study of works of the past and present, the artist would be eternally engaged in reinventing the wheel and each act of creation would be an act of ignorance from baseless knowledge. Each work of art is seen and experienced individually, but is always viewed in context of all existing art. This contextual thinking is what allows professional artists and art historians to be accepting and appreciative of all movements and styles and open to new, interpretive forms of art.

Casual Viewer

The vast majority of people have an undeveloped visual intelligence that is compounded by a lack of historical knowledge of art. When individuals with low visual literacy stand in front of a work of art, they are often left wondering how to interact with the object they see. Using the Plato analogy, they are merely seduced and held by the recognizable figurative pictorial images of the artwork. They look at a painting the same way they look at a photograph: once object recognition is achieved, they are finished viewing the painting and quickly move on to the next work of art. This brief encounter gives the casual viewer very little understanding of both the narration and underlying elements used to communicate the narrative theme in the painting. The casual viewer is looking at objects rather than searching and reasoning as to why the objects exist.

I see examples of object-based viewing every year in my classroom studio, where I produce my paintings in the same space students have classes. In this environment, students have the opportunity to see how a work of art progresses from start to finish. Each freshman class I have taught always thought the painting was finished the instant recognizable objects could be seen. To the students, a painting or work of art culminates in object recognition; they cannot see beyond the object, and it makes little difference

if it is a simple under-painting or a fully colored, completed painting. What is of importance to them is how realistic or photographic the objects look.

The casual viewer may not understand what a work of art is or what is expected of the viewer to be able to fully experience a work of art. Art is an object that has a physical presence in the current space and time of the viewer's conscious reality. If one were to casually view an object without engaging in visual dialogue with it, then nothing could be known about the object. In order to come to an understanding of a specific work of art, one must stop and engage with the artwork on its terms. A work of art has its own reality. To understand the artwork, the viewer must project himself into the artwork's reality, much the same as one would project into a character or situation in a movie or book. Once fully engaged within the artwork, the viewer must navigate the entire surface of the artwork, looking for clues and asking questions to be able to realize a meaningful and personal interpretation of the painting.

Rika Burnham, in her book *Teaching in the Art Museum*, states that knowledge of a work of art is constructed by humans engaged in meaning-making through discourse with themselves, others, and the work of art. In her constructivism point of view she states, "The Museum visitors are active inquirers who construct meaning and therefore knowledge. It is not a place where knowledge is transmitted it is a place where knowledge is produced." In her book, Ms. Burnham gives many examples of interactive discussions about works of art, which could be used as a personal template to assist in looking and finding a meaningful experience from works of art.

Summary

"The true work of art is born from the 'artist': a mysterious, enigmatic, and mystical creation. It detaches itself from him, it acquires an autonomous life, becomes a personality, an independent subject, animated with a spiritual breath, the living subject of a real existence of being."

Wassily Kandinsky

The production of art requires synthesis of interdisciplinary knowledge through the artist's visual intelligence and visual thinking skills necessary to project ideas into physical form. When fully formed, the work becomes a separate entity and reality of its own time, while existing outside of time. Its image and underlying structure is unchanging, but its meaning changes through time and fluctuates from viewer to viewer. The changing view is relative to the changing cultural view and the content, contextual knowledge, and experiential projections of the viewer. A work of art has a life of its own and, to understand it, one must interact and dialogue with it and learn to know it on one's own terms.

Noticeably absent from my discussion of art and art production is abstract art. The absence does not derive from a dismissiveness of the abstract art movement, but rather from the complexity of the changing conceptual and structural ideas of the movements. The abstract art genre is now well over a century old and it still remains one of the least understood movements in art. More than any other art movement, abstract art needs a historical reference to its origins and intent. In many ways it is a rejection of the rational world and the mechanization of the industrial age. Abstraction becomes an inner personal search for a spiritual harmony and truth that can project an ideal universal world without the boundaries of time, place and space. It is a movement that rejects the material world and celebrates the elemental spirituality contained within art.

The way I think of art and art production, both figurative and abstract, has its origins in the ideas and concepts expressed in the manifestoes by the pioneers of the abstract movement. Their philosophy of art was meant to become the spiritual center of the artist's being, making art production a spiritual act of the artist. I knew an artist who would always put on his best suit when going to an art museum. He referred to the museum visit as "going to church." Art is the spiritual center of all artists.

For a better understanding of the abstract art movements and the spirituality that resided in art I suggest the following books:

The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985 by Maurice Tuchman

Dreaming with Open Eyes: The Shamanic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art and Culture by Michael tucker

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