

“Lines Forest” is an ink composition created by Geoff McFetridge in 2001. It is composed of black ink lines on the foreground followed by a light gray background and several objects that are seemingly imprisoned by the lines, ranging from tree branches, to light bulbs, and even street signs. This was one of the first few works produced by McFetridge in his early career as a graphic designer and visual artist along with a similar work called “Shadows of the Paranormal”. His personal style is to only utilize one color along with the ingenious understanding of negative space and is usually done in a two-dimensional, perspective that creates the illusion of depth. “Lines Forest” was given to the Cooper Hewitt Museum on April 25, 2017 as a gift and is 15 feet by 30 inches. It is considered a wallpaper as it is considerably large and is protected by a screen¹.

McFetridge’s work closely resembles the ideas of György Kepes’ “Language of Vision” for a few reasons. One of them being that it follows the concept of values that Kepes describes in his book. Kepes states that “*Values are... directives towards a satisfactory human life*” and “*They are the comprehended potential “order” in man’s relationship to nature and his fellow man*”².

These are some of the points that György Kepes’ illustrate with visual examples such as F. Levstik’s Photograph of two men sitting on a bench, one man is dressed in luxury clothing while the other in rags and ripped clothing. He explains that the viewers will constantly seek unity in a piece and will draw comparisons of the similarities they see. This is quite clearly shown in “Lines Forest” as the composition of Mcfetridge’s piece has a sense of balance or order, where the light gray background and the foreground elements do not conflict but rather complement

each other and are part of one grand piece that is visually appealing and essentially, satisfying to the human eye.

Another reason is that McFetridge's piece follows Kepes' guidelines on "meaningful visual signs". In "Language of Vision", Kepes describes the importance of pictorial elements such as shape, position, size, weight, direction and distance with the need for meaningfulness. He supports this by stating that "*As one searches for spatial order, ... one also searches for meaning-order and builds from the different associations and directions of the common, meaningful whole*"². Looking at McFetridge's work, you can clearly see that the distance between negative space and each line is evenly apart which creates the perception that the objects are being imprisoned or obstructed by the foreground.. The meaning that is derived from this work comes from the fact that McFetridge created an optical illusion using shadows from a two-dimensional plane and established the perception of the third-dimension. It is intended that the viewers look for not a single time, but multiple times that Thus, the Kepes' laws of order and meaningfulness are present in McFetridge's piece.

"Lines Forest" also takes inspiration from Ferdinand De Saussure's "General Course in Linguistics" due to the fact that it places heavy emphasis on the relationship between images and words. Saussure presented the idea of duality between concept and sound-image and claims that "*The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image...The two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other.*"³, Saussure also depicts a chart of both concepts and sound-images to illustrate his point on why they work in tandem to create language. Geoff McFetridge created his composition with only the silhouettes of light bulbs, tree branches,

and road signs. intending for the objects to still be recognizable and thus, in a sense, created language through imagery. He instilled the word and the feeling of a forest in his piece by illustrating those exact concepts with dark, thick lines and exaggerated them as it is not necessarily a traditional forest with trees and shrubbery but rather a mechanical labyrinth with geometric shapes and some remnants of organic life.

In sum, Geoff McFetridge's "Lines Forest" is a composition that continues on the legacy of optical illusions. Its creation in the 21st century proposed the combination of visual communication through silhouettes and concepts which began to spawn more creative modernist designs from 2001 onward. With a simplistic color palette and clear form, "Lines Forest" continues to be admired by many graphic designers and often is credited with originality and is one of the few exhibits that maintain interest to the public. The implementation of order and value made this piece so interesting that it earned him an award for the National Design Award for Communication Design in 2016,



“**Lines Forest**” Image sourced from the Cooper Hewitt Museum

<https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2020/10/12/now-entering-lines-forest-copy/>

Works Cited

- 1) Herringshaw, Gregory. “Now Entering Lines Forest: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.” *Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum*, 9 Oct. 2020, <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2020/10/12/now-entering-lines-forest-copy/>.
- 2) Kepes, Gyorgy. *Language of Vision*. Chicago: P. Theobald, 1944. Print.
- 3) Saussure, Ferdinand , Charles Bally, and Albert Sechehaye. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966. Print.

