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## TOOLS FOR INTERPRETING VISUAL IMAGES

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### **FORMAL ELEMENTS OF ART**

#### **Formal Elements of Art**

**Line** - a point traveling in a direction. It may be curved, angular or straight.

**Shape** - a two dimensional object that has height and width. It may have varied regularity.

**Plane** - a two dimensional object that is able to tip in space as seen in perspective. It is usually regular in shape such as a triangle or rectangle. It can also be parallel to the format page.

**Form** - a three dimensional object having height, width and depth.

**Color** - in art it is a property of objects and their surroundings that reflects select wavelengths of light which appear to have blue, red, green and yellow properties as well as light and dark values. It occurs also in light as in computer images. In pigment, it is examined in *subtractive color theory* as all colors absorb light when mixed and produce a dark neutral. In computer work and theatrical light as well as physics it is examined in *additive color theory* as all colors add up to incoherent light which is white light. Color terms: primary, secondary, tertiary, value, complementary, analogous colors, analogous complements, tint, tone, shade, gradient, neutral, (light and shadow refer to *daylight* conditions, not elements of art but of describing the world).

#### **General list of Principles of organization in composition (more terms can apply)**

<b>Rhythm</b>	<b>Contrast</b>
<b>Texture</b>	<b>Pattern: (similarity and proximity) you must find 2 samples</b>
<b>Movement</b>	<b>Distance; Depth (you must find separate examples</b>
<b>Tone</b>	<b>Symmetry/Asymmetry (Note you must find two separate samples</b>
<b>Scale</b>	<b>Axis</b>
<b>Interval</b>	<b>Space</b>
<b>Density</b>	<b>Transparency</b>
<b>Proportion</b>	<b>Time/Motion/Sequence</b>
<b>Balance</b>	<b>Modularity</b>

•Also think about the difference between subject of a work and subject matter of a work. Think of content and its relationship to meaning.

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**DESCRIPTION:** What do you see in this work? How would you describe it? What *words* would be useful in the description? Do you recognize anything in the work?

**ANALYSIS:** How would you describe it in visual terms? What shapes do you see and how would you describe them? What forms? What light conditions? What organization stands out to you? Are any parts of the work exaggerated? How do you think this work was made? What was the *sequence* it was put down? What was placed first? Do you think the artist made earlier works to decide how they would make this work? Is there another way to describe the content of the work?

**INTERPRETATION:** What do you think this work is about? How does the artist get you to see a message or *the* message? What feeling do you get from the work? Would you agree with the choice of medium (and colors) used to create this work? What would you have used?

**JUDGEMENT:** Why do you think other people should see this work? What do you think is worth remembering about this picture?

NOTE: For help in looking at the work use the terms discussed for *formal elements of art* and *the principles of organization in composition* on the first Key Page.