



CONCEPT is the first building block of your image.

It is the first and most important choice you make.

The second you should consider is COMPOSITION.

Composition forms the structure or foundation on top of which the image rests.

Just like a building, a great image is built from the ground up, on a strong foundation.

Conversely, great subject matter and drawing, will always be undone by poor composition.

Kay Nielsen, Six Swans



You may be used to hearing the word composer when referring to a great piece of music. A composer chooses the different musical elements that he or she will arrange to fill the framework of a particular piece of music.

Composing an image is very much the same. The "artistic composer" chooses the different elements that will fill the framework of that particular piece of art. We refer to that framework as the Picture Plane.

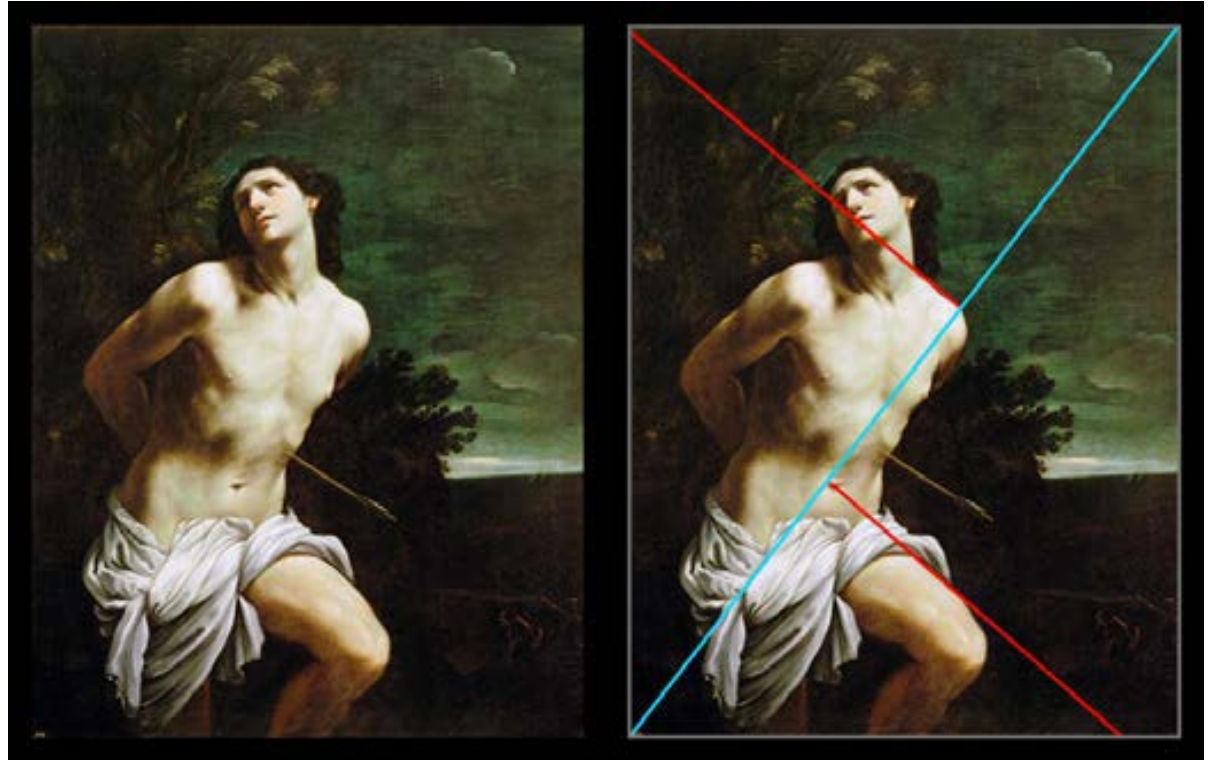
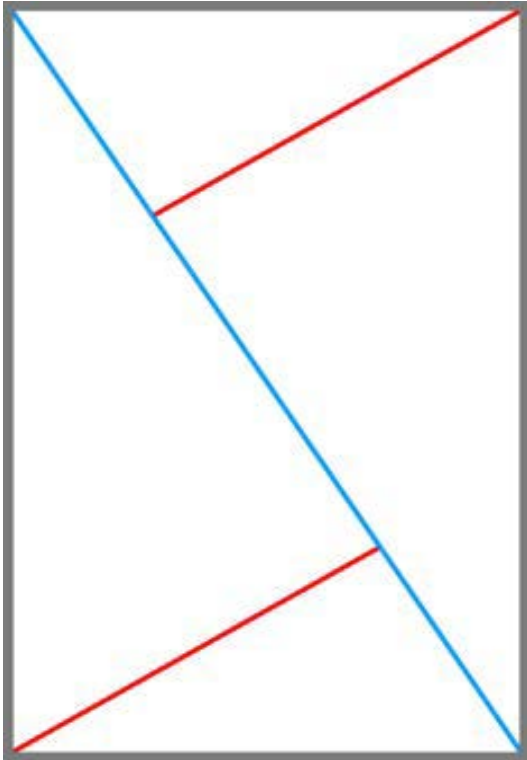
Gary Kelley, Jazz Illustration



Directional Lines

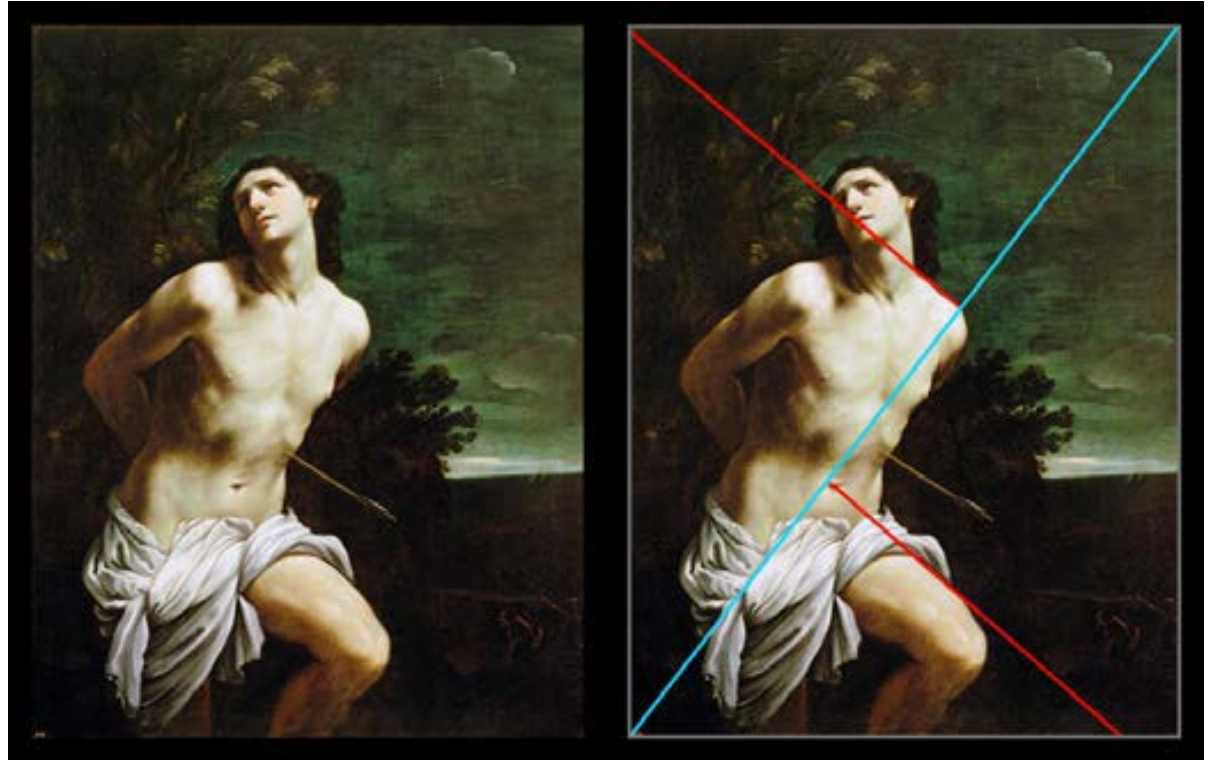
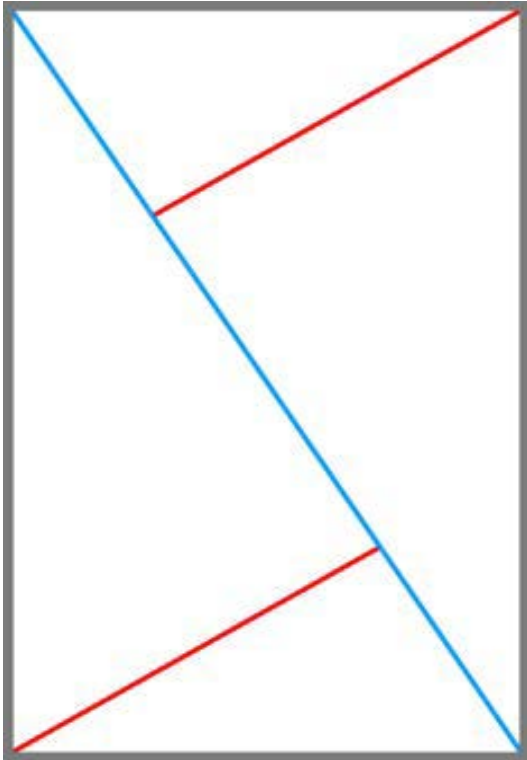
Guido Reni St Michael Archangel

The Artists of the 16th century Baroque movement used exaggerated motion and clear, easily interpreted detail, and strong diagonal composition within a static frame. This makes it fairly easy to identify the directional lines in their compositions.



Guido Reni, St. Sebastian.

Note in these Baroque paintings how these two different directional lines, highlighted in blue and red, are clearly composed at opposite angles, and are used as a tool to guide the viewer over and over again.



Guido Reni, St. Sebastian.

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Directional Lines Contemporary Use

In this image by illustrator Goni Montes can you see some of the same directional lines are being used to guide us around the picture and produce a feelings of drama?

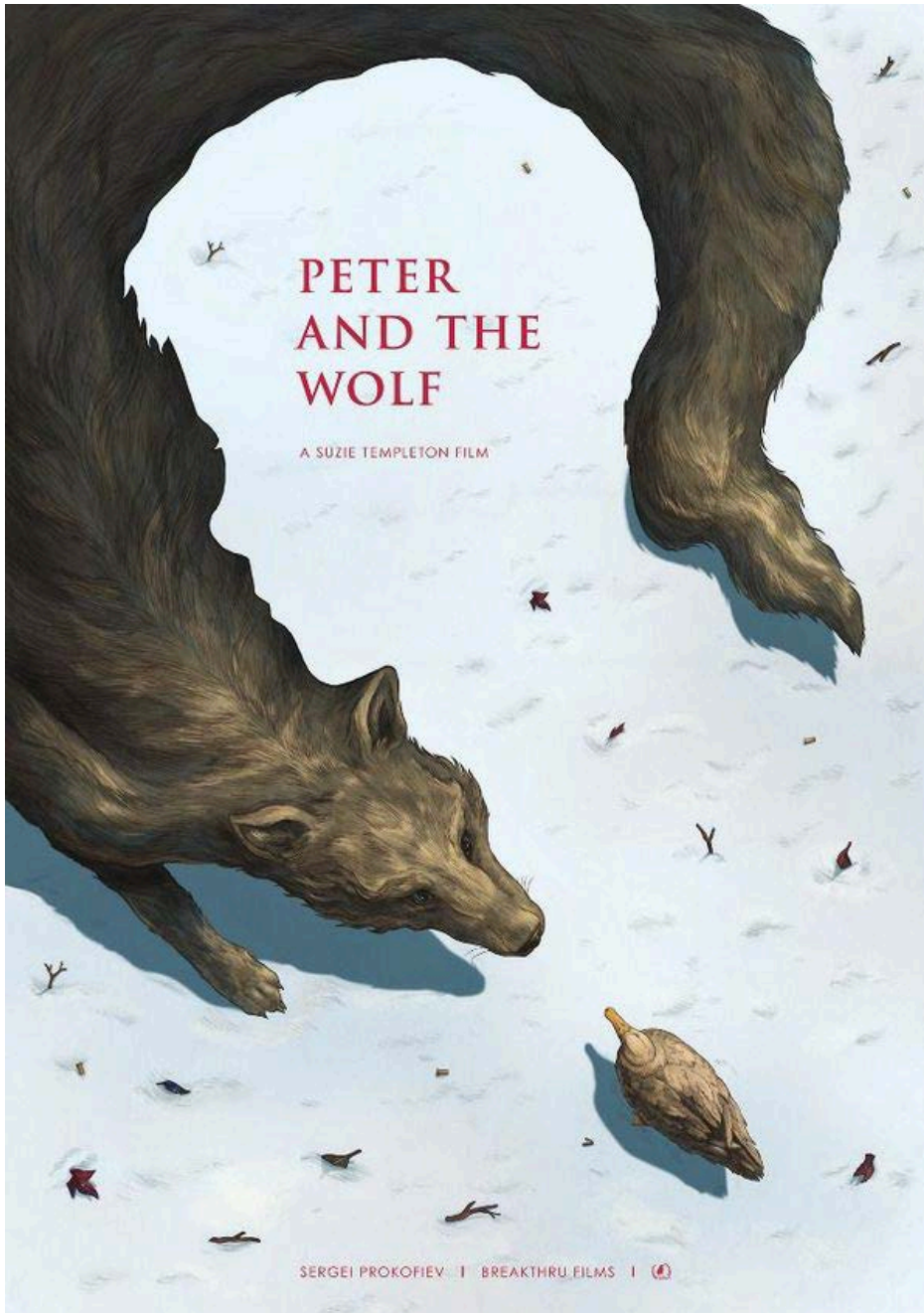


Negative Space

Sometimes its about what you leave out.

Magic can sometimes happens in the empty space between marks...

Aubrey Beardsley



...Or in the shapes formed by the breathing room left in an image.

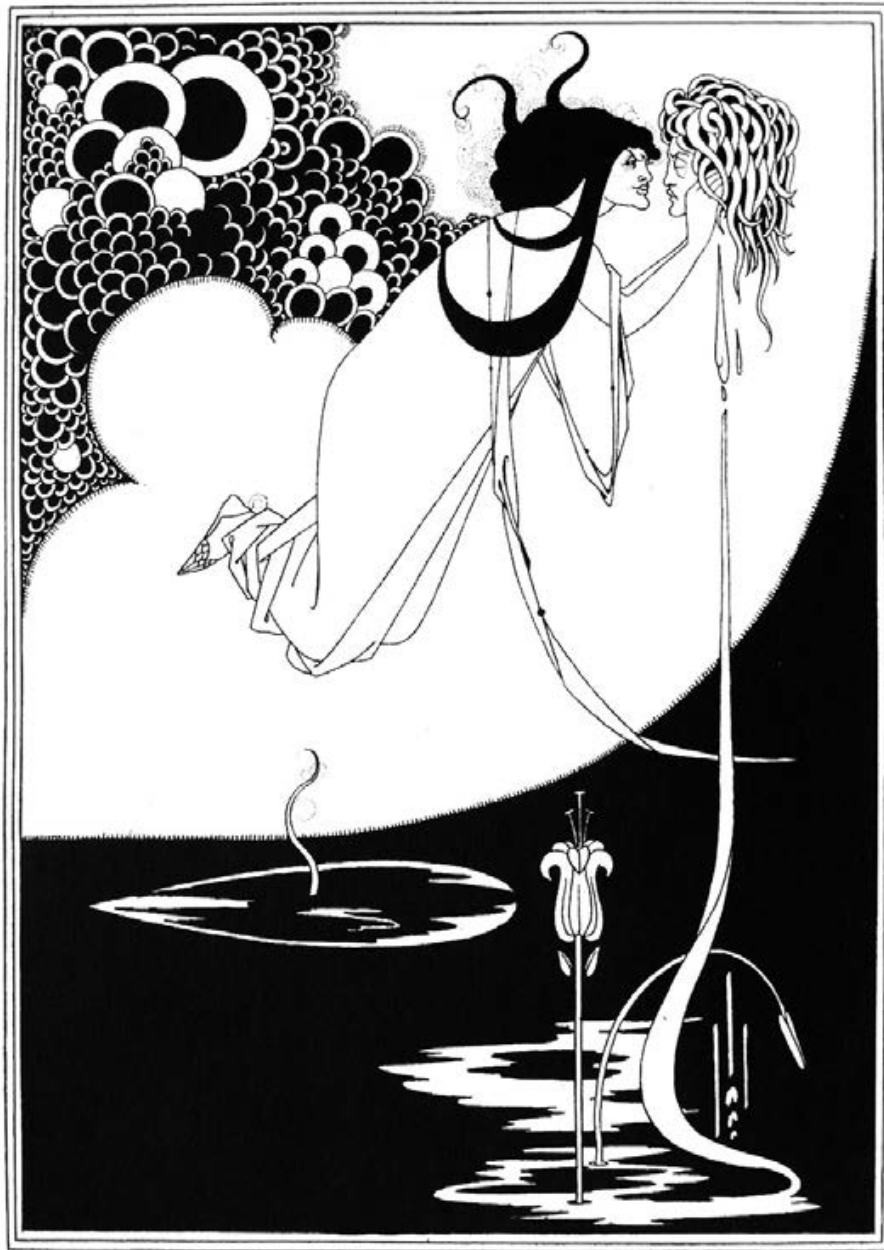
Phoebe Morris, Peter and the Wolf



...Or in the resting the space for the eye, space that is left intentionally empty.

We refer to this area of openness on the picture plane as **negative space**.

Tomer Hanuka



Use Negative Space:

To create a resting place for the eye.

In this image, the artist Aubrey Beardley—a major figure of the 19th century Art Nouveau movement—chose to leave almost half of the composition as the white of the background paper.

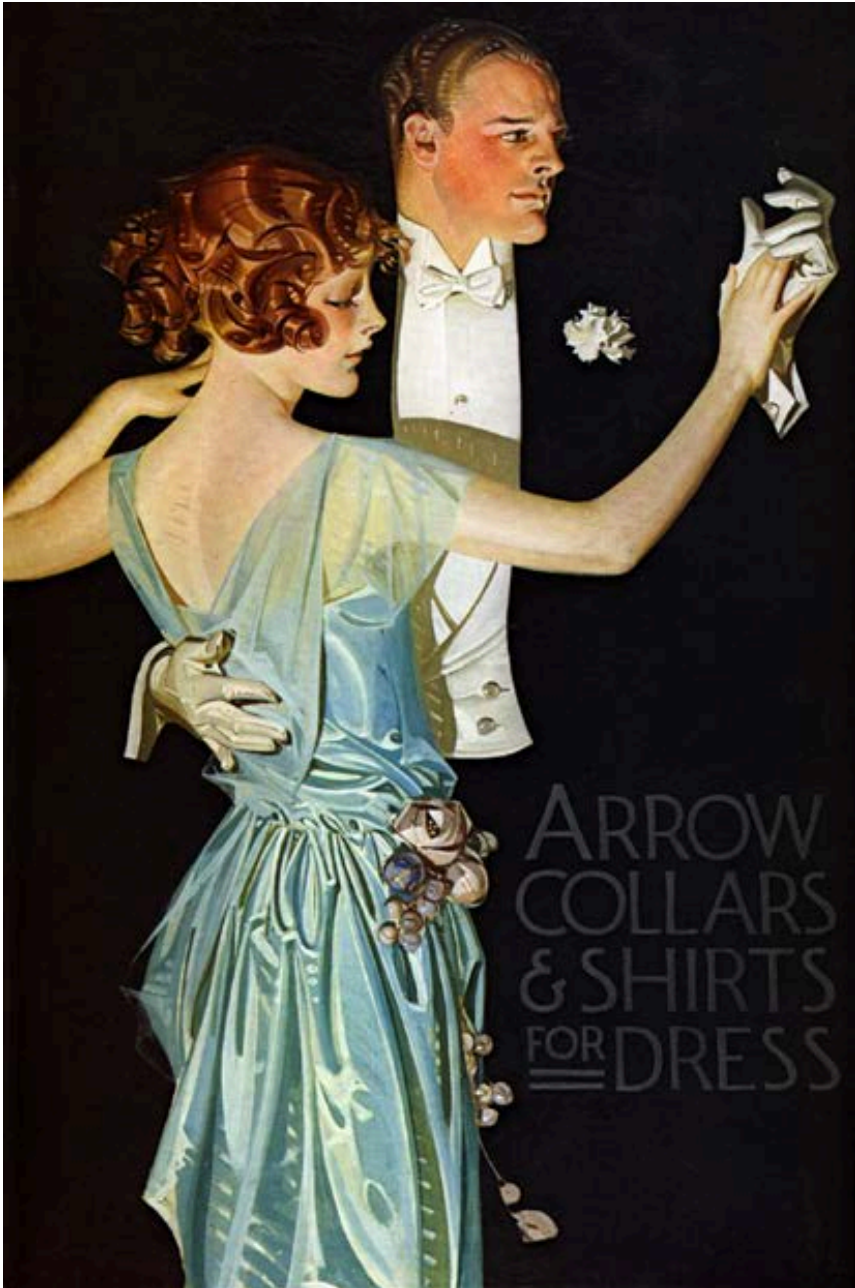
Why would he do such a thing?

Tomer Hanuka

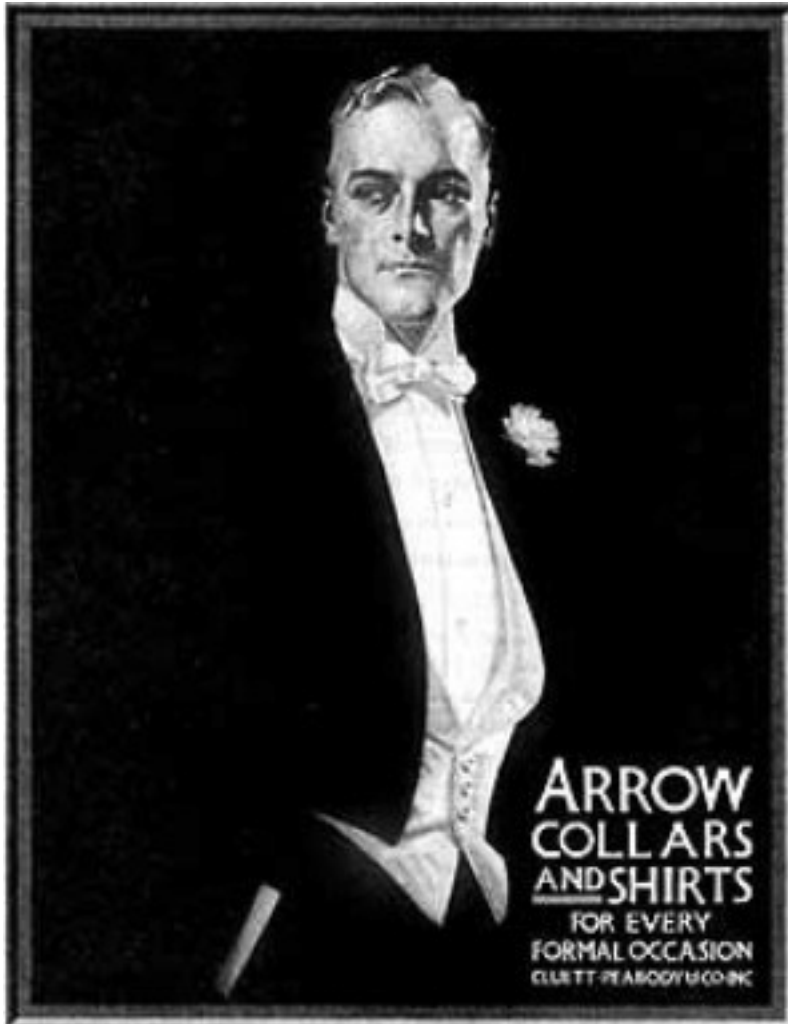
Use Negative Space:

To create contrast through missing information.

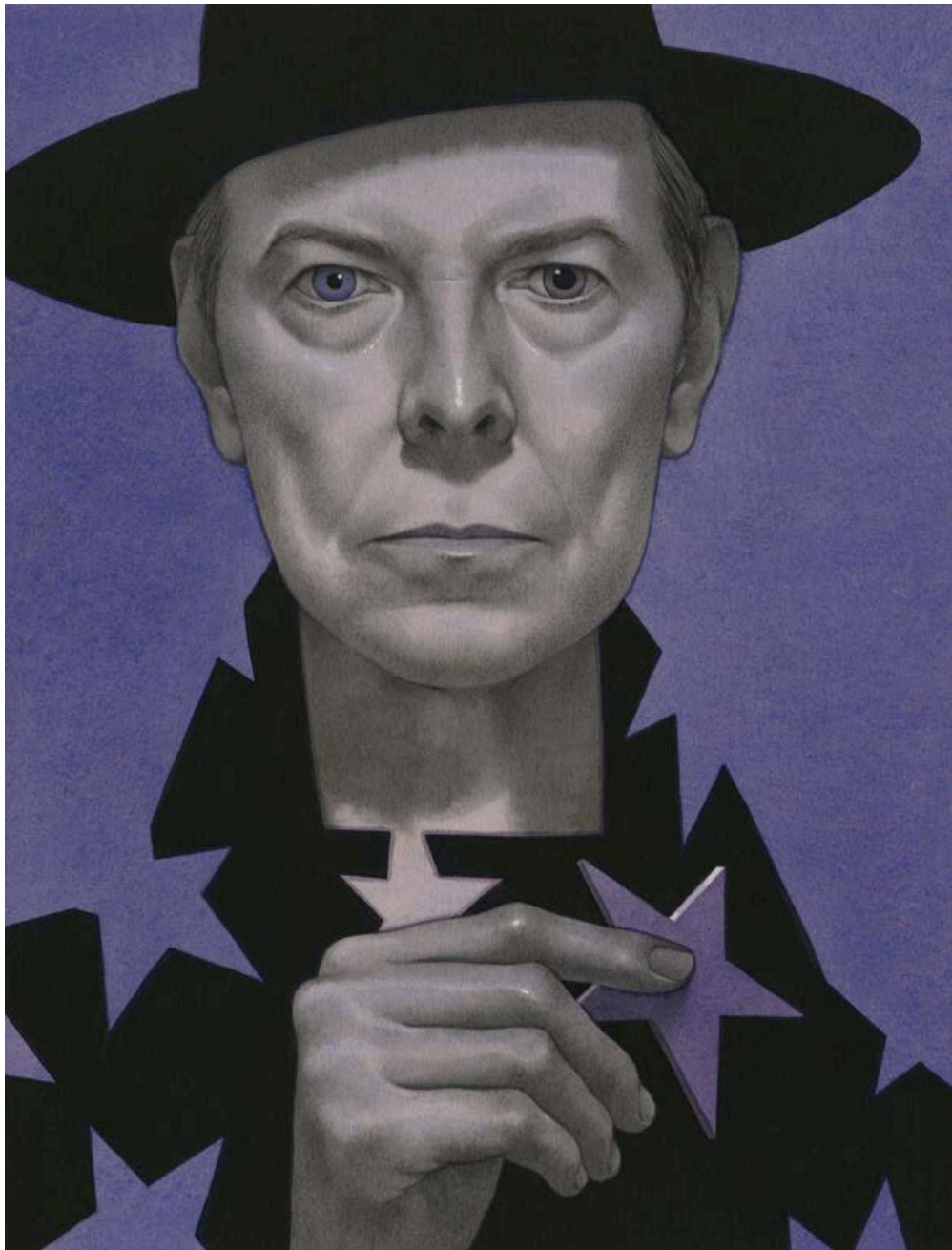
Take a look at how J.C. Leyendecker, one of the preeminent American illustrators of the early 20th century, uses negative space in these illustrations of his advertising character known as The Arrow Collar Man.



J.C. Leyendecker



The black of the ground and the black of this dapper character's tuxedo become one form. The eye is drawn both by the contrast in values (light and dark) and the striking shapes of the *missing information*.



Contemporary Illustrator Edward Kinsella uses much the same trick in these portraits of pop culture icons David Bowie and Marilyn Manson.

Edward Kinsella



Edward Kinsella

Use Negative space ...
To create tension through space between opposing elements:



Norman Rockwell uses the negative space within the illustration, *Let Nothing You Dismay*, to manipulate the viewer's emotions. Here the space between characters becomes filled with *tension*.

It's like the visual version of the long pause right before something important or shocking is said. The composition makes the viewer feel every inch of that couch.

Balance



Hokusai

Balance in art refers to the ways in which the different elements of a piece (such as lines, shapes, colors, and textures) are arranged in terms of their *weight*.

Balance



Hokusai

Balance can be symmetrical, with elements arranged equally from an imaginary line in the middle of a piece. Balance doesn't necessarily have to mean symmetry, though.

Balance



Hokusai

Asymmetrical balance is achieved when elements are arranged unevenly in a piece but work together to produce overall harmony.

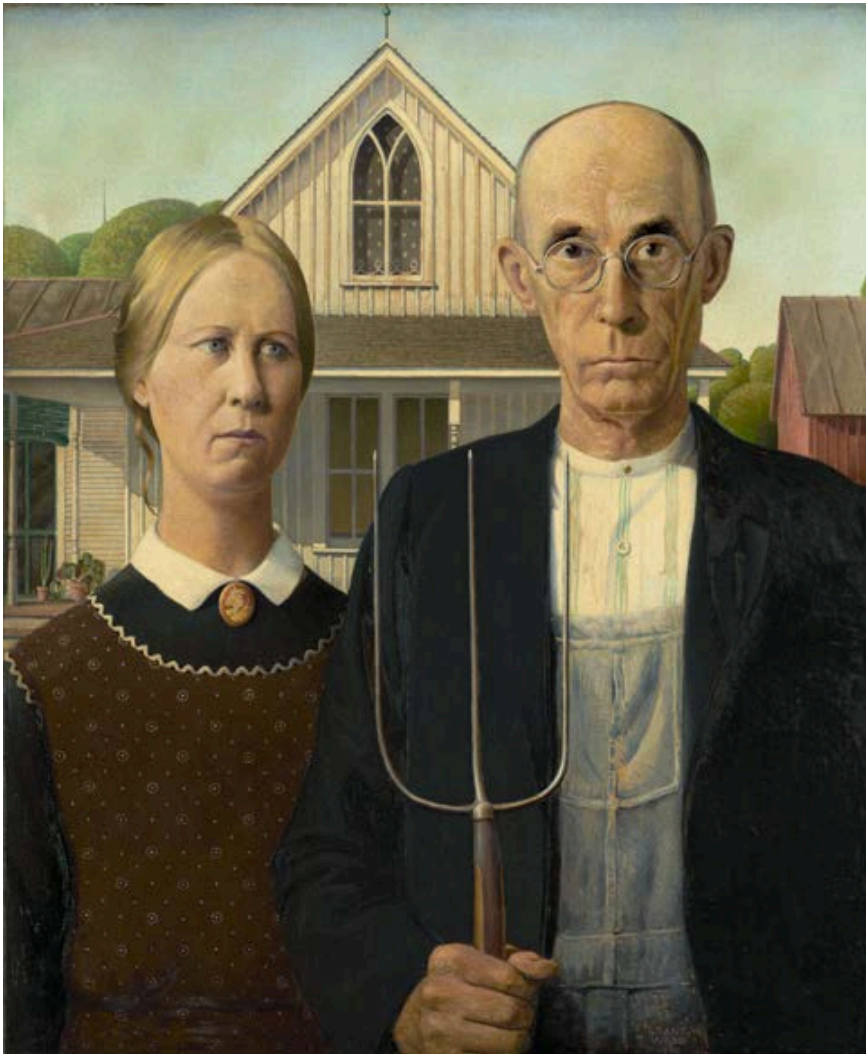


Symmetrical vs. Asymmetrical Balance

Norman Rockwell

Note what happens when Rockwell takes the same basic composition but shifts over the compositional weight to create an *Asymmetrical Balance*.

In this the weight is focused on the left side of the page, pulling us toward the boy. Not only does he support the girl physically; he actually anchors the whole composition.



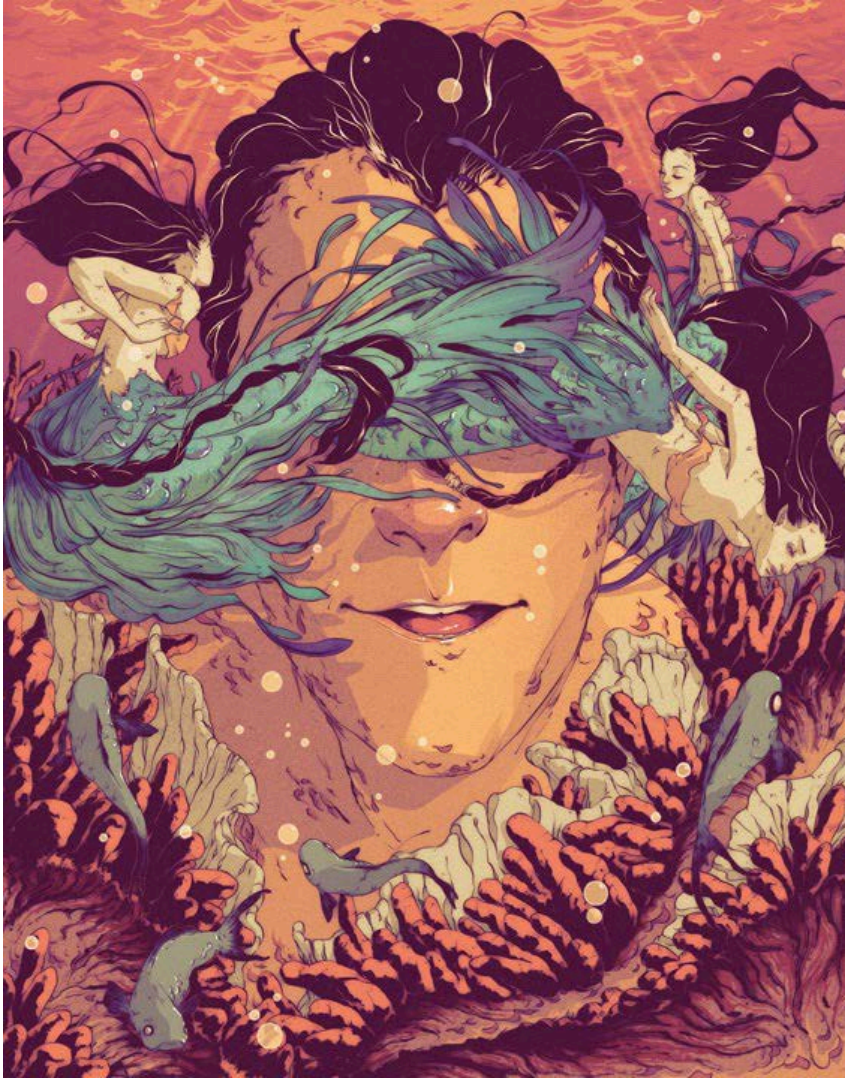
Grant Wood, 1930

Unity

Unity is the relationship among the elements of a visual image that helps all the elements function cohesively. Unity gives a sense of wholeness to a visual image.

There are many ways to create unity in an image. It can be done through placement and composition, shape, symmetry, color, concept, and so on.

In American Gothic, how many different ways can you find that the artist created unity ?



Goni Montes

Unity

Here Contemporary illustrator Goni Montes uses the same techniques with a completely different result. He creates a unified whole though:

- Overall warm color palette
- Mark making & brush stroke
- And Overall Movement and Flow

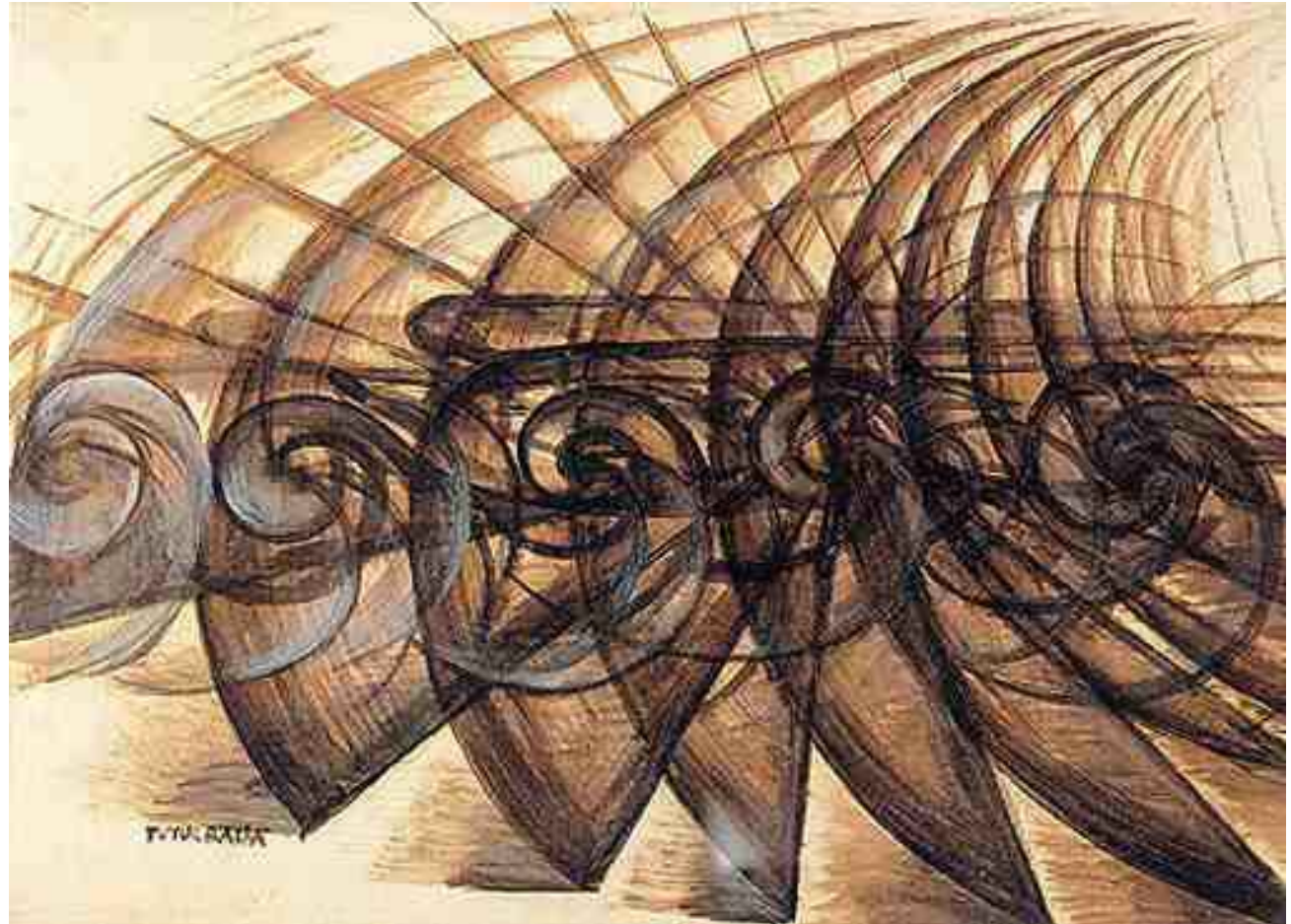
Rhythm & Movement



Umberto Boccioni, 1911

Movement is an instability, or a sense of time taking place within the image itself.

Futurism was an art movement in early 20th century Italy, obsessed with the idea of movement. Futurists used the principles of design to depict themes of the contemporary social issues of the time.



Movement can be achieved by using graphic elements such as directional lines that direct the eye in a specific direction, much as an arrow would, or through curved forms which more softly pull the viewer's eyes, or through a series of repeating forms.

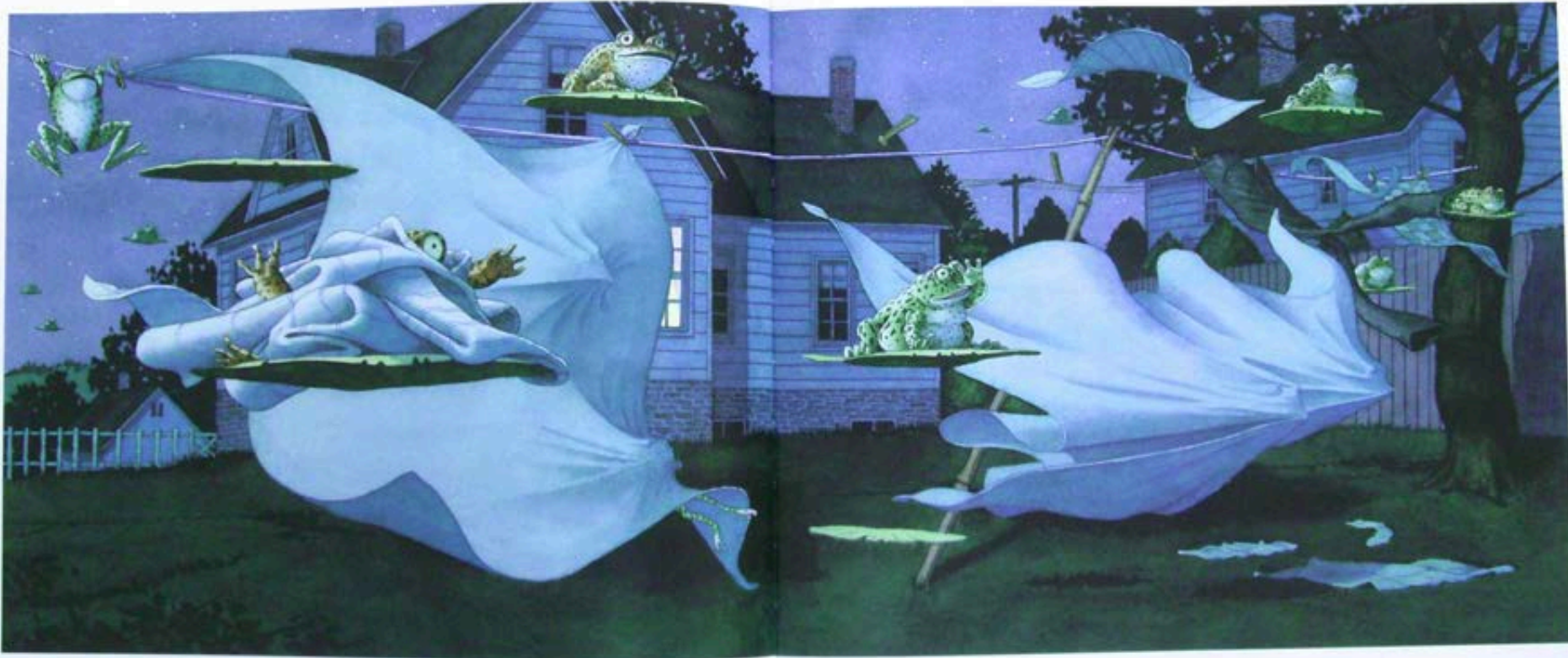
Giacomo Balla

Now that we can recognize this design principle in the abstract, let's look at it in a more representational style of art.



David Weisner

Consider how Weisner uses all of these techniques to convey a sense of motion in these illustrations from his Caldecott winning, silent children's book, *Tuesday*.



Compositional Movement can be reinforced by using rendering techniques such as in this illustration where fabric drapery is a motion indicator.

But an illustration successfully conveying movement must have this principle integrated into its compositional underpinnings.



Rhythm

Giacomo Balla's "Automobile in corsa" (1913)

Rhythm, design's first cousin to Movement, is a principle of art that's difficult to verbalize.

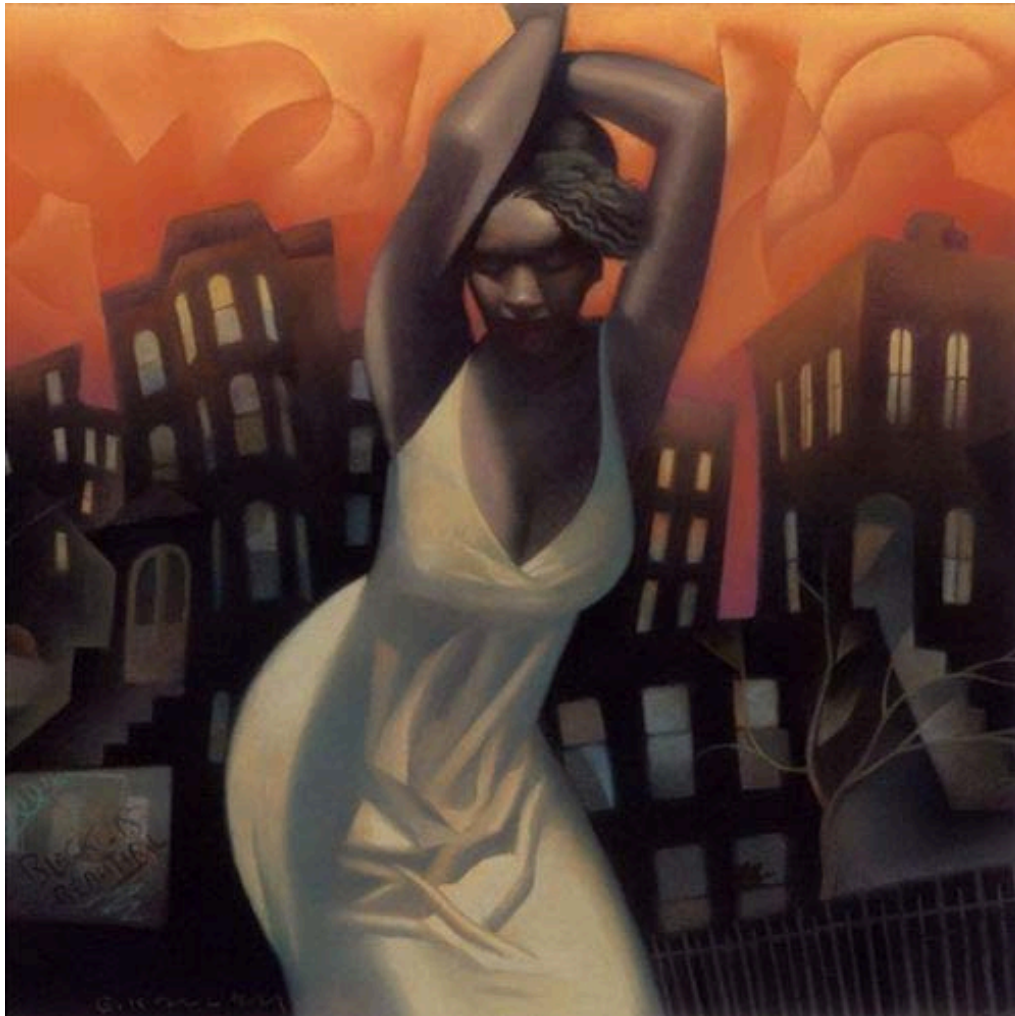
Rhythm in art—just like rhythm in music—is a unifying force undulating throughout the overall piece. Consider how rhythm is being created abstractly in this piece by Balla.

Now notice how the same techniques are applied in the more representational image by Illustrator Gary Kelley.

Rhythm signifies that the various design elements are all working in unison to lead the viewer's eye through a composition in a specific order.

Assuming that you've heard rhythm in music before, try to translate that to something you'd see instead of hear. Rhythm is essentially a visual beat.





Pastel Illustrator Gary Kelley's work is infused with this sense of a visual beat. In *Harlem Heat* even the buildings and sky seem to dance.

All of the curvilinear forms reinforce a sense of music within the piece.

