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THE MC ART FRAMEWORK™

STEP 6: CONNECT

What's in this document?

INTRODUCTION

This document is about visual design and analysis which concerns Step 6 ("Connect") of the MC Art Framework.

Content:

- Creativity and an artistic mindset
- "Art" - Things to keep in mind
- 30 design protocols and 7 elements of design explained
- Composing an image
- Multiple examples of the application of composition concepts, techniques and diagrams
- Tips for conducting visual analyses and judging results

Key information is highlighted in blue throughout this document.

PART 1

CREATIVITY

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

We have all experienced being creative—it's part of our makeup. *Being creative is never an accident; it is the result of an idea that is manifested by the merging of two or more unrelated elements into something new.* It is a thought process with no distinct rules, only guidelines and underlying principles to empower it.

The process of creativity “constructs”.

Artists observe, perceive or derive “meaning”, then “deconstruct” a scene by extracting/isolating specific elements/ideas and combining these to create something new. This is something that young people naturally comprehend and freely explore with passion and something that adults often avoid because, as adults, we strive to be quite rational, we regularly need to make judgments in our daily lives and don't wish, or like, to be judged by others. So what if you can't draw a perfect circle (you have to do 3-5 thousand to get it down) or what if you don't replace tulip bulbs in your garden every year (to ensure that all of your tulips are the same height when they next flower)? Being creative is not about such minutiae nor

about making judgements based solely on small details; rather, it is about the assessment of the whole, the overall effort and how it relates to the result itself.

WHAT MATTERS

It is the act of creating, how you chose to do it and the effort you put into it that counts; this is what others respond to and can find interesting and engaging. When viewing a final work, you can almost always sense and appreciate one's effort and gauge their desire to create regardless and independent of your personal feelings about their end result.

THE CHALLENGE WITH DEFINING CREATIVITY

We get exposed to so much fragmented information on this topic, much of which involves ambiguous concepts presented in ways that make them seem just out of reach of our ability to fully comprehend and to support learning.

There is no canned formula for being creative to follow as each creation attempt is unique though every iteration is premised on some generally accepted guiding principles.

Creativity involves many things: perceiving, interpreting, finding inspiration, analyzing, visualizing, deciding on what to do, how to best approach it, planning then doing and...being passionate each step of the way. The good news is that this can all be leveraged to enhance one's creative desires once the nature of the relationships between the various elements to being creative is understood.

VISUAL CREATIVITY

Artists have virtually complete creative freedom; we start from a blank canvas and have an extensive toolkit available to develop a concept for a work.

Complete freedom = many choices

Even though I make most of my final paintings in the studio and do edit the majority of my photographs, I do as much as I can when in close proximity to my subject. I believe that, for me, working in this way contributes to artistic

visualization, and minimizing or avoiding this altogether can often result in a missed opportunity, which ultimately compromises a final work/photograph in one or more ways. Regardless of the medium, I believe that a thoughtful approach ultimately results in work with more depth and appeal, and yielding greater artistic fulfillment and satisfaction, and that both artists and photographers who work in this way end up working with more conviction.

Photographers need to be able to visualize how to manipulate their photographs to move beyond simply rendering what is in front of them.

Artists must learn to paint what they want their canvas to convey. It is the canvas and their vision for the work becomes their reality, not the actual subject.

Visualizing an end result requires an assessment of a subject from conceptual and design perspectives...in essence, finding ways to consolidate visual elements into a cohesive message about a subject.

A CONTEXT FOR CREATIVITY

How do we make insightful observations about our subject matter, and also be creative and able to visualize a desired result? How about this for an answer:

Technique leads to
Craftsmanship which empowers
Inspiration that results in
Expression

This is essentially an equation/formula. There are no shortcuts or compromises. It's a progression with each successive element being dependent upon, and building on, the previous one.

Here is an explanation of the nature of these dependencies:

- **Technique** refers to developing the fundamental skills required to work in a given medium.
- **Craftsmanship** represents a level of competency with a medium to be able to create freely which, in turn, empowers...
- **Inspiration**, which is the result of combining one's understanding and skills in a medium(s) with ideas to enable visualization of a final work which can result in...
- **Expression**, which refers to the acts of planning and execution to produce a final finished artwork (in alignment with an artist's vision for it).

Though inspiration is dependent upon both technique and craftsmanship, **technique and craftsmanship do not make you creative; they simply put you in a position of being able to create by removing technical barriers. It is inspiration that drives creativity.** This means that you don't need to be an expert at anything to be creative but that you do need a fundamental grasp of the medium(s) you will use.

WHY BE CREATIVE?

Now that we have a framework for the creative process itself, what do we do with this, and why should we be creative? My personal belief is that [art is an expression of a perspective, understanding, or appreciation of aspects of one's environment, life experience, or idea. It is an exercise in exploration, observation, imagination, construction and communication.](#) A good photo, painting or drawing has the ability to communicate its appeal as an object that can move people and with a power that you can feel.

[Confronting daily life with our art or camera adds another dimension to our life experience.](#) The act of creating forces us to pause and ponder and look deeper into what we're experiencing. Your artwork or photographs become the face of your experiences representing your "mind's eye". This is why it matters to make artwork and photographs and acquire a comfort level with the medium(s) you use...so that you can create freely and make this part of your everyday life experiences. Being creative in any way is part of experiencing the world around us—we see it and we feel it and we can capture moments and make something

out of them. The feeling that a good photo or artwork portrays never fades and the power it embodies can grow even stronger with time.

By deciding to just carry around a camera or sketchbook with the intention of using it, you become more aware of precious everyday details and become more open to capturing your life experiences for the pleasure of it and sharing them with others. This can make anyone into a creator.

Photography can bring more "life" to the world by capturing moments of time from the past that convey an experience or meaning or emotion and preserving them for future consideration and contemplation. Drawings and other artwork demand some degree of attention and contemplation and, because they are someone's interpretation of a personal experience relating to a place, person or idea, can invite questions regarding what inspired the work, the intention behind creating the work and are often followed by a judgement regarding the artist's degree of success. This is the "experience" of art.

Section Summary:

Creativity

Creativity is dependent on a functional degree of mastery of a specific medium so that it can be used to explore and express ideas. The degree of expertise required in any medium is directly related to what it is that you wish to do in that medium. This applies to any medium: paper and pencil, oil paints, smartphone camera...

There is a relationship between the four elements of this proposed framework for the creative process: technique, craftsmanship, inspiration and expression.

Being creative is a way to further connect with, and enhance, our life experiences. What we create serves as a form of communication/sharing by which others can be moved.

PART 2

AN ARTISTIC MINDSET

WHAT IS AN ARTISTIC MINDSET?

Having an artistic mindset empowers creativity by focussing attention on elements of being creative over logistical craftsmanship (“how to”) concerns. It is a way of responding to the images one sees in the world without any imposed preconceptions or concerns and where inspiration and creativity truly come from the heart.

Knowledge and skills related to craftsmanship inform creativity to provide further inspiration.

Adopting an artistic mindset is not necessarily about learning to do a better job working with your subject matter or in a specific medium; rather, it is a way of responding to the images you see in the world. This is something that is in constant flux and may be dependent on how you happen to be feeling about your subject at any given moment.

True artistic freedom always challenges us to think “outside the box”, to imagine. The “box” defines us and also limits us

because it represents the acceptance of our own personal limitations. Focussing on images and being creative (the initial “seeing” that fuels creativity and motivation) is how children naturally create...because they don’t allow the “how” of making art to constrain their efforts and spoil their fun. Things seem to just come together without preconceived ideas or judgement. Children relish exploring the actual experience of creating.

So, what does this all mean?

Knowledge = 1/3 of the Battle

Inspiration = 1/3 of the Battle

Taking Action = 1/3 the Battle

Being Creative = Knowledge + Inspiration + Taking Action

The road to creative fulfilment is to have a sufficient mix of inspiration and knowledge with which to deliberately and decisively create.

ADOPTING AN ARTISTIC MINDSET

Adopting an artistic mindset is what will allow you to put this creative framework into practice. There are four steps involved. Here is an artist's approach to "seeing" (artistic visualization):

1. Sensing Light
2. Seeing Shapes
3. Image Design
4. Craftsmanship

These are all interdependent components of the ability to see artistically to visualize your artwork/photograph. Shapes in a scene and composition decisions are dependent on light as they are revealed to our eyes by the light present at the scene. How our subject is lit can be modified to suit compositional and "mood" choices. Light and composition dictate the mood of a scene and can be modified at will. The mood of the scene provides inspiration and contributes to creativity. Choices relating to

which medium(s) to use are based on a particular medium's strengths and weaknesses, the artist's expertise level with a medium and their vision for the final work.

This sounds like a bit of a mess however it could be represented like this:

Composition = Shapes + Space

Mood = Light + Composition

Creativity = Mood x Inspiration

Artistic Visualization = Creativity + Craftsmanship

Though the four components of an artistic mindset are related and interdependent, the first three of these contribute to the majority of your creative success. Once you know how to sense and work with the light in a scene and arrange elements in a way that engages the viewer and adds interest to your composition, most of the creative work has been done and all that remains is the doing/making part.

Section Summary:

Artistic Mindset

Having an artistic mindset empowers creativity by focussing attention on elements of being creative over logistical craftsmanship (“how to”) concerns. It is a way of responding to the images one sees in the world without any imposed preconceptions or concerns.

The road to creative fulfilment is to have a sufficient mix of inspiration and knowledge with which to deliberately and decisively create.

Adopting an artistic mindset is what puts our creative framework into practice. This involves:

1. Sensing Light
2. Seeing Shapes
3. Image Design
4. Craftsmanship

PART 3

VISUAL DESIGN

VISUAL DESIGN PROTOCOLS AND ELEMENTS

Design is the underlying order that defines every aspect of our universe and is what drives our desire for both functional and visual order to achieve some purpose.

Good design enhances the viewing experience and serves to facilitate the communication of artistic intent.

The challenge is always to engage a viewer's attention and guide the viewing experience in alignment with artistic intent.

The MC Art Framework uses an ordered approach to image analysis and visualization. Design protocols are employed to organize elements of design within a frame and define the viewing experience.

One of the main challenges with making art or taking photographs is that of representing a three-dimensional

world in two dimensions and doing this within a box/frame. You must decide how to arrange the various elements you've chosen to include in your frame forming your composition. It is important to isolate key compositional elements and determine which to include in, and which to exclude from, your composition. You should never include anything that serves as a distraction in your image; this refers to anything that does not contribute to the overall experience of your work and interferes with what you wish to convey. Some examples are branches from two trees touching each other in the sky area at their end-points (they should either not touch at all or clearly overlap) or bright or colourful objects that detract attention, items behind someone's head etc...

A frame is just the perimeter of your image, right? Wrong! The frame is not simply a box; it plays a critical role in how you create your work. A frame is comprised of two vertical and two horizontal sides and corners. It is not a constraint of any kind; the frame edges and corners provide the context for guiding the arrangement of elements to arrive at an overall visual balance in your composition. This visual balance of elements is made possible by the frame edges themselves.

Important information relating to art that you should always remember:

1. Art appreciation or the making of art is NEVER completely subjective—it requires some knowledge and involves a degree of informed analysis.
2. Design principles/protocols should NEVER BE BROKEN. Advocating the breaking of rules in support of “personal vision” is just wrong advice.
3. Design principles/protocols are meant to be used in combination; there is no such thing as achieving design success based on employing a single design protocol.
4. Making art is often referred to as a “journey”. A journey implies moving forward towards a destination, not simply engaging in repetitive activities and being hopeful that improvement will occur over time. Moving forward involves the continual and correct application of the right knowledge towards the achievement of goals.

DESIGN PROTOCOLS

The MC Art Framework design protocols are grouped into three categories:

1. Gestalt Principles
2. Elements and Techniques of Image Design
3. Image-Frame Relationships

Gestalt Principles:

Gestalt Psychology is premised on the concept that people tend to organize visual elements into groups or “unified wholes” when certain principles are applied. Gestalt Principles are a set of laws describing how we perceive objects by grouping similar elements, recognizing patterns and simplifying complex imagery. These concepts are employed in designing images to help convey meaning and engage the viewer. The basic concepts are:

- Objects and their relationship to each other are perceived in their most recognizable (interpreted) and simplest form/shape.
- Our eyes naturally follow lines or curves.
- Our mind's automatically fill in detail when it's not there.

1. **Gestalt Principle of Similarity:** When objects are similar to one another, viewers will often associate individual elements in a frame as part of a pattern or group. When grouping a small number of elements, it is important that there be an odd number, not an even one.
2. **Gestalt Principle of Symmetry:** We perceive symmetrical arrangements as being ordered and easy to take in.
3. **Gestalt Principle of Continuity:** Refers to when the mind “fills in” or assumes a continuation of a sequence or pattern of repetitive elements when one or more elements are missing—unifies multiple elements on a linear path. *Our eyes follow and “flow with” lines, paths or curves.* A powerful example of this is the use of **arabesques** (curvilinear implied shapes that associate multiple compositional elements to guide our eyes around the image). **Continuity** is related to the design protocol of **Interruption** and can play a key role in composition.
4. **Gestalt Principle of Closure:** This is similar to the **Gestalt Principle of Continuity** but refers to geometric shapes. The mind has a tendency towards simplification and sees the whole before the individual parts; it fills in gaps to perceive geometric shapes (circles, ellipses, squares, rectangles, triangles).
5. **Gestalt Principle of Proximity:** Elements that are closer together are considered to be associated with one another and not with elements which are further away from the group. This can be used to draw a viewer’s attention to an area of an image.
6. **Gestalt Principle of Figure-to-Ground:** The main purpose of composition is to identify the subject of an image to the viewer. This requires that there be clear separation between the subject (“figure”) and the background (“ground”). This is accomplished through the selective use of **Contrast** (in defining the design elements of **Shape** and **Form**) and contributes to **Parity, Unity** and **Structure**.

Elements and Techniques of Image Design:

7. **Movement:** This refers to the overall experience of the viewing experience in reference to how the image was designed to guide the viewer experience. There are a variety of design protocols and elements related to Movement. Movement can be directed along lines edges, shapes and colours within the artwork.

8. **Distraction:** When there are too many similar elements in the frame, the viewer's attention is not focussed and aimlessly "floats" around. This introduces a level of visual discord that may not be desirable. This can occur when distant elements of a similar nature to an existing group are found elsewhere in the frame and end up competing for the viewer's attention disrupting the viewing experience. Distraction can also be used in support of artistic intent in some cases. Distraction should generally be mitigated as much as possible to contribute to a harmonious viewing experience.
9. **Negative Space:** Represents space between objects in the frame. *This lets an image "breathe" and seem more "relaxed" by opening up areas between elements. If you want to focus attention on something, isolate it using negative space.* Sometimes referred to as "white space". This can be a very powerful compositional tool especially when used with the design protocol of **Repetition**.
10. **Repetition:** This refers to multiple instances of lines or shapes that share similar attributes and relative positions thus appearing to be related to each other, being used to guide the viewer's attention along a desired path through an image. Repetition is different from the **Gestalt Principle of Continuity**.
11. **Interruption:** This refers to a "break" in a pattern or repetitive elements and is related to the **Gestalt Principle of Continuity**.
12. **Overlap:** Overlap is similar to the **Gestalt Principle of Proximity** but occurs when one element is partially obscured by another thereby perceived as being behind the other. This draws attention to the object in front (the object that has broken the boundaries of the one it is in front of). This technique is used to create a sense of depth in two dimensions. It is important to note that it also causes a pause in visual flow as the eye stops to evaluate the relationship of the two objects.
13. **Contact:** This occurs when the edges of two or more objects touch but do not overlap. This creates a strong distracting point of interest which attracts a viewer's attention. This is related to the design protocol of **Overlap** but unlike Overlap, is best to avoid as it can steal the viewer's attention away.
14. **Anomaly:** The introduction of a different element amongst a grouping of similar ones serves to attract and focus a viewer's attention. This can take the form of

a shape, colour, change in value, texture...anything that represents a difference.

15. **Highlighting:** Intentionally making a particular area(s) have a higher value than surrounding areas to draw the viewer's attention to desired areas of an image. This is related to the design protocol of **Contrast**.
16. **Contrast:** This is used to focus a viewer's attention by adding variety and is related to the design protocols of **Anomaly** (light and dark, large and small, straight and curved...) and **Highlighting** and to the design elements of **Shape** and **Form**.
17. **Dominance:** The bigger an object is, the more it dominates the image. This refers to the size of one object relative to others in the frame. When composing an image and arranging shapes, it is best to begin with the largest then move on to the mid-sized ones and then the smallest at the end. This also applies to making one area of your composition more dominant which creates tension and adds interest. It also makes your eyes move around the image more to compare all of the relationships between objects and any negative space.

18. **Perspective:** Visual perspective delineates distance and depth using direction. Perspective can be leveraged to add varying degrees of three dimensional feel in two dimensions and can be a powerful compositional tool with some subject matter. It can often be used effectively to emphasize **Dominance** of an object by providing a separation and transition between foreground and background.

19. **Encapsulation:** This both separates and isolates a group of elements from surrounding ones by enclosing them to create an immediate contextual sense of importance.

Image-Frame Relationships:

20. **Tension:** Incorporating elements of movement, energy and visual weighting when designing the viewing experience adds visual interest and engages the viewer. This is achieved through the strategic arrangement of objects within the frame. What we see visually (shapes, colours, objects, space) is different from what we "experience" visually...the interplay of all of these. More tension = more attention because our minds prefer a static state of rest. This is the concept of visual tension and **is key to creating dynamic and**

interesting imagery. Tension must be used in moderation as too much can pull the eye in multiple directions and away from the focal point of interest.

Tension has an inverse relationship with Parity—there must be an equilibrium (equalized balance) achieved between the two in any successful design.

21. **Frame-Edge Tension:** Created by placing or aligning objects close to the frame edges. This can serve to “box in” an image and draw the viewer’s attention back away from the frame edge or to create tension by bringing attention to what may reside outside the frame.
22. **Alignment:** Elements that share a common axis appear more related to each other. Aligning two or more elements in a frame can quickly bring a sense of order and “stability” to an image. It visually connects elements together with a common goal. This is related to the design protocol of **Parity**.
23. **Split Section Spatial Weighting:** Refers to the relative ratios of vertically or horizontally disparate areas of a composition and their placement within the frame, the concept being, to help achieve **Parity**.
24. **Axes Alignment:** Picture a frame divided vertically and horizontally forming a cross. Elements placed along

these axes will appear more visually balanced and “stable” because they carry less tension. The degree of tension increases as you move an object towards a corner or a frame edge or off-axis somewhere. **Tension** should be used sparingly because it attracts the viewer’s attention. Too much will pull the eye in all directions at the expense of focussing on the focal point, subject and message of an image. A variety of other design protocols and Gestalt principles can be used to create tension such as **Overlap, Anomaly, Movement** (angular versus vertical or horizontal orientations of lines) and the **Gestalt Principles of Proximity** (dissimilar elements being too close to each other) and **Symmetry** (using asymmetrical shapes). Note that Axes Alignment is different from the design protocol of **Alignment**.

25. **Oblique Alignment:** Refers to [alignment of objects relative to the frame’s corner to corner “X” axes but not directly on an axis or very near to the corners of the frame](#). This is a very powerful compositional technique that guides the viewers eye through the use of oblique leading lines and shapes. [The midpoint between each corner and the centre of the X represents locations](#)

where our eyes naturally focus. These locations are referred to as “eyes”.

26. **Diagonal Alignment:** This refers to aligning shapes based on the letter X where the lines of the X intersect at right angles. The concept is to have two Xs at either side of the frame where the axes of each X run from the corners of the frame and intersect at right angles. This is not dependent on frame dimensions—the X shapes may overlap in the centre of the frame or be separated by any amount of space. Objects or implied lines align to the diagonal axes of the Xs and should not be placed on the axes near the corners of the frame. Note that this is not the same as **Oblique Alignment** where the axes run from corner to corner of the frame.

27. **Golden Section:** This is based on the Golden Ratio found in nature. Picture a line running diagonally from frame corner to frame corner that is perpendicularly bisected (90 degree angle) by a line originating from one of the other corners. The intersection point of these lines is referred to as the “eye” because this is the place where our eyes tend to focus on naturally. This is only one of four “eyes”. Others are formed when these lines are laterally reversed and vertically inverted. Aligning elements along these axes or at the points of

intersection contributes to achieving **Parity**. This is also referred to as the “Golden Spiral”, “Golden Triangle”, “Golden Mean” or “Divine Proportion” and is based on the Fibonacci Spiral. Note that these points are in different positions than the commonly used “Rule of Thirds” that divides a frame into nine equal areas.

28. **Parity:** This refers to achieving an overall visual balance between the arrangement of the objects within the frame relative to the frame boundaries themselves and the overall viewing experience. The protocols of **Alignment, Axes Alignment, Oblique Alignment, Diagonal Alignment** and **Golden Section** can play a role in this. **Parity has an inverse relationship with Tension**—there must be an equilibrium (equalized balance) achieved between the two in any successful design.

29. **Unity:** The idea behind the concept of Unity is that elements must support each other and work together towards a common goal. Unity is the measure of how well design elements belong together. Design elements should not be arbitrarily placed within the frame. Unity adds order to a design but if overdone a design can become static and dull.

30. **Structure:** This refers to the level of minimalism and organization achieved in a design and contributes to achieving **Parity** and **Unity**.

MOST POWERFUL PROTOCOLS TO USE

- Negative Space
- Repetition
- Gestalt Principle of Continuity
- Anomaly
- Contrast
- Highlighting
- Frame Edge Tension
- Axes Alignment
- Oblique Alignment
- Diagonal Alignment
- Golden Section
- Structure
- Movement

DESIGN ELEMENTS

1. **Shape:** Objects composed of other elements of design and defined by the spaces between them or around them. [Geometric shapes produce a feeling of order.](#) Organic shapes are irregular shapes that can be found in nature. The more contrast there is at the shape edges, the more clearly defined a shape is and the more attention it will attract.
2. **Form:** The form of a work is its shape and perceived volume. A two dimensional artwork can achieve the illusion of form with the use of perspective and shading (changes in **Value**). Form can be measured in terms of height (top to bottom), width (side to side) and depth (front to back) and can be defined by changes in **Value**, **Colour** or **Texture**.
3. **Value:** The perceived brightness of an area. This is often also referred to as "tone". The difference in values is called contrast.
4. **Line:** A line is a mark that spans the distance between two points. It can be straight or curved. [A line can also be implied and not contiguous.](#) One of the most important considerations in composition is line direction and sense of "movement". Lines guide the viewer's exploration of the composition.
5. **Texture:** Surface qualities which translate into tactile illusions. Texture is used to describe how something looks. It can be an actual (three dimensional) texture or a perceived (two dimensional) texture.
6. **Pattern:** When a texture repeats, it creates a pattern.
7. **Colour:** The colour of an object is determined by its pigment. Three characteristics of colour are hue (the colour itself), saturation (its brightness or dullness) and tint (created by adding white or black). Colour can be used to create a harmonious design, to evoke a desired mood or to emphasize an object. It can have a symbolic meaning.

Section Summary:

Visual Design

Design is the underlying order that defines every aspect of our universe and is what drives our desire for both functional and visual order to achieve some purpose.

Good design enhances the viewing experience and serves to facilitate the communication of artistic intent.

The challenge is always to engage a viewer's attention and guide the viewing experience in alignment with artistic intent.

The MC Art Framework uses an ordered approach to image analysis and visualization. MC Art Framework design protocols are grouped into three categories:

1. Gestalt Principles
2. Elements and Techniques of Image Design
3. Image-Frame Relationships

Concepts and elements of visual design are used to determine the arrangement of objects within a frame and define the viewing experience. Design protocols (30) are employed to organize elements of design (7) within a frame.

PART 4

SENSING LIGHT AND SEEING SHAPES

SENSING LIGHT

It's all about light! Artists paint and draw light; photographers photograph it. [Light is represented/rendered via shapes, edges, values/tones \(lightness or darkness of an area\) and colour.](#)

[Light is the most important consideration when analyzing a scene.](#) It changes over time, and its very nature can reveal different aspects of a subject. The Impressionist painters only worked on location for a designated window of time each day, so that the light, shadows and colours remained consistent for them from day to day while they were working on their painting. This is why an artist or photographer can return to one location repeatedly and produce many unique representations of the same place—the light changes the mood of the scene. Is it serene, spacious, energetic, ominous, does it portray a sense of warmth or peacefulness, of cold, solitude, introspection, grandeur...? Light is also a reflection of weather conditions and can be used creatively to isolate and emphasize specific elements in your scene.

[It is light that defines your subject and sets the mood of a painting or photograph. The mood of a scene influences artistic choices that can produce very different results.](#) Light and shadow can create atmosphere and can make shapes in your composition as important as the objects that cast them. This can define the three-dimensional quality of an object and clarify its form and contribute to the overall tones in the painting or photo. Richard Avedon's iconic studio black and white photographs leveraged areas of textureless solid black to create black "negative" space that formed an integral part of each composition.

I typically try to focus on how I feel about an image. I try to simplify what it is about my subject that I wish to convey, and then I summarize this in a few words to myself (tip: good idea to actually write this down) as a way of defining/validating what I want to bring out in my finished artwork or photograph. Usually, if I can't articulate this clearly and concisely, it's not happening and I need to either commit to spending a little more time at the scene with an open mind and wait it out or, simply move on.

Two important attributes of light that need to be taken into account are colour and tonal value ("brightness"). These are interrelated as colours have tonal value associated with

them. Many artists find it quite helpful to consider these separately.

This is the approach I take to plan my paintings and drawings (also serves as a good mindset for photography):

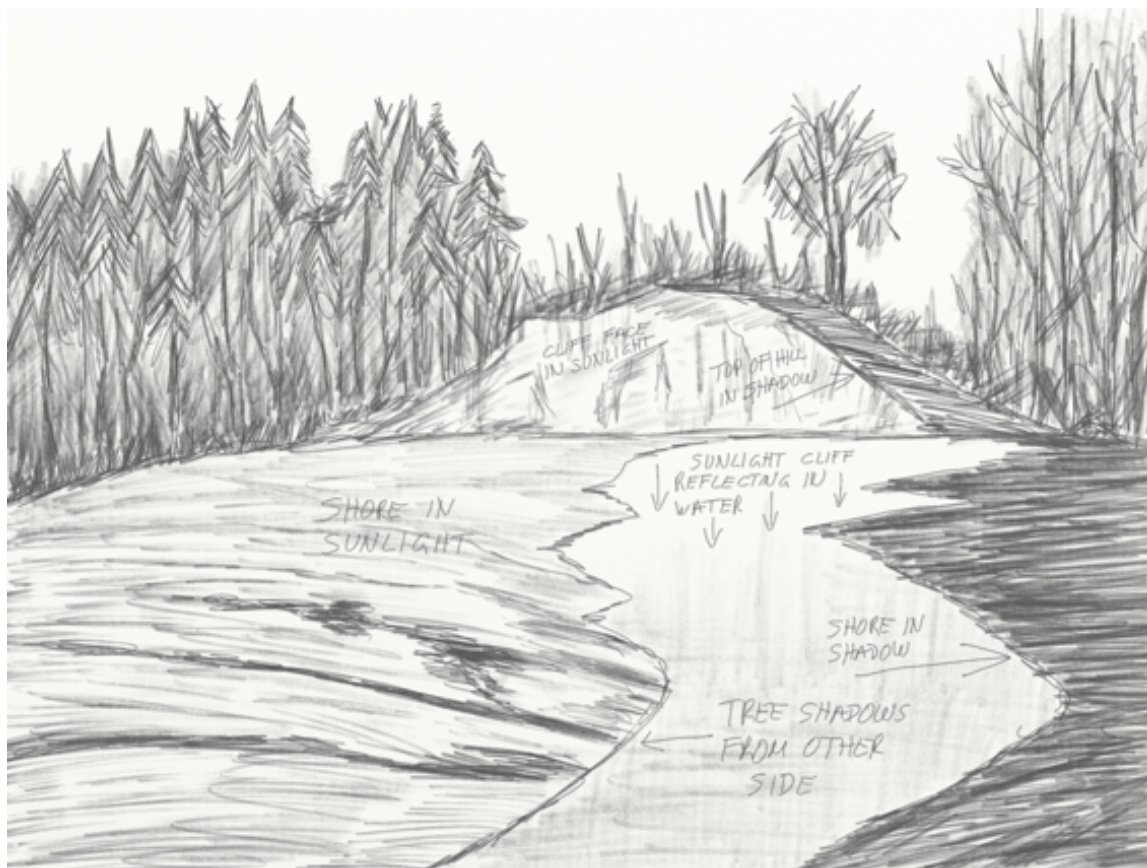
1. Colour – I make a quick painting sketch to map out a colour palette. The purpose of this is to provide more of a feel for not only the colours of a scene but for how much of a role colour might play. For example, I may wish to emphasize the blue sky reflected in the water by making the blue areas of the water brighter to be more pronounced in my painting or, I might want to enhance the green areas of a group of trees to make them stand out more in a photo or, I may leave colour out of the picture completely and focus solely on the light and graphic qualities of my scene.

2. Shapes and Lines – I typically rely on a rough drawing...often with shading notes or information. This helps me identify the shapes that I want to include in my scene. [Drawing out the shapes in a scene forces you to examine the role that light plays as it is light that “shapes” the elements in the composition.](#)

3. Values/Tones – I often make a tonal value map: a sketch that focuses on the placement of light, dark and

intermediate values in an image to assist in object/shape placement in the frame. A tonal value map of a scene can be critical to achieving compositional success; it helps you think through your composition and contributes to determining how to best “light” your work and can also be invaluable in informing compositional choices. It not only serves to help visualize the tonalities in a scene without the distraction of colour but helps to define the overall mood. In its simplest form, it can be hand written notes preferably on a rough sketch of the scene. A tonal analysis helps to understand how the combination of light and shapes in your scene come together. For example, let’s say you are making a drawing of a rock-face on the opposite side of a river. You and the river are in sunlight, and the rock-face is in complete shade. The rock-face has large interesting boulders (your focal point for the piece) at the base of it. A tonal value map accurately reflecting the values in the scene would not show much separation between the boulders and the rock-face. Making those boulders brighter than the rock-face in your finished piece would draw the viewer’s attention to them by separating them (tonally) from the rock-face background. This would also have the benefit of adding more “visual depth” to your composition and a transition zone between the bright sunlit and shaded areas of your scene balancing it out visually

and making it more interesting. This necessary change to the tonal values in the scene would likely not have been as evident to our eyes, but the tonal value map illustrated the issue by forcing us to think through the tonalities in the composition. Here is an example of tonal value notes that I made on a rough sketch of a scene illustrating a similar situation.



The scene was virtually entirely in sunlight with a few shadows of trees on the banks of the river. The tonal value map and notes represent how I envisioned the final piece. I thought that this image would be most successful in black

and white to focus solely on the light of the scene so I made a monochrome pastel drawing of it.



“Highland Creek”, Monochrome Pastel on paper, 22 x 30 inches. See how I approached the making of it [here](#).

Design protocols and elements used in this image:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| - Gestalt Principle of Similarity | - Alignment |
| - Movement | - Axes Alignment |
| - Highlighting | - Parity |
| - Contrast | - Unity |

SEEING SHAPES

It is important to [isolate core compositional elements to include and exclude in alignment with the chosen light and desired mood of your scene](#). Both the existing and desired mood of a scene must be taken into account when assessing the shapes in your scene and determining their relative positioning in the frame. A sketch and/or tonal value map and notes can prove quite helpful to inform composition decisions.

Poor Composition = Poor Design

= Bad and boring painting, drawing

or photo that no one likes or will ever remember

Composition is all about simplifying and excluding unnecessary elements, then balancing what's left within your frame to arrive at the strongest, simplest possible arrangement (design protocols of **Parity, Unity, Structure**).

So, how do we compose in interesting ways? We use elements of visual design and arrange them within our frame.

Good design enhances the viewing experience and serves to facilitate communicating meaning/purpose.

There are two aspects to getting a handle on this...

Firstly, you must [learn to recognize compositional elements in your scene](#). Here are key elements of visual design—a good mental checklist to keep in mind:

- Shapes
- Lines/Edges
- Values/Tones
- Colours
- Textures
- Patterns
- Repetition (of shapes or lines)
- Negative space (shapes formed by the space between objects)
- Contrasts between light and dark areas

Secondly, one of the main challenges with making art or taking photographs is that of representing a three-dimensional world in two dimensions and doing this within a box/frame. You must decide **how to arrange** the shapes created by the various compositional elements you've chosen to include in your frame forming your composition.

You should never include anything in your frame that serves as a distraction in your image; this refers to anything that attracts the viewer's eye that does not contribute to the overall "experience" of your work and interferes with what you wish to convey or things or shapes that don't fit in with the rest of the scene (design protocol of **Unity**). Some examples are branches from two trees touching each other in the sky area at their end-points (they should either not touch at all or clearly overlap) or bright or colourful objects that detract attention, items behind someone's head etc.

Section Summary:

Sensing Light and Seeing Shapes

Artists and photographers must be able to “see” the light of a scene, understand what it is revealing about their subject and reconcile this with what they wish to convey and emphasize in their final work. It is not about trying to realistically render what you are seeing in front of you; it’s about how to “see” what to paint, draw or photograph. This requires a fundamental understanding of the nature of light and of how to work with it. Light (shapes, lines/edges, values/tones, colour) is what guides the viewer’s eye through the finished work and defines the very nature of their experience. Light helps to determine the mood of an artwork.

It is important to isolate core compositional elements to include and exclude in alignment with the chosen light and mood of the scene and your artistic vision for it.

The steps provided (quick assessment of colours, drawing and taking notes about lines, shapes and values/tones) are simple tools that can be used to enhance artistic visualization.

Sensing light is the most important consideration when analyzing a scene. Seeing light plays a part in seeing shapes and composition.

PART 5

COMPOSITION

ABOUT COMPOSITION

The main point I want to stress about composition is that, though there are elements that require consideration, there is no formula and, therefore, no right or wrong ways to approach composition. **It is important to always explore and consider your options.** What happens when you do this is that it all starts to come together; various elements are interdependent and work together to bring an overall balance to a composition. That's pretty much the big picture.

Here are the three ways with which I approach composition:

1. Sense of Space and Depth:

It is necessary to convey a sense of three dimensional depth when working in only two dimensions. To do this, I consider several planes: the farthest distant background (e.g. sky), objects in the distance at angles (e.g. mountains), intermediate vertical objects (e.g. trees) and foreground objects (e.g. field, shrubs, rocks). There is a degree of "lightness" associated with objects in each plane relative to

those in other planes: this lightness is related to the direction of light, defining and forming shapes. This approach also helps to understand how the viewer's eye is directed through your composition and indicates direction of movement.

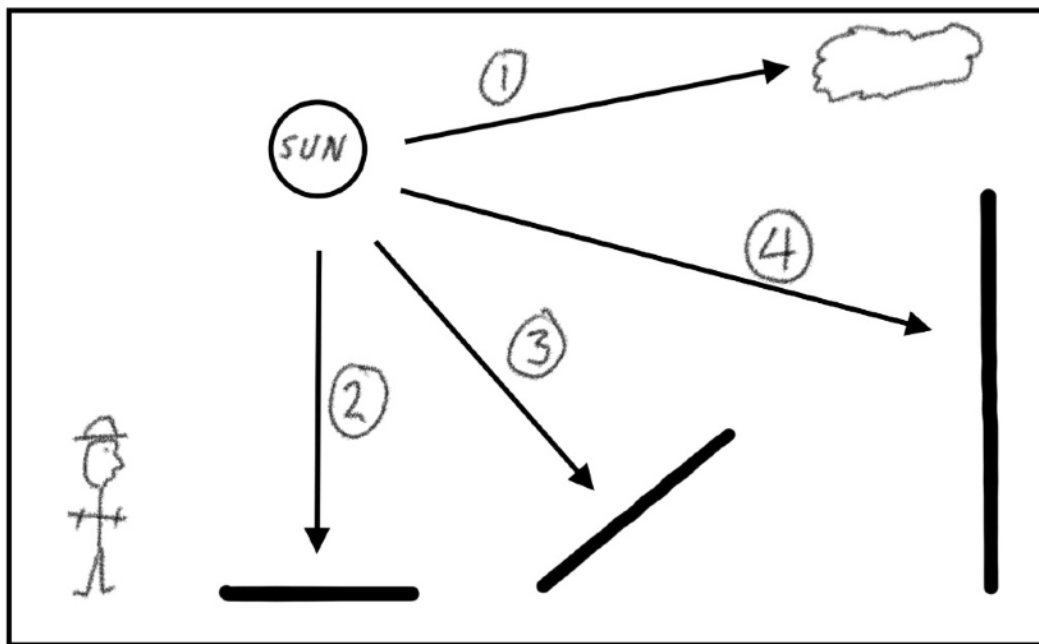
With regard to landscape subject matter specifically (though this can be applied to other subject matter as well), there are four planes of light/value to consider. These planes are premised on the degrees of reflectivity of light from objects relative to the angle of the light source (e.g. if the light source is directly above the subject, horizontal planes will receive more light than angled or vertical ones). This is not a formula approach and has to be modified according to the direction of light in your scene; as the direction of light changes, the relative brightness of the four planes changes in relation to their perpendicular orientation to the light source (simple explanation and pic coming up to illustrate these relationships).

Here are landscape elements that correspond to the various planes:

1. The sky is almost always the lightest value in nature, as the light radiates from it.

2. The ground is the flattest plane and is perpendicular to the sky (light source) so it typically receives the most light in a scene.
3. Slopes (angled elements) such as mountains and hills receive less light than the ground.
4. Vertical trees (and buildings) often get the least amount of light in a scene.

Here is a diagram to illustrate this:



You can also leverage this to make more dramatic compositions by changing your angle of view!

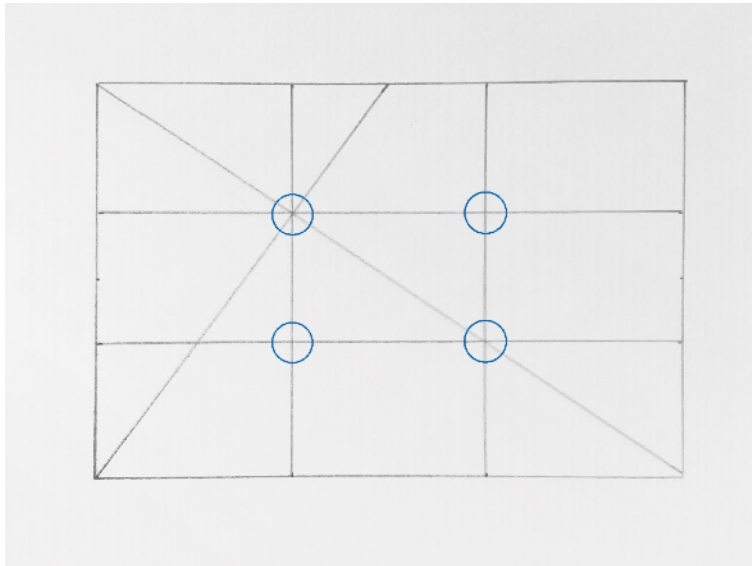
How does this work? Hint: Ever notice how sun reflections on a window change as you move or how you can see

more reflections in water as you get closer (and lower) to it?

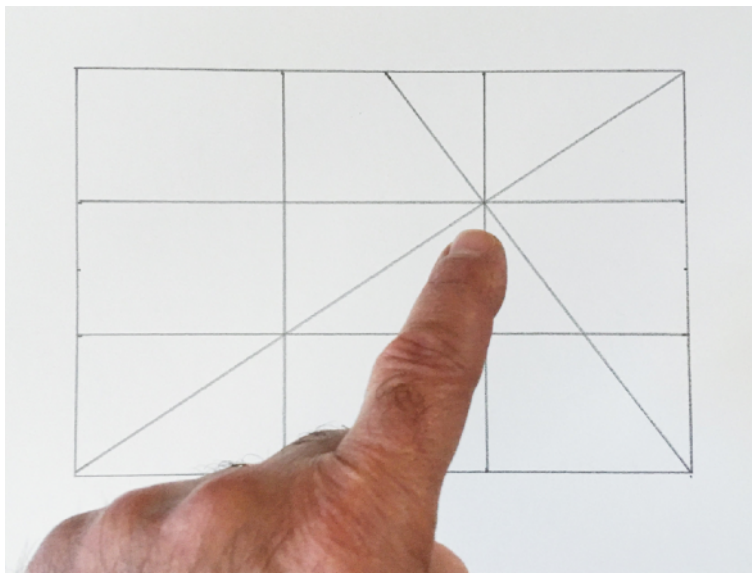
2. Golden Section and Use of Diagonals:

Please note the use of the word “and”. Although these protocols can be used individually to achieve some degree of success, they become a powerful compositional tool when combined. The Golden Section “eyes” are four central points in a frame that can inform visual placement of elements within the frame. On its own, it is not a formula for making successful dynamic, strong compositions but if completely disregarded in your planning, it can often result in failed compositions regardless of what else you do.

If you draw a line connecting two opposing corners of a frame and then draw a second line that originates from one of the other two corners that intersects the first line at a 90 degree angle, you will identify one of four “eyes”. These “second” diagonal lines also provide alternate paths along which to align objects in your scene to help create dramatic and interesting compositions. In this example, the “eyes” are circled in blue and the top left one shows alternate “second” diagonal lines that can be leveraged in composing.



Any one or more of the four points in this grid can be used to inform placement of objects in the frame.



3. Geometry:

Remember when you were young and played with building blocks and drew various shapes. That's it: shapes, not lines,

edges or forms. [Look at the world via shapes within a frame.](#) Here are some examples:

- Use rectangles of various sizes to determine the alignment of items within your frame and to represent “negative” space (larger areas in your frame with little in them around your point of interest or subject).
- [Arrange elements in your frame using partial or full circles to align them along a curve.](#)
- [One of the most powerful shapes to use is triangles.](#) They introduce diagonal lines and a sense of direction/movement and play a key role in making interesting compositions. You will find that there are often triangles associated with what you place along diagonal lines in your frame. [Triangles can be important because they can highlight and link/associate three elements in a frame.](#)

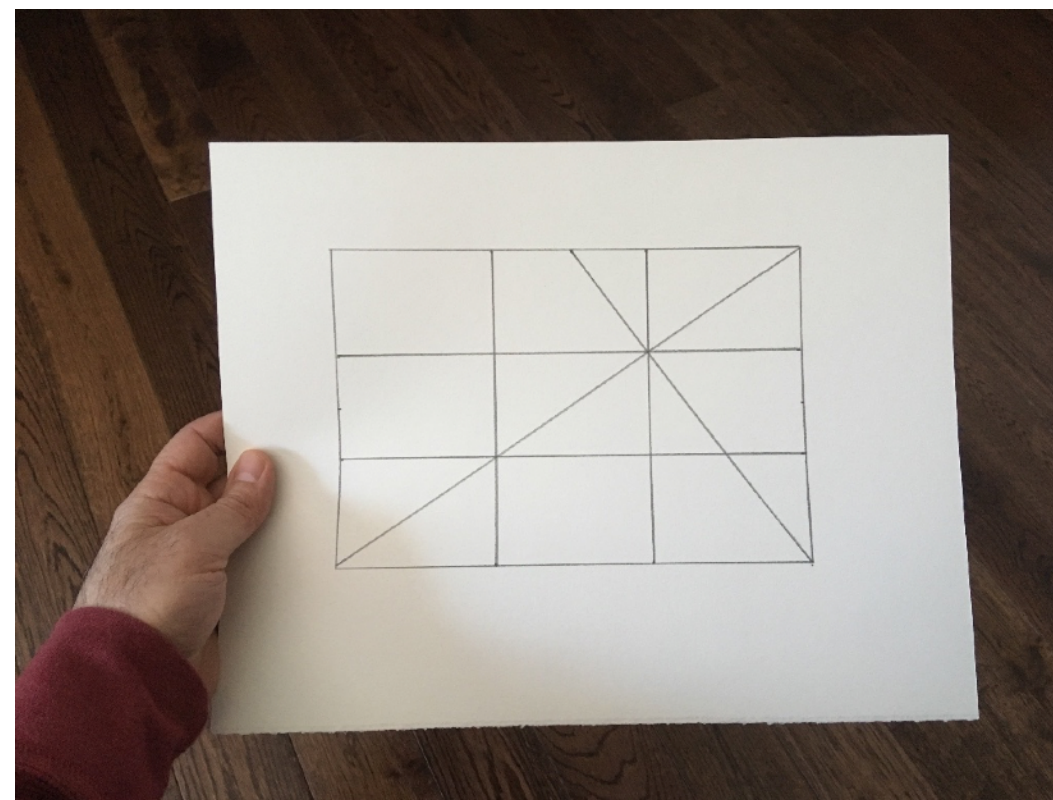
Some experience using the above concepts will enable you to more quickly recognize and arrange shapes in your frame. Being cognizant of, and taking the above into consideration, will, over time, enable you to start seeing the world around you in this way and begin to quickly inform your artistic visualization.

Regardless of where you are at any given time or whether your intention is to create something, you can always momentarily focus on, consider and analyze light and shapes around you...a great way to practice developing these visualizing habits (just not while driving or crossing the street). As you gain more experience, you will soon become able to compose “on the fly” with moving/ changing subject matter (people in the streets, animals, vehicles...)!

COMPOSITION EXAMPLES

Let’s look at some examples to illustrate the concepts covered thus far. So...examples of what exactly? We talked about seeing light, so let’s use that as our subject.

This is a box I drew showing the Golden Section with diagonals (“Golden Triangle”) that I will use to “photograph light”.



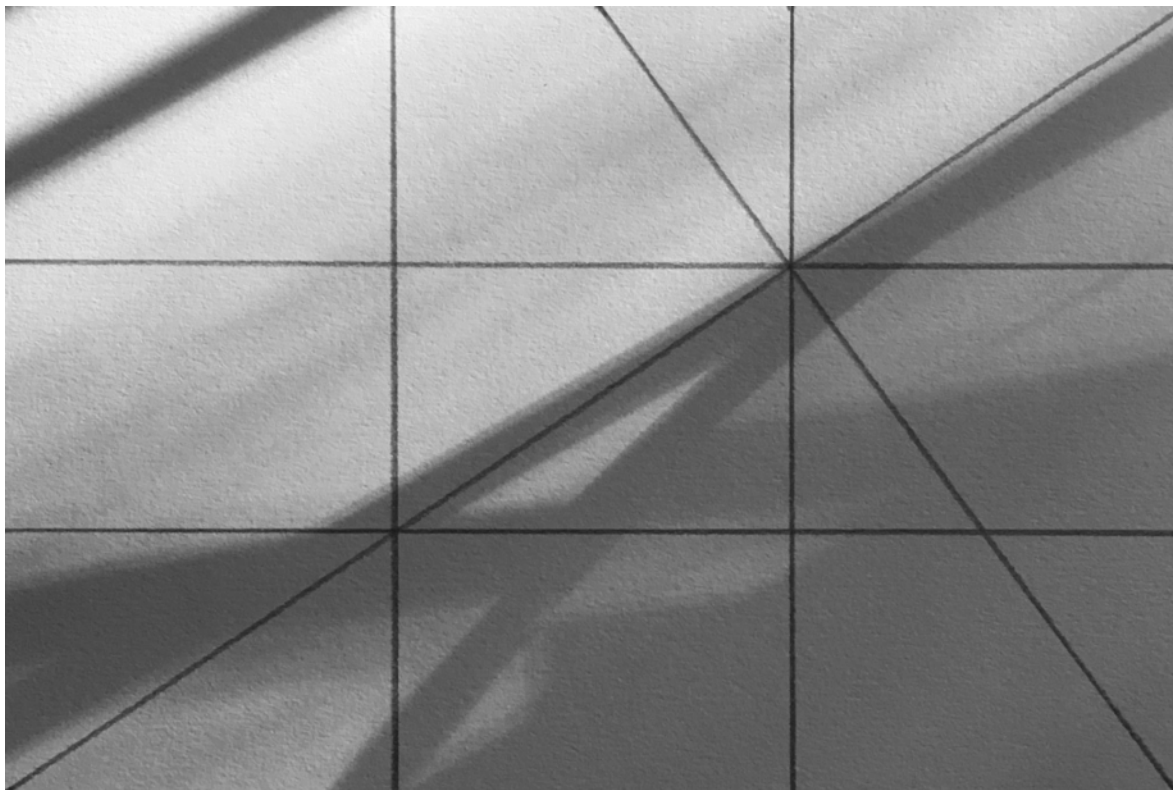
I am going to photograph shadows through a window falling on this piece of paper. To photograph this light and illustrate the use of some composition tools to create interesting arrangements of shapes, I placed my drawing in various orientations relative to cast shadows from my window and used my drawing as a compositional aid to arrange them within my frame. Once I had an interesting composition, I photographed it and then flipped the paper over to create a photo without the drawing.

So, the first photo will show my “Golden Triangle” drawing, and the second won’t. Any slight variations in cast shadows and their shapes that you may notice between the two

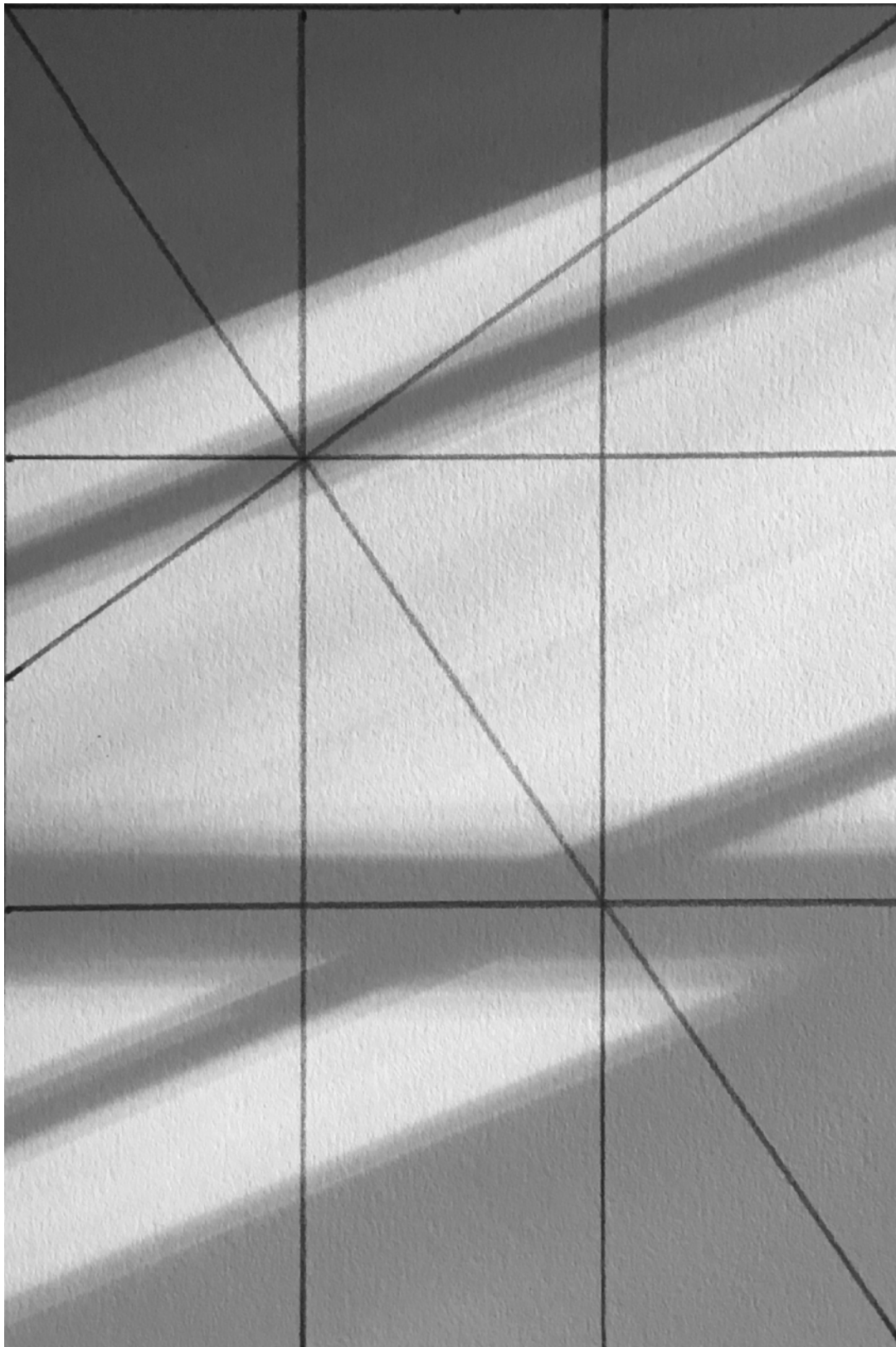
photographs is due to the change in light in the time it took me to flip the paper over and take the second photo. [Tip...light changes quickly so always do something when you get the chance! Visualizing a grid with diagonals overlaying your scene is a great exercise to train your vision to compose an image.](#)

Here are several pairs of my “shadow” photos. When viewing the second of the pair, imagine the placement of the four Golden Section “eyes” within the frame, look for diagonal lines and triangles and their orientation relative to the corners of the frame. Would you have composed these images differently and, if so, how?

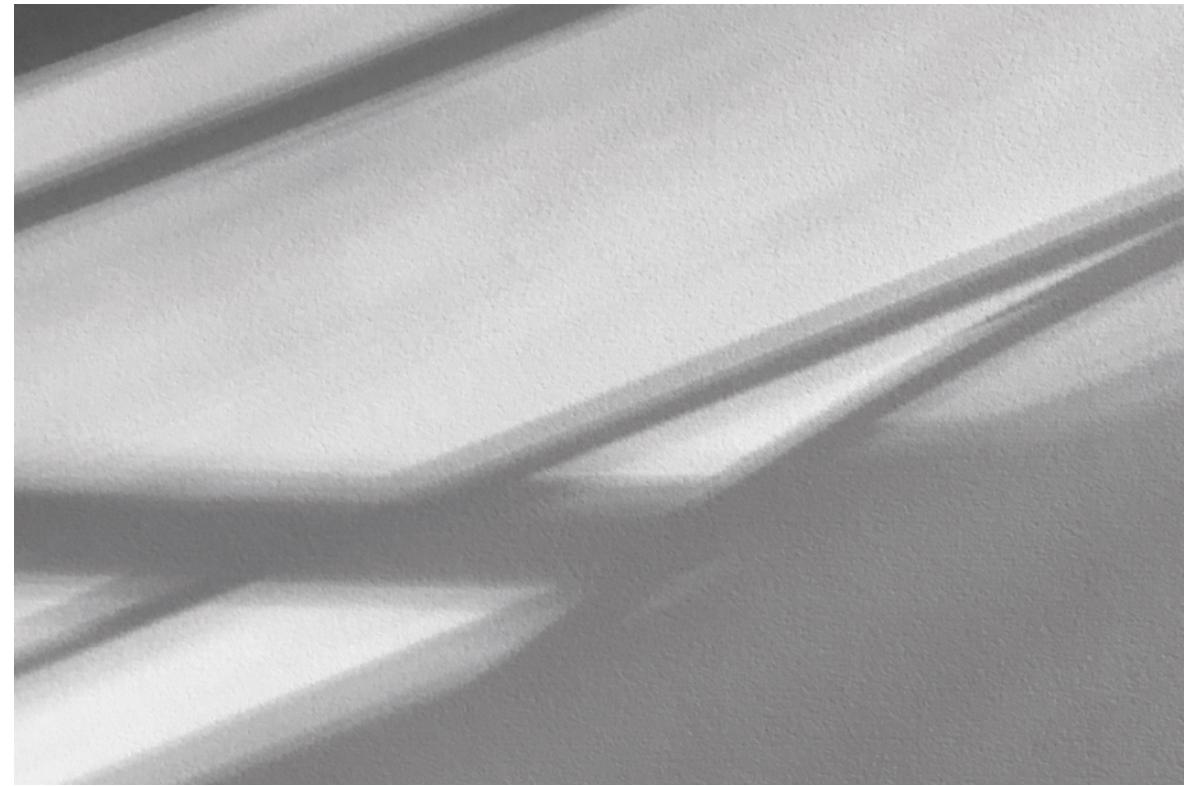
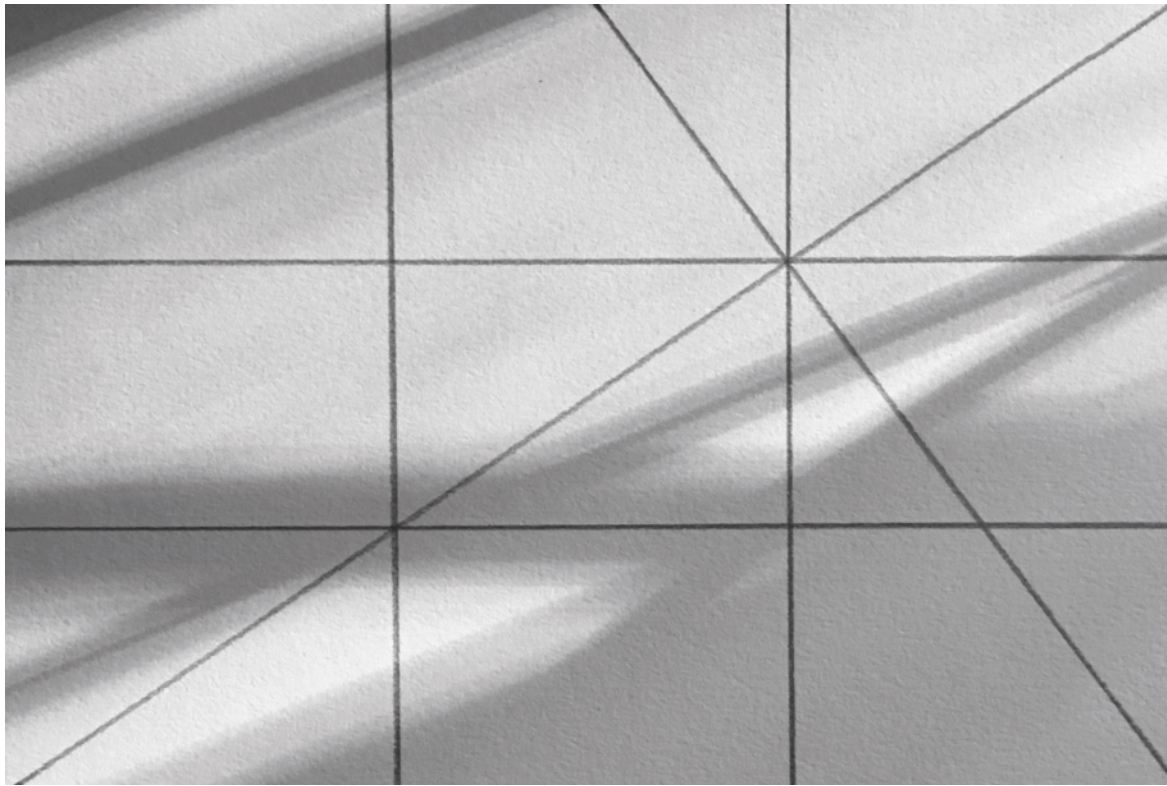
Pair 1:



Pair 2:



Pair 3:



There you have it...my shadow photos.

THE RABATMENT OF THE RECTANGLE

Rabatment is the compositional technique of leveraging square proportions. A square is a simple geometric shape that our brains look for.

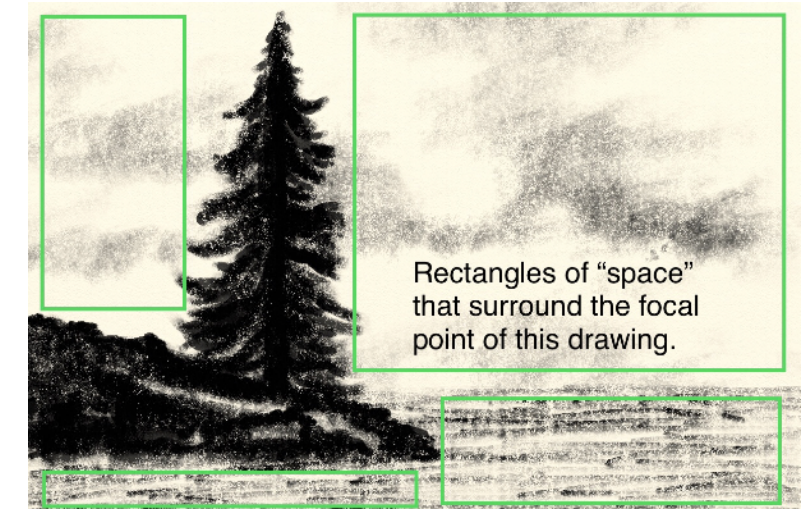
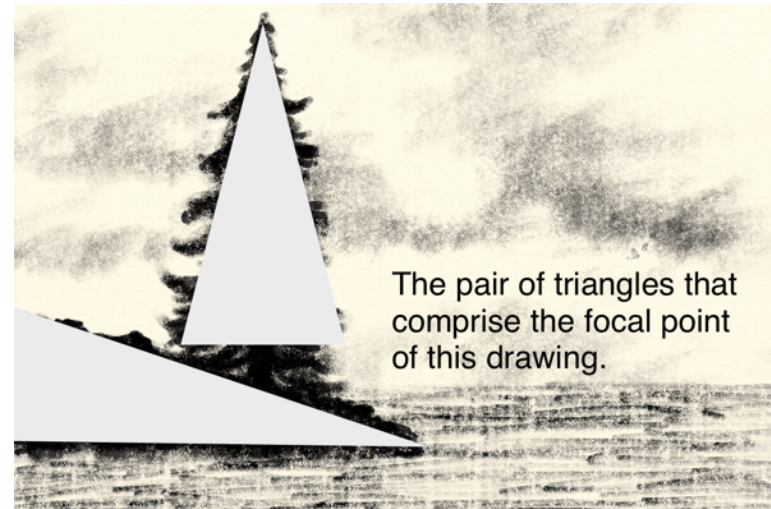
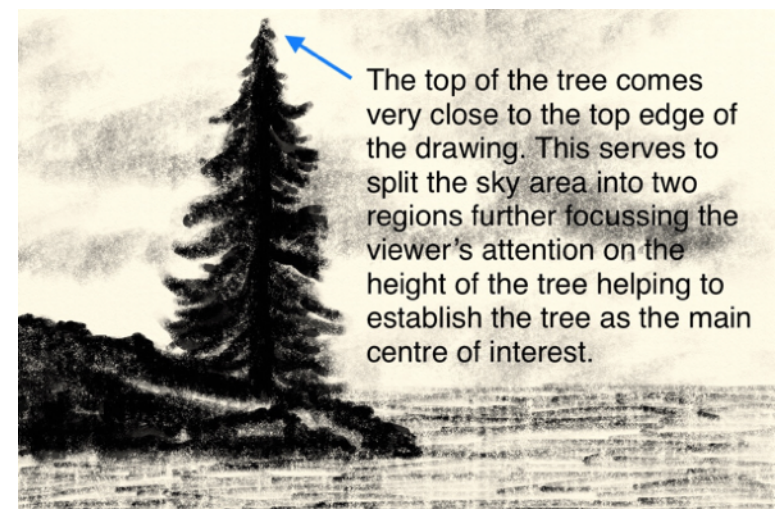
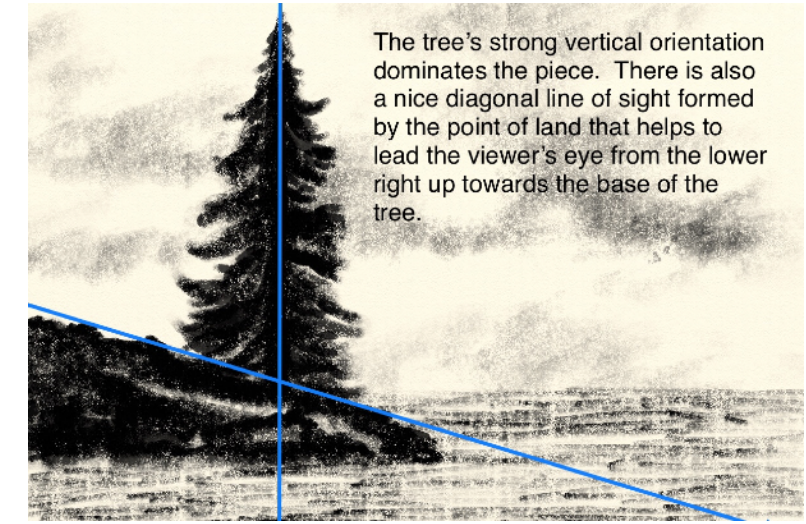
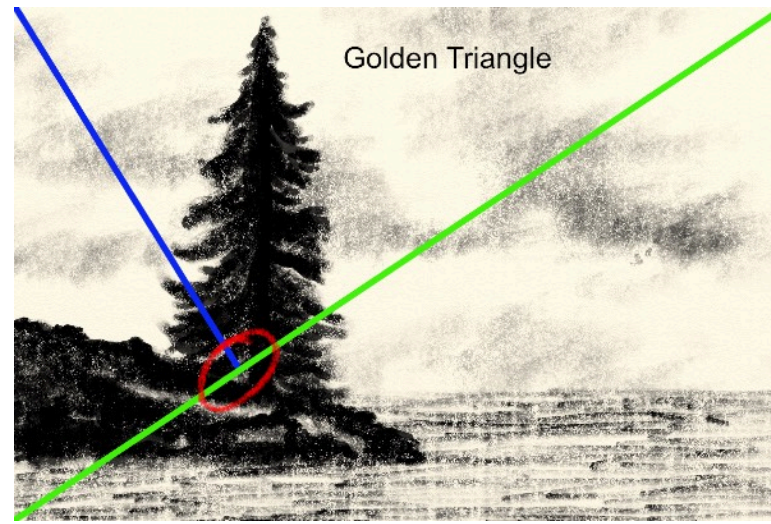
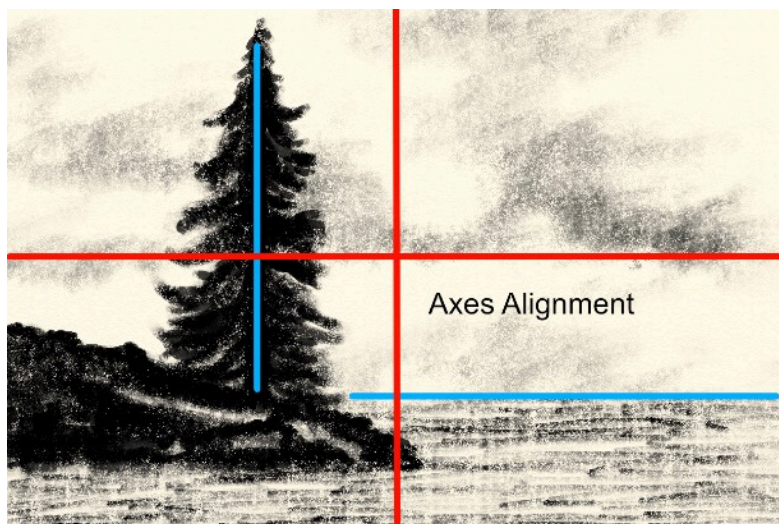
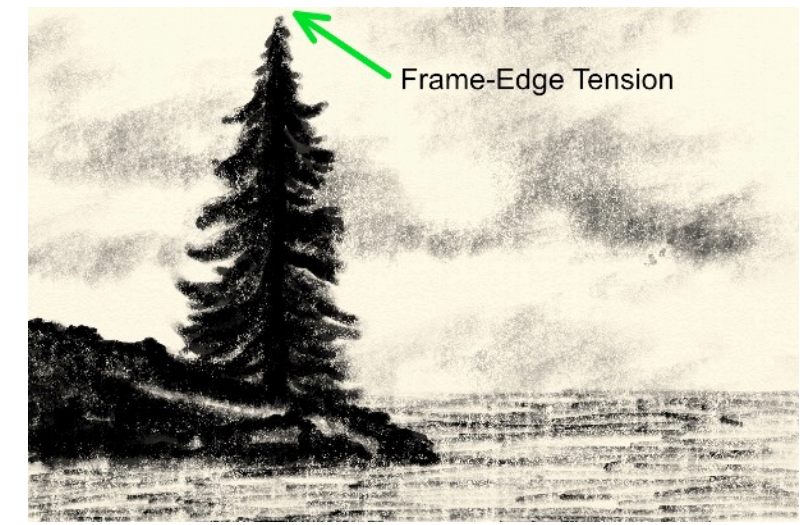
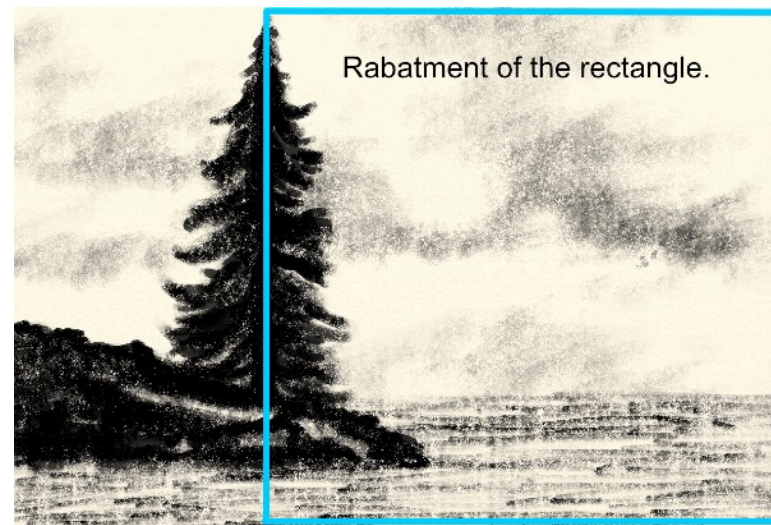
Rabatment involves placing or aligning the most important elements of your composition in alignment with the largest possible square shape that can fit within a rectangular frame where the square is anchored by three sides of the frame. The fourth imaginary side that splits the frame parallel to the short side is referred to as “the rabatment” and is used as the side of the square to align compositional elements. You can even use two squares within the frame (one on each side of the rectangle) to align compositional elements.

When elements are aligned in this manner, a compositional sense of harmony and balance is achieved throughout.



DIAGONALS AND GEOMETRY

Now, let's look at a charcoal drawing of a tree. I made notes on the drawing illustrating the use of diagonals and geometry to create my composition. I also included my thoughts regarding how I chose to position the main elements of the scene within the frame and why.



PERSPECTIVE, GEOMETRY AND DIAGONAL LINES

Here is a before and after photo example. I was taking a walk one morning and came across this scene.



Here is what interested me about this photo and why I wanted to take this picture:

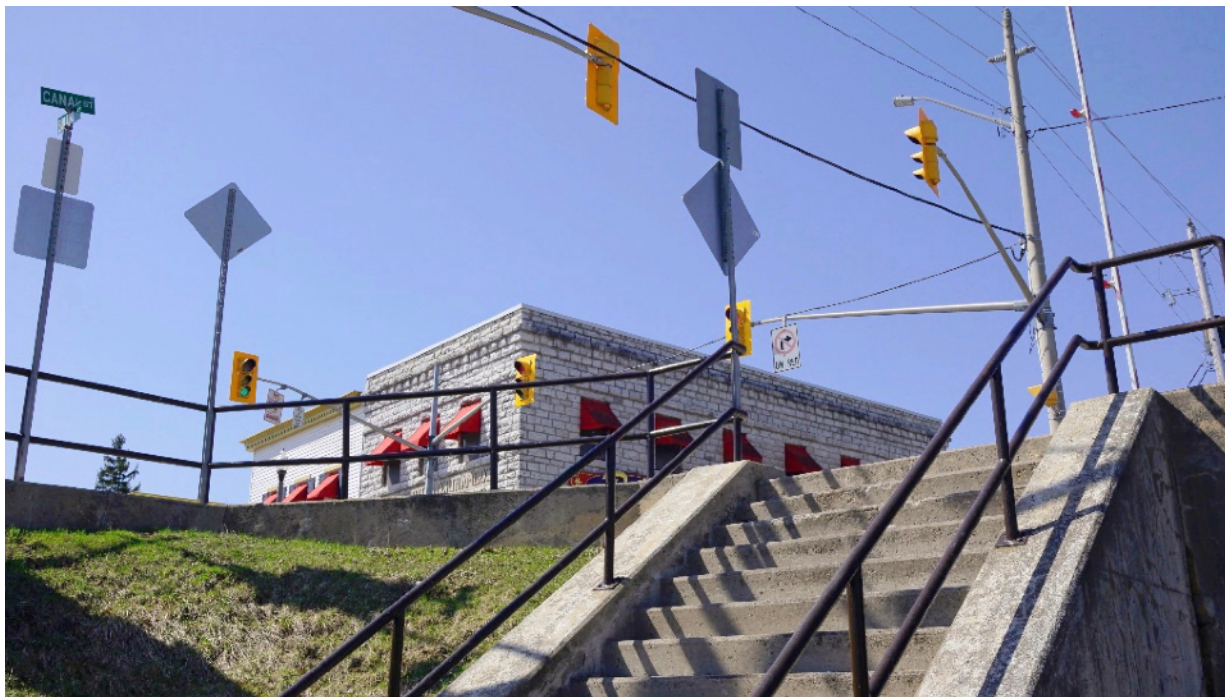
- I liked the building.
- I liked the view of the street from this low angle.
- The stairs at the right visually connect the foreground to the background.
- It's a busy scene.

What is wrong with this photo?

- There is too much foreground that serves no (visual) purpose and is a distraction.

- This photograph is lacking a sense of depth. You feel like you're simply looking at something that was in front of the camera and it doesn't make you feel like you are in the actual scene. You are looking at the stairs head-on (like something that is directly in front you...and they are).
- There are multiple objects blocking our view of what is in the background at street level.
- There is signage on the side of a building that is not easily discernible and serves as a distraction.
- The photo seems a little too busy and disorganized.
- The photo does not make good use of diagonals and triangular shapes.

Here is my second attempt at photographing this scene:



Why this second photo can be considered to be a successful image:

- Moving closer (several metres) towards the stairway to change the angle of my shot isolated the key parts of the scene that appealed to me in the first place (low angle of view looking up at the street at the two buildings) and eliminated much of the unnecessary foreground, clutter and distracting elements.

- Cutting off the bottom of the stairway makes it seem that the viewer is closer to the street level (this photo was taken from the same level as the first) and serves to draw the viewer in by increasing the urge to want to see over the top of the stairway. This also serves to create a sense of depth.
- There is good use of diagonal lines and triangles; they're all over this photo. They lead you up the stairs then over to the left, along the top of the two buildings down towards the left where the dark triangular shadow in the lower left corner draws our attention back to the stairway. Moving closer to the base of the stairway to take this shot introduced a triangular shape at the top (the buildings!) that plays a crucial role in making this photo "work". Note that the window awnings also form a triangle shape of their own echoing that of the buildings!
- Notice how the sense of depth created (by the above) makes the light in this scene and the photo itself seem more three dimensional. There was, in fact, no change in light; these photos were taken within a few seconds of one another. You can validate this by looking at the first photo again.
- Lastly, something not directly related to composition...There is obviously an intersection at the top of the hill, but there are no cars or people visible. This adds interest by creating a sense of wanting to climb the stairs to get a better look at what's up there, thus serving to draw the viewer into the scene.

Design protocols and elements used in this image:

- Gestalt Principle of Continuity	- Perspective	- Shape
- Gestalt Principle of Closure	- Tension	- Form
- Movement	- Frame-Edge Tension	- Value
- Distraction	- Oblique Alignment	- Line
- Repetition	- Diagonal Alignment	
- Contrast	- Unity	

SKETCH PHOTOS, ENCAPSULATION AND DRAMA...

Here is an example of the steps I went through to photograph this barn:



This photo lacks depth and is uninteresting. The main subject (barn) is too small and is surrounded by empty space. There is nothing of interest in the foreground, mid-ground or background, and the entire scene is lit with even, dull light. From a composition perspective, there are no diagonal lines to draw the viewer's attention into the frame. Note that even though the barn is placed on one of the "Oblique Alignment eyes", the lack of other subject matter in the scene and the lack of diagonals make this an uninteresting image. So, I added some other elements...



Now, I've incorporated diagonal elements and filled in some of the empty space to give the viewer something to look at. The structure introduced at the far left is close to the edge of the frame, and it competes with the barn thus serving as a distraction (it does not contribute anything to the overall image). I've introduced some trees and a fence and ensured that there was no overlap of elements in my scene so that I could focus attention on the barn. There are other distractions in this photo: the branches sticking out on the right side and the sticks and dead grass in the foreground. Next attempt...



Now, I've dealt with the distractions in my prior attempt but have managed to lose my diagonal emphasis. The two trees fill in some empty space nicely and their branches lead the viewer's eye into the photo towards the barn. I have also managed to draw attention to the shrub on the left and the fence post on the right...not so good. So, has this become a picture of two trees or of a barn or a picture of two trees and a barn...plus a shrub and a fencepost? Not quite there yet...



I decided that there are simply too many elements to deal with to clearly focus attention on the barn so I decided to make this a square format picture. Working with a square frame can be challenging but it forces one to simplify their image to only include relevant elements. It also means that I had to work more with the frame edges. The tree foliage fills the empty sky area nicely and the bare branches form diagonals that lead towards the barn roof. Including just a bit of the foreground shrub on the left “blocks in” the left side of the frame and directs the viewer back towards the centre of the photo. This shot could work but it’s still not quite there...



I think I'm done now. I've eliminated all distracting elements. I have framed my main subject and filled in the edges of the square frame. The trees on either side contribute to the mood of the scene and fill in the uninteresting sky area nicely. The foreground fence draws the viewer's attention in from the lower right of the frame towards the centre and into the open mid-ground where you find the barn. The barn's setting, roofline and details have become the centre of attention of this photo. There is, however, still room for slight improvement... I did not notice that there are leaves belonging to the tree on the right that are touching leaves on the tree near the barn. This is an example of the inappropriate and accidental use of the design protocols of **Contact** and **Overlap**. I find this "merging" of elements in my scene to be a visual imbalance that detracts from

the viewing experience. This could have been avoided by simply taking the photo from a slightly lower position to introduce some sky area between the two trees as I had done previously in my second attempt. This final image is a good example of using the design protocol of **Encapsulation** (the barn being in the centre of the frame completely surrounded by other subject matter).

Design protocols and elements used in this image:

- Gestalt Principle of Similarity	- Encapsulation	- Unity
- Gestalt Principle of Figure-to-Ground	- Axes Alignment	- Structure
- Movement	- Oblique Alignment	- Line
- Contact (in error, per above)	- Parity	

Here is an example to illustrate what a slight shifting of position can make to an image... Here are two images of the same group of trees. For the second, I moved in a little closer to reframe my shot. I wanted to have the tree on the left be a similar distance away from the frame edge as the tree on the right is. This introduced more of a sense of balance to my composition making the photo feel more comfortable to explore.

Before:



Design protocols and elements used in this image:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| - Gestalt Principle of Similarity | - Parity |
| - Gestalt Principle of Closure | - Unity |
| - Movement | - Structure |
| | - Line |

After:



LEVERAGING MC ART DESIGN PROTOCOL #16: CONTRAST

How to create contrast using shapes:

Strong images involve strong shapes. Our brains are hard-wired to recognize shapes, not details. Shapes are defined by their edges. A shape's edges are defined by changes in value (provides contrast). The stronger the contrast at a shape's edges, the more defined and easily recognizable a shape is.

Our eyes are instantly drawn to the brightest areas of an image that have the highest contrast. In order to capture a viewer's attention, the subject should be a well defined shape with strong contrast edges with these edges having the highest contrast found in the image.

If there are any competing areas of contrast, no matter how small or where they are placed, you will have failed to

capture the viewer's attention resulting in a failed, weak image. Note that some images are specifically designed to not have a central point of interest, in which case, there may be multiple areas of contrast throughout.

Methods to introduce contrast variety:

1. Space
 - Filled / Empty
 - Near / Far
2. Position
 - Left / Right
 - Anomaly / Grouping
 - Centred / Off-Centre
 - Top / Bottom
3. Form
 - Simple / Complex
 - Whole / Overlap
 - Organic / Geometric
4. Direction
 - Stability / Movement

5. Structure

- Organized / Chaotic
- Unity / Parity

6. Size

- Large / Small
- Perspective
- Fat / Thin

7. Colour

- Monotone / Color
- Light / Dark

8. Texture

- Fine / Coarse
- Smooth / Rough
- Sharp / Dull

9. Density

- Transparent / Opaque

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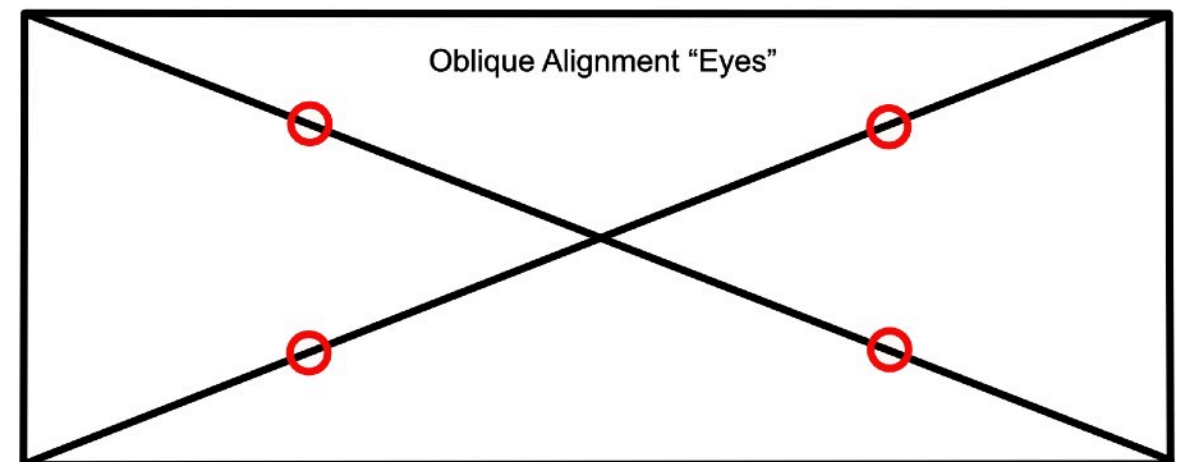
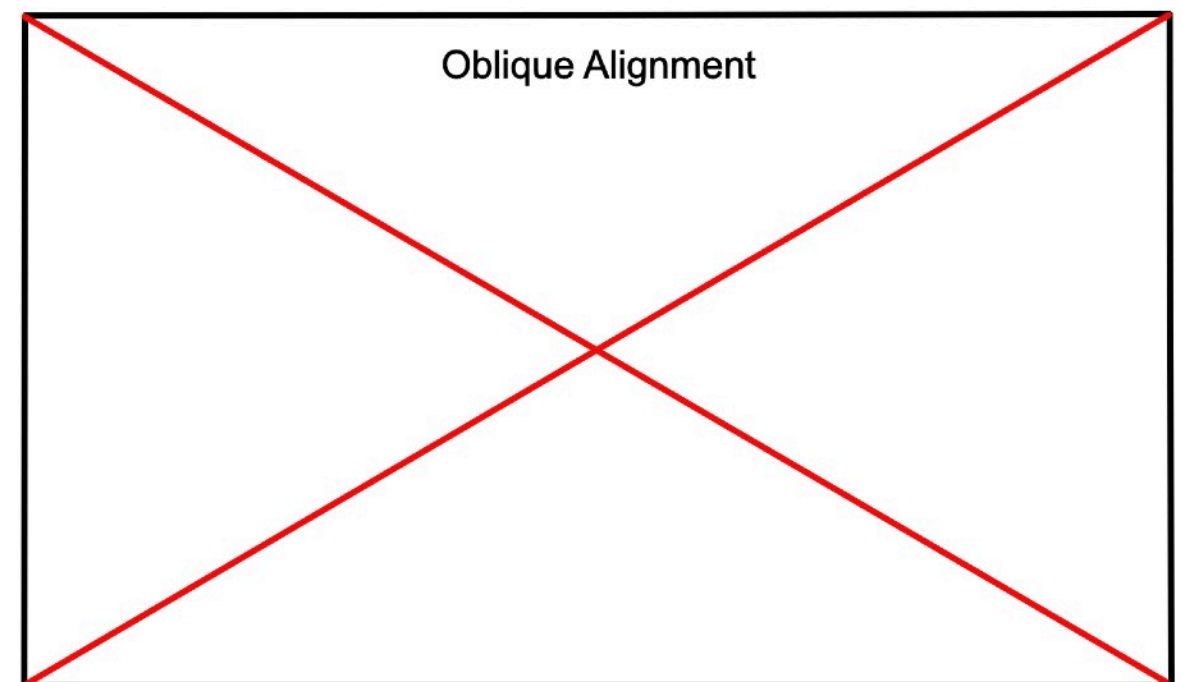
DESIGN PROTOCOL #25:

OBLIQUE ALIGNMENT

Oblique Alignment: Refers to alignment of objects relative to the frame's corner to corner "X" axes but not directly on an axis or very near to the corners of the frame where they become a distraction.

This is a very powerful and common compositional technique that guides the viewers eye through the use of oblique leading lines and shapes.

Other "eyes" are formed along the "X" axis in a rectangle where the "eye" represents the midpoint between a corner and the centre.



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DESIGN PROTOCOL #26:

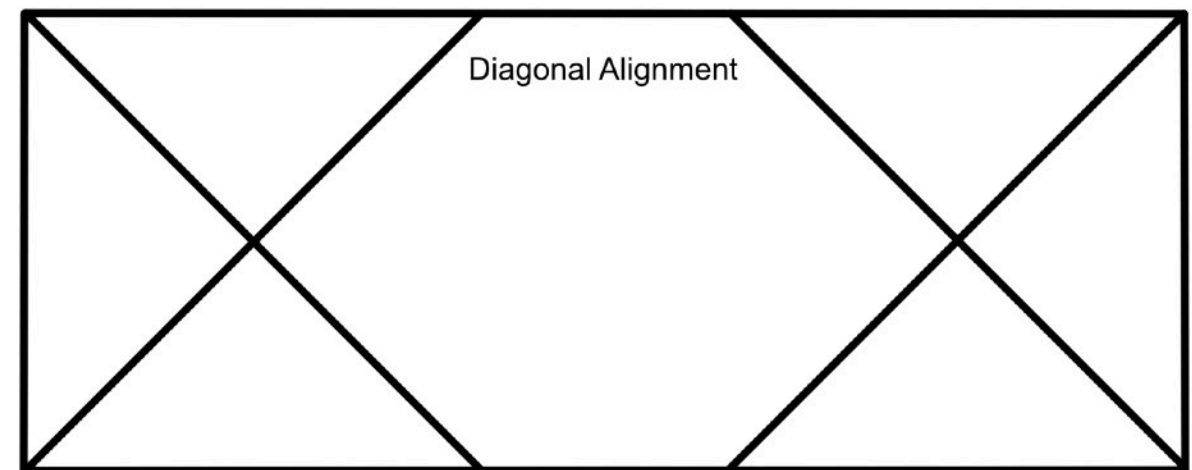
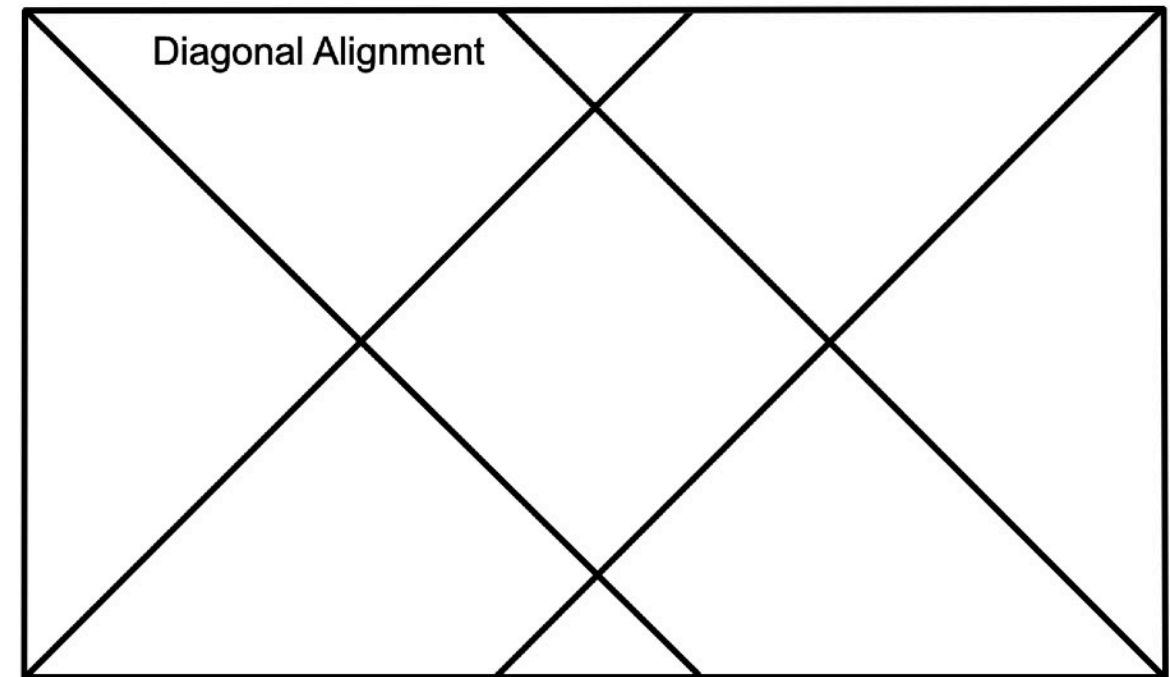
DIAGONAL ALIGNMENT

This refers to aligning shapes based on the letter X where the lines of the X intersect at right angles. The concept is to have two Xs at either side of the frame where the axes of each X run from the corners of the frame and intersect at right angles.

This is not dependent on frame dimensions—the X shapes may overlap in the centre of the frame or be separated by any amount of space.

Objects or implied lines align to the diagonal axes of the Xs and should not be placed on the axes near the corners of the frame.

Note that this is not the same as **Oblique Alignment** where the axes run from corner to corner of the frame.

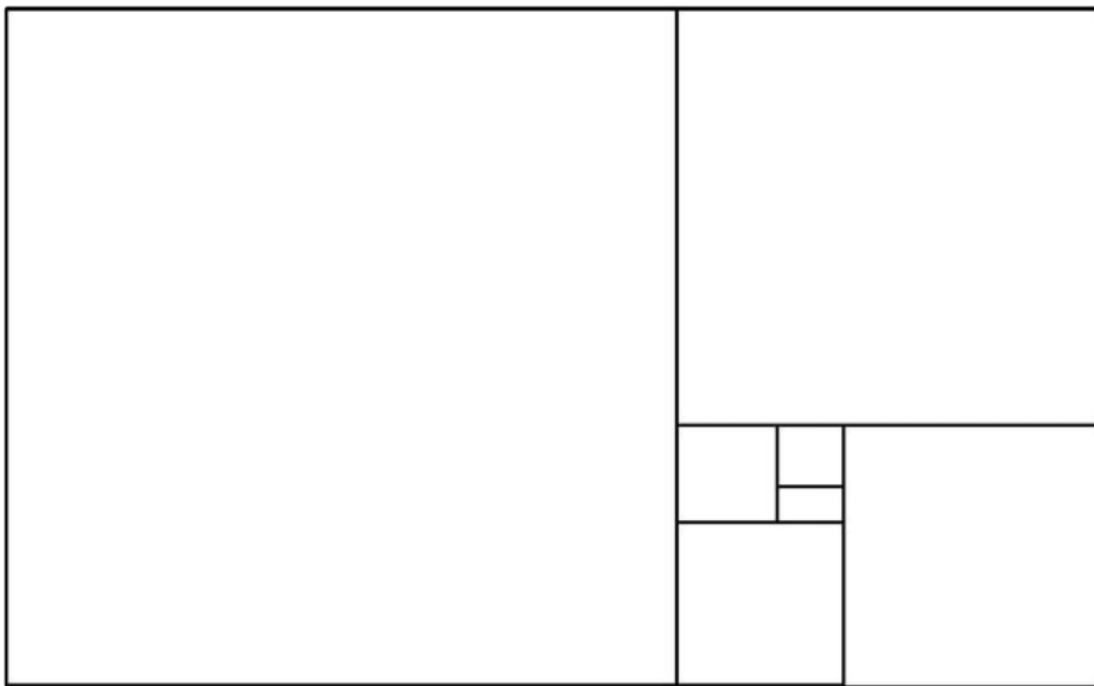


LEVERAGING MC ART

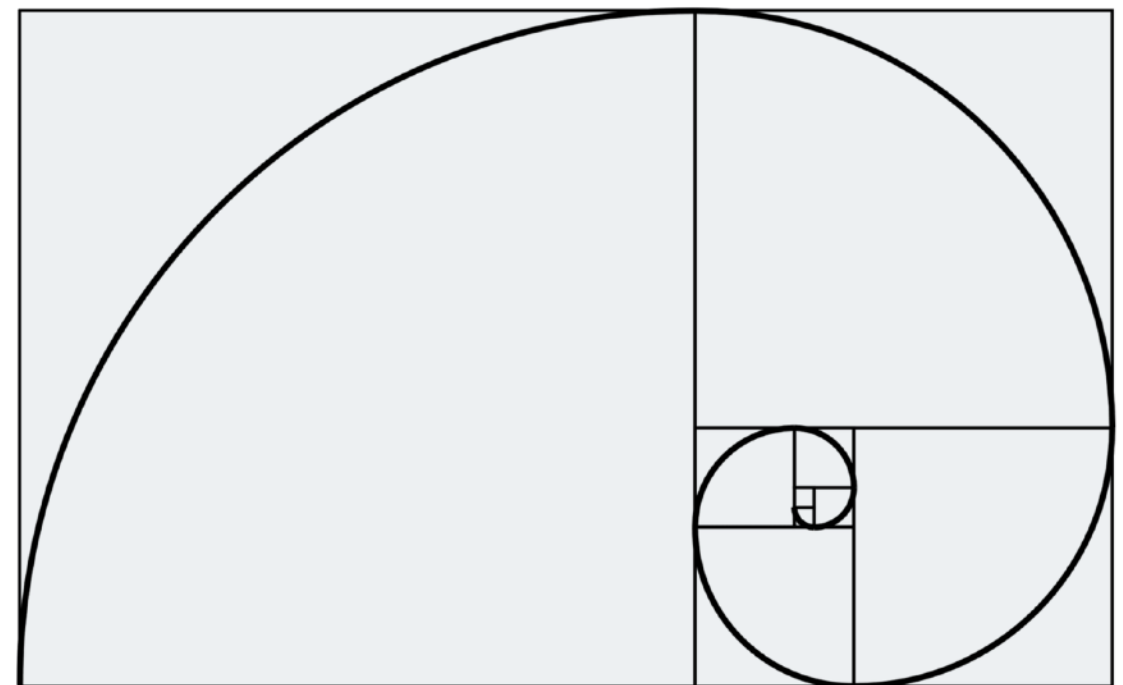
DESIGN PROTOCOL #27:

GOLDEN SECTION

The Golden Ratio divides a rectangular frame as follows:



The Golden Spiral is used to align compositional elements to the Golden Section. This technique is used extensively by artists.

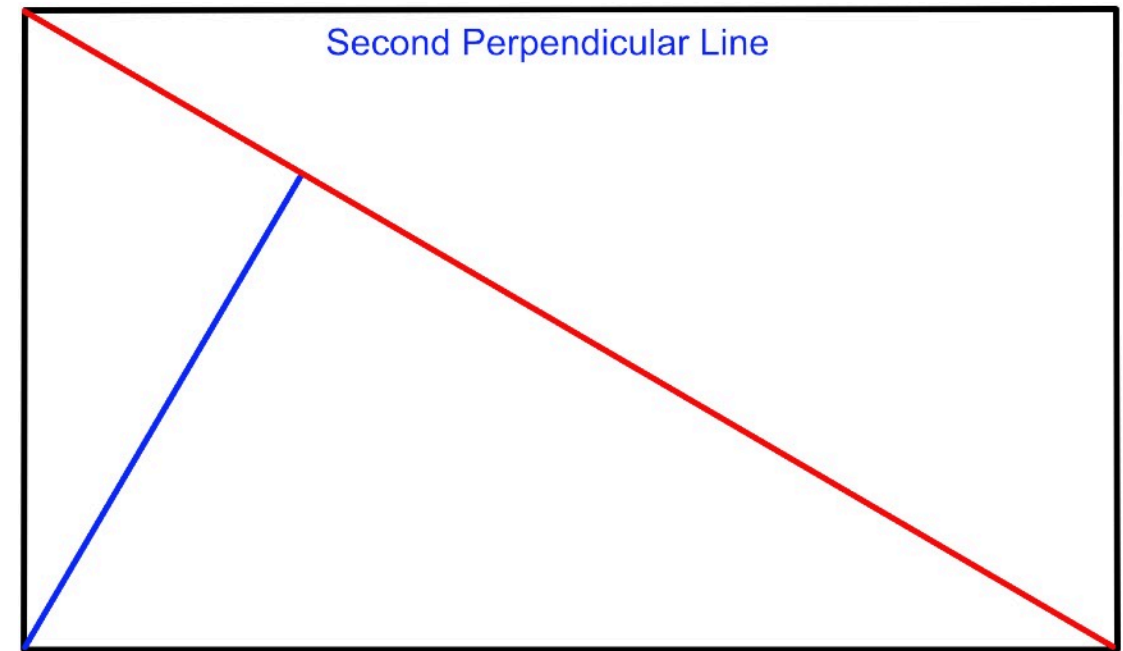
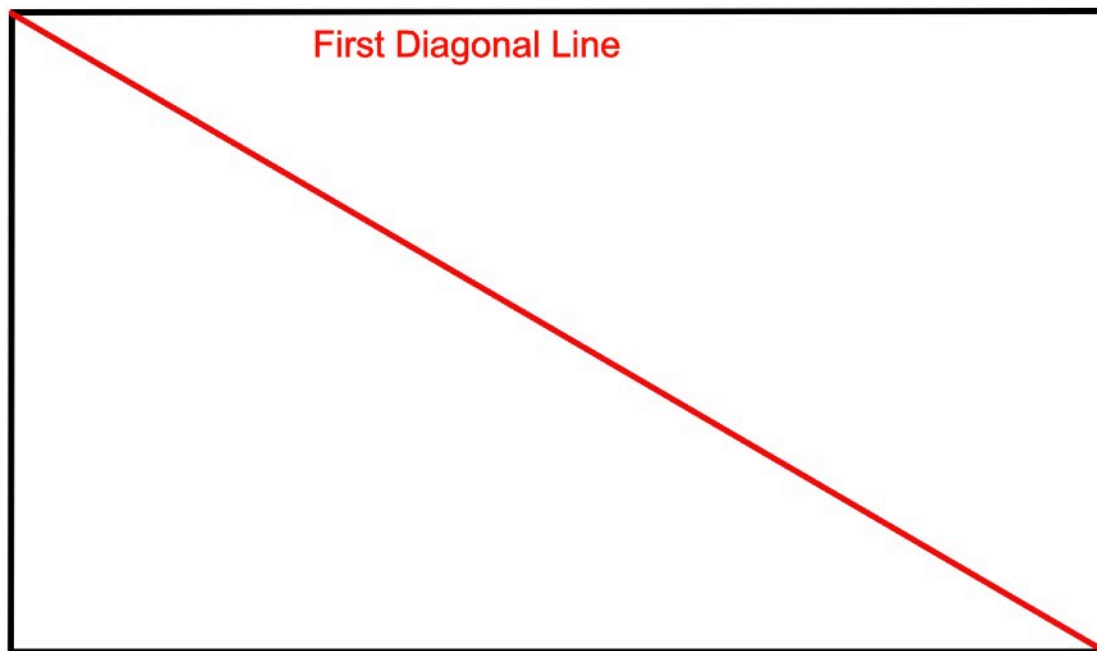


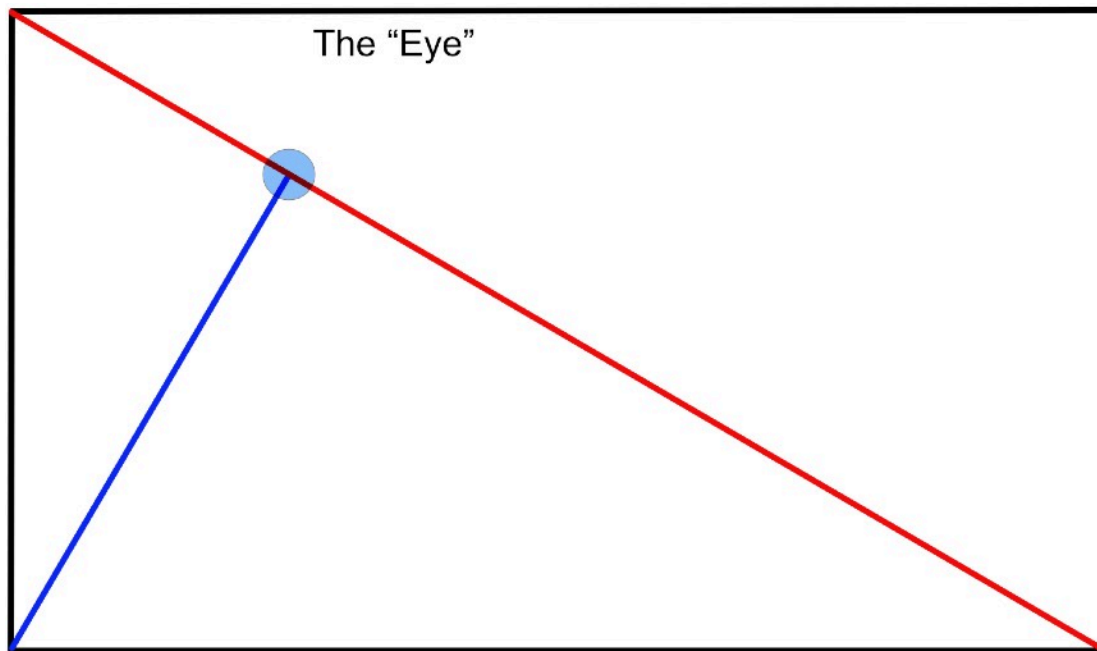
Another derivative of the Golden Section is referred to as the Golden Triangle.

This identifies four points (“eyes”) within a rectangle that the eye is naturally drawn to that can be leveraged in composing images. These points also form a variety of triangles whose angled sides can be used to align compositional elements.

This technique is often used to create dramatic images.

Here is how to construct a Golden Triangle:

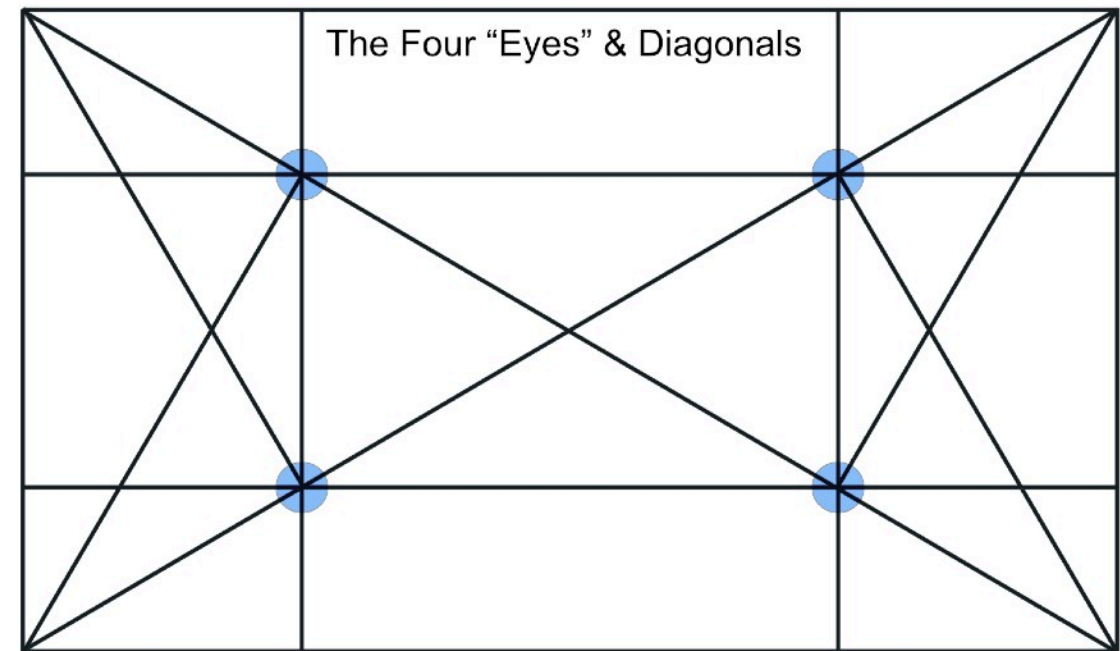




There are four eyes in any rectangle. As it pertains to the Golden Triangle, the eye positions are determined per the diagram above (two perpendicular lines).

To identify the location of the other eyes, the diagram is vertically inverted and horizontally reversed.

When a grid is created with the four eyes, we can generate what is referred to as a "Dynamic Symmetry Grid".



Dynamic Symmetry Grid

Compositional elements are placed on and in alignment with any of the points or lines in the grid. Care must be taken to draw the viewer's attention "around" the corners through the use of design protocols and elements.

Images designed in this manner embody a "constrained" **Tension** that achieves an ideal balance with **Parity**.

This is the most effective method of aligning compositional elements for dramatic impact.

LEVERAGING THE GESTALT PRINCIPLE OF FIGURE-TO-GROUND

This principle is about the relationship between the “figure” (subject) and “ground” (everything else). The figure and ground relationship is imperative. We perceive shapes as distinct objects and the figure should stand out from the ground. As the ground provides the context to define the figure, both elements are important considerations in image design.

- Ensure that the figure’s contrast edges are the brightest of all to attract the viewer’s attention and remove any potential uncertainty regarding the subject of the image.
- Pay careful attention to the ground. It is what provides a context for the figure to stand out. There should be no competing elements or excessive contrast in the ground as this results in a weak figure-to-ground relationship. Strong figure-to-ground relationships are especially important in photography where photographers are constantly challenged with finding simple, uncluttered backgrounds to make their subjects the primary focal point of their compositions.
- Strive for minimalist compositions (design protocol of Structure).

When composing an image, it is important to:

- Be able to recognize and isolate shapes from their ground
- Clearly define or create the figure’s contrast edges to separate the figure from the ground

WORKING WITH THE DESIGN ELEMENT OF LINE

One of the most important considerations in composition is **Line** direction and sense of movement (design protocol of **Movement**). Lines guide the viewer's exploration of the composition:

- Horizontal lines create feelings of stillness and tranquility and also a sense of expansiveness in a landscape.
- Straight lines can create tension and imply direction.
- Curved lines have the same, though softer, effect as straight lines and can lead the viewer "into" your composition.
- Diagonal lines suggest movement and excitement. Ones that move towards and between corners have the most impact. Avoid placing distracting elements in corners and also lines or "implied" lines that are directly aligned

with one or more corners. Align compositional lines with corners but never exactly along the "X" shape formed by lines running from corner to corner diagonally across the frame.

- Right angles ("L" shaped lines) form an interplay between vertical and horizontal planes.
- Converging lines draw the viewer into the composition and create a dynamic sense of depth...especially when they originate in/near the corners of the frame.

The alphabet can play a role with **Line** and the Gestalt Principles of **Continuity** and **Closure** when composing an image. You can align compositional elements according to the following eight letter shapes to add visual interest, movement and impact:

1. T	5. Z
2. O	6. X
3. S	7. C
4. L	8. V

WORKING WITH THE DESIGN ELEMENT OF COLOUR

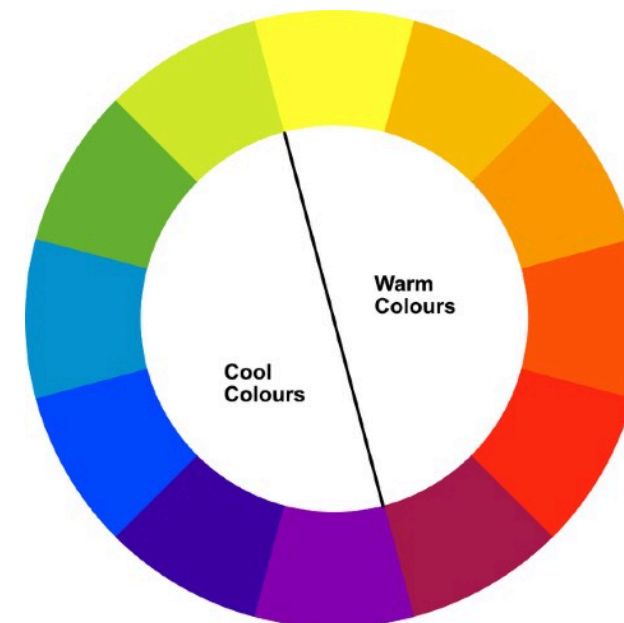
There is a lot of information available on the internet regarding colour. I will not attempt to explain colour theory in detail but will endeavour to provide a working model for using colour.

Unless you are working in monochrome or with a very restricted colour palette, colour must be assessed to ascertain its influence in your design. Colour can be the most dominant aspect of a work and is often more of a distraction than a critical design consideration therefore it must be incorporated into a design carefully at all times.

It is important to have a working knowledge of how to combine and contrast colours when we design our images. Here are some colour theory terms with illustrated colour relationship diagrams to illustrate.

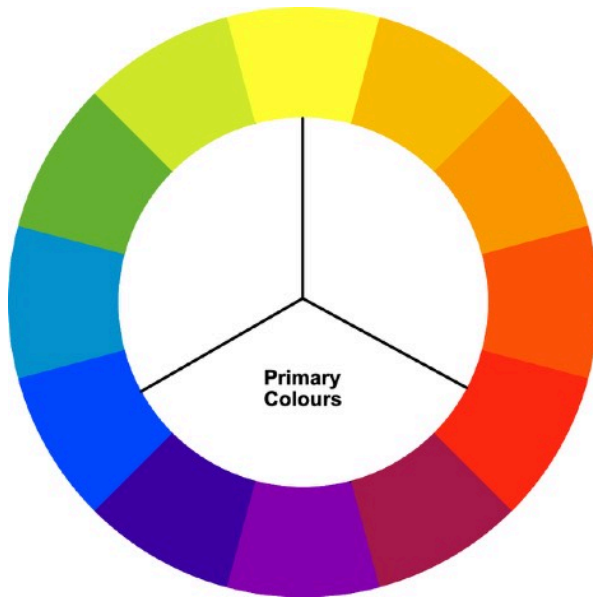
The Colour Wheel:

The “generally accepted” colour wheel has a total of twelve different colours. Warm colours are considered to be energetic and cool colours, calming.



Primary Colours:

The **primary colours** are red, blue and yellow. They are considered to be “pure” colours and cannot be created by mixing any other colours together. All other colours can be created from the three primary colours. **Primary colours dominate (particularly red and yellow)**—they stand out and grab a viewer’s attention more than other colours.



Some artists mix their own colours using primary colours combined with white and black (more on this later) to derive their own custom palettes with an infinite choice of subtle variations. Some photographers and

filmmakers “colour grade” their work with customized palettes to achieve a particular look/style..

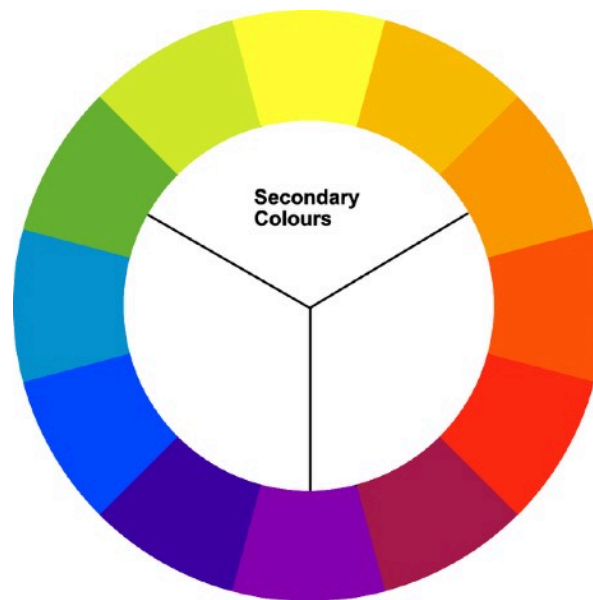
Tertiary Colours:



Tertiary colours are derived from combining a primary colour with a secondary colour.

Secondary Colours:

Secondary colours are made by combining two primary colours in equal amounts. For example, red and yellow make orange, blue and yellow make green and blue and red make purple.



COLOUR HARMONIES - TECHNIQUES FOR COMBINING COLOURS

Complementary Colours:

These are colours that are directly opposite from each other on the colour wheel.



The high contrast of complementary colours creates a vibrant look. This combination must be managed so it is not jarring. The use of complementary colours can be tricky to gauge but work well when you want something to stand out. [This is a powerful visual combination.](#)

Analogous Colours:

This refers to two or more colours that are beside each other on the colour wheel.

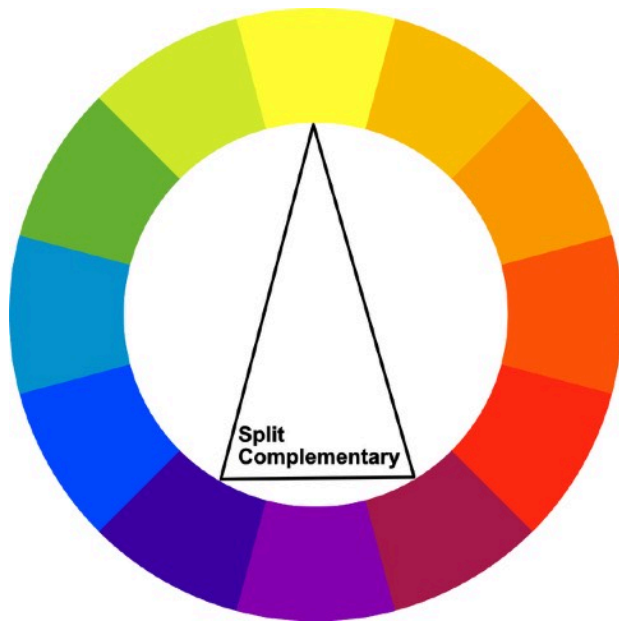


Analogous colour schemes usually match well and [create serene and comfortable designs that are harmonious and pleasing to the eye](#). They are often found in nature.

Any one colour should dominate with the others taking on a subordinate role—this achieves an ideal balance.

Split-Complementary Colours:

This combination of three colours is derived from a complementary pair with one of the colours displaced by its two adjoining analogous colours.

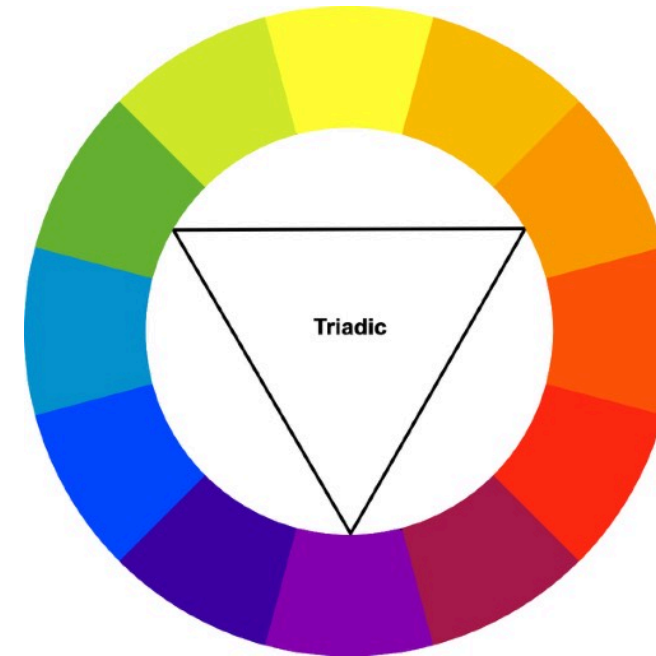


The split-complementary colour scheme is a variation of the complementary colour scheme.

This colour scheme has the same strong visual contrast as the complementary colour scheme but with less Tension.

Triadic:

A triadic colour scheme uses colours that are evenly spaced around the colour wheel:

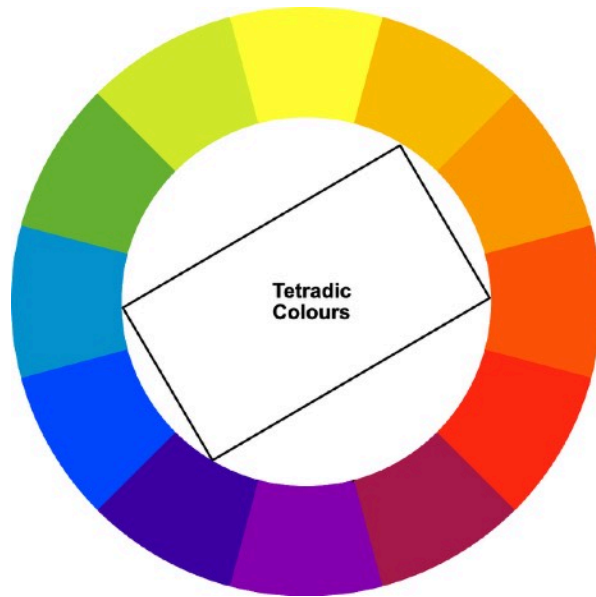


Triadic colour harmonies are quite vibrant even when using pale or unsaturated versions of hues.

Any one colour should dominate with the others taking on a subordinate role—this achieves an ideal balance.

Tetradic:

The tetradic (rectangle) colour scheme uses four colours—two complementary pairs separated by one colour on the wheel:



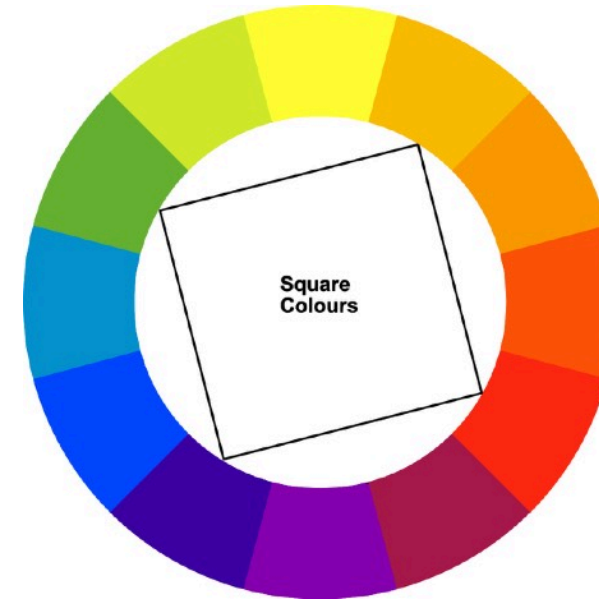
This colour scheme has a richness to it and offers numerous possibilities for variation.

It works best when one colour is dominant.

Attention should be paid to the balance between warm and cool colours in your design.

Square:

The square colour scheme is similar to the tetradic but with all four colours spaced evenly around the colour wheel:

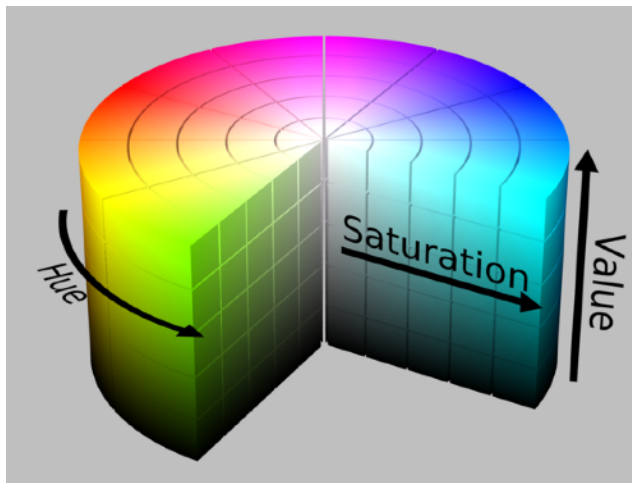


This colour scheme works best when one colour is dominant.

Attention should be paid to the balance between warm and cool colours in your design.

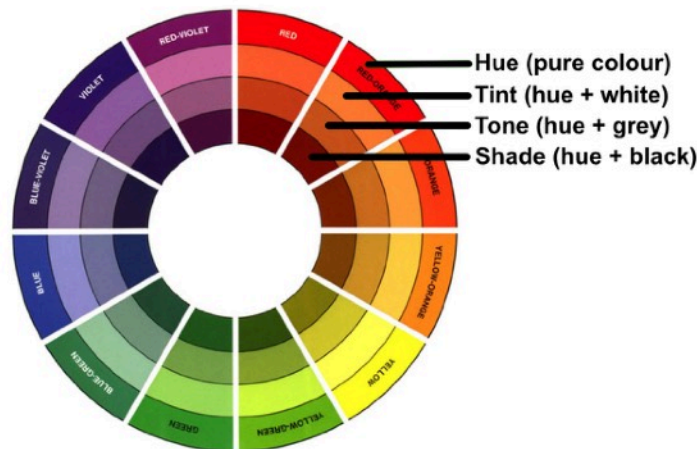
Three Attributes of Colour:

1. Value (light vs. dark)
2. Chroma (saturation, purity, strength, intensity)
3. Hue (the name of the colour family: red, yellow, green, cyan, blue, magenta)



Relationships of Hue, Tint, Tone and Shade:

Tint, tone and shade are often referred to as “value” or simply “tone”. This is technically incorrect. Adding white, grey or black to a hue, does more than brighten or darken it, it also changes its colour slightly. This



necessitates that other colours need to be added to compensate for this shift in order to maintain the hue. Painters who mix their colours from primary colours have experienced this. Photographers come across colour temperature variations in photographs (e.g. objects in shade tend to take on a bluish cast when photographed with objects in sunlight). They often compensate for this when they edit their photographs. Photographers also experience variations in how colours are rendered by their cameras and need to compensate for differences manually in their editing workflow when having to work to high commercial standards.

It is important to understand what is happening with colour so that it can be managed to yield desired results. Poor use of colour principles and relationships can result in images that just feel a bit off or not quite right–this is instinctively sensed. Errors in judgement or oversights can ruin an artwork or photograph regardless of other factors due to the power of colour in our images..

Here is a useful and practical link explaining colour theory that is also a good planning and colour evaluation resource:

<https://www.canva.com/colors/color-wheel/>

SQUARE FORMAT

The uniqueness of the square format:

Working in a square format is challenging for many artists because it can feel constraining. There seems to be either not enough vertical space or not enough horizontal space to allow an image to “breathe” and for the artist to incorporate negative (“open”) space for the eye to rest. The use of negative space invites the viewer to gaze away from the subject as negative space is what provides the context/ space for the subject itself. Square images tend to be busy compositions that entice the viewer’s eye to travel around the entire image.

Square format constraints:

Rectangular compositions allow the artist the freedom to place their main subject in one area of the frame and leverage many more MC Art Framework Elements and Techniques of Image Design and Image-Frame Relationships to guide the viewer’s eye to their subject and also away from their subject. There are fewer options with a square format as there is less extra space to work with.

Leveraging the square format:

Circular compositions embellish sensations of circling or a zooming tendency towards the centre of the frame, effectively, stealing and focussing the viewer’s attention in the centre of the frame. This results in designs with more Tension. To reign this in and introduce a sense of balance and calm, align elements along diagonal, vertical or horizontal axes to discourage a circular exploration of the image.

The square format is much more conducive to subject matter that is scattered around the frame—the frame edges seem to “contain” scattered objects or objects that compete for the viewer’s attention much better than a rectangular format where the viewer’s attention can wander more.

A square format demands a centralized composition however, placing your subject off centre and even in corners or at the edges of the frame introduces a sense of Tension and produces a more dramatic image. The square format frees the artist to do this because the square format “boxes” everything in neatly and doesn’t require the artist to utilize measures to guide the viewer’s attention back to the their subject.

A square format is quite conducive to aligning compositional elements using geometric shapes...especially a circle.

These factors make the square format extremely versatile and a joy to work with though, for many, it may take a bit of getting used to.

GESTALT, CONTRAST, GEOMETRY, LINE

This is a photograph I took in the streets of Evora, Portugal. This appears to be a simple image of two women walking on the sidewalk across the street from where I took the photograph from. There is actually a lot going on in this image that contributes to making it work.



This image has **Structure** (minimal elements) and achieves **Parity** (an overall visual balance). It makes use of multiple types of **Contrast**. One example is between light and dark.

There are three dark shapes in this image that stand out from the background:



This is also an example of the application of the **Gestalt Principles of Similarity and of Figure-to-Ground**. The background is fairly static and contrasted with the moving figures in the scene:



They are walking uphill from the lower right side of the frame towards the left. This creates **Tension** (from the perceived sense of resistance the figures are experiencing having to walk uphill). Both women are leaning towards the left offsetting the incline.

The door handle on the left plays a part in contributing to the sense of **Tension** in this scene as well. It stands out brightly from the dark wood of the door (an example of **Highlighting** and **Contrast**) and “points” to the right—it creates an implied horizontal line that extends directly to the head of one of the figures. This line is perfectly horizontal in alignment with the horizontal axis of the frame (an example of **Axes Alignment**). This implied line across the centre of the image adds to a sense of stability:



From a geometry perspective, here is how this image is partitioned:



This is also an example of **Encapsulation** (a frame within a frame).

The women's lines of sight are in parallel:



The angle of these lines, though only implied, play a particularly interesting role with regard to how they contribute to the overall composition. They align perfectly with one of the oblique diagonals of the window:



The lines of sight also happen to align with an oblique diagonal (yellow) of the overall frame itself:



This adds **Tension** due to the downward direction of these lines being in opposition to the upward incline of the pavement.



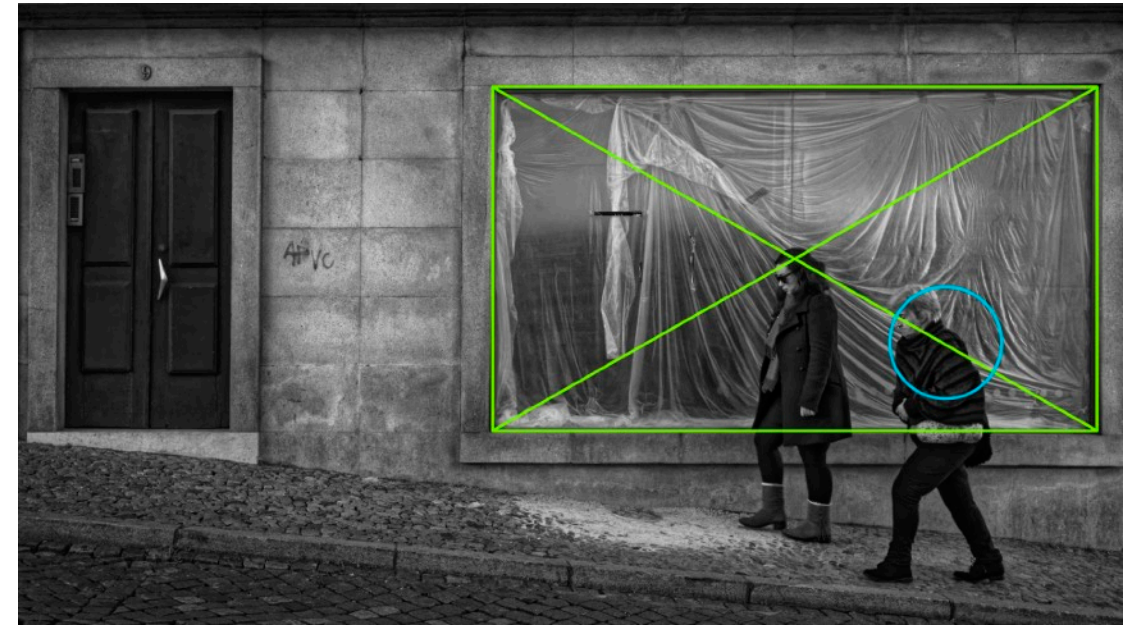
Let's look more closely at what is happening in the window area of this image.

The lead figure's head is aligned perfectly with the centre point of the window (an example of **Axes Alignment**):



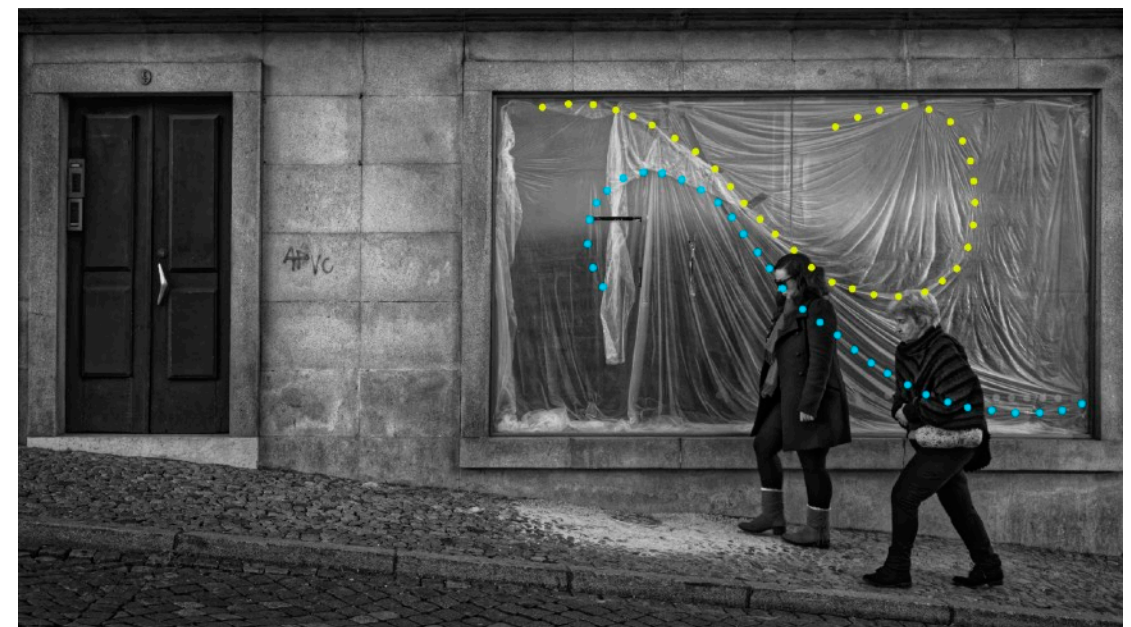
The vertical placement of this figure's arm and the horizontal orientation of the second figure's handbag (aligned with the bottom of the window "frame"), both add a sense of visual balance and stability to the image (an example of **Axes Alignment**).

The second figure's upper body and head are aligned at the midpoint ("eye") of one of the diagonal axes of the window. This is an example of **Oblique Alignment**:



There are three other elements to this composition that contribute this image.

The first is an example of **Line**, the second, **Gestalt Principles** and the third relates to another use of **Contrast**:



Line:

The “flowing” curves of the window plastic add a sense of **Movement** and energy. The arabesque originating at the bottom right of the window (blue) echos the slant of the figures’ bodies and also the direction of **Movement** in the overall frame (lower right to upper left).

Gestalt Principles:

The other arabesque (yellow) is the inverse of the blue one. These are an example of the **Gestalt Principles of Similarity** and of **Symmetry**.

Contrast:

The figures and the flowing plastic represent an organic element that contrasts with the static geometric construction of the building.

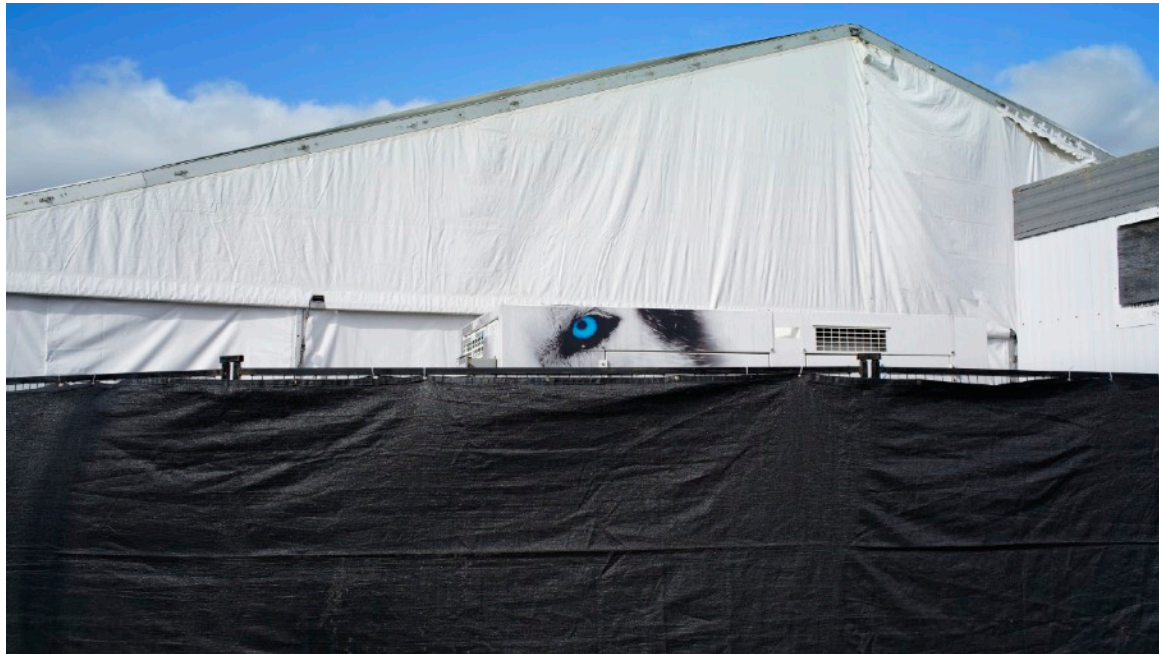


This image “works” because:

1. It has **Structure** (minimalistic and organized)
2. It has **Unity** (elements support each other and work together)
3. It has **Parity** (an overall visual balance between elements)
4. It leverages **Tension** (elements of movement, energy and visual weighting)
5. It achieves a relatively equalized balance between the degree of **Tension** and level of **Parity**

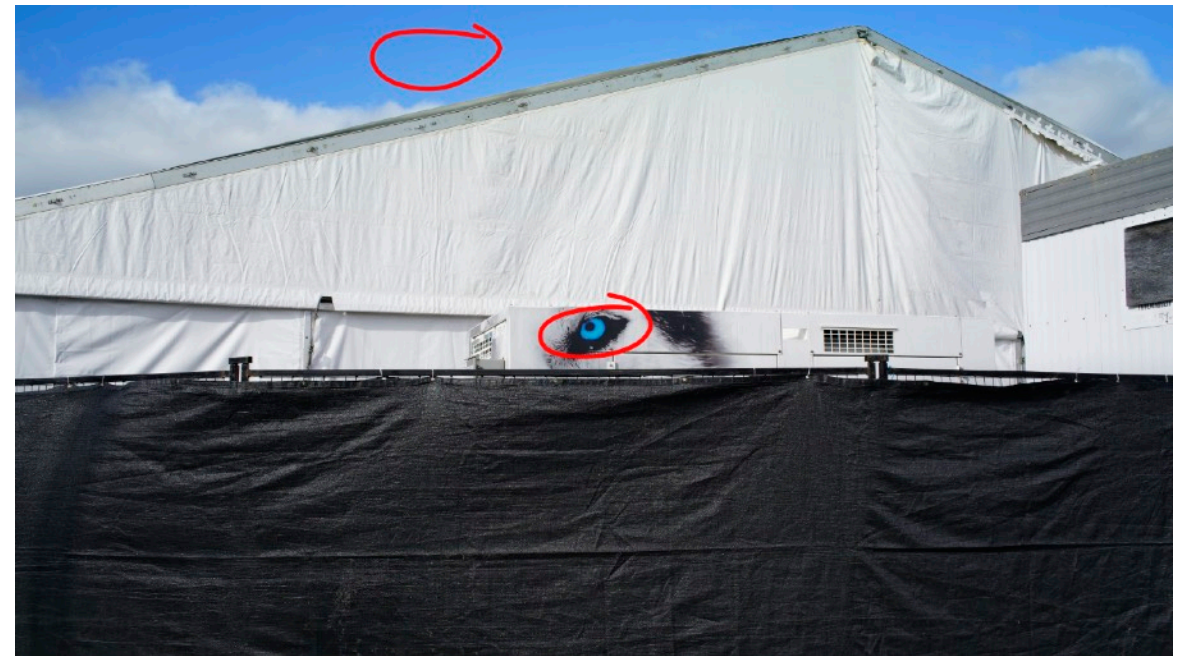
CONTRAST, THE “EYE”, COLOUR, DIAGONAL LINES, ANOMALY

This photograph of the side of a truck was taken at a fair.

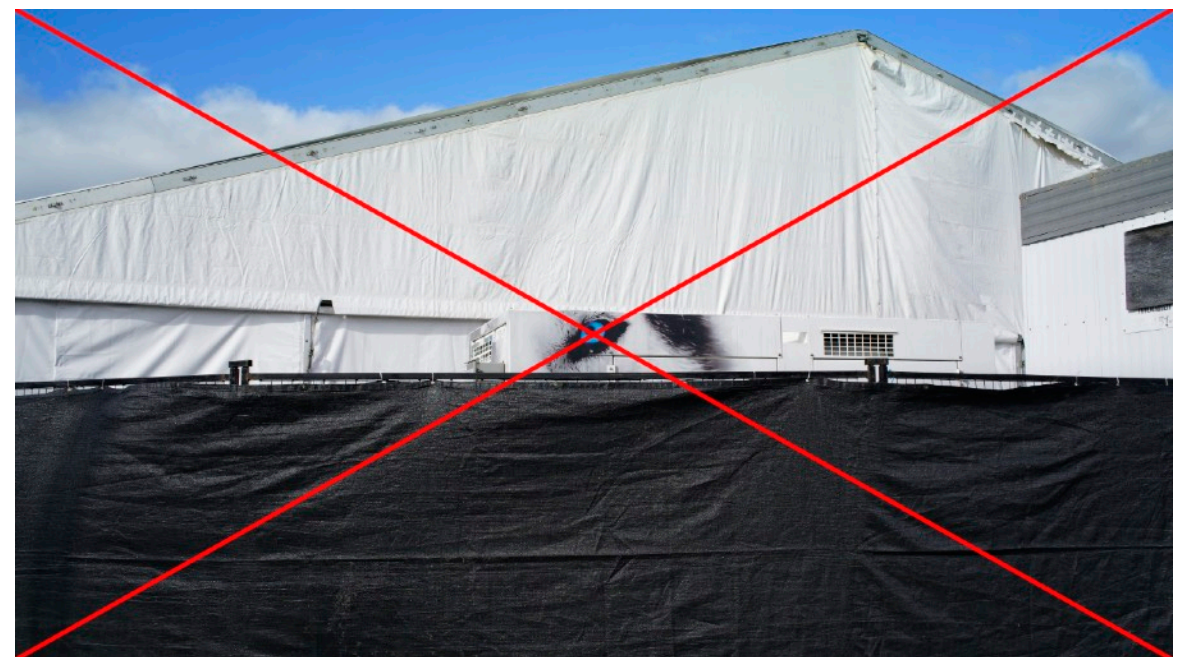


There is a dramatic contextual contrast here between nature (the animal eye painted on the side of the truck and the sky) and man (the truck, fence, trailer and structure in the background). There are also other contrasts: between light and dark, colour and monochrome and between

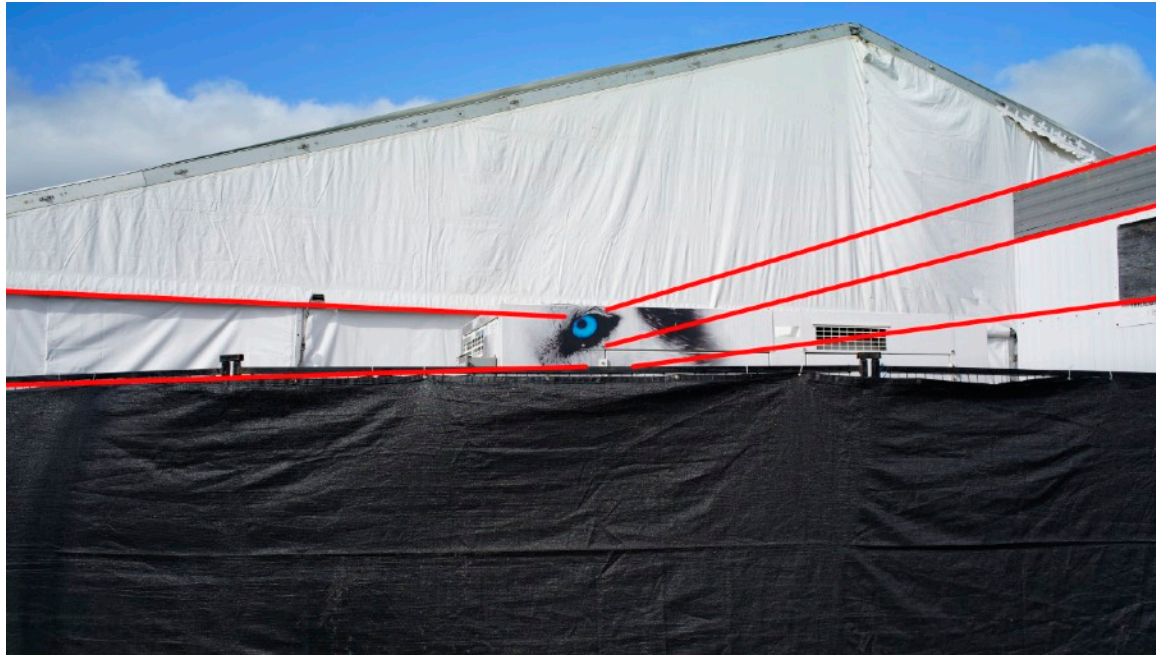
geometric and organic shapes. There are only two areas of colour in this image and they both represent natural (organic) elements—all else is monochrome and man-made.



The animal eye is in the exact centre of the image (eye):



The animal eye itself is an example of the design protocol of **Anomaly** and of **Axes Alignment**. There are implied diagonal lines that lead the viewer's eye to the "eye":



The way the frame is divided up creates some tension (see image at right). This combined with the "eye" in the eye adds considerable drama to this image. The dark foreground covered fence covering most of the bottom half of the image comes uncomfortably close to the focal point of the image: the painted animal eye on the side of the truck trailer. Note that the only near black area of the image above the fence line is the painted face of the animal on the truck's side. This serves to "connect" the upper bright part of the image with the dark foreground area.

Geometric sections (design protocol of **Split Section Spatial Weighting**):



Design protocols and elements used in this image:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| - Gestalt Principle of Figure-to-Ground | - Parity |
| - Movement | - Unity |
| - Anomaly | - Structure |
| - Contrast | - Shape |
| - Tension | - Line |
| - Split Section Spatial Weighting | - Colour |
| - Axes Alignment | |

Section Summary:

Composition

- Approach to composition: Sense of depth and space, golden section and diagonals, geometry
- Photographs of shadows composed using the golden section
- The rabatment of the rectangle as a composition technique
- Example of composing a tree drawing using geometry, rabatment, Golden Section, Axes Alignment, Negative Space, Frame-edge Tension and use of Line
- Walkthrough with analysis of the making of two photographs
- Example of how a slight change in position/perspective can make a big difference to an image
- Approaches to using the design protocol of Contrast
- Oblique and Diagonal Alignments, Golden Section, Dynamic Symmetry Grid
- The Gestalt Principle of Figure-to-Ground
- Design elements of Line and Colour
- The unique qualities of working in a square format
- Two photo examples with complete analysis of the application of numerous design protocols and elements

PART 6

VISUAL ANALYSES

CONDUCTING VISUAL ANALYSES

Here is my simple 3-step approach to making this work:

1. I often take notes (sometimes directly on rough sketches) regarding the **mood** of a scene, the **direction and quality of light**, changes to how a scene could alternatively be lit, **reflections of light** present at the scene, comments on lighting and/or tonal values in darker areas, **placement of main elements in the frame**...anything and everything that I've observed that could be taken into consideration in planning my final painting or photograph. I will sometimes make several small sketch variations of a scene where I simply outline the main shapes of my composition.
2. I also make notes on medium choices and techniques to employ that support my vision for a piece. I even, sometimes, draw lines directly on a sketch to mimic the viewing experience as a way of validating the graphic qualities and lighting of my scene.

3. I go through the MC Art Framework design protocols and elements cheat sheet from beginning to end and make a record of which apply to my image. Sometimes, I'll mark up quick sketches or photos taken with my phone with design protocols that apply to my image.

These three steps are a tremendous help to me for defining a vision for a piece and composing images.

TIP: [Spending a few hours at an art gallery with a note/sketch book and an MC Art Framework cheat sheet in hand walking around recording observations about artwork is a good way of getting the hang of conducting visual analyses.](#) You can also do this with your own artwork and photographs. You may be surprised at the number of design protocols that you may have subconsciously employed. It is important (especially in the beginning) that you [conduct analyses on finished artwork and printed photographs](#) and not on subject matter that is in front of you. The reason for this is that looking at a representation of your subject makes it easier to "see" artistically. When we are looking directly at our subject, interpreting what we're looking at is competing (for brain cycles) with our artistic "seeing" and our responses to the subject—this makes it harder to perceive it abstractly with an artistic mindset.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DRAWING

Drawing is simply a way of isolating elements and communicating information about their relationships to each other and to the frame. It can be learned just as writing and speaking are learned. It is a fundamental and invaluable tool for artists and also for photographers.

Drawing and sketching are important for a number of reasons, but the act of simply visualizing a drawing of a scene can often achieve the same effect as making a drawing itself. Practicing making drawings will eventually result in the ability to simply visualize a drawing—you need to make many drawings before you can begin to perceive something as you would have drawn it and, even then, skipping making a drawing or sketch can still compromise your creative efforts. This is why most artists draw.

Drawing informs composition by developing one's ability to understand how to work with elements of visual design.

Drawing evolves visual intuition; it provides a step back from directly viewing our subject and a new way of seeing it by reconciling what our eyes see with our artistic vision.

Drawing primes our subconscious to recognize artistic opportunities because it trains your eye to:

- See bright and dark areas and understand how they relate to one another within a frame.
- See form - Identify the main shapes/components of a scene (individual elements or groupings, light versus dark, shape, alignment, orientation/direction or placement in the frame).
- See composition - How the visual weighting of elements within the frame align in support of a chosen mood for the composition.
- See perspective - Understand how to create an illusion of depth and space in your work.
- Evaluate the viewing experience - Understand how the composition and the dark and bright areas in a scene contribute to the viewing experience. Imagine the path that a viewer's eye might travel (design protocol **Movement**) to explore your drawing. This is an invisible

but critical component of visual exploration. The viewer's experience is the direct result of the choices you make or don't make, when creating your drawing.

HOW DRAWING IMPROVES PHOTOGRAPHY

Learning to draw can also dramatically improve your photography by developing your ability to understand how to better work with elements of visual design. The very act of making a drawing both relies on and helps to train our subconscious to work with visual elements.

Incorporating the making of sketches into your photographic workflow also slows you down and improves artistic visualization by imposing some discipline around the designing of imagery and the photographic process itself and especially so, when using the MC Art Framework.

This can result in better photographs and also help you to recognize more photographic opportunities!

DOCUMENTING WITH A CAMERA

I will often take photographs around my scene for reference material to inform the final painting. I look around carefully and photograph everything that I could possibly use. For example, grasses at the base of a tree might need to be included given that the way the light is shining through them could just finish off a piece perfectly even though a painting's focus may be on

tree limbs and leaves. Another example is the way in which waves, and their reflections, move around a rock. Take close-up photos to get a feel for such subtleties (which may not be readily apparent in a photo of an entire scene).

Use of a camera is NOT a substitute for drawing; a camera is in no way selective and only records light/dark areas and colour.

Even if your final product is to be a photograph, you will often [benefit from conducting an analysis of the light and the shapes in your scene](#). Here's how:

1. [Focus on your subject](#). Think about what you like about the scene and about how to best convey this to your viewer - Gestalt principle of **Figure-to-Ground**.
2. [Walk around the scene without your camera](#) (don't look at or through it) to examine your subject and its surroundings.
3. [Identify what not to include within the frame](#). Remember to minimize compositional elements and isolate your subject (design protocol of **Structure**). Fill your frame with your subject and do not include unnecessary items (design protocol of **Unity**) or space (unless these play a role in your photo).
4. [Be mindful of what is at/near the edges or in the corners of your frame](#).
5. Try changing your point of view: different angles, and change the height of the camera and the distance to your subject. Perhaps even the focal length you are using choice of focal length can expand or compress space/depth.
6. [Be mindful of the "mood" of your shot. Use exposure creatively](#) (make your photo brighter or darker as necessary). To judge effectively, make adjustments beyond light and dark extremes to show how far "too far" is. This will provide a good sense of the extent to which you can make exposure adjustments.
7. [Take a couple of black and white photos so you will be able to more clearly see shapes and lines to assess the lighting of your scene and help with your composition decision-making](#).
8. Take both a colour and black and white photo of your scene...great for analyzing your images to learn to incorporate good design concepts and help with developing visualization skills.

9. Take your time photographing. Let things settle for a bit as this can sometimes reveal new insights.
10. Savour the process of coming up with how to best take your picture...all part of the enjoyment of being creative.
11. Don't overthink things. Come up with one or two shots and then take them. If you're not excited about taking a photo, then don't—just walk away. Keep your notes and "sketch" photos for future reference as a learning experience.

JUDGING YOUR WORK

Here is a list of items to help to judge your work as impartially as possible:

1. Does this artwork or photograph clearly express an idea or feeling? Does it say something or is it primarily a study or an exercise in solving a problem?
2. Was the work done appropriately? Is the choice of medium and approach ideal given the subject matter? Does it have a finished appearance? Is there an amateurish look to it?
3. Is anything out of proportion or out of place?
4. Is the sense of depth correct from linear, atmospheric and colour/tone perspectives?
5. How is my composition? Is the work too cluttered, too monotonous or too busy looking? Is there a focal point? Does there appear to be a sense of balance in the work?
6. Is the viewer's eye drawn to any places in the image because of something that stands out as an error (overlapping elements, odd shapes, anomalous areas...)?
7. Is there good use of colour? Is it muddy, chalky, milky, over saturated, lacking texture, unrealistic, visually noisy and disturbing? Has sufficient consideration been given to colour harmonies, values, contrasts and the use of dominant colours? Do the colours work together? Are the colours appropriate for the subject matter and aligned with artistic intent?
8. Is the degree of shadow and highlight detail appropriate given artistic intent?
9. What are the MC Art Framework design protocols and elements of design that were used in this artwork/ photograph? Were my choices appropriate and/or wise?

ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Title of Work:				
EVALUATIONS	Excellent	Just OK	Not Good	Comments
1. Subject Matter				
2. Technique				
3. Proportions				
4. Perspective/Depth				
5. Composition				
6. Errors				
7. Colour Quality				
8. Shadows and Highlights				
9. Design Protocol Use				
ASSESSMENT	Finished	Needs Work	Scrap it	Comments

Section Summary:

Conducting Visual Analyses

- 3-step approach to conducting visual analyses
- The importance of drawing
- How drawing improves photography
- Using a camera to document a scene
- Judging your Work

THE MC ART FRAMEWORK™

STEP 6: CONNECT

– End –