

Principles in Context

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will take you on a virtual field trip to an art gallery to look at examples of principles in context. Specifically, you will look at the principles through the following images:

1. The Mona Lisa

Your first stop on the tour is the *Mona Lisa*, painted by Leonardo da Vinci in the 1500s.



The first principle to notice is the heavy contrast being used here. Actually, if you take the *Mona Lisa* and subdivide it into a triangular form, you'll notice that it's kind of split in the middle, creating a yin-yang effect between the lighter and darker elements.

The next principle to notice in this image is balance. The amount of detail between the light and dark valleys is pretty equally distributed, creating an asymmetrical balance and unity. Proximity is important in the placement of background elements to communicate to the viewer the distance between the foreground and the background. Although rhythm is really hard to spot here, there's actually quite a bit of it going on with the hair.

Finally, there are some repeating elements in the fabric, guiding the viewer around the *Mona Lisa*. Most viewers are inclined to start at the face and eyes, and then trail down the hair, around the fabric, and through her arm where there are more repeating elements. All of this causes your eye to go around the *Mona Lisa*, which is again the emphasis of this piece.

2. The Night Watch

The next image in the gallery is *The Night Watch* by Rembrandt, painted in 1642.



Similar to the last piece, this painting is a great example of contrast, allowing the darkest and lightest values to surround the focal points in this piece (the two men in the foreground). The two men create a nice balance just within themselves, which ties back to that yin-yang effect; your eyes go straight to the black and white contrast. Also, the proximity between these two help make them the distinguishable characters amongst this crowd.

There is also a good visual weight subdivided horizontally across the canvas. You'll notice most of the action is going on down at the bottom, but there's still an even distribution of values, with most of the darker values up at the top.

Finally, rhythm might also be hard to spot, but you can see a lot of repeating elements as you angle up the side. It might not be apparent, but it's guiding your eye in the direction of the overall focal point or emphasis.

3. Water Lilies

Next up is *Water Lilies* by Claude Monet, painted in 1917.



This painting shows a completely different style; it's more expressive and a bit messier than some of the other pieces you've looked at. This piece does have a nice sense of balance and unity; nothing seems to be particularly out of place, and the colors play really well together.

The values are divided between darker regions and a light distribution in the center. The lilies are grouped in similar colors and values, so proximity is being used here. That's really important because it's going to allow the viewer to identify certain elements within this painting. The use of proximity is effective—despite how expressive or abstract a lot of the elements in this piece look—because it lets you differentiate the lilies from the green muck or the water.

Finally, the lilies in this piece have a nice rhythm with the repeating shapes, creating a sense of motion in the

way that flowing water would. Although the area of emphasis might not be as obvious in this piece, it seems to be in the upper right region simply because of the contrasting colors. But again, the lilies guide you as a viewer around most of this piece.

4. Guernica

We will now move on to Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, painted in 1937.



There's a lot going on in this painting, which makes knowing where to look difficult. Your eyes could go straight to the odd eyeball-looking light bulb in the upper left side of the repeating angles, which provide some rhythm. There is also a lot of repetition in these angles. Even if they're not as obvious or direct, there is a nice flow and motion that's continuously going towards the left.

Even though there's chaos, you're still able to see many of the various objects here due to the contrast between shapes. There is a lot of black on white that cuts up some of these shapes. Everything is in close proximity, except for the man over to the right, which might imply that he's in trouble or, for whatever reason, can't get away or join this stampede on the other side of the image.



THINK ABOUT IT

What do you think about unity in this piece? Is there any amidst the jumble of images?

There isn't necessarily one right answer or one correct use of a principle. Art is subjective and open to your own interpretation. Therefore, it is okay to disagree and have your own opinions about how principles are being used, especially in such radical pieces.

5. Alone Beside the Train

The next piece is *Alone Beside the Train* by AsiiMDesGraphiC, which was done in 2011.



The first thing you notice here is the beautiful rhythm in the train tracks that works well with the scale to create a sense of movement, depth, and perspective. It also guides your eye to the focal point or emphasized region, which is the girl in the white dress. You can also see how contrast plays a role. The ground and tracks are a lot

darker than the lightened areas of the track above.

Finally, the proximity of the trees also creates a dark curtain that frames the focal point. The balloon is a nice contrasting element up top. Everything is unified, and you can see that there's nothing out of place. If you subdivide this piece, you'll notice that asymmetrical balance is being used.

6. Nike Logo

Next we have a familiar logo designed by the same artist as the last piece we looked at.

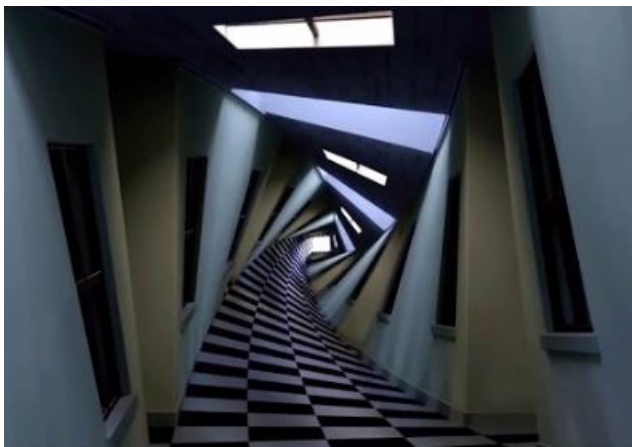


The use of proximity is very obvious here, with the text and colors grouped together. The scale of those elements creates a sense of variety between some of the bigger and smaller portions.

There's a very obvious use of contrast, with the white in the background separating the colors in the foreground. However, this image feels a bit off balance. There's a lot of empty space that maybe could be used or cropped a little differently. Otherwise, it's clear what you are supposed to look at.

7. Asylum Madness Returns

The final piece in this virtual field trip is called *Asylum Madness Returns* by Ark4n. This is a 3D render.



There are a lot of contrasting elements in this piece, like the dark tile, lights against the ceiling, dark windows, and lighter walls; however, everything seems unified and balanced. Even though the shapes differ around the piece as a whole, there is actually some nice symmetry going on with those shapes.

If you were to subdivide this in some fashion, you would have those mirrored, basic shapes. Rhythm and scale

are being used effectively to convey motion, depth, and provide direction for your eye.

Rather than using contrast as the main principle to create emphasis like some of the other pieces have, this piece uses scale and rhythm to guide your eye towards the end of the spiraling hallway.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about how the principles of visual design are applied in context. You had the opportunity to look at the **Mona Lisa**, **The Night Watch**, **Water Lilies**, **Guernica**, **Alone Beside the Train**, the **Nike Logo**, and **Asylum Madness Returns** as examples of these principles.

Keep up the learning and have a great day!

Source: THIS WORK IS ADAPTED FROM SOPHIA AUTHOR MARIO E. HERNANDEZ