

Compositional Shape

Use reverse-gradation to enhance form, which can be used with real background objects. Objects themselves can also create a reverse-gradation.

Design your image in big, harmonious, /simplified/ shapes (notan). Within the big shapes are small, simple, abstract shapes composed of c-curves, s-curves, and straights.

The compositional shape doesn't /have/ to be one, big shape.

Plan your compositional shape before drawing the object shapes.

The shape of the compositional shape depends on the feel you want to express: triangle for strength; horizontal box for stability; irregular shape for chaos, etc.

The subject should overlap the compositional shape.

Misc.

Do thumbnail studies before starting the final piece. Place a border around them *and* the final piece.

Every object in an image has to work to serve a purpose, even if that purpose is just composition.

Don't over-emphasize the composition.

For a quiet scene, put the horizon line close to the center and make it horizontal for stability. Other objects should also be horizontal. Also increase the minimalism. For chaotic or dangerous scenes, tilt the horizon.

A low horizon shows mostly sky, while a high horizon shows mostly land.

A landscape painting should have a landscape orientation.

Misc. (cont)

Unify the objects by overlapping their cast shadows or blurring the objects.

Always find a way to frame your canvas.

Jagged edges are the real details that attract the viewer's eye. Texture is the illusion of detail.

Avoid visual cliches; figure out fresh ways of presenting the subject.

Empty Space

Give the piece room to breathe by leaving enough simplified space around the edges.

More is not better; keep empty space in the image.

Do not crop to the edge of the image or at the joints of a character.

Lines and Forms of Action

The lines of action create forms of action, and they should all converge toward the subject.

Composition is about shapes and their relationships, not details.

Directional strokes that flow with the object create motion.

Use body-posture and object shapes, locations, and orientations to lead the viewer's eye around an image, and ultimately, to the subject. This is rhythm.

Perspective creates motion.

Different people's eyes will work around an image in different ways.

Manipulate a reference image to guide the viewer's eye as you see fit.

Depth

Put cooler colors in the background and warmer colors in the foreground.

Go all out with depth.

Hard edges could be in the bg and soft edges could be in the fg as long as the contrast is correct.

Blur and darken foreground objects.

Objects that are far away still have cast shadows that should be painted (if we can see them).

Between every depth level in the environment, there should be an atmospheric layer. For example, never show the bottom of a mountain.

Include a background to avoid a boring image, even an abstract background. Another option is a simple gradient. The /best/ option, however, is to give the viewer a sense of location, which an abstract background will not give them.

Balance

Use an opposing object to the subject to balance the composition, but it doesn't have to be equal in weight.

Balance the composition by using common colors on different planes.

Use three points to balance the composition.

Each quadrant of a composition should have some interest, but they shouldn't all be equally interesting.

Focal Point

The focal point has the most detail, but not too much extraneous detail; the details need to serve a purpose. The detail is lower and softer in the shadows. Objects outside the focal point have a ghost-like quality.

Focal Point (cont)

What you look at first is not necessarily the subject. The brightest object is also not necessarily the subject.

The objects immediately around the focal point inherits some of the sharpness of that focal point, even if they are at different depths.

To increase the scale of the environment, reduce the size of the subject.

Never place the focal point in the background or at the edge of the canvas.

Painting the light source in the scene will draw the viewer's attention.

Characters should either be in motion or *look* like they're about to be in motion.

Narratives

Consider staging. Should the character be at a low angle or high angle?

The narrative should take up most of the composition.

What we don't see can be more powerful than what we *do* see.

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