

# Art Composition

Composition can be defined as a means of selecting appropriate elements and arranging them within the picture space to communicate the artist's ideas, and feelings effectively to the viewer. Placing elements you have selected within your painting is very important. Composition can create either a strong and interesting piece of work, or a weak and confused piece.

You want to have your composition to combine *forms* and space to produce a harmonious whole and meaningful statement.

When you see a really great piece of art it didn't just happen. It was not the result of throwing together objects, or filling the background with detail. It is the result of careful planning, without that, the viewer could be left feeling confused and unsatisfied. A well-composed picture will leave the viewer feeling satisfied, and create an urge to see more.

Every artist approaches any given subject differently. One may like the more romantic approach, while another may want to portray it *realistically*. Another may choose to work with different *textures* to create a *mood* or atmosphere with *contrast* for the viewer. Composition allows you to say what you want to say.

In composing your picture, you decide what you want your main point of focus to be. Each artist may see the same thing, and each could choose a different point of interest. These forms that will be your point of interest could be made larger, clearer, stronger, brighter than they may actually appear in real life. Less important forms will be smaller or less distinct. *Perspective* is very important!

Through composition, and having a main focal point, the artist can actually control which part of his picture the viewer will linger over. Once a definite focal point is established, the viewer can be lead either directly or indirectly through the art. The use of light and dark contrasts will also emphasize the center of interest.

Before painting, the artist needs an idea. They must determine subject matter, and compose the subject matter in a way that is going to be the most effective. What kind of mood is going to be created? What emotions are going to be evoked? What content should be in the picture to capture the viewer, allowing them to grasp what the artist has envisioned? Will anything in the picture distract the viewer, and should it be moved, or removed? Is this the very best composition for this subject? Is the *proportion* correct?

Once the artist has thought through various questions such as these, it is time to put the ideas to paper. Rough sketches are used to ensure composition is correct, and that the picture captures the feeling the artist is trying to convey. Sketches should be kept simple, broad, and not contain a lot of detail. Once the

artist feels they have captured the effect, focal point, *rhythm* and design and feeling they want to create for the viewer, the sketches can then be transferred to the final work of art.

The 4 main elements of composition are:

*Picture area:* This is the surface within the four borders of your picture that is used for the drawing or painting. The picture area will help you determine placement of objects, and how big they should be.

*Depth:* This is the illusion of distance or a third dimension. Depth creates a three dimensional effect, making objects feel closer, or further away. The finished result will not appear flat on the paper or canvas if depth is created.

*Line:* The line or direction the viewer's eye takes to go through the picture. The objects or forms within the picture should lead the eye to the focal point. When art is viewed, most people will begin in the bottom left corner, and continue through the picture to the right. A good composition will not allow the viewer to keep going right, all the way off the page. The viewer should be lead back into the painting in a flowing motion.

*Value:* This is the lightness, or darkness of an area, or a shape within the picture. It is also used to create the over-all feel of the picture.