

UNIT CONCEPTS: NOTES TO THE TEACHER

This project introduces central ideas within the theory of composition that will be used from this point on. Student understanding of composition theory is a work of years. The bulls-eye composition project is a good introduction to the theory because the parameters—the general rules under which the composition must achieve coherence, (a bulls-eye)-- are already set. The composition is based on repeating the same patterns in the form of a mandala.

The concepts articulated below can be explained to students when the concept become relevant during the student's process. Generally, it is the teacher who can identify the problems a student is having with their composition, but the student can more easily understand these concepts when they are directly applied in the moment a problem is encountered, during their process of creating.

If the painting technique is too challenging for a group of students, an easier approach is to use Prismacolor pencils. Regular colored pencils lack the color intensity to make the results successful, so a pencil of this quality is necessary. Also, there needs to be a wide range of colors available.

When working with students on their compositions, I can identify the challenges they are having by keeping the following axioms in mind:

1. Compositions please the eye when they have an understandable order, are based on some simple underlying rules.
 2. More complex shapes can be worked into simpler ones in order to create more interest, but the whole must remain coherent. So, to keep a design coherent, the same ideas are used again and again, but given variation—turned into another direction, size changed, the color or value changed, or the shape is segmented). The same applies to variations of color. There must be some sort of coherent system underlying their combinations.
 3. Knowing how to develop a composition is to know how to stay within a narrow set of parameters while innovating within those parameters. The most brilliant compositions achieve eloquence by innovating within the narrowest set of parameters possible; doing only those actions that contribute to the power of the whole.
 4. Negative space is just as visible to the eye as positive space; therefore, of equal value in a composition. There is no such thing as "extra space."
 5. Using an 'economy of means' in a composition means that the effect the artist wants to make is achieved within specific limitations and nothing unnecessary is included. Many times a composition can be improved by subtracting things rather than adding.
 6. Restricting the 'constants' within a work enhances the coherence of the whole.
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