

1. All objects of art have a system of organization. We call this practice of organization, “composition.” The organizing principle in a grid composition looks like a checkerboard. Our eyes are compelled by patterns easy to understand. Grid patterns present a kind of visual rhythm that can be easily understood.
2. The challenge in this unit is to make a simple pattern interesting as well as easily understood. To do this, the negative and positive space must create a pleasing rhythm. The rhythm is achieved by placing negative and positive spaces together in repeated ways, alternating and innovating the same visual ideas.
3. Most art students try to be interesting by making their work complicated. But a compositions can easily be overwhelmed with the chaos of too many choices. Working with grid compositions and color requires that the artist remains within a narrow range of choices, repeating the same ideas in different ways without becoming lost in too much innovation.
4. It is a great paradox that the most profound design solutions are found within the narrowest set of parameters where color and shape are strictly controlled by an imposed set of rules. This creates coherence, but it takes innovative imagination to make designs eloquent. This principle is used when an artist uses what is called, “an economy of means.” I teach my students this phrase because in art criticism, it is a profound truth.

Vocabulary Words

Negative/positive shapes: The negative shape is the space behind an image. Both negative and positive shapes have the same visual weight, if all other things like color, value, and size are equal.

Visual weight: The strength with which something visual compels attention.

Visual rhythm: Rhythm is created by repeating patterns or shapes.

Organic shape: A shape that is mathematically complex, like a living form.

Geometric shapes: Shapes that can described easily by numbers, like a square, circle, and triangle.

Economy of means: Using only what is necessary to achieve an affect.

Visual Composition: An arrangement of elements that integrate into a single expression, a whole, not just a plurality of things. (the same way a musical composition or written composition must be based on an underlying order).