

# The Principles of Design

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LEVEL 1

## What are the principles of design?

- They are basic rules/guidelines that help an artist communicate a message more effectively to a viewer.
- In short, they are shortcuts to more effective visual communication.
- These principles can be broken down into seven areas of focus:
  1. Unity
  2. Contrast
  3. Balance
  4. Emphasis
  5. Proportion
  6. Rhythm
  7. Movement

# Basic Composition

In order to understand the Principles we need to make sure we understand the key parts that make for strong design

# Basic Composition Terms to Know

Composition: The arrangement of "stuff" within a work of art, Like the elements of art.

Visual Message: the "Big Idea" the artist wants people to "read" in their artwork

Focal Point: The main area of interest in a work of art; when used effectively it acts like an opening paragraph or "thesis statement". It should be the "Big Idea" behind the visual message.

Picture Plane: the area the artwork is occupying. Ex: edge to edge of the paper or canvas the image is on, or the area a sculpture is occupying.

Magic Diamond: a tool artist use to help with strong Focal Point placement and avoid weak placement.

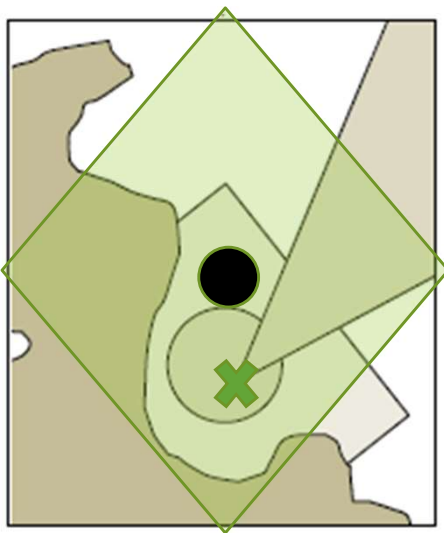
Rule of Thirds: a tool artists use to help check for Variety (increase visual interest) in a work of art- it helps

Strong Composition: more effectively and efficiently communicates the artists visual message and intent and actively engages and holds the audience's attention.

Weak Composition: artwork less engaging to the audience, message may be mixed, confused, or lacking all together. It's not bad but not as effective as it could be- (see avoiding the Nevers' for mor info).

# Basic Composition continued...

## THE MAGIC DIMOND



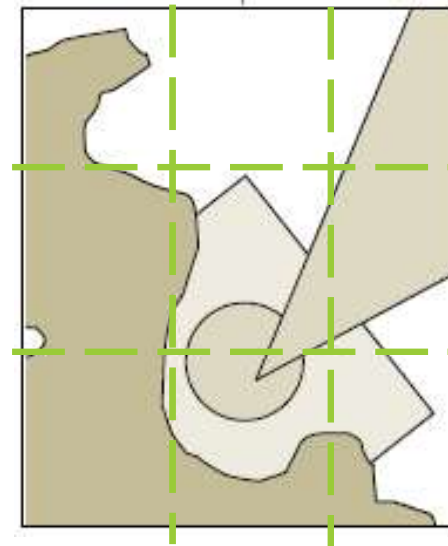
Helps with *focal point placement*. Basically anywhere in the orange is strong placement.

Weak compositions have focal points in the center or corners. They're not bad exactly they just communicate very specific ideas. Those specific ideas are very difficult to go beyond.

For example if you put the focal point in the center, viewers tend to get stuck and don't see the rest of the artwork. It gives a feeling of confrontation- the "in-your-face-factor".

*Basically be mindful of your focal point placement!*

## THE RULE OF 3RDS



Helps with *checking for variety*.

For a dynamic composition each square should have different amounts of "activity". Some square may be blank; others may have lots of different content. *Basically you don't want everything to be the same or similar.*

How it works:

In your mind divide the picture plain into thirds vertically and horizontally.

The amount of visual activity (aka stuff = shape colors, lines ect), should be different between the square in the Rule of 3<sup>rd</sup>'s Grid, avoid them being similar.

Example: some square have all white; all dark gray; some of all colors; some of the triangle, some the circle, square, and organic shape; but non of them have the same balance of all those parts.

## Basic Composition

### “The Never’s”

These are more like rules: sure there may be exceptions or even a time and a place to break them. However, it takes a lot of work to understand what those exceptions are and even when you break them for a good reason you still might end up in jail or in the case of making art- have a weaker composition.

#### Avoid the “obvious”:

- ◊ Why? You will get board fast, usually most simple and common idea instead of your best, and all your work will start to look the same- it’s not bad but gets boring.
- ◊ Quick fixes: invest a little more time and effort in the beginning before starting your project- force your self to find a more unique and personally engaging response, try out 6+ more compositions with thumbnail sketches.

#### Avoid the “Sticker Effect”

- ◊ Why? Shows lack of Unity in Design, No direction for viewer
- ◊ Quick Fix: Add stuff to visually connect stuff together (have stuff overlap or run off the edge).

#### Don’t Crowd Stuff (especially the Focal Point and Picture Plane Edges)

- ◊ Also includes never line stuff up around the edges of the Picture Plane.
- ◊ Why ?it shows lack of planning because everything looks and feels cramped, it cuts out important information when artwork is matted and framed, It’s an obvious beginner bad habit.
- ◊ Quick Fixes: Be more Mindful for the start about “Working on the Page” and the placement of everything in your composition, block in main shapes for all stuff in your composition before adding details, Start blocking with your Focal Point in mind first and make sure your other stuff is re-enforcing it instead of obscuring it.

#### Never Ever Bullseye Stuff (placing stuff too close to the middle of your picture plane)

- ◊ Why? It’s another beginner mistake: it creates too much balance and usually communicates a feeling of being “confrontational” with your audience, Eliminates any movement for your composition because your eye get stuck in the middle. Anything too centralized will become your focal Point –even if that wasn’t your intent, it’s just what happens.

P.O.D: Unity

# Unity

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What you need to know about unity...

-Unity in art describes how all the parts of a work of artwork together as a whole.

-When all elements agree, a design is considered "unified".

-Harmony is a synonym for Unity.

-Another way of understanding it is by asking an important question:

- How well do these things relate to each other in a work of art:
  - Elements of Art
  - Visual Message (aka "Big Idea", "Visual Story")
  - The Composition
  - Other Principles of Design
  - Media
  - Art Style
  - Cultural and Historical Influences

Granted artists don't always present or think about those things all the time or maybe not even all at once. However the more you are actively thinking of how those things impact your design is the sign of a more accomplished artist. It's what sets the beginners from advanced students. Everyone will be at different places from each other. Don't feel like you must know all those things all at once.

## Short Cuts to Creating Unity

1. Focus on aligning 2 things: *the Elements of Art* and your *Visual Message*
  - Your visual message is the anchor that all your other design choices (elements of art) hook into.
2. Start thinking about Unity at the beginning, *BEFORE* you start creating your work of art!
  - Why? It's hard to fix later in the process. Making art is like building a house, if you try to put up walls before you build the foundation they might not fit- sure you might be able to fix it but it will take a lot longer and it probably won't ever be as strong if you had just sucked it up and spent a little more time planning.
3. Be mindful of Variety!
  - Variety adds some visual interest and when done well can even add some interesting layers to your "Big Message"



# Short Cut to Unity #1

Example of Elements of Art and Message Alignment  
using Van Gogh's "Starry Night"

1. *His Visual Message* aka "Big Idea":
  - What the *experience* of looking at the night sky is really like" at least to him
2. *His Anchor Element choices*:
  - **Color**: Blue and Orange because those are the most common colors you will see in the dark, they also contrast nicely literally and is also another way to show the contrast between the sky and the ground. Those were also colors he liked to use in a lot of his work in general.
  - **Texture**: use texture to express the idea of the wind and how it flows as well as the effect of looking at the Milky Way (keep in mind when he painted it there wasn't as much light or air pollution and could easily see it- look up NASA photos for what it looks like in remote places today).



## Short Cut #2 Start thinking about Unity from the beginning (Design Thinking)

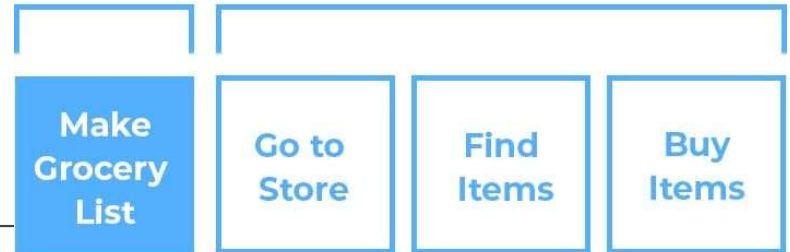
### The Grocery List Example

Creating a list for groceries is a simple task – You find the recipes you want to make for the week, then write down all the ingredients you need to buy.

At first glance, you might think there is nothing wrong with this list. It serves its purpose in communicating the ingredients you need to buy. However, let's take a look at it from a design perspective and spot the issue.

Planning

Grocery Shopping



### Groceries

Eggs  
Bread  
Green Peppers  
Cheese  
Bacon  
Buns  
Milk  
Cucumbers  
Hot Dogs  
Mustard  
Romaine

# A Closer Look

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## Groceries

Eggs  
Bread  
Green Peppers  
Cheese  
Bacon  
Buns  
Milk  
Cucumbers  
Hot Dogs  
Mustard  
Romaine

Unity is a *measure of how well* each element of your design works together.

That means a design can be

- very unified
- somewhat unified
- or not unified at all

Our grocery list example above is somewhat unified. It gets the job done, but it's still not the most effective design.

Despite having all the Principles in Design demonstrated in our grocery list, the end result is a poor design because we didn't consider "The Big Picture" first.

# Starting with “The Big Picture”



## Groceries

### Vegetables

Green Peppers  
Cucumbers  
Romaine

### Carbs

Bread  
Buns

### Proteins

Eggs  
Bacon  
Hot Dogs

### Dairy

Cheese  
Milk

Before we head out to buy our groceries, we might stop and ask ourselves a few questions:

- What role does this grocery list play in my overall shopping experience?
- What kind of shopping experience would I like to have?
- How can I better communicate this information to myself?

By thinking in these broader terms, we're able to achieve unity from the very beginning. You're no longer designing a simple grocery list, you're using design to improve your entire shopping experience.

From the big picture perspective, you can consider the store's layout, which isles you'll need to visit, and the order those isles appear. With this new information, you can redesign your grocery list to look something like this...

The result is a greater sense of unity and an improved shopping experience. By taking a little bit more of time and effort to "design" your grocery list, you save much more time and effort in the end as you get in and out of the grocery store more efficiently.

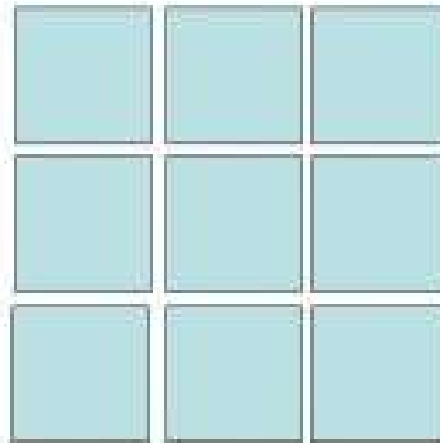
Big picture thinking is where good design begins.

# Short Cut #3

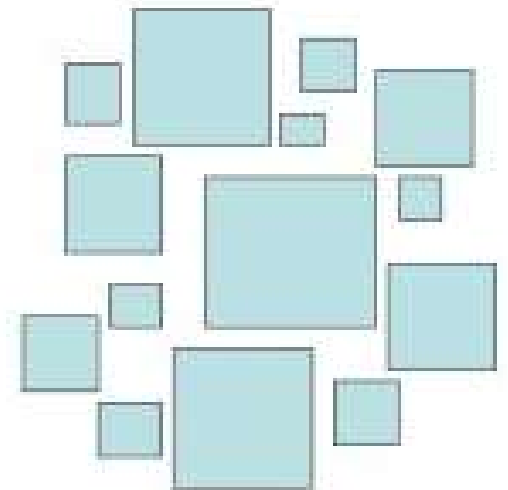
## Be Mindful of Variety

Having uniformity through out the design is good but can be boring. That's where Variety comes in. Adding a little variety is good but too much will break up the unity. The trick is to create a balance between them

- Same shape, size, tone and texture



- Same shape, tone, texture. interest created by varying size and position



P.o.D: Contrast

# What is Contrast

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Contrast refers to the arrangement of opposites in a piece so as to create visual interest, excitement and drama.



# Types of Contrast

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- **Literal Contrast:** Focuses on opposite Elements of Art (light vs. dark colors, rough vs. smooth textures, large vs. small shapes, etc.)
- **Conceptual Contrast:** Focuses on the opposite ideas (up vs. down, good vs. evil, night vs. day)
- Looking at the picture to the right
  - how many ways is it showing Literal Contrast?
  - How many kinds of Conceptual Contrast does it show?





Placing one different SHAPE in a group of shapes that are the same will make the CONTRASTING shape stand out.

Black and white are so different in value they will CONTRAST against one another when placed together.

COMPLEMENTARY COLORS will CONTRAST when they are placed next to each other. Red/green, blue/orange, and yellow/purple are complementary colors.

Including one plain PATTERN in a group of patterns or one patterned object in a group of plain objects will make them CONTRAST.

Color

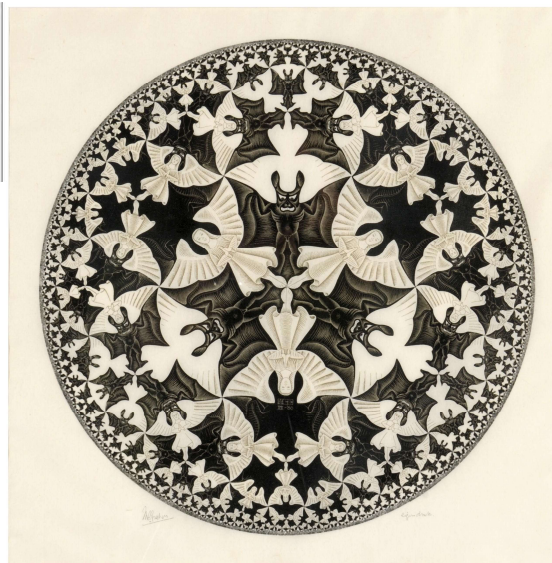
Shape

Size

Typeface

Line

Orientation



Here are just some examples to help give you a better idea of what Literal contrast can look like.

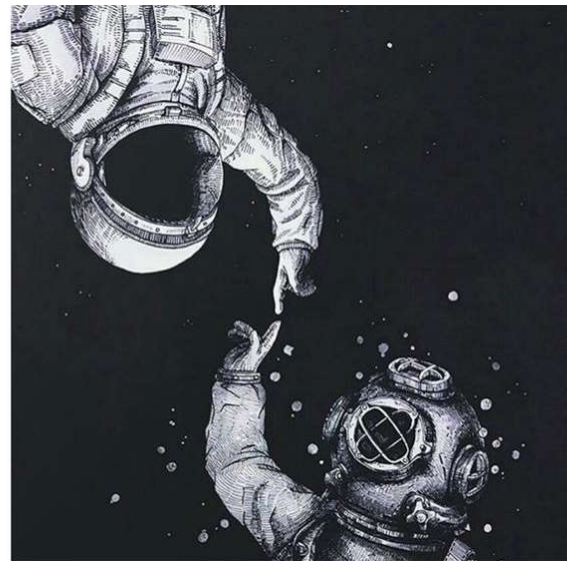
- The stuff up to the left are just some general ideas.
- The art pieces give you an idea of how artists apply contrast in abstract and realistic styles of art.
  - The one in the middle is a piece by Escher and the literal contrast focuses on color and shapes (abstract).
  - The piece on the right is by Caravaggio and focuses on value and color (realistic).

# Literal Contrast

# Conceptual Contrast

Here are just some examples to help give you a better idea of what Conceptual contrast can look like.

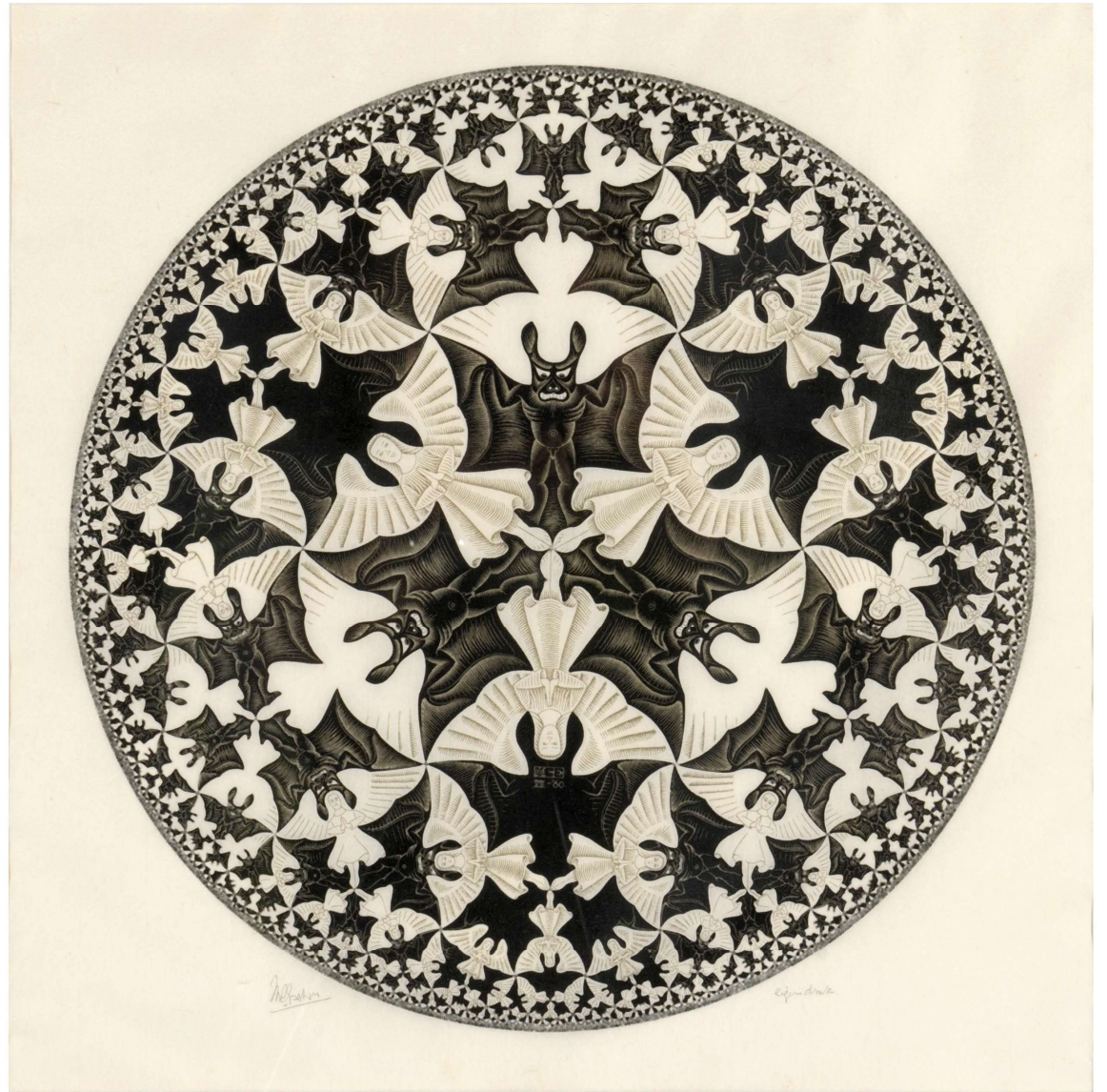
What Concepts could these pieces be contrasting? Is there more than one? What context clues are evidence for your argument?



## Adding Context: M.C. Escher's "Angels Devils (No.4)"

Escher likes experimenting with complexity both literally and figuratively.

The big idea behind Angels and Devils is the relationship between Good and Evil. He uses Tessellation to show the connections between the two: in order to understand one you need to understand the other. Tessellation is an excellent metaphor for this idea because the negative space of one shape becomes the positive space of the other. In order to tell the shapes apart he adds darker values to the Devils and lighter values to the Angels. He also uses the circle to show the infinite debate of nature of "good and evil". He even goes to the extra step of using hyperbolic, fractal math that make the shapes look like they go on to infinity. Another interesting layer is understanding all of the definitions of Hyperbolic: exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally. So is he really trying to explore how "good and evil" really relate to each other or is just saying the whole argument is not to be taken literally and there is a lot more nuance to the argument than what appears to be a simple work of art?



P.O.D: Balance

## What is Balance

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the distribution of "weight" or visual activity in a composition

In other words: how objects are organized, laid out, or arranged in a work of art.



# PARTY BALANCE

Wizard. Paladin. Knight.

# Types of Balance

## Symmetrical

- ◊ where elements are evenly spaced from an imaginary line in the middle of a piece.

## Asymmetrical

- ◊ when elements are placed unevenly in a piece, but work together to produce harmony overall.
- ◊ In other words: No obvious symmetry but the composition still feels balanced.

## Approximate

- ◊ Basically a mix of Symmetrical and Asymmetrical Balance.
- ◊ There is a point/line of symmetry however elements are not arranged exactly like they would be if they were perfectly symmetrical.

## Occult

- ◊ stuff is pushed out of balance to the extreme.
- ◊ Occult: to hide something from view or be hidden from view
- ◊ Occult Balance: describes artwork's relationship between the elements in the back and the elements in the front- usually the background is overpowering the foreground.

# Symmetrical Balance

There are 3 kinds

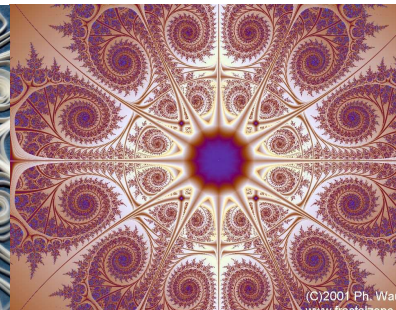
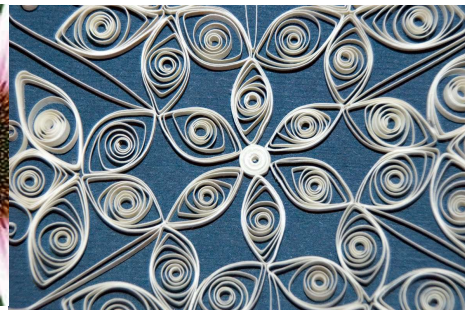
## 1. Exact (aka Bilateral)

- A mirror image or an exactly repeated design



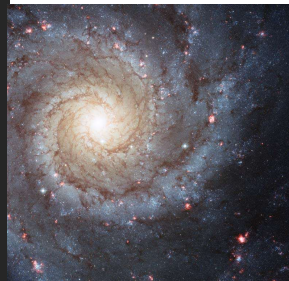
## 2. Axial

- Axial—having 2 opposing repeats, one on each side of an axis (think of a kaleidoscope)



## 3. Radial

- Radial—repeating a pattern by rotating around a center point (think of a spiral).



# Asymmetrical Balance

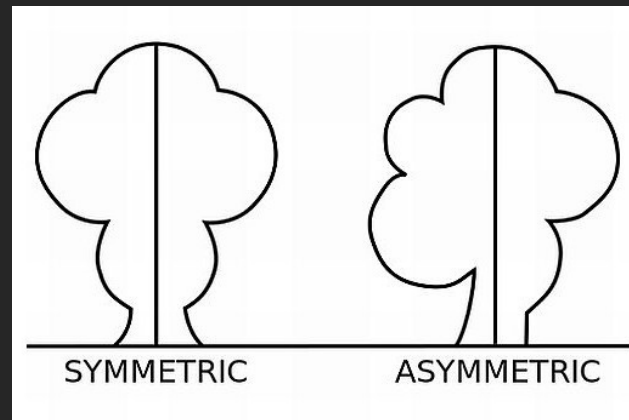
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In short it means "without Symmetry".

More advanced understanding of it is although there is no symmetry, it is still balanced.

The most common example is a Yin-Yang symbol. The White space is equal to the Black space.

In the Great Wave by Hokusai the area of the sky and land is about the same as the area of the ocean waves.







## Approximate Balance

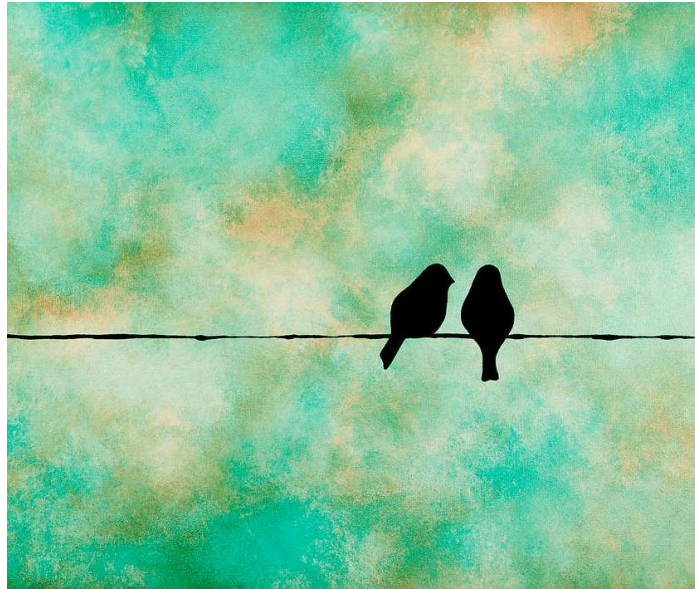
It's between exact and asymmetry. There is the idea of symmetry but it's not exact. At the same time it has more symmetry than Asymmetric Balance.

## Occult Balance

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This is more like the extreme version of Asymmetry

The balance of the composition is shifted to extremes



# Mandalas

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Religious rituals in Buddhism and Hinduism sometimes use creating artwork as a meditation tool to reflect on the various principles the religion teaches.

Mandalas are full of symbolism tied to their beliefs. Circles represent the universe because it is the only shape that has no beginning or end, it's infinite. Squares represent live on earth because there is a beginning and end.

Traditionally they are made out of sand which also represents the fragility and impermanence of live. To further this idea as soon as the mandala is created it is scooped up into a pile and the sand is taken outside and thrown into the air as an offering to the wind so it can become something else.



P.O.D: Movement



## What is Movement?

Movement is the path the viewer's eye takes through the work of art, often to focal areas.

Such movement can be directed along lines, edges, shape, and color within the work of art.

# Digging Deeper into Movement



Linear- using mostly the repetition of lines (literal and/or implied) to give the idea of movement through a work of art



Visual Passage- creating an experience for the viewer where they can imagine themselves inside the actual work of art.



Elongated Shapes- using mostly the overlapping elongated shapes that connect the edges of the picture plane to the focal point.

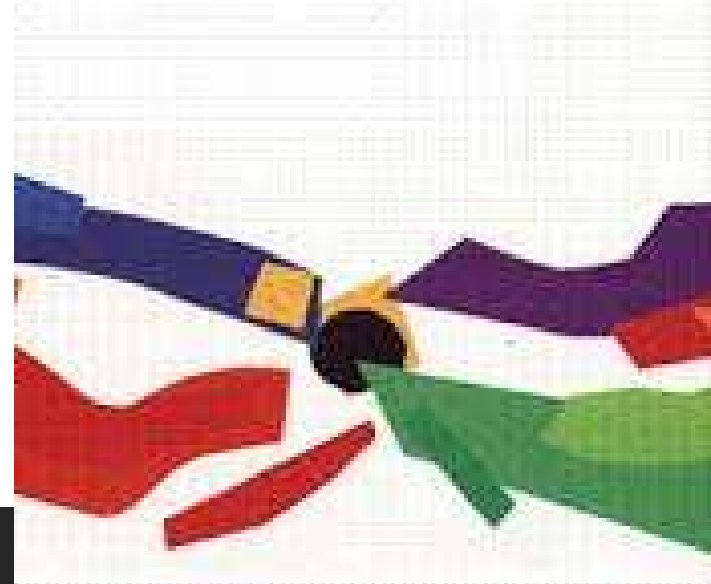


Closure- creating a composition where the viewer keeps following the shapes

## Linear and Elongated Shapes Examples

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These are very similar and really the only difference between the two is one focuses more on shapes/forms and the other lines.



# Visual Passage Examples

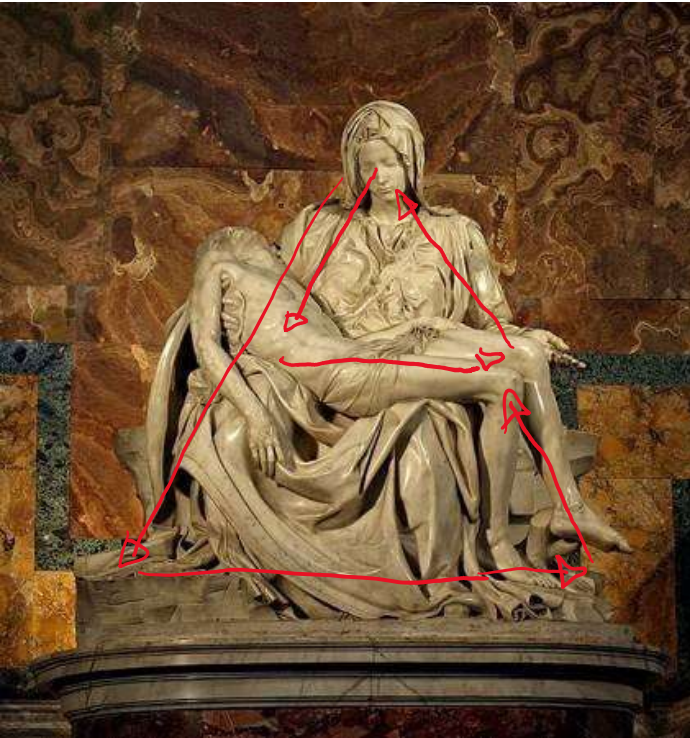
Usually have things like paths, rivers, doorways (aka portals), basically anything that invites the viewer to imagine being in the space created by the artist.

It can make the viewer ask questions like:

- What is around the corner?
- What's behind the door?
- Why is a gate open? Closed?
- Do I feel included? Excluded?







## Closure Examples

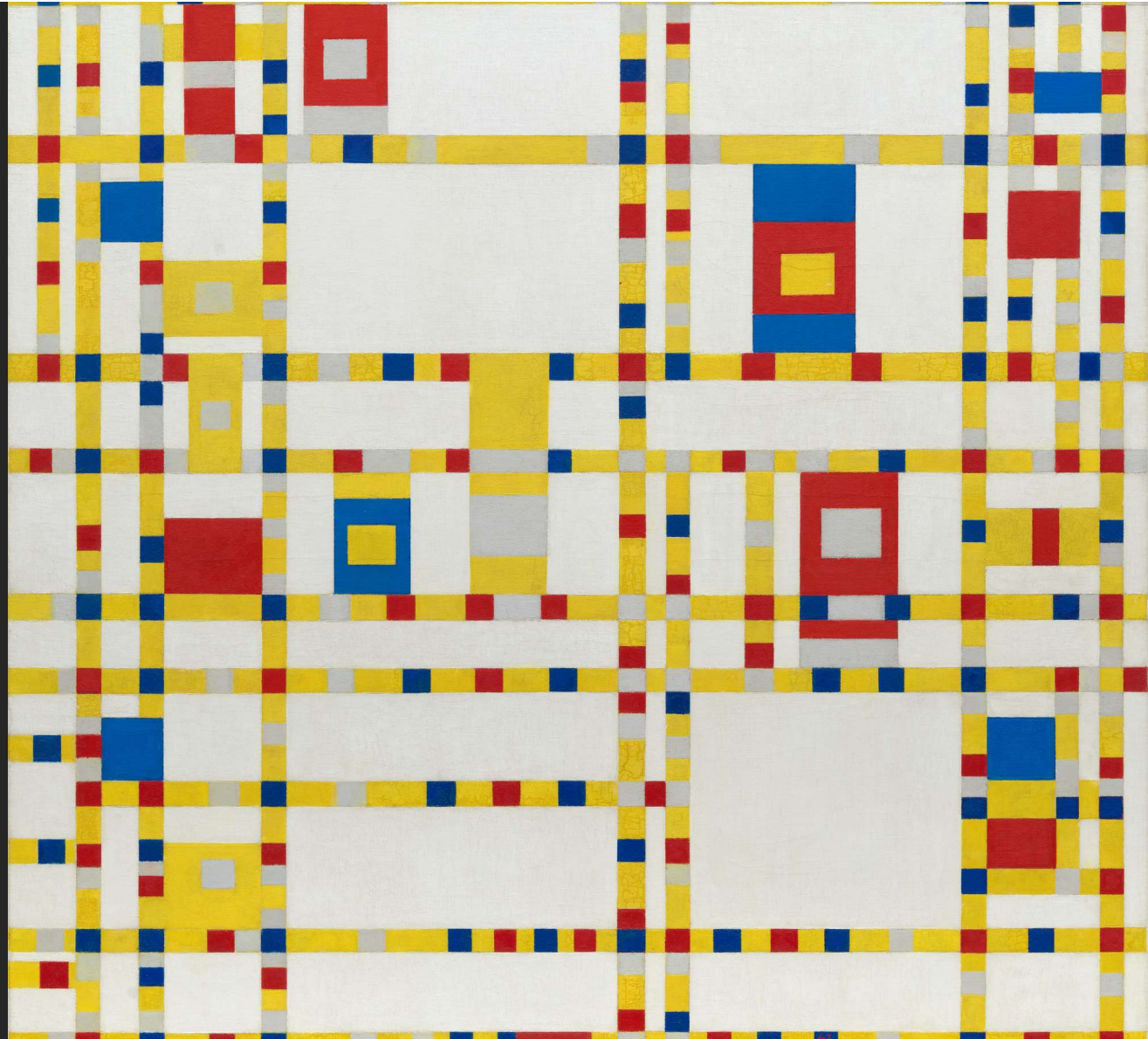
PS. TRIANGULAR AND CIRCULAR COMPOSITIONS ARE COMMON TYPES OF CLOSURE

P.O.D.: Rhythm

## What is Rhythm?

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- It's a repetition of visual elements, like shape, line and texture to create a sense of unity and progression that subconsciously feels right.
- **Rhythm in art** refers to the arrangement of shapes in a way which creates an underlying beat. It is similar to the **rhythm** of music, but instead of notes and sounds, we use colors and shapes.
- *Pattern* is a synonym for Rhythm.



# Types of Rhythm

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Regular- a pattern that repeats in an exact mathematical way; Mechanical is another name for this kind of rhythm.



Irregular- a pattern that repeats in a more organic way. It usually is more regular than Flowing but less exact than Regular.



Flowing- repetition pattern that gives the idea like that of flowing water; usually emphasizes curvy/wavy lines/shapes



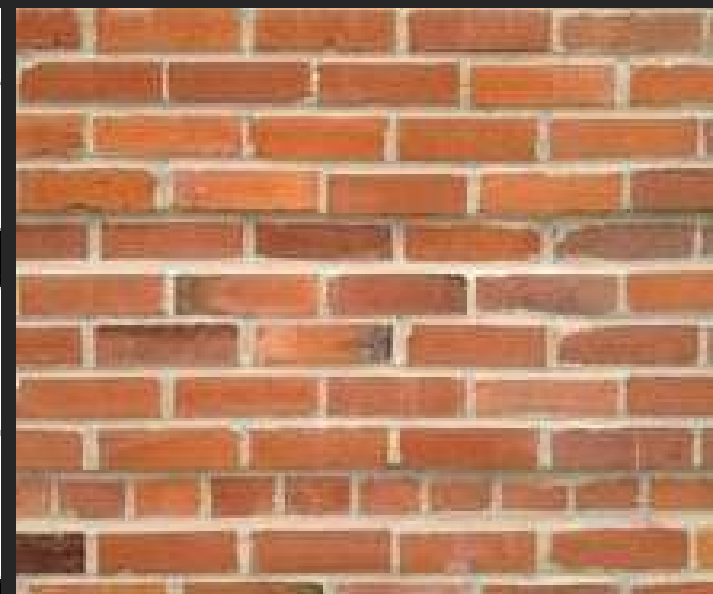
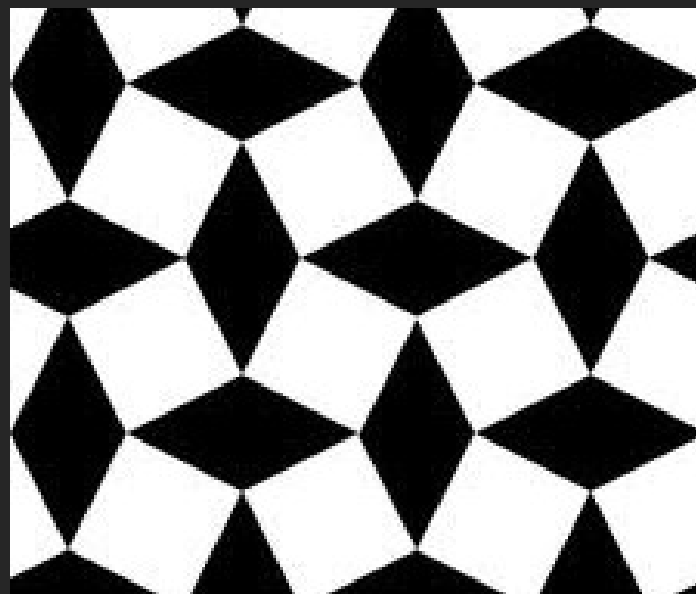
Progressive- gives the idea of something changing

# Regular Rhythm

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Other things to know:

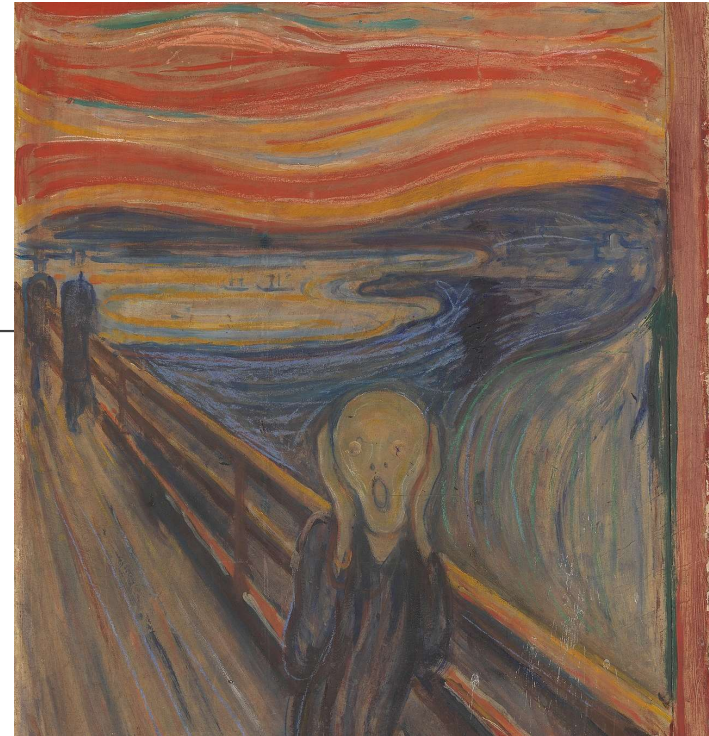
- Tessellation is a common type of Alternating Regular Rhythm and is used frequently in commercial designs. For example: patterns on fabric and wallpaper.
- Fiber Arts traditionally incorporate patterns. Many Contemporary artists like to explore the relationship between Regular and Irregular patterns.



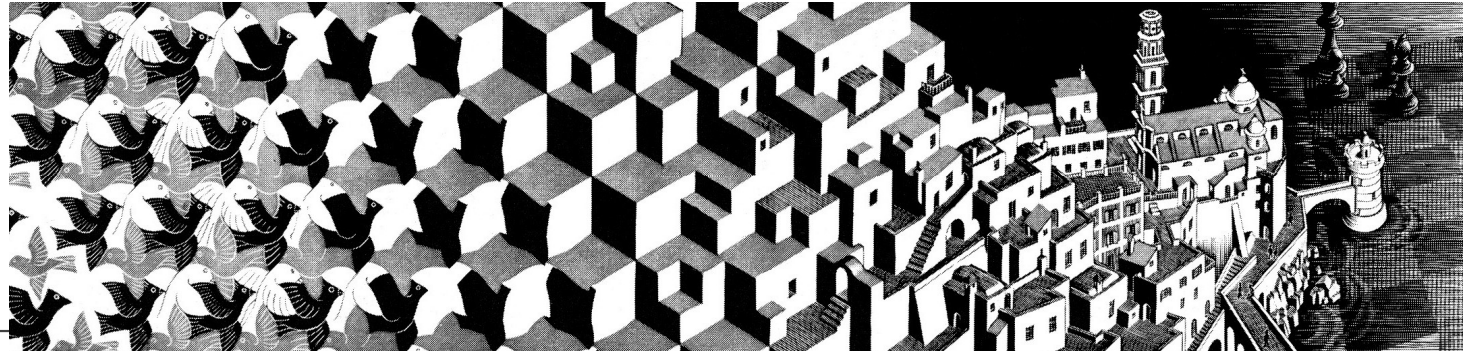


Irregular Rhythm

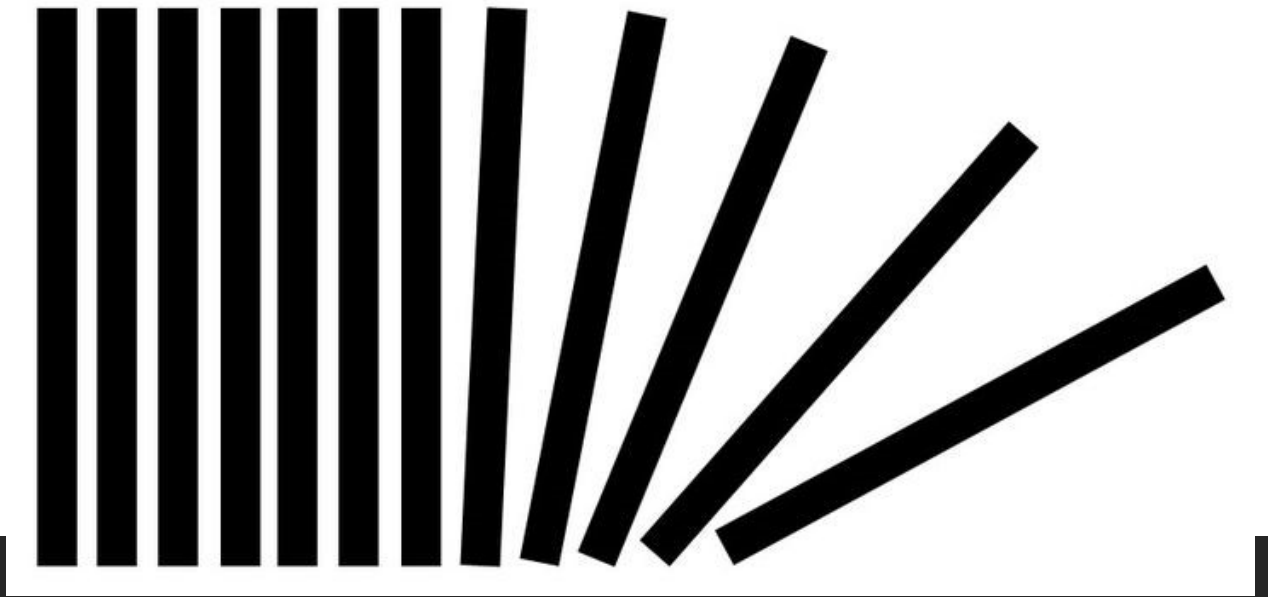
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Flowing Rhythm



# Progressive Rhythm







# Zentangle Art

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It's a type of Process Driven art created by Maria Thomas and Rick Roberts.

The Zentangle Method is an easy-to-learn, relaxing, and fun way to create beautiful images by drawing structured patterns. We call these patterns, tangles. You create tangles with combinations of dots, lines, simple curves, S-curves and orbs. These simple shapes are the "Elemental Strokes" in all Zentangle art. These patterns are drawn on small pieces of paper called "tiles." We call them tiles because you can assemble them into mosaics.

It's art is non-representational and unplanned so you can focus on each stroke and not worry about the result. There is no up or down to Zentangle art. In fact, you can most easily create Zentangle art by rotating your tile as you tangle -- always keeping your hand in a relaxed position. You don't need to know what a tangle is going to look like to draw it. You just need to know the steps. The result is a delightful surprise.

Creating Zentangle helps increased focus, creativity, self-confidence and an increased sense well-being.

# Things to know to create a Zentangle

A video that show's the traditional processes beginning to end...

<https://youtu.be/l3QuS4Qah60>



## The Eight Steps of the Zentangle Method

1. **Gratitude and Appreciation:** Get comfortable, take a few deep breaths and feel gratitude and appreciation – for this beautiful paper, for these wonderful tools, for this opportunity to create something beautiful.
2. **Corner Dots:** We teach beginning Zentangle Method with beautiful museum grade cotton paper, 3.5 inches (89 mm) square. To answer a familiar question of what to put on this beautiful paper, place a light pencil dot in each corner, about a pen's width from the edges. Now it's no longer a blank piece of paper.
3. **Border:** Connect those dots with a light pencil line, straight or curvy, to create a square. This is your border.
4. **String:** Inside the border, draw a light pencil line or lines to make what we call a "string." The string separates your tile into sections, in which you draw your tangles. A string can be any shape. It may be a curvy line that touches the edge of the border now and then, or series of straight lines that go from one side of the border to the next.
5. **Tangle:** A tangle is a predefined sequence of simple strokes that make up a pattern. Draw your tangles in pen inside (usually) the pencil strings and borders. Tangle is both noun and verb. Just as you dance a dance, you tangle your tangles. Draw your tangles with deliberate strokes. Don't worry about what it's going to look like. Just focus on each stroke of the pen as you make it. Trust that you'll know what to do next when the time to do it comes. There is no up or down to Zentangle art so feel free to rotate your tile in any direction that is most comfortable for your hand as you draw.
6. **Shade:** Add shades of gray with a graphite pencil to bring contrast and dimension to your tile. The black and white two-dimensional tangles transform through shading and appear three-dimensional. You can also use a tortillon (a paper blending stump) to soften and blend the graphite.
7. **Initial and Sign:** This is art you created. You should sign it. Put your initials on the front (many people create a unique monogram or chop for this step). On the back, place your name, date, comments and observations.
8. **Appreciate:** Hold your tile at arm's length. Turn it this way and that. Appreciate what you just created.



What kinds of Rhythm do you see...