Learning Through Your Mind's Eye

Art Attack 2013 October 26, 2013
Workshop delivered by Vaughn Gillson

The way we recognize and understand our surroundings shares qualities of core features of art. Basic shapes, grouping, value and movement – the stimuli we use to make sense of our environment – are also launching points for visual art activities and for critical thinking that takes place in both seeing and organizing creative work.

This workshop approaches art from an oblique angle, looking at the mental constructs that may be used to apply elements and principles. In the process of finding associations among dissimilar things and orchestrating multiple aspects of art, skills in organization, coordination, analysis and integration are inconspicuously employed.

Main objectives:

1. Distinguish associations among like and unlike things
2. Analyze relationships between parts and the whole
3. Construct context and evaluate its role in creating meaning

Learning activities are concerned with:

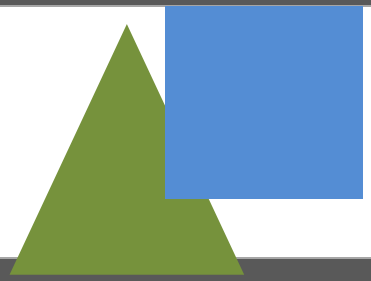
1. Basic shapes and their key characteristics
2. The role of basic shapes as foundations for complex images
3. Ways that elementary forms lay ground work for integration, unity and clarity
4. Opportunities to more fully explore art principles through limited means
5. Design relationships using tools such as contrast

Activity 1: Explore simple shapes and motif variations

- Create 6-10 variations based on each core shape. Variations may include distortion and gradually become more complex.

During this activity you will:

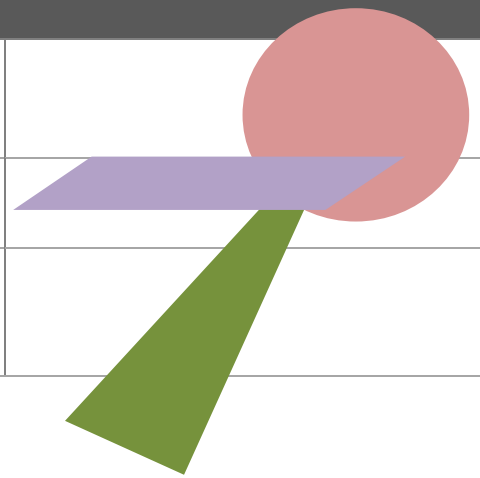
1. Identify key characteristics of core shapes
2. Examine how basic features are foundations for association, diversity and filtering

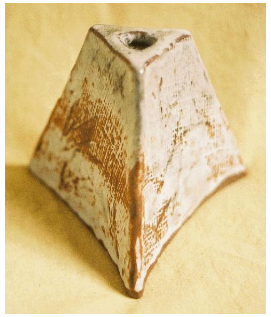


RELATED CONCEPTS

Association, Classification, Context, Definition, Generalization, Grouping, Modification, Organization, Sequence, Variation

1. Identify key characteristics of core shapes	Notes	
- List the key features of core shapes		
- How are features of each shape unique?		
- Do the characteristic features of each shape have emotional attributes?		



2. Examine how basic features are foundations for association, diversity and filtering	RELATED CONCEPTS Ambiguity, Comparison, Context, Extremity, Direction, Generalization, Gradation, Hierarchy, Reference point, Repetition	
- Describe the group through the variations of its members		
- List ways to vary the shapes that are common to all three		
- List ways to vary the shapes that are unique to each one		
- How do variations change your definition of core shapes		
- Judge the amount of deviation or variation from a simple shape that is possible without losing original shape		
- Observe where shapes move from ambiguous to clearly recognizable		
- Choose a reference point between a range of variations (this could be between two different core shapes)		
- Compare other shapes from your reference point		
- What would a scale of variations look like and could you identify the extremes		
- How can organizational tools, such as gradation, be used to define the group		
- How does context determine association		

- Are there qualities that can be measured and others that require judgment		
- Do feelings associated with simple shapes undergo change with variations		

Activity 2: Re-interpret a design through an arrangement of simple shapes

- Re-assemble photo-image with simple shapes using collage
- Last exercise worked with a progression of simple to complex shapes. Now you will go directly from complex to primary shapes, with attention to the configuration of shapes.

During this activity you will:

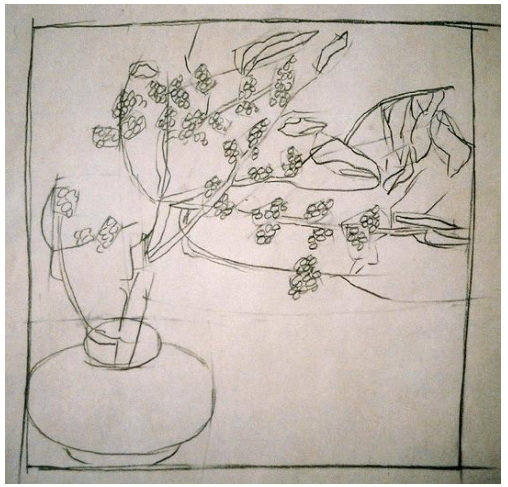
1. Explore ways that simplicity and generality are helpful for integration, unity and greater clarity.
2. Take advantage of opportunities provided by limited means

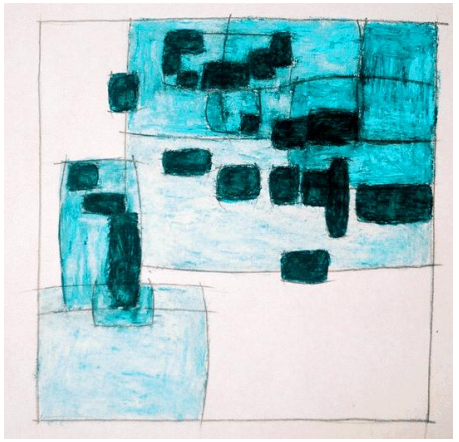
1. Explore ways that simplicity and generality may be employed for clarity, integration and unity	**Notes**
- List some key features of the original design	
- Which features of the original were considered when choosing simple shapes to represent its parts	
- How have you used the shapes to reflect their original complexity: use of many small shapes to build up complexity, varied size or orientation	
- Does the new version allow you to see aspects of the design that the original does not	

RELATED CONCEPTS

Adaptation, Cohesion, Configuration, Exchange, Interpretation, Limitation, Organization, Representation, Synthesis, Transformation, Unity

- Are you interpreting through emotional or physical resemblance		
- How have you varied the shapes to represent the original		
- Are you using the simple lines of the shapes to highlight features or modifying them for softer forms		
- What are some ways you could adjust parts of your arrangement for greater transformation		
- Can you combine parts to create emphasis or strengthen the design through a dominant area		
- Have you used repetition, line or colour to integrate the design		
2. Manage and make use of opportunities provided by limited means	RELATED CONCEPTS Channel, Compare, Focus, Generalize, Limit, Modify, Orientation, Qualify, Restrict, Simplify	
- What is the value of generalizing shapes and using limited means		
- How does limiting options encourage you to focus on the whole design		
- What are some design options available		
- Is the new whole design greater than the sum of the parts		
- Compare key features of the whole design in the original with your new arrangement		
- On what aspects can you compare the relationship between parts and the whole in the original and in your new design (e.g. shape size, quantity)		
- Which version appears more unified		





- What are other examples where less is more		

Activity 3: Examine design organization and relation ships

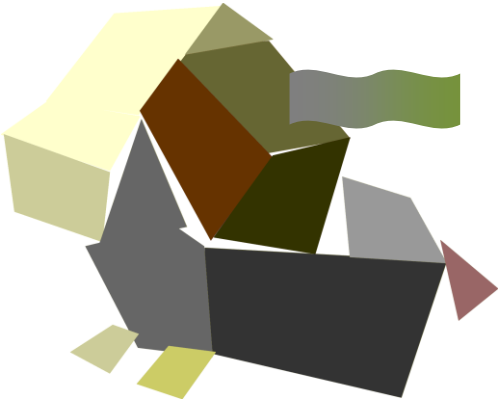
➢ Develop design relationships using tools such as contrast

RELATED CONCEPTS

Complexity, Contrast, Coordination, Focus, Integration, Linkage, Relationship, Simplicity

During this activity you will:

1. Analyze design organization through the relationships and contrast found among simple and complex shapes	Notes
- Does a certain part or area dominate the design	
- Is there a pattern through association of shape, colour or size in the design	
- Can you create a pattern through shape or colour	
- What are some other ways to set up relationships among different parts of the design	
- Compare how shapes appear in their respective contexts in the first and last exercises	
- In recapturing the spirit of the design, compare the effects of different contrast such as changing the orientation, colour or light/dark contrast of shapes	
- What are some other types of contrast that may be used to attract attention	
- How can contrast or detail affect eye movement, focus or emphasis	
- Are there pairs of elements that may be coordinated to unify the	



design such as shape and line, or colour and size		
- What are key features of the design as a whole		
- How does the broader context create meaning for the shapes inside (isolate a shape to see the difference)		
- Are there links between prominent key features and contextual meaning		
- How do the design elements affect your feelings about the subjects they represent		
- Is there a correlation between style and subject in visual art that has parallels in other arts		