

MESSAGE FROM ERIC

- SEPTEMBER -

Design Shapes

Anyone who has taken a workshop of mine or watched one of my videos will note that I repeatedly mention the importance of good shape construction. No painting will have a strong composition without this consideration.

In my workshops I emphasize the avoidance of awkward geometric shapes: rectangles, squares, circles, triangles - anything out of geometry class - and focus on constructing the better shapes of puzzle pieces. Puzzle pieces have irregularities that our minds find appealing; whereas, geometry class shapes can convey a visual discomfort - the uniformity of parallel sides and a line of symmetry down the middle make us feel uneasy.

I also encourage the repetition of shapes, but to alternate the pattern to create interest. A good example of this would be pickets of a fence. Even though realistically they are even spaced, the same color, and the same width, it would be advisable to break up the repetition with alternation - group a few, change the value of some, change the distances between the pickets. For those who feel the burden of trying to paint their subject "as is", this may be difficult. However, remember a good painting is based on understanding design concepts over the natural world as we see it.

But why does the human mind need a breaking up of visual patterns so that they do not appear repetitive or geometric? Why do we need the softer image of a variety of puzzle-pieced shapes, rather than a very static, repetitive construction? What is it in our psyche that requires this?

I am not sure I can answer this, but it is evident in all the arts - our minds demand variety. In music, we need a variety of notes, a variety of timing, and a variety of the spaces between notes. Nobody wants to listen to a steady drumbeat for long.

In writing, look at the variety of sentence structure in your favorite novel - phrases, clauses, short sentences, long sentences. A good plot with a variety of sentence structure is very appealing. A dictionary and many textbooks are not.

So really, when one thinks about it, design concepts are really built upon the knowledge of what we naturally find appealing, on a visceral level. We are hard-wired to appreciate variety, and a good artist will capitalize on this.

Keep your brush wet!

ERIC



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