

Picture This: How Pictures Work

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12 PRINCIPLES THAT APPLY TO ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

1. Smooth, flat, horizontal shapes give us a sense of stability and calm.
2. Vertical shapes are more exciting and more active. Vertical shapes rebel against the earth's gravity. They imply energy and a reaching toward the heights or the heavens.
3. Diagonal shapes are dynamic because they imply motion or tension.
4. The upper half of a picture is a place of freedom, happiness, and power; objects placed in the top half also often feel more "spiritual." The bottom half of a picture feels more threatened, heavier, sadder, or constrained; objects placed in the bottom half also feel more grounded.
5. The center of the page is the most effective "center of attention." It is the point of greatest attraction.
6. White or light backgrounds feel safer to us than dark backgrounds because we can see well during the day and only poorly at night.
7. We feel more scared looking at pointed shapes; we feel more secure or comforted looking at rounded shapes or curves.
8. The larger an object is in a picture, the stronger it feels.
9. We associate the same or similar colors much more strongly than we associate the same or similar shapes.
10. Regularity and irregularity— and their combinations—are powerful.
11. We notice contrasts, or, put another way, contrast enables us to see.
12. The movement and import of the picture is determined as much by the spaces between the shapes as by the shapes themselves.