

The Visual Rhythm in Representational Painting

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Rhythms develop in the compositions of the paintings through the contrast between the visual elements and the background, this contrast evidences each of the parts, because the visual elements do not exist without a background, and neither does it exist without the visual elements.

The composition as a whole represents the view of the Macrocosm, and here each visual element becomes representations in the view of the Microcosm, both views are not separate, but related. Rhythm is a concept that arises from the relationship between the Micro scale (which does not exist without the vision of the whole), and the Macro scale (which does not exist without the vision of the parts).

In Representational Painting the visual elements can be established through the use of tonal values, colors, geometric or organic shapes, lines and textures, when these elements are related to each other and are opposed to the background of the composition, they generate a diversification of visual rhythms.

For the spectator of the work, the visual information is presented simultaneously at once, but the idea of time is constructed through the successive reading of the visual elements presented.

Among the different visual rhythms, it is possible to highlight three distinct types:

1 - Rhythm generated through repetition

When in Representational painting the visual elements are inserted in a repetitive way, there is a presentation of visual information characterized by a constant and regular temporal resonance.

Through the rhythm generated by repetition, the visual elements are similar to each other, having in each of them the same visual characteristics present as a whole, such as geometric structures, tonal values, colors, etc. Each visual element has the same importance within the composition, and the availability of these elements resonates in the work with the sensation of time.



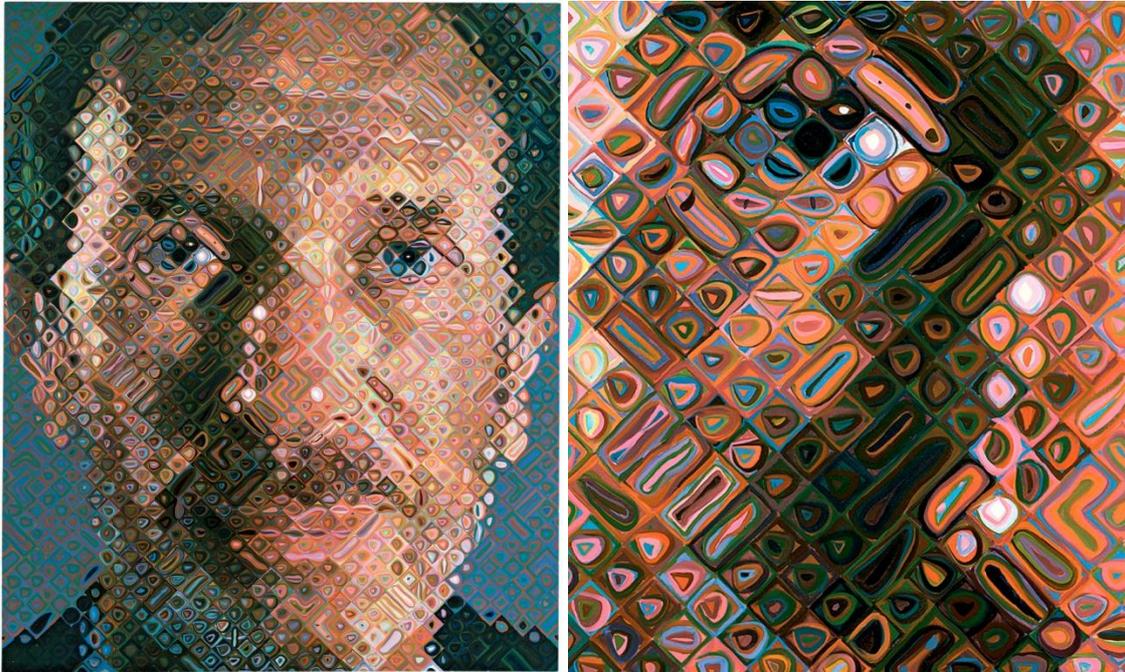
"The Delivery of the Keys". Pietro Perugino, 1481, Fresco, 330 x 550 cm, Sistine Chapel, Vatican

In the work of the artist Pietro Perugino, a symmetrical composition is presented, where each visual element is structured from square and rectangular geometric shapes.

The grouping of these geometric forms reinforces a division of the work into two parts, above there is an emphasis on the architectural elements and below an emphasis on the human figure.

In the composition, the rhythm generated by the arrangement of the three architectural elements brings the idea of a more dynamic cadenced time. This is due to the fact that the architectural elements are ordered from the square visual structure, thus enabling a quick reading of the information.

In contrast, the reading of visual information related to human figures is slower. This occurs due to the existence of two rectangular visual structures that order the two human groups, here the geometry of the rectangle has a more extensive and continuous area, and all the visual information that is presented within these structures requires a longer assimilation of time for the viewer of the work.



"Arne". Chuck Close, 1999-2000, Oil on Canvas, 259.1 x 213.4 cm

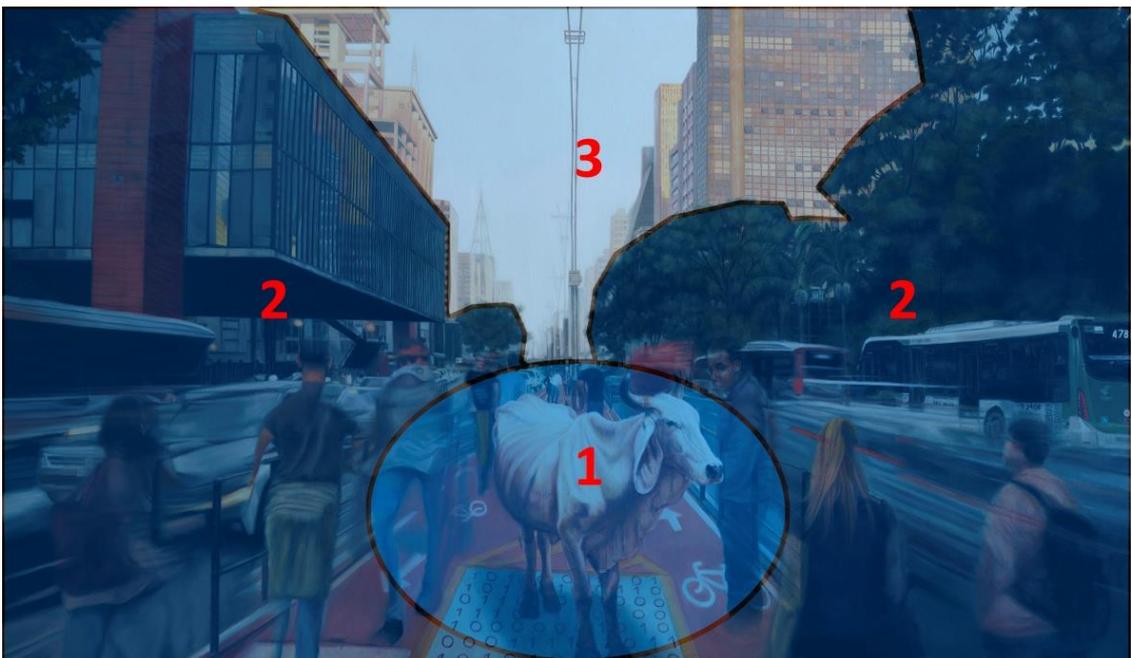
The painting by the American artist Chuck Close demonstrates a different approach regarding the use of repetition as a resource to generate rhythm, here the artist uses the repetition of geometric shapes that are ordered within a diagram composed of inclined squares and rectangles, structuring in this way visual elements formed by textures that are similar to each other, and that are interrelated.

Each visual element in the work constitutes a view of the Micro scale, these elements are ordered separately from each other, and when there is the union of all parties is made the macro scale in the composition of the work.

2 - Rhythm generated through Alternation

In Representational painting the alternation of visual elements, sometimes more prominent, sometimes more subtle, exposes the opposition between these elements and the visual planes, with this there is a rhythmic variety generated by the alternation of information.

This alternation makes the visual information be characterized with a sensation of dynamic and irregular time. The rhythm generated by the alternation makes each visual element having its own importance and differentiates itself from its peers.



“BINARY CATTLE”. Carlos Borsa, 2019, Oil on canvas, 90 x 160 cm.

In the work above, the visual rhythm is generated by the alternation between the tonal values, there is no progression from the lightest to the darkest and vice versa, here the tonal values have the function of reinforcing the separation between the visual planes.

With this, the rhythm generated by the alternation is separated into three moments, and the tonal values are established from the following order:

(1) light tonal value - (2) dark tonal value - (3) medium tonal value

At the moment when the first plane of light tonal value is opposed with the second plane of dark tonal value, a contrast is established between the visual elements and the scene enhances a greater drama. Here, there is an intention to highlight the visual element in the foreground, thus making it the most important object in the work.

The transition from the second plane of dark tonal value to the third plane of medium tonal value, demonstrates an opposite intention that is establish a smooth transition between the visual planes. Within the third plane there are brushstrokes executed using the technique of *velatura**, this makes the architectural elements gradually being fading with the background.

This abstraction of the visual information present in the background of the work intends to show a subtlety, which is opposed to the drama present in the first visual plane.

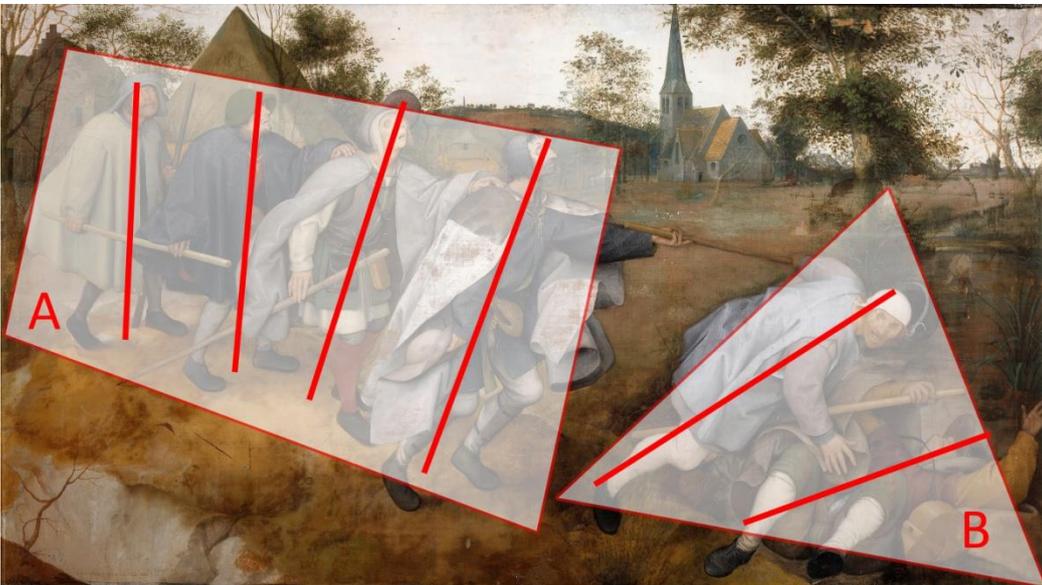
*Velatura: a thin layer of paint somewhat like a glaze but opaque or semi - opaque rather than transparent.

3 - Rhythm generated through progression.

The rhythm that is generated through the progression arises when the visual elements are ordered successively and gradually within the composition work.

In this type of rhythm, progression can be characterized through some directed movement of the elements in the composition, or through the increase of some visual aspect of the information. The rhythm generated through the progression creates a resonance of time that is presented itself as a dynamic and regular way.

Within the composition of the work each visual element can be positioned higher or lower, more distant or more inclined, greater or lesser in relation to the visual element that was previously ordered.



"The blind leading the blind". Pieter Bruegel, 1568, Oil and tempera on canvas, 86 x 154cm,

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In Pieter Bruegel's painting, it is possible to observe the use of vertical and diagonal lines that structure the position of human figures. The rhythm generated through the progression is established in the work through the sensation of movement. In the composition each of the human figures is gradually more inclined as the visual information is read from left to right.

In the work the movement is divided into two human groups, with this there is the intention of the artist to create a dynamic composition that opposes the regularity of the established rhythm, where the visual reading alternates in two opposite moments, a longer one (A) and another shorter (B).



"New York Movie". Edward Hopper, 1939. Oil on canvas, 82 x 102 cm.

In the work of the American painter Edward Hopper, the composition of the work is divided into two parts: On the left side there are three orange and red visual elements, which are organized into a more closed space and ordered from a linear perspective (A). On the right side of the composition, the visual elements have warm colors and are presented within an open visual field (B).

To the left of the composition there is a rhythmic progression, here the orange and red colors are repeated and gradually increase in size, and with this there is a visual reading of a vertical movement made from the low and going up.

In the work as a whole, the highlighted presence of warm colors, both on the right and on the left side of the composition brings a sense of balance, here the visual sensations are constructed as the viewer's gaze travels through the composition of the work.

Between the left and right sides of the work there is a horizontal movement that is generated by the availability of visual information throughout the composition. The movement, when started on the left side of the composition from the rhythmic progression, ends up within a large area of warm colors on the right side of the work.

This transition from left to right creates a sensation of expanding color. When there is the opposite movement of the visual reading from right to left, the opposite sensation of a retracting color occurs:

1, 2, 3 - 4 = Color expansion / 4 - 3, 2, 1 = Color retraction

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