

What makes a Representational Painting visually organized?

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A Representational painting when it has a high level of excellence, has in its composition a sense of organization that can be polarized and established between two extremes: the unity of visual elements that brings a sense of order, and the variety of visual contrasts that express a chaos sensation.

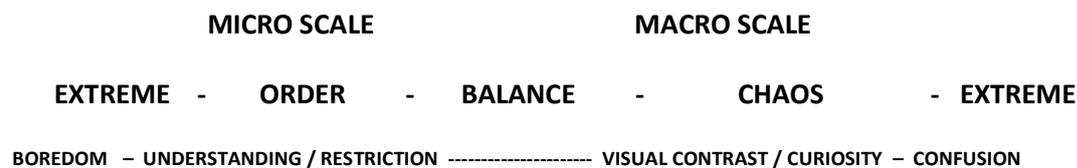
The organization of the composition can reach a point of equilibrium and move between two scales:

On the **Micro** scale, the visual aspects are structured from the union of similar visual elements with elements that are similar with each other, thus organized groups are formed through a sense of order.

On the **Macro** scale, the visual aspects are structured based on the contrast between different visual elements organized in different groups. The opposition between groups with contrasting visual identities establishes a sense of chaos.

Within the Micro scale, the sense of order, when presented in an exaggerated manner, fails to express an idea of understanding, which can make the visual reading of the work tedious.

In contrast to the Macro scale, when the sense of chaos is exaggerated, the perception based on curiosity gives way to a sense of confusion.



The visual organization of the work is done by the reading of the visual information displayed throughout the composition of the painting. This arrangement of information generates different types of relationships between visual elements, which can be of similarity or opposition, unity or variety.

In the work, when the concept of unity is presented, visual information becomes ordered within the composition of the work, the visual unit organizes the painting, and with this the visual elements present in the composition can become visibly more prominent.

When is presented the opposite of the unit, a variety of visual information occurs, the order is broken and the visual information has a plurality.

Among the visual elements that are present in the composition of representational painting we can mention the point, the line, geometric shapes, tonal values, colors, textures, direction and movement.

1 - The unit based on geometric shapes.

The composition in representational painting can present the concept of unity and variety when there are similarities and differences between the geometric shapes that structure the visual elements.

The perception of the form is realized through the spatial reading of the visual elements arranged in the composition of the work, among the geometric shapes generated by the visual reading we can mention the circles, ellipses, squares, rectangles and triangles.

A – Visual elements structured in similar ways.



"Nymphéas en fleur". Claude Monet, 1914 – 17. Oil on canvas. 160 x 180 cm. Private Collection

The work of the Master Monet shows visual elements structured from four geometric shapes: circles, rectangles, ovals and ellipses.

The composition of the work divides the visual areas from two moments: in the first there are large masses of colors that express the idea of silence, and in the second moment, the areas are characterized by the idea of noise that contrasts with the areas of silence.

These areas more "noisy" contain several fragmented visual elements that unite and also oppose to each other.

In the work, visual elements that generate unity are grouped according to the similarity between the geometric shapes, on the other hand, the geometric shapes that oppose to each other generate the variety of visual information.

All this movement formed through the differences and similarities between the structuring forms brings to the composition of the work a wealth of visual rhythms.

B - Visual elements, structured through similarly of sized shapes.



"COLLECTIVE SPECTRUM". Carlos Borsa, 2020, Oil on canvas, 130 x 191 x 3 cm.

In the composition of the painting above, the visual elements are structured based on different geometric shapes, these shapes are related to each other and contrast with their opposites.

The geometric shapes are divided into groups, within the groups each geometric shape joins its peers and characterizes a visual element. The geometric shapes are opposed to each other and separate when there are a variety of visual elements in the composition of the work, with different sizes and shapes.

The idea of chaos arises from the contrasts between opposites, and the balance of forces that establishes unity is done through opposition of the variety, because within the concept of unity, each visual element joins with similar elements.

In the work, the presence of a unity between the visual elements has the function of establishing an order that balances the chaos.

C - Visual elements structured through shapes close to each other.



“Sacred Spring: Sweet Dreams (Nave nave moe)” . Paul Gauguin, 1894, Oil on canvas, 74 x 100. Hermitage Museum

In Paul Gauguin's work the composition is organized around three groups:

- 1 - In the foreground the two human figures depicted have the same triangular structuring shapes, the same colors, and are the same size.
- 2 - In the intermediate background the visual elements are human figures that have shapes structured in ellipse and have the same skin colors.
- 3 - The third background depicts four human figures, here the visual elements are grouped through the four rectangular shapes with equal dimensions.

The way in which visual information is organized in the composition of the work establishes both the proximity between the visual elements and their division into three different groups. This movement has the function of bringing unity and variety of visual information, and with this there is a greater emphasis on the presence of different visual planes in the composition of the work.

D - Visual elements structured through the similarity of spatial orientation.



"Saint Rosalie Interceding for the Pestilents of Palermo". Anthony Van Dyck, 1624,

Oil on canvas, 99.7 x 76.7. Metropolitan Museum of Art

In Anthony Van Dyck's painting we can see that the visual elements are grouped and positioned from diagonal lines that ascend in opposite directions: the first group of visual elements is directed from left to right, and the other visual elements are directed from right to the left.

Due to this opposition between the visual elements the work presents a balance of forces, where the amount of spatial orientations present in the composition has the same number of visual elements when there is a division in two equal parts.

The most prominent element in the work is the centralized female human figure, this highlight is due to this figure having its spatial orientation a little more inclined in relation to the other visual elements that ascend from right to left.

This change is subtle and maintains a visual harmony with the whole, because even though this spatial orientation differs from all other visual elements, the highlighted human figure is still part of the group where the visual elements rise from right to left, and remains opposed to the other group.

F - Visual elements structured through the direction of movement.



"Still Life with Goldfish". Francisco Goya, 1808, Oil on canvas, 44.8 x 62.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts Houston

In the work of the painter Francisco Goya, the still life shows visual elements similar to each other but which have opposite movement directions.

The heads and eyes of the fish have oval and circular shapes, these shapes come together in two groups with equal triangular structures and that divide the composition of the painting in two parts.

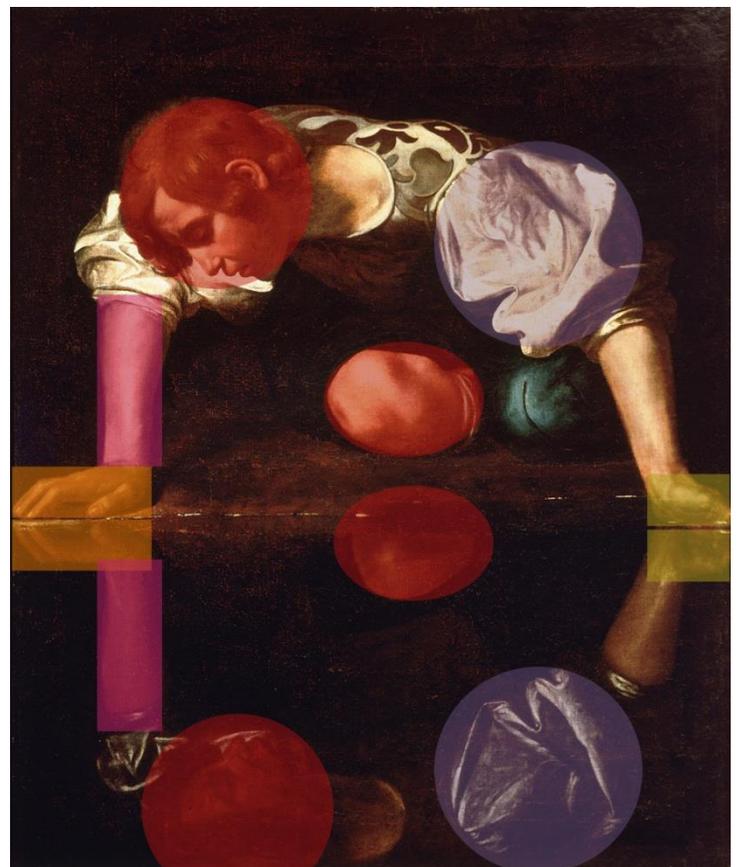
Within the composition of the work, the triangular shapes have opposite directions, positioned from the center to the left and from the center to the right of the painting.

The geometric shapes that structure the visual elements are similar and express a sense of unity in painting.

However, in this work the sense of visual balance only occurs when there is a break in the sense of unity. Visual balance occurs at the moment when visual information that is the same, contrasts in different directions of movement.

The visual balance makes the visual elements more prominent and, consequently, the composition of the work becomes visually more dynamic.

G - Visual elements structured through alignment.



"Narciso". Caravaggio, 1594 – 96. Oil on canvas, 110 x 92 cm. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica

In the work of master Caravaggio it is possible to observe the vertical and horizontal alignment of the geometric shapes that structure the visual elements of the work.

In painting, visual elements such as the head, hands, shoulder and knee are structured from circular and rectangular geometric shapes, and the presence of these shapes is repeated throughout the composition. The way in which this repetition is structured shows an alignment of geometric shapes and structures a visual ordering.

The grouping of visual elements that are similar to each other brings the perception of a unity in the composition, in addition, this perception of unity becomes enhanced thanks to the vertical and horizontal alignment of the visual elements within the composition of the work.

The sense of order is predominant in the work and the visual balance in the composition is established when the opposition of the order occurs. In the work, the contrast is determined by the variety of geometric shapes that structure the different visual elements.

2 - The unit based on colors, tonal values and textures.

The composition in representational painting can present the concept of unity and variety when there are similarities and differences between colors, tonal values and textures present in the visual elements of the painting.

The perception of chromatic, tonal and texture information is realized through the spatial reading of the visual elements arranged in the composition of the work.

A – Unit based on color similarity



“Deposition”. Raffaello Sanzio, 1507. Oil on Panel, 184 x 176 cm. Galleria Borghese

In the work of Master Raffaello, a hierarchy is applied in the use of colors: firstly there is the use of primary colors, secondly there is the use of secondary green, and thirdly there is the use of tertiary colors applied in parts of the background plane and on the floor.

This hierarchy has the function of highlighting the human figure in the composition of the work, because the primary colors applied to these visual elements have a greater visual intensity.

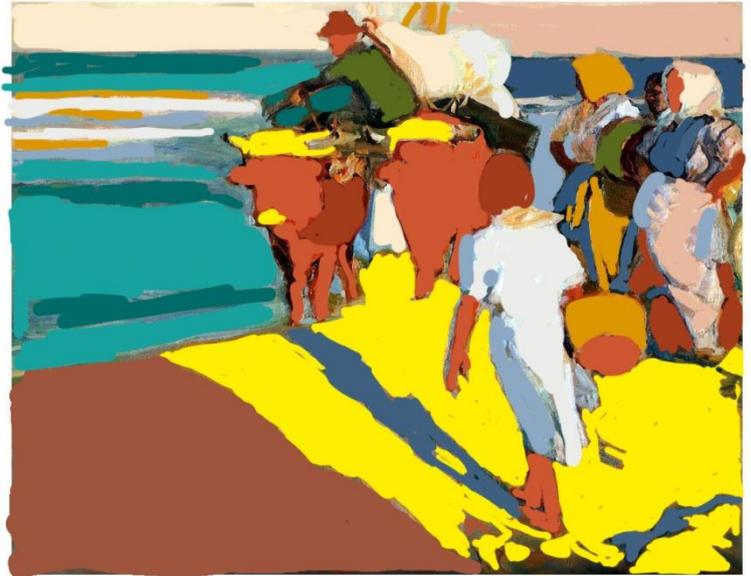
In the work, the most prominent visual elements are related through the binomial * of the colors Red and Blue, the binomial of these colors is present in the human figure and determines an area of greater visual focus in the composition.

In contrast, the relationship of the complementary colors of red and green has the opposite function to the Binomial of Red and Blue, the complementary color balances the highlighted visual elements, bringing to the composition of the work a harmony of colors.

Highlighted colors generate the concept of variety and colors in harmony generate the concept of unity.

* **Binomial:** Algebraic expression formed by the sum or difference of two terms or monomials

B – Unit based on similarity of tonal values



“Taking the boat out”. Joaquim Sorolla, 1916. Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm. Private Collection

In the work of the painter Sorolla there is the use of tonal values applied to two families of analogous colors *. The use of tonal values in painting establishes the plurality of visual information, and analogous colors are grouped in the composition of the work from two families: those of warm colors (yellow and earthy colors), and those of cold colors (blue and green).

Within the vision of each group, a dichotomy is established, where the variety of different tonal values is opposed to the concept of unity generated by the use of analogous colors.

In the composition overview, the variety has the function of highlighting the visual elements, this highlighting is done in two ways: through the application of different types of tonal values that generates plurality, and through the opposition between the different color temperatures.

In the composition of the work, visual harmony occurs when there is a balance between the concept of unity applied to families of colors, and the concept of variety applied to tonal values..

* **Analogous Colors:** Analogous colors are those placed side by side in the chromatic circle and share a basic color.

C – Unit based on similarity of textures



“Wheat field with cypress trees”. Vincent Van Gogh, 1889. Oil on canvas, 73 x 93,4 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art

In the work of master Van Gogh it is possible to observe the texture applied in the painting through the use of the impasto technique *. The use of this technique brings greater plasticity to the work due to the excess of paint that is used in the painting, this technique allows the movement of the brushstrokes to be strongly marked on the surface of the painting.

In the work the movement of the brushstrokes has different length and thickness and is divided into three groups, this division generates a variety of textures that are organized in hierarchy and applied to different types of elements and visual planes:

- 1- The larger brushstrokes have wider movements that produce the texture of the clouds, in the work these brushstrokes are applied to the background of the composition.
- 2- The medium brushstrokes generate the textures of the mountains and the base of the wheat, they are brushstrokes that establish the transition planes, because they separate the visual elements in different planes.
- 3- The smaller brushstrokes have shorter movements and generate the texture of vegetation and wheat, these are brushstrokes that are present in the first and second visual plane.

The texture generated by the various movements of the brushstrokes is present in all the elements and visual planes of the work, this totality establish a concept of unity in the work.

In contrast, the concept of variety is established through the difference between the sizes of the brush strokes, this variety makes the texture that is applied to all elements and visual planes be presented through diversified way.

* **Impasto:** is a technique that consists of applying thick strokes of paint on the canvas or support, so that the volume and shape of the strokes are visible, generate a three-dimensional effect and an added texture.

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