

Elements of Artistic Language in Drawing

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Abstract: *In visual art, whether we are talking about monochrome or polychrome, there are three structural elements: line, dot and spot. They are used harmoniously by the artist to plastically emphasize the analyzed subject. The present study is an analysis of the elements of visual language in the drawing, highlighting the moments of maximum evidence of the line, point and spot. In visual art we find them used separately but also in the associated formula, the compositional formula that brings together all the elements of visual language is a harmonious one and implicitly of high artistic value.*

Key-words: *art; drawing; traditional art; design; drawing theory*

1. Introduction

Drawing is considered, in relation to painting, as a step preceding it; without a drawn armor, we have nothing to put color on, we have nothing to build the chromatic element on. Thus the art of drawing is considered as the first step in the creation of painting and also the first stage in book illustration.

The correct use of the elements of artistic language requires discipline and training, which is also mentioned in the book addressed to those at the beginning in the study of drawing: *Complete Drawing Guide for Beginners*. Learning to draw requires both control and precision, so it helps to get used to the feeling that the pencil lives in your hand and that you can do miracles with it.²

For a while, the free and creative drawing was blurred by the book illustrators, illustrators who copied imposed models leaving the creative part in the background, their purpose being to obtain an image as close as possible to the model followed. This way of approaching art is specific to the Middle Ages and even if we talk about the art of copying, we can notice in some cases which is the original model.

According to the copies made after the masterpieces of the 14th century, studies after the ancient works emerge. Then the first studies by nature appear for the first time in private collections. Even from the old Italian designers, like Gentile de Fabriano and Pisanello, it can be observed this special dualism: the pre-established models are respected, but new elements based on the study by nature are also introduced.³

In the second half of the 14th century cartoonists made personal creations with an increased coefficient of originality. One of these drawings, considered one of the oldest, is discovered by Bernhard Degenhart in a Vatican codex.

The complexity of the drawing, implicitly its value, is based on an ample exercise of imagination in relation to the interdependence with the number of repetitions made in the

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² Delia Zahareanu. 2018. *Ghid Complet de Desen pentru Începători [Complete Drawing Guide for Beginners]*. București: Ed. Litera, p. 10.

³ Andras Drabant. 2018. *Bazele Desenului [Basics of Drawing]*. Oradea: Ed. Casa, p. 5.

learning process. The drawing is in line with any of the branches of fine arts, so its importance is put in place of honor. Drawing is directly influenced, by the current of time, fashion, but also by the artist's temperament. Both studies by nature and concerns for static nature or the human body were influenced by the a stylistic period such as impressionism, mannerism, etc.

2. Elements of artistic language in drawing

2.1. The Line

The line is an element of visual language and has two geometric features, length and width. In the case of the line, the length is considerably longer than the width. In geometry, the line is considered the shortest path between two points. The line in the drawing represents the movement of a point, drawn with the drawing tool in a set direction.

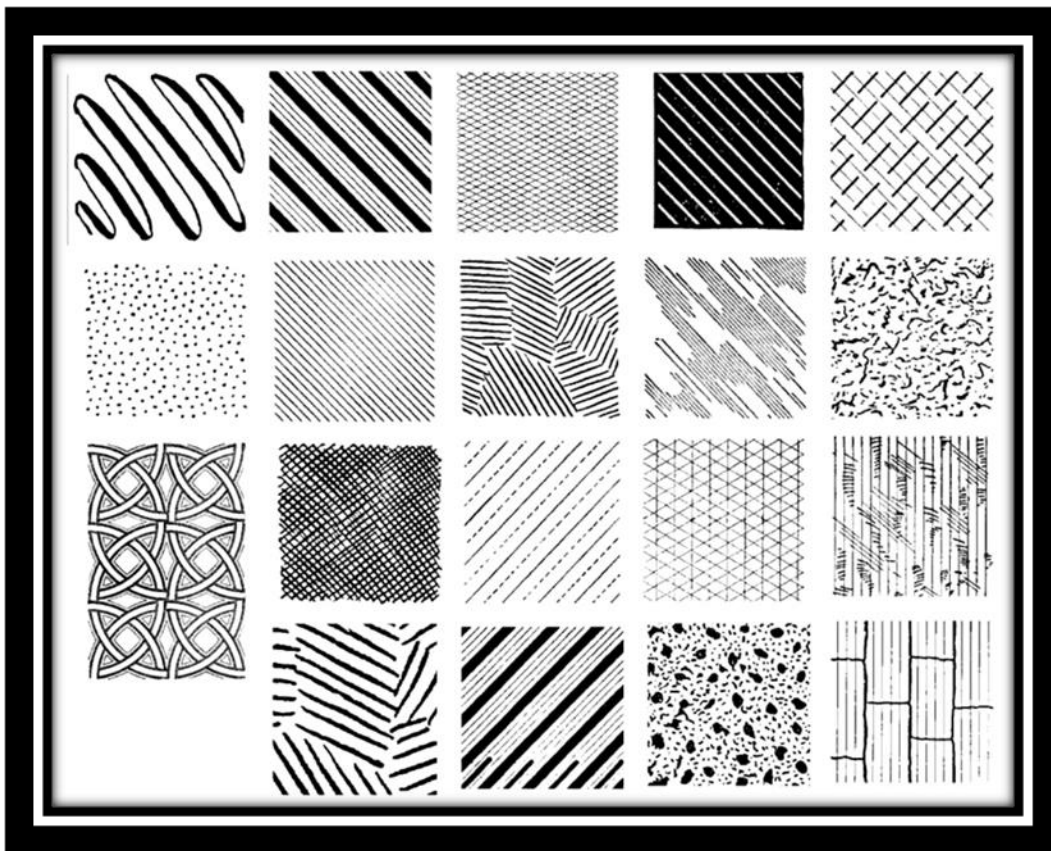


Fig.1. Different types of line

<https://www.facebook.com/how4drawing/photos/pcb.1872736792857667/1872736389524374/?type=3&theater>

The lines can be grouped by category:

- * thin, medium, thick.
- * horizontal, vertical, oblique.
- * straight, broken, sinuous.
- * continuous, interrupted.

The expressiveness of the line is defined by the trajectory, structure, length, thickness, color, value, positioning in the plastic space and the specificity of the instrument with which it was drawn.

Uniquely, the vertical line conveys a sense of upliftment and monumentality. The oblique line sends the viewer to a feeling of movement, instability and agitation. The curved line transmits harmony, movement and dynamism, the broken line is the equivalent of restlessness, hardness and transmits tension. When an artist wants to convey a complex plastic message, he creates a harmonization of lines of different shapes, as a result we have in the same plastic space a curved line next to a broken line, vertical or oblique line. We can notice such an example in Wassily Kandinsky's drawing - "Diagram 17". In this drawing we notice the use of several elements of plastic language, including the broken line, the curved, oblique line. The association of several elements of language within the same plastic composition, as mentioned above, outlines an articulated message, with details, a true semiotic path.

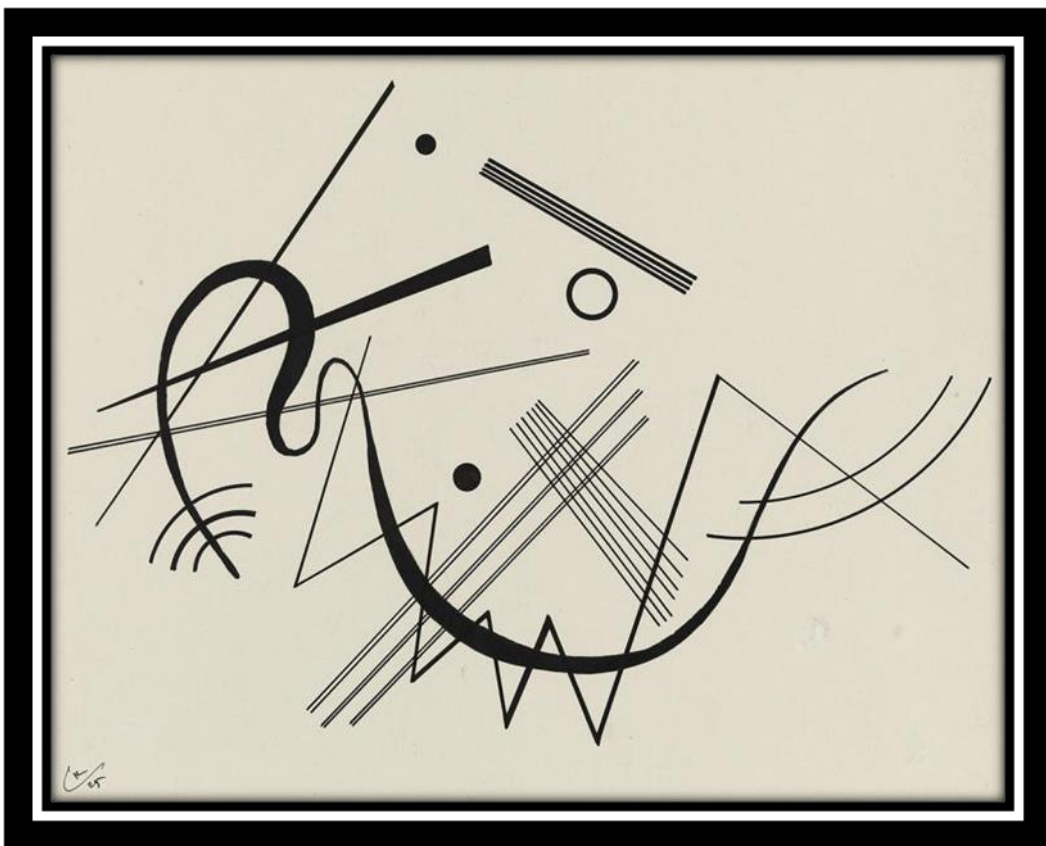


Fig. 2. Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) – “Chart 17”
<https://artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu/object/untitled-drawing-diagram-17>

The elements of artistic language in association form harmonious structures that plastically transmit the artist's message. In Kandinsky's work, the elements of artistic language are structured on a clear geometry, which we can notice in the book *Secret Geometry of Painters* by Charles Bouleau.

Kandinsky knew that only geometry could make the dynamism he possessed accessible to all. Geometry always has its supporters. The purism that today isolates each of the

components of the painting, will train them to close in planes until the shapes will move exclusively on the two dimensions of the canvas.⁴

Line and the frame.

Regardless of how we associate or modulate the line, an important aspect of the line is its ratio to the plastic surface in which it is framed. Thus, when the distance of a line from the edge of the work surface is equal denotes a stationary posture.

The line, depending on the positioning, can transmit the sensation of movement. In the 4 examples below you can see this aspect where the line transmits motion on the top-down and right-left axis.

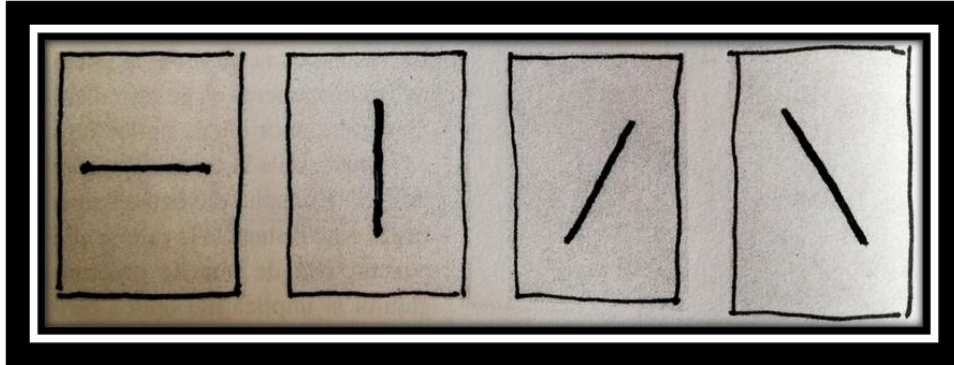


Fig. 3. The line and the equal distance to the frame

Traian Brădean. 2010. Curs de Desen [Drawing Course]. București: Ed. Polirom, p. 24.

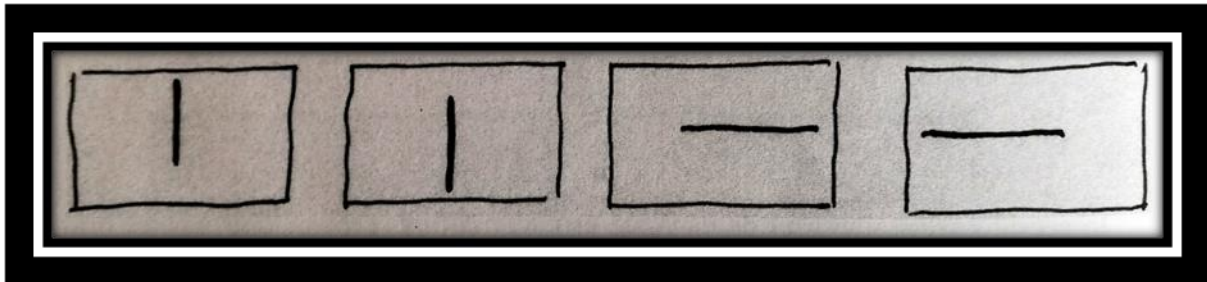


Fig. 4. The line and the equal distance to the frame

Traian Brădean. 2010. Curs de Desen [Drawing Course]. București: Ed. Polirom, p. 24.

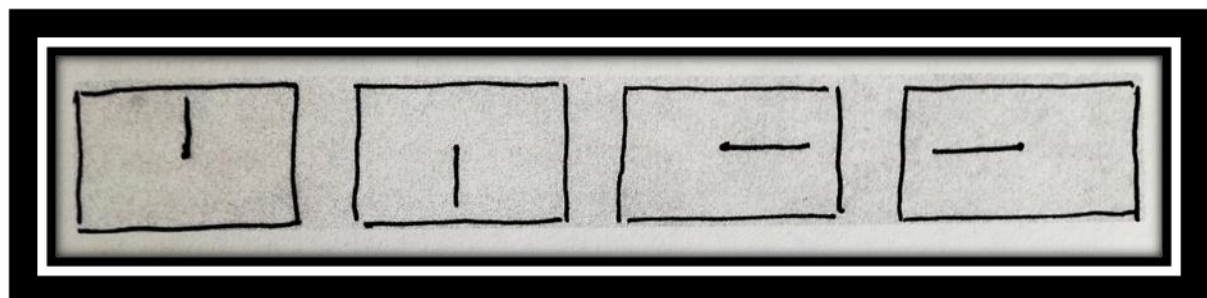


Fig. 5. The line and the equal distance to the frame

Traian Brădean. 2010. Curs de Desen [Drawing Course]. București: Ed. Polirom, p. 25.

⁴ Charles Bouleau. 1979. *Geometria Secretă a Pictorilor [The Secret Geometry of Painters]*. București: Ed. Meridiane, p. 264.

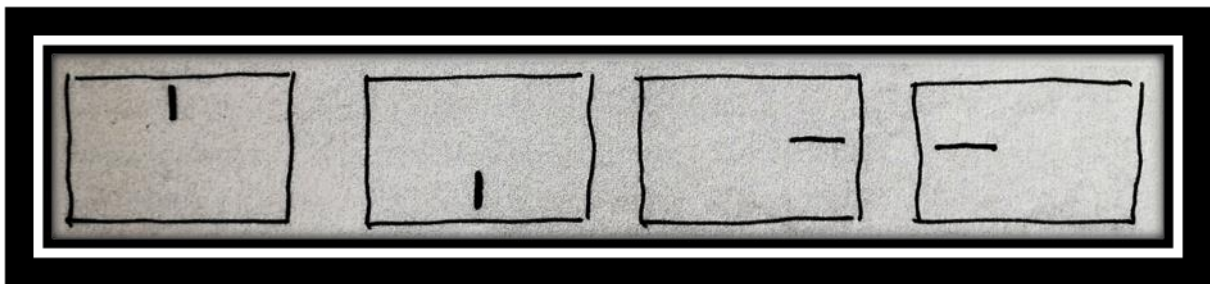


Fig. 6. The line and the sensation of movement

Traian Brădean. 2010. Curs de Desen [Drawing Course]. București: Ed. Polirom, p.25.

The motion sensation that a line transmits within a surface can be attenuated if the starting point of the line begins its path from the center of the page.

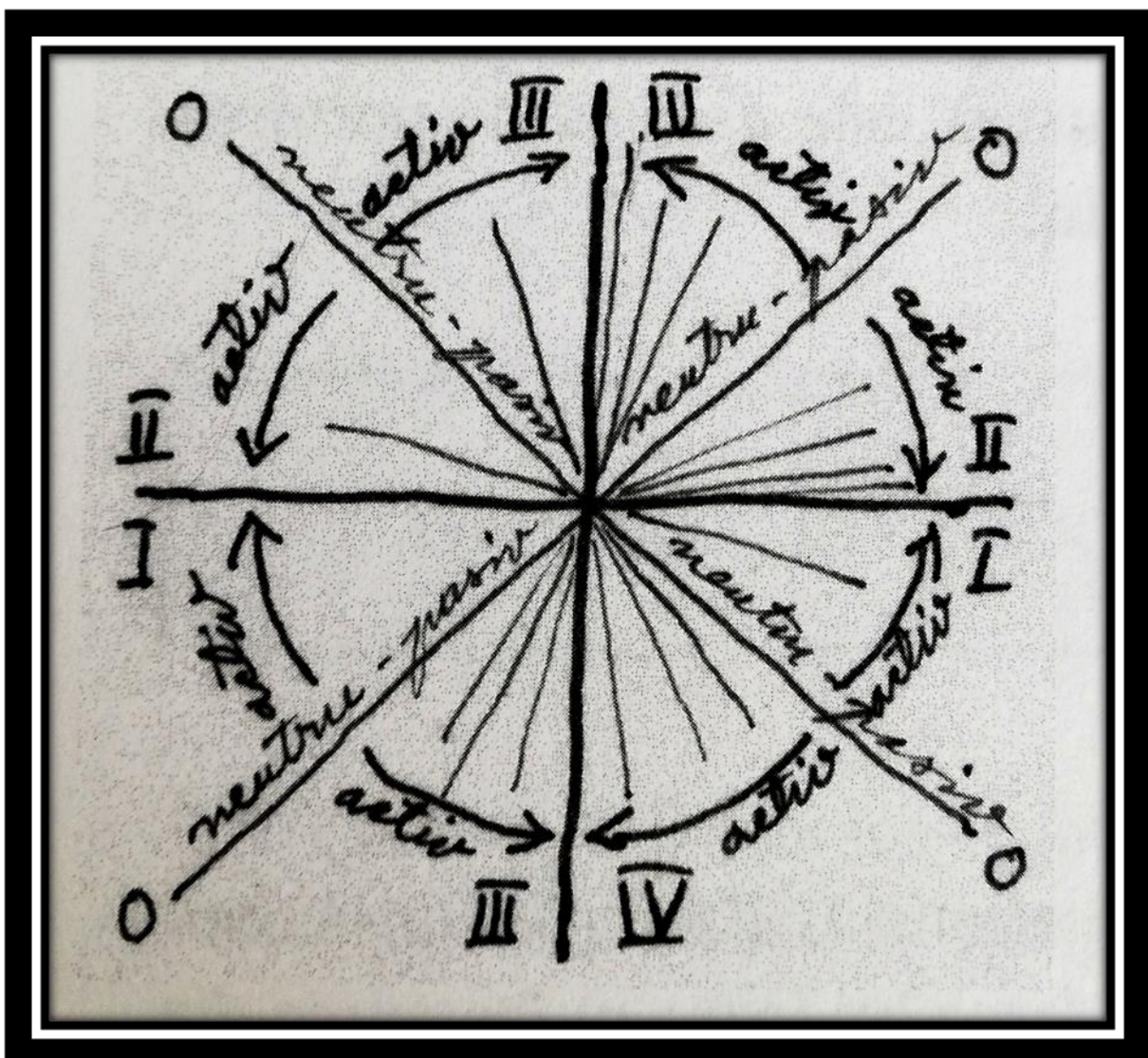


Fig. 7. The line and motion vectors

Traian Brădean. 2010. Curs de Desen. București. Ed. Polirom, p.26.

In the image above we have the starting point relative to the center of the page under the formula of a link that gives directional stability. We can also experience the separation from the center of the work surface and thus we get a feeling of free, non-gravitational movement.

In these last four examples we have the sensation of total movement: ascent-fall and departure-arrival, because the contrast of quantity is great. Paraphrasing Itten, Writing (with us) starts from the left, and the image gives a feeling of complex movement and, as such, to get out of the frame; in this case our characters leave.

In some situations, the point and the line are located on the diagonals of the rectangle. In order to more define the characteristics that the graphic sign imprints on a surface, it is necessary to use another example, through which to use in construction the ratios of all the meanings to define a more complex character.

Above are demonstrated the dynamic meanings that start from static or passive directions and reach vertical or horizontal. In the four sectors the dynamics move up and down, so horizontally, and to the right and left to the vertical: Sector I upwards, right-left; sector II down, right-left - both sectors are horizontal; sector III, up and down, to the right; sector IV, top to bottom, to the left - both sectors are vertical. The active or passive meanings are dosed in the composition when one, sometimes another as dominant, according to the character of the moral or ideational value of the painting.⁵

2.2. The Point

Along with line and shape, the point is an element of major visual language, it is the basis of many works of art as a tool for communicating the artistic message. The point can have a flat or spatial shape. The size of the „point” can be varied depending on the work surface and instruments used. The shape that the point can take can be stain, geometric shape, abstract shape and shape inspired by nature. The difference between the spot and the point being a connection of size in relation to the work surface.

The use of the point in a plastic surface can be done horizontally, vertically and obliquely or in a cadence that denotes order or disorder. Order or disorder can also refer to size, color, intensity, shape and positioning. In addition to the secondary role that the point plays in a composition, where it is part of the value, the point can also be the main character where, on its own, can be a star, a character in the distance, a flower in a field. The dot was used in a secondary way in neo-impressionism and pointillism, here the point, joined by thousands of other dots, builds an overview. This overview is inspired by the existence of the atom, but not only by the construction of the atom as a physical entity, but also by the ways in which atoms combine under the influence of natural laws⁶. In this regard, we can mention Georges Seurat, Paul Signac, Maximilian Luce, Henri Cross, Lucie Cousturier.

The point technique is a decorative one, often used, known mainly due to the copper engravings. When we use only the point in the transmission of the visual message we focus on the approach or distance of the points from the work surface. Thus we obtain value with its help where the drawn subject demands it. When we want to render a light surface, the distance between the points will be large and of course, in the case of dark surfaces, the distance will be small between the points that define a shadow area of an object, character or landscape.

⁵ Traian Brădean. 2010. *Curs de Desen [Drawing Course]*. București: Ed. Polirom, pp. 25-26.

⁶ Cristina Gelan. 2020. "Neo-impressionist aesthetics as a sign of the *monstrative*". In *Proceedings of the Education, Research, Creation Symposium*, vol. 6, no. 1, București: Ed. Muzicală, p. 131.

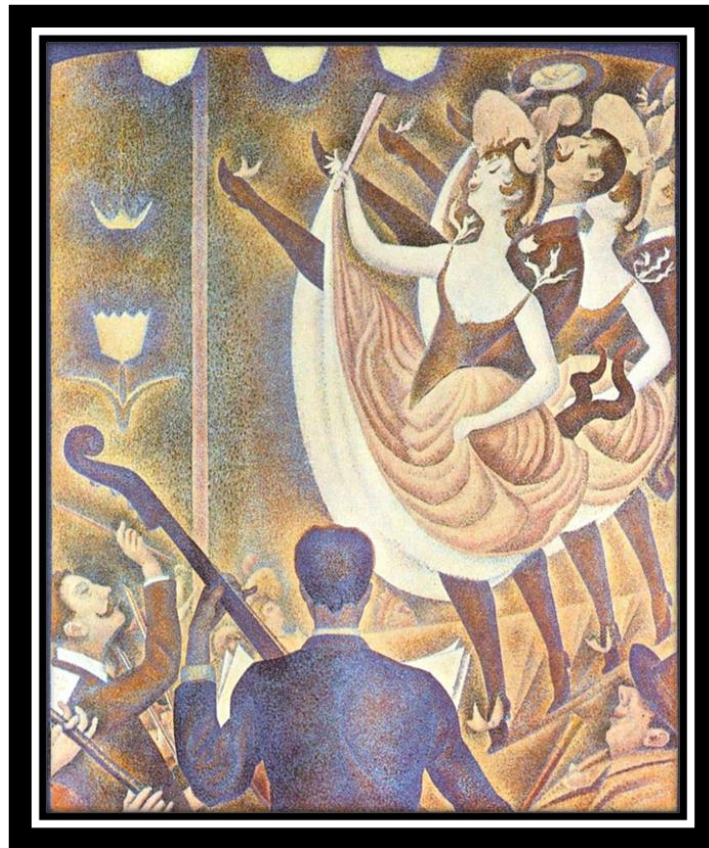


Fig. 8. Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891) – Le Chahut
https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Seurat#/media/Fi%C8%99ier:Georges_Seurat_013.jpg



Fig. 9. Paul Signac (1863 – 1935) – Palace of the Popes of Avignon
https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Signac#/media/Fi%C8%99ier:Paul_Signac_Palais_des_Papes_Avignon.jpg

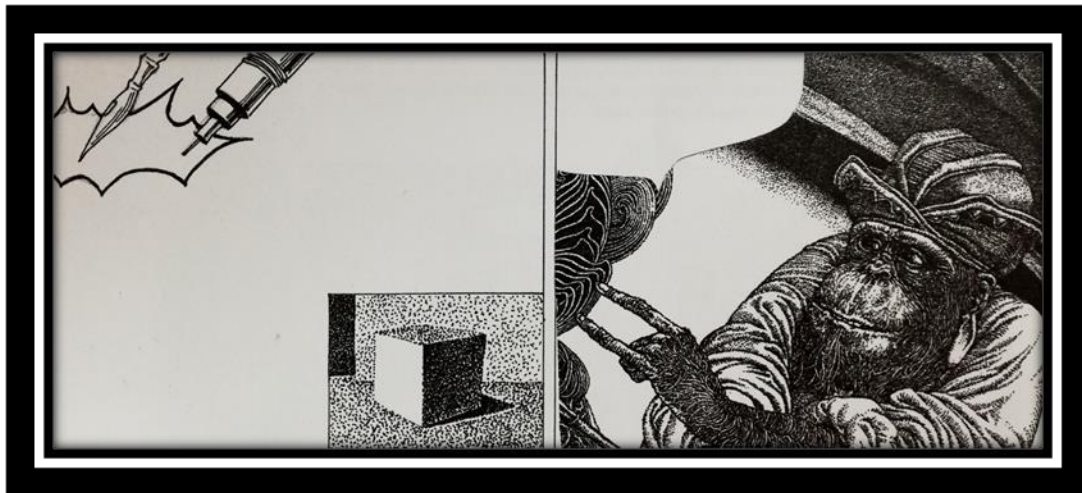


Fig. 10. Tamas Kovacs - The Dot

Andras Szunyoghy.2011.Școala de Desen [Drawing School]. București: Ed. Aquila Logistic, p.27

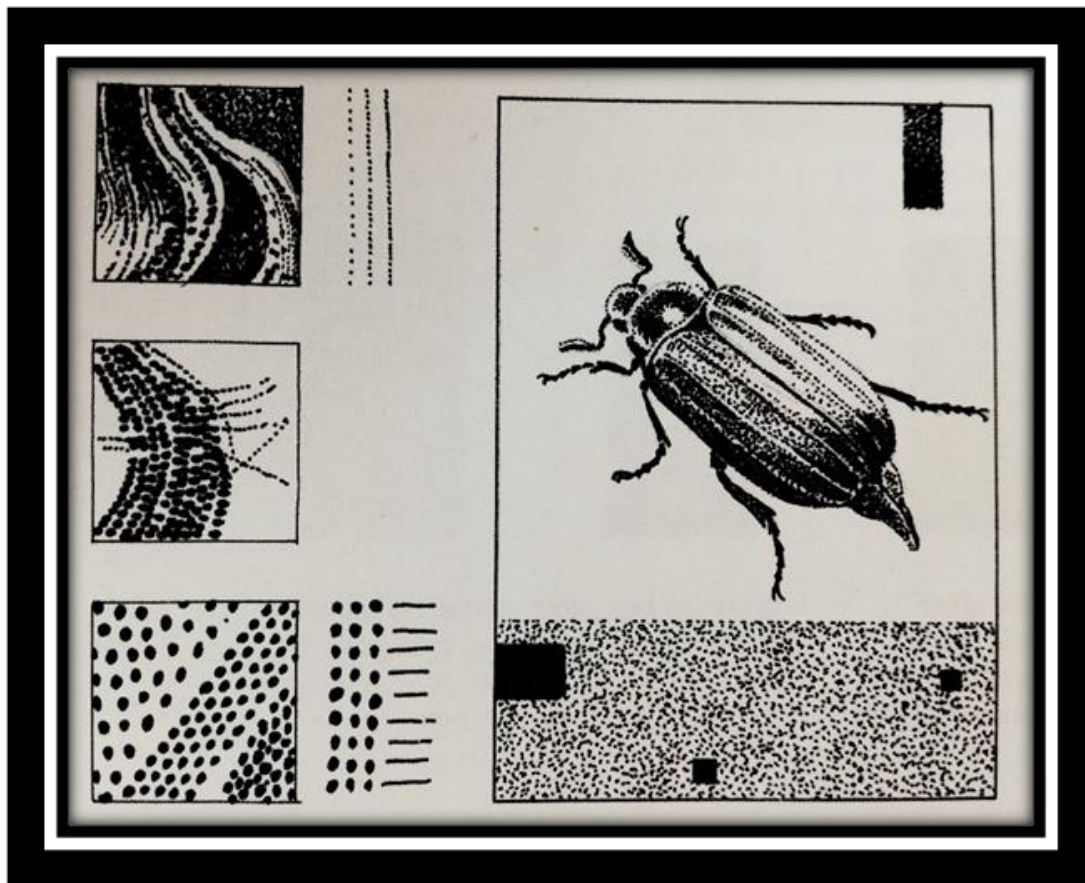


Fig. 11. Tamas Kovacs - The Dot

Andras Szunyoghy.2011.Școala de Desen [Drawing School]. București: Ed. Aquila Logistic, p.27



Fig. 12. Tamas Kovacs - The Dot

Andras Szunyoghy.2011.Școala de Desen [Drawing School]. București: Ed. Aquila Logistic, p.27

2.3. The Shape

The „form” is the third element of plastic language, encountered both in drawing and in color. The difference between shape and point is defined by size, shape, the relationship between the elements of plastic language and the relationship with the surface.

The human being has been inspired by the complexity of nature since its beginnings and has tried to imitate it and thus created new forms, interpretations of the natural that generates the artificial. The artificial or natural form in the eyes of the observer seems to define the object altogether, the false hypothesis. The shape refers only to the geometric outer format of the subject viewed, the interior of the subject being a completely different aspect. Thus we can conclude that the form is the set of visible things but also of the unknowns of an analyzed subject.

In a purely artistic sense, the form is an image elaborated and concretized plastically with language elements and technical means specifically to become functional, to make perceptible the visual idea.

The shape can be:

- * spontaneous or elaborate.
- * flat or spatial.
- * natural or artificial.
- * figurative or abstract.

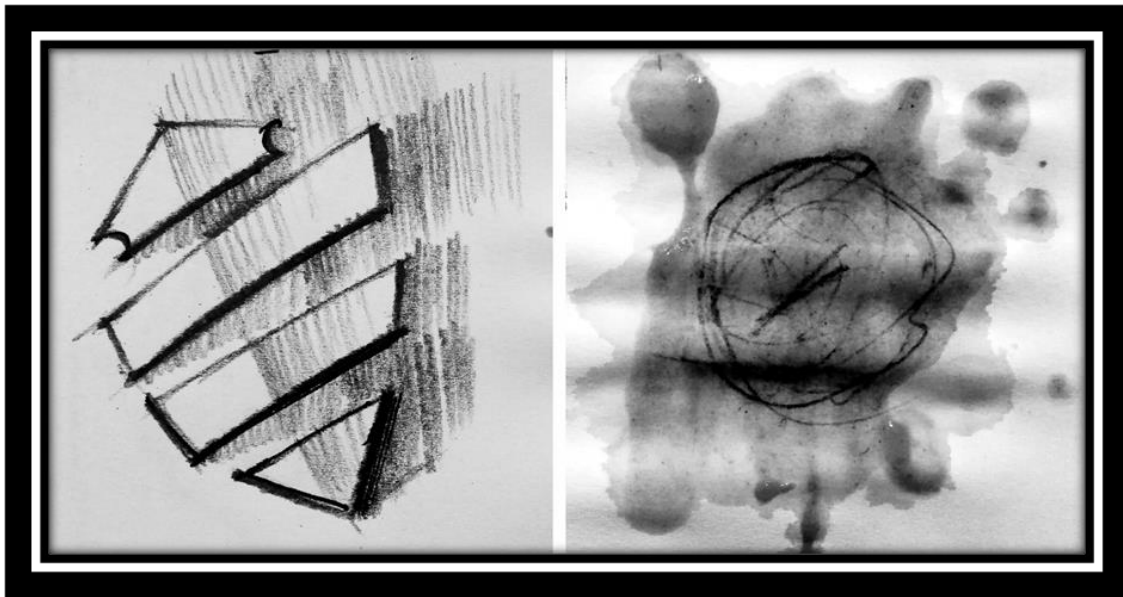


fig. 13. Elaborate shape. Spontaneous shape

The spontaneous form in the plastic arts can be obtained spontaneously or directed by different technical processes (spraying, pressing, blowing, etc.) having an aspect, most of the times, nonfigurative.

The developed shape is obtained on the basis of already existing directions. The elaborated form is the result of conscious action and is figurative in most cases.

The flat shape refers to a contour that does not inspire volumetry or perspective over time, the spatial shape is a three-dimensional, volumetric object that has a construction and vanishing point.

The natural shape is the representation without any trace of interpretation of the natural element while the artificial form is passed through the filter of the imagination, in its structure reminiscing the interventions of the artist who changes its basic shape.

The figurative shape is the clear, recognizable representation of the object proposed to be drawn, at the opposite we have the abstract form that gives the viewer the chance to have a starting point in the creative process of the imagination.

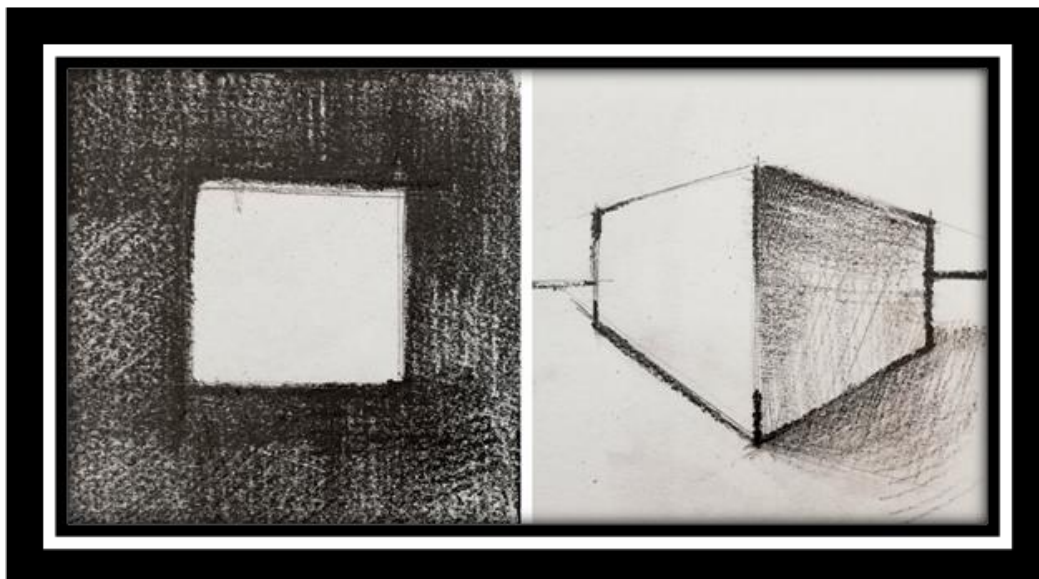


Fig. 14. Flat shape. Spatial shape



Fig. 15. Abstract shape. Figurative shape
2018. Ghid Complet de Desen pentru Începători [Complete Drawing Guide for Beginners].
București: Ed. Litera, p. 61



Fig. 16. Pablo Picasso (1881 – 1973) – Guernica
<https://www.rfi.ro/cultura-94301-picasso-pietate-teroare-drumul-spre-guernica>

In the artwork of great artists, we find clear variants of the form that respect this classification, but we also notice works of art that combine several hypostases of the form. Let's follow as an example where the characters are on the border between figurative and abstract through geometries that potentiate the visual idea of the artwork. This geometric simplification of the characters is in harmony with the whole composition and is structured on diagonal and geometry. We notice here the intelligent combination of several types of lines (curved, broken, diagonal) and geometric spots that repeatedly outline the drama of the subject approached plastically.

The elements of artistic language, in the art of drawing, sometimes come as an armor that covers aspects of spatiality and perspective. Zamfir Dumitrescu defines perspective in association with artistic language. Perspective is a science applied in the art of drawing, based on the physiology of human vision, consisting of a set of laws and methods based on geometry:

three-dimensional representation on a flat surface called a picture of the elements that make up our optical universe.⁷

3. Conclusion

Art is the combination of thought, feeling and passion in a single image or sculpture - the creation of a visual language. And drawing occupies a basic position in this language.⁸

Following this idea, we can easily notice the most important role that drawing has in highlighting and structuring the elements of fine arts language.

In the decorative and fine arts we meet the use of language elements in associated or individual form. In the most frequent cases, the way of working with the visual language elements is a mixed one, having both the line, the point and the shape within the same visual surface. Following the history of the arts, we notice how these three elements are used harmoniously as a secret language, communicating the artistic message to the connoisseurs.

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⁷ Zamfir Dumitrescu. 2002. *Ars Perspectivae [The art of perspective]*. București: Ed. Nemira, p. 4.

⁸ Andras Szunyoghy. 2011. *Școala de Desen [Drawing School]*. București: Ed. Aquila Logistic, p. 1.