

Dominance and Repetition

A Certain Path to Set Relatedness and Unity

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So often, us painters become enamored with the concept of "picture." To a painter, the worst place to go, in my opinion, is to painting a 'picture' instead of creating a fine piece of art.

The danger here is that I may be asked to answer the question, "What is art?" Not that it could ever be fully defined, there is indeed a difference between craft and art. The line dividing the two can be blurry or even indistinct in some cases.

There is a merging of ideas and skills in the making of fine art. Yes, there are, definitely, 'craft' skills involved in painting. For example, color mixing is a learned skill and can be fairly easily taught. It is, however, the sense of how far or how to limit intensity of color which divides crafter from artist. Establishing harmonies in order to set a mood in a painting also separates craft from art. In craft, it is mostly about carrying out a pattern or copying an image directly. There is courage involved when the artist decides to move away from the model or pattern and begin creating from his or her own instincts.

It is these instincts that bring about artistic growth and compounding of experience such that the hand of the artist appears within the image. It can be in the intermingling of color, or the use of specific strokes . . . it can even extend

to how the painter loads the brush to subtly affect the image or the painting. As the artist moves away from craft and more into the world of creating, he or she will learn to rely on a few steadfast principles that will sustain the virtue and the value of his or her work. One of those principles is the idea of dominance.

Dominance is the design principle which sets up and establishes unity in an artwork. Loosely speaking, dominance is defined as some aspect of an artwork that covers the most space. Not to be confused with contrast, which attracts attention, dominance has to do with how frequently a single aspect appears. There can be dominance of any or of all of the seven elements of design . . . Line, Size, Shape, Direction, Color, Value and Texture. If some derivation of the color red were to appear in a painting in over 50% of the space, one would say there is a red dominance. The color might stretch from the cool extremes to the warm and might also appear in varying degrees of saturation or intensity. The overall impression would be of a dominating presence of red in varying degrees. Jackson Pollack used a dominance of line in many varying ways to establish a dominant texture. Hopper used a dominance of hard edges to establish a feeling of emptiness or loneliness. The cubists used geometric shape dominance to hold their pieces together, while the variation among the

shapes made for interest and harmony. Andrew Wyeth used a dominance of intensity, or lack of saturation, to affect a melancholy mood.

Dominance can be achieved very simply through the use of the idea of repetition. Repeating or echoing an element over and over through a painting, with variation, helps the different spaces within a painting to relate to one another. That is to say, by virtue of the echo of a color, or line, or texture, or value or even shape, a sense of relatedness emerges.

While working hard to replicate the feeling of a photograph, it is of utmost importance to repeat colors, textures, values etc so that there is a clear sense of the parts all belonging to the same family. In other words, it is not the subject that makes the painting work, but the sum of its parts forming a unified whole. That unity is what makes paintings (or literature or poetry or theatre sets . . . all art!) work. It is the *relationship* of the parts that creates the art, not the presence of some special subject.

While painting your next piece, do you consciously decide to repeat any of the elements of design just for the sake of creating an elemental dominance? Is your thinking stuck on the “details” of the subject to make it appear more “real,” or are you more concerned with the over all aspects of relatedness of *all the parts of the artwork?*

Seek repetitions to create dominance and, therefore, unity!



Notice the warm tones and hues in this painting “*Slip Strip Abstract.*” The dominance of warm reddish color cause MOST of the parts relate. Those that are more cool, are ‘sub dominant’ and therefore offer contrast, which attracts the eye. Also, notice that the shapes are all flat and are dominantly geometric. Additionally, the edges (line) are dominantly sharp. All these seemingly unimportant aspects work together to set up relationships throughout the piece and thus, unity.