

ART AND CULTURE

Professor: Elisabeth Condon, MFA

Welcome to this unit, Fundamentals, The Language of Art. I'm Elisabeth Condon, Associate Professor of Painting and Drawing at the University of South Florida. Fundamentals, The Language of Art really makes explicit that art is a visual language. It is analogous to learning a new language like French or learning how to play a game like tennis, where there's a whole new set of rules and there's a whole new arena of concerns to know. And that's what's so important about this unit that you start to learn the vocabulary in order to put together a working knowledge of how to look at a painting or how to look at art.

There's two different modes of perception. The first is pure perception where you would look at a yellow oblong with black squares and marvel at the shapes and proportions and relationship to each other. Then there's the level of perception that's recognition where you would identify the same yellow oblong with the black squares as a bus. And recognition serves to help it so that when we're staring at the yellow oblong with black windows we're not in the way of the bus. Recognition helps us get out of the way. But perception helps to see it abstractly and that's a component of the fundamental language of art.

So in my own work, I'd like to talk about the painting Leap which is 65 inches high by about 54 inches wide. I begin my paintings with pours of paint, so that I'm not really sure when I start the painting how it's going to end up. And in this way, I relate the process of painting to travel where you might think you have tickets to Hawaii, but if there's a canceled flight or a weather condition, you're not really sure how you're going to get there or how it's going to end up. And that's the way it feels to pour out paint at the beginning and then to be able to build the painting from the pour.

So again, in the painting Leap, you can see the pour that sets out a whole shape. And then, I start moving into the pour with the opaque rocks and the transparent trees. Another compositional principle that goes into visual art is unity and variety. So with the repetition of shapes, for example, the linear trees with the little rounded leaves, and then the opaque rocks, once again, you get a sense of both different forms but then the repetition of those forms enough where the eye starts to establish a pattern, but the pattern doesn't get too boring.

In the upper part of the painting, things are more hand drawn. One of the elements of visual art is line. So the line in the trees that is drawn is very light and automated almost as if it's projected. Well, it is projected. And this gives you the feeling of a mechanized line. When you learn these words, and you see the painting, and you see how the words apply to the painting, you start to develop a language in order to spend time before a painting and to start to identify.

It's a language that's ingested with individual consciousness, and it's applied through the activity of painting. And the way that the language is used by you, who are learning it, is that your chance to spend time and start to use it in order to correspond with the painting and connect to it. And that will take you deeper into the world of painting and into the world of art in all dimensions.