

Vocabulary

unity

Unity

Unity is oneness. It brings order to the world. Without it, the world would be chaotic.

Countries made up of smaller parts are political unities: the United States is such a country. Its 50 states are joined by a single federal government. As a unit, the United States is a world power far stronger than the combined power of the separate states (**Figure 11.13**).

A tree is an example of unity in nature. It is composed of roots, trunk, bark, branches, twigs, and leaves. Each part has a purpose that contributes to the living, growing tree. An electric lamp is a manufactured unit composed of a base, electric wire, sockets, bulbs, shades, and so on. The parts of the lamp work together as a unified whole to provide light. If any part does not work, the unity of the lamp is impaired.

Creating Visual Unity

In art, **unity** is *the quality of wholeness or oneness that is achieved through the effective use of the elements and principles of art*. Unity is like an invisible glue. It joins all the separate parts so that they look as if they belong together.

Unity is difficult to understand at first because it is not easily defined. It is a quality that you feel as you view a work of art (**Figure 11.14**). As you study an artwork, you may think that you would not change one element or object. You are receiving an impression that the work is a unified whole.

► **FIGURE 11.13** Johns combines the loose brushwork of Abstract Expressionism with the commonplace objects of American Realism. His map of the United States could be pulled apart by the wild action painting, but it is unified by the harmonious, limited color scheme of a primary triad.

Jasper Johns. *Map*. 1961. Oil on canvas. 198.2 × 312.7 cm (78 × 123 1/8"). Collection, Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull. © Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.





◀ **FIGURE 11.14** The title of this work does not tell the viewer that the three children and two adults are related, but the artist reveals this in his use of line, form, color, and unity. The clothing and skin of all five figures are divided into similar, unusual free-form shapes. The children's bodies fit within the outlines of the adults. The woman's large, clapping hands are the focal point of the work. How do her hands add to the sense of unity?

Robert Gwathmey. *Children Dancing*. c. 1948. Oil on canvas. 81.2 × 101.6 cm (32 × 40"). The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio. © Estate of Robert Gwathmey/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Unity helps you concentrate on a visual image. You cannot realize how important this is until you study a work that lacks unity. Looking at a work that lacks unity is like trying to carry on a serious discussion while your little sister is practicing the violin, your brother is listening to the stereo, and your mother is running the vacuum cleaner. It would be difficult to concentrate on your conversation with all these distractions. It is the same with a work of art that lacks unity. You can't concentrate on the work as a whole, because all the parts demand separate attention.

To create unity, an artist adjusts the parts of a work so they relate to each other and to the whole work. A potter plans decorations for ceramic ware to complement the shape, size, and purpose of the work. Notice the birdlike decoration in the center of the vase in **Figure 11.15**. This creature, the phoenix, was often used to symbolize rebirth in Buddhism. It is assumed that the vase was one of a set of altar vases in a Buddhist temple. Clothing designers



▲ **FIGURE 11.15** The designs for this vase were first outlined with a trail of raised slip, filled in with glaze, and then fired. Overglaze enamels were added, and a second, lower temperature firing was done. What art elements did the artist use to create unity?

China, Shanxi or Henan Province. *Jar*. Late fifteenth century, Ming Period. Stoneware with trailed slip under glaze and overglaze enamels. Height 35.2 cm (13⁷/₈"), diameter 30.2 cm (11⁷/₈"). Asia Society, New York; Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection.

► **FIGURE 11.16** The Kuba men cut thin strips from raffia palm leaves and wove the basic cloth. Women embroidered the black plush designs onto the cloth. The finished cloth is as flexible and soft as silk. Sometimes, two or more finished cloths are sewn together to make a ceremonial skirt.

Kuba Group, Western Kasai Province, Congo. *Ceremonial Robe*. 1950–75. Cut pile and linear embroidery on plain-weave raffia palm. 58.4 × 64.8 cm (23 × 25½"). Museum of International Folk Art, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico.



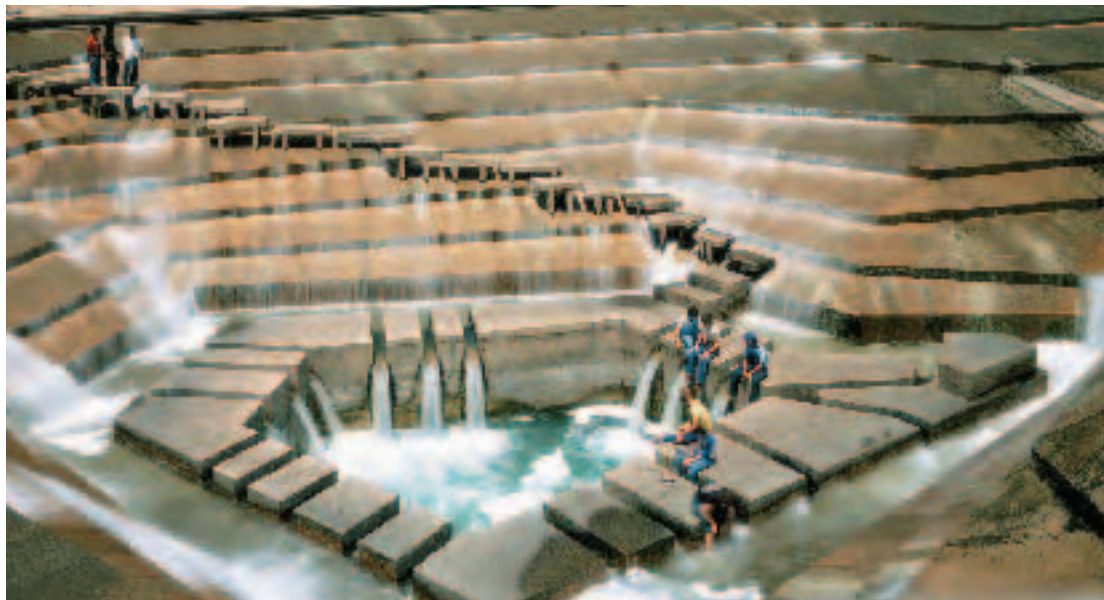
choose fabrics that complement the design and purpose of each outfit. Artists adjust the elements in a work to each other. A “busy” work with a variety of shapes and textures can be unified with a limited color scheme, for example (**Figure 11.16**).

Simplicity

Another way to create unity is through *simplicity*. Simplicity is not easy

to achieve. An artist must plan carefully to create a good, simple design. This is done by limiting the number of variations of an element. The fewer variations the artist uses, the more unified the design will seem (**Figure 11.17**).

A painting in which the entire surface is covered with a single, even layer of one hue will appear strongly unified. A sculpture of a single unit expresses a simple unity (**Figure 11.18**).



▲ **FIGURE 11.17** Johnson used simplification by limiting the materials for his *Water Garden* to concrete and water. He also limited the forms of the structure to geometric forms.

Philip Johnson. *Water Garden*. 1976. 17,000 cubic yards of concrete, 19,000 gallons of water. Fort Worth, Texas (downtown).



MEET THE ARTIST

ALLAN HOUSER



Native American,
1914–1994

Allan Houser created contemporary Apache sculpture. As a child, he listened to his father's stories about the adventures of Chief Geronimo. This gave him a deep attachment to his ancestral background, an attachment that is shown in his artwork. Houser studied at the Indian School in Sante Fe, New Mexico, and then remained in Sante Fe, where he worked as a freelance artist. During World War II, he traveled to California, where he became interested in the media of sculpture. He created works in a variety of styles and mastered bronze, metal, and stone sculpture. Houser's designs are modern, yet firmly rooted in the special tradition of his Native American forefathers. He drew inspiration from both past and present, but like all successful artists, his sculpture transcends race and language. The sculpture *Reverie* (**Figure 11.18**) shows a distinct Native American influence, but it can be appreciated by anyone, regardless of his or her background.

► **FIGURE 11.18** Notice how the artist has used simple lines and few details to create this artwork. The simplicity serves to emphasize the faces of the mother and child, which become focal points. The unity of the design shows the connection between mother and child. What feeling does this piece evoke?

Allan Houser. *Reverie*. 1981. Bronze, edition of 10. 63.5 × 58.4 × 33 cm (25 × 23 × 13"). Collection of the Duke and Duchess of Bedford. The Glen Green Galleries, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Copyright Allan Houser Inc.



Repetition

The repetition of objects and elements can be an effective way to unify a work of art. Louise Nevelson's assemblages are good examples. She collects objects that are not alike. This presents a problem of unity, which she solves in one or more ways. Often, she places the objects

in a series of boxlike containers (**Figure 11.19**). The boxes help to unify the work. She sometimes paints the entire structure the same color. Sometimes she repeats both container shape and color to unify her assemblages.

Most architects are concerned with unity. Their goal is to design structures



▲ **FIGURE 11.19** The artist has collected different found objects and assembled them together. What has the artist done to unify this work and make the objects look like they belong together? Can you identify any of the found objects?

Louise Nevelson. *Dawn*. 1962. Wood painted gold. 323 × 240 × 19 cm (127 × 94½ × 7½"). The Pace Gallery, New York, New York. © 2003 Estate of Louise Nevelson/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



that blend with the surroundings (**Figure 11.20**). They may use materials that repeat the colors and textures found in the structure's environment. They may also use materials that reflect the surroundings. For instance, mirrored outside walls have been used on skyscrapers. The mirrors reflect the shapes and colors of the clouds and sky, and the buildings seem to blend with their surroundings and the atmosphere.

Proximity

Proximity, or closeness, is another way of unifying very different shapes in a work (**Figure 11.21**). This is achieved by limiting the negative space between the shapes. Clustering the shapes in this way suggests unity and coherence. The sense of unity can be made even stronger if the cluster of unlike items is surrounded by an area of negative space.



▲ **FIGURE 11.20** Wright was a genius who dared to be different. In 1936 he was asked to design a house close to this waterfall. Instead, he placed the house right over the falls. Concrete terraces hang suspended over the running water. The stones that make up the walls come from the building site, which ties the house more closely to its surroundings.

Frank Lloyd Wright. *Fallingwater House*. Bear Run, Pennsylvania. 1936. Photography by Sandak, Inc., Stamford, Connecticut. © 2003 Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



◀ **FIGURE 11.21** The artist has used proximity by grouping the children close together. What do the children appear to be doing? What kind of meeting are they having?

Marie Bashkirtseff. *A Meeting*. 1884. Oil on canvas. 190.5 × 172.2 cm (75 × 67³/₄”). Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France. Art Resource, New York, New York.

Demonstrating Effective Use of Art Media in Design. Suppose you have been hired to create a window display for a gift shop that sells many unrelated objects. From magazines, cut out photographs of 15 unrelated objects that represent the merchandise to be displayed. Use as many unifying techniques as you can to create the display. Using pencil and then darkening with a black, felt-tip marker, draw the window and the design for the display. Glue the cutouts where the objects would be placed in the design.

Computer Option. Arrange three or four different objects close together on a table. Use the Pencil or small Brush tool to draw the outline of all the objects using a continuous line. Another option is to draw the objects as individual shapes but extend the lines into the background. Select, copy, and repeat a few of the shapes but vary their sizes. Arrange the shapes to emphasize a focal point. Add a simple background. Now, choose and apply a limited color scheme with no more than four or five colors. Title, save, and print your work.

How Artists Use Variety, Emphasis, and Harmony to Enhance Unity

As you know, artists use variety, emphasis, and harmony to make their works more interesting and appealing. If carried to extremes, however, these principles can destroy the unity of a visual work. This means that artists must be careful to balance contrasting qualities of

variety and emphasis with harmonizing and unifying techniques to create a unified work.

Jane Wilson has successfully balanced the harmonizing and varying devices in *Tempest* (**Figure 11.22**). The entire work is composed of waves of color. Although a contrasting color scheme of cool and warm colors is used, the work is unified by simple wavelike forms. The bright yellow streaks of sunlight are the focal point.

► **FIGURE 11.22** Wilson has created a unified composition, using several techniques. What has she simplified, and what has she repeated?

Jane Wilson. *Tempest*. 1993. Oil on linen. 177.8 × 177.8 cm (70 × 70"). Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York.





▲ **FIGURE 11.23** Why do you think Chryssa used the letter A as a form to contain all her active lines, shapes, and forms?

Chryssa. *The Gates to Times Square*. 1966. Welded stainless steel, neon, and Plexiglas. 3.04 × 3.04 × 3.04 m (10 × 10 × 10'). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert List, 1972.

Look closely at the work in **Figure 11.23**. The artist, Chryssa, left her home in Greece when she was 20 to study art. She arrived in New York City in the 1950s and was inspired by the materials of modern technology—especially the flashing neon signs in Times Square.

Within the letter A form in Figure 11.23, Chryssa has placed different kinds of shapes transformed from letters of the alphabet. Some are neon outlines. Others are flat metal. Everything is colored with blue light except the two Plexiglas rectangular forms near the top. They contain wiggly curved forms that are a very pale, low-intensity orange.

What do you think the different parts represent? Which art principles has she balanced to give this work unity?



Check Your Understanding

1. Define *unity*.
2. What is simplicity?
3. How is proximity used to create unity?
4. Compare and contrast the use of unity in Figure 11.14 on page 297 and Figure 11.19 on page 300. What art elements were used to create unity?

