▶ **FIGURE 5.1** Without even looking at the title, you can identify this familiar object because of the shapes used. In what way is this work "larger than life"? If you are not sure of the answer, review the credit line below. Compare and contrast this work to another sculpture by the same artist on page 261. Can you draw any conclusions about the theme of his work from these two pieces?

Claes Oldenburg. *Shoestring Potatoes Spilling from a Bag.* 1966. Canvas, kapok, glue, and acrylic. 274.3 × 116.8 × 106.7 cm (108 × 46 × 42″). Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Gift of T. B. Walker Foundation, 1966.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5

Shape, Form, and Space

You live in a world filled with objects. Each has a shape; some have form—or *depth*—and all inhabit space. As art elements, shape, form, and space are closely related to one another. Learning to "read" the meaning of these elements as well as how to use them effectively in artworks is very important as an artist.

In this chapter, you will:

- Compare and contrast the use of form and space in artworks.
- Create two- and three-dimensional works of art using direct observation and imagination.
- Interpret artistic decisions about using shapes, forms, and space in personal artworks.

Focus on Art History Up through the early twentieth century, the media of sculpting were fairly limited. Sculptors could choose from hard materials (marble, bronze) or softer ones (wood). Then a revolution in art occurred. "Anything goes" became the battle cry of experimental artists. One such artist is Swedish-born American sculptor Claes Oldenburg (b.1929). Oldenburg is a member of the Pop Art school. His art, like that of other Pop Artists, used everyday objects from American culture as a theme. Like **Figure 5.1,** however, the works are so large that the viewer can't help but notice them.

Compare and Contrast. Look at Figure 2.1 on page 24. This work shares the theme of contemporary Pop Art. Like Figure 5.1, this work uses unconventional materials. In what way does it go even further in breaking the traditional "rules" of three-dimensional art?

Vocabulary

shape
geometric shapes
free-form shapes
forms

Shapes and Forms

All objects are either shapes or forms. Rocks, puddles, flowers, shirts, houses, chairs, and paintings are all shapes and forms. The words *shape* and *form* are often used interchangeably in everyday language, but in the language of art, they have very different meanings.

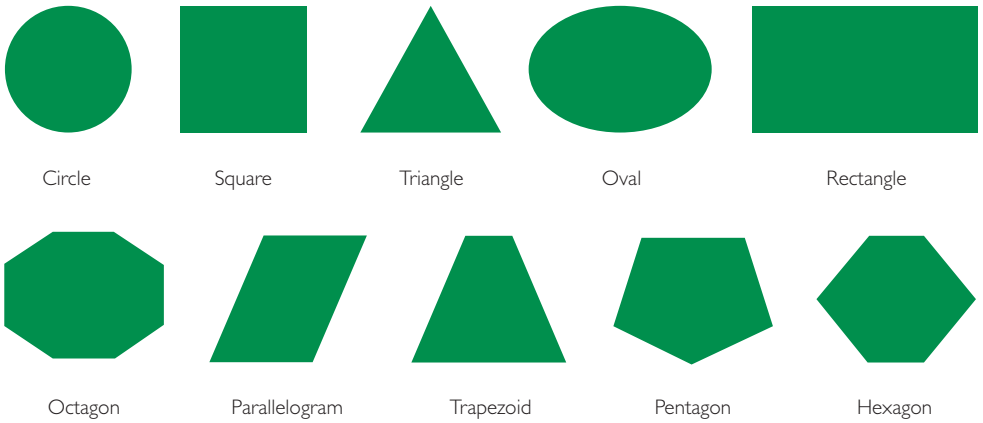
Shape

A **shape** is *a two-dimensional area that is defined in some way.* A shape may have an outline or a boundary around it, or you may recognize it by its area. For instance, if you draw the outline of a square on a sheet of paper, you have created a shape. You could also create the same shape without an outline by painting the area of the square red.

You see many two-dimensional shapes every day. They are found in most designs, which in turn can be seen on many flat surfaces. Look for shapes on such things as floor coverings, fabrics, and wallpapers. Floors and walls are two-dimensional shapes; so are tabletops, book pages, posters, and billboards. The images you create with your computer and the images in the handheld and computer games you play may have the illusion of depth, but they are also two-dimensional shapes.

Geometric Shapes

All shapes can be classified as either *geometric* or *free-form*. **Geometric shapes** are *precise shapes that can be described using mathematical formulas* **(Figure 5.2).** The basic geometric shapes are the circle, the square, and the triangle. All other geometric shapes are either variations or combinations of these basic shapes. Some of the variations include the oval, rectangle, parallelogram, trapezoid, pentagon, pentagram, hexagon, and octagon.



▲ **FIGURE 5.2** Geometric shapes.

Geometric shapes are used for decoration, uniformity, and organization. Notice the decorative quality of the geometric shapes in the artwork shown in **Figure 5.3.** How many different simple and complex geometric shapes can you find in Biggers' painting?

Road signs are examples of uniformity. The same kind of sign must always have the same shape. Do you know the shape of a stop sign? Which shape is used for "Yield"? Which shape is used for TV screens? Why do you think ceiling tiles and window panes have geometric shapes?

Free-Form Shapes

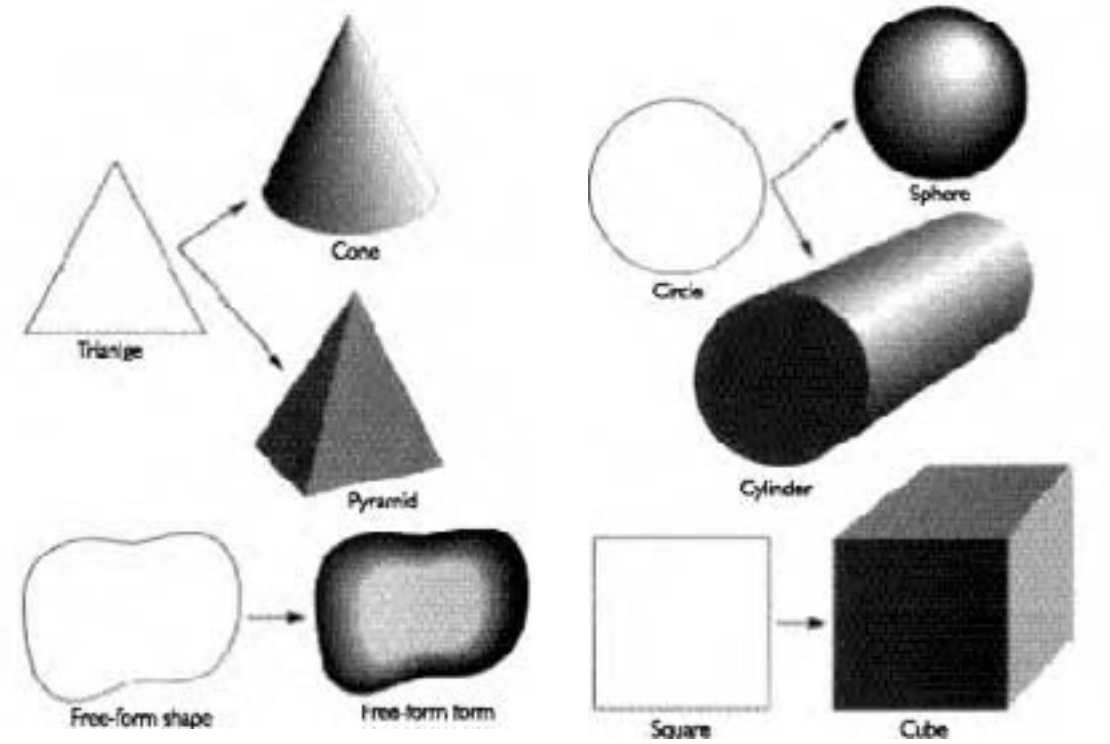
Free-form shapes are *irregular and uneven shapes.* Their outlines may be curved, angular, or a combination of both. They often occur in nature. Another word that may be used to describe free-form shapes is *organic.* Organic is used when we talk about the shapes that are silhouettes of living things such as animals, people, or trees. Look at the difference between the decorative patterns of geometric shapes in Figure 5.3 and the free-form, organic shapes painted on the vases in **Figure 5.4.** Which looks more organized?

▲ **FIGURE 5.3** Biggers uses the women in this work to represent the African civilizations of Egypt, Benin, and Dogon. The crowns are symbols of these civilizations. The cloth on their laps represents the geometry that has brought order to each culture.

John Biggers. *Starry Crown.* 1987. Acrylic, mixed media on Masonite. 155 × 124.5 cm (61 × 49″). Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas. Museum League Purchase Fund.

◀ **FIGURE 5.4** Notice the free-form, organic qualities of the dragons and clouds that were painted on this matching pair of vases. Although the forms of the vases are perfectly matched, the paintings are not exactly alike. Look closely to find the differences between the two dragons.

Chinese, *Pair of Vases.* 1426–1435. Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration. 55.2 × 29.2 cm (21¾ × 11½″). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: Nelson Trust, 40-45/1,2.



▲ **FIGURE 5.5** What kind of relationship do you see between the two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional forms?

Activity Geometric and Free-Form Shapes

Demonstrating Effective Use of Art Media in Design. Using the printed areas of a newspaper, make two cut-paper designs. Make one design by measuring and cutting precise geometric shapes. Make the second design by tearing free-form shapes. Arrange the shapes and glue them on a sheet of black construction paper. Use a white crayon to print the words *free-form* and *geometric* on the appropriate design. Try to make the letters for *geometric* look geometric, and the letters for *free-form* look free-form.

Computer Option. Use the Shape or Straight Line tools to draw four different geometric shapes. Do not overlap the shapes and space them apart so they can easily be selected and arranged later. Choose a color scheme and make each shape a solid color. Pick the Selection tool and then the Copy and Paste menu to repeat each of the shapes several times on the page. When the page is nearly full, choose a Brush or Pencil tool to draw free-form shapes in between the geometric shapes. Select the Bucket tool to fill these shapes with pattern.

Forms

Although the words *shape* and *form* are often used interchangeably in everyday language, they have different meanings in the language of art. **Forms** are *objects having three dimensions*. Like shapes, they have both length and width, but forms also have depth. *You* are a three-dimensional form; so is a tree or a table.

Two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional forms are related **(Figure 5.5).** The end of a cylinder is a circle. One side of a cube is a square. A triangle can "grow" into a cone or a pyramid.

Like shapes, forms may be either geometric **(Figure 5.6)** or free-form **(Figure 5.7** on page 102**)**. Geometric forms are used in construction, for organization, and as parts in machines. Look around you. What forms were used to build your school, your church, your home? Look under the hood of a car. What forms were used to build the motor? Did you know that common table

▲ **FIGURE 5.6** The inspiration for this work came from Smith's studies of geometric crystalline forms in the early 1960s. The title, a pun on the insect it resembles, is based on the mythical beast of the same name in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. This is one of Smith's most complex sculptures. It took him eight years to see it to completion. The six separately constructed, geometric steel units were assembled on the museum's lawn in 1972.

Tony Smith, *Gracehopper*. 1971. Welded steel and paint. Height: 7 m (23′). The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. Founders Society Purchase with other funds.

▲ **FIGURE 5.7** An Inuit artist carved this free-form, organic sculpture of a polar bear from memories of personal experiences observing and hunting polar bears. Compare and contrast the forms of this sculpture from Inuit culture to the forms of Tony Smith's minimalist sculpture in Figure 5.6.

Ashevak Adla. *Walking Bear*. Serpentine stone. 14 × 34.3 × 13.3 (5½ × 13½ × 5¼″). Courtesy of Canadeau Gallery, Quebec, Canada.

salt is made of a series of interlocking cubes? You can see these cubes when you look at salt through a microscope.

Free-form forms are irregular and uneven three-dimensional objects such as stones, puddles, and clouds. Your own body and the bodies of animals and plants are free-form forms.

Check Your Understanding

1. List three geometric shapes.
2. What is another word for *free-form* shapes?
3. Compare and contrast the use of form in the artworks in this lesson.

Activity Creating Forms

Applying Your Skills. Make a flat sheet of construction paper into a three-dimensional paper sculpture by using cutting and scoring techniques. (See Technique Tip 20 on page 435 in the Handbook.) Give your sculpture a minimum of five different surfaces. Do not cut the paper into separate pieces. Use only slots and tabs if you wish to join any parts. Experiment with scratch paper before you make your final paper sculpture.

Computer Option. Use the Round Shape tool to draw a circle or oval on the screen. Choose the Airbrush to gently add shading around the edges to make the shape appear as a solid form. Draw a free-form shape. Apply shading with the airbrush to represent a form. Consider adding a surface for the three-dimensional forms to sit on and then apply shadows.