Aesthetics Basics

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and expression of beauty. It asks the question “what is beauty?”

In the visual arts, an artwork is described based upon its visual elements as well as its content (the subject matter).

Visual Elements:

Color: Warm colors (red, yellow, orange), Cool colors (blue, green), Neutral colors (black, white, gray), Pastel colors (pink, baby blue, pale yellow), Earth colors (brown, tan, beige), Rich colors, etc.

Line: Straight, curved, shaded, broken, soft, heavy, etc.

Shape, which is two dimensional with no form or thickness, can be divided into geometric (circle, square, triangle) and organic (like a natural form)

Volume or form means that the objects depicted appear three dimensional because of the use of shading and lighting techniques. A sphere, cube, and pyramid are all examples of form.

Value is the degree of light and dark in an artwork. It is the contrast between black and white and all the tones in between. Value can also be used with colors. Contrast is the extreme change between light and dark.

Texture is about the surface quality, such as rough, fluffy, smooth, etc. that the artist creates.

Space can be divided into two types, positive and negative. Positive space is the actual space created by an object(s) in the work of art, and negative space is the space surrounding the object(s). One can also look at the composition of the work for how it is arranged spatially.

Principles of Compositional Design- How the elements are composed:

Rhythm and movement is created by patterns in the relationship of elements such as line, space, and color to one another. For example, repeated light and dark lines can create rhythm, and undulating lines can create movement.

Balance in a composition is most easily achieved through strict symmetry; however, balance can be created by making both sides of the work have equal weight (darkness of color on one side to balance out the largeness of shape on the other).
Proportion deals with the relationship of sizes. Some artists chose to make works that are realistic in the use of proportion while others may choose to use parts that are disproportionate to create an effect.

Emphasis refers to the area(s) of the work that is dominant visually. One can determine what the emphasis in a work of art (if there is one) by finding where the spot eye continually returns to.

Variety or contrast has to do with the interest created through differences within the work itself. Some works have much contrast while others are more even.

Unity deals with how all of these elements work to create a unified aesthetic experience for the viewer.