

Elements of Visual Representation
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Lecture - 18

We must not forget another purpose of working with visual images that is to tell a story through visual images. And without the help of any written script, any language or anything that is there in a written form to be read by the viewer. And the basic purpose of the story telling through images, through visual images in our tradition was very simple. That, there had been a low level of literacy in the society, and it was just kept as an alternative of writing.

So, instead of looking at, we written it paper, we read the images and we know the story and also the kind of morals, the kind of value, education that took place through those stories that got easily delivered to the society. So, we will take some example, which are most common, there are still found in our tradition and one of them is the story of the great epic Ramayan.

So, I will take that as an example and explain the characteristics of storytelling. The common trains of storytelling through symmetrical and asymmetrical arrangement or a combination of both, as like in terms of the visual structuring and the visual storytelling in the following lectures.

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Seen in the picture is the narrative of Ramayana and it is a complete Ramayan made by the great kalamkari painter Shilpa Guru in Nagaraja. What is seen in the stream now, it is a complete story of Ramayan and to have the whole story, if it is a long story, depicted in a single frame, the artist has kept few frames. He has repeated quite a few characters, quite a few sequences to have a visual unity.

But, just to concentrate on the basic structure of the painting, we must take into account the basic aspects of symmetry and asymmetry and how to combine them to have a dynamic, that goes with a flow as a story passes on. So, let us analyze the basic structure of this whole narrative story, where there is a central frame that is the main key frame for the whole composition, where we get to see it is Rama's wedding, that is taking place.

Rama and Sita being the main characters, they are coming at the centre of the whole composition, which is giving it as a sense of symmetry. Perhaps, there is a lot of narrative that is involved into this story and if the artist wanted to keep a symmetry, so that the viewer get some order to move slowly to the whole episodes of the story. So, there are more than one key frame, that are placed in a symmetric order throughout. So, let us see which are those key frames.

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To begin with there is one key frame, where we see Ganesha, who is the writer of Ramayan. He is believed to be the writer of Ramayan.

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From Ganesha writing Ramayan to the frame goes to another Squareish formation, where a precious singer, he is performing a ritual and that was the ritual that caused Rama's birth. There is another sequence here that is coming at the end of the story.

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So, if we go in a non-linear fashion, the key frame will tell us that this is, when Sita is end, when Sita is like tested in different ways, so that is the story of Sita that ends here.

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And then let us go back to the other sequence, which is there in another corner, where Hanuman is meeting Ravana for the first time in Lanka.

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So, these are the four key frames utter placed in four different corners and they tell us the different stories that has taken place in different times. But, they are placed in four corners to give us the harmony and that way it leads us to the narrative.

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So, there are other episodes like the birth of Rama, Lakshmana and his other brothers, Bharata and Shatrughna that is taking place right before this. Although in a story, this should come after the ritualistic performance, but somehow this is the main frame and

there are other stories, who are also put in a non-linear fashion. There are other sequences in a circular order.

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There are two circles, here and here, where Vali and Sugriva two Hanumans.

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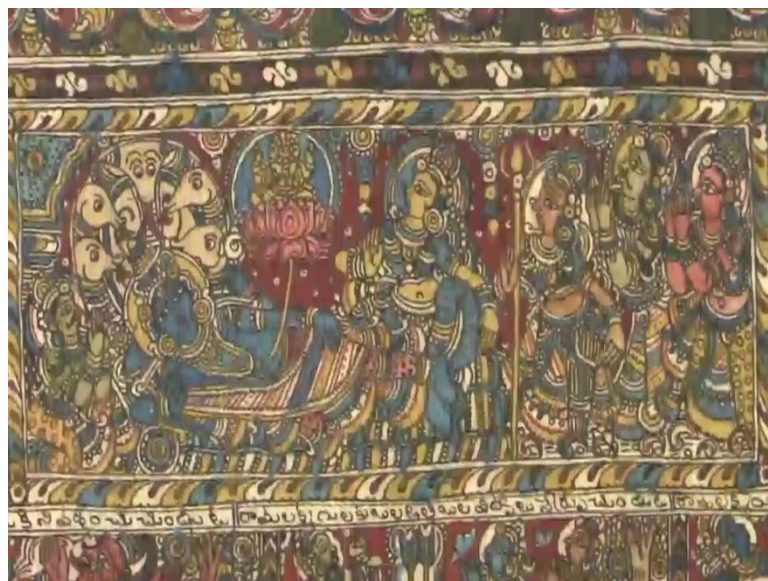
They are meeting each other, they are the two kings and two brothers and there is ((Refer Time: 05:11)) another narrative, where we can see Ravana is talking to his wife.

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There is another rectangular frame right at the bottom.

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And another one on top, the top one is telling the story of Vishnu attended by Lakshmi and they are consulting there, considering the possible birth of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna. And in the lower panel there is Kumbhakarna ((Refer Time: 05:38)), who is being awakened from his sleep. So, these are the basic stories that is going on. At the same time, we see that there are lots of repetitive figures, we see Ravana, the main character getting repeated quite a few times.

So, then the viewer takes a journey and finds out, how many times Ravana is getting repeated in the story. So, it is not that the Ravana are there in different ways, but they are coming in different sequences, they are coming for different episodes of the story.

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So, we see the same Ravana character here, it is coming here again, here, then here, we can also find the Ravana here ((Refer Time: 06:23)) in a main key frame following, which we see Ravana in another big frame. And there must be many more Ravana repeated in the whole story, there are quite a few very interesting use of texture that is quite attractive.

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Like for water, the artist is used the particular texture for stone, it is a different texture and that are quite graphical. So, we see the same texture repeated here, by the sea, where the sea they show the seas. Here there is water, the sea water and also the stones with the same texture. It has a beautiful decorative panel, that is going on in the border and that is a decorative formation which is floral and that is also working as a guiding factor to put all the sequences together.

There are many more observations that we can make gradually. But, let us move to some other story, where things are done in a different manner. It is more like using a different paradigm to tell a similar story.

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Let us see another paradigm for an effective story which is non-linear, it is a three dimensional free standing structure and it can be seen from any angle of our choice.

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So, if we turn it and we want to unfold the story, we see that it is a story of the birth of Krishna and as we keep on opening the panels, we see that there are stories taking place in a sequential order. There are different episodes and the incarnation's life and you know the kind of miracle that he performed throughout his life. So, this is very interesting to see it in this order.

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We can go to the next sequence and find out a different pattern which is more like a surprise factor. When you open the thing, you get to see Shiva and Parvathi. They are from a different mythological purpose and this is created with lots of simplification. So, seen in the picture is the Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwar, the trinity and then the couple, who are sit standing there. So, if we go to the next sequence, which are done in another primary color.

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We see another narrative that is going on, that involves a lot of secular stories, the village life, the daily life sequences.

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And also in the green, there are stories which are going on. So, traditionally there are pictures story teller, who will unfold this particular structure and they will tell you the stories one after another. So, that is how it goes on in a rotating order. So, I will take you to another example.

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So, this is a very interesting paradigm shift, when we see that, it comes in different sizes and it involves many stories. Here, we can see the different incarnations of Vishnu, who are taking birth in earth and they are performing a different activities, which are very fascinating.

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In the front door, that like this is the closed structure. When we open it, we see that there are images in symmetry.

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So, the moment you open the first door you get to see the sequences, which are also happening in a, they are like the mirror image. We see a sun here and the moon at the opposite side, but the other things are more or less similar and in a symmetry. So, we see the other characteristics like Vishnu, Shiva, who are there in part of the narrative. We can unfold the story from another order and see there are lots of other narrations that is taking place. So, it is like there are multiple stories that are depicted in all of their sides.

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This is another smaller one of the same story. So, you open it slowly and there are different order of it is openings and that is how the story gets revealed to it is viewer.

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So, storytelling in traditional Indian folk art has been always very, very fascinating. The painters, storyteller they find out different ways to tell stories in different orders. So, it is like a three dimensional structure again what when we open we see different sequences, that comes out in a very rhythmic manner. So, that is one way of looking at it, let us move to another very interesting episode of Ramayana.

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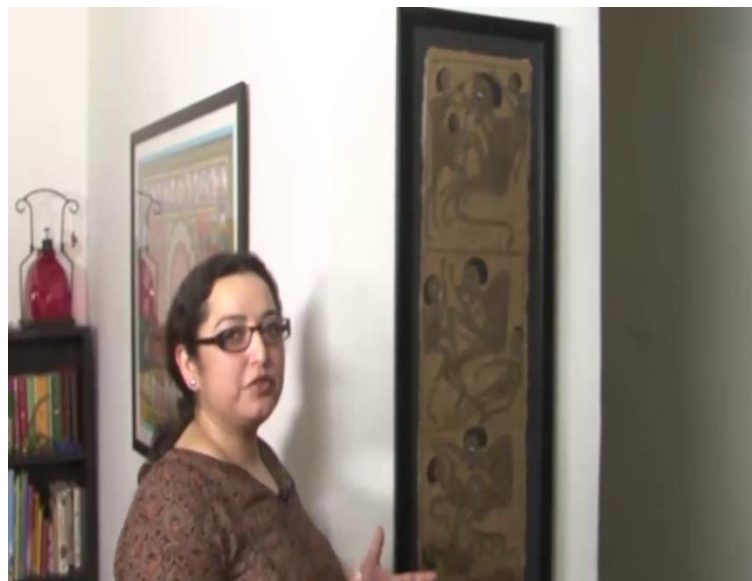
So, the whole sequence begins with one episode and then it follows a clockwise order. It just goes clockwise, it moves from one sequence to the next and then it slowly moves to

the next in this order, in a circular motion and slowly it comes back and ends here. And there are also quite a few most important key frames that are placed at both the sides in a symmetrical order. There are interesting images of a character that is Hanuman and Hanuman comes here in different poses.

So, it is more like a chronological photograph like as we see in chrono photography that the posture changes a bit and then it gives it, a sense of movement. So, that is another way of creating a narrative movement or an illusion of motion in a static image. So, at the center of the picture there is a big circle and in the circular format we see another story going on, where Rama and Sita are getting married and that is a happy episode and that is the central episode of the picture, which is very common in this tradition.

Only we see that, the background color which is a light red that is getting repeated in all other areas, creating a central harmony. So, by repeating the color in different ways in different ratio, they could put the harmony.

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This is another narrative panel from Midnapur district of Bengal and it is painted by Nirranjan Chitrakar, one of the traditional painters of that particular district and seen in the picture are five sequences of a story, which are otherwise integrated and it gives us a sense of illusion of movement. When we see that, there are characters getting repeated. So, it is done with very simple means and few line drawings, it is almost monochromatic, it does not have much of a color.

So, what we see here is a character, who is repeated and facing different sequences through different variation in the line and composition. So, they tied together and also goes in one order, which is vertical in this particular case, so that way the story goes on. So, the basic challenge of telling a story through visual images and not through words and taking the story to one order in a linear sequence, it provides us with new possibilities.

So, what we see here is the different characteristic of compositional arrangement. To be very precise, when we see symmetry in a composition, where there are two sequences it is like as we discussed in the previous lecture, that is like a c and a reverse c from two orders, that creates a circle. So, similarly a mirror image completes the idea and the mirror image tells up a certain things, which are more iconic, which are more definite direct, clear.

But, in a story, there are complexities, it cannot be always symmetrical, but the symmetry is like a prime factor for a composition. How will I manage storytelling without symmetry? So, how to create balance in symmetry becomes our next consideration, that we take help of symmetry and then put stories in different sequential order. It goes in a dynamic order, it follows a diagonal order, it can follow a vertical order, it can jump into certain area, it can skip a few episode, it can skip many other sequences and still remain continuous.

So, these are the challenges that we face in a narrative visual and we take up all this kind of elements like. You know the basic principle which is related to the elements of linear qualities, the repetitive format, the pattern repetition, repeating a pattern and creating a new pattern and that way, we repeat a formation, we create new formation and that way, we build up our language that is a complete visual language.

It does not, it never gets supported by words, maybe we know a story, but the moral, the kind of ambiance that has to be created, where the model can actually take place that can educate the viewer, that has to be taken care of. So, we need to know how to choose the right line, the right color, the right composition for that, that suits the particular story.