

**Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur**

**National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)**

**Course Title**

**Visual Perception and Art: A survey across the cultures.**

**Lecture - 03**

**Visual Perception and Visual Reality**

**by**

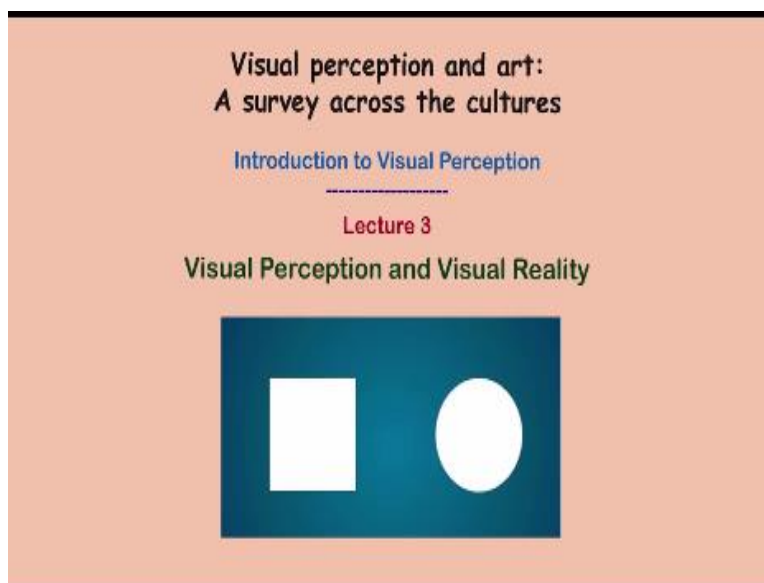
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**Viswa – Bharati**

Hello viewers welcome to books online course on visual perception and art a survey across the cultures.

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Today is the third lecture and the topic of today is lecture is visual perception and visual reality.  
As a matter of fact

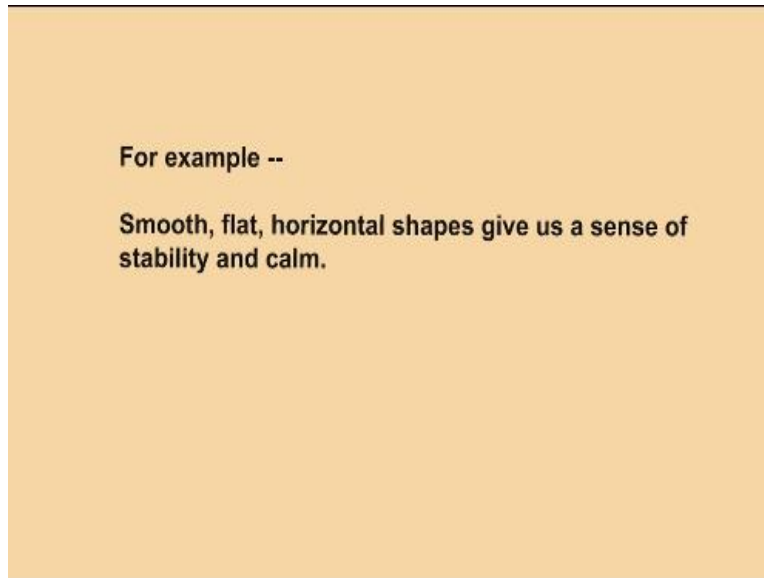
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**Pictures or works of art that affect us strongly use structural principles based on the way we have to react in the real world in order to survive. As soon as we realize this and understand these principles, we begin to feel the connection between the visual reality and visual perception and more importantly, how this connect keeps influencing the visual communication in arts including its emotional contents.**

Today we will be looking at how pictures or works of art that affect us strongly actually use certain principles of visual perception certain structural principles of visual perception based on the way we react to it in our real life. In fact that is a process of survival; as soon as we realize this and understand these principles we begin to feel the connection. The connection between the visual reality and visual perception and more importantly how this connects keeps influencing the visual communication in arts including its emotional content, and this is where the whole study becomes very interesting.

Because when you look at the visual perception principles whether in art or in reality we tend to look at them as certain geometric principles a certain structural principles and no doubt they are they are geometric principles they are structural principles, but what becomes very intriguing for us is to understand how these geometric principles or structural principles can actually evoke certain sensations which belong to the realm of feeling or emotion, and this is where a work of art assumes certain power, certain capacities of communication little more than the mere structural principles.

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For example when you look at a smooth flat horizontal shape it gives us a sense of stability and calm, for example look at this diagram what you look at,

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The bottom of this diagram is a smooth flat horizontal black space and there is a calm there is a moment of peace which is completely undisturbed by any other element.

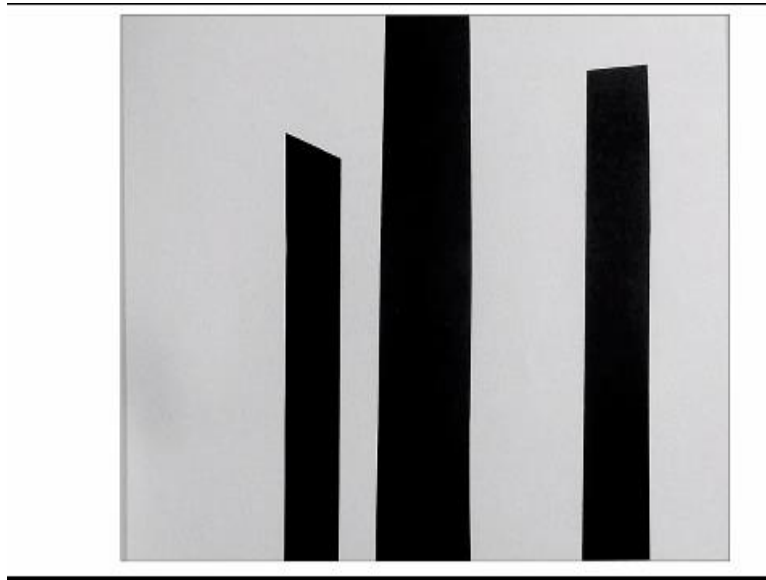
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Or --

**Vertical shapes appear to be more exciting and more active than the horizontal shape. Vertical shapes rebel against the earth's gravity. They imply energy and a reaching toward the heights or the sky or the 'heaven'.**

But the moment you have certain vertical shapes which appear to be more exciting and more active than the horizontal shape. Vertical shapes actually rebels against the Earth is gravity, so here at this moment the principles we are talking about have something to do with the gravity that we experience in a real life in the real world, and these vertical kind of shapes they imply energy and a tendency reaching towards the heights or the sky of the heaven.

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Look at this diagram so different from the one that we saw just before. The previous one evokes a sense of stability whereas this one evokes a sense of dream aspiration.

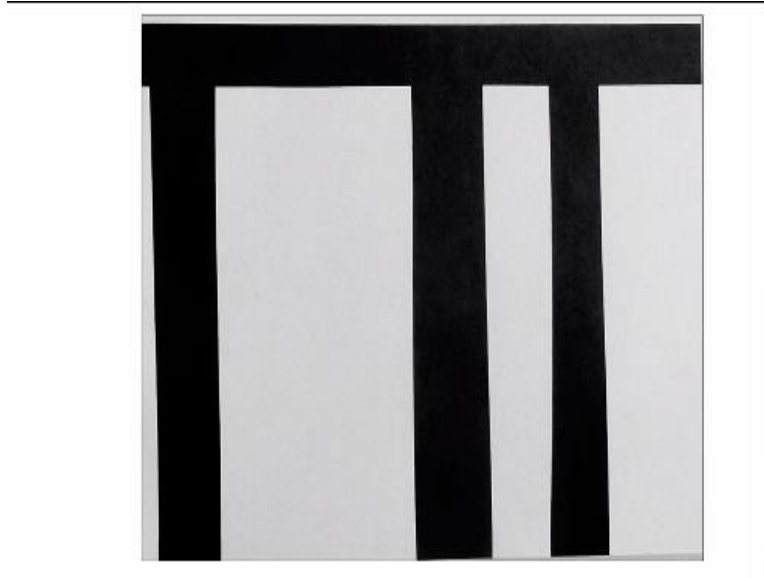
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Stability comes back, when a horizontal bar is placed across the top of a row of verticals : the sense of vitality and reaching toward the 'heavens' gets checked.

Along with order and stability, a certain element of pride emerges from this composition!

So stability comes back actually on these vertical shapes whenever a central body is placed right across the top of a row of verticals and the sense of vitality and reaching towards the heavens gets slightly checked. Along with the order of stability a certain element of pride also emerges from this composition look at this.

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So you have almost two similar set of vertical shapes but the moment you put this horizontal band on top of this row vertical shapes a certain sense of stability comes back.

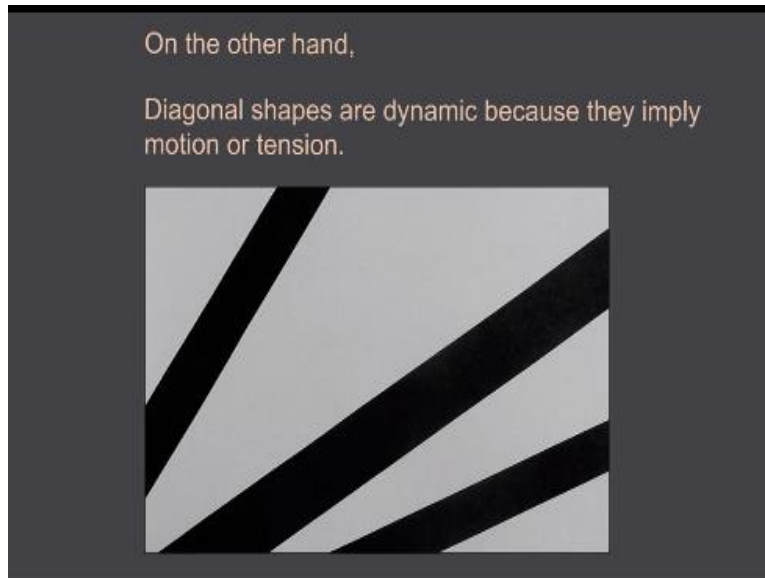


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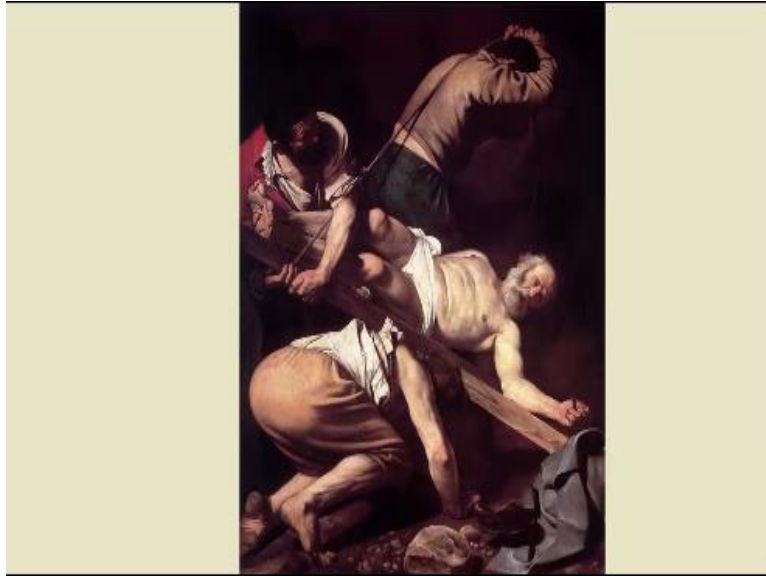
And it is this sense of stability that you also see appearing in very famous Greek classical architectures like this.

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On the other hand this has been observed that diagonal shapes are dynamic because they imply motion or tension, and because they are diagonal because they are not vertical they are not straight away presenter.

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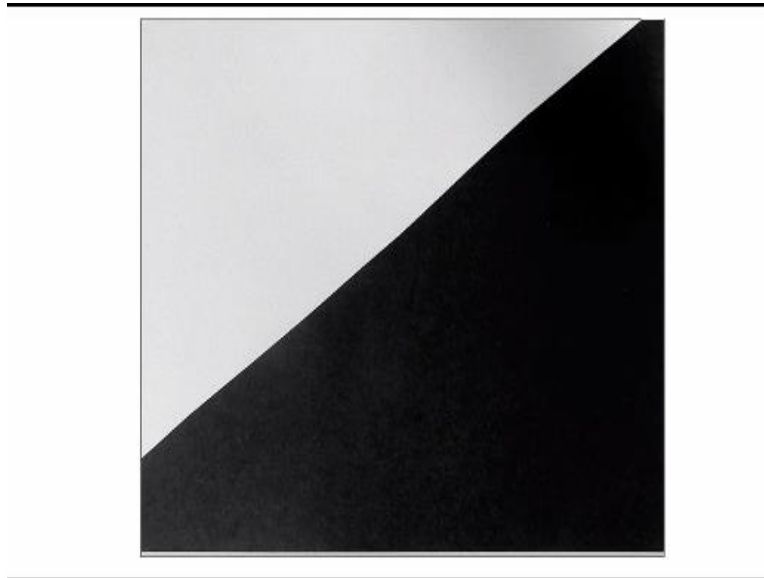
The element of diagonal motion this power of the diagonal lines to evoke a certain sense of dynamic quality within the painting has been used repeatedly by several painters like this particular painting by Caravaggio from Italy.

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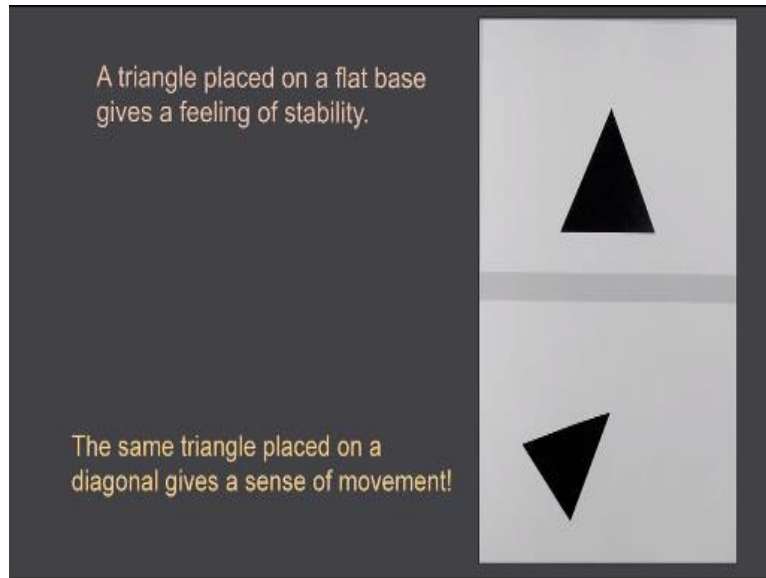
For that matter when you look at this relief panels from Mahabalipuram where you can see a conflict a kind of fight a battle between Mishashar Malini Durga and Mishashar who himself has just become here again the sculptor has introduced several diagonals in order to communicate a sense of motion a sense of activity as opposed to a sense of stability.

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A simple diagram a black-and-white diagram like this in fact establishes this theory very well, so basically it could be either of these three elements or a combination of all these elements of horizontal stability a vertical motion or a diagonal kind of dynamic quality emotion a movement.

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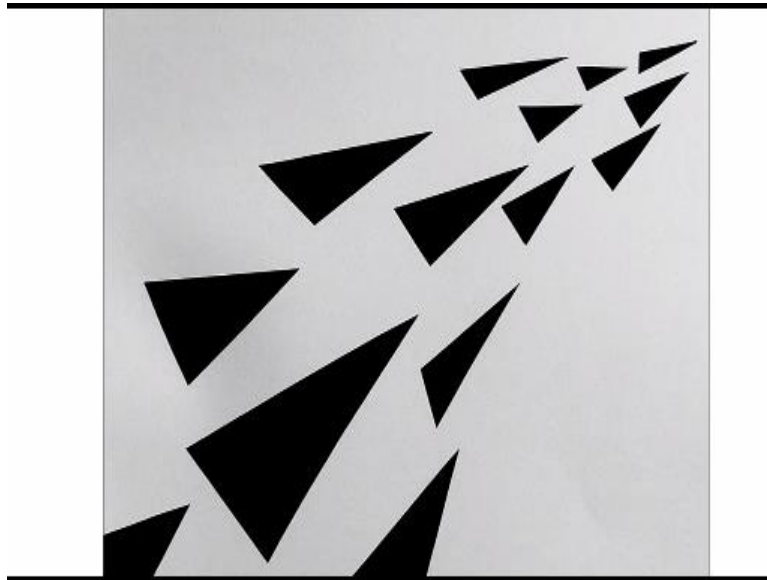


A triangle placed on a flat base gives a feeling of stability.

The same triangle placed on a diagonal gives a sense of movement!

So when you look at these two diagrams one on top of the other the top one you see is showing a triangle placed on a flat base and thus giving a feeling of stability. Now the same triangle when placed on a diagonal is the sense of movement everything is same but it is just about the positioning of that same element which brings a very important difference in what is being expressed through a particular picture.

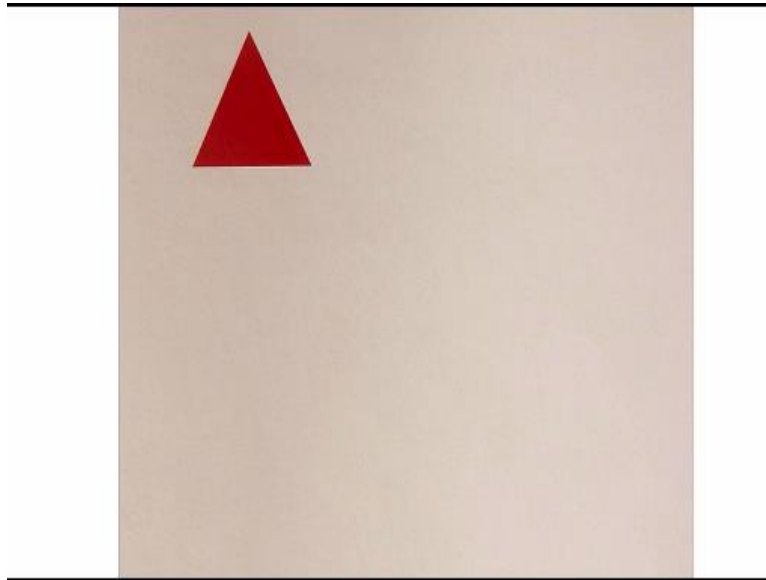
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Now along with these diagonal directions of triangular shapes in this particular picture you also see a gradual decrease in the size of the triangles well. How does this become? So important it is very significant because as you keep the size of the triangles gradually lose the dimension and decrease in size what happens is a sense of depth emerges. You feel as if the triangles in the distance receding into a certain space.

So this principle that as you keep the size decreasing the elements seems to be moving away from you is a very important element that is often used by artists in various books apart.

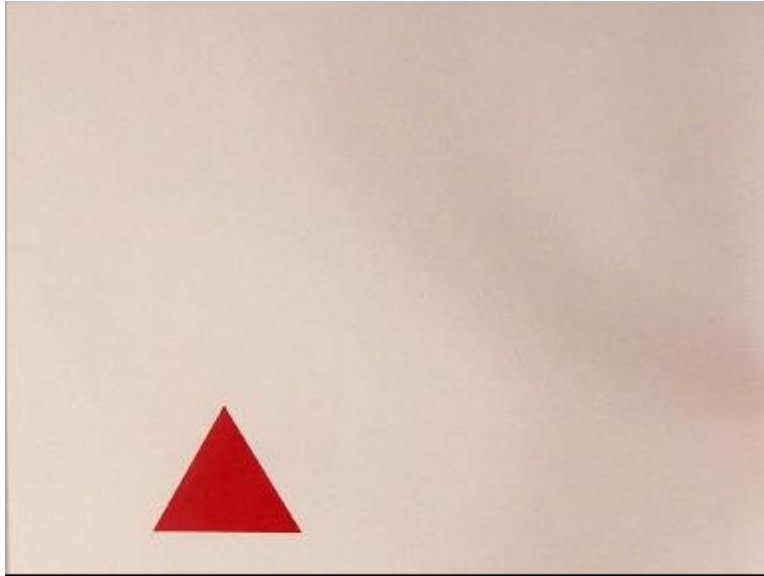
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Again space and positioning of a shape within a given space, so it is important that when you look at this diagram where you see a red triangle placed on the upper left corner of the frame evokes a certain sense. We interpret the composition in a certain way whatever it is.

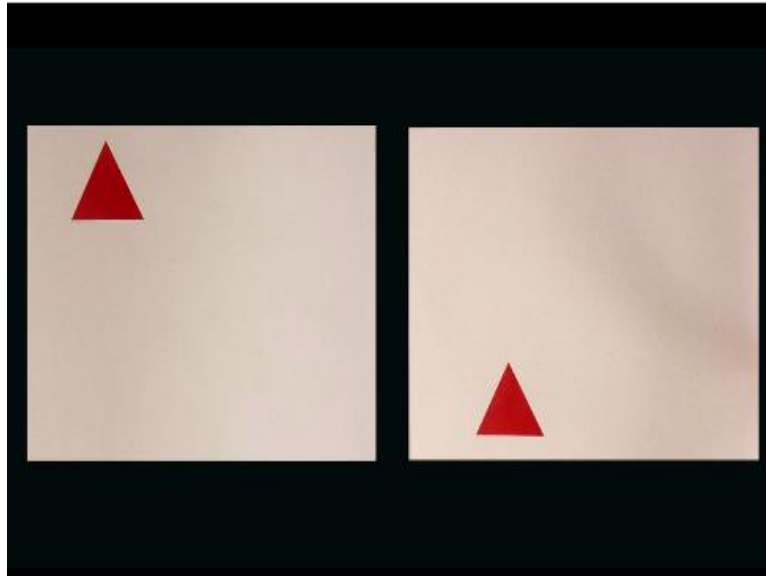


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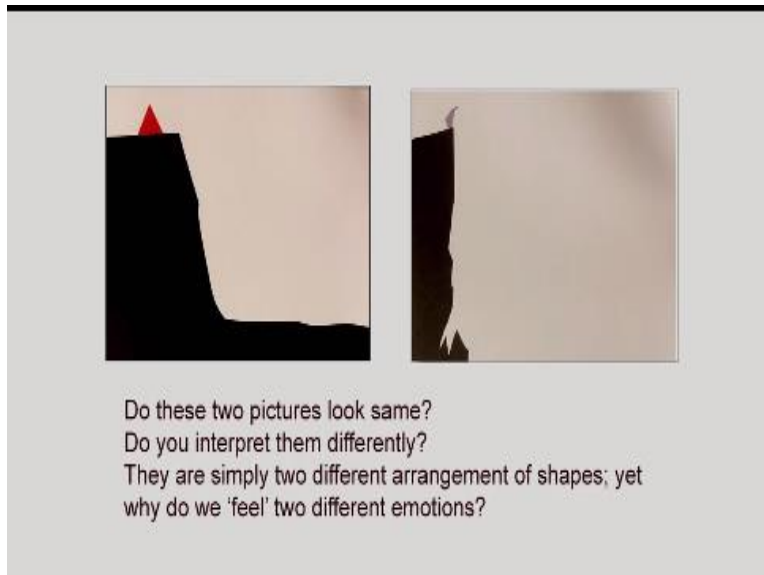
But the moment you compare this diagram which the next one when you see the same red triangle is now placed almost on an invisible horizontal line, at the bottom of the same frame you certainly see something has changed in the very content of this diagram, and here I am talking about an evocative content here and talking about an expressive contains otherwise everything else remains the same whether it is the rate triangle or it is the square kind of ground it is simply the positioning that brings very important change in what is being expressed through a diagram like this.

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So we keep these two things side by side if you look at them and why do not you make a comparison and try to find out what exactly are the change is happening when you simply change the position of the red triangle from one place to another from top to bottom from upper left corner to lower left corner. You keep looking at these two diagrams and try to figure out the changes.

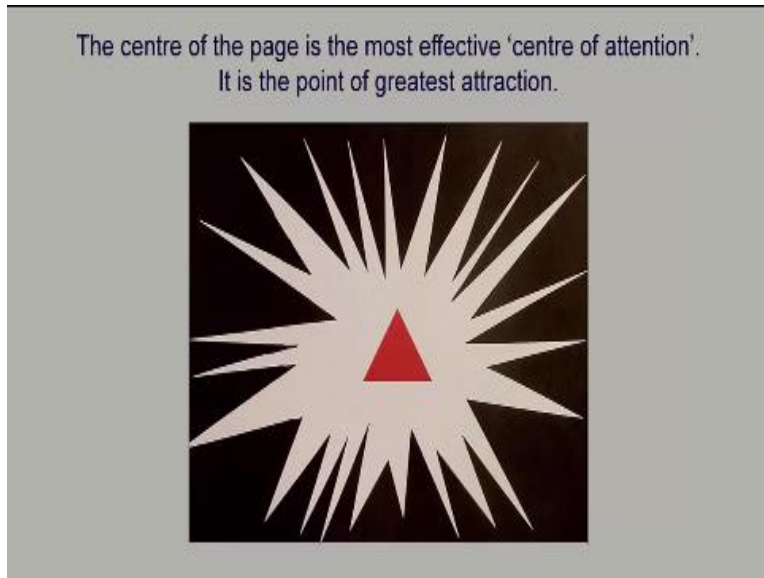
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For example let us make another experiment here compare these two frames and ask yourself whether these two pictures look exactly the same or not obviously they are not exactly the same but they have a similar tendency of having a whole lot of weight on the left-hand side of the frame yet, because of the shape and size of that shape there is some kind of difference that we feel we not be able to articulate them.

However but my question is do you interpret them differently or you have the same interpretation for both the friends why do not you look at it and figure it out once again for yourself, are they simply two different arrangement of shapes or do we feel that they are two different emotions or together, just try to.

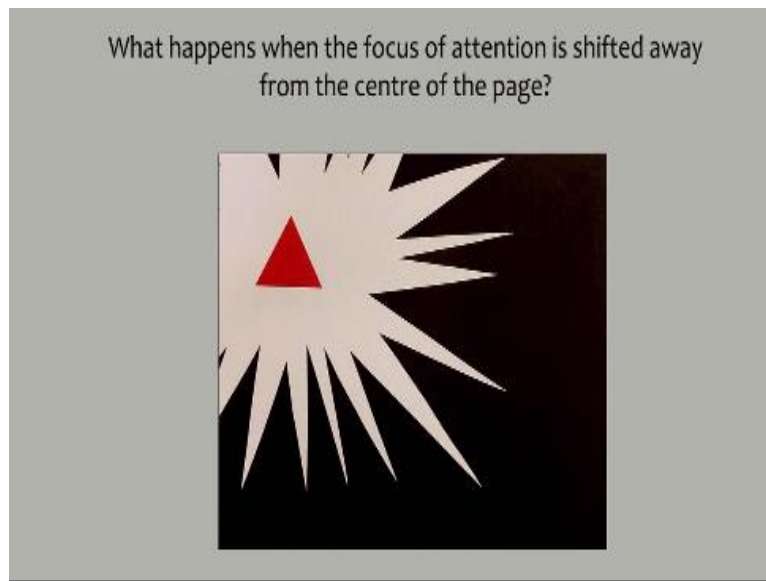
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Find out now there is another interesting principle that has been often used by artists is the centrality of a composition. For example in this particular diagram the center of the page is the most effective center of attention and it happens to be the point of the greatest attraction just because you have placed a particular shape in your painting it could be a human figure animal figure or architecture or any other thing.

But just because you have placed it right at the center of the frame, so it draws whole attention towards itself.

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Now next one you see on with the same composition but shifted slightly towards the upper left corner of the diagram, so my question is what happens when the focus of attention is shifted away from the center of the page. You give me the answer what exactly had happened because the red triangle being the only red triangle once again in this same frame so we cannot really say it has lost its attraction the kind of attraction.

It received when it was there at the center of the frame despite the fact that the red triangle is has been shifted away from the center it is still the one element which receives a lot of attraction yet I am sure there is some difference between when you have that element at the center of the painting and when you have the element being shifted away from the center. What exactly is the difference?

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Now in conventional traditional paintings like this image of Lord Krishna you see how the centrally placed position of an icon becomes so crucial for the painter to make that I can draw all the attention towards itself, including the cows around Lord Krishna. So in most of the cases where you have iconic paintings like this you will observe usually the images of gods and goddesses are placed at the center of the painting in order to draw all the attentions.

Not that these artists had any opportunity to study the principles of visual perception and apply these principles on these paintings but it was a rather intuitive discovery that you keep something at the center it is going to draw all this attention towards itself, so it is an understanding that these painters realized through their experience and later on studies and visual psycho logic prove to be these things very correct.

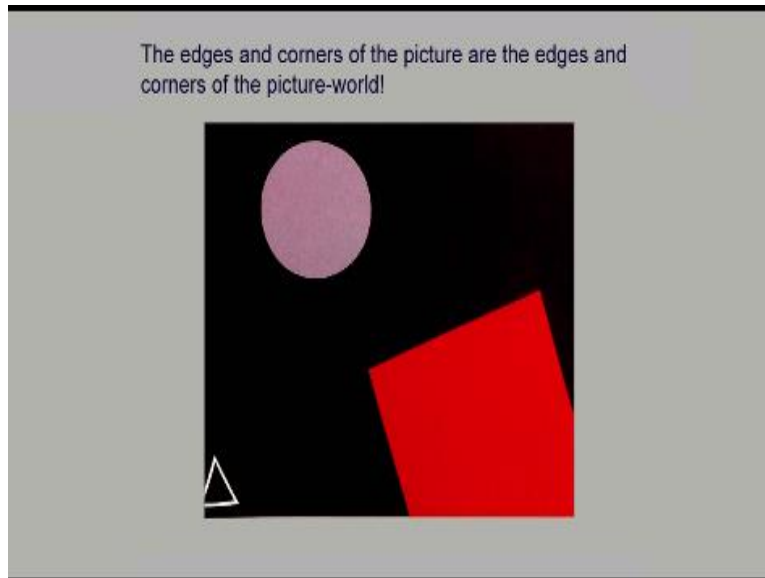
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Now on the other hand in this painting you see that the figures has been placed slightly off centered, now once again just because the figures have been placed slightly off centered more towards on the right-hand side does not mean that they do not receive any attention. Still they do receive lot of attention but the meaning of the presence of these figures in the painting because of their positioning certainly undergoes a certain change as if there is something else more attractive than this group of people.

As if something is happening also outside the frame as well whereas in the previous one the frame the composition of this painting is self contained everything is happening within the frame but the moment you shape certainly limited a group of elements on one side of the painting it evokes sense it creates a sense that there is something else that is happening outside the frame as well.

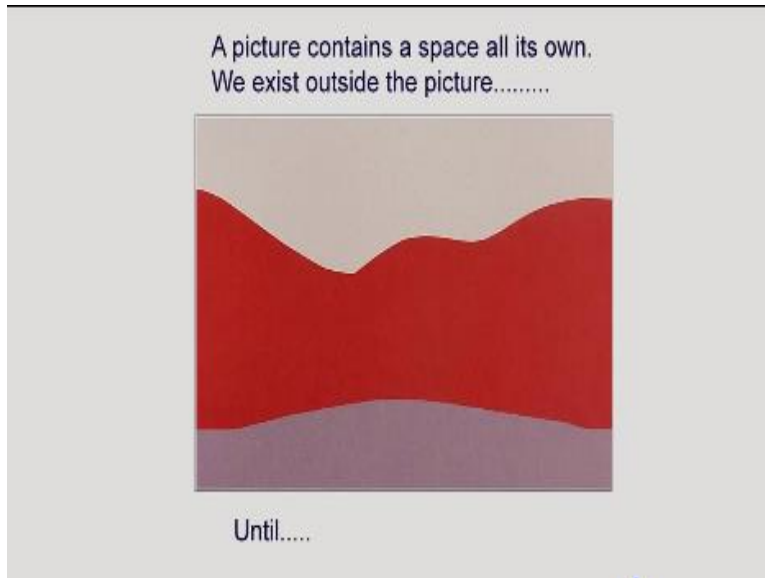
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Now interestingly by the same token the edges and corners are the frame of the picture they become they are very important on the one hand and on the other and they become the edges and corners of the picture world the physical edge and corner of the paper on which you are making a painting or a canvas on you are making a painting they assume the role of the edge and corner of the picture world or the pictorial world.

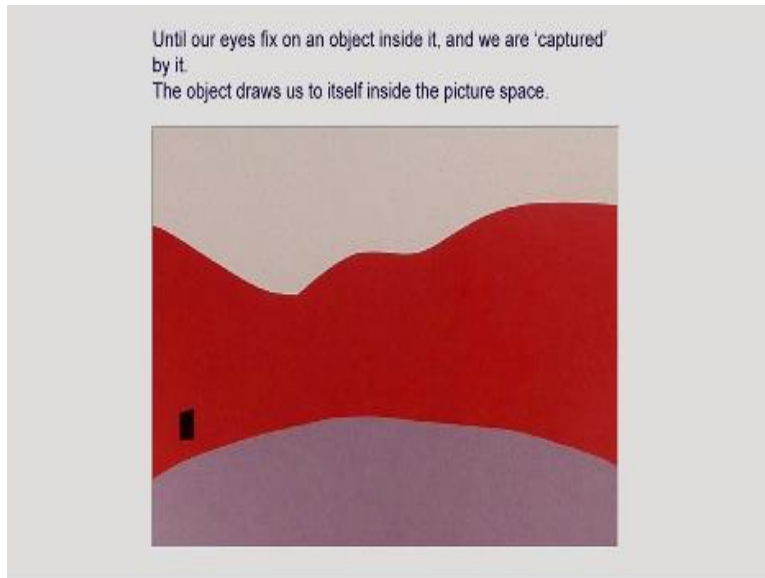


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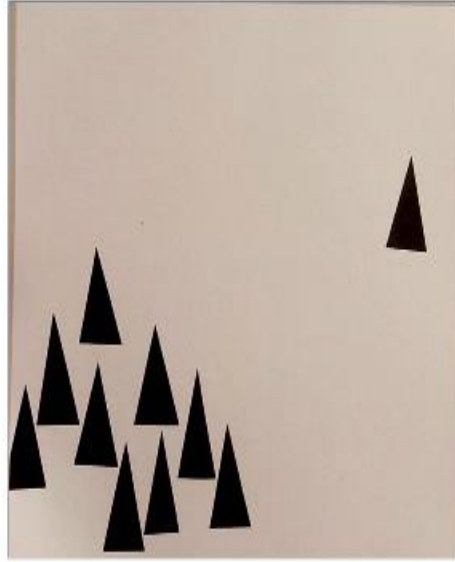
A picture contains a space all it is own and we the viewers is generally believed to be existing outside the picture until now look at the next one.

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Until our eyes fix on an object inside it and we are captured by it is at this moment that we also become a part of the painting or part of the picture because object draws us to itself inside the picture space. So when you compare the previous one without any object with this one with an object you can see there is a stark contrast in terms of how we find ourselves positioned these are always the composition.

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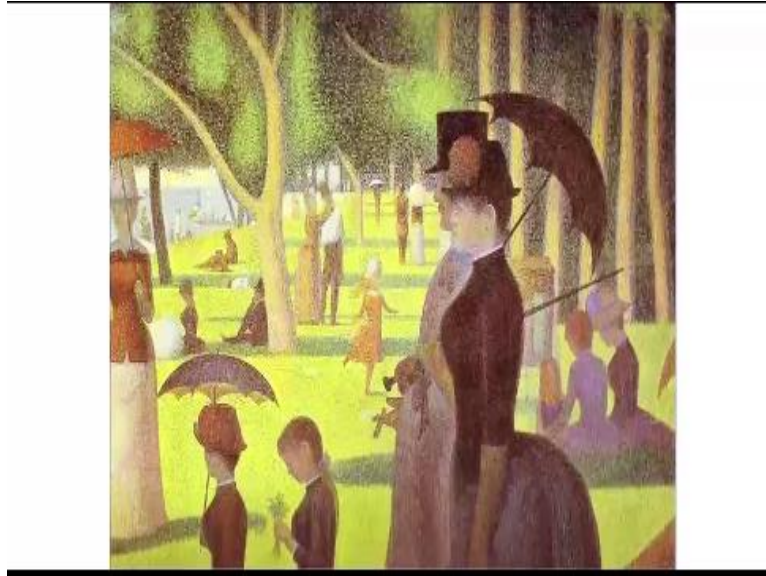
Similarly an isolation this is the principle of isolation the moment you isolate one particular element from a group of shapes isolate it away or from the rest of the group it creates a different pace for its own.

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And this principle of isolation has been used several times by many painters and artists. If there is no isolation there is the possibility of overlapping like this one you see two shades overlapping each other hence these two shapes would always become visually related to each other mentally connect to each other and if it happens to be a subjective painting with some story line or narration they will be connected through a certain storyline as well.

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Now when you look at a painting by such like this an impressionist painter who also worked in the post-impressionist era the French painter such developed a technique of painting and representing figures where you have details, but all the details got somewhat submerged under various points and strokes and brush marks, so on the one hand when you look at these paintings up close you see this dots this point and that is one of the reasons why his style of painting acquired this name of pointillism.

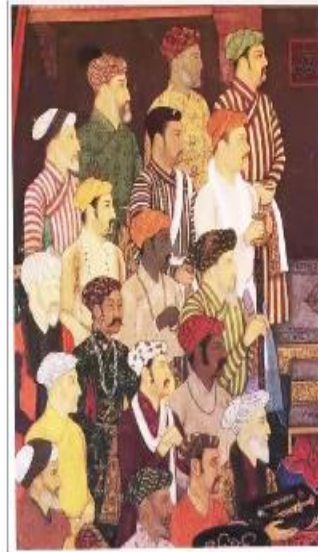
But at the same time when you move away from yourself away from the painting you can see that how the details gradually begin to appear not necessarily in the painting but maybe in your mind in your mental eye.

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For example this one you see a kind of overlapping of three figures they are so close to each other I mean it need not be communicated, but it gets very easily communicated to these three figures are together there is no such isolation that you feel here. This is a picture of a Chinese King being a companion by two assistants maybe two ministers maybe took very close spells they will be always with them and they are also there to enhance the power the transient of the king himself.

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Again a detail from Mughal painting very you can see overlapping and due to these overlapping not only there is this possibility of accommodating whole lot of figures within one space but this principle of overlapping enables the painter also to give us a sense of space real space within which these figures have been positioned or placed. So this is what we are trying to understand now that is how certain principles of visual perception of visual reality are being or have always been used by the painters to express what they wanted to express.

To depict what they want to show to narrate the story they want to tell us. Now an extension of this idea in the next two subsequent lectures lecture number four and five we shall be looking at actual works of art and a few more principles and how they are connected to each other in the larger context of visual perception. Thank you.

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