Visualizing Music

How do both composers and artists use repetition, pattern, rhythm, contrast, harmony, balance, and discord?

What connections can we find between color and music theory?

Many compositional elements in music have parallels to choices artists make when composing images. This Permanent Collection Portfolio Guide of historic and contemporary paintings and prints features a sampling of works from the Addison's collection offering varied perspectives and discussion points for connections between musical composition and visual art.

Educators are encouraged to use this Guide and the expanded Portfolio Image List as a starting point, a place from which to dig deeper, ask questions, and make new connections for class plans and projects.

For online use, click the images in this guide to access digital images in the Addison's online database.

SELECTED THEMATIC APPROACHES

Repetition — How can repetition create movement and rhythm within an artwork or musical piece?

Motive/Motif — How do repeated units of pattern connect a composition to itself and create unity?

Texture — How is texture in art related to the ways in which instruments are grouped to create and manage texture in music?

Negative Space — How are rests in musical composition similar to the space surrounding details in visual composition?

Color and Tonal Intervals — Which color juxtapositions feel harmonious or discordant?

Shift of Perception — How do perception changes in music echo the ways in which our eyes perceive color and compositional relationships?
Repetition and Rhythm

How do both artists and composers use repetition to create rhythm?

How might the visual rhythm of the above artworks translate into a musical composition?

Artists often repeat elements, including shape, pattern, or color, in visual compositions to create movement and rhythm. **Winslow Homer** uses yellow and olive sweeps of grass to form compelling diagonals rising to the left, emphasizing the power of nature via the wind against which both the right-leaning figure and shrub struggle. Contemporary artist **Terry Winters**'s rhythmic, swooping lines evoke abstract interpretations of blueprints or topographical maps. Action painter **Jackson Pollock** often bent over a canvas on the floor, flinging and pouring paint, repeating the same physical motion over and over again. The results are a three-dimensional rhythmic record of his actions.

Repetition and rhythm can also be emphasized through photographic compositions. This rhythmic, pattern-focused image by 1930’s street photographer **Aaron Siskind** belays his future interest in abstraction.
Motive/Motif

What connections can be made between a motive in music and a motif in literature and art?

How do repeated and altered units of pattern connect a composition to itself and create unity?

Artists often repeat key ideas in their work for emphasis. The painter Stuart Davis wrote about the angle and the triangle as the basic units of pictorial construction, and depicted the vertical, angular structure of ships' masts and the grid pattern of their rigging in his work Red Cart. This grid pattern also reappears throughout the composition in different guises, including along the top edge as the backdrop against which the harbor scene appears to hang, attached by rope through an eyelet. Grid or checkerboard pattern unites the various areas of Berenice Abbott's photograph EL 2nd and 3rd Avenue Lines, as well.

Albert Bierstadt, known for his dramatic 19th century landscapes, represents a sunlit summit surrounded by shadowed ridges through a series of enlarged, minimized, and inverted triangles in his composition The Snow Mountain. Similarly, Frederick Remington constructs a series of repeating shapes in Moonlight Wolf, as the triangle of sky mimics the triangle of water, the arch of the wolf’s back parallels the line of the sloping hills, the white-tipped tail mimics the shape of the tip of the shoreline, and the wolf’s eyes reflect the yellow of the stars.
How do artists use visual/implied and actual texture?

How are instruments grouped to create and manage texture in music?

Artists can convey texture visually in two dimensions, using color, shape, line, and shading to give the viewer a sense of how an object depicted would feel in real life if touched. John Singleton Copley inspires viewers to imagine the lace and silk of Mary Elizabeth Martin’s dress as juxtaposed with the texture of her dog’s fur. John Frederick Peto uses the technique of trompe-l’oeil (“fool the eye”) to construct this deceptively realistic two-dimensional painting, simulating the contrasting textures of a wooden bulletin board strung with ribbons behind which letters and notes could be slipped for easy reference.

Other artists use the actual texture of their materials to add a tactile quality to the work. The chalky, matte surface of John Henry Twachtman’s Country House in Winter, Cos Cob reflects the atmosphere of his quiet, winter scene covered in snow. While Jackson Pollock (see image on page 2) uses complex interactions of paint poured or squeezed straight from the tube to play with the impression of surface and depth in his work, contemporary artist Mark Bradford arranges, layers, and sands bits of billboards, advertisements, string, and permanent end-papers from beauty shops onto canvases rich in texture and visual complexity.
Negative Space

How are rests in music composition similar to negative space in visual composition?

What is the relationship between positive and negative space, an object and the space surrounding it?

Negative space, the empty space around an object, helps to create balance within a composition. Ansel Adams, known for his high contrast nature photography, uses the darkness between aspen trees to highlight each tree individually as well as the pattern or rhythm they create. These light/dark, positive/negative relationships can also be used in reverse. Aaron Siskind, whose later photography explored patterns through abstract compositions, allows the white of the sky in his photograph to potentially become positive space against the darkness of each stone in the wall.

Sol LeWitt was an influential practitioner of Conceptual Art, in which the artist is the originator of the idea rather than the craftsman, and each of his Wall Drawings begins as a set of instructions and an accompanying diagram. In Wall Drawing #713, designed for the cove of the ceiling at the Addison Gallery, twenty different irregular pentagons are formed by negative space within layered combinations of red, yellow, blue and/or black.

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Sol LeWitt, Interpretation, Variation, and Music:

Just as a music composition sounds different each time it is played due to acoustics and interpretation by the musicians, potential for variation abounds in LeWitt's Wall Drawings. Explore documentation and video of a sample project at [http://www.andover.edu/Museums/Addison/AboutUs/AddisonUpdates/Pages/20141231_LewittMath.aspx](http://www.andover.edu/Museums/Addison/AboutUs/AddisonUpdates/Pages/20141231_LewittMath.aspx).
Color and Tonal Intervals

What connections can we find between color and music theory?

Which color juxtapositions feel harmonious or discordant? What connections can we make to consonance and dissonance in music?

Artists employ relationships between colors to embue their work with mood and atmosphere. In Ellsworth Kelly’s minimalist composition the green and the red-orange seem to vibrate against each other. Color also plays a large role in conceptual artist and photographer Sandy Skoglund’s work, including Revenge of the Goldfish. The artist selects contrasting hues within monochromatic scenes to engage the brain’s visual process using color psychology and associations to manipulate the viewer’s experience.

Artist and paint manufacturer Hardesty Gillmore Maratta’s color system of the late 19th and early 20th century aimed to achieve harmony of color through triadic arrangements. In 1909, the painter John Sloan adopted Maratta’s color system, which involved determining a set palette composed of three dominant colors. The three colors, or the “triad,” were the only colors that could be used in full-intensity for the painting, and other colors were not used or grayed in hue. In Sunday, Women Drying Their Hair, Sloan uses the triad of yellow-orange, green, and purple.
Shift of Perception

What factors influence how a viewer perceives color, texture, or line?

How do perception changes in music echo the ways our eyes perceive color and compositional relationships?

Numerous factors determine how each of us perceives images. In the mid 20th century, educator and artist Josef Albers’s nested squares examined the way adjacent colors expand and contract, recede or advance, and his juxtapositions demonstrate the ways certain colors can make others appear cooler or warmer. His painting Bent Black also tests viewer perception, with precise equal areas of each color: black, dark gray, light gray, and white.

Irene Rice Pereira experimented with bringing light into her work and often incorporated a wide range of unusual paints, as well as glass, plastic, gold leaf, and other reflective materials. The multiple glass layers of Pereira’s Light is Gold influence our perception of the composition. The geometric lines and angles seem to bend and curve as you move around the work, due to light passing through the scalloped glass.
Curriculum Connections and Resources

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

English
• mood, tone, atmosphere
• perception and point of view
• descriptions of sound
• onomatopoeia
• repetition and motif
• rhythm and meter

Art
• abstraction
• minimalism
• impressionism
• abstract expressionism
• action painting
• repetition
• pattern
• motif
• composition
• mood, tone, atmosphere
• negative space
• perception and point of view
• line and shape
• color theory and color relationships

Science
• observation and gathering data
• color theory, light, and vision

History/Social Studies
• reflections of world history in music and art history

Math
• geometry
• patterns
• ratios
• scaling

CONNECTIONS TO ADDITIONAL THEMATIC PORTFOLIOS

Visualizing Math
Visualizing Science
Visualizing Poetry

TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCES

Learn more about works in the Addison collection by searching http://accessaddison.andover.edu/

Resources for selected topics and artists discussed in this Portfolio Guide:

Color Theory

Texture
Metropolitan Museum of Art: http://www.metmuseum.org/connections/texture#/Feature/

Josef Albers
Khan Academy, Albers, Homage to the Square: https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/abstract-exp-nyschool/ny-school/a/albers-homage-to-the-square

Sol LeWitt

Jackson Pollock
Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, Jackson Pollock and Jazz: Inspiration or Imitation?: http://www.academia.edu/10164140/Jackson_Pollock_and_Jazz_Inspiration_or_Imitation