

Composition

Composition is a term that applies to any work of art, be it drawing, painting, photography, music and writing and can be re-interpreted simply as “putting together”. In visual art composition encompasses elements of design which make up the overall image.

The basic elements of design are -

- ◆ Line - the visual path that enables the eye to move within the piece.
- ◆ Shape - areas defined by edges within the piece, whether geometric or organic.
- ◆ Colour - hues with their various values and intensities.
- ◆ Texture - surface qualities which translate into tactile illusions.
- ◆ Form - 3-D length, width, or depth.
- ◆ Value - Shading used to emphasize form.
- ◆ Space - the space taken up by (positive) or in between (negative) objects.

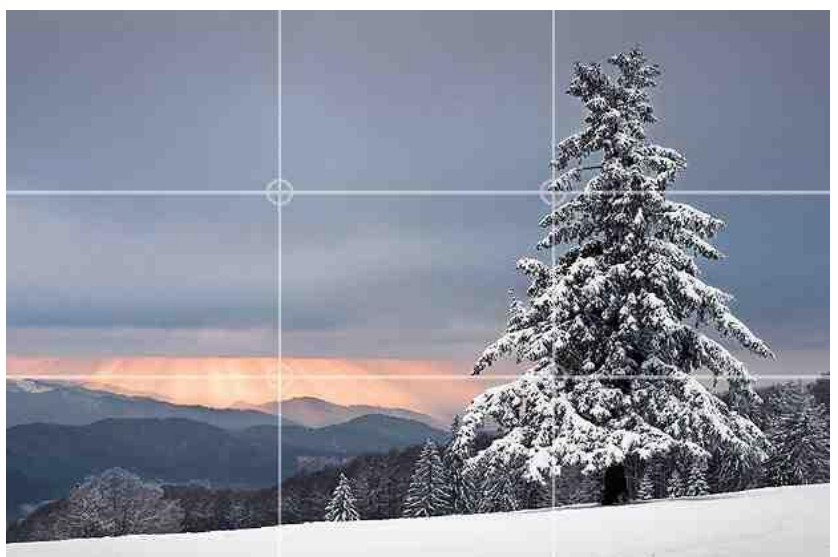
When faced with the task of formalising a composition on a white surface an artist has to make two fundamental decisions, what to begin with and where to place it. The artist has to determine the centre of interest and then arrange the other elements of the composition around it. The artist also has to consider the gaze of the viewer and ensure that the composition rests comfortably on the eyes. The simplest way to ensure that a composition rests comfortably in the viewers eye is to employ the rule of thirds. By splitting a surface into a nine square grid an artist can ensure that their composition is balanced and ensure that no one element will dictate the viewers visual journey through an image.

Examples -

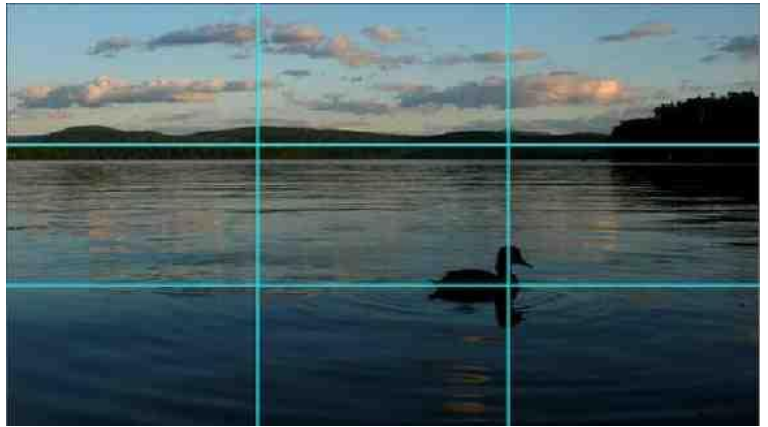
Landscapes

This landscape demonstrates perfectly how the rule of thirds can help an artist arrange an image that compliments both the subject and the viewers gaze. The mountains make up the lower third of the image while the sky makes up the negative space of the upper two thirds. This sits the landscape low in the composition and allows the viewer to look through the image comfortably.

As a general rule you never place an object directly in the centre of an image unless you want to make that object the main focus of the image as this will dictate the viewers gaze. In this case the composition works perfectly because the photographer has placed the large tree on the far right third of the composition which forms a comfortable L shaped composition with the landscape.



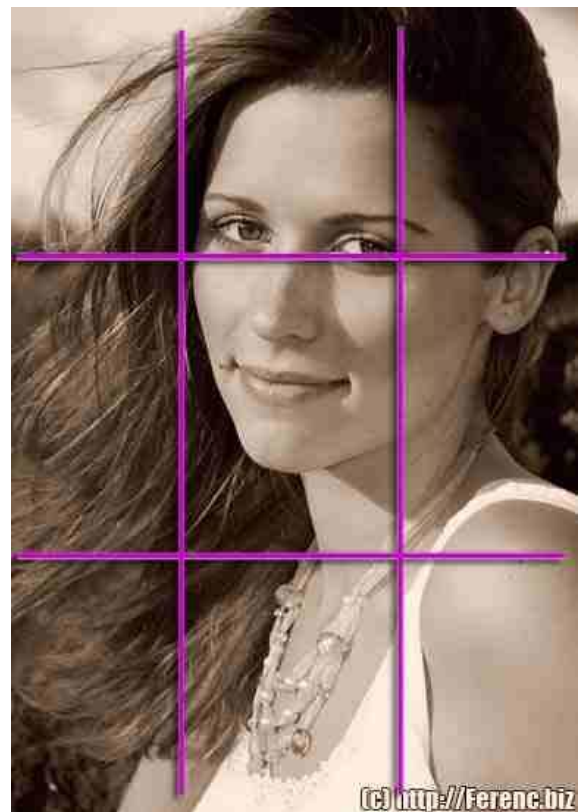
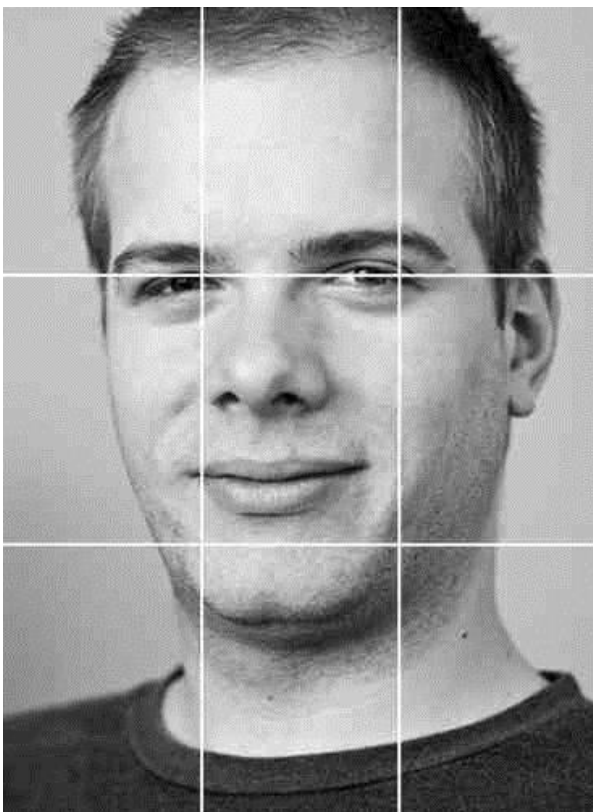
In this image the sky and distant hills make up the upper third of the image whilst the water makes up the lower two with the duck on the right hand side. As long as you place the elements within these boundaries the image will be well composed.



Portraits

The two portraits below show how the rule of thirds can be applied in different ways. The image of the left shows a central portrait which dictates the viewers gaze. However, the specific elements are still split into thirds so as to ensure a balanced composition. Notice how the eyes sit on or near the line of the upper third and the nose and mouth in the middle section of the grid. This splits the portrait into forehead in the upper third, nose and mouth in the central third and the chin and neck in the lower third.

The image on the right is a more conventional use of the rule whereby the head makes up two thirds of the grid whilst the left third is negative space. However, notice how in both portraits the right eyes (as we look at them) rest on the line of the left third of the grid. Again this is to ensure a balanced composition that will compliment the viewers gaze.



Still Life

This simple arrangement shows how with just a few unassuming objects an artist can use the rule of thirds to create a balanced and interesting L shaped composition.



In contrast this image shows how a complicated and busy arrangement can be organised by separating it into thirds. The lower portion of the arrangement actually makes up the lower two thirds of the image and the bottle on the left sits directly on the left hand line. Similarly there are several elements such as the bowls in the lower third of the image that sit within the squares and touch the left and right hand lines. Overall the image is a mixture of L shapes and ellipses which rest comfortably on the eye despite the complicated arrangement.

