



The Elements of Art

“My belief is that it is most important for an artist to develop an approach and philosophy about life—if he has developed this philosophy, he does not put paint on canvas, he puts himself on canvas.”

—Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)

Quick Write

Interpreting Text. Read and interpret the above quote. What does the artist mean? Write a brief interpretation of the quote in your own words. What have you learned about Jacob Lawrence from his painting and quote?



Jacob Lawrence. *Street to M'bari*. 1964. Gouache with graphite on wove paper. 56.5 × 78.4 cm (22 1/4 × 30 7/8"). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James T. Dyke. 1993.18.1.



▲ **FIGURE 4.1** Richly decorated interior settings, lit by the bright sunlight in south France, were a favorite theme of Henri Matisse. He transformed ordinary rooms into exotic settings full of energy. Matisse's use of line gives this painting a feeling of energy. Compare and contrast the variety of lines in this work.

Henri Matisse. *Interior with Egyptian Curtain*. 1948. Oil on canvas. 116.2 × 88.9 cm (45¾ × 35"). The Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C. © 2003 Succession H. Matisse, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Line

When you, as a child, first picked up a crayon, a line might have been the first mark you made. You use lines to write numbers, symbols, and the letters of the alphabet. The lines on a map help you find the best route from one place to another. You use lines to draw pictures. Lines are everywhere.

In this chapter, you will:

- Compare and contrast the use of line in artworks.
- Identify the different kinds of lines and the ways lines can vary in appearance.
- Demonstrate how lines are used to change values.
- Analyze the expressive qualities or meanings of different lines in works of art.

Focus on Art History

Figure 4.1 was painted by Henri Matisse (1869–1954)

in 1924. At this time, Matisse was well established in the European art world. He experimented with different styles throughout his long and varied career. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Matisse and a group of young French artists were shown together in a famous art exhibit. Their use of intense colors, bold designs, and energetic brushwork inspired a critic to name them the *Fauves*, or “Wild Beasts.” Notice how the energetic lines in Figure 4.1 dance across the canvas and add decorative patterns to the fabrics and tree.

Compare and Contrast. This interior scene includes a still-life arrangement on a table. Figure 4.13 on page 74, painted 50 years later, also includes a still-life setup on a table. How are these works similar? How are they different?

Vocabulary

line
dimension
outline
implied lines
value
crosshatching

The Element of Line

Lines are everywhere. You can see lines in the grain of a piece of wood or in the cracks on a sidewalk. Lines are used to create words, numbers, and symbols. They are also used to create art. In drawing, **line** is *an element of art that is the path of a moving point through space*.



▲ **FIGURE 4.2** The artist has used the line of the highway to pull your eyes into and through this artwork. Compare and contrast the kinds of line the artist has used in this painting. How do they convey movement and rhythm?

Yvonne Jacquette. *Town of Skowhegan, Maine V.* 1988. Oil on canvas. 198.6 × 163 cm (78³/₁₆ × 64³/₁₆”). Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, NYC.

What Is Line?

Artists use line to lead your eyes through a work of art. This is because it takes movement to make a line. When you see a line, your eyes usually follow its movement. Lines can lead your eyes into, around, and out of visual images, as in the painting in **Figure 4.2**. Notice how the artist uses the line of the highway to pull your eyes into the artwork.

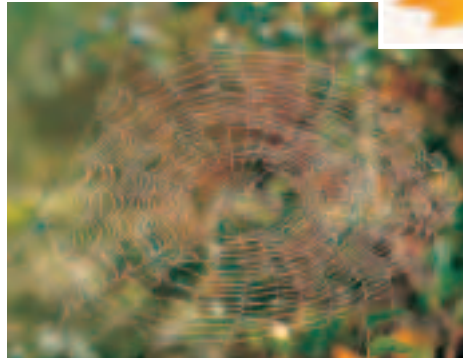
A line has width as well as length, but usually the width of a line is very small compared with its length. In fact, a line is thought of as being one-dimensional. Its one dimension is length. **Dimension** means *the amount of space an object takes up in one direction*. Two-dimensional objects have height as well as width. A painting is two-dimensional. Three-dimensional objects have height, width, and depth. A sculpture is three-dimensional. You will learn more about dimensions in the next chapter when you study shape, form, and space.

Artists create lines in many ways. A line can be drawn on paper with a pencil or scratched into wet clay with a stick. Of course, the world is full of lines

that were not drawn with a tool. Some thin, solid objects look like lines. Examples are tree trunks, yarn, spiderwebs, and wires (**Figure 4.3**). These items look like lines because length is their most important dimension.

Some lines that we think we see in nature really do not exist. For instance, when you look at the edges of shapes, you think of lines. In the photo of the dogwood blossom (**Figure 4.4**), notice that there are no black lines around the outside of each petal. However, in a drawing of that same blossom in **Figure 4.5**, lines are used to show the edges of each shape. *A line that shows or creates the outer edges of a shape is an **outline**.*

Implied lines are *a series of points that the viewer's eyes automatically connect*. Implied lines are suggested rather than real lines. A series of dots or dashes, a line of machine stitches, or a trail of wet footprints can create an implied line. A group of shapes arranged in a row can also create an implied line. In **Figure 4.6** on page 72, Abrasha has created a Hanukkah menorah that holds nine cone-shaped candles. The round tops of the cones create an implied line that leads your eyes across the top of the menorah.



▲ **FIGURE 4.3** What lines do you see around you?



▲ **FIGURE 4.4** What edges do you see?



▲ **FIGURE 4.5** Student work. How have the edges on this picture been created?

► **FIGURE 4.6** The artist has used implied line to create a sense of movement. How many sets of nine shapes can you find that create implied lines? Describe the lines.

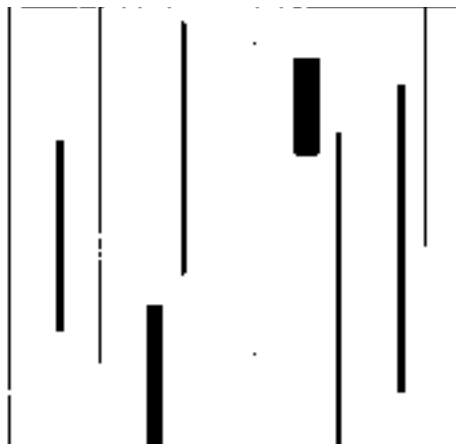
Abrasha. *Hanukkah Menorah*. 1995. Fabricated stainless steel, silver, and gold. 17.5 × 43.8 × 7.3 cm (6⁷/₈ × 17¹/₄ × 2⁷/₈"). Renwick Gallery, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



Kinds of Lines

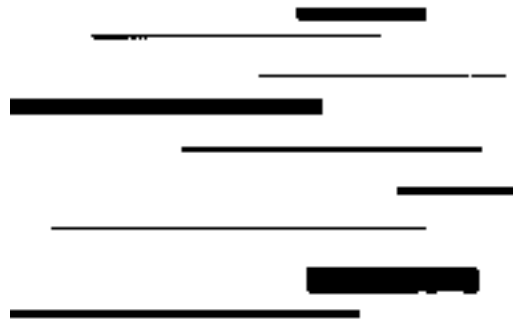
There are five basic kinds of lines: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, and zigzag.

Vertical lines (**Figure 4.7**) move straight up and down—they do not lean at all. A vertical line drawn on a piece of paper is perpendicular to the bottom edge of the paper. It is also perpendicular to the horizon (the line where earth and sky seem to meet). When you stand up straight, your body forms a vertical line.



▲ **FIGURE 4.7** Vertical lines move straight up and down.

Horizontal lines (**Figure 4.8**) are parallel to the horizon. They do not slant. When you lie flat on the floor, your body forms a horizontal line.



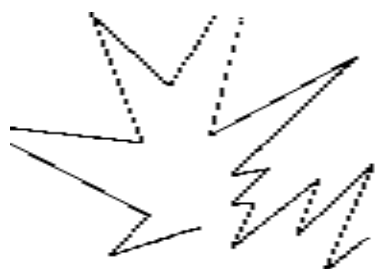
▲ **FIGURE 4.8** Horizontal lines lie parallel to the horizon.

Diagonal lines (**Figure 4.9**) slant. Diagonals are somewhere between a vertical and a horizontal line. Diagonals look as if they are either rising or falling. Imagine you are standing straight up; then, with your body stiff, you fall to the floor. At any point during your fall, your body forms a diagonal line.



▲ **FIGURE 4.9** Diagonal lines slant.

Zigzag lines (**Figure 4.10**) are made from a combination of diagonal lines. The diagonals form angles and change direction suddenly.



▲ **FIGURE 4.10** Zigzag lines are combinations of diagonals.

Curved lines (**Figure 4.11**) change direction gradually. When you draw wiggly lines, you are putting together a series of curves. Other kinds of curved lines form spirals and circles.



▲ **FIGURE 4.11** Curved lines change direction gradually.

Activity

Analyzing Lines in Artworks

Applying Your Skills. Select and analyze one of the following paintings from this chapter: Figure 4.1, 4.12, 4.16, 4.18, or 4.19. Diagram the lines of the painting. Use green for verticals, blue for horizontals, red for diagonals, and violet for curves. Place your diagram on display. Can your classmates identify the painting you represented by looking at the colors?

Computer Option. Use the Line tool to create a series of drawings to illustrate each of the five line types. Vary the widths and lengths of your lines. You may also choose to vary patterns and colors. Label each drawing's line type.

Line Variation

Lines vary in appearance in five major ways:

- **Length.** Lines can be long or short.



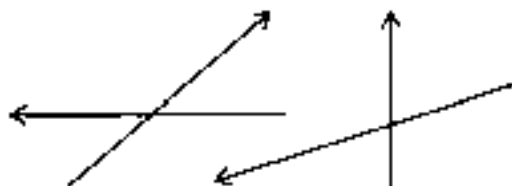
- **Width.** Lines can be thick or thin.



- **Texture.** Lines can be rough or smooth.



- **Direction.** Lines can move in any direction, such as vertical, horizontal, or diagonal.



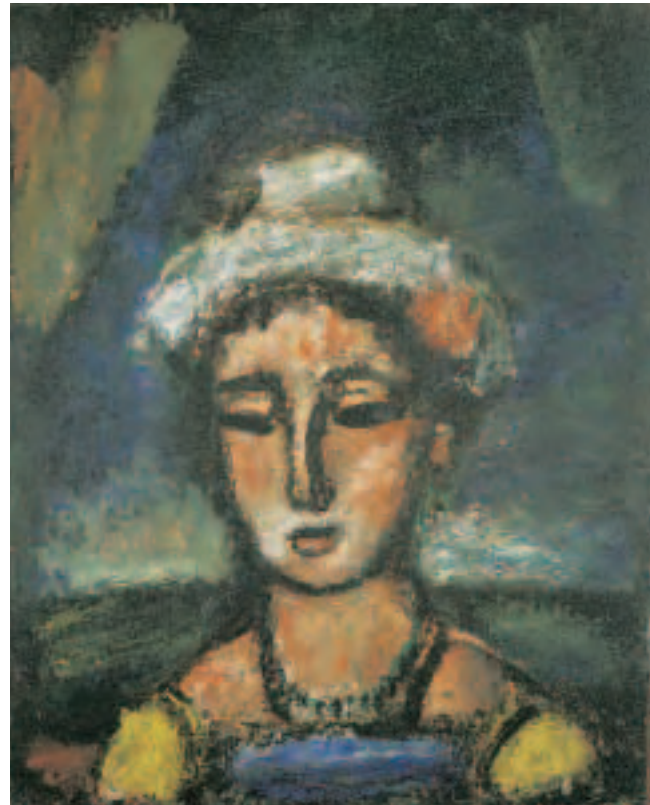
- **Degree of curve.** Lines can curve gradually or not at all, become wavy, or form spirals.



These five variations can be combined in many, many ways. You can make long, wide lines; rough, short lines; and smooth, curved lines.

► **FIGURE 4.12** When Rouault was a boy he was apprenticed to a maker of stained glass. The thick black lines surrounding bright colors in his paintings remind the viewer of stained-glass windows.

Georges Rouault. *The Italian Woman*. 1938. Oil on panel. 79.4 × 63 cm (31¹/₄ × 24¹³/₁₆"), Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Vladimir Horowitz. © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.



▲ **FIGURE 4.13** Although this painting is called a still life, it seems to have movement and activity. This is because of the artist's use of line. How many different line directions and line variations can you find in this painting? Describe them.

Alice Neel. *Still Life, Rose of Sharon*. 1973. Oil on canvas. 101.6 × 76.2 cm (40 × 30"). Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York. Arthur M. Bullowa Bequest.

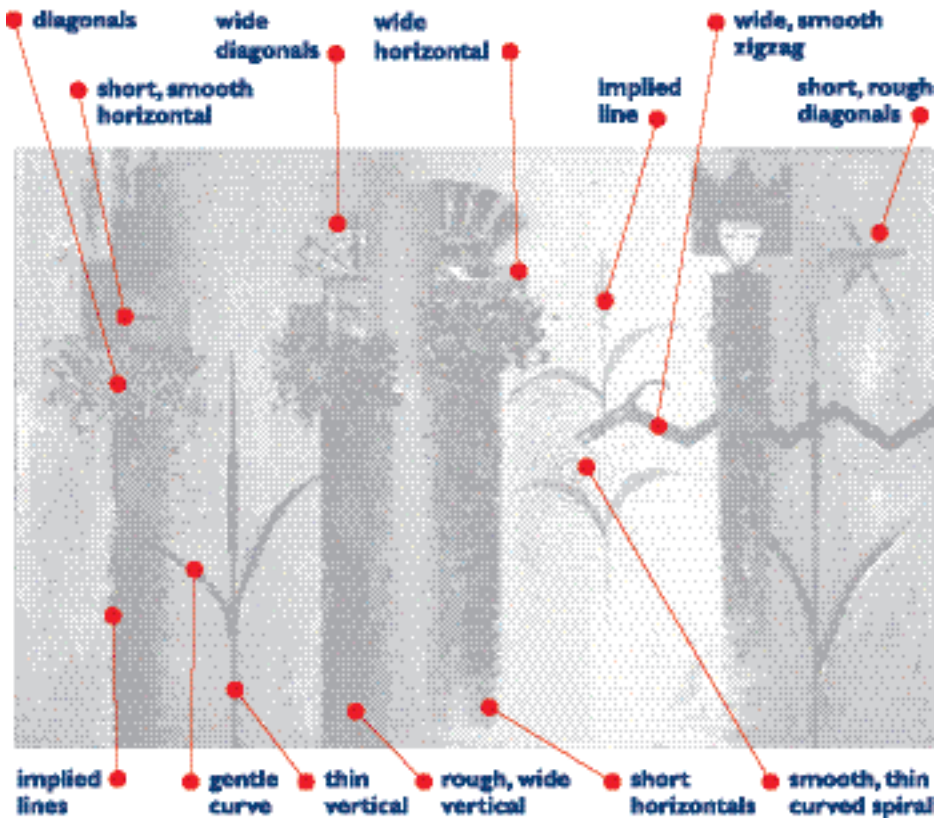
The media, tools, and surfaces used to make lines affect the way a line looks. As with the combination of various line types, a multitude of possible effects can be created. Some common materials used by artists to make lines are graphite, chalk, crayon, ink, and paint. The material is applied by using a tool. Some tools used for making lines include pencils, markers, pens, brushes, and scissors.

Artists use different tools and materials to create different types of lines. For example, a line drawn with chalk on a chalkboard looks smoother than a line drawn with chalk on a sidewalk. Some artists have discovered very unusual ways of using line, as shown in **Figures 4.12** and **4.13**. In **Figure 4.14**, the artist has used many line types and variations.

LOOKING CLOSELY

Line Types and Variations

In this painting, the artist has used five different kinds of line and many line variations. Can you find other examples of line and line variation combinations?



◀ FIGURE 4.14

Dan Namingha. *Blessing Rain Chant*. 1992. Acrylic on canvas. 198 × 304.8 cm (78 × 120"). Niman Fine Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Line and Value

Value is the element of art that describes the darkness or lightness of an object. Value depends on how much light a surface reflects. A surface has a dark value if it

reflects little light. It has a light value if it reflects a lot of light. Every time you make a pencil mark on a piece of white paper, you are creating a line with a certain value. The harder you press, the

darker the value. A series of closely placed lines can create areas of dark value. The lines may be parallel or they may cross one another. **Crosshatching** is the technique of using crossed lines for shading.

The values that line groups create depend on four factors: the number of lines, the size of the spaces between the lines, the media, and the tools. A soft

pencil (2B, 4B) makes a wide, dark line. A hard pencil (2H, 4H) makes a thin, gray line. A crayon stroked over a rough surface makes a broken line. A crayon stroked over smooth paper makes a solid line.

Look at the Dürer drawing in **Figure 4.15**. Use a magnifying glass to study the way Dürer has used line combinations to create dark and light values.

Activity

Using Line to Create Value

Demonstrating Effective Use of Art Media and Tools in Drawing.

Fold a sheet of white drawing paper into nine squares. In each square use a different combination of parallel or crosshatched lines to create a different value. Try a variety of pencils, from hard 2H to soft 4B lead. Try quill pens, ballpoint pens, and felt-tip pens. Think of some other tools and materials to use.

Computer Option. Use the Line tool to draw three diagonal lines (that are not parallel) from screen edge to screen edge. This will divide your screen into six or seven sections. Fill each section with lines. Vary the spacing of the lines by placing them close together in one section and farther apart in another. Lines can be crosshatched. You can choose the Patterns palette and fill the sections by using the Fill Bucket tool, or create your own patterns. Use only black and white. Notice that the value of the area darkens as lines are placed close together and lightens when lines are farther apart.



Check Your Understanding

1. How is *line* defined in drawing?
2. What are the five basic kinds of lines?
3. Compare and contrast five ways that lines vary in appearance in artworks.
4. Describe the crosshatching technique.



▲ **FIGURE 4.15** The artist has used line to create this drawing. Identify the areas where the artist has used crosshatching to indicate shading. What kinds of line variation has Dürer used?

Albrecht Dürer. *An Oriental Ruler Seated on His Throne*. c. 1495. Pen and black ink. 30.6 × 19.7 cm (12 × 7¾"). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. © 1998 Board of Trustees. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.