

The entire painting essay example

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



Communication

Introduction

Gestalt psychology is built around the theory that the brain processes images and information in a holistic manner and creates self-organized juxtapositions. As per gestalt psychology, therefore, the ‘whole’ is invariably larger than ‘the sum of the parts’. Accordingly, the mind tries to make sense of images through the processes of ‘proximity’, ‘closure’, ‘figure-ground’, ‘common fate’, ‘similarity’ and ‘good continuation’ (Liquori, 2011). The principles of Gestalt can be best explained with a painting as an example.

Analysis of a Painting Using Gestalt Psychology

Figure 1: The Singing Butler (Vettriano, 1992)

‘The Singing Butler’ is a famous painting by Jack Vettriano (1992). In the image, we see a man and a woman dancing. The ground appears wet. In the distance is a dark blue band and the sky is overcast. A man is holding an umbrella for the couple. Another woman appears to be struggling to hold her umbrella aloft.

The Gestalt principle of similarity propels the mind to connect the water on the ground to the overcast sky, and one deduces that it has just rained. The setting is deduced to be a beach, as the brain applies the principle of proximity of the beach to the sea, seen as a dark blue band on the horizon. The three figures in black are comprehended as hotel staff due to similar attire. The two umbrellas, seen with the emphasis of the woman struggling to hold her umbrella aloft, indicate that it is windy. Therefore, the brain

registers the image as one where a butler is serenading his love on the beach on a windy, rainy day.

The Painting With One Element Removed

Once the woman holding the umbrella is removed, the brain can no longer register the fact that it is windy, as the absence of two umbrellas remove the linkage of the principle of similarity connected to umbrellas, coupled with the principle of closure applied to the woman struggling with her umbrella, gave the idea of a windy day. Further, the notion that it is a butler dancing is also put to doubt, as there are only two figures in similar attire. It therefore appears that there is a gentleman with his ladylove dancing on the beach, with his butler holding the umbrella.

The Painting With Two Elements Removed

Once the person holding the umbrella over the couple is removed, the social status of the couple becomes even fuzzier. Now, the brain merely registers the image as a couple dancing on the beach. The original suggestions of the man being a butler, and it being a windy day, are both absent.

Conclusion

The exercise of removing elements from an image demonstrates how the various parts of the image are combined in the brain to provide information that is greater than the sum of the parts. Artists, painters and advertisers use this principle to draw the viewers into their images and provide visual cues to messages they desire the viewers to carry. Towards this end, they would use the gestalt principles of ‘proximity’, ‘closure’, ‘figure-ground’, ‘common fate’, ‘and similarity’ and ‘good continuation’.

References

Liquori, E. (2011). The close relationship between Gestalt principles and design. Retrieved April 18, 2015, from <http://www.instantshift.com/2011/09/19/the-close-relationship-between-gestalt-principles-and-design/>

Vettriano, J. (1992). The singing butler [Painting]. Retrieved April 18, 2015, from <http://www.jackvettriano.com/shop/the-singing-butler-2/>