

Composition?

I've heard of that.

Kind of.

**HES.
ART**

This guide is about composition, also known layout. How I arrange a picture on the canvas.

It is NOT written by an expert in composition but you're in a good place. A place to start.

Very broadly speaking, composition in art is about two things.

Focus

The important part of
your image.

and Balance

The rest of it, used to guide our eyes and compliment the focus.

Let's take a look at this idea in action. This image has a very definite focal point- the boat.

It is balanced by the long, sweeping horizon, fluffy clouds and sea.



There are some easy-to-apply ways to pull attention to the focal point of your image.

Most of them boil down to **contrast**.

Colour- also known as Hue. Our eyes are drawn to colours that stand out in the crowd. The red sail and brown hull contrast with the lighter pastel-tone sky and blues of the sea.



Light/Dark- also known as Value. This one can go either way. In a light image, we are drawn first to the darkest section. In a dark image, we will be drawn to the light. The shadow on the sail enhances contrast and draws the eye.



Some other general rules for contrast....

...and the exception.

Specificity > Vagueness



Detail overrides anything vague.
In J.M.W Turner's painting, our eye is drawn to the ship and tug boat amidst painterly clouds of sea and sky.

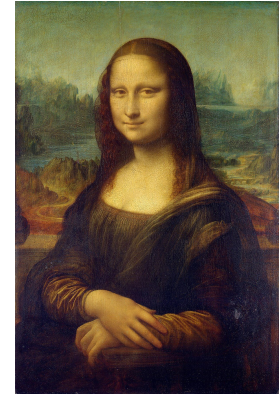
Add more detail where you want focus, and less where you do not.

Hard > Soft



Our eyes are pulled to where detail is crisp and clean. Like a movie camera, we can choose what piece of our picture is 'in focus' and areas that are soft or blurred will become less important.

Faces > All



Unless deliberately obscured by other elements in art, we will be drawn to faces and human-like features above all.

Use this Face Power wisely.

So you've decided on your focus.

How do you balance it out?

This part is (unfortunately) different every time.

It's about filling in the space around a picture's focal point and making it feel comfortable to look at. It takes a lot of trial and error, and even experienced artists can take a few shots to get a picture feeling right.

Luckily, some helpful people wrote down some ideas a long time ago. They tried to defined with hard maths what looks most 'pleasing'.



The 'golden ratio'.

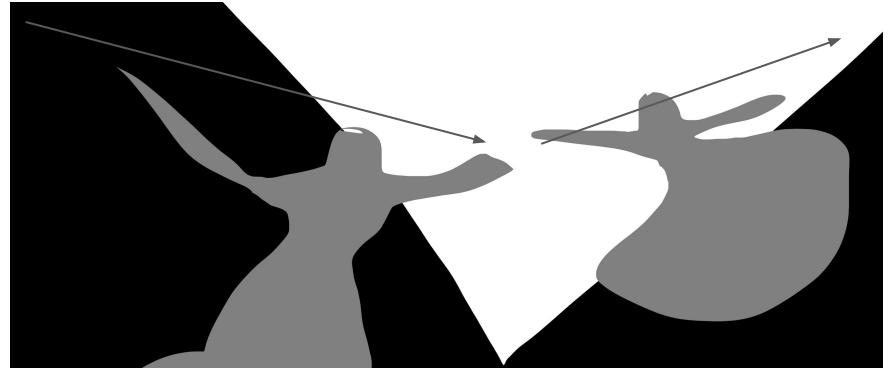
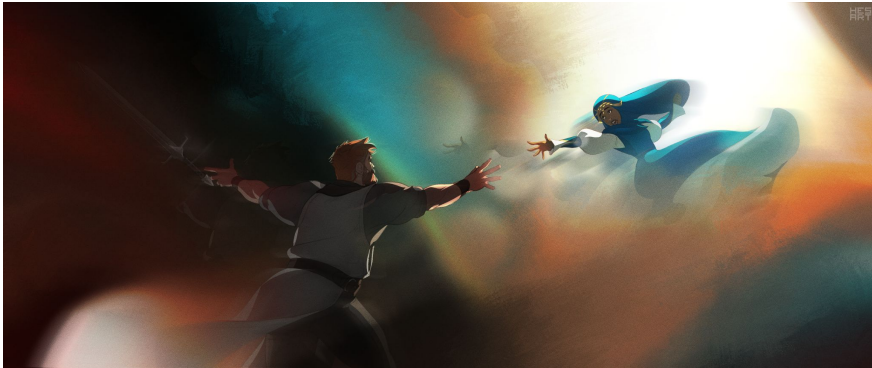


The 'rule of thirds'.

In my opinion, the golden ratio and the rule of thirds shouldn't be taken as hard templates that you MUST abide by. They're guides with some solid ideas behind them.

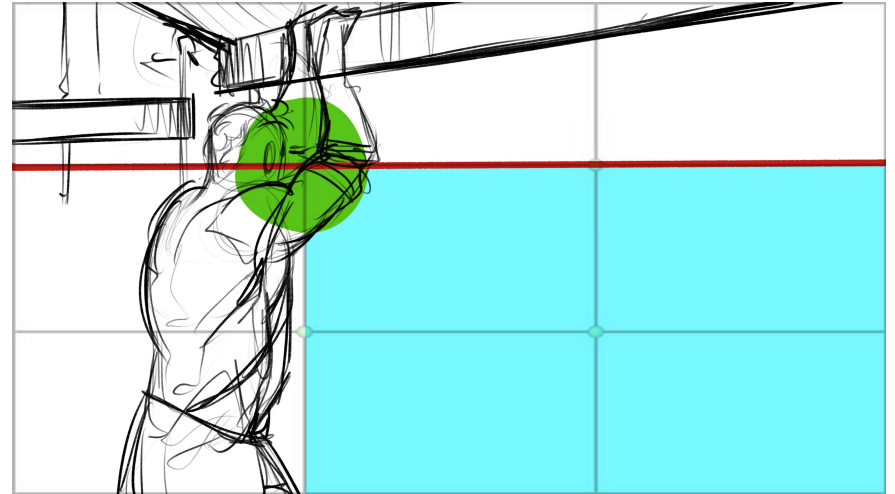
The golden ratio is about flow, and the line our eyes like to follow through a picture.

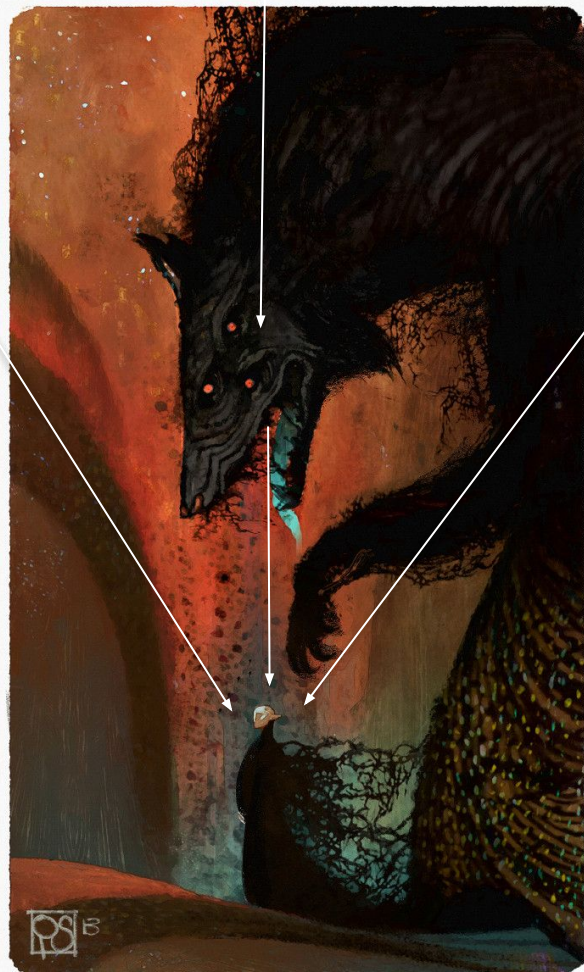
When you put together background elements, make a little breadcrumb trail. Can you follow that trail to your focus and beyond?



The rule of thirds is about asymmetry.
An image tends to look more natural
and comfortable when it's not mirrored
or completely centred.

This idea can help our eye travel
around a picture too, or frame the
focus more intensely.

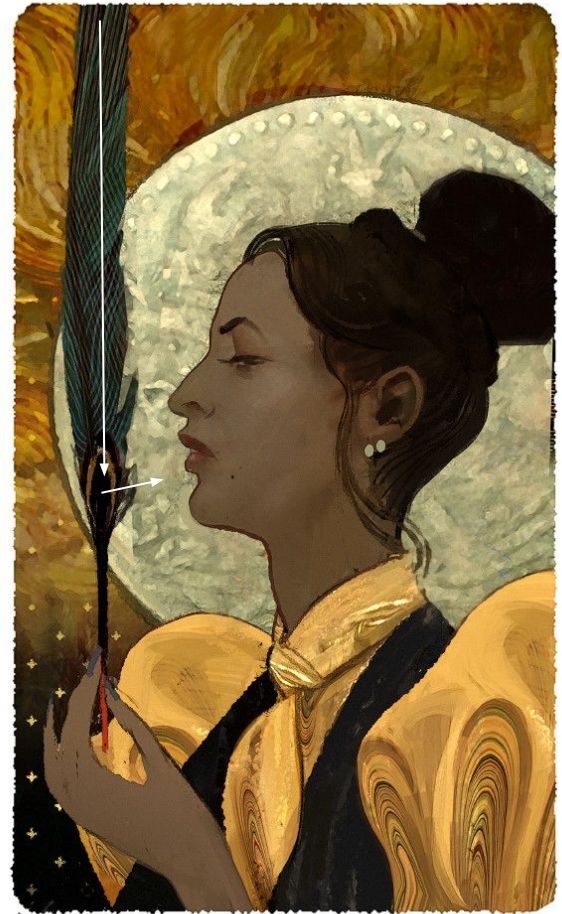




For impact,
for drama,
for intensity...

**...sometimes we
need to throw
those “rules” out
of the window.**

Good composition
isn't always bound to
thirds or stuck on a
rail.



DA: Inquisition character art, Ramil Sunga

Plan ahead. Explore your options. Keep the big picture in mind.

Thumbnails- little rough drawings of what you have in mind- are ideal for exploring different compositions.

If you know how to get to your focus from the start, you're much less likely to get lost along the way.

And for goodness' sake, zoom out every now and then.

Whatever your approach, make sure you keep a handle on the whole picture.

Is it working? Does it look good? **Is it making your eyeballs happy?**