

## Art Fundamentals Essay

In the work *Street Berlin*, by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Kirchner uses the principles of line, shape, and contrast to create a flowing image that makes the viewer feel as if they are on a busy Berlin Street. The work uses many freeform lines, these communicate the feeling of movement and bustle, they also communicate a sense of independence. These lines encourage a sense of individuality within the groups of people. The use of diagonal lines further this sense of movement. The lack of geometric shapes continues to fuel the notion of liveliness in this piece. As the diagonal lines encourage the viewer to look all over the painting, the contrast of the darker, muted colors of all the people in the painting and bright white collars of the main ladies draws the viewer's attention to the faces of the women.

Although this work is two-dimensional, texture is implied by the brush strokes that are used. The brush strokes are small. This makes the viewer imagine the painting as feeling light and feather-like rather than feeling like oil paint. These feather-like strokes highlight the organic nature of the painting. This piece does not have a third dimensional form, but the elements of movement and perspective make the viewer feel as if the painting is in three dimensions. The figures in this piece are slender; these forms imply a light mass and elongated volume. If they were physical objects, they would be longer and narrower rather than shorter and squatter.

Kirchner uses the elements of value and space in this work to isolate the two ladies in the foreground. These figures have a slightly lighter value than the figures behind them. This shows that they belong in their space but allows them to stand out as the highlighted characters. The space work in this piece makes it even more clear that these women in the foreground are the main subject. They are much larger than the figures behind them, which makes the lady in the purple

dress and the lady in the blue dress feel much closer to the viewer than the other people in the scene. Atmospheric perspective is used as well. The people in the foreground are much more defined than the people in the background. This reinforces the feeling that the people in the foreground are closer to the viewer.

In *Street Berlin*, the colors are all from a similar part of the color wheel; accordingly, they are considered analogous. This gives the painting a feeling of harmony even though there is a lot of movement and distortion. The low saturation of the colors communicate the feeling of calmness while the opposing cool and warm colors create a contrast. The organic shapes continue to encourage a sense of movement and energy, and when these elements are combined, they form a piece of chaos and calm, which reflects how one may feel being surrounded on a busy Berlin Street just taking in the scenery while pursuing an adventure.

The painting does not have any elements associated with the passage of time but does have elements of movement. This piece has implied movement that the women are wading down the street, although they are not moving, the organic shapes and diagonal lines create the illusion that these women are walking towards the viewer. The different directions that the people in the painting are facing add to the element of movement, the mind wants to imagine them moving in the way that they are facing.

*Street Berlin* has a good balance between unity and variety. The piece displays conceptual unity with the ideas of travel and rush. Kirchner achieves this by having many different figures traveling to many different places. The train and car continue to add to this effect. This further emphasizes the idea of a busy street during peak travel hours. A lot of the variety in this work is displayed using color. There are a lot of warmer pinks and reds as well as cooler blues and purples. Although these colors are all analogous on the color wheel, the contrast between the warm and

cool colors adds variety to the piece. This piece displays asymmetrical balance. Altogether, the work balances itself out even though it has a lot of variety, and this helps to emphasize the “calm in the chaos” feel.

The painting itself has an almost life-size scale. This invites the viewer to enter the world on this Berlin Street and to become a part of the art themselves. The women in the foreground of the painting have a much larger scale than the people in the back, this shows that they are the most important people in this painting. If we follow the scale, the next most important people are the man to the far right of the ladies, the men behind and between them, and least importantly the people in the upper lefthand corner of the painting who are very small. The proportions of the people in the foreground are also slightly distorted. They are taller than one would expect them to be. This adds extra emphasis and importance to them while maintaining their sleek visage.

The focal point of this work is the women in the foreground. They are separated from the rest of the work using color and are directly contrasting the sea of men in black suits behind them. There is also subordination through the train and vehicle. Although these objects are in the same black hue as the male figures, they add some contrast through their shape. When a viewer looks at Street Berlin, they are immediately drawn to the women in the foreground, and then to the train. As they look at the train, they notice the rest of the scenery and proceed to get lost in the painting.

Street Berlin does not have any explicit repeating patterns, but it does have motifs. Each Businessman in his black suit is a motif, and the repetitiveness of them show how little the men vary between themselves. They are all almost the same with a few differences. This creates a sense of monotony that is only broken by the women in the foreground. There is also rhythm when this piece is viewed. The subordinating focal points of the train and the car invite the viewer to take a

closer look around the painting. These points guide the eyes of the viewer around the painting and allow them to notice more detail, like the fences in the background.

A formal analysis of Street Berlin reveals that the most important elements to consider are lines and color. The combination of these elements provides the basis for everything else in the painting and are a great steppingstone for diving deeper into the rest of the painting. Kirchner's individual style is shown through his brush strokes and dull colors. The brushstrokes in Street Berlin are visible and add to the individual style of Kirchner. When performing an iconographic analysis on Street Berlin, one notices that the women in the foreground are distinct from the men in the back. This is a symbol of individuality. The women seem to be the only ones who are enjoying themselves. This sends the message that even if someone must stand out to be themselves, it will ultimately lead to joy in their own life. When performing a contextual analysis on Street Berlin, one can learn that the painting was created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Kirchner was part of an expressionist group. This information helps the viewer to understand why Kirchner used his style of painting when creating this work, and why he adopted this "avant-garde" style. When analyzing a work of art, and especially when one is sharing that analysis, it is important to recognize any biases that may alter how the piece is described. When these biases are included in the analysis, it is no longer an analysis and becomes a critique. Critiques are an important part of art appreciation, but it is also important to understand how each element of a piece can contribute to the meaning of the whole without one's personal biases.