

# Expressive Art through Line

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## Expressive Art through Line

**“Line – the essence of art, the language of free expression.”**

- Foundations of Art & Design, Lois Fichner-Rathus, 2008, Thomas Wadsworth, Belmont, CA

Line is one of the basic elements in art as it is one-dimensional and can differ in terms of width, length and direction. It is used in various ways; straight or curved, thick or thin, horizontal, vertical or diagonal therefore can be used to create form. Line can be used to help the eye to see around the compositions and somewhat convey a story or message. Line is used everywhere in our lives. We can see it in everything from dirt to the sky. This essay will study the use of Line in Expressive Art because it is believed that line is one of the best elements used by any artist to express their feelings, emotions onto an artwork. It will study the different art movements that elaborate expressiveness through various techniques and media. In art, expression and line are fundamentally linked. With no expression, the Line we draw would mean nothing as Line are created through the connection of points and are defined as the side-by-side placement of an infinite number of points. In other words, line is infinite; line has no endpoint, and is ever going. The length of the line may become longer if the point moves on. However, a line has no measureable size because they have no width. Therefore, for Line to perceive in the world of arts, it must have a width as well as length. Therefore, in art, a point – which has no measureable size, becomes a dot – which has a measurable size. Thus in art, Line is a moving dot so when you put a point of an instrument to a surface, move your hand and your results is a line.



Close-up of a leaf's veins, 2005  
Alice Smith School

Line may actually be the gaps in stratified rock or fissures in a complex crystal or even in the veins in the leaf or the rings of a tree. Yet artists are so captivated by the complexity of line and the endless way we can manipulate line, imitating the 'handiwork' that they have observed in nature.



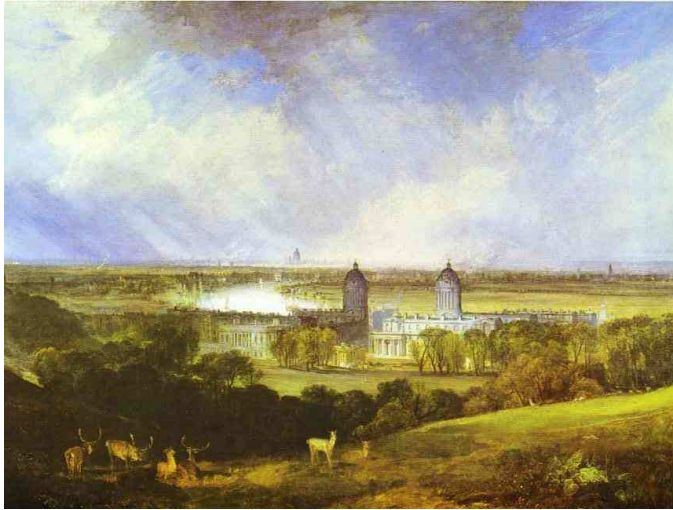
Women's Ceremony, MCA  
2000  
Alice Smith School  
WCA (WCA) Art Centre  
over the

In Pre-historic times, line was use as a source of communication and eventually it became written and visual language. Pebbles were used for counting, carried inscriptions with Line and geometric designs that later led to a more complicated representation. Even the simplest of the images are based exclusively on linear elements. Writing is the ordering of knowledge. It cannot exist unless the whole world agrees what a particular symbol represents. The link between communication, pictogram and art is that there is a comparison found in line as an element of art and essential tool of the artist. How do artists communicate their feelings onto their canvas? Aboriginal paintings are a good example of how line could be used to create pictograms – images in their simple forms. Each pictogram has their symbolic meanings and representations. From this we learn that since the beginning of time, line is heavily used to convey stories or messages and thus begun the evolution of what art is today. Looking at 'Women's Ceremony', the people are illustrated as



## Expressive Art through Line

merely just semi-circles, and are gathered around the ceremony which is represented as the blue circle patches.



London, William Turner, 1809  
Oil on Canvas  
Tate Gallery, London, UK

The use of Line represents their feelings and emotions. The representations of the Line and symbols they choose are to represent those feelings or knowledge they wish to put out onto the canvas. For artists such as Michelangelo; painting is similar to an author writing a book because authors express their creativity and passion through their written words. Artists write theirs through Line, and so each painting has a story of its own. Like they say, a painting is worth a thousand words.

Even though viewers may simply just observe Line to be just a random scribble, the direction of the Line does illustrate some meanings. Horizontal Line represents a sense of rest or pause because the earth seems to

be horizontal therefore objects that are parallel to earth looks restful. Horizontal Line gives the idea of space and imply a continuation of a picture beyond the plane to the left or and right such as Turner's painting "London".

Artists would begin a line drawing at the start of their paintings. They would do experiments on different elements to be able to get a general idea of what they want to do for their compositions. Although the compositions may appear non-linear, they will always be come certain aspect that is linear. If you inspect all paintings, sculpture, photograph there is always be linear qualities within.

In the beginning of the 1400s, Florence, Italy began the revolution of modern painting. Then later in the 1500 it spread throughout the rest of Europe. The

High Renaissance (1500-1520)

consisted of artists that

created sculptures and paintings with mastered techniques.

One of them was Leonardo Da Vinci (1452 – 1519) who was also known as the Renaissance man. As seen in his 'Grotesque Head' sketch Da Vinci uses Line to create tone, texture as well as movements. Focusing around the area of the hair, we can see that Da Vinci uses the circular Line to emphasis the rhythm of the hair, and



A Grotesque Head  
Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1507-1507



Study of the hands  
Leonardo da Vinci, 1508  
Study of the hands  
with white on the wrist  
1508



A close to the  
section of the  
drawing

## Expressive Art through Line

yet he also has diagonal Line going across the circular Line to show depth. Here the Line is used to create tone and shades, to bring out the three-dimensional of the picture. If we bring our next focus to the back of the neck and downwards, we see Da Vinci leaves his sketches incomplete as they are just studies of human faces. Although Da Vinci leaves his sketches without any closure there is still a sense of elegance in his sketches do to his highly detailed skills.

When the renaissance started to influence other European countries in the 1500, a German artist Albrecht Durer (1471 – 1528) came with his technique of graphic art. Durer believes that "Art stands firmly fixed in nature, and he who can't find it there, he has it." Looking at his 'Study of Praying Hands' what was most impressive are the details of the prayer hands where it is similar to Da Vinci's. Like Da Vinci, Durer also uses Line to create depth and make it appear realistic. We can see how much effort Durer puts into the study of praying hands. The endless linear details on the hands emphasis how important the hands represented to Durer. A sense of sadness is expressed in this sketch because we see the details of how skinny and old the pair of hands are. The line help illustrate the idea of human mortality and how short our lives are.

The Arts and Craft movement came around during 1880 until 1910. A movement that sprung from the United Kingdom and was inspire by William Morris (1834 – 1896). Although Art Nouveau and Arts & Craft movement started around the same time, it can be argue that they are highly similar due to its decorative linear pattern designs.

Morris inspired by the nature of the world and organic imagery. The linear aspects of his work are the complexity of Line that overlap and the use of curve Line. Curve line helps convey energy as well as elegances. The only time an artist would use curve Line would be to show the curves of a human body. Curve line illustrates the sense of gentleness, shallow and softening effect on the composition. The curves on a human body would often have a pleasing, and sensual effect. Therefore, Morris may be reflecting on the idea

of complexity and elegance. Despite the intertwining of certain flowers in the sketch, it does convey a feeling of chaos yet tamed.



Design for Snakehead, William Morris, 1876  
Watercolour and pencil on paper  
National Museums & Galleries of Wales



The Peacock Skin, Aubrey Beardsley, 1895  
From Salome by Oscar Wilde

Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), his works mainly consisted of illustrations done in inks. Art Nouveau (1890 -1910) is merely decorative arts, where the styles were asymmetrical, highly ornamental, intertwining plants, liberal and yet delicate. The themes were generally symbolism and erotic nature and their designs created to be dreamlike and exotic forms. It was mainly practise on furniture, jewellery and book designs. Beardsley linear work reflected a lot about his



**Expressive Art through Line**

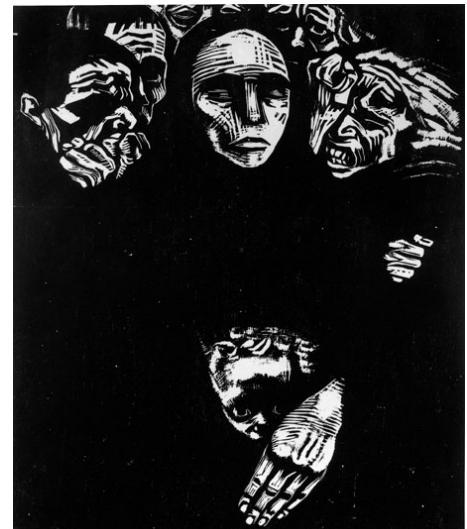
lifestyle. He mastered the 'Japoniste' techniques where Beardsley was able to balance out the flat, black areas of the compositions with the white spaces. With the peacock skirt, it is highly curved to illustrate the dynamic yet sensual effects that easily sweep the blank page that it easily fills up the page. The technique was very effective that it was use to help differentiate between what he drew and what was left out. This technique was known as the 'Negative Shape'. The complex detail on the peacock skirt helps to balance out the illustration as the large white surface areas are left blank. Beardsley's use of Line creates a sense of value and texture therefore despite using only black Indian ink; he is still able to present a depth in his illustrations. Beardsley continued to draw controversial illustrations of eroticism, corruption and depravity. Beardsley's illustrations were highly detailed from the landscape of trees to the strains of the hair of a person. He did challenge the traditional ways of painting by using Indian ink, keeping it black and white and using the idea of decorations into art.



The Starry Night by Vincent Van Gogh, 1889  
 O'wncchics  
 The Met, MoMA, New York

In comparison to Beardsley's 'refine' drawings, Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890) may be one of the best example artists who use linear qualities to express ones feelings. Van Gogh obsessed with religion and social service was a misfit during his childhood days. In 1886 he discovered the Post-Impressionist in Paris and found his style in painting. He switched from dark to bright colours, and social realist to outdoor scenes. In Van Gogh's 'Starry Night', the brushstrokes are clearly seen to be the linear quality of the painting. It is seen that the brushstrokes have been 'agitatedly' painted on and full of passion and rhythm. Unlike Beardsley who creates controversy illustrations, Van Gogh's sufferings

and pain is clearly seen in his swirling brushstrokes. It is somewhat ironic that Van Gogh produces a painting that at first appears to be peaceful and restless. Yet as we study more into the painting, we discover that the swirling Line shows Van Gogh's frustrated thoughts in life and his desperation. What makes this painting very unique is the direction of the strokes of the paintings. If we focus around the area of the swirling clouds, it can be seen that Van Gogh exaggerates the thickness of the brush strokes Line to indicate the movement of the clouds. The eye would be following the same direction of the Line that is stirring the starry night. The red and blue arrows demonstrate where the Line is being focused around. This allows viewers' eyes to be left wondered throughout the painting. Following the curves and singling out the stars as they are being joined



**The People**, Käthe Kollwitz, 1922-1923

Print, Woodcut on Japan paper  
 The Robert Gore Rifkind Center for

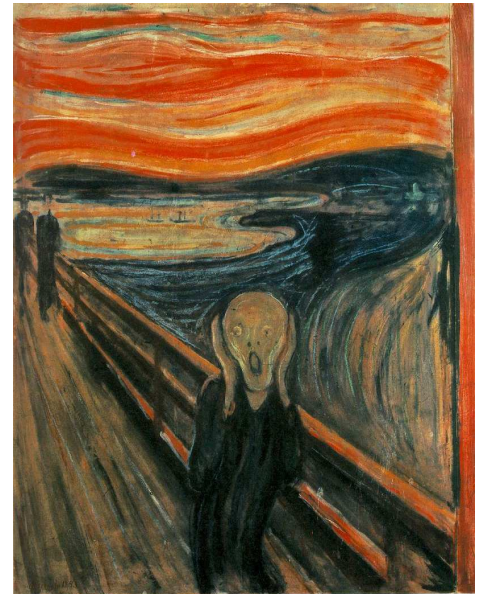
## Expressive Art through Line

dot-to-dot. This also creates the illusion of ongoing movement whilst the stars are fixed which viewers would also see.

To express one's emotions, even Line is able to illustrate such a picture. ▲ German female artist, Käthe Kollwitz (1867 – 1945) is known for her famous etching and printed artworks. Her works is also another best example of conveying an artist's feelings. Kollwitz being a victim of both World Wars shows her heartache of losing loved ones and her compassion towards poverty and social conditions of Germany in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Looking at 'The People', the details on the faces is clearly seen as linear, the picture can nearly be seen like a quick sketch on paper. The content of the print also has the same element of Beardsley's 'Japoniste'; however instead Kollwitz uses black to convey the spaces and using the white to enhance the expression and details of the people. It can be seen that 'The People' conveys a despair mood, as the linear details outline the sadness and oppressive emotions. Kollwitz's 'The People' style can be argued to be similar to Van Gogh's expressive 'Starry Night' style, where the use of Line helps convey the artist emotions. Each stroke is able to convey Kollwitz's turmoil in response to the living conditions of those who lived poorly. It can be seen in most of Kollwitz's self portraits the intensive feeling from her linear scribbles.

▲ different use of line found in the work of a great Norwegian painter was highly inspired by the impressionist and post-impressionist artist during his stay at Paris. Edvard Munch (1863 – 1944) is one of the greatest expressionist artists, and his prime era was during 1892-1908 in Berlin. Munch was one of the greatest inspirations for the German Expressionist Movement, as Munch's style was very bold and strong and reflected the situation of Germany both spiritually and socially when World War I arose.

Munch's 'The Scream' reflected his melancholic personality, because of the traumatic experience event he witness as a child. Munch's style of art is the portrayal of extreme emotions such as jealousy, confusion, sexuality, desire and loneliness. He portrayed emotions through distorting form and colour. In his 'Scream' it represents an idea of a person losing his mind, and with sharply curved Line, he created the effect of turmoil, chaos and violence. In each stroke that was agitatedly painted on at the background, convey the message of insanity and the fear of losing one's mind with a sense of turbulent rhythm. Today



*The Scream, Edvard Munch, 1893  
Oil on Canvas  
National Gallery, Oslo*

Munch's 'The Scream' painting is highly recognised as a representation of anxiety, and when he first exhibits his paintings it caused so much uproar that the exhibit had to be closed.





## Expressive Art through Line

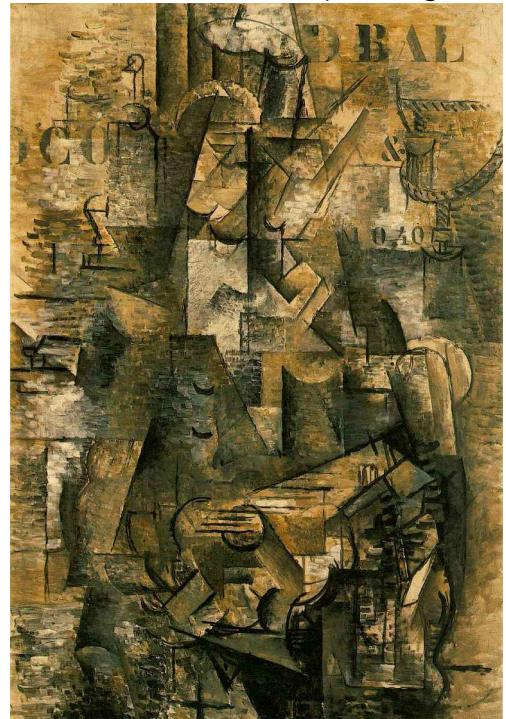


*The Disintegration of Persistence of Memory, Salvador Dalí, 1952-54  
O'Connell's  
The Disintegration of Persistence of Memory*

Line does not usually have to be a physical line in paintings. Looking at Salvador Dalí's (1904 – 1989) 'The Disintegration of Persistence of Memory', is a representation of Einstein's Theory of Relativity where Dalí incorporated the wrapping of time in gravity. However if we look from a linear point of view, what we realise is the perspective seen within this painting. It can be said that the linear perspective gives an effect of solidity and relative position. With the help of line, artists are able to create different scales, from a big scaled image vanishing into a mere dot. Within Dalí's painting we can perceive the line coming from one end of the painting to the vanishing point, in the centre of the painting. The use of the perspective line is when the audience looks at the painting, they cannot

help but get pulled in and their focus attention is led to the centre of the painting. Dalí has challenge of line but interpreting it into bringing structure within the painting.

Where as in comparison to Georges Braque's (1882 – 1963) 'Le Portugais', it does not have a main focus point that the audience would look at immediately. Having to work personally close to Pablo Picasso (1881 – 1973), was developing the same style of cubism as well, which is why they both have similar style in art. However 'Le Portugais' has a fusion of both futurist and cubism style of using broken lines and creating a juxtaposition composition, the only difference is that 'Le Portugais' is a juxtaposition piece of a still life. Braque's style also reflects the exploration of using geometric shapes to convey certain elements. What is interesting to see is how Braque conveys the tonal work with merely using horizontal lines. Braque took the exploration of line further by using it to create a sense of depth into his paintings. Even line itself is able to create depth into a painting. The broken line here creates the image of a dream-like mood where all Braque's memories of the place are fused together.



*Le Portugais (Le Portugais), Georges Braque  
1908-1909  
O'Connell's*



## Expressive Art through Line



Marcel Duchamp  
Nude Descending a Staircase no. 2  
Owens College

Staircase, No. 2



Similarly to the futurist artists, Marcel Duchamp (1887 – 1968) was an artist who was widely famous for his controversial 'Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2' painting. This painting is a fusion of both futurism and cubism therefore has both the elements of using geometric patterns and sense of movement. Like the futurist artist, Duchamp uses lines to illustrate the motion of a person walking down a stairs. Although certain aspects of the body were shaped into geometric patterns, it only makes the composition seem more constructed. The aspect of line here is used to convey the dynamism something so simple such as walking down the stairs, can be painted into something that appears so complex. Note how Duchamp use of lines that he makes them repetitive which again helps emphasise the idea of motion and constructive style. The repetitions of line creates such complexity and layering that it displays such a structuralise concept. The diagonal line helps create the painting to appear more energetic and explosive and thus helps highlights the motion in progress.

From 1874's Impressionism to the current 21<sup>st</sup> century's contemporary art, the use of Line has changed and artist challenges the purpose of line. Looking at centuries of art, line has always been used in every single way possible. It is without a doubt one of the fundamental elements in art. It is seen that through centuries of art, line

has been used and convey through various aspects. Some of which are obvious to spot, and others are not so obvious. Line helps convey any emotions by merely drawing a straight line, scribbles, or broken line. It can be perceived as a statement regarding a movement, or a guideline to help the viewers look within a painting. With repetitions of line, the composition is seen to be in motion thus created the futurist movement. With Dali's perspective of lines, it only creates the idea of time and how we, the viewers are only attracted to it. With delicate flowing details of flowers or merely a portrait, the art nouveau were able to create such highly detailed decorations. Simple lines can also be seen as something so complex and chaotic. Through many centuries, line is established as the essence of art. It is the language of freedom, the ability to express oneself freely.

**WORD COUNT:** 3268 words

## Expressive Art through Line

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