

A writer must understand what nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and other word forms are, before putting them together in sentences that make sense to a reader. Similarly, an artist must understand the essential elements of design that must be put together to create a composition that will “make sense” to a viewer of their artwork.

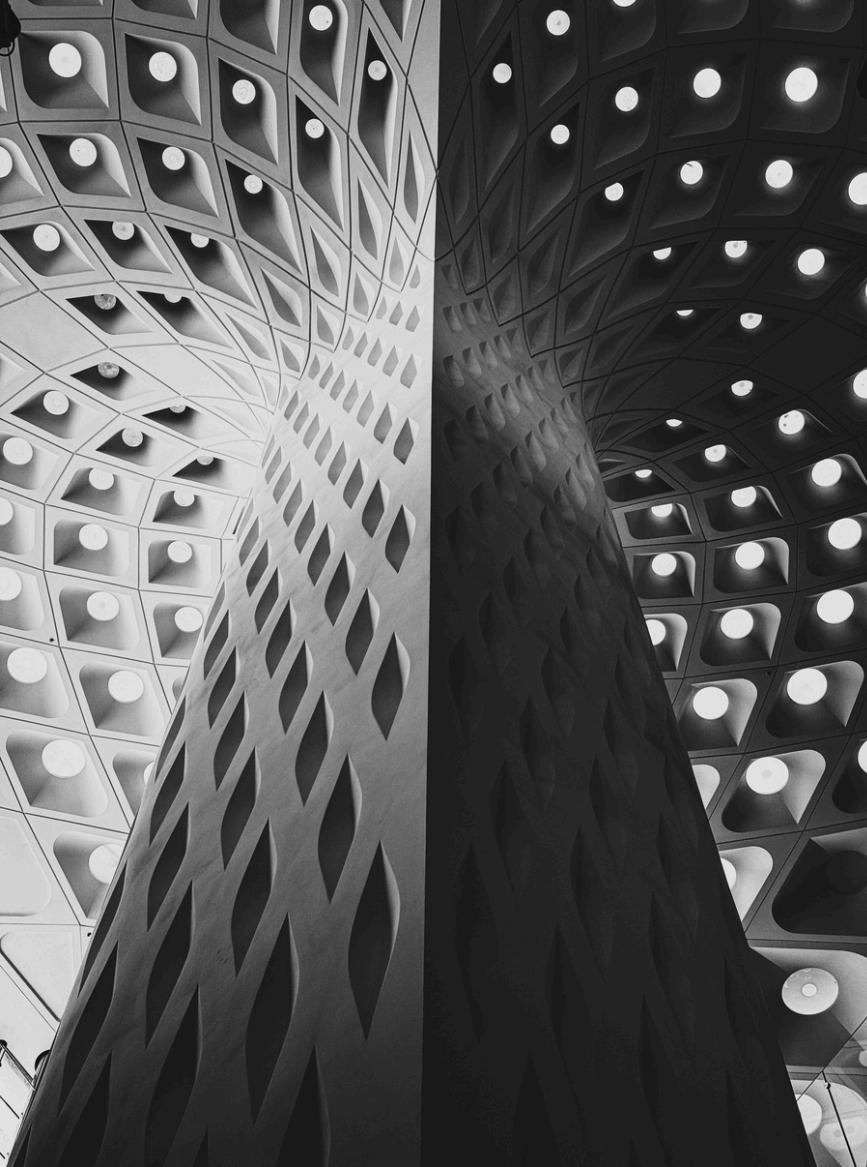
— PETER GLENDINNING

PHOTOGRAPHS: VIVEK VERMA

## ELEMENTS OF VISUAL ART

# Shapes & Forms

In photography, shapes and forms aren’t mere elements—they are the very architecture of visual storytelling. They anchor compositions, sculpt depth, and stir emotion, turning fleeting moments into powerful narratives that linger in the viewer’s imagination long after. Let’s explore how you can use shapes and forms creatively to make strong compositions.

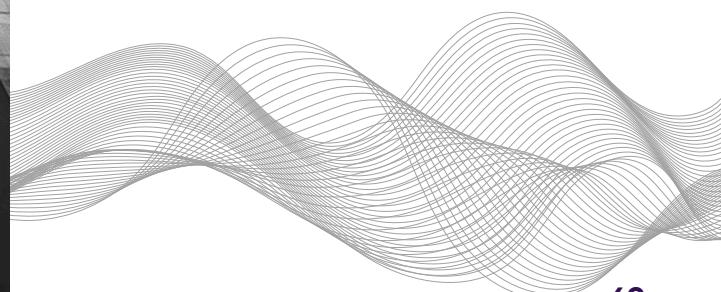


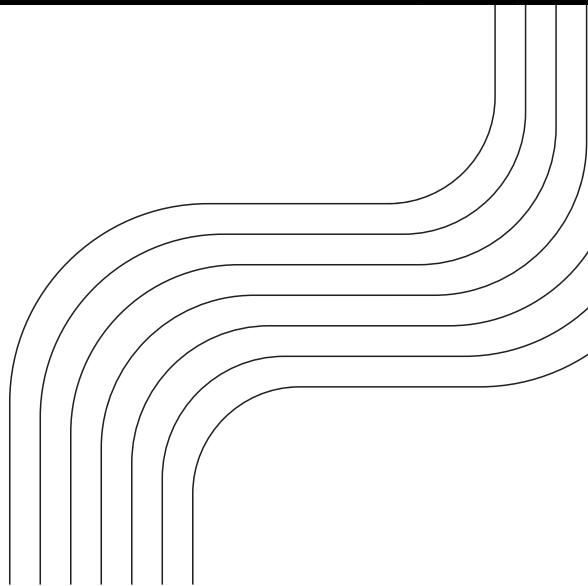
# Shapes

Shape is represented as flat two-dimensional (length and width) enclosed area of space with definite outline. It doesn't have any appearance of depth. It is often defined by a change in value (darkness and lightness) or some other form of contrast.

Irregular or flowy shapes (like curves) are considered organic, while angular shapes (like rectangles and triangles) are considered geometric. Shapes can be observed as single object and also as a collection of objects.

- Silhouette is a good example of creative use of shape;
- Front or back lighting can be used to emphasize the shape;
- Colours help you pronounce the 'flatness' of shape better;
- As the details of the subject are hidden, shape creates mystery element around the main subject;
- Negative shapes (having no tangible form of their own but are made with objects around them) can also be used creatively to create great composition;
- Circles introduce energy and movement in a photograph as the eyes are constantly directed around the image;
- Squares and rectangles give a feeling of stability and solidity, particularly, when large;
- Regular shapes (circles, squares and equilateral triangles) convey a sense of order and stability;
- Organic or curved shapes suggest relaxation and calmness.





## ARTISTS

PIET MONDRIAN

PICASSO

WASSILY KANDINSKY

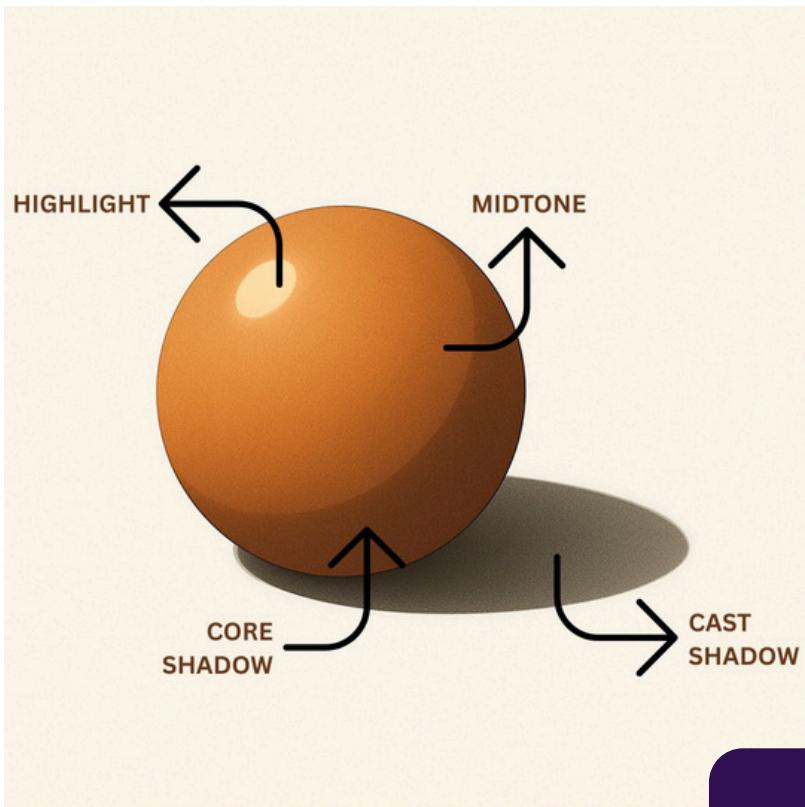
AGNES MARTIN



# Forms

Form is always three-dimensional and encloses volume, having length, width, and height. It creates a sense of depth either through lighting or perspective. Form is often visualized with indistinct borders or edges.

A cube seen from an angular position highlights the form while the same cube seen straight onto only reveals the shape (i.e., square). Geometric forms can be mathematical and precise, e.g., sphere, cube, pyramid, cone, and cylinder. Organic forms can be free-flowing, curvy, asymmetrical and thus cannot be easily measured.



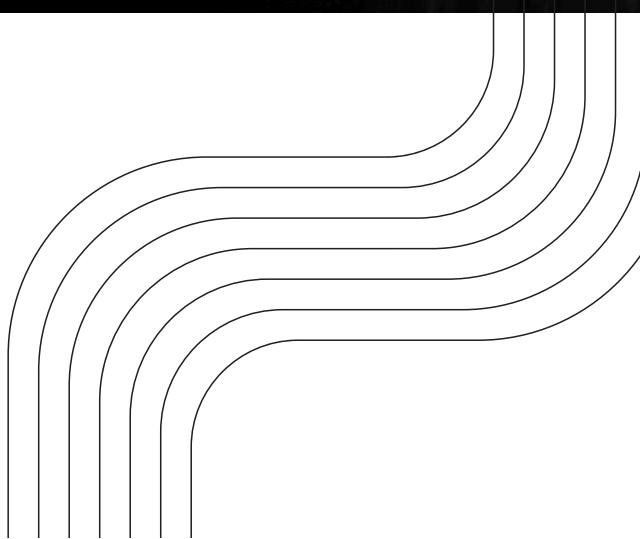
- Shadows help in emphasizing the depth;
- Seeing the subject from an angle (not straight) also creates depth;
- Prefer sidelight over direct straight light;
- Black-and-white is often preferred over colour to emphasize depth (due to tonal range);
- Use soft light to create tonal gradations that can give your subject depth;
- Be mindful of layers (foreground, midground and background) in your composition to give a sense of depth;
- Reflections can also add form;
- Consider setting your EVF (electronic viewfinder) to display in black and white to see and identify forms more easily;
- Create the illusion of form by understanding how light reacts on the object;
- Telephoto lenses reduce the depth (hence form) by compressing the scene, while wide-angle lenses increase depth by exaggerating the perspective;
- Use dodge and burn tools during post-processing to emphasize the depth.

**Highlight** shows the area where light hits the subject directly.

**Mid-tone** shows a middle value of the colour of an object, which is neither directly hit by light nor opposite to the direction of light.

**Core Shadow** shows the area that is directly opposite to the direction of light and hence shaded on the object.

**Cast Shadow** shows the area that is shaded on surrounding objects and surfaces because of blocked light.



## ARTISTS

LEONARDO DA VINCI

MICHELANGELO

RAMBRANDT

MARK ROTHKO

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

