

# ASSIGNMENT #6

*Principles of Art & Composition:*
*Emphasis, Focal Point, Rule of Thirds*

# REVIEW: ELEMENTS VS. PRINCIPLES OF ART

**Elements of Art are considered the "building blocks" of an artwork. Every single artwork (be it abstract or representational) is composed out of them. In other words, art cannot be created without them.**

**7 Elements of Art:**

- Line
- Shape
- Color
- Texture
- Form
- Value
- Space

**Principles of Art refer to how artists arrange, organize and manipulate elements in order to create a visual composition that is visually pleasing and transmits a message or idea.**

**8 Principles of Art:**

- Balance
- **Contrast**
- **Emphasis**
- Movement
- Pattern
- Rhythm
- Unity
- Variety

# PRINCIPLES OF ART: EMPHASIS

- **In art, *emphasis* happens when the artist deliberately manipulates the Elements of Art (color, shape, line, texture, etc.) to give dominance to a specific area of the piece. In other words, the artist uses emphasis to call the viewer's attention to a certain area first.**

- For this to happen, the artist must establish where the focal point or the main element/object of the composition will be located prior to starting with the actual painting process.

- **Emphasis and focal points are essential because, as we have discussed in the past, an effective visual composition (whether representational or abstract) is able to not only catch the viewer's attention, but "guide" his/her eyes through the piece.**

- **Our eyes like to move around a visual composition and not stay stagnant. As artists, being in control of that movement (what the eye sees first, second and last) is vital as it helps give a piece meaning and allows us to tell a story.**



**Georgia O'Keeffe**, *Calla Lilies on Red*, 1928

# PRINCIPLES OF ART: EMPHASIS

- Though there are no hard rules when it comes to art, and it's not 100% necessary to have a focal point in a drawing or painting, it is *certainly* recommended.

- **It's important to give thought to these aspects of a visual composition, especially when we're just starting out, as this will help us develop our eye for aesthetics and skill for creating compositions with direction and a *purpose*.**

- **It could be argued that all effective artworks employ some kind of emphasis. If a piece lacks this principle, it may seen monotonous and boring to the eye.**

- We also want to stay away from over-saturating our drawing or painting area, as this overwhelms the eyes and confuses our viewers.



**Gustav Klimt**, *The Kiss*, 1907–1908

# HOW ARTISTS CREATE EMPHASIS



**Emphasis/Contrast by Use of Color and Repetition*
**George Rodrigue,**
*Blues Can Hide a Bad Apple,*
1992

**Emphasis is achieved by making use of *contrasting* Elements of Art, which we briefly discussed in our second class. We can create contrast in a variety of ways:**

- **Color:** Differences in value, saturation, use of contrasting color schemes **See class on Color*
- **Texture**: High texture vs. low levels of texture
- **Size:** Large vs. small
- **Placement:** Artists can strategically place the main subject in areas that are known to attract attention or in isolation, away from other elements
- **Repetition:** Patterns created by similar elements can be interrupted in some way and this causes the different element to get noticed
- **Level of detail:** High level of detail attracts more attention than low levels of detail
- **Implied lines**: Perspective and/or converging lines help indirectly “frame” or point towards the main subject

# EXAMPLES OF EMPHASIS IN FAMOUS ARTWORKS

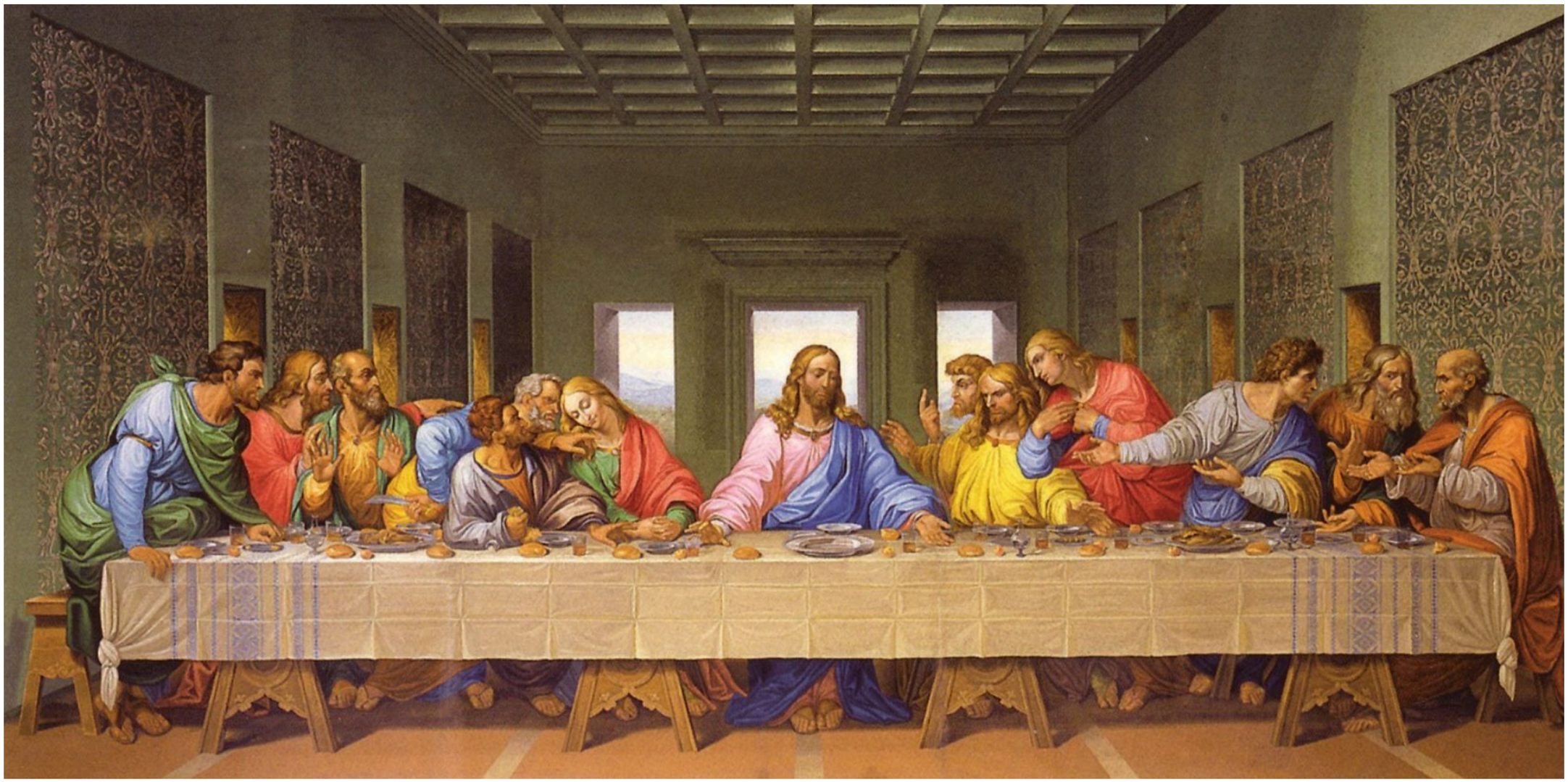


**Emphasis/Contrast by color (value) and placement*
**Johannes Vermeer,** *Girl with a Pearl Earring,* 1665



**Emphasis/Contrast by color (value) and placement*
***James McNeill Whistler,*** Whistler's Mother, 1871

# EXAMPLES OF EMPHASIS IN FAMOUS ARTWORKS



**Emphasis/Contrast by placement, repetition and implied line (1-Point Perspective)*
**Leonardo da Vinci,** *Last Supper,* 1495-1498

# EMPHASIS AND SUBORDINATION

- **It's important to understand that an artwork may have more than one area of emphasis. However, one typically dominates over all others.**

- If two or more are given equal importance, our eyes/ brains will have trouble interpreting the piece.

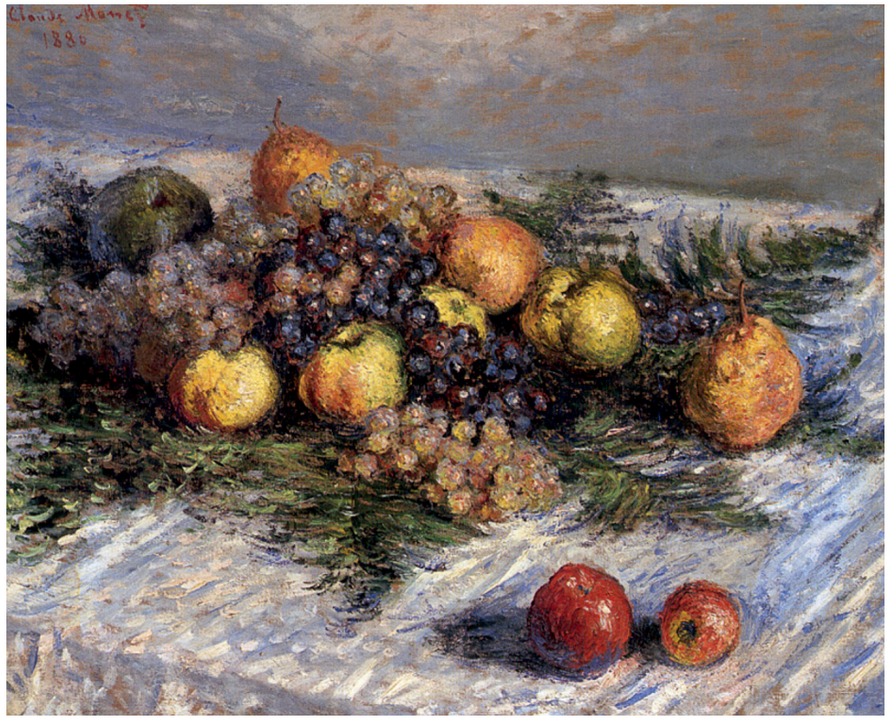
- **The degree to which the different focal points stand out determines the order in which the viewer notices them.**

- **This is created by *subordination*. While artists emphasize the focal point, they also de-emphasize other elements to allow the main subject to stand out. In other words, these secondary/tertiary elements support the main element.**

- It could be argued that many effective paintings don't have a particular focal point, but instead the painting as *a whole* is the focal point. In these cases, it's essential that there is enough harmony and small points of interest throughout the painting to keep the eye moving.



**Claude Monet,** *Haystacks,* 1891



**Claude Monet,** *Still Life with Pears and Grapes*, 1880

# EXAMPLES OF EMPHASIS IN FAMOUS ARTWORKS

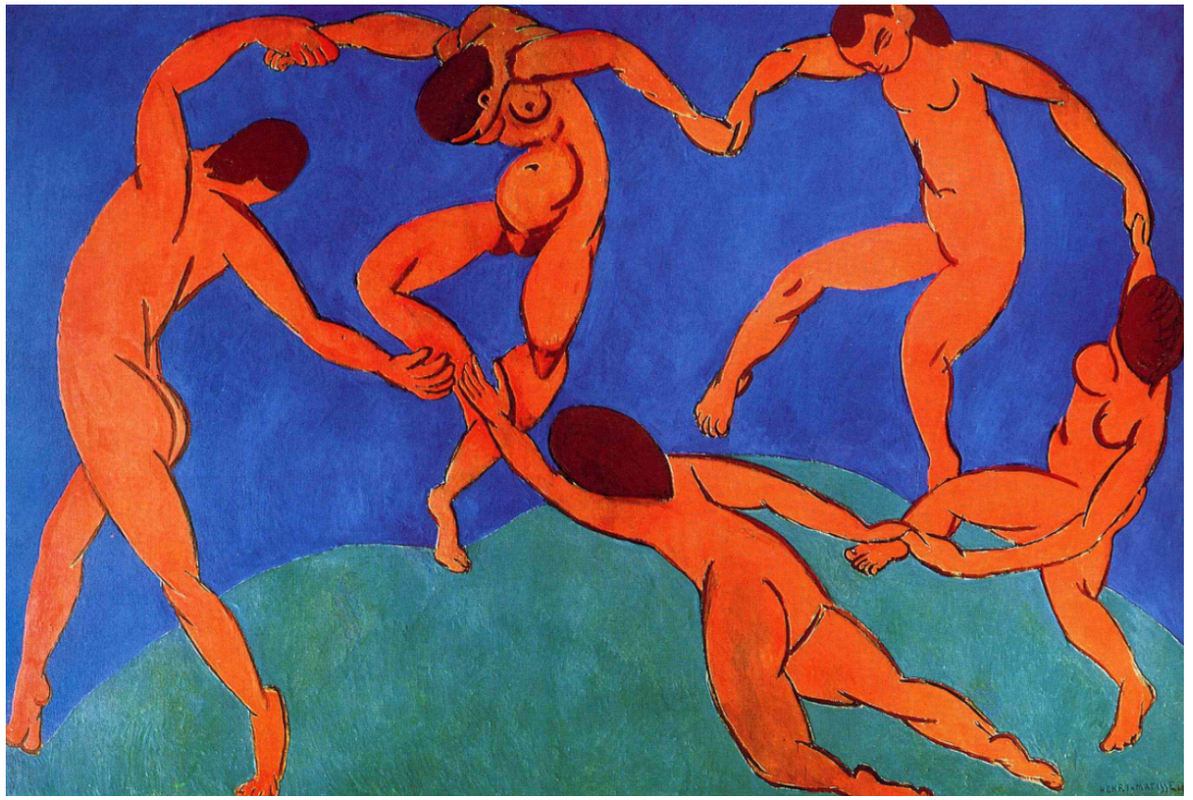


**Emphasis/Contrast by placement (central) and implied line + Shows subordination*
**Sandro Botticelli**, *The Birth of Venus,* 1480s

# EXAMPLES OF EMPHASIS IN FAMOUS ART

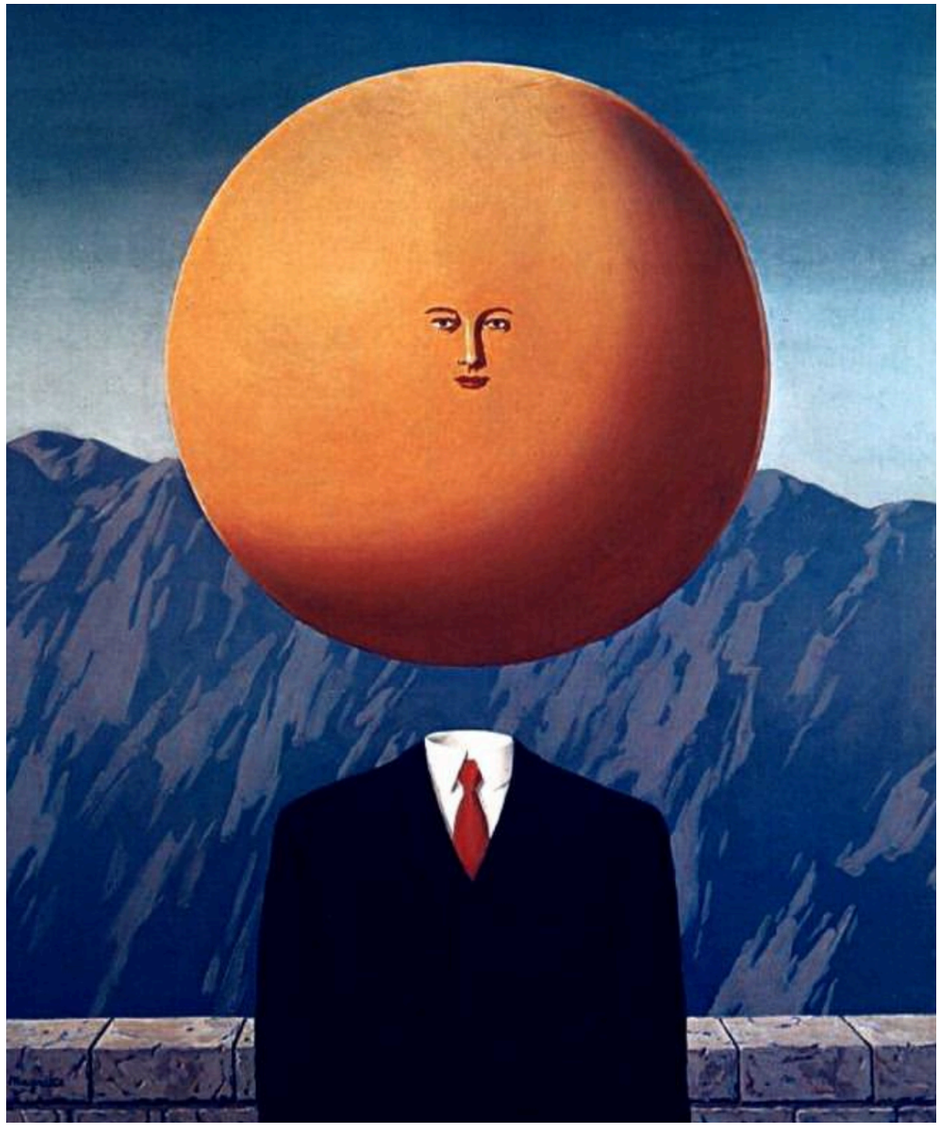


**Emphasis/Contrast by color (value) and placement*
**John Singer Sargent,** *A Dinner Table At Night,* 1884



**Emphasis/Contrast by color (value) and repetition*
**Henri Matisse,** *Dance*, 1909

# EXAMPLES OF EMPHASIS IN FAMOUS ART



**Emphasis/Contrast by color, size and placement*
**Rene Magritte,** *The Art of Living,* 1967



**Emphasis/Contrast by color, size and placement*
**Henri Rousseau,** *Self Portrait*, 1890

# WHY COMPOSITIONAL ARRANGEMENT IS IMPORTANT

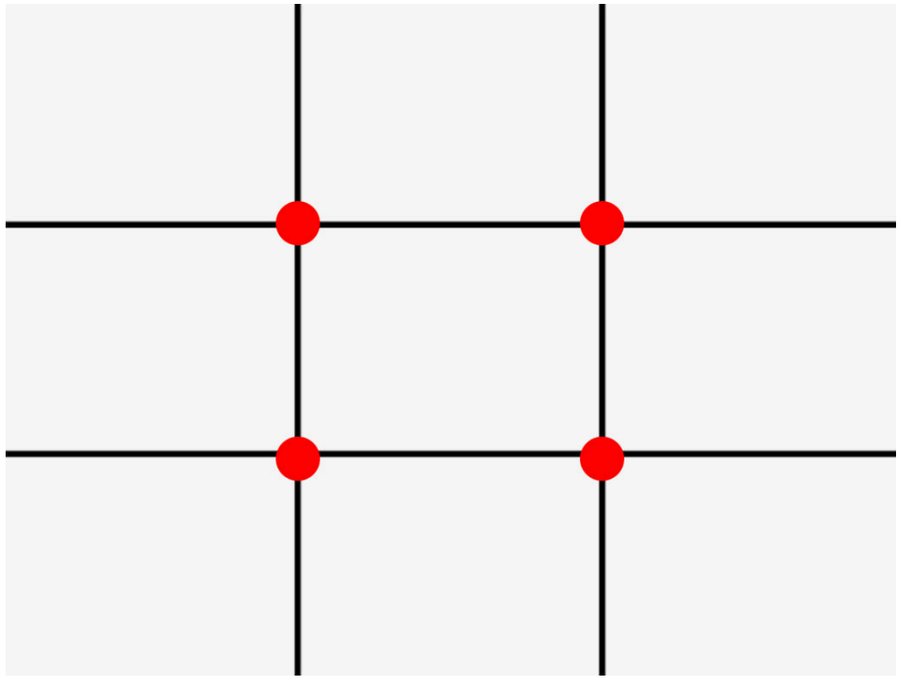
- Now that we have covered all of the Elements and Principles of Art, it's time to start getting into more advanced topics on compositional arrangement.

- **When it comes to creating a visual composition, it's not only about the subject you draw/paint, but also its *location* within the space, and the *cropping/framing* you decide to go for.**

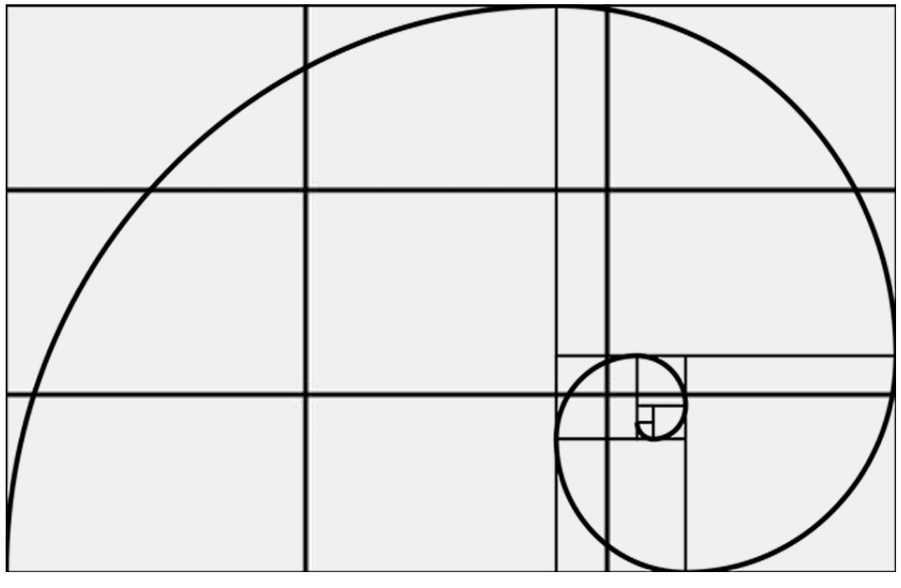
- **All of these things can have a *huge* impact on how effectively an artwork is able to transmit an idea, emotion, or story.**

- **Though you'll *always* be able to find exceptions, generally speaking, a visual composition is going to be more pleasing (and interesting to look at) when the focal point is placed off-center and away from the middle of the composition.**

- The Rule of Thirds is a simplified version of the Golden Rectangle/Golden Ratio/Fibonacci Spiral, which was originally discovered and used by the ancient Greeks in their architecture and design.



*Rule of Thirds Grid*



*Rule of Thirds Grid and Fibonacci Spiral overlay*

# THE RULE OF THIRDS IN ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

- **The Rule of Thirds suggests that we arrange our scene using the horizontal and vertical lines in the grid and place the most important elements where the lines intersect or along one of these lines.**

- **During the Renaissance, artists started using thirds, as well as perspective grids more and more. They realized that the human eye doesn't like to stay stagnant in the centre of a scene.**

- **Renaissance painters noticed they were able to tell better stories with their art and gave their viewers more to look at. By seeing more of the "setting" around the main subject of the piece, we're able to get much more information.**

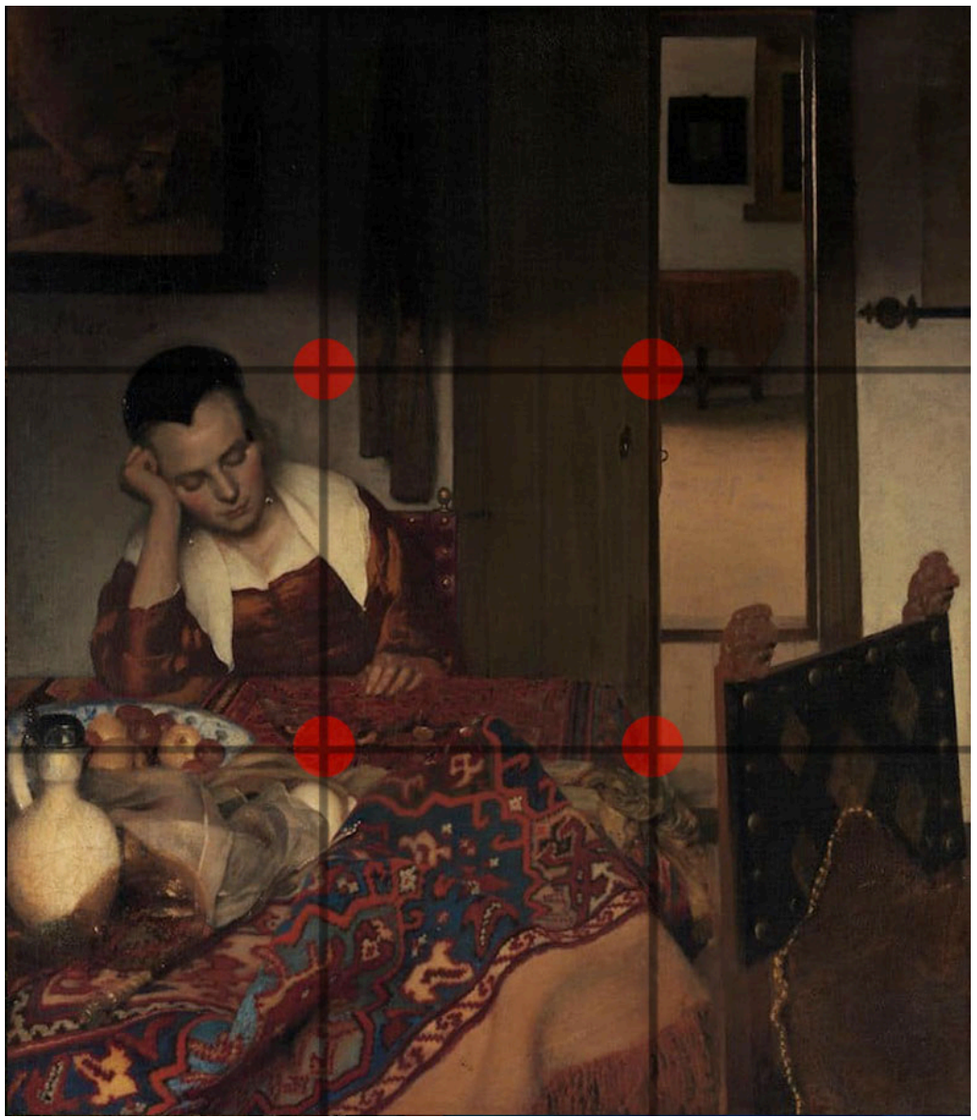
- The Rule of Thirds also helps us stay away from cutting our compositions into equal halves vertically or horizontally, which leads to symmetrical balance.

- By using this grid, beginners will develop an eye for more aesthetically pleasing and effective compositions. In time, they'll start seeing these grids in their heads!





# RULE OF THIRDS IN FAMOUS ARTWORKS



**Johannes Vermeer**, *A Maid Asleep*, (1656–57)



**Henri Rousseau,** *The Dream,* 1910

# RULE OF THIRDS IN FAMOUS ARTWORKS



**Winslow Homer**, *The Fog Warning*, 1885

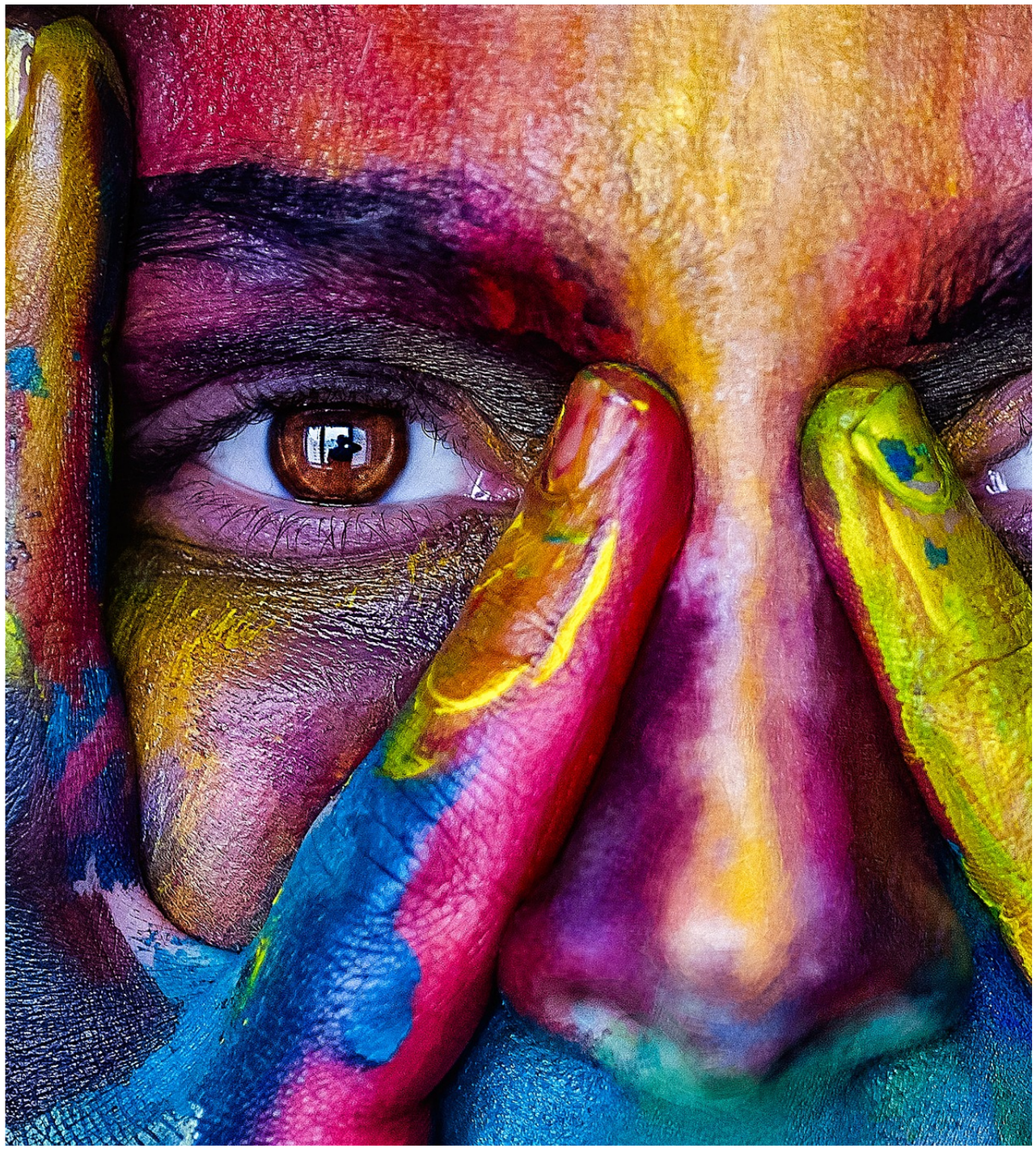


**Paul Cezanne**, *Still Life w/Fruit Dish*, 1880

# CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT #6:

- **Create a series of thumbnail sketches of the subject of your choice (landscape, still life, portrait, etc.) focusing on compositional arrangement. Make sure you establish a focal point and practice using the Rule of Thirds.**
- **Decide on a sketch you feel is strongest in terms of impact, balance and storytelling.**
- **Create a more complete version of your piece using your drawing/painting medium of choice.**
- **Have fun and be creative! :)**

# ARTISTIC PROCESS *SUGGESTED* STAGES



1. Dream/Visualize it
2. Plan + Prepare
3. Execution
4. End it (or repeat it)
5. Evaluate + Reflect