

# Gestalt

The German word for Form  
and its meaning for design

## Perception and Gestalt Theory

- Developed in Europe by Max Wertheimer (1880-1943, Wolfgang Kohler (1887-1967), and Kurt Koffka (1886-1941)
- Premise is that organization is central to all mental activity and is a reflection of how the brain works
- Whole is understood to be different from the sum of the parts
- High organization = good gestalt
- Strong grouping = *Unity* in design

## Four Aspects of Gestalt Theory

- Closure
- Proximity
- Continuance
- Similarity

# Closure

- A form exhibits closure when its separate elements are placed so that you perceive the design as a whole rather than as disparate sections.



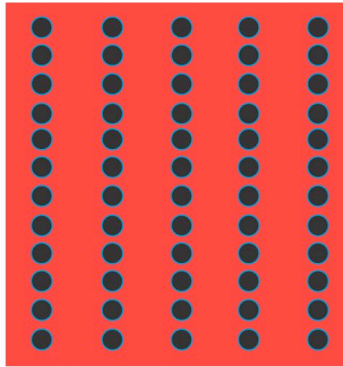
The three rectangles are implied by the four right angles visible in each shape. This is an obvious diagram of closure. Sometimes, closure provides a minimal hint of the form and shape recognition is more slowly recognized.

# Proximity

Proximity refers to the distance between elements. Elements can be close edged, touch, overlap, and can be combined, like underlining a phrase groups the words.

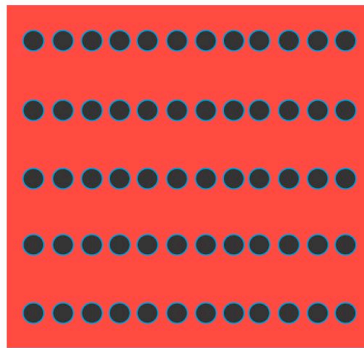


# Proximity



Do you see rows or columns and why?

## Proximity of Rows



Rows are visible instead of columns because spacing forces the association.

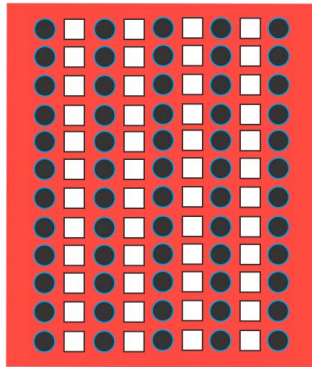
## Proximity of Line Pairs



Pairs of lines with one leftover single line is the dominant perception. The three large channels are seen second, if at all.

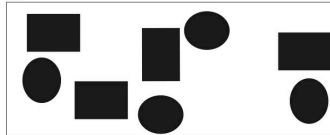
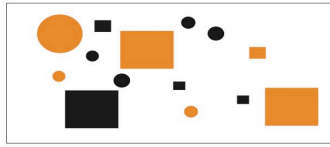
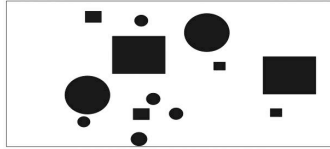


# Similarity



When spacing is the same distance, shape similarity becomes dominant, and columns are preferred over rows.

# Similarity



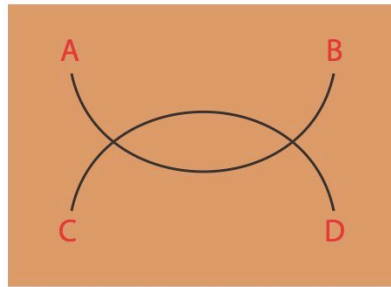
Similarity is based on what an element looks like, not what it is. By forming groups of like things, one can help create unity:

- size
- value/color
- shape

## Continuance

- Continuance is predicated on the notion that once the viewer starts to look in a certain direction, they will keep the eye pathway moving until they 'see' something.
- Eye Pathways - We will follow eyes to see where they are looking
- Actual Paths - arrows, lines, roads, walkways, rivers, lead the eye towards a destination
- Perspective - lines that form edges along receding planes in a composition will direct the eye along their leading edges

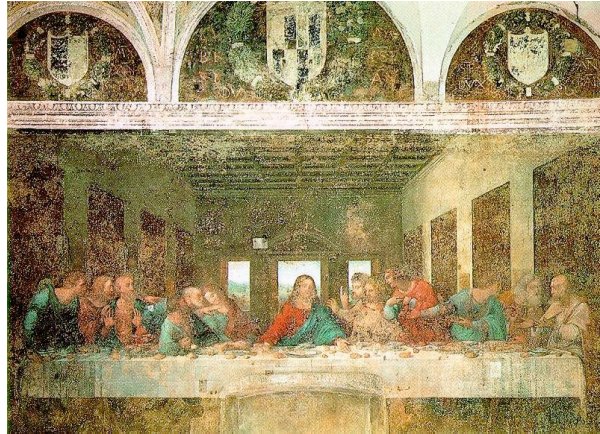
# Continuity



Why do we follow the A to the B instead of moving from A to C?

## Continuance

In the DaVinci painting of the "Last Supper," all the apostles are looking at Christ. What else points to Christ?





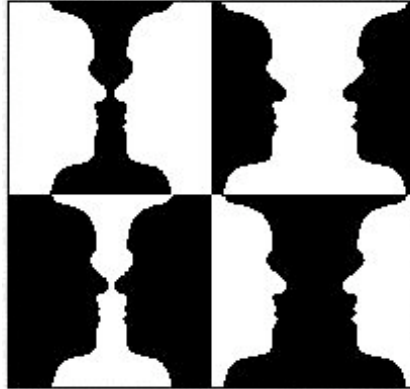
Da Vinci's "Last Supper" showing Continuance using Perspective Lines

## Figure Ground Relationship



Figure/Ground is one of the most basic of Gestalts. This vase/face image is a traditional image that can be traced back to 1795. A Danish psychologist, Edgar Rubin gave it the vase/face name. Here one sees either two faces in profile, or a central vase, but both images cannot be seen simultaneously.

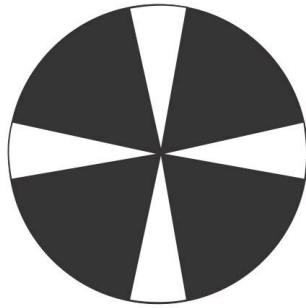
## Figure/Ground Vase Emphasis



Does moving the profiles closer allow the vase to be seen first?



## Figure/Ground Smallness Principle



The principle of smallness is that areas that are smaller tend to be seen as figures against a larger 'ground'. Do you see the four white pie wedges first, and the four larger sections, second?

# Symmetry

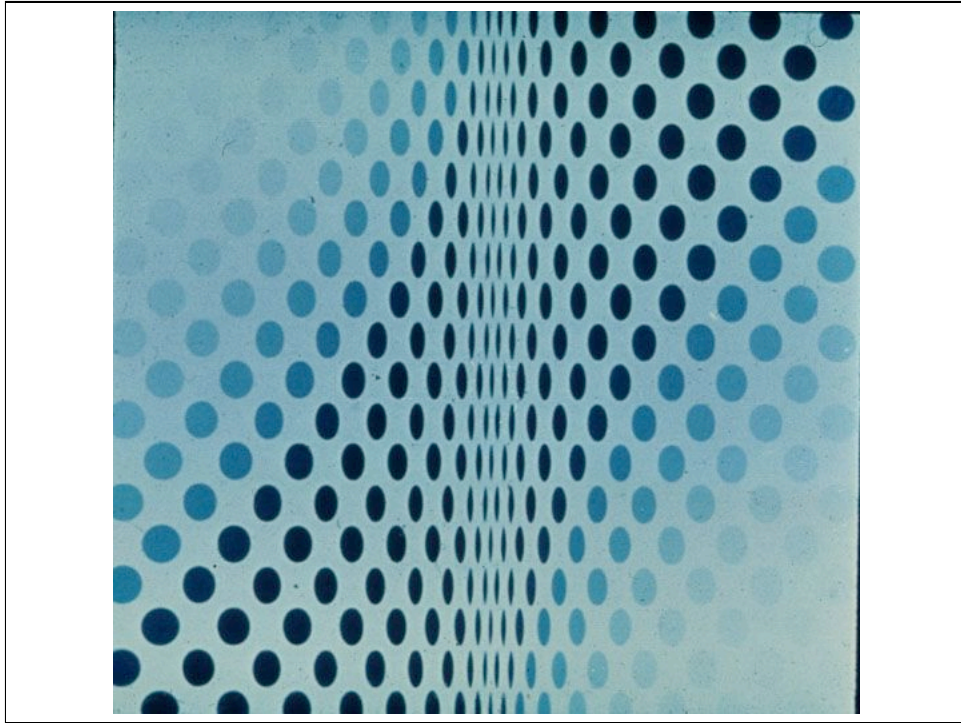


Shapes that are symmetrical (have equal sides across a vertical axis) are seen as figures against an asymmetrical ground.

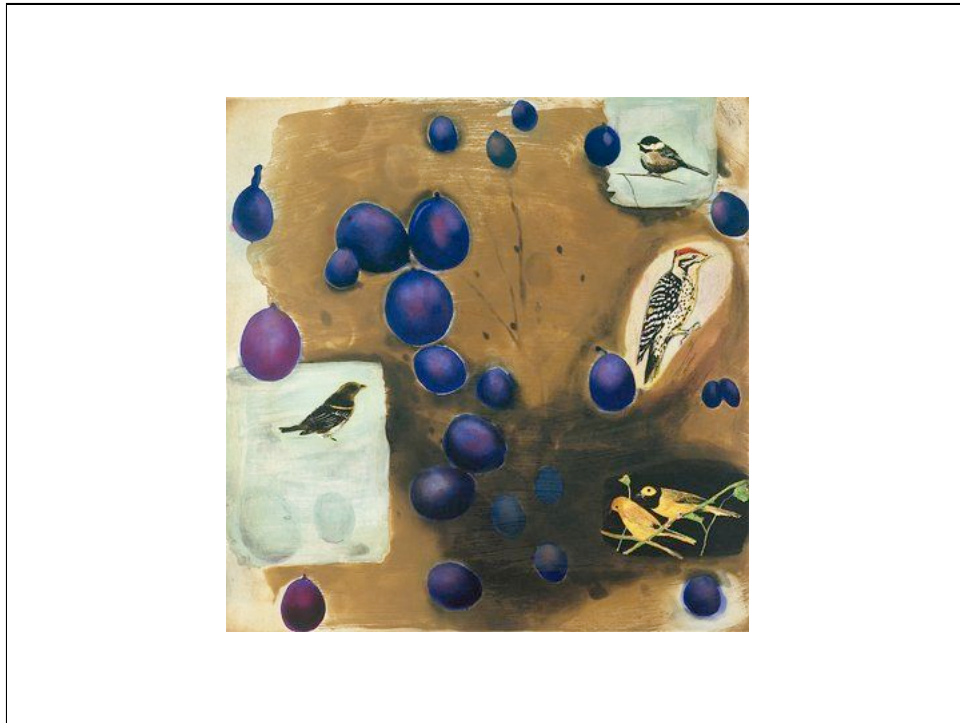
## Surroundedness



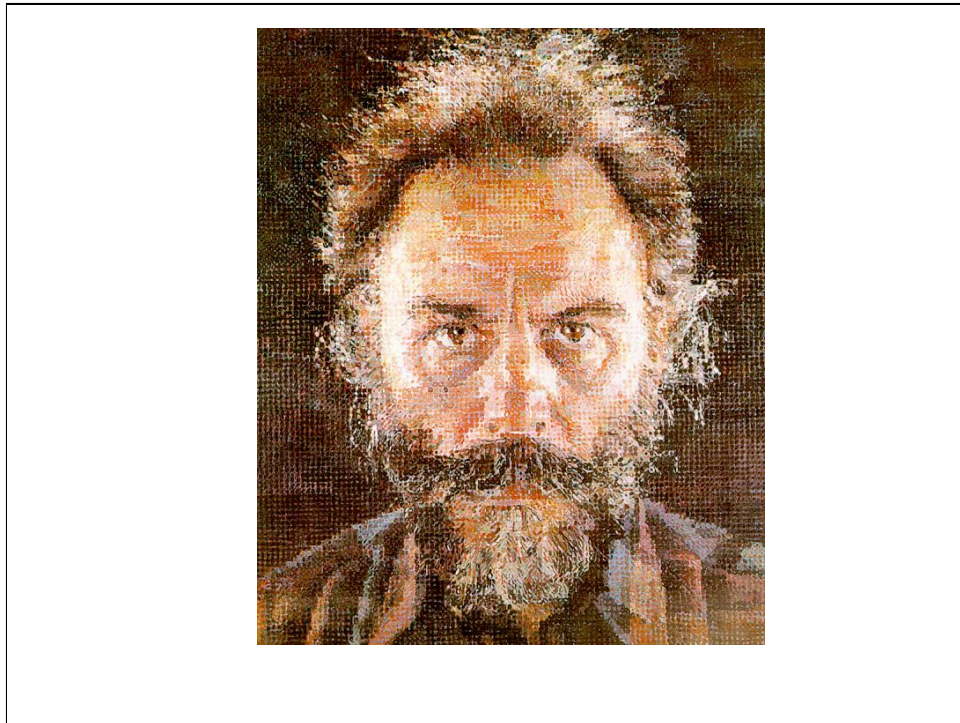
Surroundedness is a principle that states if enough of a border or framework surrounds an area, it will be seen as a figure.



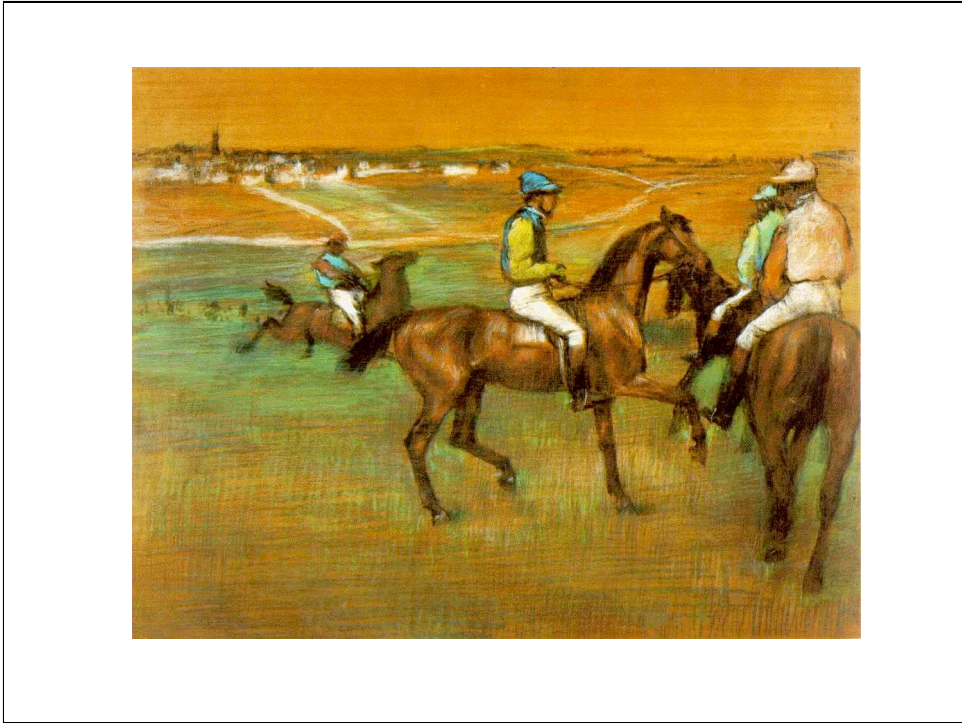
Which gestalt(s) in use in this painting by Bridgett Riley?



Chris Brown is moving the eye of the viewer using mostly continuance and similarity.



In this painting by Chuck Close, small squares of color were derived from a grid placed over a photograph and painted to match the hue and value from each square. Closure allows us to see the portrait, when viewed at a proper distance.

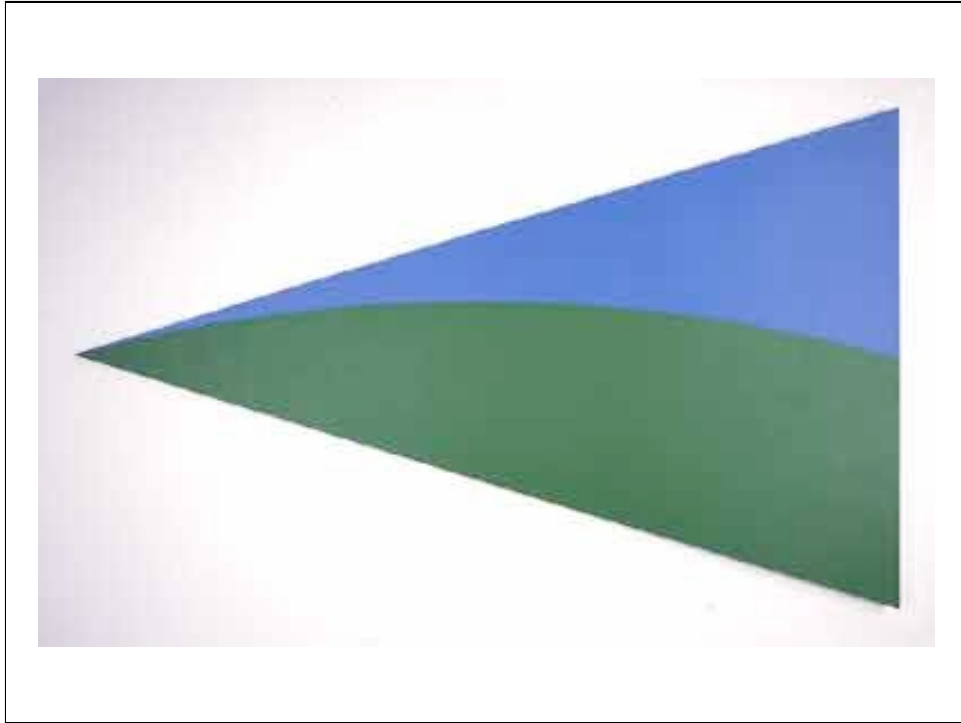


Degas makes use of continuance to move the eye from the foreground horses to the distant town and back.

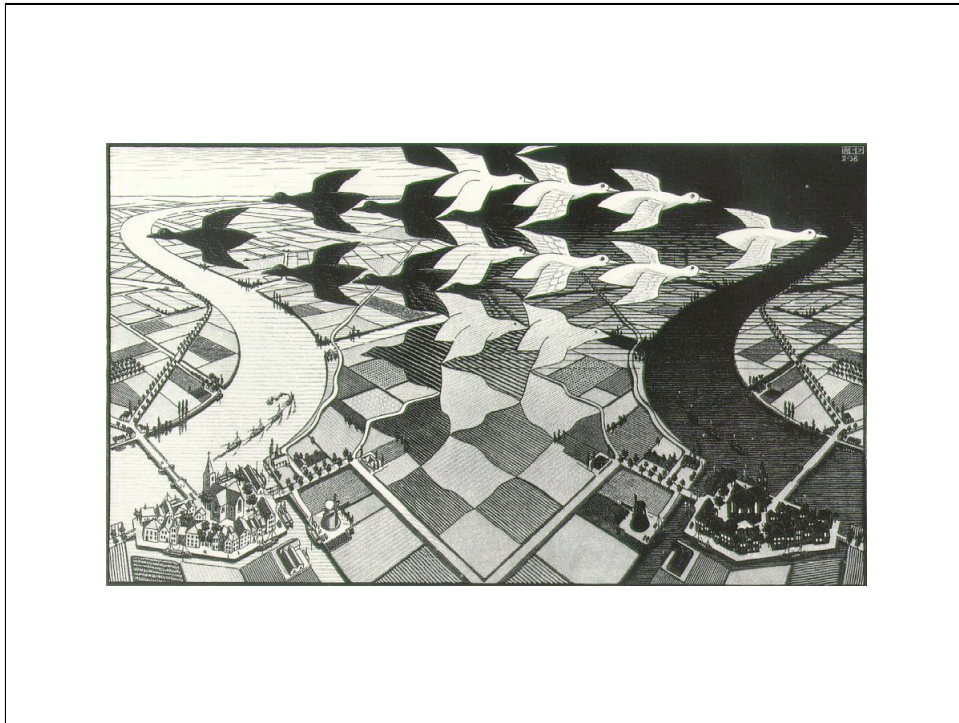


Proximity groups this playful assembly of lines into an abstract form. What direction does it seem to be moving?





Ellsworth Kelly painted a very simple shape that suggests land and sky, moving inside this triangle. Continuance is a strong factor in its design.



M.C. Escher has created a figure ground **reversal** with geese flying into the day and night simultaneously. In the center section of the print, the geese can be seen as white against a black ground or the reverse, but not both seen at the same time.



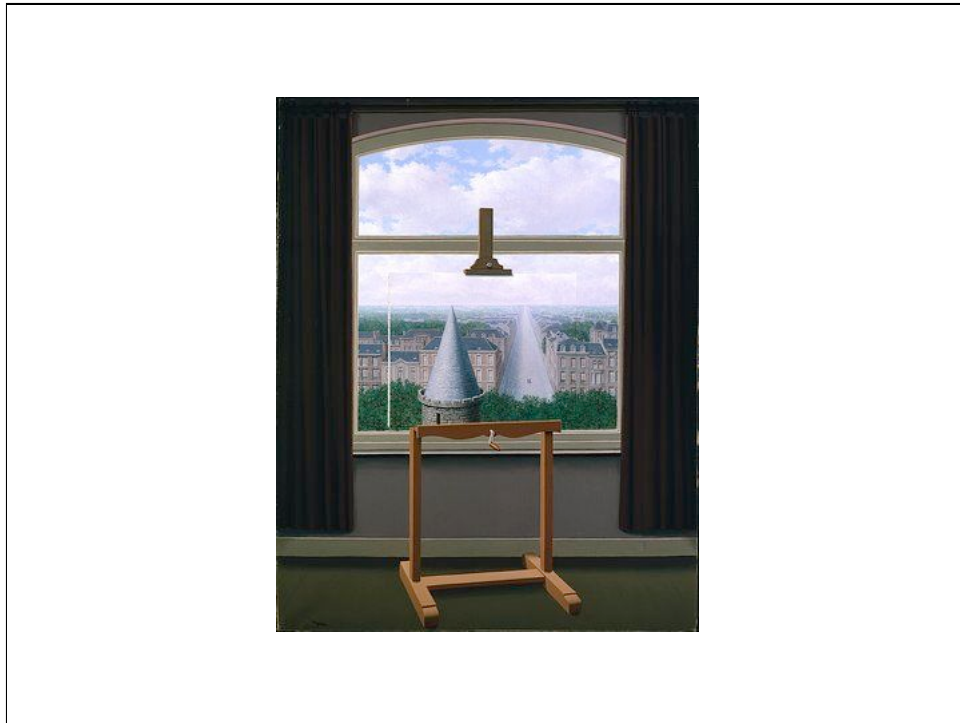
Franz Kline uses large painted shapes to confound the figure and ground relationships.



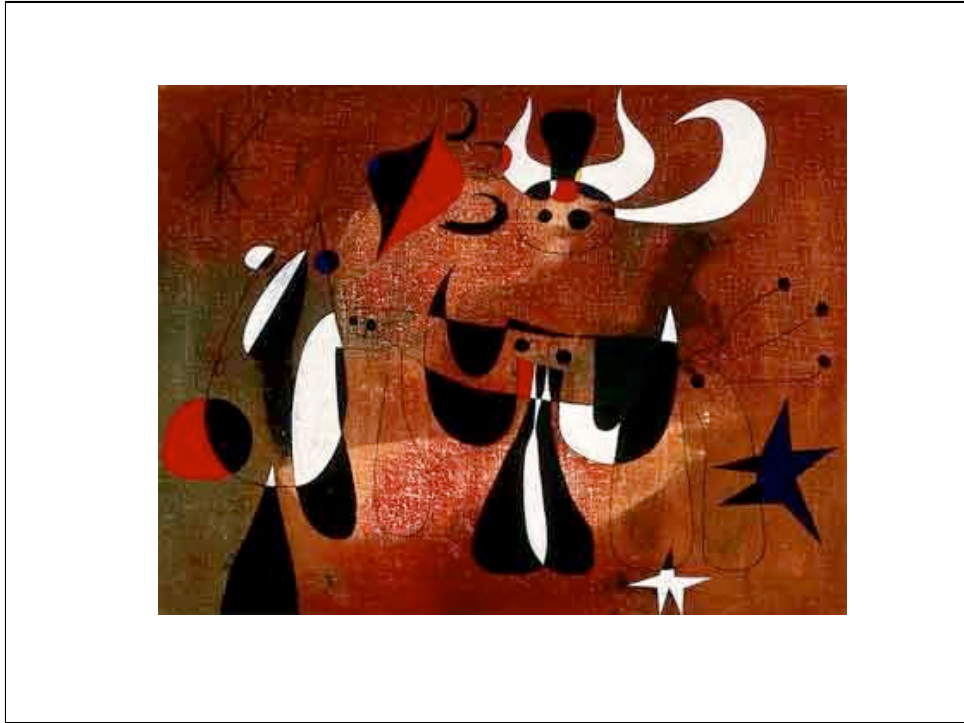
Nascimbene, a contemporary graphic designer, paints the floor with repeated patterns, tables, and cloths. Using similarity in this way allows the viewer to become very aware of differences, such as the legs, food and red color.



Jasper Johns has used the concept of closure to create the map of the United States.



Magritte is fooling the eye with similarity of the castle and the distant road, as well as the painting inside the window...inside a painting.



Miro has used proximity to associate these shapes into Personages.