

Line

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Artists use lines in many ways in works of art. Each line can define shape and form differently. You will examine various different types of lines in this lesson, as well as examples of lines in various pieces of art. This lesson focuses on:



BIG IDEA

The line is an important element of composition and helps artists to define form and shape in a composition.

1. Contour Lines

Contour lines simply define the edge of a form. Another way to think of contour lines is that they are the outline of a drawing, or the line that defines the overall shape and dimensions of an object.

IN CONTEXT

In the example below, observe this work of art rendered using only contour lines.



Egon Schiele

Mutter mit Kind



TERM TO KNOW

Contour Line

A line drawn to indicate the edge of a form.

2. Gestural Lines

Gestural lines are lines that emphasize movement in the gesture of the hand. Where contour lines are more deliberate and static, gestural lines are quick and timely. Their emphasis is on capturing movement rather than defining the outer contour of other shapes or forms.

IN CONTEXT

Below is a painting by Jean Michel Basquiat. Notice how many of the lines appear to be gestural, as if the artist used a paintbrush to scribble lines on the page, capturing a sense of movement in this image. These are gestural lines.



Jean Michel Basquiat

Wicker

1984

Acrylic, oil stick, and photocopy collage on canvas



TERM TO KNOW

Gestural Line

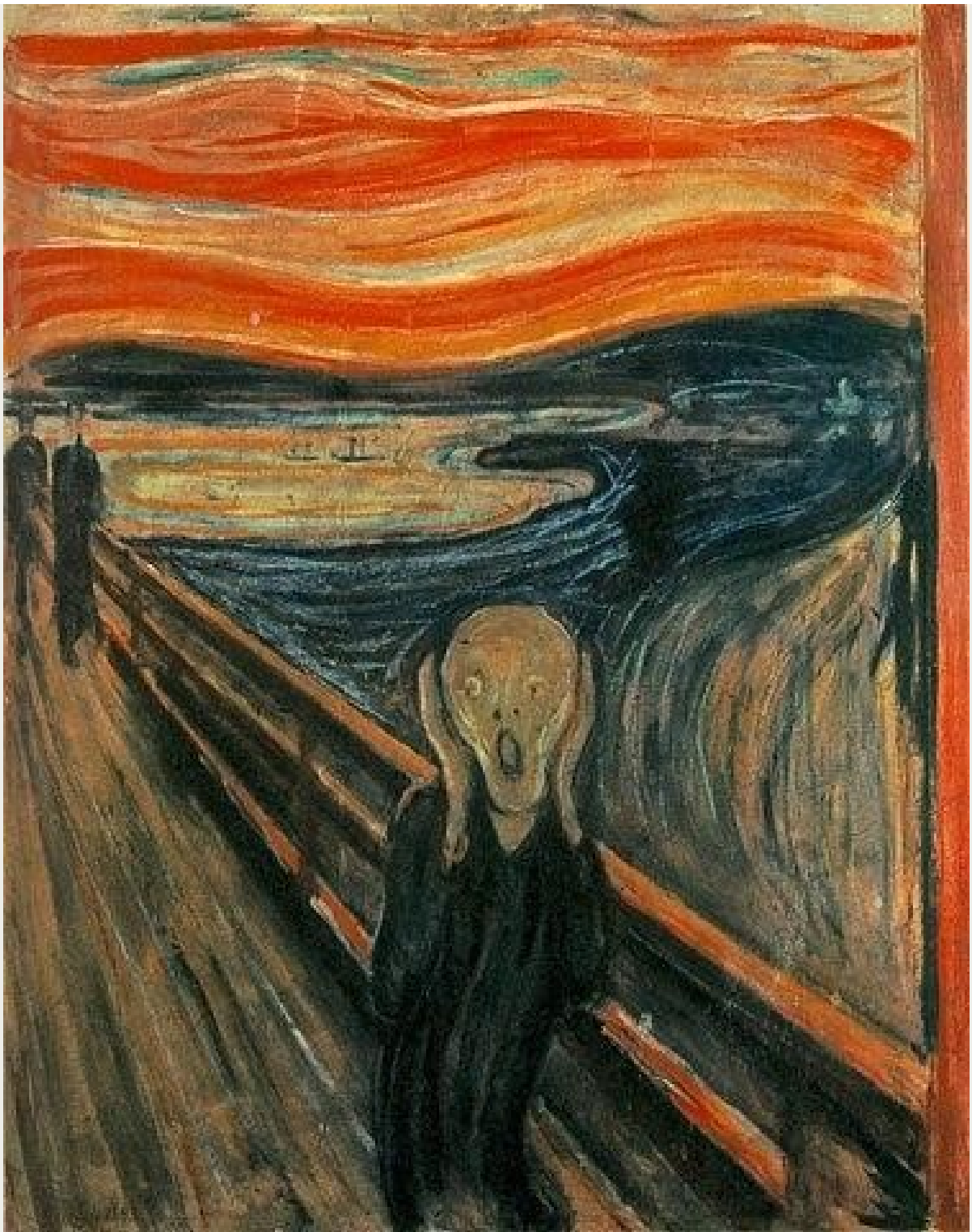
A line that emphasizes the gesture of the hand; it is often also expressive.

3. Expressive Lines

Expressive lines are lines that seem to be expressive of the artist's emotions.

IN CONTEXT

As you look below at Edvard Munch's *Scream*, notice how nothing in the painting has a crisp, hard edge to it. The middle and background, in particular, begin to blur into a chaotic swirl of line and color that really enhances the feeling of anxiety or impending doom. Munch claims that *Scream* was inspired by an actual event where he was walking down a pier and noticed that the sky had turned a bloodred color. Some suggested that the atmospheric distortion of light and resulting optical effects, particularly in the upper northern hemisphere, were ash debris from the massive 1883 eruption of mount Krakatoa in Indonesia.



Edvard Munch

Scream



TERM TO KNOW

Expressive Line

A line that seems to be an expression of the artist's emotions.

4. Curvilinear Lines

This silver box from India is covered in examples of curvilinear lines that suggest the forms of flowers, leaves, and vines. **Curvilinear lines** are simply curved lines. They often express the idea of forms that come from nature, rather than man-made forms.

IN CONTEXT



Filigreed box

India

19th century

Silver



TERM TO KNOW

Curvilinear Line

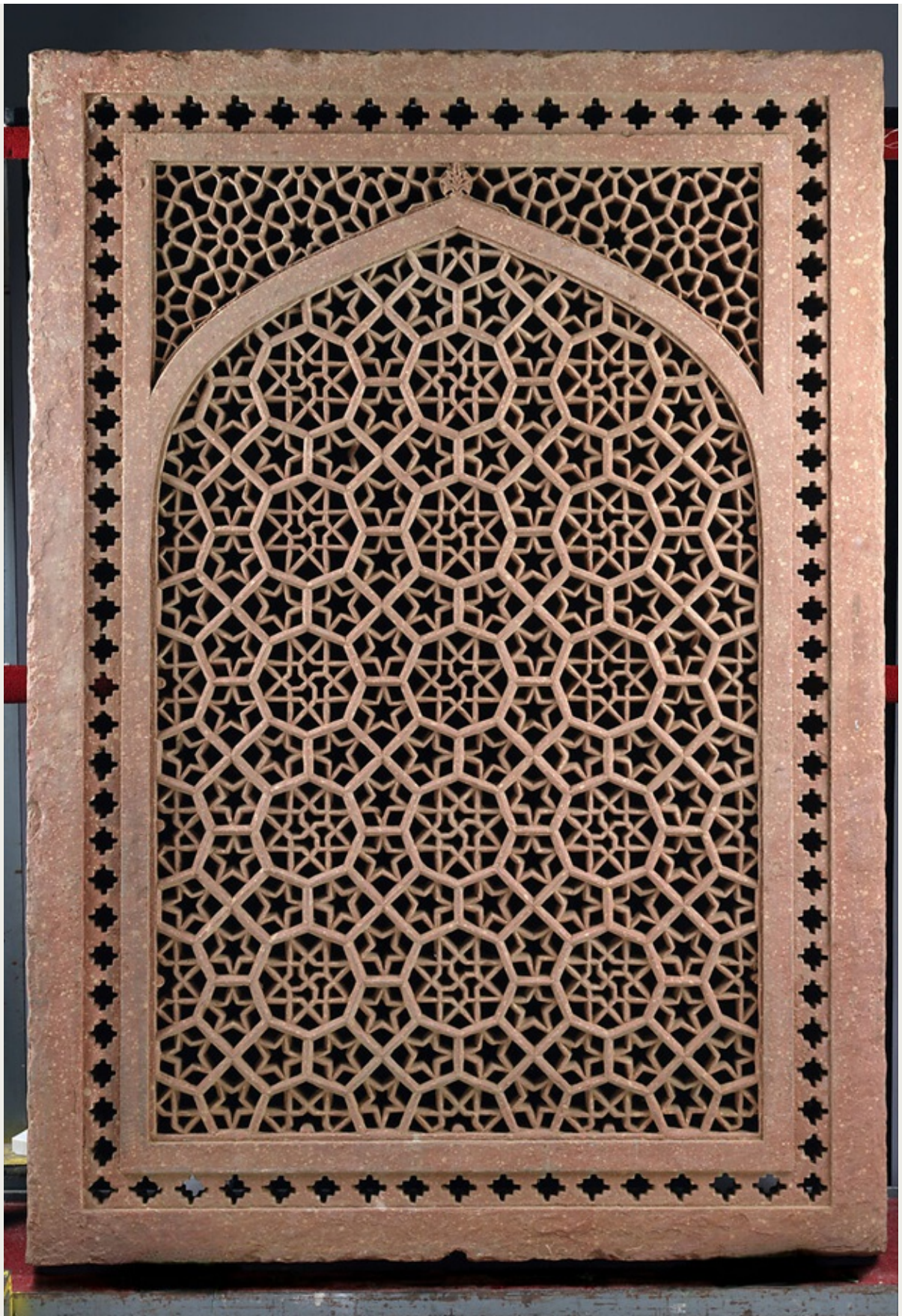
Lines in art that are curved.

5. Rectilinear Lines

Rectilinear lines are simply straight lines. For instance, the de Stijl movement of the early 20th century, which falls under the umbrella of abstract art, produced works of art that utilized only geometric shapes, primary colors, and rectilinear lines. Artists who belonged to this movement include Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg. However, examples of geometric abstraction are present in many different artistic movements and cultural traditions. Under the influence of Islam, which forbids the depiction of human beings and animals in monumental architecture, there are many examples of elaborate tilework and carving that involves elaborate, kaleidoscopic forms of geometric abstraction that reflect the complexity of God's creation.

IN CONTEXT

Below is a screen carved out of red sandstone from India. Notice how almost the entire image is covered in rectilinear, or straight, lines. This would have been a decorative element in a building, with the sunlight shining through it creating designs through shadows cast on the floor and walls.



Pierced window screen

India

Second half 16th century

Red sandstone



TERM TO KNOW

Rectilinear Line

A straight line.



SUMMARY

Lines can help an artist define shape and form in various ways in composition. In this lesson, you learned about **expressive lines**, which an artist uses as an expression of emotion. **Gestural lines** are also slightly expressive at times, but these lines emphasize the gesture of the hand. You also learned about **contour lines**, which indicate the edge of a form. Finally, you learned about **curvilinear lines** and **rectilinear lines**. Remember, curvilinear lines are curved, and rectilinear lines are straight.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Contour Line

A line drawn to indicate the edge of a form.

Curvilinear Line

Lines in art that are curved.

Expressive Line

A line that seems to be an expression of the artist's emotions.

Gestural Line

A line that emphasizes the gesture of the hand; it is often also expressive.

Rectilinear Line

A straight line.