

# Composition

by Sophia

## WHAT'S COVERED

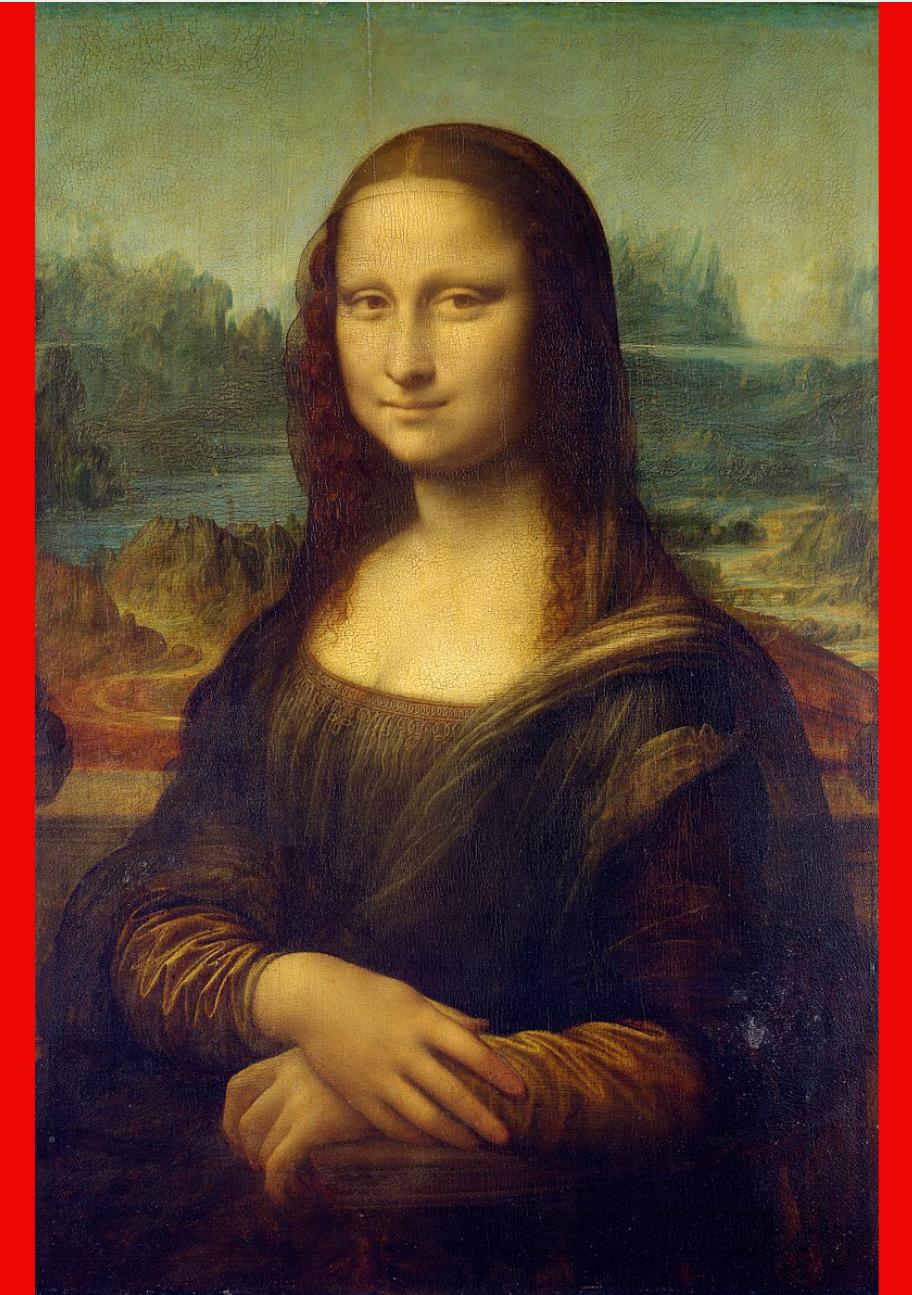
The basics of composition can be used when discussing many types of artwork. To truly understand these basics, it is important to understand the associated vocabulary. This lesson covers:

## 1. Picture Plane

The picture plane is an imaginary flat area that corresponds to the surface of the painting, with the idea that the image is like a window that has a view to another world.

### IN CONTEXT

Take a look at the image of the *Mona Lisa* below. Where is the picture plane in this painting?



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Picture Plane

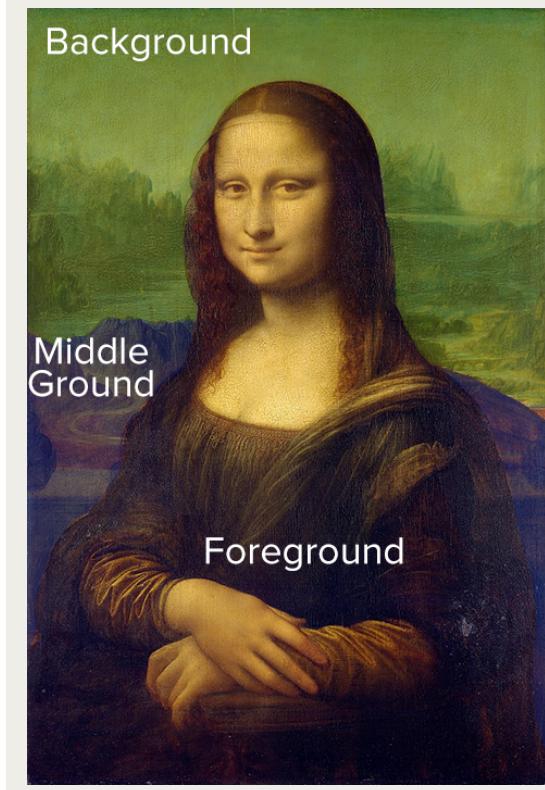
The invisible plane that corresponds to the surface of the painting; the picture plane is like a window opening out onto another world.

## 2. Foreground, Middle Ground, and Background

The foreground is the part of the picture closest to the viewer. The middle ground is the middle area between the foreground, and the background is the part of the composition most distant from the picture plane. Paintings that include a foreground, middle ground, and background are usually landscape paintings or incorporate some aspect of landscape, as this approach indicates that the image depicts a lot of space.

#### IN CONTEXT

Take a look at the image below. The foreground in this painting is Mona Lisa herself. Notice that the middle ground (blue) is in between the foreground and background (green).



#### DID YOU KNOW

Although it's simple to illustrate, the way in which the artist renders them is very important. This might help determine a sense of openness or space, or a sense of confinement. This image depicts a sense of openness.

#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Foreground

The part of the painting closest to the picture plane, usually corresponding to the bottom of the composition.

##### Middle Ground

The part of the composition between the foreground and the background.

##### Background

The most distant part of the composition from the picture plane; it is usually shown higher, smaller, and hazier than the foreground.

## 3. Different Viewpoints

The *Mona Lisa* is a great example depicting the foreground, middle ground, and background as ascending from the bottom of the painting. This is a very common way of suggesting depth in a 2D work of art. However, this isn't the only way to render depth of field.

#### IN CONTEXT

Take a look at the image below. This fresco shows the foreground as the outermost section of the picture plane (purple), with the middle ring in blue depicting the middle ground. The center rectangle is the background.



This arrangement works well because you'd be looking up. The artist is trying to depict a sense of height, rather than the sense of depth like you saw with the *Mona Lisa*.

### BIG IDEA

The basics of composition can be used when discussing many types of artwork but are especially useful when describing illusionistic artwork. Illusionism is an approach to making art that is closely associated with Europe, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. For this reason, the examples in this lesson come from Europe.

### SUMMARY

The basics of composition, including picture plane, foreground, middle ground and background are important to understand when observing and describing artwork. It is also important to consider different viewpoints, or what the artist is trying to depict, such as sense of depth versus sense of height, when viewing artwork.

Source: this work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.

### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Background

The most distant part of the composition from the picture plane; it is usually shown higher, smaller, and hazier than the foreground.

#### Foreground

The part of the painting closest to the picture plane, usually corresponding to the bottom of the composition.

#### Middle Ground

The part of the composition between the foreground and the background.

#### Picture Plane

The invisible plane that corresponds to the surface of the painting; the picture plane is like a window opening out onto another world.