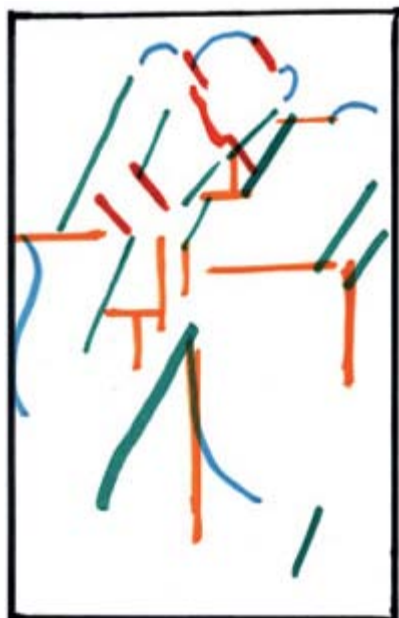


## Finding A Direction by Christopher Schink

**An artist does not compose his painting by filling it with things —** boats, barns, trees ,and mountains. He composes it by designing and arranging on his paper areas of color, value, line, and, most of all, shape. He designs the shapes to suggest the things that inspired him and organizes these shapes in a harmonious pattern. To create a pleasing and expressive design, he arranges these shapes according to their size and the intricacy and direction of their edges.

By charting and analyzing the direction of the edges of the shapes in your painting, you are able to determine whether you have created a dominant movement that helps convey your expressive intent. You can clearly see where and how contrasting movements attract the eye. You can alter, subdue, or eliminate shapes whose direction detracts from the effectiveness of your design.



The repeated diagonal movements (shown in green) in this painting give it a feeling of action and drama. The diagonals moving in a counter-direction (in red) create contrast. The horizontal and vertical movements (in orange) help stabilize the design. A few curvilinear movements (in blue) are distributed throughout the painting.

## VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL MOVEMENTS

Repeated horizontal movements in a composition create a sense of calm. They suggest space and landscape. Repeated vertical movements seem formal, suggesting man and nature. Paintings composed primarily of vertical and horizontal movements have a quiet, stable quality. You should emphasize by repetition either the horizontal or vertical movements in your composition. If you employ verticals and horizontal movements in equal numbers, your design will be confusing and less effective.



*"Mr. Northern's Home" by Dean Mitchell  
Watercolor, 20" x 30"*

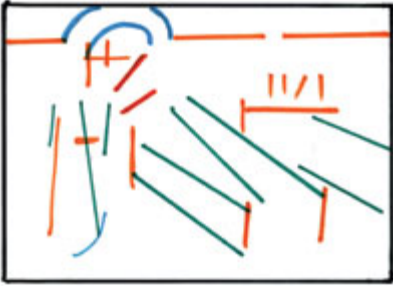


In this beautifully orchestrated painting, Kansas artist Dean Mitchell uses repeated horizontal and vertical movements (slightly tilted) to create a unified and formal composition. He employs a few diagonals for variety but depends primarily on contrasts in value and intensity to animate his composition.

## DIAGONAL MOVEMENTS

Repeated diagonal movements create a sense of motion and action. For example, you create a very different effect when you describe tree trunks with diagonal movements rather than with verticals. Diagonals are difficult to compose if their angles are all different. By repeating several angles throughout your design, you develop a rhythmic, unified composition.





In this composition Virginia artist Annie Massie uses repeated diagonals (in green) that radiate from the arching movements (in blue) in the upper left. She uses a shadow on the figure to provide a counter diagonal (in red) within the arc and places a long horizontal movement behind it.

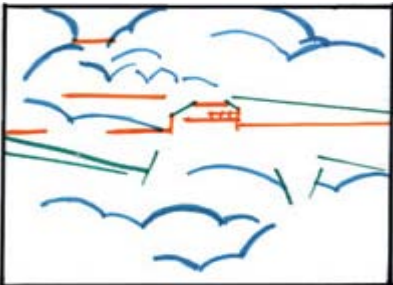
Circles are difficult to use in a composition. They create a target that traps the viewer's eye. Arcs (like the ones used here) allow the eye to escape.

## CURVILINEAR MOVEMENTS

Curvilinear movements have a sensual or emotional quality. They seem organic and naturalistic. Compositions built on repeated curvilinear movements appear weaker and less structured than those built in verticals, horizontals and diagonals. You'll find gentle, curving movements easier to compose than circular movements.



"Winter Boats, Killarney" by Brian Atyeo  
Acrylic on paper, 16" x 20"



Atyeo uses curves (blue) as the dominant movement in this landscape by echoing in the foreground and middle ground the rolling movement of the cloud shapes. He uses a few horizontals and verticals (orange) for contrast. The slow-moving curves give his painting a lyrical quality.

## Try This...

1. Lay a piece of tracing paper over one of your value sketches, drawings or photographs. With a soft pencil accurately trace the direction of the edges of the shapes you can see in your reference image.
2. Remove the tracing paper and analyze the movement of line you've drawn. Is there a dominant direction? Is it horizontal, vertical, diagonal or curvilinear? Or do you have a little of everything? Is there a contrasting movement (for example, a few verticals in a field of horizontals)? Do these contrasting movements occur in areas of importance?
3. Ignoring your reference material (hide it somewhere where you can't peek at it), try a new drawing and redesign the direction of the shapes in your composition.
4. For your new drawing decide on a dominant direction (horizontal, diagonal, etc.) and repeat it as often as possible. Don't think about the thing you're drawing or try to accurately render it; just show the direction of its edges. Don't worry about accuracy; look for rhythm. In this drawing place contrasting movements in areas you feel are important.
5. Try this again emphasizing a different dominant movement. Compare this design with the previous one. Does it feel different? Does it more effectively convey your expressive intent?
6. Try laying tracing paper over a reproduction of a painting you admire and tracing the direction of the shapes. You may be surprised at how well its shapes are designed and composed. That's not an accident; it's the work of an artist.