

Further Exercises

1. Choose a painting that you particularly like. Placing the elements exactly, translate the painting into an abstract composition using only rectangles, circles, and triangles and three or four colors, to learn how the structure works.

2. Represent a situation that evokes a strong emotion: snake(s), shark(s), rat(s), or spider(s) attacking a victim; a parent and child with water; people dancing; a child giving food to animal(s); a person watering, tending, or planting plants; a person trapped in a cage/dungeon/flaming forest; a person triumphant upon conquering a bear/finny/mountain.

3. Illustrate a poem or series of poems, using the same three or four colors but representing different moods.

4. Illustrate a cover for a book, or a poster for a movie. Ask yourself the same questions as for the other pictures, but add a further question: How can I most effectively use the letters to enhance the feeling I want to evoke? Look at how words are used on a variety of posters and book covers.

5. Illustrate a folk tale or short story, again using the same limited colors throughout, eliciting appropriate emotions for each of five or six scenes. Try making the first and last pictures similar to each other but different, to give a sense of coming full circle but with changed feelings. Be sure to make a cover as well.

In each case, it seems most helpful to represent a situation that would particularly affect you personally. One of the most powerful "bird attacking victim" pictures I've seen was made by a woman who had been attacked by birds while rock climbing. One of the most powerful "parent and child with water" pictures was made by a woman who for the first time had left someone else to care for her ten-month-old child. One of the most moving pictures of a figure in the wilderness was made by a man who had just returned from two weeks walking alone in the desert.

Playing with cut paper forces us to concentrate on the basic structure and on how this structure affects our emotions. But this is the basis for all our visual art forms, the foundation upon which the rest is built. Once you understand how these principles work with paper, you can use them in any medium.

This is just the beginning.