

Visual Elements Analysis

of

The Alba Madonna by Raphael

Line: Smooth, curvilinear lines dominate this painting. The smooth lines have an elegant feel and their curvilinear quality speaks of nature, femininity, and nurturing. Although there are important diagonal line directions in this work, they combine to form the shape of a triangle which thwarts their normal message of instability.

Shape: The primary shapes (formed by the curvilinear lines) are organic, and they strengthen the message of nature, femininity, and nurturing while adding an emotional, instinctual quality. In contrast to the organic shapes, the three figures form the geometric shape of an upright triangle, adding an enduring stability to the scene.

Depth: The space-creating devices—overlapping, size, placement, color, and atmospheric perspective—are all being used, giving a convincing feeling of realistic depth. The only space-creating device not used is linear perspective because there are no significant parallel lines moving away from the viewer into depth. The horizon appears to fall at about the level of the Madonna's lower shoulder, placing us in the same space as the figures, though below her eye level.

Value: Raphael uses chiaroscuro throughout the painting, giving a gentle, rounded naturalism to the scene. The figures and the landscape have real weight and volume. There is also a fair amount of minimal value contrast—high key in the foreground and background (light browns and beiges blending into equally light blues and greens), providing unity to the landscape.

Color: The background uses mostly cool, analogous colors (blues and greens). The blue is echoed in the Madonna's cape in the foreground, connecting her with the sky visually and the divine blue heavens symbolically. The cool colors are calming, and their analogous relationship provides unity

to the painting. The warm and cool color combination (pink and blue) of the Madonna's clothing, add some intensity. In traditional Christian symbolism, pink represents maternal love, but as a tint of red, it also references blood and the sacrifice of Christ.

Summary: If you add up all the communicating qualities of the visual elements, you get elegance, a gentle naturalism, femininity, maternal nurturing, stability, divinity united with a three-dimensional world that we are a part of, and a sense of calm with a hint of emotional intensity in the Madonna.