

## COMPOSITION:

*“The principles of design are the recipe for a good work of art. The principles combine the elements to create an aesthetic placement of things that will produce a good design. The Principles of design are the results of your working with the elements of art. Use them in every piece of art you do and you will be happy with the results.”* quote by Retired professor of Art at Goshen College

**Subject Matter** - The all-important part of a painting or photograph to which all other elements are supportive in that they do not generate distraction. Competing portions of a painting or photograph can diminish the power, intensity, or preferred focus on the center of interest/subject. Declines may include, but are not limited to: eyes being closed, poor angle, wilted or dead petals, expressions which do not suit the category, etc.

**Balance of Elements** - is a feeling of visual equality. Objects, values, colors, textures, shapes, forms, etc., are used in creating balance in a composition. Balance is a visual interpretation of gravity in the design. Large, dense elements appear to be heavier while smaller elements appear to be lighter. In art, harmony is the combination or adaptation of elements to form a consistent and orderly whole. It can also be described as a combination of parts or details with each other to produce an aesthetically pleasing effect. Harmony describes the combination of the pictorial elements; color, tone, line, form, content, brushwork, etc. needed to harmonize into a consistent and orderly whole. Declines may include, but are not limited to: poor combination of clip art and photographic elements, uncomplimentary color or pattern combinations, chaotic designs, random placement of non-essential elements, etc.

**Unprofessional** - Whether a photograph, illustration or digital art, the creation process must appear to have been applied with a complete understanding of the medium, giving the overall appearance of a professional greeting card. Declines may include, but are not limited to: distracting elements and/or background, household items, snapshots of people, babies, crowds, buildings, street scenes, knickknacks, and food, photographs from moving vehicles or through windows, and children's art; i.e., messy, distorted and/or poorly drawn art.

**Placement/Position** - A visual flow through the composition that the eye follows. It can be as your eyes move from element to element by way of placement and position, the placement of dark and light areas that your eyes are drawn to or the shape and lines created by a single object and its placement within the composition that draws the eyes in and out of the image. Declines may include, but are not limited to: elements which are cutoff, tilting buildings, poor angles, chaotic compositions, etc.

**Framing/Alignment** - Care should be taken when adding a framed element to an image as well as when adding art to a card front. The format is 5x7 or 7x5 with a 1/4-inch trim line. When adding art to a greeting card front, the completed card must have a feeling of intention in the design. Declines may include, but are not limited to: slapping a square piece of art on a rectangle card surface, odd or unappealing frame techniques or matting such as ovals, poor alignment of the image so that the edges of the card are not evenly spaced, stretching an image as a method to re-size, etc.

**Perspective:** The horizon line is a theoretical line that represents the eye level of the observer. In general, the horizon line is the same as the horizon (the edge of the land against the sky). Linear perspective is a system for drawing objects that use lines and vanishing points to determine how much an object's apparent size changes with space in relation to the horizon line, giving the piece depth.

Declines may include, but are not limited to: the ocean tilted and “falling out of the image”, vertical lines not being vertical, tilting buildings, and windows, etc.

## TYPOGRAPHY

*“Many artists go about picking a font as though they were searching for new music to listen to: they assess the personality of each face and look for something unique and distinctive that expresses their particular aesthetic taste, perspective and personal history. This approach is problematic, because it places too much importance on individuality.”* quote by: Dan Mayerdesign Teacher of Design Theory and History at Prague College

**Font Choice:** Find the right font to fit the occasion the greeting card is being designed for AND fits the style of your design. Pay attention to age, gender, and formality of both your design and the category you wish to place it in. Declines may include, but are not limited to: overly formal cursive, heavy blackletter font on cards for young children, elegant fonts on humorous images, excessive sizing which appears unprofessional, excessive use of dingbats and/or special effect fonts, etc.

**Font Combination:** Usually one typeface will do, however if you choose to combine fonts in a single design, the general rule is never more than two and if you combine . . . keep it in the exact same family OR change it a lot! Don't use slight variations in typeface when combining. Be brave or don't tackle it at all. Declines may include, but are not limited to: combinations of fonts which cause chaos in the image, etc.

**Legibility:** Occasionally there's a need for a font that screams character, often referred to as Display typefaces, which includes everything from Comic Sans and bunny fonts to the Scriptina font. Applied sparingly these fonts can add a much-needed dash of spice or elegance to a design, but they can quickly become obnoxious if used throughout the design. Greeting card fonts need to be clearly legible. Declines may include, but are not limited to: text which is too small, written over cluttered areas within the image and/or text which overlaps other text, etc.

**Effects:** Keep your text effects to a minimum, if you choose to use them. Once in awhile a slight shadow or thin outline (stroke) can lift the text off the background for a finished look. In general, using effects such as beveling and outer glow can go from “adding the right touch” to “excessive and unpleasant use” in a hurry. Declines may include, but are not limited to: excessive beveling on the text, excessive glow, deep shadows which cause the text to become blurry, thick strokes, filtering, and styles used on text which appear unprofessional, any text which draws so much attention that the image is lost, etc.

**Font Color:** Again, text needs to be very legible. Using a pretty blue on a bright purple background is not only illegible, it's unappealing. Stick to colors which harmonize with your image and are light or dark enough to be clearly legible. Declines may include, but are not limited to: colors which clash and cause chaos within the design, colors that cause it to be illegible, too dark, too light, etc.

**Text Placement:** When designing a greeting card, your text placement should not be an afterthought. The best place for the text to reside on your design needs to be well thought out. Your message needs to be part of the composition NOT just stuck wherever there is space left! Do not use slanted or curved text without choosing a font that translates well when tilted or curved and you've become an expert in this technique which can make or break a design. Nine out of ten designs look unprofessional when the

text is done this way . . . so unless you know what you are doing, don't do it. Declines may include, but are not limited to: Curved, tilted, wavy or slanted text, text broken up and randomly placed all over the image, text which is placed across a face or important part of the image, etc.

## IMAGE QUALITY

**Sharpness/Clarity:** Images, whether photographs, scans of original artwork, or photographs of artwork, must have good clarity with sharp details and edges. This does not mean you can't have selective focus or add a soft, dreamy effect to photographs which when well executed can be a technique which provides a professional feel to a photograph. Declines may include, but are not limited to: blurry areas within an image, blurry edges, soft focus if not appropriate and professionally created, lack of depth of field, blurry images due to improper capture of movement, etc.

**Grain/Color Noise:** Grain is found when scanning old photographs or artwork. In this digital age, it tends to be noise that is found in the image. This can be caused by low resolution when scanning artwork or when taking a photograph. It also is visible in photographs that were taken in low light without proper compensation. Color noise can occur when the image has been pushed to exceed its limits in a digital darkroom environment. Any form or intensity of grain and/or noise in artwork or photography will not render well in print on greeting cards and will not be accepted.

**Poor Scans:** Scanned art and photography must be free of dust and scratches, careless cropping and misalignment upon final upload. Scans must be at minimum the same image size and resolution requirements for any GCU upload. Pay attention to alignment, resolution, color, and contrast when scanning your artwork. Declines may include, but are not limited to: crooked scans, poor color, dirt, dust, scratches, tears, low resolution, pix-elated images, etc.

**Reflections:** When photographing artwork, reflections resulting from photographing of a piece of art in the frame and under glass will not be accepted. The only way to achieve a quality, marketable photograph of your artwork is to remove the piece from the frame and set up proper lighting, tripod, and equipment to achieve results worth representing your original art.

**Color/Contrast:** Artwork or photographs which have been unprofessionally scanned or created often have a muddy look or a color cast of magenta, blue, or yellow. This can happen when a photograph is taken if the camera is not set up properly and during scanning if the scanner is not properly calibrated and adjusted. If the whites of your final image are not white and your blacks are not black, your image is not marketable. These color cast variations and dark, muddy tonal values will not reproduce well in print. This applies to all imagery; photography, digital art, scanned artwork and everything in between. Contrast refers to the arrangement of opposite elements; light vs. dark colors, rough vs. smooth textures, large vs. small shapes, etc. in artwork, design and photography to create visual interest, excitement and drama. In photography, this is most often used to describe the balance of levels from light to dark. Declines may include, but are not limited to: muddy imagery, flat contrast, color casts which are unnatural and unpleasant (whether intentional or not), excessive texturing, etc.

**Resolution:** The term resolution can be defined as both the number of pixels per inch in a digitized photograph or piece of art determining width and height. When the resolution is too low, in the case of GCU less than 300 ppi (pixels per inch), it results in both a loss of sharpness and the image gets a "pixaleted" look . . . you see the small squares that make the image, or lastly; straight lines show a "staircase" effect so at full-size you see jagged edges. None of these effects will be accepted.

**Excessive Effects** - Artists should use a light hand when using special effect filters and blending options offered in digital software. There are many tutorials on the Internet on the use of the various filters available. Filters are not intended to be used in their default settings; it often takes a lot of tweaking and the use of more than one filter or blending mode to achieve an attractive image. A filter will not save a bad photo. Declines may include, but are not limited to: excessive beveling on objects, text and borders, overuse of digital filters, poorly executed effects, poor blending from masking and background removal, etc.

**Lighting / Flash-eye:** Photographs must have exceptionally good lighting. Avoid submitting images with deep shadows and blown-out highlights which lose detail in those areas, or red-eye (flash-eye) in photographs of living beings. Declines may include, but are not limited to: blown out highlights, complete loss of detail in important shadows, harsh lighting, very low lighting, flash-eye regardless of the whether the result is red or not, etc.

## MARKETABILITY

*“There is a distinction between “fine art” on a card and a greeting card design. The distinction being “art for arts' sake” makes a nice fine art card for sale in gallery environments and on fine art site; however, fine art usually does not make a marketable greeting card without additional design elements such as: typography, border, verse, etc. Consumers purchase greeting cards specifically to suit occasions, holidays, genders, relations, ages and to send a clearly defined message to the recipient. Greeting cards are designed with that criteria in mind.”* quote by: **Doreen Erhardt, Artist, Greeting Card Universe**

**Occasion Specific:** Cards can meet all other requirements and still be declined due to the image not relating to the occasion/category of the card. Unexpected / unrelated subject matter is the artist's opportunity to make it “work” with a creative verse. Your image, card front text, and inner verse **MUST** all apply directly to the occasion, gender, relation, and age of the category.

**Gender Specific:** Cards can meet all other requirements and still be declined due to the image not suiting the gender of the category selected. Pink flowers for example are generally not marketable on a card for a man. Your image, card front text, and inner verse **MUST** all apply directly to the occasion, gender, relation, and age of the category.

**Age Specific:** Cards can meet all other requirements and still be declined due to the image not suiting the age of the category selected. Flowers and scenics for example are generally not marketable on a card for ages under 13. Your image, card front text, and inner verse **MUST** all apply directly to the occasion, gender, relation, and age of the category.

**Photo Card Area:** On photo card designs, the photo area should serve as the focal point of the overall design. Compositional emphasis should be on the photo, not other elements on the card. Maximize the photo size as the focal point. Specifically: Entire photo area (a single photo or multiple photos) should ideally use 1/3 to 1/2 of the card's surface. If design is used to create multiple cards, elements should vary and be appropriate by occasion, age, relation, and gender.

**Creative Use Policy:** Effective immediately all derivative works containing elements and/or photographs that are not the original creations of the submitting artist, or the reviewer feels are not the

original creations of the submitting artist, must have a link(s) to the elements/photograph or thorough source description provided in the Notes to Reviewer. This allows for a quicker review process and after all, YOU are the one who obtained the elements and know the copyright holders terms so it is quick and easy for you to provide that information. Reviewers will continue to return card submissions when the ownership is in question and no links or information are provided. These issues pertain to the right to sell the card and therefore its marketability.

**No Thank You:** A card design can meet all the requirements and still lack impact, rendering it unmarketable in GCU's market. The card needs to draw the eye, invoke feelings, and attract an interest in being purchased. Greeting Card Universe reserves the right to say No Thank You to any card, store, or artist which they feel are not a good fit for their market.

**Intellectual Property:** Use of manufactured items such as a Teddy Bear must not infringe on the copyright of the manufacturer and must be of studio quality in the lighting and still-life composition of the photograph. In general, it is best not to use recognizable store-bought items, statues, monuments, national parks, bridges, public buildings, etc., or any sign, vehicle, tool, or product that a) Is recognizable by color, form, design, shape, or location and/or b) Any part of the brand, label or logo is showing in your photos unless you have written permission due to potential copyright infringement. See a partial list on the GCU Wiki (<http://gcuwiki.com/ip.html>).