

Art Academy Projects using the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection as a study guide and resource.

The following are projects assigned to students of Mt. St. Ursula's Art Academy class which is a class devoted to an academic study of visual art. As a requirement for the seniors they must paint a religious subject painting for the school's permanent collection. The process begins with the selection of a painting from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's permanent collection. The work is photographed and printed so the students may begin to explore the work's compositional structure. They are asked to look for geometrical structures that support the positioning of the subject as well as use the mathematical formula of the Golden Mean to locate the focal point of the composition which defines the subject of the painting.





On the photocopy the students are free to explore the structure. The red horizontal and vertical lines represent the Golden Mean formula and converge in the center of the Christ child's eyes. The Madonna and the child form their own separate triangular shape with the child's triangle aligning on the vertical golden Mean line. The drapery of the Madonna clothing converges toward the Golden Mean intersection in the center of the child's head. The rest of the shapes have to do with repeated shape creating a rhythm or plastic rhyme.



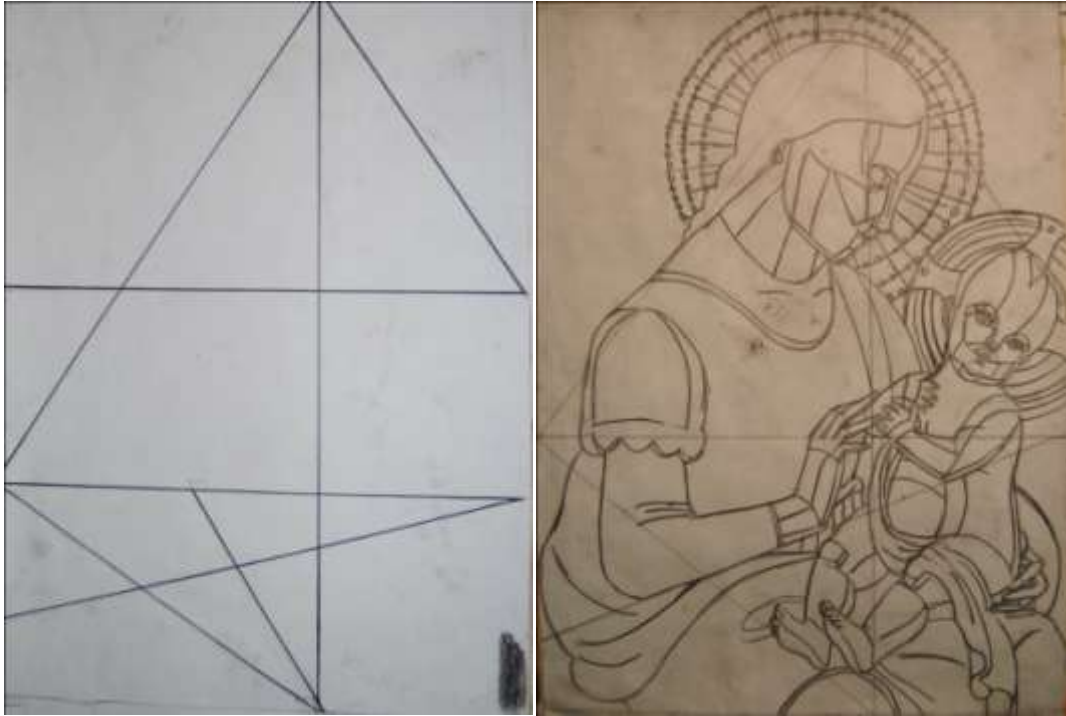
There can be no compositional learning if the students simply grids the painting and then use corresponding grid lines for their drawing and painting. It is the exploration using the geometric shapes and the use of the golden mean that teaches the students how to compose a work of art. It teaches them to think visually beyond the objects and subject of the drawing/painting and they start to think of their work of art as a whole rather than a part. In this particular case we were not going to use the background so to create a new balance the student aligned the apex of the triangular shape of the Madonna to match the apex of the child's on the same golden mean vertical line which also solidifies the subject and content of the painting. At this point the student is no longer copying a painting but creating a painting that was based on a painting from the Museum's collection. The student is free to develop her painting based upon the abilities and limitations of her own skill. In this drawing the student is beginning to break the figures into planes which will aid in the three dimensional representation of the figures. Below is the final painting. The painting below is painted by a senior 4th year art academy student.



The next student's selected painting from the Museum's collection.



In this composition the red vertical and horizontal lines are again the application of the golden mean and the converging point is the interaction of the Madonna's and child's hands suggesting that the subject of the painting is the interaction of the mother and child. This is reemphasized by the mother and child sharing or constructing the dominant triangle in the upper part of the painting that rises up from the horizontal Golden Mean line. You can also see how the arms and feet angle to the Golden mean lines at the outer edges of the composition. At this point it is easy to question whether there are triangles since they do not appear to be clearly defined by a solid object. However according to Daniel Dennett's book *Consciousness Explained* he goes to great length to explain how once a pattern is started the mind will finish it and often times it is at an unconscious level. To me this suggests that the completion of the composition is in its subliminal substructure that defines the location of the objects. The compositions without this substructure in the work of art would seem incomplete. This is the basis for why I have the students study composition and think of the whole and not just the parts (subject). I think it is important to note the perfect triangle made by the hands of the Madonna and child and it's similarity of the triangle of the upper composition. The circles and half circles represent the plastic rhyme.



The drawing on the left is the compositional structure and the student must build the subject (object) drawings using this structure as the frame work for her painting. Once again changes have been made to solidify the unity of the mother and child by aligning the arms as you can see in the drawing on the right. At this point the painting now makes the transition from copy to work based on the museum's collections. The structural (compositional) lessons have been learned as well as how to communicate the union of the Madonna and child. The student now proceeds at her own skill level to complete the painting relying on her knowledge of structure of the figures to complete the painting. The painting below is completed by a senior 4th year art academy student.



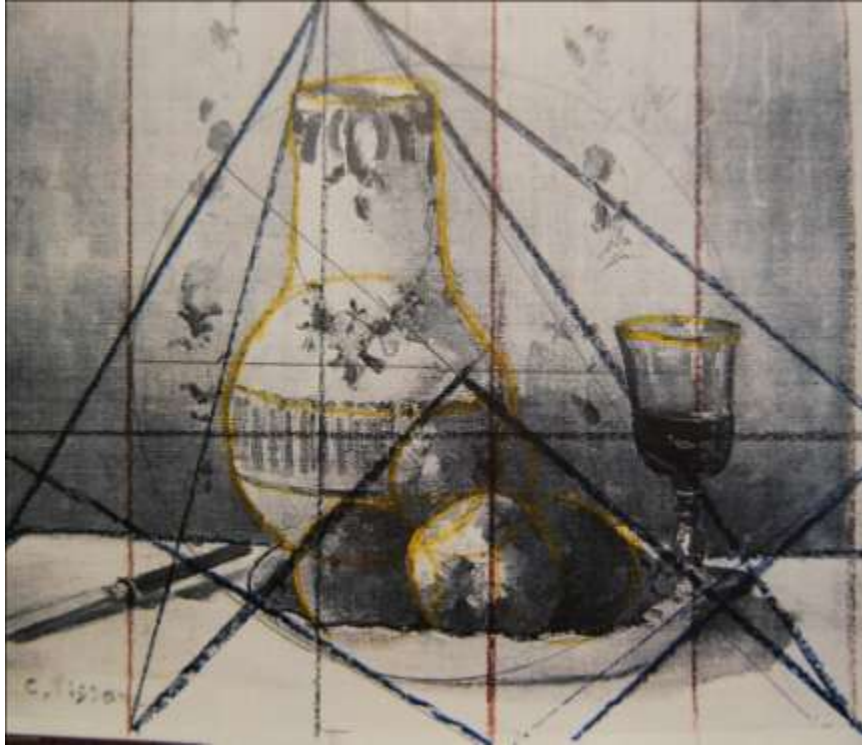
The following is a very basic application of the Golden Mean.



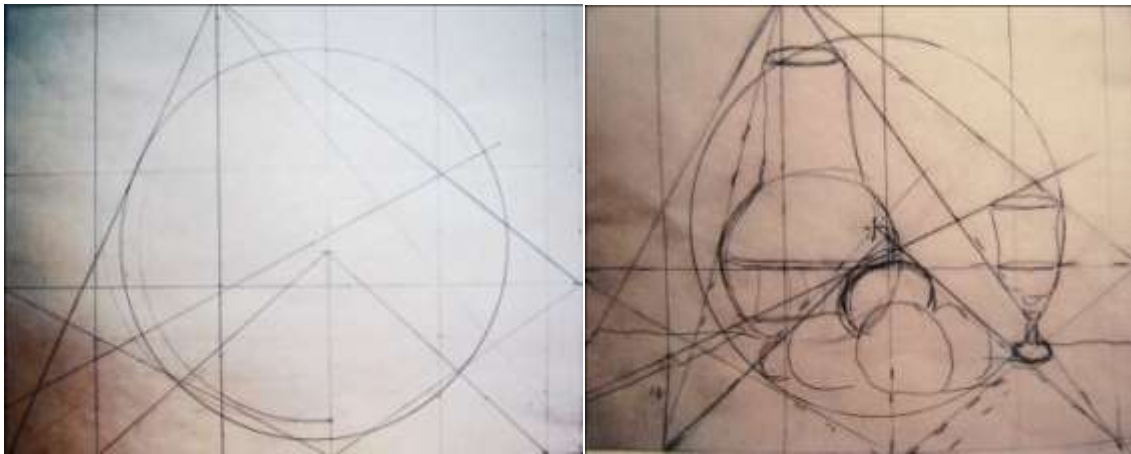
In the drawing the student began with the horizontal and vertical golden Mean formula. The horizontal one goes directly through the eyes and the vertical line goes directly between the eyes. The rest of the face is built around that intersection. The drawing is completed by a senior second year art academy student.

The next Example is from a Still life painting selected from the 19th Century galleries.





Once again the student explores the composition looking for geometrical shapes that becomes the basis for compositional structure.



The drawing on the left is the compositional structure and the drawing on the right is how the objects fit into the structure. In the final painting the vase was moved to the left to strengthen the circle element of the composition. The work below is completed by a sophomore in her second year of art academy study.



The final example is from a Cézanne painting.



The student is looking for a pattern and structure to use in building her painting. The vertical and horizontal ones represent the Golden Mean lines and the blue lines are the extension of the background pattern. The table cloth is moved to strengthen the vertical Golden mean line and the rest of the objects were moved slightly to reinforce the geometric patterned structure caused by the background shapes. The painting below is by a junior in her second year of art academy study.

