

How Does an Artist Use the Visual Elements of Art?

Core Competency: Communication Skills

In 1857, French painter Jean-François Millet (jawn fran-SWAH mee-LAY) created *The Gleaners* (figure 3.59B). In the painting, three women, the poorest of the poor, glean bits of wheat from a field. They stoop to collect the remnants left after the harvest, so that their families will have something to eat. In the distance, contrasting with their meager collections, are the abundant gains of the landowner piled high. The women appear monumental and unfazed by the backbreaking work. Millet also depicted the image using a free and loose impasto that lends an overall softness to the difficult scene. Millet thought of himself as a painter of the downtrodden. In fact, Millet's works were often seen as revolutionary calls to support the lower class.

Write an analysis of the painting, considering each of the visual elements of art. Describe each of these visual elements and explain how each element supports what you think the content of the painting is. (Remember that the content must be informed by the context.) To do so, answer each of the points below. A color wheel is provided in figure 3.59A for your use.

Describe Millet's use of *line*. Be sure to discuss:

- The character of the lines
- The directions of the lines
- The actual and implied lines
- How the lines support the content

Describe Millet's use of *shape*. Be sure to discuss:

- The character of the shapes
- The directions of the shapes
- The geometric and organic shapes

- The positive and negative shapes
- How the shapes support the content

Describe Millet's use of *texture*. Be sure to discuss:

- The character of the texture
- The actual and simulated texture
- How the texture supports the content

Describe Millet's use of *light and value*. Be sure to discuss:

- The various values throughout the work
- The use of *chiaroscuro*
- The use of value to create expression
- How the light and value support the content

Describe Millet's use of *color*. Be sure to discuss:

- The hues used
- The value of the colors
- The intensity of the colors
- The scheme
- How the colors support the content

Describe Millet's use of *space*. Be sure to discuss:

- The techniques Millet used to create the illusion of the three-dimensional space
- How the space supports the content

Describe Millet's use of *time*. Be sure to discuss:

- The methods he used to make time appear in the work
- How the time supports the content



(A)



(B)

FIGURE 3.59A AND B. (A) Color wheel; (B) Jean-François Millet. *The Gleaners*. 1857. Oil on canvas, 2' 9" x 3' 8". Musée d'Orsay, Paris.