



Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers

Arthur Wesley Dow

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First published in 1899, Arthur Wesley Dow's *Composition* has probably influenced more Americans than any other text to think of visual form and composition in relation to artistic modernity. While Dow is known as the mentor of Georgia O'Keeffe and Max Weber, his legacy as a proponent of modern art has suffered undeserved neglect by recent artists and art historians.

In *Composition* Dow develops a system for teaching students to create freely constructed images on the basis of harmonic relations between lines, colors, and dark and light patterns. Greatly influenced by Japanese art, he expounds a theory of "flat" formal equilibrium as an essential component of telling pictorial creation. Generations of teachers and their public school pupils learned from Dow's orientalism and adopted basic postimpressionist principles without even knowing the term. The reappearance of Dow's practical, well-illustrated guide, enhanced by Joseph Masheck's discussion of its historical ramifications, is an important event for all concerned with the visual arts and the intellectual antecedents of American modernism.

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