

## Design Challenge #1:

### Principles of Design

Donna Davis

Selected artwork:

[Ni Zan, Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu, dated 1372.](#)



Figure 1: Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu

Note. From Woods.and.valleys.of.Mount.Yu [Hanging scroll; ink on paper], by Z. Ni, 1372, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, United States, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/45636>. In the public domain.

This single Chinese traditional painting works well for all seven principles of visual design:

**Focal Point / Emphasis:** The large mountain mass at the left-center becomes the main focal point right away. The open water and empty paper around it make that form stand out even more. This choice creates emphasis, providing the viewer with a clear point to focus.

**Contrast:** The painting uses dark, textured ink strokes on a pale paper background, creating a range of grays, while the red seals sharply contrast with the neutral surface. This contrast enhances the composition's clarity and visual interest.

**Balance:** The composition is asymmetrical, but it still feels stable. The heavy mountain form on the left is balanced by the inscriptions above and the lighter distant hills on the right. An effective design does not need perfect symmetry; it needs visual balance.

**Scale / Proportion:** The mountain appears massive compared with the tiny trees and shoreline details. That difference in scale gives the landscape a sense of depth. In design, proportion helps create rhythm and direction of the design.

**Movement / Rhythm:** My gaze travels from the mountain to the foreground plants and water, then back up to the mountain and across to the calligraphy and distant peaks. This movement forms a complete circle through the painting's elements. The repeated brush strokes in the rocks and trees create a gentle rhythm that guides the viewer through the composition.

**Pattern:** Repeated ink textures in the rocks, tree shapes, waves, and seal forms create a pattern across the surface. This pattern helps organize the composition, making the painting feel intentional rather than random.

**Unity:** The painting feels unified through its limited color, consistent brushwork, and open space. Together, these elements create a calm and cohesive design.

**Reference:**

Ni, Z. (1372). Woods.and.valleys.of.Mount.Yu [Hanging scroll; ink on paper]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, United States.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/45636>