The world around you exists in three dimensions. Every object—a tree, a house, your friend—has height, width, and depth. Imagine awaking one day to the discovery that depth had vanished. You would still be able to identify the shapes, or outlines, of objects. You would not, however, be able to see their forms—their three-dimensionality.

These terms, shape and form, play an important role in the language of art. Along with a third term—space—they represent three related art elements. In this lesson you will learn more about this relationship. You will also learn—and see—how these elements are used in works of art.

Figure 2–19 Herbin shunned the use of objects in his work. He used bright colors and geometric shapes to create art that expressed his intellectual attitude toward painting. His work influenced the Hard Edge and Op art painters of the 1960s.

SHAPE

In art a shape is an element that refers to an area clearly set off by one or more of the other six visual elements of art. Shapes are flat. They are limited to only two dimensions: height and width. A ball’s shape is a circle. A shape may have an outline or boundary around it. Some shapes show up because of color. Others are set off purely by the space that surrounds them. Shapes may be thought of as belonging to one of two categories:

- **Geometric shapes.** These are precise shapes that look as if they were made with a ruler or other drawing tool. The square, the circle, the triangle, the rectangle, and the oval are the five basic geometric shapes. The painting shown in Figure 2–19 is made up largely of geometric shapes.

- **Organic shapes.** These are not regular or even. Their outlines curve to make free-form shapes. Organic shapes are often found in nature. Objects in the painting shown in Figure 2–20 are based on organic, free-form shapes.

◆ Figure 2–20  The young man depicted is an organic, free-form shape. The torn paper in the background is made of free-form, irregular shapes.

**Form**

Like shapes, forms have height and width. Forms, however, have a third dimension: depth. In fact, **form** is defined as an element of art that refers to an object with three dimensions. A tree is a three-dimensional form. So are you.

As with shapes, forms are grouped as either geometric or organic. Examples of geometric forms are a baseball and a child’s building block. Examples of organic forms are a stone, a leaf, and a person.

Shapes and forms are closely linked in art (Figure 2–21). The end of a cylinder is a circle. One side of a cube is a square. A triangle can “grow” into a pyramid.

**Space**

Space is an element of art that refers to the distance or area between, around, above, below, and within objects. Space is empty until objects fill it. All objects take up space. You, for instance, are a living, breathing form moving through space.

Space occurs in both two- and three-dimensional art. In a two-dimensional work such as a painting or drawing, space is often represented as areas of color between and around shapes. Such space is known as negative space. In three-dimensional artworks, such as sculpture, space is real. The space in and around a freestanding sculpture, like the one in Figure 2–22, permits the viewer to move around the work and see it from different angles.

**Creating the Illusion of Space in Two-Dimensional Art**

Although drawings and paintings are created in two dimensions, they can be made to appear three-dimensional. Artists have developed techniques for giving the feeling of depth in paintings and drawings. These include:

- **Overlapping.** Having one shape cover part of another shape.
- **Size.** Making distant shapes smaller than closer ones. Look again at Figure 1–2 on page 4.
- **Focus.** Adding more detail to closer objects, less detail to distant objects.
- **Placement.** Placing distant objects higher up in the picture, closer ones lower down.
• **Intensity and value.** Using colors that are lower in intensity and lighter in value for objects in the distance.

• **Linear perspective.** Slanting the horizontal lines of buildings and other objects so they seem to come together at a point on the horizon.

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**Check Your Understanding**

1. What is *shape*?
2. What are the two types of shapes?
3. What is *form*?
4. What are the two types of forms?
5. Name two techniques that artists use for creating a feeling of space.

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**Figure 2–22** This is the earliest of Moore’s reclining figures. This work shows Moore’s fascination with the human form.

Henry Moore. *Reclining Figure*. 1935–36. Elmwood. 48.3 × 93.3 × 44.5 cm (19 36⁄7 × 171⁄2"). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Room of Contemporary Art Fund, 1939.

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**Historical Connection.** What do underground bomb shelters have in common with the art of Africa? Both played a role in shaping the sculpture of Henry Moore. Moore was born in England and served in the British army in World War I. After the war, he attended art school on grant money issued to war veterans. As a student, he developed a keen interest in African tribal sculpture. He would later adopt features of this style in his own abstract sculpture. On the brink of World War II, Moore received an unusual request from the British government. They asked him to create drawings depicting life in underground bomb shelters. From 1940 to 1943, he focused almost entirely on drawing. These drawings, mostly of families or rounded forms of people, had an enormous impact on his later sculptures.