

The Golden Secret

As artists we are always looking for ways to make our paintings better, more pleasing to the eye and pleasing to our viewers.

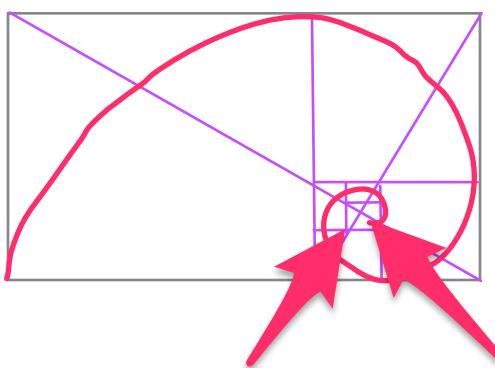
There are a couple of different ways to do this through composition, one of which is a better understanding and use of The Golden Mean; also called The Golden Section, The Golden Proportion, The Golden Ratio, The Golden Triangle or The Divine Proportion.

The Golden Ratio is a mathematical way of finding the “most pleasing” place for the center of interest in a painting and the movement of the parts leading to the center of interest. It is said, the reason the Mona Lisa, by Leonardo Di Vinci is so popular is because Di Vinci used the Golden Mean to establish his composition.

Let’s start with the math; just for a moment. First, I am an artist, not a mathematician, so it took a bit of work to understand the “logical” side of placement, but there are plenty of artists out there with really big brains that find incorporating math into their work to be fun. Who would have thought that?

Mathematically The Golden Ratio is $(1 + \sqrt{5})/2 = 1.6180339887$ Now that “that” is perfectly clear, in Greek the letter “PHI” represents The Golden Ratio. I know that’s helpful.

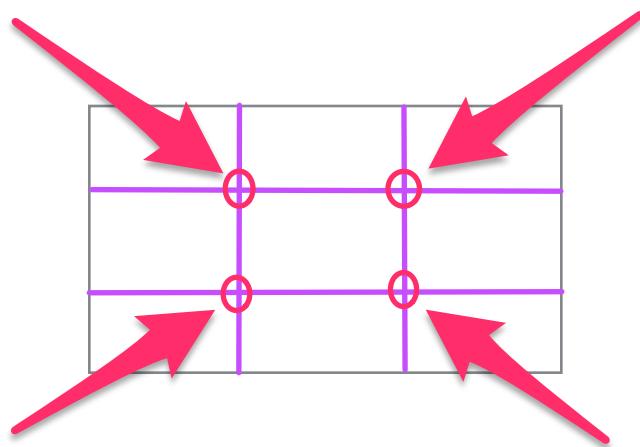
For our purposes, as artists we need to understand, more simply, and here is a little graphic to help with that:



This is the most visually pleasing placement and movement for an artistic composition. How is that so, you ask? Well, it is a mathematical formula that is continually repeated in nature and the human form and that is why many times it is referred to as “The Divine Proportion”

Isn't there an easier way to arrive at the same, or similar conclusion without all the math? I'm glad you asked, because there is.

Photography uses a simpler division called the "Rule of Thirds." This idea is based upon dividing a canvas/board/paper into 3 equal parts both vertically and horizontally with the most pleasing placement of the center of interest being the intersection of the vertical and horizontal lines. It is visually much easier to arrive at the placement of the center of interest using this method.



Why didn't you just lead into this "composition thing" with the Rule of Thirds? I'm glad you asked. There is a "movement" in The Golden Mean that helps lead the eye into the center of interest that isn't necessarily expressed in The Rule of Thirds. It's important to understand this so that when you are painting, you can more purposefully place your center of interest and the movement of the elements leading into the center of interest through understand.

I hope this helps!

Forever Yours In Paint,
Kathryn