

Marie Massey

Plein Air Painting Workshops



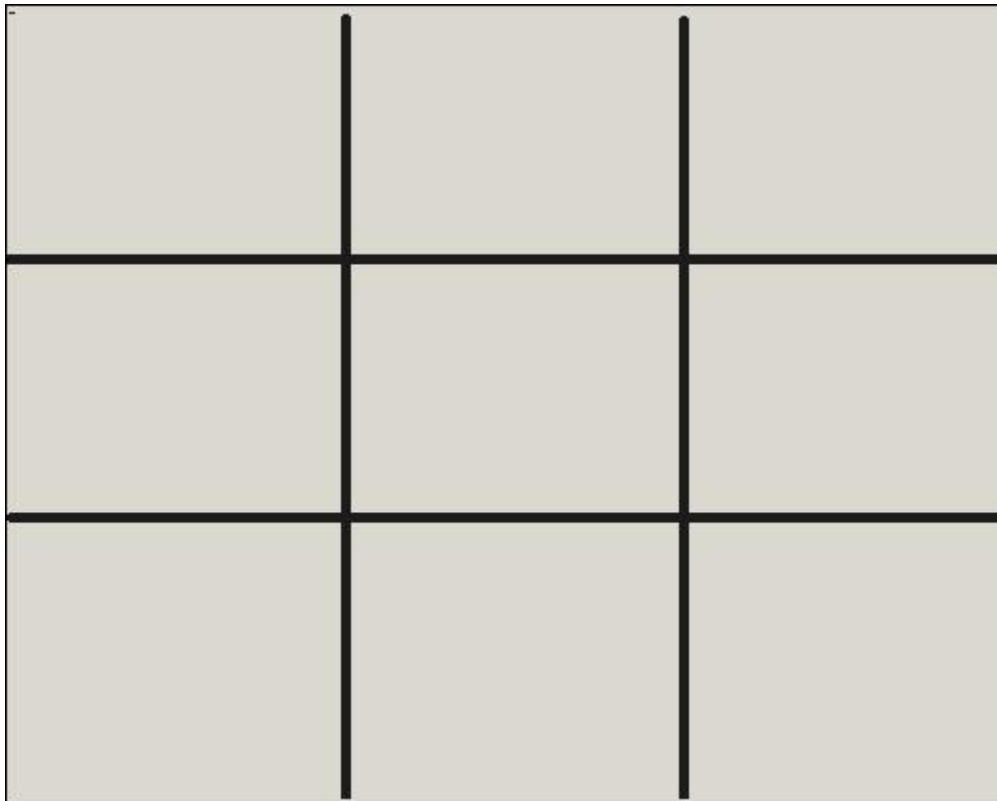
Marie Massey Fine Art
painting the beauty of everyday

Composition & Design: Painting in Layers, Oil Land and Sea Scape

There are a number of powerful visual areas within a basic rectangle that artists can use to enhance the composition and design of their paintings. For example, the *rule of thirds* can be used as a tool for enhancing and improving our design and composition.

Why the rule of thirds works

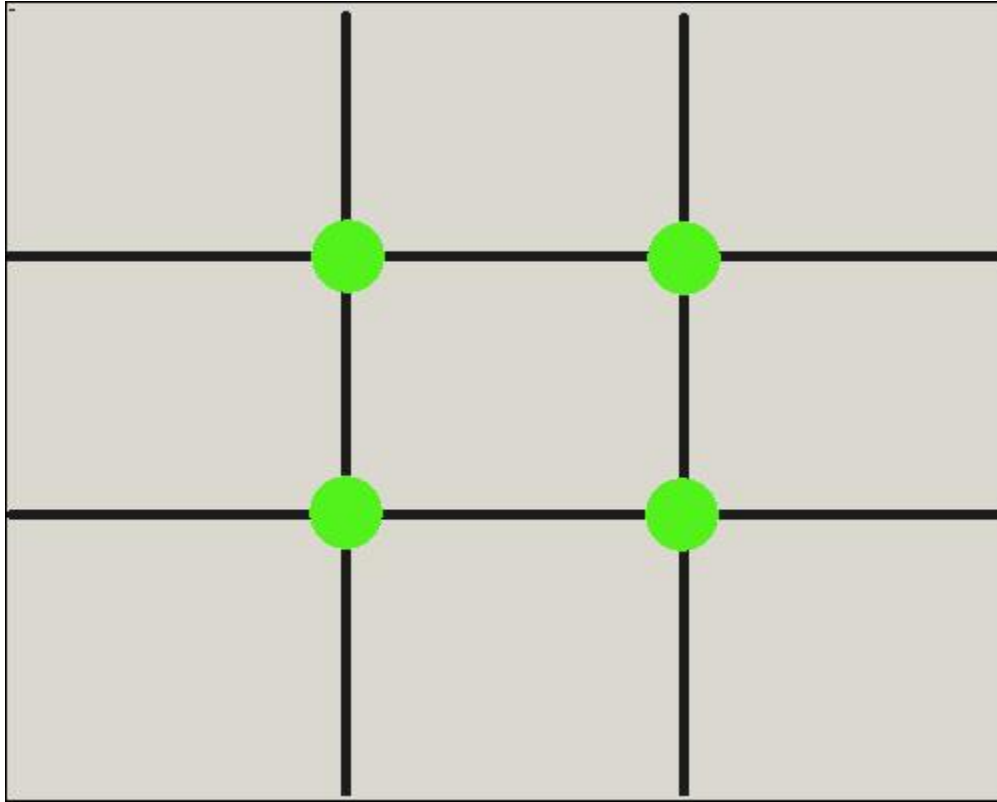
In the diagram below, a rectangle has been divided horizontally and vertically by four lines. The rule of thirds states that the centers of interest for any rectangle lie somewhere along those lines.



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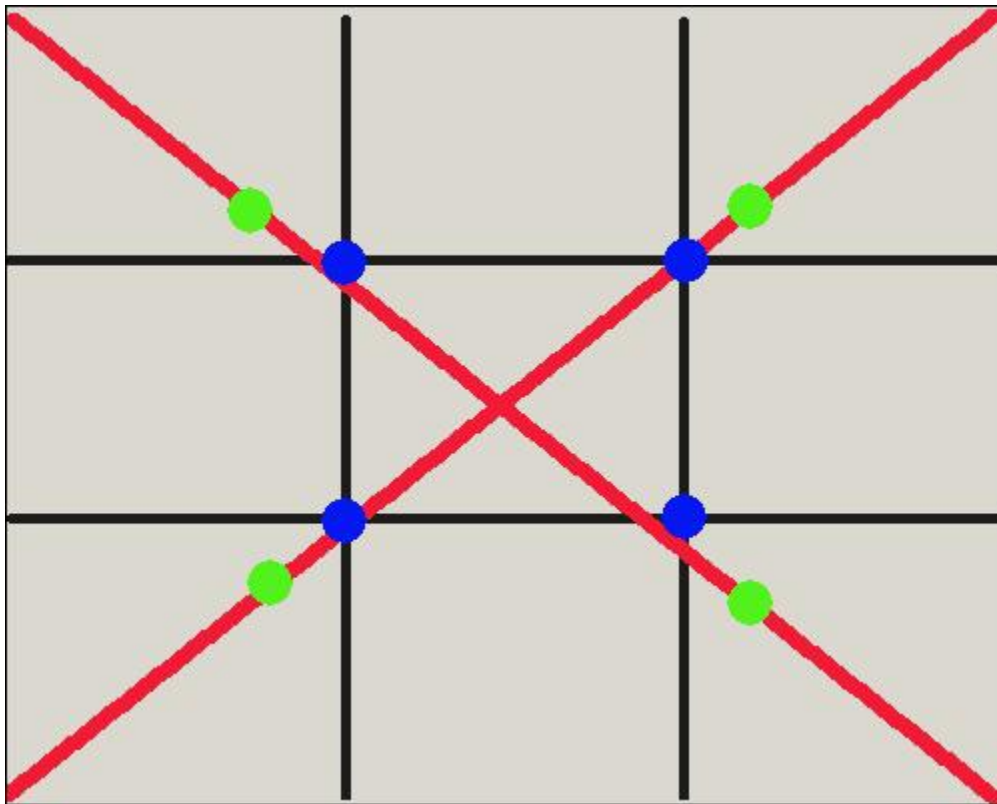
Photographers and cinematographers have dubbed the intersections of those lines *power points*, shown by the green dots here:



In this next illustration, those power points are marked with blue dots while the “eyes” are marked with green dots.

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How to use the rule of thirds in your art

Align an image with these lines or by placing your focal points near the power points you can give balance to a composition while simultaneously making it more engaging to the eye.

For example, we all know to avoid placing the horizon line of a photograph directly in the center of the image. Putting the horizon line $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way from the top or $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way from the bottom creates a more attractive composition.

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Horizon at upper third



Horizon at lower third



Horizon in the middle

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This is the rule of thirds in action. And of course, using the rule on art with vertical elements instead of horizontal ones works just as well.

There are many types of composition. It is good to have these in your mind as options for your painting when you are approaching a scene.

S – Curve Composition:

The eye tends to follow along edges. An S-curve is simply a curve of some object, line or path that curves back and forth horizontally as you proceed vertically through the landscape, much like the letter S—in fact, usually exactly like the letter S.

One of the most common uses of the S-curve is in painting the landscape—a stream, or perhaps a road zigzagging from the viewer back toward the horizon. Hot Stream, Husavik is a pretty direct example. Our eyes tend to flow to the horizon with the stream edges.

First, the eye tends to move along edges. Second, in this case, we start off moving left-to-right, which is likely to be your predominant reading direction. Finally, we move upward through the landscape, from near to far. When painting the path, we will cut the S curve with horizontal lines and this will make it lay down.



Little Butano Creek, Butano State Park, California **by photographer Joe Decker**

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Red Morning Dunes, Monument Valley, by **photographer Joe Decker**

You'll also often find s-curves even where there isn't such a direct line as the stream and stream edges here. In *Red Morning Dunes*, there's an s-curve implied in the path—between the bushes we'd walk through if we were heading “into” the picture.

S-curves often seem to contribute a sense of depth to a landscape. In both these examples, we see similar types of plants getting smaller and smaller as we wander back along the s-curve, giving our mind an easy opportunity to compare sizes and thus “see” the perspective and depth. In *Red Morning Dunes*, the way the plants overlap each as they form the boundaries of the s-curve also contributes to that sense of depth.

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Radiating Line Composition:

You create lines from various points in your painting which converge at the focal point. These radiating lines guide your eyes to the focal point and hold them there for a while before you travel to other parts of the picture.



O or Circular:



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Steel Yard



Ell or Rectangular Composition

