

Bonsai is distinct from any other visual art in that its creative medium—a tree—is alive. Because a bonsai continues to grow and develop over its lifetime, it is a work of art that is never finished.

As living art, bonsai incorporates the elements and principles of design found within painting, sculpture, and other artforms. These design elements and principles are the tools artists use to communicate with you, the viewer. Learning about how each tool works will enhance your appreciation for each artist's work.

*-Aarin Packard
Pacific Bonsai Museum Curator*

PACIFIC BONSAI MUSEUM

Nestled amidst towering conifers, Pacific Bonsai Museum connects people to nature through the living art of bonsai. We offer engaging, groundbreaking exhibits that honor the history and traditions of bonsai while evolving the art form.

TOURS

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Closed Mondays

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LIVING
ART
OF
BONSAI
21 APR -
30 SEPT
2018

OF ELEMENTS
OF DESIGN

PACIFIC
bonsai
MUSEUM

LINE

A line is a path that connects a series of points in space. Lines guide your eye around a work of art. Different kinds of lines create different feelings. In bonsai, natural trunk lines are preferable to artificial lines. Artificial lines are perfectly straight; natural lines, by contrast, have variations. The more random the variations, the more natural the trunk line looks as it flows up from its roots.

TEXTURE

Texture refers to the way things feel (physical texture) or the idea of how they might feel if touched (visual texture). Trees are great sources of texture. Pines have thick, rough bark; junipers have swirling dead wood; and beeches have smooth, white bark. The bonsai pot can add texture too. A smooth pot can suggest the bonsai is growing in a peaceful meadow while a roughly textured pot can suggest a harsh growing environment.

THE LAB

The physical space, or environment, in which art is created can have a tremendous influence on what is made. Bonsai has lacked a space where these established elements of design could be fully explored, challenged, or even broken... until now. Pacific Bonsai Museum's LAB (Living Art of Bonsai) is an experimental bonsai design collaboration. This multiyear endeavor kicks off in 2018 with an inaugural project that reimagines traditional bonsai practices by investigating sequence.

SHAPE

Shapes have two dimensions—width and height—and recognizable boundaries. Like lines, shapes can look artificial (geometric) or natural (organic). Bonsai combine geometric and organic shapes. The overall shape, or silhouette, of a bonsai is determined by the perimeter of its branches. A bonsai artist trims the branches to create a more formal (geometric) or natural (organic) silhouette.

COLOR

Color is produced when light strikes an object and reflects back to your eyes. Like textures, different colors can trigger different feelings. In the plant world, color is an indicator of season. Yellow and orange leaves speak of fall while red berries are associated with winter. The color of the bonsai pot, is another very important part of the artform and can also create feelings like calm or excitement.

Kelli MacConnell

Linocut Printmaker Portland, Oregon

Captivated by wilderness since early childhood, linocut printmaker Kelli MacConnell translates her natural surroundings into richly detailed prints. For MacConnell, printmaking fosters a relationship between humans and the natural world. Through her creations, she strives to show how people can both exist in civilization and remain connected to that which is inherently wild.

FORM

While shapes have two dimensions, forms have three dimensions. Depth—the third dimension—adds visual weight, drawing you in for a closer look. One way to create a sense of depth is by playing with scale, which governs your perception of how far away something is. In a forest-style bonsai, taller trees are usually placed in the front of shorter trees, which creates an optical illusion of increased depth.

SPACE

Space can be either positive or negative. Positive spaces are areas occupied by a shape or form. Negative spaces are the areas in between and around those positive spaces. Young trees have many branches in order to maximize growth (positive space). When a branch dies and falls off, negative space is created. The older a tree gets, the fewer branches (positive space) it has, and the more negative space it has.

David Cutchin

Frame Maker Anthony, Florida

Artist David Cutchin sees a memoir of adversity and resilience in the raw or antique lumber he uses for his sculptures—he sees a story. David repurposes the dead wood of a bonsai into a work of art. The juxtaposition of the geometric frame and the organic bonsai form forces us to consider our relationship with the natural world.