

Esthetic Aspects of the Desert, An Outline

By Carl D. Duncan, Chairman, Division of Natural Sciences

San Jose State College-1952

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Imagery

Shortage of water - drying winds forbidding wastes of sand and rocks.

Also strange appeal - lure - spell - charm - fascination - strange hold on men's hearts and minds and souls.

What constitutes this appeal?

Form, line, proportion - masses

Line reveals and expresses form.

Line is the fundamental basis on which all beauty of form rests

Lines of an automobile, plane, racing yacht, horse, bird, well-proportioned human form, a suit of clothes, or a frock.

If lines are not good no embellishment can conceal the lack of beauty of form in anything.

Line and form revealed in the desert are the resultants of economical and harmonious resolution of the natural forces that shape the desert: wind, water, sunshine, erosion and deposition, and crustal movements.

Harmonious resolution of forces results in beauty of line and form and no beauty of form exists without it.

Symmetry of valleys, basins fans, mountains, trees, shrubs, flowers, etc.

Symmetry of individual plants results from their isolation and spacing that permits them to respond equally to stimuli from all directions.

Balance Mass against mass - area against area - form against form.

Vast areas of gentle sweeping contour are relieved by small masses which are the remnants of mountains.

Agreeable proportions exist in most features of desert landscapes.

Gently concave surfaces of alluvial fans provide the long, sweeping, restful profiles of most gentle slopes that reach out from bordering mountains to meet in the intervening valleys and basins.

Landscape in the nude.

Color - delicate to flamboyant

Color schemes are pleasing if there is a blend of scaled hues or harmonious or satisfying contrasts.

True in clothes, houses, boats, public buildings, paintings, etc.

The desert has both scaled hues and contrasts.

Wide range of hues in both related series and contrasts.

All harmonized by tempering effects of sun and atmosphere.

all pastelled, grayed, approximated in intensities and values.

Only striking contrasts are in green of new foliage of mesquite, creosote bush and other plants. Green is restful color.

Brilliant coloring of individual flowers and masses of flowers.

These are always keyed to and harmonious with the foliage of the plants that bear them and the colors of soil and rocks that constitute the setting in which the flowers bloom.

Sunset and sunrise flamboyance

Sunset colors suffuse and are reflected from the mountains and valley slopes.

Sunset colors are picked up and enriched by atmospheric haze.

Complements of sunset colors are given out in shadows.

Rhythmic repetition

Succession of mountain beyond mountain regularly weakened by haze give both rhythm and scaled hues and intensity values.

Succession of dunes and alluvial fans.

Spaced trees and shrubs marching up alluvial fans or into the distance are highly rhythmic and satisfying.

Suggestion of movement

Long gently curving slopes

Leading one into another

Leading on and on and on

Lost in distance and back again

Gradual reduction in apparent size of similar objects with increasing distance. The element of "vanishing point perspective."

Sense of Completeness

Wholeness - belongingness of interrelation

All encompassing

Comparable to viewing the heavens at night

Grandeur, serenity, repose greets one in every direction

Something humbling, ennobling, satisfying results from the realization of one's place in natural setting

In recognition of fact that man must bend with and adjust to the elements but that he can trust the elements if he so does.

In some measure -- all who spend considerable time in the desert and look beyond themselves sense these things, even when they know not what they are sensing. All feel the esthetic appeal of the desert.