<u>Visual Elements – Light</u>

I. Term: Light/Value

II. Definition of the term: The range of tonalities from white to black.

III. Examples of the term:

ACTUAL LIGHT: Actual light (from sources such as the sun, a flame, or a light bulb) illuminates three-dimensional objects and creates shadows and highlights.

- This room, designed by James Turrell, features actual light. He created a 12 foot square opening called a 'skyspace' to let in natural, overhead light. Recessed lights shine up towards the curved ceiling. Actual light also shines in through the doorways.

James Turrell, *Live Oak Friends Meeting House, Houston,* 2001

EFFECTS OF ACTUAL LIGHT: The appearance of an object can change dramatically as the source of actual light changes. It is almost hard to believe these photos show the same sculpture. Different lighting conditions transform the look of the piece.

Naum Gabo, *Constructed Head no. 2*, 1916

IMPLIED LIGHT: Implied light refers to the **illusion** of actual light in a two dimensional artwork. The shadows and highlights in a 2-D work are not created by an actual source of light outside of the work.

- In Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew,* 1599-1600, you can see the illusion of light coming from the upper right. This is *implied* light, not actual light. There is not an actual source of light shining on the subjects from outside of the painting. Instead, Caravaggio has created the illusion of light with paint.


TENEBRISM: *Tenebrism* refers to the use of dramatic illumination in a painting. This style is characterized by brightly lit figures emerging from a dark background.

In Caravaggio's painting, the illusion of a "spotlight" shining on the men is an implied light often associated with *tenebrism.*
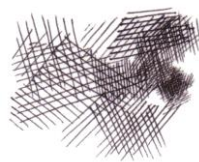
2-D TECHNIQUES: Gradual shading, hatching, crosshatching, and stippling are some of techniques artists use to create light and dark variations:
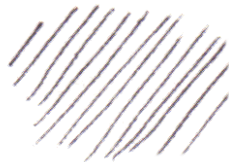

gradual shading   hatching   crosshatching   stippling

Dark values can be created by making dense marks. Areas with more disbursed marks look lighter.

VALUE SCALE: Here is a value scale. A *value scale* is a visual series of spaces starting with white or the lightest *tint* on one end, and gradually transitioning to the black, the darkest *shade*. The addition of white creates *tints* and addition of black creates *shades*.
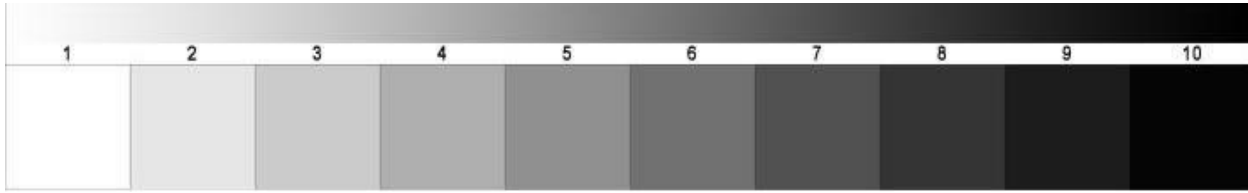
CHIAROSCURO: The term, *chiaroscuro,* refers to the use of subtle gradations and deep variations of light and dark values in a two-dimensional work. Chiaroscuro can be used to enhance the delineation of forms within the work and create dramatic contrast. *Chiaro* means "light" or "clear" and *oscuro* means "dark" or "obscure."