

Balance

In assessing visual balance, we always assume centre vertical axis and usually expect to see some kind of equal visual weight distribution on either side. This axis functions as a fulcrum on the scale or see-saw, and the two sides should achieve a sense of equilibrium.



Imbalance

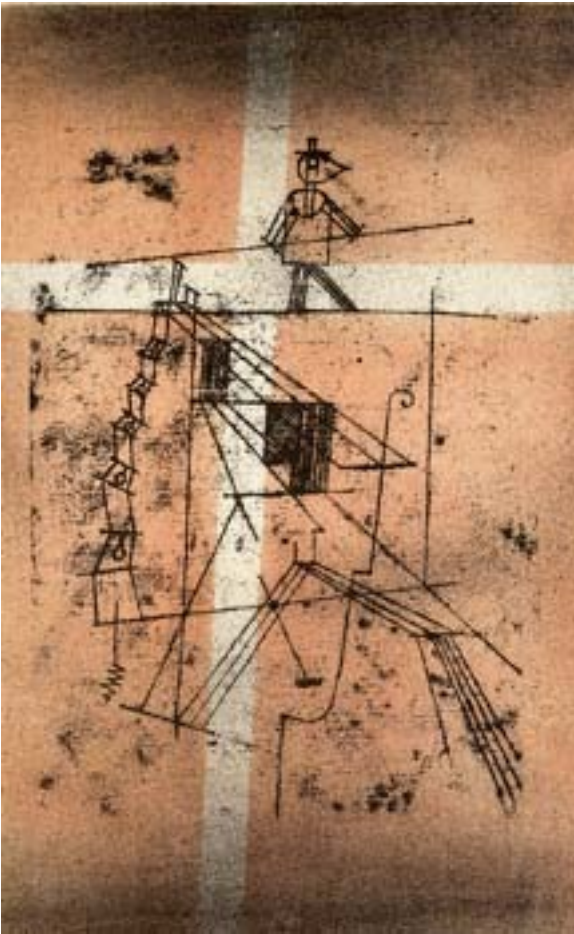
In absence of this equilibrium, we feel a need to rearrange the elements.

Balance: - equal distribution of visual weight.

Imbalance can be a useful tool, intrigues us and attracts our attention for exactly this unexpected quality.



We recognize classical art by its perfect balance of horizontal with the verticals.



In Paul Klee's whimsical tight rope walker, the instability of the image expresses the theme perfectly.

The artist can manipulate the vertical balance freely to fit a particular theme or purpose.

Symmetrical Balance

The simplest type of balance-shapes is repeated in the same positions on either side of a central vertical axis. One side in effect becomes the mirror image of the other side.

Symmetrical balance is rarer in painting than in architecture.

Many religious paintings that were intended as altarpieces employed symmetry so as not to interrupt the prevailing tenor of the architectural setting.

The symmetrical formal positioning can be understood quickly and would not intrigue the viewer. One's attention can be directed to the theme; on the other hand, negatively become regular, repetitive, monotonous, predictable and thus uninteresting depends on the designer's aim.

The simplicity of symmetrical balance can be an asset if the design elements are busy and complex. Only the symmetrical repetition keeps a fantastically complicated design of "jumpy" shapes organized and at least somewhat coherent.





Asymmetrical Balance

Which weighs more? a pound of feather or a pound of lead? The riddle similes visual balance.



Katsushika Hokusai, South wind and clearing weather, from Thirty-six Views of Fuji.

The large mass of the mountain sits to the right of the centre axis. But the composition is not off balance. The left side provides enough visual interest to balance the weight of the large triangular mountain that draws our first attention. The visual interest is provided by the complicated pattern of light clouds against the darker sky, and the dark mass of small triangles, which suggests a forest of trees. The two sides of the compositions are thus very different, with dissimilar elements, yet a sense of balance is maintained.



Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates. Ford Foundation Building. New York(Rogers Fund, 1936).

The weight and eye attraction of two sides are balanced with very different elements and materials. The strong simple rectangular areas of brown granite on the left are visually balanced by the lighter but more intricate window pattern of reflecting glass on the right. This change and contrast provide visual interest and excitement.

Attempts to balance dissimilar items involve more complex considerations and more subtle factors.

Balance by Colour

A small area of bright colour can balance a much larger area of a duller, more neutral colour. Our eyes, drawn by the colour, see the smaller element to be as interesting and as heavy visually as the larger element.



Gauguin, Two Women on a Beach

The figure at the left with the red and white sarong, and the one at the right are very different in size, but the artist establishes equilibrium based on colour. The right figure, if dressed in bright, eye-attracting red, would become far too dominant.



Kuniyoshi, Nichiren in Exile. Colour woodcut 1831

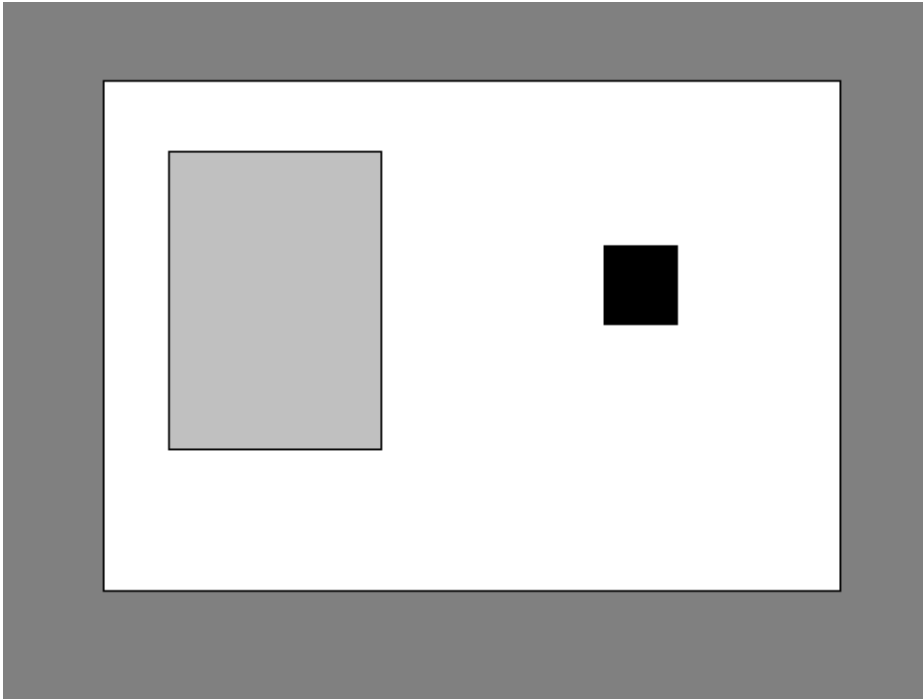
Here, there is a very subtle balance being seen by colour; white and warm grays dominate the snow scene. The figure with a strong colour, repeats the browns of the houses. This colour note is balanced by the much larger area of the sea, which is a cooler tone of blue, repeated in a more neutral, darkening sky above. The essentially empty right side has been balanced by colour.

Balance by colour is a valuable tool allowing a great difference of shapes on either side of the centre axis and still achieving equal eye attraction.

Balance by Value

Asymmetrical balance is based on equal eye attraction-dissimilar objects are equally interesting to the eye.

One element that attracts our attention is value difference, a contrast of light and dark.

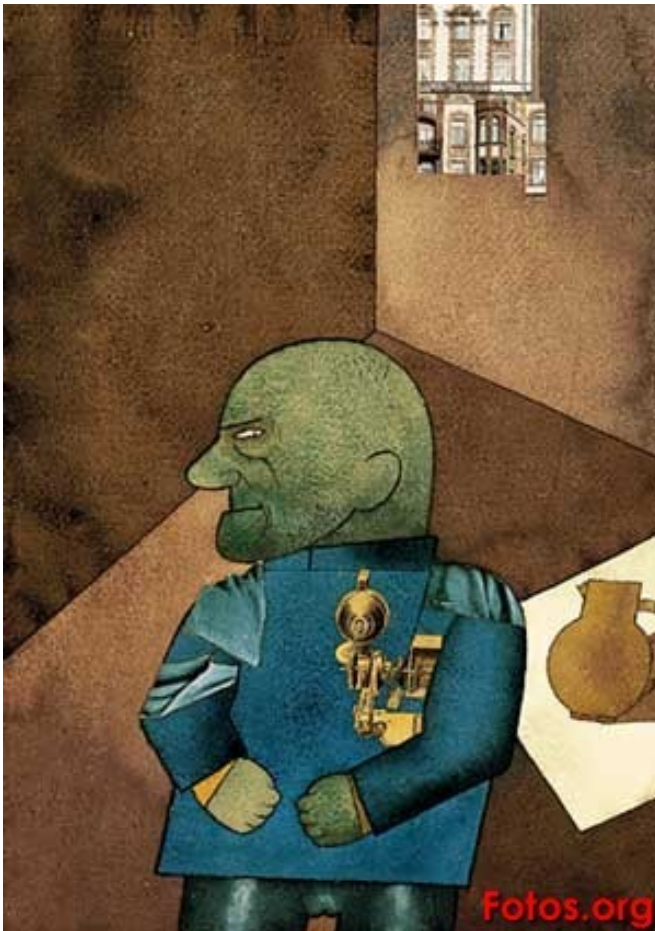


Black against white gives a stronger contrast than gray against white; therefore, a smaller amount of black is needed to visually balance a larger amount of gray.



John Singer Sargent.1880

The bright flesh tint balances with the deepest dark and mid-tones.

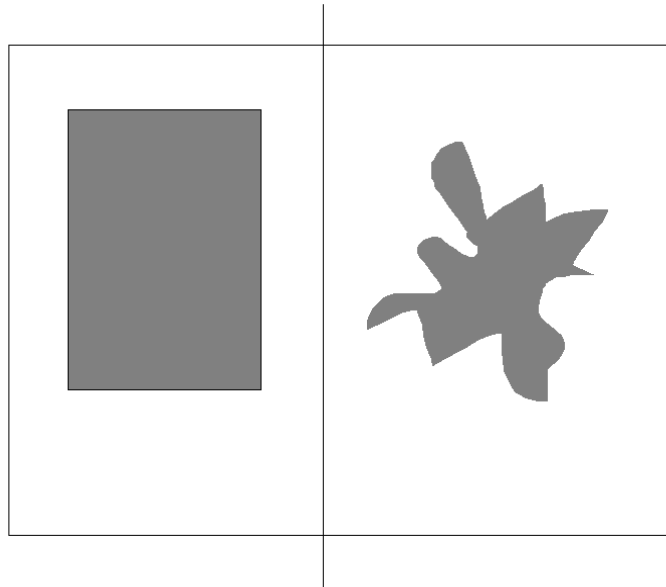


George Grosz. The Engineer Heartfield. 1920

The strong look of the figure gives emphasis and importance to the left side. The contrast of the white table against the dark background balances the right side.

Balance by Shape

Sometimes two objects of same colour value and texture are put together with some differences of their shapes, The complex form attracts the eyes of the viewer due to its more complicated contour.





The large dominating part of the design, is essentially simple, for example the lenses part of the camera, and always balanced by the pattern of the many complicated shapes/mechanical forms as the counter part.

Balance by Texture

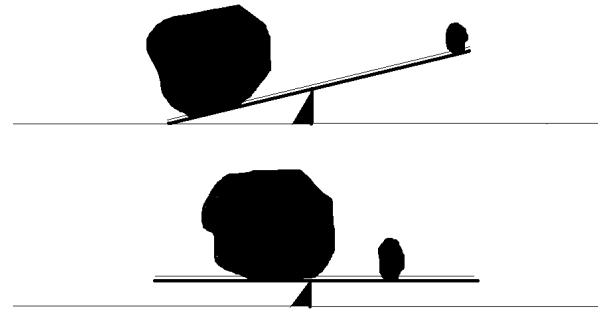


A small textured shape can balance a larger, more subtle shape.



The shiny, reflective surfaces of a silver tea set are the major element in balancing the figure in a painting by Mary Cassatt.

Balance by Position



- A balance is possible by changing the proximity of two objects of different weight.
- In Physics, there is a principal, that, two items of unequal weight can be brought to equilibrium by moving the heavier inward toward the fulcrum.
- In visual design this means that a large item placed closer to the centre can be balanced by a smaller item placed out toward the edge.
- Balance by position or proximity often lends an unusual, unexpected quality to the composition. The effect not only seems casual and unplanned but also can, at first glance, seem to be in imbalance.



Edgar Degas, Dancers Practicing at the Bar, 1877 With the two dancers mainly to the right of centre, the only balancing element on the left is the small water can, however, its placement, isolated at the left edge of the painting, visually balances the much larger figure.



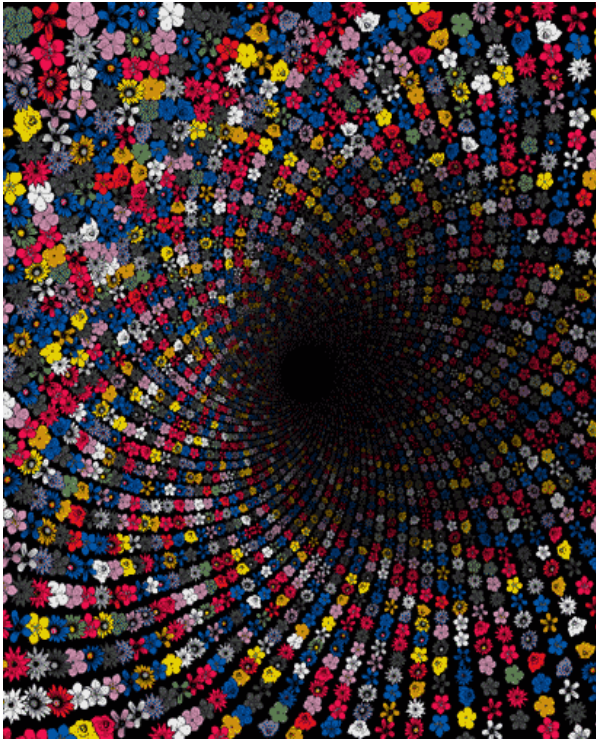
Thomas Gainsborough. 1748-50 has obvious emphasis on the left, but the placement of the three trees and the wheat sheaves at far right, running off the edge of the picture, provides a subtle balance.



Le Corbusier. Still-life 1920 The same principal being used with the larger objects are grouped on the left. The neck of the guitar creates a strong horizontal line that leads our eyes to the right. On the right the smaller isolated bottle balances the heavier objects on the other side.

We move the objects or elements mentally in the process of designing to see how the balance is affected.

Balance by Eye Direction



A single small space can be as important as many larger ones if it is made the focal point of the design

Asymmetrical balance is based on equal eye attraction, and here the large elements themselves make a small element the focal point.



Georges Seurat, Le Chahut, 1890, the small white gaslight form at the left assumes great visual importance from the number of elements that lead our eyes to that side. All the dancers kick their legs in the same direction, and the dark, diagonal, linear shape of the bass fiddle takes the eye right to this light shape. Almost everywhere we look something works to move our eyes to the one seemingly unimportant form that balances the whole picture.



The same norm applies in the Art Deco railway poster. Only a few lines of the distant station are on the right side of the design, but the eye direction creates the optical balance.



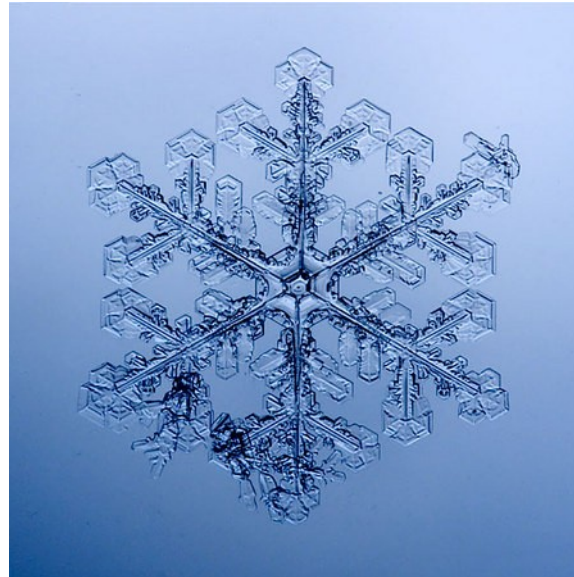
The direction in which the **figures look** also applies, because we viewers will involuntarily look the same way.

Analysis Summary

The principals often overlap and are often used together.

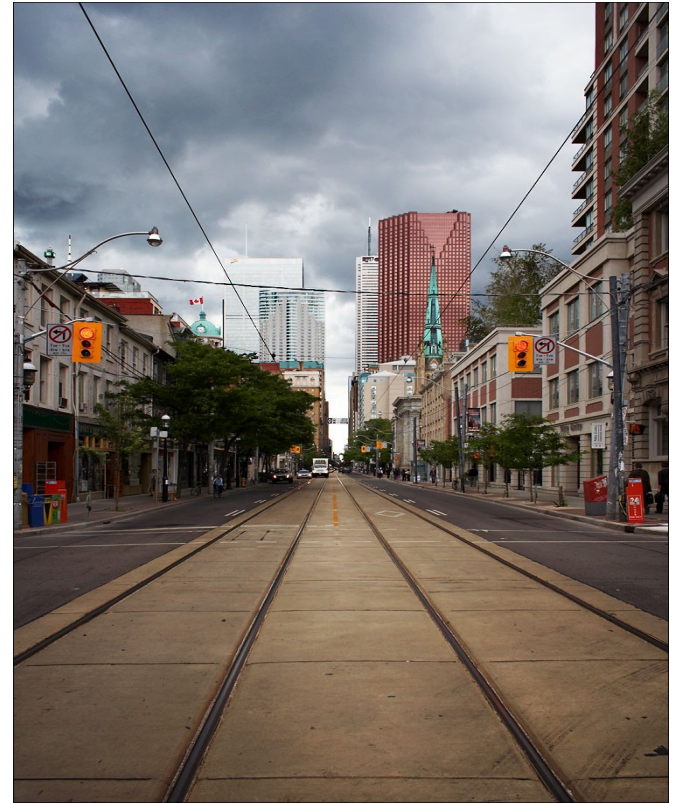
Radial Balance

Here all the elements radiate or circle out from a common central point.



The sun with its emanating rays is a familiar symbol that expresses the basic idea. It is also found in snowflakes.

It is not anything unrelated to symmetrical and asymmetrical balance, it focuses in the middle or off centre.



Radial balance looks effective in jewelry design.

This kind of a balance may also be a little too obvious to be entirely satisfactory.

The one point perspective of the receding elements and rooflines directs our eye to the centre and also takes it out to spread in a radial manner.

The fact that radial balance is rare in narrative painting should not deter one from experimenting with it. It can be a useful tool in organizing design and some extremely effective designs may result.

Crystallographic Balance

Allover Pattern

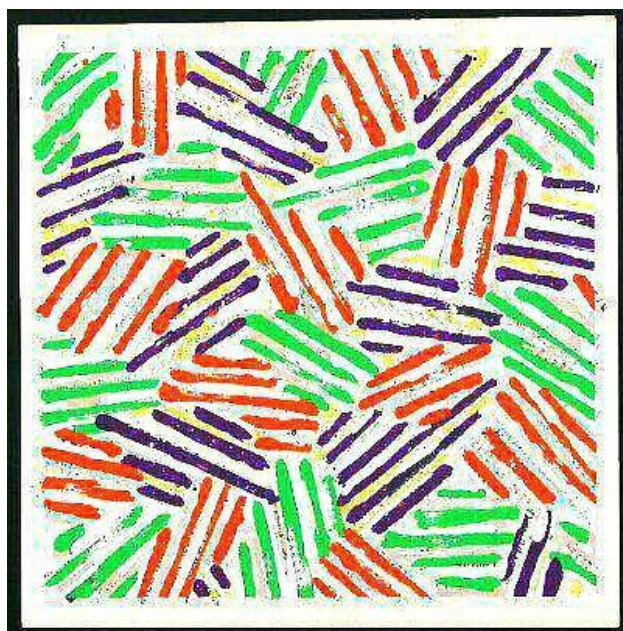
- An equal emphasis over the whole format
The same weight or eye attraction almost everywhere
- **A special refinement of symmetrical Balance.**
- But a constant repetition of the same quality everywhere on the surface is truly a different impression from our usual concept of symmetrical balance.
- Often with dynamic pattern that extends without real change over the whole painting.
- No beginning no end no focal point-unless indeed, the whole picture is the focal point.
- Sometimes with a subtle change of value and even distribution creates the visual balance.



Lee Krasner *White Squares*, c. 1948
Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in. (61 x 76.2 cm)



Ibram Lassaw, *Welded sculpture* 1953



Jasper Jones 1960

Printed fabrics

