Emphasis/Focal Point

A designer's job is to catch attention and provide a pattern that stimulates the viewer by offering some visual satisfaction.

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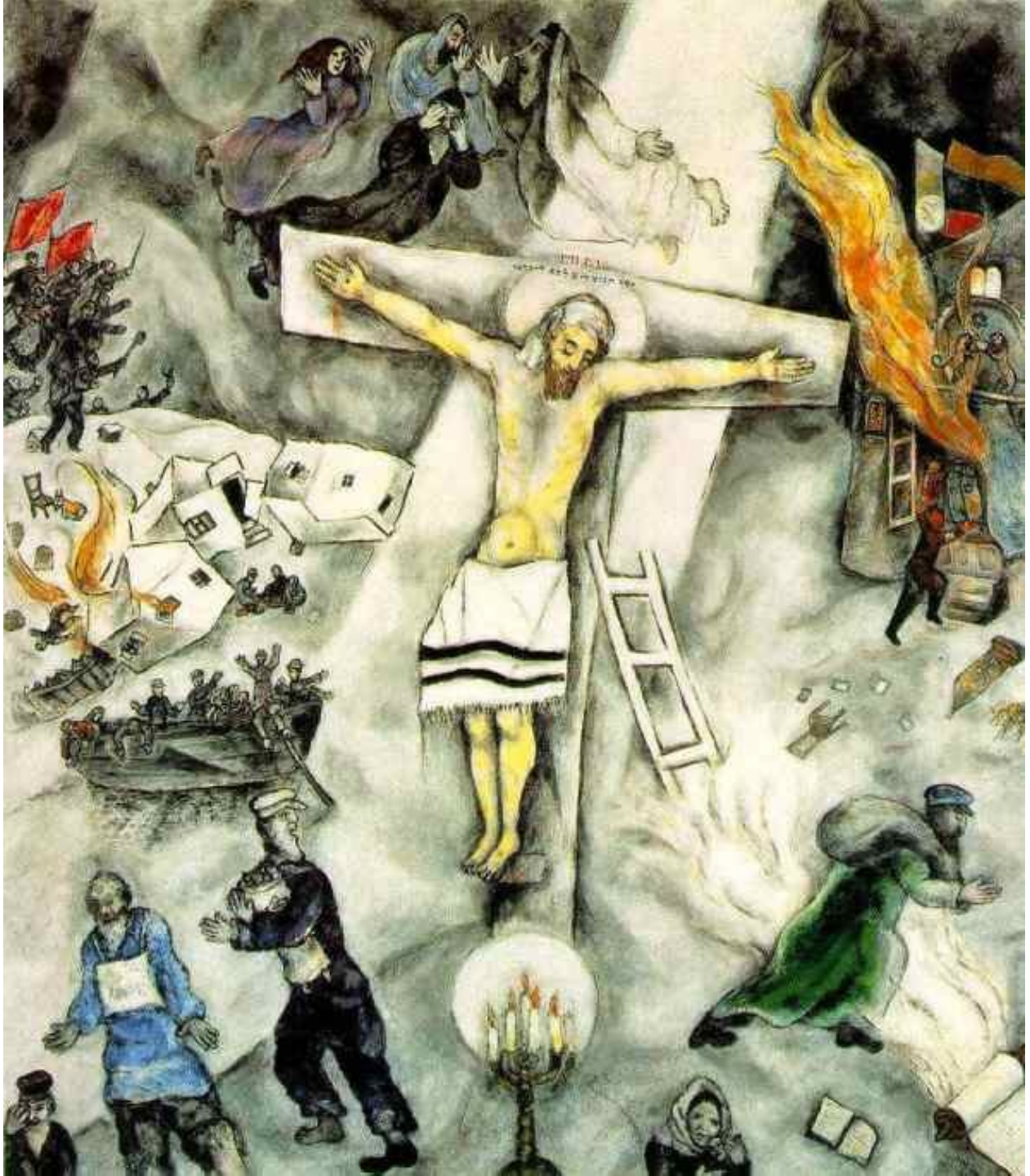

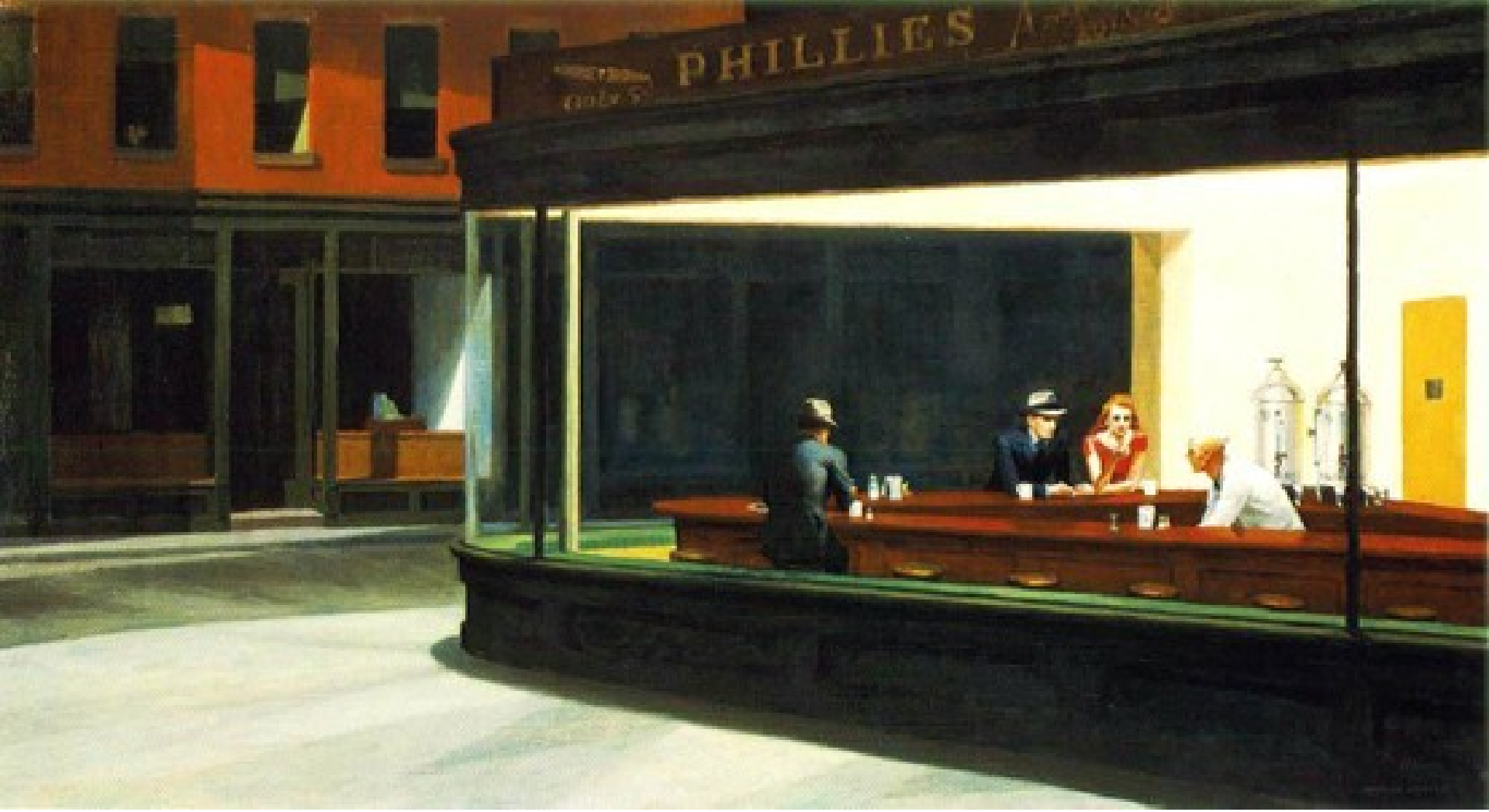
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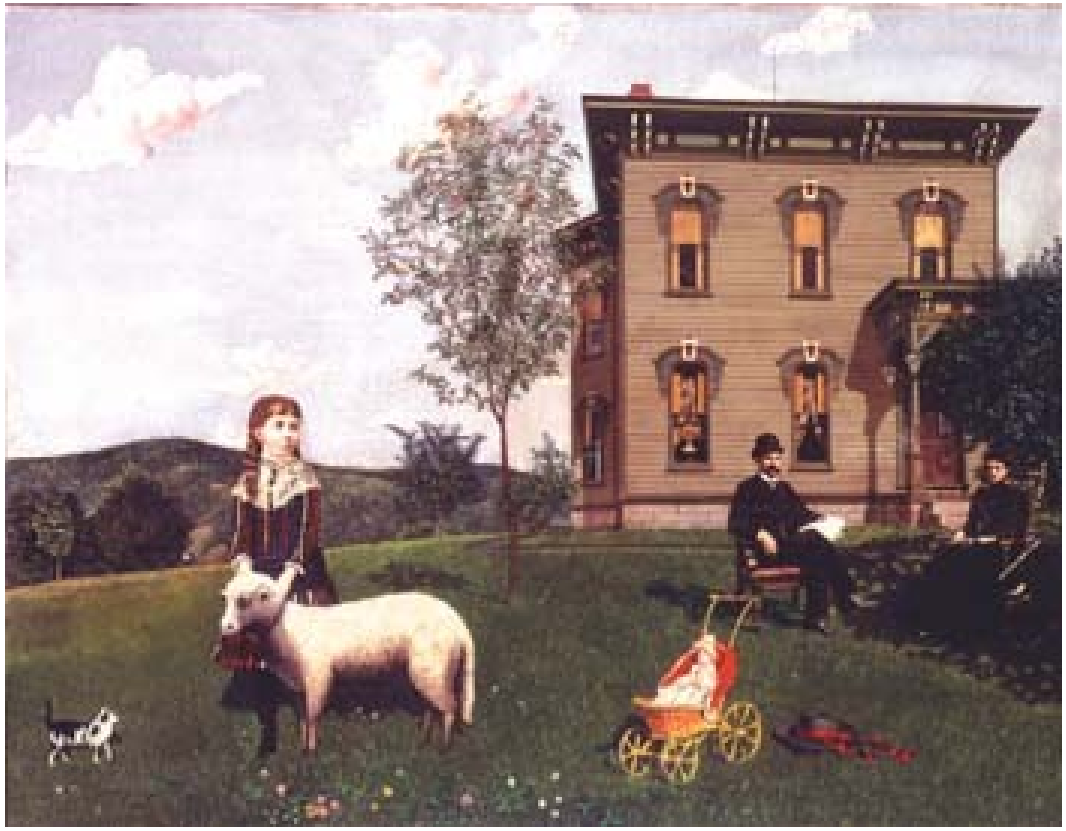
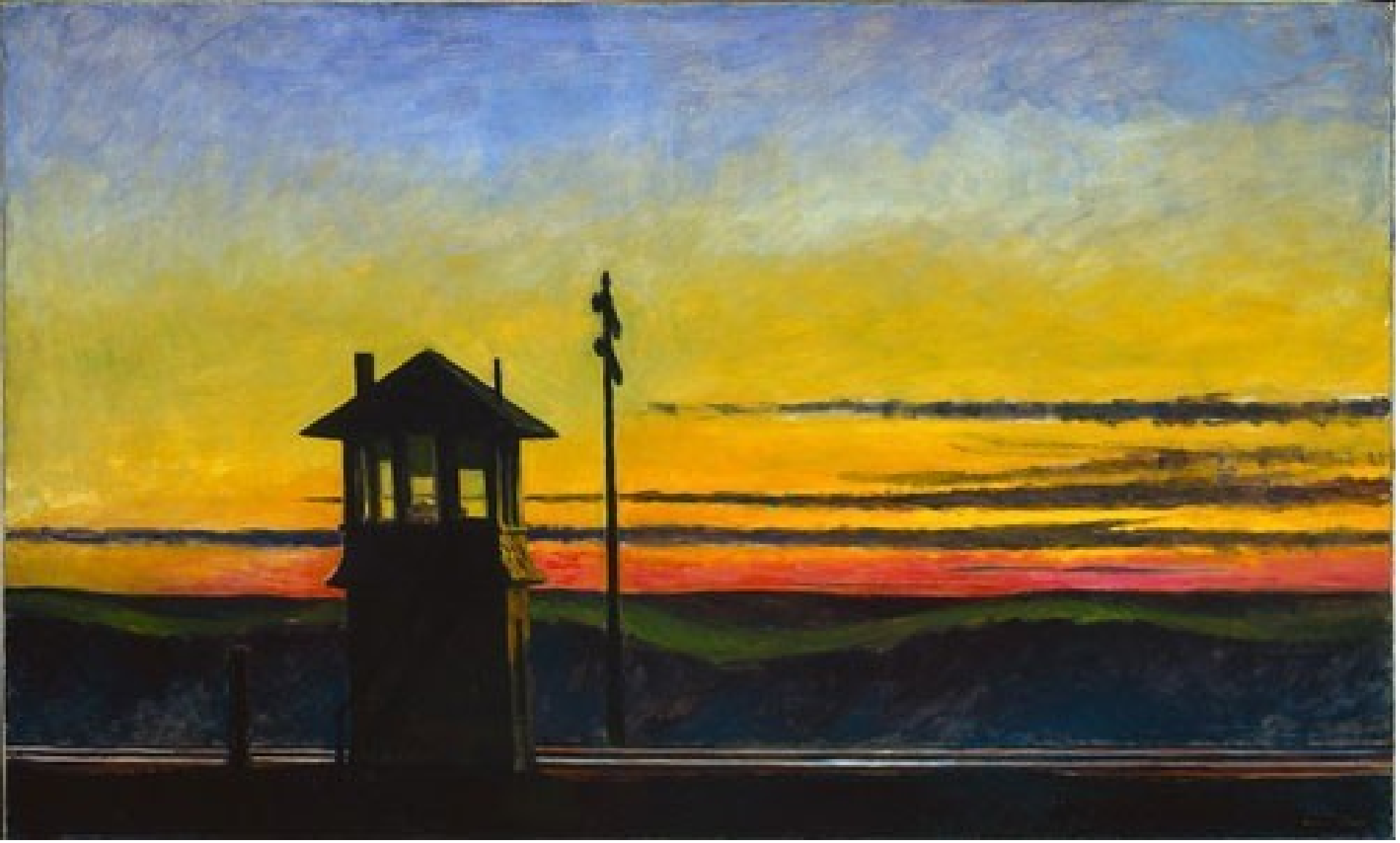


Edwin Romanzo Elmer.Mournung Picture.1890.

The child dominates the picture and is the first thing we see.
She is the largest figure and her head carefully in silhouette against the light coloured sky.
The sharp contrast of her dark and light dress with the white lamb also attracts our eye.
The artist's chosen emphasis is unmistakable.



Franz Kline, 1958

The slanted V-shape in the centre of Kline's painting is a brilliant, light element. The brightness stands out against the dark shapes and immediately establishes the feeling of dynamic movement that permeates the composition.

A focal point and several accents

- There can be more than one focal point, but the designer must be careful.

- Sometimes secondary points of emphasis that have lesser attention value than the focal point are called ***accents***. A focal point and several accents can be very effective.
- On the other hand, several focal points of equal emphasis can turn the design into a three-ring circus where the viewer does not know where to look first. **Interest is replaced by confusion**: when everything is emphasized, nothing is emphasized.

- As a general rule, a focal point results when one element differs from the others. Whatever interrupts an overall feeling or pattern automatically attracts the eye by this difference. The possibilities are almost endless:

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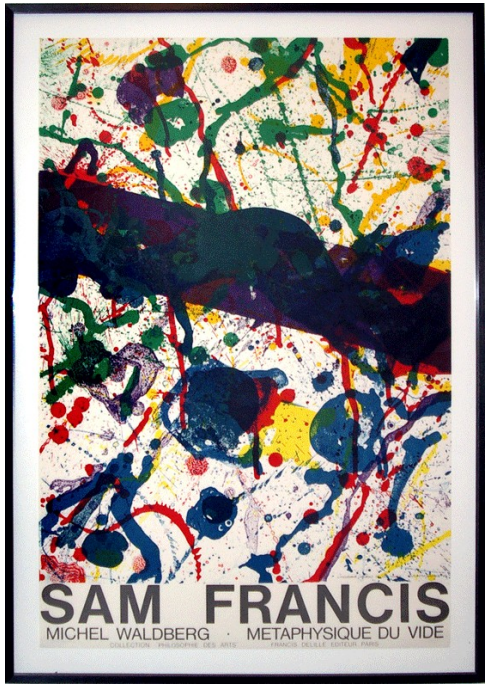
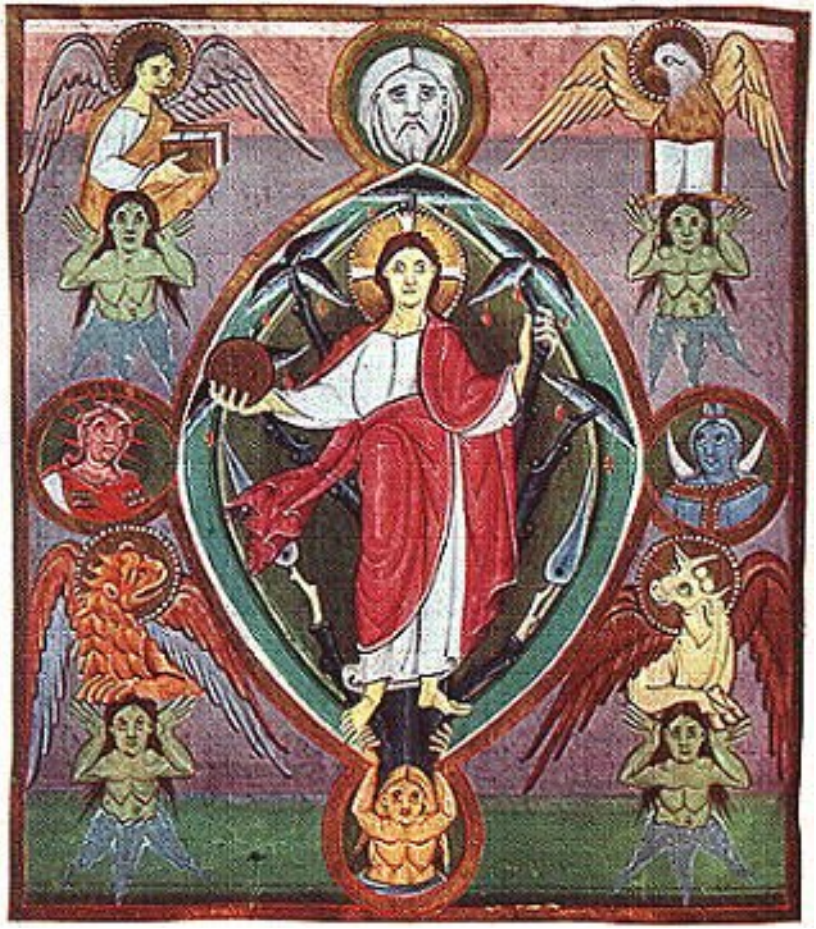
Emphasis by contrast



When most of the elements are vertical, a few horizontal forms break the pattern and become focal points.

In a design consisting of large smooth planes, a small, linear, detailed element is emphasized.



When many elements are about the same size, the one that is much larger is visually important.

In a design of mainly abstract forms, the occasional recognizable image becomes a focus of attention.

Many other possibilities may also occur to you with the idea of emphasis by contrast, the element that contrasts with, rather than continues, the prevailing design scheme becomes the focal point.

Emphasis by Isolation

When one item is isolated or sits apart from the other elements or groups of elements, it becomes the focal point.

By its separation, an element takes on visual importance.

This is contrast, of course, but in terms of placement not forms.

In this still-life by Cezanne the pitcher is the part of a unified composition, but it sits away from the items grouped together at right. The pitcher (water jug) is an emphasized element only through its detached position.

Putting the focal point directly in the centre does look slightly contrived.

However, it is wise to remember that a focal point placed too close to an edge will have a tendency to pull the viewer's eye right out of the picture.

Emphasis by Placement

If many elements point to one item, our attention is directed there, and a focal point results.

A radial design is a perfect example of this device. More common in Architecture rather in two dimensional arts.

Jhon Steuart Curry,1928 Baptism in Kansas, all the figures look directly on the preacher and the girl automatically directing our eyes there as well.

Bill Brandt.Policeman in Bermonday. *Photograph*, The policeman, being the only figure, is a natural focal point. Beyond this, his placement at the point where other background lines converge (the perspective diagonals of brick wall) reinforces his dramatic emphasis.

The effect need not be as obvious as in these examples. However, once your focal point has been decided upon, it is wise to avoid having other major or visually important elements point or lead the eye away from it.

Confusion of emphasis can result.

Degree of Emphasis

- Any emphasis should be created with some subtlety and sense of restraint.
- The focal point must remain a part of the overall design.
- It should not be so obvious that that it overpowers/overwhelms the rest of the design.
- A specific theme may, at times, call for a very dominant, even overwhelming, focal point. But, in general, the principle of unity and the creation of a harmonious pattern with related elements are more important than the injection of a focal point if this point would jeopardize the design's unity.

Absence of Focal Point

A definite focal point is not a necessity in creating a successful design. It is a tool that artists may or may not use, depending on their aims.
There are examples of successful visual designs which are puzzling and ambiguous with no real starting point or visual climax.

Some art forms, by their very nature rule out the use of a focal point.

Woven or printed fabrics consist of an unstressed repetition of one or more motifs over the whole surface.

We often spent time watching such designs and the designer achieves his/her goal.

Centralized Placement

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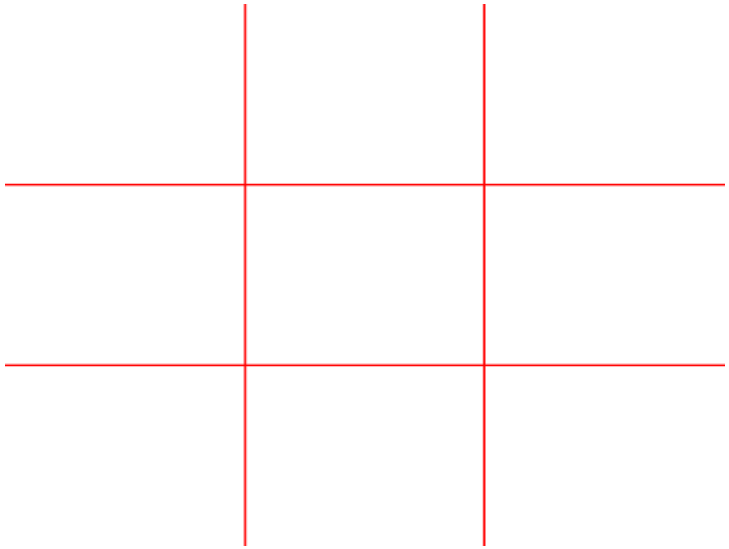
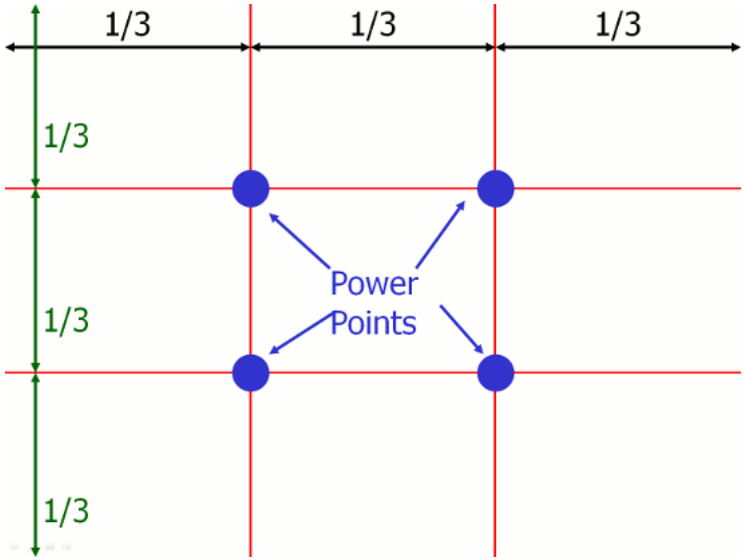
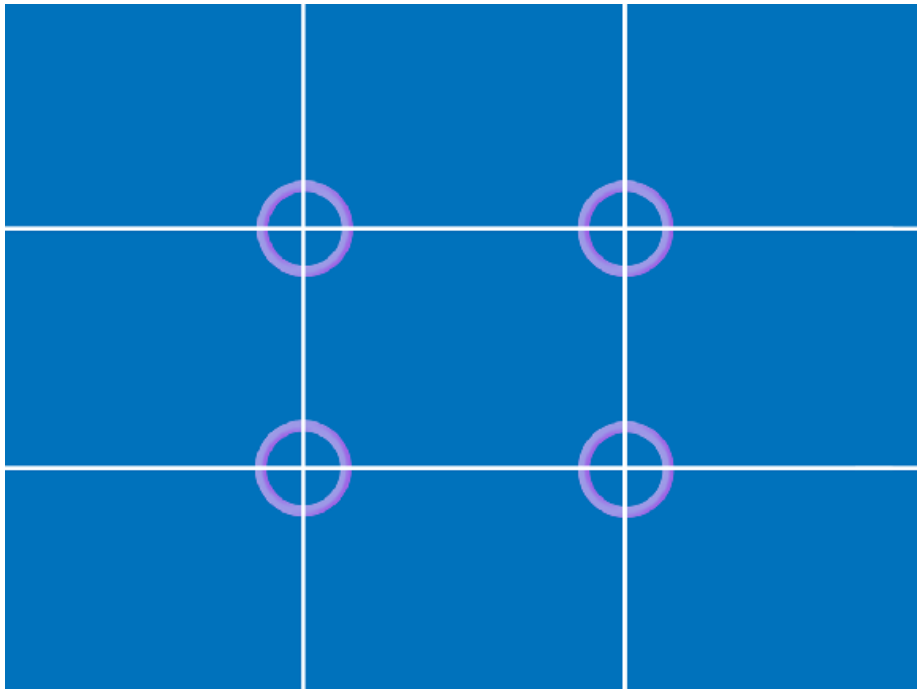
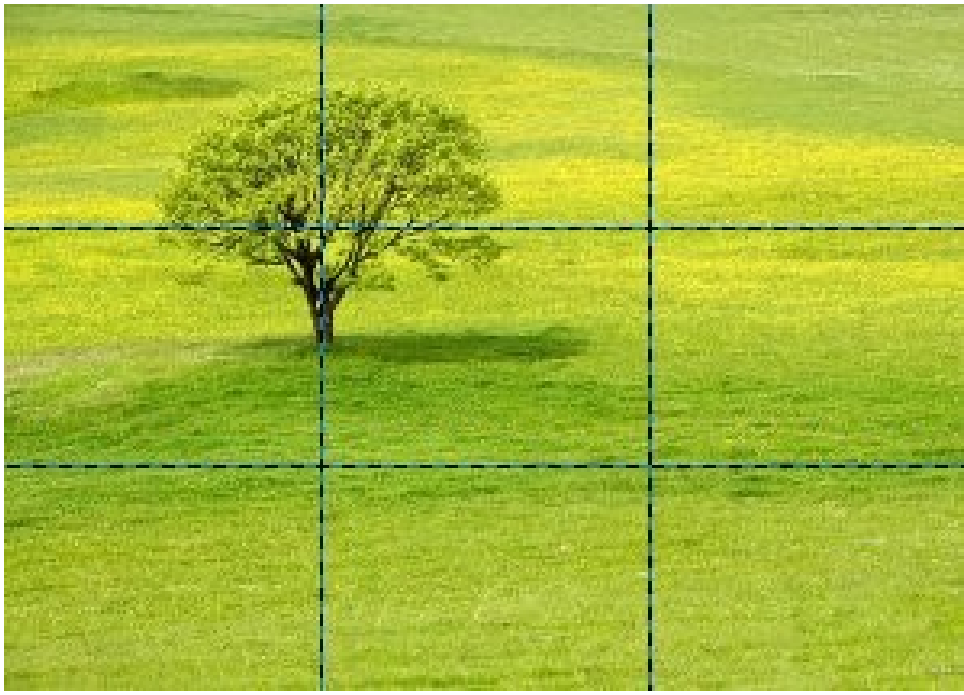
Rule of Thirds: The Golden Mean

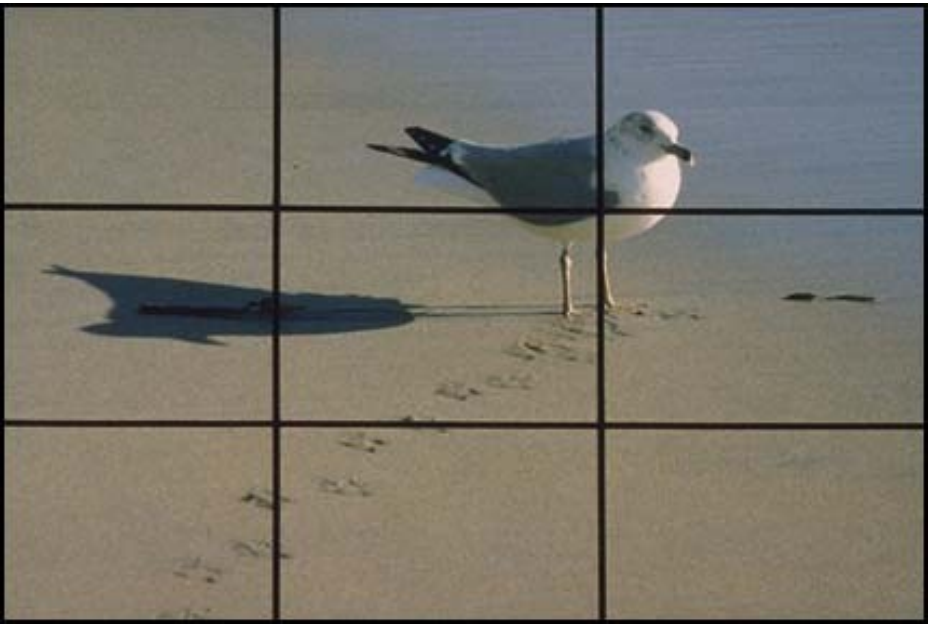
- You can use the rule of thirds as a guide in the off-center placement of your subjects.
- The intersections of these imaginary lines suggest four options for placing the center of interest for good composition.
- You can also apply the rule of thirds guidelines to the placement of the horizon in your photos.

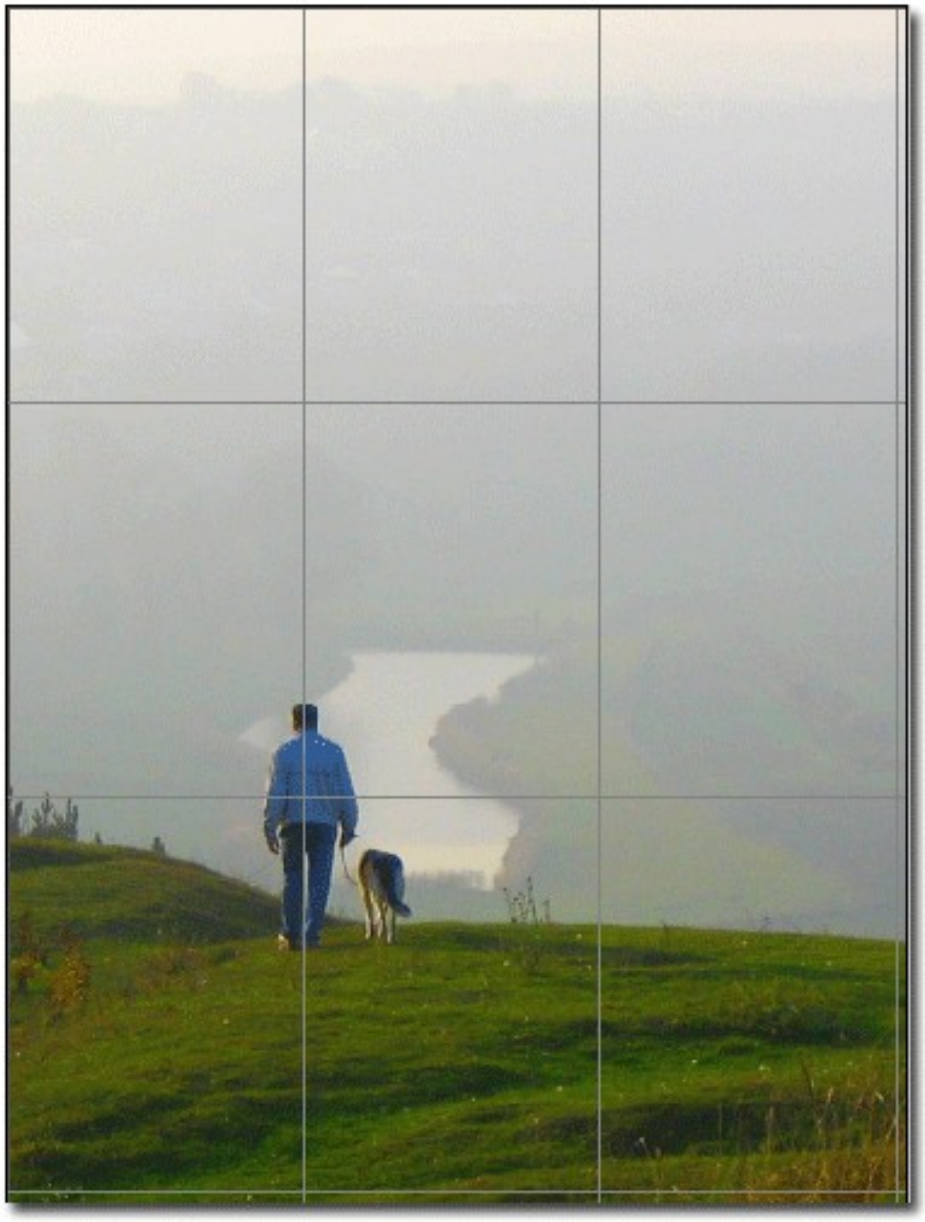


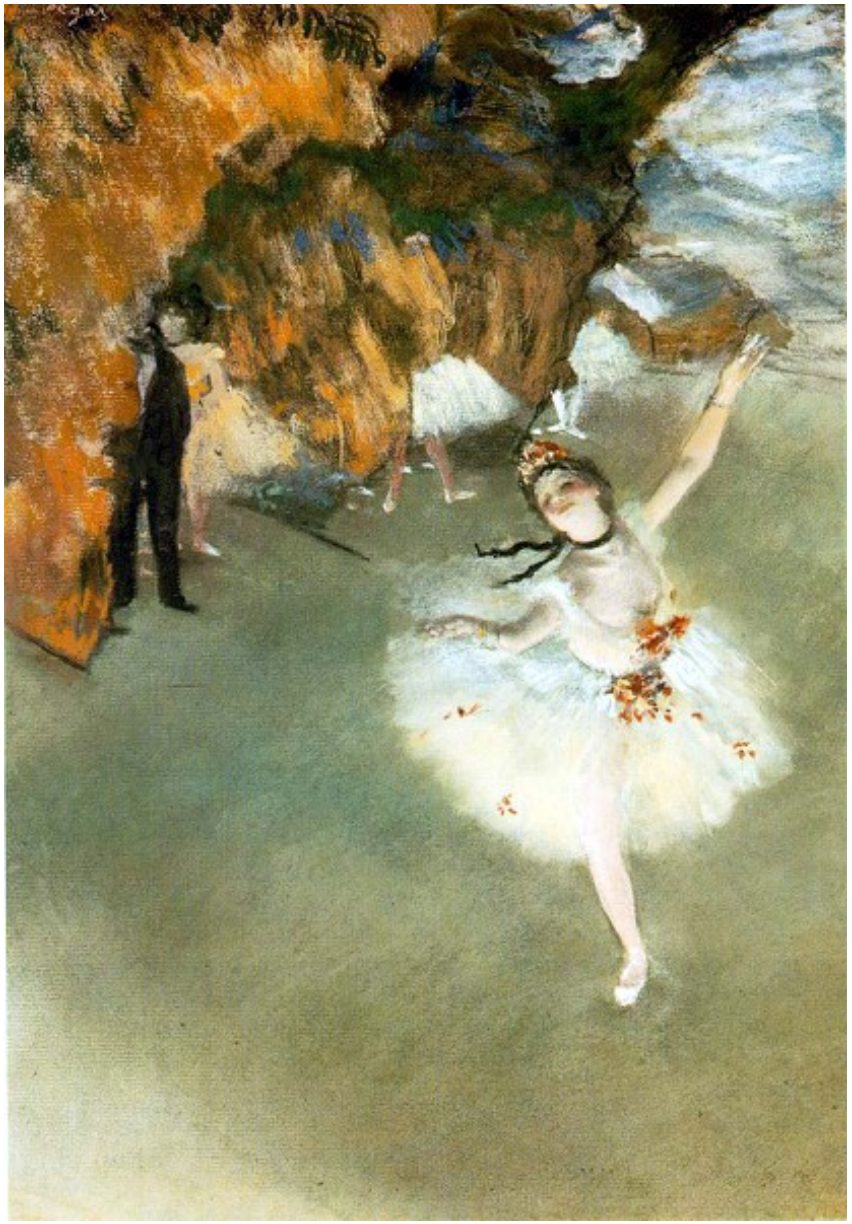












Rule of Thirds: The Golden Mean

Imagine you're shooting a landscape and there's an isolated farmhouse in the distance or a single tree in the middle of a field, acting as the main focal point. Most photographers would stick this subject in the centre of the frame - which can work in some situations. However, you will generally get a more pleasing sense of balance if you position it using the rule-of-thirds.