

ART 101 2D Design & Color Theory

Handout Balance

Kalamazoo Valley Community College -Winter 2014

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Symmetrical Balance / Formal Balance

The simplest type of balance, both to create and to recognize, is called **Symmetrical Balance**. In **Symmetrical Balance**, like shapes are repeated in the same positions on either side of a vertical, horizontal or diagonal axis. One side, in effect, can become the mirror image of the other side. Conscious symmetrical repetition, while creating perfect balance, can be undeniably static, so that the term **Formal Balance** is used to describe the same idea.

Asymmetrical Balance / Informal Balance

The second type of balance is called **Asymmetrical Balance**. In this case balance is achieved with dissimilar objects that have equal visual weight or equal eye attraction. Symmetrical arrange compositions appear artificial. Our visual experiences in life are not symmetrically arranged. Nature is not symmetrical. A tree is not symmetrical. The advantage of **Asymmetrical Balance** is that it relates a casual, not contrived feeling. So the term **Informal Balance** is used to describe Asymmetrical Balance. Asymmetrical balance usually has an odd number of elements (for example 5, 7, 9,11).

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 in light and dark. **Shape** and **Texture** also attracts our attention and is used in Asymmetrical Balance.

Balance by Position often lends an unusual, unexpected quality to the composition. **Eye Direction** or what I call "**Directional Force**" is carefully plotted by the artist, not only for balance but also for general compositional unity.

Radial Balance

Radial Balance is a third variety of balance. Here all the elements radiate or circle out from a common point. Radial Balance is not entirely distinct from Symmetrical or Asymmetrical Balance. It is merely a refinement of one or the other, depending on whether the focus occurs in the middle or off center.

Allover Balance

Allover Balance is the fourth variety of balance. Artwork that exhibit this type of balance have an equal emphasis over the whole format – the same eye attraction everywhere.

Emotional Messages

Symmetrical Balance

The formal quality in symmetry imparts an immediate feeling of permanence, strength, and stability. A dignified solemn subject such as the Madonna enthroned by Domenico Veneziano, (right) clearly calls for the stable, calm qualities symmetrical balance can impart. This painting also shows one distinct advantage to symmetrical compositions: the immediate creation and emphasis of a focal point.



Asymmetrical Balance

The two creatures on this scene from Walt Disney's Fantasia: The Rights of Spring (right) attract our attention and are the emphasis of the composition. The picture is balanced, by the up swinging tail that moves up through the right and onto the middle of the format. The variations of value of lights, mediums and darks also add movement to this scene. The Disney artist also used Directional Forces to build a successful composition, the position of the creatures bodies, and the spikes on the tail of the creature on the right direct the viewers eye to the focal point.



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Radial Balance

The major composition advantage in radial balance is the immediate and obvious creation of a focal point. This might seem a little too contrived and unnatural, a little too obvious to be entirely satisfactory for fine art. But this is the very reason it can be useful in graphic design, illustration and animation. For example where there is a visual need to emphasize a product, or a headline, a radial composition uses many elements to direct the viewer's eye to the one important element. The dramatic scene from Walt Disney's *Fantasia: The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (right) uses swirling water to bring the viewer's eye to Mickey.



Allover Balance

There is no beginning and no end and no focal point within a composition with Allover Balance. Traditional quilt patterns are a very good example of Allover Balance. They are often distinguished by a constant, active, repetition of the same motif. In the Adobe Illustrator pattern on the right. The objects are distributed evenly throughout the design by their placement on a grid. There is no point of emphasis in this composition.

