

Principles of Design:

Emphasis

Emphasis

Emphasis **creates a focal point** in a design; it is how we bring **attention to what is most important**.

The **center of interest** is an area that first attracts attention in a composition; it is sometimes used interchangeably with **focal point**. **It is where the action begins.**

Emphasis is what **catches the eye** and makes the viewer stop and look at the image.

Emphasis is also sometimes called dominance.

Without emphasis, without getting the viewer to look at the image, communication cannot occur.

A design lacking emphasis may result in **monotony (i.e., “boring art”)**.

Emphasis can be created by contrast.

An element in contrast with something else is more easily seen and understood; **something different attracts the eye.**

Any of the elements can be contrasted: **line** (a curve in the midst of straight lines), **shape** (a circle in a field of squares), **color** (one red dot on a background of grays and blacks), **value** (a light or dark area in the middle of its opposite) and **texture** (rough vs. smooth).

Contrast can also be created by contrasting orientation in **space** (horizontal, vertical, diagonal), **style** (a geometric shape in an otherwise naturalistic image) and **size**.

An **anomaly**, or something that departs from the norm, will also stand out and grab our attention, for example a person wearing a snowsuit on a tropical beach.

Emphasis by Contrast

In realistic art, **the focal point** is usually quite easy to spot.

Larger figures, usually found in the foreground, provide a focal point.



Even in non-realistic art, it is usually easy to spot the focal point.

If most of the figures are horizontal, a vertical element will stand out as a focal point.



If the rest of the elements are irregular, a geometric shape will stand out.



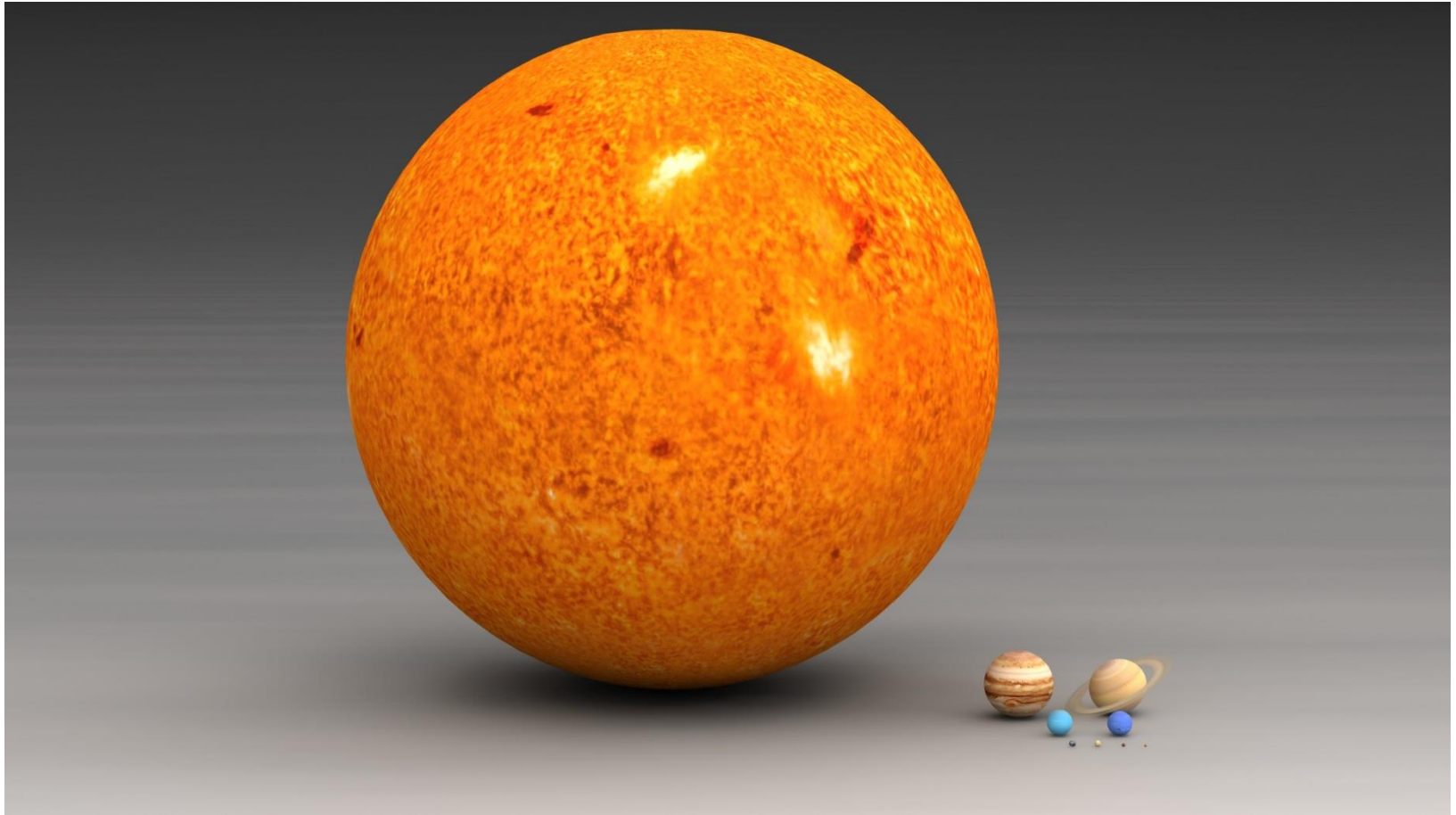
Emphasis by Contrast of Color



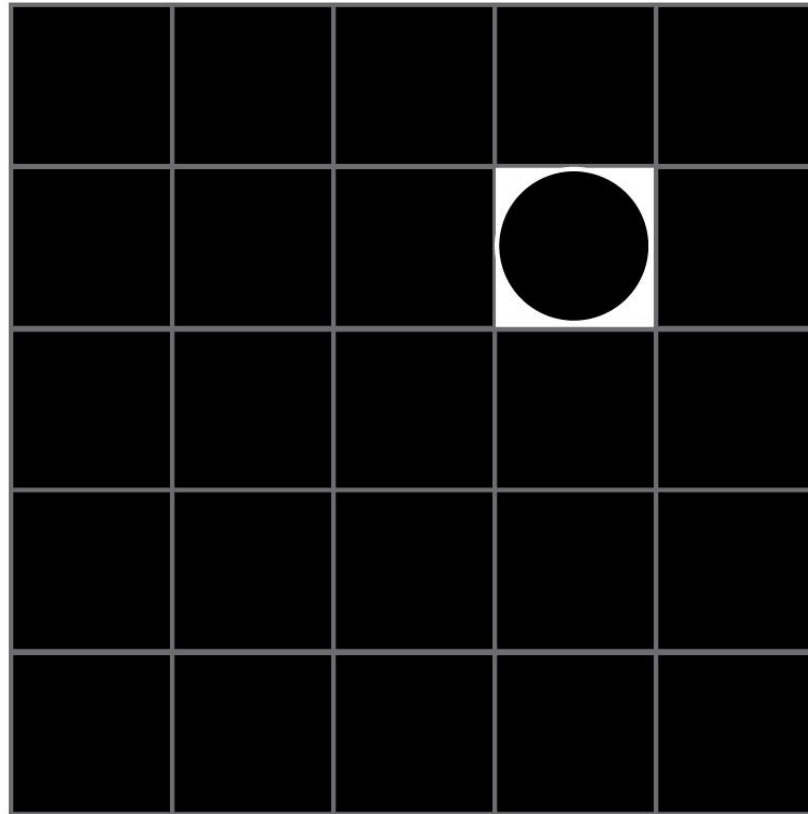
Emphasis by Contrast of Color & Value



Emphasis by Contrast of Size



Emphasis by Contrast of Shape



Emphasis can also be created by placement.

Implied lines all directed toward the same place can create a **focal point** there.

Isolating an element from the others by its position in space will also create emphasis.





The Last Supper, by Leonardo da Vinci (1494–1498)

