

Principles of Design:

Balance

Balance

In Art, Balance is the concept of visual equilibrium and stability, and relates to our physical sense of balance.

Most successful compositions achieve balance in one of two ways: **symmetrically** or **asymmetrically**.

Balance in a 3D object is easy to understand; if balance isn't achieved, the object tips over.

To understand balance in 2D composition, we must use our imagination to carry this 3D forward to the flat surface.

Symmetry

Symmetrical balance can be described as having equal "weight" on equal sides of a centrally placed fulcrum.

It may also be referred to as **formal balance**.



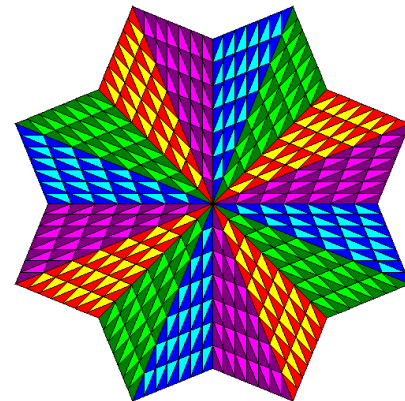
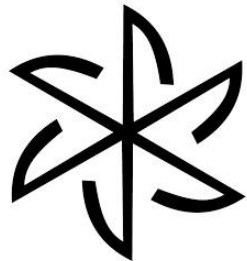
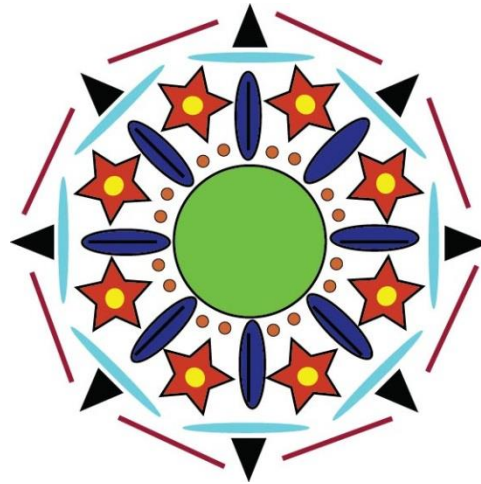
Bilateral Symmetry

When the elements are arranged equally on either side of a central axis, the result is Bilateral symmetry. This axis may be horizontal or vertical.



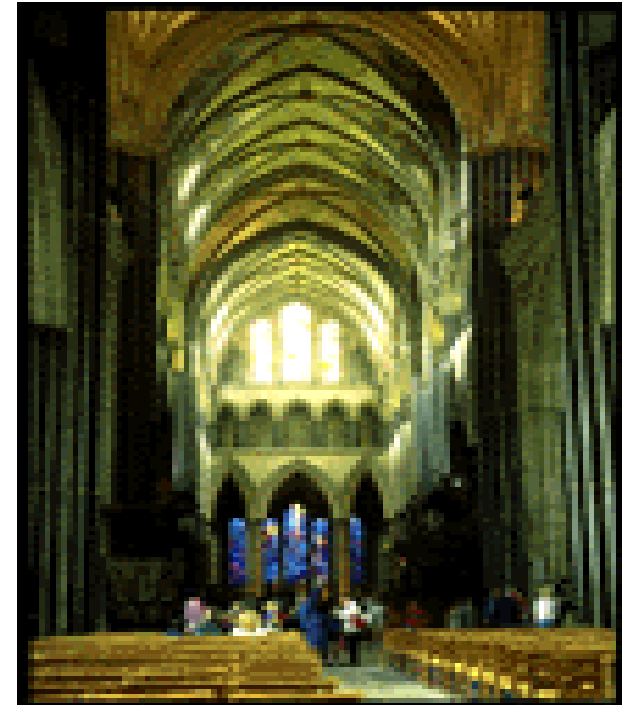
Radial Symmetry

It is also possible to build formal balance by arranging elements equally around a **central point** , resulting in radial symmetry.



Approximate Symmetry

There is a variant of symmetrical balance called **approximate symmetry** in which equivalent but not identical forms are arranged around the fulcrum line.



Assymmetry

Asymmetrical balance, also called informal balance, is more complex and difficult to envisage.

It involves placement of objects in a way that will allow objects of **varying visual weight** to balance one another around a fulcrum point.

This can be best imagined by envisioning a literal balance scale that can represent the visual "weights" that can be imagined in a two dimensional composition.



Assymetry

(continued)

For example, it is possible to balance a heavy weight with a cluster of lighter weights on equal sides of a fulcrum; in a picture, this might be a cluster of small objects balanced by a large object.

It is also possible to imagine objects of equal weight but different mass (such as a large mass of feathers versus a small mass of stones) on equal sides of a fulcrum.

Unequal weights can even be balanced by shifting the fulcrum point on our imaginary scale.

Assymetry

(examples)

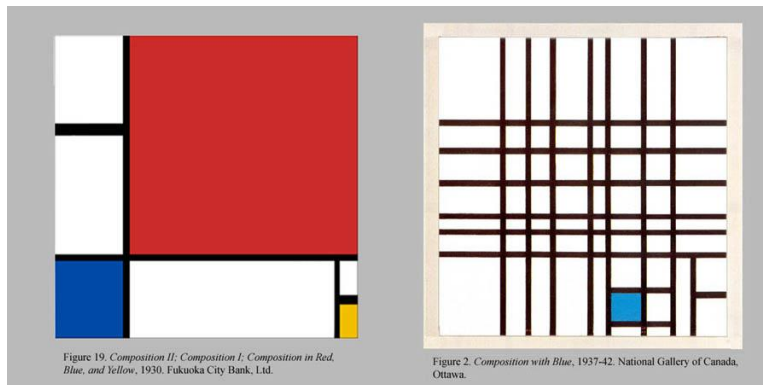
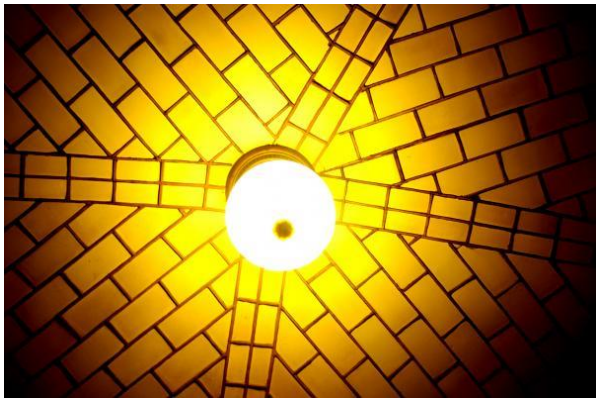


Figure 19. *Composition II; Composition I; Composition in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930. Fukuoka City Bank, Ltd.

Figure 2. *Composition with Blue*, 1937-42. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.