Design Principles - Balance

I. Term: Balance

II. Definition of the term: The achievement of equilibrium when elements have been arranged to offset the relative weight on the opposing side.

III. Examples of the term: Balance can be achieved most directly with simple symmetry or by following a few general guidelines to create thoughtful arrangements of the elements.

SYMMETRICAL BALANCE: The most basic way to achieve balance is to make the sides identical. A vertical axis is required to achieve balance with symmetry. Symmetrical balance is sometimes called formal balance because a formula must be followed. Everything on the one side must be mirrored on the other side.

(Kifwebe mask, Luba tribe, Zaire (Congo), 16th-early 19th centuries)

- You can experiment with symmetrical balance by holding a mirror perpendicular to a surface.

BIAXIAL SYMMETRY: This is a type of symmetrical balance using two or more axes. The image is balanced from left to right and top to bottom. The top and bottom can be the same as the two sides or different.

(Navajo Blanket 1870-1875)

RADIAL BALANCE: This is a type of symmetrical balance with multiple axes and elements that radiate out from the center.
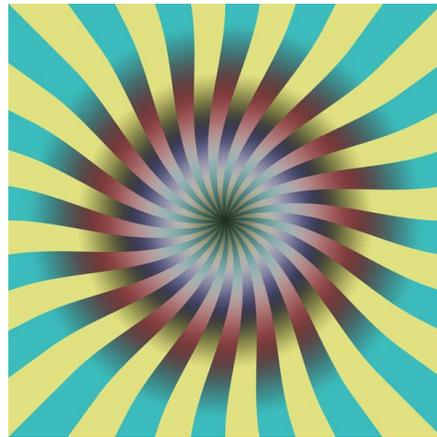
ASYMMETRICAL BALANCE: An asymmetrical work seems balanced although the sides do not match. This type of balance (sometimes called informal balance) is achieved by creating similar visual weight on the left and right sides. Asymmetrical balance is not an exact science but there are some general guidelines.

Size: A large form is visually heavier, or more attention-getting, than a smaller form.
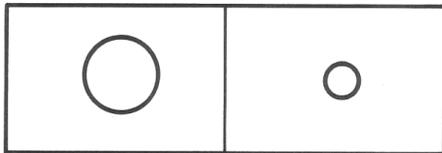
(not balanced)   (balanced)
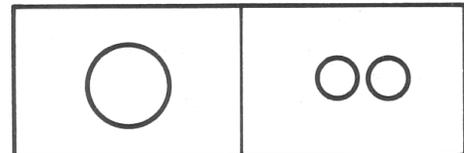
- Therefore, two or more small forms can balance a larger form.

Light/Value: A dark value form is heavier than a light form of the same size.

(not balanced)   (balanced)
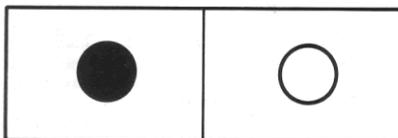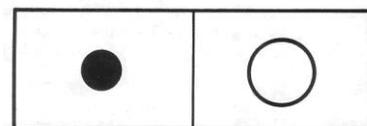
- Therefore, a smaller dark form can balance a larger light one.

Space: A form gathers weight as it nears the edge of a picture.

<div align="center">

(not balanced)　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(balanced)

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- Therefore, a small form near the edge can balance a larger form near the center.

Color: Intense colors are heavier than pale colors. The intensity/weight of any color increases as the background color approaches its compliment.

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(balanced)

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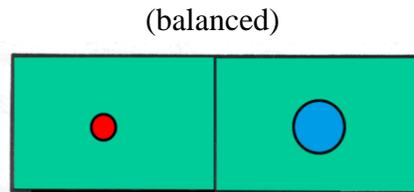
- Therefore, a small shape with intense color can balance a larger shape with less intensity.

Shape/Mass: Complex forms attract attention and are heavier than simple forms.

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(balanced)

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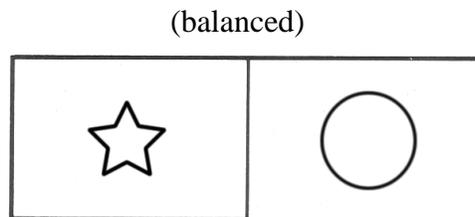
Pattern/Texture: An interesting texture or pattern can add complexity and visual weight to a small form.

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(balanced)

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