Assignment 5: Balance- Symmetry and Asymmetry

Balance is concerned with the distribution of visual interest. There are 4 basic types of balance that we will deal with in this assignment: symmetry (including multi-axial and radial), near symmetry, asymmetry and asymmetrical balance.

**Symmetry:**
Symmetry is achieved when the elements of one side of a vertical or horizontal axis is mirrored to the other. This is also sometimes called Formal Symmetry or Reflection Symmetry. More complex formal symmetry can be created by increasing the number of axes across which an image can be mirrored. This is referred to as bi-axial (2 axes) or multi-axial symmetry. Formal symmetry can also stem from a central focal point. This is called Radial Symmetry.

**Near symmetry:**
Is the state where a vertical and/or horizontal axis still persists but instead of the elements being mirrored from one side to another, the elements may be flipped or twisted in some way so that the image repeats but not in the same way as the original side. Examples of this type of symmetry would be a face card from a deck of cards or some examples Celtic knot work.

**Asymmetry:**
Is the absence completely of any symmetrical placement. It is a valid element of design when employed intentionally and typically creates a sense of unease or tension in a composition because we do not naturally want to see unbalanced or asymmetrical imagery.

**Asymmetrical Balance:**
Asymmetrical Balance is what most artists strive to achieve. Asymmetrical balance is not symmetrical yet the perceived weight, position, directional force, etc. of the elements that make up the composition are still pleasing to the eye and imply a sense of unity and variety while balancing each other. This is the most complex and most difficult form of balance but it is usually the most dynamic and interesting when achieved.
Remember the principles of asymmetrical balance from our first lecture:
- A larger form is heavier, more attention getting than a small form. 2 or more small forms can balance a larger one.
- A form gathers visual weight as it nears the edge of the picture. A small form near an edge can balance a larger form near the center.
- A complex form is visually heavier than a simple form. A small, complex form can balance a large simple form.
- A small, textured shape can balance a larger, un-textured one.
- A smaller, darker form can balance a lighter, larger form.

So, **position, complexity, color/texture and size** are 4 main keys to balance.

Keep in mind the principles of visual balance with color:
- Warm colors are heavier than cool colors. Or more accurately; warm colors come forward, cool colors recede. A small amount of warm color can balance a large expanse of cool color.
- Intense colors are heavier than pale or weak colors (tints or shades)

Assignment: Balance- Symmetry and Asymmetry (4 parts)
This assignment consists of 4 separate compositions. You may use no more than 4 (including your background color) colors of your choice for all of the compositions. The minimum size for all your compositions must be 8.5 x 11.” It may be larger but all 4 projects must be the same finished size. You will work your designs out with preliminary sketches (thumbnails). You may use pencil and indicate color positions with small swatches in colored pencil or the medium of your choice. Once you have your designs worked out, enlarge the design to at least 8.5 x 11” and use construction paper in your 4 color choices to create the shapes from your sketch/ enlargement. All of your compositions should be non-representational, i.e. contain no subject matter. The shapes you use may be overlapped or trimmed to make new shapes. In all your compositions, use the elements of shape, line and color in an interesting, creative way. In all the compositions except Part 3, work to successfully create an interesting sense of movement and balance using line, shape and color.

Part 1:
Simple Symmetry
You will first create a simple symmetrical design. You want to create a design that employs **SYMMETRY ON ONLY THE VERTICAL AXIS**. You may use only circles, triangles, rectangles or squares as shape elements. Start by creating at least 3 thumbnail sketches approximately ½ to ¾ of your required finished size of a simple symmetrical composition utilizing only circles, triangles, rectangles and/or squares. Include these initial designs in your large sketchpad with your finished compositions.
Part 2:
Bi-axial Symmetry

Start by creating at least 3 thumbnail sketches approximately ½ to ¼ of your required finished size of a BI-AXIAL SYMMETRICAL composition utilizing only circles, triangles, rectangles and/or squares. Include these initial designs in your large sketchpad with your finished compositions.

Part 3:
Asymmetry

Start by creating at least 3 thumbnail sketches approximately ½ to ¼ of your required finished size composition that employs NO SYMMETRY OR BALANCE at all utilizing only circles, triangles, rectangles and/or squares. Include these initial designs in your large sketchpad with your finished compositions.

Your goal is still to create a composition of interest and purposeful design. Strive to create a sense of tension using line, shape, color and placement. The color choices of your shapes and the shapes themselves will play an important part in how you create interesting asymmetry in your finished product.
Part 4:  
Asymmetrical Balance

Start by creating at least 3 thumbnail sketches approximately ½ to ¼ of your required finished size of ASYMMETRICALLY BALANCED composition utilizing only circles, triangles, rectangles and/or squares. Include these initial designs in your large sketchpad with your finished compositions. You will create an interesting composition using no symmetry at all but still creating a balanced composition with movement across the picture plane. For this portion, avoid placing objects in the center of the composition, exactly in the corners, or lining objects up along their center axes.

Avoid these positions when designing for asymmetrical balance:

Basic Requirements Recap (read each assignment carefully to make sure you fully understand all parameters):
- Minimum size of each composition: 8.5 x 11”
- 4 colors maximum including your background
- 3 sketches/thumbnail variations for each composition
- Only geometric shapes. They may be cut up and altered.
- No representational imagery

Materials:
- Large sketchpad
- Construction paper
- Ruler and shape (circle) templates or jar lids of varying sizes- anything to get clean circles
- Scissors/ X-acto knife
- Small sketchpad for thumbnail drawings
- Paste

To Finish:
Paste all examples in the order listed here neatly into your large sketchpad, centered, on individual pages. Neatly label each page with your name, class, and assignment information as indicated in the labeling section in your syllabus. Refer to your syllabus for the due date.

You may review this assignment in color at www.classinfoonline.org