

Vocabulary

informal balance

Informal Balance

Informal balance gives the viewer the same comfortable feeling as formal balance, but in a much more subtle way. **Informal balance**, or asymmetry, involves *a balance of unlike objects*. While informal balance can express dignity, endurance, and stability, these qualities are less pronounced. Informal balance seems more realistic because it is closer to what appears in your everyday environment. It does not consist of two equal or nearly equal halves or sides. Instead, it relies on the artistic arrangement of objects to *appear* balanced.

Using Informal Balance in Art

Informal balance creates a casual effect (**Figure 9.12**). Although it seems less planned than formal balance, it is not. What appears to be an accidental arrangement of elements can be quite complicated. Symmetry merely requires that elements be repeated in a mirror image. Informal balance is more complex. Artists must consider all the visual weight factors and put them together correctly. Many factors influence the visual weight, or the attraction, that elements in a work of art have to the viewer's eyes.



▲ **FIGURE 9.12** Pippin balanced the large, simple form of the log cabin near the center of the work with a complex shape formed by two trees and a shed near the edge of the work.

Horace Pippin. *Cabin in the Cotton*. Mid-1930s. Oil on panel. 46 × 84.1 cm (18¹/₈ × 33¹/₈”). The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. In memoriam: Frances W. Pick from her children Thomas F. Pick and Mary P. Hines, 1996.417.



▲ **FIGURE 9.13** The objects in this painting appear balanced because the complex shape of the creature on the right is counteracted by the large, thin spiral shape on the left. Also, the background space is informally balanced by the areas of orange and brown.

Joan Miró. *Landscape (The Hare)*. Autumn 1927. Oil on canvas. 129.5 × 194 cm (51 × 76³/₈”). The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York. © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, ADAGP/Paris.

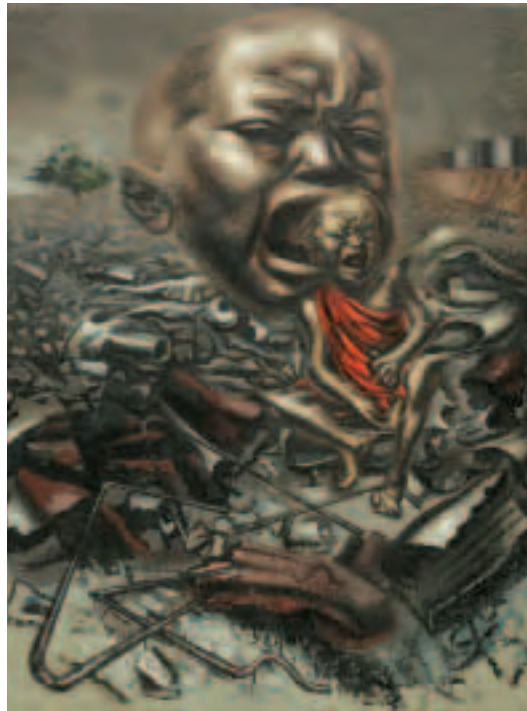
Size and Contour

A large shape or form appears to be heavier than a small shape. Several small shapes or forms can balance one large shape.

An object with a complicated contour is more interesting and appears to be heavier than one with a simple contour. A small, complex object can balance a large, simple object (**Figure 9.13**).

Color

A high-intensity color has more visual weight than a low-intensity color. The viewer’s eyes are drawn to the area of bright color. What does this mean in terms of balance? It means that a small area of bright color is able to balance a larger area of a dull, neutral color (**Figure 9.14**).



▲ **FIGURE 9.14** The bright red color of the cloth wrapped around the child helps it stand out against the larger, low-intensity color of the enlarged head and the neutral colors of the forms on the ground.

David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Echo of a Scream*. 1937. Enamel on wood. 121.9 × 91.4 cm (48 × 36”). Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Gift of Edward M. M. Warburg (633.193a). © Estate of David Alfaro Siqueiros/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

► **FIGURE 9.15** Notice how the artist used small areas of bright, warm yellow and orange to balance cool greens and blues as well as neutral and low-intensity colors.

Emily Carr. *A Rushing Sea of Undergrowth*. 1932–35. Oil on canvas. 112.8 x 69 cm (44³/₈ x 27¹/₈”). Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Emily Carr Trust, VAG 42.3.17.



Warm colors carry more visual weight than cool colors. Red appears heavier than blue, and yellow/orange appears heavier than green (**Figure 9.15**).

Value

The stronger the contrast in value between an object and the background, the more visual weight the object has (**Figure 9.16**). Black against white has more weight than gray against white. Dark values appear heavier than light values. A dark red seems heavier than a light red.

Texture

A rough texture, with its uneven pattern of light highlights and dark, irregular shadows, attracts the viewer’s eye more easily than a smooth, even surface does. This means that a small, rough-textured area can balance a large, smooth surface. In a poster or advertisement, a block of printed words has the quality of rough texture because of the irregular pattern of light and dark. Graphic designers must keep this in mind when balancing words with other visual elements.

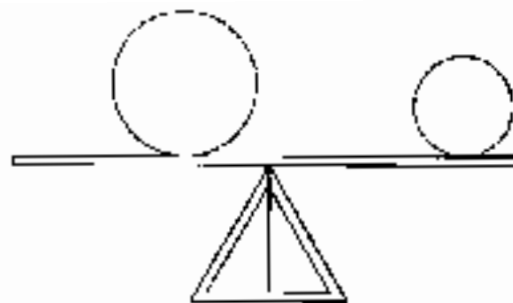


◀ **FIGURE 9.16** Elijah's white beard is the lightest area in the illustration. The use of this bright, light color emphasizes Elijah, who otherwise might blend in with the neutral, dull colors of the background. Compare and contrast this use of color and balance with Figure 9.15 on page 236.

Jerry Pinkney. Illustration from *Journeys with Elijah*.

Position

Children playing on a seesaw quickly discover that two friends of unequal weight can balance the seesaw by adjusting their positions. The heavier child moves toward the center; the lighter child slides toward the end. The board is then in balance (**Figure 9.17**).



▲ **FIGURE 9.17** Does the seesaw look balanced?



▲ **FIGURE 9.18** In the foreground, two dancers placed side by side create a busy, large shape that draws the viewer's attention. How do the four small dancers in the distance create balance with the dancers in the foreground?

Edgar Degas. *Before the Ballet*. 1890/1892. Oil on canvas. 40 × 88.9 cm (15¾ × 35"). National Gallery, Washington, D.C. Widener Collection.

Activity

Using Informal Balance

Demonstrating Effective Use of Art Media in Design. Create small designs using cut paper and/or fabric shapes to illustrate five weight arrangements that create informal balance. In each design keep all of the elements as alike as possible. Vary only the weight factors. For example, to illustrate differences in size, a large red circle could be balanced by several small red circles.

Computer Option. Use the drawing tools of your choice to make a series of small compositions that show informal balance. Use both lines and shapes. Explore changes in size, color, texture, value, contour, and position to create these asymmetrical compositions. Make several of each kind. Title, save, and print your best examples. Display them and compare with your classmates.

In visual art, a large object close to the dominant area of the work can be balanced by a smaller object placed farther away from the dominant area (**Figure 9.18**). In this way, a large, positive shape and a small, negative space can be balanced against a small, positive shape and a large, negative space.



Check Your Understanding

1. What is the effect of informal balance?
2. Name the six factors that influence the visual weight of an object.
3. Which has a heavier visual weight, an object with a simple contour or one with a complicated contour?