# Design Principles

Chapter 3 Emphasis/Focal Point

Introduction

Focal Point – the point of emphasis in an image or design.

■ The element emphasized in a picture can attract attention and encourages the viewer to look further.

Tip:

→ There are hundreds and thousands of images in front of us every day.

→ In order to catch the attention of the viewer, try using a strong ***Focal Point.***
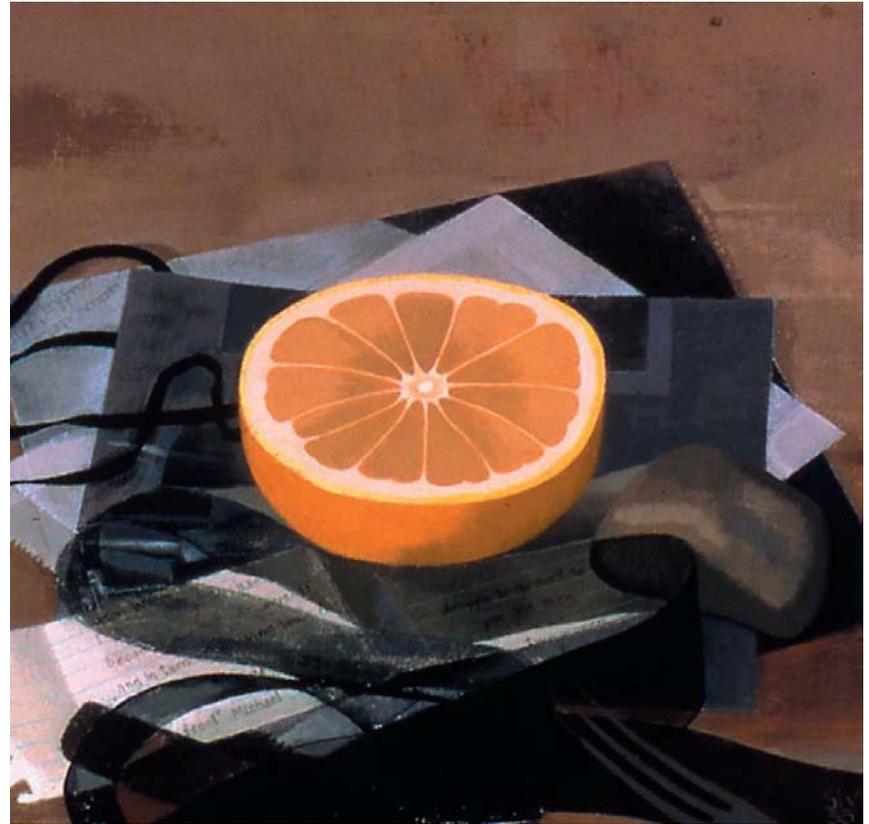
Susan Jane Walp. Grapefruit with Black Ribbons. 2000. Oil on linen, 8" 8 1/4". Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

Using Focal Point for Emphasis

- There can be more then one focal point in a picture.
- A second focal point might be referred to as an accent or counterpoint.
- However, be careful not to have too many points of focus.
- Abstracts and patterns can also have focal points.

"When everything is emphasized, nothing is emphasized."
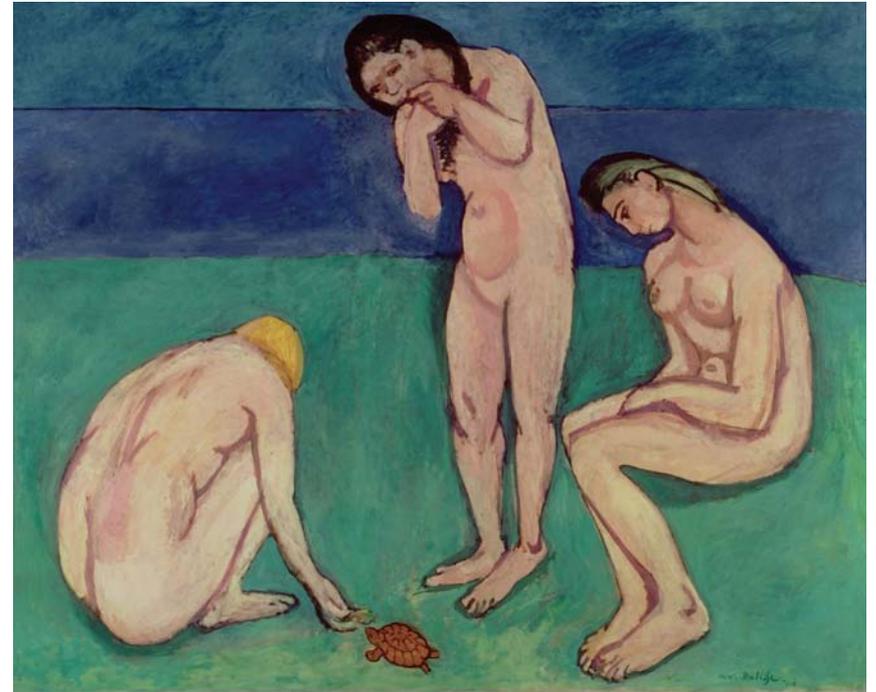
Henri Matisse. Bathers with a Turtle. 1908. Oil on canvas. © St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri, USA/© Succession H. Matisse/DACS/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Ways to Achieve Emphasis:

I.   Emphasis by Contrast

II.   Emphasis by Isolation

III.   Emphasis by Placement

Jeff Wall. The Pine on the Corner. 1990. 3' 10 3/4"   3' 10 1/4" (1.19   1.48 m). Edition of 3. Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

Ways to Achieve Emphasis:

The ways to achieve emphasis by contrast are endless. Just some of the ideas you could use include:

- Isolating One Element

- Change in Direction of the shapes or lines.
- Making one Element Distorted or vice versa.
- Change in Size of one object.
- Change in Shape of one object.
    - Geometric vs Organic.
- Changing the Color of one object.
- Changing the Brightness of one object.

I.   Ways to Achieve Emphasis:
A. Emphasis by Contrast

Many things of all one style, color, shape, placement, etc…

+

1 element that is the opposite
= Point of focus!

(Sometimes this is also called *emphasis by contrast.)*

B. Emphasis by Isolation

- Take the repetition of the same object over and over and have just one of these off by itself.

- Example: If most of the elements are dark; one point of light or a light object will become the Point of Focus.

- Note: It is important not to place the point of focus too close to the edge as it will pull the viewer's eye off of the page.
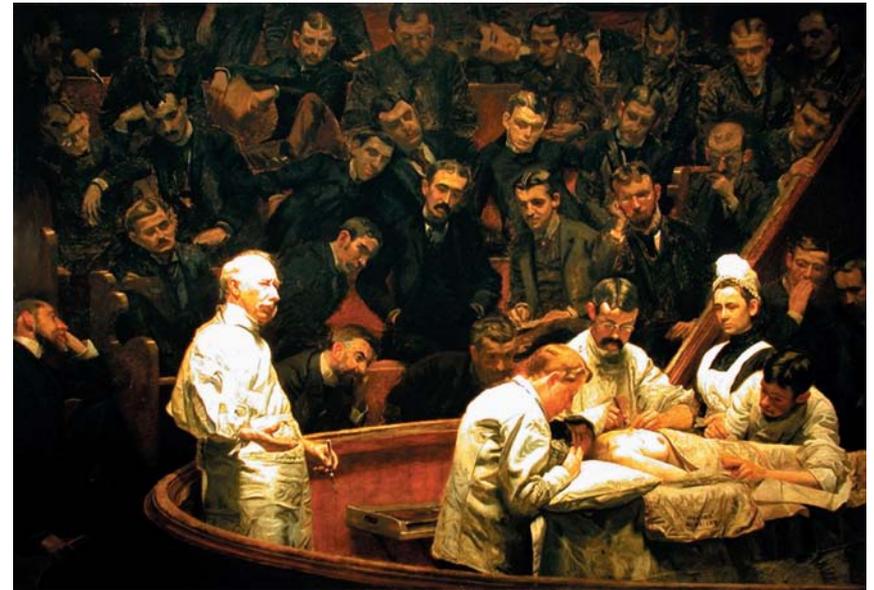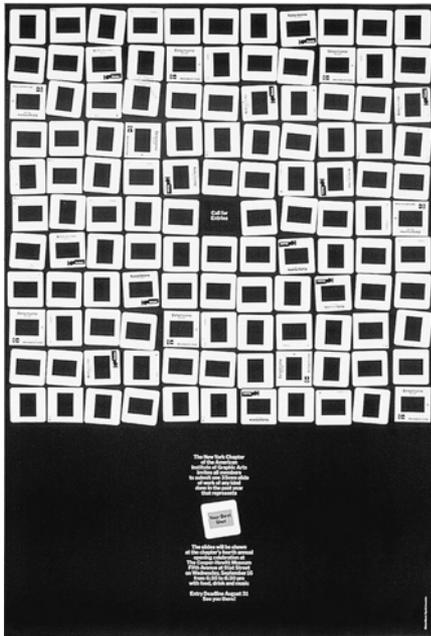

Call for entries for AIGA/New York show, "Take Your Best Shot." Designer: Michael Beirut, Vignelli Associates, New York.

Thomas Eakins. The Agnew Clinic. 1889. Oil on canvas, 6' 2 1/2"   10' 10 1/2" (1.9   3.3 m). University of Pennsylvania Art Collection, Philadelphia.

C. Emphasis by Placement

- When all the lines point toward the center, as in radial design, the focal point will be the center.

- In other words, the placement object can lead the viewers eye to what you want them to notice.
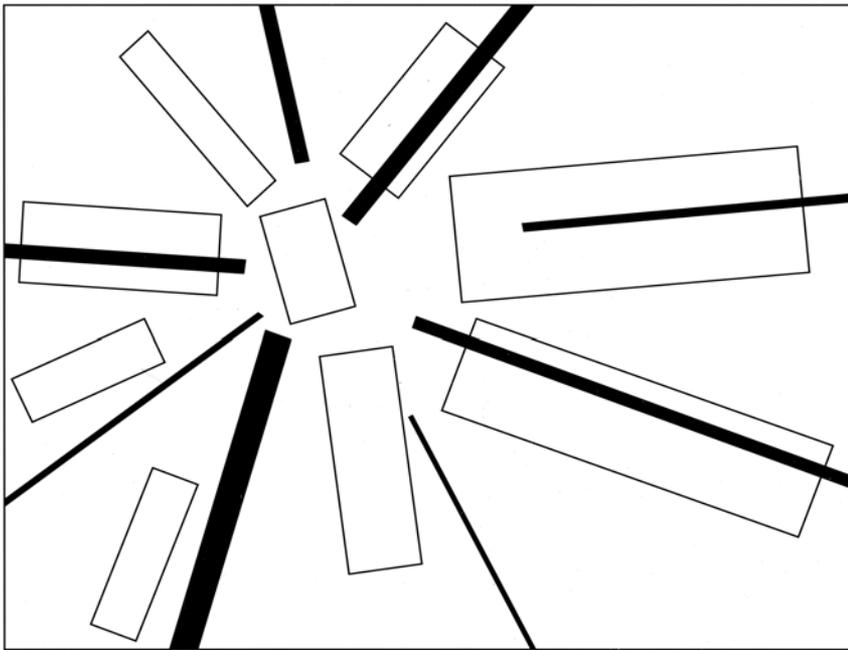
Our eyes are drawn to the central element of this design by all the elements radiating from it.

Jan Vermeer. A Lady at the Virginals with a Gentleman (The Music Lesson). 1662–1664. Oil on canvas, 2' 5"   2' 1". The Royal Collection, London.

Tips on where to place the Focal Point

- Try not to use the dead center of the picture. (Its called the 'dead' center for a reason.)

- Try not to put the focal point too close to the edge of the picture or it will pull the viewer's eye off the page.

- Have something (like the gaze or direction of the object) pointing back into the composition.

II. Degree of Emphasis

"A specific theme may, at times, call for a dominant, even visually overwhelming focal point."

For Example: A magazine in the supermarket needs to catch the shoppers eye.

Maintaining Unity with a Focal Point

- "The Focal Point should remain related to and part of the overall design."

Absence of Focal Point

Emphasizing the Whole Over the Parts

Use repetition of a motif over the whole surface.

For example: Fabric, wall paper, etc…

Note: Sometimes you can draw attention to a design simply by not using a focal point.

Lee Krasner. Untitled. 1949. Oil on composition board, 4' 3' 1" (122 94 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York (gift of Alfonso A. Ossorio).