

Lisette Melendez

Elements of Design: Pablo Picasso

New York City College of Technology



Figure 1. Dora Maar in an Armchair, Picasso (1939).



Figure 2. BCBG Max Azria, NYC (2017).

Pablo Picasso was a talented artist born in Malaga, Spain in 1881 (Picasso's Early Life, 2009). Over his lifetime, he was able to produce a wide range of paintings and sculptures that continue to inspire people 'til this day (Pablo and his Paintings, 2009). Picasso spent most of his adult life in France, where a lot of the social issues taking place at that time had a huge impact on his work. After visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I was instantly drawn to Picasso's portrait of Dora Maar, who was his muse/lover at the time (Picasso's Early Life, 2009), entitled *Dora Maar in an Armchair*. The composition was completed in 1939 at the Hotel du Tigre where they witnessed the outbreak of World War II.

Composition: A composition is the organization or grouping of parts or elements to achieve a unified whole (Bell; Turnus, 2012). As a whole, this painting demands attention because of the various hues used throughout. Despite the events happening at the time, Picasso kept this particular piece vibrant and inviting. The arrangement of wider lines vs. the thinner lines used to

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

paint Maar's body adds great contrast. Even though it seems like there's a lot going on in this painting, the background does not take away from the overall focal point.

The window pictured in figure two is a display at BCBG Max Azria located on Fifth Avenue in New York City. It contains two mannequins and a side table showcasing various items from clothing to accessories. Instead of using a solid background, the design team opted for long, vertical mirror panels. These panels not only add dimension, but they also allow the viewer to see the details of each product from the back. To maintain a very minimal and chic overall appearance, the color palette for this display was kept to a minimum.

Color: Color is an element of art made up of three properties: hue, value, and intensity (Bell; Turnus, 2012). Picasso was known for using color to convey his emotions through his artwork (Color and Emotion, 2009). This composition has a combination of both primary and secondary hues. He used tints of red, blue, and green for the wallpaper background that gives a cool, calm, and inviting feel to the overall piece. The use of complementary hues are seen in the wallpaper and Maar's jacket with blue and orange. For the portrait of Dora Maar herself, he opted for bold, vibrant hues such as yellow, green, purple, blue with slight pops of red and orange to highlight certain areas.

The BCBG Max Azria window is very minimal in terms of color. In this display, the viewer will notice a palette of red, black, beige, white and gold. Red represents love and passion, while black symbolizes power and sophistication, and white is clean/pure. Beige is neutral and accentuates just about any other hue surrounding it (12 Colors and Emotions They Evoke, 2015). These hues were used strategically to grab the attention of their ideal target market. Depending on the use and placement of color, it could visually give the illusion of texture.

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Texture: Texture is the surface treatment or feel, visually and/or physically (Bell; Turnus, 2012). *Dora Maar in an Armchair* is an oil on canvas composition (Modern and Contemporary Art, 2017). The *juxtaposition* of the short strokes and longer strokes Picasso used throughout the piece created a humorous effect. The brush strokes contributed to the overall texture of this composition. The shorter strokes used in the wallpaper and Dora Maar's face and hair appear to be a lot harsher, while the longer strokes used on the hat and outline of her body have a smoother appearance.

In this particular window display, there aren't any dramatic uses of texture. The mirror panels in the back add dimension to the overall display. The juxtaposition of smoothness and sheen of the gold bracelet and the dull red dress creates great contrast. The lace emulating pattern on the right mannequin's dress also gives the illusion of a rough texture, along with the gold icicle-like necklace she is wearing. As shown in this display, lines can be used to visually create texture.

Line: Lines create direction, the way they are arranged determines the effectiveness of the presentation (Bell; Turnus, 2012). In art, lines hold various meanings. *Vertical* lines are used to represent strength, height, and force. In this particular piece, Picasso used vertical lines to add height to the walls in the background and to add length to Maar's hair. Vertical lines are also seen on the back of the chair to symbolize the wood's strength. *Horizontal* lines are easygoing, peaceful, calm, and cuts the vertical effect. The use of horizontal lines are most prominent in the background, adding more of a 3-Dimensional appearance. Picasso used *curved* lines on Maar's face and on her jacket representing femininity. *Diagonal* lines depict action, strength, and force. There are noticeable diagonal lines seen on Dora Maar's hat and also help compose the structure of her face.

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Much like Picasso's piece, vertical lines were used a lot in this window display. The backdrop itself is made of vertical mirror panels of different sizes. Vertical lines are seen again on the left mannequin's bracelet as well as the ridged vertical lines on the purse she is carrying. There are some horizontal lines seen on the print of the right mannequin's dress and the cuff on the blazer she is holding. The horizontal hems of each of the mannequin's dresses indirectly lets the viewer know where their eyes should stop. There are some curved lines in the pattern of the dress as well as the strap of heels. The curved lines add a very soft and feminine touch to each of the products. The primary diagonal line in this display is found on the slit of the dress on the left. The way lines are positioned can help maintain balance throughout the composition.

Balance: Balance is the symmetrical or formal balance creating a mirror image. Asymmetrical or informal balance meaning sides of equal weight, but not exact replicas (Bell; Turnus, 2012). Picasso was known for his innovative use of shapes and angles. After all, he did help develop Cubism, which is an abstract painting technique (What Kind of Art Did Picasso Do, 2015). This composition practices asymmetrical balance. While both sides aren't exact replicas, the placement of hair on Dora's head on the left and elongated rim on her hat balances out the fact that her body is positioned slightly to the right.

The BCBG Max Azria display showcases an asymmetrical balance. The placement of color played a huge role in how the overall balance turned out in this display. If all of the red hues were placed too closely to each other, it would have possibly clashed and bothered the eyes of whoever was viewing it. When using a bold color such as red, it is important to make sure that all of the dominant elements aren't placed solely on one side.

Dominance: Some element should be dominant, and is often the mannequin (Bell; Turnus, 2012). In the case of this composition, Dora Maar herself is the dominant factor. She is almost

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

perfectly centered making her impossible to miss. The subordinate object in this piece would be the wooden arm chair. Although it is not fully pictured, it is still a key element to the overall painting (hence it's title).

When looking at the BCBG Max Azria display, one is bound to spot the dominate object. In this case, the mannequin on the left is more dominant than the one on the right. Although the mannequin on the right is positioned closer to the store window, the red on the left mannequin's dress would instantly grab the viewer's attention. Despite the fact that mannequins are typically the most dominant elements, it seems as if the mannequin on the right's main purpose is to showcase the red blazer since it isn't as bold. The contrast between the muted dress and bright red blazer allows it to stand out a lot more.

Contrast: Contrast is the sharp difference, different forms, and lines within a composition (Bell; Turnus, 2012). As mentioned earlier, the use of vertical, horizontal, curved, and diagonal lines created a unified piece that is pleasant on the eyes. Picasso used tinted uses in the background to ensure that everything in the foreground really stood out. He executed this by using hues that are high in intensity such as yellow and blue. He also used black and white to highlight and create shadows in certain areas, leaving a noticeable sharp difference.

The contrast in the BCBG Max Azria display is used on both sides. On the left you have the first mannequin with the red dress. The black blazer and purse she is carrying created a sharp difference against the bright red fabric used on the dress. The dark lips also contrasts with the color of the mannequin itself. Moving along the display, you have the second mannequin. The beige undertone of the dress deeply contrasts with the black pattern on it. Carefully utilizing the contrast between elements can help when trying to maintain proportion.

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Proportion: Proportion can be defined as the relationship size scale and weight among the elements (Bell; Turnus, 2012). With this composition being a portrait of Dora Maar, it makes sense that her body occupies most of the canvas space. The arm chair is also pretty large, but is scaled just enough to prevent too much attention to it. Another main object seen in this painting is Maar's hat. It is a lot smaller than her head and face, adding to the humor aspect of this composition.

In this display, the two mannequins are huge compared to the small side table on the right. In fact, it's likely that if you don't actually stop to look at the whole window, you'd miss it. No matter what angle the viewer is looking from, one's eyes would still go to either one of the mannequins. The mannequin on the left is a lot more vibrant than the other. However, since the right mannequin's dress consists of neutral colors, it doesn't add any additional weight to that side of the window. The way each and every element is proportioned would contribute to the overall flow and rhythm of the composition itself.

Rhythm: Rhythm is a self-contained movement from element to element. It leads the viewer's eye from dominate object to subordinate object (Bell; Turnus, 2012). From a viewer's perspective, the composition might appear to move in a circular motion. At first glance, one's eyes might be immediately drawn to Dora Maar's face. The lines of her face would then lead the viewer to the curve of her shoulders and towards to the back of the chair. With the combination of both vertical and horizontal lines on the chair, one's eyes naturally follow to her arms, then jacket, right back up to her face.

The way the left mannequin's arms are posed leads you to the second mannequin. The right mannequin's arm is pointing directly at the purse, drawing some attention to it. Due to the fact that the second mannequin is wearing such a muted toned dress, one's eye would gradually move

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

from the dress straight to the arm holding the red blazer. The slant of the blazer then leads one to the side table where the heels are displayed. The repetition of red throughout the display guides the eyes from one side to the other.

Repetition: Repeating or reiterating an idea or motif (Bell; Turnus, 2012). Picasso was known for his modern and unique spin on shapes and this composition is no different. However, this particular painting seems to have a lot more lines than anything. The most prominent lines are the ones seen of the printed wallpaper in the background. Vertical lines symbolize strength, height, pride, majesty, and dignity. Picasso was also known for conveying his emotions through his work (Color and Emotion, 2009). With that in mind, it is possible that he purposely used vertical lines to symbolize both his and Dora Maar's strength during the dark times of World War II.

Vertical lines are repeated throughout the BCBG Max Azria display. As mentioned earlier, vertical lines can mean a number of things such as strength, height, pride, majesty, and dignity. For this particular window display, it seems as if they are used to symbolize both majesty and dignity. BCBG Max Azria manufactures and sells ready-to-wear products and accessories for women worldwide (Company Overview, 2016). Their ideal target market consists of young professionals between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. That being said, their consumers want to be seen in high quality, trendy clothing and accessories that demonstrates self-respect, while gaining the respect of others. The use of red is also reiterated throughout this display.

Art has a huge influence on life. People use art of different mediums to express their creativity. Many different artists have turned to art to capture moments in their lives that people can reflect on now. It is possible for people to look at a painting and have a better understanding of what was going on during that time period. Colors and patterns can affect someone's mood.

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

For example, colors like yellow often evoke happiness while black gives off a much edgier and powerful feel to a composition.

Taking a full course in Visual Merchandising has broadened my perspective of what Visual Merchandising actually is. While making sure that the display is able to convey a message while maintaining an eye-catching appearance, there's way more to it than just a pretty window display. It takes a thorough understanding of the brand's image and of course, what appeals to your ideal consumer. Knowledge of light and color are also key elements to creating a display that is effective. With this assignment, I've learned that paying attention to detail is a must. Even the smallest things are capable of making a huge difference.

References

Bell, J.; Turnus K. (2012). *Silent Selling: Best Practices and Effective Strategies in Visual Merchandising* (4th ed.). New York: Fairchild Books.

Company Overview. (2016, August). Retrieved from <http://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapid=922187>

Figure 1. Pablo Picasso | Dora Maar in an Armchair | Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved from <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/487039>

Figure 2. BCBG Max Azria. (2017, March). Retrieved from 5th Avenue, New York City

Grover, H. (2009, March 25). Color and Emotion. Retrieved from http://www.ehow.com/facts_4866921_kind-art-did-picasso-do.html

Grover, H. (2009, March 25). What Kind of Art Is Picasso Known For? Retrieved from http://www.ehow.com/facts_4866921_kind-art-did-picasso-do.html

Pablo Picasso and his Paintings. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.pablocicasso.org/>

Picasso's Early Life. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.pablocicasso.org/>

Staff, C. B. (2015, June 11). 12 Colors and the Emotions They Evoke. Retrieved from <http://www.creativebloq.com/web-design/12-colours-and-emotions-they-evoke-61515112/2>