

Mia Washington

BUF 2203 – Visual Merchandising

The Elements of Design in a Composition and Window Display

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Figure 1. A composition by Pablo Picasso called “Faun with Stars” (1955).



Figure 2. Window Display at Phillip Plein’s Madison Avenue Store (2017).

Paintings are perfect examples as to why the elements of design stands out as significant in visual displays. It is a composition, which is *the organization or grouping of parts or elements to achieve a unified whole with the arrangement of lines, form, shapes and colors* (Adomaitis, 2017). Pablo Picasso is an artist whose paintings are required to be properly observed, with an understanding of the colors, characters and symbols to better emphasis the true meaning of the piece. Picasso is a Spanish painter, sculptor, printer, ceramicist, and stage designer who gets acknowledged today as being one of the greatest and influential artist of the 20th century (“Pablo Picasso”, 2017). This *composition* called “Faun with Stars” was created in 1955 (“Pablo Picasso | Faun with Stars | The Met”, 2017). During this time, the “Mickey Mouse Club” makes a debut and the Mercedes-Benz 190SL (“What Happened in 1955”, 2017). Famous weddings were also

taking place in the entertainment and art world (“Famous Weddings and Divorces in 1955”, 2017). Tragedy for Picasso occurred being that his first wife died (“Picasso’s Widow, 60, Kills Herself at Chateau on Rivera, Police Say”, 1986). Shortly after, he met someone else (“Picasso’s Widow, 60, Kills Herself at Chateau on Rivera, Police Say”, 1986). Art is usually a reflection of what’s going on in the artist’s personal life or the world around them.

Another example of a visual display that exhibits elements of design are windows for boutiques or high-end fashion stores. A popular shopping area in New York City, Fifth Avenue, is full of retailers who fall in these categories. Phillip Plein can be found on this thoroughfare. The designer, whom the brand is named after, pursued luxury and edginess for the silhouettes he creates (“The Designer”, 2017). Art, architecture, and foreign cultures are strong influences for his designs (“The Designer”, 2017). The Spring/Summer 2017 collection advertised in the store’s window displays pieces from the “Alice in GhettoLand” runway show that uncovered reference to urban America’s Hip Hop (Sulmers, 2016). The biggest impact of Hip Hop came in the nineties, which also was an era for grunge rock (Romano, 2016; Farago, 2015). Plein makes it obvious how distinctions from crossing cultures can work as a format to one’s innuendo.

Color is applied for specific purpose. Color is the first and most critical of design element (Adomaitis, 2017). *Color consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary colors* (Adomaitis, 2017). *Primary colors* are red, yellow and blue which are the starting points for all color on the color wheel (Bell, & Ternus, 2012). *Secondary colors* are formed by combining the primaries (Bell, & Ternus, 2012). *Tertiary colors are formed by mixing primary colors with secondary colors* (Bell, & Ternus, 2012). None of these are present in the painting. *Neutral colors* are present from

the use of black and beige (Adomaitis, 2017). The main color used by Picasso in this painting is black. Black is the *absence of color* (Adomaitis, 2017). Since the background of the painting is black, it gives off the impression that it is night time and nothing else is present but the figure(s) being viewed when looking at it. Beige is a calm color that does not clash with any color (Chapman, 2010). This explains why it was used with the black to depict with ease what Picasso was communicating. Beige is shown around the stars, objects and figures of the painting to represent the light from the stars that is being reflected on them. *Shade* is the *darkening of a color by the addition of black or grey* (Bell & Ternus, 2012). *Tint* is the *lightening of the color by adding white* (Bell & Ternus, 2012). Different *tints* and *shades* of both black and beige are shown to highlight and define different symbols and figures in the composition. The details of one figure's body used a *shade* of beige to define its physical features being shined on. A *tint* of black is used in a star, showing that the light from it is either fading, or becoming too far to notice.

The colors black, silver, and red are present in the window display. When black is used in fashion, it can represent sexy and sophisticated (Bourn, 2010). It can also increase the sense of confidence in appearance, potential and possibility (Bourn, 2010). Silver is known to be fun, yet glamorous, elegant and sophisticated at the same time (Bourn, 2010). Red is an assertive color. Love, passion, desire, lust, and determination are some factors that it can be used to represent (Bourn, 2010). Sexual implication is also noticed in hip hop by its lyrics and seductive music video content. In addition, all the colors are associated with dark or gothic themes. These terms describe rock culture. Since black is utilized the most, the message is given to be graceful when dealing with what can appear wild, which comes from the red color. When added with silver it

can give the perception of being sneaky and undercover between what's being shown and what is subliminal.

The *composition* shows *texture* through the material used to create it. *Texture* is *how a surface feels to the touch or how it appears that it might feel if touched* (Bell & Ternus, 2012). In this portrait, the *texture* is shown through the oil on canvas ("Pablo Picasso | Faun with Stars | The Met", 2017). The brushstrokes also apply the feel in the painting. Stippling strokes, which is defined as scattered dots or other marks was placed on the faces, to show the twinkling from the stars being reflected on the figures (Benve, 2016). Fine strokes are noticed throughout the painting. This is created using a long flat brush by the name of one stroke and a similar ribbon effect brush called dagger striper (Brush Shapes and Their Uses, 2006). The plaid resembling a picnic blanket is an example of the one stroke being used. The strokes on the body in the area resembling a chest show a dagger striper being used in the appearance of masculine chest features. It is also used in the stroke near the feminine face that looks like a smile, as well as the body shape of the figure whom appears to be playing an instrument. Rough strokes are shown in the stars, while soft strokes are shown in what looks like a traveler's bag. *Juxtaposition*, or *contrast* is the *sharp difference* in a *composition*. The strokes of the more feminine face of the figure(s) is smoother than the masculine side. The bottom in comparison to the top is more detailed.

Texture is seen throughout the window by the material being displayed in every aspect of it. The mannequins are plastic with a white glossy finish ("Plastic Mannequins Wholesale", 2017). The female's blazer is composed of viscose rayon and elastane ("Phillip Plein New

York's Window Display", 2017). Viscose rayon is a synthetic fiber that is silk-like with a higher moisture absorbance than cotton ("Viscose Rayon", 2017). Elastane, also known as spandex, is a synthetic fiber that is extremely strong and elastic ("How Is Elastane Made?", 2017). Her leggings are made with the same material with a percentage of polyester "Phillip Plein New York's Window Display", 2017). Both pieces have metal incorporated into the product. Her shoes are made of calf leather, goat leather, and cow ("Sandals High Heels "Aurillec"", 2017). The bag is calf leather with metal decorations ("Mini Shoulder "Spring Valley"", 2017). The look is completed with a fox fur collar ("Fur Collar "Sea Side"", 2017). The men's bomber is constructed with polyamide and cotton ("Bomber "My Last"", 2017). Polyamide is a synthetic fabric whose properties are ideal for sports clothing and jackets ("What Are Polyamide Fabrics?", 2017). His pants are a black washed denim. The sneakers are made of calf leather ("Mid-Top Platforms "Akira"", 2017). *Textiles* essential to rock culture's image is reflected in the mannequins' leather and metal. *Juxtaposition* is vivid between the male and female mannequins. The female is clothed in more attractive garments due to its construction with more visible skin. Her outfit would get more attention based on the embellishments and impact of sexuality.

Line and formation show vividly in the *composition*. *Lines guide the eye to a feature or linear element that sets a mood* (Bell & Ternus, 2012). There are *horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and curved* lines in this painting. *Horizontal lines are long and used to suggest calm and stability* (Adomaitis, 2017). These *lines* are used in the hair of the figure, suggesting that no wind is blowing that night. *Vertical lines show a sense of height*, that is displayed on the neck of a figure, which expresses its position being closer to the stars than to the ground (Adomaitis, 2017).

Diagonal lines show motion, which is present on the figure which separates two faces (Adomaitis, 2017). The difference in how the faces appear at the very moment is discovered, as well as the fact that one face belongs to another body than where it is viewed on. *Curved lines* bring felinity (Adomaitis, 2017). It is used to shape the more feminine face and body in the painting. It is also spotted near the masculine chest, which can show love is being expressed.

There are many signs of *line* and *formation* in the window. The male's clothing has *horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines*. The *vertical lines* on the torso section of the bomber give slimness to the jacket, which is a fit type that is trending in fashion ("Importance of Lines in Fashion", 2013). The *horizontal lines* displayed on the arms of the bomber, creates broadness, which for a man can mean muscles ("Importance of Lines in Fashion", 2013). The *diagonal lines* are in the fishbone pattern of his sneakers, which is the style known for a punk rocker (DeLeon, 2013). The glass behind the mannequins use *lines* to form hexagon patterns. The female representative does not show any *lines*.

Balance is another element of this *composition*. *Balance* is an *equality of optical weight and relative importance that creates a unified presentation* (Bell & Ternus, 2012). It can be either *symmetrical* or *asymmetrical* (Adomaitis, 2017). *Symmetrical* is *the weighted balance*, while *asymmetrical* shows *the sides of equal weight but not exact replicas* (Adomaitis, 2017). This was created *asymmetrical*. If it was split in half, the right side of the *composition* would weigh more. The right side has more masculinity that gives it stronger attributes, equaling more weight.

The window display has an *asymmetrical balance*. The right side with the male figure would weigh more for many reasons. A male's body is expected to have more mass than a female's. With the stars on the jacket, it creates an illusion that it is being weighed down on the mannequin which also adds weight. The skull on the belt and fishbone straps on the male shoes also add to this.

Dominance is another key component. As reiterated in a class lecture, *some element should be dominant* (Adomaitis, 2017). The faced-figure is without a fact the most dominant of this *composition*. The faces are of a faun and a nymph (Voorhies, 2017). A faun, also known as a pane, is based out of classical mythology describing a male with goat features (Kelly, 2013). Fauns were soldiers for the gods Faunus and Pan (Kelly, 2013). They were known for lusting for women, as their Roman god, Faunus himself had a companion goddess (Kelly, 2013). A nymph is a nature goddess, who were responsible for the care of plants and animals of their domain, with their male counterparts being panes (Kelly, 2013). Picasso uses the faun as a representation of himself and his second wife, Jacqueline (Voorhies, 2017). It is being perceived that his wife (the nymph) is taking care of him, being that he is a faun (animal). He is desiring her, and the use of the night and no other figure(s) present tell he only has eyes for her. Another use of a goat symbolizes old age, being that Picasso was 72 when they met ("Picasso's Widow, 60, Kills Herself at Chateau on Rivera, Police Say", 1986). Nymph, sounds a lot like the word nympho, or nymphomaniac which usually describes a woman with excessive sexual tendencies. Sex is usually at its peak in youth, which reflects on Jacqueline's age at their time of acquaintance, with her being 26 ("Picasso's Widow, 60, Kills Herself at Chateau on Rivera, Police Say", 1986). It can

be inferred that Picasso viewed her as young and full of life, as well as fresh in the cycle of reproduction.

Dominance is put on the female mannequin. The stance that the male figure is placed in gives heed to his feminine counterpart. The glare from the glass also compliments the metal pieces equipped to her. Her being more accessorized with the hanging bag also gives her more of a role in the window. Being that she is not fully covered and have bare parts like in the arms and feet also gives off a sexual look, and sex stands out.

There are significant *proportions* displayed in the *composition*. *Proportion is the relationship size and scale among elements* (Bell & Ternus, 2012). The faun and nymph-faced figure is created larger than the stars, although the stars appear higher. This gives off that they are at equal or similar eye levels. The faun and nymph-faced figure is also larger than the figure with an instrument being played, which turns out to be the nymph (Voorhies, 2017). This draws focus to the main character being shown, the faun who is watching the nymph play. His point of view is the highlight of it all.

The *proportion* between the male and female mannequins appear to be similar in size and scale. One can infer the idea was to have the two be viewed equal. The hexagon glass behind them is larger, which can reflect the purpose of something being bigger than the two of them, for instance, their chemistry.

One's encounter with the *rhythm* can begin at the middle of the *composition*. *Rhythm is achieved by repetition of design elements that can create a unique sense of visual cadence or*

emphasis for the viewer (Bell & Ternus, 2012). The *diagonal line* splitting the faces draws one to that part of the painting which can go *circular* to show the shift of the faces. Once one looks at the faces a couple times, being that the eyes in the portrait go in the direction of the other figure, that becomes the next focus point. The figure is positioned upward and with the flute being held in the same direction eyes are then moved to the sky/stars which then brings one around in a clockwise motion to examine the details of the larger figure in full and minor details of the environment.

The *rhythm* of the window starts in the middle, where one would see the glare of the glass. When the figures become more clear, one looks to the male mannequin whose head is tilted to the female. One's focus is then directed to the female's fur and then below to the metals of her blazer and then to the chain of her handbag. Her shoes are then noticed and then reexamination of the male figure occurs starting from the stars on his jacket to the skull on his belt and last his strapped sneakers.

Repetition does make an appearance in the Picasso painting. This is achieved when *recurring design elements like size, color, or shape in a presentation create a special sense of visual rhythm* (Bell & Ternus, 2012). The dots painted on the figures are being constantly used to say the stars are glistening over them. This is the only example of *repetition* present. Although the stars are duplicated, it is normally never exhibited without plural copies in addition to its correspondence.

The hexagon pattern makes the *repetition* for the window. It can be a symbol for lovers and harmony (“Hexagon Symbolic Meaning”, 2013). Plein is known to embody engagement in the pursuit of pleasure through his work (Thawley, 2016). With this pattern, a heavy attraction can be taken from the roles of the mannequins to how you view the clothing and buying the brand itself.

From closely observing the *composition* and window display, one can notice a correlation between art and life. Personal, social, political, environmental and economical experience or knowledge are expressed in different forms. It can be shown abstract or with clear descriptions. Picasso’s love life was the reflection of his painting. Plein’s concepts were culturally inspired and acknowledged in the shop window’s interpretation. Art is a way to share with the world your thoughts, ideas, and/or interest. Being able to see into how a person makes life/art can connect us to create further discussion in learning about what goes on outside of our own worlds.

This assignment through the observations and research on *color* and *texture* has shown me everything is more than what meets the eye. Everything is done for a reason, and specifically placed for viewers to get a better understanding of the vision. Before this assignment, I had no idea how to properly examine a *composition* or store window display. Now I can see myself taking the time to get what the story truly is for what is it I’m looking at.

I’ve learned from this assignment and this course all about the *elements of design* which can be constructed in places or things outside. *Color* has more of an impact than I thought. If not properly used it can easily create controversy or bring clarity. I can see myself looking at the world different, being that art is all around me and I would want to make sure I’m getting the most out of it.

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Figure 1. A composition by Pablo Picasso called “Faun with Stars” (1955).

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Figure 2. Window Display at Phillip Plein's Madison Avenue Store (2017). Retrieved from Washington, M. (Photograph). (2017). Phillip Plein Window[photograph]. New York, NY: Phillip Plein.

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