Elements and Principles of Design
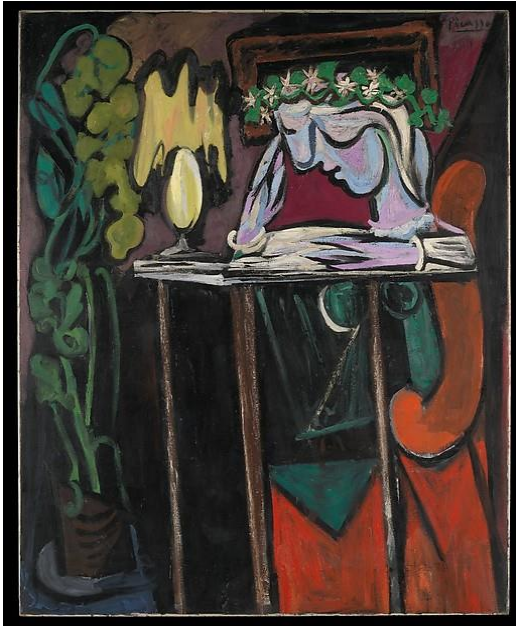

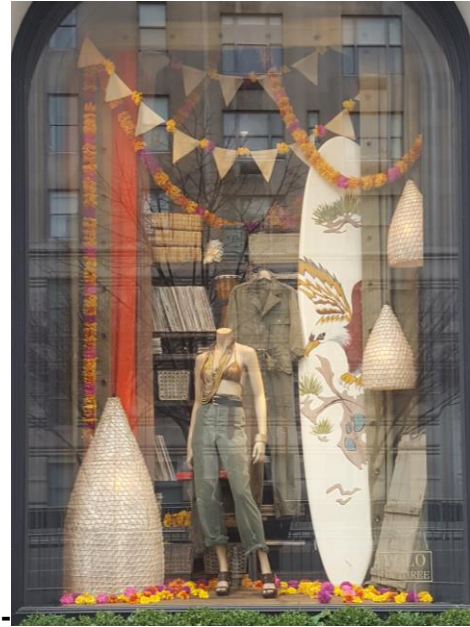Figure 1. Pablo Picasso's *Reading at a Table* Composition (Picasso, 2017).

Figure 2. Ralph Lauren Spring 2017 window display (Vasquez, 2017).

Pablo Picasso (1881- 1973) was a renowned artist known for his use of surrealism and cubism to show truth in life throughout his career (Biography, 2017). His first art teacher was his father who he surpassed in talent by age thirteen (Biography, 2016). During his late teens, Picasso dropped out of art school to focus on modern art forms such as painting, drawing, sculpting, etc. (History, 2017). While focusing on the arts, he created the art style Cubism, which is forming shapes with cubes and angles, alongside artist George Braques (History, 2017). Throughout his life, Picasso created 50,000 pieces, each falling into its own painting style period (Biography, 2017). He is best known for his work in the "Blue Period (1901- 1904)," "Cubism Period (1906- 1914)", and "Surrealism Period (1920- 1937)," where he had art pieces depicting imaginative dreams (Geocities, 2017). Picasso's *Reading at a Table*, a painting of Picasso lover at the time, is part of the Surrealism period because it was painted in 1934.

The *composition,* which refers to the organization of elements to achieve a unified whole, of Picasso's *Reading at a Table* consists of rounded, rectangular, and angular shapes with the assistance of color to create a big picture (Bell & Ternus, 2012; Picasso, 2017). These rounded shapes come together to form a woman's face and breast, a lamp, and flowers while the rectangular shapes solidify forms such as the table, shelf, and chair (Picasso, 2017). As for the angular shapes, they add background details to the painting by creating shadows on the wall and darker hues to the dress as an effect of the shadows (Picasso, 2017). By adding color to the composition, the shapes separate while also giving the painting life and a story behind the shapes.

When a composition has *color*, the colors chosen say more than words by creating a mood (Bell & Ternus, 2011). In the background of the painting, the wall color is a shaded red with big shaded corners signifying the room is barely lit (Picasso, 2017). Shading means to add black to a color to reduce the amount of light it contains (Bell & Ternus, 2011). Conversely, tinting means adding white (Bell & Ternus, 2011). The woman's tinted blue skin displays the woman in her most calm and relaxed state; sleeping (Debrowski et al, 2010). The tinted purple with pink undertones or muted color along her face, neck and hands alongside the same tinted purple with white in the flower wreath and hair enhances her innocent feminine qualities giving her a sense of serenity (Voorhies, 2004; McNee, 2016). Moreover Picasso employs split complementary or a base color complemented by two similar colors on the color wheel to accentuate objects around the light source (Picasso, 2017). Using tints of yellow, blue and purple, Picasso brings attention to the only light source in the room, whose light cast faintly on the objects around it (Bell & Ternus, 2011; Picasso, 2017). The choice of color for the dress (green) and the chair (red) complement each other, which also defines her womanly shape.

Picasso also uses colors and brush strokes when creating *textures* or different surface treatments throughout the composition (Bell & Ternus, 2011; Picasso, 2017). By adding white paint and using long brush strokes, Picasso creates long hair like strands (Voorhies, 2004). For the woman's face, he used a paint-loaded brush with heavy brush strokes to create the illusion of depth on her eyelids and hands (Debrowski et al., 2010). The strong contrast or juxtaposition between the thicker brush strokes on the eyes and the softer ones at her cheeks enhance the smoothness of skin (Debrowski et al., 2010). The smoothness of the plant and light source also create contrast with the texture of her face and table (Debrowski, 2010). In addition, Picasso uses heavy brush strokes to create a three dimensional effect on the floral wreath and juxtaposition with the smooth stem of the wreath.

Like the stem of the floral wreath, most of the *lines* in the composition are curved; the other forms (vertical, horizontal, diagonal) appearing four times or less (Picasso, 2017). The curved lines depicting her face and body, the flower plant, light, and arm of the chair all represent femininity through the womanly shaped outline (Bells & Ternus, 2011; Picasso, 2017). There are four vertical lines in this composition: the woman's neck and the three table legs (Picasso, 2017). Her neck represents her majestic beauty and the legs show the height of the table (Bells & Ternus, 2011). As for horizontal lines, the tabletop makes the table seem wide and under the desk, towards the end of the dress is the second line represents the ending of the tables shadow (Picasso, 2017). One of the most prominent diagonal lines, which indicates action, is the shaded part starting at the right corner and going across the composition represents the dark area light does not reach (Bell & Ternus, 2011; Picasso, 2016). The other diagonal lines are those forming the end of the dress, in turn, the length of her body, showing how short she is (Voorhies, 2004).

These lines may help form *balance* by assisting in creating formal mirror like images or informal optical weight (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The composition does have a slight informal or optical weight balance with the flowers and bright light source being across the woman (Bell & Ternus, 2017; Picasso, 2017). Taking into consideration the texture of both, the brush strokes on the woman's face outweigh the brush strokes of the flower (Picasso, 2017). Besides the two objects being on opposite sides, there is no balance in the composition. The shapes on the bottom left of the composition creating the shadows on her dress and under the table are not repeated on the left side of the composition meaning there is no formal balance. When looking at the composition as top and bottom halves, the top half is more colorful than the bottom showing the painting neglects having formal balance.

The *dominant* or most prominent figure in the painting is the woman's face (Bells & Ternus, 2011; Picasso, 2017). The colors forming her face are the most tinted and textured in the composition, drawing attention directly to her face (Picasso, 2017). The second most dominant object is the light source (Picasso, 2017). The light source is one of the only objects showing a close to true color in the composition (Picasso, 2017). By making the woman's face the dominant element in the painting, the purpose of the piece is she.

The *proportion* or the relationship between size, scale, and weight among elements of the composition is similar to the balance because the weight between elements is not the same (Bells & Ternus, 2011). Comparing the size of the table to the woman, the woman looks smaller, almost childlike, next to the table (Voorhies, 2004). Also looking at the light source and the flower, the flowers are much larger than the light is (Picasso, 2017). Knowing this, Picasso put the lamp at the top of the painting to create a more even weight (Picasso, 2017). Considering the

amount of shadowing in the painting, the light source value in color is strong in attempt to even out the weight of the shadowing.

The *rhythm* or movement from element to element of the composition goes in a circular shape, dominant figures first (Bells & Ternus, 2011). Because the woman is the dominant figure in the composition, she is the first thing to catch the eye of the viewer. From there, viewers look to the light source because of its change in texture and it yellow hue (Picasso, 2017). The similarity in hues of yellow brings the viewer to the left of the light source where the flowers are, which takes the eye down the spiraling stems and across, where the bottom of the chair is located (Picasso, 2017). The viewer then looks up to where Picasso's mistress womanly curves are located and next to the table to the second darkest parts of the composition (Picasso, 2017). After noticing these things, the viewer can now look at the background and process the picture again with the effects of the shading.

Repetition, meaning to reiterate an idea in a composition, helps strengthen the message of the piece (Bell & Ternus, 2012). Flowers are a repeating segment in the composition as part of the floral wreath on the woman's head and a huge flower next to the light source (Picasso, 2017). By reiterating the flowers, Picasso is stressing how feminine, young, and fertile the woman is (Picasso, 2017). Another thing that is repeated in the composition is the use of shading (Picasso, 2017). By using shading, Picasso is creating a darker and more intimate picture for viewers (Voorhies, 2004). This abundant use of shading makes the viewer focus more on the brightest part of the composition, which is Picasso's mistress. The repetition of these things shows the composition is dedicated to his dear mistress.

Life was the influencer of Picasso's *Reading at a Table* (Voorhies, 2004). In art, it is very common to see art pieces being created by life because the meaning and experience shown in the

painting can transcend time (Reference, 2017). For example, most of Picasso's paintings depict his emotions on what was going on around him or in his personal life (Voorhies, 2004). His lover, like many others before it (Voorhies, 2004), influenced the painting mentioned. Similarly, art has also influenced life. For example, architecture and even visual displays can be inspired by art (Bells & Ternus, 2011). Knowing this, it is understandable why the elements and principles of design can be used to analyze Ralph Lauren's Spring 2017 visual window display as it is also forms of art.

Ralph Lauren does well in incorporating life into their visual displays. In Ralph Lauren's Spring 2017 window display, the *composition* is made of triangles, rectangular, and rounded shapes (Foley, 2017). The triangular shapes form triangle garlands and netted lamps (Lauren, 2017). Rounded shapes create flower garlands and a surfboard relating the display to spring, possibly on an island (Lauren, 2017). The background of the display is composed of books and music records creating rectangular shapes in the background (Lauren, 2017). By combining these shapes in the display, they work together to create a spring safari like vibe.

To accentuate this theme, *color* is added to the composition. The orange in the flowers and curtain makes the display look cheerful and festive (McNee, 2016). The red on the surfboard stimulates the eyes while a tinted red creates pink in the flower garlands adding a pretty and feminine effect to the display (Lauren, 2017). Hues of green are seen on the curtains and the mannequin's pants symbolizing the security of nature (McNee, 2016). The bikini top the mannequin is wearing is made of brown and tinted brown which is also seen in the lamps showing the relaxation and cooling effect of the environment (McNee, 2016). Using these colors demonstrates a festive moment in a calming nature like location.

Texture is shown in the colorful and neutral hued objects in the display. The most prominent textured object is the floral garlands. These three-dimensional flowers with the assistance of their bright color make them stand out more (Bell & Ternus, 2011). This shows juxtaposition against the smooth green curtains which emphasizes the festiveness of the flowers (Lauren, 2017; Bell & Ternus, 2011). Juxtaposition is also shown between the netted lamps and the colorful flowers bringing out the vacation relaxation feel of the display (Lauren, 2017; Bell & Ternus, 2011). This display of different textures demonstrates the theme of a relaxing safari getaway.

By using *line*, a feminine theme is further emphasized. The curved lines appear as hanging garlands, a surfboard, and the netted lamps (Lauren, 2017). These curved lined enhance the femininity of the garments by surrounding the mannequin on almost all sides (Lauren, 2017; Bell & Ternus, 2012). Straight lines appear as a flower garland hanging straight down alongside the curtains and the surfboard (Lauren, 2017). Placing the curved garland and the vertical line of the curtain together symbolizes the strength and pride of women (Lauren, 2017: Bell & Ternus, 2012). Horizontal lines are seen in the background of the display as the bookshelves. This creates a relaxing feel against the strength of the straight lines.

This strength can also be applied to the *balance* of the composition. The display uses the garlands and the netted lamps to create mirrored images and equal weight in texture (Lauren, 2017). When the floral garland is placed on the left of the composition and netted lamps a placed on the opposite side to create similar weight (Lauren, 2017; Bell & Ternus, 2012). To create a mirror image of the garland hanging from the ceiling, flower petals are scattered on the flower to reiterate them (Lauren, 2017). When dividing the composition into halves there is no balance because the right side has more objects then the left and the bottom half is fuller than the top.

The *dominant* side of the painting would be the right because of the height and the brightness of the surfboard (Bells & Ternus, 2012). The dominant object is the mannequin because it is the biggest object placed in the center of the composition. By placing the mannequin here, viewers immediately focus on the mannequin and observe what it is wearing (Lauren, 2017). Behind the mannequin is another article of clothing creating more emphasis on the clothing (Lauren, 2017). By doing this, the focus is on the clothing and the "woman" wearing it.

When considering *proportion*, comparing the size of the mannequin to the surfboard one can see the mannequin is significantly smaller (Lauren, 2017; Bell & Ternus, 2012). The brightness of the surfboard emphasizes this. On the floor of the display is the flowers whose vivid color creates a heavy weight unrivaled by any other color in the composition. The small-netted lamps were hung instead of being placed on the floor to prevent from creating a mirror image and to promote movement in the composition (Lauren, 2017). Throughout the composition, the size and colors are used to make sure the display is balanced on both sides.

The *rhythm* of the composition moves in a spiral motion starting with the most dominant object, which is the mannequin (Lauren, 2017; Bell & Ternus, 2012). The next dominant object is the surfboard because it is the brightest and largest object in the display (Lauren, 2017). Following the surfboard is the hanging lamps which then leads the eye to the gray wood board under it (Lauren, 2017). After, the colorful flowers are seen on the floor trailing to the biggest lamp, then up the hanging floral garland and curtains (Lauren, 2017). The next thing viewers see are the different garlands hanging from ceiling (Lauren, 2017). Only after observing these pieces does the viewer look at the background then at the display as a whole.

One of the most reiterated objects throughout the composition is the floral garlands. By using *repetition* the visual display informs viewers what the main topic or purpose of the display is (Bell & Ternus, 2012). These floral garlands represent femininity in the spring season. The flowers create a frame to display the main selling point which is the mannequins clothing (Lauren, 2017). This composition shows that Ralph Lauren is selling women's spring clothing in the location of the store; they are selling a feminine and stylish spring experience. When something is repeated many times in a display, it reflects the theme for the display which is women's apparel inspired by a safari.

The Ralph Lauren display and Picasso's *Reading at a Table* are both compositions surrounding women. Picasso uses the elements and principles of design to show viewers his fondness for his mistress with every brushstroke while Ralph Lauren used them to accentuate the stores clothing and theme (Picasso, 2017; Lauren, 2017). By analyzing both compositions, I learned how displays and art pieces could speak for themselves if viewers were willing to look at it completely. The smallest details can speak volumes. Most tools of visual merchandising can also be applied to people. Similar to the elements of design assignment, the way a person presents themselves can evoke certain thoughts about the so it is important to be aware of these things. One glance can say a thousand things about the person being observed.

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