

Seeing Through Arrangement

- For years, I've favored the method of translation. I enjoy working with concepts and exploring how things function. In this case, I've consistently focused on different forms of a single thing. However, the book "Arranging Things: A Rhetoric of Object Placement"¹ has inspired me to observe objects by juxtaposing them with others, rather than solely concentrating on the concept of the thing itself. My series of visual experiments aims to explore how the arrangement of things affects the way we see them.

The author of this book is Leonard Koren, with illustrations by Nathalie Du Pasquier. Leonard proposed eight rhetorical principles and summarized them into 3 categories: physicality, abstraction, integration. The main body of the book analyzes 53 different illustrations using these 8 principles.

an example of illustration



My dialogue doesn't focus on these analyses. Instead, it centers on the preceding section "What is 'arranging things'" (pp. 13–17) and the 'Notes' chapter (pp. 107–126). I've organized the content as follows: on the left side, I've recorded information about the book and the author's thoughts; on the right side, I've placed my own work and reflections as a response and expression.

Arranging things has two aspects: (1) the selection of objects and (2) the manner in which they are arranged.

Let's first focus on (1): a thing—or in my case, an image of a thing.

In the commercial realm, arranging things is omnipresent and goes by many names. The arrangements of flowers is called floral design. The arrangement of objects in homes and offices is called interior decorating.

This idea reminds me of a concept: our knowledge isn't neatly divided into physics, chemistry, biology, and so on. Instead, there's only one world, and different disciplines are simply different perspectives. We can discuss an object's dimensions and lighting very precisely, or we can explore its metaphorical significance in mythology.

My work centers on images of things. These images can represent a specific individual or an abstract concept.

- 2 "One and Three Chairs" (Joseph Kosuth, 1965)² raises similar questions about a single object. When we present a chair visually, are we representing its name, its image, or the object itself?

I propose a tentative categorization for images that represent specific objects, object concepts, or declare themselves as images: images without shadows or texture suggest object concepts; PNG images with shadows appear as concrete objects; and images with background clutter openly present themselves as images. Different images might evoke these

interpretations:

1. A round pivot point
2. A red-shelled egg with numerous spots
3. A red-shelled egg with numerous spots in its holder on the table near the window

Next, let's explore the relationships between things.

An arrangement of things is not just an aesthetic expression; it's a communicative act. In many cases, arrangement is language-like. A vase full of red roses next to a candelabra and a bottle of chilling champagne "says" romance.

'Rose' serves as an anchor point, influencing our perception of the candle within the same image. The connection between these two is semantic. In essence, "the image of a rose" and "the image of a candle" could be replaced by the words "rose" and "candle." Another type of connection exists based on the images themselves. For instance, when images of an egg and an orange are placed side by side, we perceive their shared qualities—both are round shapes with colors in the orange-yellow spectrum.

composition



This concept resembles how two points determine a line and three points define a plane. At first, interpreting connections between images may seem less clear than understanding semantic links. Yet, with practice, we quickly adapt to this method of interpretation. It's similar to Leonard's repeated analysis of illustrations created using the same technique.

This aims to (a) compare and contrast various arrangements, (b) establish consistent qualitative judgment criteria, and (c) enable different people to discuss rearrangements using mutually understandable terms.

I summarize two ways of looking at objects: "rose is red" and "rose is romance." In the two images titled "Red" and "Romance," roses appear differently. In the "Red" group, the semantics of various images collide: red roses, red road signs, and red pencils—roses, road signs, pencils—reconstruct into a new discourse.

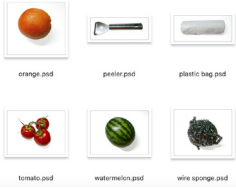
An image carries information in many dimensions, such as color, shape, or function. When certain anchor points determine that shape information should be read from the image, the rest superfluous conditions and attributes seem to float in the air.

Communication systems, like natural languages, grow and develop through perpetual use and experimentation. In the process, the communication possibilities are extended.

My communication system relies on the images themselves rather than the objects they represent.

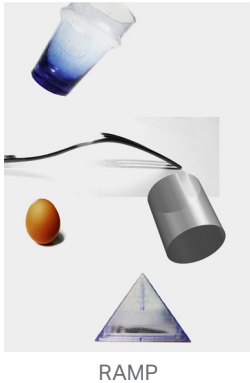
That is, if the object is a bottle rather than a book, it doesn't seem to make much difference to the overall meaning of the arrangement.

library of images



To compel myself to view images as they are, I employ three methods: (1) Restricting myself to objects within my room, limiting the available items. (2) Generating multiple representations of a single object—photographing from various angles, manipulating shadows and backgrounds, and creating digital models. (3) Focusing on the image itself rather than what it represents, carefully arranging images within the frame.

composition-2



- 3 This approach to viewing images echoes poet Gertrude Stein's³ perspective on words. She advocates for abandoning preconceived notions about objects and instead re-examining them with fresh eyes. As Stein put it, "I did express what something was, a little by talking and listening to that thing, but a great deal by looking at that thing..."
- 4 My approach of creating new connections using only existing elements mirrors the technique of Taiwanese poet Xia Yu⁴. She dismantles entire poetry collections, then reconstructs new poems using the existing words. This compositional method yields two potential outcomes: either focusing entirely on the composition while disregarding the objects (as seen in Laura Letinsky's⁵ work), or generating fresh semantic associations (the direction I pursue).
- 5

real world: arrangements have no titles.

art world: artworks always have titles. Even 'untitled' is a title designating a work of art.

real world: things in arrangements never entirely lose their sense of tangible, physical reality.

art world: things in artworks can also be represented abstractly or conceptually; that is, non-materially.

There's one point the book doesn't mention: when phenomena that defy common sense appear in the physical world, people often assume it's due to some limiting condition. However, in images without limitations, some irrationality can actually capture the viewer's attention. I try to establish a new connection, a perspective, between images. It's like when Duchamp put a urinal in the art world, forcing everyone to look at the same object from a new perspective.

So titles are necessary; a title is an entry point to help one enter. If the image fails, the title is at least a range, pointing in a direction.