



Positive and Negative Space

? What are we covering today?

Yesterday, we were introduced to sighting, measuring, and mapping. We saw how effective these techniques can be for ensuring greater accuracy in your drawings.

Today, we'll look at another strategy that can be used to ensure greater accuracy when drawing from observation. In fact, this approach to analyzing your subject can be very effective. It requires a bit of practice and repetition - but over time, you'll get better at using it to evaluate how you are seeing your subject and recording it in a drawing.

The technique I'm alluding to is recognizing and analyzing positive and negative space.

We discussed creating the illusion of space in a drawing on days 15-18. The type of space that we'll discuss today is different. Instead of space that exists around, above and below our subjects, we'll be discussing the space that exists on our drawing surface and the relationship between the shape of our subjects and the areas around them.

What is positive space?

Positive space is the area or areas within the drawing or pictorial space that includes the subjects.

In the image on the right, the flowers and the stems are considered to be the positive space.

What is negative space?

Negative space is the area or areas within the drawing or pictorial space around the subjects.

In this image, the white space around the flowers and stems are considered to be the negative spaces.



Positive space and negative space work together to create our composition. Positive doesn't mean good and negative doesn't mean bad in this case.

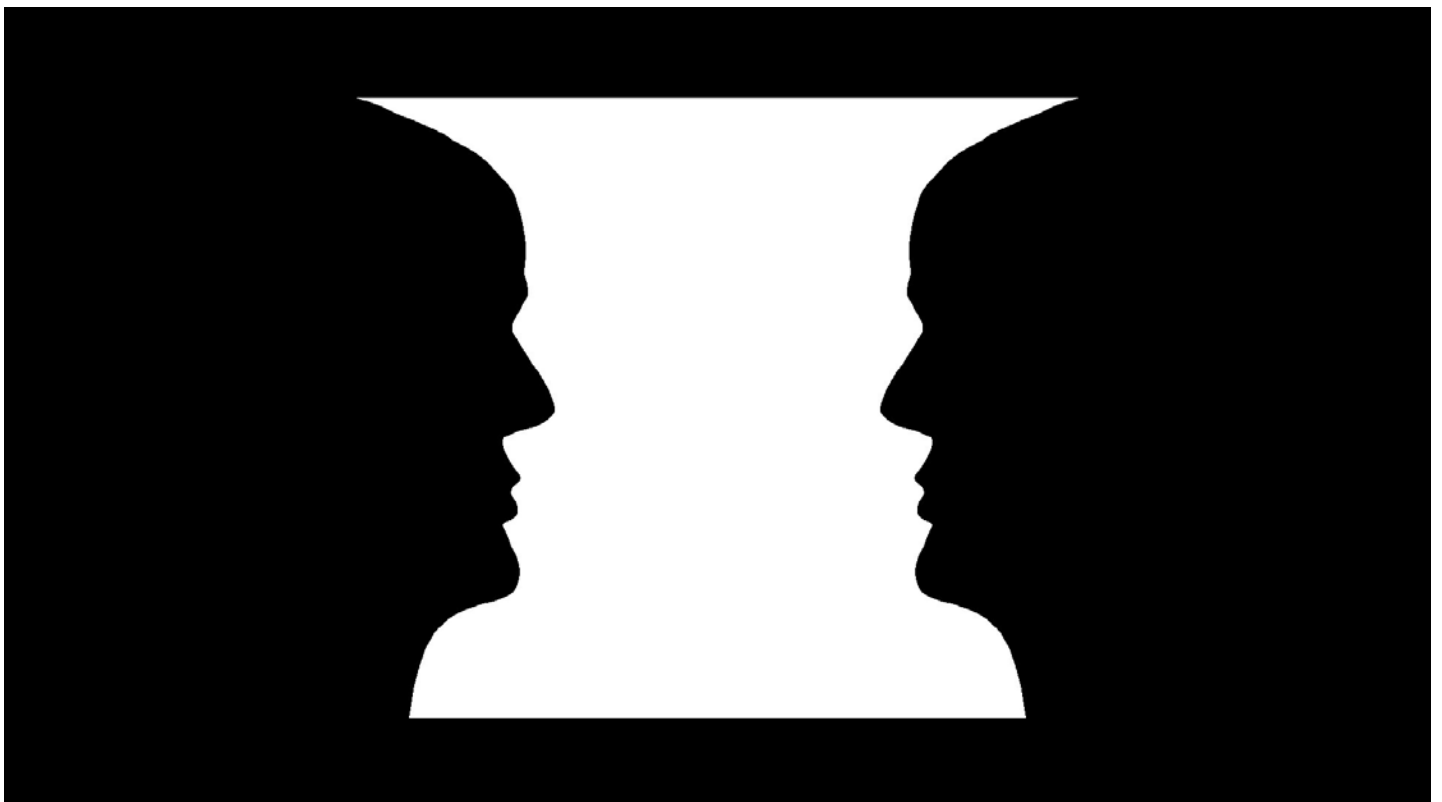
We can think of positive and negative space in terms of shape. In fact, positive and negative space is sometimes referred to as positive and negative shape.

Lets' look at the orchid again (pictured right), but this time, let's consider the positive and negative space in terms of shape.

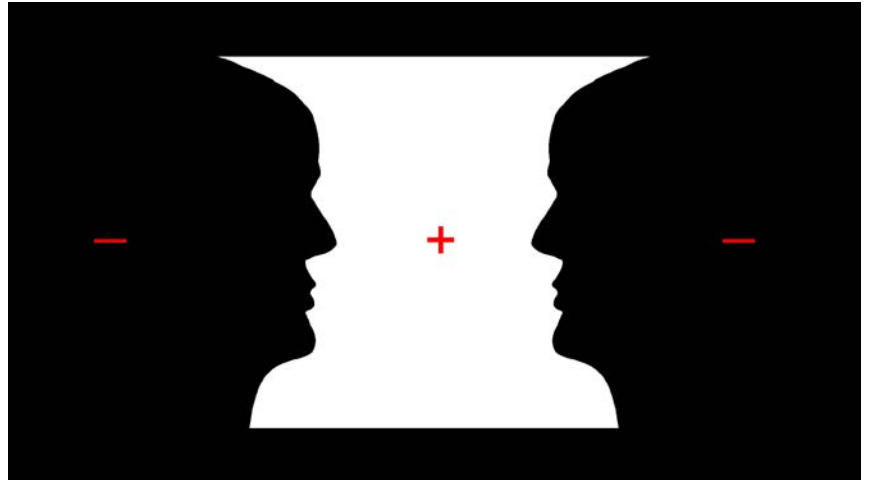
Here we can see the black positive shape of the flowers and stems and how their relationship with the white negative shapes help us to understand the subject - even without any details.



Take a look at the image below. Do you see a vase or do you see two faces?

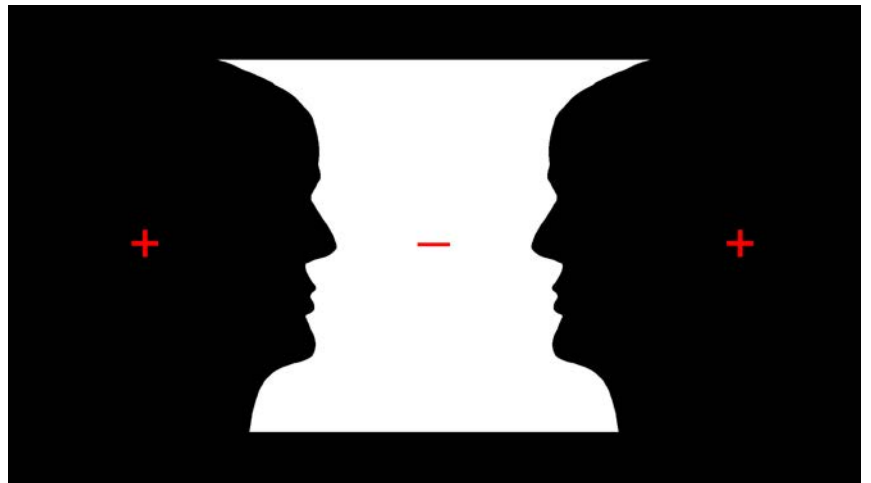


If you see a vase, then you're seeing the white space as the positive space and the black space as the negative space.



If you see two faces, then you're seeing the black space as the positive space and the white space as the negative space.

Most of us can see an image like this both ways. It's the relationship of the positive and negative space that helps us to either see a vase or a face - or both.



Today's Mindset

Now, you may be wondering how this relates to drawing? While analyzing our subject when drawing, we can look for these relationships between positive and negative space in terms of shape.

As we draw, we can compare the shapes that we see and capture them in the drawing. Since we can evaluate both the positive and negative shapes, we have a better chance of capturing the overall shape of the subject accurately on the drawing surface.

And that leads us to today's mindset...

"We can compare positive and negative space (shapes) to ensure greater accuracy in our drawings."

Today's Drawing Exercise

Now let's practice this concept with a challenging exercise. We'll draw only the positive shapes of the subject. While we do so, we'll pay special attention to the negative shapes as well.

We can start anywhere on the subject that feels comfortable. In this case, we'll begin with the upper left flower. We'll first draw a few of the contour lines and then fill in the positive shape of the flower with a solid application of 2B graphite.



It's important to work slowly and take your time. This is a challenging subject. As we continue to fill in the positive shapes of the flower, we'll make comparisons to the negative spaces and shapes around them.



Avoid putting pressure on yourself with this exercise. It is not meant to be a finished drawing. Instead, this exercise is meant to train your brain to see the spatial relationships between positive and negative space.

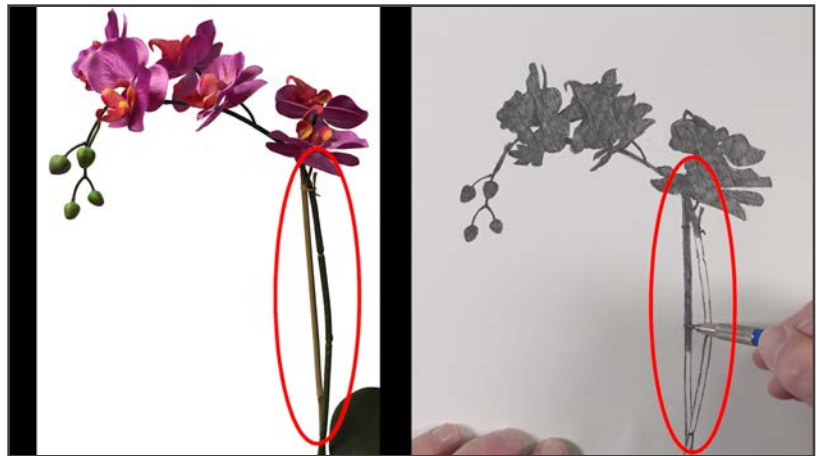


By practicing this exercise, we become better at noticing the relationships between shapes. This skill carries over into our finished drawings and helps us to recognize inconsistencies that can be changed to make our drawings more accurate.

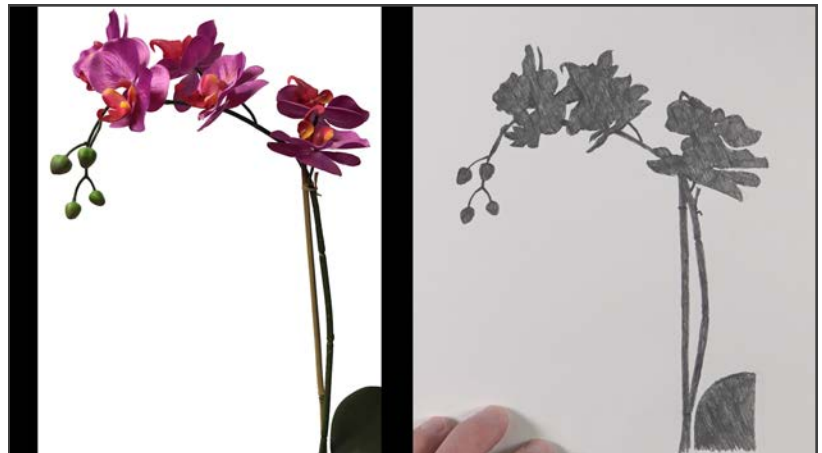


It's important to understand that inconsistencies will exist in every drawing that you create. No drawing will ever be perfect. You can see a clear inconsistency in the image on the right. The negative space is too wide in the drawing compared to the reference.

When we create a drawing, we should strive for perfection, but understand that we'll never fully achieve it.



If you make this drawing exercise a regular part of your practice, you'll notice that your ability to analyze spatial relationships between positive and negative shapes will improve - and your drawing skill along with it.



Today we learned that we can use positive and negative space or shapes to help to ensure greater accuracy in our drawings. By comparing both the positive and negative spaces on our subject, we can better duplicate this information in a drawing.

Tomorrow, we'll take a look at another method of ensuring accuracy in our drawings by looking at the process of drawing with the aid of a grid.