

the element of space

The American architect Frank Lloyd Wright once said,
“Space is the breath of art.”

The element of *space* is fundamental: painters imply space, photographers capture space, sculptors rely on space and form, and architects build space.

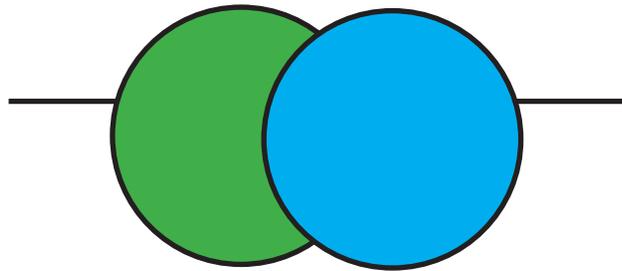
But what *is* space, exactly?

Space refers to the areas around, between, and within objects.

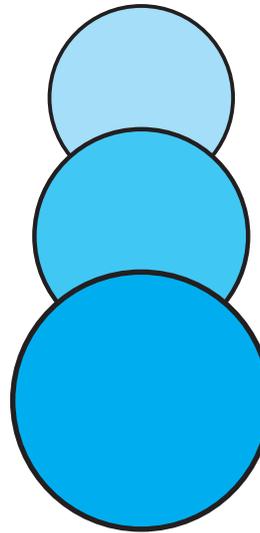
Space can be *positive* or *negative*, open or closed, shallow or deep, and two-dimensional or three-dimensional.

Think about a drawing or a painting. It is usually a flat surface over which the artist can create pictures of people, objects, landscapes. In other words, the artist create the illusion of three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional space.

Let's see how that can be done!

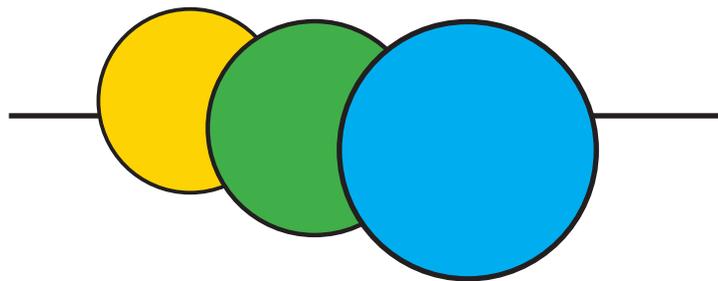
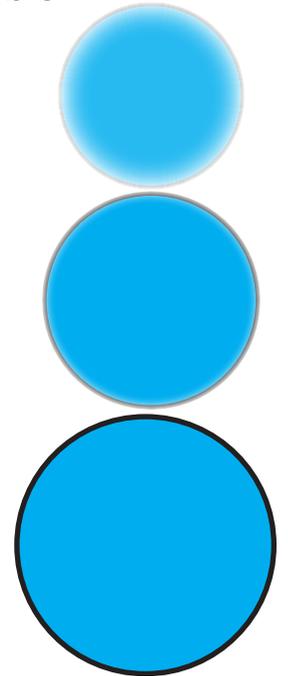


Overlapping: closer objects will hide further ones

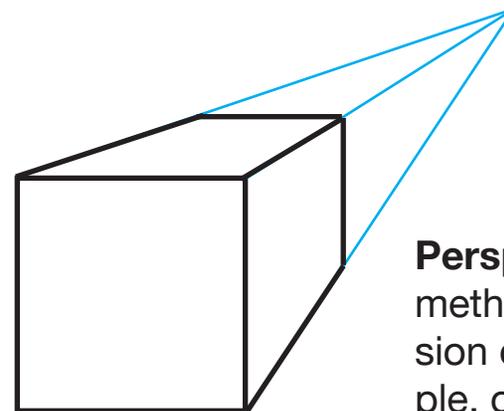


Value: objects that are further away are usually lighter in value.

Details: the furthest is an object the less details are visible



Size: the further is an object the small it looks



Perspective: A drawing method that create the illusion of space. In the example, one point perspective.

Rinko Kawauchi often contrasts small, sharply focused figures with blurry, soft backgrounds in her photographs.



Such a contrast in detail gives a sense of real depth, even if the subject is subtle or miniscule.

Rinko Kawauchi, *untitled from the series AILA*, 1972

Painter Alex Roulette uses **leading lines** as well as classic **single** and **two-point perspective** to create the impression of space in his work.



Alex Roulette, *Waiting*, 2018

Notice too how objects get smaller in order to seem more distant from each other . . .

Notice how painter Kahinde Wiley overlapped some of the background pattern onto the front of the people in this portrait.



Kahinde Wiley, *Three Girls in a Wood*, 2018

This overlapping gives a sense of three-dimensional space.

Try it out! Using some of the methods in the previous page, draw a scene in the space below. Make sure to make some objects look close and some far!



positive & negative

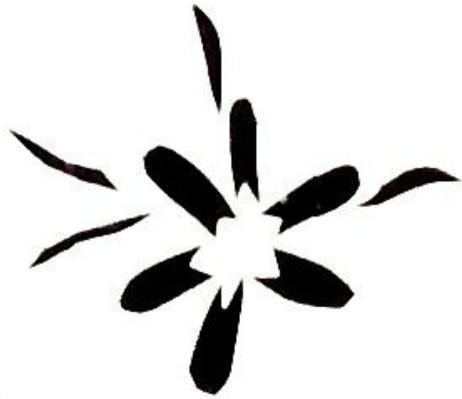
The subject of a work of art, like trees in a landscapes, a face in a portrait, or objects in a still life, occupy the **positive space**.

Everything else is considered **negative space**, like the background or the surrounding areas.

Chinese art has always been a great example of the use of negative space to create a simplified, quiet, “zen” atmosphere in an artwork.



It's about



the **presence**



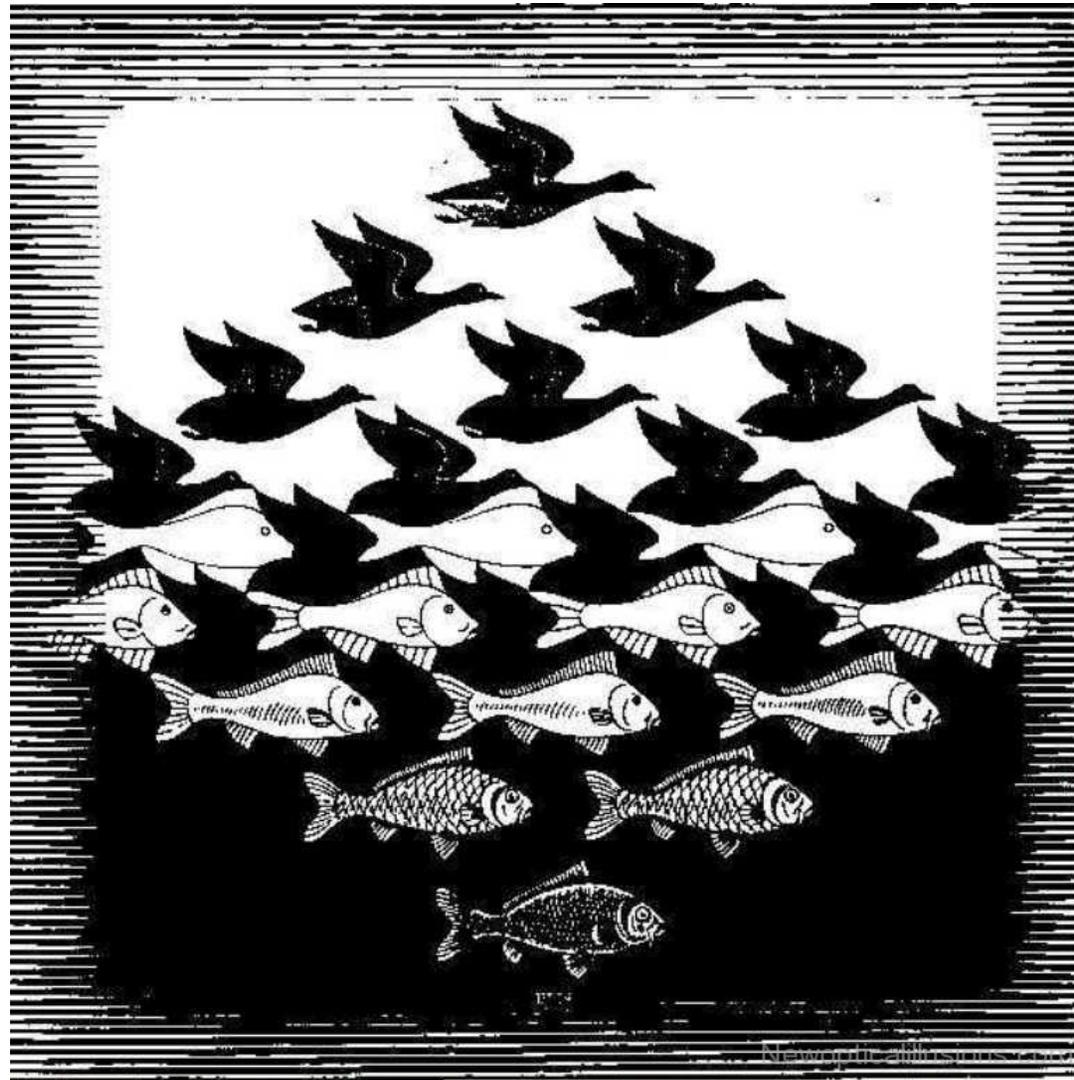
of absence



Are you able to label negative and positive spaces in the artwork below?

Be careful! Things can be a bit confusing!

In fact, graphic design in the 20th century saw a new and different trend, as artists began to play with the creation of images with the negative space itself.



M.C. Escher, *Sky and Water I*, 1938

CHALLENGE: create an image
& its inverse.

Use negative & positive space.

Use one black and one white sheet of paper.

Fold each in half.

If you cut out a black shape, glue it to the white side
& vice versa.

c o n s t r u c t i n g s p a c e

One of the goals of Minimalist sculptors was to produce work that engaged the surrounding space. Of course visual art is made to be looked at, but these artists sought to involve viewers in a more physical way, acknowledging that their perception shifts as they move through space.

Richard Serra said of this work, “Even though it seemed it might collapse, it was in fact freestanding. You could see through it, look into it, walk around it, and I thought, ‘There’s no getting around it. This is sculpture.’”



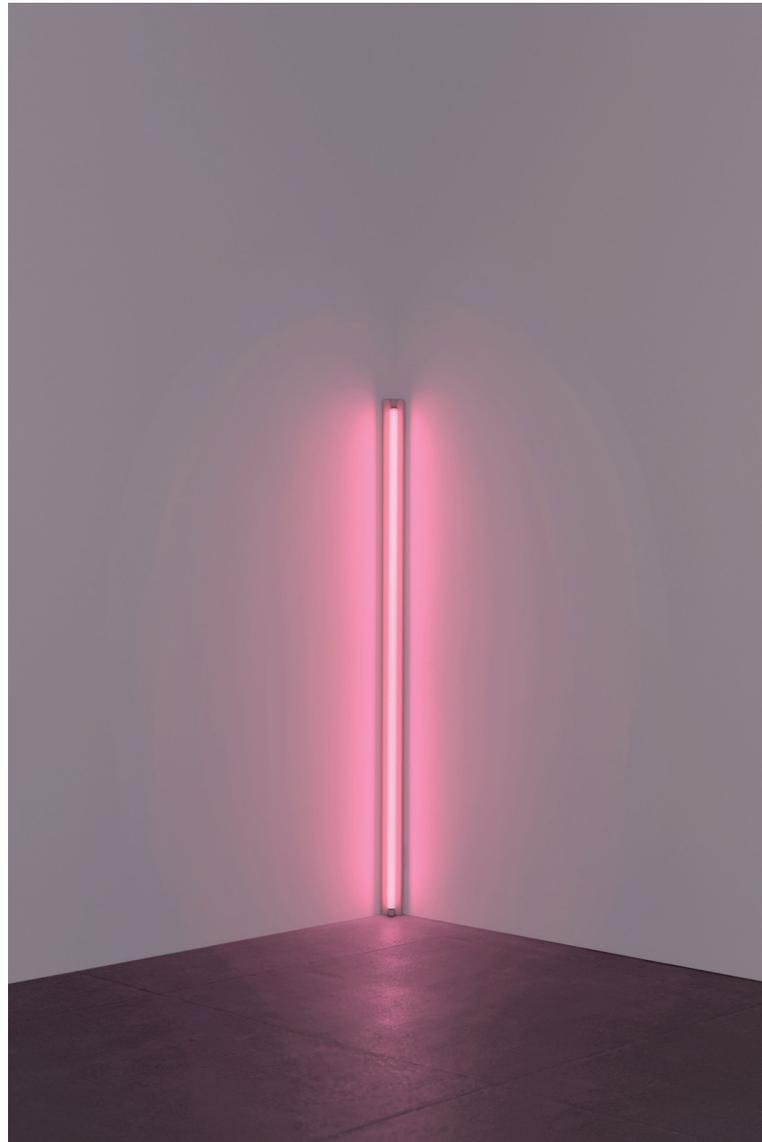
Richard Serra, One Ton Prop (House of Cards), 1986

How is this work using the element of space?

c o n s t r u c t i n g s p a c e

The medium of light

When a viewer looks at this object for a sustained period of time in close proximity, the light creates an effect of a cylinder much wider than the tube itself. When the light shining from the tube touches people or objects, it illuminates and colors these as well.



Dan Flavin, *pink out of a corner (to Jasper Johns)*, 1963

How is this work using the element of space?

Sometimes, an artwork is not about space, but lack thereof.

Henri Matisse was one of several artists of his time protesting the illusion of space in his work, creating very flat compositions like this one.



Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911

He often used **red**, generally thought of as the most bold and forceful hue, as the focus of these paintings. Why do you think he chose this color?

Thinking about the element of space, use this page to draw a self-portrait in your favorite place.