

Spatial Depth: Shading + Tone #2



JMW Turner

INTRO

Above is a painting by Turner of Lake Lucerne showing a superb sense of space. There are many tools artists use to create the illusion of depth and space in their drawing and paintings. To create a sense of space for your 3D objects to exist within requires the use of aerial perspective (different to linear 2 or 3 point perspective).

This project concentrates on teaching you how to use the principles of aerial perspective – by manipulating your use of monochrome tone to create in your drawings and paintings the effect of;

- **Spatial depth**

EQUIPMENT

- **Materials:** 2B-8B Pencil; putty rubber; cloth; either pencil, graphite or charcoal,
 - A3, A4 paper
- **Resources:** A group of still life objects with minimal surface detail: mug, bowl, vase, plant pot, ball, directional light (natural or a small lamp)

ARTIST IMAGES

- JMW Turner
- Giorgio Morandi

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To create spatial depth through the use of aerial perspective requires you to use more than just the correct shading although this is a big part of the illusion you are creating. Your drawings need to demonstrate all the points below. There is a lot we can learn from landscape paintings to use in still life.

TASK 1

You will be asked to create

- **1 main drawing (size A3) of a still life in pencil or charcoal in outline only. Keep it light.**
- **some smaller studies (A4) to learn from.**

Set up a still life of up to 5 objects on a table. Spread the objects out across the table from front to back (don't clump them together). Look at the still life with the objects near your eye level (ie: sitting down to draw will work better than standing up). Follow the points below to help you achieve aerial perspective.

1. **Make sure your objects get smaller the further away they are from you**

We all know that the same size object will look smaller the further away from you it is. But how much smaller does it need to be to give the effect of the right size of space?

- a. You can check this by holding up a piece of glass or Perspex (borrow a piece from an old picture frame).
- b. Hold it steadily in front of you and carefully outline the objects in your still life with a marker pen.
- c. Look at the drawing you have just made and compare the height + width of an object in front with one in the distance.
 - i. You will notice that objects of similar size, when placed further away from you, shrink quite dramatically – a lot more than you would think.
 - ii. Try another drawing and this time have an even greater distance between the objects and see how the distant one shrinks even more!
- d. This will help you draw your objects more accurately.

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2. Disappearing details

We all know that reading the eye chart when having your eyes checked is easier if you moved closer to it rather than remain further away – but that would be cheating! It may seem obvious, but what this teaches us is often overlooked when drawing and painting. Clearly we can observe more detail in objects closer to us than those further away.

- a. You can check this by making 2 drawings of the same object. Firstly, up close, secondly when it is placed at the far end of a table.
 - i. Make sure that when drawing you stay true to drawing only what you can see, not what you know to be there.
- b. Try this with an object with lots of surface texture and details such as a patterned teacup, a flower or head of broccoli.
- c. Look at your 2 drawings you have just made and compare the level of detail in each.
 - i. You will notice firstly that the detail in the second drawing is smaller (see 1 above) but also there should be less of it. This is because you simply could not see it with the increase in distance.
- d. Remember this when drawing your still life. Distant objects have less detail than those close up.

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3. Edges - sharp or fuzzy

Our brains trick us into thinking that we always see everything crystal clear. The truth is we only see the things that we focus on in sharp focus, the rest is blurry – very much like a camera.

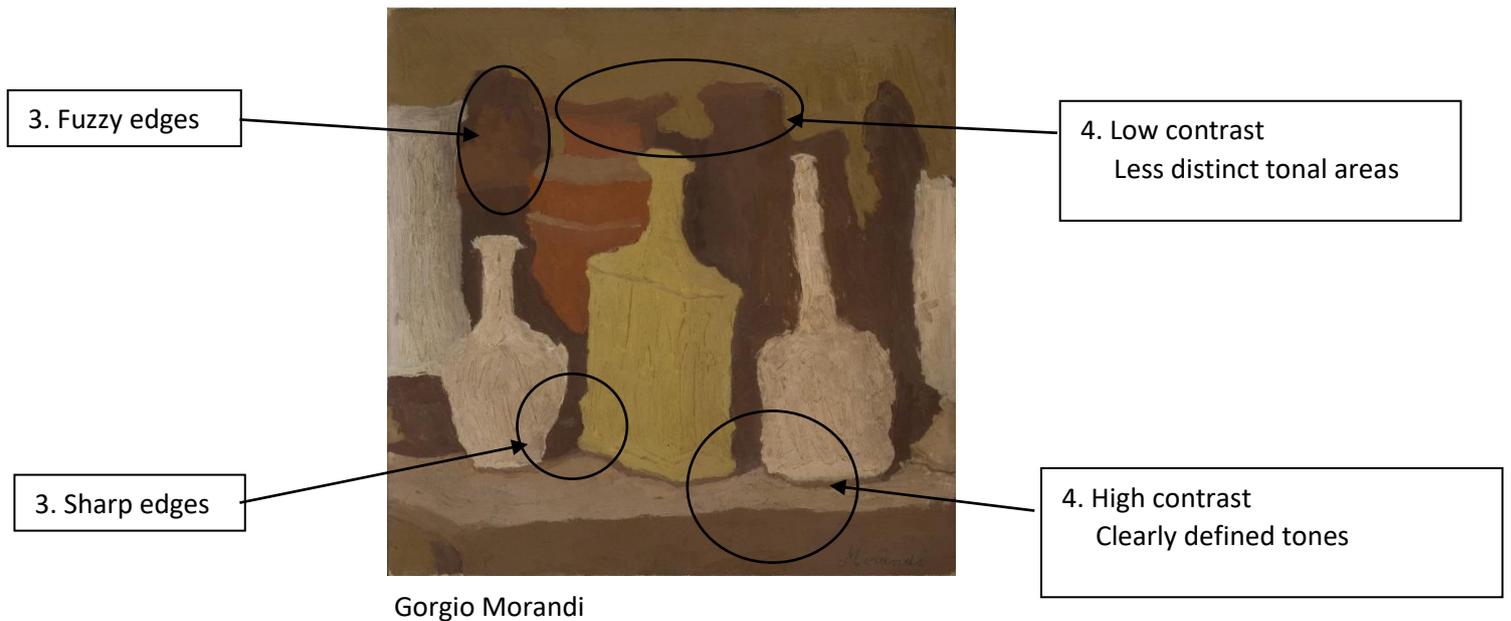
- a. You can check this by holding the tip of your pencil or charcoal really close up to your eyes and focus on it to see all the detail. Keep your eyes focused on the pencil tip, but shift your attention to the background.
 - i. You will be aware that everything else is blurred.
- b. If you shift to looking at the background, not only will you see a double image of the pencil tip, but the background will come into sharp focus and the pencil tip will be blurred.
- c. Use this in your drawings to make sure that objects close to you have sharp edges and lines, while those further away have blurry, less crisp lines and edges.
 - i. When we get to the shading stage I would suggest using a harder pencil (2B – 4B) for objects in the front and a softer pencil (4B – 8B) for objects further away.

You will be getting the ideas by now that simply put – you can see less information in objects further away. Acknowledging this in your drawing is crucial in achieving the illusion of spatial depth.

*Beginners make the mistake of imbuing all the objects in a still life with the same level of detail because they 'know it is there' because they have studied the objects very carefully.
This flattens the illusion of space.*

However this is not the reality of how we experience things in life. Your drawings need to acknowledge the real-life experience of seeing less the further away things are.

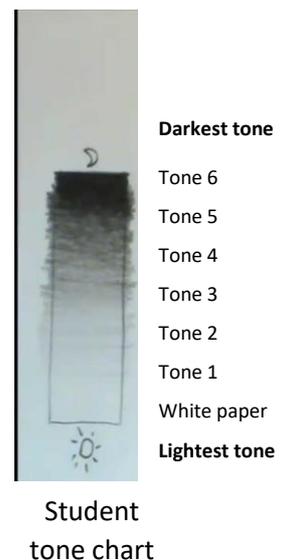
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4. Tonal contrasts

Tonal contrasts nearer to you are more distinct than those further away – they have sharper edges (see 3 above) that is, they are more clearly defined. Tonal differences in objects further away are seen less distinctly so they will look like one tone merges together with the next – they are less defined (have fuzzy edges).

- a. You can check this by making 2 drawings of one of your objects. Your drawing in pencil or charcoal should concentrate on observing the tonal values correctly (as you did in Shading + Tone project #1).
 - i. Your first drawing should be made from the far side of the room with the object at a distance from you. The second drawing move your chair up close to the object.
 - ii. Look at your 2 drawings and compare how you have drawn the tones.
 1. Drawing 1 should have clearly defined differences in the tonal values, with better defined edges, and distinct jumps in tonal value – more contrast.
 2. Drawing 2 should have less distinct differences in tonal values, with fuzzy edges, and tones that are more similar to each other – less contrast.
- b. Translate this to your drawings so that objects in the front have distinct tonal jumps while objects further away have tones that are more similar to each other.



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5. Distant neutral colours + lighter tones

These 2 features of aerial perspective are more clearly seen in landscape where the impact of the atmosphere is greater. However, you can use these affects to enhance spatial depth in a still life drawing even though it has comparably very limited depth.

- a. **Neutral colours:** colours on the horizon will be more neutral to our eyes, very often more blue. But as we are concentrating on tone in this project we will leave this aspect of aerial perspective to when we do a colour project, as it will not impact on our drawing.
- b. **Lighter tones:** Over great distance, colours and tones will look lighter or paler due to the atmospheric impact. But as we are concentrating on a still life with limited spatial depth we will leave this aspect of aerial perspective to when we do a landscape project, as it will not impact on our drawing.
 - i. In a still life it is OK to have a dark background without limiting the illusion of spatial depth as long as you follow all the other principles we have been learning about.

END RESULT:

- You will have a number of small studies completed that have helped you to learn about the principles of aerial perspectives,
- You will have completed a larger still life drawing in light line, ready to develop in Task 2.
 - Focus on applying **Principles 1 and 2.**

TASK 2

Now that your main still life drawing is correctly drawn and you are aware of the principles of aerial perspective you can continue with the shading.

- Add in the shading and details to your drawing
 - Use the skills you learnt in Shade + Tone Project #1
 - Focus on applying **Principles 3 + 4.**

END RESULT: a completed monochrome drawing of a still life showing a good illusion of space.

TASK 3

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