

Shape + composition



Henri Matisse

INTRO

This project is about helping you see the objects, landscapes, people you draw as a series of flat shapes. All too often we find it difficult to compose our pictures unless we learn to see the objects within our pictures reduced to their basic Art Elements, of which shape is one.

We need to see our compositions as a mix of the Art Elements (Line, Tone, Colour, Shape, Pattern, Texture) so we can focus on how these elements (not the jug, tree or person) is working within a dynamic composition on the flat surface of your paper or canvas.

EQUIPMENT

- **Materials:** 4B-8B Pencil, rubber, cloth, graphite, charcoal, soft chalk pastels
 - A1, A2 or A3 paper (you can use newsprint or lining paper for tasks 1 - 3)
- **Resources:** Still life objects and anything else you find interesting (garden or room views, etc)

ARTIST IMAGES

- Matisse

POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Use our facebook page: click on this link [Creative Art Courses](#)
 - **#artroom516** – use at the end every post message

Shape + composition

Surface detail such as texture, colour, light and shade is alluring and is what entangles our senses and pulls our attention away from the important things. Put it to one side for now. You can return to it in the last step of this project.

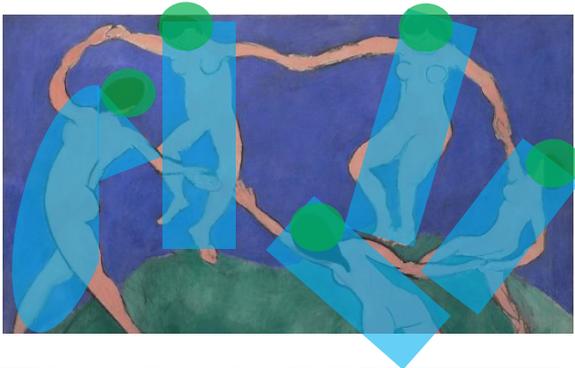
- Composition is one of the key things that gets lost as the objects in our pictures become ever more complex and detailed as we strive for naturalism and realistic looking images.
- When starting a drawing or painting my suggestion is to follow these steps;
 1. **Positive Shapes:** Draw the underlying shape of your objects (trees, figures, etc)
 2. **Negative shapes:** Notice the shapes created in between the objects you are drawing.
 3. **Composition:** Experiment with how these shapes interact dynamically across your page or canvas.
 4. **Relationships:** Notice how all these shapes link together and relate to each other in interesting ways.
 5. **Surface details:** Draw or paint surface information like texture, light and shade, detailed information, etc in any style you wish – photo realistic to semi-abstract – the choice is yours.

This teaches you that there is an abstract design underneath every picture you create or look at. The stronger the abstract composition of shapes – the stronger your finished picture.

It is easy to see in abstract or semi-abstract art – more difficult to see in realistic art.

See the next page for artists images...

Shape + composition



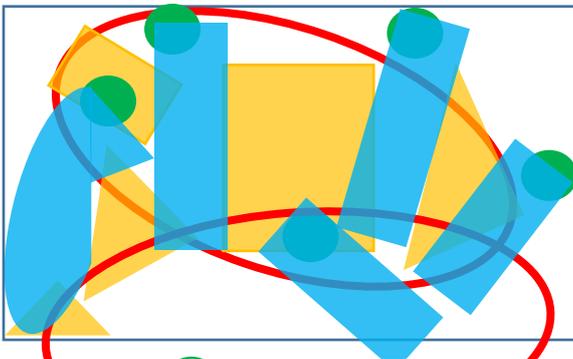
1

Positive shapes (figures) seen as geometric shapes distributed across the picture as an abstract design or pattern



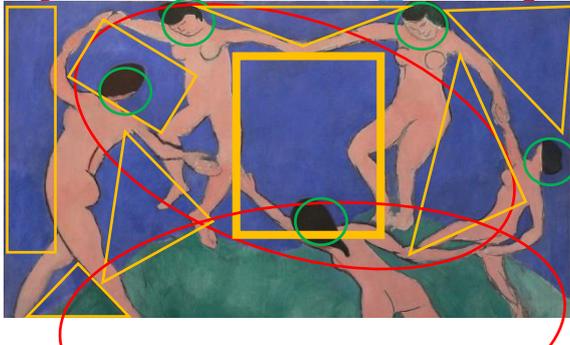
2

Negative shapes (sky + grass) seen as geometric shapes distributed across the picture as an abstract design or pattern



3

Composition of the dominant geometric shapes create a powerful and dynamic abstract design.



4

Relationship of the dominant geometric shapes linking all parts of the picture together.

Positive shapes of objects (figures)
Negative shapes of Sky



5

Surface detail of colour, tone, texture, line, etc is now added on top of the basic geometric shapes.

Shape + composition



Student example of a still life arrangement

- A few of the negative shapes created in this picture (I've not selected all – you can do the rest)
- A few of the positive shapes in this picture (I've not selected all – you can do the rest)

TASK 1

Uncovering Shape

Set up a still life on a table similar to the example above

- Look at your still life objects on the table.
 1. Draw the positive objects as simple flat shapes
Fill your page with the objects so they almost touch at all 4 sides.
 - Try to find which of these geometric shapes: circles, cubes, ovals, rectangles, cones, triangles, etc (or creative variations of the pure geometry) fit the real objects you are looking at.
 - Use pencil crayon to shade them in
 2. Draw geometric shapes within the negative spaces between the objects.
 - They do not need to be purely geometric (this is not maths) but as close as possible to help keep things simple
 - Shade them in a different colour

Shape + composition

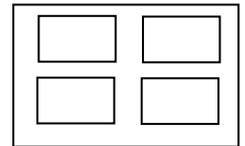


Student example of a still life arrangement
Seeing the abstract design of positive + negative shapes that make up the composition
(I've not selected all the shapes – you can do the rest)

TASK 2

Improve your composition

3. Try to see your still life composition as a geometric design of flat shapes
 - Play with your abstract design and shift, re-arrange/alter the composition to improve the abstract design.
 - Remember, you can only move shapes in your compositions in relation to how much you can actually move the objects on your table. So keep it real!
 - Re-draw a few times using your coloured pencils
 - Become really aware of the design and pattern your shapes make in each composition you try.
 - Layout a page like this and try 4 different compositions
4. Which of the 4 compositions work best?
 - Think about the relationship between the shapes – how they link together, how they intersect each other, how they balance out across the page. Are the shapes distributed how you want them – do they move horizontally, vertically, diagonally? Are they too close to the edges or too much in the middle? Do big shapes balance out little shapes?
 - See image 4 above: See how Matisse used a square of blue sky in the middle to give a balance to his composition to help emphasize all the movement of the dancers.
5. Now is the time to draw all the gorgeous surface detail you have probably been wanting to draw since the start of this project
 - Use all your observational and observational skills to render the surface of the objects in your own style



END RESULT

This project will help you create more powerful and well thought out compositions and vastly improve the quality of your drawings and paintings.

TASK 5

POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Use our facebook page: click on this link [Creative Art Courses](#)
 - **#artroom516** – use at the end every post message