

DIG ART!

CULTIVATING CREATIVITY
IN THE GARDEN

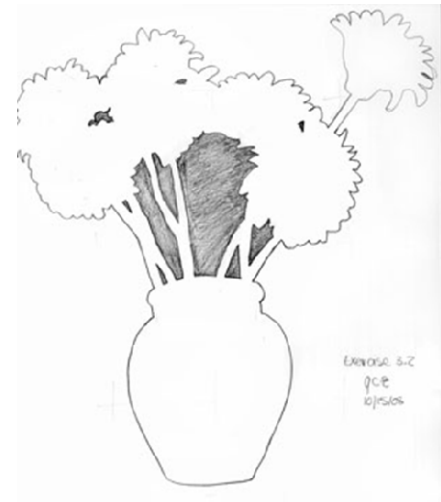


Visual Art: Negative Space Drawing in the Garden Part 4

- Overview** This activity focuses on drawing using negative space—a term used for the spaces that surround an object.
- Objectives** Students will:
- practice botanical illustration skills by drawing using visual concepts of negative space
- Time** 30 minutes
- Materials**
- A plant, potted or from outdoors, and preferably leafy, with large and loosely arranged leaves. If students absolutely cannot find one, a photograph of a houseplant could work, but note that learning to draw from 3-dimensional objects will take students much further in their ability to illustrate and they should always do so if possible.
 - paper viewfinder (a note card or piece of paper with a hole cut out of the center)
 - sketchbook
 - pencil
- Instructions**
1. Students will first find a comfortable seated position. Moving during this exercise will change their spatial perception and may become confusing.
 2. Demonstrate how to hold a viewfinder between yourself and the plant so that the outer edges of the plant are cut off by the edges of the viewfinder. This will give students fully-enclosed negative spaces to draw.
 3. Ask students to let their focus blur slightly until they no longer see a plant in front of them, and they are instead concentrating on the negative—empty or “in between”—spaces between the leaves, stems or petals.
 4. This may take a bit of time because our brains are trained to neglect this information and pay attention only to the shapes of objects in front of us. Try to imagine that the shapes of the negative spaces are just as real or physical as the shapes of the leaves.
 5. Next, guide students to move their eyes slowly along the edges of the negative space as their pencil moves correspondingly on the page.

6. Remind students that they are not drawing the leaves or stems in this exercise, but instead drawing the *spaces* between them and fitting these spaces together on their page exactly as they fit together on their plant.
7. As they move along, students may notice that their drawing will contain references to the plant, and yet will look a bit different, too. Encourage students to stay focused on the negative spaces.
8. When all of the negative shapes that exist in their plant have been drawn, students can fill the spaces in (see drawing below). Does an image of their plant pop out? It should. If not, encourage them to keep practicing this exercise.

9. If your students are still having trouble with this exercise, encourage them to try copying only the negative shapes of the picture given at right as an example. Remind them that details of these spaces are just as important as the details of the object shown.



10. Students occasionally find this exercise frustrating. This is because they are learning to see in a way that opposes how they have seen things their whole life, and they are using information they typically tune out. The more they practice trying to see both the positive shapes and negative spaces that surround objects and the more they practice depicting objects this way, the better they'll become at drawing. The more they engage as they're drawing, the more naturally it will come and the more the practice of capturing negative space will become an intuitive, useful tool.

Resources

The Art of Botanical Drawing by Agathe Ravet-Haevermans

The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain by Betty Edwards

A Handbook of Biological Illustration by Frances W. Zweifel

How to Draw Plants by Keith West