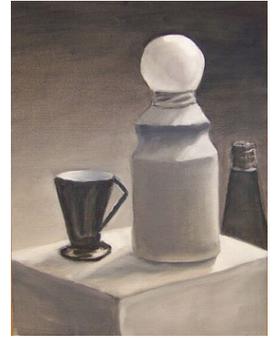


Figure and Ground

What we visually attend to at any time is called figure, and it is always against some kind of background. The first step in perception is to distinguish figure from ground. For instance, in the example shown, the still-life objects are the figure, the background is the ground.

A few important observations regarding figure-ground include:

1. Figure and ground cannot be seen simultaneously, but can be seen sequentially.
2. Even though the figure and ground are in the same physical plane, the figure often appears nearer to the observer.
3. Figure is seen as having contour; ground is not.



Given this, your problem with this painting is to find a way to integrate your figure and ground.

There are a variety of ways to integrate figure and ground. When two shapes share the same contour is an effective way of **embedding** or concealing images. One only has to pick up a children's magazine and look at the "Hidden Pictures" illustration challenge. Children and even adults take pleasure in finding hidden/embedded images. This can be seen as a form of "hide-and-seek" or even "peek-a-boo," that fascinated us as little children. Both involve a sense of discovery. Example: Cecily Brown.



Camouflage can be thought of as a way of confusing the relationship between figure and ground, a way of creating visual noise. Cubism, as practiced by Picasso, Braque, and others, provided some of the inspiration for camouflage. Example: Picasso—*Guitar Player*, integrates the figure (the woman playing the guitar) with the background.)



The **Gestalt** school of psychology, which originated in Germany in about 1912 by Dr. Max Wertheimer, provides some simple and convincing evidence about how we organize and group individual visual elements so that they are perceived as wholes. An object is perceived based on the total context or field it exists in. Put differently,

visual elements within a person's visual field are either attracted to each other (grouped) or repelled (not grouped). The Gestalt psychologists put forth a number of concepts to describe how grouping of visual elements occurs within a context of a field. Example: Shingue Smith



See other samples on website.