

# What is SHAPE?

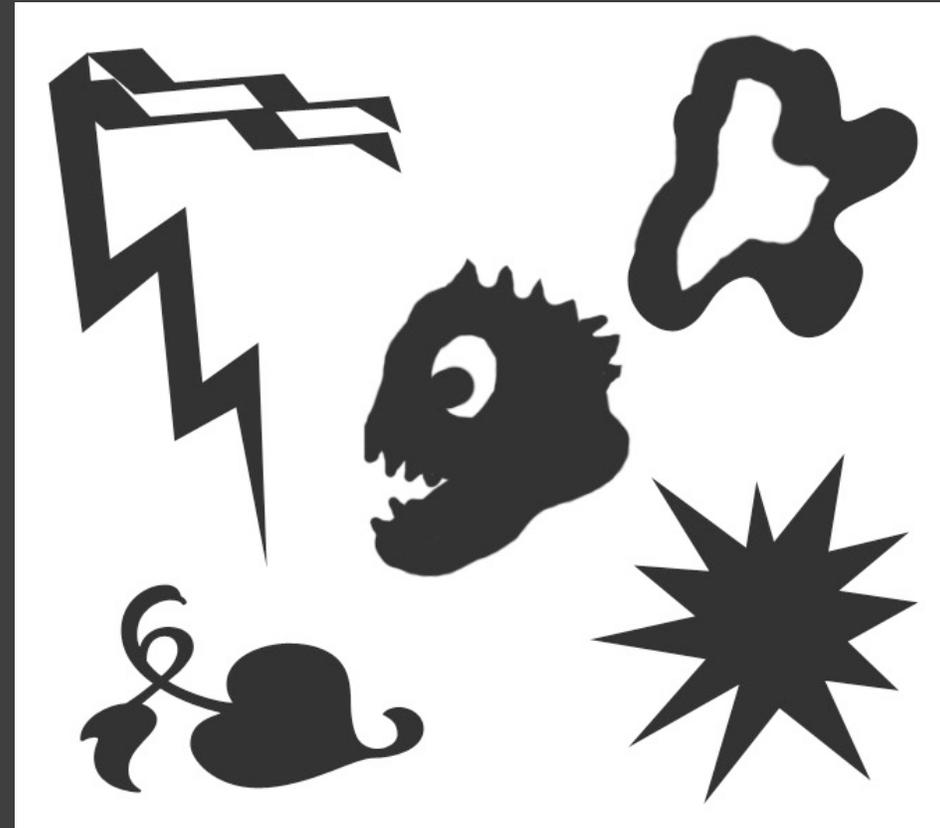
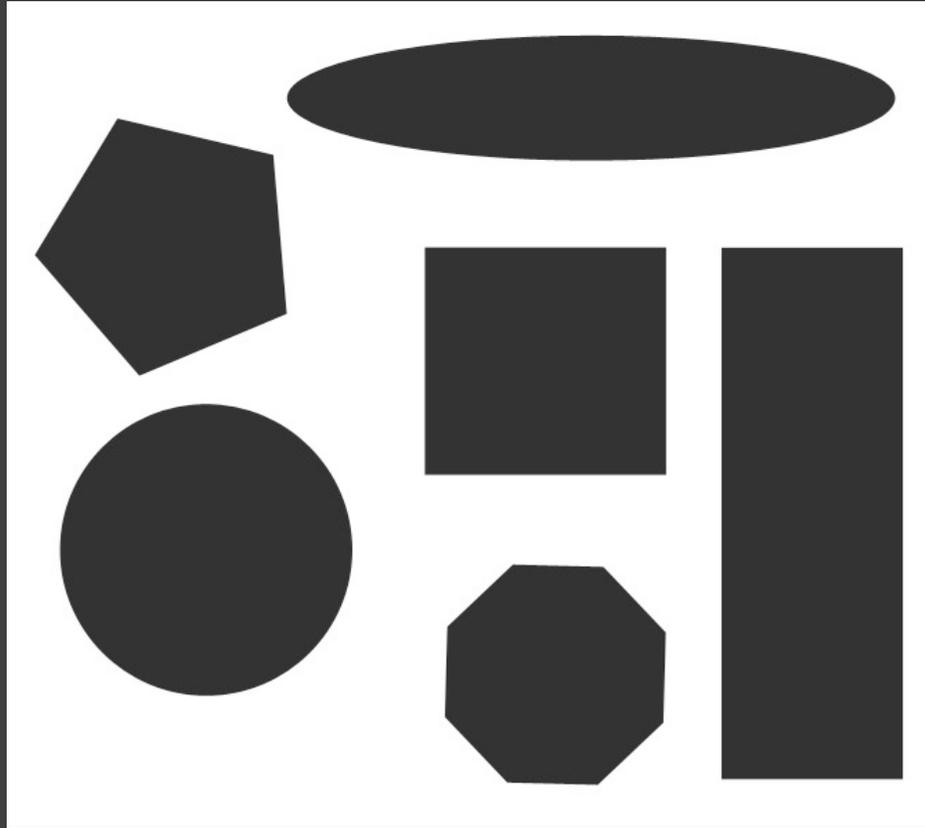
Shapes exist in a two-dimensional space. They can be regular or irregular, simple or complex, geometric or organic.

- Shape is a perceivable area (think silhouette). Shapes can be created by lines or by color or value changes that define edges. The shape itself is the positive space, and the space around the shape is the negative space.
- A positive shape in a drawing automatically creates a negative shape.
- Some shapes in art are clearly defined while others are barely discernable.
- The difference in clarity of shape can impact the content of a work.

Vassily Kandinsky  
*Several Circles*  
Oil on Canvas, 1926.

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), License: Public Domain





Marie Porterfield Barry, Source: Original Work, License: CC BY-SA 4.0

Right: Geometric Shapes are shapes with mathematically regular contours, like circles, rectangles, and octagons

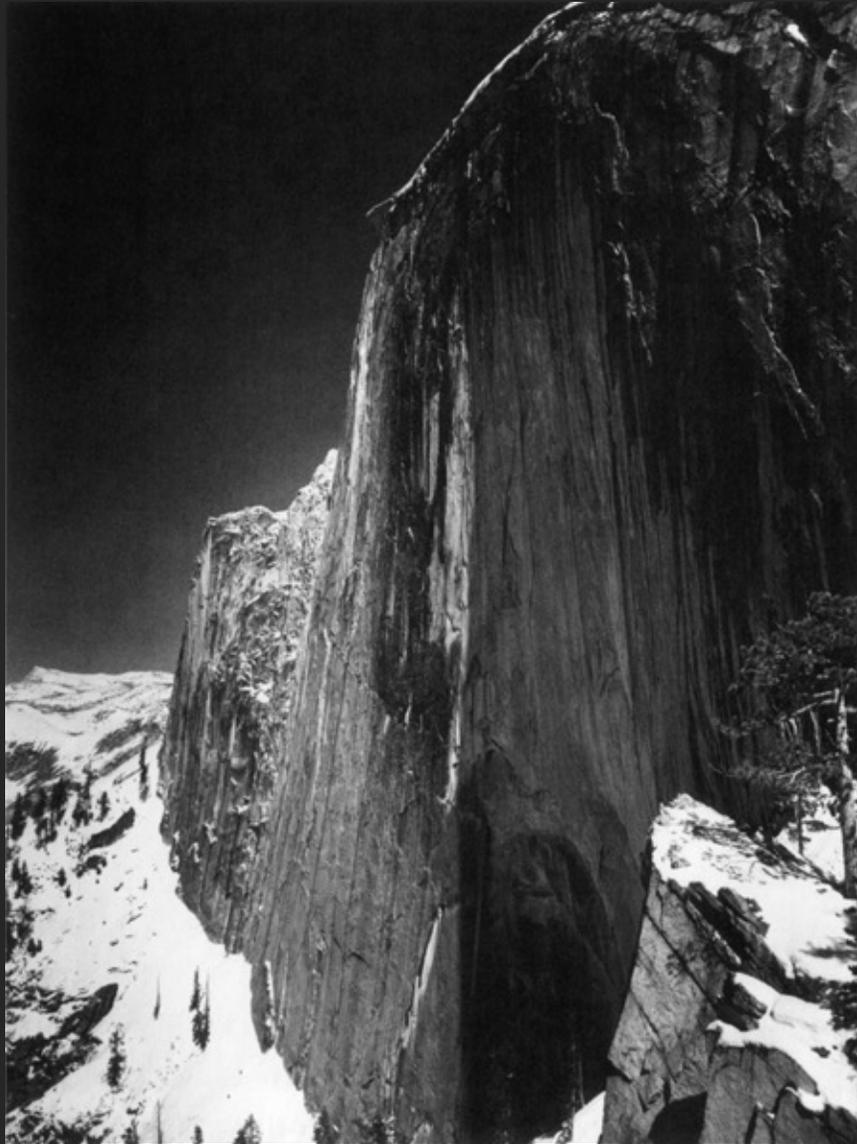
Left: Organic Shapes are irregular, asymmetrical, and often found in nature.



Auguste Rodin  
“The Kiss”, marble,  
1882



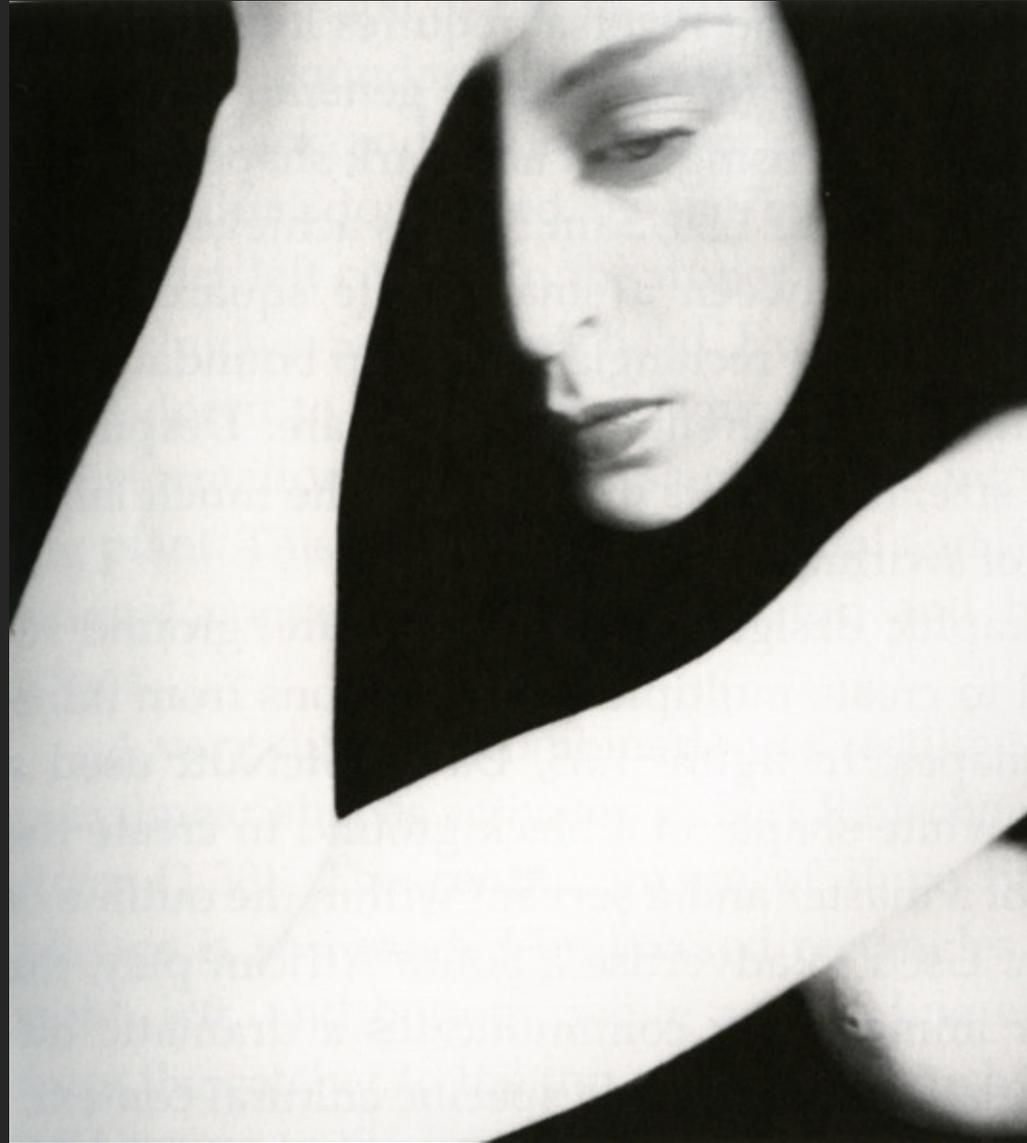
- Classical example of representational shape.



Reality vs. Abstract Representation

## Abstract Representation vs. Nonrepresentational





Positive and Negative Shape

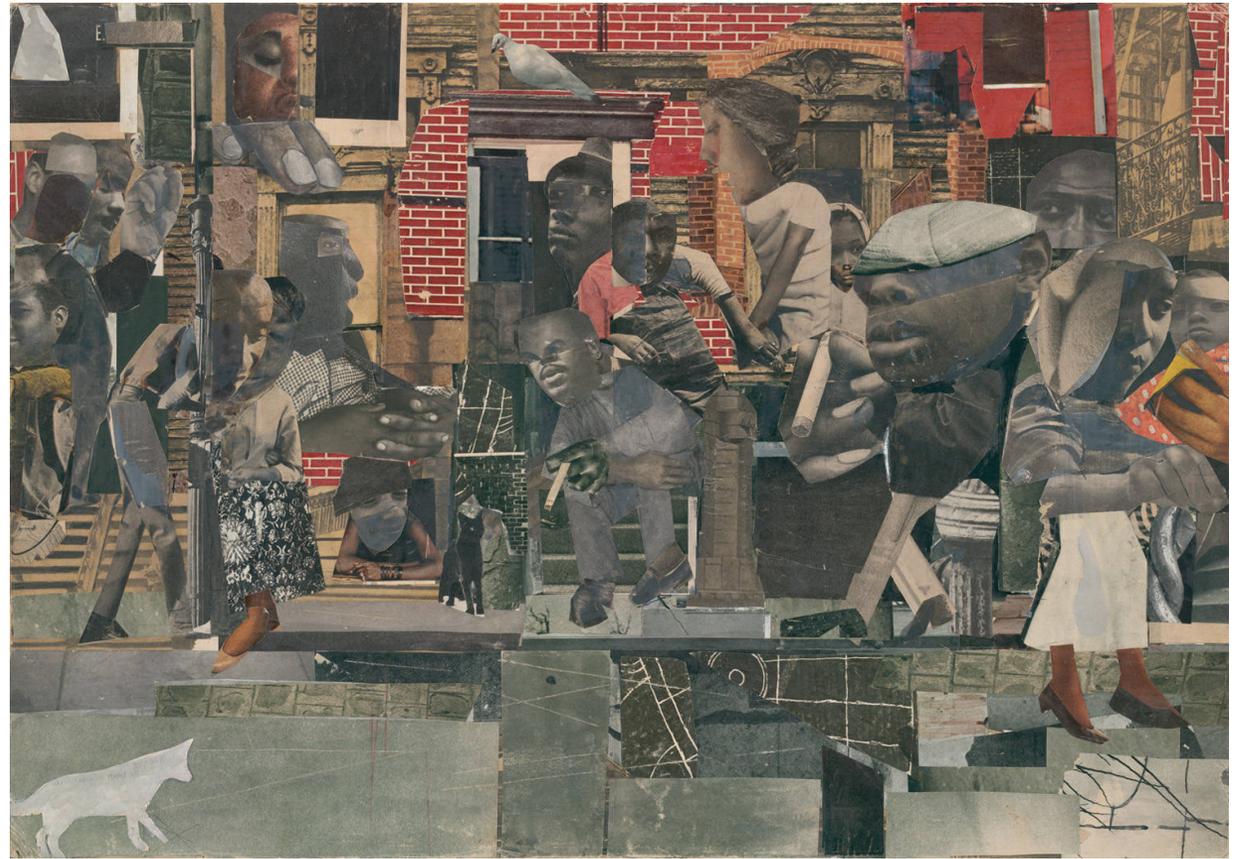


Stuart Davis  
“Rapt at Rappaport’s”,  
oil on canvas, 1951-  
1952



Pieces mimic cut paper shapes similar to Matisse’s later work. Overlapping creates the illusion of depth and space/layers. Contrasting organic, geometric, and linear shapes provide a variety of shapes to explore. Overall use of approximate symmetry).

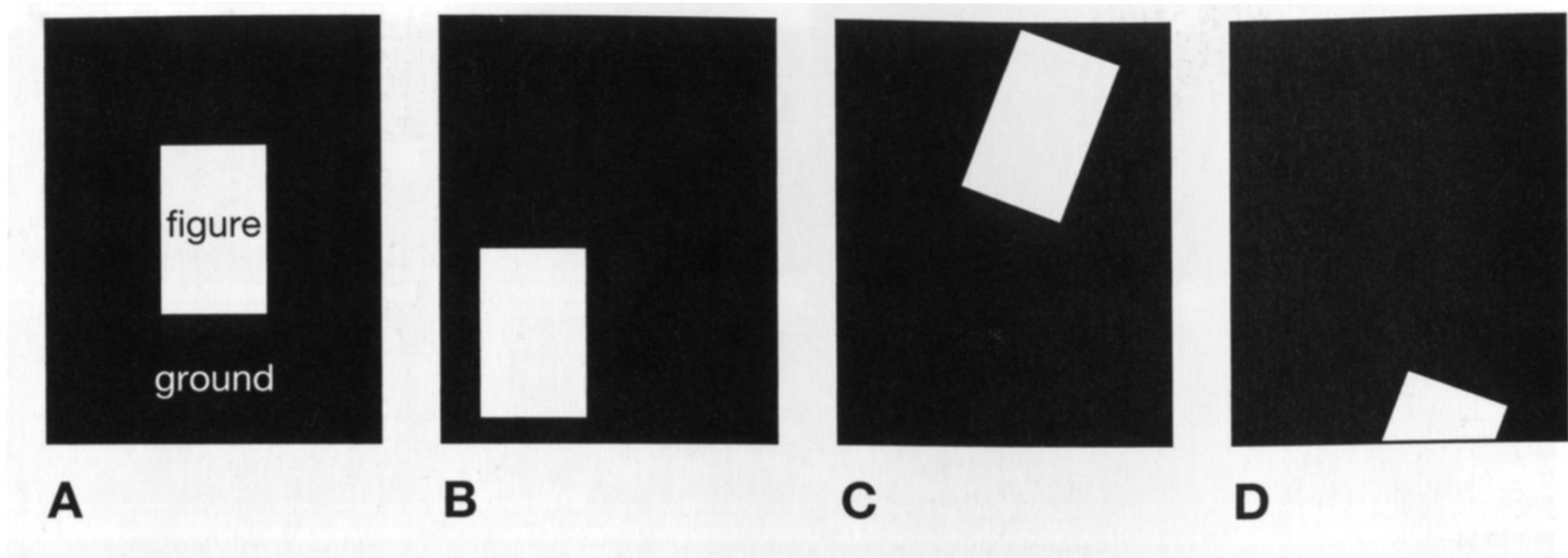




Romare Bearden  
“The Dove” Cut-and-pasted printed  
paper, gouache, pencil, and colored  
pencil on board, 1964

Collaged shapes from existing materials. Plays with scale and proportion by overlapping shapes. Space is flattened and abstracted. Changes in scale & proportion create areas of emphasis

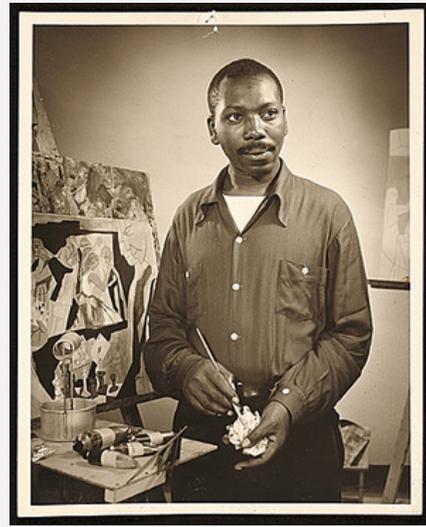




Note the stability of B, the idea of gravity expressed in C, & how in D we still sense that it is a rectangle falling off the page.



Jacob Lawrence  
“The Carpenters”,  
gouache, watercolor  
and pencil on paper,  
1946



Hard, angular shapes, geometric planes make the space flat, and the forms lean more towards abstraction. What Lawrence referred to as dynamic cubism. Asymmetrical balance creates visual weight on one side of the composition. Strong use of implied shapes by using color to break up space. Multiple focal points are being used as well.





Elizabeth Murray  
“Muddy Waters”, Oil  
on Canvas on Wood  
2003 -2004



Representational vs Non-Representational shapes.  
Abstraction occurs within the recognizable elements, but this is not the same as non-representational shapes. Good use of linear shapes, direction and movement





Elizabeth Murray  
“installation view of BOP”

Arrangement is made more complex by using organic and geometric shapes. Positive/negative space is explored through the changing arrangement of shapes. Movement is made possible by using linear marks throughout shapes



Kara Walker  
*Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND  
and LIFELIKE Panoramic Journey into  
Picturesque Southern Slavery or  
“Life at ‘Ol’ Virginny’s Hole’ ,  
Cut Paper, 1997*

Silhouette's become major shapes that help define the narrative content of Walker's work. Shapes exist within vignettes create minor narratives within the larger context of the work.



# Terms to consider

- **Shape**- A flat, enclosed area or 3D volume/form
- **Format**- The first shape we recognize in the composition
- **Positive/Negative** – The “figure”, or recognizable shape, and its surrounding space, aka the “ground”. They share an equal relationship.
- **Figure/Ground Reversal**- When both positive and negative shapes command your attention.
- **Rectilinear**-Shapes made from straight lines and angular corners
- **Curvilinear**-Shapes dominated by flowing, curved edges
- **Geometric** –Precise shapes with mathematical sides and consistent curves.
- **Organic**-Shapes that represent natural forms typically found in nature.
- **Overlapping** can create the illusion of spatial depth.
- **Unity** is achieved by using similar shapes
- **Variety** can be defined as difference and creates a more unique composition
- **Composition**-Combining multiple parts into a cohesive whole
- **Containment**-The unifying force created by the edge of a composition
- **Grouping**-Making order and connections between separate visual elements
- **Repetition**-Using the same visual element over and over
- **Focal Point**- Compositional device used to hold viewer’s attention or to direct focus
- **Balance**-Distribution of weight, physical or visual
- **Asymmetry**-Does not mirror itself on either side of an axis.
- **Symmetrical**-Mirrors itself on either side of an axis
- **Approximate**-Similar imagery appears on either side of an axis
- **Radial**-Centered focal point and mirrors itself horizontally and vertically