

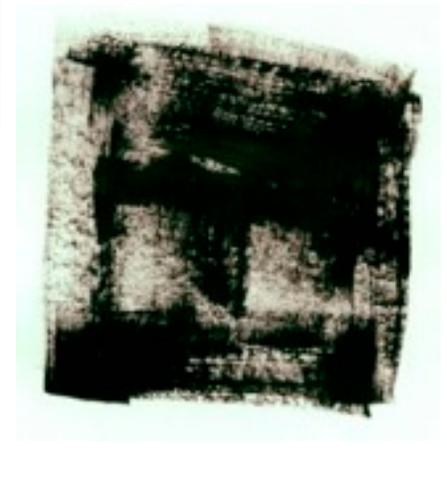
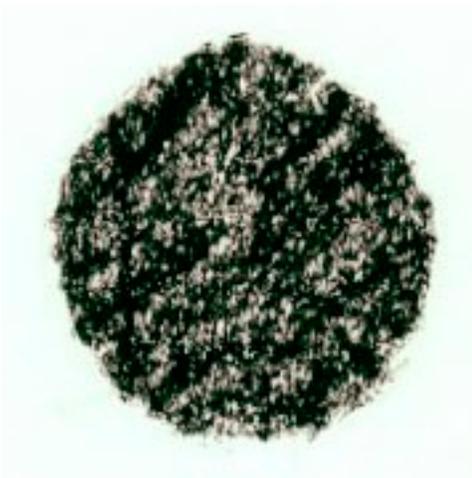
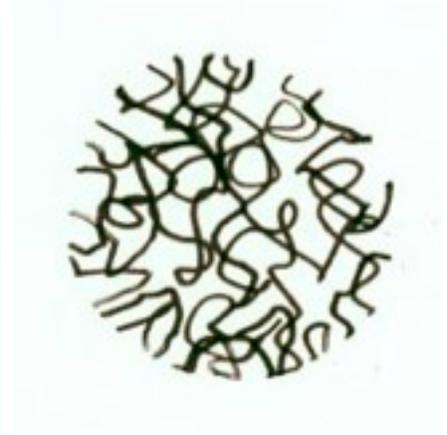
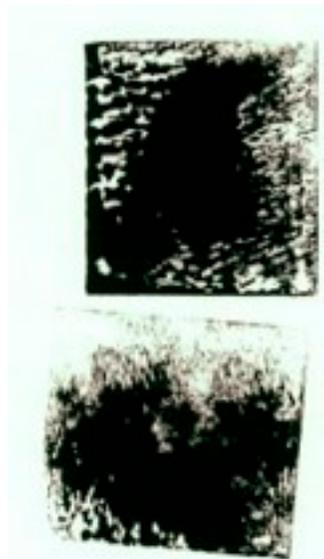
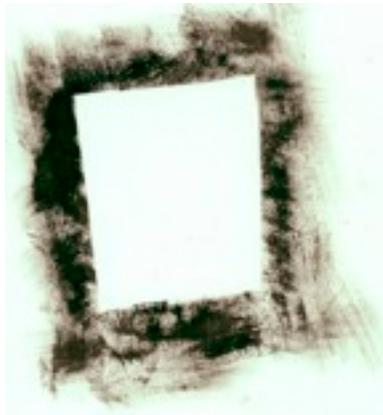
Extreme Composition: Lesson 2

Shape

Lesson 1 was about line; this lesson is about shape. We're going to work with simple shapes - circles and their variations, and squares / rectangles and their variations. I want to focus on the relationships of shapes to one another and to the edges of the piece, so simpler is better. This lesson has three exercises: (1) making shapes with various techniques and materials; (2) making arrangements using one shape and variations; and (3) creating compositions with shape and line.

Explorations

Watch the video and try different techniques for creating simple shapes such as circles, ovals, squares, rectangles, and triangles. Come up with your own techniques in addition to the ones shown in the video. Believe me, you will find lots once you get started.



Arrangements

Now that you've got a wide vocabulary for creating shapes, we'll do some exploration of arrangement. "Arrangement of elements" is, after all, part of what constitutes composition.

Shape and Variations

Limit your palette to black, white, and gray for the studies. Choose one shape type.

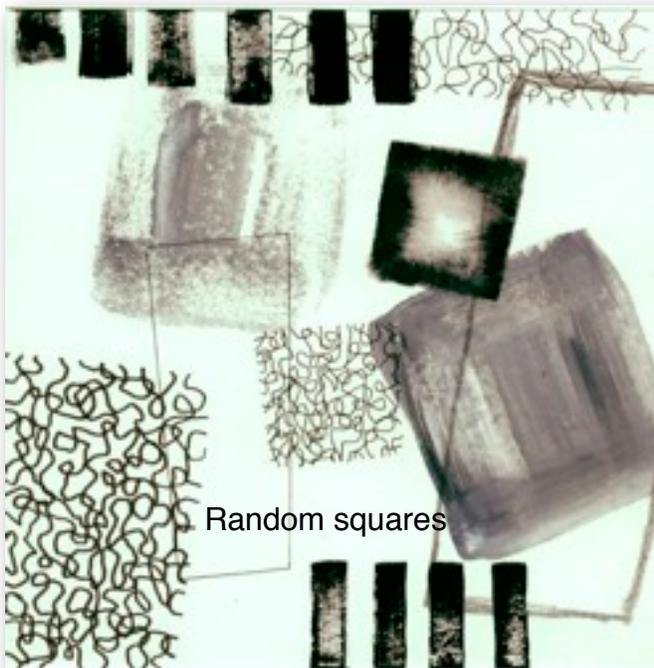
1. Use variations on the shape, using the techniques illustrated above and demonstrated in the video. Use any other techniques as well to get maximum variation in the quality of your chosen shape.
2. Experiment with various *arrangements* of the shapes with respect to each other and with respect to the edges of the page.

Suggested arrangements with respect to each other:

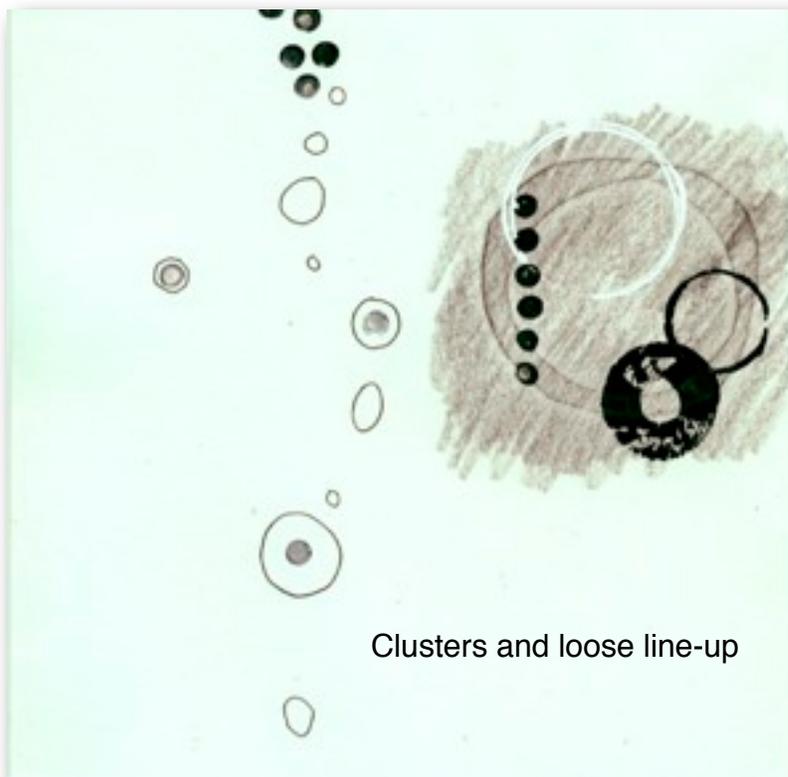
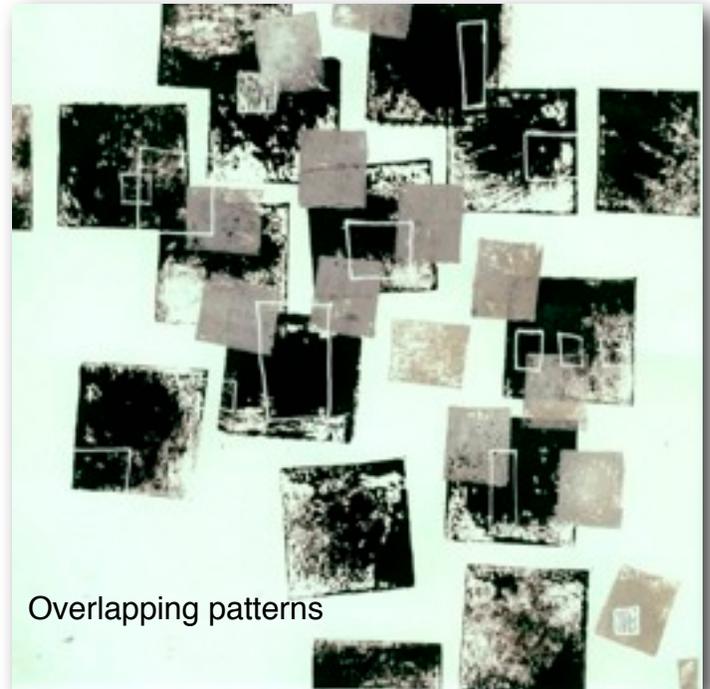
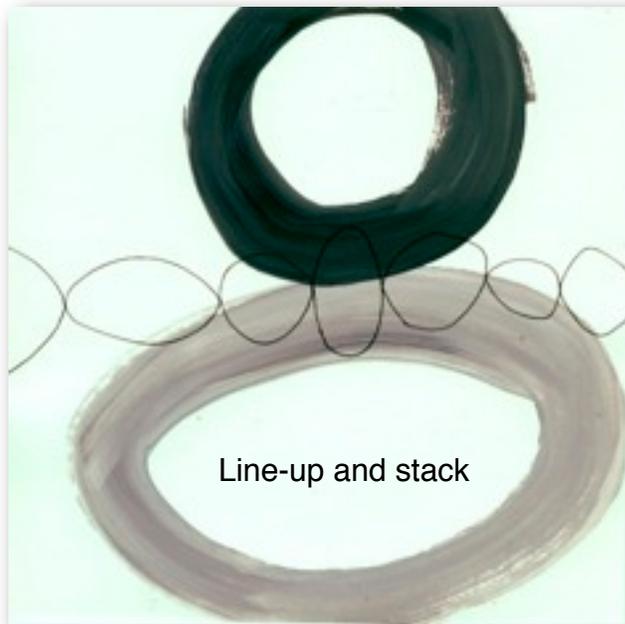
- Stacks
- Clusters
- floating
- pattern, or repeated shape
- grid
- line-up



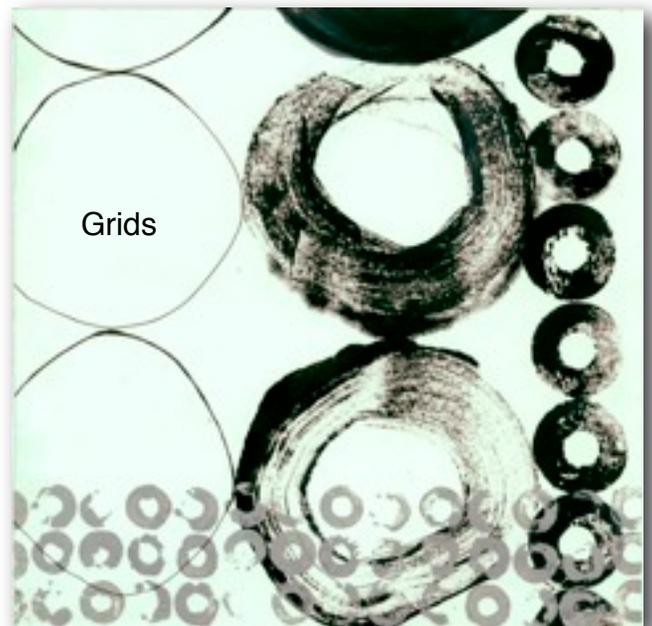
Pay attention to how the shapes interact with the edges of the page. They can:



- Touch it
- overlap it
- sit away from it
- hover near it



These are my explorations, choosing one shape type and making various arrangements.



Compositions

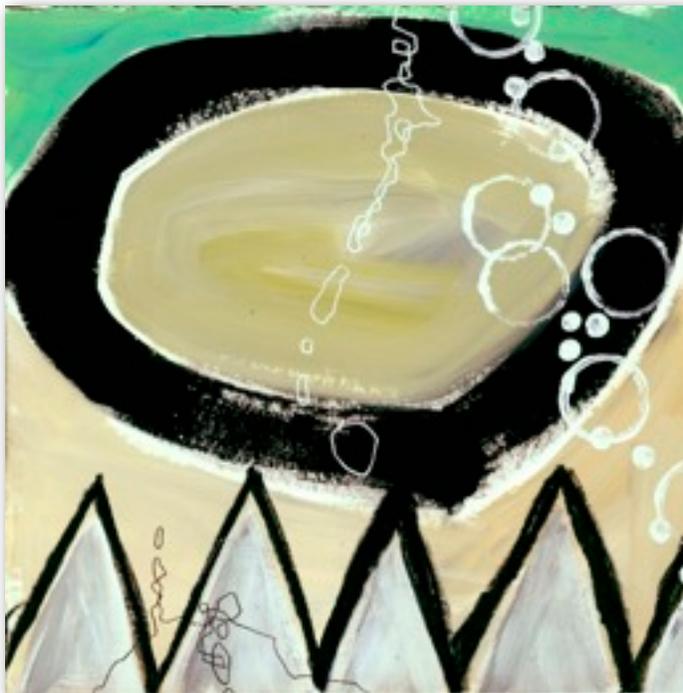
Two Shapes and a Line

I had in mind giving you an exercise with more restrictions, but when I tried out various ideas, the restrictions seemed restrictive.

A “shape type” is like shape-and-variations: squares and rectangles is one type; circles and ovals; triangles of different proportions; etc. You may try a more complex shape for this exercise if you like: a simple leaf shape, a star, even a heart (though be careful not to get overly sweet and sentimental with it - use it as an abstract shape).

Make a group of compositions each using one or two shape types, with as many or as few shapes as you like in whatever materials and techniques you like. Then add line to each composition. Again, any material you like. I say “group” rather than “series” because these can be each quite different from each other. You can use different shapes for each one, or the same. Your choice. Here are my examples:

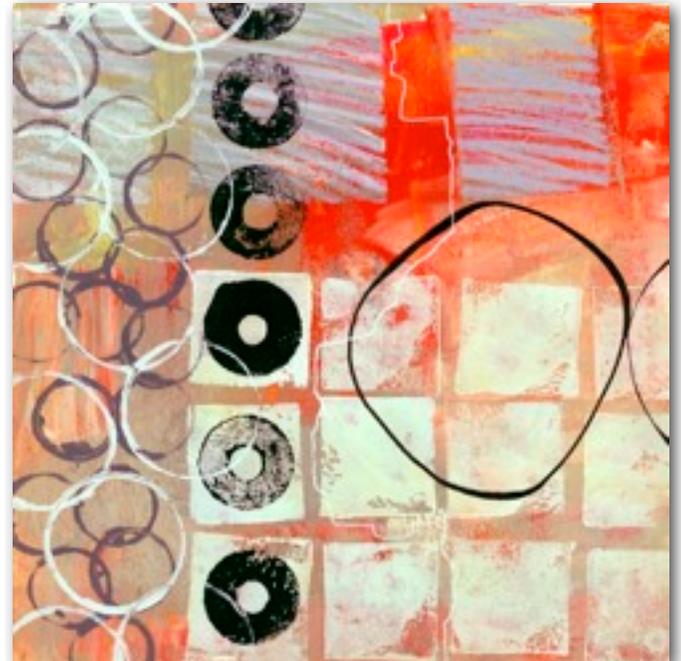
Right: I used squares/rectangles and circles/ovals. I used paint and collage for the red rectangles; paint and crayon for the green and gray squares; collage and stamping for the black and white circles; and cut paper for the black line.



Left: I used circles and triangles. Paint, crayon (around the triangles), stamped white circles, and pens for the line.



Rectangles in paint and collage; circle (donut) in paint; lines in graphite, crayon, and pen.



Circles and squares: white squares are stamped, grey ones scribbled with crayon through stencils; circles are stamped (washer and paint bottle) and drawn with pen; white line with gel pen.



Triangles in black paint, collage, masked and scribbled with graphite, and felt pen; squares stamped with mat board stamp; line in fine pen.



This is the piece I did in a video demonstration. I had not done it specifically for this lesson, but it fits the criteria: squares and circles plus line. Paint, crayon, collage, pen, white gel pen.

If you would like more direction, a place to start, consider the following:

- Try some *minimal* compositions, ones that are very spare in which that ground takes up most of the space, and the shapes and lines only a minimal amount of space.
- Try *overkill* compositions, with as much complexity and variety as possible. Overwork them intentionally.
- Layer linear shapes over solid shapes.
- Look at “suggested arrangements” on page 2. Create one arrangement with one shape, another arrangement with a different shape.
- Try *huge* shapes with tiny shapes, nothing in between.

Reflect on Composition

Look at each of my examples and ask yourself:

Does it look balanced or off-balance; symmetrical or asymmetrical?

Does it seem to be finished, or is it inconclusive?

Does your eye move in a pleasing way, or are there abrupt stops and starts?

Does your eye focus on one particular area?

Are they fun to look at? Or boring?

When making these pieces, I started from the standpoint of the exercise: choose a vocabulary to begin with, and play around with it. See what happens. I was not thinking balance, focal point, etc. Some pieces look balanced to me, some look a little scattered. I don't see real “focal points” in most of them, but I don't feel the lack of focus

either. Some look finished to me, others look like maybe I could continue working on them. These are observations, not evaluations.

So, here is the “breaking all the rules” part: a piece can have no focal area, yet be successful on other grounds. It can look out of balance, and that can work. This is subjective, and I can only give my opinion in terms of what pieces I consider successful. Here are a couple of examples:

- My piece in the upper right of page 5 looks off balance to me, and a little scattered. However, to my eye, that creates a tension that compels me to look at it more. It *does something* for me.
- The piece on page 6 doesn't focus my eye anywhere in particular, but it does move my eye around, and its rhythm (repetition of elements) and depth compels me to look further.

I'll leave the rest to you. Make your pieces, then ask yourself the same questions. Try to answer them with observations, not judgements. Have fun!