

Figure & Ground

Art & Design

Which shape the eye takes as the subject, and how to control that choice.

Perception sorts a field into a figure that has shape and a ground that runs behind it. The negative shape is always doing work, whether or not it was designed.

READS AS FIGURE

smaller, enclosed

FLIPS

one reading at a time

- Smaller, enclosed, convex areas read as figure.
- The ground appears to continue behind the figure.
- Ambiguous fields flip between the two readings.
- Rubin's vase, 1915, is the standard demonstration.
- Only one reading is available at any moment.
- In a mark, the counter-shape is a design decision.

LOOK FOR IT

The white arrow inside the FedEx wordmark is ground that has been given a shape on purpose.

Design the negative shapes deliberately. Left to chance they are still there, and they still carry half the reading.