

Notan

Art & Design

The two- or three-value pattern under a picture, judged before any detail.

A Japanese term for the arrangement of light and dark masses. A notan study flattens a design to two or three values, showing whether the shapes work at all.

VALUES
two or three

THUMBNAIL
about 5 cm

- Two values: everything is either light or dark.
- Thumbnails of about 5 cm are large enough.
- Good notan reads from across the room.
- Detail cannot rescue a weak value pattern.
- Notan judges masses; the value scale judges modelling.
- Squinting is the fastest way to see it.

LOOK FOR IT

Three thumbnails first: dark subject on light, light on dark, and an even split between them.

Notan is about the shape of the masses, not their brightness. A well-shaped dark can be any dark you like.