

The Figure Ground Plan

Architecture

The drawing that shows a city as solid and void, and what it makes visible.

A figure ground plan fills every building solid black and leaves all open space white, so the pattern of mass and space can be read without any other information.

NOLLI MAP OF ROME
1748

DRAW AT
1:2000 to 1:5000

- Giambattista Nolli mapped Rome this way in 1748.
- Nolli left public interiors white, as part of the space.
- Traditional cities read as solid with carved voids.
- Modernist plans read as objects in open space.
- Neither is automatically better; they behave differently.
- Draw it at 1:2000 or 1:5000 for a district.

LOOK FOR IT

Compare Rome with Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin for Paris: solid with carved voids against objects on a lawn.

The figure ground hides use, height and quality. It answers one question well and says nothing about the rest.