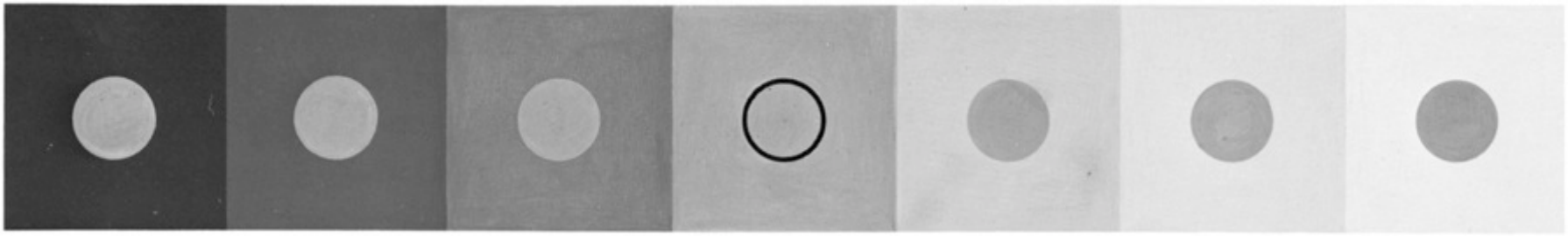
Introduction to Value

Light and Dark

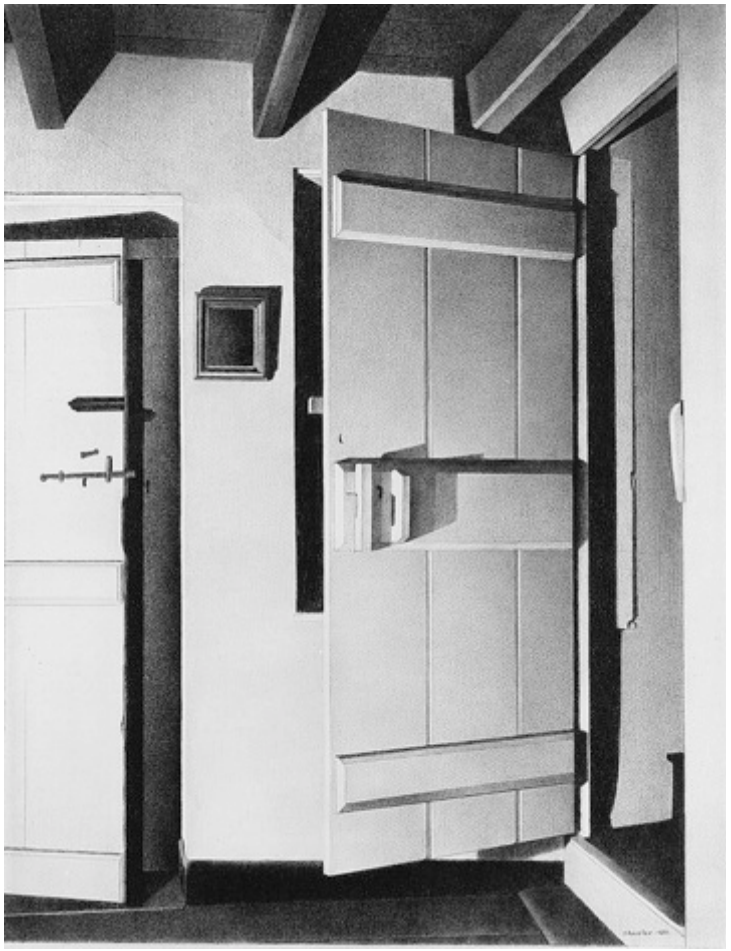
- ***Value*** is the artistic term for light and dark.
- It is only because of changes between light and dark that can we see things.
- Light reveals form.
- ***Achromatic Grays*** – grays that contain no color, just black and white
- ***Value Range*** - The lightest and darkest areas of value in a particular work. A full range of values extends from white through infinite steps or gradations of grays, all the way to black.



A value scale of gray. The center circles are identical in value.

The Relationship Between Light and Dark Areas.

- ***Value Contrast*** – The relationship between different areas of dark and light.
- The average human can see 40 different variation in value. (shades of gray)
- The term low-value can be used to talk about the contrast between any two areas next to each other that are little.



Charles Sheeler. The Open Door. 1932. Conté crayon on paper, mounted on cardboard, 1’ 11 3/4” x 1’ 6” (60.7 x 46.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edith and Milton Lowenthal Collection, bequest of Edith Abrahamson Lowenthal, 1991 (1992.24.7).

← Low Contrast Image

- Slight variation between values
- Subtle and Soft appearance

← High Contrast Image

- Large variation between values
- Juxtaposition of bright whites and dark blacks
- Dramatic appearance

High Key or Low Key

- To create work that is subtle (and often calming) you can use colors that have values that are very close to each other.
- ***High Key*** – when a work of art's range of values are all LIGHT colors
- ***Low Key*** – when a work of art's range of values are all DARK colors

Giovanni Paolo Pannini. Scalinata della Trinità dei Monti. c. 1756-1758. Pen and black ink, brush and gray wash, watercolor, over graphite, 1' 1 11/16" x 11 9/16" (34.8 x 29.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1971 (1971.63.1).

↑High Key

- when a work of art's range of values are all LIGHT colors
- Overall Lightness
- Non-threatening, meditative, airy

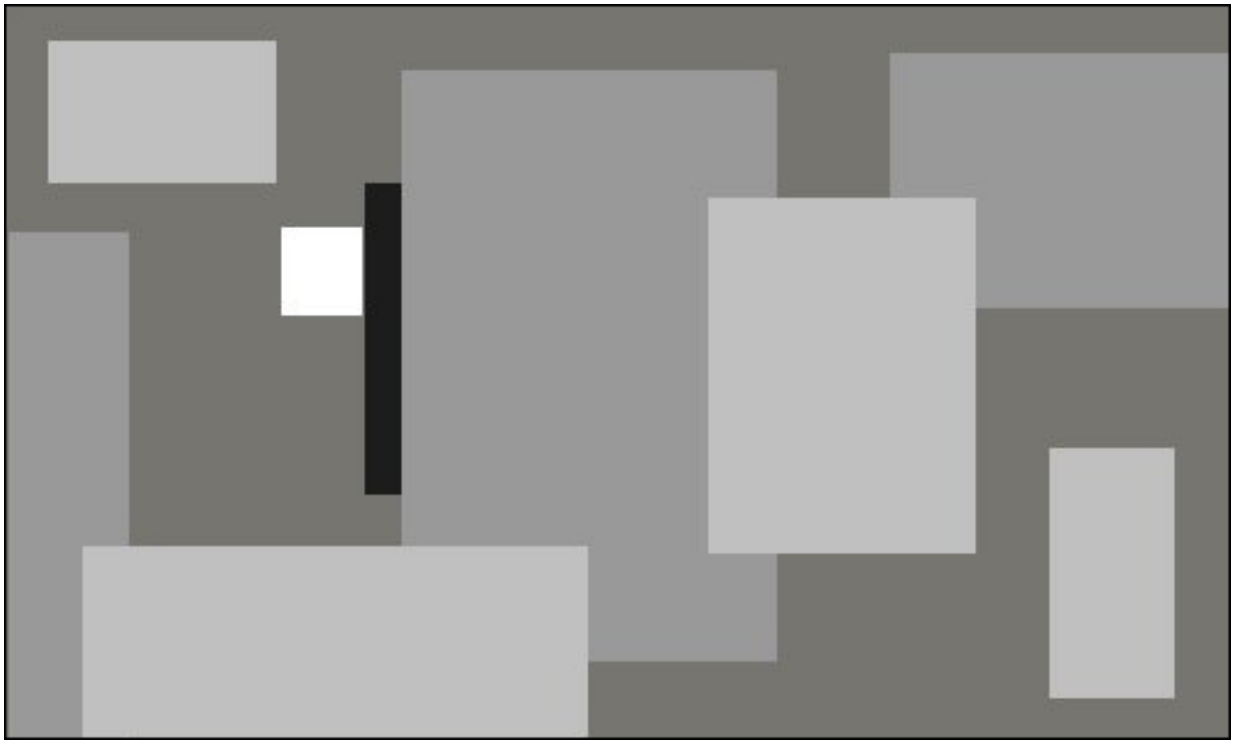
↑Low Key

- when a work of art's range of values are all DARK colors
- Overall Darkness
- Mysterious, dramatic, aggressive, etc.

Value as Emphasis

Creating a Focal Point

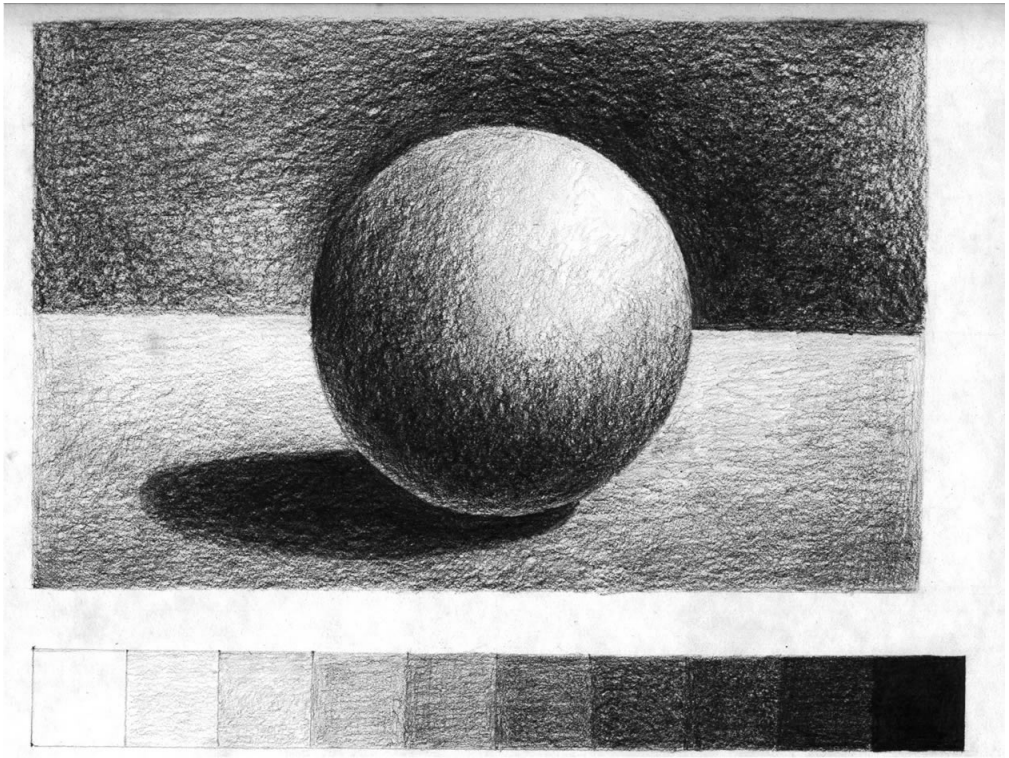
- ***Value Emphasis*** - Use of a high contrast between values can draw the viewer's attention.
- You can create a focal point.
- Or you can emphasize a character or feature.



Value and Space

- Value can be used to create volume and space by using gradations of light and dark.

Chiaroscuro – from the Italian words, "light" and "dark" it refers to a piece that uses light and dark to imply depth and volume. (Often there is a big change between the light and dark areas.)



Value and Atmospheric Perspective

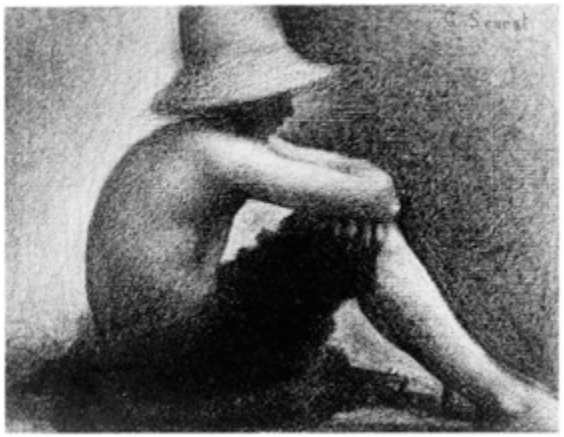
Value is good for creating the illusion of depth or space.

- High Value contrasts seem to come forward.
- Low Value contrasts seem to move away.

Aerial or atmospheric perspective - our eyes see things further away as being grayer (and sometimes bluish) and less distinct.

Caspar David Friedrich. The Wanderer Above the Sea of Mist. c. 1817-1818. Oil on canvas, 2' 4 3/8" x 2' 5 3/8" (94.8 x 74.8 cm). Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

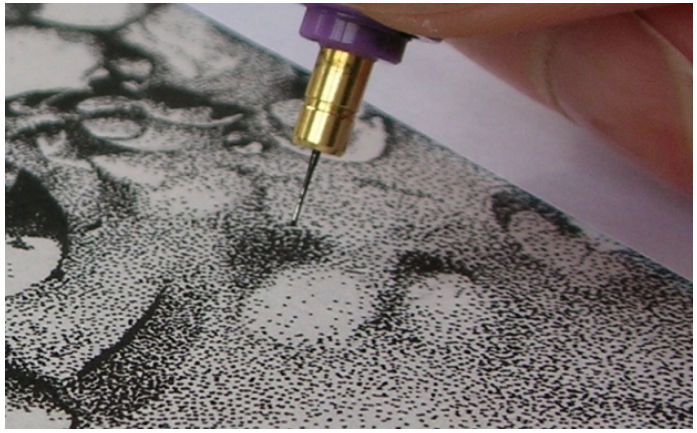
Some Ways to Create Value



Shading (pencil, charcoal)

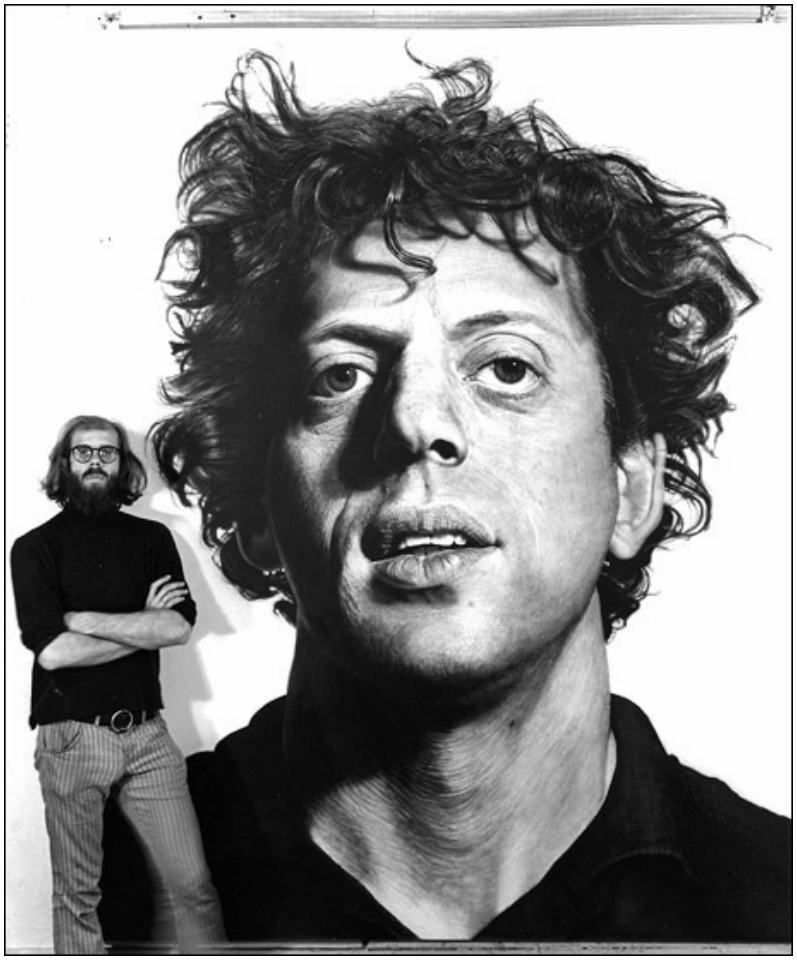
Cross Hatching
(pen, pencil, charcoal)

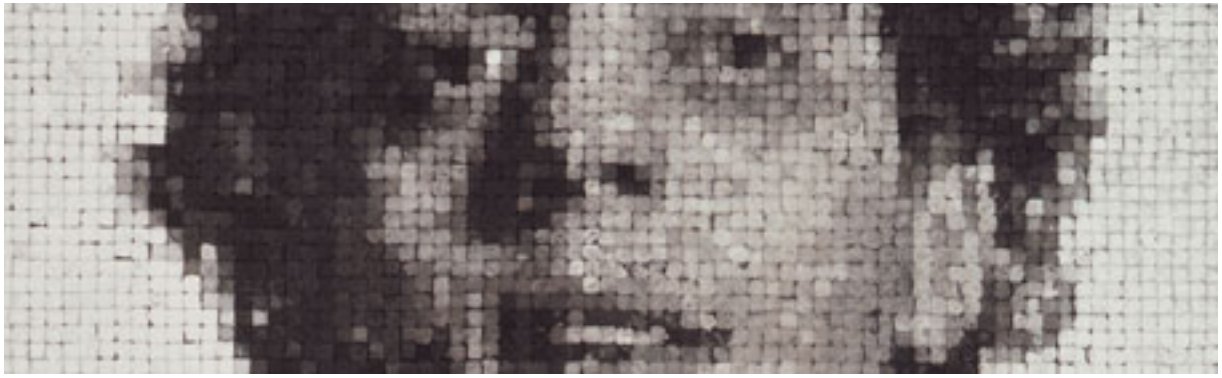
Pixels (computer,
newspaper and magazines)

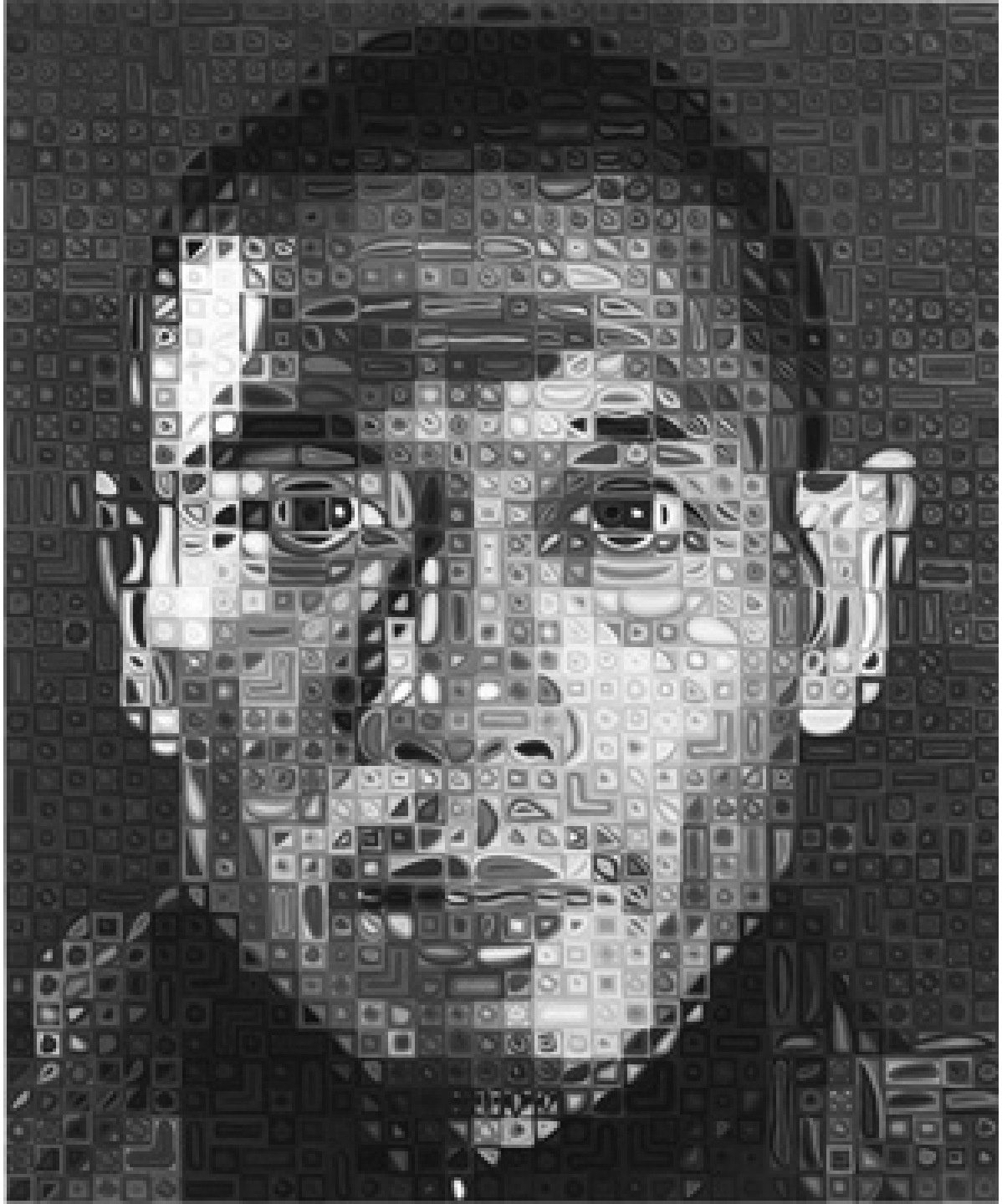


Stippling (pen/ink, pencil)

Washes (paint, ink)







Detail

Student Examples

Student Example 4