



THE SEA IN NEGATIVE

Discover the power of negative drawing and be amazed by
a new way of seeing light and shadow!

Welcome!

Water is an essential element in human life and has been the protagonist of many artworks: from cave paintings, where it symbolizes fertility, to Renaissance painting where it becomes a symbol of purity and protection through the rite of baptism, to contemporary works where water is associated with individual emotions. The sea has always fascinated humans with its vastness: it can be calm, rough, rippled, foamy, stormy, full of overwhelming waves.

The sea evokes personal memories, joyful or sad, scents and reflections. Many artists have depicted the sea in their own style.

Light, like water, is precious and indispensable like air, capable of many “magical” effects. The absence of light can evoke fear; a gloomy day can bring sadness, while strong light can lift the mood. Changing the lighting also changes the perception and meaning of the object or scene. In artworks, light can increase drama or make a painting more delicate. What if we reversed the perception of light and shadow? The illuminated parts would become dark, and the shadowed parts light: creating a “negative” effect.

materials

To carry out the activity proposed in this sheet, you will need black cardboard, a red pencil, and a white pencil.



Artist Hans Op de Beeck says:

“I create parallel worlds using fiction as a tool to talk about reality.”

Let's begin

Negative drawing is a technique that reverses our traditional approach to drawing. Instead of starting with shadows and dark details, it invites us to focus on light and let the darkness of the black paper frame what we want to highlight.

Drawing in negative means using the black sheet as the "void" from which forms emerge through the use of a white pencil.

Instead of adding dark shadows to define contours, light defines the shape, with shadows appearing later.

This approach emphasizes the importance of emptiness, **which magically gives life and structure to the composition.**

The concept connects to the philosophy of creating with emptiness, where emptiness is not absence but a creative space.



This technique is a great exercise to train visual perception, stimulating our ability to recognize and enhance contrasts between light and shadow, and to see things not just as defined objects but as interactions between space, light, and absence. Contours are no longer drawn with sharp lines but emerge from the combination of light and void, creating a softer effect with a surprisingly vivid result!



Now it's your turn

Be inspired by the artwork *In Silent Conversation with Correggio – Nocturnal Sea* by Hans Op de Beeck, which recalls the negative drawing technique. The nocturnal sea, wrapped in deep shadows, takes shape thanks to light, which, as in negative drawing, becomes the only element capable of revealing forms and giving life to the composition. Scan the QR code to view the artwork in high resolution.



Hans Op de Beeck,
In Silent Conversation with Correggio – Nocturnal Sea
2009



For Hans Op de Beeck, the past is the future of our predecessors: history is an endless repetition of destruction and construction, war and peace, light and shadow. The artist says: "Making art is a constructive act: it heals those who create it and, consequently, those who observe it."

Now it's your turn

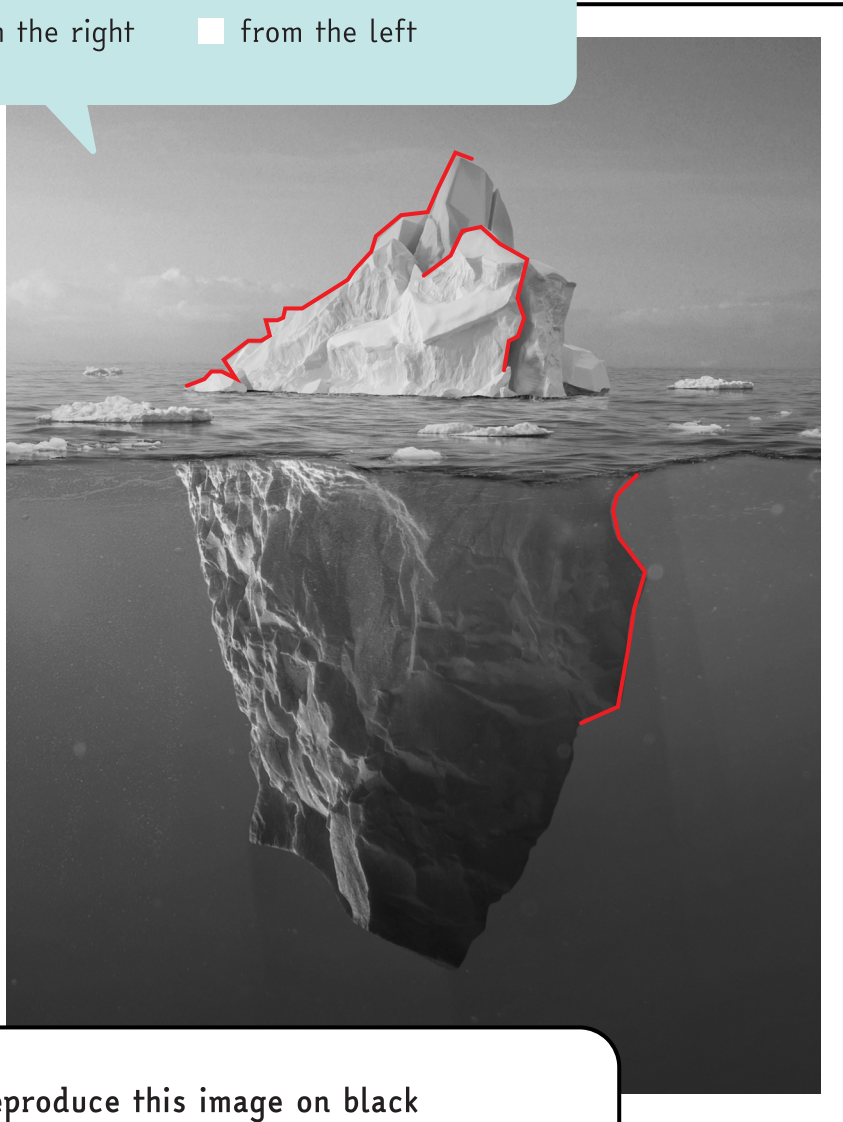
What to do?

To help you create your negative artwork, observe these two images of marine environments: the ones on the left show original colors, the others are in black and white. This change allows you to focus not only on the use of shadows and light but also on the sensations evoked by the absence of color. Now look at the last image and try to reproduce it in negative on the black cardboard!



Observe the light: where does it come from?

☐ from the right ☐ from the left



Try to reproduce this image on black cardboard: start by lightly tracing the iceberg's contours, first on the photo with the red pencil and then on the black cardboard with the white pencil. The more contours you trace, the more precise your artwork will be!

Observe the light and answer the question: based on the direction of the light, you can identify the brightest and darkest areas.

To reproduce the bright ones, go over the traced areas several times with the white pencil; for the darker ones, leave them lighter and more shaded.



About the artist

► **Hans Op de Beeck** is a Belgian artist born in 1969. His work spans painting, sculpture, large immersive installations, art films, and photography. He studies humans as tragicomic actors. In his works, he “loves to evoke, not simulate,” representing human figures, objects, and environments that seem real: everything is gray, anonymous, without light and color. This separation between the earth from which humans come and the virtual world visible through a computer screen leads the artist to reflect on the relationship between reality and representation, between what humans see and what they want to believe they see, in the lack of identity caused by mass conformity.

The artist aims to lead the viewer to reflect on contemporary society and existence by creating a form of visual fiction that offers a sensory moment of wonder and silence. His works are exhibited in the world’s most important museums.