WetCanvas!

Basic 102: Class 7 - Negative Drawing with Mike Sibley

Hi everyone, and thanks to Jay and Judi for inviting me to present this workshop. It didn't take me long (nano-seconds!) to find a topic, as this one has probably had the greatest affect on my own work – Negative Drawing.

I've set this out in three stages:
1. An introduction to Negative drawing and its cousin, Negative Space.
2. A demonstration of the basics and varieties.
3. A demonstration involving all the varieties of Negative Drawing, which I encourage you to have a go at yourself.

The tools you will require are simple:
- Paper – preferably plate finish or at least smooth
- Pencils – 6B, 2B, HB, H, and 2H (I use 2mm clutch pencils but any will do)

And these will help but aren't essential:
- Kneaded eraser or Blu-Tack (preferably the latter)
- Tortillon

Those of you who have my book 'Drawing from Line to Life' will recognise some of the following, but there's plenty of new content too – so read on!

Drawing involves planning, and planning includes the identification of differing areas of texture, importance, and contrast. Rarely do we have the painter's luxury of working directly on our canvas. We don't possess a wide brush to quickly transfer an image from the mind into a visible form. Nor can we remove our medium and start again from fresh. A painter can scrape the paint from the canvas, but the graphite artist is well advised to take a more controlled approach. Removing graphite from paper inevitably removes paper fibres, and flattens the surface texture, which results in less tooth for succeeding applications of graphite to adhere to. The same principle applies to the application of graphite within a work in progress - if the graphite being applied is not a constituent of that area's tone or texture, *don't apply it*! Do not 'test out ideas' or experiment on your final drawing surface. Preserve the pristine surface of your paper at all cost, until you are absolutely certain that the marks you are making are the true and required marks. An erased area will never match the brilliance of an untouched one.

NEGATIVE DRAWING
I often hear the phrases 'negative drawing' and 'negative space' used as if they are synonymous. They aren't. Negative space is employed as a brain-fooling method of seeing shapes with clarity. Negative Drawing is a conscious method of working that isolates and protects areas of your paper. These areas can be entire elements that are often completed later; smaller areas where the intention is to leave them as virgin highlights or white shapes against a darker background; or minute areas that, for example, form white hairs between their cast shadows.

To further dispel confusion, Negative Drawing does not involve any form of erasing. Applying graphite and cutting into it with an eraser could be described as 'drawing in negative', but it is the exact opposite of true Negative Drawing, which primarily exists to

isolate and protect virgin areas of paper. Think of it as defining the boundaries of a shape using only the tone that surrounds it. In other words, you aren' t drawing the object but simply giving the illusion of the object by drawing around it.

Negative drawing can be used in two distinct ways - controlled and spontaneous. In a controlled scenario, a background area may be carefully and accurately drawn around a mid or foreground element in order to establish its existence - to create it as a white silhouette. Spontaneous drawing, however, involves the instinctive and speedy drawing of shadows to expose and display the white areas between them - with no outlining or prior planning. In other words, drawing the negative spaces to define the positive shapes. Confused? Don' t worry, all will become clear....

NEGATIVE SPACE
Negative Drawing involves the use of Negative Space. To be more exact, it involves the conscious creation of negative space; therefore an understanding of the use of Negative Space is essential. So let' s study that first.

The brain is highly focussed - too focussed for our purposes. It would seem by all accounts to store memory in the form of images, and these images, or symbols, are the mainstay of the brain's defence mechanism. About half of our brain is devoted to vision and continual attempts to interpret what we see - we guess on the clues available to us – and those guesses might be vital to our survival.

Images then are of supreme importance to the brain, and matching to stored, standard symbols offers a very speedy classification system. However, as artists, this facility works against us, because our brains automatically overlay the images we see with a range of symbols. This effectively disables the ability to produce realistic drawing because the information gathered is so basic – and often inaccurate if the brain's 'guess' was incorrect.

Fortunately, there are many ways of fooling the brain into letting go of the desire to match symbols, to classify, during the act of drawing. For example, working faster than you can think serves to disable the argumentative side of your brain, which struggles to keep up and then loses interest.

To learn to see what is *really* there and not what you *think* is there, you need to take your brain's automatic reaction out of the equation. Believe me, learning to see correctly really is a hard lesson to learn but the best way involves fooling your brain into not recognising the troublesome features. Fortunately, we have *Negative Space* as a supreme tool.
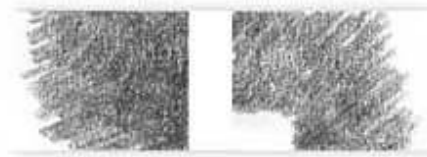
Using negative space
This exercise will not only help your mind to concentrate on the spaces between lines it will also help to confound your brain – your logical mind that attempts to identify everything it sees. You're going to give it a really tough time because instead of drawing an object itself, you'll be drawing the empty space around it. Take two strips of paper; say an inch by three inches (2.5 x 7.5cm). Now shade the right hand end of one strip right up to the edges…

Now do the same to the left hand end of the other strip and, without drawing any lines, leave an oblong clear in the bottom corner.

Now take a clean sheet of paper and lay your two strips end to end with a gap between them.

What you have drawn is the capital letter 'L'. That the letter exists is entirely due to negative space. The white of the letter is pristine, not a result of the removal of graphite.

Practice drawing articles you know. Try to picture each on the page and then shade around it. Don't draw lines around them first - if you do, you'll just be shading around a positive shape, not shading the negative space to cause the positive image to appear. Since these abstract shapes share a continuous border with the object, when you draw the negative shape, you'll be drawing the positive outline too.

You can employ the drawing of negative space almost anywhere at any time. All you need to do is switch your mind from positive to negative drawing. You'll soon learn to understand that negative space is as important as positive shape. One cannot exist without the other - they share equal standing. As that is true it doesn't matter which you draw. However, drawing the negative spaces will make you really look at what you are drawing. You can't guess their shape or draw what you think is there because they have no recognisable outlines. Use this technique whenever you are having problems with drawing something the way it really looks. You'll almost always end up with a more accurate drawing.

The use of negative space offers many advantages. Not only will it assist you in determining the true shapes of elements within your drawing it will also make white available to you as a usable colour. As with watercolour painting, the only white we have

as graphite artists is the paper itself.   I will guard this white at any cost. There will be times that you may have to erase lines or features to create 'white' details but they will never have the clarity and brilliance of an untouched area. Learning to draw the space around those areas is a lesson well worth the effort of learning. It forms the basis of Negative Drawing, which, once it becomes second nature to you, will allow you to switch effortlessly between positive drawing (drawing the object) and negative drawing (drawing around the object).

NEGATIVE DRAWING - explained
Where Negative Space involved the art of drawing the areas around an object to define the object itself, Negative Drawing involves the deliberate creation of your own negative space.

So, what exactly is 'negative' drawing? What do you see when you look at the picture below? Do you see an ancient black drinking cup? Maybe an ebony candlestick holder? Or do you see two white faces both looking at each other? Imagine yourself 'seeing' these two faces on a white sheet of paper and then filling in the space between them so the faces are revealed. *That is Negative Drawing!*
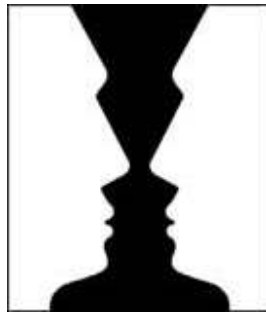
A 'negative' image is one that is entirely created by the area surrounding it - I prefer to call it 'white space'. The uses of negative drawing extend from creating bright highlights that describe the curvature of a dark object, or white shapes defined by their shadows, to the isolation of key elements that can be better drawn at a later stage. You can't draw white with a graphite pencil so, just like a watercolour painter, you have to draw around it to define its shape.

The utilisation of negative drawing involves a conscious decision - it's a method, not an intrinsic element of art. The white space may, for example, be of greater or lesser importance than the black areas. If the drawing is of the drinking cup then the cup is a positive image - no negative drawing is involved - just draw the cup. If the drawing is of the two faces then the 'cup' is the result of the decision to employ negative drawing and exists only to define them. Teaching yourself to see white on white and drawing around it is one of the best lessons you will ever learn.

Other Negative Drawing and Negative Space resources:
http://www2.arts.ubc.ca/TheatreDesign/crslib/drw04/negsp.htm
http://www.dueysdrawings.com/negative_drawing.html
http://drawsketch.about.com/od/learntodraw/ss/negativespace.htm
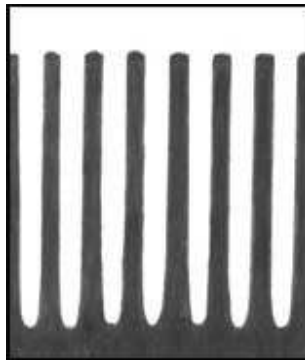http://www.SibleyFineArt.com/tutorial--draw-grass.htm

NEGATIVE DRAWING - the basics…

If we draw three lines (below) how many lines have we created? The answer is five – three black and two white.

Let's make that more obvious. I'll extend and join the black lines, increase their number and join the white lines too.

Which is dominant or positive? Are we using negative drawing? Right now we can't say. They share equal importance, as neither has yet been defined as an object. So let's do that - we'll zoom out until one or the other becomes a defined shape.

Now it becomes obvious that the subject is the white comb. It existed only in my mind until I enclosed it by defining the dark negative space.

It's not easy to begin thinking this way. However, with practice, negative drawing becomes second nature and, more importantly, you learn to switch your mind between negative and positive drawing at will, and even to blend the two together. Negative Drawing, if you' re

drawing spontaneously, involves ' seeing' a white shape on white paper and shading around it. The same is true if it' s planned beforehand, but then you' ll have guidelines to assist you.

Why use this method?
Negative drawing offers important advantages that no other system can fully compete with.

• It can divide a task into simple, manageable elements. No erasing is involved. Your whites remain pristine, and your paper's tooth is preserved for really crisp results.

• It permits you, when drawing spontaneously, to quickly create white objects on the paper by simply drawing the shadows between them - hair and grass, for example. You can do this without any thought being given to form or spatial relationships, as a final layer of tone applied over the area supplies the tonal shaping - either locally (a single blade of foreground grass) or globally (the overall lighting that' s affecting the area).

• It permits you to split your drawing up into elements that you fully understand and those that you don' t. By drawing around the unknown elements first, you often gain a better understanding of them. You can literally draw around potential problems and return to them later.

• It permits you to split your drawing up into areas of texture. If, for example, you' re drawing the wooden side of a barn, it' s easier to concentrate on, and complete, that texture by simply working around anything that overlaps it.

• It permits you to split your drawing up into areas of differing importance to afford much greater control over tonal relationships. For example, you can establish the background before the foreground to give much greater control over the visual separation of the two. You can draw into the created white silhouette *after* you have established the tones surrounding it, so when you begin to draw the enclosed element you can control the tones you use to make it stand out - or not, if that is your aim. You can see below that I drew around the rope because I needed to control the way it stood out from the background.


Drawing the rope first would dictate the tones available for both the dog and the background, which is not at all what we want. In this case the rope passes in front of both

the dog' s white leg and the dark groud. By drawing both first, I now know exactly how to make that rope stand out - and how to make it blend into the ground at its lower end.

Negative drawing, as you have seen, will allow you to concentrate on one aspect at a time. Using my way of working from dark to light, you establish the very darkest tones first. Now you know your darkest tone and your lightest (the white of your paper). The black is then extended and diluted as required to form the mid-tones, and drawn around the highlights, features and problem areas. When the black or dark areas are completed, all your lighter tones will just be flat white spaces. Now, with the full understanding of the tones surrounding them, you can begin to draw within the spaces to give them the tonal values and shaping that they require. This is much easier to practice than explain!

TYPES OF NEGATIVE DRAWING… Pre-planned
The art of negative drawing covers many variations and complexities. The simplest method involves pre-planned objects that already have guidelines around them, as you just saw with the dog. You can choose to treat these elements as 'unknowns'- drawing around areas that present a problem or features that you can only properly complete at a later stage. In both cases they result from the need for additional information that is not presently available. I used this method with the roots and brambles that disappear into the shadows in my study of 'Overlooked!' I first drew the blacks then completed the dark localised background, leaving each root as a white shape. Then I drew the roots from light to dark.
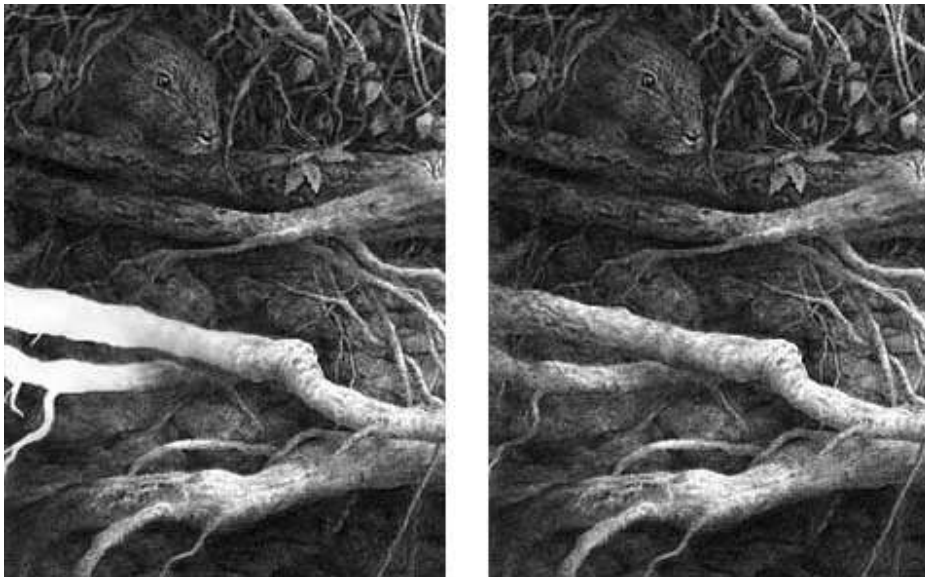
By doing it this way, you will have already established your lightest and darkest tones, so you just need to draw from one into the other. In this case I had three potential problems. I needed to maintain a sharp division between the roots and the background, I didn't know how dense to make the shadows, and I was uncertain as to how the highlights should degrade as they approach the shadowed area. Leaving them as just white space and completing the dark surroundings first, meant I could return to the roots knowing exactly the tones required to make them stand out from the rocks or merge with the shadows.

TYPES OF NEGATIVE DRAWING… Spontaneous
Now things begin to get a little more complex. So far I've mentioned *positive* drawing (the cup in the "faces/cup" illustration) and *negative* drawing. The two can be combined in one area, one feature, or even one line. In this method a drawn line may be positive at one end and negative at the other.

We're going to draw grass, and make use of two of its visual properties: the bases of tapering blades are hidden by the blades in front of them, and less light filters down into the densely packed bases so the blades appear progressively lighter with height.

Imagine that there are only two marks that we can make: one upward and one down. I'm using the upward stroke to positively draw the stalks that spring up from the base of a clump of grass - it actually represents a blade of grass:

The downward stroke tapers off and defines the tops of the stalks in the clump below the one I'm drawing - it draws in negative, as it forms the shadow, the negative space, between two blades. It's also true that the same two operations may be achieved at either end of the *same* line. Don't worry it gets easier!

I've added more blades (the original blades are arrowed), and already a suggestion of white blades is beginning to appear below. There is no pre-planning involved at all here. All the drawing is completely spontaneous and drawn quickly - too quickly for the conscious mind to interfere.
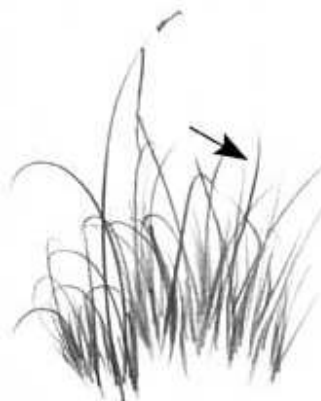
Taken a stage further you can now clearly see the upward strokes forming grass blades at the top and the down-strokes beginning to define lighter blades below. A little extra work, mainly with down-strokes, further refines the lower layer of grass.

Now the process begins again lower down. This new drawing area creates two further 'layers' of grass - just as the previous one did - a positively drawn rear layer with a negatively drawn white layer in front of it. Here positive strokes at the base are drawn up into the previously-created white shapes above and begin to create new ones below, defining a new foreground layer, which we'll leave undeveloped here.

Finally, a degree of localised negative drawing in the central section blends the two together, and a small amount of tone has been added to give body and form to the negatively drawn grass.

COMBINATION DRAWING – combining the two…
Now things might appear to be getting even more complex. But, no - this is simply a combination of the two previous methods and actually makes your life simpler. I'm all for simple! However complex a job may appear to be, it's always possible to break it down into manageable elements or processes.

Here, in this small 2" x 3" (5 x 8cm) drawing, I've mapped out the main stalks; lightly drawing a line either side to delineate the space that constitutes the stalk and leaf. Remember that you are defining white space so be aware that it is the inside edge of your pencil line that counts - you are drawing that line around a white shape.

Having planned and defined the main stalks (I call them 'status' stalks - they're food for the brain) I'll switch to a more spontaneous style of working to map out the less distinct grass on the rear-most plane. I rarely outline anything in these areas but create stalks merely by drawing the negative space. Here is where you let your imagination go free, working at a

pace that prevents conscious intervention. You will find yourself introducing stalks here and there that may even surprise you with their placement. Don't try to be too accurate - inaccuracies lend an extra realism in this case. And don't touch those 'status' stalks – they are 'unknowns'; you cannot properly define their tonal values until you have completed the grass behind them.

As you work on this secondary area between the established white spaces that represent the status stalks of grass, introduce random shapes and lines. As long as these vaguely follow the rules of natural grass and foliage, they will serve to fool the brain into seeing more detail than exists. In life you couldn't distinguish every element in such an arrangement (especially in areas of deep shadow) so you shouldn't be able to do so here either.

Now picture, really picture, yourself looking into that area and begin to add reality to the situation; toning some stalks down a little and others so much that they are barely discernible. If you can see the reality in your mind you will achieve a sense of reality in your drawing. If you're not sure how to treat something, leave it white then go back to it once it's

surrounded - as I have done here with the foreground. It's going to be water and I can't draw the reflections until I know exactly what reflections are required.

Finally, the status stalks are given body, adjusting the tone of those behind them if required. The foreground grass is drawn, just as I described earlier, and the water and reflections established.

IN CONCLUSION…
Negative drawing offers the means to tackle complicated tasks in manageable stages and, within the white space, presents the opportunity to draw perfectly and completely, without alteration or experimentation. Getting it right the first time will always give a sharply defined finish that all other methods muddy. It's a liberating and controllable way of working and scores above all other methods in the drawing of complex negative shapes. This is particularly true when the 'positive' areas are miniscule – such as the light hairs of this

Lynx-point Siamese cat that exist only because of the negative spaces drawn between them…


PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION

So far much of this workshop has been drawn from my Studio Tips pages at www.SibleyFineArt.com and from two chapters of my book Drawing From Line to Life. But from here on we're entering fresh territory -- the Demonstration. I strongly suggest you follow and repeat this in your own style, as nothing teaches like experience. I'll guide you along the way, and relate my own reasons for decisions made and techniques employed. By all means follow my example, but if you have developed a style of your own, translate it into your way of working to gain the greatest benefit.

1: The guidelines and strategy
After a few changes – goodbye Bird, goodbye Butterfly, hello Bindweed! – I've arrived at a composition that will demonstrate all the varieties of Negative Drawing - planned, spontaneous, and work division.

Here we have a background of Sycamore-like leaves (which I see as being dark and shaded); a central support provided by the rusty iron axle from an old chicken house; and the Bindweed, with a visiting Hoverfly. The original shown here measures 4" x 8" (10 x 20 cm). Although I usually draw on a plate finish, my paper is 300 series Strathmore Bristol smooth, but these Negative Drawing methods will work on any surface. All guidelines are drawn with a flat-faced 2B to ensure complete removal if required.
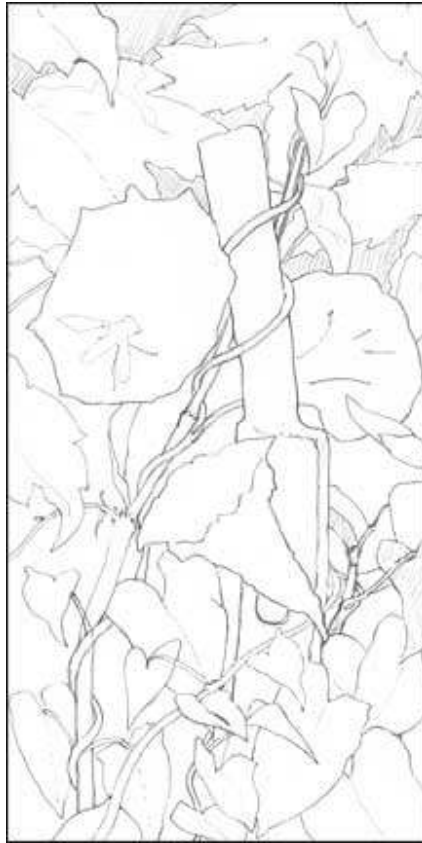
It's complex and difficult to understand this fully, so let's begin to simplify it. Imagine it as being on three planes or layers.

Layer 1, the rear-most, contains the dark leaves with even darker shadows between them. Only the main elements are planned, as I'll be spontaneously adding others between them as I work – drawing not leaves but the *impression* of them – taking and using key shapes from the planned leaves.

Layer 2 is the iron, and Bindweed stems and foliage, with at least one leaf from the background intruding into this layer to connect the two.

Layer 3 contains the Bindweed's flowers and the Hoverfly. These are the main elements – the subject of our drawing.

And I'm going to tackle them in that order. I want the Bindweed's flowers to shine out from the drawing, which demands a dark background. But, without that background being established first, I have nothing against which I can judge the tones required for the flowers. So I'll leave them pristine white until I know for certain what is required.

2: Establishing the blacks

I know where I want the deepest shadows to appear and establishing them now sets up my entire breadth of available tones – the blacks of the shadows and the white of the paper. All other tones must fall between these two extremes. The light, incidentally, is shining from the left, just below the top left corner, which is something that I have to take into account at all times.
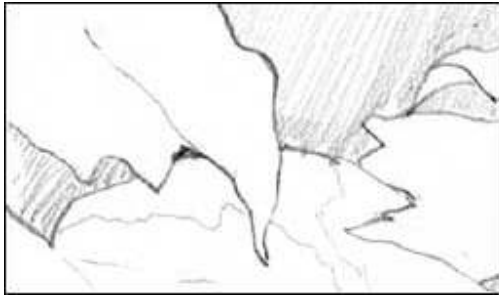
Here, in the top left corner, a certain amount of redrawing is going on as I work each area. I'm only using the guidelines to loosely fix placements. But notice too that Negative Drawing is already in use - in the centre, white amorphous shapes are being left clear of graphite. These are not planned but are left as they occur. Later they will be toned down to varying degrees to suggest detail where no detail exists; and to relieve an otherwise dull, flat area of tone.

3: In-progress Negative Drawing
I feel it's necessary to move onto drawing one of the leaves – to get a feel for the drawing of this element. I have not used this 300 series Strathmore Bristol smooth paper before and I'm finding its textured surface annoying, as I detest any sign of surface texture appearing in my drawings.

Immediately, one strategy suggested itself for the drawing of the ribs – spontaneous negative drawing. The ribs cannot be drawn first, as their tonal values are unknown; and drawing them first would dictate the tones used for the leaf. I want the reverse to be true – the leaf is more important than its ribs. So here the flat face of an HB chisel point is being used to shape the leaf and draw around the ribs - the position of each one being imagined as the work progresses.
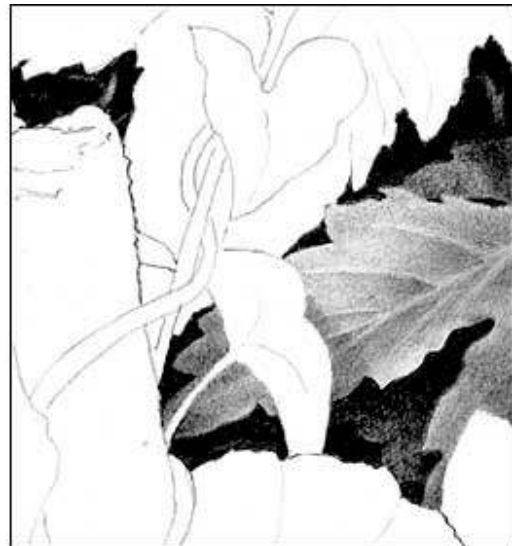

Following the HB, I burnished with 2H (to remove some of that annoying paper texture!), and layered a little F to tone down the whole leaf. The layers extended over the ribs to tone them down too, and to provide shaping. A layer of HB finally dulled and completed the area, as I want the 'sense' of the ribs to be apparent but don't want them to be overtly visible. The same strategy will be used for all the Sycamore leaves.

Negative Drawing encompasses the use for tiny detail right through to the division of work into blocks. Here the leaves themselves form the blocks – allowing me to concentrate solely on a single texture, and to keep the three-dimensional shaping in my mind as I work, although that is an ever-evolving process. More random, amorphous shapes have been introduced (bottom left), earlier ones toned down, and stem-like structures suggest a plane behind the one I'm completing.

Before I move further down, I'll complete that last top leaf, and show it in steps. Step 1 (below) is where I'm working out the general structure in my mind; laying light tones, positioning the ribs, and forming the three-dimensional shape. I never work these things out beforehand but just go with flow. The spontaneity seems to produce vitality, and maintains a natural balance to the composition. By Step 2 I've refined the shaping and have begun to hide the top corner in shade. By using negative drawing to split my drawing up, I'm afforded much more control over each element. Localised negative drawing still forms the ribs, which will be completed as soon as I've finalised the tonal value of the leaf. Step 3 sees the completion. Now I can correctly tone those ribs, which in this case I want to merely suggest – with a little more prominence given to the left-hand ribs that point the eye to the Hoverfly, as does the highlight near the tip of the leaf.
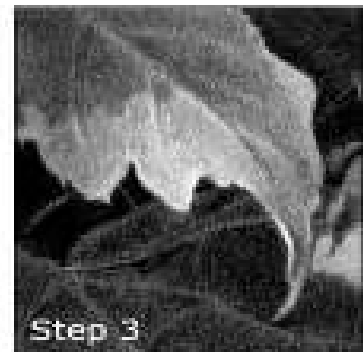
4: Watch that line!

Whenever you outline something to define it as a white pace, remember that your pencil line possesses a width. You are enclosing a white space that is, or will become, a positive element of your drawing. It's a 'white silhouette', so butt the inside edge of your pencil point up to the boundary. If you stray into the white space you will merely define it as being smaller than it should be.

5: Backtracking…

Remember the earlier 'Reeds and water' example of inventing negatively drawn elements 'behind' the main elements?   I'm doing the same here. The real advantage is that everything is drawn, or outlined, as though they were on a single plane. Each invented to fulfil a natural balance – to fill or break up an otherwise dull area – or to point the eye in a certain direction. Later these can be individually pushed and pulled onto separate planes – some quite distinct, and others barely discernable – whatever is required to heighten the reality, and add a little natural mystery. Nature does not display everything with absolute clarity, so between the stalks and vines, more amorphous shapes, which have already been toned down, serve to fool the brain into seeing depth and detail that is not actually there.

The front plane is still left untouched and, when the time arrives to begin work on it, the background is easily adjusted if required. Blu-Tack or a kneaded eraser can be used to soften and lighten; and additional layers may be added to darken where shadows may have been omitted, or just to push the foreground forward.

6: Mapping…

Occasionally I map out an area before tone is applied (step 1). This doesn't negate the use of negative drawing; it just controls it to some extent. These are simply guidelines – in this case showing me where the natural ribs of this leaf will occur. I chose this method in this instance because, unlike the other Bindweed leaves that require only a suggestion of ribs, this is the reverse side of the leaf, which presents the true ribs themselves. First (step 2), the shadows of the ribs are drawn with 2B, and then the basic shaping of the body begins, with grade H in this case.
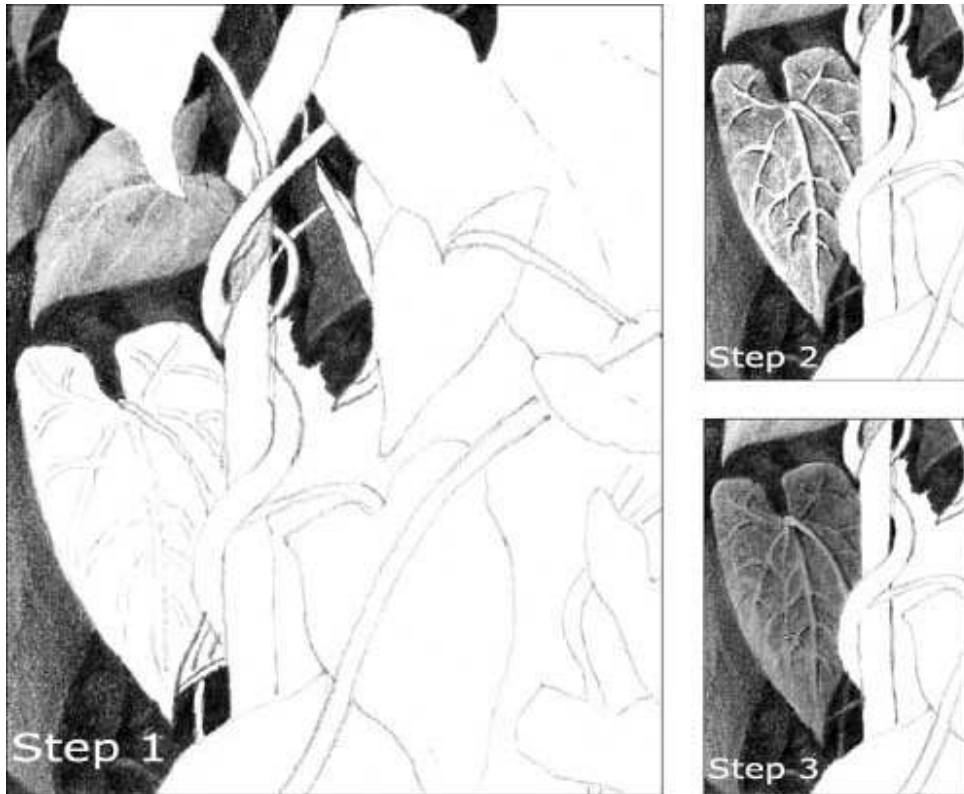
The ribs' shadows have been reduced with Blu-Tack (step 3), the leaf toned to give it shaping, the stalk completed, and then an overall blending layer of HB added unity by toning the ribs to blend them into the overall scheme. Fine-tuning was finally carried out with an H grade lead. This strategy gives ultimate control over the final appearance. Here I decided to play down the ribs – obvious enough to suggest the back of a leaf, but not so intrusive that they catch the eye.

7: Making adjustments…

Let's recap and take, as an example, the previous leaf. You can see that the body was shaped while disregarding the ribs. Then an overall layer unified the various elements into a whole – this time including the ribs. Hatching, cross-hatching, and circulism were all used

for that layer. We have both the shaping and detail established, so at any future time additional tone layers can be added to push any element further into the shadows, without disturbing the overall appearance that resides in the lower layers. This is very handy; because at this point I'm fairly certain that some elements are too light. But I prefer to work that way – it's easier to darken than lighten if the detail is to be preserved. This is where I've reached so far – all of the background elements established, and one or two of the mid-plane elements too:

8: The midground plane…
I'm going to tackle the rusty iron next, and I have a wide choice of available tones. I can draw it dark and thick with rust, or lighter with surface pitting and even vestiges of paint. My initial decision is to go for something between the two, as I want it to be visually separated from the background, but dark enough to finally push the Bindweed forward. Instead of beginning with the main axle, I'm going to chicken out and draw the connecting bolt first and then the right-hand stub. I can work out what is required in these areas without errors significantly affecting the whole. Later I can carry through what I've learned to the main axle.

Rust is characterised by surface pits, and these pits display both internal shadows and edge highlights. Negative drawing really simplifies the drawing of this texture, as it allows the pencil to explore the surface – picture those pits in your mind and ignore midtones and highlights. I'll return later to this texture when I begin drawing the axle. The pits will be deeper, and the lighting more direct, so I can more easily explain the technique. The following illustrations are twice their actual size. **Step 1**: 2B shadows. **Step 2**: H layering, leaving highlights. **Step 3**: F and HB layering to darken entire element. The layering is carried out with the flat face of a chisel point so, no matter how hard the pressure is applied, all preceding layers will remain unaffected and just darkened. Also, as shown here (step 4, about actual size), the layers can be extended to cover and darken surrounding areas while preserving the edges, details, and relative contrasts of the various elements.
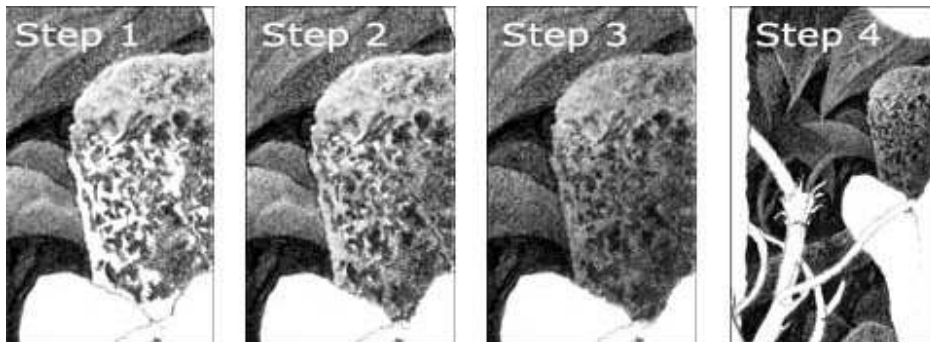
In the meantime, don't take what I'm writing here as carved in stone – establishing the shadows first will allow you fully explore the area, but add additional layers as and when you feel they are appropriate.
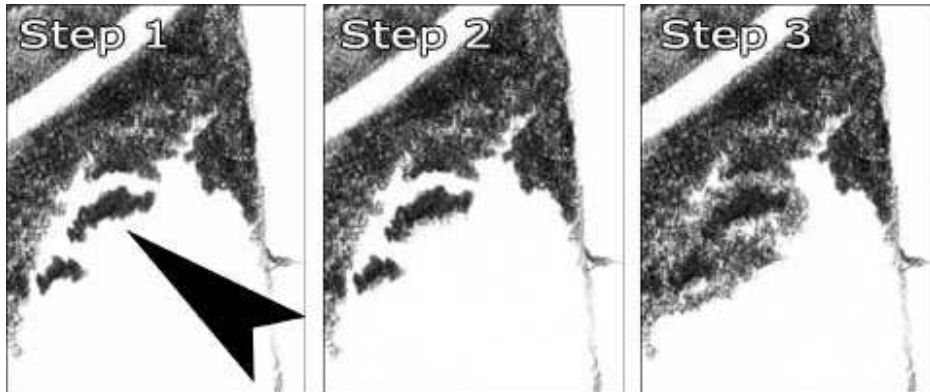
9: Rust and Negative Drawing…
Negative drawing is very useful for drawing rust pits. Consider that every pit contains three elements:
Step 1: An internal shadow cast by the lip nearest the light source. As you invent the shape, keep asking yourself "can this point see the light" – if it can, the shadow you are about to draw cannot exist.

Step 2: An internal shaded neutral area – the flat base of the pit. I just decrease the pressure on the 2B point I'm using to blur the bottom edge of the cast shadow.

Step 3: A highlight where the sharp edge of the bottom rim of the pit catches the light. Simply draw around it and leave it as a negative shape. Later, when you know the correct value required, you can return and dull the highlight.

10: Highlights and Negative Drawing…

Using that strategy gives you full control over the strength of the highlight, and the same is true of highlights in general. I wish I had a better example for you… but I got carried away with drawing and completed all but one of stem of the vine. The following is twice the actual size.
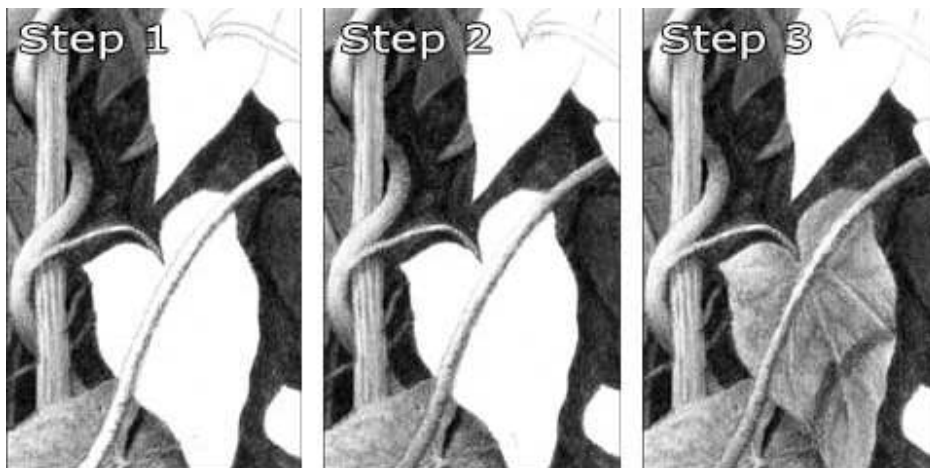
Here (I hope!) you can see that the core shadow has been established first (step 1), using 2B and circulism to achieve a broken appearance. Then (step 2) the secondary shading has been applied, with grade H, to begin to shape the round form. The key highlight (the area of the curve directly facing the light source) has been identified. Finally (step 3), the remaining tone has been applied with grade 2H, omitting the key highlight area. In this case I decided to draw the leaf to exhibit the intensity of the highlight before applying final adjustments, such as muting the lower end to stop it leading the eye out of the composition. The same scheme was applied to the cast shadow across the leaf – the lower end is deliberately vague so the sharper higher end attracts the eye and leads it up into the drawing.

11: Completing the principal elements…

Well, that's completed all but one leaf, three flowers, a bud and the Hoverfly. By now I think you know all I do about negative drawing, so take a break and sit back while I complete it…

I may help you to know that the technique used for the flowers, in the very light areas, was to draw slightly darker than required, then Blu-Tack was used to gradually fade each area until the subtlety of tone I wanted was achieved. The areas were also lightly blended with a tortillon – which was then used to draw the ribs in the flower heads. The graphite on the tip toned the ribs along their length then, as the graphite was gradually depleted, the line naturally faded out. The interior of the flowers has more subtle shading than is apparent here - it doesn't scan well - so I slightly enhanced the tone that was captured.

Negative Drawing is a method well worth adding to your armoury. In complex drawings like this one, I find Negative Drawing to be an absolute blessing. You can break the composition down into smaller and smaller elements, which makes keeping control so much easier. You can concentrate purely on that one section and, in this case, easily work out the cast shadows as you progress. Do have a go yourself, even if it's only a small area or element – nothing teaches like practise and experience - and practise really does aid understanding of any technique.

Size: 4" x 8"
Drawing time: about 35 hours

I thoroughly enjoyed drawing this study (despite my questionable choice of paper!). Many thanks for staying with this… and no excuses for not trying this yourself – you can download everything you require. :o)

"Hoverfly on Bindweed"

Photo and outline downloading

If you wish to have a go at this composition, or even just a part of it, you can download all that you require from here:

www.SibleyFineArt.com/workshop_resources.htm

You can select and download the photographic sources (with backgrounds removed). The complete line drawing of the final demonstration is also available, or you can choose from individual line drawings of the major elements to formulate your own composition.

A fuller description of this and many other techniques are presented in my 288 page book Drawing From Line to Life – currently available from www.SibleyFineArt.com and www.ThePencilPoint.com and soon from www.Amazon.co.uk.