

Glossary of Art Terms

Abstract – a style of art in which shapes, designs, textures and colors are represented in a way that may look unrealistic, but that emphasizes moods or feelings. Abstract art is characterized by the use of geometric lines and shapes and bright, bold colors.

Aesthetic – pertaining to the artistic and beautiful, a perception that something is pleasing to the eye.

Analogous Colors – colors that are closely related. For example, blue, blue-violet and violet all have the color blue in common.

Asymmetrical – having a kind of balance in which the two sides of an artwork are not exactly alike, but still look balanced.

Background – the parts of an artwork that lie in the distance and appear to be behind objects in the foreground.

Balance – a principle of design. The arrangement of elements in a work of art (including size and number of objects) that achieves a sense of equality.

Bird's Eye View – a scene shown from high up in the air as a bird in flight might see it.

Brush stroke – a line, shape or texture created by applying paint to a surface with a paintbrush in a particular way.

Calligraphy – the art of writing letters and words in an ornamental style using brushes or pens.

Collage – work of art created by gluing bits of paper, fabric, scraps, photographs or other materials to a flat surface.

Color – An element of art. The hue, value, and intensity of an object. The primary colors are red, blue and yellow: every color except white can be created from various blending of these three colors.

Color Wheel – a circle divided into sections of different colors. It shows how colors can be mixed or used together.

Complementary Colors – colors that are opposite on the color wheel and contrast

with each other. For example, orange is the complement blue, yellow, of purple and red of green.

Composition – arrangement or design of elements of an artwork to achieve balance, contrast rhythm, emphasis and unity to make an effective expression of an artist's idea. The term also refers generally to any work of art.

Contrast – a large difference between two things; for example, warm and cool, yellow and purple, light and shadow. Contrasting values, colors and textures add excitement, emphasis and interest to a work of art.

Cool Colors – the family of related or analogous colors ranging from the greens through the blues and violets. They remind people of cool places, things and feelings.

Depth – the apparent distance from front to back or near to far in a work of art. Techniques of perspective are used to create the illusion of depth in a two dimensional painting.

Design – to plan and arrange all the parts of an artwork. Also, an organized and creative arrangement of the elements in a work of art.

Detail – a distinctive feature of an object or scene which can be seen most clearly close up. Also, a small part of a work of art, enlarged to show a close-up of its features.

Dominant – the part of a design that is the most important, powerful or has the most influence. A certain color can be dominant, and so can an object, line, shape or texture.

Elements of Art – basic components which are put together to make a visual work of art. They are color, line, shape, texture, space, form and value. All works of art are composed of these basic elements.

Emphasis – the use of sizes, shapes, colors, textures and other elements and principles of design to draw attention to certain areas or objects in a work of art.

Focal Point – the most important part or area in a work of art. All other parts should center around, provide background for, or draw attention to the focal point. It is also called the center of interest.

Foreground – the part of a work of art that appears to be in the front, nearest to the viewer, usually in the lower part of the picture.

Foreshadowing – perspective applied to a single object.

Form – an element of art; the three dimensional structure of an object. In two dimensions, a form is represented as a shape.

Fresco – painting done with water-based paint on fresh plaster so that as it dries, the colors are absorbed into the wall.

Frieze – a horizontal band of decorative or narrative art, often part of the decoration of a building.

Genre – paintings that depict scenes or events from everyday life, usually realistically.

Geometric – design based on simple shapes, such as triangles, squares, rectangles and circles.

Gouache Art – an opaque watercolor paint similar to poster paint. It is often used in making studies for oil paintings because the results are similar.

Graphic Art – type of visual art made for commercial purposes. Examples are posters, advertisements, signs, book and magazine illustrations.

Horizon Line – actual or imaginary line in a work of art representing the point at which water or land seems to end and the sky begins.

Hue – another word for color.

Illustrate – to create designs and pictures for books or magazines to explain or show what happens in a story.

Impasto – the application of paint so thickly that it stands out in relief.

Implied Lines – lines you cannot see. Implied lines are hidden.

Intensity – relative brightness or dullness of a color.

Intermediate Colors – a color made by mixing a secondary color with a primary color. Examples are blue-green, yellow-orange, and red-violet.

Kinetic – expressing motion.

Landscape – a painting or drawing showing a scene from nature; often including mountains, trees, rivers, fields and other outdoor scenery.

Line – an element of art; a continuous path of a point as it moves across a surface. A line can vary in length, width, direction, curvature or color.

Linear Perspective – way of showing depth and distance in a picture with converging lines. Lines that are parallel get closer together and objects get smaller in distance.

Medium (plural – media) – material that an artist uses, such as oil, pen and ink, chalk, watercolor: the technique such as painting, sculpture or collage, used with these materials.

Middle Ground – the part of the artwork that lies between the foreground and the background.

Mixed Media – work of art formed from a combination of more than one medium, often in an unusual combination of unrelated materials such as wood, clay, paint and fabric.

Model – a person who poses for an artist. Also, a small-sized copy or image that represents a larger object.

Montage – a special kind of collage, made from pieces of other pictures.

Mood – the feeling or emotion suggested or created in the viewer by a work of art.

Mosaic – a picture or design made by fitting small pieces or colored stone, glass, paper or tile together.

Motif – element or combination of elements repeated often enough in a composition to become a dominant feature.

Movement – the arrangement of the parts of a design to create a sense of motion by using lines that cause the eye to move over the work. Also, -a tendency or trend by artists during a period to use certain techniques or methods.

Mural – a large painting that covers a wall or painted directly on to a wall.

Negative Space – the empty space surrounding shapes or forms in a work of art.

Neutral Colors – colors that blend or combine with all other colors to alter their value or intensity, and are not part of the color wheel. Black, white, brown and gray are considered neutral colors.

One-Point Perspective – a form of linear perspective in which all lines appear to meet at a single point on the horizon.

Opaque – something that does not let light in and cannot be seen through.

Organic – utilizes shapes and forms that are related to or developed from plant and animal forms.

Outline – a line that shows or creates the outer edges of a shape of form, also sometimes called the contour.

Overlap – to extend over or rest on top of something and partly cover it up.

Pattern – the repetition of shapes, lines or colors in a design.

Perspective – a technique of representing three-dimensional scenes or objects on a flat, two-dimensional surface. Perspective is achieved by creating the illusion of depth and distance. (linear and atmospheric)

Portrait – any work of art showing a person, several people or an animal. Portraits usually emphasize just the face but can include part or all of the body.

Positive Space – the spaces of a work of art that is filled with something, such as lines, shapes, colors or designs. (See also negative spaces).

Primary Colors – the hues red, yellow and blue. The primary colors cannot be produced by mixing any other colors. All other colors are made from these colors.

Principles of Design – guidelines that aid in arranging and composing attractive designs. These include balance, contrast, pattern, variety, rhythm and emphasis.

Print – a kind of artwork in which ink or paint is put onto a block (wood, linoleum, etc) which has a design carved into it. The block is then pressed onto paper to make a print (copy) of the design.

Proportion – the size, location or amount of something as compared to something else; the relationship of the parts to the whole.

Radial – lines or shapes that spread out from a central point.

Realistic – the true appearance of people, objects or scenes as seen by the human eye. Realistic art attempts to re-create the colors, textures, shapes and arrangement of actual objects.

Related Colors – colors that are next to each other on the color wheel.

Relief – a type of sculpture in which figures are raised above the surface or from the background that is flat or has hollowed out parts.

Repetition – a design that has parts that are used over and over again in a pleasing way.

Rhythm – regular repetition of lines, shapes, colors or patterns. The arrangement or parts of an artwork that make it seem to have a special beat or repeated movement.

Rubbing – an artwork in which a copy of a textured surface is made by rubbing the edge of a crayon, pastel or other drawing tool over a piece of paper which rest on its surface.

Scale – the ration of the size of the parts in a drawing or artwork to their size in the original. If a picture is drawn to scale, all of its parts are equally smaller or larger than the original.

Sculpture – carving, model or other three-dimensional piece of art.

Secondary Colors – colors that are mixed from two of the primary colors. The secondary colors are orange, green, and purple.

Shade – an element of art. The outline, edge or flat surface of a form as a circle or a square.

Sketch – a simple, quick, rough drawing done without a lot of detail but catching the chief features and a general impression of an object or scene.

Space – an empty place (negative) or area in which something exists (positive).

Still Life – a drawing or painting of an arrangement of non-moving, non-living object such as fruit, flowers, bottles, etc. The arrangement is usually set indoors and includes at least or manufactured object, such as a bowl or vase.

Style – artistic technique, an artist's special way of creating art.

Symbol – something that stands for something else, especially a letter, figure or sign that represents a real object or an idea.