

Visual Art Glossary

Abstract. Artwork in which little or no attempt is made to represent images realistically, and objects are often simplified or distorted.

Acrylic. A fast-drying, water-based plastic polymer painting medium.

Aesthetics. A branch of philosophy that focuses on the nature of beauty, the nature and value of art, and the inquiry processes and human responses associated with those topics.

Analysis. In art criticism, discovering how the principles of art are used to organize the art elements. In art history, determining the style of the artwork.

Architecture. The art and science of designing and erecting buildings.

Armature. Supporting structure for sculpture.

Art Criticism. Describing and evaluating the media, processes, and meanings of works of visual art, and making comparative judgments.

Art Elements. Visual arts components, such as line, texture, color, form, value, shape, and space.

Art History. A record of the visual arts, incorporating information, interpretations, and judgments about art objects, artists, and conceptual influences on developments in the visual arts.

Artifact. An object representing a particular culture or stage of technological development.

Art Media. Broad categories for grouping works of visual art according to the art materials used.

Assemblage. Sculpting technique in which the artist gathers and joins together a variety of materials.

Asymmetry. A type of balance in works of art in which parts on opposite sides of a perceived midline give the appearance of equal visual weight.

Atmospheric Perspective. Objects in the distance appear less distinct in form and more muted in color.

Background. The area of an artwork that appears to be behind other objects or farther away from the viewer.

Balance. Element of design that deals with equally arranging visual elements in a work of art.

Symmetrical – Formal balance in which two halves or sides of a design create a mirror image.

Asymmetrical – Another name for informal balance, in which unlike objects have equal visual weight or eye attraction.

Radial Balance – Type of balance in which forces or elements branch out from a central axis in a circular pattern.

Bas-relief. Sculpture in which areas project slightly from a flat surface.

Blending. Technique of shading through smooth, gradual application of value.

Calligraphy. An Asian method of beautiful handwriting.

Carving. A subtractive form of sculpture, in which the material is cut, chipped, or drilled away from a solid material to create a sculpture.

Casting. Process of sculpture in which a molten metal or substance is poured into a mold and allowed to harden.

Ceramic. Art of making objects with clay to produce pottery and sculpture.

Chiaroscuro. Method of arranging light and shadow in two-dimensional art to create the illusion of three-dimensional form.

Clay. A natural earthly material which is plastic when wet and becomes hard and brittle upon treatment by high heat (firing).

Coil. Long roll of clay joined into a circle or spiral.

Collage. Artwork onto which materials such as textured paper and fabric are attached.

Color. Element of design that is a property of light.

Primary – red, yellow, blue

Secondary – orange, green, violet (made from the primary colors)

Tertiary – produced by mixing two secondary colors.

Intensity – brightness of color.

Value – lights and darks of a color or greys.

Hue – name of color.

Color Schemes. Plan for organizing color.

Complementary – colors opposite each other on a standard color wheel.

Analogous – colors which are closely related to each other and in which common color can be found (yellow, yellow-orange, orange, etc.)

Monochromatic – tones of one color in addition to the main hue

Triad – any three colors found on a standard color wheel that are connected by a triangle (red, yellow, and blue)

Intermediate – colors made from a primary and secondary (blue-green, yellow-orange)

Split complement – color on either side of the direct complement (blue-green, yellow-green).

Cool Colors – Colors in which blue, green or violet predominate.

Warm Colors – Colors in which red, orange or yellow predominate.

Color Wheel. Sectioned circle with colors in a bent spectrum.

Composition. The ordered arrangement of the elements of art according to the principles of design.

Concept. An abstract or general idea

Conjoint. Carried on by two or more people in combination; cooperative participation; teacher guided.

Contemporary. Modern; current; coming into being during the same period of time.

Content. Meaning and significance; events, physical detail, and information in a work of art.

Contour Line. A line that defines the edges and surface ridges of an object.

Contrast. Differences between two or more elements (e.g., value, color, texture) in a composition; juxtaposition of different elements in a work of art. Also, the degree of difference between the lightest and darkest parts of a picture.

Conventional Performances. Only giving back certain identified "facts, concepts or problem sets" (one answer tests that do not require understanding of subject matter).

Criteria. Standards of judgement.

Critique. Evaluating, judging, synthesizing, analyzing.

Cross Hatching. Superimposed layers of parallel lines (hatching) at an angle to one another; used to create shadow and modeling.

Culture. Socially transmitted behaviors, arts, beliefs, institutions and all products of human work and thought, considered as the expression of a particular period, class, community or population.

Decorative. Ornamental; beauty over function.

Design. An artwork that has a planned arrangement of elements and principles.

Dimension. Amount of space an object takes up in one direction.

Dominance. The importance of the emphasis of one aspect in relation to all other aspects of a design.

Dominant. Element of a work of art that is noticed first.

Drawing. An art technique using pencil, pen, brush, charcoal, crayon, pastel or stylus.

Dye. Pigments that dissolve in liquid.

Fabric. Material made from fibers.

Fiber. Thin, threadlike linear material that can be woven or spun into fabric.

Figure-ground. In design, the background and the main subject.

Focal Point. The first part of a work to attract the attention of the viewer.

Foreground. In a visual work, the area that appears to be closest to the viewer.

Foreshortening. Method of drawing or painting an object or person so that it seems to go back into space.

Form. Element of art that is three-dimensional and encloses space. Form has length, width, and depth.

Freestanding. Work of art surrounded on all sides by space.

Function/Functional. Purpose of an art work; designed chiefly from the point of view of use.

Genre. The representation of people, subjects and scenes from everyday life.

Gesture Drawing. Quick sketch used to capture the movement or position of a figure.

Glaze. A gloss or mat coating developed on clay under heat.

Global. Worldwide.

Gradation. Gradual transition from one form or element to another with slight changes in value.

Graphics. Images and words generated by hand or computer.

Handbuilt. Forming without mechanical manipulation (usually referring to clay).

Harmony. The principle of design that creates unity in a work of art by stressing similarities of separate but related parts.

Hatching. Small, grouped lines made in drawing or engraving.

Icon. Symbol or image.

Illustrate. Create visual images that complement written words.

Interface. To interact or coordinate harmoniously.

In the Round. Freestanding sculpture surrounded on all sides by space.

Intuitive. Perceived knowledge from experience and feelings.

Jewelry. An ornament for personal adornment.

Judgement. In art criticism, determining the degree of artistic merit. In art history, determining the contribution of a work of art to the history of art.

Kinetic. Work of art that actually moves in space.

Line. A point moving in space. Line can vary in width, length, curvature, or direction.

Linear Perspective. Graphic system that creates the illusion of depth and volume on a flat surface.

Medium (Media). Material(s) used to create works of art.

Middleground. The area of an artwork that appears to be between the foreground and the background.

Mixed Media. Two or more media used in one artwork.

Mobile. A sculpture with a balanced arrangement of moveable parts.

Modeling. An additive process of sculpture in which soft, pliable material is built up and shaped.

Mosaic. Artwork made with small cubes of colored paper, marble, glass or tile and set into cement.

Motif. Unit that is repeated in visual rhythm.

Movement. Principle of design that deals with creating the illusion of action or physical change in position.

Mural. Painting on wall or ceiling.

Narrative. The written word describing a visual work of art and/or its artist (usually, but not confined to art history texts).

Negative Space. Empty space surrounding shapes and forms.

Neutral Colors. Black, white and gray.

Objective. Knowledge which some believe to be independent of experience and personal feeling.

Oil Paint. Pigments in linseed oil or another vegetable drying oil to make a smooth paste consistency; permanent color.

Opaque. Quality of a material that does not let any light pass through.

Outline. Line that shows the outer edges.

Paint. Pigments mixed with oil or water.

Palette. Tray for mixing colors of paints; colors used in a particular work of art.

Papier Mache. Modeling material made of paper and liquid paste molded over a supporting structure.

Pastels. Pigments held together with gum and molded into sticks.

Pattern. Decorative visual repetition.

Performance Art. A type of art in which events are planned and enacted before an audience for aesthetic reasons.

Perspective. Refers to two major systems for showing depth and distance in a work of art (linear perspective and atmospheric perspective).

Photography. The art or process of producing pictures by the action of light on surfaces sensitized by various processes.

Picture Plane. The flat surface of a two-dimensional art work.

Pigment. Finely ground, colored powders that form paint when mixed with a liquid.

Portfolio. A body of finished work.

Portrait. Image of a person, especially the face and upper body.

Positive Space. Shapes or spaces that are or represent solid objects.

Principles of Art. Ways artists organize the elements of art. The principles consist of balance, emphasis, harmony, variety, gradation, movement, rhythm, and proportion.

Printmaking. The artist designs and manufactures one or a series of prints, such as woodcuts, silk-screens, linoleum, etc.

Process Portfolio. A portfolio that includes a series of work that changes over time.

Proportion. The size relationships of one part to the whole or of one part to another part.

Reflection. The act of serious thought or contemplation; thoughtful consideration of an artwork.

Relief. Sculpture that projects from a flat background.

Repetition. Technique for creating rhythm and unity in which a motif appears again and again.

Rhythm. Principle of art that indicates movement by the repetition of elements.

Rubric. A guide for judgement or assessment; a description of expectations.

Sculpture. A three dimensional work of art.

Shade. The darkness of a color; may be achieved by adding black.

Shape. Element of art that defines a two dimensional space.

Sketch. Quick, rough drawing without much detail that can be used as a plan for later work.

Space. The element of art referring to the emptiness or area between, around, above, below or within objects.

Stippling. Painting, drawing, etc. by means of flecks or dots.

Style. Identifying characteristics of a particular artist, period, group or movement.

Surface Design. The patterning, coloring and transformation of fibers and other materials directed toward art and design.

Symbol. Lines, shapes and colors used to represent something else.

Synthesize. To form a whole from separate parts (visualizing).

Technique. A specific way to create artwork, often by following a step-by-step procedure.

Tempera. Paint made by mixing pigments with egg yolk.

Texture. Actual or implied appearances of surface characteristics (e.g., rough or smooth).

Three Dimensional. 3-D form – measured by height, width, and depth.

Tint. Light value of a color made by mixing with white.

Tone. Tint or shade; may be achieved by adding black or white to a color.

Transparent. Quality of a material that allows light to pass through.

Two Dimensional. 2-D form- measured by height and width.

Unity. Principle of design that allows a combination of elements, principles, and media to be viewed as a whole.

Value. The lightness or darkness of a hue or neutral color.

Value Scale. The range of values from black to white and light to dark.

Visual Art Components.

Production – visual art making.

Aesthetics – relating to value, beauty and theory.

Criticism – the process of judging visual art works and/or their narratives.

History – recordings of the past.

Wash. Thin, liquid application of paint in any medium.

Watercolor. Pigments dispensed in a gum Arabic solution; a work of art so produced; also, the paint used in this technique; water based.

Weaving. Interlacing strands of material.

Wheelbuilt. Referring to the use of a mechanical device in order to form clay