

GLOSSARY OF ART TERMS

Abstract

A style of art that is not realistic. Unusual lines, colors, and shapes make the subject look unrealistic. It is often characterized by the use of geometric lines and shapes and bold, bright colors.

Aesthetic

Ideas about what makes a work of art beautiful or satisfying.

Additive

the means of building up a surface by adding, combining or building up materials.

Analogous colors

Colors that appear next to each other on the color wheel. Analogous colors have one hue in common. For example, blue, blue-green, and blue-violet all contain blue. Also called related colors.

Animation

Creating a motion picture that consists of a series of drawings, each of which shows a slight change from the drawing before it. When the drawings are photographed and projected in rapid succession, the figures seem to move.

Animator

A person who creates animation.

Arch

A curved shape in a building. An arch can frame a doorway and window or it can support a wall or ceiling.

Architect

A person who designs buildings and supervises construction of the building.

Architecture

The art and science of designing buildings and other structures.

Art criticism

The process of looking at, thinking about, and judging an artwork.

Art media

The materials used by artists.

Assemblage

A 3-dimensional work of art made by joining materials and objects together.

Asymmetrical balance

A type of balance in which the two sides of an artwork are not exactly alike, but are still visually balanced.

Background

The part of an artwork that seems the farthest away.

Balance

The arrangement of the elements, in a work of art, to create a sense of equilibrium. Balance is a principle of art.

Bird's-eye view

A point of view looking down from above.

Bisque

Clay that has been fired once and is unglazed.

Blend

To mix or rub colors together.

Block

In printmaking, a piece of flat material, such as wood, clay, or metal, into which a design has been carved. It is also known as a plate. The block is used to print the design.

Border

A frame-like edge around a shape or image.

Brayer

In printing, a rubber roller used to spread ink over a surface.

Brush stroke

A line, shape, mark, or texture made with paintbrush.

Career

A person's job or profession.

Cartoon

An artwork that shows people or things in ways that are funny. Cartoons often have words that go with them.

Carve

To cut away parts from a block of wood, stone, or other hard materials.

Center of Interest

The part of an artwork that you notice first.

Ceramics

The art of making objects from clay and hardening them with fire.

Cityscape

Artwork that gives a view of a city.

Clay

A soft, moist material used to create artworks such as sculpture and pottery.

Close-up

A very near or close view of an object or subject.

Coil

A rope-like shape that has been rolled from clay or other such material.

Collage

Artwork made by gluing bits of paper, pictures, fabric, or other materials to a flat surface.

Color

What is perceived when waves of light strike the retina. Color is an element of art.

Color wheel

Colors arranged in a certain order in the shape of a circle.

Column

In architecture a long post made of steel, stone, etc., that is used as a support in a building

Complementary color

Colors that contrast with one another. Complementary colors are opposite one another on the color wheel.

Composition

An arrangement of the elements of art using the principles of art to express the artist's idea.

Construct

To make something by joining together materials.

Contrast

The effect of showing the difference between two unlike things, such as a dark color and a light color.

Contour

The outline of a shape.

Contrasting colors

Colors placed opposite one another on the color wheel. Also called complementary colors. For example, orange and blue are contrasting colors.

Cool colors

The family of colors that includes greens, blues, and violets. Cool colors bring to mind cool things, places, and feelings.

Craftsmanship

Skill, knowledge and neatness resulting in expert workmanship.

Crayon Resist

Using waxy crayon properties to repel (Resist) watercolor paint that is brushed over it; the watercolor paint adheres to the paper surrounding the crayon.

Creative

Having a skill or talent for making things in a new or different way; showing originality and imagination.

Credit line

The information that is given with a picture of an artwork. A credit line usually tells the artist, title, date, medium, size, and location of an artwork.

Critique

The process of using description, analysis, interpretation, and judgement to evaluate a work of art.

Cross-hatching

A method of showing value by using parallel lines at different angles that get darker as they are drawn closer together.

Cultural style

A style of art that shows something about the culture in which the artist lives or lived.

Culture

The customs, beliefs, arts, and way of life of a group of people.

Depth

The apparent distance from front to back.

Design

A plan for the arrangement of the art elements (lines, spaces, colors, shapes, forms and textures in an artwork. Also, the act of arranging the parts of an artwork.

Detail

A small part of an artwork.

Diagonal

A slanted edge or line

Distance

The sense of depth or space between objects in an artwork.

Dome

In architecture a rounded vault forming the roof of a building or structure, typically with a circular base.

Drawing

An artwork consisting of lines and shapes/forms sketched on paper with materials such as pencils, pens, chalk, pastels.

Edge

The outside line of a shape or form.

Elements of art

The basic parts of an artwork. Line, color, value, shape, form, texture, and space are elements of art.

Emphasis

It is the importance given to certain object or areas in an artwork. Color, texture, shape, and size can be used to create emphasis. Emphasis is a principle of design.

Enlargement

Creating a design that is larger than the original.

Exaggeration

Showing something in a way that makes it seem larger or more important than it is.

Expression

A special look that communicates strong feeling. A smile is an expression of happiness.

Expressionists

A group of artists who use simple designs and brilliant colors to express feelings. Artists began using this style in Germany in the early 1900's. It gained interest in the United States in the 1940's and 1950's.

Exterior

The outer part of a building or other form.

Fabric

Cloth made by knitting or weaving threads together.

Fantasy

Something that reflects the imaginary.

Fiber Artist

An artist who creates artworks by sewing, weaving, knitting, or stitching fibers together.

Fibers

The threads that made up yarn, string, fabric, and other such materials.

Firing

Heating clay to the required temperature to harden.

Focal Point

The area in a work of art that an artist emphasizes.

Folk art

Art made by people who have not been formally trained in art. Folk art usually reflects the artist's culture or tradition.

Folk Artist

Artists who have not been formally trained in art.

Foreground

The part of an artwork that seems the closest to you.

Foreshortening

Shortening lines or objects in an artwork to create an impression of depth and distance.

Form

A three-dimensional object, such as a cube or a ball. Form is an element of art. Form may be depicted on a 2-D surface.

Found object

Something that an artist finds and uses in an artwork such as a scrap of metal or a piece of wood, etc.

Functional

Designed with a useful purpose in mind.

Galleries

Places where artwork can be seen and bought.

Glaze

A thin, transparent, glassy coating on ceramics.

Geometric

A word describing shapes and forms such as squares, circles, cubes, and spheres.

Gesture Drawing

Quick scribbles to show movements of the body that quickly records an entire image.

Greenware

Unfired clay.

Harmony

A principle of art that combines elements of art in a composition to stress similarities of separate but related parts.

Highlights

Areas of direct light on an object.

Horizon line

In an artwork, the line where the ground and sky appear to meet.

Horizontal

Moving straight across from side to side rather than up-and-down. For example, the top edge of a piece of paper is horizontal.

Hue

Another word for color.

Illusion

An image that tricks the eye or seems to be something it is not.

Illustration

A picture used to help explain something or tell a story. An illustrator creates pictures for books, magazines, or other printed works.

Imagination

To have the power to visualize and build mental images; dream about things that have never happened; feel intuitively; and to reach beyond sensual or real boundaries.

Implied

Suggested, but not actually shown, as in an implied line.

Impressionists

A group of artists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who paid special attention to light and its effect on subjects in their paintings.

Intensity

The brightness or dullness of a color.

Interior

The inside of a building or another hollow form, such as a box.

Interior Design

Is the art of planning and creating indoor spaces such as rooms.

Intermediate Colors

Colors that are a mixture of a primary and a secondary color. Blue–green, red–orange, and red–violet are examples of intermediate colors.

Isocahedron

A polyhedron with 20 faces

Judgement

Fourth step in an art criticism process in which you formulate your own opinion on the success or failure of the artwork.

Kiln

The furnace in which clay is fired to harden it.

Landscape

A drawing or painting that shows outdoor scenery such as trees, lakes, mountains, and fields.

Line

A mark on a surface. Lines can be created by a pen, pencil, brush, stick etc., on a variety of surfaces. Line is an element of art.

Loom

A frame or machine used to hold yarn or other fibers for weaving.

Mask

An artwork made to be placed over a person's face for decoration or disguise.

Media

Materials used to create an artwork, such as clay or paint. The singular of media is medium.

Middle ground

In an artwork, the part between the foreground and the background.

Mixed media

Artworks that are created from more than one medium.

Mobile

A type of sculpture in which objects are suspended and balanced so that they are moved by currents of air.

Model

Someone or something an artist uses as an example when creating an artwork. Also a small copy of something.

Monochrome

A color scheme using only tints and shades of a single color.

Mood

The feeling created in a work or art.

Mosaic

An artwork made from small pieces of colored glass, stone, paper, or other materials.

Motif

An element that is repeated often enough to be an important feature of a design.

Motion

A sense of movement or action in an artwork.

Mount

Adhere an artwork to another larger paper or cardboard to form a border.

Movement

The sense of motion or action created in an artwork. Also, a trend in an art is called a movement.

Mural

A large artwork, usually a painting, that is created or placed on a wall or ceiling, often in a public place. A muralist creates murals.

Museum

A place where works of art are cared for and displayed.

Negative space

The empty space around and between forms or shapes in an artwork.

Neutrals

A word used for black, white, and tints and shades of gray. (Some artists use tints and shades of brown as neutrals.)

Non-Functional

An artwork or other object that serves no useful purpose but is appreciated for its beauty alone.

Non-objective

A style of art that does not represent real objects.

Octahedron

A polyhedron with eight faces

One-point perspective

The graphic system in which all diagonal lines converge to a singular point on the horizon line.

Opaque

Not letting light through; the opposite of transparent

Origami

From *ori* meaning "folding", and *kami* meaning "paper" (*kami* changes to *gami* due to rendaku) is the art of paper folding, which is often associated with Japanese culture. In modern usage, the word "origami" is used as an inclusive term for all folding practices, regardless of their culture of origin.

Organic

A word describing shapes and forms similar to those in nature and the opposite of geometric.

Orthogonals

Also known as Convergence lines. In Linear Perspective drawing, orthogonals are the diagonal lines that can be drawn along receding parallel lines (or rows of objects) to the vanishing point.

Outline

The line that forms the edge of any shape or form. Also called the contour.

Overlap

To partly or completely cover one shape or form with another.

Painting

An artwork created by using a brush or other tool to apply tempera, watercolor, oil, acrylic, etc. to a surface.

Palette

A flat surface (palette, boards, etc.) on which an artist holds and mixes colors.

Parallel Lines

Two lines that never cross (intersect)

Pastel

A crayon made of either chalk or oil.

Pattern

Repeated colors, lines, shapes, or textures in an artwork. Pattern is a principal of design. Also, a plan or model to be followed when making something.

Perpendicular Lines

Perpendicular means "at right angles". A line meeting another at a right angle, or 90° is said to be perpendicular to it.

Perspective

A way of making a flat artwork look as if it has depth. In a painting, an artist creates perspective by making far-away objects smaller and nearby objects larger.

Pictographs

Ancient drawings, often found on cave walls, that tell stories or record a culture's beliefs and practices.

Pinch method

A way of shaping a ball of clay into pottery by pinching, pulling, and pressing it with the hands.

Plate

In printmaking, a piece of flat material, such as wood or metal, with a design on the surface. The plate is used to print the design.

Portrait

A work of art created to show a person, animal, or group of people, usually focusing on the face.

Pose

The way subjects sit or stand while an artist paints portraits of them.

Positive space

Shapes, forms, or lines that stand out from the background in a work of art.

Potter

An artist who makes pottery.

Primary colors

The colors from which all other colors are made. The primary colors are red, yellow, and blue.

Principles of design

Guidelines artists use as they create art works. Unity, variety, emphasis, balance, proportion, pattern, and rhythm Movement are the principles of design.

Print

An artwork created by making an impression of a design.

Printmaking

The process of making one or more prints.

Profile

Something that is seen or shown from the side, such as a side view of a face.

Proportion

The relation of one thing to another with respect to size and placement.

Radial balance

A type of balance in which lines or shapes spread out from a center point.

Realism

Art style which renders life in a life-like way.

Realistic

Showing something, such as a person or scene, as it might really look.

Relief print

A print made by covering a printing block with ink or paint and pressing paper onto the block. The areas or lines gouged out do not print. (Examples: woodcut, block print, linocut, styrofoam plate, etc.)

Relief sculpture

A kind of sculpture in which a design or image is carved into a flat surface. May be high relief or low relief.)

Resist medium

A material, such as wax, used to protect parts of a surface from paint or dye.

Rhythm

The repeating of elements, such as lines, shapes, or colors, that creates a pattern of visual motion in an artwork. Rhythm is a principle.

Rubbing

An artwork created by placing paper on a raised surface and then rubbing the paper with chalk, crayon, or a pencil.

Sculpture– An artwork made by modeling, carving or joining materials

into a 3-dimensional form. Clay, wood, stone, and metal are often used to make sculptures.

Seascape

An work that includes in the scene the sea, ocean, or shore.

Secondary colors

A color made by mixing two primary colors. The secondary colors are green, violet, and orange.

Self-portrait

A drawing, painting, photograph, or sculpture that shows the likeness of the artist.

Shade

A color made by adding black to a hue. For example, adding black to green results in dark green. Also a dark value of a color.

Shading

A way of showing gradual changes in lightness or darkness in a drawing or painting. Shading helps make a picture look more realistic.

Shape

A flat area, such as a circle or a square, that has clear boundaries. Shape is an element of art.

Sketch

A quick drawing. A sketch can be used to explore a subject or plan an artwork.

Sketchbook

A book or pad of paper used for drawing and keeping sketches

Slab

A method of making pottery in which a flat piece of clay is cut into shapes which are joined together to form an object.

Slip

Watery clay in a creamy consistency used with scoring to join two pieces of clay.

Space

An empty surface or area. Also, the area surrounding something.

Still life

An artwork showing an arrangement of objects that cannot move on their own, such as fruit or flowers

Stippling

Technique of using patterns of dots to create values and value gradation.

Studio

A room or building where an artist creates art.

Style

An artist's own way of designing and creating art. Also a technique used by a group of artists in a particular time or culture.

Subject

What an artwork is about. A person, animal, object, or scene

Subtractive

A word describing sculpture that is made by taking away, or subtracting, material from a larger piece or block.

Surface

The outside layer of a material, an object, or another form.

Surrealism

The Twentieth Century artistic style that uses dreams and fantasy as subject matter.

Symbol

A letter, color, sign, or picture that expresses a larger meaning, For example, a red heart is often used as a symbol for love.

Symmetrical balance

A type of balance in which both sides of an artwork look the same or almost the same.

Symmetry

Balance created by making both sides of an artwork the same, equal or almost the same.

Tactile

A texture you can feel with your hands.

Technique

The way an artist uses art materials to create a certain type of artwork.

Technology

The way human beings use machines and other tools to make or do something.

Tempera paint

A chalky, water-based paint. Also called poster paint.

Tetrahedron

A polyhedron composed of four triangular faces.

Texture

The way a surface looks and feels, such as smooth, rough, or bumpy. Texture is an element of art.

Theme

In an artwork, the artist's message about the subject of the work.

Three-dimensional

Having height, width, and thickness. Forms are three-dimensional.

Tint

A color such as pink that is created by mixing a hue with white. Also, a light value of a color.

Translucent

Something through which light can be seen.

Two-dimensional

Having height and width; flat. Shapes are two-dimensional.

Two-point perspective

Perspective in which receding lines meet at two vanishing points.

Unity– The quality of seeming whole and complete, with all parts looking right together. Unity is a principle of design.

Value

The lightness or darkness of colors. Tints have a light value. Shades have a dark value. Value is an element of art.

Vanishing point

A point on the horizon or eye-level line at which receding parallel lines meet in a perspective drawing.

Variety

The combination of elements or art, such as line, shape, or color, in an artwork. Variety is a principle of design.

Vertical

Moving up and down rather than side to side. For example, the side edge of a piece of paper is vertical.

Visual rhythm

In an artwork, rhythm created by repeating elements, such as colors and lines. Visual rhythm might remind a viewer of music or dance rhythm.

Warm colors

The family of colors that includes reds, yellows, and oranges. Warm colors bring to mind warm things, places, and feelings.

Weaver

An artist who creates weavings

Weaving

An artwork made of thread, yarn, or other fibers laced or woven together on a loom.

Wedge

A method of cutting and reforming (kneading) clay to make it homogenous. This helps to eliminate air bubbles from the clay.

Worm's-eye view

A point of view from ground level.