

GLOSSARY

Art has a specific vocabulary. It is a visual language composed of many elements such as color, line, shape, texture, light and space. An artist combines these elements to create a composition which, because of its unique arrangement, has a mood all its own.

abstract An abstract artwork is usually based on a subject you can identify. The artist takes an image or object and changes its appearance by leaving out details, simplifying or rearranging its parts to express his or her idea or feeling. Abstraction can occur in varying degrees, so you may not recognize the beginning subject in the final product. Abstract work with no recognizable subject matter is called non-objective art.

academic A general term for artworks that seem to be based on rules set up by some person or group other than the artist. Artists created academic artwork by following rigid rules made by leaders of European art schools or academies in the 1700s and 1800s.

Academic Style Art created according to the rules of official academies of painting and sculpture which flourished in the 17th to the 19th centuries; conservative; often based on classical models.

aerial perspective Also called atmospheric perspective. A method of showing the effect of light, air and distance on a flat surface. It is usually achieved by using blues and light, dull hues for distant objects.

American Regionalism (1930s) Art history term for a painting style inspired by life in rural areas and small towns in the Midwest.

American Scene Painters (1910-1950) An art history term for artists who portrayed American life in a direct, unglamorized manner.

aquatint In printmaking, an intaglio (etching) process in which a metal plate is prepared with small particles of resin. When the plate is heated, the particles adhere, leaving tiny openings. By timed etching of the metal in acid, varying tones are produced.

arbitrary color Color chosen by the artist to symbolize an idea or to express a feeling. Opposite of optical color.

art Objects such as paintings, prints or sculptures made with creativity and imagination, often as a form of personal expression.

art criticism The process and the result of critical thinking about art. Art criticism involves the description, analysis and interpretation of art. It does not always include a stated, explicit judgement of worth or merit.

artist A person who creates objects such as paintings, prints and sculptures with creativity and imagination, often as a form of personal expression.

atmospheric perspective (aerial perspective) A way to show how light, air and distance make flat surfaces look different. It is usually done by using blues and light, dull hues for objects which are far away.

background Parts of artwork that appear to be distant or behind the objects in the foreground or front.

brushstroke A line, shape or texture created by putting paint on a surface with a paint brush.

canvas A strong cloth which, since the Renaissance, many artists have used as a surface for painting.

charcoal A soft drawing medium made of charred wood, vines or compressed charcoal.

cityscape An artwork that depicts the city (buildings, streets, shops, etc.) as subject matter.

collection A group of objects gathered together for study, comparison, enjoyment or exhibition.

color The general term for the quality that makes the bands of the rainbow appear to the eye as violet, red, yellow, etc.; loosely, color also includes black and white. Color is described in terms of its qualities: hue, lightness and saturation.

composition To create, form or design something by arranging parts to create a unified whole.

compositional elements The different components (objects, lines, colors, shapes, etc.) of a composition.

contemporary Either an artwork of the present time, or a term referring to something the same or nearly the same age as someone or something else.

content The main idea or subject of a work of art.

contour A line which shows or describes the edges, ridges or outline of a shape or form.

contrast A large difference between two things: for example, rough and smooth, yellow and purple, and light and shadow. Contrasts usually add excitement, drama and interest to artworks.

design The plan, organization or arrangement of elements in a work of art.

diagonal A direction that a line can have. Diagonal lines may be used to show motion.

drawing A work of art, often on paper, that uses primarily line.

easel painting A small to medium sized painting that can be supported on an easel. Also a general term used for paintings created for purposes other than illustration.

elements of art The visual "tools" artists use to create art. The elements (categories) include line, color, shape, space, light and texture.

emphasis Area in a work of art that catches and holds the viewer's attention. This area usually has contrasting sizes, shapes, colors or other distinctive features.

engraving The process of using a sharp tool to cut a design into a material, usually metal. Engraving is also an intaglio printmaking process based on cutting grooves into a metal or wood surface.

etching An intaglio printmaking process. The image is made by coating the surface of a metal plate, scratching through the coating, then placing the plate in acid. The acid burns through the scratched lines, making grooves in the metal that can hold ink.

exhibit A temporary show or display of a group of artworks. Also called an exhibition.

expressionism A style of art in which the main idea is to show a definite or strong mood or feeling. If written with a capital E, Expressionism is a definite style of art which was created mostly in Germany, from about 1890 to 1920. The term "Expressionism" was first used at the 1911 Fauvist and Cubist exhibition in Berlin. It describes art that distorts reality through exaggeration, vigorous and visible brushwork and strong color, in order to express an artist's ideas or emotions.

Federal Art Program A United States government program, set up during the Depression to create jobs for American artists.

figure A general term for any shape or form that we see as distinct from a background. Also, a human form in a work of art.

fine art Art that is valued for its design qualities and ideas or expressiveness, not just for its technical excellence or use.

focal point An area of an artwork that first attracts and usually sustains the viewer's attention.

foreground In a scene or artwork, the part that seems near or close to the viewer.

form Any three-dimensional object. A form can be measured from top to bottom (height), side to side (width) and front to back (depth). Also a general term that refers to the structure or design of a work.

glaze In painting, a thin layer of transparent paint. In ceramics, a thin coating of minerals fused to clay by firing. Glaze creates a permanent, glassy surface on clay.

gouache An opaque watercolor made from pigments ground in water and mixed with a binder. Gouache looks like school tempera or poster paint.

history painting An artwork that depicts a mythological or historical event.

horizon line A level line where water or land seems to end and the sky begins. It is usually on the eye level of the observer. If the horizon cannot be seen, its placement must be imagined.

horizontal A line or shape that is parallel to the top and bottom edges of a surface.

hue The common name of color in, or related to, the color spectrum, such as yellow, yellow-orange, blue-violet, green. Hue is another word for color.

idealized More perfect than you would ordinarily find in any particular example.

illusions of space The use of artistic devices, especially perspective system, to produce a likeness of three-dimensional space on a flat surface.

imagination The ability to picture things in the mind, often things that are not seen in the real world.

imaginary Something created from the imagination.

Impressionism (1875 - 1900) A style of painting that began in France. It emphasizes candid glimpses of subjects and the momentary effects of sunlight on color.

landmark Something that is easy to see and important to people in a community- a building, a statue, a park.

landscape An artwork that depicts the land (mountains, valleys, rivers, etc.) as subject matter. Categories of landscape include *cityscape* and *seascape*.

light The condition of illumination upon which sight depends; the opposite of dark. In art, we are referring to the light the artist shows or implies (sunlight, moonlight, candlelight, etc.)

line A mark with length and direction, created by a point that moves across a surface. A line can vary in length, width, direction, curvature and color. Line can be two-dimensional (a pencil line on paper), three-dimensional (wire) or implied.

linear style A painting technique in which contours or outlines are prominent.

lithography A method of printing from a prepared flat stone or metal plate and based on the principle that grease and water repel each other. A drawing is made on the stone or plate with a greasy drawing material and then washed with water. When greasy ink is applied, it sticks to the greasy drawing but runs off the wet surface. This allows a print to be made of the drawing.

medium The material and technique used by the artist to produce a work of art. It may also refer to the liquid with which powdered pigments are mixed to make paint.

middleground Parts of an artwork that appear to be between objects in the foreground and the background.

mood A conscious state or temper of mind or predominant emotion.

mural A large painting or artwork, generally designed for and created on the wall or ceiling of a public building.

museum An institution devoted to the acquisition, care, study and display of objects.

mythology The stories told in a culture about their gods and goddesses.

narrative Visual artworks created to tell a story or teach ideas.

Naturalism An artistic tendency prevailing in the late 19th century which led artists to become more interested in depicting the trivia of everyday life; parallel movement in literature and often confused with realism.

naturalists Artists who study plant and animal life in their natural surroundings and then accurately draw or paint what they have observed.

oil paint A relatively slow-drying paint made from pigments mixed with an oil base. When it dries, it becomes a hard film, protecting the brilliance of the colors.

outline A line that shows or creates the outer edge of a shape or form. Also called a contour.

painterly A general painting style in which patches of color and visible brushstrokes show, allowing the viewer to infer the artist's gestures in applying paint.

paintings Works produced by applying paint to a surface.

pastel A chalk-like crayon made of finely ground color. A picture made with pastel crayons. Also a term for tints of colors.

permanent collection A collection of art that a museum owns.

perspective Techniques for creating the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface.

picture plane The surface of a two-dimensional artwork.

pigment Any coloring matter, usually a fine powder, mixed with a liquid or binder to make paint, ink, dyes or crayons.

point of view The angle from which the viewer sees an object or a scene.

Realism (1850-1900) A style of art that shows places, events, people or objects as the eye sees them. It was developed in the mid-nineteenth-century by artists who did not use the formulas of Neo-classicism and the drama of Romanticism.

realistic Art that shows a recognizable subject with lifelike colors, textures, shadows and proportions.

Regionalism A movement within American Scene Painting which concentrated in the Mid-West in the 1930s. It captured the flavor of life there in a literal painting style.

representational Similar to the way an object or scene looks.

romantic Art that emphasizes strong emotions, personal responses, and imagination.

Romanticism (1815-1875) A revolt against the formality and intellectual discipline of Neo-Classicism, the movement developed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Romantics emphasized commitment to feeling, emotion, to the individual's right of expression, Nature and the past were important subjects to the Romantics. The movement was particularly strong in England, France, and Germany; the most important romantic artists include Turner, Constable, Gericault and Delacroix.

Royal Academy The Royal Academy of Arts in London was founded in 1768, for the purpose of cultivating and improving the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. The memorial presented to George III, asking for its charter, stated that the two principal objects were the establishment of a well-regulated school or academy of design, and an annual exhibition open to all artists of distinguished merit. Among the thirty-six original members were Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, Benjamin West, Mary Moser, and Angelica Kaufmann. The first President was Sir Joshua Reynolds, succeeded in 1792 by Benjamin West.

The Salon An official French exhibition of paintings which was first held in 1667. Between 1789-1889 it became the most fashionable artistic competition for artists. Acceptance by the Salon was both conservative and academic and usually meant financial success for an artist.

seascape Artwork that shows a scene of the sea, ocean, a coastal environment or a large lake.

shape A flat figure created when actual or implied lines meet to enclose a space. A change in color or shading can define a shape. Shapes can be divided into several types: geometric (square, triangle, circle) and organic (irregular in outline).

sketch A drawing done quickly to catch the important features of a subject. Also, a drawing that may be used to try out an idea or plan another work.

space Element of art referring to the empty or open area between, around, above, below or within objects. Shapes and forms are defined by space around and within them. Space is often described as three-dimensional or two-dimensional, as positive (occupied by a shape or form) or negative (surrounding a shape or form). Space can be implied or real. In two-dimensional artwork it is the illusion an artist creates that we are looking into something that has depth, as well as height and width. In three-dimensional artwork, space is the real distance between forms.

studio A place where an artist creates his or her artwork.

study A painting or drawing that records a particular object(s) in great detail and can be used to create a finished work of art; a practice version of a work of art that examines either a part of or the entire composition and is used to develop the final version.

style The specific qualities (line, texture of paint, point of view, attention to detail, color, etc.) that characterize the art of an individual or group.

subject A topic or idea represented in an artwork.

symbol Something that stands for something else; especially a letter, figure or sign that represents a real object or idea. A red heart shape is a common symbol for love.

technique An artist's way of using art materials to achieve a desired result. A technique can be an artist's unique way to create artwork (a special kind of brushstroke) or a fairly standard step-by-step procedure (the technique of creating a crayon-resist).

two-dimensional Artwork that is flat or typically measured in only two major ways: height and width.

value Element of art that refers to the darkness or lightness of a surface. Value depends on how much light a surface reflects. Tints are light values of pure colors. Shades are dark values of pure colors. Values can also be an important element in works of art in which color is absent or very subtle (drawings, prints, photographs, most sculpture and architecture).

vanishing point In a perspective drawing, one or more points on the horizon where receding lines seem to meet.

viewer A person looking at a work of art.

wash A very thin coat of paint. A color that has been thinned with water (or turpentine, if the paint is oil) so that when it is brushed on paper, canvas, or board the surface beneath can still be seen.

watercolor A transparent paint made by mixing powdered colors with a binder and water. The term also means an artwork done with this paint.