

# Art Glossary

## Western Art History

**Abstract:** not realistic, though often based on an actual subject.

**Abstract Concept:** an idea that does not take a visible form, such as justice, truth.

**Aesthetics:** the study of the beautiful in art; defined by the visual, moral, and social standards of the culture in which it was created; focuses on the nature of beauty, the nature and value of art, our responses to art, and how we define what is art.

**Allegorical:** in a work of art, an image (or images) that illustrates an abstract concept, idea or story, often suggesting deeper meaning.

**Anatomy:** the study of the structure of the human body, especially the bones and muscles.

**Ancient and Near Eastern Art:** 3,000 BC – 630 AD; created in the present day areas from Turkey to Afghanistan.

**Ancient Egyptian Art:** 3,000 BC – 400 AD; the time of the pharaohs and pyramids in the area of modern day Egypt.

**Ancient Greek and Roman Art:** 1,000 BC – 400 AD; created in the areas controlled by the Greek city-states around the Mediterranean Sea and the Roman Empire from North Africa to England.

**Architecture:** the art and science of designing and erecting buildings.

**Art:** the making or doing of things that have form and beauty; usually creative and unique, art expresses human feelings and spiritual beliefs.

**Artist:** a person who creates art; in ancient times the artist created works for the religious or political powers; in Medieval and Renaissance times, the artist created works for the church and wealthy patrons; in modern times, artists create for themselves, businesses, patrons or churches.

**Asymmetrical:** different on either side of a central axis (a line drawn down the middle).

**Balance:** if you draw an imaginary line down the middle of a composition, symmetrical balance is when the right side of the artwork is the same as the left side; in asymmetrical balance the sides are different.

**Belief:** ideas about something held to be true by a person or culture; generally about why or how something occurs;

**Bronze:** an alloy of copper and tin used for sculpture.

**Calligraphy:** beautiful or expert handwriting; often a special style created by artists.

**Caricature:** character studies that usually exaggerate one or more features, often with humorous or satirical intent.

**Carving:** a subtractive method of sculpture; taking away wood or stone.

**Cave Art:** prehistoric art found in caves underground.

**Ceramic:** any object made of clay and fired (baked at high temperatures).

**Classical:** originating in ancient Greece or Rome; represents unadorned beauty.

**Collage:** a grouping of different textures, objects and materials glued down.

**Composition:** the manner in which the artist presents the subject or subjects in a composition.

**Contemporary Art:** generally defined as art produced during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1950-2000 AD.

**Contour:** an outline drawing of an object.

**Cool Colors:** colors that recede (appear to go away from us), such as blue, green and violet.

**Creative:** original, expressive or imaginative; the ability to put together lines, colors, forms and subjects in ways that are new and different.

**Design:** the organization of line, form, color, value, texture and space in an eye-pleasing arrangement; artists use repetition, emphasis, unity, proportion and/or contrast to organize their art works.

**Diagonal Line:** a line that goes in a slanted direction; within a square it could go from the upper left corner to the lower right corner.

**Drawing:** usually a work in pen, pencil or charcoal on paper.

**Element:** artistic design considerations such as color, line, texture, shape or form and space.

**Emphasis:** a design principle that gives dominance to a particular area through color, size or repetition.

**Exaggerate:** to enlarge something out of proportion with nearby objects or people.

**Expressionism:** the artist uses exaggeration of form and facial or body gestures to appeal directly to the beholder's emotional response – love, hate, fear, patriotism, religion.

**Figure:** the human or animal form used in creating art; i.e. figure-drawing.

**Genre:** a form of realistic painting of people that depicts ordinary events of the day; not religious, historical or mythological.

**Geometric:** any art or style primarily using the basic shapes – rectangles, squares, circles, triangles; often in a pattern.

**High Key:** an artwork that uses primarily bright colors and tints.

**Horizon Line:** the distant view where sky meets water or land at the artist's eye level.

**Horizontal Line:** a line that runs side to side.

**Illustration:** an artwork developed to accompany a story, advertisement, or written text.

**Impressionism:** an outdoor painting technique that shows the changing effects of light and color; Europe and America 1850 – 1900.

**Islamic Art:** 629 – 1400 AD; created in the service of the Muslim religion in the area south of the Mediterranean Sea from Spain to India.

**Landscape:** a scenery painting; also includes the cityscape or seascape.

**Low Key:** an artwork that uses primarily dark colors and shades.

**Marble:** a hard, crystalline, metamorphic limestone, white or variously colored, sometimes streaked, which can be carved then polished to a high shine.

**Medieval Art:** art works created in Europe from 400 – 1300 AD; includes present-day England, France, Italy and Germany.

**Medium:** the material that is used in an artwork; i.e. watercolor, oil, marble, bronze; plural media.

**Modeling:** in sculpture building up clay or wax into a form; in painting varying the colors to suggest a three-dimensional quality.

**Mosaic:** images formed by combining many small objects, such as small colored stones, ceramic tiles or glass pieces, fixed to a hard, stable surface.

**Motif:** a main element, idea or feature, specifically in art, literature or music; a repeated figure in a design.

**Mural:** a continuous painting made to fill a wall.

**Mythology:** a collection of traditional stories from a preliterate society about the origin and history of a people, its deities, ancestors and heroes.

**Narrative Art:** an artwork that tells a story.

**Painting:** the act, art or occupation of picturing scenes, objects, persons, etc. with paint.

**Patron:** a person, usually wealthy and influential, who sponsors and supports a person, activity etc.; for example, a patron commissions an artist to create a work of art.

**Pattern:** an overall design that repeats the same lines or shapes to cover a surface.

**Perspective:** a formal method of creating a three-dimensional effect on a two-dimensional surface. There are three kinds: visual perspective – making distant objects smaller; aerial or atmospheric – colors in the distance are hazier or bluer; linear perspective – having lines converge to meet at a single point on the horizon.

**Pigment:** powdered earth, minerals and chemicals, ground and mixed with a binder such as oil.

**Portrait:** a painting, photograph or other likeness of a person, especially one showing a face.

**Prehistoric Art:** created before a culture develops a written language; the period of time depends upon the culture.

**Primary Colors:** red, yellow and blue; may be mixed to make other colors but cannot themselves be mixed from other colors.

**Print:** a work of art, usually on paper, created from a “plate” that has been transformed through a technique such as engraving, etching or woodcut and then inked and the image is transferred to paper.

**Proportion:** the pleasing relationship of all parts to each other and the whole of the design; also refers to the correct proportions in showing a human body, where each part (head, hand, etc.) is normal compared to the other parts.

**Realism:** a style of artwork in which we can clearly identify the person, place or thing; an artist’s attempt to show a subject as accurately as possible.

**Relief:** in sculpture and architecture the projection of figures and forms from a flat surface so that they stand partly free.

**Renaissance:** the revival of classical Greek and Roman art, literature, and learning based on Humanism; Europe 1400 – 1600 AD.

**Secondary Colors:** green, purple and orange; the colors obtained by mixing the primary colors.

**Sculpture:** the art of carving wood, chiseling stone, casting and welding metal, modeling clay or wax, or assembling these materials into three-dimensional representations, such as statues, figures, forms, etc.

**Secular:** having to do with the temporal (worldly), not the spiritual or religious.

**Shade:** any color mixed with black; it makes the color darker.

**Spiritual:** relating to the nature of the spirit – the unseen force that gives life; concerned with the soul or a supernatural being, for example, gods or God.

**Spiritual Artwork:** artwork that shows spiritual images or is used in religious ceremonies.

**Symbol:** something that stands for or represents another thing; especially an object to represent something abstract, as a dove represents peace.

**Tapestry:** multi-colored pictorial or decorative weaving meant to be hung on a wall or placed on furniture.

**Textile:** cloth, fabric; especially one that is woven or knitted.

**Texture:** the tactile (feeling through the skin) quality of a surface; smooth, rough, slick, sticky.

**Tint:** any color mixed with white; it makes the color lighter.

**Unique:** being the only one of its kind; being without an equal or equivalent.

**Value:** a principle, standard or quality considered worthwhile or desirable; common values are compassion, freedom, honesty, justice, peace, respect, responsibility, tolerance.

**Variety:** the differences in scale, surface, line, value and shape that give interest to a composition.

**Vertical Line:** a line that goes from top to bottom.

**Visual Arts:** a broad category that includes the traditional fine arts such as drawing, painting, printmaking, and sculpture; communication and design arts such as film, television, graphics, and product design; architecture and environmental arts such as urban, building, interior and landscape design; folk arts; and other works of art such as ceramics, fibers, jewelry, works in wood, paper and other materials.

**Warm Colors:** colors that advance, such as red, red-orange, orange and yellow.