

Art Glossary

A

abstract: artwork where objects have been changed or modified so they no longer look realistic.

acrylic paint: a water-based paint with a polymer binder; dries to a permanent finish.

aesthetics: the study or theory of the beautiful in art.

analogous: colours that are next to each other on the colour wheel and are related by a single hue; e.g., red, red-orange, orange, and red-violet.

analyse: in visual art, to examine the features of an artwork as they relate to the elements of art and principles of design.

art criticism: the process and result of critical thinking about art; usually involves the description, analysis, and interpretation of art, as well as some kind of judgment or determination of the quality of the piece.

asymmetry: a way of organizing the parts of a design so that one side differs from the other without destroying the overall balance and harmony; also called *informal balance*.

B

background: the part of the picture plane that seems to be the farthest from the viewer.

C

canvas: linen or cotton cloth tightly stretched over and attached to wooden stretcher bars to create a taut surface for oil or acrylic painting.

collage: artwork made by attaching pieces of paper or other materials to a flat surface.

colour: the various visual phenomena that are the results of the reflection or absorption of light by a surface. Colour has three properties: hue, value, and intensity.

colour groups: groupings of colours that have certain likenesses or differences; sometimes called *colour families* or *relationships*.

colour harmonies: colour groupings that have a pleasing visual effect (as opposed to colours that clash with one another).

colour wheel: a tool for organizing colour that shows the visible light spectrum organized in a circular format; a tool that helps to chart the relationships between colours (hues).

complementary colours: pairs of colours that are opposite one another on the colour wheel. Red and green, blue and orange, and yellow and violet have the greatest degree of contrast. Red-violet and yellow-green, red-orange and blue-green, and yellow-orange and blue-violet are also complementary colours.

composition: the arrangement of the elements of art and the principles of design within a given work of art.

computer design: any visual expression (original art, functional graphics, scientific illustrations) created with a computer.

contrast: design principle that emphasizes differences between the art elements. For example, a painting may have bright colours that contrast with dull colours or angular shapes that contrast with rounded shapes. Sharp contrast draws attention and can direct a viewer to a focal point within a work of art.

cool colours: a colour group associated with blue that includes blue-green, blue-violet, green, yellow-green, and violet. Cool colours appear to recede in space and have a general psychological association with coolness.

D

depth: the actual dimension of depth within a work of art or the illusion of showing distance in a work of art.

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

dimensional: measurement in one direction. A two-dimensional (2-D) work of art has the two dimensions of length and width; a three-dimensional (3-D) work of art has the three dimensions of length, width, and depth.

E

elements of art: the basic components or tools of visual communication; include line, space, shape/form, value, colour, and texture.

emphasis: the principle of design that is concerned with dominance; the development of a main idea or centre of interest (**focal point**).

F

fine art: works made to be enjoyed, not functional, and judged by the theories of art.

focal point: the area within a composition at which the emphasis is greatest and where the eye of the viewer continually comes to rest (the centre of interest).

foreground: the part of a picture which appears closest to the viewer and often is at the bottom of the picture.

form: element of art that refers to the three-dimensional quality/qualities of an artwork.

found objects: common or unusual objects that may be used to create a work of art; specifically refers to scrap, discarded materials that have been “found” and used in artworks.

functional art: functional objects such as dishes and clothes that are of a high artistic quality and/or craftsmanship; art with a utilitarian purpose.

G

graphic design: visual communication intended to be used with commercial printing/reproductive processes in both two- and three-dimensional presentations.

grid: pattern of intersecting vertical and horizontal lines.

gouache: opaque water-based paint that dries to a dense matte finish; similar to the appearance and quality of poster paints.

H

hue: property of colour that refers to the intrinsic “colour” of a colour. Distinguishing between a colour that is more red-orange than red-violet is referencing the property of hue.

I

Impressionism: 19th-century art movement that rejected the historical themes and nostalgic images favoured by the academic and romantic painters of the day. The Impressionists looked to the life around them as the inspiration for their paintings of sunlit landscapes, middle-class people at leisure, and mothers with children

impressionistic: showing the effects of light and atmospheric conditions of an artist’s work that spontaneously captures a moment in time.

intensity: the property of colour that refers to the brightness or dullness of a colour; how pure the colour is.

interpret: to respond to art work by identifying the feelings, moods, and ideas communicated by the work of art. Interpretation also calls for the investigation of the influence of time and place upon the artist who created the work of art.

K

L

landscape: the subject matter category in which the main theme of the work is natural scenery such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers, and lakes. Traditionally, the space depicted in a landscape is divided into three parts.

line: element of art which refers to the mark(s) made on a surface by a moving point. The element of line has a wide range of qualities and expressive possibilities: curved lines, diagonal lines, dotted lines, straight lines, etc.

M

mat: to frame a picture or drawing with a cardboard border. The “mat” used in matting an art work can be made of cardboard, acid-free papers, or archival cotton fibres.

media: the material used by the artist to produce art (i.e., paint, clay, fibres).

middle ground: area in a picture between the **foreground** and the **background**.

mixed media: any art work that uses more than one medium.

monochromatic: a colour scheme that uses one colour and all of the tones, tints, and shades that can be derived from it.

monoprint definition - One of a series of prints in which each has some differences of colour, design, texture, etc. applied to an underlying common image.

motif: a unit repeated to create visual rhythm.

movement: the design principle that uses some of the elements of art to produce the look of action or to cause the viewer's eye to sweep over the art work in a certain manner.

mural: surface treatment or decoration that is applied directly to a wall. A painted fresco is one form of a mural.

N

narrative artwork: a work of art whose primary purpose is to tell a story.

naturalistic: art work that looks like the subject it is trying to represent.

negative space: the areas of space that are in and around the subject matter. The negative spaces define the subject matter.

neutral colours: Black, white, grey, and brown are considered to be “neutral” colours because they are (theoretically) neither warm nor cool colours. Some neutral colours may be achieved by mixing a complementary colour pair—which “neutralizes” them.

non-objective/nonrepresentational: artwork that contains no recognizable objects or forms.

P

oil pastels: media with similar colour pigments as chalk pastels, but an oil-and-wax composition.

pastels: pigments pressed into sticks and used as a dry medium on paper; sometimes referred to as hard or soft *chalk pastels*.

pattern: repetition of an element of art (i.e., shapes, lines, or colours) to achieve decoration or ornamentation.

perspective: system of representing three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface, giving the illusion of depth in space. Linear perspective deals with drawing, and atmospheric perspective attempts to use colour and value changes to get the effect of distance.

portrait: subject matter category in which the main purpose of the art work is to communicate a likeness of an individual or group of individuals.

positive space: the primary subject matter in a work of art, as opposed to the background or unoccupied spaces.

primary colours: hues that cannot be produced by a mixture of other hues: magenta red, yellow, and cyan (turquoise) blue.

principles of design: concepts for combining the elements of art into successful art forms, including balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, repetition, rhythm, proportion, unity, and variety.

printmaking: the process of reproducing images on a flat surface; three types are relief block (linoleum, wood), intaglio (etching, engraving), and stencil (silkscreen).

processes: both art methods and the media used for visual communication in a variety of art forms.

proportion: the relationship in size of one component of a work of art to another.

R

random rhythm: visual rhythm in which a motif is repeated in no apparent order.

Realism: 19th-century art movement in which artists focused attention on ordinary people, such as peasants and labourers, who had not been pictured in art up to that time. Realists depicted real scenes from contemporary life, from city street scenes to country funerals.

realistic: art work that attempts a photographic likeness of the subject matter; sometimes refers to the choice of subject that is commonplace as opposed to courtly and idealized.

relief sculpture: three-dimensional forms attached to a background.

Renaissance: literally means “rebirth.” The Renaissance period in Europe lasted from the 14th century through the 16th century and was distinguished by a renewed interest in classical art, architecture, literature, and philosophy.

repetition: a way of combining art elements so that the same elements are used over and over to achieve balance and harmony.

representational art: artworks whose primary purpose is to depict the visual appearance of objects and things.

rhythm: refers to a way of utilizing art elements to produce the look and feel of rhythmic movement with a visual tempo or beat.

Romanticism: late 18th- and early 19th-century movement that emphasized the values of passionate emotion and artistic freedom. Romanticism was a philosophical attitude that emphasized emotion, imagination, mystery, and the pursuit of one’s unique destiny.

S

secondary colours: violet, green, orange; hues that can be produced by mixing two of the primary hues. Magenta red and cyan (turquoise) blue make violet. Yellow and cyan blue make green. Magenta red and yellow make orange.

shades: colours created when black is added to a hue to darken a colour.

shape: element of art that refers to an enclosed area of 2-D or 3-D space that is defined by its external edge. Almost everything you see has one main shape. A shape can be created within an artwork by enclosing an area with a line, or it can be achieved by making changes in value, colours, forms, or one of the other elements of art.

space: element of art that refers to the perceived distance or area between, around, above, below, or within a given area. Artworks can deal with actual physical space or the illusion of space (depth), depending on the aims of the artist; major divisions within the composition of an artwork include areas of positive and negative space.

still life: the subject matter category in which the main purpose of the art work is to show inanimate objects.

style: a characteristic manner of presenting ideas and feeling in visual form; may also refer to an individual artist or a group of artists whose work has certain features in common.

symbolic: works of art that have forms, images, or subjects representing meanings other than the ones with which they are usually associated.

symmetry: a way of organizing the parts of a design so that one side duplicates or mirrors the other.

T

tempera paint: water-based paint that traditionally had pigment mixed with an egg binder. Sometimes called poster paint, this opaque medium now has a chemical binder.

tertiary colours: red-violet, red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet; colours that can be created by mixing a primary and a secondary colour. The tertiary colours fall between primary and secondary colours on the colour wheel.

textiles: art works that are created from natural or manmade fibres. Weaving, basketry, stitchery, and knitting are just a few of the processes involved in textile design.

texture: element of art that refers to the perceived surface quality or “feel” of an object—its roughness, smoothness, softness, etc. Artworks can deal with the actual physical texture of a surface or the illusion of texture, depending on the aim of the artist.

tints: colours obtained by adding white to the hue to lighten it.

tones: colours obtained by adding grey to the hue of a colour.

triadic: a colour group or colour scheme using three colours of equal distance from one another on the colour wheel, forming an equilateral triangle. Red, yellow, and blue form a triadic colour group.

U

unity: refers to the visual quality of wholeness or oneness that is achieved through effective use of the elements of art and principles of design.

V

value: element of art that refers to the degree and qualities of lightness or darkness. In colour theory, value refers to the lightness (**tint**) or darkness (**shade**) of a colour; i.e. pink is a tint of red.

vanishing point: in perspective drawing, a point or points on the horizon where receding parallel lines seem to meet.

variety: quality achieved when the art elements are combined in various combinations to increase visual interest. For instance, an assortment of shapes that are of a variety of sizes attracts more attention than an assortment of shapes all the same size.

W

warm colours: a colour group that is associated with red that includes red-orange, red-violet, orange, yellow-orange, and usually yellow. Warm colours appear to advance in space and have a general psychological association with warmth.

watercolour: transparent water-based paint that uses gum Arabic as a binder.