

KCAI School for Continuing and Professional Studies

Glossary of art terms

Abstraction

The modification of a natural form by simplification or distortion

Abstract Expressionism

1940s New York painting movement based on Abstract Art, also referred to as action painting

Acrylic paint

Fast-drying paint containing pigment suspension in acrylic polymer emulsion

Additive color

Color that results from the mixture of two or more colored lights; the visual blending of separate spots of transmitted colored light

Aesthetic

Ideas about what makes a work of art beautiful or satisfying, also pertaining to the beautiful, as opposed to the useful, scientific or emotional

Analogous colors

Colors that are closely related or near each other on the color spectrum

Animation

The rapid display of images to create an illusion of movement; still images can be created by hand or digitally

Archival

Refers to materials, especially paper, that meet certain criteria for permanence, such as lignin-free, pH neutral, alkaline-buffered and stable in light

Art Nouveau

An art style of the late 1800s featuring curving, often swirling shapes based on organic forms

Assemblage

The technique of creating a sculpture by joining together individual pieces or segments; sometimes “found” objects

Atmospheric perspective

Objects in the distance are blurred, indistinct, misty and often bluer

Background

The part of an artwork that seems the farthest away

Balance - principle of art

The arrangement of the elements, in a work of art, to create a sense of equilibrium

Bisque

Clay that has been fired once and is unglazed

Baroque

A dramatic art style associated with European art between 1550-1750, using ornamentation and many curved lines

Bas relief

Sculpture in which figures project only slightly from a background, as on a coin, also known as low relief

Blending

Smoothing the edges of two colors together so that they have a smooth gradation where they meet

Block

In printmaking, a piece of flat material, such as wood, linoleum or metal, into which a design has been carved

Book binding

The art of attaching multiple pages into various book formats

Brushwork

The characteristic manner in which each artist brushes paint onto a canvas

Casting

The process of making a sculpture by pouring liquid material such as clay, metal or plastic into a mold and allowing it to harden

Canvas

Closely woven cloth used as a support for paintings, gessoed and primed before use

Cel animation

Also called traditional or hand-drawn animation; involves drawing each frame of a movement by hand

Ceramics

The art of making objects of clay and firing them in a kiln

Chiaroscuro

The effect of light and shade in a painting or drawing, especially where strong tonal contrasts are used

Classical art

The artistic style of Greece and Rome; also any art based on logical, rational principles and deliberate composition

Claymation

A type of stop-motion animation in which the characters are made of clay and moved between each frame

Coil construction

A method of forming pottery or sculpture from rolls of clay that are smoothed together

Color - element of art

The perceptive properties of the visible light spectrum

Color theory

The study of color mixing, including the properties of hue, saturation and value

Color wheel

A circular representation of color theory that clearly shows color relationships

Complimentary colors

Hues directly opposite one another on the color wheel; when placed side-by-side, complementary colors are intensified

Conservation

The restoration of works of art with the aim to correct damage caused by mishandling and improper environmental conditions

Contemporary Art

Art made since World War II, or art made in the current day

Contrast - principal of art

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

Conceptual art

An art form in which the underlying idea or concept and the process by which it is achieved are more important than any tangible product

Contour

A line that creates a boundary separating an area of space or object from the space around it

Chroma

The relative intensity of a hue when compared to grayness or lack of hue

Collage

Image making in which the artist uses materials such as cut paper, objects and magazine clippings and glues them onto a surface

Composition

The placement or arrangement of visual elements in a work of art or a photograph

Critique

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

Cubism

A style of art from the early 20th century where forms are fragmented into planes or geometric facets

Dada

A movement that emerged in 1916 in Europe that mocked all established traditions in art with works that were deliberately vulgar and nonsensical

Deckled edge

The ragged edge found on handmade papers that cannot be reproduced by machines; a sign of quality handmade paper

Encaustic

A painting technique in which pigment is added to melted beeswax

Expressionism

A style of art in which the artist seeks to express internal emotional experiences rather than impressions of the external world

Fiber art

Any type of fine art that uses textiles, yarn, natural or synthetic fibers, often focusing on materials and processes as significant

Foreground

The part of an artwork that seems the closest

Form - element of art

Any three-dimensional shape, including geometric and organic shapes

Gesso

A white ground material for preparing rigid supports for painting, made of a mixture of chalk, white pigment and glue

Gouache

Opaque, or non-translucent, watercolors used primarily for illustrations

Graphic design

The art of combining text and images in advertisements, on websites and in other media

Harmony - principal of art

A sense of consistency and orderliness achieved by using similar elements and colors throughout an artwork

Hierarchy

Using design elements to lead the viewer through each element in order of its importance

Hue

The perceived color of an object, identified by a common name such as red, orange, blue

Illustration

The art form of creating images for books; also art in a similar style, emphasizing drawing

Impasto

A style of painting characterized by thick, juicy color application

Impressionism

A 19th century French art movement concerned with depicting the visual impression of the moment, especially in terms of the effect of light and color

Intaglio

A printmaking processes where the image is incised onto the surface of the plate; includes drypoint, etching, engraving

Kiln

A furnace of clay bricks used for firing pottery and fusing glass

Kiln form glass

An art form in which glass is fused, slumped, draped or textured by the heat of a kiln

Line - element of art

A mark on a surface that is longer than wide, used to define shapes and forms

Linear perspective

Forms that are far away are made smaller, and parallel lines receding into the distance converge at a point on the horizon line known as the vanishing point

Lithography

A printmaking process on flat stones using the principal that oil attracts oil and repels water

Loom

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

Mannerism

Art style from approximately 1520–1580 in Europe, characterized by a dramatic use of space and light and a tendency toward elongated figures

Mixed media

In drawing and painting this refers to the use of different media in the same picture, such as pencil and ink

Modern Art

Artistic works produced roughly from 1860–1970, in which artistic traditions are disregarded in favor of experimentation

Monotype

A printmaking process made by painting on glass and transferring to paper; unique among printmaking techniques because it does not allow for multiples

Motion graphics

Graphics that use video footage or animation, usually for use on websites

Movement - principal of art

Showing actions, or alternatively, the path the viewer's eye follows throughout an artwork

Multimedia design

The art form of combining text, audio, still images, animation, video and interactivity, for advertisements, websites and other media

Negative space

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

Neo-Classicism

A style in 19th century art that was inspired by the classical styles of Greece and Rome, using mathematical composition and defined, simple lines

Neutral

Colors that have no hue: black, white, brown or gray

Palette

The surface on which paints are mixed or the range of colors used by an artist

Pastel

A colored crayon that consists of pigment mixed with aqueous binder; pastel works are considered paintings rather than drawings

Pattern - principal of art

Repeated colors, lines, shapes, or textures in an artwork

Pigments

Particles with inherent color that can be mixed with various binders to form paint, crayon, dye or ink

Photogram

A photograph made by placing objects directly on light-sensitive material and exposing to light

Plein Air

Paintings done outside directly from the subject, popularized by Impressionists

Pulp

The fibrous cellulose substance from which paper is made

Precious metal clay

A clay used for jewelry making with suspended particles of silver or gold; when the clay is fired, the organic elements burn away, leaving only metal

Primary colors

Colors that cannot be created by mixing. Primary colors are red, yellow and blue

Proportion - principal of art

Size relationships between parts of a whole, or between two or more objects perceived as a unit, such as parts of the human body or face

Registration

A number of systems used in color printing, to ensure that each element prints in the correct position

Realism

The art movement or style of representing familiar things as they actually are; also called naturalism

Relief

A number of printmaking processes in which ink is rolled over high areas and printed, including woodblock and linoleum block printing

Renaissance

The European art style from 1400–1525, characterized by an interest in Classical art and influenced by new science, such as perspective and anatomy

Romanticism

An art movement from the 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, the importance of the individual and the sublime in nature

Rococo

A style of art popular in Europe in the 18th century, emphasizing ornate but small-scale decoration, curvilinear forms and pastel colors

Screen printing

A printmaking technique in which ink is forced through mesh onto paper; stencils are applied in a variety of methods to determine where the ink goes

Sculpture

A three-dimensional form modeled, carved or assembled

Secondary colors

Hues created by combining two primary colors, as yellow and blue mixed together yield green

Sfumato

A drawing technique in which the drawing surface is covered in gray chalk or charcoal and highlights and shadows are added by erasing and darkening the existing shade of gray; also gradual, shaded transitions from light to dark with no hard lines

Shade

A color mixed with black, resulting in a darker color

Shape - element of art

Areas in two-dimensional space that can be defined by edges; shapes can be geometric or organic

Shibori

Several methods of dyeing cloth with a pattern by binding, stitching, folding and twisting it

Sizing

Material applied to a surface of paper to alter or lessen its absorbency, necessary for painting and other wet media to prevent feathering and bleeding

Slab construction

A ceramic technique in which flat pieces of clay are rolled, then joined

SLR

An abbreviation for Single Lense Reflex, a high-quality camera with removable lenses and a mirror system that removes parallax error

Space - element of art

The distances around or between components of an artwork, such as foreground and background; also includes positive and negative space

Still life

A two-dimensional work in which the subject matter is an arrangement of objects: fruit, flowers, tableware and pottery

Stop-motion animation

An animation technique in which real objects are moved and photographed, creating an illusion of independent movement

Study

A detailed drawing or painting made of one or more parts of a final composition, but not the whole work.

Support/substrate

The basic surface of a painting or artwork; paper, canvas, board

Surface design

The embellishment of textile surfaces through dyeing, printing and weaving

Surrealism

A painting style of the early 20th century that emphasized imagery and visions from dreams and fantasies

Tempera

A type of paint originally made by mixing egg yolks with pigment, now a variety of low-cost paints

Texture - element of art

The feel of roughness or smoothness of a surface, or the illusion of roughness or smoothness in an image

Tint

A color mixed with white, creating a lighter color

Unity - principal of art

A sense of wholeness or completeness in a work of art

Value - element of art

The relative lightness or darkness of a hue, also the use of lights and darks in an artwork

Variety - principal of art

The principal of an artwork having diverse elements, such as color and contrast

Volume

The illusion of space that an object or figure fills in an artwork, the actual space taken up by a three-dimensional work

Wash

A thin, broadly applied layer of transparent paint or ink

Watercolor

A technique of painting using a binder made from a water-soluble gum; watercolors can be transparent or opaque

Wax resist

The use of a waxy medium such as crayon to make a design over which a colored wash is spread

Wet on wet

The application of fresh paint over an area on which the paint is still wet

Wheel throwing

A ceramic technique where radially symmetrical vessels are formed on a spinning wheel

Woodworking

Making objects from wood, including furniture and art pieces