

Art Words

Art Words

The following words are commonly used in art and in art classes.

Teachers and students can include new words or variations of words as they are discovered and used.

A

abstract art

Art which stresses elements of composition, rather than subject. The subject usually is unidentifiable or, if identifiable has been simplified or rearranged.

accent

A distinctive feature that accentuates or complements the overall design of a work of art.

acrylic

Paint composed of pigments bound by acrylic resin, a type of

plastic. Acrylic paints are water soluble before they dry.

actual texture

A texture that can be perceived through the sense of touch.

additive sculpture

Process of creating a three-dimensional artwork by adding separate parts to create a whole. Materials could include paper, wood, clay, found objects, metal, etc.

aesthetics

The theory of the artistic or the beautiful; pertaining to work philosophically pleasing to the emotional nature of humans.

amorphous

Without definite form.

analogous colors

Colors that are next to each other on the color wheel (for example, yellow, yellow-orange, and orange). Also called related colors; similar or alike.

architect

Structural design professional who designs buildings and supervises their construction.

architecture

The art and science of designing building and other large-scale, aesthetically pleasing, functional structures.

armature

A frame made of wire or other materials and used to hold up a sculpture.

art criticism

Process of thinking and learning (making discriminating judgments) about a work of art in order to be able to draw informed conclusions about its quality or meaning.

art history

Study of the historical and cultural contexts of art.

artifact

An object created by human beings. Most artifacts are originally produced to serve a function. They acquire aesthetic value over time.

artist's intention

An artist's purpose or reason for creating a particular artwork; often difficult to know.

artistic elements

Visual properties of color, line, shape, form, texture, and value. Sensory properties are immediately visible in a work of art.

artistic perception

Using awareness, sensitivity, and intuition to gain insight and knowledge regarding natural and human-made environments.

artwork

An object or image resulting from imaginative conception and creation that invokes a feeling of pleasure or another emotional response in the viewer and that may convey meaning.

assemblage

Type of three-dimensional art built by combining and connecting a variety of objects and found materials to create

a unified whole.

asymmetrical balance

Type of balance in which two sides of an artwork are not alike, but carry equal or nearly equal visual weight. Also known as informal balance.

B

background

Part of an artwork that appears to be farthest from the viewer, or in the distance of the scene.

balance

The impression of equilibrium in a pictorial or sculptural composition. Balance can be symmetrical, asymmetrical, or radial. Balance is a principle of design.

bird's-eye view

View from above or from a high vantage point.

bisque

Unglazed fired ceramic clay.

block printing

Method of printing in which a raised design or image is created on a flat surface. The design is covered with ink or color and then paper is pressed onto it.

book designer

An artist who designs and creates the layout of a book's cover

and its pages.

border design

Design that creates a framelike edge around a shape.

brayer

In printing, a hand-held rubber roller used to spread ink over a surface. A small hand roller used to spread printmaking ink thinly and evenly.

C

calligraphy

The art of beautiful handwriting, often for decorative purposes.

cartoon

The term has two well-defined meanings. Originally a cartoon was a full-scale and detailed preparatory rendering for a painting, tapestry, or fresco. Now a cartoon is a drawing that shows people or things in a humorous situation and that is often accompanied by a caption.

carving

Creation of a three-dimensional artwork by cutting away unwanted parts of a block of hard material, such as wood or stone. This is the subtractive method.

centre of interest

Part of an artwork the viewer notices first; most important part of an artwork.

ceramic clay

Type of clay that, after being formed, is fired at a high temperature in a kiln to harden and produce ceramic artworks.

cityscape

An artwork showing a view of a city or skyline.

classical

Term applied to artwork that exhibits the characteristics of ancient Greek and Roman art, such as proportion, balance, and idealized forms and themes.

clay

Substance found in the earth that is pliable when moist and hardens when baked. Clay is used to create artworks such as sculpture and pottery.

close-up

Point of view in which objects in an artwork appear to be very near the viewer.

collage

A two-dimensional artwork created by arranging and gluing pictures or photographs, or pieces of paper, fabric, or other materials onto a flat surface.

colour

Also referred to as hue, color is the appearance of an object created by the quality of light it reflects or emits. Colours all come from the three primaries and black and white. Colour has three properties – hue, value, and intensity. The term colour can also refer to a paint, dye, pigment, or other substance that imparts color. Colour is an element of art.

colour family

A group of related colours, for example, warm colours and cool colours are colour families.

colour scheme

A plan for combining colours in a work of art.

colour wheel

Circular chart that shows primary, secondary, and intermediate colours in an order that illustrates progression through the spectrum and relationships among colours.

complementary colour scheme

Colour scheme made from colours that are directly across from one another on the colour wheel.

complementary colours

Colours that are directly across from one another on the colour wheel. These colours contrast strongly with one another.

compose

To plan or create an artwork so all parts are arranged to make a unified whole.

composition

The arrangement of the elements of art. Composition may also refer to any work of art using the principals of art to create a unified artwork.

computer-assisted art

Artworks created with the help of computer software.

construct

To build or make something by putting materials together; additive art.

context

The varied and interwoven circumstances in which a work of art is or was created. These can include factors that pertain to the artist, the intended function of the work of art, the historical period when the art work was produced and its reception and interpretation at that time.

contour

Outline of a shape or the surface of a form. A line that represents such an outline.

contour line

Lines that represent the outer edge and undulating surfaces within a form, such as shapes or wrinkles and folds.

contrast

Difference between two unlike things, such as a dark color and a light color.

converging lines

Actual or implied lines that move toward one another and conjoin at a point in space.

cool colors

Greens, blues, purples, and related colors; cool colors suggest cold and seem to move away from the viewer. Cool colors suggest cool objects, places, and feelings.

creativity

Simply stated, the ability to create. However the word has connotations of originality, productivity, imagination and

innovation.

credit line

Information that accompanies a reproduction of a piece of fine art. It usually includes the artist's name, title of the artwork, date the artwork was completed, medium used, and the artwork's current owner or location.

critique

A close examination; a critical review.

cross-hatched lines

Parallel, crossed lines drawn in more than one direction gradually creating a denser and denser pattern; often used to create a darker value in drawings or printmaking.

culture

Customs, beliefs, arts, and a way of life of a community or a population.

curator

Administrative director of a museum. A person who conducts research for a museum. Curators select artworks among a museum's permanent collection for display and recommend additional artworks for purchase by a museum.

D

depth

Perception of spatial distance between objects in a two-dimensional work of art.

design

The creative, organized, and methodical arrangement of lines, spaces, colors, shapes, textures, and other elements in an artwork. Also, the act of planning and arranging the parts of an artwork using the principals of design.

detail

The small parts of a larger structure, object, or image.

diorama

A three-dimensional, often miniature scene. In a diorama, modeled figures are displayed against a realistic, painted background.

distance

In art, the illusion of the third dimension (depth, or near to far) created in a two-dimensional artwork.

distortion

The twisting or exaggerating forms from their normal shape, often done to express strong emotion.

drawing

An artwork consisting of lines and shapes sketched on paper with materials, such as pencils, pens, chalk, or pastels. Also, the process of creating a line or shape on paper using a drawing implement.

E

earth art

Type of art in which the completed artwork is made from and becomes an important part of the environment in which it was created. Also called earthwork.

elements of art

Basic components of an artwork, including line, shape, form, color, value, texture, and space.

embossing

A designed surface in which parts are raised.

emphasis

Refers to the created center of interest, the place in an artwork where your eye first lands. Emphasis is a principal of design.

engrave

To use a sharp tool to carve letters or pictures into hard materials, such as metal or wood. Also called etching.

etching

Printmaking process in which a metal plate is coated with wax or a like substance, a design is cut into the coating, and the metal plate is submerged in acid. The acid burns the metal along the lines of the designs, creating grooves that hold the ink for printing.

exaggeration

Showing something in a way that enlarges or overemphasizes its importance.

express

To communicate one's thoughts or feelings through words, gestures, or art.

F

fantasy

Art inspired by the creative imagination; unrestrained fancy.

femmage

Type of collage that includes fabric art traditionally made by women.

fiber arts

Artworks created out of yarn, thread, or cloth (for example, stitchery and weaving).

fired

Hardened by great heat; usually refers to clay. For example, in ceramics clay objects are fired in a kiln.

firing

Process of using extreme heat to harden objects made of clay.

fixative

A substance that is sprayed over charcoal, pastel, or pencil drawings to make those materials adhere permanently to the paper and to prevent smearing.

focus

The central aspect of an image or that which draws the viewers attention.

foreground

The part of an artwork that appears to be nearest the viewer,

or in the front of the scene.

form

Form has depth, length, and width, and resides in space. It is perceived as three-dimensional. Form is an element of art.

formal balance

Type of balance in which the visual properties or features on both sides of a center line (vertical, horizontal, or diagonal) are similar or identical. Also known as symmetrical balance.

found object

Any item that an artist finds and uses in an artwork. Found objects can be manufactured items, such as clock parts or natural objects, such as tree bark.

fresco

Painting technique, often used for murals, in which water-based paint is applied to wet plaster. As it dries, the plaster absorbs the paint and the painting becomes part of the wall.

functional

Something that is designed with a specific purpose in mind.

G

galleries

Buildings or areas devoted to the exhibition of artworks for viewing or for sale.

geometric

Term used to describe shapes or forms that are mathematically defined or regular in appearance, such as circles, spheres, squares, or cubes (shapes that have names).

gesture drawing

A drawing done quickly to show main action lines or paths of movement.

glaze

Melted glass coating fired onto pottery; applied as liquid.

graphic art

Design and production of commercial artworks, such as signs, posters, advertisements, book jackets, and computer software.

greenware

Any clay form that has not been fired.

H

handbuilding

Working the clay with hands only; coiling, pinching, and slab building are three basic techniques.

heritage

History, culture, and traditions of a group of people.

hieroglyphics

System of writing, such as that of the ancient Egyptians, that uses pictures or symbols rather than words or letters.

horizon line

The line created in an artwork by the meeting of sky and ground, usually on the viewer's eye level.

horizontal

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

hue

Another word for color.

I

illusion

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

illustrate

To create or design pictures for books, magazines, or other printed works.

illustrator

An artist who creates pictures for books, magazines, or other printed works.

imaginary

Of or having to do with the imagination; not realistic.

implied

Something that is suggested or inferred, rather than directly apparent.

impression

Indentation in a material. A single copy of a print done in a set.

informal balance

Type of balance in which two sides of an artwork are not alike but carry equal or nearly equal visual weight. Also known as asymmetrical balance.

intensity

Brightness or dullness of a color. A color's intensity is highest, or most pure, when it is not mixed with another color. Colors that contain traces of other colors or of black or white have lower intensity.

intermediate colors

Colors created when a primary color (red, yellow, or blue) is mixed with a secondary color (orange, green, or violet).

irregular

Term used to describe shapes and forms that are not geometric. Also known as organic or amorphous (shapes that do not have a name).

K

kiln

In art, an oven which reaches very high temperatures used to harden clay.

L

landscape

An artwork depicting an outdoor scene or scenery.

line

Line is the path of a point moving through space. Lines vary in width, length, direction, color, and degree of curve and can be two-dimensional or implied. Line is an element of art.

linear perspective

Technique that makes use of line to create the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface. If the lines in an artwork created with this technique are extended, they converge on an imaginary point on an imaginary line that represents the eye level of the viewer. This point is called the vanishing point.

loom

Tool or device used to create fabric by weaving fibers together.

M

medium

Material with which an artwork is created (for example, charcoal, pastels, oil paints, or clay). Medium also refers to the technique used to make an artwork, such as painting, sculpture, or etching. (plural – media or mediums)

middle ground

The part of an artwork that appears to lie between objects in the foreground and background.

mixed media

An artwork created by using more than one medium. For example, a collage mixing drawing and painting can be a mixed-media artwork.

model

Someone or something that serves as a subject for an artist. Small replica of another larger object, usually built to scale. Also, to create an artwork by shaping a malleable substance such as clay.

modeling clay

Plastic material used for making forms. It usually comes in a variety of colors and can be reused since it does not harden. It cannot be fired and should not be used for permanent artworks.

monochrome

Color scheme limited to different values of one hue. Also, an artwork that is monochromatic.

monoprint

A single printing made from a plate, after which the plate needs to be reworked in order to pull another monoprint.

mood

The feeling or emotion created in a work of art.

mosaic

An artwork created by setting tesserae (small pieces of glass, tile, stones, paper, or similar material) into mortar or onto

another adhesive background to create a unified pattern or image.

motif

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

movement

Refers to the suggestion of motion through use of various elements in an artwork.

mural

A large artwork, usually a painting, applied directly to a wall or ceiling. Murals often appear on or in public buildings.

museum

An institution designed for the acquisition, presentation, study, and exhibition of works of artistic, historical, and cultural value.

N

negative space

An enclosed empty space which helps define forms and makes an essential contribution to the composition.

neutrals

Term used for black, white, tints, and shades of gray. Some designers also consider browns to be neutrals.

nonobjective

Style of art that does not represent actual objects, scenes, or figures; nonrepresentational.

nonrepresentational

Term used to describe art in which the artist expresses ideas, thoughts, or feelings without depicting a realistic object; nonobjective.

O

objective art

Representational; has recognizable subjects.

oil pastels

Oil-based drawing crayon.

opaque

Not allowing light to pass through; the opposite of transparent.

organic

Term used to describe irregular shapes, particularly those resembling objects found in nature.

original

An artwork that is singular and distinctive from other artworks. Also, the actual, authenticated artwork, rather than a reproduction or copy of it.

P

painting

An artwork created by using a brush or other tool to apply tempera, watercolor, oil, acrylic, or another kind of paint to a surface. Also, the process of creating an artwork with paint.

palette

A flat board on which an artist mixes colors.

papier-mâché

Process of creating forms by covering an armature or other base with strips of paper that have been soaked in watery paste, and then molding the strips. The form hardens as it dries.

pastel

Drawing tool, similar in shape to a crayon, made from a paste of finely ground pigment. Also refers to a tint of a color.

pattern

Refers to the repetition or recurrence of a design element, exact or varied, which establishes a visual beat. Pattern is a principle of design. Also, a plan or model to be followed when making something.

perspective

Techniques for showing three-dimensional objects or scenes on a flat or nearly flat surface.

photograph

An image recorded by a camera on film and then printed on photosensitive paper. An image recorded digitally, and read

and printed by a computer.

photorealism

An international movement in painting and sculpture arising in the late 1960s and early 1970s characterized by the precise, observation of subject matter, such as street scenes or portraits, often taken from actual photographs.

pictograph

A highly simplified symbol of an object or action, i.e., Egyptian hieroglyphics.

picture plane

A term used to describe the surface of the picture that can be imagined like a plane of glass behind which the elements of the image are arranged. Through the use of various techniques such as perspective and overlapping of objects the artist creates an illusion of depth receding away from the picture plane.

pigment

Very fine, colored powder that is mixed with a liquid base such as oil or water to make paint.

pinch method

Method of shaping clay into pottery by pinching, pressing, and pulling it with the fingers and hands.

plane

A flat surface.

plate

In printmaking a piece of flat material, such as metal, stone, clay, or wood, with a design on its surface used to print an

impression of the design.

portfolio

Collection or sampling of an artist's artwork, arranged in a protective cover or folder for review or display.

portrait

An artwork that features a person, an animal, or a group of people, usually placing emphasis on the face.

positive space

The space that a form or shape occupies in an artwork.

pottery

Functional objects such as vases, bowls, pots, and dishes that are modeled from wet clay. Pottery is usually fired in a kiln.

primary colors

The three colors (blue, red, and yellow) from which other colors are made. The primary colors cannot be made from other colors.

principals of design

Set of guidelines for the arrangement of the elements of art. Principals of design include unity, emphasis, balance, proportion/scale, pattern, and rhythm/movement.

print

An artwork created by pressing a design onto paper or another flat surface using a block or other object coated with wet color. Multiple copies of a print can often be made by reinking the block and repeating the process. See printmaking.

printing block

In printing, a piece of material, such as clay or wood, into which a design has been carved. Ink or paint is applied to the surface of the block, paper is pressed onto the block, and an impression of the design is created. Also known as a plate.

printmaking

Process of creating prints, or multiple copies of a single image, using one of several techniques or media, i.e., a woodcut, an engraving or etching, transfer paper, photograph, or a monoprint.

proportion

Relationship between the size of a part when compared to that of another part or of the whole. For example, an artist drawing a head will keep in mind the size relationship of the nose to the face, an architect the door to the building. Proportion is a principle of design.

Q

quilt

In art, a bedcover made from two layers of cloth which have been arranged and stitched together in a colorful design. Also, the process of creating a quilt.

quiltblock

A square, usually of fabric, that is decorated in some way and combined with other quiltblocks to create a quilt.

R

radial balance

A sense of balance created when lines or shapes spread out from a center point in regular patterns.

radial design

Circular design radiating from a center.

raku

A fast firing, spontaneous clay method derived from the Japanese Raku dynasties of potters (1500 to present).

realism

Style of art that seeks to reproduce reality exactly, rather than to idealize or interpret them.

related colors

Colors that are next to each other on the color wheel (for example, yellow, yellow-orange, and orange). Also called analogous colors.

relief print

A print made by covering a printing block with ink and then pressing paper onto the block.

representational

Term used to describe art that depicts a subject as it appears.

reproduction

Copy or replica of an original artwork; photograph of print of an artwork.

resist medium

Material applied to a surface to protect it from liquids such as paint or dye.

rhythm

Refers to the suggestion of motion or beat through the use of the elements in an artwork. Rhythm is a principle of design.

rubbing

Copy of a textured or raised surface made by placing paper over the surface and rubbing the paper with chalk, pencil, or crayon.

S

scale

Proportional relationship between an object represented in an artwork and the real object. Something drawn 1/3 scale means all parts are drawn 1/3 the size of the original.

score

To use an instrument to roughen or scratch joints of a clay sculpture prior to joining them. To scratch a line in order to easily bend a paper.

scoring

Inscribing or scratching with a tool in any medium.

sculptor

An artist whose primary medium is three-dimensional art or sculpture.

sculpture

An artwork made by modeling, carving, casting, or joining materials into a three-dimensional whole. Also, the process of making such an artwork. Clay, wood, stone, and metal are common materials used for sculpture.

seascape

An artwork that represents the sea, ocean, or shore.

secondary color

A color created by mixing two primary colors in equal proportions. The secondary colors are orange (made from red and yellow), green (made from blue and yellow), and violet (made from red and blue).

self-portrait

An artwork showing a likeness of the artist who created it.

senses

The faculties of hearing, sight, smell, touch, and taste. An artwork may appeal to one or more of the senses.

shade

A dark value of a color created by adding black to the color.

shading

A way of showing gradual changes in lightness or darkness in an artwork. Shading helps make an artwork appear more three-dimensional.

shape

Implies spatial form and is usually perceived as two-dimensional. It is distinguished from its surroundings by its outline. A shape encloses space and can be geometric (such as

a circle or square) or organic (having an irregular outline).
Shape is an element of art.

silhouette

Images showing no interior detail set against a contrasting background.

sketch

A quick drawing that contains little detail but captures the main features of a subject. A sketch is often used to explore a theme or to plan another, more detailed work.

slip

Creamlike mixture of clay and water that acts as glue to join scored pieces of clay.

space

Refers to the area in which art is organized. Shapes and forms are defined by the empty space surrounding them (negative space) and by the space they occupy (positive space). Space is an element of art.

stencil

Piece of paper, cardboard, plastic, or another material with a cutout design; an image is made when paint or ink is applied through the design to a surface underneath.

still life

An artwork showing an arrangement of inanimate objects.

story quilt

A quilt showing pictures that tell a story.

style

An artist's unique way of creating is referred to as his/her particular style. Style can also be characteristic of a group of artists, a culture, or a period in time. An artwork's style includes all the features that make it different from or similar to other works.

subject

Person, object, or scene represented in an artwork; the recognizable topic of an artwork.

subtractive

Removing material from the starting form to create a sculpture.

subtractive method

Process of creating a three-dimensional artwork by removing, or subtracting material, as in carving a form from a plaster block.

symbols

A form, image, icon, or subject that represents an idea or meaning other than its outward appearance.

symmetrical balance

Type of balance in which the visual properties or features on both sides of a center line (vertical, horizontal, or diagonal) are similar or identical and feels balanced. A human face, for example, is symmetrically balanced (although not identical) along a vertical line. Also known as formal balance.

T

tempera

Water-soluble paint, also known as poster paint.

texture

Refers to the tactile qualities of a surface (actual) or to the visual representation of such surface qualities (implied). Texture is an element of art.

theme

The artist's particular interpretation of a broad or abstract topic such as nature, love, or beauty.

three-dimensional

A form in space which can be measured in three directions; having height, width, and depth; not flat. Also, the illusion of depth.

tint

A light value of a color created by adding the color to white.

tradition

Knowledge, beliefs, or activities handed down from one generation to the next.

translucent

Allowing the passage of light but not the perception of distinct images.

transparent

Able to be seen through clearly; the opposite of opaque.

two-dimensional

Flat, on one plane; can be measured in two directions.

U

unity

Appearance of oneness; it is the design continuity that eliminates confusion. Unity is a principle of design.

utilitarian art

Art created primarily for a practical purpose. A quilt, for example, can be a utilitarian artwork.

V

value

Relative lightness or darkness of a color and is perceived in terms of contrast. For example, pink is a light value of red, while navy is a dark value of blue. Value is an element of art.

vanishing point

In an artwork using linear perspective, the point at which converging lines meet.

variety

Use of different elements of art to add interest to an artwork. Variety is a principle of design.

vertical

Upright, at right angles to the horizon.

viewpoint

An angle or side from which an object can be seen or depicted in an artwork.

visual texture

Texture that is perceived by sight rather than by touch, as in an artwork (implied texture).

W

warm colors

Reds, oranges, and yellows; warm colors suggest warmth and seem to move toward the viewer. Warm colors suggest warm objects, places, and feelings.

warp

In weaving, fibers stretched vertically on a loom and across which the weft is woven.

watercolor

Paint composed of a water soluble pigment. A painting with watercolors plays with levels of transparency.

weaving

Process of interlacing strands of fiber, such as thread or yarn, on a loom to create a piece of fabric or an artwork.

weft

In weaving, fibers woven from side to side and through the warp on a loom.

wet on dry

A watercolor technique in which a wet paintbrush on dry watercolor paper which causes sharper and dark edged brush strokes.

wet on wet

A watercolor technique in which the pigment is applied to wet paper resulting in undefined shapes and slightly blurred brush strokes.

woodcut

A print made by inking a carved block of wood and pressing it onto paper or another flat surface. Piece of wood into which a design is cut and from which prints are made.