

# VISUAL ART TERMS

## VOCABULARY LIST & PERIODS IN ART HISTORY

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**abstract:** In art, the rendering of images and objects in a stylized or simplified way, so their formal or expressive aspects are emphasized.

**acrylic:** A plastic resin that, when mixed with water and pigment, forms an inorganic and quick-drying paint medium.

**aesthetic:** Pertaining to the appreciation of the beauty, as opposed to the functional or utilitarian aspects.

**assemblages:** Sculptures constructed from a variety of readymade parts and materials that were not originally meant to be used in artworks.

**asymmetric balance:** Balance achieved in a composition when neither side reflects or mirrors the other.

**atmospheric perspective:** A technique, often employed in landscape painting, designed to suggest three-dimensional space in the two-dimensional space of the picture plane, and in which forms and objects distant from the viewer become less distinct, often bluer or cooler in color, and contrast among the various distant elements is greatly reduced.

**avant-garde:** Those whose works can be characterized as unorthodox and experimental.

**balance:** the arrangement of images to create visual stability in an artwork.

**base line:** An imaginary line on which a group of objects or one object sits.

**bat:** A disk or slab of plaster, wood or plastic on which pottery is formed or dried.

**bisque:** Pottery that has been fired but not yet glazed.

**blind contour:** A contour drawing where the artist never looks down at the paper but keeps their eye on the subject.

**casting:** Filling a mold with a material that will harden and reproduce the volume and surface detail of the mold.

**ceramic:** Clay products that have been fired for permanence.

**chiaroscuro:** In drawing and painting, the use of light and dark to create the effect of three-dimensional surfaces.

**classical line:** A kind of line that is mathematical, precise, and rationally organized, emphasized by the vertical and horizontal grid, as opposed to expressive line.

**clay:** Fine grained earthy materials formed by the decomposition of feldspar, a granite type rock. When combined with water, is plastic enough to be shaped and when dried and fired, become a rock-like state. Pure clay is  $Al_2O_3 \cdot 2SiO_2 \cdot 2H_2O$ .

**coiling:** A method of creating pots by building bottom and walls with even, rope like coils.

**collage:** A work made by pasting various scraps or pieces of material-cloth, paper, photographs, etc. - onto the surface of the composition.

**color:** An element of art with three properties: hue, value and intensity. The response of vision to wavelengths of reflected light.

**comparative process:** The basic critical tool of art history and criticism, in which works of art are compared and contrasted with one another in order to establish both differences and similarities between various works.

**complementary colors:** Two colors which are directly opposite each other on the color wheel, meaning they are in extreme contrast with each other.

**conceptual art:** a style of art emphasizing the idea behind the work of art rather than the work itself.

**cones:** Tall, slender pyramids made of clay and glaze constituents which bend or melt at a given temperature in a kiln.

**composition:** The organization of the formal elements in a work of art.

**conceptual art:** An art form in which the idea behind the work and the process of its making are more important than the final product.

**content:** The subject matter of a work of art.

**contour:** The visible border of an object in space.

**cool colors:** Those colors in which blue is dominant, including greens and violets.

**cross-hatching:** Two or more sets of roughly parallel and overlapping lines, set at an angle to one another, in order to create a sense of shadow and depth.

**dry footing:** To clean the bottom of a glazed piece before firing.

**edition:** The number of images printed from the plate, stone, block, or other process. The body of the edition is numbered (for example, 1/100 through 10/100) directly on the print, usually in pencil.

**elements of design:** Space, line, shape, form, color, value and texture. The tools the artist works with to create an artwork according to the principles of design.

**embellishment:** an ornament or decoration.

**environmental art:** An artwork that is part of the environment surrounding it, or which provides an enclosed environment that viewers can enter; or an arrangement that the viewer can walk through or around.

**eye level:** An imaginary horizontal line parallel to the student's eyes. Important to establish in drawing one- and two- point perspectives.

**fiber art:** Artworks made up of fiber materials such as grasses, raffia, and twigs. They are sometimes woven together, braided, knotted, and gathered to create depth.

**figure-ground relationship:** In a two-dimensional work, the relationship between a form or

figure and its background.

**fixative:** A thin liquid film sprayed over pastel, graphite or charcoal drawings to protect them from smudging.

**foreshortening:** The use of perspective to represent the apparent visual contraction of an object or figure that extends backwards from the picture plane.

**form:** The three-dimensionality of a sculpture or object in the round.

**fresco:** Mixing pigments with water, spreading an area of wet plaster onto a wall or ceiling before it dries.

**gel medium:** Added to acrylic paint as an extender for thick, transparent glazes; increases gloss and handling time.

**geometric shapes:** Mechanical, human made shapes such as squares, triangles, circles, etc. Geometric shapes have regular edges as opposed to the irregular edges of organic shapes.

**gesso:** A mixture of glue, whiting and water, used as an undercoating for a painting.

**glaze:** A liquid suspension of finely ground minerals which is applied on the surface of bisque fired clay. The glaze ingredients will melt together when fired to form a glossy glass-like surface.

**grog:** Clay that has been fired then crushed to form a coarse, medium-grained or fine sand-like material. The addition of grog to clay reduces shrinkage, reduces drying or firing cracks.

**greenware:** Clay in an unfired state.

**hatching:** shading using closely spaced, parallel lines used to suggest light and shadow.

**highlight:** an area or a spot in a drawing, painting, or photograph that is strongly illuminated.

**hue:** A color, usually one of the six basic colors of the spectrum.

**impasto:** The thick building up of pigment (paint) to give a visible texture.

**implied line:** a line created by movement or direction, such as a line established by a pointed finger, the direction of a glance, etc.

**Impressionism:** The first Modern art movement developed in France during the second half of the nineteenth century. (see Art Periods section)

**installation art:** Often large in scale and temporary, these assembled artworks often juxtapose two- or three-dimensional objects and materials.

**intensity:** The relative purity of a color's hue, its brightness or dullness; also known as *saturation*.

**intermediate colors:** The range of colors on the color wheel between each primary color and its neighboring secondary color; yellow-green, for example.

**key:** The relative lightness or darkness of a picture or the colors in it.

**kiln:** A furnace used for firing clay products; electric, gas and wood-fired.

**kinetic sculpture:** Sculpture that moves.

**line:** An element of art which is used to define space, contours and outlines, or suggest mass and volume.

**linear perspective:** A system for depicting three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface that depends upon two related principles; that things perceived as far away are smaller than things nearer the viewer, and that parallel lines receding into the distance converge at a vanishing point on the horizon line.

**logo:** The name or symbol associated with the advertiser in art or type form that remains constant from ad to ad.

**matrix:** an object upon which a design has been formed and which is then used to make an impression on a piece of paper, thus creating a print. A {wood} block, {metal} plate, or {lithographic} stone can be used as a matrix.

**medium:** (1) Any material used to create a work of art. (2) In painting, a liquid added to the paint that makes it easier to manipulate.

**mock-up:** a preliminary step where an image is simplified prior to the printmaking process.

**modeling:** A method that produces a sculpture from a pliable material like clay, papier-mache, wax, or plaster.

**monochromatic colors:** One color which is modified by changing the values and saturation of the hue by additions of black or white.

**monotype:** a one-of-a-kind print made in an edition of one, often from a painting made on a non-absorbent glass or metal plate. The image can be transferred to paper by hand rubbing or with a press.

**mosaic:** A design or picture composed of many pieces of stone, glass or other material.

**negative space:** Empty space, surrounding a positive shape and also the space between two positive shapes.

**one-point perspective:** A system for depicting three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, based upon the illusion that all parallel lines, when receding into the space, will converge at a single vanishing point on the horizon line.

**opaque:** Pigment that does not allow underneath colors to show through.

**organic shapes:** A free-form, irregular shape.

**outline:** A line that can define only the outside edge of an object, not its contour, but a resulting silhouette of the form.

**oxidation:** The act of combining with oxygen, usually at high temperatures.

**paper-mache:** A French term that means *masticated paper*, or paper reduced to a pulp.

**pastel:** (1) A soft crayon made of chalk and pigment. Also any work done in this medium. (2) a pale, light color.

**pattern:** The repetition of elements or combinations of elements in a recognizable organization.

**pencil:** A drawing tool made of graphite encased in a soft wood cylinder. Pencils have specific numbers that indicate hardness or softness ranging from 6B (softest), 5B, 4B, 3B, 2B, B, HB, F, H, 2H, 3H, 4H, 5H, 6H, 7H, 8H, 9H (hardest).

**perspective:** A formula for projecting the illusion of three-dimensional space onto a two-dimensional surface.

**picture plane:** The surface on which the artist works.

**pigment:** A powdered coloring material for paint, crayons, chalks and ink.

**plasticity:** The quality of clay which permits it to be readily shaped into different forms without cracking or crumbling.

**plate:** the basis for a print-can be wooden or linoleum block, cardboard collagraph, acrylic or metal.

**porosity:** The quality or degree of being porous, filled with holes, capable of absorbing liquids.

**portraiture:** a painting, photograph, or other artistic representation of a person or object.

**positive space:** The enclosed areas or objects in an artwork. They may suggest recognizable objects or nonrepresentational shapes.

**pottery:** Ceramic ware made of clay and hardened by firing at low temperatures.

**primary colors:** The hues that in theory cannot be created from mixture of other hues and from which all other hues are created. (R,Y,B)

**principles of design:** Balance, emphasis, rhythm, movement, repetition, contrast and unity. The methods or techniques that artists use to organize or design artworks by controlling and ordering the elements of design.

**printmaking:** the production of images normally on paper and exceptionally on fabric, parchment, plastic or other support by various processes of multiplication.

**print:** Any one of multiple impressions made from a master image.

**proportion:** The relationship between the parts and of the parts to the whole.

**relief:** A type of sculpture in which forms project from the background. (Low/high relief)

**saturation:** The purity, vividness or intensity of a color.

**scale:** The comparative size of a thing in relation to another like thing, or its "normal" or "expected" size.

**scoring:** Making marks on the edges of two pieces of clay before joining with slip.

**sculpture:** Three-dimensional forms (sculpture in the round) or forms in relief created by carving, assemblage, or modeling.

**scumbling:** Adding a thin layer of color (paint) over a dry under layer, allowing the under layer to show through.

**secondary colors:** a hue created by combining two primary colors. (O,G,V)

**shade:** A color or hue modified by the addition of another color, black.

**shape:** when a line crosses itself or intersects with other lines to enclose a space, this is created.

**simulated texture:** The imitation of the tactile quality of a surface, a suggested imitation of the subject's texture.

**slab:** Clay evenly rolled and formed and formed by draping or joining.

**slip:** Liquid clay, clay in liquid suspension, used for joining.

**space:** An element of art that indicated areas between, around, above, below, or within something.

**spectrum:** The colored bands of visible light created when sunlight passes through a prism.

**still life:** A work of art that consists of an arrangement of inanimate objects.

**stipple:** To make individual small dots with a stiff brush in a slightly darker color(s)

**subjective:** As opposed to objective, full of personal emotions and feelings.

**symbol:** An image, sign, or element, such as color, that is understood, by content, to suggest some meaning.

**symmetry:** When two halves of a composition correspond to one another in terms of size, shape, and placement of forms.

**tempera:** (1) creamy, opaque, water-based paint in a variety of grades, colors and sizes. (2) A technique of painting in which the water based paint is mixed or tempered with egg yolk.

**template:** a pattern, mold, or the like used to model a particular shape or product.

**texture:** The actual tactile characteristics of a thing, or the visual simulation of such characteristics.

**three-dimensional space:** Any space that possesses height, width, and depth.

**tint:** A color or hue modified by the addition of another color, white.

**translucent:** A thin veil of color painted over another with a transparent result.

**transparent:** Those colors that allow a strong underneath color to show through.

**two-point perspective:** A version of linear perspective in which there are two (or more) vanishing points in the composition.

**value:** The range from light to dark or from white, through gray to black.

**vanishing point:** the point on the horizon line where parallel lines appear to converge.

**warm colors:** Those hues in which yellow and red are dominant.

**watercolor:** A paint medium consisting of pigments suspended in a solution of water and gum arabic.

**wedging:** A process by which clay is kneaded to force out air bubbles, to align coarse particles, and to develop a homogeneous consistency.

**wheel:** Machine for making symmetrical pots; driven by hand, foot, or electric power.

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### Periods in Art History

**Abstract Expressionism:** A painting style of the late 1940s and early 1950s, predominantly American, characterized by its rendering of expressive content by abstract or nonobjective means.

**Art Deco:** A popular art and design style of the 1920s and 1930s associated with the 1925 Exposition International des Arts in Paris and characterized by its integration of organic and geometric forms.

**Art Nouveau:** The art and design style characterized by curvilinear and organic forms that dominated popular culture at the turn of the century, and that achieved particular success at the 1900 International Exposition in Paris.

**Baroque:** A dominant style of art in Europe in the seventeenth century characterized by its theatrical, or dramatic, use of light and color, by its ornate forms, and by its disregard for classical principles of composition.

**Bauhaus:** A German school of design, founded by Walter Gropius in 1919 and closed by Hitler in 1933.

**Cubism:** A style of art pioneered by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in the first decade of the twentieth century, noted for the geometry of its forms, its fragmentation of the object, and its increasing abstraction.

**Dada:** An art movement that originated during World War I in a number of world capitals, including Paris, Berlin, Zurich and New York, and that was so different from traditional styles and materials of art that it was considered by many to be "anti-art."

**Expressionism :** An art that stresses the psychological and emotional content of the work, associated particularly with German art in the early twentieth century.

**Futurism:** An early twentieth century art movement, characterized by its desire to celebrate the movement and speed of modern, industrial life.

**Impressionism:** A late nineteenth century art movement, created in France, and characterized by its use of discontinuous strokes of color meant to reproduce the effects of light.

**Minimalism:** A style of art, predominantly American, that dates from the mid-twentieth century, characterized by its rejection of expressive content and its use of "minimal" formal means.

**Neoclassicism:** A style of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that was influenced by the Greek Classical style.

**Optical Painting (Op Art):** An art style particularly popular in the 1960's in which line and color

are manipulated in ways that stimulate the eye into believing it perceives movement.

**Pop Art:** A style arising in the early 1960s characterized by its emphasis on the forms and imagery of mass culture.

**Post-Impressionism:** A name that describes the painting of a number of artists, working in widely different styles, in the last decades of the nineteenth century in France.

**Rococo:** A style popular in the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century, particularly in France, characterized by curvilinear forms, pastel colors, and its light, often frivolous subject matter.

**Romanesque Art:** The dominant style of art and architecture in Europe from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, characterized, in architecture by the round arch and the barrel vault.

**Romanticism:** A dramatic, emotional, and subjective art rising in the early nineteenth century in opposition to discipline of Neoclassicism.

**Surrealism:** A style of art of the early twentieth century that emphasized dream imagery, chance operations, and rapid, thoughtless form; the unconscious mind.