

Terra Teacher Lab

Visual Art Glossary

Source: California Visual and Performing Arts: Visual Arts Content Standards
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/vaglossary.asp>

abstract. Artwork in which the subject matter is stated in a brief, simplified manner. Little or no attempt is made to represent images realistically, and objects are often simplified or distorted.

additive. Refers to the process of joining a series of parts together to create a sculpture.

aerial perspective. Aerial or atmospheric perspective achieved by using bluer, lighter, and duller hues for distant objects in a two-dimensional work of art.

aesthetics. A branch of philosophy; the study of art and theories about the nature and components of aesthetic experience.

analogous. Refers to closely related colors; a color scheme that combines several hues next to each other on the color wheel.

arbitrary colors. Colors selected and used without reference to those found in reality.

art elements. See elements of art.

assemblage. A three-dimensional composition in which a collection of objects is unified in a sculptural work.

asymmetry. A balance of parts on opposite sides of a perceived midline, giving the appearance of equal visual weight.

atmospheric perspective. See aerial perspective.

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

balance. The way in which the elements in visual arts are arranged to create a feeling of equilibrium in a work of art. The three types of balance are symmetry, asymmetry, and radial.

collage. An artistic composition made of various materials (e.g., paper, cloth, or wood) glued on a surface.

color. The visual sensation dependent on the reflection or absorption of light from a given surface. The three characteristics of color are hue, value, and intensity.

color relationships. Also called color schemes or harmonies. They refer to the relationships of colors on the color wheel. Basic color schemes include monochromatic, analogous, and complementary.

complementary colors. Colors opposite one another on the color wheel. Red/green, blue/orange, and yellow/violet are examples of complementary colors.

composition. The organization of elements in a work of art.

content. Message, idea, or feelings expressed in a work of art.

contour drawings. The drawing of an object as though the drawing tool is moving along all the edges and ridges of the form.

contrast. Difference between two or more elements (e.g., value, color, texture) in a composition; juxtaposition of dissimilar elements in a work of art; also, the degree of difference between the lightest and darkest parts of a picture.

cool colors. Colors suggesting coolness: blue, green, and violet.

curvature. The act of curving or bending. One of the characteristics of line.

curvilinear. Formed or enclosed by curved lines.

design. The plan, conception, or organization of a work of art; the arrangement of independent parts (the elements of art) to form a coordinated whole.

distortion. Condition of being twisted or bent out of shape. In art, distortion is often used as an expressive technique.

dominance. The importance of the emphasis of one aspect in relation to all other aspects of a design.

elements of art. Sensory components used to create works of art: line, color, shape/form, texture, value, space.

emphasis. Special stress given to an element to make it stand out.

expressive content. Ideas that express ideas and moods.

figurative. Pertaining to representation of form or figure in art.

foreground. Part of a two-dimensional artwork that appears to be nearer the viewer or in the front. Middle ground and background are the parts of the picture that appear to be farther and farthest away.

focal point. The place in a work of art on which attention becomes centered because of an element emphasized in some way.

form. A three-dimensional volume or the illusion of three dimensions (related to shape, which is two-dimensional); the particular characteristics of the visual elements of a work of art (as distinguished from its subject matter or content).

function. The purpose and use of a work of art.

genre. The representation of people, subjects, and scenes from everyday life.

gesture drawing. The drawing of lines quickly and loosely to show movement in a subject.

harmony. The principle of design that combines elements in a work of art to emphasize the similarities of separate but related parts.

hue. Refers to the name of a color (e.g., red, blue, yellow, orange).

intensity. Also called chroma or saturation. It refers to the brightness of a color (a color is full in intensity only when pure and unmixed). Color intensity can be changed by adding black, white, gray, or an opposite color on the color wheel.

line. A point moving in space. Line can vary in width, length, curvature, color, or direction.

linear perspective. A graphic system used by artists to create the illusion of depth and volume on a flat surface. The lines of buildings and other objects in a picture are slanted, making them appear to extend back into space.

line direction. Line direction may be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal.

line quality. The unique character of a drawn line as it changes lightness/darkness, direction, curvature, or width.

mass. The outside size and bulk of a form, such as a building or a sculpture; the visual weight of an object.

media. Plural of medium, referring to materials used to make art; categories of art (e.g., painting, sculpture, film).

middle ground. Area of a two-dimensional work of art between foreground and background.

mixed media. A work of art for which more than one type of art material is used to create the finished piece.

monochromatic. A color scheme involving the use of only one hue that can vary in value or intensity.

mood. The state of mind or feeling communicated in a work of art, frequently through color.

motif. A unit repeated over and over in a pattern. The repeated motif often creates a sense of rhythm.

movement. The principle of design dealing with the creation of action.

negative. Refers to shapes or spaces that are or represent areas unoccupied by objects.

neutral colors. The colors black, white, gray, and variations of brown. They are included in the color family called earth colors.

nonobjective. Having no recognizable object as an image. Also called nonrepresentational.

observational drawing skills. Skills learned while observing firsthand the object, figure, or place.

one-point perspective. A way to show three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface. Lines appear to go away from the viewer and meet at a single point on the horizon known as the vanishing point.

organic. Refers to shapes or forms having irregular edges or to surfaces or objects resembling things existing in nature.

pattern. Anything repeated in a predictable combination.

perspective. A system for representing three-dimensional objects viewed in spatial recession on a two-dimensional surface.

point of view. The angle from which the viewer sees the objects or scene.

positive. Shapes or spaces that are or represent solid objects.

primary colors. Refers to the colors red, yellow, and blue. From these all other colors are created.

printmaking. The transferring of an inked image from one surface (from the plate or block) to another (usually paper).

principles of design. The organization of works of art. They involve the ways in which the elements of art are arranged (balance, contrast, dominance, emphasis, movement, repetition, rhythm, subordination, variation, unity).

properties of color. Characteristics of colors: hue, value, intensity.

proportion. The size relationships of one part to the whole and of one part to another.

rectilinear. Formed or enclosed by straight lines to create a rectangle.

rhythm. Intentional, regular repetition of lines or shapes to achieve a specific repetitious effect or pattern.

scale. Relative size, proportion. Used to determine measurements or dimensions within a design or work of art.

sculpture. A three-dimensional work of art either in the round (to be viewed from all sides) or in bas relief (low relief in which figures protrude slightly from the background).

secondary colors. Colors that are mixtures of two primaries. Red and yellow make orange, yellow and blue make green, and blue and red make violet.

shade. Color with black added to it.

shape. A two-dimensional area or plane that may be open or closed, free-form or geometric. It can be found in nature or is made by humans.

space. The emptiness or area between, around, above, below, or contained within objects. Shapes and forms are defined by the space around and within them, just as spaces are defined by the shapes and forms around and within them.

still life. Arrangement or work of art showing a collection of inanimate objects.

structure. The way in which parts are arranged or put together to form a whole.

style. A set of characteristics of the art of a culture, a period, or school of art. It is the characteristic expression of an individual artist.

stylized. Simplified; exaggerated.

subordination. Making an element appear to hold a secondary or lesser importance within a design or work of art.

subtractive. Refers to sculpting method produced by removing or taking away from the original material (the opposite of *additive*).

texture. The surface quality of materials, either actual (tactile) or implied (visual). It is one of the elements of art.

theme. An idea based on a particular subject.

three-dimensional. Having height, width, and depth. Also referred to as 3-D.

tint. Color lightened with white added to it.

tone. Color shaded or darkened with gray (black plus white).

two-dimensional. Having height and width but not depth. Also referred to as 2-D.

two-point perspective. A system to show three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface. The illusion of space and volume utilizes two vanishing points on the horizon line.

unity. Total visual effect in a composition achieved by the careful blending of the elements of art and the principles of design.

value. Lightness or darkness of a hue or neutral color. A value scale shows the range of values from black to white.

value scale. Scale showing the range of values from black to white and light to dark.

vanishing point. In perspective drawing, a point at which receding lines seem to converge.

virtual. Refers to an image produced by the imagination and not existing in reality.

visual literacy. Includes thinking and communication. Visual thinking is the ability to transform thoughts and information into images; visual communication takes place when people are able to construct meaning from the visual image.

visual metaphor. Images in which characteristics of objects are likened to one another and represented as that other. They are closely related to concepts about symbolism.

volume. The space within a form (e.g., in architecture, volume refers to the space within a building).

warm colors. Colors suggesting warmth: red, yellow, and orange.

watercolor. Transparent pigment mixed with water. Paintings done with this medium are known as watercolors.