

## A VOCABULARY FOR DISCUSSING ART

### THE ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

**line:** the path of a point that moves through space. Line can be described in terms of width, direction, movement, length, curvature, and even color.

**shape:** a distinct spatial form depicted in two dimensions and created by lines or a change in color, shading, or materials.

**form:** a unit in an artwork that is defined or set apart by a definite contour; sometimes used synonymously with shape, or used to refer to a shape that is depicted in three rather than two dimensions.

**space:** the visual or actual area within and around shapes and forms. Positive space defines the contents of a shape or form, and is bound by edges or surfaces. Negative space refers to the "empty" area surrounding a shape or form, and also helps to define the boundaries of a shape or form.

**texture:** the look and feel of a surface, which may be described in such terms as rough, smooth, hard, soft, scratchy, silky, fine, coarse, and so on.

**color:** the hue, value, and intensity of an object. The primary colors are red, yellow, and blue; every color except white can be created from various blending of these three colors.

**value:** the relative lightness or darkness of tones or colors. For example, white and yellow have a light value; black and violet have a dark value.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

**balance:** the arrangement of elements in a work of art in one of three ways: perfect symmetry (*formal balance*), in which every element in the work is perfectly balanced against every other element; asymmetry (*informal balance*), in which there is no one-to-one, even correspondence of elements; and radial (*from the center*) in which elements are balanced around a center, as in a circular mandala design.

**variety:** the assortment of lines, colors, forms, shapes, or textures in a work of art.

**rhythm (*movement*):** regular repetition of lines, shapes, colors, or patterns in a work of art.

**emphasis:** the accent, stress, or importance of a part of an artwork. Opposing sizes, shapes, and lines, contrasting colors, closer detail, and intense, bright color are all used to emphasize, or draw attention to, certain areas or objects in a work of art.

**proportion:** the relationship of the distance of objects in a composition, as in, for example, close up and far away; the relationship of the size of one part to another or to the whole.

**contrast:** significant degrees of difference between lines, colors, shapes, values, forms, and/or textures.

**unity:** the interrelation, balance, and organization of all elements of an artwork to achieve a quality of oneness, or a pleasing sense. (*Note: a composition can be pleasingly exciting, pleasingly disturbing, pleasingly tranquil and so on*)

## ART GLOSSARY

**abstract:** style of art in which shapes, designs, textures, and colors are presented in a way that may look unrealistic but that emphasizes moods or feelings. Abstract art is characterized by the use of geometric lines and shapes and bold, bright colors.

**aesthetic:** pertaining to the artistic and beautiful; a perception that something pleases the eye.

**arch:** curved structure over an opening such as a door or window. An arch may either stand alone or support the walls around the opening.

**assemblage:** art made by combining a collection of three-dimensional objects into a whole. It can either be a free-standing sculpture or be mounted on a panel, and it is usually made from scraps, junk, or various manufactured or natural objects.

**atmospheric perspective:** way of showing depth and distance in a painting by using fading colors and hazy details to indicate objects in the distance.

**background:** parts of an artwork that lie in the distance and appear to be behind objects in the foreground.

**bronze:** mixture of copper, tin, and other metals often used in cast sculptures because it is very strong and hard.

**calligraphy:** artful form of writing letters or words with brushes or pens, originated by the Chinese.

**caricature:** picture in which a person's distinctive features, such as nose, ears, or mouth, are distorted or exaggerated.

**carving:** technique for making sculpture by cutting away unwanted parts; a carved object.

**cast:** to copy a solid object by pouring a liquid, such as melted metal, clay, wax, or plaster, into a mold and letting it harden. The mold is then removed and a copy, or cast, is left in the shape of the mold.

**ceramics:** art of making and decorating objects of clay that are fired in a kiln; pottery.

**collage:** work of art created by gluing bits of paper, fabric, scraps, photographs, or other materials to a flat surface.

**complementary colors:** colors that are opposites on the color wheel and contrast with each other. For example, orange is the complement of blue, yellow of violet, and red of green.

**composition:** arrangement or design of elements of an artwork to achieve balance, contrast, rhythm, emphasis, and unity and to make it an effective expression of the artist's idea. The term also refers generally to any work of art.

**convention:** established technique or manner of representing art images or ideas.

**cool colors:** family of related colors ranging from the greens through the blues and violets.

**cross-hatching:** shading done by drawing closely set parallel lines that crisscross. Cross-hatching is used to show contrast between light and shadow in drawings, paintings, and engravings.

**depth:** direct measurement from front to back or near to far, represented in an artwork by the actual or apparent distance from bottom to top or front to back. Techniques of perspective are used to create the illusion of depth in a two-dimensional painting.

**design:** organized and creative arrangement of the elements of an artwork, including lines, shapes, textures, spaces, and colors.

**detail:** small part of a work of art, enlarged to show a close-up of its features. Also, a distinctive feature of an object or scene that can be seen most clearly close-up.

**dimension:** measure of length, width, or depth. Two-dimensional art, such as a painting, has length and width. Three-dimensional art, such as sculpture, has length, width, and depth.

**dominant:** part of a design that is most important, most powerful, or has the most influence. A certain color can be dominant, and so can an object, line, shape, or texture.

**embroidery:** decorative designs sewn on cloth with a needle and thread or yarn.

**engraving:** process of carving or cutting pictures, letters, or designs into a hard material such as wood, metal, or ivory with a graver, burin, or other sharp, chisel-like tool. When the surface is inked, a print can be made from the form.

**fine art:** type of art primarily created for the purpose of providing beauty and enjoyment rather than for commercial use. It is often intended to be uplifting, thought provoking, and life-enhancing.

**focal point:** most important part or area in a work of art. All other parts should center around, provide background for, or draw attention to the focal point. It is also called the center of interest.

**folk art:** traditional art made by people who have had no formal art training but who practice art styles and techniques that have been handed down through generations.

**foreground:** portion of a work of art that appears to be in front.

**found object:** natural or manufactured object not originally intended to be used as art but treated as art or included in an assembled work of art.

**free-form:** irregular, asymmetrical; not formed according to any present rules or standard design.

**fresco:** painting done with water-based paint on fresh plaster so that as it dries the colors are absorbed into the wall.

**frieze:** horizontal band of decorative or narrative art, often part of the decoration of a building.

**geometric:** design based on simple shapes such as rectangles, triangles, circles, or straight lines.

**Gothic:** architectural style developed in western Europe from the 1100s to the 1400s, characterized by pointed arches, tall buildings with thin walls and large stained glass windows, and airy interior space.

**gradation:** gradual, often subtle change from light to dark, rough to smooth, or from one hue to another.

**graphic art:** type of visual art made for commercial purposes. Packaging, posters, advertisements, signs, and book and magazine illustrations are examples of graphic art.

**ground line:** imaginary or real line on which the figures and objects in a painting rest, which forms a base and keeps the figures from appearing to float in space.

**highlight:** to center attention on or emphasize through use of color.

**horizon line:** actual or imaginary line in a work of art representing the point at which water or land seems to end and the sky begins.

**hue:** another word for color, such as red, yellow, or green.

**illuminated manuscript:** manuscript page that is decorated with ornamental designs, miniatures, or lettering, often with gold leaf. Illuminated manuscripts are most often associated with the Middle Ages.

**imagery:** imaginative expression of objects, feelings, ideas, and experiences in art, depicting both physical and nonphysical things.

**intensity:** relative brightness or dullness of a color.

**landscape:** design or view made up of natural outdoor scenery, such as mountains, rivers, fields, or forests.

**linear perspective:** way of showing depth and distance in a picture with converging lines. In linear perspective, lines that are parallel get closer together and objects get smaller in the distance.

**lithography:** printing process invented in 1798 in which a picture or design is drawn on a smooth stone or metal plate with a special wax or grease crayon. The surface is then treated with a chemical that allows ink to adhere only where the crayon has been used. Finally, the surface is inked and the crayon design is printed on paper.

**mass:** area inside a shape.

**medium (plural media):** material an artist uses, such as oil, pen and ink, or chalk; the technique, such as painting, sculpture, or collage, used with these materials.

**mixed media:** work of art formed from the combination of more than one medium, often an unusual combination of seemingly unrelated materials such as wood, clay, paint, and fabric.

**model:** person or thing used as an example or pattern for an artist to follow when creating a work of art; a small copy or image that represents a larger object.

**mosaic:** picture or design made by fitting small pieces of colored paper, glass, tile, stone, or other materials onto a background.

**motif:** element or combination of elements repeated often enough in a composition to become a dominant feature.

**mural:** large painting that covers a wall. It can be painted directly onto the wall or onto wood, paper, or canvas to be attached to the wall.

**neutral colors:** colors that blend or combine with all other colors to alter their value or intensity. Black, white, and gray are considered neutral colors.

**nonrepresentational art:** style of painting or drawing in which the image created bears little resemblance to the natural or realistic form of the subject.

**outline:** line that shows or reveals the outer edges of a shape or form.

**overlapping:** technique in which one shape or part covers some part or all of another. Since overlapping objects appear closer, this is a perspective technique used to show distance in artworks.

**palette:** tray or board on which colors are mixed; also, the colors used by a particular artist or for a particular artwork.

**papier-mâché:** art material made of paper torn into strips or made into pulp and mixed with art paste. It can be molded into various shapes when wet and produces a solid material that is quite strong when it dries.

**path of vision:** imaginary route the eyes follow when one is viewing a work of art. It usually begins at the bottom edge, moves clockwise, and ends at the center of interest.

**pattern:** repetition of shapes, lines, or colors in a design.

**perspective:** representation, of a three-dimensional object on a flat, two-dimensional surface. Perspective is achieved by creating the illusion of depth and distance. The two types of perspective are linear and atmospheric.

**pigment:** fine, colored powder that makes paint when combined with various liquid mixtures, such as water and a binding agent.

**portrait:** painting, sculpture, drawing, photograph, or other work of art showing a person, several people, or an animal. Portraits usually show just the face but can include part or all of the body.

**post and lintel:** way of building an opening using two upright posts to support a horizontal beam, or lintel.

**primary colors:** the hues red, yellow, and blue, which in different combinations produce all other colors except white. The primary colors cannot be produced by mixing any other colors together.

**print:** shape or mark made from a printing block or other object that is covered with wet color and then pressed onto a flat surface, such as paper or cloth. Most prints can be repeated by re-inking the printing block. Prints can be made in many ways, including the use of an engraved block or stone, transfer paper, or a film negative.

**relief:** type of sculpture in which figures are raised above the surface or from a background that is flat or has hollowed out parts.

**representational:** style of painting and drawing that depicts the subject as it appears.

**scale:** ratio of the size of parts in a drawing or artwork to their size in the original. If a picture is drawn to scale, all of its parts are equally smaller or larger than the original.

**sculpture:** carving, model, or other three-dimensional piece of art.

**secondary colors:** colors created by combining two of the three primary colors. The secondary colors are orange, green, and violet.

**shade:** color to which black or another dark hue has been added to make that color darker. For example, black added to red produces darker shades of red.

**shading:** showing gradations of light and darkness in a picture by darkening areas that would be in shadow and leaving other areas light.

**sketch:** a simple, quick, rough drawing done without a lot of detail but catching the chief features and a general impression of an object or scene.

**solidity:** the quality of having bulk and being three-dimensional. Shading and texture show the solidity of an object in a drawing or painting.

**statue:** carved, modeled, or sculpted free-standing three-dimensional figures especially of a person or animal.

**still life:** drawing or painting of an arrangement of nonmoving, nonliving objects, such as fruit, flowers, or bottles. The arrangement is usually set indoors and contains at least one manufactured object, such as a vase or bowl.

**style:** artistic technique or a way of expressing, using materials, constructing, or designing characteristic of an individual, group, period, or culture.

**stylized:** figures or objects in a work of art that are not represented naturally but are designed to conform to a particular pattern or artistic approach.

**symbol:** something that stands for something else, especially a letter, figure, or sign that represents a real object or an idea.

**tapestry:** picture or design woven or stitched in cloth and hung on a wall.

**technique:** the way an artist uses tools and media.

**theme:** realistic or abstract subject or topic in an artistic work.

**vanishing point:** in linear perspective, the place on the horizon where parallel lines appear to meet or converge.

**viewpoint:** position or place from which an artist views the subject that is to be represented.

**warm colors:** family of related colors ranging from the reds through the oranges and yellows.

**wash:** background of a watercolor picture, prepared by using thin, watery paint applied quickly with large, sweeping brush strokes.

**woodcut:** wooden surface on which a picture or design has been cut to form a relief used for printing.