

## Glossary of Art Terms

**Abstract Art:** 20<sup>th</sup> century art style that experimented with the elements of art (line, color, shape, form and texture) and emphasized form and emotion over recognizable subject matter. Artistic representations were often generalized, universal, and non-representational. Artists who worked in this style include Wassily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock. (*image 1*)

**Abstract Expressionism:** Painting style developed and popularized after during the 1940s and 1950s in New York City. Artists who worked in this style did not attempt to represent identifiable subjects. Expression was sought through gestural painting and spontaneity. Color Field painting and action painting were two different styles within Abstract Expressionism. (*image 2*)

**Academic Art:** Works by artists who adhere to conventions and aesthetic doctrines dictated by national schools of art (academies) which are accepted as an authority. Art academies have included the French Académie des Beaux-Arts, the English Royal Academy of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of Art. Academic artists from NOMA's collection include William-Adolphe Bouguereau and Jean-Léon Gérôme.

**Action Painting:** Action painters applied paint freely to canvases in rapid forceful strokes by splashing, hurling or dripping paint. Artists who painted in this style include Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock and Sam Francis.

**Aerial Perspective:** Also referred to as atmospheric perspective. A method utilized by artists to suggest a far distance in a landscape painting. As the distance between an object and the viewer increases, outlines become less precise and colors become less pronounced and bluer.

**Aesthetic:** The branch of philosophy that provides a theory relating to the nature of beauty and fine art in accordance with the accepted notions of good taste.

**Art Criticism:** A system used to discuss and evaluate visual art in terms of beauty and aesthetics. It consists of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment.

**Art Nouveau:** An artistic movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries seen especially in decorative arts and architecture. The movement focused on the abolishment of the traditional hierarchy of the arts, which viewed painting and sculpture as being superior to craft-based decorative arts. First popular in Europe, the style includes exaggerated, asymmetrical forms including whiplash curves, flames, waves, and stylized female forms.

**Avant-garde:** A term derived from the French word meaning "before the group" or the French military term meaning "front line." Avant-garde denotes artists and concepts which abandon tradition in search of a strikingly new, experimental, or radical perspective for the time. The content is often unfamiliar and shocking.



1. Wassily Kandinsky, *Sketch for "Several Circles."* 1926



2. Sam Francis, *White Line I.* 1959.

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**Background:** The part of a scene or picture that appears to be toward the back and farthest from the viewer. This is opposite of the foreground.

**Balance:** Principle of design concerned with equalizing visual elements in the composition of a work of art to create stability.

**Baroque:** Artistic style that developed after the Reformation in the seventeenth century. Primarily, the Baroque style uses exaggerated lines and forms to create a sense of dynamism, drama, and emotionalism. Artists used theatrical effects such as dramatic lighting effects, contrast between dark and light, and ornamentation.

**Byzantine:** The art of the Byzantine Empire, that developed around the capital city of Constantinople (now Istanbul) in the eastern Roman Empire from the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the fall of Rome in 1453. The style blended Roman, Greek, and Oriental art and has notable influences from Syria and Egypt. Paintings and mosaics were usually religious and featured rich colors, flat figures and central plan churches.

**Classical:** Referring to the art of ancient Greece and Rome. The Greeks created art based on the ideals of perfect proportion and logic rather than emotion. The Romans adapted Greek art and spread it throughout the civilized world which ensured that it remained a vital source of ideas and inspiration.

**Color:** An element of art that is derived from reflected light. The sensation of color is determined visually by the brain's response to different wavelengths of light. Color has three properties: hue (color name), value (lightness or darkness), and intensity (strength). Colors can be described as warm or cool, glossy or matte, subdued or bright.

**Color-Field Painting:** 20<sup>th</sup> century style of painting affiliated with Abstract Expressionism during the 1940s and 50s. Color Field painters applied broad areas of color to unprimed canvases. Artists who painted in this style include Mark Rothko and Alma Thomas.

**Color scheme:** Plan for organizing colors within an art work. Types of color schemes include monochromatic, analogous, complementary, triad, split complementary, warm, and cool.

**Composition:** Term referring to the design of a given work and the way in which the principles of design are used to organize the elements.

**Contemporary Art:** Art created from the late 20th century to the present day. Art of this time usually implies that the artist is still alive or the work was completed within the past thirty years.

**Contrapposto:** Literally “around the post,” contrapposto is a way of depicting the human body asymmetrically in such a manner that one part of the body is counterbalanced by another. The weight of a figure is placed on one leg while the hips move to one side and are balanced by a counter movement of the torso. Contrapposto first appeared in sculpture from ancient Greece, was revived during the Renaissance and used by Mannerist artists. (*image 3*)



3. Auguste Rodin, *Age of Bronze*. 1875-76.

**Contrast:** A principle of design which creates a focal point by juxtaposing elements of art to create an obvious difference between items to call attention to parts of a composition.

**Crafts:** Often denotes functional or decorative handmade objects such as weaving, ceramics or jewelry. Also refers to traditional or folk objects. (*image 4*)

**Cubism:** Influential 20<sup>th</sup> century art movement that first appeared in 1907 and was spearheaded by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Cubism is an analytic study in form. Objects are represented from many different points of view simultaneously using overlapping facets. Followers of Picasso and Braque include Ferdinand Leger, Jacques Lipchitz and Jean Metzinger. (*image 5*)

**Dada:** Early 20<sup>th</sup> century art movement developed in Zurich in 1916 as a reaction World War I. The term, Dada, was chosen to describe “non-art.” Nonsense texts, performances, and absurd works of art produced by chance and unconventional methods were meant to create the effect of anti-art. Artists associated with the Dada Movement include Marcel Duchamp, Hans Arp, and Kurt Schwitters.

**Dimension:** Amount of space and object takes up in one direction. The three dimensions are height, width, and depth.

**Distortion:** Deviations from the expected proportions so that a figure or object is exaggerated or elongated.

**Earthenware:** Pottery or other objects made from fired clay which is porous and permeable. Earthenware is fired at relatively low temperatures, may be glazed or unglazed, and is usually (but not always) buff, red or brown in color.

**Elements of Art:** Basic visual symbols in the language of art: line, shape, form, space, color, value, and texture.

**Emphasis:** Principle of design that makes one part of a work dominant over the other parts.

**Expressionism:** German Expressionism was a 20<sup>th</sup> century art movement specific to two groups in Germany, Die Brücke and Der Blau Reiter, whose participants favored the communication of emotion over realistic representations. German Expressionists include Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Wasily Kandinsky and George Rouault. Expressionistic artists employ exaggeration and the distortion of color and form to express personal feelings.

**Fauvism:** Derived from the French word *fauve* meaning “wild beast,” fauvism was the first of the avant-garde movements that flourished in France in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fauve painters broke from Impressionism as well as traditional methods of perception. The style is defined by a use of bright, vivid colors directly from the tube often applied in broad flat areas with undisguised brushstrokes. Artists associated with the Fauve movement include Henri Matisse and George Braque. (*image 6*)

**Figurative:** Representative art that portrays things such as the human figure or nature as they are perceived in the visible world, however altered or distorted they are represented.



4. Newcomb Pottery, *Yuccus*. 1908.



5. Jacques Lipchitz, *Bather III*. 1916-17.



**Focal point:** The first part of a work to attract the attention of the viewer and to which the eye returns most naturally. Focal points are created by contrast, location, isolation, convergence, and use of the unusual.

**Folk Art:** Made by artists who have had not had artistic training and who employ traditional techniques and styles that have been handed down through generations. Subject matter is often inspired by everyday life and reflects traditional cultures. Folk artists are also referred to as Self-Taught artists.

**Foreground:** The part of a scene or picture that appears closest to the viewer. The background is what appears behind the foreground.

**Form:** An element of a work of art that has three dimensions (width, length and height) and encloses volume.

**Futurism:** Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian artistic movement in which dynamic motion is suggested through style and subject matter. Futurism emphasized themes associated with contemporary concepts such as speed, technology, and the industrial city. Umberto Boccioni was a leading futurist. (*image 7*)

**Genre scenes:** Artistic depictions of events from everyday life. This subject matter was first popular during the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Netherlands.

**Gothic:** Giorgio Vasari, an Italian Renaissance art historian, coined the term in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to refer to an architectural and artistic style prevalent in Western Europe between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is characterized by the integration of the arts of sculpture, painting, stained glass and architecture and is epitomized by cathedrals of this era. Gothic cathedrals used soaring interiors, pointed arches, and flying buttresses to emphasize upward movement and featured stained-glass windows. Paintings of this era showed humans in a realistic, although flat, style. Examples from NOMA's collection include *Madonna and Child with Saints* by followers of Bernardo Daddi of c. 1340.

**Harmony:** Principle of design that creates unity by stressing similarities of separate but related parts in a work of art.

**Iconography:** The systematic study and identification of the subject-matter and symbolism of works of art as opposed to their style. Figures are symbolic or have reference to various meanings that relate to the narrative of the work.

**Impressionism:** An art movement and style that originated in Paris in the 1860s. Impressionist artists painted contemporary subjects and emphasized the momentary effects of sunlight, rather than painting in a highly refined style recommended by the Academy. Impressionist artists include Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, and Mary Cassatt.

**Kinetic Art:** Art which incorporates movement by motor, wind, hand pressure, other direct means, or which gives the illusion of movement by the use of optical techniques. It was popularized by Alexander Calder in the 1930s.

**Landscape:** A painting or drawing which represents natural scenery as the main feature.



6. Georges Braque, *Landscape at L'Estaque*. 1906.



7. Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. 1913, cast 1972.

**Line:** An element of art that is considered a path through space and is used by an artist to control the viewer's eye movement within a work of art.

**Mannerism:** European 16<sup>th</sup> century artistic style which developed out of the Renaissance by rejecting balance and harmony in favor of emotional intensity and ambiguity. Mannerist paintings feature highly emotional scenes and distorted figures.

**Medium:** Material used to create a work of art.

**Middle ground:** The part of a scene or picture that is between the foreground and the background.

**Minimalism:** Term coined in the 1960s to describe art which abandons all pretensions at expressiveness or illusion. Minimalist works are depersonalized and the hand of the artist is not present. Minimalist forms in painting and in sculpture are reduced to their ultimate simplicity. Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland are associated with Minimalism.

**Modern Art:** In art historical terms it is used to describe new styles and attitudes toward art created from about the 1860s through the 1970s. During this time artists experimented with formal and emotional qualities and viewed contemporary events, feelings and ideas as viable subjects for their work, rather than limiting themselves to traditional subject matter. "Art for art's sake" is often considered the mantra of this period when artists explored new means of expression.

**Movement:** Principle of design that deals with creating the illusion of action or physical change in position.

**Negative space:** An enclosed empty space in architecture, sculpture, or a painting which makes an essential contribution to the composition. The shape and size of negative space affects the interpretation of positive space. (image 8)

**Neoclassicism:** Artistic style developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a response against Rococo, which came to be viewed as shallow and gaudy. Neoclassicist art used classical features and was unemotional and realistic. Benjamin West and Jean-Joseph Tiallasson worked in this style.

**Nonobjective:** Works of art that have no representation of recognizable figures and objects.

**Op Art:** The term Op Art relates to several tendencies in art-making developed during the 1960s that involved a wide range of experiments with optics or optical illusions. Artists tried to create the impression of movement on the surface of paintings with hard edges, smooth surfaces, and mathematical planning. These experiments often involved the use of bright colors, skewed perspectives, and natural or man-made light.

**Palette:** An artist's choice of colors for a work. Also, a palette is a portable tray on which an artist mixes his or her colors.



8. Henry Moore. *Reclining Mother and Child*. 1975, cast 1977.

**Perspective:** A method of representing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface by creating the illusion of depth and volume. Using mathematical models and modulations in size, variations, placement, detail, color, and converging lines of objects, artists can create the sense of depth making the painting appear to be an extension of the viewer's own real space.

**Pop Art:** Artistic style used in the early 1960s in America featuring subject matter from everyday imagery that is a part of consumer culture or popular culture with a mixture of irony and celebration. Common sources include mass media, commercial art, celebrities, product packaging, comic strips, and advertising. Pop artists include Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and Claes Oldenberg. (*image 9*)

**Portrait:** Representation or likeness of an individual especially the face and upper body. (*image 9*)

**Positive space:** Shapes or forms in two- and three-dimensional art.

**Post-Impressionism:** French painting style of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which followed the Impressionist painters and used elements of art to express feelings and ideas. The Post-Impressionist movement refers to a time period in which principal artists Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Cézanne, Georges Seurat, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh worked and developed distinctly different styles.

**Principles of design:** Rules that govern how artists organize the elements of art. The principles of design are rhythm, movement, balance, proportion, variety, emphasis, harmony, and unity.

**Proportion:** Principle of art concerned with the size and relationships of one part to another.

**Realism:** Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century artistic style in which artists turned away from the style of Neoclassicism and the theatrical drama of Romanticism to paint familiar scenes and events as they actually appeared. Realism can also denote works from any time period which are rendered in a realistic manner.

**Relief sculpture:** A type of sculpture in which form projects from a background. The terms high and low refer to the depth of the projection. The higher the relief, the more of the object is revealed and more shadows are created.

**Representational art:** Works of art that contains easily recognizable objects.

**Renaissance:** A term denoting a revival or resurrection of knowledge and culture that took place primarily in Italy between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, but also in other European countries. During this time artists looked to the ancient Greek and Roman artistic and philosophical traditions for inspiration and sought to perfect the illusion of physical reality through the depiction of idealized figures placed within a rationally defined space.



9. Andy Warhol. *Mick Jagger*. 1975



**Rhythm:** Principle of design that indicates movement by repetition of elements. Visual rhythm is created by repeating positive spaces separated by negative spaces. There are five types of rhythm: random, regular, alternating, flowing, and progressive.

**Rococo:** 18<sup>th</sup> century artistic style that is often considered the last stage of the Baroque and eventually gave way to Neoclassicism. Rococo was elegant and ornately decorative with a lighthearted mood. The ornate details and an emphasis on florid and playful elements with gilded and ostentatious elements were not necessarily balanced or symmetrical. (*image 10*)

**Romanticism:** Early 19<sup>th</sup> century artistic style that reacted against the cool reason of Neoclassicism. Romantic artists emphasized emotions in a bold, dramatic manner and returned to nature in its wild state as a source of inspiration. Bright colors, loose compositions, and exotic settings often combined to create paintings tinged with nostalgia.

**Seascape:** Painting or drawing which represents the sea as the main feature.

**Self-portrait:** Representation or likeness of one's own image. An artist creates a portrait of him or herself.

**Self-taught Artist:** An artist who has never received formal training from an art school or university and, at least at first, has little or no contact with the artistic mainstream.

**Shape:** An element of art referring to the definition of a two-dimensional area.

**Space:** The element of art that refers to the emptiness or area between, around, above, below, or within objects. Shapes and forms are defined by space around and within them.

**Still-life:** Painting or drawing of inanimate objects typically fruits, flowers, game, or decorative arts.

**Style:** The artist's personal way of using the elements of art and principles of design to express feelings and ideas.

**Stylization:** A method of simplification or generalization of forms found in nature in a nonrealistic manner in order to increase its aesthetic and expressive content.

**Surrealism:** 20<sup>th</sup> century artistic movement founded by André Breton and born out of the Dada movement. Surrealism was inspired by the writings of Sigmund Freud and based on the uncontrolled association of mental images that often occur in dreams. Surrealism asserted that art can come from the unconscious and found artistic expression through collage and freehand abstraction based on automatic drawing as well as the incongruous juxtaposition of objects. Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Henri Magritte and Joan Miró are among the artists associated with Surrealism. (*image 11*)



10. Charles Joseph Natoire, *The Toilet of Psyche*. 1735-36.



11. Joan Miró. *Persons in the Presence of a Metamorphosis*. 1936.

**Symbolist:** A late 19<sup>th</sup> century art movement that was centered on art and literature. The symbolists rejected objectivity in favor of fantasy worlds, religious mysticism, and ambiguous subject matter.

**Texture:** The element of art that refers to how things feel or look as if they might feel if touched. Texture is perceived by touch and sight.

**Trompe l'oeil:** French for “deceives the eye.” Trompe l'oeil is a painting technique in which painters try to give the viewer the illusion of seeing a three-dimensional object.

**Unity:** Principle of art which is concerned with the quality of wholeness or oneness that is achieved through the effective use of the elements and principles of art.

**Value:** The art element that describes the darkness or lightness of an object. Value depends on how much light a surface reflects. Value is also one of the three properties of color.

**Variety:** Principle of design concerned with differences or contrast.