

VISUAL ARTS – GLOSSARY

Art elements

Lines

Lines are an element of art that are made from marks that move across a surface or space. There are different types of lines. These include vertical, horizontal, diagonal, straight or curved lines. Lines can be two-dimensional, such as a pencil line on paper, or three-dimensional as in the lines of wire in a wire sculpture.

Shape/Form

Shape is an element of art that depicts an enclosed two-dimensional space through the use of height and width, but not depth. Shapes can give the illusion of being three-dimensional. This makes shape different from form, which is an element of art that is three-dimensional: it has height, width, and depth. Form can also be used to mean the total structure of an artwork.

Colour

Colour is created by light reflecting off objects back into the human eye. There are three primary colours: red, blue and yellow. These cannot be created by mixing colours. Secondary colours are green, orange and purple, which are created by mixing two of the primary colours together. For example, when the primary colours blue and yellow are mixed, they make green.

Space

Space is an element of art that describes the area or distance between, around, above, below or within an object. Space can be two-dimensional, flat, shallow and illusory, or three-dimensional, deep and actual.

Size

Size is an element of art that refers to the actual dimensions of an object. Size can be used to suggest depth to create perspective on a two-dimensional surface, with smaller sized objects appearing to be far away and larger objects appearing to be closer.

Scale

Scale is an element of art that is used to define the relationship between the size of an object and the representation of that object. It is shown as a number ratio of two quantities listed in the same units of measurement. If the actual size of an object is the same as the representation of that object it is called full-scale.

Art principles

Composition

A composition is an art principle that refers to the arrangement of the elements within an artwork. An artwork's composition can be looked at using the principles of design, which include balance and proportion.

Proportion/Scale

Proportion is a principle of design that compares the relationship between an element of an artwork's composition to another element of the composition, or to the artwork as a whole. Proportion is gauged by comparing size, scale, quantity or emphasis. An artwork can be out of proportion if, for example, an aspect looks too large by comparison to the rest of the composition. Conversely, an artwork can look in proportion if, for example, an aspect looks like to be the right size by comparison to the rest of the composition.

Pattern

A pattern is caused by the repetition of shapes, lines, colours or other elements. Pattern can also mean an instruction, model or mould that can be used to replicate the intended item.

Repetition

Repetition is the act of using the same element, such as a colour or shape, over and over.

Positive forms/space

Positive space refers to the area within an artwork that is not empty, so is therefore filled in through the use of lines, colour, shapes or other elements.

Negative forms/space

Negative space refers to the in-between areas within an artwork or the area around the outside of an artwork that is empty, and therefore not filled in through the use of lines, colours, shapes or other elements. Negative space is also called a void.

Abstraction

An abstraction is a work of art with no recognisable subject matter. Abstraction is also the process of making a work of art without recognisable, or realistic-appearing, subject matter or elements. Abstract images can be based on an actual form, or something that does not have a form such as an emotion. The colour red, for example, can be used to create the feeling of anger or passion. Wassily Kandinsky is said to be one of the artists who first invented abstract art in 1910–1913.

Appropriation

Appropriation means to borrow. In art, appropriation is done by using an element created by someone else, then putting the borrowed element with new elements, which results in a new artwork.

Fragmentation

Fragmentation is the process of breaking elements into fragments or pieces. Fragmentation can be used to create multiple points of view.

Multiple points of view

Multiple points of view happen when different viewpoints or angles of the one object can be seen all at the same time within a single artwork. This principle is said to have been first introduced in Cubist artwork, an early 20th century art movement started by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso.

Assemblage

Assemblage is the technique used to create a sculpture from non-art elements such as rubbish. Artists who often use assemblage include Joseph Beuys, Karel Appel and Robert Rauschenberg.

Didactic panel

A didactic panel is an instructional panel that talks about the artwork it accompanies. These panels are usually found on a wall or pedestal near the work they explain.

Profile view

A profile view is the side view of an object or person .

Frontal view

A frontal view is the face-on view of an object or person.

Still life

A still life is an artwork that shows an arrangement of non-living and often commonplace objects, such as bowls of fruit, vegetables, cut bunches of flowers, books or other items. Still life is often a two-dimensional artwork.

Portrait

A portrait is an artwork that represents a particular person, group of people or an animal. Portraits can be two-dimensional or three-dimensional. The term portrait is also used in art to refer to the vertical orientation of a rectangle, with the horizontal orientation of a rectangle called landscape.

Two-dimensional (2D)

Two-dimensional means a work has height and width, but no actual depth.

Three-dimensional (3D)

Three-dimensional means that a work has height, width and depth, or the appearance of depth.

Four-dimensional (4D)

Four-dimensional means that height, width, depth and time are all present in a work. Examples of artworks that have four dimensions include video art, which changes over time and has height, width and depth.

Texture moulds

A mould is a form used to shape or cast a fluid or flexible material such as clay, plaster or paper. A texture mould creates a raised or textured surface on the form that is made in the mould.

Time-based media

Time-based media is a type of artwork that uses time as a central aspect. Such works include film, video and computer art.

Studio critique

The studio is a space where an artist produces, studies, or teaches art. A studio critique is a critical review or discussion of the artist's artwork that occurs in the studio space, often between student and instructor.

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