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GLOSSARY of ART TERMS

abstract/abstraction - Abstract means the modification of a (usually) natural form by simplification or distortion. Abstraction is the category of such modified images. (See also non-objective.)

assemblage - (pronounced as-sem-blidge) - A type of modern sculpture consisting of combining multiple objects or forms, often 'found' objects (see below). The most well known assemblages are those made by Robert Rauschenberg in the 1950's and '60's; for example, one assemblage consisted of a stuffed goat with an automobile tire encircling its stomach, mounted on a painted base. The objects are combined for their visual (sculptural) properties, as well as for their expressive properties.

collage - (pronounced col-laj) - French word for cut and pasted scraps of materials, such as paper, cardboard, chair caning, playing cards, etc., to a painting or drawing surface; sometimes also combined with painting or drawing.

complementary colours - Colours which are located opposite one another on the colour wheel (e.g., red and green, yellow and purple, blue and orange); colours which when mixed together will (in colour theory) produce a neutral colour (a colour which is neither warm nor cool). In the case of the three primary colours (red, yellow and blue), the complementary of one primary will be the mixture of the other two primaries (complementary of red will be a mixture of yellow and blue, or green). When placed next to one another, complementary colours will make one another appear much more intense, sometimes in an "eye-popping" sense, which was utilized by Op artists of the 1960's to create optical effects. Also in colour theory, an object's primary colour has its complementary colour in its shadows (e.g., the shadows on and around a painted yellow apple will contain some purple).

composition - The process of arranging the forms of two- and three-dimensional visual art into a unified whole, by means of elements and principles of design, such as line, shape, colour, balance, contrast, space, etc., for purposes of formal clarity and artistic expression.

conception/execution - Conception is the birth process of an artistic idea, from the initial creative impulse through aesthetic refinement, problem-solving, and visualization/realization. Execution is the second half of the creative process: the actual carrying out of the idea, in terms of method and materials, which often involves compromises and alterations of the initial conception. Artists often see the initial conception as the guiding force for their aesthetic decisions, in terms of formal elements of design, and in terms of the expressive content desired. Contemporary conceptual artists place more emphasis on the first part of the creative process; traditional artists are somewhat more concerned with the techniques and methods involved in producing the artwork. The painter Henri Matisse advised, in his essay *On Painting*, that artists should keep their initial impulse in the front of their minds when working on a painting, to make the best expressive and formal decisions.



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conceptual - Pertaining to the process involved in the initial stages of art-making (i.e., the initial conception, or idea). Also, the name of a contemporary art movement which is mainly concerned with this process of conceiving of and developing the initial idea, as opposed to the carrying-out of the idea into concrete form.

contemporary art - The term contemporary describes the most recent art, in this case as distinguished from modern art, which is generally considered to have lost its dominance in the mid-1950's.

cross-hatching - The practice of overlapping parallel sets of lines in drawing to indicate lights and darks, or shading. (Hatching is one set of parallel lines, cross-hatching is one set going in one direction, with another overlapped set going in a different, often perpendicular, direction.)

diptych - Two separate paintings which are attached by hinges or other means, displayed as one artwork.

drawing - Pencil, pen, ink, charcoal or other similar mediums on paper or other support, tending toward a linear quality rather than mass, and also with a tendency toward black-and-white, rather than colour (one exception being pastel).

engraving - A general term used to describe traditional printing processes, such as etching, aquatint, drypoint, etc., where an image is made by the use of metal plates and engraving tools, and printed, usually through a printing press. The image can be incised into the plate, or drawn with fluid and then dipped in acid to etch the uncovered areas. These processes are still used by artists, but of course have been supplanted by more modern processes for general printing purposes.

expressionistic - A characteristic of some art, generally since the mid-19th century, leaning toward the expression of emotion over objective description. There are still many artists whose work has expressionistic tendencies; in the 1980's there was a period of art called Neo-Expressionist. (The word 'neo' before an art label means that there is a reprise of work similar to the original movement.)

figurative - A term used to describe art which is based on the figure, usually in realistic or semi-realistic terms; also loosely used to describe an artist who paints or sculpts representationally, as opposed to painting or sculpting in an abstract or non-objective manner.

focal point - In two-dimensional images, the center of interest visually and/or subject-wise; tends to be used more in traditional, representational art than in modern and contemporary art, where the picture surface tends to have more of an overall importance, rather than one important area.

formal - A term used by artists to describe the visual elements of a work of art, such as composition, space, colour, etc., i.e., formal elements.



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found object - First used in the early years of the 20th century (in the Dadaist movement), a found object is any object that an artist comes upon, and uses in an artwork, or as the artwork itself. Marcel Duchamp called these works 'readymades.' He exhibited a urinal in the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York in 1917, under the signature 'R Mutt'; Dada was the precursor to Surrealism, and was an 'anti-art' movement after World War I, which sought to avoid order and rationality in art. Dada also questioned the very meaning of art: what is art? who decides if an object is art? is it art because an artist places it in a museum and calls it art? etc. Later, Picasso made a bull's head from found objects: the seat and handle bars of a bicycle.

gesture/gestural - The concept of gesture in drawing is twofold: it describes the action of a figure; and it embodies the intangible "essence" of a figure or object. The action line of a figure is often a graphic undulating line, which follows the movement of the entire body of the figure being drawn or painted. The term gestural is an extension of this idea to describe a type of painting which is characterized by brushstrokes with a gestural quality, that is, flowing, curved, undulating lines or forms. Gestural composition means a type of composition based on gestural directional movements. The work of Arshile Gorky, the Abstract Expressionist, is an example of gestural painting, which often connotes a spiritual or emotional content.

glaze/glazing - A glaze is a thin layer of translucent oil paint applied to all or part of a painting, to modify the tone or colour underneath. Glazing is the process of using this technique.

graphic/graphic arts - The graphic arts (drawing and engraving) are said to depend for their effect on drawing, as opposed to colour. The term graphic describes drawings or prints which lean more toward drawing (line) than colour (mass). I think that this division is less pertinent in modern and contemporary art than in traditional art or art of the past.

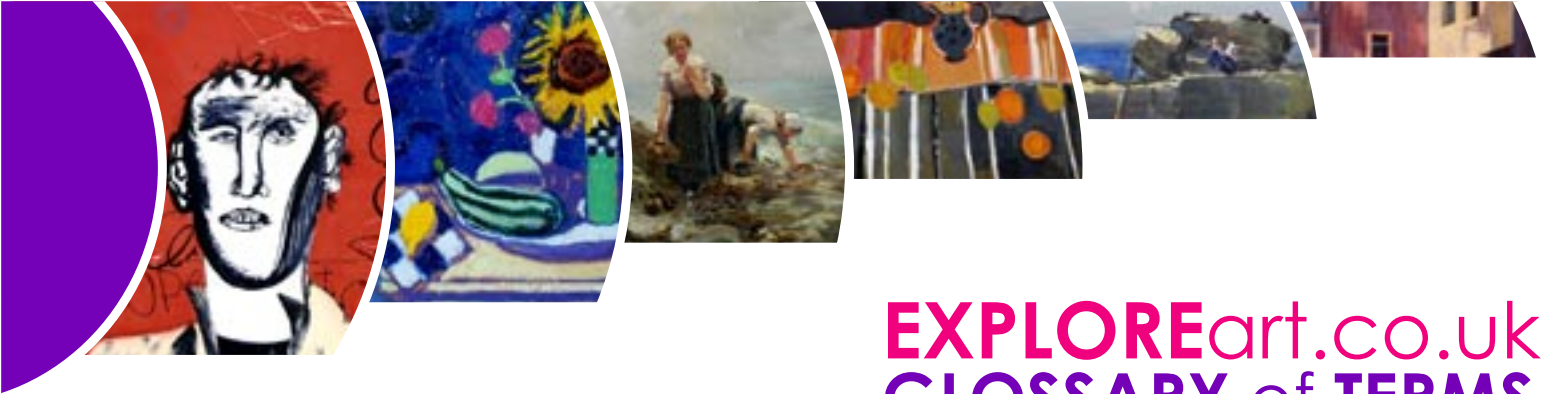
hatching - A technique used in drawing to indicate light and shade, or form, consisting of parallel lines of varying width, darkness and spacing. Cross-hatching is simply two or more overlapping sets of these parallel sets of lines, at a perpendicular or other angle to the first set of lines.

hue - Referring to the actual colour of a form or object, e.g., a red car.

iconography - Knowledge of the meanings to be attached to pictorial representations; perhaps the visual equivalent of symbols or metaphors in literature. An artist may be aware of his/her iconography and use it consciously; probably just as often, the iconography is used in a semi-conscious way. An artist will intuitively choose images because of meanings they have for him/her, and over the course of time a pattern can often be found, as a logical progression or repeating images. An artist can be said to have a personal iconography, which is often noted and analyzed by others, including art historians, critics, writers and the public. Often, the meanings seen in an artist's work by others differs, somewhat or considerably, from what the artist has intended.

impasto - An Italian term for oil paint applied very thickly onto the canvas or other support, resulting in evident brushstrokes (visible).

installation - A type of art, usually sculptural, which is often large enough to fill an entire space, such as a gallery, and consists of a number and variety of components.



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linear - Describing a quality related to the use of line in painting or sculpture; can refer to directional movement in composition, or the actual use of the element of line in the image or sculpture, as contrasted with the use of mass or shape forms.

medium - Material or technique an artist works in; also, the (usually liquid or semi-liquid) vehicle in which pigments are carried or mixed (e.g., oil, egg yolk, water, refined linseed oil).

modern art - Generally considered to be the period from about 1905 to the mid-1950's, when Pop art ushered in what is referred to as the postmodern period in art. Modern art is generally characterized by formal experimentation and exploration, and mostly seriousness of purpose.

motif - (pronounced mo-teef) - A French term which refers to: the subject matter or content of a work of art (e.g., a landscape motif); also refers to a visual element used in a work of art, as in a recurring motif (i.e., Warhol used the motif of soup cans in his early works; or Mondrian used rectangles as a visual motif).

oil - Oil paint was developed in the late 18th century and used by many of the French Impressionist painters. It is a stable, colour-fast paint, which can be bought in ready mixed colour tubes, that dries slowly, allowing re-working and blending. Before oil paint, the paint colours were less stable and lightfast and had to be laboriously pre-mixed before use, with a limited colour range available.

painterly - An adjective used to describe a style of painting which is based not on linear or outline drawing, but rather patches or areas of color. In painterly two-dimensional images, the edges of forms tend to merge into one another, or into the background, rather than be separated by outlines or contours. Titian and Rembrandt are two artists with painterly approaches; Botticelli's work is not painterly, but more linear/drawing oriented.

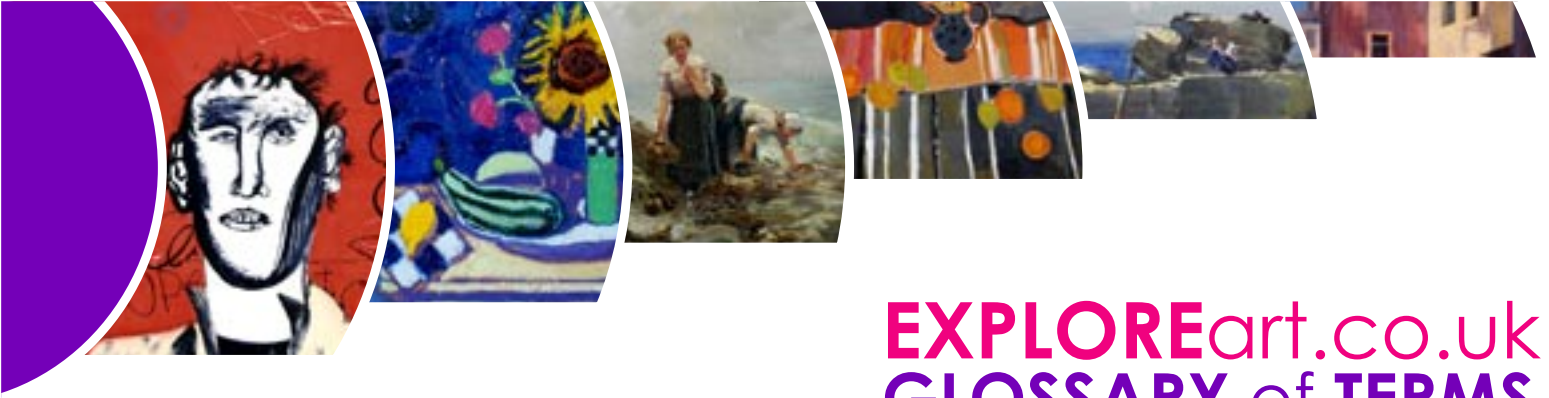
palette - A thin piece of glass, wood or other material, or pad of paper, which is used to hold the paint to be used in painting; also, the range of colours used by a particular painter.

pastel - A drawing stick made of pigments ground with chalk and mixed with gum water; also, a drawing executed with these pastel sticks; also, a soft, subdued tint (light shade) of a colour.

perspective - A semi-mathematical technique for representing spatial relationships and three-dimensional objects on a flat surface.

photomontage - (pronounced photo-montaj) - A two-dimensional combining of photographs or parts of photographs into an image on paper or other material (a technique much used by the Surrealists in the 1920's, such as Max Ernst).

postmodern - A term used to describe the period of art which followed the modern period, i.e., from the 1950's until recently. The term implies a shift away from the formal rigors of the modernists, toward the less formally and emotionally stringent Pop artists, and other art movements which followed.



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printmaking - The category of fine art printing processes, including etching, lithography, woodcut, and silkscreen, in which multiple images are made from the same metal plate, heavy stone, wood or linoleum block, or silkscreen, with black-and-white or colour printing inks.

proportion - The relation of one part to the whole, or to other parts (for example, of the human body). For example, the human body is approximately 7 to 7-1/2 times the height of the head; the vertical halfway point of the body is the groin; the legs are halved at the knees, etc. Proportion also refers to the relative sizes of the visual elements in a composition, and their optimum relationships for good design.

realism - Representational painting which, unlike ideal art, desires to depict forms and images as they really are, without idealizing them.

representational art - Art which is based on images which can be found in the objective world, or at least in the artist's imagination; i.e., images which can perhaps be named or recognized. For instance, an objectively faithful depiction of a person is representational art; also, a depiction of an alien from outer space can also be considered a representational image.

tone - The lightness or darkness of an area in terms of black to white; also called value, i.e., a light or dark red, or light or dark grey.

triptych - A painting which consists of one center panel, with two paintings attached on either side by means of hinges or other means, as "wings."

wash - A transparent layer of diluted color that is brushed on.

watercolour - Painting in pigments suspended in water and a binder such as gum arabic. Traditionally used in a light to dark manner, using the white of the paper to determine values.

wet-on-wet - The technique of painting wet colour into a wet surface (paper saturated with water) to give a blurred, wash appearance. Utilised often for sky or seascape.