

Glossary of Art Terms

- atmospheric perspective The representation of space in a drawing or painting by making objects appear distant by blurring outlines, by showing less detail, and by making colors lighter and cooler.
- background The part of the painting or other image that seems to be farthest from the viewer.
- balance The arrangement of the sensory properties (line, shape, color, space, texture, and pattern) so that there appears to be visual equilibrium. The balance may be symmetrical (the same on both sides) or asymmetrical (different on each side, but in equilibrium). Another word for symmetrical balance is formal; another word for asymmetrical balance is informal.
- center of interest The focal point of a work of art. The area in an artwork to which all movement is directed.
- complementary colors Pairs of colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel: red/green, blue/orange, purple/yellow. Complementary colors intensify each other when paired, but neutralize each other when mixed.
- composition How elements are positioned in relation to each other within a work of art.
- contrast Great difference between things: light/dark, smooth/rough, thick/thin, etc.
- cool colors Colors that remind people of cool things: blues, greens, purples.
- foreground The part of a painting or image that seems closest to the viewer.
- landscape A work of art that shows the features of the natural environment such as trees, mountains, or rivers.
- line A continuous, slender mark made on a surface; a real or suggested line or path joining the elements in a composition.
- linear perspective A system of drawing or painting that gives the illusion of depth.
- movement The arrangement of the elements of an artwork so that a sense of motion is created and the eye moves through the artwork.

- negative space
Area in an image or sculpture that is not taken up by any forms, but surrounds forms and fills in the “gaps” of the composition.
- pattern
Lines, colors or shapes repeated over and over in a planned way.
- portrait
An artwork that represents a person’s likeness.
- primary colors
Red, blue, yellow; all other colors can be mixed from these, but you cannot mix colors to make these three.
- repetition
Elements that appear over and over in an artwork. This often creates a sense of movement or rhythm.
- secondary colors
Orange, green and purple; each of these colors is made by mixing two primary colors together.
- shape
An enclosed, two-dimensional space. Shapes may be geometric (squares, circles, rectangles, triangles, etc.) or natural with curving or irregular outlines.
- space
The illusion of depth created by an artist in a two-dimensional artwork. Space may also be open areas in an artwork.
- still life
An artwork of inanimate objects (usually arranged) such as vases, bottles, fruits, or flowers.
- texture
The feel of a surface, either real or simulated, such as when an artist makes an object in a painting look shiny.
- unity
The formal property in a work of art in which the sensory properties are arranged into a harmonious whole.
- value
The lightness or darkness of a color.
- warm colors
Colors that remind people of warm things: red, yellow, or orange.