

Glossary of Art Terms

Non-Western Art History

Aborigines: indigenous peoples of the Australian continent. Beginning about 35,000 BC and continuing to the present, the aborigines developed wide range of artworks including painting on leaves, wood carving, rock carving, sculpture, sand-painting and ceremonial clothing, as well as artistic decorations found on weaponry and also tools. Aboriginal artists often work in “dream-time” and use what is called an “X-ray” technique.

Abstract: not realistic, though often based on an actual subject.

Aesthetics: the study of the beautiful in art; defined by the visual, moral, and social standards of the culture in which it was created; focuses on the nature of beauty, the nature and value of art, our responses to art, and how we define what is art.

African Art: the artworks from the many empires and tribes from the continent of Africa, generally below the Sahara Desert; also sometimes called Sub-Saharan Art; includes the modern nations of Nigeria, Congo, South Africa, Sudan, Ghana, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Angola and many more.

Anatomy: the study of the structure of the human body, especially the bones and muscles.

Architecture: the art and science of designing and erecting buildings.

Art: the making or doing of things that have form and beauty; usually creative and unique, art expresses human feelings and spiritual beliefs.

Artist: a person who creates art; in ancient times the artist created works for the religious or political powers; in Medieval and Renaissance times, the artist created works for the church and wealthy patrons; in modern times, artists create for themselves, businesses, patrons or churches.

Asymmetrical: different on either side of a central axis (a line drawn down the middle).

Balance: equilibrium in a composition, either symmetrical or asymmetrical.

Belief: spiritual ideas about something held to be true by a person or culture; generally about why or how something occurs.

Benin, Kingdom of: (1440–1897) was a pre-colonial African state in what is now modern Nigeria. (It is not to be confused with the modern-day country called Benin.) They traded extensively in ivory, palm oil and pepper. The kingdom developed an advanced artistic culture, especially in its famous artifacts of bronze, iron and ivory. These include bronze wall plaques and life-sized bronze heads depicting the Obas (rulers) of Benin.

Bronze: an alloy of copper and tin used for sculpture.

Buddhism: A set of philosophical, ethical and religious beliefs based on the teachings of the historical Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama c.563-479 BC) who lived in India. The foundations of Buddhist tradition and practice are the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma (the teachings), and the Sangha (the community). There are two main schools. *Hinayana* developed the basic concepts of Buddhist community and gathered together the sutras and writings into the Buddhist canon; stressed individual enlightenment. Mahayana developed in the 1st century BC and stressed the liberation of all living beings.

Calligraphy: beautiful or expert handwriting; often a special style created by artists.

Caricature: character studies that usually exaggerate one or more features, often with humorous or satirical intent.

Carving: a subtractive method of sculpture; taking away wood or stone.

Cave Art: prehistoric art found in caves underground.

Central Asian Art: artwork from the area above the Himalayan Mountains, stretching from present day Iran west to China; includes the modern nations of Mongolia, Afghanistan, Kyrgystan, Tadjhistan and Kazakhstan, as well as parts of southern Russia.

Ceramic: any object made of clay and fired (baked at high temperatures); pottery.

Chinese Art: art from the area of the present day People's Republic of China; the many Chinese dynasties stretch from 1,000 BC to 1911 AD.

Chonin Culture: urban commoner culture of Japan, see Edo Period

Collage: a grouping of different textures, objects and materials glued down.

Composition: the manner in which the forms, lines and colors of an artwork are arranged.

Contemporary Non-Western Art: generally defined as art produced during the later half of the 20th century, 1980 to the present in the areas beyond Europe and America.

Contour drawing: a drawing of an object or person showing only the outline, the edges along the outside of the shape.

Cool Colors: colors that recede (appear to go away from the viewer), such as blue, green and violet.

Creative: original, expressive or imaginative; the ability to put together lines, colors, forms and subjects in ways that are new and different.

Daoism: (“the way”) In China, a philosophy developed by Lao Zi (“Old One”) (born 604 BC) aimed at achieving harmony with nature and the universe. Taoist propriety and ethics emphasize the Three Jewels of the Tao: compassion, moderation, and humility, while Taoist thought generally focuses on nature, the relationship between humanity and the cosmos, health and longevity, and wu wei (action through inaction), which is thought to produce harmony with the Universe. Reverence for ancestor spirits and immortals is also common in popular Taoism.

Decorative Art: artwork using the elements and principles of design created on everyday objects such as clothing, jewelry and household goods.

Design: the organization of line, form, color, value, texture and space in an eye-pleasing arrangement; artists use repetition, emphasis, unity, proportion and/or contrast to organize their art works.

Drawing: usually a work in pen, pencil or charcoal on paper.

Economics: the social science that is concerned with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Micro-economics looks at markets and agents (buyers and sellers, whether individuals or groups); macro-economics looks at larger issues facing the entire economy, such as employment, growth, inflation and fiscal policies.

Edo Period: or Tokugawa period (1603 to 1868) was a feudal era when Japan was ruled by the shoguns of the Tokugawa family. The government closed the country to foreign trade and ruled over 250 years of peace. Various shogunal policies led to the development of a strong economy and a vibrant urban culture. Merchants and craftsmen developed the *chonin* culture, with distinctive visual arts and theater available to a large segment of the population. In 1750 Edo (modern Tokyo) was the largest city in the world.

Element: artistic design considerations such as color, line, texture, shape or form and space.

Emphasis: a design principle that gives dominance to a particular area through color, size or repetition.

Figure: the human or animal form used in creating art; i.e. figure-drawing.

Geometric: any art or style primarily using the basic shapes – rectangles, squares, circles, triangles; often in a pattern.

Illustration: an artwork developed to accompany a story, advertisement, or written text.

Hinduism: Hinduism is formed of diverse traditions and has no single founder. Among its roots is the historical Vedic religion of Iron Age India, and as such Hinduism is often called the "oldest living religion." Hinduism conceives the whole world as a single family that defies the one truth, and therefore it accepts all forms of beliefs and dismisses

labels of distinct religions that would imply a division of identity. Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include (but are not restricted to), Dharma (ethics/duties), Samsāra (the continuing cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth), Karma (action and subsequent reaction), Moksha (liberation from samsara), and the various Yogas (paths or practices).

Indian Art: artwork created on the Indian sub-continent from the Indus Civilization of 2,000 BC to the present; this includes the present modern nations of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Islam: the monotheistic religion articulated by the Qur'an, a text considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of God, and by the Prophet of Islam Muhammad's teachings. Muslims believe that God is one and incomparable and that the purpose of life is to worship God. They regard their religion as the completed and universal version of a primordial, monotheistic faith revealed at many times and places before, including, notably, to the prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Religious practices include the Five Pillars of Islam, which are five obligatory acts of worship

Japanese Art: artwork created on the islands of the modern nation of Japan from the Jomon Civilization of 3,000 BC to the present

Japonisme: French for "Japanese style," the vogue for Japanese art and adopting Japanese art styles in Europe and North America art after Japan reopened to trade with the world in the 1850s.

Landscape: an outdoor scenery painting; also includes the cityscape or seascape.

Marble: a hard, crystalline limestone, white or variously colored, sometimes streaked, which can be carved then polished to a high shine.

Maya, Kingdom of: is a Mesoamerican civilization, noted for the only known fully developed written language of the pre-Columbian Americas, as well as its art, architecture, and mathematical and astronomical systems. Many Maya cities reached their highest state development during the Classic period (c. 250 AD to 900 AD), and continued throughout the Post-Classic period until the arrival of the Spanish. At its peak, it was one of the most densely populated and culturally dynamic societies in the world.

Medium: the material that is used in an artwork; i.e. watercolor, oil, marble, bronze; plural media.

Modeling: in sculpture building up clay or wax into a form; in painting varying the colors to suggest a three-dimensional quality.

Mosaic: images formed by small colored stones, glass or clay pieces, fixed to a hard, stable surface; in modern times other materials such as wood and paper have been used.

Motif: a main element, idea or feature, specifically in art, literature or music; a repeated figure in a design.

Mughal, Kingdom of: or Mogul Empire in former English usage, was an Indian-Islamic power that ruled a large portion of the Indian subcontinent beginning in 1526. They invaded and ruled most of South Asia by the late 17th and early 18th centuries by forming alliance with Indian Maharaja and ended in the mid-19th century. During the height of the empire (1556 – 1707) all the significant monuments of the Mughals, their most visible legacy, date to this period. It was characterized by the expansion of Persian cultural influence in the Indian subcontinent, with brilliant literary, artistic and architectural results.

Mural: a continuous painting made to fill a wall.

Mythology: a collection of traditional stories from a preliterate society (before writing is invented) about the origin and history of a people, its gods, ancestors and heroes.

Narrative Art: an artwork that tells a story.

Native American Art: artwork created on the continents of North America, including modern day Canada, the United States, Mexico (including the civilizations of the Mayas and Aztecs), Central America, and South America, including modern day Columbia, Peru (including the Incas), Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Artworks created before Columbus discovered the Americas are called Pre-Columbian. After 1500, many traditional native artworks flourished until the native people were enslaved or forced onto reservations. Many Native Americans are reclaiming their artistic heritage.

Oceanic Art: artwork created on the many islands of the western Pacific Ocean, including modern day Australia, Indonesia, Borneo, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands (USA protectorate).

Painting: the act, art or occupation of picturing scenes, objects, persons, etc. with paint.

Patron: a person, usually wealthy and influential, who sponsors and supports a person, activity etc.; for example, a patron commissions an artist to create a work of art.

Pattern: an overall design that repeats the same lines, colors and/or shapes.

Perspective: a formal method of creating a three-dimensional effect on a two-dimensional surface. There are three kinds: visual perspective – making distant objects smaller; aerial or atmospheric – colors in the distance are hazier or bluer; linear perspective – having lines converge to meet at a single point on the horizon.

Pigment: powdered earth, minerals and chemicals, ground and mixed with a binder such as oil.

Politics: Politics is a process by which groups of people make collective decisions. The term is generally applied to behavior within civil governments, but politics has been observed in other group interactions, including corporate, academic, and religious institutions. It consists of "social relations involving authority or power" and refers to the regulation of a political unit and to the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply policy.

Portrait: a painting, photograph or other likeness of a person, especially one showing a face.

Prehistoric Art: created before a culture develops a written language; the period of time depends upon the culture.

Primary Colors: red, yellow and blue; may be mixed to make other colors but cannot themselves be mixed from other colors.

Print: a work of art, usually on paper, created from a "plate" that has been transformed through a technique such as engraving, etching or woodcut and then inked and the image is transferred to paper.

Relief: in sculpture and architecture the projection of figures and forms from a flat surface so that they stand partly free.

Religion: Religion is the belief in and worship of a god or gods, or in general a set of beliefs explaining the existence of and giving meaning to the universe, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs and frequently having organized leadership.

Religious Artwork: artwork that shows religious images or is used in religious ceremonies.

Secondary Colors: green, purple and orange; the colors obtained by mixing the primary colors; green = yellow + blue, purple = red + blue, orange = yellow + red.

Sculpture: the art of carving wood, chiseling stone, casting and welding metal, modeling clay or wax, or assembling these materials into three-dimensional representations, such as statues, figures, forms, etc.

Shade: any color mixed with black; it makes the color darker.

Shamanism: Shamanism encompasses the belief that shamans are intermediaries or messengers between the human world and the spirit worlds. Shamans are said to treat ailments/illness by mending the soul. Alleviating traumas affecting the soul/spirit restores the physical body of the individual to balance and wholeness. The shaman also enters supernatural realms or dimensions to obtain solutions to problems afflicting the community. Shamans may visit other worlds/dimensions to bring guidance to misguided souls and to ameliorate illnesses of the human soul caused by foreign elements. The shaman operates primarily within the spiritual world, which in turn affects the human world. The restoration of balance results in the elimination of the ailment.

Shintoism: (“The Way of The Gods”) The native animistic religion of Japan of which the emperor is the leader. Shinto is organized around the heavenly gods led by Amaterasu and the earthly gods led by her brother, Susano-o. The gods, *kami*, are unseen and awe-inspiring; believed to inhabit natural phenomenon such as rocks, trees, waterfalls and mountains. Shinto festivals revolve around the agricultural cycle.

South East Asian Art: artwork created in the area of modern day Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore; this includes the ancient kingdom of Khmer about 900 – 1200 AD.

Spiritual: relating to the nature of the spirit – the unseen force that gives life; concerned with the soul or a supernatural being, for example, gods or God.

Symbol: something that stands for or represents another thing; especially an object to represent something abstract, as a dove often represents peace in Western culture.

Symmetrical: the same on either side of a central axis (a line drawn down the middle).

Tang Dynasty: 618 – 907 AD, with its capital at Chang'an (present-day Xi'an), the most populous city in the world at the time, is generally regarded as a high point in Chinese civilization, a golden age of cosmopolitan culture. Art and culture flourished, partially fed by extensive trade along the Silk Road which connected China to cultures as far west as Persia. Its territory, acquired through the military campaigns of its early rulers, was greater than that of the Han period.

Tapestry: multi-colored pictorial or decorative weaving meant to be hung on a wall or placed on furniture.

Textile: cloth, fabric; especially one that is woven or knitted.

Texture: the tactile quality of a surface; smooth, rough, slick, sticky.

Tint: any color mixed with white; it makes the color lighter.

Value: artistic – the relative lightness or darkness of gray or colors; tints are light colors (mixed with white) and shades are dark colors (mixed with black).

Value: social – a principle, standard or quality considered worthwhile or desirable; common values are compassion, freedom, honesty, justice, peace, respect, responsibility, tolerance.

Visual Arts: a broad category that includes the traditional fine arts such as drawing, painting, printmaking, decorative arts and sculpture; communication and design arts such as film, television, graphics, and product design; architecture and environmental arts such as urban, building, interior and landscape design; folk arts; and other works of art such as ceramics, fibers, jewelry, works in wood, paper and other materials.

Ukiyo: literally translated as "floating world" in English, referring to a conception of an evanescent world, impermanent, fleeting beauty and a realm of entertainments (kabuki, courtesans, geisha) divorced from the responsibilities of the mundane, everyday world; "pictures of the floating world", i.e. ukiyo-e, are considered a genre unto themselves.

Ukiyoe: is a genre of Japanese multi-colored woodblock prints (or woodcuts) and paintings produced between the 17th and the 20th centuries, featuring motifs of landscapes, tales from history, the theatre, and pleasure quarters.

Unique: being the only one of its kind; being without an equal or equivalent. Note: the phrase "very unique" is overkill.

Warm Colors: colors that advance (appear to come towards the viewer), such as red, red-orange, orange and yellow.

X-Ray Style: art from the Arnhem Land and Kakadu regions of the Northern Territory, Australia, in which the skeletons and viscera of the animals and humans portrayed are drawn inside the outline, as if by cross section.

Zen Buddhism: de-emphasizes theoretical knowledge of Buddhism in favor of direct realization through meditation and dharma practices. The establishment of Zen is credited to the South Indian prince-turned-monk Bodhidharma, who came to China to teach a "special transmission outside scriptures, not founded on words or letters".