Art History Vocabulary

Wachowiak & Clements (2006, p. 228)


**Abstract Expressionism** - A style developed in the mid-20th century. It emphasized form and color rather than an actual subject. Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning were abstract expressionists.

**Action painting** - A style of abstract painting that uses techniques such as the dribbling or splashing of paint to achieve a spontaneous effect. In Action Painting the canvas is the arena in which the artist acts.

**African classical art** - Ceremonial sculpture, masks, and crafts produced by African tribal cultures, as well as by the African cultures of colonial and post-colonial periods. Generally African art means sub-Saharan art, with the cultures of Africa's northern parts typically referred to as Egyptian and North African.

**Art Nouveau** - French for "The New Art." An international art movement and style of decoration and architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, characterized particularly by the curvilinear depiction of leaves and flowers, often in the form of vines. These might also be described as foliate forms, with sinuous lines, and non-geometric, "whiplash" curves.

**Assemblage** - Assemblage is a form of sculpture comprised of "found" objects. A three-dimensional composition made of various materials such as found objects, paper, wood, and textiles.

**Baroque** - A form of art and architecture that was popular in Europe in the 17th and early 18th centuries. Baroque art was very ornate, dramatic and realistic. The Palace of Versailles near Paris is considered to be the greatest example of baroque architecture. Caravaggio and Rembrandt were baroque painters.

**Bauhaus** - A very influential German school of art and design. Underlying the Bauhaus aesthetic was a fervent utopianism, based upon ideals of simplified forms and unadorned functionalism, and a belief that the machine economy could deliver elegantly designed items for the masses, using techniques and materials employed especially in industrial fabrication and manufacture — steel, concrete, chrome, glass, etc. All students took a preliminary course before moving on to specialist workshops, including carpentry, weaving, pottery, stagecraft, graphic arts, and graphic design.

**Caricature** - A representation in which the subject's distinctive features or peculiarities are deliberately exaggerated to produce a comic or grotesque effect. Also, the art of making such representations.
**Chiaroscuro** - A word borrowed from Italian ("light and shade" or "dark") referring to the modeling of volume by depicting light and shade by contrasting them boldly. This is one means of strengthening an illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface.

**Critic** - Among those in art careers, a person who describes, analyzes, interprets, evaluates, and expresses judgments of the merits, faults and value of artworks. One who produces art criticism.

**Critique** - A critical review or discussion, in particular, for our purposes, one dealing with works of art. A critique is often a meeting involving a group of art students with one or more instructors, and sometimes one or more guests, in a discussion resulting in the assessment of those students' artwork, to review or discuss those works critically in order to sustain and nourish critical reflection. Participants in a critique should focus on describing, analyzing, interpreting, and judging works to an understanding of them which is as deep and broad as time will allow. The works considered in a critique might constitute a portion of a project to be completed within the current semester, up to a large body of recent works. A critique should advance the students' work, and convey a structure which will sustain them as artists long after their graduation.

**Cubism** - One of the most influential art movements (1907-1914) of the twentieth century, Cubism was begun by Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1882-1973) and Georges Braque (French, 1882-1963) in 1907. In Cubism the subject matter is broken up, analyzed, and reassembled in an abstracted form. Cubism is a style of art that stressed basic abstract geometric forms and often presented the subject from many angles at the same time.

**Dadaism** - An early twentieth century art movement which ridiculed contemporary culture and traditional art forms. The movement was formed to prove the bankruptcy of existing style of artistic expression rather than to promote a particular style itself. It was born as a consequence of the collapse during World War I of social and moral values which had developed to that time. Dada artists produced works which were nihilistic or reflected a cynical attitude toward social values, and, at the same time, irrational — absurd and playful, emotive and intuitive, and often cryptic.

**Earthworks** - Earth art or Earthworks (also called "land art") refers to a movement of artists with wide ranging goals, but all created in nature, employing such materials as stones, dirt, and leaves. Most works are sculptural. Earthworks often refer to phenomena such as the slow process of erosion or to the movement of planets or stars, especially the sun. Many earthworks are intended to help us to better understand nature. Some demonstrate the inherent differences between nature and civilization, often pointing out artists' desires to understand, conquer, and control natural processes.

**Environmental art** - Refers to art which involves the creation or manipulation of a large or enclosed space, many effectively surrounding its audience.

**Expressive** - (with a small e — the more general sense) An attitude conveyed by the set of a person's facial features. Also, a quality of inner experience, the emotions of the artist (expressive qualities) communicated through emphasis and distortion, which can be found in works of art of any period.

**Expressionism** (with a capital E - the more specific sense) Expressionist painters interpreted things around them in exaggerated, distorted and emotional ways. Expressionism is an art movement dominant in Germany from 1905-1925.
**Feminist art movement** - Especially since the late 1960s, when the feminist art movement can be said to have emerged, women have been particularly interested in what makes them different from males — what makes women artists and their art different from male artists and their art.

**Folk art** - Art made by people who have had little or no formal schooling in art. Folk artists usually make works of art with traditional techniques and content, in styles handed down through many generations, and often of a particular region. Paintings, sculptures, ceramics, metalwork, costume, tools, and other everyday objects all may be folk art.

**Formalist** – A person who holds to an aesthetic and critical theory of art which places emphasis on form — the structural qualities instead of either content (sometimes called literal or allegorical qualities) or contextual qualities. According to this point of view, the most important thing about a work of art is the effective organization of the elements of art through the use of the principles of design. Also known as structuralism,

**Gallery installation or installation art** - Art that is or has been installed — arranged in a place — either by the artist or as specified by the artist. It might be either site-specific or not, and either indoors or out. The term became widely used in the 1970s and 1980s, and continues to be employed by many people. Installations may be temporary or permanent, but most will be known to posterity through documentation.

**Genre** - Genre painting is the depiction of subjects and scenes from everyday life, ordinary folk and common activities. When used in the plural form, genres are the various categories of subject matter in the traditional academic hierarchy, in descending order of importance: history, mythology, religion, portraiture, genre, landscape, still life, and vernacular.

**Happening** - Happenings were loosely structured theatrical pieces from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s, which shared qualities of unexpectedness (a large margin for improvisation), variety of means, and chaos, with the reactions of the audience potentially influencing the action under way. Although there are elements of theatricality involved in happenings, they took place without traditionally theatrical participants or environments, and resulted from an evolution in modernist art in which the outside edges of the work are blurred, broken, or nonexistent. This trend sprang from artists' reaching for the means of establishing more direct relationships between artist and audience, and between art and life, simultaneous with their rejection of the market's control of art. A happening might take a political or sociological direction, but it could also take a poetic or playful one. Other terms referring to a happening might make it more of an event, a concert, a performance, or an action.

**Impressionism** - An art movement and style of painting that started in France during the 1860s. Impressionist artists tried to paint candid glimpses of their subjects showing the effects of sunlight on things at different times of day. The impressionists tried to capture an immediate visual interpretation of their subjects by using color rather than lines. Claude Monet and Pierre Auguste Renoir were impressionist painters.

**Instrumentalism** – Requires that art move people to act for the betterment of society. Art serves as an instrument for furthering a point of view that might be moral, social, political, or spiritual.

**Magic realism** - An artistic genre in which magical elements or illogical scenarios appear in an otherwise realistic or even "normal" setting. (Wikipedia)
Minimalism - This style was popular from the 1950s through the 1970s. Minimalist paintings and sculpture were very simple, both in how they were presented and what they represented. Richard Serra was a Minimalist artist, and Frank Stella devoted part of his career to Minimalism.

Mobile - A construction made of objects that are balanced and arranged on wire arms and suspended so as to move freely. Alexander Calder (American, 1898-1976) introduced this art form which included sculptures (including mobiles, stabiles, standing mobiles, and wire sculptures), and monumental outdoor works, as well as oil paintings, works on paper, toys, jewelry, and household objects.

Naive art - The style of naive painting is characterized by a careful, simplifying approach, non-scientific perspective, bright colors, and often, an enchantingly literal depiction of imaginary scenes. Although not following any particular movement or aesthetic, naive painters have been a continuing international phenomenon and influence since the beginning of the twentieth century. The term usually refers to works produced by artists (also called naïfs or naïfs) who had no formal training.

Op art - A twentieth century art movement and style in which artists sought to create an impression of movement on the picture surface by means of optical illusion. It is derived from, and is also known as Optical Art and Perceptual Abstraction.

Paint - Works of art made with paint on a surface. Often the surface, also called a support, is either a tightly stretched piece of canvas or a panel. How the ground (on which paint is applied) is prepared on the support depends greatly on the type of paint to be used. Paintings are usually intended to be placed in frames, and exhibited on walls, but there have been plenty of exceptions. Also, the act of painting, which may involve a wide range of techniques and materials, along with the artist's other concerns which effect the content of a work.

Painterly - A painting technique in which forms are created with patches of color, exploiting color and tonal relationships. The opposite approach is known as linear, in which things are represented in terms of contour, with precise edges.

Patron - Someone who supports, protects, or champions somebody or something such as an institution, an event, or a cause; a sponsor or benefactor. In Europe, until the growth of the middle classes in the nineteenth century, when more and more patrons of the arts were wealthy merchants and industrialists, most patrons of the arts were either leaders of the aristocracy or of the Catholic church. Now some of them have made their fortunes with profits from products like the device you're looking at right now! Artists have often made their patrons the subjects of their work.

Pointillism - A method of painting developed in France in the 1880s in which tiny dots of color are applied to the canvas. When viewed from a distance, the points of color appear to blend together to make other colors and to form shapes and outlines. Georges Seurat (French, 1859-1891) was its leading exponent.

Pop art - An art movement and style that had its origins in England in the 1950s and made its way to the United States during the 1960s. Pop artists have focused attention upon familiar images of the popular culture such as billboards, comic strips, magazine advertisements, and supermarket products. See Andy Warhol.
**Postmodern art** - Art, architecture, or literature that reacts against earlier modernist principles, as by reintroducing traditional or classical elements of style or by carrying modernist styles or practices to extremes.

**Post-Impressionism** - The Post-impressionists followed the Impressionists. The movement originated in Paris and was popular in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Post-impressionist painters rebelled against the reality of impressionism and created emotional, personal works. Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin were post-impressionist painters.

**Realism** - The realistic and natural representation of people, places, and/or things in a work of art. The opposite of idealization. One of the common themes of postmodernism is that this popular notion of an unmediated presentation is not possible. This sense of realism is sometimes considered synonymous with naturalism. Realism (with an upper case "R"), also known as the Realist school, denotes a mid-nineteenth century art movement and style in which artists discarded the formulas of Neoclassicism and the theatrical drama of Romanticism to paint familiar scenes and events as they actually looked. Typically it involved some sort of sociopolitical or moral message, in the depiction of ugly or commonplace subjects.

**Romanticism** - A style of art popular in the early 19th century. Romantic artists produced exotic, emotional works that portrayed an idealized world and nostalgia for the past. William Blake was a member of the romantic school of painters.

**Social realism** - A type of realism which is more overtly political in content, critical of society, marked by its realistic depiction of social problems. The greatest impact of this art movement was felt in the first half of the twentieth century, however. Mexican muralists Diego Rivera (1886-1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974) strongly influenced many North American social realist and New Deal artists.

**Surrealism** - Surrealist artists came from all over the world. The movement, popular in the 1920s, drew on images from artists’ erie imaginations and dreams. Spanish painters Salvador Dali and Joan Miró were Surrealists.