

abstraction

A term for the visual effects derived by the simplification and/or rearrangement of the appearance of natural objects, or nonrepresentational work arranged simply to satisfy artists' needs for organization or expression. Abstraction is present in varying degrees in all works of art, from full representation to complete nonobjectivity.

academic

Art that conforms to established traditions and approved conventions as practiced in art academies. Academic art stresses standards and set procedures and rules.

approximate symmetry

The use of similar imagery on either side of a central axis. The visual material on one side may resemble that on the other but is varied to prevent visual monotony.

asymmetry

Having unlike or noncorresponding, appearances--"without symmetry." An example: a two-dimensional artwork that, without any necessarily visible or implied axis, displays an uneven distribution of parts throughout.

balance

A sense of equilibrium achieved through implied weight, attention, or attraction, by manipulating the visual elements within an artwork to achieve unity.

closure

A concept from Gestalt psychology in which the development of groupings or patterned relationships occurs when incomplete information is seen as a complete, unified whole; the artist provides minimum visual clues, and the observer brings them to final recognition.

complementary colors

Two colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel. A primary color is complementary to a secondary color, which is a mixture of the two remaining primaries.

composition

An arrangement and/or structure of all the art elements, according to the principles of organization, that achieves a unified whole. Often used interchangeably with the term 'design'.

concept

1. A comprehensive idea or generalization.
2. An idea that brings diverse elements into a basic relationship.

content

The expression, essential meaning, significance, or aesthetic value of a work of art. Content refers to the sensory, subjective, psychological, or emotional properties we feel in a work of art, as opposed to our perception of its descriptive aspects alone.

cool colors

Color "temperature" may be considered as another way to organize color. Any colors containing blue, such as green, violet, or blue-green, are associated with air, sky, earth and water; these are called cool. (See **warm colors**.)

design

The underlying plan on which artists base their total work. In a broader sense, design may be considered synonymous with the term 'form'.

dominance

The principle of visual organization in which certain elements assume more importance than others in the same composition or design. Some features are emphasized, and others are subordinated.

economy

The distillation of the image to the basic essentials for clarity of presentation.

elements of art

Line, shape, value, texture, and color -- the basic ingredients the artist uses separately or in combination to produce artistic imagery. Their use produces the visual language of art.

form

1. The organization or inventive arrangement of all the visual elements according to the principles that will develop unity in the artwork.
2. The total appearance or organization.

Gestalt (Gestalt Psychology)

A German word for "form"; an organized whole experience. Around 1912, the Gestalt psychologists promoted the theory that explains

psychological phenomena by their relationships to total forms, or Gestalten, rather than by their parts.

harmony

The quality of relating the visual elements of a composition. Harmony is achieved by the repetition of characteristics that are the same or similar. These cohesive factors create pleasing interaction.

hue

Designates the common name of a color and indicates its position in the spectrum or on the color wheel. Hue is determined by the specific wavelength of the color in a ray of light.

interpenetration

The movement of planes, objects, or shapes through each other, locking them together within a specified area of space.

monochromatic

Having only one hue; the complete range of value of one color from white to black.

motif

A designed unit or pattern that is repeated often enough in the total composition to make it a significant or dominant feature. Motif is similar to theme or melody in a musical composition.

movement

Eye travel directed by visual pathways in a work of art.

naturalism

The approach to art that is essentially a description of things visually experienced. Pure naturalism would contain no personal interpretation introduced by the artist.

negative area(s)

The unoccupied or empty space left after the positive elements have been created by the artist. However, when these areas have boundaries, they also function as design shapes in the total structure. (See **positive area**.)

nonobjective, nonrepresentational (art)

A type of art that is entirely imaginative and not derived from anything visually perceived by the artist. The elements, their organization, and their treatment by the artist are entirely personalized and consequently, not associated by the observer with any previously experienced natural objects.

objective (art, shape)

A type of art that is based, as near as possible, on physical actuality or optical perception. Such art tends to appear natural or real.

pattern

1. Any artistic design (sometimes serving as a model for imitation).
2. A repeated element and/or design that is usually varied and produces interconnections and obvious directional movements.

positive area(s)

The state in the artwork in which the art elements (shape, line, etc.), or their combination, produce the subject-- nonrepresentational or recognizable images. (See **negative area**.)

principles of organization

Seven principles that guide the use of the elements of art in achieving unity: harmony, variety, balance, proportion, dominance, movement, and economy.

proportion

The comparative relationships between the parts of a whole or units as to size. For example, the size of the Statue of Liberty's hand relates to the size of her head. (See **scale**.)

radial

Emanating from a central location.

repetition

The use of the same visual effect a number of times in the same composition. Repetition may produce the dominance of one visual idea, a feeling of harmonious relationships, an obviously planned pattern, or a rhythmic movement.

rhythm

A continuance, a flow, or a sense of movement achieved by the repetition of regulated visual units; the use of measured accents.

scale

The association of size relative to a constant standard or specific unit of measure related to human dimensions. For example, the Statue of Liberty's scale is apparent when she is seen next to an automobile. (See **proportion**.)

simultaneous contrast

When two different colors come into direct contact, the contrast intensifies the difference between them.

subject

1. In a descriptive approach to art, subject refers to the persons or things represented, as well as the artists' experiences, that serve as inspiration.
2. In abstract or nonobjective forms of art, subject refers merely to the visual signs used by the artist. In this case, the subject has little to do with anything experienced in the natural environment.

subjective (art, shape, color, etc.)

That which is derived from the mind reflecting a personal viewpoint, bias, or emotion.

symmetry

The exact duplication of appearance in mirrorlike repetition on either side of a (usually imaginary) straight-lined central axis.

transparency

A visual quality in which a distant image or element can be seen through a nearer one.

unity

The result of bringing the elements of art into the appropriate ratio between harmony and variety to achieve a sense of oneness.

value (color)

1. The relative degree of light or dark.
2. The characteristics of color determined by light or dark or the quantity of light reflected by the color.

variety

Differences achieved by opposing, contrasting, changing, elaborating, or diversifying elements in a composition to add individualism and interest; the counterweight of 'harmony' in art.

warm colors

Color "temperature" may be considered as another way to organize color. Red, orange, and yellow are associated with the sun or fire and thus are considered warm. (See **cool colors**.)

Glossary compiled from the following source:
Ocvirk, Otto G. et al. Art Fundamentals with Core Concepts.
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