

Fine Arts Terminology - Composition

Abstract – art that looks as if it contains little or no recognizable or realistic forms from the physical world. Focus is on formal elements such as colors, lines, or shapes. Artists often “abstract” objects by changing, simplifying, or exaggerating what they see

Bust – a traditional statue type, a portrait of an individual from the chest up, or from the shoulders up. This form was first developed in classical art.

Column – a vertical, weight-bearing architectural member, round and consisting of a base, a shaft and topped by a capital. Columns are most closely associated with classical art and architecture.

Composition – the arrangement of the design elements within the design area, for example the placement of objects (houses, people, trees) within a painting. Design elements can refer not only to objects, but also to lighting, color, lines, etc. This refers to the ordering of the visual and emotional experience, to give unity and consistency to a work of art and to allow the viewer to comprehend its meaning.

Contrast the difference or opposition of various elements, such as color, lighting or texture, within an artwork.

Figure - a representation, pictorial or sculptural, of an object, particularly of a person

Foreground - the ground or parts situated, or represented as situated, in the front; the portion of a scene nearest to the viewer

Harmony – the unity of all the visual elements in a work of art. This is often achieved through balancing elements within a work, and repeating similar or complementary elements throughout. As a result of such balance, all components of a work form a complete unit.

Horizon line – in a two-dimensional work, such as a painting, the line where land or water ends and sky begins. This feature is most commonly visible in landscapes. A horizon line is often included to give a sense of depth of perspective, the feeling that an image is not flat but projects back into three-dimensional space.

Hue – the name of a color, such as red, green or yellow.

Idealized – describing art which depicts objects not as they exist in reality, but rather in perfect, ideal terms.

Negative space – space in a composition that is blank, which is not occupied by an element or form.

Nude – an artistic representation of a nude human figure. Nudes have been prevalent since Classical times and are used both for intense study of anatomy and posture and idealization of the human form.

Perspective – the art of picturing objects on a flat surface so as to give the appearance of distance or depth; the art of creating the illusion of three-dimensions on a two-dimensional surface.

Picture plane – the surface of a picture

Portrait – an artistic representation of a person

Positive space – space in a composition that is occupied by an element or form

Relief sculpture – a type of sculpture in which forms project from a background. This type of sculpture is often used to decorate the sides of buildings. It is the opposite of freestanding sculpture.

Self-portrait – a portrait an artist makes using himself or herself as the subject.

Still life – a painting or other two-dimensional work of art representing inanimate objects such as fruit or flowers.