

Glossary of Museum Terms

art Refers to objects, environments, or experiences (as in performance art) that are visual in nature, were created by the use of skill and imagination, and possess aesthetic value.

artist A person who creates art.

art museum Buildings, groups of buildings, or spaces within buildings where works of art are housed and displayed for public benefit. Places where art is sold are called “galleries.”

abstract art Art that departs significantly from natural appearances. Forms are modified or changed to varying degrees in order to emphasize certain qualities or content. Recognizable references to original appearances may be slight.

art elements Line, Shape, Light, Color, Space, and Texture.

art principles Balance, Proportion, Harmony, Emphasis, Movement, Rhythm, Contrast, and Pattern.

collection Refers to groups of objects that have been brought together by an individual or organization. A *permanent collection* refers to all the art objects owned by a museum.

curator A person who organizes exhibits, selects artwork for display, and studies the artists.

docent A person (usually a volunteer) who guides visitors through a museum or art gallery.

donor A person or group who contributes objects or money to a museum.

experimental art New art forms that may involve computers and/or working with new formats such as performance art.

found object Recycled materials that can be used to make artwork such as candy wrappers, wire, aluminum cans or even old appliances.

gallery A room within an art museum where artworks are shown or establishments in which works of art are displayed for sale.

installations Collectively, the physical elements that constitute an exhibition, including the exhibit design, graphics, labels, lighting, audiovisual components, and exhibit cases, as well as the objects on display.

media What the objects are made of (paint, metal, clay, papier-mâché).

mixed media Any combination of a variety of materials plus the associated techniques, used in the making of a single work of art.

mobile A type of sculpture in which parts move, often activated by air currents.

mural A large wall painting, often executed in fresco.

museum educator A person who creates lessons about artworks and hands-on art activities for students and adults.

performance art Refers to works of art that unfold over time and that combine elements of theater and object-oriented art. Performed by visual artists and not theater artists such as actors and dancers.

photograph Refers to still images produced from the chemical action of light on a sensitive film, paper, glass, or metal.

print A multiple-original impression made from a plate, stone, wood block, or screen by an artist or made under the artist's supervision. Prints are usually made in editions, with each print numbered and signed by the artist. Photographs are also referred to as prints.

registrar A person who is in charge of museum object records and the care of those objects.

relief sculpture Sculptures in which the ornaments or figures are attached to a background from which they stand out to a greater or lesser degree. Reliefs are often used as architectural decoration and to tell a story.

sculpture (visual art) Works of art in which images and forms are produced in relief, in intaglio, or in the round (*three-dimensional*). It refers particularly to art works created by carving or engraving a hard material, by molding or casting a malleable material, or by assembling parts to create a three-dimensional object. It is typically used to refer to large or medium-sized objects made of stone, wood, bronze, or another metal.

security guard A person who helps museum visitors and protects the artwork.

site-specific art Any work made for a certain place, which cannot be separated or exhibited apart from its intended environment.

still life A painting or other *two-dimensional* work of art representing inanimate objects such as bottles, fruit, and flowers. Also, the arrangement of these objects from which a drawing, painting, or other work is made.

subject matter The idea behind the object. What the artwork is depicting.

two-dimensional Objects that are flat or one-sided (drawings, paintings, prints).

three-dimensional Objects that take up space and have more than one side (sculptures).