



## **What to look for when looking for art.**

*A little guide for the purchase-shy.*

There are three fundamental components to art: the artist, the medium and the artwork itself. The artist uses a medium, such as paint or glass, and a subject, such as a landscape or still life, to create the artwork.

All art begins with the artist so let's start there. It is the artist's vision and their ability to capture an emotional moment which brings a subject to life whether it is a landscape or a person or just form and color. If a piece of art attracts you, find out a little bit more about the artist: where else have they shown their work, what other artists have they worked with, have they been featured in a publication, is their work in any museums? Most artists would be happy to talk to you about their background and gallery owners (sometimes called *gallerists*) will have all kinds of information for you. Questions will help you gain a better understanding of the artist's technique, style and perspective.

There are many different kinds of materials which the artist uses to convey their vision. These materials can be paint, glass, bronze, clay, paper, canvas, sound, words, or light. These substances can vary widely even within the same discipline. Painting for instance covers oil paints, acrylic paints, tempera, or watercolors just to name a few. Each medium that is used has different qualities and durability. To demystify this process, we've broken down some basic terms you're likely to hear when discussing art, as well as some genre-specific terms for painting, photography and sculpture.

With this new vocabulary under your belt, you'll be talking the talk in no time and loading up your car or your pocket with an inspiring work of art.

## GENERAL TERMS

*Abstract* - art that does not depict objects in the natural world, but instead uses color and form in a non-representational or subjective way.

*Realism* - depiction of subjects as they appear in everyday life, without embellishment or interpretation.

*Surrealism* - describes unexpected juxtapositions or use of non-sequiturs in art, often philosophical in concept.

*Conceptual* - sometimes called idea art, in which the concept(s) or idea(s) involved in the work take precedence over traditional aesthetic and material concerns.

*Composition* – the plan, placement or arrangement of the elements of art in a work which helps communicate ideas or feelings with the viewer.

*Mixed Media* – works of art made with more than one medium.

*Original* – art created by the artist's hand and is not reproduced mechanically.

*Print* – a copy of the original artwork usually reproduced mechanically through varying techniques include ink-jet printing (called *giclee* prints), lithography, and archival processing.

*Limited Edition* – the practice of limiting the number of impressions of a print (or photograph) which are then numbered to denote the run of the reproduction. This often denoted at the bottom of a work and looks like 10/250 which means that this is the tenth print in a series of 250. *Psst* - There is virtually no difference in value between the first numbered print and the 99<sup>th</sup>.

*Artist's Proof, often denoted by A.P. near the signature* – a single print used by the artist to test the quality of the print itself. An artist may have had to create a number of A.P.s before the details come our just right.

## PAINTING TERMS

*Acrylic* – water-based synthetic paint; versatile and long lasting.

*Oil* – paint in which the pigment (color) is held together with a binder of oil, usually linseed and has a slow drying time.

*Pastel* – dried water or oil-based paste manufactured in stick form.

*Watercolor* – water-based, traditionally transparent, paint.

*Canvas* – most popular surface to paint on and usually made of linen or the less expensive cotton.

*Alla Prima* - method of painting in which the desired effects of the final painting are achieved in the first application of paint.

*Impasto* - thick paint applied to a surface in a heavy manner.

*Scumbling* – way of obtaining a softened effect by the application of a thin layer of color to the surface of a painting.

*Pleine Aire* – means that the artist worked outside at the site of the landscape which he or she has painted.

## PHOTOGRAPHY TERMS

*Speed* – describes the film’s threshold sensitivity to light with lower numbers equaling slower speeds (resulting in finer grain and better color) and higher number equaling higher speeds (better for low light and action shots).

*Exposure* – the total amount of light allowed to fall on the film during the process of taking the picture with higher values (known as “EV”) denoting more light.

*Negative* – refers to the entire strip of film or images or a color-reversed image.

*Digital Imaging* – uses electronic devices to record images as data and is stored on a memory chip or computer as a file where the resolution is determined by number of pixels.

*Archival Print* – achieved with the use of special archival pigment ink-jet printers and acid-free papers processed to strict standards; generally of high resolution and saturation, fade-resistant with a long life expectancy of around 100 years.

*Fibre-based paper* - mainly used for exclusively high-quality prints and to maximize archival stability

*resin-coated paper* - sealed against the photographic chemicals and water used for processing resulting in shorter life span

## SCULPTURE TERMS

*Relief* – a modeled form projecting out from a flat background often used to decorate buildings.

*Casting* – process by which a fluid melt is introduced into a mold, allowed to harden and then ejected to reveal the final shape. Castings can be done in metal, glass, wax, plastic or other solid material that can be liquefied and then turned back into a solid.

*Carving* – a reductive process in which the sculptor starts with a solid block and removes material using chisels and other tools.

*Modeling* – an additive process in which material is steadily built up to produce the finished figure.

*Full Antique* – mouth-blown cylinder method of producing art glass.

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But when all is said and done, just have confidence in your eyes, mind and heart.  
-- knowing what you like is the real key to the art of buying art and that is what matters most!

### Summary:

1. Know what you like.
2. Know your budget.
3. Ask questions.
4. Be confident.
5. Enjoy!