Vocabulary Terms: Definitions

**two-dimensional** - having height and width.

**line** - 1. a point in motion. 2. a series of adjacent points. 3. a connection between points. 4. an implied connection between points.

**line weight** - the relative width, value and suggested pressure of a line.

**plane** – 1. an area that is essentially two-dimensional, having height and width. 2. a flat or level surface.

**shape** – an enclosed area created when a line connects to enclose an area, or an area of color or texture is defined by a clear boundary.

**mark** – refers to line/texture/surface variation on a two-dimensional, three-dimensional or digital surface, or in an environment. A collection of marks may also create the sense of a larger overall mark.

**contour line** - line that delineates both the outside edge of an object and the edges of planes, as opposed to outline, which delineates only the outside edge of objects.

**gesture (approach)** - a quick, all-encompassing statement of forms. In gesture, the hand mimics the movement of the eyes, quickly defining the subject’s general characteristics – movement, weight, shape, tension, scale, and proportion.

**hatching** – creating tonal or shading effects with closely spaced parallel lines. When more such lines are placed at an angle across the first, it is called cross-hatching.

**texture** – the surface quality of a two-dimensional or a three-dimensional form. Texture can be created visually, using multiple marks; physically, through surface variation; or through the inherent property of a specific material, such as the texture of sand as opposed to the texture of polished glass.

**scale** – scale is established when associations of size are created relative to some constant standard or specific unit of measurement relative to human dimensions. For example, the Statue of Liberty’s scale is apparent when it is seen next to an automobile.

**contrast** – the degree of difference between compositional parts or between one image and another.

**composition** – an arrangement and/or structure of all the elements that achieves a unified whole.
**figure/ground** – forms and shapes can be thought of as positive or negative. In a two dimensional composition, the objects constitute the positive forms or figure, while the background is the negative space or ground.

- **figure** – Any positive shape or form noticeably separated from the background, or the negative space.
- **ground** – The surface of a 2D design that acts as the background or surrounding space for the “figures” in the composition.

**negative space** – any clearly defined area around a positive shape, or the empty space surrounding the object/figures in a composition. A shape created through the absence of an object rather than through the presence of an object.

**symmetrical** – refers to an even distribution of visual weight on either side of an axis.

**asymmetrical** – refers to an uneven distribution of visual weight on either side of an axis.

**proportion** – the relationship of elements within a whole – for example, the relationship of your hand to the rest of your body.

**repetition** – involves the use of patterning to achieve visual movement. This repetition may be a clear repetition of elements in a composition, or it may be a more subtle repetition that can be observed in the underlying structure of the image. Repetition can take the form of an exact duplication, a near duplication, or duplication with variety.

**movement** – is the suggestion or illusion of motion in a painting, sculpture, or design. For example, circles going diagonally up and down from right to left could show that the design moves up and to the right or down and to the left.

**magnification/cropping** – involves expanding or reducing the picture plane for composition effect.

**balance** – a sense of equilibrium achieved through implied weight, attention, or attraction whether it be symmetrical or asymmetrical.

**emphasis** – special attention given to some component of a composition, which gives it prominence.

**unity** – unity refers to the oneness, or wholeness, in a design that occurs when all parts work together to create a cohesive whole. However, unity also exists in variety. It is not necessary for all elements to be identical providing they have a common visual quality.

**rhythm** – a visual tempo or beat; refers to a regular repetition of elements to produce the look and feel of movement.

**harmony** is the visually satisfying effect of combining similar, related elements.
**volume** – an area of defined or occupied space created through a grouping of several dots, lines and/or planes.

**weight** – the visual or physical heaviness of an object or a composition.

**value** – the relative lightness or darkness of a hue, or of a neutral varying from white to black. The gradation of tone from light to dark, from white through gray to black.

**depth (illusion of)** – the illusion of distance downward or inward within a composition.

**space (illusion of)** – the illusion of distance between one element and another and between figure(s) and ground within a composition.

**horizon line** – the line which forms the apparent boundary between earth and sky.

**perspective** – a technique used to project an illusion of the three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional surface that helps to create a sense of depth through the illusion of receding space.

**one-point perspective** – a system for depicting three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional plane, requiring the illusion that all parallel lines that recede into space converge at a single point on the horizon, called the vanishing point.

**two-point perspective** – a system for depicting three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional plane, requiring the illusion that all parallel lines converge at two points on the horizon.

**three-point perspective** – a system for depicting three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional plane. In addition to lines receding to two points on the horizon, lines parallel and vertical to the ground appear to converge to a third, vertical vanishing point.

**foreshortening** – a technique for producing the illusion of an object’s extension into space by contracting its form.

**symbol** – a form or image that stands for something more than its obvious, immediate meaning. An image or sign that represents something else, because of convention, association, or resemblance.

**deconstruct** – to analyze an artwork by looking each composite part in relation to the whole.

**text** – term commonly used to refer to the use of words and/or letters in a work of art.

**subject** – what the artwork is about – or the person, object or idea on which an artwork is based.
form – material or what the work is made of, as well as its overall shape.

process – how the work was made (may influence content.)

content – the artist’s relationship to the subject (idea communicated) – message.

concept – a well developed idea or a comprehensive generalization.

context – the circumstances or events that form the environment within which something exists or takes place.

organic – a shape or form relating to those found in the natural world or suggestive of living organisms (also referred to as biomorphic.)

geometric – a shape or form derived from or suggestive of mathematics, characterized by crisp precise edges and consistent curves.

association – a connection of ideas, memories, or feelings with each other, events, objects, or sensory input.

metaphor – a word or phrase applied to someone or something which is not intended literally, but to make a comparison (for example, to say that someone “is a snake.”)

representational – a visual depiction of someone or something which refers to the original and is recognizable.

abstract – based on generalizations and not specific details – a simplification that aims to depict an object by focusing on an essential aspect of its form or structure.

objective – relying on facts or elements without opinion based judgments – describing an object based on the visual elements or design parameters.

subjective – based on someone’s opinions or feelings rather than on facts or evidence.