

An Introduction to Different Types of Art Painting Styles

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The 'Wiki-people' defines the art of painting as

"the practice of applying paint, pigment, color or other medium to a surface"

Well, how can anyone make that any simpler! But, **is art painting as simple as it sounds?** To be fair, it never is and never was.

The art of painting is evolving incessantly. The way artists visualize scenarios and depict it onto the canvas is changing. The use of colors are getting complex and the way thoughts are illustrated on the canvas is getting even more intricate.

For any beginner, it might be difficult to get used to the different practices and styles the artists follow in creating paintings. Here are some of the **common painting styles** artists follow today.

The Western Style

The Western style is one of the most commonly followed art painting style today. Modernism, Impressionism, abstract painting and some less famous styles like photorealism and surrealism, are all part of the vast Western style family.

Modernism

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Even though many have tried to define modernism, the real modernism has always managed to slip away from those definitions. Somebody had to draw a line and it turned out to be the art critics who took up the responsibility. So, now, Modernism is officially the period between **1860 and 1970**.

In simple words, **modernism** is a break away from the traditional form of art painting. One can say it is an infused form of art derived from many disciplines. In a way, modernism is a radical way of thinking by artists of that era, with no boundaries set by traditional method.

Impressionism

modernist painting by Gloria Goodman Bernstein.

Impressionism is an art movement originated in Paris in late 19th century. Impressionism caught eyes of many critics, but mostly for the wrong reasons. The thin brush strokes, common and ordinary subjects, unusual angles etc are some features of this style of art painting. Outdoor sceneries of landscapes and even streets became settings for impressionist painters.

If you look closely at impressionist paintings, you will find that **black is a color** that is rarely used. For dark tones, complementary colors were mixed and used. The artists were very keen about making the color and reflection right for every object on the canvas. More importance was given to natural lighting. Impressionist paintings were even considered as an **alternative to photography**, which then lacked the luxury of colors.

Abstract Style



An abstract painting by Victor Figol

Any
art
that



An Impressionist painting 'Sunrise' by Claude Monet

illustrates anything, but not in the truest of forms, can be classified as abstract art. This is a real product of radical thought.

In abstract paintings, you will never find a man, animal or even any real life object. Every object on the canvas is represented as either colors and or shapes. A simple shape on the painting can do many wonders. The artist might augment the shape with some simple exaggerations. Sometimes, the shape is scaled down to produce the effect the artist wants on the canvas.

The **colors on the canvas** represent **emotions** and **shapes symbolize objects**. In the abstract style paintings of 21st century, anything can happen on the canvas. There is hardly any direction on the abstract paintings of today. Yet, the results are appealing and aesthetically satisfying.

Expressionism

The abstract style of art takes many forms. Expressionism is one such form. This style of painting is closely related to the **emotions and feelings of human heart**. This emotional overflow of human heart is illustrated from a subject's perspective. The expressionist paintings either represents emotional state of the artist or is intended to induce some kind of an emotional echo within the viewer.

Jackson Pollock was one of the biggest names in expressionist art painting. However, in most of his famous creations, he hardly touched the canvas with a brush. Pouring paint onto the canvas was his style of painting. This way he could capture the natural movement of paint too. Another famous expressionist artist is **Vincent Van Gogh**.

An expressionist painting 'The Scream' by Edward Munch



Cubism

Famous artist Paul Cezanne said that, "*Everything in nature takes its form from the sphere, the cone, and the cylinder.*" Later this became the basis of Cubism. In this abstract art form, **geometrical solids** play an important

role. The final product will be a blend of actual form of the object and some geometrical shape.



'Cassie Thinking About Cubism' by Philip Absolon

Although not the purest form of abstract painting, you will find traces of abstract thinking in Surrealism. This is actually a movement that sprouted in the early 20th century. It included writing and many forms of visual artworks. Obviously, paintings became a big part of this movement. These Surrealistic paintings could strike you with **elements of surprise**. **This** remains one of its primary features too. **Juxtaposition**, placing two abstract concepts together, is another feature of Surrealistic paintings.

Today, Cubism is another style of abstract art painting. But, Cubism was a strong presence in the art world even before abstract painting became prevalent. People like Picasso, Braque, Gris etc followed Cubism and made it famous. The world of art painting would have never been the same without contributions from these Cubist artists.

Surrealism



A surrealistic painting by Vladimir Kush

The Eastern Style

The Chinese Painting Style



A beautiful Chinese painting

The oldest artistic tradition in the world, Chinese painting, involves techniques used in **Calligraphy**. The artists use colored inks for painting on paper, silk etc. But, they never use oil for painting.

Gong-bi and **Shui-mo**, meaning meticulous and ink & wash painting, are the two widely used techniques. The first technique uses detailed and precise brush strokes while the other is the common watercolor painting.

The artists are not just drawing the appearance of an object. They look to **capture the soul of that object**, the energy within, the spirit. This is what makes Chinese paintings different. They also try to keep the use of extravagant and vibrant colors to the minimum.

The Chinese artists follow six principles of painting, which was actually set up in the 5th century. The six principles are:

1. **"Spirit Resonance"**, or vitality. It refers to the flow of energy that encompasses theme, work, and artist. Xie He, an ancient Chinese artist, said that without Spirit Resonance, there was no need to look further.

2. “**Bone Method**“, or the way of using the brush. This refers not only to texture and brush stroke, but also to the close link between handwriting and personality. In his day, the art of calligraphy was inseparable from painting.
3. “**Correspondence to the Object**“, or the depicting of form, which would include shape and line.
4. “**Suitability to Type**“, or the application of color, including layers, value and tone.
5. “**Division and Planning**“, or placing and arrangement. It corresponds to composition, space and depth.
6. “**Transmission by Copying**“, or the copying of models, not only from life but also the works of antiquity.

Today, Chinese artists have started experimenting with new themes and colors by breaking out of the tradition. These Chinese artists are influenced by western techniques. They are ready to try their luck from outside the box of tradition.

Japanese Painting Style



A beautiful Japanese painting

Japanese art can mesmerize you in many ways. If you look at it from the outside, its charm, simplicity and fluency can greatly make you want it. But if you try to learn more about Japanese painting, you will find yourself in a world of bewilderment. If you are not familiar with Japanese terms, you will find this art not so easy. Japanese painting takes influences from Chinese, other eastern and western art.

Japanese painting art has its own schools of thought and styles. ‘**Suibokuga**’ is one such school of art, where artists use only **black ink** for painting. The kind of paintings Japanese artists produced using only black ink would amaze any world-class artist. This school of art was result of a direct influence from Chinese art and Buddhism.

‘**Suibokuga**’ school. In fact, it was a sign of protest against not using vibrant colors in painting. So, Kano followers used bright and vibrant colors in their paintings. This school of arts has many branches today including the prominent ‘**Ukiyo-e**’.

‘**Kano**’ was another school of art that budded in the 15th century. This school was a total conflict with the existing

The ‘**Shijo**’ school of art was a derivative from the old ‘**Kano**’ school. Use of common people as subject and portraying their emotions was characteristic of this school of art. ‘**Shijo**’ school of art produced more realistic and sometimes cynical paintings.

In 19th century Japan, a new form of art painting came up called ‘**Nanga**’. You can identify this school of art by the use of natural scenes and subjects like landscapes, flowers and even cultural influences.

The Indian Style

Being extremely diverse in culture, you can expect Indian painting tradition to be diverse as well. Indian painting is mostly a direct result of traditions and changing life styles over the years. You would even find Indian rock paintings dating back to as early as **5500 BC**. The caves of **Ajanta and Ellora** are famous for its mural paintings.

During the reign of Mughal empire, Indian painting tradition took a new turn. A new form of painting called **Mughal painting** came up. ‘**Hamzanama**’ is one of the first and most famous Mughal paintings known today. Rulers of that time, Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan were all keen in promoting the art of painting. However, Aurangzeb showed

little interest in arts and this probably led to downfall of art painting afterwards.



A Rajput Painting by Nihâl Chand

Next major era of painting started during the Rajput Empire and is called **Rajput Paintings**. The artists preferred creation of miniatures, but the subjects of the paintings were diverse. You would find paintings illustrating events from great Indian epics, landscapes and human life. *Rajput Paintings* are famous for its rich use of colors. An interesting fact about the colors used for these paintings is that some of the colors used were made from precious stones, silver and even gold! It took weeks to prepare the colors needed for these paintings.

Mysore

paintings are famous for the level of detailing given to the subjects and for the use of **gentle colors**. Like any other classical South Indian painting, Gods and scenes from **Hindu mythologies** found its place reserved in Mysore paintings.

The creation of a perfect Mysore Painting has many stages. It starts with a rough sketch of the image. The base on which this sketch is made is just a paper pasted on a wooden board. First the throne or anything of that importance are painted. Even gold foils were used for a better output. Then, watercolor is used to complete the painting, but only gentle tones.



Mysore Painting by Shobana Udayasankar

Tanjore painting is

perhaps the most important and old classical painting of south India. Use of rich colors, attention given to every minute detail and, most importantly, elegance, are some specialties of Tanjore paintings. The artists used precious stones and threads to make paintings look better. Dyes were used for giving color to the paintings.



A beautiful Tanjore painting

When it comes to modern times, there is only one prevailing style in Indian art painting. That has to be the Bengal School style of painting.

Artists like **Abanindranath Tagore** promoted this painting style in spite of many controversies following this new thought. However, artists were always looking to break free of these traditions. The modern Indian painting is a result of struggle by Indian painters to break the shackles. Artists like F.N. Souza, M.F. Hussain, S.H. Raza etc are the people who started Indian modernist approach in art painting.

Summary

Different cultures around the world have produced different types of **art paintings**. Although each form of painting is

special, you will be able to relate more to a specific form of art painting. It might be the thoughts or the way expressed. It might even be the use of colors. Following the inspiration and creating a splendor on the canvas is all you need to do!

What other painting styles are there? Which one is your favourite? Which modern art style would you prefer for your living room? Share your views with us.

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