



# Art Styles Explained: From Realism to Abstract

Part of the joy of painting in the 21st century is the range of art styles to choose from. The late 19th century and 20th century saw artists make huge leaps in painting styles, influenced by technology, such as the invention of the metal paint tube and photography, as well as world events.

# Art Style: Photorealism

Photorealism, Super Realism, Sharp Focus Realism, Hyper Realism, you can call it whichever of these labels you prefer and argue about the minute details between the styles, but ultimately they're all art styles where **the illusion of reality is created through paint so the result looks more like a large, sharply focused photo than anything else.**

Photorealism is a style which often seems more real than reality, with detail down to the last grain of sand and wrinkle on someone's face. Where nothing is left out, nothing is too insignificant or unimportant not to be included in the painting. Though it doesn't mean an artist painting in this style doesn't consider the arrangement of things to make a stronger composition.



# Art Style: Realism

Realism is the art style most people regard as "real art", where the subject of the painting looks very much like it appears in real life. From a little distance everything looks "real" but up close you'll see it's an illusion created by skillful use of paint, of color and tone. The artist uses perspective to create an illusion of reality, setting the composition and lighting to make the most of the subject.



Image: Stuart Gregory / Getty Images

# Art Style: Painterly

Painterly is an art style that is close to realism but celebrates more the use of paint, through evident brushwork and texture in the paint. It doesn't try to hide what was used to create the painting by smoothing out any texture or marks left in the paint by a brush.



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**Romantic** is a style of art popular in the 19th century Europe, often showing the sea or the countryside, and usually expressing strong emotions.

# Art Style: Impressionism

Impressionism is an art style that is still much loved today and it's hard to imagine that when it first appeared on the art scene in Paris in the 19th century, most critics hated and ridiculed it. What was then regarded as an unfinished and rough painting style, is now loved as being the impact of light on nature filtered through an artistic eye to show the rest of us just what can be seen if you know how to look properly.





## Art Style: Expressionism

Expressionism is characterized by the artist not feeling compelled to use realistic colors or using perspective techniques to recreate an illusion of reality. Rather colors are selected to fit the emotion felt or to create emotional impact.

In the example of this art style shown, for instance, while we know no-one's face is truly green, nor does anyone have a line around their chin or for a nose, we still recognize it as a painting of a face. But instead of it focusing on being a likeness of someone, it's a painting that conveys a sense of mood and emotion foremost.

**Modernism** describes both a set of cultural tendencies and an array of associated cultural movements, originally arising from wide-scale and far-reaching changes to Western society in the late 19th century and early 20th century. **Modernism was a revolt against the conservative values of realism.** The term encompasses the activities and output of those who felt the "traditional" forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life were becoming outdated in the new economic, social and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world. A salient characteristic of modernism is self-consciousness. This often led to experiments with form, and work that draws attention to the processes and materials used (and to the further tendency of abstraction).





**Art Style:**

## **Abstraction**

(abstract art)

Abstractionism is about painting the essence of a subject rather than the detail, but still retaining an echo of whatever it is that prompted the idea (unlike a pure abstract). You might reduce the subject to the dominant colors, shapes, or patterns. Think reduced reality the detail you need to paint the character of the scene.



**Abstract art** doesn't try to look like anything from the "real world", it is an art style that is intentionally non-representational. The subject or point of the painting is the colors used, the textures in the artwork, the materials used to create it.

At its worst, abstract art looks like a accidental mess of paint. At its best, it has an impact that strikes you from the moment you see it.



**Surrealism** is a cultural movement that began in the early 1920s, and is best known for the visual artworks and writings of the group members.

Surrealist artworks feature the element of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions and non sequitur; however, many Surrealist artists and writers regard their work as an expression of the philosophical movement first and foremost, with the works being an artifact.





# **FUTURISM**

is a style of art in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which emphasized the importance of modern things, especially technology and machines.

**Action painting**, sometimes called gestural abstraction, is a style of painting in which paint is spontaneously dribbled, splashed or smeared onto the canvas, rather than being carefully applied. The resulting work often emphasizes the physical act of painting itself as an essential aspect of the finished work or concern of its artist. The style was widespread from the 1940s until the early 1960s, and is closely associated with abstract expressionism (some critics have used the terms "action painting" and "abstract expressionism" interchangeably).





- **Cubism** is a 20<sup>th</sup> century style of art, in which objects and people are represented by geometric shapes.

Georges Braque, 1910, Violin and Candlestick, oil on canvas, 60.96 cm x 50.17 cm, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



Paul Cézanne, Quarry  
Bibémus, 1898-1900,  
Museum Folkwang,  
Essen, Germany



Pablo Picasso, 1909-10, Figure dans un  
Fauteuil (Seated Nude, Femme nue  
assise), oil on canvas, 92.1 x 73 cm,  
Tate Modern, London