

# ART MEDIAS

*"It is art that makes life...and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process." - Henry James*

Art has meant different things to different people at distinctive times through our human history. In the text *Art Fundamentals*, the authors\* speak of the term as we use it today as probably having been derived from the Renaissance words *arti* and *arte*. "Arti was the designation for the craft guilds of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries to which the artists were closely tied by the traditions of their calling. The word for craftsmanship is *art*, implied knowledge of the materials utilized by the artist as well as the surface on which they would execute their work. *Arte* or craftsmanship also implied the skillful handling of those materials in the sense of producing images more or less like those of nature, but certainly not in the sense of imitating the exact appearance of nature."

While our definitions of just what art is continue to evolve with the ever-changing human experience, it can be said that art remains the result of a profound search, the goal of which is to explore, discover and communicate. It is a personal journey made by every artist: a passionate and obsessive trek that, without apology, exposes the soul of the artist and the viewer alike. It reaches out to each of us, exposing mysteries and offering up bold truths as beautifully documented through the artist's unending dialogue of visual signs.

Cherry Creek Arts Festival presents this introduction to the many quality visual works of art that you will experience at the Arts Festival. While this provides you with basic information on each of the media categories represented at the exhibition, it doesn't begin to fully describe any media in depth. Nor does it explore the varied aesthetic and often distinctive creativity evident in the artists' work.

To gain a fuller understanding and appreciation for the overwhelming strength and diversity of contemporary art exhibited at the Arts Festival, we strongly encourage you to speak directly with any of the show's participating professional artists. By entering into a dialogue with the masterful creators of these fine works, you will gain insight and appreciation for the creative process and its results that far exceed our simplistic narrative descriptions.

As an additional aid to your experience, terms which may be unfamiliar to you are highlighted in italics when the term is defined within the text.

\*Art Fundamentals: Theory and Practice; Robert Stinson, Phillip Wigg, Robert Bore, David Cayton, and Otto Ocvirk.

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## CERAMICS

Since the 1800s, the term ceramics has been identified with items crafted of baked porcelain and clay. Ceramic wares are often indiscriminately

referred to as pottery, clay, earthenware and porcelain. However, there are important distinctions and varied applications.

With its origin in China (circa 7th or 8th century A.D.), porcelain is an extremely hard, translucent variety of ceramics made with fine clay of kaolin and silica. Clay has been crafted into both functional and decorative items since prehistoric time, with the art's refinement occurring in the ancient cultures of China, the Middle East and the Americas.

In contemporary usage, works of art fashioned from clay are most commonly referred to as earthenware or stoneware. Earthenware are items made of reddish-tan clay and fired at or heated to temperatures of less than 700o centigrade with the clay remaining porous unless a glaze, often a mixture of finely ground pigments, minerals and other colorants, is applied in liquid form. Then a second firing is completed at still a higher temperature. Stoneware, as the name implies, is a very hard ceramic made from a mixture of fusible stone and clay. It is fired at temperatures that reach 1400o centigrade, which may vitrify the stoneware, giving it a glass-like characteristic.

As you observe the ceramic wares exhibited at the Arts Festival, you will note pieces that may be functional or purely decorative in nature. Functional objects are items such as pitchers, plates, bowls and coffee mugs, while decorative ceramics have no implied practical use and are designed for their beauty alone.

You may also note that ceramic works are constructed in variations of two basic methods: wheel thrown or hand built. An artist may create a piece, using a potter's wheel by centering the ceramic material on the spinning surface of the wheel and "pulling" the walls of a vessel up from the rotating mass of clay. As you may guess, hand-built ceramic wares are created by the artist's manipulation of the clay material by hand into various shapes. Ceramics may also be fired in a number of different fashions from the crude bonfire or pit firing processes to much more sophisticated firing in electric or oil fired ovens called kilns.

## DIGITAL

Digital art is contemporary art using a variety of distinctive digital technologies in the production or output of artwork. Pioneered in the 1970's, digital art became viable and widespread in the 1990's as computers, software, digital cameras and sophisticated digital tools became more available.

The use of digital computer technologies is as varied as the creativity and imagination of the artist to create artwork using scanned or digital camera images, digital painting or computer-generated mathematical models. To realize their ideas, the digital artist uses traditional principles of design, balance, repetition and other aspects that all art forms use.

Digital painting is created directly on the computer in a similar fashion as non-digital painting by applying traditional painting techniques with the use of software, mouse, graphics tablet, stylus, etc. The artist has the ability to arrange the painting in separate layers, edit independent layers, undo and redo strokes, use multiples of identical images and choose millions of shades of color. The digital output of the painting results in an image as if painted on canvas and the artist may make changes before each printing to create an original print.

Digital photography or scanned images are used to create original works of art by creating abstract or figurative forms, manipulating or combining images, morphing images, changing colors and using electronic versions of brushes, filters and enlargers to produce images that artists can't get by using conventional photographic tools.

## DRAWING

As the most basic of all two-dimensional art forms, the act of drawing has captured the spontaneity of expression of human thoughts from time immemorial. The first drawings were, no doubt, practical expressions of communication later evolving to represent artists' interpretation of their

environment and ultimately to express a full range of emotion and creativity. Many of us are familiar with the famed cave drawings of Lascaux in France and the awesome rock paintings of Australian Aboriginal peoples. Their powerful imagery confirms our need for artistic expression as an integral element of even the earliest human existence.

All artists draw. These drawings may be nothing more than preparatory sketches for later works, they may represent larger plans or act as studies for envisioned works, or they may represent – as many of the fine works of Arts Festival artists beautifully demonstrate – a final, fully developed work of art.

Drawing may be generally defined as the result of an implement, running over the surface that captures the resultant mark. That is to say, an artist drags a pencil, chalk, pen, brush or similar implement across a sheet of paper, board or other surface to create a series of visible impressions. Most drawings are linear in construction; some are composed entirely of tonal contrast. They may be figurative or nonrepresentational. Drawings may be executed utilizing a variety of materials. However, all drawings are crafted from either dry media that include chalk, charcoal, pastel, pencil, silverpoint and wax crayon or from the fluid medium of paints, inks and washes transferred to a surface by pen or brush.

While the artist traditionally approached drawing with these media exclusively and executed works only on flat, two-dimensional surfaces, such limitations have diminished and there are now no rules to confine the artist's denotation of drawing.

## **FIBER**

Fibers may be defined as slender, threadlike materials originating from both organic (e.g., silk, plants, wool, metals) and synthetic (e.g., glass, nylon, plastic) sources. Based in ancient cultural traditions such as the Polynesian's tapa or bark cloth which was crafted by beating out the inner bark of bread, fruit and fig trees, the fiber arts now include a number of

disciplines in which fibers are entwined, coiled, woven and knotted to create an object which may be either functional or purely decorative.

Among others, fiber disciplines include basketry, embroidery, weaving and tapestry, as well as papermaking and a number of techniques such as batik and hand printing where design is applied to fabrics.

Basketry is the process of creating baskets through the interweaving of largely organic plant materials such as grasses, rushes and wood splits. This ancient tradition has been elevated to a remarkable level of technical expertise and beauty with baskets produced by groups like the coastal tribes of Native America and Aboriginal Australians respected as a form of modular sculpture.

Weaving is the creation of fabric or textiles by interlacing vertical fibers called the warp and horizontal fibers called the weft or woop, often on a loom. Utilizing varied materials, weavings may be crafted to create both two- and three-dimensional objects that can be functional, wearable or decorative.

Embroidery is the technique of decorating fabric with fibers using needlework stitched in varied patterns, as opposed to tapestry where the pattern is a hand-woven textile using a non-repetitive design woven into the fabric.

Paper has emerged from archaic times when cultures such as the Egyptians created the precursors of modern paper by flattening the stems of papyrus reed to create a writing surface. Artists now craft individual sheets of paper by hand through a process that starts with the creation of a cellulose pulp – usually derived from recycled paper, wood, rags or grass that has been boiled, mixed with a small amount of caustic agent to remove impurities, and boiled again. Blended with fresh water, the pulp is spread out on a mold and deckle frame that allows the excess water to drain away through a screen. The pulp is then pressed between felt to remove remaining water, leaving behind a thin layer of intertwined fibers. When dry, the fibers lock together to form a solid sheet or leaf.

Batik, a Javanese tradition, refers to both the product and process of pattern-dyed textiles. A design is first painted onto fabric with wax so that when the textile is dyed, the wax resists the color of the dye. Multiple waxing and dye baths create deeper, complex colors and patterns.

Hand printing, brought to Europe by ancient Oriental traders, is the technique of stamping a design carved into a wooden block that has been inked and applied onto fabric.

## GLASS

Nothing captures the dance of light like glass. A remarkably versatile material created by fusing sand, or silica with alkali minerals such as cadmium, cobalt, copper, lead, lime, potash or soda, glass is considered a super cooled liquid rather than a true solid material. It may have been first developed as a glaze for ceramics in the regions of ancient Mesopotamia or Syria. Those early artisans created the first glass vessels by dipping a ceramic core or rod into molten glass to build up thickness, or by wrapping threads of molten glass around the core, which was removed once the glass cooled. Later, molten glass was cast in molds.

The invention of glass blowing by the Romans transformed the nature of glass production with surviving examples of early Roman glassworks still prized today for their beauty and technical expertise. This technique utilizes a hollow tube or rod that is first dipped into molten glass and removed. Air is then blown through the tube causing the glass to form a bubble, which is shaped by the artist's rolling, poking and pulling of the still-pliable glass. Multiple layers of colored glass may be applied and/or infused into the work to create an endless array of color, pattern and texture.

Glass artists today create works that may be functional or purely decorative by design. At the Arts Festival, you may observe glassworks that have been crafted via glass blowing, molding or casting as well as works that have been kiln formed. Of course, some glass works may also be etched or engraved. Kilns, or specialized ovens, are used to heat glass

for various processes. In the fusing process, glass pieces are heated until they become plastic and thus may be fused together. Through the enameling process, powdered glass is melted onto metal settings. Slumping is the process of heating glass until it bends to conform to a shape defined by a mold or by supporting wires or rods. Annealing, or the controlled cooling of glass, is a key kiln process for glass. It stabilizes and reduces stress within the glass so that the work will not crack or explode at a later date.

## **JEWELRY**

Noted author Harold Newman defines jewelry as “any decorative article that is made of metal, gemstones and/or hard organic material of high quality, contrived with artistry or superior craftsmanship, and intended to be worn on a person, including articles that are functional as well as decorative.” Jewelers may craft ornamental works of art from precious metals and often set gems or semiprecious stones within the metal settings. The surfaces of jewelry may also be enameled by melting powdered glass onto them. Today, many contemporary jewelry pieces are only as limited as the artist’s imagination in creating pieces using synthetic materials, recycled items, beads, glass, natural materials, etc. Thus, jewelry is a decorative art in which wear-ability is the only constraint.

While most jewelry sold by large retailers is mass-produced and remains conservative in design catering to mainstream consumer appeal, you will find that Arts Festival jewelers are not constrained by this dictate. Their original pieces are both dynamic in design and technical execution, with each representing miniature works of art.

## **METALWORKS**

For thousand of years, artists have worked metals into both functional and decorative objects. Iron, gold and silver along with many other metals and their alloys have long been fashioned into useful items, both functional and purely ornamental in nature. It is not uncommon for artists



to also utilize aluminum, brass, bronze and steel in their creations. The malleability of metals makes them a popular material for seemingly endless applications.

Metalworks: includes all non-sculptural, non-jewelry works crafted from metals. Metals may be cast, hammered or embossed to feature raised designs. No production studio work is allowed.

## **MIXED MEDIA**

Both the two-dimensional and three-dimensional mixed media categories contain art works that draw on several media combining different types of physical material to create a single visual image. Generally speaking, two-dimensional works are defined as pieces of art that are confined to a relatively flat surface, and not rising above the surface more than a fraction of an inch. Three-dimensional works have extension in depth, rising up and/or out from the flat plane of a surface.

At the Arts Festival, you will find great diversity in both the media and content of art works within the two-dimensional and three-dimensional mixed media categories. Possibly more so than in any other media designation, the mixed media categories result in the greatest variety of materials and diversity of techniques, styles and content in artists' work.

## **PAINTING**

Generally, painting may be defined as the application of pigment to a surface. The manner in which that application occurs is via the liquid substance that carries the pigment: paint. Paint is composed of pigment mixed with a solvent as a medium and a binding agent. However, the lines are often blurry between painting and drawing, between the traditional notion of painting executed only on a two-dimensional surface and painting executed as a three-dimensional work of art.

Through the centuries, artists have utilized several types of painting. Encaustic, a technique utilized extensively by ancient Greeks and

Egyptians, employed melted wax as the agent in the paint. Tempura, the dominant technique during the Middle Ages, most commonly incorporated poultry eggs thinned with water as the binding agent, but casein and various types of glue or gum were also used. Fresco, the technique of painting on plaster, was utilized extensively during the Renaissance and again by Mexican muralists in the early half of the 20th century.

Works by artists participating in the Arts Festival will largely employ either acrylic, oil or watercolor paints. In contemporary usage, watercolor refers specifically to a technique called aquarelle, or the application of transparent films of paint to an absorbent white surface. Watercolor paint is a mixture of pigments, a gum arabic agent and water as the medium.

Oil paints have been widely used by artists since the 15th century, first as a glaze over tempura works and then as the primary paint for their works. Oil paints are composed of pigments, linseed oil as agent, and turpentine as a medium. The slow-drying and easily mixed colors of oils make them a perennial favorite among artist. Acrylic paints consist of a plastic agent and water medium. Unlike oils, which demand preparation of the surface with gesso, acrylic may be successfully applied to any number and type of surfaces.

Through diverse and eclectic styles of painting such as Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism and many others, artists have shaped our perceptions of ourselves and of the world around us.

## **NEW MEDIA**

This category includes artwork that makes use of electronic media and technology. It includes projection work, video art, interactive electronic work, new technology work, light sculpture, etc.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY**

Derived from the Greek work meaning “to write with light,” photography is one of the newer visual art forms. Knowledge of the optical principle of the camera obscura can, in fact, be traced back to Aristotle. Much later, when scientists grasped the fact that the darkening of silver salts happened due to their exposure to light and light alone rather than the influence of heat or temperature, photography became a valid invention.

Today, the lines between photographic science and art have blurred considerably and photography is broadly accepted as both an art and a science. While requiring the same aesthetic and artistic demands of other media, it also necessitates a considerable understanding of the physics, chemistry and mechanics unique to the art form. Like those artists who work in ceramics, metals and wood, a considerable technical knowledge is essential to successfully execute a photographic work of art. With the invention of the digital camera, many artists are using digital techniques to create their photographic works of art.

From those origins of the camera obscura, or darkened chamber in which the real image of an object was received through a small opening or lens and focused onto a facing wall, we now have cameras of remarkable complexity and versatility. Many of these cameras feature automatic adjustments and controls that virtually ensure that even the novice may successfully manipulate focus and lighting conditions from which a commercial processor may then produce a competent photographic image or print.

Of course, the photographic artists participating in the Arts Festival create works that transcend the ability of the camera to simply deliver an image, but instead provide us with a perspective unique to the artist. The artist manipulates each image in its lighting, composition, execution and printing processes within the darkroom or on the computer.

## **PRINTMAKING**

Printmaking may be broadly defined as work which exists in multiple copies as reproduced from a working surface that is coated in ink and

then pressed against a surface, which is most often paper. The matrix may be a plate, woodblock, lithographic stone, or silkscreen stencil. There are four major categories of printmaking: intaglio, lithography, relief and serigraphy. Monotypes are the result of a combined printmaking and painting process. These processes are often combined and blended with other media to create unique works of art.

Intaglio prints are made into a metal plate by incising or scratching an image. Both engraving and etching are intaglio processes, but differ from one another in that an engraving is produced by inscribing the plate with a sharp, pointed instrument called a burin that results in both the transfer of ink and ridge like texture that can be felt on the print. In an etching, the artist uses a needle to draw an image across a plate that has been coated with wax or resin, exposing the bare metal but not scratching it. The plate is placed in an acid bath that eats away at the metal, producing the recessed depressions that will later hold ink.

Lithographs are prints made by drawing with a greasy material onto fine-grained, porous limestone or a zinc plate, and then wetting the stone or plate and applying greasy ink, which will only cling to the drawn lines. Because of the fluid nature of the greasy material utilized to create the image, no two prints are exactly alike.

Relief prints are the result of the working surface being carved away to reveal the image that will receive ink and be transferred to paper. It is the opposite of intaglio in that the areas to be printed are raised.

Serigraphs are produced from a screen-printing technique that pushes ink through a fine mesh screen that has been masked in selected areas. Multiple passes over the surface with different colored inks and masked screens produce a multicolored image. While no two resultant prints will be exactly alike, great consistency through many consecutive prints may be achieved through this technique.

Monotypes are created from paintings executed in oil or watercolor on a nonporous surface. A piece of paper is laid over the work and both are run through a press to transfer the image from matrix to paper.

Photogravure prints are produced from a commercial printing process using resin-coated plates or cylinders that are photographically etched or engraved in intaglio.

## SCULPTURE

Whether we consider the great idol heads of the Pacific Islands, the great pyramids at Gizeh in Egypt or the megalithic structures of Stonehenge in England, sculpture has its roots firmly planted in our history. Strictly defined, the term sculpture means carving. In today's art applications however, the term translates to almost any work of art carried out in three dimensions, where a mass of aesthetically inarticulate material has been manipulated into meaningful shape and arrangement by either reductive or additive techniques.

Wasting and modeling are the two traditional sculpture techniques. However, the range of new materials available today has dramatically expanded, resulting in new techniques of assemblage and construction.

Wasting or carving is where material is cut away from a blank mass. This requires careful planning because once material is removed it cannot be replaced. Modeling refers to the addition of material, often clay or plaster to an armature or skeletal framework. The finished model often then serves as the original from which molds and castings are made. Traditionally, castings were made from bronze, but resins are now quite common.

Assemblage is when everyday objects are brought together to create a sculptural work. Construction is the technique of joining parts together by gluing, nailing, riveting, screwing, or otherwise linking materials.

Wrought iron forging and brazing are other popular sculpture techniques. Wrought iron forging is the process of heating iron billet or bar until it is red hot or white hot, then beating, bending and hammering the work into shape. White hot iron can be pressure welded together by hammering. Welding and riveting are also commonly used to join metals of higher density together. Brazing uses molten brass to join together pieces of mild steel at low temperature.

## WOOD

While contemporary woodworkers often take great advantage of an extraordinary array of specialized power tools to execute their works, the same basic carving, cutting and shaping tools that have existed with little change over many centuries remain key instruments in the creation of all wooden works of art. Crafting meaning from wood requires an intimate understanding of the material and, much like a sculptor of marble, the woodworker must possess a great sensitivity to the unique nature of wood – its grain, texture, hardness – and a fundamental understanding of the piece “hidden” within the material.

The soul of a tree may be revealed in many ways. Wood turning uses carving and shaping to showcase distinctive attributes of wood; and every woodworker knows that the results vary significantly from variety to variety: white oak being a very different wood from pine, cherry distinctive from cottonwood, and wenge unlike mahogany. Techniques of joinery, veneer, inlay, lamination and finishing add an infinite variety to the resultant form, texture and color of wooden works with each technique commanding the mastery of a specific set of skills.

Wooden works of art that you observe at the Arts Festival are likely to be varied and include both decorative and functional objects: segmented and turned vessels, laminated and solid wood furniture, and carved objects.