



VAN GOGH  
ONLY SOLD  
ONE PAINTING  
IN HIS LIFETIME

ART USED TO BE AN  
OLYMPIC EVENT

THE MONA LISA'S  
LIPS TOOK 12  
YEARS TO PAINT



OUR BRAINS  
TRANSLATE LIGHT  
WAVES INTO COLOUR

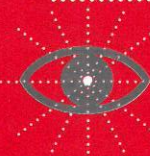


# HOW ART WORKS



STILL LIFE  
GIVES MEANING TO  
SIMPLE OBJECTS

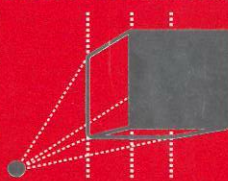
SURREALISM  
IS A REACTION AGAINST  
RATIONALITY



THE HUMAN EYE  
CAN SEE AROUND A  
MILLION COLOURS

The CONCEPTS visually explained

PERSPECTIVE  
DEPICTS 3D SCENES  
ON A 2D SURFACE



PICASSO  
PRODUCED AROUND  
147,800 WORKS

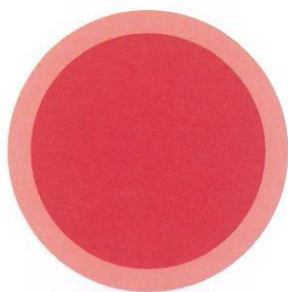


# **HOW ART WORKS**





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SCIENTIFIC



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# DEFINING ART



# What is art?

**Art encompasses a diverse range of creative human expression and activity, which results in the production of works that variously display technical skills, aesthetic decisions, emotional power, intellectual theories, and conceptual ideas.**

## **A way of thinking**

Trying to explain in words the overwhelmingly visual medium of art is no easy matter – especially as there is no universally agreed definition of what art actually is. There have been attempts throughout history and across cultures, but these explanations have themselves shifted as times have changed. Art's elusive nature is partly due to its subjectivity – it means different things to different people. Artists themselves have

different views on what art is, with some believing it is an inherently political undertaking, while others view it as an activity that has value in and of itself. Then there are those who see art as a process, the act of making forms and the expression of visual qualities.

It might be safer to say that art is a way of thinking. Artists are curious by nature and want to question the world. For the artist, art never stops: it is a lifelong commitment to learning and mastering a visual language and material vocabulary.

As a practice, it is separate from decorative arts, and is often referred to as fine art because of its subject matter and aesthetic



**FROM 1912 TO 1952,  
ART WAS AN EVENT  
IN THE OLYMPICS**





**WHY IS SOME  
ART SO EXPENSIVE?**

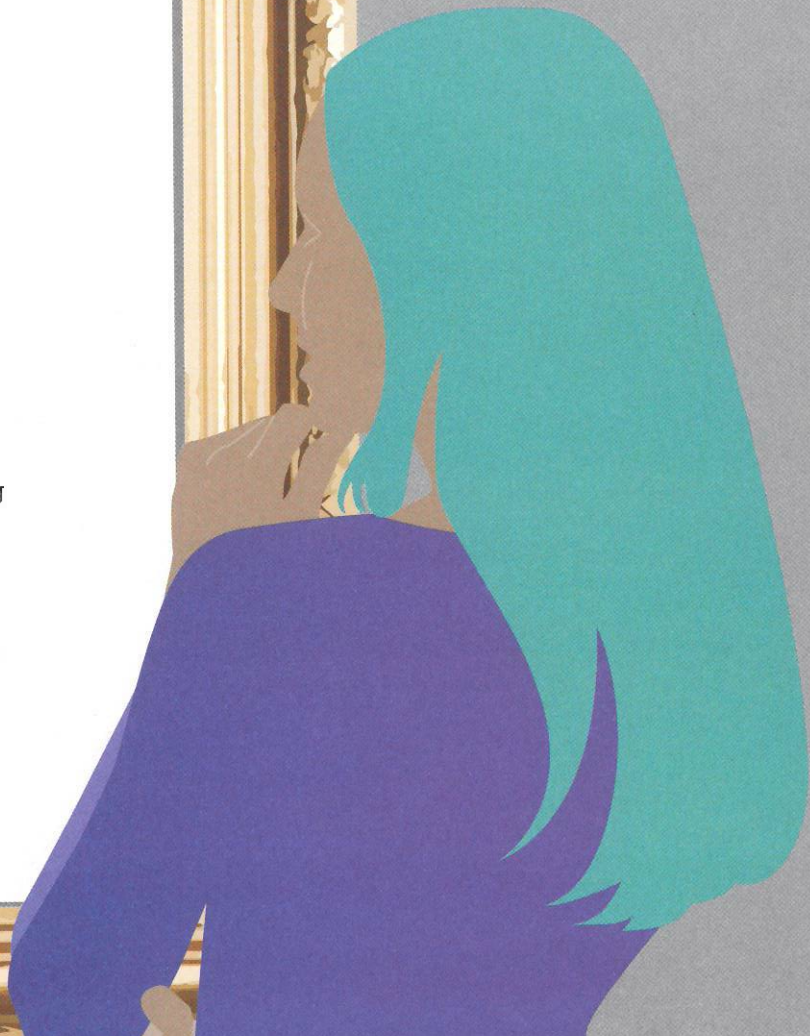
Artworks by a small number of famous artists have become a prestigious form of investment for the super-rich. However, most artists' work is sold for much smaller sums.

and conceptual content. Art appeals to the human need to make things, and to express emotion. Art describes life and the imagination, poses philosophical questions, and communicates on a deep visual level.

**A powerful force**

Art can consist of crafted objects, such as paintings and sculptures, or it can be performed. Art can be made for a gallery, for the outdoor environment, for a domestic space, or for the digital world. It can be made to last, or temporary.

Art may also be seen as dangerous, giving expression to powerful ideas. It has been suppressed by authorities for being "degenerate". Art can represent the ineffable and the intangible, or turn an idea into something concrete and compelling. Art makes connections across cultures and across time, and it is carried ever forwards by those who make it – and those who enjoy it.





# What does art do?

**A successful artwork is one that makes the viewer think and ask questions – about what the work means, what it is trying to say, and how it is saying it. More personally, it should provoke the viewer into thinking about their relationship with the work, and why they are affected by it.**

## **The role of art**

Art is a complex language made up of visual qualities, material processes, and subject matter and content. It also incorporates the identity of the artist that makes it. Art can be mysterious or direct, beautiful or grotesque, but it always communicates in some way with the viewer. Some art is intended to be appreciated for the qualities of its form, and its use of craft and skill, giving the viewer an aesthetic experience. Socially engaged art is meant to communicate a particular point of view to the audience and to effect change. Expressive artworks connect emotionally with the viewer and create a sense of empathy. Narrative artwork creates worlds and scenarios that might be real or imaginary, but which draw in the viewer.

### **Tells a story**

Art can tell a story and take the viewer into an imaginative, fictional world, or an enhanced reality. Story-telling can be explored through a series of images, where the viewer “reads” the tale through sequential compositions, or through the use of narrative imagery or metaphor in single artworks.

### **Conveys meaning**

Art conveys meaning by the way it is made, its appearance, and its context. The exact meaning of an artwork can be difficult to identify, as artists often try not to be obvious or literal, aiming for a more subtle approach that encourages the viewer to spend time considering the work.

## **THE IDEA OF THE ARTIST**

It was only from the early 1400s that artists began to be known by name and celebrated for their creativity. Before then, art was made by nameless artisans who were viewed as craftsmen rather than artists.







**Expresses feeling**

Art is particularly suited to expressing feeling and emotion as it communicates on a deep visual level. The artist might express their own emotions through the work, or suggest a particular mood, which the viewer can then feel through their experience of the piece.

**SHOULD ART  
BE BEAUTIFUL?**

Art reflects and comments on life, so it should be beautiful – but it should also be ugly, confusing, happy, sad, strange, and any other human quality it is possible to think of, too.

**Provides  
aesthetic pleasure**

Whilst some art is deliberately difficult, provocative, or “ugly”, other art is intended to be experienced as beautiful or aesthetically pleasing. This gives the viewer a sense of pleasure, space to reflect, and a connection to the artwork.

**Reflects the  
world around it**

One of art’s most powerful and useful qualities is that it can be used to hold a mirror up to society. Some art asks people to think about difficult subjects, such as death, loss, conflict, or poverty, often through creating or using confronting or disturbing images to provoke a response.

**Carries a message**

Art can have a powerful voice. Public art is effective in conveying messages to a wide audience, while individual artists tend to use a more personal, allusive approach to share their concerns, engaging in more of a dialogue with viewers than state-sponsored or corporate art can offer.

**Explores pure line,  
colour, or shape**

Art does not have to contain a message. It can be purely formal, an exercise in exploring a work’s visual or physical qualities and how they affect the viewer through elements such as the arrangement of shape, colour, scale, and the materials used.



## MIXED

### The art of the material world

Textiles are now widely used in art, in "soft sculpture" processes such as quilting and sewing. Paper art includes the genre of artists' books, which artists often make and bind themselves, and paper sculpture. Installation art is where the artist creates an environment in which the viewer moves and interacts. Mixed media (meaning materials) combines elements of different art forms into individual pieces or works.



## TWO-DIMENSIONAL

### Picturing the world

Two-dimensional art forms encompass mark-making, colour, line, gesture, and surface. Surfaces range from paper and canvas to wood and even walls. Painting and drawing have a spontaneous, immediate quality and are closely related, with artists often working with both media. Printmaking is more process-based, with the use of print presses, while murals can be large-scale indoor and outdoor works. Photography captures images that can be used to convey meaning.



## OTHER

### Art as an experience

Conceptual art and performance art originated in the early 20th century but became more widespread in the 1960s, when artists questioned the meaning and the role of art itself in a time of intense social and political unrest. Performance uses the human body as a medium and can be interactive, and digital and film explore how cinematic processes and computer technologies can convey artistic ideas.

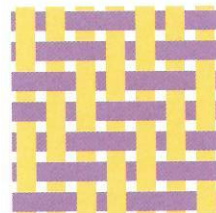


## CAN SOUND BE ART?

In 1913–1930, the Futurist Luigi Russolo built the first sound art pieces – "noise machines". Since then, sound has been used in installations, performance art, kinetic sculptures, digital art, and more.

## CRAFTS

Fine art was once distinguished from craft as it was seen as having an intellectual content that its more functional counterpart lacked. Today, it is agreed that utilitarian objects, whether it is a pot, a chair, or piece of embroidery, can have artistic merit, or simply be a work of art in their own right.







# Forms of art

Art can embody many forms, having evolved from ancient practices of painting, drawing, and sculpture, to encompass contemporary art forms such as performance and video. The 20th century produced a radical transformation and expansion in what could be considered art.

## How artists choose their artform

Artists select their chosen media for many different reasons. For some artists, the idea or concept is the principle which decides the form that the artwork should take. Other artists feel an affiliation with a particular medium or material process, or they may prefer to work in two or three dimensions. Many artists work across media, using and even combining different art forms to create mixed media works or environments. Becoming skilled in any art form requires study and practice to build experience and facility.



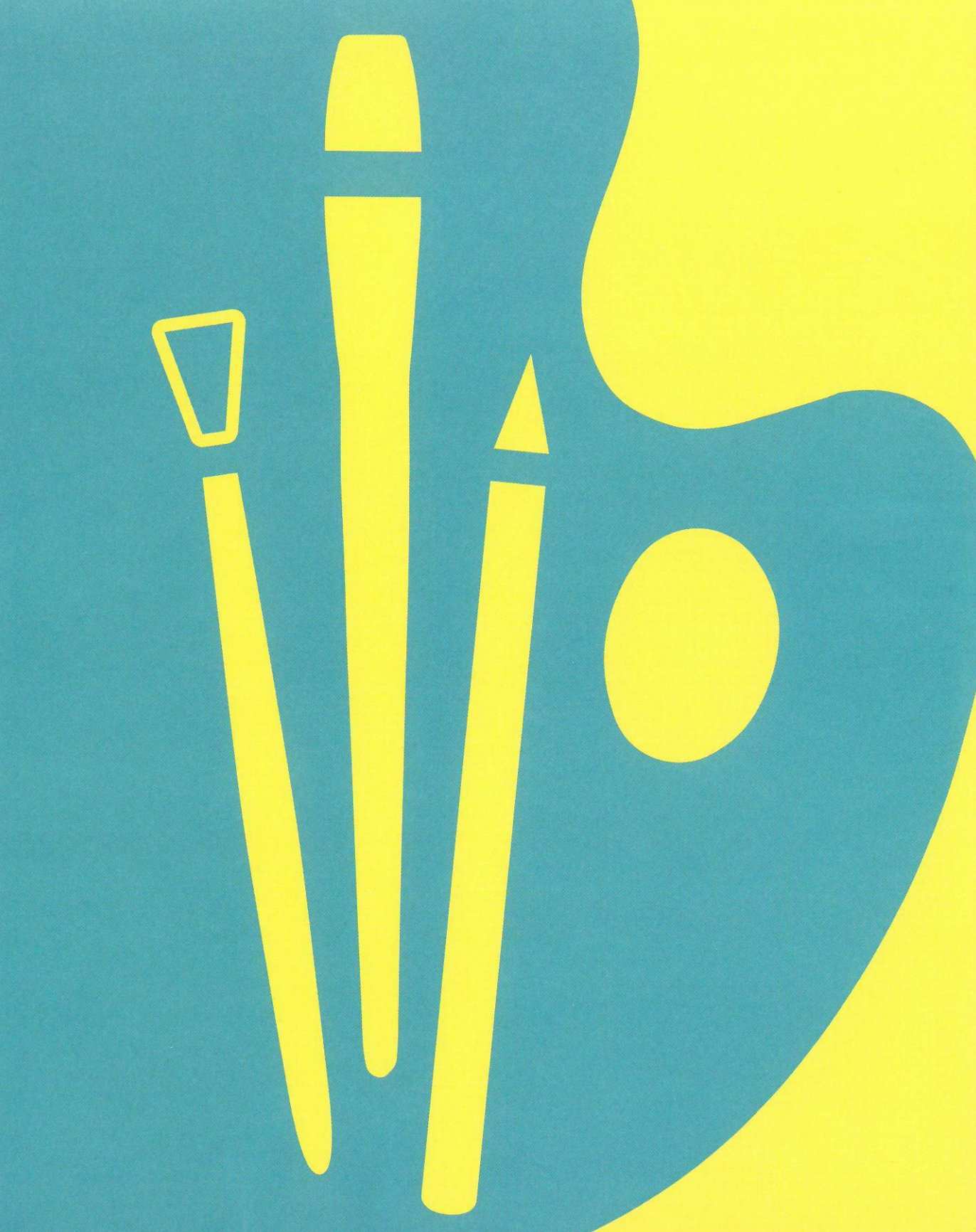
### THREE-DIMENSIONAL

**Embodied art that occupies a space**  
Sculpture can be made out of any material. Contemporary sculpture often combines different and unusual items, such as found objects or building materials. Traditional sculpting matter includes marble and stone, as well as bronze and plaster, which require a casting process. Once made as purely functional vessels, ceramics evolved into the creation of decorative and experimental pieces.



**HUMANS HAVE BEEN MAKING  
FIGURATIVE SCULPTURES FOR  
AT LEAST 35,000 YEARS**







# MEDIA AND MATERIALS

## PAINT AND KNIVES

Although they are mainly used for mixing paint on palettes, paint knives can also be used to make marks by applying paint directly to a painting. This tends to create the kind of thick, heavy marks typically used in impasto, giving a work an expressive and heavily textured quality.



**SLOW, TEXTURED MARK**



**BROAD, GESTURAL MARK**



**FLUID, RAPID MARK**

## ABSTRACT ART OFTEN FEATURES EXPRESSIVE MARKS



# Mark making

**Mark making describes the visible actions used in creating an artwork, and how those actions are carried out through gesture and strokes.**

### Approaches to mark making

Mark making is inherent to both a work's overall style and to its emotional impact – marks are the tangible link between the artist and the viewer. Mark making expresses emotion and physical action: it can be spontaneous, showing speed and intuition, or planned, using line quality or repetition. With drawing materials such as charcoal (see pp.22–23), loose marks and smudges create immediacy, while pencil is often used for smaller, more detailed lines and patterns. In painting, mark making can incorporate poured paint, drips, or flatness as well as brush strokes.

#### Mark making with oils

Oil paint has a versatility that embraces many types of mark making. A few examples are shown here, illustrating principles that artists can apply across a range of other drawing and painting media.

COARSE MARKS

Paint is applied generously



Gestural strokes using brushes with coarse hairs can be used to imply texture, solidity, or movement. This also helps to establish the “core” elements of the image.

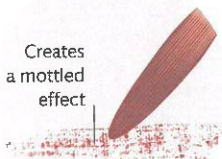
Head is implied using simplified mark making in two tones

Broad, fast strokes convey a feeling of immediacy

Use of dry brush effect suggests movement

DRY BRUSH MARKS

Creates a mottled effect



Dry brush marks can be made with coarse brushes, often using repetitive movements. This creates mottled, textured effects, with individual marks blending together.







### FINE MARKS

Unfinished quality adds dynamism

Small details add focus

Fine detail is added using controlled, slow marks with a small brush. Lines, patterns, or fine dots can also be added in this way. Fine marks can give a work detail and visual interest.

Form is impressionistic rather than detailed

Expressive mark making shows the artist's hand at work

### EXPRESSIVE MARKS

Lively, confident mark making

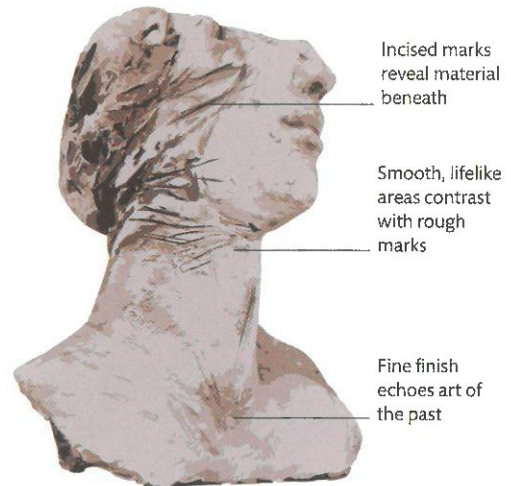
Looser, more vigorous marks can be used to show the physical act of painting or drawing on the canvas and suggest expression, feeling, and action.

## IS MARK MAKING PURELY VISUAL?

Mark making can be aural as much as visual. Sound artists often use particular sounds, noises, and "glitches" to enhance their work or make it identifiably theirs.

## Mark making in sculpture

In sculpture, artists can choose whether to disguise the physical act of mark making or draw attention to it as part of the work. Movement can be implied by using visible marks, for example leaving hand marks in clay or emphasizing rough carving marks in wood or stone. In structural processes such as welding or casting, the artist may leave their mark making in place or smooth it off to create a "cleaner" effect.



Incised marks reveal material beneath

Smooth, lifelike areas contrast with rough marks

Fine finish echoes art of the past

### Scarring and sgraffito

Sculptor Henry Moore "scarred" some of his plaster works, cutting in lines to give the pieces a feeling of fragility. Sgraffito is where the sculptor scratches away a top layer of material to reveal a contrasting underlayer.





# GOYA WAS ABLE TO PAINT AT NIGHT BY FIXING A CANDLE TO HIS HAT

Short-bristled, flat-headed brush used for short, controlled strokes

Fine brush used for making variable lines, where pressure is adjusted to alter the thickness

File used to smooth down inaccessible areas in sculptures made from hard material

## PAINTING

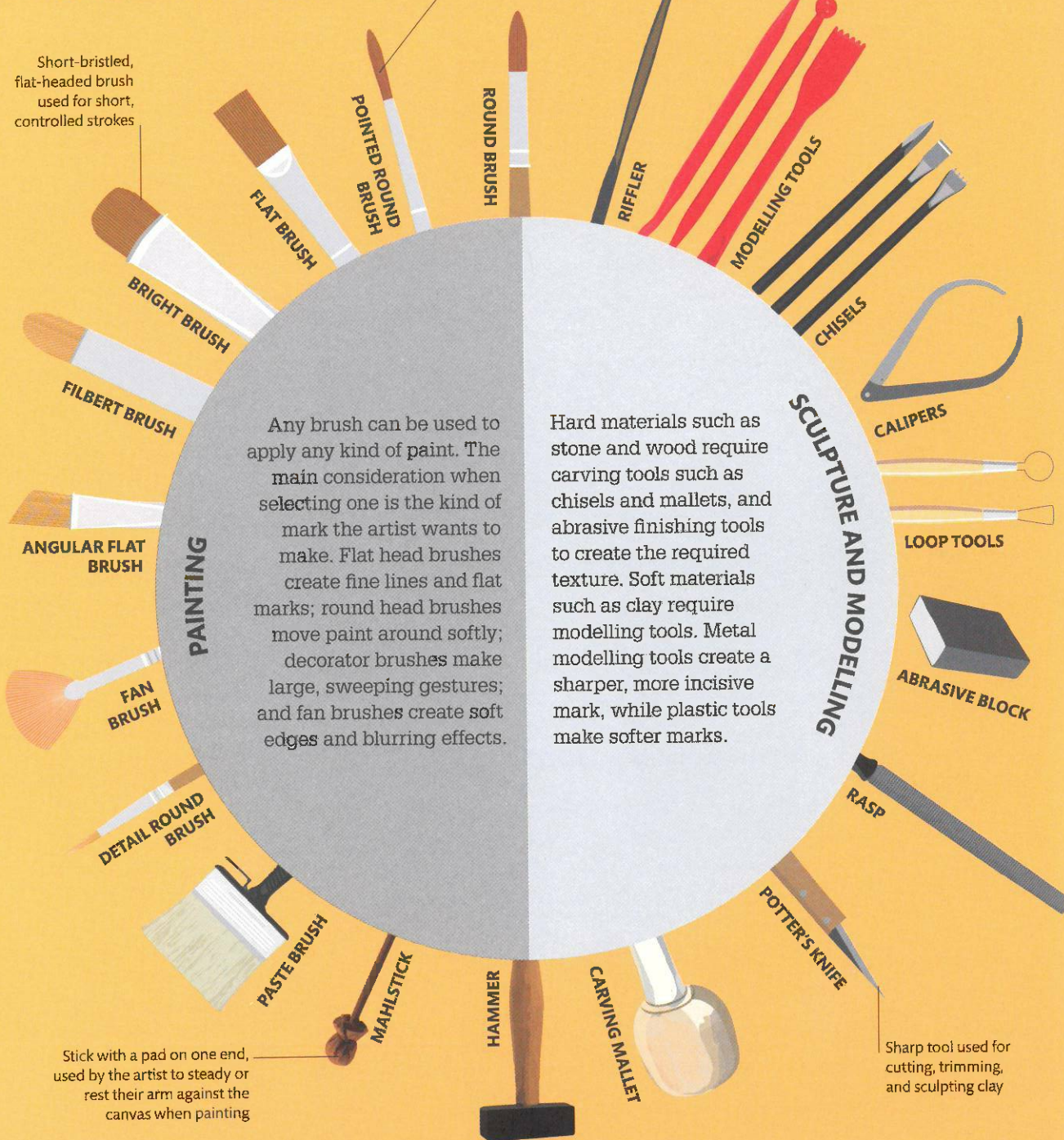
Any brush can be used to apply any kind of paint. The main consideration when selecting one is the kind of mark the artist wants to make. Flat head brushes create fine lines and flat marks; round head brushes move paint around softly; decorator brushes make large, sweeping gestures; and fan brushes create soft edges and blurring effects.

## SCULPTURE AND MODELLING

Hard materials such as stone and wood require carving tools such as chisels and mallets, and abrasive finishing tools to create the required texture. Soft materials such as clay require modelling tools. Metal modelling tools create a sharper, more incisive mark, while plastic tools make softer marks.

Stick with a pad on one end, used by the artist to steady or rest their arm against the canvas when painting

Sharp tool used for cutting, trimming, and sculpting clay







# Tools

There are certain key tools that traditionally form the backbone of an artist's toolbox. In practice, however, an artist can make use of any object that can be employed to make a mark.

## From brushes to chainsaws

It is useful to have a wide range of conventional tools when making art. A painter, for example, will usually have a wide selection of brushes ranging from fine to large, decorator-style examples. Sculptors should have a selection of carving or modelling tools suitable for the materials they wish to use. Beyond these expected items, however, artists also use unconventional tools to help them in their work. Artist Helen Frankenthaler used large floor brushes and mops to create huge swathes of luminous colour on canvas, and Germany's Georg Baselitz used a chainsaw and axes to carve expressive large-scale heads and figures in wood.

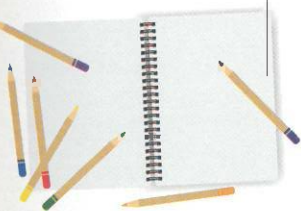
### DOES A BRUSH'S HAIR TYPE MATTER?

Natural hairs, especially sable, are porous and flexible, making them ideal for use with oil-based paints; synthetic fibres, being stiffer and less absorbent, work better for watercolours.

## Using flat surfaces

Flat surfaces for painting and drawing provide support and resistance to mark-making and brush strokes. The particular type of surface helps determine the fluidity and texture of the paint applied. In addition to wood, canvas, and paper, unusual surfaces that have interesting textures or transparencies can be used, such as Perspex or acrylic sheets, glass, and even metal.

Thick, absorbent paper works best for sketch pads



### Sketchpads

Sketchpads are used to note down ideas and jot down experiments. Charcoal, chalk, and pastels can smudge, so require a fixative spray.

MDF is compressed wood fibre, wax, and resin



### Board

MDF or wood is treated with a primer such as gesso to give a hard finish; unprimed, MDF and wood have a raw feel and are more absorbent.

Canvases are cotton or linen



### Canvas

Stretched and primed canvas has a good level of resistance and is very durable. Its absorbency helps to protect against paint chipping.

## HOUSEHOLD TOOLS

Household tools are an inexpensive and inventive way to create interesting marks. Large floor brushes, scourers, or wire wool can be used to create abrasions, texture, and surface details in painting and sculpture.



### Sponges

Sponges create a mottled effect and can be used to erase or swipe paint.



### Scourers

Scourers create a scratchy texture which works with paint, clay, or plaster.



### Paint roller

A roller covers large areas quickly, creating a flat surface without visible brush strokes.



# Pencils and charcoal

Drawing is one of the oldest forms of visual art, with the first known charcoal sketches dating from the Paleolithic era, 30,000 years ago. The most common and widespread drawing tool today is the pencil, comprised of a graphite core enclosed in a wooden shell.

## Instant marks

First developed during the 16th and 17th centuries, the pencil is a versatile drawing tool and provides the most immediate, responsive form of drawing. It instantaneously records the movements of the hand, leaving a physical mark that is water-resistant and reasonably durable, but that can also be erased if required. Graphite comes in varying degrees of hardness (see right).

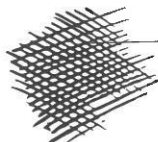
## Shading with hatching

Multiple lines can be used to create the illusion of shade, shape, depth, shadow, and more. Spacing can be increased or decreased to adjust how dark the area will be. This is typically done with dark, clear lines.



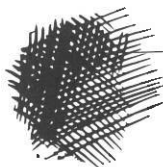
Linear hatching adds depth

### HATCHING



Layered lines used for shadows

### CROSS-HATCHING



Intersecting lines can depict contours

### DOUBLE CROSS-HATCHING

Initial lines often made with the pencil held lightly halfway down the shaft to keep marks loose

Ellipse used to mark out perspective in rough sketches

First marks set outlines and large shapes

## Line and texture

Initial sketches (below left) allow the artist to map out the composition, and lines can be easily erased and edited; later in the process, shading and cross-hatching create shadow and volume to bring a subject to life (below right).

Light, soft areas of blending tones add highlights and give the impression of reflections

