Glossary of art historical terms:

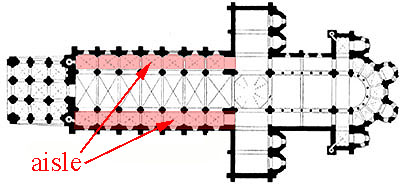
**Abstract –**

1, Art that is non-representational, purely autonomous and makes no reference to an exterior world.

2, Art that abstracts its objects from the visible world (makes them less coherent as objects, as in cubism.)

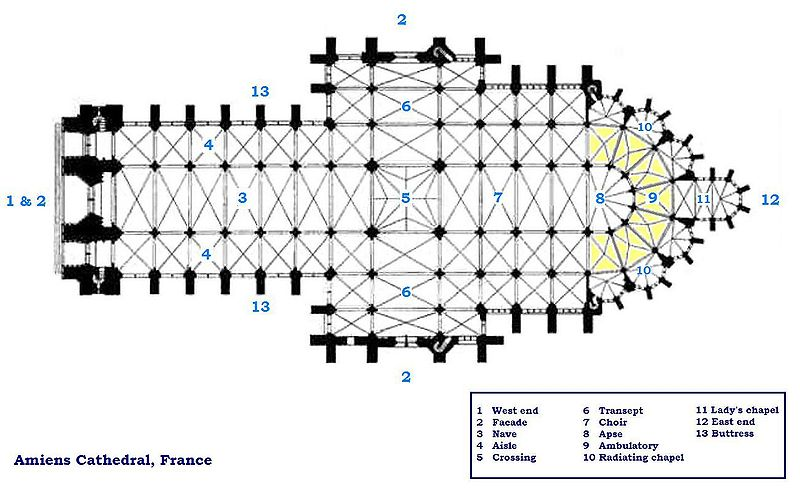
**Acanthus** – Mediterranean plant with thick, prickly leaves. Thought to be the inspiration for Corinthian columns.

**Aerial Perspective** – The perception of distance in a painting, specifically relating to the lightening colour of the landscape the further into the distance it goes.

**Aisle** – Part of a church or hall which runs parallel to the main span of the building (often called a nave) and divided from it by columns or occasionally a screen wall.

**Altarpiece** – A devotional painting or sculpture placed on, above or behind an altar.

**Ambulatory** – An aisle surrounding the choir or chancel of a church or cathedral.



Ambulatory

**Amphitheatre** – An elliptical or circular space surrounded by rising tiers of seats. Used by the Romans for gladiatorial combat.

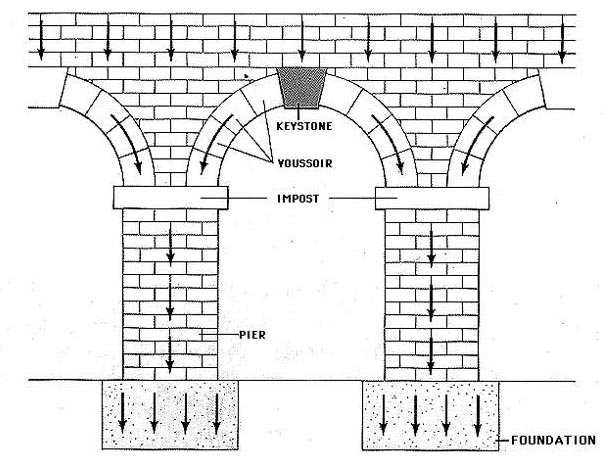
**Apse** – Vaulted semicircular termination of a building, usually in a church.

**Aqueduct** – Artificial channel used for carrying water, usually an elevated structure supported on arches.

**Arabesque** – Intricate surface decoration of plant forms, spirals knots etc. without human figures.

Arcade – A range of arches on piers or columns, either free standing or attached to a wall.

**Arch** – A curved span over a two supports, which allows weight from above to be channeled through the supports.



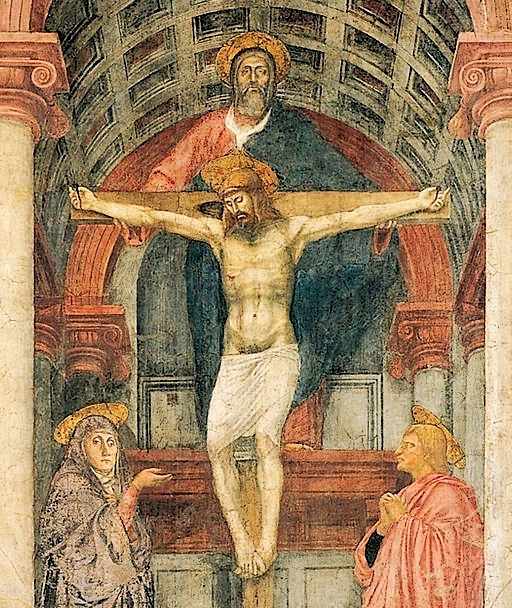
Arch

**Architrave** – The lowest part of an entablature (see Frieze)

**Asymmetry** – Absence of symmetry.

**Avant Guard** – In the vanguard, or those in advance or ahead of their time.

**Axis** – In art of architecture, an imaginary line which passes centrally through a figure or composition, façade or ground plan to give it an impression of balance.

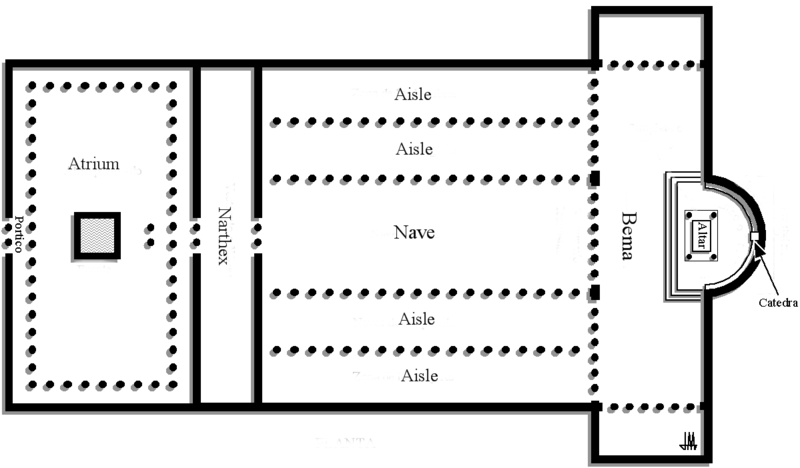


Example of lines of axis. These can help reveal artistic composition.

**Baptistery** – A building for Christian baptismal rites. Usually separate from the church.

**Basilica** – Ancient Roman colonnaded building used for civic functions. Became the ground plan for early Christian churches.

**Basilica** ground plan.

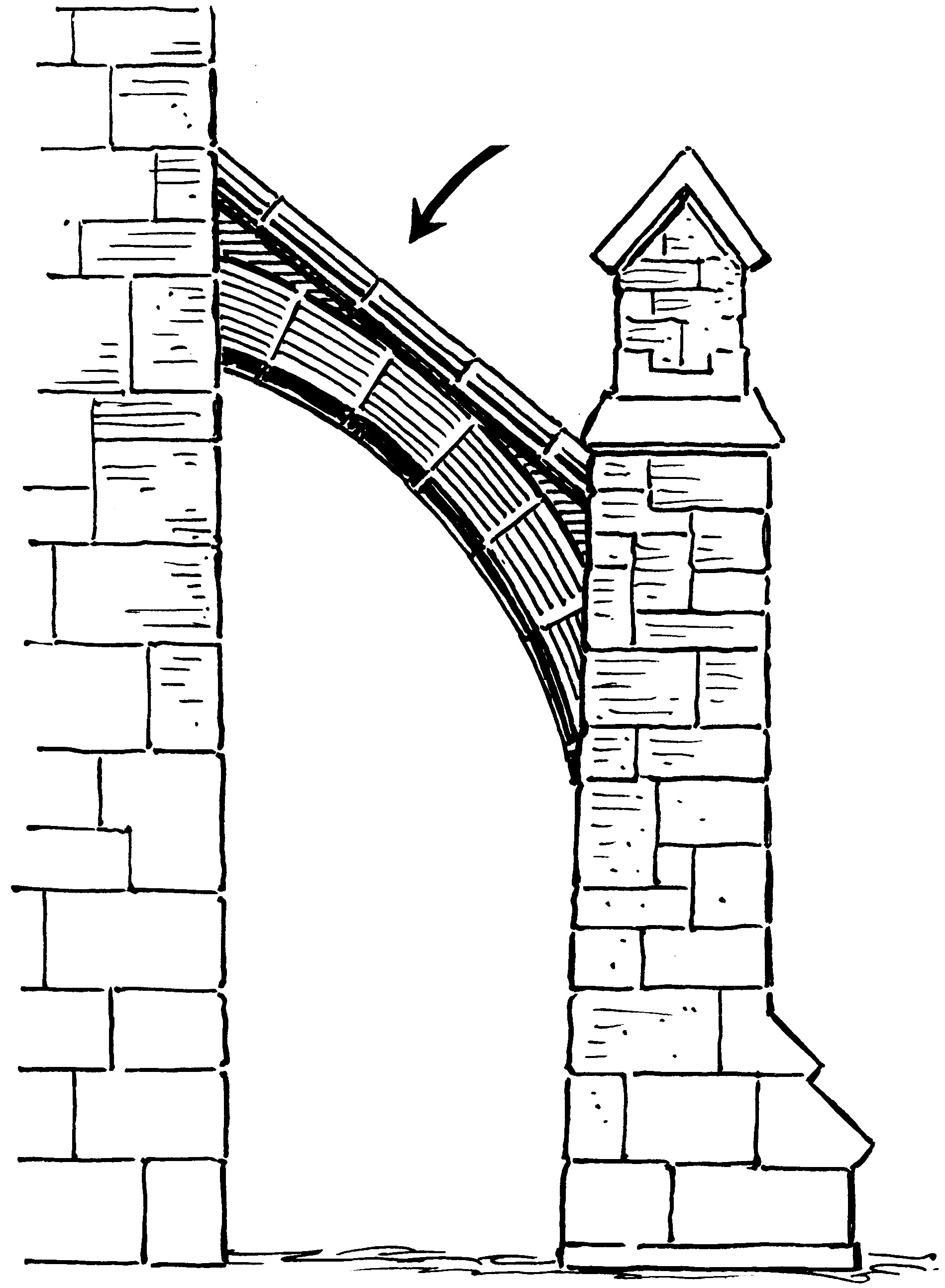


**Boss** – A (usually) decorative projection used to cover the intersection of vaults.

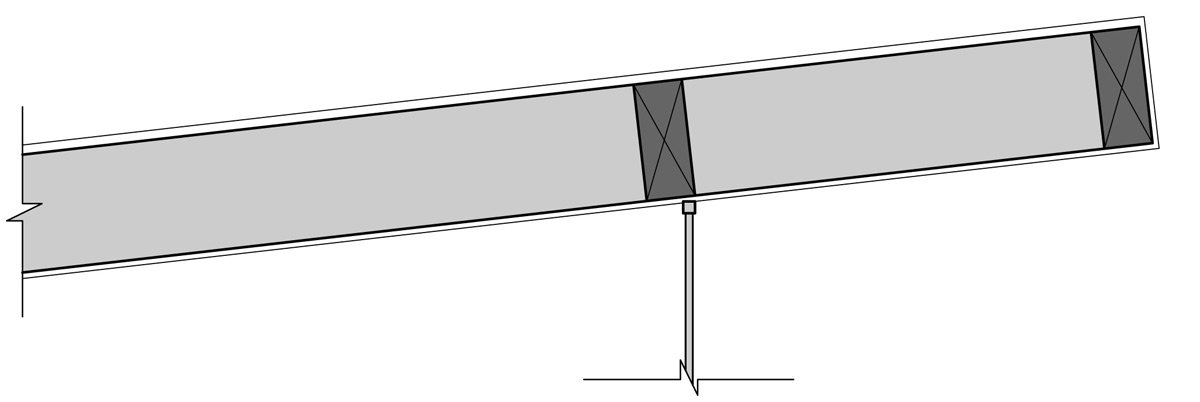


Boss.

**Buttress** – A projecting support built against a wall to give it additional strength, usually to counteract the lateral thrust of an arch or vault.



**Cantilever** – A projecting beam, canopy etc. supported by a downward force behind the fulcrum. Usually anchored at one end.



**Canvas** – A course unbleached cloth, woven from hemp or flax and used in the West as a support for oil painting since the 15th Century.

**Capital** – The top portion of a column (see orders)

**Caryatid** – A full or half length statue of a female used as a support instead of a column.

**Chalice** – Wine cup used for drinking the sacramental wine in Christian Mass or Communion.

**Chancel** – The east end of a church in which the altar is placed. Reserved for the clergy and choir and occasionally hidden by a screen.

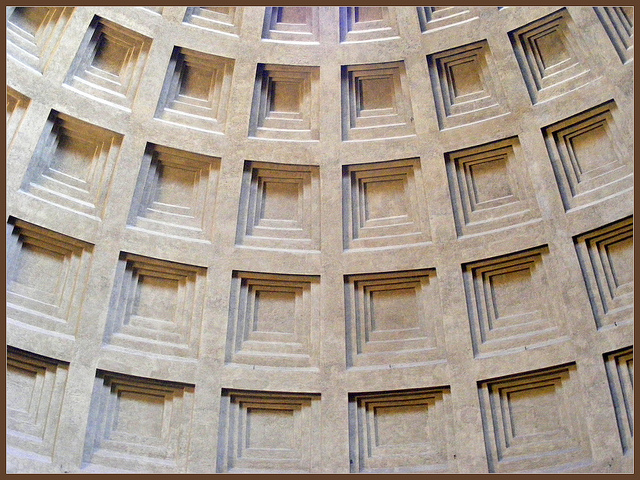
**Chiaroscuro** – In painting, the manipulation of light and dark to give the effect of modeling.

**Choir** – The part of a church where the service is sung. Part of the chancel.

**Clerestory** – The upper stage of the nave walls of a basilica or church, rising above the aisle roofs and pierced with windows.

**Coffering** – Decoration of a ceiling, vault or arch consisting of sunken square or polygonal shapes.

Example of coffering from the dome of the Pantheon in Rome.



**Collage** – A composition made by gluing pieces of paper, cloth etc. on a canvas or other ground.

**Colonnade** – A row of columns carrying an entablature or arches.

**Compound Pier** – Like a column, but with several engaged or semi-detached shafts against its faces.

**Contour** – An outline defining a form.

**Contraposto** – A pose in which one part of the body is twisted in an opposite direction to another.



**Cornice** – In classical architecture the top projecting entablature, or a projecting ornamental molding along the top of a wall.

**Cross-Hatching** – A method of shading in drawings and engravings by superimposing hatching or lines running in opposite directions.

**Cruciform** – Shaped like a cross.

**Cupola** – A dome.

**Diptych** – A picture or relief on two hinged panels.

**Engaged column** – One that is attached to or sunk into a wall or pier.

**Entasis** – The slight convex curve in the shaft of a column.

**Façade** – Architecturally emphasized front or face of a building.

**Fenestration** – The arrangement of windows in a building.

**Figurative Art** – Depictions of the visible world, not necessarily including human or animal figures.

**Fluting** – Shallow concave grooves running vertically on the shaft of a column, pilaster or other surface.

**Foreshortening Perspective** – Applied to a single form e.g. a foot represented as pointing out of, not in line with, a pictorial plane.



Example of foreshortening. Jesus’ feet appear to emerge from the painting.

**Forum** – An open space surrounded by public buildings in an ancient Roman town. A political and civic center.

**Fresco** – Wall and ceiling painting on fresh (fresco) moist lime plaster with pigments ground together so that they are absorbed into the plaster.

**Frieze** – The middle division of an entablature. More loosely, a sculptured or decorated horizontal band.

**Functionalism** - The theory that a building, piece of furniture, or other object should be designed primarily to fulfill its material function and its form should be determined exclusively by its function.

**Gable** – A triangular section at the end of a pitched roof.

**Genre Painting** – A painting of everyday life.

**Genres** – The various categories of painting e.g. history, landscape, portrait, still life etc.

**Golden Section or Golden Mean** – An irrational proportion, probably known to the ancient Greeks and used by Renaissance art theorists. Essentially the division of a composition so that the smaller part is to the larger part, what the larger part is to the whole. Roughly 5:8 as a fraction.

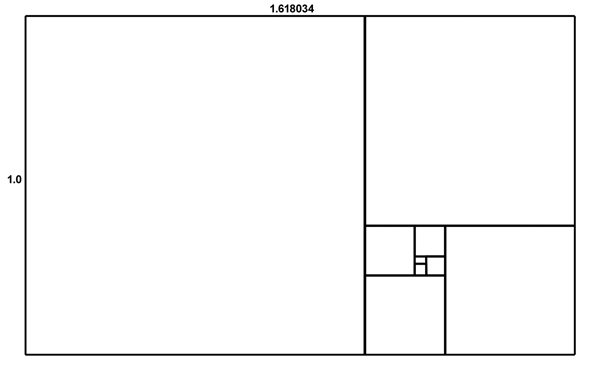


Diagram of diminishing golden means.

**Ground** – The surface on which a painting is executed.

**Halo** – The circular light behind a sacred persons head. Similar is a glory or nimbus, which is a radiant holy light that surrounding a holy person.

**Hatching** – Parallel lines indicating shadow in a drawing or engraving.

**Highlight** – In a painting, a spot of the highest or lightest value, usually white.

**History Painting** – A figurative painting of a scene from classical mythology, the Bible, the lives of saints, or an historical event.

**Icon** – A small, portable panel painting of Christ, the Virgin and Child or the saints, produced for Greek or Russian Orthodox Christians.

**Iconoclasm** – The prohibition or destruction of religious images.

**Iconography** – The study of the meaning of visual images whether conveyed directly or through symbols or allegories.

**Iconology** – The study of the meaning of visual images in relation to their historical-cultural context.

**Impasto** – Oil paint thickly applied.

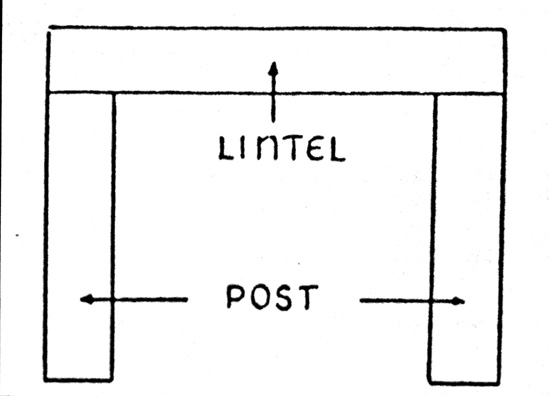
**Installation** – A designed environment set up as an art-work, usually multimedia. Always site specific.

**Intensity** – Richness or saturation of colour.

**Keystone** – The central stone of an arch or rib vault.

**Linear Style** – Paintings in which forms are defined mainly by line, as opposed to those described as painterly.

**Lintel** – A horizontal beam or stone bridging an opening.



**Mass** – The three-dimensional bulk of an object, as distinct from the two-dimensional area it covers or the single plane on its surface.

**Medium** – The process or means used by an artist (e.g. oil on canvas).

**Memento Mori** – An image intended to serve as a reminder of death, usually a human skull.

**Modelling** – The process of fashioning materials like clay or wax, and by extension (in painting, drawing etc.) the indication of solid form through shading.

**Monochrome** – Painting or drawing or photograph in the tones of a single colour.

**Mosaic** – A pictorial representation made of small coloured stones, or cubes of stone, set in plaster.

**Mural** – A painting on a wall. Usually, but not always, a fresco.

**Nave** – The congregational area of a church, flanked by aisles.

**Oculus** – A circular opening in a wall or ceiling.

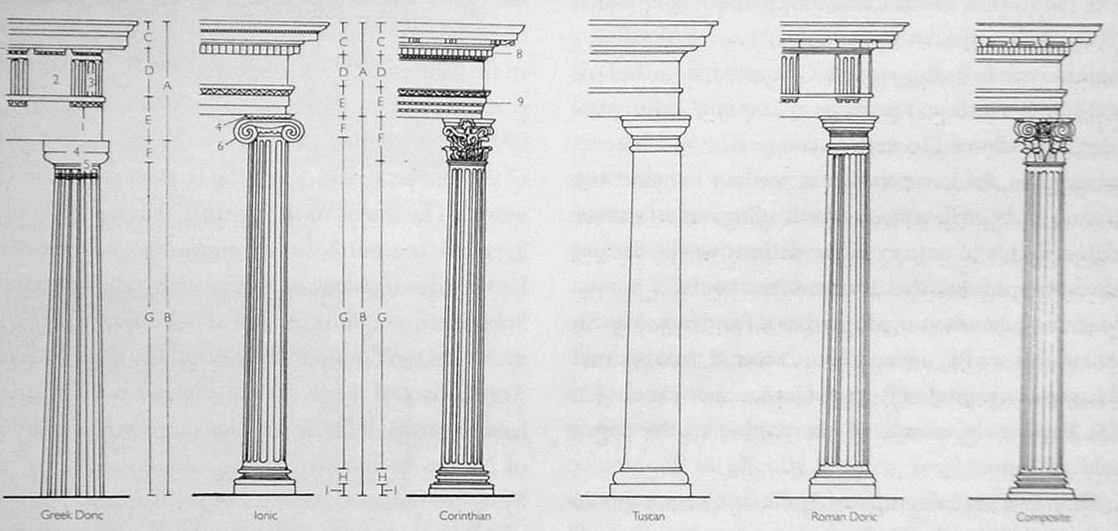
**Orders** – In classical architecture an order consists of a column with base (usually) shaft, capital and entablature, decorated according to one of six accepted models.

Try to learn **Doric, Ionic** and **Corinthian.**

Doric

Ionic

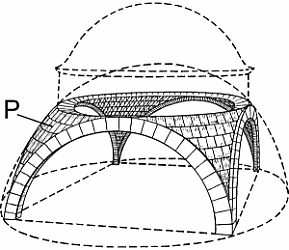
Corinthian

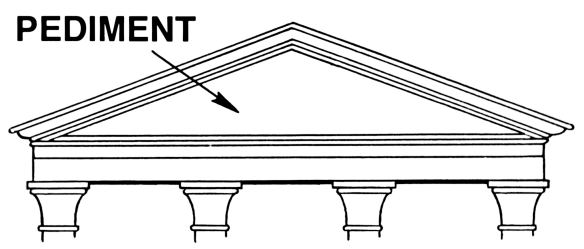


**Painterly** – Characteristic of a painting in which forms are defined by tone rather than line.

**Palette** – The range of colours used by an artist.

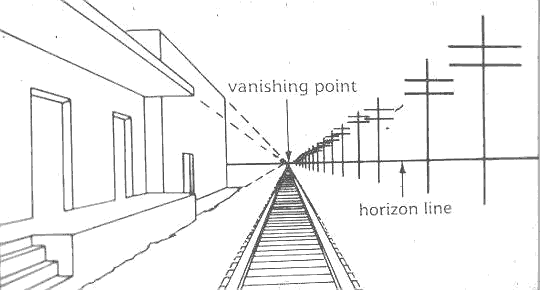
**Patina** – The effect produced, either naturally or artificially, on bronze by oxidation. The term is also used figuratively for the surface texture of old objects. Pedestal – In classical architecture, the base supporting a single column or colonnade. More loosely, the base of for a statue, bust, vase or any superstructure.

**Pediment** – A low pitched gable over a portico, door or window.



**Pendentive** – A concave spandrel, leading from the angle of two walls to the base of a circular dome.

**Perspective** – Systems of representing objects in spatial recession.



**Picture Plane** – The flat surface of a picture. If painted according to Western ideas of perspective, it is conceived of as a transparent window between the spectator and the pictorial space.

**Pier** – A solid masonry support.

**Pieta** – An image or sculpture of the Virgin Mary with the dead Christ on her lap.

**Pigment** – The colouring substance, usually a powder, held together by a medium (e.g. oil for paint, gum arabic for watercolour) which allows it to be applied evenly and fixes it to the ground.

**Pilaster** – A shallow pier projecting only slightly from a wall.

**Pillar** – A free-standing upright member, distinct from a column in that it need not be circular or conform with the classical orders.

**Plan** – The horizontal arrangement of one or more buildings or a single part of a building; or a diagram showing such an arrangement.

**Plein Air Painting** – A painting executed out of doors.

**Plinth** - The projecting base of a wall or column.

**Ploychromy** – The use of many colours in a painting, sculpture or building.

**Polyptych** – A painting or relief, usually an altarpiece on more than three panels.

**Portico** – A roofed space, open or partly enclosed, forming the entrance, and usually the centerpiece of the façade.

**Priming** – A coating applied to a surface which is to be painted.

**Pulpit** – An elevated stand surrounded by a parapet for a preacher or reader in a Christian place of worship.

**Relief Sculpture** – Sculptural forms projecting from a ground, called high relief when they are at least half in the round, otherwise low relief or bas-relief.

**Rib** – A projecting band on a ceiling or vault, usually structural but sometimes purely decorative, separating the cells of a groined vault.

**Rose Window** – A large circular window on the façade of a gothic church.

**Rustication** – Massive blocks of masonry with roughened surfaces and sunk joints, often simulated in plaster.

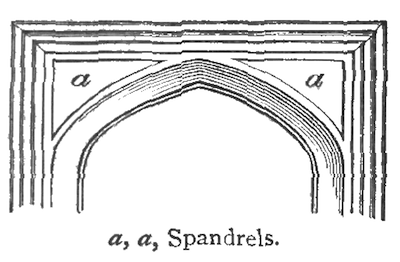
**Sacra Conversazione** – The Virgin and Child with saints depicted in such a way as they occupy a single pictorial space.

**Saturation** – The relative brightness or dullness of colour, also called intensity.

**Scuola** – Venetian term for a religious confraternity of laymen and its premises. Similar to a medieval guild.

**Sfumato** – A soft, misty effect attained in oil painting mainly by the use of glazes. Leonardo da Vinci was particularly good at this.

**Spandrel** – A triangular area between the side of an arch, the the horizontal drawn from its apex the vertical from between two arches in an arcade.



**Still Life** – A representation of inanimate objects such as fruit, flowers, dead animals or household objects.

**String Course** – A continuous horizontal band in, or more usually projecting from, an exterior wall.

**Stucco** – Various types of plaster used as a protective and decorative covering for walls. Often used for relief decorations on ceilings and interior walls.

**Swag** – An ornamental motif resembling a piece of cloth draped over two supports.

**Symmetry** – The correspondence of parts of an object or its decorations on either side of a real or imaginary line.



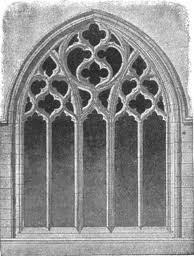
Example of symmetry in architecture.

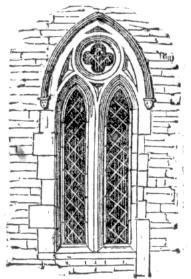
**Tempera** – Painting with powdered pigments made workable (tempted) with egg yolk and water, a technique practiced in Europe from the early Middle Ages till the 16th Century.

**Terracotta** – Baked or fired but unglazed clay, usually reddish brown in colour.

**Tondo** – A painting or relief of circular shape.

**Tracery** – Ornamental intersecting work in the upper part of a Gothic window, screen or panel, or on the surface of a vault. There are two kinds: plate and bar tracery. Plate tracery looks like holes punched into a solid wall with a cookie cutter, whilst bar tracery looks like a complex and fragile construction of ribs.





Bar tracery

Plate tracery

**Transverse arch** – An arch separating one bay of a vault from another in Romanesque and Gothic architecture.

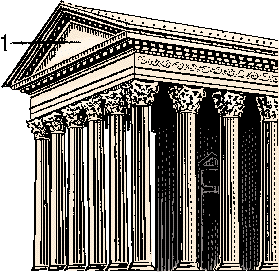
**Triglyph** – Three vertical lines marked onto a square block which forms part of the entablature on a Doric Order. (See Orders)

**Triptych** – A painting on three panels.

**Triumphal arch** – A free standing monumental gateway of a type originated in Rome, but much used till the 19th century for its symbolism of empire and conquest (e.g. Marble arch)

**Trompe L’oeil** – An illusionistic painting intended to ‘decieve the eye’.

**Tympanum** – The area between the lintel of a doorway and the arch above it, also the triangular or segmental space enclosed by the moldings of a pediment.



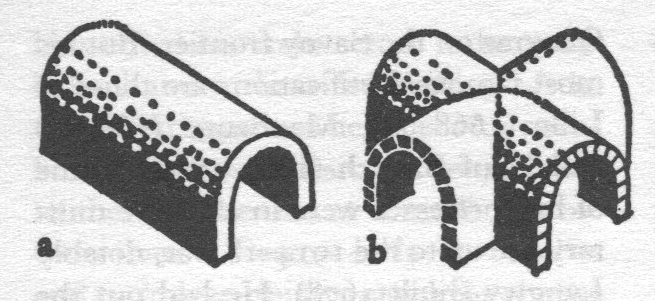
Tympanum

**Underpainting** – The initial layers of paint, especially on oil painting, but also tempera and others.

**Vanishing point** – In an image observing the laws of linear perspective, the point on which the lines defining depth in a painting meet. See vanishing point on perspective.

**Varnish** – A solution of resin applied as a protective coat over a painting, sometimes tinted to modify the colours of the pigment beneath it.

**Vaulting** – A masonry roof or ceiling constructed on the principle of the arch. The simplest form is a tunnel or barrel vault of continuous or semicircular or pointed section, unbroken by cross vaults (a rather than b) The intersection of two tunnel vaults of identical shape produces a groin vault (b).



**Volume** – Space enclosed by mass e.g. the interior of a building.

**Volute** – The spiral scroll on capitals of the Ionic and, less prominently, Corinthian orders (see orders). Traditionally thought to have come from the spiral of a ram’s horns.

**Voussoir** – A wedge-shaped brick or stone forming one of the segments of an arch.