

What Is the Definition of Texture in Art?

Texture Can Be Real or Implied

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Texture is one of [seven elements of art](#). It is used to describe the way a three-dimensional work actually feels when touched. In two-dimensional work, such as painting, it may refer to the visual "feel" of a piece.

UNDERSTANDING TEXTURE IN ART

At its most basic, texture is defined as a tactile quality of an object's surface. It appeals to our sense of touch, which can evoke feelings of pleasure, discomfort, or familiarity.

Artists use this knowledge to elicit emotional responses from people who view their work. The reasons for doing so vary greatly, but texture is a fundamental element in many pieces of art.

Take rocks, for example. A real rock might feel rough or smooth and it definitely feels hard when touched or picked up. A painter depicting a rock would create the illusions of these qualities through the use of other elements of art such as color, line, and shape.

Textures are described by a whole host of adjectives. Rough and smooth are two of the most common, but they can be further defined. You might also hear words like coarse, bumpy, rugged, fluffy, lumpy, or pebbly when referring to a rough surface. For smooth surfaces, words like polished, velvety, slick, flat, and even can be used.

TEXTURE IN THREE-DIMENSIONAL ART

Three-dimensional artwork relies on texture and you cannot find a piece of sculpture or pottery that does not include it.

Fundamentally, the materials used give a piece of art texture. That may be marble, bronze, clay, metal, or wood, but this sets the foundation for the work feels if it were touched.

As the artist develops a piece of work, they can add more texture through technique. One might sand, polish, or buff a surface smooth or they might give it a patina, bleach it, gouge it, or otherwise rough it up.

Many times you will see texture used in patterns such a series of intersecting diagonals lines that give a surface a basketweave look. Rectangles staggered in rows offer the texture of a brick pattern and concentric, irregular ellipses may imitate the texture of wood grain.

Three-dimensional artists often use a contrast of texture as well. One element of an artwork may be smooth as glass while another element is rough and mangled. This contradiction adds to the impact of the work and can help convey their message just as strongly as a piece made of one uniform texture.

TEXTURE IN TWO-DIMENSIONAL ART

Artists working in a two-dimensional medium also work with texture and the texture may either be real or implied. Photographers, for instance, almost always work with the reality of texture when creating art. Yet, they can enhance or downplay that through the manipulation of light and angle.

In painting, drawing, and printmaking, an artist often implies texture through the use of brushstrokes lines [as seen in crosshatching](#). When working with the [impasto painting technique](#) or with collage, the texture can be very real and dynamic.

Watercolor painter, Margaret Roseman, said, *"I aim for an abstract element of a realistic subject and use texture to add interest and suggest depth."* This sums up the way many two-dimensional artists feel about texture.

Texture is something that artists can play with through the manipulation of their medium and materials. For instance, [you can draw a rose](#) on a rough textured paper and it won't have the softness of one drawn on a smooth surface. Likewise, some artists use less gesso to prime canvas because they want that texture to show through the paint they apply on it.

TEXTURE IS EVERYWHERE

As in art, you can see texture everywhere. To begin to correlate reality with the artwork you see or create, take the time to really notice the textures around you. The smooth leather of your chair, the coarse grains of the carpet, and the fluffy softness of the clouds in the sky all invoke feelings.

As artists and those who appreciate it, regular exercise in recognizing texture can do wonders for your experience.