G. Moreau: *St. George and the Dragon*, 1880



Medieval Artist: *St. George and the Dragon*

## Figurative

In figurative works of art you can recognize objects from real life or from an imaginary reality.

You can identify things you partially or completely know or recognize, like mountains, trees, a castle, but also poses, clothing and gestures. Facial expressions, the direction of the gaze and the way the figures look are all recognizable features. All the representations on this page are figurative.

## Detail, detailed

The unicorn in the tapestry *Lady with the Unicorn* has naturalistic, recognizable features. Although no one has ever seen a unicorn, people in the Middle Ages believed the animal was real. As shown, the animal is something of a hybrid between a deer and a horse. You can see it has cloven hooves, which are shown very precisely, right down to the details.

## Naturalistic

In the legend of St. George, the dragon symbolizes evil and the devil. No one has ever seen a dragon or the devil, but they are often drawn and painted, just like other imaginary or fantasy animals. Dragons are usually shown very lifelike, with their claws, scales, tails, teeth or beaks. The attitude and shadows on Moreau's dragon make it look far more lifelike than the dragon beside it, depicted by the medieval artist. A lifelike, but imaginary representation is called naturalistic.

## Simplistic

All the riders, horses and dragons on this page are easy to recognize. You can see the head, torso, arms and legs of the human figures and animals. Some details (smaller parts such as eyes, nose, mouth, fingers, nails, scales) are hard to see in some figures. They are not depicted in any detail. This we call simplistic art.

*Lady with the Unicorn*, 15th C

Anon: *St. George and the Dragon*, plaque (wall tile), 1555

P. de Hoogh: *Woman and Child on a Bleaching Field*, 1659


E. Kirchner: *Elisabeth Quay in Berlin*, 1913

## Realism

If a representation closely resembles reality, it is called realism. More than 500 years ago, realistic portraits were in fashion. They were only successful if they showed a very good likeness of the sitter/person. The dimensions and proportions, the facial expression, all the details, everything had to be perfectly correct. This also applied to landscapes and cityscapes. Pieter de Hoogh painted *Woman and Child on a Bleaching Field* over 350 years ago. It is so popular that it has become almost a picture postcard. Naturally, over the years Delft has changed a lot.

## Impressionism

If a representation does not show actual reality but just gives an impression of reality, it is called impressionism. It is the impression of a few details, a moment, a mood or the fall of light. Claude Monet blurred the shapes and left out the details in his *Parliament Reflected in the Thames*. This strengthens the impressionistic quality of the painting. Monet shows us the effect of light in the clouds and on water.

## Deformed, distortion

In *Elizabeth Quay in Berlin*, the streets, trees and buildings are easy to recognize. Yet this is not realism. The trees look streaky and prickly. There are two pointy figures in the foreground. This also applies to the buildings and the bridge. The painter has painted his interpretation of a scene and therefore it is slightly distorted.
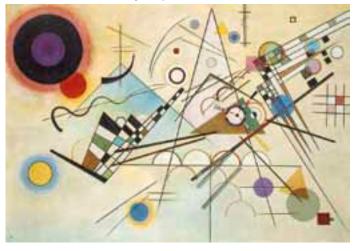
## Abstract

*Composition No. 8* is an abstract by Kandinsky. Maybe you recognize a tower and a sun, but that was not the artist's intention. This is a composition of colours, clean lines and surfaces. Here and there the colours fade and run into each other. A representation without recognizable features is called abstract. There is of course the borderland where paintings are nearly abstract, but where you can still recognize figurative elements.
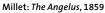

C. Monet: *Parliament Reflected in the Thames*, 1905


W. Kandinsky: *Composition No. 8, Sketch* 1923

Millet: *The Angelus*, 1859



P. Gauguin: *Tahitian Women*, 1894

## Alienation

Maybe you find Millet's *The Angelus* strange. Two figures are praying in the middle of a field. They are looking down at the ground and seem introverted. But when Millet painted this scene, such a situation was quite normal. People just stopped their work to pray. Dali reworked Millet's subject in his own way. Now the painting has really become an example of alienation. The emptiness, the solitary figures, the tiny people, the light and shadows all suggest a distancing mood. A work of art can have an alienating effect when it brings together sizes or objects that normally do not go together.
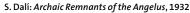
## Surrealism

In Salvador Dali's *Archaic Remnants of the Angelus* you can recognize Millet's *The Angelus*. Dalí has taken the figures from *The Angelus* and reworked them in a weird style called surrealism. Dali tried to express his bizarre thoughts and dreams in his work. The huge statues on the beach are ruins. Branches and trees grow out of them. Salvador Dali painted with great precision and in great detail. He is famous for his surrealist paintings.

## Exotic

Exotic means coming from a faraway country.
*Tahitian Women* is exotic. You can see that by the Tahitian clothes on the two figures. Gauguin painted this on the island of Tahiti, in the Pacific Ocean. He went there because he wanted to live somewhere that, in his view, was still in a fresh and original (natural) state.

## Expressionism

In contrast to the painting of the two Tahitian women, the painting of the *Married Couple* by Karel Appel is totally unrealistic. The figures are strongly distorted, deformed. Moreover, Appel used striking colours. He painted how he felt and perceived the subject. We call it expressionism when an artist shows us a personal expression or interpretation of the subject.

S. Dalí: *Archaic Remnants of the Angelus*, 1932

K. Appel: *Married Couple,* 1976

P. della Francesca: *Count of Montefeltro*, 1472



P. della Francesca: *Madonna with Child and Saints*, 1465

## Portrait

A portrait is a likeness. Over the years many people have had their portraits painted or drawn and, later on, photographed. When the Renaissance began more than 600 years ago, rich and important people commissioned (ordered) portraits for the first time since the ancient Roman period. *Madonna with Child and Saints* dates from that time. The person who commissioned the Madonna also ordered his own portrait. This was the Count of Montefeltro, seen kneeling in the foreground. You can recognize the count by his face. Unlike the saints in the background, he wears a suit of armour and carries a sword, the attributes of a knight. Piero della Francesca portrayed the group in 'full face', 'profile' and 'three-quarter view'.

When someone is portrayed from top to toe, we speak of a **complete portrait**. But other versions are possible. The most common of these just shows the face. Others include the **half portrait** or **bust** and **group** portraits. If the artists sit in front of a mirror to paint a *self- portrait*, they come up with surprisingly original results. Some artists like to pull silly faces.

## Profile

A portrait in profile is a side view or silhouette of a person, like we see in the *Count of Montefeltro.* The count's face and especially his nose have a very striking profile.

## Full frontal

You recognize people by their faces, the front of the head. As the term suggests, a full frontal portrait shows someone looking directly at the viewer. The painting *The Blue Hat* is both a *full frontal* and a *half portrait*.
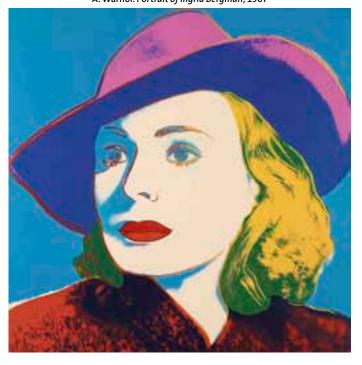
## Three-quarter view

The portrait of Ingrid Bergman shows a three-quarter view of her face. This means you can see the face half from the front and half from the side, a three-quarter turn. Warhol used photography, photo editing and screen printing for his *Portrait of Ingrid Bergman*.

K. van Dongen: *The Blue Hat*, 1912

A. Warhol: *Portrait of Ingrid Bergman*, 1967

V. van Gogh: *Self Portrait*, 1887



C. Brancusi: *Pogany No. 1*, 1913

## Self-portrait

A self-portrait is a likeness that the artist has made of himself. Vincent van Gogh, one of the most famous Dutch artists, made many self-portraits, both drawings and paintings. Sometimes painters included a self-portrait in a large group portrait. Often a self-portrait was intended to advertise the artist's abilities as a painter. Artists also did self-portraits as studies and when they had no money to pay a model.

## Styled

*Pogany No. 1* by Brancusi is perhaps hardly recognizable as a portrait. He gave the work a name, 'Pogany', and that makes it a portrait. The design of the figurine is highly stylized: it leaves out the details and shows just the outlines. The whole statue is round and finished smoothly, except where the form should continue, for example, to the arms.
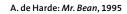
## Head

While a portrait is a representation of a person, you won't always recognize a real person in a head. Horst Antes makes heads that are notable for their design: he paints them in profile.

## Caricature

A caricature is a send-up of a person. You can recognize the person at once. The artist greatly exaggerates the personal characteristics, such as the size and shape of the eyebrows, nose, mouth and ears. As in this caricature of Mr. Bean, the exaggeration is usually very **expressive**. A caricature is stylized, and all parts are drawn in the same clear style.

A **cartoon** depicts a situation in a funny or mocking manner. Cartoon figures are often caricatures.

A. de Harde: *Mr. Bean*, 1995

H. Antes: *Head with Hand*, 1978

B. van der Helst: *Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard in Celebration of the Peace of Munster,* 1649

## Group portrait (figure piece)

In a figure piece, the human figure determines the painting. Together the figures act out a scene from a story, as in *Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard in Celebration of the Peace of Munster* by Van der Helst or *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* by David. Without the story, it would be just a group portrait. The militia guards that Van der Helst has portrayed are celebrating the end of the Eighty Years' War. Paintings of militia guards (*schutterstukken*) were popular in the Dutch Republic in the Golden Age. The more you paid to be in the picture, the more prominently you were displayed.

## Biblical or religious scenes

The church and nobility were powerful clients or patrons in the Middle Ages and long afterwards. They gave artists and craftsmen commissions to decorate churches with religious scenes: illustrations of stories from the Bible. Giotto was commissioned by the noble Scrovegni family to paint their home chapel. Scrovegni hoped this would win him a place in heaven. In *The Judas Kiss,* Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. That is how he showed the soldiers who Jesus was, when they came to capture him.

## Mythological scenes

Mythology is the knowledge of the ancient tales of the gods, the myths, of a people. In *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* David illustrates a mythical story from the history of Rome.
Greek and Roman gods and epics have had a great influence on the visual arts and literature in Europe. Particularly the stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have inspired many artists.

## Pose

When someone takes a photo of you, you want to make sure you look your best. You strike a pose that makes you look good. Van der Helst posed all the individuals in *Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard*. This gives the painting a theatrical look. People also posed for the *Sabines*.
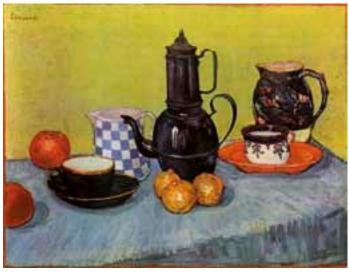During their apprenticeships, artists learned all the knowledge and skills needed to faithfully depict the human body. Much attention was paid to anatomy (showing postures, proportions and the structure of the body). Students learned sculpting, drawing and painting from a live model posing for them. Posing for a painting or drawing is called modelling.

Giotto: *The Judas Kiss*, 1306



J. David: *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, 1799

V. van Gogh: *Still Life with Blue Coffee Pot, 1888*



W. Claesz Heda: *Still Life*, 1627

## Still life

As the term suggests, nothing moves (is alive) in a still life. The French speak of 'nature morte', dead nature. Usually still lives are representations of flowers, a collection of objects, fruits and food. The articles are carefully placed together, as in the painting by Willem Claesz Heda. He put his objects in front and behind each other so that they belong together. He chose the lighting carefully. Still lives became a trend in the Dutch Republic in 1500. With still lives, artists could show off their technique and demonstrate how well they could paint. Displaying the true colours, shine and shadows of lemon rind was especially very difficult.

## Light source

Light sources include a candle, a lamp, the sun, the moon or a fire. Not all still lives and other paintings show the source of light, as you can see in the paintings on this page. Light sources not only provide light but also create shadows and glare. They set the tone of the representation.
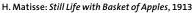
## Background - foreground

The background is the space behind the main part of the representation. The foreground is in front.

Willem Claesz Heda and Vincent van Gogh treated the background of their still lives as a flat plane. In *Still Life with Basket of Apples* by Henri Matisse the background is decorated with colourful planes and lines. The foreground is largely taken up by a cloth hanging over the red box. What effect does the background have in Van Gogh's still life when you compare it to the painting by Matisse?
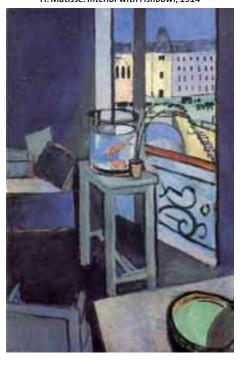
## Interior

In *Interior with fishbowl* Henri Matisse gives us an interior that shows us more than just the inside of a house. It is actually a combination of an interior, a still life and a landscape. The landscape, in this case a cityscape, is visible through the window. An interior is a *genre* in painting, like the portrait, still life or landscape genres.
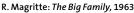
H. Matisse: *Still Life with Basket of Apples*, 1913



H. Matisse: *Interior with Fishbowl*, 1914

R. Magritte: *The Big Family*, 1963


Logo of the Mini car

## Symbol

The concepts of faith, hope and love, freedom, justice, loyalty, evil or peace all have their own symbols. The best known is the heart as a symbol of love. But there are many other symbols, such as numbers, flags, letters or symbols on traffic signs. Even animals are used as symbols. The dove stands for love and peace, and also symbolizes the soul of someone who has just died. Given the title of his painting, Magritte apparently thinks differently about pigeons. There are also mysterious symbolic animals that do not really exist, like the phoenix, a mythical bird that could rise from its ashes after death.

## Pictogram, icon

One picture speaks a thousand words. That's why you find pictograms and icons everywhere, including the apps on your tablet or smartphone. It's logical: everyone understands these images at once or has learned what they mean. Pictograms are used widely as warning or information signs in stations and airports. These images stand for one or more words. That's why the use of symbols is also called imagery. Pictogram literally means painted letter: picto comes from the Latin 'pictus' (painted) and gram comes from 'gramma' (letter).

## Logo, trademark

A logo is a symbol or emblem of a company, institution or city. It may be purely graphic (icon or symbol), a piece of text, or a combination of both. A company chooses its logo to match its unique corporate image. During the rise of the car-making industry many manufacturers chose to use a fast animal in their logo. Jaguar even took on the name. In the logo of the Mini you can make out the sleek, stylized form of wings. Why would they have chosen wings for the Mini?

## Attribute

An attribute is an object that belongs to someone and that you can recognize him or her by. A crown is the attribute of a king or queen. The statue of Lady Justice at law courts has a set of scales for an attribute. A coat of arms is an attribute belonging to a noble family. The German emperor wore an eagle on his shield. The eagle is a symbol of power, beauty and independence.

Twitter logo



German emperor at a tournament, 1453