

Texture, Tactility

by Sophia



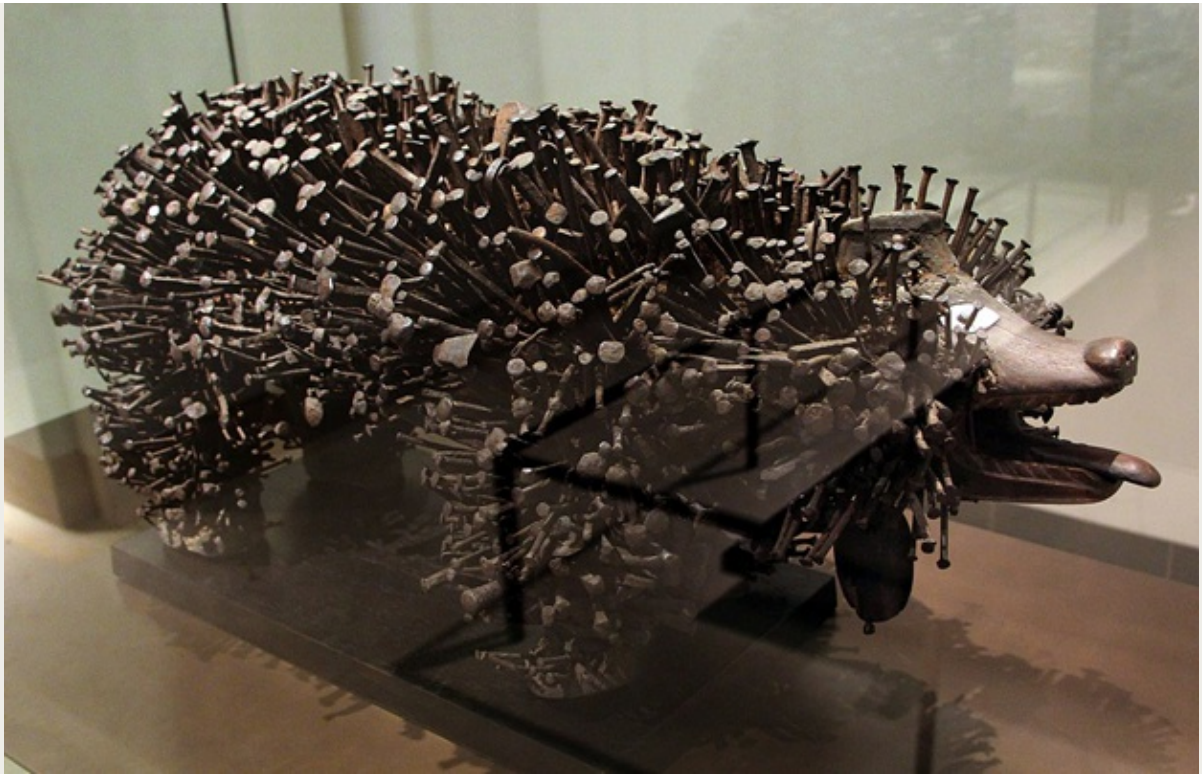
WHAT'S COVERED

Artists use many different techniques when creating works of art. Texture is just one tool that is used to create specific characteristics in artwork. In this lesson, you will learn about:

1. Texture

If you could touch a piece of art, how might it feel? **Texture** and tactility refer to the way in which the work of art would feel if a person could touch it. Nkisi figures from central Africa might be made of wood or ceramic and have nails, pins, and pegs that are hammered or inserted into them as part of oath-taking ceremonies. This nkisi is a dog and is almost completely covered in nails. Notice the difference in texture between the dog's face and the nails covering its body.

IN CONTEXT



Nkisi figure

Central Africa

18th century

Wood, metal, and porcelain

Nkisi figures come from central Africa, from what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. Originally, they were made of wood or ceramic and filled with medicine known as bilongo, which activated their forces. These figures were used in oath-making ceremonies between people and served the function of maintaining law and order and resolving disputes. Every time an oath would be taken, the two participants would hammer nails into the surface of the figure. This particular figure is a dog and would be referred to as a nkisi kozo.

You may notice that this object had a very specific function and was not a work of art in the way that we understand it in the United States. At the same time, the interplay of textures and materials in this object make it visually interesting and similar to a work of traditional sculpture. Learning the reasons why people made these objects and what they mean is an important stage in appreciating them on their own terms and not trying to force Western definitions of art on them.



TERM TO KNOW

Texture

How the surface of a work of art would feel if one could touch it, or its visible, tactile qualities.

2. Texture in Painting

Historically, painters were trained how to hide or eliminate the appearance of **brushstrokes**. The term

painterly, in contrast, refers to a style of painting that *emphasized* the brushstroke in the application of paint. The brushstroke and application of paint are major features of the painting when using this style.

IN CONTEXT

The impressionistic painters often made the brushstroke itself an important feature of the painting. While Monet was out of the studio painting on-site trying to capture natural phenomena, for example, he often used these techniques. The way light plays on the water is an example of a scene in which an artist might use this technique.

Take a look below at a close-up of the painting *Starry Night* by Vincent van Gogh. You can see thick buildup of paint on the surface of the painting here. This is an example of **impasto**, or the thick buildup of paint, usually oil or acrylic, on the surface of a painting.



Vincent van Gogh

Starry Night

Here is a painting of the Waterloo Bridge by Claude Monet. Looking closely, you can actually see where the brush applied a dollop of paint. This showcases the individual brushstrokes.



Claude Monet
Waterloo Bridge



TERMS TO KNOW

Painterly

A style of painting (such as Impressionism) that emphasizes the brushstroke action of applying paint to a surface.

Brushstroke

The visible mark of the paintbrush on the surface of a painting.

Impasto

The thick buildup of paint, usually oil or acrylic, on the surface of a painting.

3. Mixed Media

An artist does not always choose to use one medium exclusively when creating works of art. Mixed media is an art form that incorporates different types of media, such as paper, paint, found objects, etc., into one work of art.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Below is an example of mixed media. This is one of the place settings included in *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago. The media include porcelain, quilted fabric, and embroidery. The media used in this work were very important to creating its meaning because they are associated with craft and women's work rather than high art. In making this work, Judy Chicago listed the names of over one thousand women who were important to arts and culture but had been excluded. She was also making a visual argument that media associated with craft can be just as serious as painting and

sculpture. At the same time, one of the main problems with *The Dinner Party* is its lack of representation of women of color. The Sojourner Truth place setting was the only one dedicated to an African American woman. What other famous women of color could have been included here?



Judy Chicago

Sojourner Truth place setting from *The Dinner Party*

1975–1979

Multimedia



TERM TO KNOW

Mixed Media

Any type of art that combines different artistic media.

4. Sculptural Texture

These techniques are not only seen in works on paper, such as paintings. Texture can be seen in sculptures as well. Below is an African mask that includes many different textures due to the use of different materials, including shells, beads, fabric, wood, and paint. Even the repetition of geometric shapes and lines creates a visual texture. This mask represents a woman and honors women generally speaking, but men wear it in performances.



Face mask (Ngady Mwaash)

Kuba, Democratic Republic of Congo

Late 19th–mid 20th century



BIG IDEA

Texture is an important element of composition. In certain artistic movements, texture is a defining characteristic of that movement.



SUMMARY

Texture is often an important and defining element of a piece of artwork. Texture includes all of the visible, tactile qualities that help us envision how the work of art might feel. **Painterly**, one technique to incorporate texture, uses defined brushstrokes instead of attempting to hide the strokes. **Mixed media** brings types of media, such as paper, paint, found objects, etc., into one work of art. Texture can even be seen in sculptures. Marble is a common medium used in **sculptural texture**, as fine details are easy to achieve due to the materials.

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TERMS TO KNOW

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Mixed Media

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Texture

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