

Columbia University Masterpieces of Western Art: Glossary

Abacus—The square slab located as the uppermost element of the capital of a column; sometimes molded or otherwise decorated, and supporting the architrave.

Aisle—Longitudinal passageway located to either side of the nave (central space) or transepts of a basilican church plan.

Ambulatory—The passageway surrounding the apse or hemicycle located at the east end of a basilican church plan. Chapels located along the outer perimeter of the ambulatory are sometimes referred to as radiating chapels.

Apsé—The semicircular or polygonal space containing the high altar located at the east end of a basilican church plan

Arch—A structural element spanning an opening, round-headed or pointed, resting on columns or piers, designed to transfer the vertical thrust of a roofing system (usually stone vaults) to either side of the opening.

Architrave—The lowermost horizontal element of a classical entablature (upper structure) resting directly on the capitals of the supporting columns.

Axial Chapel—A chapel located on the main axis of a building. The apse of a basilican church plan may be referred to as an axial chapel.

Bar Tracery—Stone openwork of molded mullions that divide a window into segments in decorative patterns, common in the clerestory and rose windows of Gothic churches.

Barrel Vault—Round-headed stone vault supported by parallel walls or arcades.

Base of Column—The lowermost element at the bottom of a column. Columns in the Doric Order do not have bases.

Buttress—Pier-like vertical masonry elements built to strengthen or support walls or resist the lateral thrust of vaults.

Cantilever Construction—Construction employing a horizontally projecting member unsupported at one end often using concrete and steel building materials. Falling Water by Frank Lloyd Wright is an example of cantilever construction.

Capital—The uppermost member of a column often carved in a decorative manner and conforming to one of the architectural orders (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian).

Cartoon—A full-size preparatory drawing made for the purpose of transferring a design to the working surface of a painting, tapestry, or other large work. Raphael's cartoon for the lower section of the School of Athens is one of the most important examples surviving from the Renaissance.

Caryatid—A supporting architectural element serving the function of a pier, column, or pilaster and carved in the form of a draped female figure.

Cella (pl. cellae)—The main sanctuary or ceremonial space in a Greek temple.

Choir—The space in a basilican church plan located between the crossing of the nave and the apse, reserved for choristers and clergy. Sometimes referred to as the chancel.

Clerestory—Literally, a clear story. In a basilican church, the uppermost section of the nave wall, located above the triforium, and rising the roofs covering the lateral aisles, pierced by a row of windows to admit light into the nave. Clerestory windows often contain stained glass depicting Old and New Testament subjects.

Colonnade—A rows of columns supporting an entablature (upper structure) and often one side of a roof surrounding a building, such as a Greek temple.

Colonnettes—Slender columns attached to supporting columns or piers in Gothic architecture.

Column—Cylindrical, upright masonry architectural elements usually comprised of three sections: a base, capital, and shaft supporting an entablature. Columns arranged in rows form a colonnade. The space between each column is called the intercolumniation.

Compound Pier—Vertical supporting structural elements composed of several engaged (or attached) columns or pilasters grouped around a central core exhibiting a complex profile or shape characteristic of Gothic architecture.

Contrapposto (from the Latin *contrapositus*, i.e., placed opposite)—Arranged graceful posture of the human body in which the body parts (head, arms, and legs) are set on oblique axes, balanced but asymmetrical, turning around the body's vertical axis resulting in hips, shoulders, and head turned in different directions. The Greek sculpture of the Doryphorous is the most famous example of this posture.

Cornice—The projecting, uppermost horizontal member of classical entablatures.

Crossing—The square space in a basilican church plan where the transept intersects with the nave, often marked by a tower known as the crossing tower.

Diagonal Rib—Slender stone moldings, or arched supports, called ribs arranged in a diagonal formation and positioned along the groins (or joins) of a vault, crossing in the center, used either to mask the groins or to support or decorate the vault.

Doric Order—The architectural order characterized by columns, generally without bases, relatively simple capitals, and a frieze composed of alternating triglyphs and metopes.

Drawing—The application of lines on a surface, often paper, using a pencil, pen, chalk, or some other tracing instrument to delineate forms such as the human figure or landscape elements. Drawings are often used to plan and develop the elements of a composition in preparation for a painting or fresco.

Drypoint—Intaglio print-making process using a sharp needle held like a pencil to scratch lines into the surface of a metal plate creating a burr that yields a soft and velvety line in the final print. Drypoint may be used in conjunction with etching and engraving to heighten atmospheric effects.

Echinus—The convex moldings supporting the abaci of Doric capitals and appearing between the volutes on Ionic capitals.

Engraving—Intaglio print-making process in which the design is incised with a graver or burin into the metal printing plate. The lines cut into the surface of the plate receive the ink and are printed on paper.

Entablature—The complex horizontal upper structure of a Greek temple supported by columns, divided into an architrave, frieze, and pediment.

Etching—Intaglio print-making process in which the design is scratched into the surface of an acid-resistant coating the surface of a metal printing plate; the plate is exposed to acid, which etches the design on the plate where the metal is exposed. The lines cut into the surface of the plate receive the ink and are printed on paper.

Façade—The principal exterior face of a building designed to emphasize a main entrance and sometimes decorated with sculptural programs, such as the west façade of Amiens Cathedral.

Fluted Shaft—The decorative surface treatment on the shaft of a column characterized by regularly spaced vertical parallel grooves referred to as flutes.

Flying Buttress—Exterior stone supports in the form of arches located between an upright pier or buttress and the building wall designed to transmit the thrust of a vault or roof from the upper part of a wall outward to the pier or buttress. The exterior of Gothic cathedrals is characterized by flying buttresses usually located along the sides of the nave and around the choir or east end of the building.

Fountains—Ornamental, ceremonial or practical monuments designed with apertures for the emission of water and sometimes decorated with sculpture, such as Gianlorenzo Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers located in the Piazza Navona in Rome.

Fresco—Mural painting technique applying water-based pigments to freshly laid lime plaster, used extensively in Italy from the 13th through the 18th centuries. The process depends on the absorption of the water-based pigments into the damp plaster forming a durable bond that, when dried, actually forms part of the substance of the plaster wall surface. Because plaster dries rapidly, only small sections may be painted at one time.

Frieze (continuous)—Middle horizontal member of a classical entablature, above the architrave and below the cornice, designed as an uninterrupted band.

Frieze (metopes and triglyphs)—Middle horizontal member of a classical entablature, above the architrave and below the cornice. In the Doric Order, the frieze is decorated with alternating segments of metopes and triglyphs.

Groin Vault—A vault characterized by sharp ridges or edges on the interior surface formed by the intersection of two or more tunnel or barrel vaults.

Hemicycle—The semicircular space at the east end of a basilican church plan.

Hypostyle Hall—Ceremonial space containing a large number of closely placed columns supporting the roof, characteristic of ancient Egyptian religious structures, and constructed using the post and lintel system.

Ionic Order—The architectural order characterized by capitals with volutes, richly carved moldings, and fluted columns with bases.

Jamb—The vertical elements framing the sides of a door (portal) or window. In Gothic architecture, the jambs of the portals are often arranged in an extended design that spreads outward (splayed) and decorated with sculpture called jamb figures.

Jamb Figure—Sculptured figures located on the jambs, or vertical side elements, of a portal or doorway. In medieval architecture, jamb figures usually represent Old and New Testament figures or Christian saints.

Lancet—Slender windows with pointed lancet arches at the top, common in Gothic architecture.

Metopes—Panels arranged in alternation with triglyphs located in the Doric frieze of a Greek temple, often carved with figural relief sculpture depicting mythological scenes such as the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs in the Parthenon.

Naos (pl. naoi)—The principal ceremonial chamber in a Greek temple, often housing the monumental statue of the deity.

Nave—The main central space of a basilican church plan interior extending from the entrance to the choir. The pierced side walls, usually opening onto side-aisles, are composed of the nave arcade (columns or piers supporting arches), the triforium and the clerestory, often covered by a vaulted ceiling.

Nave Arcade—The row of columns or piers supporting arches along the lower section of the nave in a basilican church. The nave arcade is usually surmounted by a triforium and clerestory.

Nave Vault—The stone ceiling or roofing system based on arch construction covering the nave of a basilican church, divided into sections, or bays, usually supported by diagonal ribs and transverse arches. In Amiens Cathedral, each bay is composed of four sections and is therefore called a quadripartite vault.

Pediment—Low-pitched triangular gable located above the horizontal architrave and frieze on the narrow ends of a Greek temple, sometimes filled with sculptural groupings depicting mythological events. In the Parthenon, the east pediment contained sculptures representing the Birth of Athena and the west pediment contained sculptures representing the Contest between Athena and Poseidon.

Pier—A square or rectangular vertical masonry supporting element used on both the exterior and interior of buildings.

Pilier Cantonne—A column with engaged colonnettes or shafts forming a complex profile and characteristic of Gothic architecture.

Pointed Arch—A structural member spanning an opening in which the wedge-shaped stones (voussoirs) are arranged so the apex of the arch is a point. Pointed arches are a characteristic structural feature of Gothic architecture.

Portal—A prominent, monumental entrance on the façade of a building designed to emphasize the importance of the entrance, sometimes decorated with sculpture such as the portals on the west façade of Amiens Cathedral.

Portico—A roofed space or porch, open along at least one side and usually associated with an entrance, supported by a colonnade, often surmounted by a pediment, and resting on a wide flight of steps.

Portrait Bust—Portrait representations of the head and shoulders of a human figure, often sculpture, such as in Gianlorenzo Bernini's portraits of Cardinal Scipione Borghese and Costanza Bonarelli.

Post and Lintel—A simple construction system using upright posts or columns supporting horizontal beams or lintels, used in buildings such as the Parthenon. It is one of the oldest construction systems used also in Egyptian temples as well as prehistoric sites such as Stonehenge in England.

Pronaos (pl. pronaoi)—The open vestibule or entrance chamber in front of the naos or cella of a Greek temple.

Pteromata (pl. pteroma)—A passageway between the walls of the cella and the columns of the peristyle in a Greek temple.

Quadripartite Vault—Vaults divided into four vaulting cells or sections, as in the nave vaults of Amiens Cathedral.

Quatrefoil—Framing devices composed of four equal lobes separated by cusps, as seen on the lower jambs of the west façade of Amiens Cathedral.

Radiating Chapels—Chapels located along the outer perimeter of the ambulatory in the east end of basilican church plan. Chapels may be defined as any space used for worship or veneration in a Christian church, often dedicated to an individual saint or Christian episode.

Ribbed Vault—Vaults that include slender arched moldings or supports called ribs, used either as structural or decorative elements arranged in a diagonal formation on the surface of the vault and crossing in the center. The brick or stone covering spanning each section between the ribs is called the web. Ribbed vaults are usually composed of four (quadripartite) or six (sexpartite) sections.

Rose Window—Monumental circular windows formed with patterned stone tracery and filled with stained glass located in the west facade or transept facades of a Christian church.

Round Arch—Curved or semi-circular structural elements, spanning openings and transmitting vertical thrusts to either side of the opening. A series of uninterrupted round arches constitutes a tunnel or barrel vault.

Stereobate—The massive stone substructures located below the stylobate (pavement) in a Greek temple.

Stylobate—The uppermost course of pavement on which columns rest in a Greek temple. The stylobate rests on the stereobate.

Transept—Transverse arms of a basilican church plan set at right angles to the nave. The lateral spaces of the transept are referred to as the north and south transepts or transept arms. The area where the transept and nave intersect is called the crossing, sometimes surmounted by a tower, and providing a monumental space separating the nave and the choir.

Transverse Rib or Arch—Monumental stone arches (ribs) located at right angles to the longitudinal axis of the nave in a basilican church, dividing the space and the vaults into regular bays or compartments.

Triforium—Arcaded register or level of the wall in a basilican church interior located between the arcade and clerestory that corresponds to the space between the side-aisle vault and the lean-to roof above that vault. The triforium may be blind (no passageway) or may include a passageway set behind it. The triforium may be glazed, e.g., the wall behind the triforium is pierced by windows, as is the case in the choir of Amiens Cathedral.

Triglyphs—The characteristic ornamental panels located on the frieze of the entablature of the Doric Order, consisting of a raised block composed of three vertical bands separated by indented flutes or channels.

Triptych—Altarpieces composed of painted or carved panels arranged in a tripartite design, often hinged so that the outer wings fold over the central portion. Examples include works by Hieronymous Bosch.

Trumeau Figure—A sculptural figure located on the upright pillar (trumeau) located in the center of a large doorway or portal. The trumeau supports the horizontal lintel spanning the top of the doorway.

Tympanum (pl. tympana)—The triangular or segmental spaces enclosed by a pediment (Classical Architecture) or fitted within an arch (Medieval Architecture) often embellished with sculptural decoration representing mythological scenes (The Parthenon) or Christian subjects (Amiens Cathedral).

Upright Buttress—Substantial pier-like masonry structural members designed to strengthen or support walls or resist the lateral thrust of vaults.

Vault—A ceiling or roof constructed of brick or stone built on the principal of the round or pointed arch designed to transmit outward and downward thrust along structural members such as columns, piers and buttresses. Major vault types include barrel vaults, groin vaults and rib vaults.

West Façade—The principal exterior face of a Christian building located on the west end of the structure and often embellished with sculptural programs representing Old and New Testament subjects as well as episodes from the lives of the saints.

West Façade Portals—The principal entranceways on the west face or façade of a Christian church designed as impressive, monumental doorways often embellished with sculptural programs including jamb figures and tympana representing Old and New Testament subjects as well as episodes from the lives of the saints.