**MODULE 2.1**

**UNIT III**

**THE MEDIUM OF ARTS**

**Medium and Technique**

**Medium Defined**

Unless an artist translates his experience into a form that can be perceived, it cannot be shared by other people. Art has to exist in some medium to be recognized as such.

Medium in art refers to the material or means which the artist uses to objectify his feeling or thought: pigment in painting; stone, wood and metl in sculpture; various building materials in architecture; sound in music, words in literature; and budy movements in the dance.

According to medium, the arts are classified into:

1. The ***visual or space arts*** – those whose medium can be seen and which occupy space. These in turn are grouped into two categories:
2. *The two-dimensional arts*, such as painting, drawing, printmaking and photography, and
3. *The three-dimensional arts*, such as sculpture, architecture, landscaping, community planning, industrial design and the crafts like ceramics and furniture-making.
4. The **auditory or time arts** – those whose medium can be heard and which are expressed in time. These are music and literature.
5. The **combined arts** – those whose mediums can be both seen and heard, and which exist in both space and time. These include the dance, the drama, the opera, and the movies. Along with music, there are also known as the performing arts, because each art work is apprehended as a happening. Each requires time in which to occur. These arts depend for their continued existence on repeated performance.

As you must have noticed, the arts may be enjoyed primarily through either the visual or the auditory sense, or through both, although other senses help toward their enjoyment. The sense of touch, for example, enhances the appreciation of sculpture and textile design.

**The Artist and His Medium**

When an artist proceeds to give shape to his vision, his first thoughts are on what medium to employ. There are no fixed rules governing the choice of materials and processes to use. Sometimes the requirements of a patron or the nature of the work leaves the artist no choice at all. Oftentimes, however, the matter of selecting the medium is left entirely to the artist himself.

An artist’s choice is usually influenced by such practical considerations as the availability of material, the use to which the art object will be put, the idea that he wants to communicate, and the nature and special characteristics of the medium itself. The artist normally selects the material that he can handle well and that would best suit his purpose as well as adequately bring out the qualities which he wants it to show.

When an artist chooses to paint in oil instead of watercolor, he does so because he feels that oil paint has characteristics that make it a better medium to express his idea. When a designer decides on the material for a furniture set, he thinks about the set’s precise function. Living room furniture call for grace, comfort and elegance; hence, its materials must show these qualities.

The nature of each medium determines the way it an be worked and turned into a work of art. Stone must be chiseled, metal must be cast.

The nature of the medium also determines what can be expressed through it. Only subjects that are captured or frozen in one moment of time can be shown by the mediums of the space arts. Actual movement cannot be reflected in stone, for example. Paintings can show people in certain poses, not in motion. Through multiple exposure, a photograph can at best only suggest sequenes of movements.

Each medium has its own range of characteristics which determine the physical appearance of the finished product. Wood is capable of a smooth, shiny finish; it can be carved in great detail. But limestone is rough-textured and is good only for massive work which call for simple lines.

Each medium has inherent limitations, as well as potentials. And it is a wise artist wh accepts these limitations and at the same time exploits them. For each medium has its own way of behaving. Although it responds to the artist’s way of handling it, it nevertheless imposes its will on him, daring him to explore its various possibilities.

**The Artist and His Technique**

A good artist make his medium work for him to produce effects he cannot possibly attain by any other means. An artist’s knowledge of his medium and his skill in making it achieve what he wants it to, make up what is called technique. A poet’s technique is his way of putting words together to express an emotion or narrate a story. A pianist’s technique is his skill in handling the instrument and in interpreting a musical composition.

Obviously, artists differ from each other in technique even if they work with the same medium. Each artist, working with the same medium may employ a different technique at another time for another purpose. Technique is adapted as the need arises.

It is in the use of technique that the artist differs from the craftsman. The making of a piece of sculpture, for instance, is not the same as the making of a spoon or a cabinet. Although both require technical competence, creativity enters into the work of the sculptor. His work is amost always in response to some leap of imagination as some critics put it. It is an attempt to objectivity an original, imagined design and in the process of working his material, he exploits every possibility that the medium offers, never really knowing how his work will turn out until it is finished. The process then becomes some kind of adventure to him. He uses technique only as a means to an end.

Not so with the craftsman. He merely follows the dictates of the designer and is concerned exclusively wiht the manipulation of hte material in order to produce the kind of product that he is expected to turn out. He is not free to innovate. At best, he is a mere copyist, using technique as an end in itself.

Originality, then, is what distinguishes an art from a craft – originality in expression, at least, for there is really no such thing as a completely original work of art.

In judging a work of art, what matters is not so much the technical virtuousity of he art as how well he has employed his means – medium and technique – to achieve his end.

**3.1 THE MEDIUMS OF THE VISUAL ARTS**

**3.1.1Painting and the Related Arts**

**Painting Mediums**

Painting is the process of applying pigment on a smooth surface – paper, cloth, canvas, wood or plaster – to secure an interesting arrangement of forms, lines, and colors. Pigment, that part of hte paint which supplies the color, is fine poweder ground from some clay, stone or mineral, exptracted from vegetable matter or produced by a chemical process. It is mixed with a binder, usually a liquid, that allows the powder to be spread over the flat surface until it dries. This substance is called a vehicle

Each kind of paint has unique qualities that the artist can use to advantage.

*Encaustic*. Encaustic, one of the early mediums, is the application of a mixture of hot beeswax, resin, and ground pigment to any porous surface, followed by the application of heat to set the colors and bind them to the ground. When the surface cools, it is polished with a cloth. This gives the wax a soft luster that heightens its transluscent quality.

The Egyptians, Greeks and Romans used encaustic to paint portraits on coffins.

*Tempera*. Tempera paints are earth or mineral pigments mixed with egg yolk and egg white. Since the paint dries quickly, corrctions are difficult to make. Thus, the artist using this medium must plan his design well.

In the past, tempera was most often used for painting on vellum in the poduction of books. Now tempera is normally applied on wooden panels carefully surfaced with gesso, a combination of gypsum or chalk and gelatin or glue.

*Fresco*. Fresco painting is the application of earth pigments mixed with water on a plaster wall while the plaster is damp. Color then sinks into the surface and becomes an integral part of the wall. The image becomes permanently fixed and lasts as long as the wall exists.

The most famous example of fresco apiting is that done my Michelangelo of the Sistine chapel ceiling. Leonardo da Vinci painted his Last Supper on the refectory wall of hte Santa Maria della Grazie Convent in Milan. However, his experiment in painting on a dry wall with a medium that was not mixed with water resulted in a work that began to deteriorate ot longafter he had finished it.

*Watercolor*. Watercolor in tempered paint made of pure ground pigment bound with gum arabic. Painters apply watercolor in thin, almost transparent films. The surface of the paper then shows thorugh giving a delicate, luminous texture to the painting. Gouache is paint in which the pgiment has been mixed with a chalklike material. This materials makes the paint opaque.

Normally, watercolor painting has to be done in one sitting. Spontaneity is its very essence. There can be very little orno corrections made at all with watercolor.

*Oil*. In oil painting, pigment ground in linseed oil is applied to primed canvas. Traditionally, artists either ground their own colors or had the work done by apprentices. Present-day oil paint, however, is factory-prepared and comes in tubes. Since it is rather thick, it has to be thinned with oils, turpentine or any other solvent before it is applied on canvas.

Oil paint is a very flexible medium. Using a brush, an air brush, a palette kniefe or even his bare hands the artists can apply the paint thinly or thickly as a transparent film or an opaque surface. Sometimes it is applied to smootly that we are not aware of the artist’s brush strokes.

The transluscent quality of oil allows one color painted underneath another to show through. Thus, the direct method of superimposing transparent layers of colors can result in an exciting mingling of tomes and fine gradations of light and dark.

Oil paints ar slow to dry and the painting can be changed and worked over a long period of time. When oil dries, it forms a tough, glossy film on the surface.

*Acrylic*. Synthetic paints using acrylic polymer emulsions as binder as the newest mediums and the one that are widely used by today’s painters. They have many advantages. For one thing, they combine the transparency and quick drying characteristics of watercolor and the flexibility of oil. They are completely insoluble when dry, and theycan be used on almost any surface. They can be applied thinly with a water dripped brush or laid on in thick impastos with a knife. Unlike oil, acrylic paints do not tend to crack, turn yellow or darken with age.

**3.1.2 Mosaic**

Mosaic art is related to painting only because it creates pictures on flat surfaces. Mosaics are wall or floor decorations made of small cubes or irregularity cut pieces of colored stone or glass called tesserae. These are fitted together to form a pattern and glued on a surface with plaster or cement.

The traditional mosaic technique consistd in embedding individual tesserae directly into a wall of damp mortar, following a well-planned design or cartoon. In the modern process, the tesserae are glued with a special paste to sheets of paper on which segments of hte whole design have been drawn in reverse. These sheets are pressed, tesserae side down, agains the wet mortar freshly applied on the wall. The temporary paper support is peeled or washed off when the mortar has set.

Mosaic art was an important feature of Byzantine churches. A very famous mosaic is that of Empress Theodora an her attendant, which can be found in the church of San Vitale of Ravemna, Italy.

Examples of religious art in the Philippines done in mosaic are found at Sta. Cruz Church in Manila and at the Victorias Church in Negros Occidental. The altar design at Sta. Cruz Church shows a wounded white lamb, symbolizing Christ, straddling a stream that flows down to the tabernacle. Th wall mosaic at the Victorias Church depicts scenes from the New Testament and shows Christ, Mary, Joseph and the Apostles in the garb of Filipino peasants. Th tesserae used are bits of glass from beer, cold cream and blue medicine bottles collected by the workers of the sugar central and their families.

**3.1.3 Stained Glass**

Stained glass developed a major art when it appeared as an important part of the Gothic cathedral. It served many purposes. Stained glass windows admitted the much-needed light that was missingfrom the Romanesque churches. By doing this, they enlivened the otherwise tomblike interiors and introduced a brightand warm atmosphere. They were also means of religious, instruction, depicting scenes form the Bible and from the lives of saints.

Stained glass derives its effects from the variations in the light that shines through it. It is transluscent glass colored by mixing metallic oxides into the molten glass or by fixing them onto the surface of the clear glass. The glass is then cut into shapes determined by the artist’s design. These pieces are finally assembled into the desired image and held together by strips of lead. Because there is a very sharp division of lines and colors, it is very difficult to achieve much espressive detail in stained glass windows. Big window panels are frequently supported further by iron rods placed in strategic positions.

**3.1.4 Tapestry**

The walls of palaces, castles and chapels in Europe were decorated in the Middle Ages with hangings called tapestries. These hanging added color to the drab interiors and also served to retain in the room whatever heat was generated from the fireplace.

Tapestries are fabrics into which colored designs have been woven. In making tapestry, the weaver closely follows a pattern, the actual size of the finished tapestry which is placed under the warp threads on the loom. A shuttle is employed to weave each color thread used as weft over the area where the color appears in the pattern.

**3.1.5 Drawing**

Drawing is the most fundamental of all skills needed in the arts. All designed objects are first visualized in drawings before they are actually made.

A drawing may be a study made for the sake of learning how to draw some forms or as a means of investigating a particular detail of what may eventually become a larger composition. It may be a sketch showing the general organization or design of a product being planned. It may be a cartoon, such as the fullsize work meant to be a basis for some other work like a tapestry or a relief print. Or it may be a finished work in itself.

Drawing can be done with various mediums. The mostcommon these is pencil, the lead (graphite) of which comes in differing harness, from soft and smudgy to very hard and needlelike, making possible a wide range of values.

Ink, one of the oldest material still in use, allows for a great variety of qualities, depending on the tools and techniques used in applying the ink and the surfaces on which it is applied. India ink comes in liquid form, chinese ink in solid sticks that are dissolved in water before use. Bistre and sepia are two kinds of ink that artists use extensively. Bistre is gray brown ink made from the soot produced by burning some resinous wood and sepia, a strong dark-brown ink, comes from the ink sacs of cuttlefish or squid.

Pen and ink drawing are characterized by precisely controlled and uniformly wide lines. When done in combination with washes, they offer an interesting contrast to the soft and shadowy quality of the wash background. Chinese ink drawing, often executed on silk or rice paper with a brush, are either in monochrome ink or in combination of ink lines and watercolor.

Pastel and chalk are dry pigment held together with a gum binder and compressed into sticks.. chalk is usually employed in preliminary sketches. As finished works of art, these drawings are quite fragile and must be sprayed iwth a fixative to prevent the pgiment from rubbing off.

Charcoal is especially useful in representing broad masses of light and shadow. Charcoal may justcome from a burned twig or piece of wood, but in modern manufacture, charcoal sticks or pencils are made from particles of carbon mixed with a binder and compressed. Available in a wide range of hardness, theycan be used directly for crisp lines or rubbed to velvety tones, while the hardest produces the lightest, grayest ones.

Crayons are pigment bound by wax and compressed into sticks. They adhere well to the paper surface but they do not lend themselves to rubbing to achieve gradations in value.

Silverpoint, popular during the Renaissance, is not in general use today. In this medium, a silver-pointed instrument or a silver wire is drawn over a sheet of paper prepared beforehand with zinc white. It then produces a thin, even graying line that cannot be erased.

**3.1.6 Printmaking**

A print is a graphic image that results from a duplicating process. The technique of printmaking involves the preparation of a master image on a plate made of wood metal, or stone from whch the impression is taken. Each print is considered an original work, a reproduction. Although often a fascimile of an orignal work, a reproduction is usually a photomechanically made image, in the making of which which the original artist has no hand at all. Calendar pictures are reproductions.

The making of prints was originally resorted to in order to make many faithful copies of a drawing. Today, printmaking has become an independent art; it is as popular as painting and sculpture.

The four major processes involved in printmaking are the *relief, intaglio, planographic* and *stencil process.*

Relief Painting

Relief painting involves cutting away from a block of weed or linoleum the portions of the design that the artist does not want to show, leaving the design to stand out on the block. The uncut, smooth surface is then covered with ink, which under pressure, leaves an impression on paper on cardboard.

Color prints are made with separate block for each color, as in the Japanese ukiyo-e. The artist must becareful to insure that the color is printed precisely on the proper area.

For linocuts, linoleum is mounted on a block of wood and worked in the same manner as a woodcut. Like the woodcut, the linocut does not allow for great detail in the design. Both lend themselves to bold lines and wide areas of light and dark.

Intaglio Printing

The principles of printing in intaglio are exactly the opposite of those of relief printing. The design is scratched, engraved or etched into a metal plate. The incised line or depressed area is filled with ink, which, under considerable pressure, leaves a sharp impression on damp paper.

Engraving is one of the most highly skilled methods of incising lines into a hard surface. It is done with a cutting tool called a burin.

Drypoint is done with needlelike instruments. Instead of the lines being gonged out, a burr or a tiny curl of metal is left along the edges of the line by the tool drawn across the plate. The resulting printed image has finer lines and a velvety appearance produced by the ink caught in the burr.

The basic procedure of etching involves drawing an image witha blunt needle on a metal plate that has been covered with a protective waxlike film called the ground. Portions of the wax covering are thus scratched away, exposing parts of the metal plate. The plate is then immersed in an acid bath adn the acid slowly eats into the exposed lines and areas. After the plate is cleaned of th acid-resisting coat, it is inked and then wiped clean so that the ink remains only in the incised lines. The plate is then ready for printing.

Aquatint and mezzotint are variations of the etching process. With mezzotint, however, no acid is used. The artist firts roughens the surface of htemetal plate with a tool that looks like a vegetable chopper with many sharp cutting teeth. Some areas are scraped or burnished. Ink is retained in unscraped parts of the plate and so a dark value results; only a trace of ink remains in the scraped areas, and so, the printed area is light.

The Planographic Process

Planographic or surface printing is done from an almost smooth surface whch has been treated chemically or mechanically so that some areas will print and others will not. The lithographic process is based on the fact that grease repels water and that fatty substancs tend to stick to each other. The artist draws his design with a greasy crayon or pencil on a slab special limestone or a zinc plate. The drawing is then fixed with an acid solution. Then a greasy ink is spread over it with a roller. A print can then be made by pressing a piece of paper on the plate.

The Stencil Process

Stencil printing is done by cutting designs out of special paper, cardboard, or metal sheet in such a way that when ink is rubbed over it, the design is reproduced on the surface beneath.

Seisgraphy, or silk-screen printing is fundamentally a multicolor stencil process. The printing is done through a screen which consists of a very fine silk or nylon mesh stretched tightly over a simple wooden frame. Parts of the mesh are blocked out with a stencil and the areas whcih are to print are left open. The screen is then placed over the paper to be printed. Ink or paint is squeezed through the open portions in the mesh onto the paper or cloth underneath. For multicolor prints a separte screen is used for each color.

Contemporary artists often combine different printmaking method to produce new and exciting effects.