

# Exploring Different Art Styles: A Guide to Techniques, Materials and Movements

Art can be expressed in many forms, from intricate realism to bold abstraction. Across centuries, artists have developed distinct styles to convey emotion, tell stories or reflect the world around them. These styles often evolve through experimentation with techniques, tools and materials—ranging from oil paint and charcoal to more contemporary processes such as collage and printmaking. Each approach offers its own visual language and creative possibilities.

Among the many accessible art forms today, lino printing continues to attract attention for its bold, graphic qualities and tactile process. Beginners and experienced artists alike can find inspiration in the tradition of relief printmaking, especially when paired with a carefully chosen [range of lino printing supplies](#) suited to their style and skill level.

This article provides an overview of several key art styles, examining their characteristics, historical contexts and how they can be adapted or combined in contemporary practice.



Photo by [Anna Kolosyuk](#) on [Unsplash](#)

## Realism and Naturalism

**Realism** emerged in the mid-19th century as a response to romanticism, aiming to depict everyday life without idealisation. It focuses on accurate observation, fine detail and the faithful representation of subjects. In both painting and drawing, artists working in a realist style often use graphite, charcoal, oil paint or watercolour to achieve subtle gradations and lifelike textures.

Closely related is **naturalism**, which prioritises anatomical precision, light, and atmospheric effects. Many landscape artists and portrait painters draw on naturalist techniques to bring credibility and depth to their work.

This style can also be found in botanical illustration and scientific drawing, where accuracy is essential. Although it may seem distant from more expressive media, realism can inform printmaking processes as well, especially when fine

carving or subtle tonal work is involved.

## Impressionism

Emerging in France during the late 19th century, [Impressionism broke with traditional studio practices](#) by encouraging artists to paint outdoors and capture the fleeting effects of light and colour. Loose brushwork, vibrant palettes and a focus on atmosphere define the style. Impressionist painters such as Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas aimed to record immediate impressions rather than precise details.

Although originally linked to oil painting, impressionistic qualities can be achieved using other media such as pastels, watercolours or acrylics. The emphasis on colour blending and layered mark-making makes this style adaptable across formats, including print-based processes like monotype or painterly relief prints.

## Expressionism

**Expressionism** prioritises emotional response over realism. Originating in Germany in the early 20th century, it is characterised by exaggerated forms, distorted perspectives and intense colour. Expressionist artists sought to convey inner turmoil, anxiety or spiritual insight through dynamic composition and non-naturalistic imagery.

This style lends itself well to bold line work and contrast-heavy media such as ink, woodcut or linocut. The Expressionist group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge) included several artists who experimented with early forms of lino printing and woodblock printing. Their work shows how printmaking can serve not only as a reproduction method but also as a powerful creative form in its own right.

# Abstract Art

**Abstraction** removes direct representation from the image, focusing instead on shapes, colours, textures and movement. Artists working in this style are often more concerned with composition, rhythm or mood than with depicting recognisable subjects.

There are several branches of abstraction, including geometric abstraction (seen in the work of Piet Mondrian or Kazimir Malevich) and lyrical abstraction (such as that developed by Wassily Kandinsky). Abstract art can be deeply meditative, spontaneous or mathematical, depending on the intent behind it.

In printmaking, abstract designs often rely on repeated patterns, texture-building techniques and layered blocks. Relief printing methods, including linocut, are well suited to abstraction due to their capacity for strong shapes and clean lines. The simplicity of carving into a surface and the richness of ink against paper allow for expressive, non-representational imagery.

## Surrealism

Developed in the 1920s, **Surrealism** drew upon dreams, subconscious imagery and unexpected juxtapositions. Influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud, surrealist artists explored irrational and fantastical elements through detailed renderings or collage-based compositions.

Artists such as Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst used traditional techniques to render bizarre, dreamlike scenes with photographic precision. Others, like Joan Miró, adopted a looser, more symbolic approach.

Surrealism continues to inspire contemporary artists across various media, including sculpture, digital art and

printmaking. Linocut and etching can be used to explore surreal ideas, particularly when narrative or symbolic elements are carved into a block and combined across multiple prints.

## Pop Art

[Pop Art arose in the 1950s and 60s](#), embracing popular culture, advertising and mass media as artistic subjects. Bold outlines, flat colour areas and repetition define the style, famously represented by artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein.

This style translates especially well into screen printing and relief techniques, where the focus is on reproducibility and high-impact visuals. Pop Art continues to influence graphic design and illustration, often blending traditional hand-made elements with digital tools.

## Contemporary and Mixed Media

Today, many artists choose to work in a **contemporary** or **mixed media** style, borrowing elements from various historical movements. The boundaries between painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture and digital work are increasingly blurred. Artists may combine found materials, collage, textiles, or photography with traditional techniques to create layered, complex pieces.

In this context, lino printing remains a valuable and versatile component. Blocks can be carved with abstract patterns, figurative scenes or graphic symbols, then integrated into mixed media compositions. The surface quality and tactile nature of hand-printed images offer contrast and depth when paired with other media.

# Choosing a Style and Medium

Artists are not limited to working within a single style. In fact, many develop their own personal approach by experimenting with several techniques. A single subject might be rendered realistically, expressed abstractly or stylised through graphic line work depending on the materials and intent.

Lino printing, in particular, offers a good starting point for exploring both figurative and abstract styles. The process of designing, carving and printing encourages a slower, more intentional approach that suits both bold visual statements and more detailed illustrative work.

Working with well-matched **lino printing supplies**—including quality blocks, tools and inks—allows for better control and creative flexibility. Soft blocks offer easier carving for newcomers, while traditional grey linoleum may be preferred for fine detail and sharper edges.

## Final Thoughts

Understanding different art styles not only deepens appreciation for artistic traditions but also provides a framework for personal experimentation. Whether drawn to the realism of classical drawing, the spontaneity of impressionism or the structure of abstraction, artists have a wide range of [lino cutting tools](#) at their disposal.

Printmaking, and lino printing in particular, offers a valuable bridge between styles. It can be expressive, precise, symbolic or decorative, depending on the artist's goals. With the right materials and an openness to learning, artists can continue to develop and refine their own voice, informed by the rich history of artistic movements that came before.