

WESTERN ART HISTORY

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Many of the terms used in this timeline are illustrated in the vocabulary section on the other side of this chart.

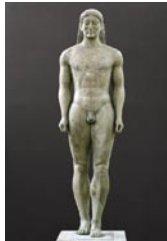
PERIODS IN WESTERN ART

GREEK (C. 900–30 BCE)

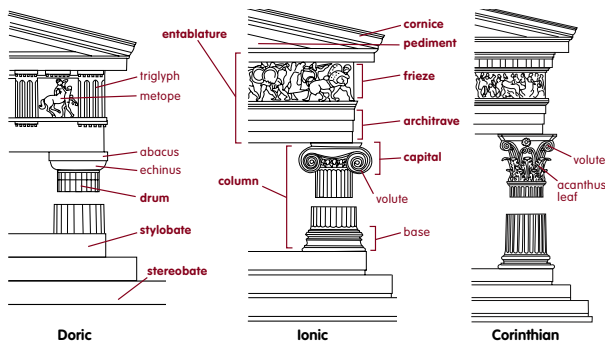
ARCHAIC (C. 700–480 BCE)

As the Greek city-states grew and prospered, many artists competed for commissions to create religious and civic buildings, sculptures, and ceramics.

- Monumental, freestanding **sculptures** first appeared in Greece around 600 BCE. These earliest life-size figures of men and women were simply called *kouroi* (pl. *kouroi*), or "young man," and *kore* (pl. *korai*), or "young woman." The stiff, columnar forms exhibit similarities with earlier Egyptian art.
- From the early 6th century BCE, potters and painters began to explore the potential narrative and decorative possibilities of **ceramic wares** by painting them with geometric patterns and, later, with human figures. Some of these artists even signed their work.
- Temple architecture** increased in size and became more refined in its proportions and use of materials. These large stone **post-and-lintel** structures were built in three classical Greek orders, or building styles. The **Doric**, the first order to originate, had simple ornamentation and columns that sat directly on the floor of the temple. The **Ionic** order elevated its columns on bases and added curved *volute*s to the *capitals* that crowned the columns. The **Corinthian** order, which originated c. 430 BCE, had capitals ornamented with acanthus leaves.



Kouros from Anavysos.
c. 525 BCE. Marble. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.



Features common to all three orders are labeled in bold.

CLASSICAL (C. 480–320 BCE)

With a long standing threat from Persia finally repulsed c. 450 BCE, the artists and architects of the Greek city-states developed a type of artistic naturalism that could convey the Classical Greek ideal of human self-reliance and could also serve the needs of their religion.

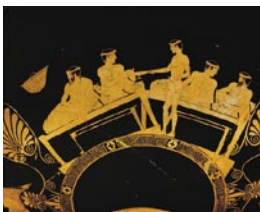
- Under the leadership of Pericles, the city of Athens used its wealth for **large-scale projects of art and architecture**. The greatest of Pericles' projects was the rebuilding of the Acropolis, the hilltop site used primarily for religious ceremonies, after its destruction by Persian troops in 480 BCE. Among the buildings elevated on this site was the **Parthenon temple** (447–432 BCE). Dedicated to the goddess Athena, the Parthenon is a Doric-order temple decorated with an Ionic **frieze**, a band of sculptural decoration that sits above the columns. The Parthenon, like many Greek temples of this period, made use of a complex set of proportions that took into account the viewer's bodily relation with the structure. Its extensive **sculptural decorations** told stories that celebrated Athens' civic and religious life.
- The regularity and ideal proportionality displayed in temple design was also exhibited in the Classical era's **sculptures of the human body**. Figural sculptures were less blocky than in the Archaic period, conveying greater movement and anatomical detail. The introduction of *contrapposto*, or "weight shift," around 480 BCE gave movement and a naturalness of form to previously rigid legs and torsos. Bronze was the preferred medium, although we know most of these images today through later Roman marble copies.



Riace Bronze (B).
c. 460 BCE. Bronze. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Reggio Calabria



The Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens. Oblique view of west facade and north side. 447–432 BCE.



Banqueting scene from the rim of a red-figured cup. c. 460 BCE. Louvre, Paris.

HELLENISTIC (C. 320–30 BCE)

Hellenistic artists depicted specific moments and individuals, turning away from the Classical artists' practice of depicting ideal human forms.

Whereas the artists of the Classical era created idealized forms, later Hellenistic artists looked more and more to everyday life for their inspiration, often creating images of spectacular human spontaneity and movement such as the statuette of a boxer from the first century BCE.



The Boxer.
c. 100–50 BCE. Bronze. Museo Nazionale Romano delle Terme, Rome.

ROMAN (C. 509 BCE–476 CE)

REPUBLICAN PERIOD (C. 509–27 BCE)

Roman artists of the Republican period tended to highlight civil and political ideals and leaders. The government commissioned many public works, while wealthy citizens also commissioned works for private enjoyment.

- Very little remains of the **earliest Roman art**, but it is similar to those objects created by the Etruscan civilization that dominated northern Italy from the 8th to the 6th centuries BCE.
- The Roman Republic, founded in 509 BCE, grew rapidly over the course of five centuries. During this period, many Romans were exposed to both ancient and contemporary works of **Greek art and architecture**. The Roman artists admired this craftsmanship, adopting the Greek use of idealized human proportion and the Greek orders of architecture. The Roman civilization even adopted select Greek gods as their own.
- In **sculpture**, Roman artists combined Greek idealism with their own interest in rendering accurate portraits of particular citizens, as in the bust at right.
- In their **architecture**, Romans built spectacular temples, palaces, and funerary monuments, while excelling also in city planning. With the development of **concrete**, an inexpensive and highly flexible building material, the Romans were able to construct larger and more complex architectural forms than had been previously possible.



Lucius Cornelius Sulla (?).
80–75 BCE. Museo Archeologico, Venice.

EARLY EMPIRE (C. 27 BCE–180 CE)

After civil war weakened the Roman Republic, a series of powerful leaders reshaped Rome's government into an empire. The Roman emperors maintained a peaceful period, known as the *Pax Romana*, for more than 150 years that allowed significant economic, political, and artistic growth.

- To accommodate the rapidly growing population both in Rome and its provinces, new buildings and civic infrastructure were developed. Large **aqueducts** were built to carry water to the crowded cities.
- The **Roman Colosseum** (72–80 CE) was a large amphitheater built for the performance of spectacles, such as animal hunts and battles between gladiators. Seating over 50,000 people, the Colosseum was a multi-story structure that utilized all three Classical orders.
- The Romans considered their unique power to lie in politics and their system of government. As a result, their art emphasized the strength of their **leaders** and often recorded the **historical events** of ancient Rome. Many **triumphal arches**, such as the **Arch of Titus** (81 CE), were built to celebrate Roman military successes. This type of arch, serving as both a freestanding architectural form and a location for major sculptural displays, was a Roman innovation.
- Elaborate private homes, such as **Hadrian's Villa** (c. 135 CE), were also built, and were decorated with **colorful wall paintings** and detailed **floor mosaics**.



Arch of Titus, Rome.
Erected 81 CE.



Centaur fighting wild animals, detail from the mosaics created for Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli. 118–128 CE. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany.

LATE EMPIRE (C. 180–395 CE)

After struggles for imperial succession increased, tentative order was restored in the late Roman Empire. During this period of political unrest, Roman artists preferred a higher degree of abstraction, while the architects created grandiose structures that belied the troubled times.

- During this period, protective masonry walls were built to surround a Rome in decline while major buildings, such as the Palace of Diocletian (c. 300 CE) in modern-day Croatia, were erected in the provinces.
- In Roman sculpture, increasingly simplified details and stiff, often mask-like features replaced accurate portrayal of individuals.



The Tetrarchs (detail). 4th c. BCE. Red porphyry. S. Marco, Venice.

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PERIODS IN WESTERN ART (CONTINUED)

EARLY CHRISTIAN AND BYZANTINE (C. 100–1453 CE)

EARLY AND IMPERIAL CHRISTIANITY (C. 100–600 CE)

After the Roman Emperor Constantine granted Christians freedom of worship in 313 CE, artists began in earnest to construct Christian churches and create Christian imagery.

- Before 313 CE, most Christian art consisted of small objects and wall murals painted in **catcombs**, underground burial chambers.
- Once Emperor Constantine consolidated his power c. 324 CE, he began a series of monumental building projects, both civic and Christian, across his empire. One project was a **basilica**, an oblong church with a **nave**, **aisles** and **apse**, to be built over the presumed tomb of St. Peter in Rome. This basilica, now replaced by a Renaissance structure, was begun in 324 CE and was based on Roman architectural prototypes. (See Elements of a Roman Basilica.)
- Artists during this period created stunning **mosaics** on the walls of these churches, as well as other precious images in ivory and on parchment. While the images display stylistic similarities with the Greek and Roman art of previous periods, they also demonstrate an increased interest in abstraction and a different style of narration, based on symbolic representation.



Top: **Christ as Good Shepherd.** 1st–3rd c. CE. Fresco. Catacombs of Saint Priscilla, Rome.

Bottom: **Christ before Pilate.** detail from the Codex Purpureus Rossanensis. Early 6th c. CE. Painted purple vellum. Biblioteca Arcivescovile, Rome.



BYZANTINE (527–1453 CE)

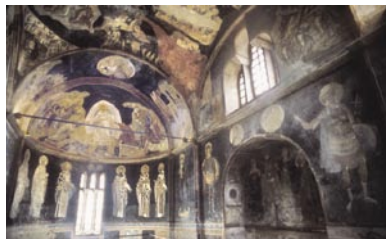
In 395 CE, the Roman Empire split and the eastern section became known as the Byzantine Empire, so named because its capital, Constantinople, was built on the site of the former Greek city Byzantium. In some ways, the artistic paths of the Christian East and West diverged from this historical moment.

- Under Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora, Byzantine society grew stronger and more consolidated. Constantinople underwent a major building campaign, including the construction of the **church of Hagia Sophia** (532–37 CE), with its domed basilica plan.
- Justinian conquered the Italian city of Ravenna in 540, making it an important administrative city of the empire. There, the churches **Sant' Apollinare in Classe** (dedicated 549 CE) and **San Vitale** (526–47 CE) were decorated in glittering mosaics in which dematerialized bodies float in a heavenly golden background.
- After a period of **iconoclasm** (the rejection and destruction of images, particularly religious images) in the 8th century, Byzantine art and architecture flourished until a period of occupation, in the 13th century, by Western Crusaders.
- In 1261, these outsiders were expelled and the Byzantine artistic tradition prospered once again. Later Byzantine art and architecture exhibited a remarkable interest in ideal geometry and mathematical precision, as seen in the early 14th-century renovations of the church of the **Monastery of Christ in Chora** (today the Kariye Camii Museum in Istanbul). In 1453, Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople.



Above: **The Court of Empress Theodora.** 6th c. CE. Mosaic from San Vitale, Ravenna.

Below: **Parecclesion of Kariye Camii, Istanbul** (originally the Monastery of Christ in Chora). Early 14th c. CE.

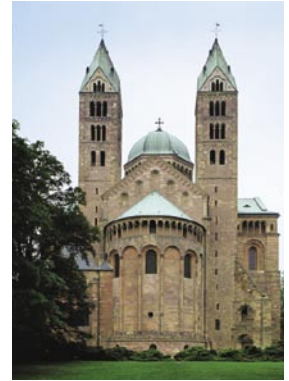


MEDIEVAL (c. 750–1400 CE)

ROMANESQUE (C. 1000–1150 CE)

The term *Romanesque* has been applied to the art and architecture of the 11th and 12th centuries because the Western European structures of this period utilize forms, such as rounded arches and thick masonry walls, similar to those of the ancient Roman Empire.

- Thousands of churches were built during the High Middle Ages. Many served as stops for pilgrims who journeyed long distances to visit holy sites. These structures often employed forms seen in earlier Christian basilicas, although they also introduced new structural developments. **Stone masonry vaulting**, in the shapes of **barrel and groin vaulting**, replaced wooden roofs to protect against fire. **Ambulatories**, often with **radiating chapels**, allowed visitors to walk around the **apse** to view relics and other sacred objects.
- Western artists of the 11th and 12th centuries decorated these structures with impressive **large-scale sculptural programs** (groupings of sculptures). These images did not serve merely as ornamentation; they also depicted stories in the Christian tradition that could be used to teach the faithful. The **portals** (doors) of the churches were a favorite site for these stone carvings, as with the Abbey of Saint-Pierre de Moissac.
- **Wall painting** (paintings done directly on the wall surface), **manuscript illumination** (the illustration and decoration of books and written documents), **enamelwork** and **ivory carving** were other important artistic products of this period. The forms of all 11th- and 12th-century images were often quite **abstract and stylized**, relying heavily on symbols to convey meaning.



Cathedral of Speyer, Germany. View of the east end. 1030–61 CE.



Left: **Abbey of Saint-Pierre de Moissac, France.** View of the south portal. c. 1115–30 CE. Center: **Dragon Fighting an Angel,** detail of the ceiling frescoes adorning the abbey of Saint-Savin-sur-Gartempe, France, c. 1100 CE. Right: France (Limoges), **Becket Casket.** c. 1180 CE. Gilt copper and champlevé enamel on a wooden core, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

GOthic (C. 1100–1400 CE)

Gothic art developed in the Île-de-France (i.e., Paris and its surrounding region) in the early 12th century and its incredibly intricate forms soon spread across Western Europe. The term *Gothic* was coined during the Italian Renaissance to refer to the style of the Goths, or Germanic peoples, who had destroyed the classical culture of the Roman Empire.

- Between the 12th and 15th centuries, Western Europe prospered with the growth of trade and cities. Many new monumental **cathedrals** were erected, some over the sites of older, Romanesque structures. Gothic architecture utilized building techniques such as **groin vaults**, **pointed arches**, and the **flying buttress** to give soaring height to interiors abundantly illuminated by **stained glass windows**. This new emphasis on vertical height and transparency of walls represented a shift from the thick, weighty masonry of Romanesque structures. The architecture continued to display elaborate sculptural decoration on their portals. (See Elements of a Gothic Cathedral.)
- Gothic images show an increased interest in **naturalistic representation**, relying more on the viewer's ability to recognize the objects depicted to convey meaning than on abstract symbols. This period also saw the development of the **cult of the Virgin Mary**, with the proliferation of her image.
- The number of small-scale art objects produced for personal use and private devotion increased in this era. These objects often took the form of manuscript illumination and carved ivories. Large **tapestries** (decorative fabric weaving) also became common.



The High Chapel of Saint-Chapelle, Paris. 1246–1248 CE.



PERIODS IN WESTERN ART (CONTINUED)



Top Left: Jean Pucelle, **The Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux** (Folios 154–5). 1324–28 CE. Grisaille and tempera on vellum. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Top Right: **Lovers Playing Chess**. 13th–14th c. CE. Ivory. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Bottom: **"Taste,"** from the series, the Unicorn Tapestries, woven in the Netherlands and based on cartoons made in Paris. 1484–1500 CE. Musée du Moyen Age (Cluny), Paris.



Top Left: Michaelangelo, **The Holy Family** (The Doni Tondo), c. 1504. Oil on panel. Uffizi, Florence.
Top Right: Albrecht Dürer, **Old Man, or Study for a Saint**. 1521. Brush drawing on brown paper. Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.

Bottom Left: Raphael, **School of Athens**. 1510–1511. Fresco. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Rome
Bottom Right: Donato Bramante, **The Tempietto**. San Pietro in Montoria, Rome. 1502–11.



RENAISSANCE (c. 1350–1600)

EARLY RENAISSANCE (C.1350–1490)

The term Renaissance was coined from the French word meaning "rebirth." Europe's Renaissance has long been viewed as a rebirth of Greek and Roman ideals, including the increased use of Classical artistic forms. With the rise of a middle class of merchants and bankers, the arts found new sources of support.

- In both Northern and Southern Europe, Classical proportions were applied to architecture as well as to depictions of the human body. Renaissance humanist philosophy, with its focus on the human rather than the divine, and on the virtues of physical and mental self-perfection, encouraged this approach to art.
- The majority of paintings and sculptures still treated religious topics, but these scenes were now depicted in earthly rather than celestial settings. In banishing the flat, abstract background of many earlier medieval works, Renaissance painters created scenes with naturalistic **landscapes** and introduced mathematical **perspective** to their works (See Painting Composition and Technique). Examples of such techniques appear in the works of **Jan van Eyck** (Flemish) and **Masaccio** (Italian).
- The sculpture of this period, such as Donatello's *David* (c. 1420 or as late as 1470), also returned to the techniques of free-standing bronze and marble statuary so common in Greek and Roman art.



Donatello, **David**, c. 1420 or as late as 1470. Bronze. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.



Masaccio, **The Tribute Money**, c. 1427. Fresco. Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence

HIGH RENAISSANCE (C. 1490–1520)

This historical moment saw one of the most intense periods of development in the visual arts. Florence and Rome were great centers of artistic production during this time, but Northern Europe produced equally significant works of art.

- Under the patronage of a series of powerful popes, Raphael painted **frescoes** on the walls of the Vatican palace, including the celebrated *School of Athens* (c. 1510–11), and Michelangelo completed the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (1508–12). **Oil painting** became a popular medium during this period, allowing Renaissance artists to create shimmering transparent layers, smoky effects, and dramatic **chiaroscuro**. (See Painting Vocabulary.)
- Rationalized and mathematically precise architecture flourished alongside reinterpretations of the Classical orders, as at Bramante's Roman **Tempietto** (1502–10) where Greek and Roman forms seem to merge in an example of almost perfect structural geometry.
- Northern European artists also produced similarly striking works, although their images mimicked Classical art less slavishly, as demonstrated by the naturalistic, but not abstractly idealized, forms of Albrecht Dürer's drawing, *Old Man, or Study for a Saint* (1521).

LATE RENAISSANCE (C. 1520–1600)

The twisting and unstable forms of Late Renaissance art and architecture replaced the regularity and symmetry of the previous period.

- Late Renaissance artists adopted a bold, colorful style that often elongated or contorted the human body, as in the painting *The Burial of Count Orgaz* (1586) by the Spanish emigré El Greco. This style of art is often called **Mannerist**, from the Italian word *maniera*, meaning "manner or style," suggesting an exaggerated stylization of form that draws attention to itself, a type of "art for art's sake."
- The architecture of the Late Renaissance includes the completion of the new basilica of St. Peter in Rome by **Michelangelo** (from 1546–64) and **Giacomo della Porta** (from 1590–93).



El Greco, **The Burial of Count Orgaz**. 1586. Oil on canvas. San Tomé, Toledo, Spain.

BAROQUE (C. 1600–1700)

Derived from *barroco*, the Portuguese term for an irregularly shaped pearl, the term Baroque is applied to the arts of the 17th and early 18th centuries. The art and architecture of this period tended to use space dynamically in displays of passion.

- The calm elegance of the Renaissance gave way to **scenes of high tension and combat**, especially in sculpture, where artists created intricate three-dimensional forms, such as Gianlorenzo Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1645–52).
- Painters, such as Artemisia Gentileschi, one of the first well-known female artists, as well as the Dutch Rembrandt van Rijn and Flemish Peter Paul Rubens, used dramatic, single-source lighting and dynamic diagonal compositions to give **movement and emotional impact** to their works.
- Architects across Western Europe delighted in the creation of fluid structural patterns. The sprawling, undulating palace complex built by Louis Le Vau and Jules Hardouin-Mansart at **Versailles** (1668–85) for the French king Louis XIV exemplifies this type of complexity.



Left: Artemisia Gentileschi, **Judith Beheading Holofernes**. 1612–21. Oil on canvas. Uffizi, Florence.

Right: Gianlorenzo Bernini, **The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa**. 1645–52. Marble. Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.

CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE

PERIODS IN WESTERN ART (CONTINUED)

THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

(C. 1700–1789)

Across Western Europe and even in the newly colonized continent of North America, this period saw violent upheavals in the social order. The styles of the Western tradition began to proliferate and diversify.

- In French art, this period of art is often called **Rococo**, a term derived from the French *rocaille* ("shell"), because the delicate and sinuous Rococo objects were reminiscent of the curvaceous form of a shell. Using **pastel colors** and **dynamic compositions**, Rococo artists often depicted scenes of sensual enjoyment and romantic love, as seen in *The Embarkation for Cythera* (1717), by French artist Jean-Antoine Watteau.
- **Commissioned portraits** became increasingly popular during this period. The English portrait artists Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough developed a delicate and airy painting style to create lasting images of the English aristocracy, while the self-taught American artist John Singleton Copley painted American subjects with slightly more precision.
- Architects of the 18th century continued to utilize a vocabulary of Classical forms. The recent taste for sinuous and complex structures often extended to the **landscape**, with extensive, planned gardens created for personal residences. They included the geometric landscaping at the palace of Versailles and the more romanticized gardens of English country houses, such as the Chatsworth House in Derbyshire.



Jean-Antoine Watteau, *The Embarkation for Cythera*. 1717. Oil on canvas. Louvre, Paris.



John Singleton Copley, *Mrs. George Watson*. 1765. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY ART

(C. 1780–1905)

NEOCLASSICISM (C. 1780–1820)

In the late 18th century, Neoclassical artists, especially those in France, created sharper, more strictly organized images, rejecting the ornate and light-hearted character of Rococo art.

- The serpentine lines of Rococo were replaced with symmetrical and rectilinear forms that helped French painters represent the new **Republican themes** of virtue and civic duty. Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784) typifies Neoclassical style and content. The rigid figures posing in the foreground of a shallow architectural space give the work the appearance of an ancient sculptural frieze.
- The **Arc de Triomphe** (1806–36), designed by Jean-François Chalgrin, is a more literal recreation of an antique form, providing the 19th-century French with a triumphal arch in the style of the Ancient Romans.



Left: *Arc de Triomphe*, Paris. Completed 1836.

Right: Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii*. 1784. Oil on canvas. Louvre, Paris.



ROMANTICISM (C. 1820–1840)

Romantic artists inherited the Enlightenment era's admiration for the natural world, yet they rebelled against what they considered an overemphasis on strict rationality.

The Industrial Revolution destroyed Europe's agrarian economy. In its place, the modern nation-state arose. Romantics felt alienated from the newly transformed nations and drew on themes from history, literature, nature, and religion to depict **dramatic emotions** and the **individual's isolation**. *Monk by the Sea* (1809–10), a painting by German artist Caspar David Friedrich, exemplifies the effects sought by Romantic artists. A swirling, grey, indistinct mass of sky and sea almost overwhelms a single, isolated monk.



Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*. 1809–10. Oil on canvas. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany.

REALISM (C. 1840–1865)

Realist artists sought to represent the vanishing culture of the everyday that was losing ground to the mass-produced culture of industrial development.

Realist painters privileged scenes of **workers**, **domestic everyday life**, and **landscapes**, which traditionally had been ranked at the bottom of the list of important subjects. Artists such as Gustave Courbet and Édouard Manet adopted a painting style that drew attention to both itself and its subject matter through the use of **stark outlines** and **sharply contrasting colors**.



Edouard Manet, *Olympia*. 1865. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

IMPRESSIONISM, POSTIMPRESSIONISM AND LATE 19TH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE (C. 1865–1905)

A new, self-consciously modern attitude transformed the Western artistic tradition at the end of the 19th century.

- **Impressionist** painters focused on subjects that reflected the **elements of modern life**, such as railroads, factories, urban development, and the new leisure time of the middle class. In order to capture these quickly changing experiences of modern metropolitan life, Impressionists, such as Claude Monet and Berthe Morisot, began to sketch outside in direct sunlight using a **rapid style of loose brushstrokes**.
- **Postimpressionists** furthered the work of abstraction begun with Impressionism. George Seurat developed a style called *pointillism*. Instead of mixing his colors on a palette, he placed dots of strong colors side-by-side on a canvas to be mixed together in the viewer's eyes. Paul Cézanne's landscapes and still-lives use non-naturalistic colors and often break up the subject matter into fragments that represent brushstrokes more than objects.
- Late 19th-century **architecture** began to take advantage of new structural materials, such as **cast iron** and **steel**, to create monumental new structures, such as the Brooklyn Bridge (1867–83), for an ever-growing modern society. The railroads and factories, so favored as subject matter by painters, should also be remembered as new types of architecture invented during this period.



Top: Paul Cezanne, *Five Bathers*. c. 1875–77. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Bottom: Anonymous, *Man Walking on the Brooklyn Bridge*. c. 1900. Photograph. The New York Public Library, New York.



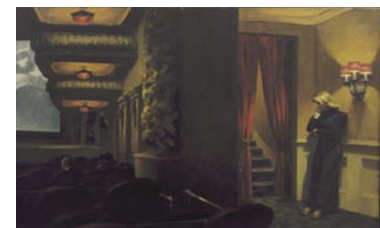
Claude Monet, *La Rue Montorgueil, Paris, During the Celebrations of June 30, 1878*. 1878. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

20TH-CENTURY MODERNISM

(C. 1911–1960)

Modernism asked the probing question, "What is a piece of art?" In the past, art had been defined by its religious use. In the 20th century, art came to be defined as an object with no purpose other than to give visual enjoyment to the viewer.

- Given the **atrocities of mechanized warfare** in World War I and the discovery of the unconscious by **psychoanalysis**, many European artists felt the realities of modern life could not be expressed by traditional means. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque began flattening the compositions of their paintings and working in **monochrome** (a single color).
- Mid-century **American artists** expressed their hopes and fears about modern life through different means. While Edward Hopper's Depression-era images of personal isolation in crowded settings might



Edward Hopper, *New York Movie*. 1939. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

PERIODS IN WESTERN ART (CONTINUED)

evoke discomfort, the images by Charles Sheeler and Grand Wood of an idealized American countryside suggested greater optimism for the future. Later 20th-century American artists, such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, would turn to extreme levels of abstraction to express emotion and meaning.

- Modernist **architects**, such as Le Corbusier, stressed that modern buildings should rationally express their materials of steel and glass and not hide underneath decoration as past architecture had done. Many architects of modern skyscrapers responded to this same aesthetic call. Simple, abstract forms abounded in these genres.
- **Sculpture** of this period addressed similar questions. Marcel Duchamp began using readymade objects and chance operations in the creation of his sculptural works, thereby pointing out that art objects are assigned meaning through conventional symbolism and cultural assumptions, and throwing those assumptions into question.

Top: Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913. Metal wheel mounted on painted wooden stool. The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Bottom: Le Corbusier, *Villa Savoye*, Poissy-sur-Seine, France. 1929–30.



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POSTMODERNISM (C. 1960–PRESENT)

Postmodernism in the visual arts cannot be defined by single style or movement but rather by a diversity of approaches.

- Late-20th century artists often produced **social critique** of the increasing saturation of **mass culture** in daily life. Pop artist Andy Warhol approached this subject ironically by creating reproducible images of Hollywood stars and mass-marketed consumer goods, and hanging them on the wall as art.
- **New genres** that often combined different media, such as video, performance, and conceptual art, were also introduced. Nam June Paik created multimedia works that required the viewer to spend time experiencing the art object, while Allan Kaprow staged "happenings," where the art was itself an experience.
- **Photography**, after gaining acceptance throughout the 20th century as an artistic medium in its own right, truly flourished by mid-century. Diane Arbus used the camera to record an off-kilter world, while Cindy Sherman manipulated the naturalism of the photographic image to subvert the viewer's assumptions about the line between reality and fiction.
- Postmodern **architecture** challenged the modernist notion that abstract, universal ideals would necessarily appeal to the viewer. Architects like Michael Graves and Frank Gehry playfully combined traditional and untraditional architectural forms in structures that give the impression of being monumental sculptures.



Left: Nam June Paik, *Technology*, 1991. 25 video monitors, 3 laser disc players each with unique disc, in cabinet. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.

Right: Frank Gehry, *The Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain*. Opened 1997.

VOCABULARY

Most works of art exist somewhere on a spectrum between complete abstraction and complete naturalism.

Abstract

Art that does not aim for realistic imitation of nature, or **mimesis**. An abstract work does not naturalistically represent an object or scene. Rather, it presents the concept of that object.

Naturalistic

Art that aims to represent its subject as it appears to the objective human eye. Often, the term **realistic** is used interchangeably, although realism often implies an artist's choice of subject matter in addition to the manner in which the subject is represented.

PAINTING

MEDIA

Acrylic

Pigments are mixed with a synthetic base of plastic resins. Acrylic paint's quick drying time and easy cleanup have made it popular since the 1950s.

Encaustic

Pigments are mixed with heated wax. This technique was first used by Greek and Roman artists and increased in use after the mid-18th century.

Gouache

A type of watercolor paint used since ancient times (first in Egypt) for its exceptional opacity.

Oil

Pigments are suspended in an oil medium, often linseed oil. Since oil is slow to dry, the paint can be worked over a period of time. The sheer quality of the oil gives the paint a shimmer. It is often applied in thin layers, or **glazes**. If mixed with only a small amount of oil, the paint can be applied in thick clumps, a technique known as **impasto**. Oil painting gained prominence in Europe in the 15th century.

Support

In painting, a support is the surface on which the paint is applied. The most common types are **wood panel**, **canvas**, and **paper**.

Tempera

Pigments are mixed with egg yolks, water, or glue. Tempera paint was often used in **wood panel** paintings or **frescoes**, which are paintings done directly onto the surface of a wall.

Watercolor

Pigments are suspended in water and applied to an absorbent surface, usually paper. Watercolor paint's transparency has made it popular for sketching purposes.

COMPOSITION AND TECHNIQUE

Chiaroscuro

A technique in painting and drawing of contrasting gradations of lights and darks of the same color, to create a three-dimensional effect. Literally, *chiaroscuro* means "light-dark."

Figure-ground relationship

The relationship established in a two-dimensional work between the forms in the foreground and the background.

Foreshortening

A use of perspective technique to create the sense of sharp projection into space.

Sfumato

A smoky or hazy effect used in painting in which a form is defined without the clear use of lines. Often, the technique is used to create a sense of **atmospheric perspective**.

Perspective

Atmospheric perspective

The appearance of three dimensions, established through changes in **color** and **clarity**. The intensity of the colors and the clarity of form diminish around the horizon line. The use of cool colors in the background gives a sense of recession back into the picture plane, whereas warm colors appear to approach the viewer and project into the foreground.

Linear Perspective

A technique developed in the Italian Renaissance for creating the illusion of three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface

One-point Perspective

The sense of three dimensions and the recession of space are developed through plotting a **horizon line** and several **orthogonal lines** (lines of projection) that merge at the **vanishing point**. Objects arranged according to this grid appear to diminish in size as they are closer to the vanishing point.

Two-point Perspective

Like one-point perspective, but with two vanishing points.

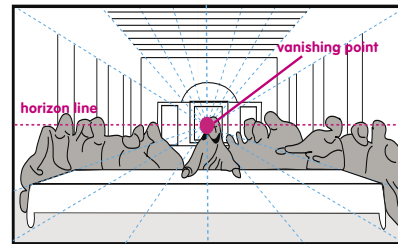


Diagram of one-point perspective in Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, c. 1495–98. Tempera wall mural. Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan.

SCULPTURE

MEDIA

Bronze and other metals
Clay (ceramic)
Mixed media
Plaster
Stone
Wood

COMPOSITION AND TECHNIQUE

Additive

A work created by adding mass, as in ceramic sculpture.

Carving

The medium is transformed by removing excess material from around the figures being created by the artist. Carving can be used to create either a *relief* or a *figure in the round*.

Casting

Molten metal is poured into a mold shaped to contain the desired form. **Lost wax casting** produces hollow sculptures that are generally capable of higher levels of detail than those made with **solid metal casting**.

Contrapposto

In figurative sculpture, the technique of representing naturally-shifting body weight. The figure appears to be about to move.

Enamelwork

Artistic practice by which surfaces, usually metal, are decorated with a vitreous glaze fused onto that surface by intense heat, creating sparkling, colored patterns.

Freestanding sculpture, or sculpture in the round

Fully three-dimensional sculpture that is often worked equally on all sides. It may be situated so that it can be seen from multiple angles or only from one. It may stand on its own, or be set in an architectural context.

Incising

A method of sculpting in which the medium is transformed by cutting lines into the surface.

Relief

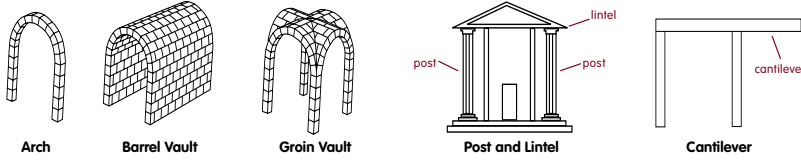
Sculpture that has a flat back plate and is often fitted into an architectural setting. **High relief** sculpture has a large amount of projection from the back plate, while **low relief** (or *bas-relief*) remains flatter, with a smaller degree of projection. **Friezes** are generally carved in relief.

Subtractive

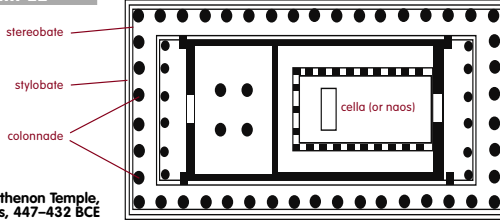
A work created by reducing the volume of an original mass. Michelangelo favored the subtractive mode, saying that he was "freeing" his forms from the block of stone.

ARCHITECTURE

MODES OF CONSTRUCTION



ELEMENTS OF A GREEK TEMPLE

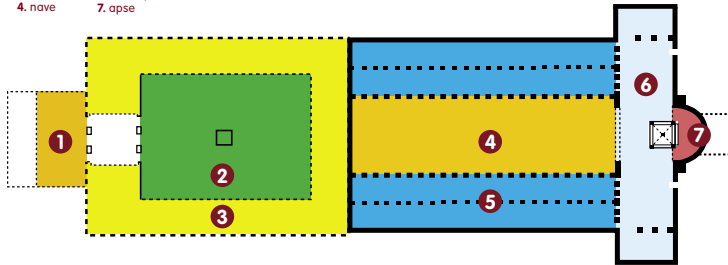


Plan of the Parthenon Temple, Athens, 447-432 BCE

ELEMENTS OF A ROMAN BASILICA

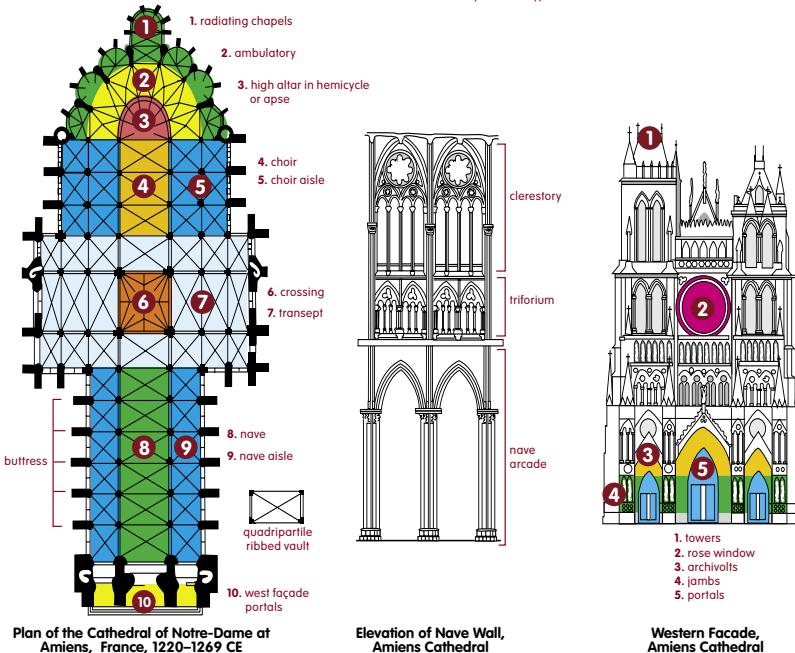
Reconstruction Plan of Old St. Peter's, Rome, c. 320-327 CE

1. propylaeum
2. atrium
3. narthex
4. nave
5. nave aisle
6. transept
7. apse



ELEMENTS OF A GOTHIC CATHEDRAL

While the images here refer to a Gothic cathedral, these terms can be used to identify the elements in many different types of Western Christian churches.



Plan of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame at Amiens, France, 1220-1269 CE

Elevation of Nave Wall, Amiens Cathedral

Western Facade, Amiens Cathedral

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WRITING ABOUT ART

Matching what you see with what you write is a difficult task, one that requires not only sharp looking but also facility with language.

- Your **subjective response** can be good place to start when selecting a topic for an art-historical essay. In the ancient world, rhetoricians would practice their writing skills through the use of **ekphrasis**, a literary practice of vividly describing a work of art. Ekphrasis continued into the Byzantine era and was later revived in the Italian Renaissance. These authors often evoked the impact the work of art had on the spectator, and the process of writing an ekphrasis can help you to begin writing.
- Your **analysis** of a work of art should always start with a close look at the artwork. This detailed study of the visual elements of an art object is called **formal analysis**. Formal analysis aims to understand how meaning is created by the work's composition. As such, formal analysis is not mere description. Rather, it examines the **relations of elements** of the composition to understand its artistic and cultural importance. Depending upon what your assignment is, you will be able to tie in social and cultural information to support your formal analysis. However, your argument should be based first and foremost in close observation.

NOTE ON WORKING FROM REPRODUCTIONS

Photographic reproductions make many works available to be seen and studied. However, they are sometimes not accurate because the color is altered and forms can be distorted. If you are not able to view the original work, check multiple sources.

GETTING STARTED: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- Content or subject matter**
 - What is happening in the work?
 - Can you identify a specific place depicted in the work? A location where the scene takes place? Familiar objects?
 - If there are people depicted, can you identify them by name or by social role (e.g., warrior, flower seller, priest)?
 - Are there any objects or characteristics that give you insight into a person's type (e.g., a figure carrying a book to indicate scholarship)?
 - Does the title of the work give you any clues?
 - What sources (religious, literary, mythical) might the work have been derived from?
- Medium/material**
 - What are the specific materials (media) used in the artwork?
 - How does its medium determine or contribute to the work?
- Composition**
 - What shape and size is the work?
 - Does it give a sense of depth or recession of space (three-dimensionality)?
 - If so, what kind of perspective is used and how does it interact with the subject matter?
 - Does the artist shade or model forms so they appear voluminous or flat?
 - How do the elements of the work relate to each other?
 - What is the relation of the figure to the background?
 - Does the composition make use of diagonal, horizontal, or vertical lines?
 - How do you respond as a spectator to the composition?
 - Does it seem calm, balanced, dynamic, or aggressive?
 - How is color used in the work?
- Setting and context**
 - For what purpose (religious, educational, political, pleasure) was the work originally created?
 - Where was the work originally located or meant to be viewed (e.g., a public plaza, a church, a private home)?
 - Has the overall condition of the work deteriorated since it was created?
- Artist and Historical Period**

If the assignment is not a research essay, ask your instructor whether you may include biographical and scholarly sources.

 - What in the life of the artist may contribute to your understanding of the piece?
 - How is the work different from previous or later works by the same artist?
 - What might the work tell you about the culture in which it was created?

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