ARHS10003 FINE ARTS-VISUAL

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ART 2503 Fine Arts - Visual

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Licensing

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

*A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in **Back Matter/Detailed Licensing**.*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Acquire some measure of visual literacy.
- Express thoughts clearly after analyzing a work of art using terminology appropriate to the subject.

What is beautiful? Who determines that? Is beauty scientific, rooted in proportion and symmetry, is it cultural, or is it specifically rooted in the individual? Having this conversation about beauty, and more specifically, the way you perceive beauty, is key to opening the conversation about art.

1.1: Why Art Matters

1.2: Supporting Images for Why Art Matters

1.3: Understanding Art

1.4: Supporting Images for Understanding Art

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1.1: Why Art Matters

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Note

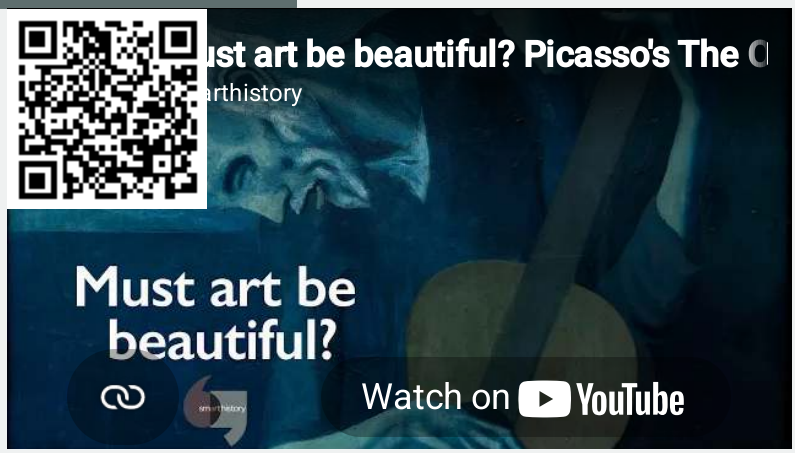
After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Why Art Matters. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

What is beautiful? Who determines that? Is beauty scientific, rooted in proportion and symmetry, is it cultural, or is it specifically rooted in the individual? Having this conversation about beauty, and more specifically, the way you perceive beauty, is key to opening the conversation about art.

Must art be beautiful? Picasso's *Old Guitarist*

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Must art be beautiful? Picasso's Old Guitarist



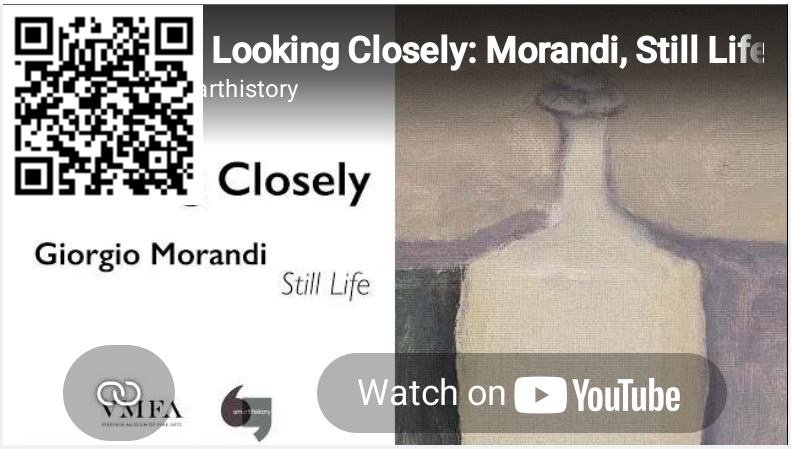
Beth and Steven ask, "Must art be beautiful" looking at Pablo Picasso's, The Old Guitarist, late 1903–early 1904, oil on panel, 122.9 × 82.6 cm (Art Institute of Chicago, © 2018 Estate of Pablo Picasso). speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

On looking closely: Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

On Looking Closely: Giorgio Morandi Still Life

This extraordinarily simple painting raises fundamental issues of how we see, how we describe, and even of the history of art.



Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1959, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 35.2 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond) © estate of the artist. Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

Additional Information

Must art be beautiful? Picasso's Old Guitarist

Video transcript

[0:00] [music]

Dr. Steven Zucker: [0:04] I think often we make the assumption that art is beautiful, but is that required? Must art be beautiful?

Dr. Beth Harris: [0:12] We also think, “Well, this is ugly, so this can’t be art.” As an art historian, it’s become clear to me that there are many different ideas of beauty — that every culture has its ideas, and over time ideas of beauty change.

Dr. Zucker: [0:26] And over my lifetime, what I consider to be beautiful has changed. That does suggest that there is not a fixed notion of what is beautiful.

Dr. Harris: [0:34] Nevertheless, most of us would agree that a rose is beautiful and a cockroach is ugly.

Dr. Zucker: [0:40] That’s referencing an 18th-century German philosopher, whose name is Kant, who spent a lot of time thinking about how we define what is beautiful — what philosophers call the study of aesthetics.

Dr. Harris: [0:51] There’s been a lot of science about the fact that human beings seem attracted to forms that are symmetrical, forms that have certain kinds of proportions. It does seem like maybe there’s a biological truth about what is beauty for human beings.

Dr. Zucker: [1:07] And as a historian, I’m interested in the way that notions of beauty have changed over time. The ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras thought that beauty was rooted in a universal harmony, and that when we produced something that reflected those harmonies, we saw that thing as beautiful.

[1:24] Then there’s the issue of who determines what is beautiful. I think in the 21st century we’re very comfortable with the idea that beauty is something that’s determined by one’s experience, that is deeply personal, but that was not always the case.

Dr. Harris: [1:37] We live in an era where the individual is paramount. Old forms of authority that would have told us what is beautiful don’t exist in the same way for us. In the 19th century and hundreds of years before that, there were art academies that decided what was beautiful.

Dr. Zucker: [1:52] It’s interesting to think about how the academies, the royal academies in Europe, determined what was beautiful.

Dr. Harris: [1:58] That relied on ancient Greek and Roman culture.

Dr. Zucker: [2:02] And so artists focused on understanding a kind of ideal proportion of the human body especially. That became a paramount concern.

Dr. Harris: [2:10] The academies promoted a concept of the ideal.

Dr. Zucker: [2:13] There was a standard that artists tried to achieve.

Dr. Harris: [2:16] All of art education was geared toward teaching one to be able to achieve that kind of beauty.

Dr. Zucker: [2:23] That must have been so oppressive. It must have been suffocating for artists.

Dr. Harris: [2:28] It's interesting to look back to the mid-19th century and artists like Courbet and art criticism by Baudelaire, both of whom promoted an idea of beauty that was specific to the time one lived. That is, a beauty that was contingent and not eternal, so that the modern streets of the city, which everyone would normally define back then as ugly, could be seen as beautiful.

Dr. Zucker: [2:53] And it's not incidental that that writer and that artist lived in a moment when the authority of the monarch was being challenged.

Dr. Harris: [3:01] And challenging a single idea of beauty was really important for artists.

Dr. Zucker: [3:06] We're standing in the third-floor galleries of the Art Institute of Chicago, looking at a really famous painting by Pablo Picasso. It's "The Old Guitarist," from his Blue Period. We're seeing the work of a young artist.

[3:17] Although from our position in the 21st century, it might be relatively easy to see the painting as beautiful, for someone looking at this painting when it was new in 1903/1904, it would have been radically ugly. I can say that with certainty because of the way that the artist is deforming the human body.

Dr. Harris: [3:34] It's not as though Picasso was the first artist at the end of the 19th century to do that, but he is doing it to an extreme degree here.

Dr. Zucker: [3:42] We see a man in rags. His eye is closed, a reference to his blindness, but he's actively playing a guitar.

Dr. Harris: [3:49] His neck is inclined in a way which is impossible, but which is also very expressive.

Dr. Zucker: [3:55] There have been many times throughout history when artists have distorted the body for particular purposes. It's clear that Picasso is looking back to the great Spanish painter El Greco, who attenuated and distorted bodies to create a heightened sense of the spiritual.

Dr. Harris: [4:10] We are looking at a figure who's very close to us. There's no space that recedes behind him. We have these flat planes of color, and the guitar itself is almost also completely frontal. And that neck is inclined down toward the guitar.

[4:26] It's as though his whole body is absorbed in listening to the music that he's playing. This figure in his solitude is finding comfort in his art.

Dr. Zucker: [4:36] And is having an aesthetic experience, engaged in that music, that is almost identical to the aesthetic experience that I have when I stand in front of this painting. And so Picasso is doing something extraordinary. He's creating a bridge between the melancholic experience within this canvas and the experience that I'm having.

Dr. Harris: [4:56] In some ways, Picasso gives us a painting where we can't see, either. The figure is enclosed within this rectangular shape. This is a figure who's in his own world.

Dr. Zucker: [5:07] And so Picasso is creating this, I think, universal experience, and because of that, he heightens my empathy for this man, for his plight, and he does that in a number of different ways. He does it through his distortion of the body.

[5:20] He does it through the use of blues, and browns, and greens, and blacks. And he does it through the proximity, but also he produces a sense of empathy because of the evident poverty of this figure.

Dr. Harris: [5:32] This is a man who feels exposed to the elements of the world, and yet those elements don't enter this painting.

Dr. Zucker: [5:41] Let's go back to this issue of what beauty is and whether or not this painting is, in fact, ugly. I would argue that the empathy that the artist creates is itself a kind of beauty, and perhaps is actually a more profound form of beauty than easy beauty, than an image of a rose.

Dr. Harris: [5:59] Another image of a blind man playing guitar might not have that same effect. The formal elements, together with the subject matter, are what move us.

[6:09] [music]

Artwork details

Table of artwork details

Title	Old Guitarist
Artist(s)	Pablo Picasso(opens in new window)
Dates	1903–04
Places	Europe(opens in new window) / Western Europe / France
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms(opens in new window)
Artwork Type	Painting(opens in new window)
Material	Oil paint(opens in new window), Panel(opens in new window)
Technique	

Bibliography

This painting at the Art Institute of Chicago(opens in new window)

Cite this page

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On looking closely: Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*

Video transcript

0:00:05.4 Dr. Steven Zucker: One of the most important skills in art history is the skill of describing, finding the words to express the complexity of form. We've chosen a modern painting, one that was painted in 1959 by Giorgio Morandi, an Italian artist, because it seems very simple and so it should be easy to find words to describe it. Okay, so let's start. This is a relatively small painting. We actually are both standing less than three feet away, we wanna come up close and really be able to see it.

0:00:37.0 Dr. Beth Harris: It's almost square in format, and we are clearly looking at a still life. I see what look like bottles on a table top, a cup. I'm reading that light lavender as a table meeting a horizon line of the wall, which is a light grey behind it, and these objects placed on the table, even though there is no indication of their weight. They don't cast shadows. So these are things my mind is inferring.

0:01:07.6 Dr. Steven Zucker: I wanna start with the ground, before we even get to those objects, I see a little band of grey-yellow at the very bottom, this lavender field, and then above that, more of that yellowish grey. All of that is rendered with a fairly wet brush, so that you can actually see the paint strokes, and you get a sense that the oil paint is functioning almost like water color, it's been thinned out, so that there are areas where the paint is almost missing and you can actually see back to the surface of the canvas behind it.

0:01:38.5 Dr. Beth Harris: What is most apparent to me is the difference between what my mind wants to do to what I'm seeing and the very stripped down information that I'm given in the painting. In the case of the small fluted bowl in the foreground center, I have more of a sense of its placement on the table because of the darker paint that surrounds it, that acts as a shadow and gives me a sense that this is a three-dimensional object, although that lavender ground gives me no indication of recession into space.

0:02:14.8 Dr. Steven Zucker: We seem to be looking across at that bowl, and yet we're also seeing a bit of the ovoid at the top, that is, we're looking down at the bowl at the same time, so there is a little bit of a discontinuity.

0:02:28.2 Dr. Beth Harris: Although I want to read those as bottles or carafes of some sort sitting on the table, I wonder why their necks don't seem symmetrical. Why the purple paint seems to sometimes come in front of the yellowish white paint of what I assume to be these bottles.

0:02:45.4 Dr. Steven Zucker: If we look at the bottle on the left and we look at the right side of that bottle, you can see that there's a grey vertical line now that might be the table top, because it's the same color as the table top, but at the same time, I read that as a

facet of the bottle itself that is of its right side receding in space. It is very slippery what's happening here as we try to make sense of these forms in space. Another example is that green rectangle that emerges from the back edge of the bowl in front and separates the two bottles. At first, we assume that that's a shadow, because after all it's in between them, and perhaps one of the bottles is casting that shadow, but the top of it is flat and it wouldn't be flat if it was a cast shadow, and so it becomes both a negative space and perhaps a form that's in part hidden behind those bottles?

0:03:36.8 Dr. Beth Harris: The bottle on the right has a few horizontal lines of white paint that read like the reflection of glass, but the one on the left doesn't have those and is painted in a very flat and matte way without any of that sense of reflectivity.

0:03:55.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: The thing that probably bothers me the most in this painting, and I should say bothers me in a good way, because it makes me question what I'm seeing, is back of the table, which I want to have a continuous arcing form as if this is the back of a large round table. But right around the shoulders of the bottles, that table edge seems to deform and seems to become a bit more parallel with what I take to be the shoulders of the bottles, so that the back of the table seems to edge up. Or, am I possibly looking down at the depth of the bottles? It's impossible to know, but when I come away with is the sense that the artist seems willing to distort what he sees for the internal logic of the canvas that he wants to end up with.

0:04:42.7 Dr. Beth Harris: For me, this is about a relationship between the painting and the viewer, because it feels so much about confounding my expectations and a kind of insistence on illegibility. And so it feels like a painting that wants to surprise me and make me engage and activate it. Why do we read those two white lines as a reflection in the glass? Our mind and our eyes work together to make sense of the world, which is maybe not giving us as much information as we think it is.

0:05:18.9 Dr. Steven Zucker: So this extraordinarily simple painting of a few objects on a table—that are not telling a story, that are not depicting a likeness—is raising fundamental issues of how we see, how we describe, and even of the history of art.

0:05:33.0 Dr. Beth Harris: But the next question, why is this something of interest at this moment, in this place where the artist is? What is it about this historical moment that is calling for this kind of questioning?

0:05:46.2 Dr. Steven Zucker: But that would be the subject of another video.

Bibliography

This work at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts(opens in new window)

Laura Mattioli Rossi, editor, *The Later Morandi: Still Lifes 1950–1964* (Milan: Mazzotta Edizione, 1998).

Important fundamentals

Read a *Reframing Art History* textbook chapter, Learning to look and think critically(opens in new window)

Modern art and reality(opens in new window)

Cite this page

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1.2: Supporting Images for Why Art Matters

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

In this section, students are encouraged to explore the featured artwork alongside a supplemental image that provides an alternative perspective. Together, the two works highlight how pieces with similar characteristics can still reflect different viewpoints, evoke distinct moods, or emerge from diverse cultural contexts. By comparing them, students gain a broader understanding of how art communicates meaning across traditions and how multiple interpretations enrich the study of visual expression.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Figure 1.2.1: The Old Guitarist (opens in new window)(1903-04, oil on panel, 122.9 x 82.6 cm) Public Domain(opens in new window)

Star Circle

Figure **1.2.1**: Sari Dienes, *Star Circle*, 1953–59 (assembled as late as 1959), plaster and paint on foam board, 121.92 x 81.28 x 3.49 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts) © Sari Dienes Foundation

Still Life, Giorgio Morandi

Figure **1.2.1**: Giorgio Morandi, Still Life, 1959, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 35.2 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond © estate of the artist)

Figure **1.2.1**: Figure : Flowers on a Tree Trunk(opens in new window) (early 1700s, oil on canvas, 93 x 74 cm) Public Domain(opens in new window)

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1.3: Understanding Art

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Understanding Art. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Introduction to art historical analysis

by Dr. Robert Glass

Figure 1.3.1: Seated Figure, Djenné peoples, Inland Niger Delta region, Mali, 13th century. Terracotta, 10 x 9 3/4 x 11 3/4 in. (25.4 x 24.8 x 29.8 cm.) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo: The Metropolitan Museum, public domain) Resting his head on his right knee, arms wrapped around his compact form, this sculpture, as the Met puts it, "simultaneously suggests the knotted tension of anxiety and the sublime absorption of deep prayer."

Why does a work of art look the way it does? Who made it and why? What does it mean? These questions and others like them lie at the heart of art historical inquiry. Art historians use various types of analysis to provide answers. These have varied over time and continue to evolve, but in general, three categories can be distinguished. In the essays and videos on Smarthistory, different types of analysis are used, often without identifying them explicitly. If you become familiar with the three categories below, you will be able to recognize them.

Art as physical object

Oil and pigments on canvas, carved marble, woven fibers, a concrete dome—most works of art and architecture are physical things. As such, a fundamental determinant of the way they look is the material of which they are made. In architecture, the word used for this is simply materials. In art, the term medium (plural: media) is also used.

Figure 1.3.2: Left: Woman with wax tablets and stylus, c. 50 CE. Fresco. National Archaeological Museum, Naples. (Photo: Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0). Center: Justinian (detail), *Justinian and Attendants*, north wall of the apse, San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, c. 547. Mosaic. (Photo: Dr. Robert Glass, via Smarthistory). Right: King David (detail), north transept lancet window, Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres, Chartres, France, c. 1145 and 1194-c. 1220. (Photo: © Dr Stuart Whatling, via Smarthistory)

Materials have specific properties that dictate the ways they can be manipulated and the effects they can produce. For example, marble will crack under its own weight if not properly balanced and supported, which imposes limits on the sculptural forms or architectural designs that can be created with it. Fresco painting, stained glass, and mosaic are all capable of creating breathtaking images, but their visual qualities differ significantly due to the distinct physical properties and working methods of each medium. This latter aspect—the way a medium is worked or used—is called technique. Together, materials and technique determine basic visual features and the parameters within which an artist or architect must work.

Learning to recognize specific media and techniques and how they have been used historically are fundamental art historical skills. Not only do they allow you to understand the logic behind specific visual qualities, but they may also help identify when and where a work was made since certain media and techniques are characteristic of specific periods and places.

Conservation

Technological advances have led to new methods of analyzing materials and techniques. Today this research is carried out primarily by art conservators. Because art and architecture, like all physical things, are subject to the corrosive effects of time and environment, conservation science is a crucial field. Training in art conservation typically involves coursework in chemistry as well as the practice and history of art.

While the main job of conservators is preservation, their investigative techniques can also benefit art historians. Technologies such as X-radiography, ultraviolet illumination, and infrared reflectography can reveal features of an object invisible to the human eye, such as the inside of a bronze statue, changes made to a painting, or drawing under a paint surface. X-ray fluorescence can identify the pigments in paint or the composition of metals by their chemical profiles. Dendrochronology can establish the earliest date a wooden object could have been made based on tree ring growth patterns. Analysis of materials and techniques using methods such as these can help art historians answer questions about when, where, how, or by whom, a work was made.

Figure **1.3.3**: Egon Schiele, *Portrait of Wally Neuzil*, 1912. Oil on panel, 32 × 39.8 cm. Leopold Museum, Vienna, Austria. (Photo via Smarthistory) Here, the sitter leans forward, her large blue eyes slightly out of focus but still arresting, set off by the complementary orange hues of her hair and lips and drawing the viewer into closer contemplation.

Art as visual experience

Most art is visually compelling. While materials and technique determine the range of what is possible, the final appearance of a work is the product of numerous additional choices made by the artist. An artist painting a portrait of a woman in oil on canvas must decide on the size and shape of the canvas, the scale of the woman and where to place her, and the types of forms, lines, colors, and brushstrokes to use in representing the sitter and her surroundings. In a compelling work of art, myriad variables such as these and others come together to create an engaging visual experience.

Visual (formal) analysis

Art historians use visual analysis to describe and understand this experience. Often called formal analysis because it focuses on form rather than subject matter or historical context, this typically consists of two parts: description of the visual features of a work and analysis of their effects. To describe visual properties systematically, art historians rely on an established set of terms and concepts. These include characteristics such as format, scale, composition, and viewpoint; treatment of the human figure and space; and the use of form, line, color, light, and texture.

In describing visual qualities, formal analysis usually identifies certain features as contributing to the overall impression of the work. For example, a prominent linear form might suggest strength if straight and vertical, grace or sensuality if sinuous, or stability and calm if long and horizontal. Sharp contrasts in light and dark may make an image feel bold and dramatic whereas subdued lighting might suggest gentleness or intimacy. In the past, formal analysis assumed there was some elementary level of universality in the human response to visual form and tried to describe these effects. Today, the method is understood as more subjective, but still valued as a critical exercise and means of analyzing visual experience, especially in introductory art history courses.

Figure **1.3.4**: Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1784. Oil on canvas, 3.3 x 4.25 m. Painted in Rome, exhibited at the salon of 1785. Musée du Louvre, Paris. (Photo via Smarthistory) David's style is characterized by clean lines and clear composition that emphasize straightforward storytelling.

Style

Formal analysis is a powerful tool for appreciating art. Armed with it, you can analyze any work based simply on the experience of looking at it. But the method is also important for understanding art in its historical context. This is because the visual properties of works made by an individual artist or, more generally, by artists working in the same time and place, typically have common features. Art historians call these shared characteristics style. As James Elkins elegantly phrased it, style is “a coherence of qualities in periods or people.” [1] This may include consistency in things like medium, function, and subject matter, but when art historians use the term style, they primarily mean formal characteristics. Style varies by time and place, so like medium and technique, it can be used to determine the origin of a work of art. Because of its complexity, style is a far more specific indicator than materials and technique alone. Early art historians used stylistic analysis to categorize the vast legacy of undocumented art, assigning works to cultures, artistic circles, or individual artists based on their formal qualities. Today, stylistic analysis continues to be used to establish origins when unknown works are discovered or previous attributions revised.

In addition to helping categorize individual works, style has shaped the narratives told by art historians in fundamental ways. Until the mid-20th century, most histories of art focused on tracing stylistic development and change. As a result, many of the period divisions traditionally used for Western art are based on style. Some examples are Geometric, Orientalizing, Archaic, and Classical in ancient Greece, Romanesque and Gothic in Medieval Europe, and the Early, High, and Late Renaissance. Today style is only one of many aspects of art that interest art historians, but the power of tradition has ensured that style-based period divisions and labels remain widely used. Likewise, familiarity with the style of specific periods, places, and artists is still considered fundamental art historical knowledge and often remains the focus of introductory art history textbooks and courses.

Art as cultural artifact

While understanding the physical properties and visual experience of art are important, today most art historical research focuses on the significance of works as cultural artifacts. This category of analysis is characterized by a variety of approaches, but all share the basic objective of examining art in relation to its historical context. Most often, this is the time and place in which a work was created—typically we want to know why and by whom it was made and how it originally functioned. But since works of art and architecture often survive for centuries, art historians may also study a work’s cultural significance at later historical moments.

Figure **1.3.5**: Buddha Shakyamuni or Akshobhya, the Buddha of the East, Tibet, 11th-12th century. Gilt copper, 58 cm high. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo via Smarthistory) Buddhas like this were used as objects of devotion and not just as visually pleasing art.

Subject matter / iconography

Figure **1.3.6**: Michelangelo, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (detail), Vatican, Rome, Italy. Fresco, 1508-12. (Photo: Kent G Becker, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0). Iconographical elements in this fresco include the flowing gray beard and hair of God the Father.

One of the most basic types of contextual analysis is the interpretation of subject matter. Much art is representational (i.e., it creates a likeness of something), and naturally we want to understand what is shown and why. Art historians call the subject matter of images iconography. Iconographic analysis is the interpretation of its meaning. In many cases, such as an image of the crucified Christ or seated Buddha, identifying the subject presents few problems. When the iconography is obscure or treated in an unusual way, art historians try to understand it by studying the historical context in which the image was made, typically through comparison with texts and other imagery from the time. With challenging images, scholars may disagree on which contextual materials are relevant, resulting in conflicting interpretations. For many complex or enigmatic works, the meanings of the subject matter continue to be debated and reinterpreted today.

Function

Another common aspect of art investigated through contextual analysis is function. Historically, many works of art and nearly all architecture were intended to serve some purpose beyond the aesthetic. Understanding function is crucial because it usually plays a role in determining many features, including iconography, materials, format, and aspects of style. At the most basic level, art historians analyze function by identifying types—an altarpiece, portrait, Book of Hours, tomb, palace, etc. Studying the history and use of a given type provides a context for understanding specific examples.

Analysis of function becomes more complex when the personal motivations of the people responsible for making a work are considered. For much of history, this includes not only artists but also the patrons who commissioned works and in some cases, advisors acting on the patron's behalf. When such agents can be identified, definitively or hypothetically, their motivations become potential contexts for understanding purpose and appearance.

With complex works, this can soon raise interpretive quandaries. Take, for example, Michelangelo's famous frescos on ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Are these highly original paintings best understood in relation to the function of the chapel (a key ritual site in the Vatican palace), or the concerns of the painter, Michelangelo, or of the patron, Pope Julius II, or of one or more of the Julius's advisors at the papal court? The answer is likely some combination of these, but the contextual materials relevant to each are so vast and diverse that there is no one way to interpret them.

Thinking critically

This raises a final point about analyzing the meaning of art and architecture as cultural artifacts. While art historians rely on facts as much as possible and seek to interpret works in ways that are historically plausible, we recognize that subjectivity is inescapable. As discussed in "What is art history?," we interpret the past in ways that make sense in the present. Today, art historians continue to ask traditional questions like those noted above, but they also ask new ones inspired by social developments such as feminism, globalism, multiculturalism, and identity politics.

So, as you read, watch, and listen, try to recognize the approaches being used and to think critically about them. Is the speaker or writer talking about the work as a physical object, visual experience, or cultural artifact? (Often it will be some combination.) What contexts are being used to explain meaning? Which contexts are not considered? This may leave you with as many questions as answers, but that is good. You are here not only to gain knowledge, but also to develop a curiosity about the world and the ability to think critically about it.

[1] James Elkins, "Style," *Grove Art Online*, *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2017).

Articles in this chapter:

- Dr. Robert Glass, "Introduction to art historical analysis," in *Smarthistory*, October 28, 2017 (CC BY-NC-SA)

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1.4: Supporting Images for Understanding Art

Understanding Art: Supporting Images

In this section, students are encouraged to explore the featured artwork alongside a supplemental image that provides an alternative perspective. Together, the two works highlight how pieces with similar characteristics can still reflect different viewpoints, evoke distinct moods, or emerge from diverse cultural contexts. By comparing them, students gain a broader understanding of how art communicates meaning across traditions and how multiple interpretations enrich the study of visual expression.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Seated Figure, Djenné peoples

Figure **1.4.1**: Seated Figure, Djenné peoples, Inland Niger Delta region, Mali, 13th century. Terracotta, 10 x 9 3/4 x 11 3/4 in. (25.4 x 24.8 x 29.8 cm.) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo: The Metropolitan Museum, public domain) Resting his head on his right knee, arms wrapped around his compact form, this sculpture, as the Met puts it, "simultaneously suggests the knotted tension of anxiety and the sublime absorption of deep prayer."

Terracotta Warriors

Figure 1.4.1: Pit 1, Army of the First Emperor, c. 210 B.C.E. (Qin dynasty), Lintong District, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China, painted terracotta (Emperor Qin Shi Huang's Mausoleum Site Museum; photo: chensiyuan(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 4.0)

Woman with Wax Tablets and Stylus

Figure 1.4.1: Woman with wax tablets and stylus, c. 50 CE. Fresco. National Archaeological Museum, Naples. (Photo: Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Sugar Cane

Justinian and Attendants

Adoration of the Magi

Lancet Windows

Portrait of Wally Neuzil

Self-Portrait with Her Daughter

Oath of Horatii

Cornelia, Mother of the Gracci, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures

Buddha Shakyamuni or Akshobhya

Beaker with Inverse Face

Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

Figure **1.4.1**: Diego Rivera's 1931 mural, "Sugar Cane."

La Mozquita

Figure **1.4.1**: Emperor Justinian Mosaic, San Vitale, Ravenna, c. 546-56

Figure 1.4.1: Sol, Hammath Tiberias Synagogue, 286–337 C.E. (Center for Jewish Art(opens in new window))

Figure 1.4.1: Circle of Peter Hemmel von Andlau (Strassburger Werkstattgemeinschaft), *Adoration of the Magi* (detail), 1507, Munich, Germany, pot metal and colorless glass, vitreous paint, and silver stain, 72.4 x 45.7 cm (Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; photo: Steven Zucker(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

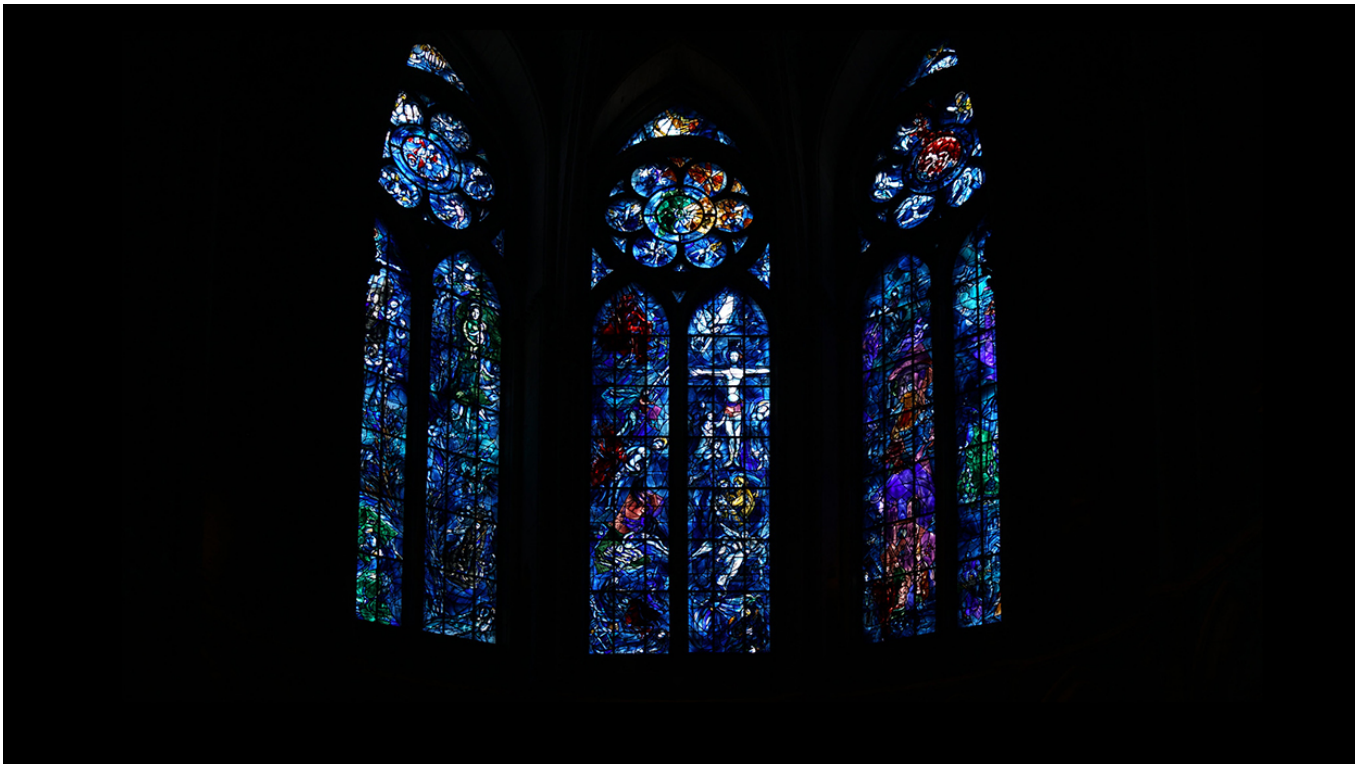

Figure **1.4.1**: Marc Chagall, stained glass windows replacing war-damaged ones, Reims Cathedral, 1967-1985 (photo: **Dr. Steven Zucker(opens in new window)**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Figure **1.4.1**: Egon Schiele, *Portrait of Wally Neuzil*, 1912, oil on panel, 32 x 39.8 cm (Leopold Museum, Vienna; photo: Steven Zucker(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Figure **1.4.1**: Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie (à l'Antique)*, 1789, oil on wood, 130 x 94 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

Figure **1.4.1**:Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1784, oil on canvas, 3.3 x 4.25 m, painted in Rome, exhibited at the salon of 1785 (Musée du Louvre; photo: Steven Zucker(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Figure **1.4.1**: Angelica Kauffmann, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as Her Treasures*, c. 1785, oil on canvas, 40 x 50″ (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

Figure **1.4.1**: Buddha Shakyamuni or Akshobhya, the Buddha of the East, 11th–12th century, Tibet, gilt copper, 58 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window))

Figure 1.4.1: Aquillas, Sicán (Lambayeque), 10th – 11th century, gold (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), photo: Steven Zucker (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Figure 1.4.1: Michelangelo, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (detail), Vatican, Rome, Italy. Fresco, 1508-12. (Photo: Kent G Becker, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0). Iconographical elements in this fresco include the flowing gray beard and hair of God the Father.

Figure **1.4.1**: Hypostyle hall, Great Mosque at Córdoba, Spain, begun 786 and enlarged during the 9th and 10th centuries

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Elements of Art and Principles of Design

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Acquire some measure of visual literacy.
- Understand the varied processes involved in traditional art media.
- Identify and analyze the role of art in various cultures.
- Express thoughts clearly after analyzing a work of art using terminology appropriate to the subject.

The elements of art and the principles of design are compositional tools that help artists when creating work. The elements of art - line, shape, form, volume, mass, texture, value, space, and color - are the basic building blocks. The principles of design - contrast, balance, scale, proportion, movement, emphasis, pattern, variety, rhythm, and unity - are the rules for organization in the composition. Paying attention to these compositional components will go a long way toward creating art that is both engaging and communicates the intended message.

2.1: Color and Value

2.1.1: Supporting Images for Color and Value

2.2: Line, Shape, and Form

2.2.1: Supporting Images for Line, Shape, and Form

2.3: Space, Surface and Depth, Proportion and Scale

2.3.1: Supporting Images for Space, Surface and Depth, Proportion and Scale

2.4: Texture, Pattern, Repetition and Rhythm, Variety and Unity

2.4.1: Supporting Images for Texture, Pattern, Repetition and Rhythm, and Variety and Unity

2.5: Balance and Movement

2.5.1: Supporting Images for Balance and Movement

2.6: Naturalism, Realism, Abstraction, and Idealization

2.6.1: Supporting Images for Naturalism, Realism, Abstraction, and Idealization

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2.1: Color and Value

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

> **Note**
>
> After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Color and Value. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Color

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

Hue

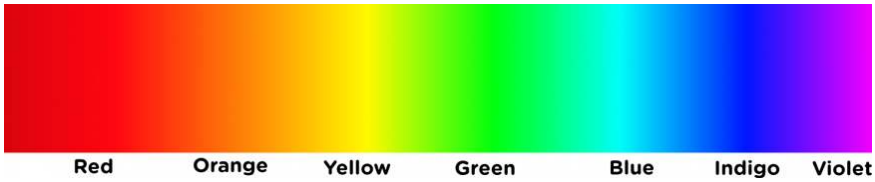

Figure **2.1.11**: Colors of the visible light spectrum. (Image: **Meganbeckett27**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Artists can use colors for many reasons other than to simply duplicate reality including setting moods and highlighting importance.

The colors of the world can be divided in different ways. When we use the term “color” casually, what we usually mean is hue. Hues appear on the visible spectrum. On the spectrum, we see the pure hues. These can be divided into primary, secondary and tertiary colors, as on this color wheel.

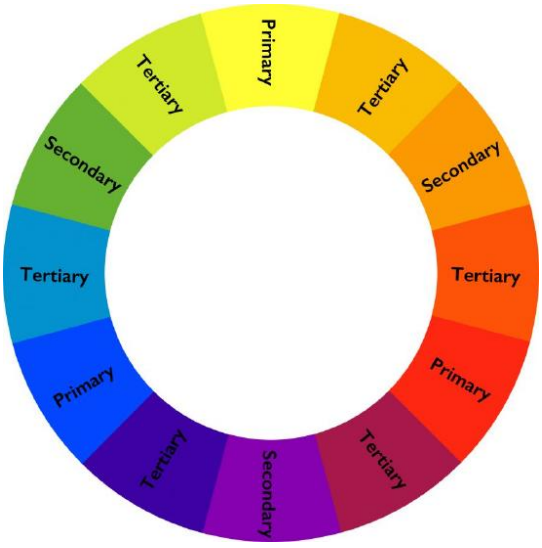

Figure **2.1.12**: Color wheel. (Image: public domain)

Primary, secondary and tertiary colors

Primary colors are, for most art media, red, yellow and blue (the exception is the additive color system, which is used in computer screens, theater lighting and the like, and has red, green, and blue as its primary colors). All the rest of the colors can be made from these.

Secondary colors are made by mixing two primary colors: Red and yellow make orange, and so on.

Tertiary colors are made by mixing a primary color with a secondary color.

Complementary and analogous colors

The colors opposite one another (like red and green or blue and orange) are complementary colors, which tend to stand out boldly next to one another. These are therefore often used for university colors and sport team logos. Colors next to one another (like red and orange or blue and green) are analogous colors, and these tend to blend together more smoothly.

Warm and cool colors

The colors on the left of this wheel are called cool colors and those to the right are warm colors. Using cool or warm colors in an image can create moods. Pierre Auguste Renoir used warm colors for his *Mother and Child*, 1886, creating a warm, cheerful, inviting scene. The oranges, pinks and yellows dominate the image.

Figure **2.1.13**: Left: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Mother and Child*, 1886. Pastel, 79.1 x 63.5 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Right: David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Peasant Mother*, 1962. Oil on burlap, 249 x 180 cm. Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City. (© David Alfaro Siqueiros) (Photos via Smarthistory)

Diego Alfaro Siqueiros presents a similar subject in his *Peasant Mother* (1929), but through the use of cool colors, instead creates a sad, cold scene dominated by figures of blues and greens. Neither of these artists was worried about portraying the world as it really looked. Instead, they used color to inspire feelings in the viewer.

Value (tint and shade)

Color can also be considered in terms of value, which is the degree of lightness or darkness of a color. If we add white to a hue, we get a tint. If we add black, we get a shade. As we might expect, tints tend to be more cheerful—pastel colors are all tints. Shades tend to be gloomier. Indeed, our terms for moods are based on these properties, so that we say that we are lighthearted, or in a dark temper. There are many tints in the Renoir's *Mother and Child*, and many shades in Siqueiros' *Peasant Mother*.

Figure **2.1.14**: Henri Matisse, *Red Room (Harmony in Red)*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 180.5 x 221 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Figure **2.1.15**: Zhou Chen, *Peach Blossom Spring*, 102.5 x 161.5 cm. Suzhou Museum, China. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Saturation

Finally, intensity or saturation is how bright or dull a color is. Henri Matisse tended to use very saturated colors, as in *Red Room (Harmony in Red)* (1908), whereas in *Peach Blossom Spring* (1533), Zhou Chen relied on a much more muted palette with very little saturation of colors.

The landscape is almost entirely in shades of brown and beige. The grey-green of the trees is low in saturation, leaving the single splash of red on the child's clothes the only moment of high saturation in the image. Therefore, we notice this tiny detail within this large painting. The Matisse painting, on the other hand, is a blaze of colors. The vibrant red of the wall and tablecloth dominates the image, in sharp contrast with the green grass showing through the window and the blues and purples curving throughout the image.

Contrast

Contrast is the amount of variation between the highest and lowest values in a work. This is perhaps most commonly used to talk about photography, but can be applied to any work. Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Cliffs of Moher* (1989) has very low contrast. There are no dark blacks, no stark whites; everything is in very similar shades of gray.

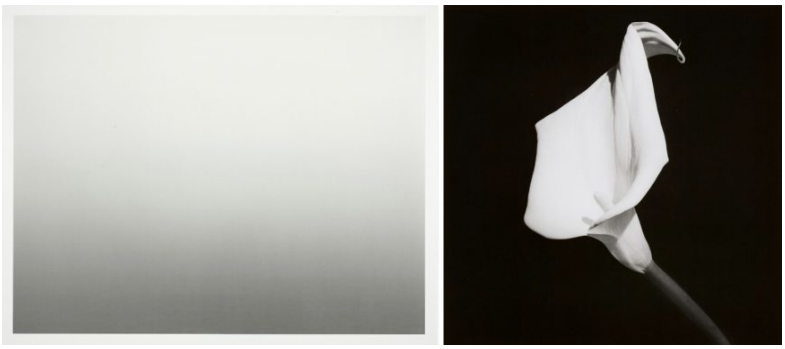

Figure 1.2.161.2.16: Left: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Atlantic Ocean, Cliffs of Moher*, 1989. Offset lithograph, 24 x 31 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. (© Hiroshi Sugimoto); Right: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Calla Lily*, 1987. Gelatin silver print, 17.94 × 17.78 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota (© Robert Mapplethorpe / The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation) (Photos via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure 1.2.171.2.17: Kara Walker, *Untitled (from Testimony)*, 2004. Cut black paper with pencil, pressure-sensitive tape, metal fasteners, and synthetic polymer film on paperboard, 52.7 x 38.1 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

The low contrast conveys the soft and gentle feeling of a heavy mist over quiet water. On the other hand, Robert Mapplethorpe photograph, *Calla Lily* (1987) has much higher contrast, meaning that the difference in the whites and blacks is much greater. The effect is much sharper and crisper, making this simple flower appear grand and impressive.

Moving yet further, in Kara Walker's silhouette image, *Untitled (from Testimony)*, the contrast is absolute. We see only black and white (and here, some red).

In this case, the artist is using the power of this contrast to draw the viewer's attention to some of the problems in American race relations, and their origins in the institution of chattel slavery. Therefore, while visual elements produce visual effects, their implications can extend well beyond the purely visual.

Note that Value is not merely the use of black, white, and gray, but it can overlap with the element of Color. For instance, the red color in Kara Walker's image above is lighter than the black and darker than the white and could therefore be called a mid-tone, or middle value.

Value

Value refers to the use of light and dark in art. Value can be subdivided into tint (light hues) and shade (dark hues). In painting, which uses subtractive color, value changes are achieved by adding black or white to a color. Artists may also employ shading,

which refers to a more subtle manipulation of value. The value scale is used to show the standard variations in tones. Values near the lighter end of the spectrum are termed high-keyed, while those on the darker end are low-keyed.

Value scale: The value scale represents different degrees of light and dark used in artwork.

In two-dimensional artworks, the use of value can help to give a shape the illusion of mass or volume. It will also give the entire composition a sense of lighting. High contrast refers to the placing of lighter areas directly against much darker ones, so their difference is showcased, creating a dramatic effect. High contrast also refers to the presence of more blacks than white or grey. Low-contrast images result from placing mid-range values together so there is not much visible difference between them, creating a more subtle mood.

In Baroque painting, the technique of chiaroscuro was used to produce highly dramatic effects in art. Chiaroscuro, which means literally “light-dark” in Italian, refers to clear tonal contrasts exemplified by very high-keyed whites, placed directly against very low-keyed darks. Candlelit scenes were common in Baroque painting as they effectively produced this dramatic type of effect. Caravaggio used a high contrast palette in such works as *The Denial of St. Peter* to create his expressive chiaroscuro scene.

Caravaggio, *The Denial of St. Peter*, 1610: Caravaggio’s *The Denial of St. Peter* is an excellent example of how light can be manipulated in artwork.

Artists use the contrast between light and shadow to create the sense of three-dimensional form on a flat surface—and to shape viewers' perceptions. The terms "value" or "tone" are often used to describe this quality lightness and darkness. The artist may use light strategically to direct attention, create a particular mood, or communicate a message with an artwork. This video examines how three artists, using painting, printmaking, and installation, have used light to particular effect in their work.

Art Institute of Chicago, "Art Explainer 3: Light and Shadow(opens in new window)"

The following works from the Art Institute of Chicago appear in this video:

Tanner,(opens in new window) *The Two Disciples at the Tomb(opens in new window)*

Kollwitz, Battlefield(opens in new window)

Flavin, “monument” for V. Tatlin(opens in new window)

Articles in this Chapter:

- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, “Color,” in *Smarthistory*, June 24, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, “Space,” in *Smarthistory*, July 9, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, “Texture,” in *Smarthistory*, July 10, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Art Institute of Chicago, “Surface and Depth,” in *Smarthistory*, January 26, 2018 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Art Institute of Chicago, “Light and shadow,” in *Smarthistory*, February 7, 2018 (CC BY-NC-SA)

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- **3: The Visual Elements and Principles of Composition** by Cerise Myers, Ellen C. Caldwell, Alice J. Taylor, Margaret Phelps & Lisa Soccio is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Supporting Images for Color and Value

In this section, students are invited to examine the featured artwork as a demonstration of how artists employ the **elements of art**—such as line, color, texture, and space—alongside the **principles of design**—including balance, contrast, emphasis, and unity—to shape meaning and guide the viewer's experience. The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Color

Mother and Child

Young Woman Watering a Shrub

Peasant Mother

The Banjo Lesson

Red Room

Color Structure

Peach Blossom Spring

Bridalveil Fall

Green Wheat Fields, Auvers

A Piece of Wood [A Piece of Wood II]

Atlantic Ocean, Cliffs of Moher

The Bay

Calla Lily

Fotogramm

Untitled (from Testimony)

I Will Not Make Boring Art

Value

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Mother and Child*, 1886, pastel, 79.1 x 63.5 cm (Cleveland Museum of Art)

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Young Woman Watering a Shrub (Translation), Berthe Morisot, French 1876 from VMFA.museum Image released via Creative Commons CC-BY-NC

Figure **2.1.1.1**: David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Peasant Mother*, 1962. Oil on burlap, 249 x 180 cm. Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City. (© David Alfaro Siqueiros) (Photos via Smarthistory)

The Two Disciples at the Tomb

The Supper at Emmaus

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893, oil on canvas, 49 × 35.5 inches / 124.5 × 90.2 cm (Hampton University Museum, Hampton, VA)

Battlefield

Migrant Mother

"monument" for V. Tatlin

The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Henri Matisse, *Red Room (Harmony in Red)*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 180.5 x 221 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia. (Photo via Smarthistory)

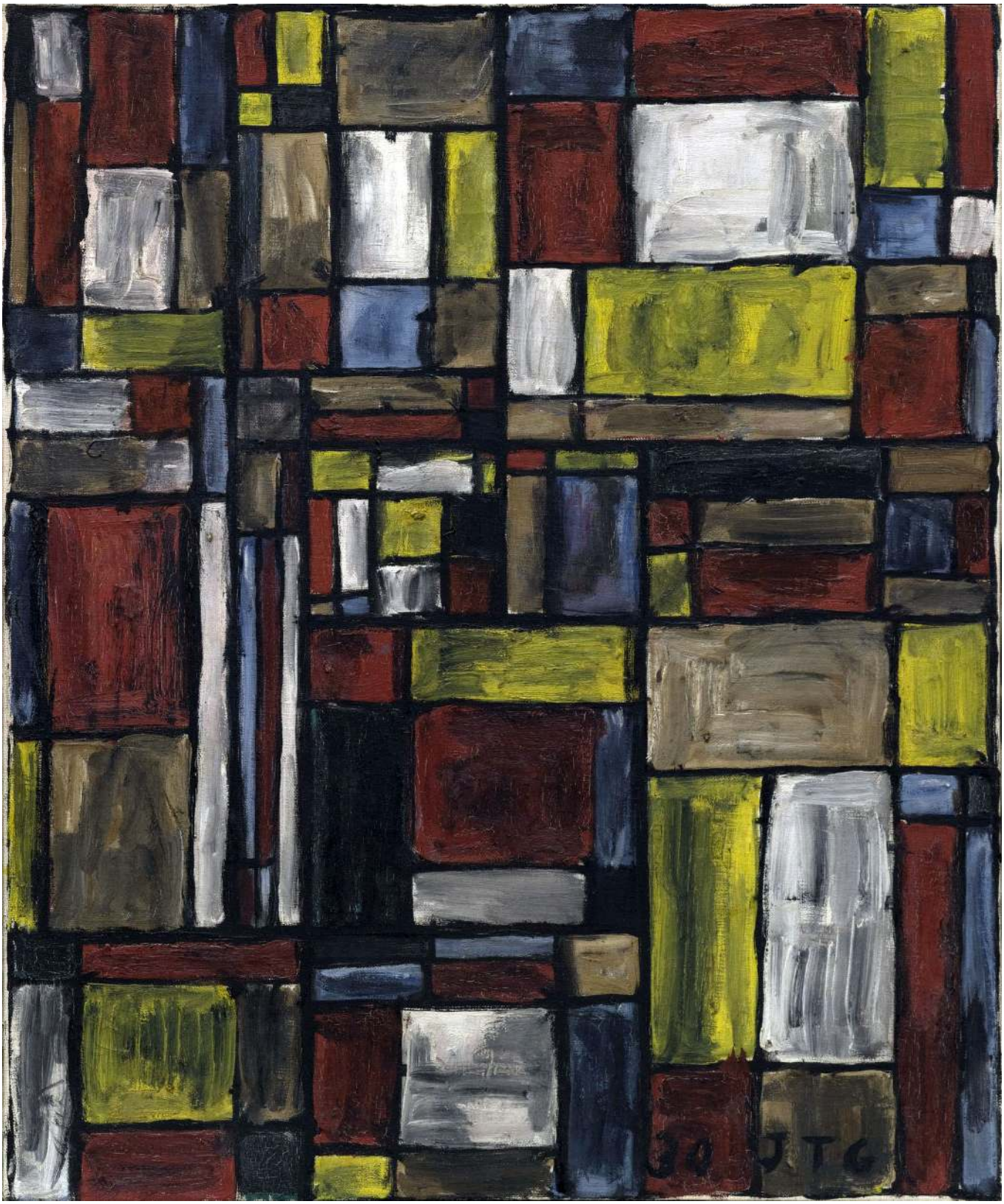

Figure 2.1.1.1: Joaquín Torres-García, *Color Structure*, 1930, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches (The Museum of Modern Art, New York(opens in new window))

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Zhou Chen, *Peach Blossom Spring*, 102.5 X 161.5 cm (Suzhou Museum)

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Binh Danh, *Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite CA, May 31, 2012*, 2012, daguerreotype. 6.5 x 8.5 inches

Figure 2.1.1.1: Green Wheat Fields, Auvers 1890 Vincent van Gogh, 28 1/2 2 36 in., National Gallery of Art Public Domain

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/375720

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Georgia O'Keeffe, (1887-1986), A Piece of Wood II/ From Knot of Wood, 1942, oil on canvas, 24 3/4 X 19 3/4 in. Art Bridges. Photo: Steve Panceccasio

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Atlantic Ocean, Cliffs of Moher*, 1989. Offset lithograph, 24 x 31 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. (© Hiroshi Sugimoto)(Photos via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Helen Frankenthaler, *The Bay*, 1963, acrylic on canvas, 6′ 8-7/8″ x 6′ 9-7/8″ (Detroit Institute of Arts)

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Calla Lily*, 1987, gelatin silver print, 17.94 × 17.78 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art) © Robert Mapplethorpe / The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

Figure **2.1.1.1**: László Moholy-Nagy, *Fotogramm* (Photogram), 1926, gelatin silver print, 9 7/16 × 7 1/16 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window))

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Kara Walker, *Untitled (from Testimony)*, 2004, cut black paper with pencil, pressure-sensitive tape, metal fasteners, and synthetic polymer film on paperboard, 52.7 x 38.1 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

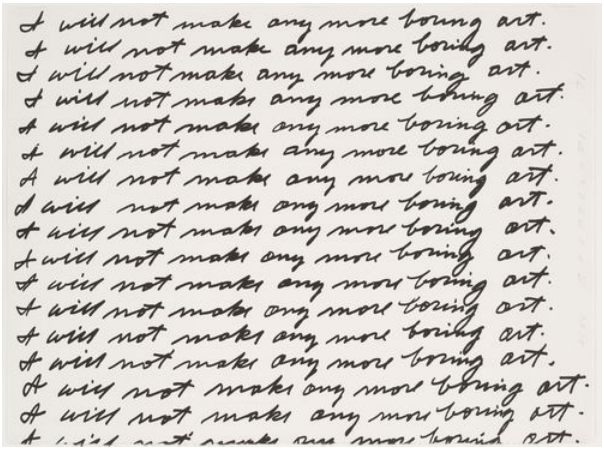

Figure **2.1.1.1**: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971, lithograph, 57 x 76.4 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (© John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist)

The Two Disciples at the Tomb

Figure **2.1.1.1**: The Two Disciples at the Tomb Date: c. 1906 Artist: Henry Ossawa Tanner (American, 1859–1937) CC0 Public Domain

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Supper at Emmaus(opens in new window) (1601, oil on canvas, 141 x 196.2 cm) Public Domain(opens in new window)

Battlefield

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Battlefield, Date 1907, Artist Käthe Kollwitz German, 1867-1945 © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

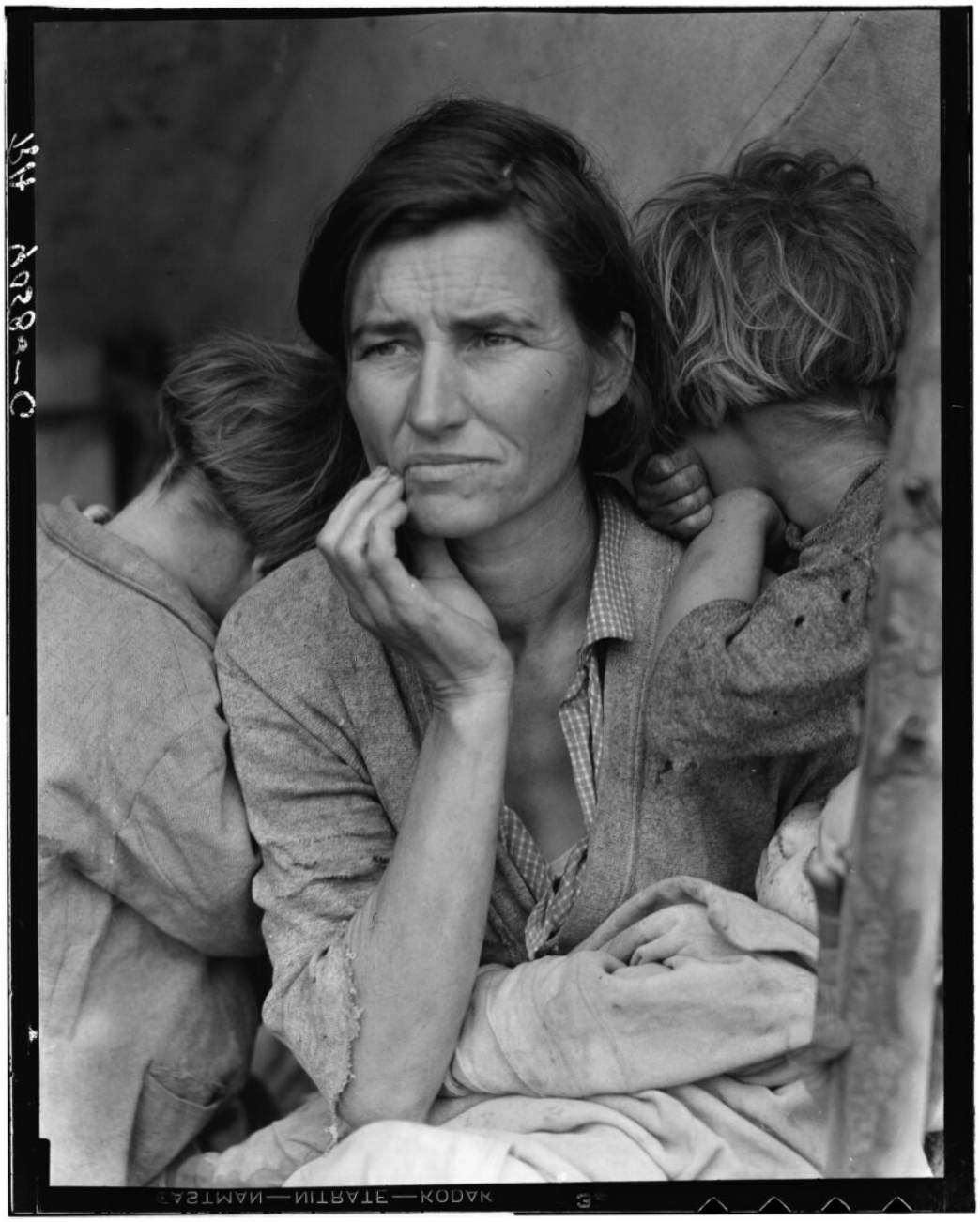

Figure 2.1.1.1: Florence Owens's grandson, Roger Sprague, identified the subjects, from left to right, as: "Katherine Owens age 4, Florence Owens (later known as Thompson) age 32, Ruby Owens age 5. Baby on mother's lap is Norma age 1 year." [1] Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother / Destitute Pea Pickers in California, Mother of Seven Children. Age Thirty-Two. Nipomo, California*, 1936, digital reproduction from retouched negative (Library of Congress(opens in new window), Washington, D.C.)

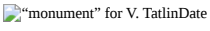

Figure 2.1.1.1: "monument" for V. TatlinDate: 1964 Artist: Dan Flavin American, 1933–1996 © 2018 Stephen Flavin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

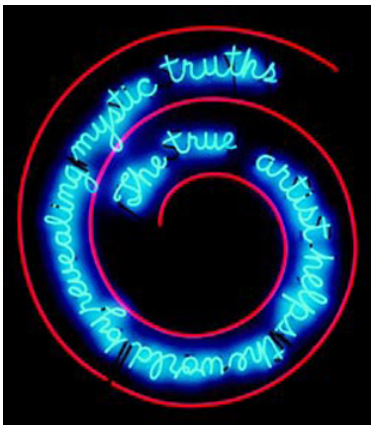

Figure **2.1.1.1**: Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967, neon and clear glass tubing suspension supports; 149.86 x 139.7 x 5.08 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

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2.2: Line, Shape, and Form

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Line, Shape, and Form. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Line

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

Figure 2.2.1: Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen*, from *The Apocalypse*, 1498. Woodcut, 38.7 x 27.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, public domain)

Line is the most basic visual element. Lines can be used to define shapes and figures, but also to indicate motion, emotion, and other elements.

Figure 2.2.2: Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen*, from *The Apocalypse* (detail). (Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, public domain)

Contour lines and hatching

In a woodblock print of *The Four Horsemen* from *The Apocalypse* by Albrecht Dürer(opens in new window), contour lines—lines that define shapes—are used to mark the outside of all of the elements of the image.

The outline of the hat on one of the horsemen, for example, is clearly made by a few black contour lines. This simple device is so effective that it is hard to remember that there is no hat here, only a few black marks on a white page.

Note, though, that lines are also used to show shading—the shadows caused when light hits one side of an object, leaving the other in shadow. On the hat, for example, the closely spaced lines, called hatching, show that the left side of his hat is in a shadow. This also helps the hat to look more three-dimensional, giving it a sense of form.

Figure 2.2.3: Roy Lichtenstein, *In the Car*, 1963. Oil and magna on canvas, 172.00 x 203.50 cm. National Galleries, Scotland. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/DACS 2018. (Photo: National Galleries of Scotland, via Smarthistory)

Contour lines outline all the figures and forms in the image, creating the illusion of shading and form. In addition, there are horizontal lines in the background. While these create shading, they also help create the sense that the riders are moving rapidly from left to right. Motion lines may be familiar to you from comic strips, but they appear in all sorts of work.

Organic and inorganic (geometric) lines

In the Dürer print, we can also divide the lines into organic and inorganic (or geometric) lines (see the section on shape for more on organic and inorganic). Organic lines are loose, curving lines like those found in nature. In the Dürer print, the lines of the horses' manes and tails, the figures' hair, and the ruffled clouds are all organic. Inorganic lines are generally straight or perfectly curving lines, like those found in geometry. In this image, most of the lines are organic, but the horizontal lines in the background are inorganic.

Figure 2.2.4: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1483-86. Oil on panel, 199 x 122 cm. Louvre Museum, Paris, France. (Photo: Louvre Museum, public domain)

Implied lines

We can also look for implied lines. These are not actually drawn, but we can connect the dots (literally or figuratively) to create the lines in our minds. Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*(opens in new window) contains wonderful examples of implied lines.

Here, the implied lines are sight lines, which guide us throughout the image. These help us know where to look, and show us what is important in the painting. Follow the gazes of the figures as they look and point at one another. The angel in the red cape to the right looks out at us, and then points at the infant John the Baptist, at the left. He looks at the infant Jesus, who in turn looks back again at him. Above, Mary looks down at Jesus, and also gestures toward him with her hand.

Figure 2.2.5: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, (detail with implied lines). (Photo: Louvre Museum, public domain)

Basically, once we make it into the space of the painting by meeting the gaze of the angel, we become locked in a cycle of movement between the holy figures, guided by their sight lines.

Shape and Form

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

Shape builds on line and color, as it has to be made of one or both of these. Shape is the property of a two-dimensional form, usually defined by a line around it or by a change in color.

There are two main types of shapes, geometric and organic. While most works of art contain both geometric and organic shapes, looking at those that are more completely divided can serve to clarify these qualities.

Geometric shapes

Piet Mondrian is an excellent example of an artist who used geometric shapes almost exclusively. In his *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red* (1937-42), Mondrian, uses straight vertical and horizontal black lines to divide his canvas into rectangles of primary colors.

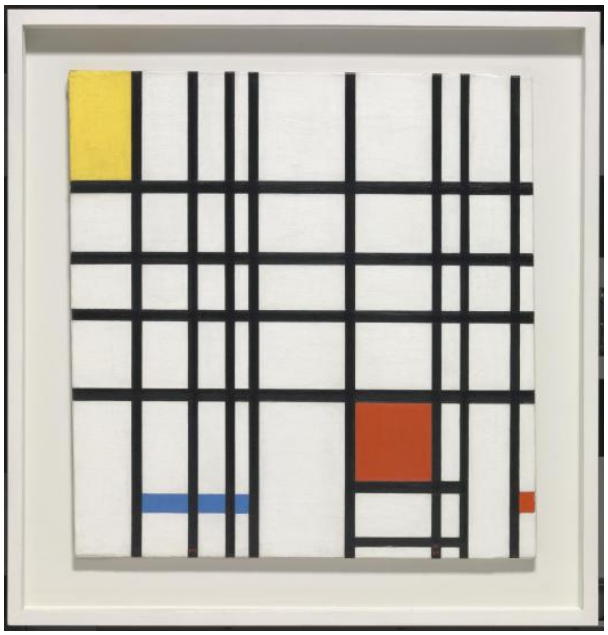

Figure 2.2.6: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red*, 1937–42. Oil on canvas, 72.7 x 69.2 cm. Tate Museum, London, England. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Nothing here gives the impression of the natural world. On the other hand, Maori facial tattooing, known as *moko*, uses primarily organic shapes. They are still, like Mondrian's shapes, generally abstract — they do not depict any clear images — but the shapes are like those found in nature, curving, twisting, and spiraling across their wearers' faces. The edges of the lines and shapes are crisp, but the forms are curving and sensuous.

Figure 2.2.7: Early Maori were highly skilled in Ta Moko, the process of tattooing. Location: Te Kuiti, Waikato. (Photo: James Heremaia, WorldWide licence)

Figure 2.2.8: Cueva de las Manos, Perito Moreno, Argentina, c. 7300 BCE. Mineral pigments (iron oxides, kaolin, natrojarosite, and manganese oxide) on cave wall. (Photo: Mariano, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Editors' Note

Shape can be either positive or negative. In this photograph from the Cueva de las Manos, we can see both positive shapes (handprints created by dipping the hand in pigment and then placing it on the stone) and negative shapes (formed by applying pigment over the hand, with the resulting shape defined by the absence of pigment).

Figure 2.2.9: Negative space in the photograph below of the Ancestor Figure (*Korwar*). (Illustration by Dr. Cerise Myers, CC BY 2.0)

We can also speak of negative space, which refers to the area around and between the figure and ground. The illustration above shows the negative space around the Ancestor Figure (*Korwar*) as shown in the photograph below. In a painting or drawing, artists often consider both positive and negative space in balancing their composition, as is discussed in the following chapter.

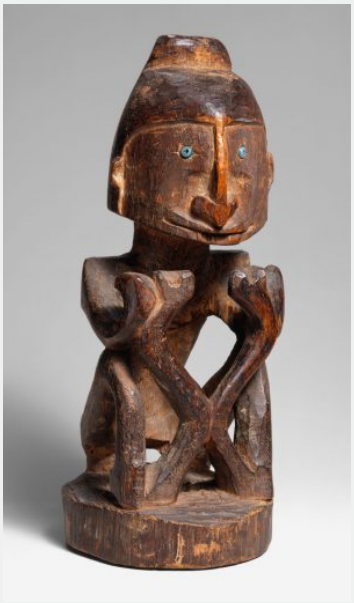

Figure 2.2.10: Ancestor Figure (*Korwar*), Indonesia, Papua Province (Irian Jaya), Cenderawasih Bay region, in northwest New Guinea, late 19th–early 20th century. Wood and glass beads, 26 cm high. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Form

Form is actual, three-dimensional shape, though it is often used to describe the illusion of three-dimensionality, as well. Like shape, form can be geometric or organic.

A small *korwar* — a representation of an ancestor — from Irian Jaya, New Guinea, mixes these form types well. While the figure is predominantly geometric, with the head shaped like a cube and the nose an arrow pointing downward, the curving organic lines around the eyes soften this effect a bit.

Articles in this chapter:

- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, "Line," in *Smarthistory*, June 23, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, "Shape and Form," in *Smarthistory*, July 11, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)

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In this section, students are invited to examine the featured artwork as a demonstration of how artists employ the **elements of art**—such as line, color, texture, and space—alongside the **principles of design**—including balance, contrast, emphasis, and unity—to shape meaning and guide the viewer's experience. The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

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Line

The Four Horsemen, from The Apocalypse

Figure **2.2.1.1**: Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1498, woodcut, 15-1/4 x 11-7/16″ / 38.8 x 29.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The Tetons - Snake River

In the Car

Navigation Chart

The Virgin of the Rocks

Improvisation 28

Figure **2.2.1.1**: Ansel Adams, *"The Tetons—Snake River," Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming*, 1942 (**National Archives(opens in new window)**)

Figure **2.2.1.1**: Roy Lichtenstein, *In the Car*, 1963. Oil and magna on canvas, 172.00 x 203.50 cm. National Galleries, Scotland. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/DACS 2018. (Photo: National Galleries of Scotland(opens in new window), via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Joinville Soldier Walking

Shape and Form

Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red

The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II

Ta Moko

Figure **2.2.1.1**: Early Maori were highly skilled in Ta Moko, the process of tattooing. Location: Te Kuiti, Waikato. (Photo: James Heremaia(opens in new window), WorldWide licence(opens in new window))

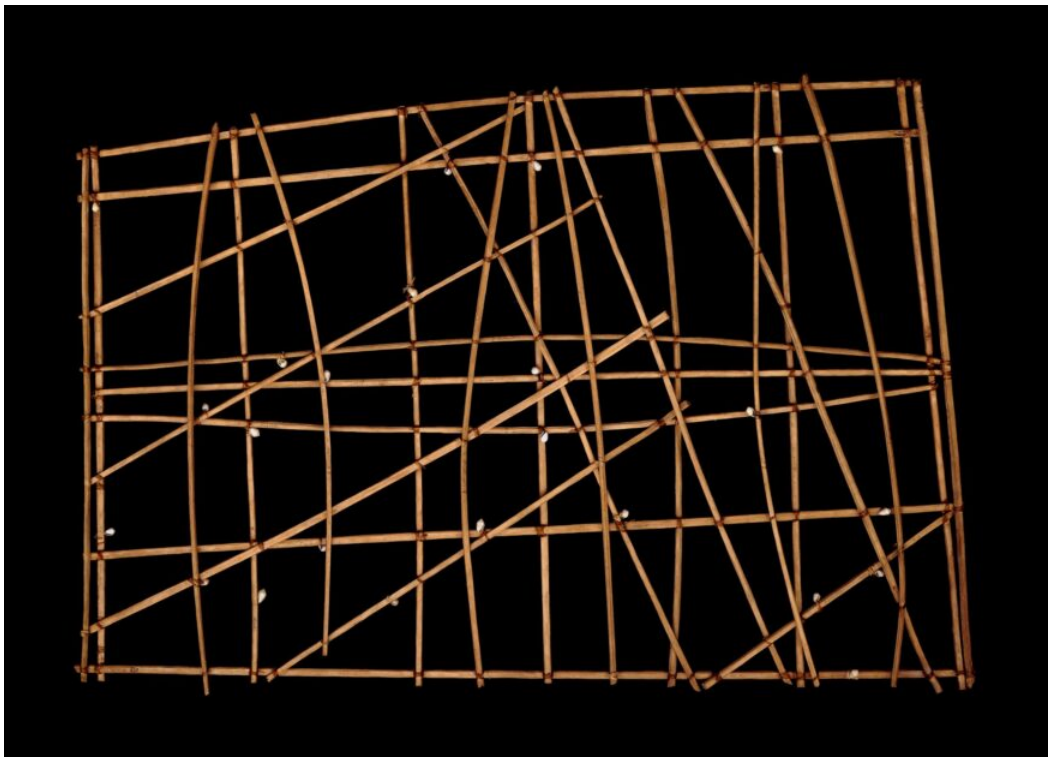

Figure 2.2.1.1: Navigation chart (*rebbelib*), probably 19th century C.E. (Marshall Islands, Micronesia), wood, shell, and fiber, 67.5 x 99 x 3 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum(opens in new window), London)

Muqarnas

Ceramic Lantern, 13th Century Syria

Korwar

West Buddha, Bamiyan

Figure **2.2.1.1**: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1483-86. Oil on panel, 199 x 122 cm. Louvre Museum, Paris, France. (Photo: Louvre Museum, public domain)

Figure 2.2.1.1: Vasily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 28* (second version), 1912, oil on canvas, 111.4 x 162.1 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

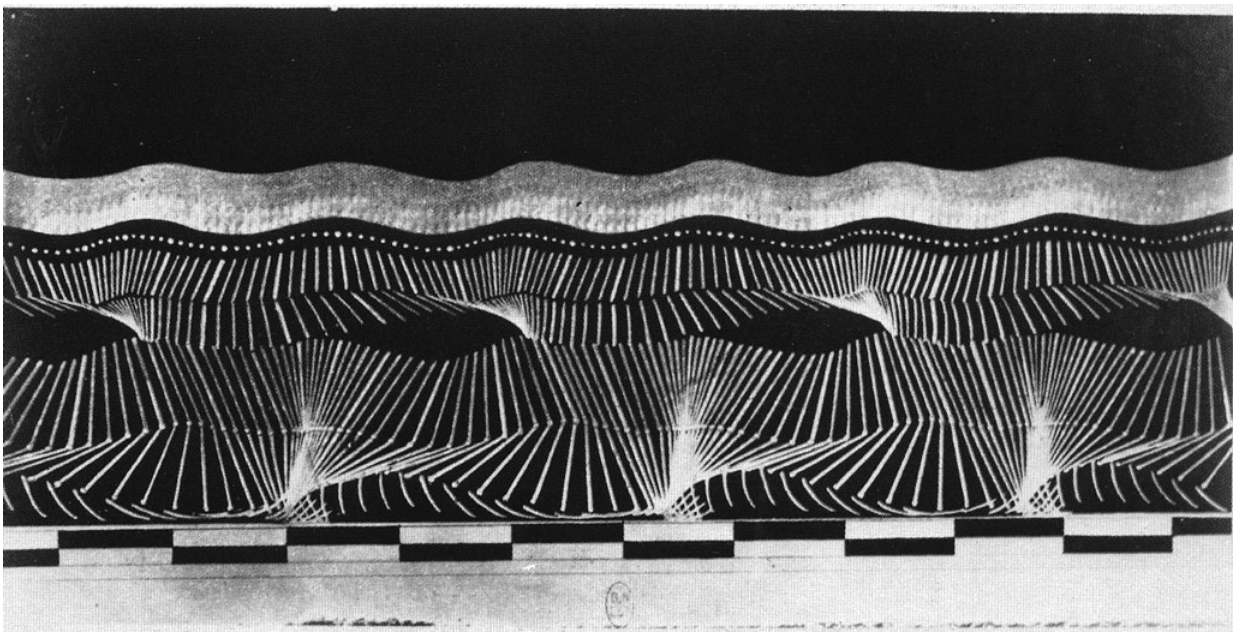

Figure 2.2.1.1: Jules Etienne Marey, *Joinville Soldier Walking*, 1883, geometric chronophotograph (Paris College de France)

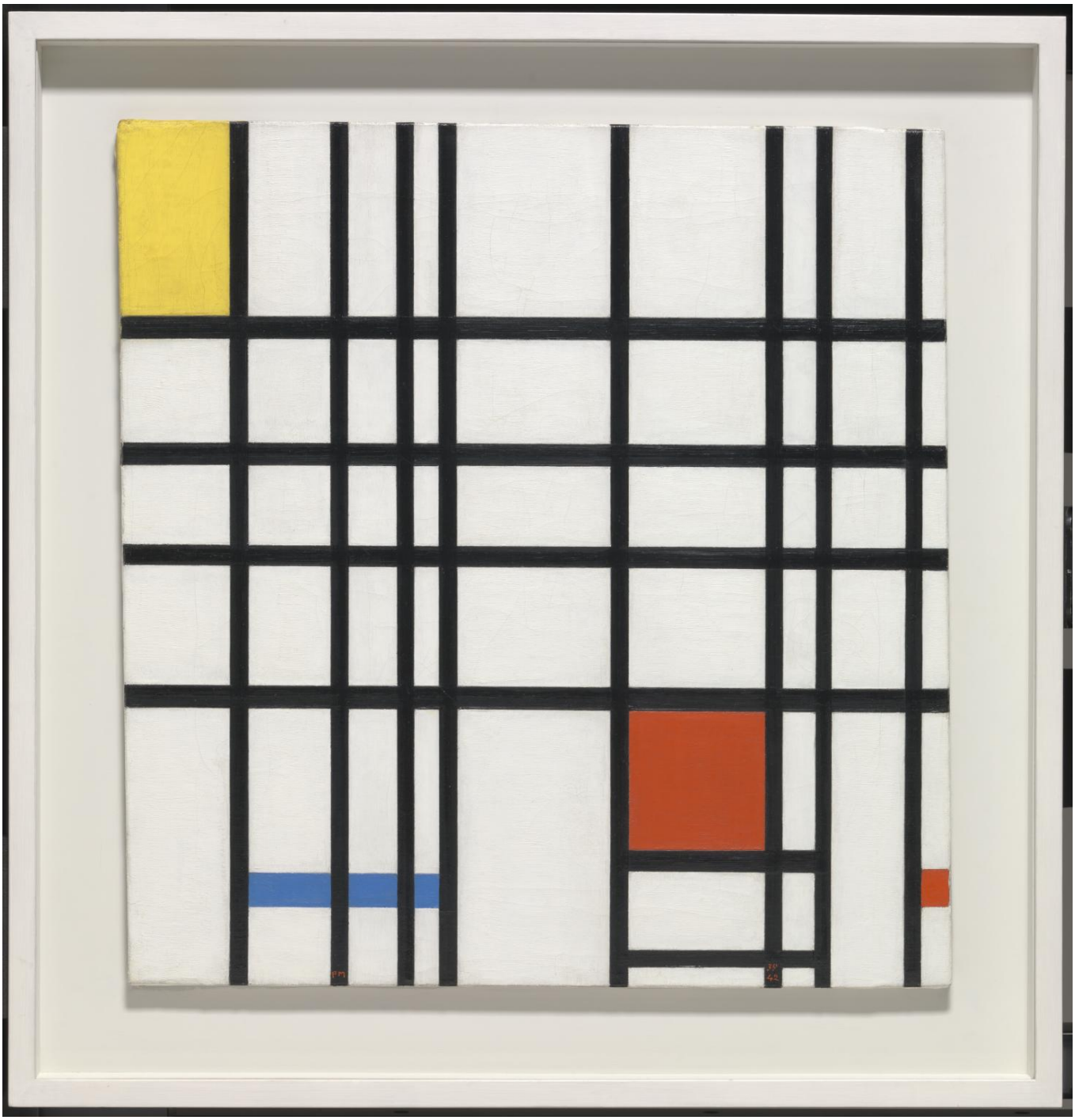

Figure **2.2.1.1**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red*, 1937–42. Oil on canvas, 72.7 x 69.2 cm. Tate Museum, London, England. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

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Figure **2.2.1.1**: Frank Stella, The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II, 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.5 x 337.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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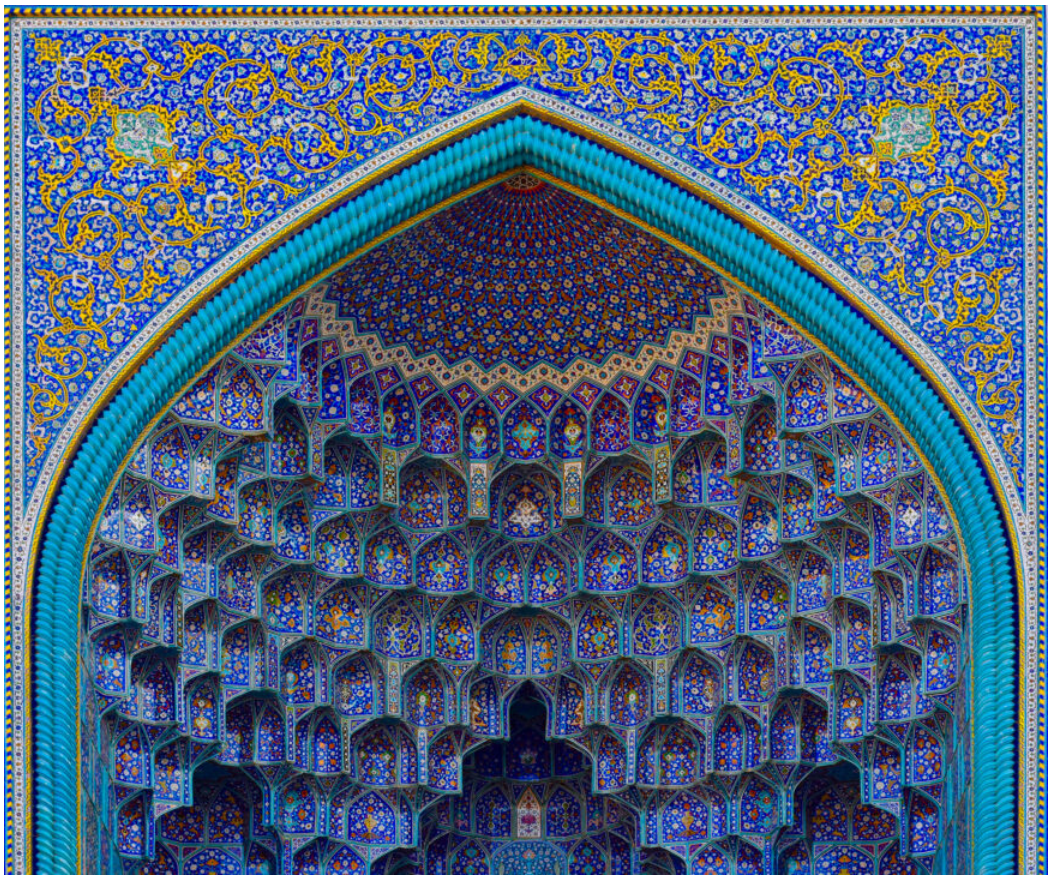

Figure 2.2.1.1: Muqarnas from the façade of Masjid-i Imām, Isfahan, Iran, 1612–38 (photo: Farzan95(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 4.0)

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Figure **2.2.1.1**: Ceramic Lantern early 13th century OA Public Domain The Met

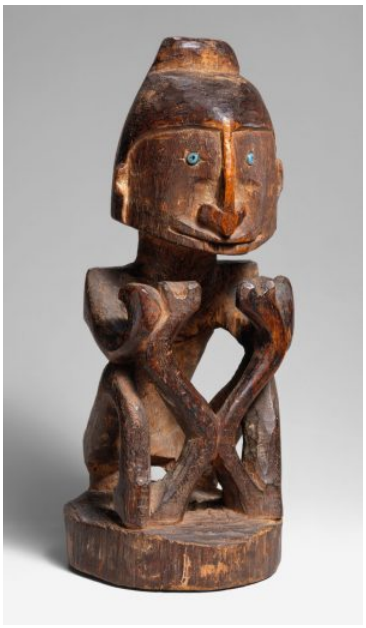

Figure **2.2.1.1**: Ancestor Figure (*Korwar*), Indonesia, Papua Province (Irian Jaya), Cenderawasih Bay region, in northwest New Guinea, late 19th–early 20th century. Wood and glass beads, 26 cm high. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

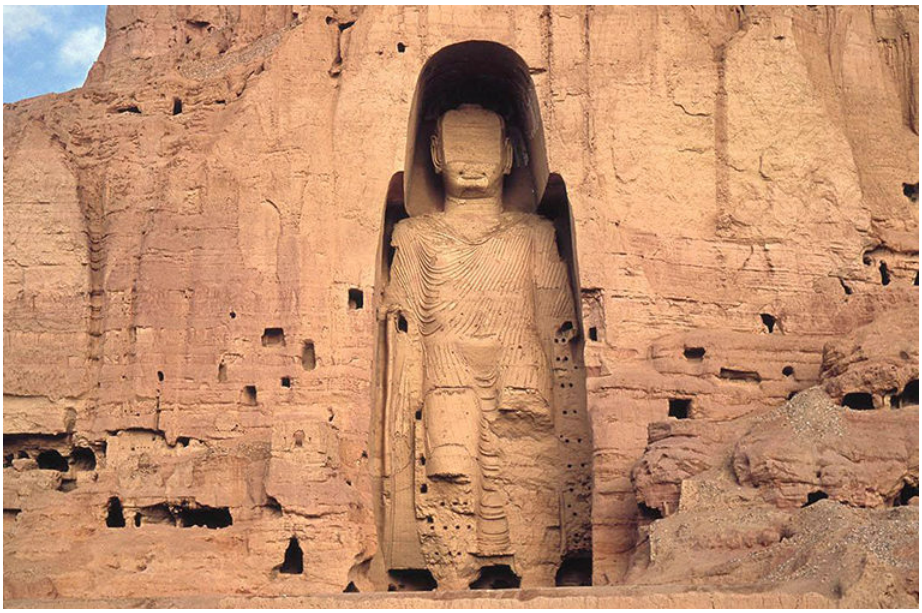

Figure **2.2.1.1**: West Buddha surrounded by caves, c. 6th-7th C.E., stone, stucco, paint, 175 feet high, Bamiyan, Afghanistan, destroyed 2001 (photo: © Afghanistan Embassy)

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2.3: Space, Surface and Depth, Proportion and Scale

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Space, Surface and Depth, Proportion and Scale. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Space

by Dr. Simon Mittman

Figure **2.3.18**: Left: Raphael, *La Donna Velata*, 1514-15. Oil on canvas, 82 x 60.5 cm. Palazzi Pitti, Florence; Right: St. John the Evangelist in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D IV, f. 209v. (Photos via Smarthistory)

A convincing illusion of space

Space is used to refer both to depth—real or represented—and also to the general surface area within a work of art. Some periods of art history show a great deal of interest in creating convincing illusions of three-dimensional space in two-dimensional media. Perhaps the most iconic (though certainly not the only) example of this is the Italian Renaissance (c. 1400-1600), when artists very deliberately worked to created convincing illusions of depth.

Look at how Raphael creates an illusion of three-dimensional form in *La Donna Velata*. Through careful variations in value, particularly in shading—the use of darker colors to create the illusion of shadows—Raphael convinces us that the woman in the painting is really there in three dimensions.

Light seems to strike her from her left, casting her right side in shadow. The folds of her voluminous sleeve are a particularly splendid example of the illusion of space. Even examining a small detail of it, it is hard to believe that there is no depth, at all, just thin layers of paint on flat canvas.

Figure **2.3.19**: Details of the sleeve, Left: Raphael, *La Donna Velata*; Right: St. John the Evangelist in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. (Photos via Smarthistory)

For sharp contrast, we can examine a detail of a page of the *Lindisfarne Gospels* . Both images show a person in voluminous robes, looking out at us, but here, the similarities end. Raphael's figure is lit softly, creating highlights and shadows that create a sense of roundness and weight to her body and clothes. The figure of John the Evangelist from the *Lindisfarne Gospels* , on the other hand, is almost totally flat. There is virtually no shading to his body and the folds on his clothes are purely schematic patterns.

If we isolate a small detail of John's sleeve, as we did with La Donna Velata's, it is difficult to even recall that this series of lines and colors is intended to be seen as a three-dimensional form, at all.

Figure **2.3.20**: Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83. Fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet. Vatican, Rome, Italy. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Figure **2.3.21**: Wolf Vostell, *No: Life as a Picture—A Picture as Life* series, 1963. Photograph. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Linear and atmospheric perspective

There are various methods used by artists to create the illusion that their figures exist in three-dimensional space. Among the more effective are linear and atmospheric perspective(opens in new window). Another work from the Italian Renaissance will serve to demonstrate both. Pietro Perugino's *Christ Handing the Keys to St. Peter*(opens in new window), uses both linear and atmospheric perspective to create a very convincing illusion of depth.

Linear perspective is based on the optical illusion that parallel lines seem to converge as they recede into the distance. Railroad tracks are the classic example, as in, Wolf Vostell's photograph from his *No: Life as a Picture—A Picture as Life* series from 1963. If we overlay the lines used on Perugino's painting, we can see how he used this effect. The lines are called orthogonal lines or orthogonals and they meet on the horizon line, at the vanishing point. Note that as all the orthogonals converge, the forms also get smaller.

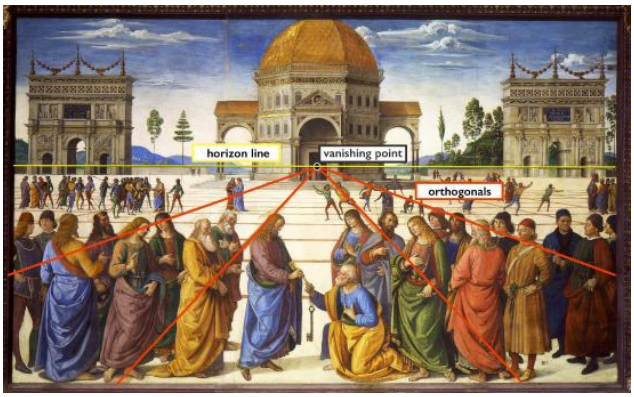

Figure **2.3.22**: Perspective diagram, Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Figure **2.3.23**: Tobias Verhaecht, *The Clivus Scauri in Rome*. Chalk, graphite and ink on paper, 22 x 17.1 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Perugino also uses atmospheric perspective(opens in new window). This is based on the optical effect that makes objects in the distance appear paler, bluer, and less detailed that objects that are close to us. Returning to Perugino's painting, we can see that he has replicated this effect, carefully making the figures in the foreground (the portion of the image that appears to be closest to the viewer) bolder in color, the smaller figures in the middle ground paler, and the hills in the background (the portion of the image that appears to be in the far distance) fading off into pale blues.The tool of one-point linear perspective is very simple, and artists can use it to create a convincing illusion of depth with only a few pencil strokes and without the careful measuring and use of a straightedge, as in Tobias Verhaecht's sketch of a Roman ruin. Two- and three-point linear perspective are slightly more complicated, but operate on the same general principles and produce similar results.

An important note

It is important to note, though, that the use of various techniques to create a convincing illusion of depth does not make Raphael or Perugino "better" artists than the anonymous medieval monk who painted the page of the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, nor does it make their works any "better" or more sophisticated. The illusion of depth is one of the many tools in the artist's toolbox, and it is serves some purposes very well, but it is not always the most powerful or effective way to convey an idea and, indeed, can sometimes be in direct conflict with the intentions of an artist.

Surface and Depth

by Art Institute of Chicago

What makes paintings feel as deep as the view from a window or as flat as a wall?

Online Resource: Surface and Depth

Paintings have both a literal surface and a conceptual surface called the picture plane. The picture plane can act like a transparent window, opening onto what feels like deep, three-dimensional space, or—especially in modern art—may emphasize its own flatness as a surface for paint. In a *trompe l'oeil* painting (from the French, meaning to deceive the eye), the space might not be especially deep, but the objects looks real enough to touch and may even break the picture plane. This video examines how artists can achieve these various effects of depth, and their results.

The Art Institute of Chicago, Art Explainer 2: Surface and Depth

The following works from the Art Institute of Chicago appear in this video:

- Poussin, *Landscape with St. John on Patmos*(opens in new window)
- Harnett, *For Sunday's Dinner*(opens in new window)
- Mondrian, *Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray*(opens in new window)

Proportion and scale

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

Proportion

Proportion refers to the relationship of parts of a body or form to one another and of the parts to the whole, for example, the size of the head of a figure in relation to the entire body.

Scale

Figure **2.3.7**: Altar group with Oba Akenzura I, Benin, Nigeria, eighteenth century. Brass, 63 cm. Ethnological Museum, Berlin, Germany. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Scale is the relationship of parts of an image to the image as a whole, or to something in the world outside of the image, for example, the size of the figure of a king in an image as compared to the size of the figure of his servant in the same image, or the size of a statue of the king as compared to the size of an actual person. Beginning with proportion, we can look again at

Doryphoros. We will compare his proportions to those of an *Altar Group from Benin with Oba (King) Akenzua I and Two Attendants*.

The proportions of *Doryphoros* (Figure **2.3.4**) were laid out according to mathematical formulas in order to create an image that the sculptor believed presented the "ideal man." *Doryphoros* is about seven "heads" tall, so to speak, whereas the Akenzua is approximately two and a half "heads" tall. *Doryphoros*' limbs fit within the range of average human proportion, whereas Akenzua's legs are considerably shorter than his torso.

While their proportions are quite different, both present figures considered to be ideal by their cultures. *Doryphoros* embodies quite literally the focus on external beauty—according to the tastes of the day—that was prevalent in Classical Greece, whereas the image of Akenzua shows, with the intentional enlargement of the head, the greater importance of the intellect in the culture.

Hierarchical scale

Scale can refer to any relationship of parts to the whole, but one particular type is of great significance in many periods: hierarchical scale is scale based on relative importance. That is, the more important a figure, the larger he or she is in relation to the figures around him or her. This is quite different from the naturalistic scale found in works organized by linear perspective, like Perugino's painting.

Akenzua, for example, is considerably larger than the figures that flank him. These are not children, but adult male attendants. We are not supposed to therefore assume that Akenzua is a giant, but rather, that he is far more important than the other two men. Also note that the other two have rather different proportions: their heads are much smaller in relation to their bodies, and their arms and legs longer. This reminds us that Akenzua's proportions are absolutely deliberate, not the result of incompetence but of a conscious effort to convey a cultural meaning.

Before leaving this work, though, two more details should be mentioned. At their feet are small cats, but these are leopards—traditional symbols of the king—and so even the attendants are comparatively giant. And below the cats are fallen men, bound with their hands behind them, decapitated. The symbolism of decapitation as the ultimate, dehumanizing death highlights the importance of the scale of the head of the king who towers over them.

Articles in this chapter:

- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, "Space," in *Smarthistory*, July 9, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Art Institute of Chicago, "Surface and Depth," in *Smarthistory*, January 26, 2018 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, "Proportion and scale," in *Smarthistory*, July 11, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)

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2.3.1: Supporting Images for Space, Surface and Depth, Proportion and Scale

Supporting Images for Space, Surface and Depth, Proportion and Scale

In this section, students are invited to examine the featured artwork as a demonstration of how artists employ the **elements of art**—such as line, color, texture, and space—alongside the **principles of design**—including balance, contrast, emphasis, and unity—to shape meaning and guide the viewer's experience. The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Space

La Donna Velata

Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone

St. John the Evangelist in the Lindisfarne Gospels

The Utrecht Psalter

The Harley Psalter

The Eadwine Psalter

Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter

Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria

Life as a Picture - A Picture as Life Series

Perspective Painting of the Lake to the East

The Clivus Scauri in Rome

Chamber of the Sphinx

Cloister of St. Trophime

Surface and Depth

Landscape with St.John on Patmos

The Oxbow

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Raphael, *La Donna Velata*, 1514-15. Oil on canvas, 82 x 60.5 cm. Palazzi Pitti, Florence

Figure 2.3.1.1: Thomas Moran, *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, 1872, oil on canvas mounted on aluminum, 213 x 266.3 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

For Sunday's Dinner

Still Life of Oysters, Cookies, and Comfits

Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray

Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition

Proportion and Scale

Altar Group with Oba Akenzua I

The Gates

Storyteller with Twenty Figures

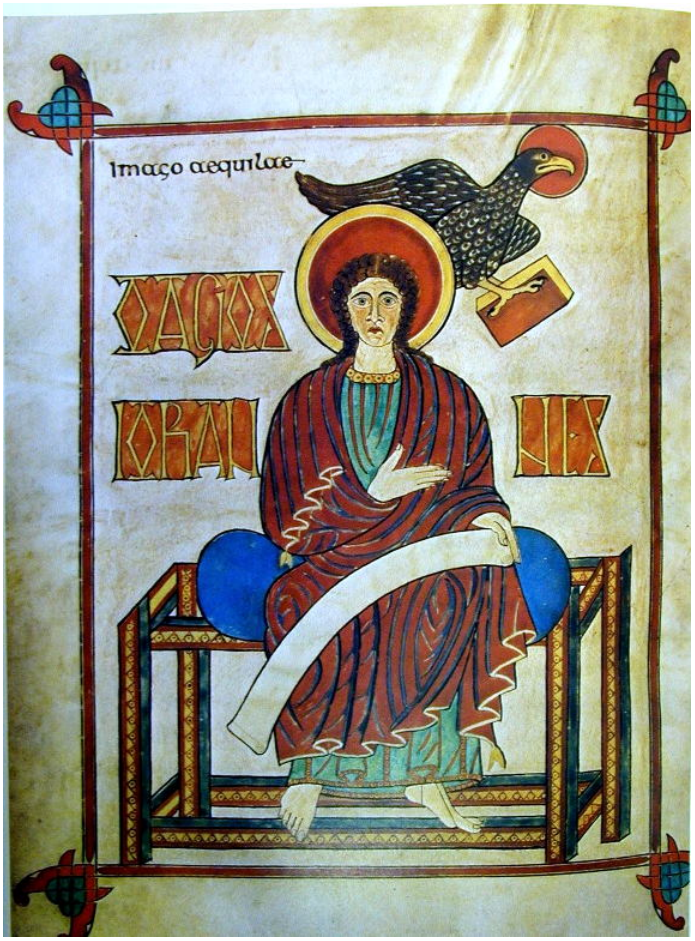

Figure **2.3.1.1**: St. John the Evangelist in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D IV, f. 209v. (Photos via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Ultrecht Psalter: From the Utrecht Psalter, ninth century. Naturalistic and energetic figurine line drawings were entirely new and became the most influential innovation of Carolinian art in later periods.

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Harley Psalter, illustration to Psalm 15(16):5, Harley MS 603, fol. 8r, (detail), Canterbury, England, first half of the 11th century. Colored inks on parchment, 380 x 310 mm. British Library, London, England. (Photo: The British Library(opens in new window), public domain(opens in new window))

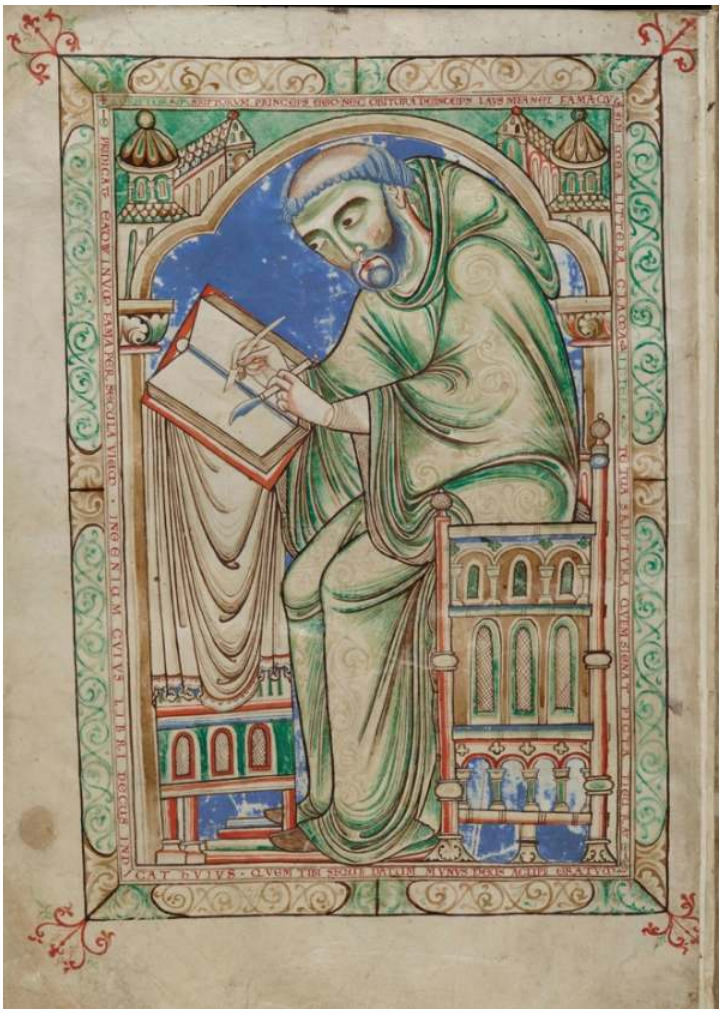

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Tripartitum Psalterium Eadwini (The Eadwine Psalter) This work is copyright the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License CC-BY-NC

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83. Fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet. Vatican, Rome, Italy. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

EDIT THIS IMAGE

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Gentile Bellini and Giovanni Bellini, *Saint Mark Preaching in a Square of Alexandria in Egypt*, 1504-07, oil on canvas, 347 x 770 cm (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan)

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Wolf Vostell, *No: Life as a Picture—A Picture as Life* series, 1963. Photograph. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

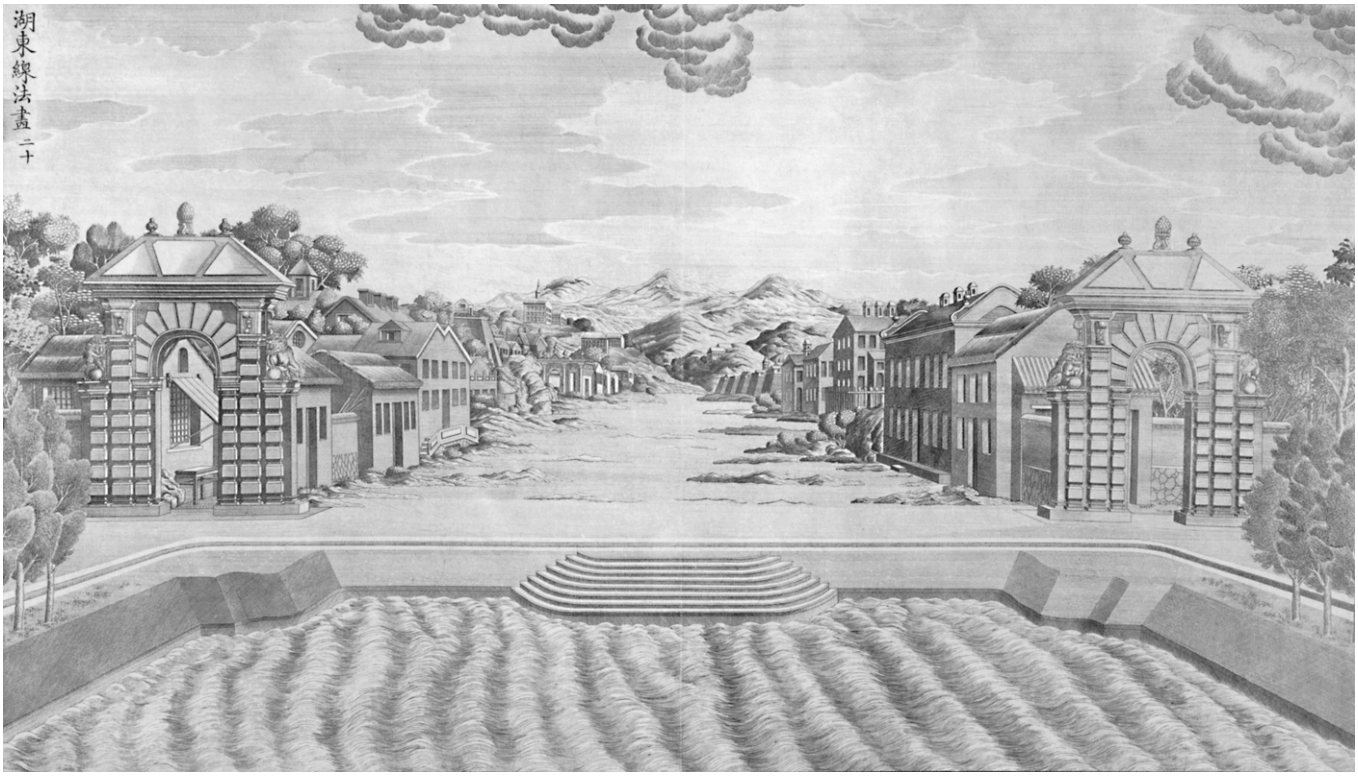

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Perspective paintings east of the lakeHudong xianfahua 湖東線法畫 Image Source: Visualizing Cultures.mit.edu [visualizingcultures.mit.edu]

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Tobias Verhaecht, *The Clivus Scauri in Rome*. Chalk, graphite and ink on paper, 22 x 17.1 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure **2.3.1.1**: "Chamber Of The Sphinx," rediscovered in 2019, Domus Aurea, Rome (photo: Parco archeologico del Colosseo)

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Raphael, *La Donna Velata*, 1514-15. Oil on canvas, 82 x 60.5 cm. Palazzi Pitti, Florence

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Landscape with Saint John on Patmos, Artist: Nicolas Poussin, Year: 1640, Type: Oil on Canvas Dimensions 100.3 cm × 136.4 cm (39.5 in × 53.7 in) Location Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, oil on canvas, 1836 (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

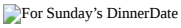

Figure **2.3.1.1**: For Sunday's Dinner Date: 1888 Artist: William Michael Harnett (American, born Ireland, 1848–1892) CC0 Public Designation

Figure 2.3.1.1: Still Life with Oysters, Cookies, and Comfits Osias Beert (Flemish, about 1580–1623)about 1610 MFABoston

Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red

Figure 2.3.1.1: Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and GrayDate: 1921 Artist: Piet Mondrian Dutch, 1872–1944 CC0 Public Designation

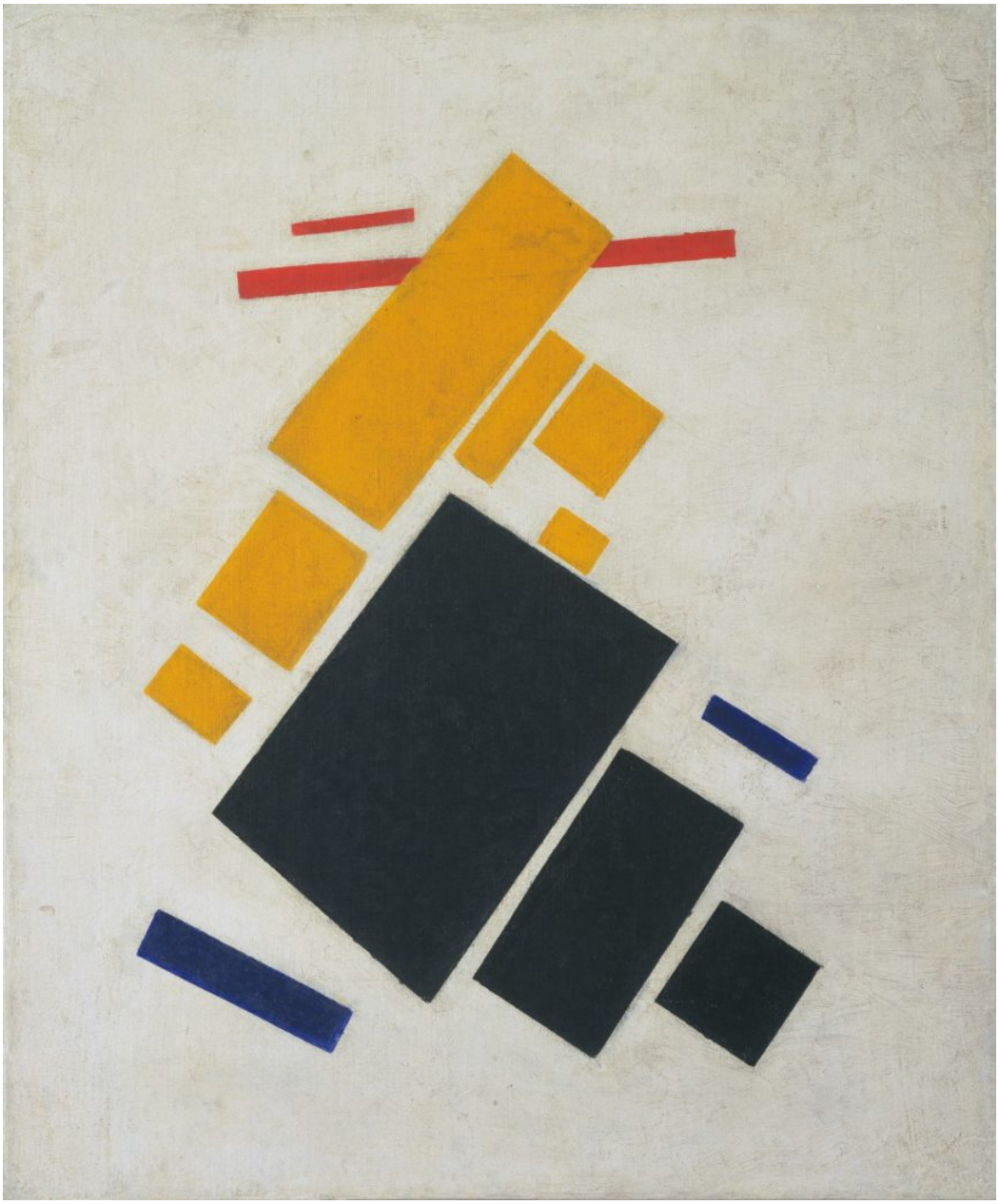

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Kasimir Malevich, *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition*, 1915, oil on canvas, 58.1 x. 48.3 cm, (MoMA)

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Altar group with Oba Akenzura I, Benin, Nigeria, eighteenth century. Brass, 63 cm. Ethnological Museum, Berlin, Germany. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure 2.3.1.1: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-2005 (view across the pond looking southeast) © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Figure **2.3.1.1**: Helen Cordero, Storyteller with Twenty Figures, ca. 1985, fired clay with slip and beeweed, 11 1⁄8 x 7 7⁄8 x 11 in. (28.3 x 20.0 x 27.9 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Chuck and Jan Rosenak and museum purchase made possible by Mrs. Gibson Fahnestock, 1997.124.148

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2.4: Texture, Pattern, Repetition and Rhythm, Variety and Unity

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Texture, Pattern, Repetition and Rhythm, Variety and Unity. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Texture

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

Texture is an element that appeals to our sense of touch. Whether the texture is an actual surface or merely the visual illusion of a texture, the sense of touch is triggered in our thoughts and feelings.

Figure 1.2.241.2.24: Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog*, 1994-2001. Transparent color coating, stainless steel, 320 x 380 x 120 cm. (Photo: Kim(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 2.0(opens in new window))

Surface texture

Jeff Koons' *Balloon Dog* has a perfectly smooth, mirrored surface. Like many textures, it is difficult to resist touching, though we must. Our sense of touch is one of the main ways we understand our world and it is amazing to consider how the sense of touch can still be triggered through what we see, the same psychological and emotional response can occur, evoking feelings and memories of when we have touched similar surfaces in our past.

In contrast to the smoothness above, the coarse, bristly surface of an ancient Shang Dynasty Fang-Ding—a ritual vessel used in worshipping dead ancestors—grants the work a vibrant energy that is, perhaps, less inviting to touch.

Figure 1.2.251.2.25: Fangding Ritual Food Vessel with Abstract Decor, Shang dynasty, China, 14th-11th century BCE. Cast bronze, 21.7 x 17.1 x 15.2 cm. Harvard Art Museums. (Photo: Harvard Art Museums(opens in new window), via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

The illusion of texture

The illusion of texture is no less important to our experience of artworks.

Dutch still life paintings are justly famous for their careful, illusionistic replication of objects. The smooth silver plates and glass goblet of Pieter Claesz's *Still Life* seem to tease us, as do the rougher cookies and breads, and the crumbly pie. The knife handle, pointing out of the image toward us, seems just beyond our grasp, and therefore makes this magnificent spread all the more tantalizing.

Figure 1.2.261.2.26: Pieter Claesz, *Still Life*, c. 1625. Oil on panel, 48 × 76.9 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

When engaging works of art, notice what textures you see and consider how they affect your sense of touch. What does a particular texture seem to convey and how does this relate to what the other elements are bringing to the artwork?

Pattern, repetition and rhythm, variety and unity

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

Figure **2.4.8**: Vairocana Buddha, China, 16th-17th century. Bronze, 99 cm. Cantor Arts Center, Stanford, California. (Photo via Smarthistory)

When an image or object is repeated throughout a work of art, or a part of a work, this is called either pattern or repetition.

Repetition and pattern

Repetition can be less structured than pattern, which is more regular. Both can work to create a sense of rhythm, as discussed below. The large base of a Ming Dynasty Chinese Bronze statue of Vairochana Buddha is composed of literally thousands of tiny bodhisattvas (enlightened beings who have chosen to stay on earth to help others achieve enlightenment), which therefore seem to serve to support Buddha figuratively, as well as visually. Their repetition is very regular, establishing a clear pattern. This is also the case in the Buddhist mandala (Figure **2.4.3**) from the 9th century. The pattern in both cases emphasizes the unity of purpose shared by these thousands of figures, each an embodiment of the ideal of compassion.

Rhythm

Figure **2.4.9**: Hypostyle hall, Great Mosque at Cordoba, Spain, begun 786 and enlarged during the 9th and 10th centuries. (Photo: wsifrancis, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Rhythm is the visual tempo set by repeating elements in a work of art or architecture. The arches and columns of the Great Mosque of Cordoba(opens in new window) provide a good example. They are spaced very evenly, setting up an even tone to the building. This is then enlivened by the rhythm created by the striped pattern on the arches.

For contrast, we could look at Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*. Pollock was a fan of jazz music, and tried to capture something of its loose, syncopated rhythms. The resulting drip-paintings (they were made with the large canvases lain on the floor of his studio) have similarly loose, improvisational compositions. Despite its lack of formal structure, there is a clear rhythm running horizontally across the painting, and Pollock uses the title of the work to draw our attention to it.

Figure **2.4.10**: Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950. Enamel on canvas, 266.7 x 525.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Variety and Unity

Figure **2.4.11**: Garbhadhatu (Taizokai) Mandala (Womb World) (detail). (Photo via Smarthistory)

Variety is the use of different visual elements throughout a work, whereas unity is a feeling that all the parts of a work fit together well. These do not have to be opposites, as a work filled with variety might also have unity. The World Womb Mandala is an excellent example. Unlike the Ming Dynasty Bronze statue of Buddha, where all of the bodhisattvas are more or less identical, the many bodhisattvas on the World Womb Mandala are each individualized. At a distance, they all become one, expressing great unity, but taken one at a time, each as an object of devotional contemplation, they contain more variety than it would at first appear.

Articles in this chapter:

- De. Asa Simon Mittman, "Texture(opens in new window)," in Smarthistory, July 10, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, "Pattern, repetition and rhythm, variety and unity," in *Smarthistory*, July 10, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)

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2.4.1: Supporting Images for Texture, Pattern, Repetition and Rhythm, and Variety and Unity

Supporting Images for Texture, Pattern, Repetition and Rhythm, and Variety and Unity

In this section, students are invited to examine the featured artwork as a demonstration of how artists employ the **elements of art**—such as line, color, texture, and space—alongside the **principles of design**—including balance, contrast, emphasis, and unity—to shape meaning and guide the viewer's experience. The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

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Texture

Balloon Dog

Chair

Fangding Ritual Food Vessel with Abstract Decor

Crater Moon

Still Life, Claesz

Buffalo

Pattern, Repetition and Rhythm, Variety and Unity

Vairocana Buddha

Bowl

Hypostyle Hall

Bowl with a Majlis Scene by a Pond

Autumn Rhythm - Number 30

Small Woods Where I Met Myself

Variety and Unity

Garbhadhatu (Taizokai) Mandala (Womb World)

Additional Supporting Images

Mulholland Drive

The Block

Figure 2.4.1.1: Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog*, 1994-2001. Transparent color coating, stainless steel, 320 x 380 x 120 cm. (Photo: Kim(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 2.0(opens in new window))

Figure 2.4.1.1:Chair; Attributed to Henry Turchin (American, 1891 - 1967), Design Director: Louis Dierra (American, active ca. 1939); Manufactured by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA), ca. 1947; Slumped plate glass, metal, woven textile; Museum purchase through gift of George R. Kravis II and from General Acquisitions Endowment Fund; 2013-1-1 The Miracle of Glass | Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum

Figure 2.4.1.1: Fangding Ritual Food Vessel with Abstract Decor, Shang dynasty, China, 14th-11th century BCE. Cast bronze, 21.7 x 17.1 x 15.2 cm. Harvard Art Museums. (Photo: Harvard Art Museums(opens in new window), via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure 2.4.1.1:Crater Moon, 1990s, stoneware, 55.9 cm diameter (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville) © Toshiko Takaezu. -Flickr (smarthistory)

Figure 2.4.1.1: Pieter Claesz, *Still Life*, c. 1625. Oil on panel, 48 × 76.9 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure 2.4.1.1:Title: Buffalo figure Date: 19th century Geography: Republic of Benin, Abomey Culture: Fon peoples, Danhomè Kingdom Medium: Silver, iron, copper alloy, wood Dimensions: H. 13 3/16 × W. 9 × D. 18 3/4 in. (33.5 × 22.9 × 47.6 cm) Classification: Metal-Ornaments Credit Line: Gift of Anne d'Harnoncourt and Joseph Rishel, in memory of Rene and Sarah Carr d'Harnoncourt and Nelson A. Rockefeller, 2002 Object Number: 2002.517.1 Curatorial Department: The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing

Figure 2.4.1.1: Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog*, 1994-2001. Transparent color coating, stainless steel, 320 x 380 x 120 cm. (Photo: Kim(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 2.0(opens in new window))

Figure 2.4.1.1:© **The Trustees of the British Museum**. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence(opens in new window).

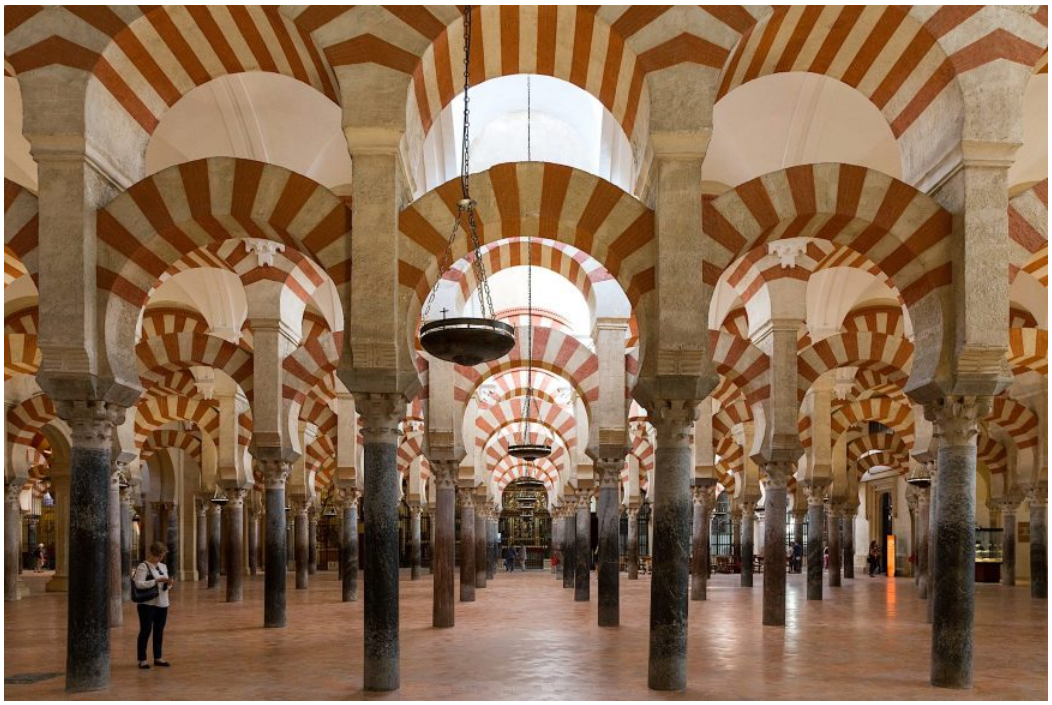

Figure 2.4.1.1: Hypostyle hall, Great Mosque at Cordoba, Spain, begun 786 and enlarged during the 9th and 10th centuries. (Photo: wsifrancis(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0(opens in new window))

Figure 2.4.1.1:Bowl with a Majlis Scene by a Pond Abu Zayd al-Kashani Iranian dated 582 AH/1186 CE - Public Domain @TheMetCollection

Figure 2.4.1.1: Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950. Enamel on canvas, 266.7 x 525.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Small Wood Where I Met Myself

Figure 2.4.1.1:Small Wood Where I Met Myself, Medium Gelatin Silver Print, Date: 1967 Artist: Jerry Uelsmann American, 1934-2022 (Art Institute Chicago)

Figure 2.4.1.1: Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog*, 1994-2001. Transparent color coating, stainless steel, 320 x 380 x 120 cm. (Photo: Kim(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 2.0(opens in new window))

Figure 2.4.1.1: Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio David Hockney (England, Bradford, active United States, born 1937) England, 1980 Paintings Acrylic on canvas 86 × 243 in. (218.44 × 617.22 cm) © David Hockney (LACMA)

Figure 2.4.1.1: The Block Romare Bearden American 1971Date: 1971 Medium: Cut and torn pasted printed, colored and painted papers, metallic papers, graphite, porous-point pen, watercolor, opaque watercolor, and ink on Masonite Dimensions: 48 in. × 18 ft. (121.9 × 548.6 cm) Other (Individual panel): 48 × 36 in. (121.9 × 91.4 cm)© 2025 Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

This page titled 2.4.1: Supporting Images for Texture, Pattern, Repetition and Rhythm, and Variety and Unity is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LueCrecy Ragan, Arkansas State University - Beebe.

2.5: Balance and Movement

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Balance and Movement. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Balance

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

Figure **2.5.1**: Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83, fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet (Vatican, Rome)

Balance and symmetry

Balance is an even use of elements throughout a work of art. Symmetry is a very formal type of balance consisting of a mirroring of portions of an image. Bilateral symmetry, that is, two- sided symmetry, is the most common, in which two halves of a work of art mirror each other, as in Perugino's painting, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*. In this painting, the symmetry gives the painting not only a sense of balance, but also a sense of calm, stability, and formality. Notice in particular the way that the building and arches in the background are painted to make the work symmetrical.

Figure **2.5.1**: Temple of Artemis, Corfu, Greece, c. 600-580 BCE. (Image via Smarthistory)

Just as the structures, themselves, are symmetrical in Perugino's painting, symmetry is also common in major works of architecture, where it lends buildings a tone of stability and power. Classical Greek temples like the Temple of Artemis at Corfu are rigidly symmetrical.

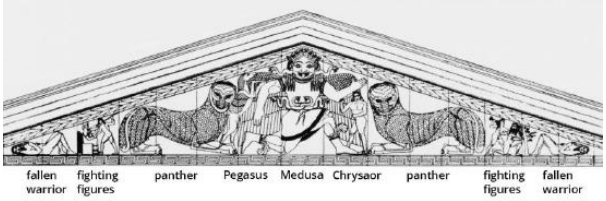

Figure 2.5.2: Pediment detail, Temple of Artemis, Corfu, Greece, c. 600-580 BCE. (Image via Smarthistory)

In this diagram (the temple is now a ruin), even the sculpture on the façade—the front of a building—is nearly perfectly symmetrical. At the outer corners are a mirrored pair of fallen warriors, then two pairs (one now fragmentary) of fighting figures, then two mirrored panthers, and then, in the center, Medusa, with two of her children beside her (Pegasus and Chrysaor).

Even the fearsome Gorgon in the center is presented facing directly outward at us, so that her face can be presented in hideous symmetry, with her great, bulging eyes, grimacing mouth, plaited hair, and even the snakes that emerge from the back of her head carved in perfect symmetry. This work should serve to counter the frequently made statement that symmetry makes works beautiful. While many cultures associate symmetry with beauty, and this temple as a whole might be described as such, a grotesque figure remains grotesque even when perfectly symmetrical.

Radial symmetry

Figure 2.5.3: Garbhadhatu (Taizokai) Mandala (Womb World), mandala of Innate Reason and Original Enlightenment, Japan, Heian period (Tantric Buddhism), late 9th century. Colors on silk. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Radial symmetry is created when an image is symmetrical around a central point or axis, like a sunflower viewed head-on. Radial symmetry creates a strong sense of unity in a work of art, and is common in sacred images.

In a Shingon Tantric Buddhist World Womb Mandala, all points seem to radiate outward from the central figure of the Buddha. The numerous figures around him are bodhisattvas, individuals who have chosen out of compassion to delay their entry into Nirvana in order to help others who are suffering. It is fitting that they are shown as if emanating out of the Buddha, himself, as his enlightenment and compassion are the source and model for theirs. The image also gives a sense that the universe itself is highly ordered.

Figure **2.5.4**: Polykleitos, *Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer)*, ancient Roman marble copy found in Pompeii of the lost bronze original, c. 450-40 BCE. Marble, 211 cm. Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy. (Photo: Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0)

However, perfect symmetry is not necessary to create a sense of balance in an image. Asymmetrical balance is created when two sides of an image do not mirror each other, but still have approximately the same visual weight, the same amount of detail or shapes or color, and so on. The Classical Greek sculpture *Doryphoros (The Spearbearer)* by Polykleitos provides a clear example of asymmetrical balance. The figure does not stand in a symmetrical way, but overall, seems even, calm, balanced. In this case, the figure has his weight on his right leg, so this leg is tensed. The left leg is relaxed and bent. Balancing this out, the right arm hangs loosely, but the left arm is tensed. In this way, the body — which itself is symmetrical, or would be if he were posed with his feet side by side, looking straight ahead, with his arms hanging down — is balanced. This pose is called contrapposto, and is often used to give standing human figures a sense of life and animation.

Emphasis

Emphasis consists of drawing attention to one or more points in a work. This can be accomplished through any of the visual elements. In the World Womb Mandala, the Buddha is emphasized through location (he is centered in the image), color (the vivid red petals around him draw the eye), line (all of the rows of figures essentially guide the eye inward to the center through implied lines, and the lines dividing the red petals direct us inward, as well), symmetry (the radial symmetry focuses us inward to the center), and so on. In essence, we cannot help but return, again and again, to the Buddha, the focus of the image and also the focus of Buddhist devotion.

Movement

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

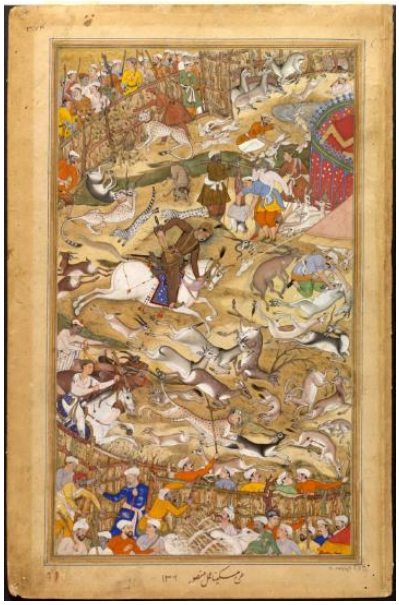

Figure **2.5.5**: Akbar on horseback, hunting animals within an enclosure, illustration from the *Akbarnama*, Mughal Empire, India, c. 1590-95. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 32.1 x 18.8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Movement refers to a sense of motion as the eye is guided through a work of art. This can be accomplished by showing figures in motion, or simply through the visual elements.

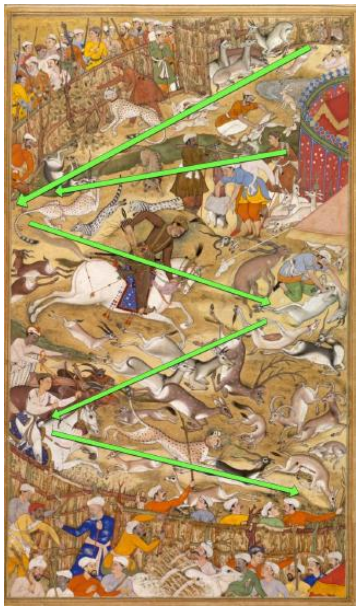

Figure **2.5.6**: Akbar on horseback, hunting animals within an enclosure, illustration from the *Akbarnama*. (Photo via Smarthistory)

An Indian illumination—that is, a painting in a handmade book—from the *Akbarnama* showing Akbar hunting in an enclosure demonstrates both types. As with the Dürer woodcut, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse(opens in new window)*, the rider on his horse charges rapidly from left to right across the image. The smaller animals scatter, darting in all directions and also hunting one another. Their movements create a strong sense of movement throughout the image. However, there are formal elements that intensify this.

Diagonals

Just as the horizontal lines behind the riders in the Dürer woodcut suggested their movement forward, so here, lines and colors help convey the motion of people and animals. There is a strong zigzag that brings us from top to bottom, or bottom to top.

Starting at the top-right corner, the fences form a strong diagonal, accompanied by the slash of green representing a stream. These meet at the left edge, where the momentum then follows Akbar on his large white horse, also emphasized by the line of darker earth that moves in a downward diagonal from the horse's mouth. This motion then again reverses direction, in a downward diagonal, back to the left edge, which in turn bounces back to the bottom right edge.

Our eyes therefore move throughout the image not only because the figures in it are depicted in motion, but also because of the manipulation of the visual elements.

Articles in this chapter:

- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, "Balance, symmetry, and emphasis," in *Smarthistory*, July 10, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, "Movement," in *Smarthistory*, July 10, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)

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- **3.2: Principles of Composition** by Cerise Myers, Ellen C. Caldwell, Alice J. Taylor, Margaret Phelps & Lisa Soccio is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Supporting Images for Balance and Movement

In this section, students are invited to examine the featured artwork as a demonstration of how artists employ the **elements of art**—such as line, color, texture, and space—alongside the **principles of design**—including balance, contrast, emphasis, and unity—to shape meaning and guide the viewer's experience. The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Balance

Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter

Figure 2.5.1.1: Perugino, Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83, fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet (Vatican, Rome) SmartHistory

Chiswick House

Temple of Artemis

Villa Savoye

Garbhadhatu (Taizokai) Mandala (Womb World)

Four Mandalas of the Vajravali

Figure 2.5.1.1:Chiswick House, London, 1726–29, designed by Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington and 4th Earl of Cork (with William Kent).SmartHistory

Doryphoros

The Mulberry Bend

Movement

Akbar on horseback, hunting animals within an enclosure

Silver Upper White River

Storm King Wavefield

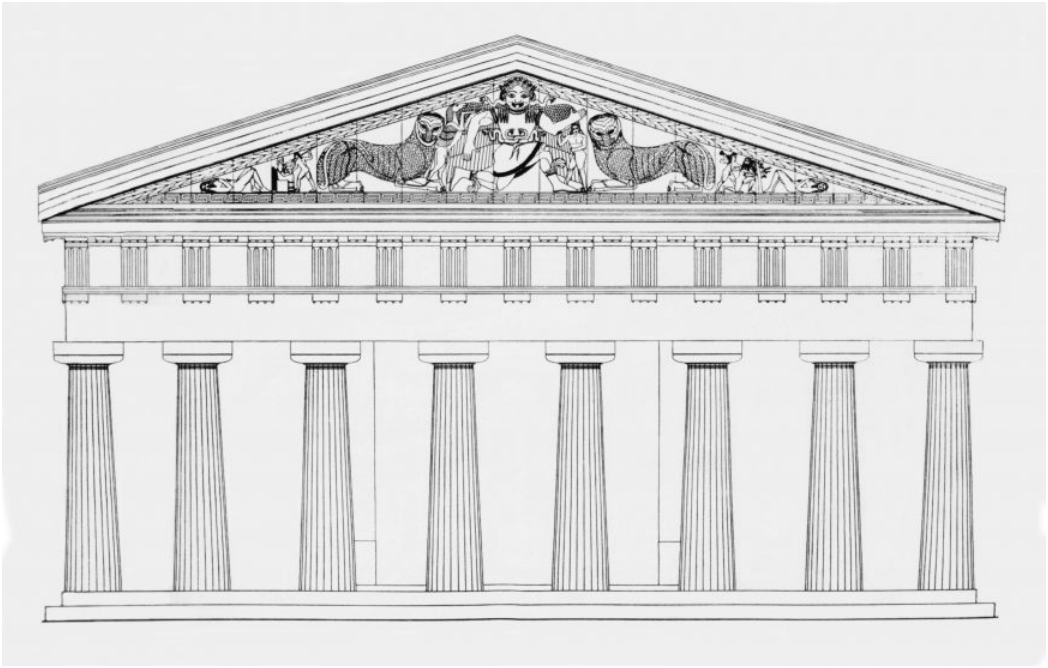

Figure 2.5.1.1: Temple of Artemis, Corfu, Greece, c. 600-580 BCE. (Image via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure 2.5.1.1:Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: **Renato Saboya(opens in new window)**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Figure 2.5.1.1: Garbhadhatu (Taizokai) Mandala (Womb World), mandala of Innate Reason and Original Enlightenment, Japan, Heian period (Tantric Buddhism), late 9th century. Colors on silk. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure 2.5.1.1:Wangguli and five additional Newar artists, *Four Mandalas of the Vajravali Cycle* (Ewam Choden Monastery, Tsang Province, Central Tibet), 1429–56, pigments on cloth, 88.9 x 73.7 cm; Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art; C2007.6.1 (HAR 81826).

Figure 2.5.1.1: Polykleitos, *Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer)*, ancient Roman marble copy found in Pompeii of the lost bronze original, c. 450-40 BCE. Marble, 211 cm. Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy. (Photo: Carole Raddato(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 2.0(opens in new window))

Figure 2.5.1.1:Jacob August Riis, The Mulberry Bend, c. 1890, 7 x 6″, from How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1890 (The Museum of the City of New York) SmartHistory

Figure 2.5.1.1: Akbar on horseback, hunting animals within an enclosure, illustration from the *Akbarnama*, Mughal Empire, India, c. 1590-95. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 32.1 x 18.8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England. (Photo via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure 2.5.1.1:Silver Upper White River, 2014 Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AK Recycled Silver 131” x 240” x 3/8” Photography: Dero Sanford, courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art @MayLinStudio

Figure 2.5.1.1:Storm King Wavefield, 2009 Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, NY 240,000 square feet 410’ x 490’ x 15’ tall Photography: Jerry Thompson, courtesy Storm King Art Center

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2.6: Naturalism, Realism, Abstraction, and Idealization

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Naturalism, Realism, Abstraction, and Idealization. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Naturalism, realism, abstraction and idealization

by Dr. Asa Simon Mittman

Caravaggio, *The Doubting of Thomas*, c. 1601-02, oil on canvas, 107 x 146 cm (Sanssouci Picture Gallery)

Hakuin Ekaku, *Portrait of Daruma*, mid-18th century, Edo period Japan, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 117.5 x 54 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Naturalism is resemblance to the "real world," as we see it around us. The more naturalistic a work, the more it looks like our world, and the less naturalistic, the less so.

Representational versus non-representation

For extremes, we will compare a work by Caravaggio with a work by Hakuin Ekaku, a Japanese Zen Buddhist monk. Caravaggio's Italian Baroque *The Doubting of Thomas* is highly naturalistic, whereas Hakuin's portrait of Daruma rejects naturalism. Both paintings are representational, which means that they both depict something, as opposed to non-representational works like Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*(opens in new window), where there is no visual picture hidden in the lines.

Verism

In Caravaggio's image, the face of Thomas, who leans down to look directly at the wound in Jesus' side, is rendered in minute, realistic detail. His hairs are individually rendered, his features distinct and recognizable, his skin browned from the sun and with dirt.

Caravaggio found his models for holy figures in the streets, and their humble conditions are carefully depicted in his paintings. All this adds up to naturalism, and perhaps even to the highest degree of naturalism, referred to as verism.

Moving toward abstraction

Ekaku's portrait of Daruma, on the other hand, is recognizable as a human face, but all the elements have all been rendered somewhat abstractly — that is, in some way deviating from or ignoring the natural world, simplifying or altering it for effect. We might also say that Ekaku's image is stylized — designed according to the principles of a particular style rather than being beholden to the way things look in "the real world."

This does not make it less "good" as a work of art, and also does not mean that the artist was less skilled. Rather, it is simply a different, less naturalistic style, designed to suit different goals. Here, the emphasis is not on the great Buddhist sage's literal appearance (he died over a millennium before this work was made), but on his wisdom, embodied in his giant, upturned eyes and vast forehead.

Kazmir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack – Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*, 1915, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 44.5 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Polykleitos, *Doryphoros*, c. 450-40 B.C.E., ancient Roman marble copy of a lost bronze original, 211 cm (Archaeological Museum, Naples)

Non-representational art

The farthest extent of abstraction is non-representational or non-objective art, in which the subject is not merely abstract, but wholly absent.

This type of art, which many viewers find highly challenging, makes little or no reference to the natural world, such as Kazimir Malevich's geometric paintings such as *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack – Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension.*

In such works, we are in a purely formal world, with no recognizable subject in the work but the work, itself, and where the tools of visual analysis are the only points of entry into the work.

Idealization

There is one other way, though, that we can speak of naturalism. Instead of contrasting it with abstraction, we can contrast it with realism.

We can see that the *Doryphoros* is highly naturalistic, in that he looks very much like a living person. On the other hand, he presents his culture's physical ideal of symmetry, youth, fitness, and, indeed, relaxation.

If we are being honest, we would have to admit that while a person *could* look like this, rather few of us do. It is therefore highly idealized. In this sense, the work lacks realism — since, in a way, according to ancient Greek views, it is too perfect.

Satsubari, *The Second of the Sixteen Rakan*, late 14th century, hanging scroll; ink, color, and gold on silk, 115.3 x 49.3cm (Mary Griggs Burke collection)

Naturalism and realism

Let's take another example — a fourteenth century Japanese painting, *The Second of the Sixteen Rakan* (*Rakan* are figures in Buddhism who protect Buddhist law and bless donors). Here the figure does not appear naturalistic, in that the work is clearly a painting, with a loose style and exaggeration of features.

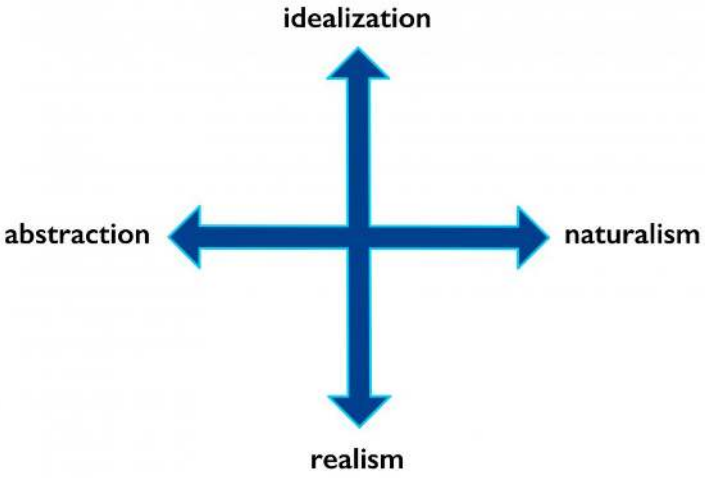
On the other hand, the work is highly realistic, in that the artist has presented us with a figure that is ordinary or even slightly grotesque, rather than idealized. He is old, wrinkled and bent, his earlobe hanging low (stretched out by large gold earrings) as a marker of his past wealth. His clothes are rumpled, his socks slipping downward. While the image is not very naturalistic, it is still highly realistic.

Naturalism, realism, abstraction and idealization

Disentangling naturalism from realism is tricky, and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, despite their important differences.

Naturalism and realism might or might not appear in the same work. An image might be naturalistic and realistic, like *The Doubting of Thomas*, or naturalistic and idealized, as is *Doryphoros*.

Alternately, a work might be abstracted and realistic, like the *Second Rakan*, or abstracted and idealized, like St. John in the Lindisfarne Gospels(opens in new window)). A diagram presents the nexus of these terms, and we might plot just about every work of art in this book somewhere within it .



Duane Hanson, *Slab Man*. 1974-75, vinyl resin and fiberglass, polychromed in oil (Cantor Arts Center)

Too real?

Some works, of course, like those by Duane Hanson(opens in new window), have both forms of naturalism.

His life-size sculptures of people revel in their ordinary nature, and are also startlingly lifelike — veristic — so much so that they are frequently mistaken for real people when on display in museum exhibitions.

I have been fooled by two of them, over the years. One was dressed as a museum guard and another as a workman. Even though I had seen *Slab Man* dozens of times, when his gallery was under construction and he was surrounded by carts of equipment and tools, I was fooled anew.

Cite this page

Dr. Asa Simon Mittman, "Naturalism, realism, abstraction and idealization," in *Smarthistory*, July 11, 2019, accessed December 16, 2025, Naturalism Smart history [smarthistory.org].

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2.6.1: Supporting Images for Naturalism, Realism, Abstraction, and Idealization

In this section, students are invited to examine the featured artwork as a demonstration of how artists employ the **elements of art**—such as line, color, texture, and space—alongside the **principles of design**—including balance, contrast, emphasis, and unity—to shape meaning and guide the viewer's experience. The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

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Naturalism

The Doubting of Thomas

St. Paul the Hermit

Portrait of Daruma

Two Lovers

Abstraction

Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Caravaggio, The Doubting of Thomas, c. 1601-02, oil on canvas, 107 x 146 cm (Sanssouci Picture Gallery) - SmartHistory

Electrical Prisms

Boxes

Idealization

Figure **2.6.1.1**:Jusepe de Ribera, St Paul the Hermit, c. 1638, oil on canvas,132.7 x 106.7 cm (Walters Art Museum, Baltimore)SmartHistory

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Hakuin Ekaku, Portrait of Daruma, mid-18th century, Edo period Japan, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 117.5 x 54 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) SmartHistory

The Second of the Sixteen Rakan

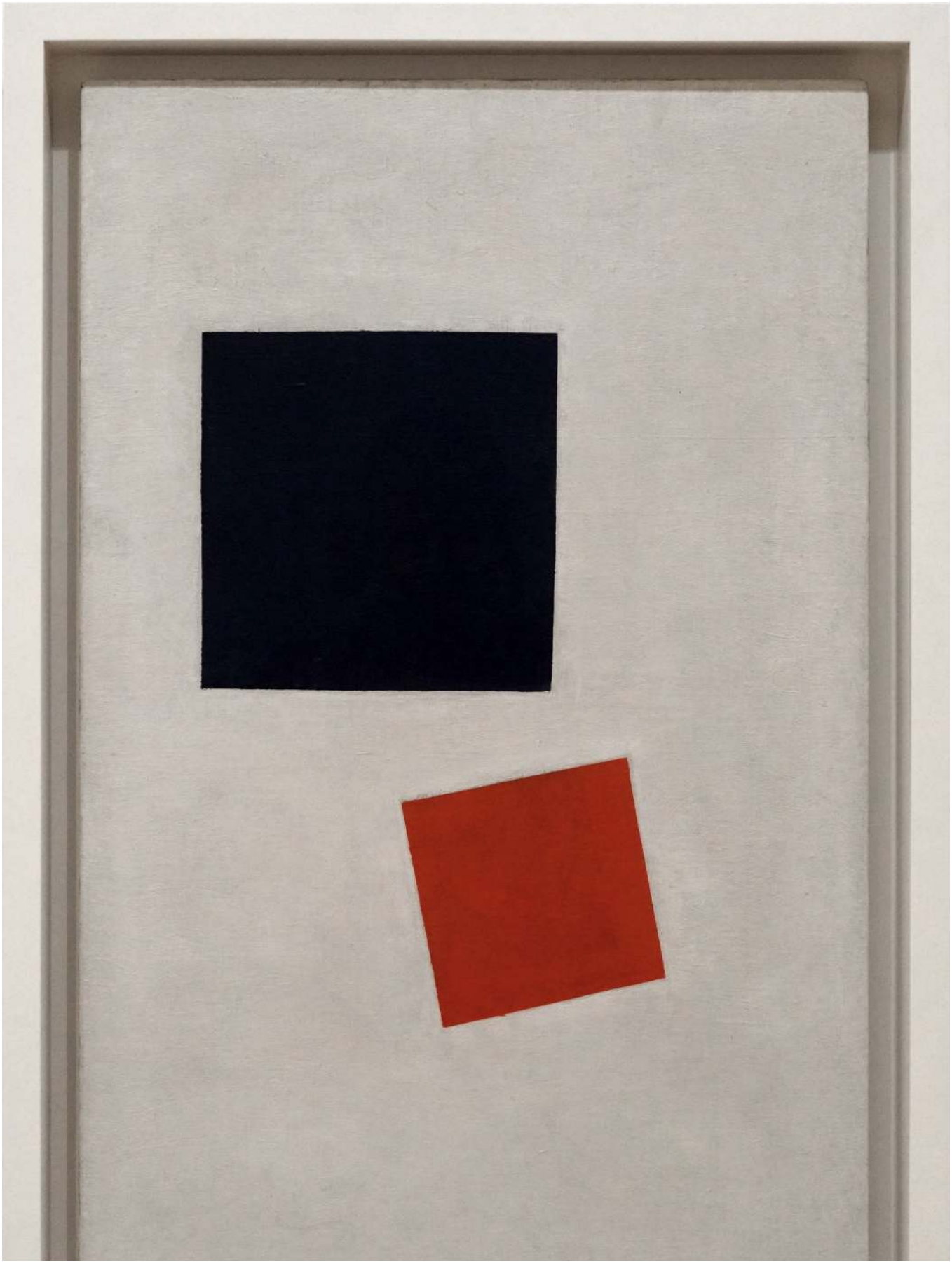
Portrait of a Man in Red Chalk

Realism

Slab Man

Father

Figure **2.6.1.1**:Hishikawa Moronobu, *Two Lovers*, c. 1675–80, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 22.9 x 33.7 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window)**)SmartHistory



https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/375718

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Kazmir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack – Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*, 1915, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 44.5 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)(Image via Smarthistory(opens in new window))

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Sonia Delaunay, Electrical Prisms, 1914, oil on canvas, 250 x 250 cm (MNAM Centre Pompidou) SmartHistory

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Joe Overstreet, Boxes, 1970, acrylic on constructed canvas with metal grommets and cotton rope, 292.1 × 171.5 × 121.9 cm (Art Bridges, © estate of the artist) (smarthistory Steven Zucker

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Satsubari, The Second of the Sixteen Rakan, late 14th century, hanging scroll; ink, color, and gold on silk, 115.3 x 49.3cm (Mary Griggs Burke collection) SmartHistory

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of a man in red chalk (self-portrait)*, c. 1512, red chalk on paper (Biblioteca Reale, Turin)

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Duane Hanson, Slab Man. 1974-75, vinyl resin and fiberglass, polychromed in oil (Cantor Arts Center) - SmartHistory

Figure **2.6.1.1**: Luo Zhongli, Father, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China) - SmartHistory

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Analyzing_Art

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify characteristics of a given period of art.
- Identify selected works of various artists.
- Identify and analyze the role of art in various cultures.
- Identify and understand current events in visual art.
- Express thoughts clearly after analyzing a work of art using terminology appropriate to the subject.

The analysis of art extends beyond determining whether an image is aesthetically pleasing. An objective approach requires breaking down the visual components of a work into identifiable categories that can be examined and reassembled into a coherent evaluation. This process involves viewing artwork as a system of visual information. The goal of this lesson is to promote closer observation and to clarify how individual elements of art contribute to the overall composition. It also emphasizes examining the relationships among these elements, which form the principles that create unity within the work. After completing a formal analysis, the observer can then move toward interpreting the artwork's meaning.

3.1: Formal and Art Historical Analysis

3.1.1: Supporting Images for Formal and Art Historical Analysis

3.2: Iconography and Iconographic Analysis

3.2.1: Supporting Images for Iconography and Iconographic Analysis

3.3: Questions to Consider

3.3.1: Using Cultural Theory to Investigate the Debate- Art vs. Craft

3.3.2: Medici Art

3.3.3: The Bauhaus Design

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3.1: Formal and Art Historical Analysis

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Formal and Art Historical Analysis. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

How to Look At (and Think About) Art

By Sarah Churchill

In the discipline of art history, the artist and his labors form the objects of our scholarly interest. Our research, which considers not only what the art looks like, but what the works means, involves what we call "formal analysis" and "art historical research." With formal analysis, we are trying to understand the appearance of the work as a series of purposeful choices made by the artist. We seek to know why these choices were made and how they contribute to the overall impact and meaning of the work. With art historical research, we seek to understand the social, cultural, economic and historical contexts in which artists live and work. This involves reading primary and secondary resources in order to learn about the conditions of artistic production. We will discuss each of these in greater detail below.

When art historians look at and think about art, many questions come to mind. These may include: Why does a work look as it does? Who made the work? Why did they make it? What does it mean? In what style was the work produced? What is the work's purpose? Who was it produced for? By using both formal analysis and art historical research, we come to understand how the work of art communicates as it does. We can also begin to understand how meaning can change over time or how meaning is impacted by contexts of display (an altar in a church versus an altar on display in a museum for example) and layers of time and space. As Picasso explained, a picture "lives a life like a living creature…the picture lives only through the man who is looking at it."

Picasso's statement here reminds us that while artists create with specific intentions, works of art are also socially produced, influenced by politics, religion, culture and social circumstances and even by our own biases and experiences. We too bring something to the study of art. According to James Elkins, art doesn't "speak", *we* speak for it. As viewers we bring our own meanings into the study of art and we draw understanding from our own experiences. Therefore, it's important that we understand our own critical thinking. As art historians, we learn to separate subjective responses and opinions from that which is observably true and objective.

Formal Analysis: Making Thinking Visible

Why is art so compelling? Formal analysis, or a detailed examination of the physical object itself and the elements and principles of design that make up a work of art, gives you the language to describe and understand your experience with art more fully. Basically, formal analysis is the means by which you slow down and observe different aspects of the work of art, like the use of color or textures, and consider how the work's observable characteristics contribute to the meaning or function of the work. It is a process that helps to make our own thinking more visible.

In formal analysis, we temporarily put aside questions of historical context to focus solely on what the work *looks like*. Here we develop detailed descriptions of the visual properties and analyze the impact and effect of these characteristics on the work as a whole. A series of broken, jagged lines, for example, can communicate aggression. It might make you feel uneasy. Conversely, a smooth, meandering line can signal playfulness. Your response as a viewer may be one of joy or pleasure. Color, composition, texture, etc. all play a part in the way the work of art communicates its meaning to the viewer.

The process of carefully looking and then reflecting on what you're observing reveals what the brain does automatically when you experience a work of art. First you observe, then you analyze and react. Formal analysis slows this process down and helps you to understand it better. It forces you to carefully consider the choices an artist has made and the effects of these decisions upon the viewer.

Although your subjective (personal) response is part of a formal analysis, judgment ("I like" or "I don't like;" "This is beautiful," or "This is not beautiful") is not the end goal in formal analysis. Rather, formal analysis deconstructs our *thinking* about works of art. With slow, careful observation, we begin to unpack a work of art by understanding the series of choices the artist has made. Formal analysis helps us to understand both artistic intentions and our own thinking more deeply. The video below provides a useful example of formal analysis in action.

Formal (or Visual) Analysis "How To" - a Quick Start Guide

It helps to organize your looking according to the various elements of principles of design (see section 1.2), skipping any that don't necessarily apply to the work your analyzing. Creating a chart or mind map is also a useful way to collect your thoughts. The categories below will help you get started.

- size/scale
- line
- color
- composition
- material (or medium)
- form (or shapes)
- light (or tone)
- textures or patterns

1. Begin by considering the piece as a whole. Note your sensations and subjective reactions but put them aside. You'll come back to them later.

2. Create a brief "snapshot" that describes, in a sentence or two, what it is you're looking at. This snapshot might also be understood as the subject matter or narrative of the work Ex. "A portrait of a young woman with red hair in a white dress holding a black cat lovingly in her lap." or "A seascape featuring an enormous clipper ship being tossed in an angry black sea at dusk." Remember that a subject need not be figurative or narrative. Abstract art also has a subject, though the subject might be color or form itself!

3. What do you see? Look at the work in detail. Consider the qualities of color, line, form, etc. and make notes about what you observe. Use the list of categories provided to help organize your observations, or create your own. Use lots of describing words. No detail is too small! Questions listed below will help you get started:

- What colors are used? Are they warm or cool? Are they harmonious or do they clash? Ex. "burnt orange sun - contrasts with cobalt sky"
- What shapes or forms do you see? Are they amorphous, rectangular, figurative etc.?
- What materials are used? (oil paint, graphite, marble, stone, metal, fabric. etc.)
- Are there words, numbers or letters?
- Are there any recognizable figures or is the work abstract?

- Notice line if it exists. Describe it in detail: fluid, curving, sharp, wide, dashed, etc. "solid, thin and snaking line is used to suggest the edges of the various forms of a desk and chair"
- Is the work three-dimensional or flat?
- Is the space deep or shallow? Explain your answer.
- Describe the light. Where does it fall? Are parts of the image obscured by light or lack of it?

4. Support evaluative statements ("I feel like," or "this looks like") with visual evidence. What do you *see* that makes you say that? Ex. "I think the woman in the painting is sad because she holds her head in hands and looks away from us. Her body language, which is hunched over, suggests that she is in pain." Be careful not to assume anything - always be asking yourself, "what's the visual evidence that supports this idea?"

5. Consider the role of each of the elements you've observed in contributing to the work's meaning or function. Refer back to your initial subjective reaction here. A night sky, for example, may feel peaceful *or* ominous, depending upon specific choices the artist has made. Ask why different elements of the work operate as they do. Why did the artist choose these colors, textures, composition, etc.?

6. Discuss meaning of the work only after you've carefully considered formal properties and analyzed their purpose within the larger work. Revisit your initial reactions. Have they changed? Which of the formal elements you observed made you feel that way? If your feelings have shifted, why?

Art Historical Analysis:

Clearly, there are limits to what art historians can understand about a work just by looking at it! In order to get at the context of how or why a work was produced, or what it might mean, we must incorporate additional resources and information. With art historical analysis, we compare what we see against what we know of the longer timeline of art history. We might, for example, compare a painting or sculpture against other works with which it may share stylistic characteristics. Or, we may look for ways in which the work in question is different from other works from the same period or by the same artist. Comparison can tell art historians an awful lot about meaning and production in art.

We also consult primary and secondary resources to learn about the conditions and circumstances of artistic production. Primary resources are an immediate, first-hand account and include legal documents, newspaper articles, speeches, diaries, letters, interviews, archival records, auto-biographies, economic data, ledgers and photographs. A secondary resource is one step away from the primary resource. The author has consulted the primary resources and is distilling and analyzing them for you, the reader. A secondary resource may include a survey text, an anthology, a biography, a scholarly article or a documentary.

Art historians use *both* formal analysis and historical research to understand better the history of art. Note in the video below how the narrators, Beth Harris and Steven Zucker, consider Goya's *Third of May* (1808). They begin with a formal analysis before moving on to a discussion of the subject matter (or narrative). Finally, the historical context of the painting's production is explored. As you watch, make note of all the different kinds of questions Harris and Zucker pose of the painting and then see if you can determine what kinds of evidence and which methods of research (formal or historical) were used to answer them. The video's conclusion illustrates how formal analysis, subject matter and historical research can be brought together to illuminate how and why Goya's *Third of May* remains such an arresting painting.

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3.1.1: Supporting Images for Formal and Art Historical Analysis

Supporting Images for Formal and Art Historical Analysis

In this section, students are invited to explore the featured artwork used to explore two methods of art analysis, formal and historical, used to emphasize the need to examine both visual and contextual elements of the artwork. It aims to enhance understanding through guiding questions that promote deeper reflection and critique of the piece's significance and meaning.

The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Formal Analysis

Madonna of the Meadow

Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures

Historical Analysis

Third of May, 1808

Plowing in the Nivernais

Wivenhoe Park

Figure **3.1.1.1**: Raphael, *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1505–06, oil on panel, 885 x 1130 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

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Figure **3.1.1.1**: Angelica Kauffmann, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as Her Treasures*, c. 1785, oil on canvas, 40 x 50″ (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

Figure **3.1.1.1**: Francisco Goya, *The Third of May 1808 in Madrid: the executions on Principe Pio hill, 1808*, 1814–15, oil on canvas, 8′ 9″ × 13′ 4″ (Museo del Prado, Madrid)

Figure **3.1.1.1**: Rosa Bonheur, *Plowing in the Nivernais* (or *The First Dressing*), 1849, oil on canvas (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) via SmartHistory

Figure **3.1.1.1**: John Constable, Wivenhoe Park, Essex, 1816, oil on canvas, 56.1 x 101.2 cm (National Gallery of Art) via SmartHistory

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3.2: Iconography and Iconographic Analysis

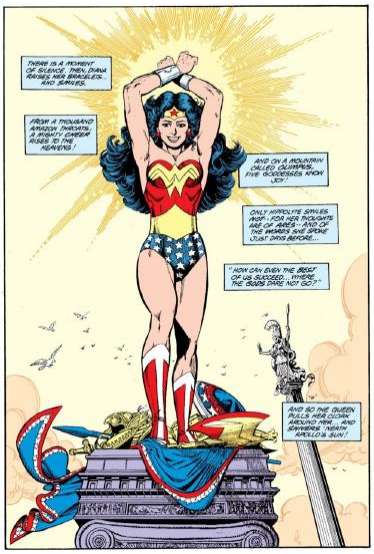
Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Iconography and Iconographic Analysis *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Iconography and iconographic analysis: an introduction

by Dr. Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank



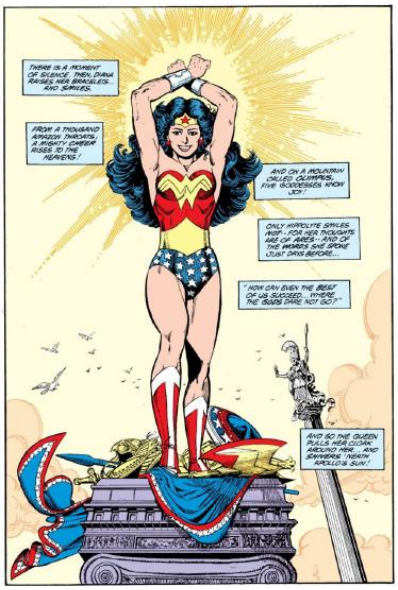
Who is this? (© DC comics)

How to do an iconographic analysis

Take a look at this image. Who is this? What symbols do you notice that help to identify the subject? You'll notice that this is a drawing of a human figure dressed in a tight-fitting bodice of red and yellow; blue briefs with white stars; and tall, red boots. A golden design stretches across their chest, appearing like the letters WW stacked atop one another in the form of a bird. The figure also wears headgear decorated with a red star, and silver wristlets. Long blue-black hair cascades down their back, and they have a well-developed musculature. To identify the subject of this image, we could use the iconographic method.

But what is iconography? And how do you use the iconographic method to analyze art? The purpose of this essay is to introduce you to the iconographic method used by art historians, and to consider its merits and limitations.

Let's begin by explaining what the word "iconography" literally means. It comes from two Greek words, *eikon* (meaning "image") and *graphe* (meaning "writing"). Together we get "image-writing," so the word "iconography" conveys the idea that an image can tell a story. But the study of the iconography of an image is actually more complex, since it involves understanding the specific culturally constructed symbols and motifs in a work of art that can help us to identify the subject matter. To understand the symbols, you have to be familiar with their culturally specific meaning—as in, you need to be "in the know" about agreed upon conventions. The iconographic approach is not particularly interested in the form or style of an artwork.



Wonder Woman (© DC Entertainment/George Pérez, Bruce Patterson, and Tatjana Wood)

Let's return to the image above. This happens to be the DC comic book character Wonder Woman, who is identified by motifs like her red, yellow, and blue clothes; her red boots; and long, dark hair.

Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman, for the television series Wonder Woman (1975–1979), ABC television (photo in the public domain)

Even when the style of a comic book changes (such as with a new artist) or the story of Wonder Woman plays out on a television screen or as a toy, we are able to identify her. But what happens when we remove most of these shared attributes or motifs? We can't identify her as easily, rapidly, or securely. Imagine we simply changed the colors of her outfit to green, purple, and orange, or her hair to blonde—we might not recognize her as Wonder Woman any longer.

What is happening in this scene?

Beginning to understand the iconographic approach

Let's consider the iconographic approach using an example from 14th-century Italy. What symbols do you notice that help you to identify the subject?

Crucifixion, from the *Rabbula Gospels*, 586, parchment, 25.5 cm x 33.5 cm (Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Florence)

If you identified the subject as the Crucifixion (an event described in the Christian Bible as the moment when the Christian savior Jesus Christ is killed on a cross), then you are correct. The symbols and motifs that helped us to make that identification are: a prominent cross, a person hanging on the cross, other figures surrounding the cross, elements that we identify as a landscape, and so forth. This artistic representation of this subject began to be codified by the 5th and 6th centuries, and became standard Christian iconography. Like Wonder Woman, a consistent set of signs, symbols, and attributes allow us to identify the subject matter over centuries and across the globe—no matter the style of the artwork.

Standardizing the symbols and attributes of a subject like the Crucifixion helps viewers identify important figures and events. Consider that in many places throughout time most people couldn't read, and images played an important role to help diverse audiences learn stories. For instance, in Renaissance Europe, perhaps as many as 95% of people couldn't read! Maintaining a

standardized iconography of the most important moments in Christian theology was one way to help Christian devotees "read" Biblical stories or the lives of saints.

But how do we know how to interpret symbols from the past? One way is to look at written texts (including oral traditions recorded in written form) from the same era as an artwork to see if we can match a particular symbol or motif in the written story with what we are seeing. If we are looking at something made in 14th-century Italy for example, we would turn to texts from this time.

Crucifixion. Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel, 1305–06, Padua, Italy (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The steps of the iconographic approach

A German art historian named Erwin Panofsky popularized the iconographic method in the 1930s (largely using medieval and renaissance art of western Europe, such as his famous essay about Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait), and he described three steps:

1. Pre-iconographic (primary or natural subject matter)
2. Convention and precedent (iconography)
3. Uncovering the intrinsic meaning (iconology)

Step 1

The pre-iconographic, is identifying pure forms according to Panofsky. In our image of the Crucifixion, this is observing that we see a person nailed to a cross surrounded by other figures.

Step 2

Or convention and precedent, involves finding a text or oral tradition that describes what you are seeing. For the Crucifixion, this could be the Bible (among other things). If in reading the Bible, we read John 19:16–19, we then can make the association between what we saw in Step 1 (a person nailed to a cross) with a narrative.

> ***"So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. [Pontius] Pilate had a***

> ***notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."***

Step 3

According to Panofsky, uncovers an image's intrinsic meaning. This step is actually an extension of iconography, and is called iconology. (In fact, it would be more accurate to call this entire approach the iconographic-iconological method, but it is unwieldy and so often shortened to the "iconographic method"; sometimes art historians pair this third step with other approaches). This means beginning to frame the image within its specific time, location, and culture. Perhaps you've heard about an artwork's historical context. This is what Panofsky asks us to begin to consider here.

If we use our Crucifixion example, let's say we know it dates to the 14th century. This was a time when there were dramatic political, religious, and social transformations. The Black Death ravaged Europe in the mid-14th century. The Franciscan religious order, which originated a century earlier, took their mission to the streets, encouraging people to focus on Jesus' suffering. They wanted Christians to cultivate a more personal relationship with God. Famine, war, financial instability: many places during this time experienced hardship of some sort. With Panofsky's third step, we might consider whether these larger historical factors could have shaped or affected the artist's decision to show the Crucifixion in a certain way. In this version, we see figures in the scene expressing a range of emotions. Their bodies cast shadows, giving the illusion that they are three-dimensional. Was this an attempt to help viewers connect with God during a difficult period?

Who or what is this figure?

More practice with the iconographic method

Let's practice doing the iconographic method with another object.

Step 1

What does this image show on the simplest level?

A standing figure, with a circular disc behind the head.

Step 2

Let's identify the figure by looking at the motifs and symbols

Buddha from Gandhara, c. 2nd–3rd century C.E., Gandhara, schist (Tokyo National Museum)

The figure has two arms (although the right one is broken off), two legs, and a face that looks human. The figure has a projection on top of its head, a small raised circle on its forehead, and elongated earlobes, and is wearing what appear to be long robes.

This is the Buddha, and he is shown with his standard symbols: the *ushnisha* (the cranial protuberance that looks almost like a bun), an *urna* (the auspicious mark on the forehead), and the elongated ears (caused by the heavy jewelry that he once wore before he renounced his wealth). We not only see these same motifs in other images of the Buddha, but we read about them in texts that discuss the Buddha. The circular disc behind his head is a halo—a symbol used by many religions to distinguish divine figures. The halo is broadly used to signify importance and holiness. If the *ushnisha* and *urna* weren't on this figure, the halo and elongated ears alone wouldn't necessarily be enough to identify this figure as the Buddha.

Step 3

Let's consider the intrinsic meaning of this sculpture

For this step, we could compare this figure of the Buddha to others made at this time, or even those made before and after it. We might consider the practice of Buddhism at the time it was made. We could even look at art from other cultures that looks familiar to this one.

Comparison of a Buddha from Gandhara with a Roman sculpture. Left: Buddha, c. 2nd–3rd century C.E., Gandhara, schist (Tokyo National Museum); right: “Caligula,” 1st century C.E., Roman, marble (Virginia Museum of Fine Art)

With this particular example, a Buddha from Gandhara, we find that images of the Buddha in an anthropomorphic (human) form did not exist prior to their production in Gandhara and Mathura. We might also find that this Buddha sculpture looks similar to Roman figural sculpture, prompting us to ask why this similarity exists.

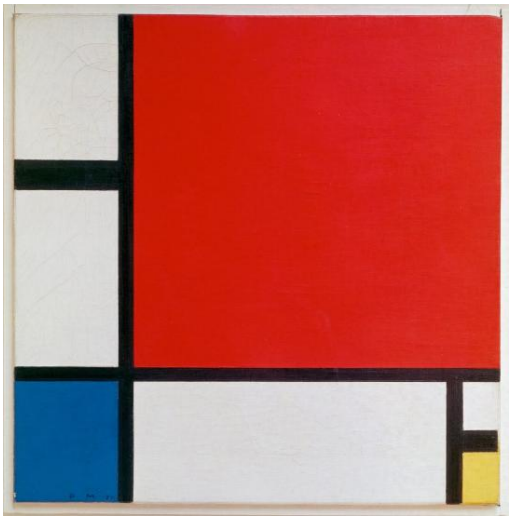
While this approach to analyzing art is useful (and fun!), it does have limitations.

Page from the Codex Zouche-Nuttall, 1200–1521 A.D., Mixtec. Painted deer skin, 19 x 23.5 cm. The British Museum, London, Am1902,0308.1 (BM Add. MSS 39671). Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license

The limitations of the iconographic method

The iconographic method relies heavily on primary source texts to help us identify symbols and motifs. But what if a culture did not have written texts? What if the textual record is incomplete? Or what if you are so unfamiliar with a certain culture that you don't even know where to begin to look to identify an object's iconography?

Take, for instance, a section of the Mixtec codex (book) known as the Codex Zouche-Nuttall. At first glance we can see that there are figures, structures, and perhaps locations. But what do all the other motifs mean? Who might these figures be? The story here is probably less familiar to you, and the writing is pictographic (image writing). We don't have alphabetic texts that describe in great detail who or what is happening here.



Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Another example that demonstrates the limitations of the iconographic method is Piet Mondrian's *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*. It is an abstract image without specific symbols. An iconographic analysis isn't possible, yet take heart! Other methods can help to interpret this painting.

While the iconographic method is useful, other methods of analysis challenge aspects of it. For instance, some scholars would argue that this method relies too heavily on written texts and that it tries to determine a singular or fixed meaning for each symbol and motif, and we know that motifs and symbols can have multiple, shifting meanings. Some scholars also claim that the iconographic approach shifts the focus away from the art itself because the method invites us to spend more time tracing meaning back to written sources rather than focusing attention on the object itself. Another critique of the iconographic method is that it does not do enough to address the social history of an artwork, considering the roles of patrons, viewers, and more. Finally, a limitation of this method is that it positions art as a passive reflection of ideas rather than as an active participant in encoding them.

Nevertheless, the iconographic method can be very useful when used in combination with other art-historical approaches.

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3.2.1: Supporting Images for Iconography and Iconographic Analysis

In this section, students are invited to explore the featured artwork used to explore iconography and its analytical methods in art history, focusing on culturally constructed symbols for subject identification. The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Supporting Images for Iconography and Iconographic Analysis

Wonder Woman

Look Mickey

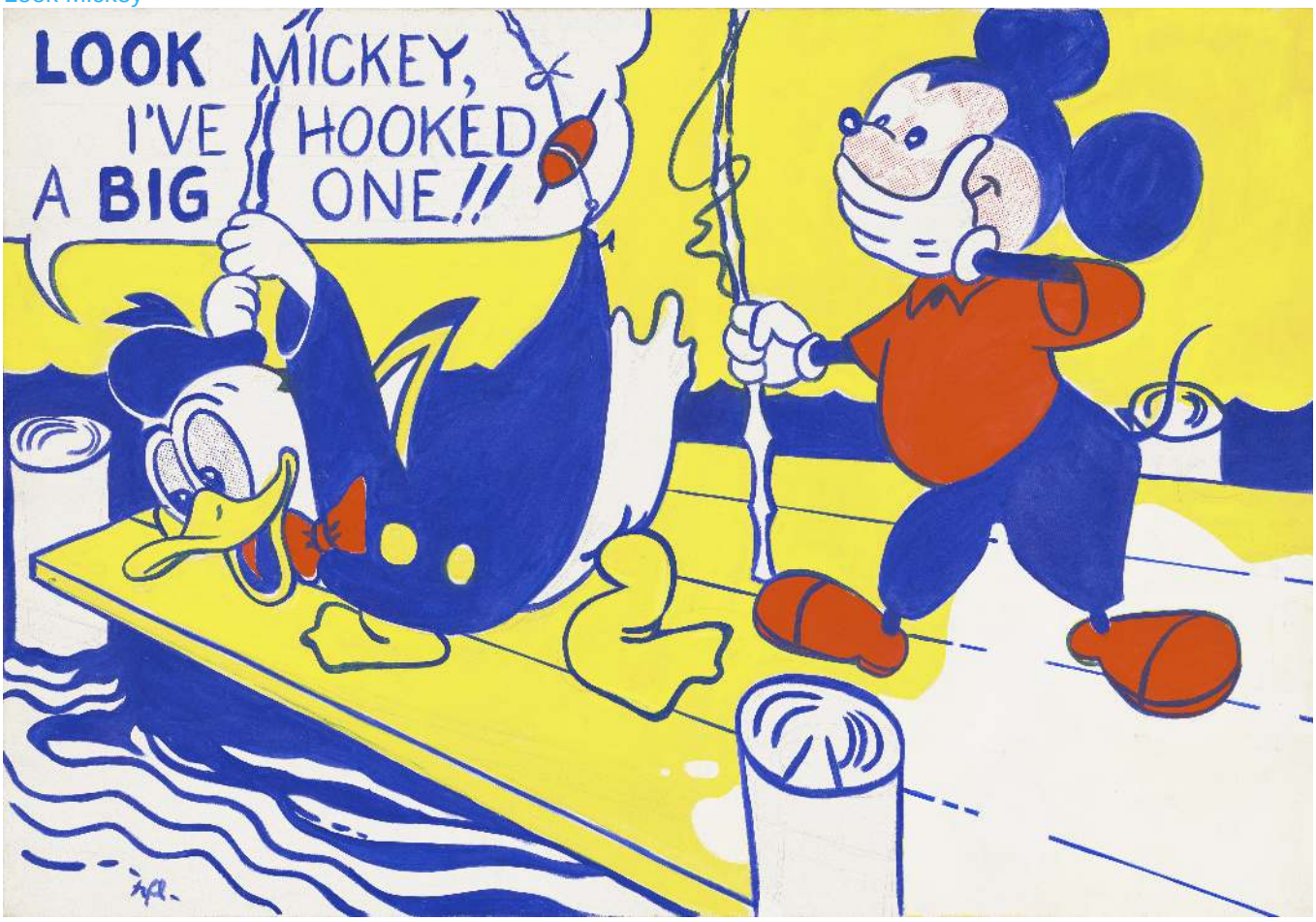

Figure **3.2.1.1**: Roy Lichtenstein, Look Mickey, Gift of Roy and Dorothy Lichtenstein (Copyright; The Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Art owns the copyright to this artwork. @ Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington.)

Mel Casas, Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash)

Melesio Casas, *Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash)*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 72-3/4 x 97 x 2-1/4 inches (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville) © Mel Casas Family Trust. Speakers: Victor Gomez, Curatorial Assistant, Contemporary Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Steven Zucker

Figure **3.2.1.1**: Wonder Woman (© DC Entertainment/George Pérez, Bruce Patterson, and Tatjana Wood) via SmartHistory

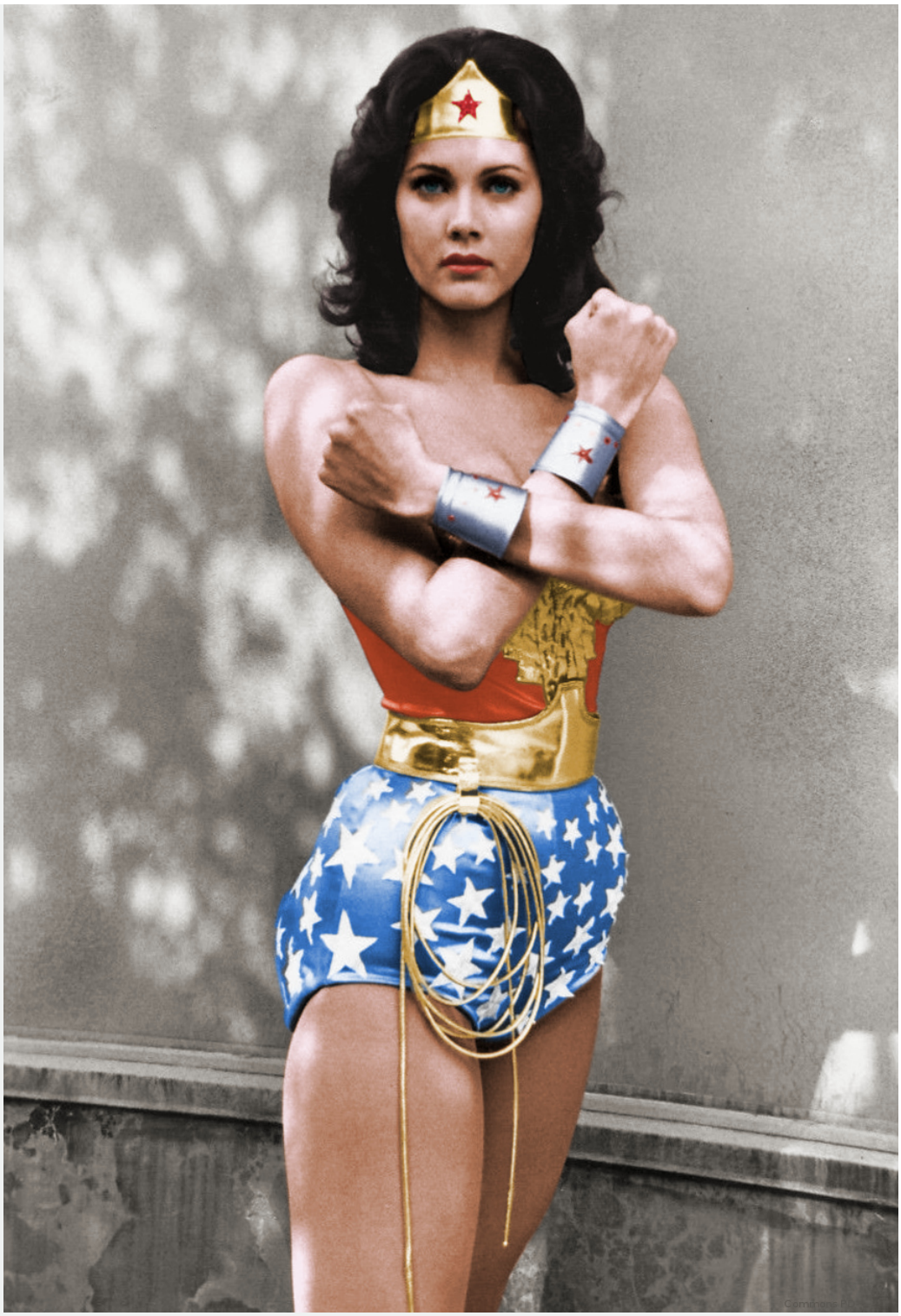

Figure 3.2.1.1: Image of Linda Carter as WonderWoman via SmartHistory

Crucifixion

Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of Saint John Climacus

Buddha from Gandhara

Shah Jahan Holding an Emerald

Caligula

Nitza Tufiño, *Pareja Taína*

Nitza Tufino, Pareja Taina

oto: Steven Zucker, CC

Nitza Tufiño, *Pareja Taína (Taíno Couple)*, 1972, acrylic, charcoal, and polyurethane on Masonite, 123.8 x 122.5 cm (El Museo del Barrio, New York) © Nitza Tufiño. Speakers: Dr. Susanna V. Temkin, Senior Curator, El Museo del Barrio and Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño, University of Puerto Rico

Figure **3.2.1.1**: Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of Saint John Climacus, late 12th century, tempera and gold on panel, 41.3 x 29.9 x 2.1 cm (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt)

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/380178

Figure **3.2.1.1**: Buddha from Gandhara, c. 2nd–3rd century C.E., Gandhara, schist (Tokyo National Museum)

Figure **3.2.1.1**: Muhammad Abed, *Shah Jahan holding an emerald*, 1628 (dated regnal year 1), India, 21.4 x 9.5 cm (Victoria & Albert Museum(opens in new window))

Figure 3.2.1.1: “Caligula,” 1st century C.E., Roman, marble (Virginia Museum of Fine Art) via SmartHistory

Page from the Codex Zouche-Nuttall

Figure **3.2.1.1**: Page from the Codex Zouche-Nuttall, 1200–1521 A.D., Mixtec. Painted deer skin, 19 x 23.5 cm. The British Museum, London, Am1902,0308.1 (BM Add. MSS 39671). Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license

The Dinner Party

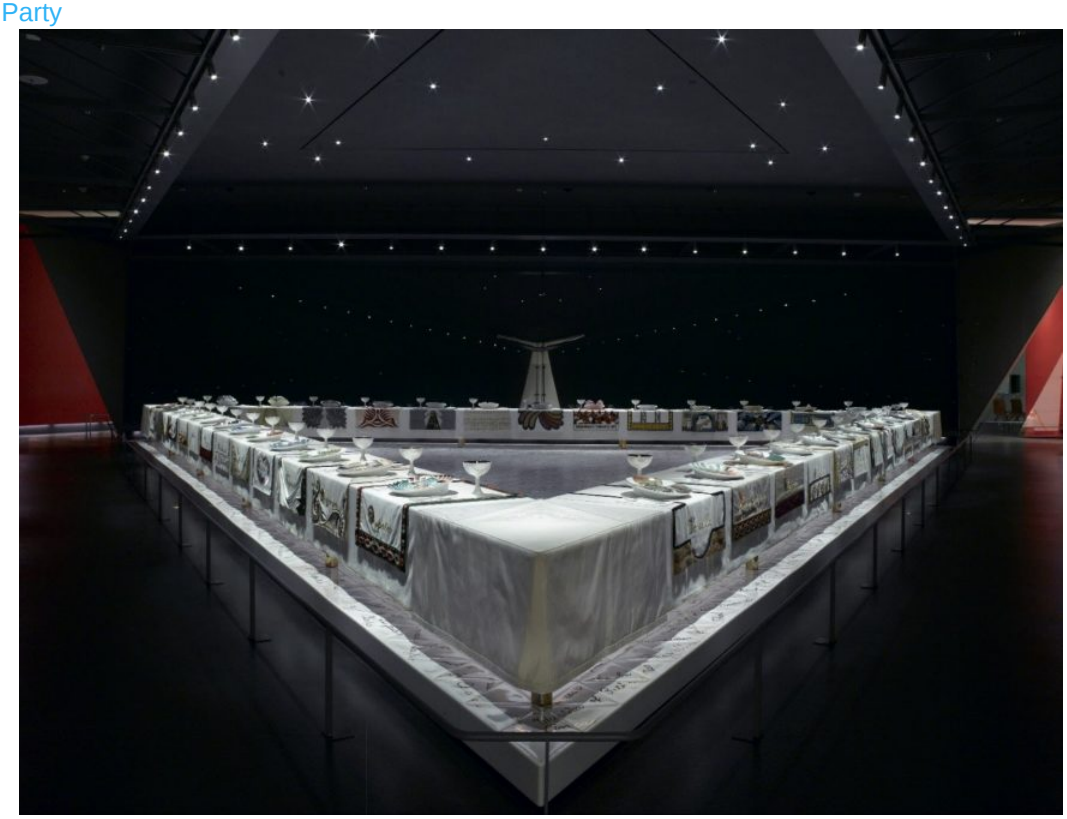

Figure **3.2.1.1**: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, ceramic, porcelain, and textile, 1463 x 1463 cm (**Brooklyn Museum(opens in new window)**) via SmartHistory

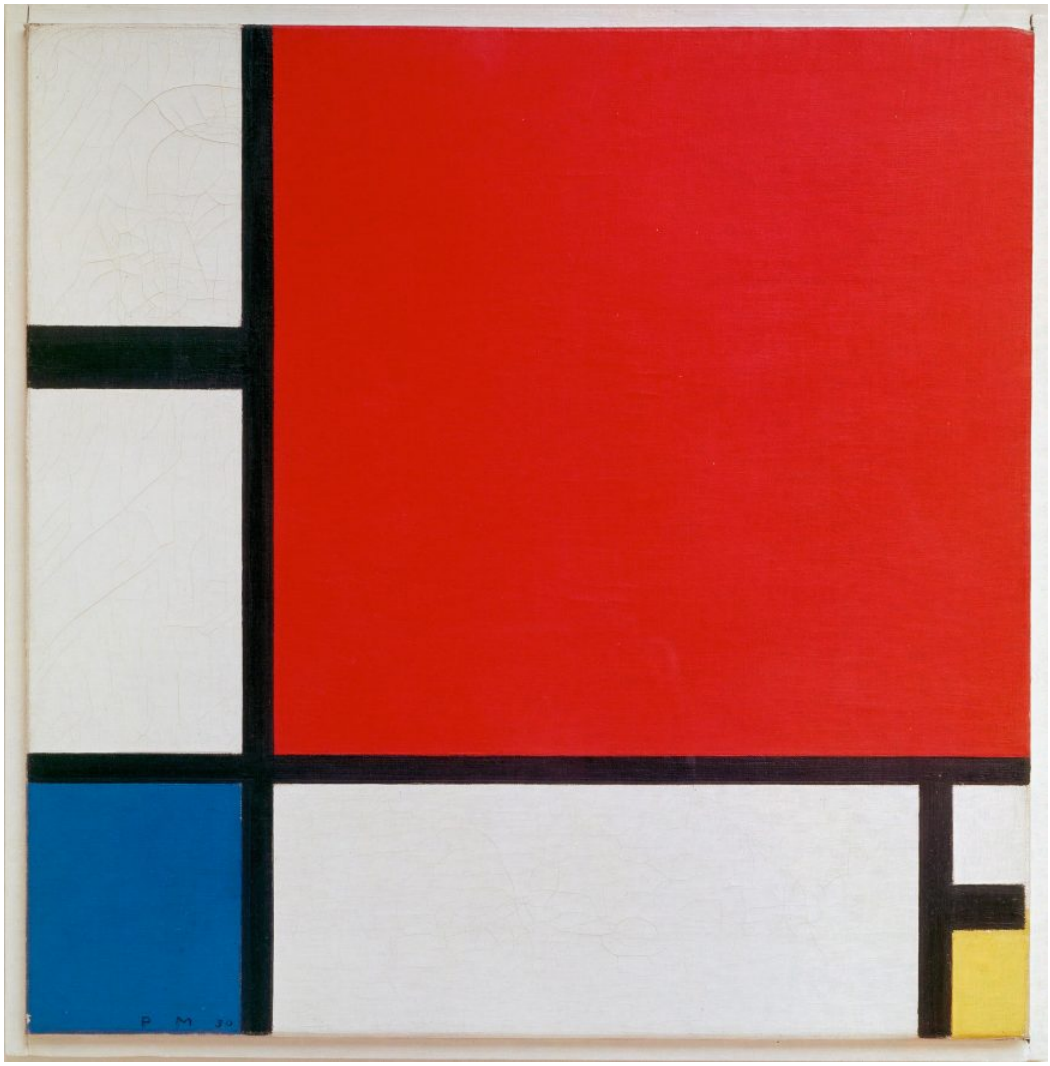

Figure **3.2.1.1**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich) via SmartHistory

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.3: Questions to Consider

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Questions to Consider

Is there a difference between art and craft?

Difference between art and craft?

by TED-Ed

Was da Vinci an artistic genius? Sure, but he was also born in the right place at the right time — pre-Renaissance, Western artists got little individual credit for their work. And in many non-Western cultures, traditional forms have always been prized over innovation. So, where do we get our notions of art vs. craft? Laura Morelli traces the history of how we assign value to the visual arts. Lesson by Laura Morelli, animation by Sandro Katamashvili.

Citation: TED-Ed, "Is there a difference between art and craft?," in *Smarthistory*, December 20, 2015, accessed December 15, 2025, SmartHistory Art and Craft [smarthistory.org].

What does it mean to be an "old master" and to make a "masterpiece"?

What does it mean to be an “old master” and to make a “masterpiece”?

by Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

This video featuring Kerry James Marshall talking about his practice and the ideas driving it accompanied the exhibition Kerry James Marshall: Mastry, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The exhibition is cocurated by Dieter Roelstraete, former Manilow Senior Curator at the MCA; Helen Molesworth, Chief Curator at MOCA; and Ian Alteveer, Associate Curator at The Met. At the MCA, the exhibition was realized with the assistance of former Curatorial Assistant Karsten Lund and former Research Associate Abigail Winograd.

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Citation: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, "What does it mean to be an “old master” and to make a “masterpiece”?," in *Smarthistory*, May 21, 2021, accessed December 17, 2025, SmartHistory Mastry [smarthistory.org].

What's the point of realism?

The Case for Realism

by The Art Assignment

What’s the point of making realistic paintings when photography can do the trick? We look at the history of artists recreating the world as we see it and ponder why it’s still happening.

Citation: The Art Assignment, "The case for Realism," in *Smarthistory*, March 4, 2019, accessed December 15, 2025, Realism [smarthistory.org].

What made art valuable, in the Middle Ages and Renaissance vs. now?

by Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

For artists working in the West in the period before the modern era(opens in new window) (before about 1800 or so), the process of selling art was different than it is now. In the Middle Ages(opens in new window) and in the Renaissance(opens in new window) works of art were commissioned, that is, they were ordered by a patron (the person paying for the work of art), and then made to order. A patron usually entered into a contract with an artist that specified how much he would be paid, what kinds of materials would be used, how long it would take to complete, and what the subject of the work would be.

Not what we would consider artistic freedom—but it did have its advantages. You didn’t paint something and then just hope it would sell, the way artists often do now.

Patrons often asked to be included in the painting they commissioned. When patrons appear in a painting we usually refer to them as donors. In this painting, the donor is shown kneeling on the right before the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele*, 1436, oil on panel, 141 x 176.5 cm (including frame) (Groeningemuseum(opens in new window), Bruges)

What was the status of the artist before the modern era?

One way to understand this is to think about what you "order" to have made for you today. A pizza comes to mind—ordered from the cook at the local pizza parlor—"I'll have a large pie with pepperoni," or a birthday cake from a baker—"I'd like a chocolate cake with mocha icing and blue letters that say 'Happy Birthday Jerry.'" Or perhaps you ordered a set of bookshelves from a carpenter, or a wedding dress from a seamstress?

Does our culture consider cooks and carpenters to be as high in their status as lawyers or doctors (remember we're not asking what we think, but what value our culture generally gives to those professions)? Our culture creates a distinction that we sometimes refer to as "blue collar" work versus "white collar" work.

In the Middle Ages and even for much of the Renaissance, the artist was seen as someone who worked with his or her hands—they were considered skilled laborers, craftsmen, or artisans. This was something that Renaissance artists fought fiercely against. They wanted, understandably, to be considered as thinkers and innovators. And during the Renaissance the status of the artist does change dramatically, but it would take centuries for successful artists to gain the extremely high status we grant to "art stars" today (for example, Pablo Picasso(opens in new window), Andy Warhol(opens in new window), Jeff Koons(opens in new window), or Damien Hirst(opens in new window)).

Left: Simone Martini, *Annunciation*, 1333, tempera on panel, 184 x 210 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence; photo: Steven Zucker(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0); right: soup can (detail), Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962, synthetic polymer on thirty-two canvases, each canvas 20 x 16 inches (Museum of Modern Art, New York; photo: Steven Zucker(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

What we value has changed

Medieval paintings were often sumptuous objects made with gold(opens in new window) and other precious materials (like Simone Martini's *Annunciation*(opens in new window)). What made these paintings valuable were these materials (blue, for example, was often made from the rare and expensive semi-precious stone, lapis lazuli(opens in new window)). These materials were lavished on objects to express religious devotion or to reflect the wealth and status of its patron. Today the value of a painting is often the result of something entirely different. Picasso could have painted on a napkin and it would have been incredibly valuable just because it was by Picasso—art is now an expression of the artist and materials often have little to do with the worth of the art.

Bibliography

Life in a Renaissance artist's workshop(opens in new window)

Important fundamentals

Why commission artwork during the Renaissance?(opens in new window)

Learn about the role of the workshop in late medieval and early modern Northern Europe(opens in new window)

Learn about the role of the workshop in Italian Renaissance art(opens in new window)

Cite this page

Cite this page as: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris, "What made art valuable, in the Middle Ages and Renaissance vs. now," in *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015, accessed December 17, 2025, Valuable Art then and now [smarthistory.org].

3.3.1: Using Cultural Theory to Investigate the Debate- Art vs. Craft

3.3.2: Medici Art

3.3.3: The Bauhaus Design

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3.3.1: Using Cultural Theory to Investigate the Debate- Art vs. Craft

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

By Dr. Lisa Floryshak

In May of 1919, Walter Gropius, an architect, opened the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany with a manifesto aimed at drawing publicity to this new school; it contained the following statement: “Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without those class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsmen and artists.”[1] This statement gave hope to and fascinated many western artists who have chosen to work within a media that has traditionally been designated as craft for the past six centuries. What Gropius was suggesting was a reuniting of all artists and artisans under one banner. He sought to use the arts as a means to bringing harmony and prosperity to post-war Germany.[2] Bauhaus sought to approach art education in a manner that was both universal and less academic, essentially to make it more accessible. Since the strict delineation and distinct designation of art, which elevated painting, sculpture, and architecture to an intellectual form of visual expression and left the craftsman, such as goldsmiths, weavers, and printmakers within the structure of an industrial application, artisans have fought to elevate their media and regain their status as artists in society. Would the Bauhaus offer hope? The aesthetic argument of art versus craft was started in the Florentine Renaissance by a civic humanist and it has continued to develop since. The current debate could fill volumes with highly developed theoretical arguments, many of them made without considering the context. Before we unpack the impact of this aesthetic ascension, it is necessary to understand its origins. To do this, we must take a look at the business of banking: collecting, patronage, and risk management.

While there were quite a few merchant banks during the Middle Ages engaged in trade and acquisitions of artifacts as investments, there was a definite move towards more contemporary commodities during the lead up to the Renaissance, particularly within the city of Florence. This was at the direction of a few key players. There was also a push to move away from a religious line of thinking and towards a renewed interest in antiquities and their scholarly teachings, specifically that of Greek and Roman philosophy. This prompted an age of civic humanism, or an ideology that draws upon those classics. Leon Battista Alberti, commonly called the Renaissance man, was one of those scholars that was engaged in civic humanism, reflecting upon and interpreting the classic writings of antiquity, specifically those of Cicero, to argue for a more secular approach to government as well as to call for commitment of its citizens to civic duties.[3] In 1435, Alberti, was the intellectual that has been credited with defining the terms artist and artisan in his writings about the artworks being created in Florence.[4] The socialites of the time, including the most known banking family in Europe, the Medici, aspired to heed the values expressed within such writings as a means of accounting for their quest for opulence as an expatiation of their sins, and the commissioning of religiously based artwork became the norm during this time and was used as a way to avoid the strict usury laws put forth by the church.[5] The Medici, were among the Florentine elite that managed to create a capitalist economy under the auspices of beautification of both the spiritual self and the city, despite these lavish displays being equated with sin at the time. Understanding that if one paid reparations to those that were wronged before or upon death, the church would forgive the sin of usury. They proceeded to negotiate a method of trading with the church: art and artifacts for cleansing of sins.[6] This was a practice that served the Medici well, as they became the patrons of many liturgical projects. However, the art of both commissioning and collecting works was tied up within their banking business; importing, exporting, and brokering of works was both investment and collateral. The Medici bank existed in a time that was between extreme hardships, both plagues and major wars. They rose to power under an auspicious manner, the plague of 1397 had left much of the financial system and government in ruins. Giovani “Bacci” Medici, a former bank manager in Rome, started the bank in a merchant shop owned by the Medici family. They lent out sums of money, collected collateral and charged interest. The bank invested in collecting both antiquities and objects as a means to boosting the bank’s capital with the goal of preserving the family lineage. Within a generation of a fairly quiet existence,upon the elder Bacci’s death, his son Cosimo expanded both the operations and the collections to include more artwork.[7]

To understand the Medici, one can look to the Benozzo Gizzoli painting “Procession of the Magi,” which is part of a series of frescoes commissioned by Cosimo de Medici for the Medici Chapel in Florence. The painting is spans three walls within the chapel, which was constructed in 1444. It depicts the Biblical scene of the Profession of the Magi. Gizzoli has painted Cosimo, his two legitimate sons Giovanni, and Piero, as well as one illegitimate son, Carlo, front and center in the image in a placement of compositional emphasis. Just beyond them are two important dignitaries from Milan that are aligned with the Pope, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta and Galeazzo Maria Sforza. Then just beyond them are the humanists Marcelo Ficino, who was the Platonic

Scholar that was charged with educating the elite children of the time in a school that Cosimo set up, Luigi Pulci, the poet known for his epic, Morgante, which was eventually set aflame in the Bonfire of the Vanities for its burlesque tone, and the artist Gizzoli himself surrounded by the elite members of the art guilds. The wealthy and influential members of the Florentine society make an appearance in the back of the procession.[8] At this time in Florence there was great pride in belonging to the Confraternity of the Magi, which collected offerings in grand manner for the church on specific days of the year, January 6th being one of them. The leader of the procession was charged with the task of the levying from citizens, specifically Jews, an offering in the name of God and the church.[9] The group also told a great deal about social status being described as they were looked upon with suspicion for being a front for political activity and required a special license to belong. The members were described as good men, morally adept, physically and mentally fit, divine even.[10] Considering this family was the most affluent family in all of Europe at the time, with banking branches as far away as London, and one of the most extensive art and antiquities collections outside of royalty, there is a question that needs to be asked in reference to the influence that they may have had on the humanists' writings of the time, including Alberti's. Were the Humanists encouraged to bolster the value of specific lifestyles to raise the capital of the patron requesting the writing? After all, Cosimo's extensive collection of classical manuscripts was an investment in the family business and flaunting of power.[11] It was also said that Cosimo had a pension for collecting books, and understood the value of education, but the act of studying would remove him from the world.[12] Scholarly examination of his letters speak of his popularity as a well spoken and somewhat ruthless Florentine Merchant that had strong affinities to both Alberti, and the Duke of Milan.[13]

Alberti's writing, On Painting, is complete with a dedication and letter to the architect Brunelleschi, who had just failed at a major project that had been at the direction of Cosimo de Medici. In "Book Two", he spends a great deal of the chapter creating a hierarchical structure of art practice. The painter is seen as divine, with his gift stemming from a Godlike intervention. Architecture derives from that directly, then sculptors and masons, and all the other artisans.[14] Considering that Florence was always in one sort of skirmish or another at that time, and had just acquired Arezzo, Cortona, Pisa, and Leghorn, they had high hopes for both Sienna and Lucca.[15] Cosimo de Medici funded the campaign for Lucca and commissioned Brunelleschi to engineer dams on the Serchio River with the hopes of flooding the city. The plan backfired and the city of Florence was flooded instead. It was an epic fail that left Brunelleschi embarrassed and Cosimo de Medici exiled.[16] Was Alberti's writing, On Painting, done to boost the confidence and worth of Cosimo de Medici's collection as he returned from his time in exile in 1434? After all, he was becoming far more political. Or was it written at his direction to control the prices being set forth by the guilds?[17] It was the policy within times of exile to confiscate property, which would then be used as a form of capital that the government could gain from. In Florence, specifically, only the property of the exiled was considered, not the family. This enabled families to maintain their identity. If property was sold by the city, it was often sold to family or friends. The Medici property during this time was preserved because Cosimo maintained his composure and continued with his public life upon returning to Florence.[18] Dale Kent makes a point of disclosing that there was in fact a referral exchange that occurred between artists and patrons and the writing of Alberti was widely followed as an informative source. There was supply and demand, as well as a capitalistic approach to collecting that considered the political as well as the fashionable.[19] She also makes reference to both Cosimo's and Alberti's preference to demand for things in writing in a certain way that they are realized.[20]

What is interesting to this equation, is that while it is evident the wealthy hung on every word that the humanists had to say, Alberti himself subscribed to a life of moderation, and was not one that was interested in idle time for leisure and contemplation. However, he did write quite extensively about agriculture, and commented that pastoral country landscapes could be good for the soul. While he was not a huge fan of the far off villa, he may actually be the one that brought it into vogue when he wrote about how farms should be an investment to consider: two fold, one property for production, with a tenant and sharecropper plantation structure not unlike the southern United States, and one farm as a tax liability, where the soul could be renewed.[21] He goes on to say, that if city life is something that one cannot escape completely, than a garden space, or Hortus, should be considered to allow for an escape from the pollution and vile populous of the city and the breathing of fresh air.[22] While he idealizes the villa as the ultimate romantic ideal, he also advocates for city living that mimics the villa, and is as a light and airy as space will allow. Within this thought, he advocates that those of all classes, particularly the humbler ones, should aspire to this.[23] This encouragement has remained within western society since, as evidenced by the Mitchell Owen article "Alexandrine and Grégoire Vermesse Turn a Woebegone Sicilian House into an Evocation of Tours Past" in the May 2019 Architectural Digest issue, where the collecting feature is a restored Neo-Classical villa in Sicily depicting opulence with the propaganda of desire. [24] Alberti's writings beyond the separation of art and craft helped to shape the social order of the day, from thoughts on suburban flight to promoting the artists of his most powerful patron, the Medici. One must ask however, how is it that his thinking not only survives but thrives for six hundred plus years? The

answer may not be within the arts community, but within the influence set forth and maintained by the financial elites. The Medici started their empire interested in collecting antiquities; their turn to commissioning contemporary art was their assurance into "Gods good favor" and atonement for their sins. Despite the religious nature of the work they commissioned, it was still considered a family investment and inventoried often.[25] The bankers of Florence set the precedent for including art within the investment considerations, many including the Medici, choosing to be the dealer/broker as well.

Further investigation into society norms at the time reveals that there is a direct socio-economic strategy that gives new meaning to amassing family fortune and "keeping it in the family." Cosimo de Medici, after all was married into one of the other prominent banking families, the Bardis.[26] Lillian H. Zirpolo wrote an article about the marriage practices in Rome in reference to the Sacchetti family, also bankers and collectors. She explains that in certain cities, there was an encouragement to climb the social ladder, if you were in an economic position to do so. Rome was a fairly open society in this manner, whereas Florence was not. One thing that was common across all boundaries however, was that the affluent looked at the family itself as a business, producing members that would be slated to be priests with the hopes they would become cardinals; they would hone members to be art collectors and brokers, educate others with the hopes of political aspirations, and they would not marry outside their kind.[27] To this end, in reference to the Medici, they produced at least four Popes, several royal marriages, and three that rose to the top of administrative government offices.[28]

The interesting piece in the search for the reasoning behind Alberti's list of hierarchy in the arts, is that painters, sculptors, architects still kept their guild structure despite his aesthetic theory and this continued well into the 18th century, extending as far as the Medici's reach into Northern Europe. This can be referenced visually, with painters such as Gentileschi studying under Caravaggio, Goya under Luzan, and in the written form, Obreen's published lists of guild memberships during his work as an archivist in the 18th century.[29] Could this mean that Alberti's writing was merely a guide to influence patrons to indulge in collecting specific types of art? It seems that the later generations of the Medici had another artist and scholar under their patronage by the name of Georgio Vissari, who authored several volumes under the title Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects in 1547 that appear to be a means to accomplishing the same end and also dedicated them to Cosimo de Medici. To this day the series is considered one of the most informative texts for the basis of art history.[30] It is thought that this is the text that kept Alberti's original writing alive as Vasari was well versed in Latin and relied heavily on it when providing a biographical sketch of artists which included the likes of Michelangelo.[31] With the family business preservation practices, and the scholarly endeavors that appear at just the right time, it would seem that this could be the case. With this being said, how did it shape the thinking going forward? While the Renaissance and its patrons set the stage for further delineation in the world of art and collecting, the relationship between banking and art collecting continued to grow. The Fugger family of Augsburg, for instance, were coming into power in Germany, in the late part of the 16th century. They too were bankers, and traded extensively in the art that they were patrons of, even offering a catalogue of inventory they were willing to part with as early as 1565.[32] The family lineage boasts similar preservation tactics: entire estates were tied up in the business, occupational patterns show clergy, military, merchants, and government officials.[33] What is important to know about the beginnings of this family is that there is a broad description of what constitutes art and the delineation seems to be more of art and artifacts, rather than art and craft. The family does have a far different relationship with the contemporary patrons they are working with: mostly they are a well-organized class of peasants artisans and there always seems to be a middleman that plays negotiator in the equation. However, if one were to examine the collection, there is a noticeable preference to artisan works that were exotic, from far off places, including the Americas, rather than what could be found at home.[34]

The Fuggers have been credited for being the spark to the Reformation with the sale of Indulgences, which was a scheme that was set up to help Albrecht of Hohenzollern pay back the somewhat bottomless loan that was made to him by Jakob Frugger for his clerical quest, to become the Archbishop of Mainz, one of the most powerful positions in Europe. The money was used to pay off Pope Leo X, a Medici for the favor. Leo had a brother in contention for the same position, so he upped the price and pocketed the money, and told his brother to go home and enjoy his life. Fugger, the Pope, and Albrecht conspired to use the sale of indulgences to cover the loan. They hired the best-known indulgence salesman to go town to town peddling reparations with an entourage that included Frugger's auditors in tow. The Fuggers employed a business tactic that would later become a common practice of the time. It was the use of multiple auditors as a means of covering up any shady dealings, as those auditors would only be fixated on agreeing upon the funds, as they would argue how they were obtained. They made great strides until they came to the town of Juterborg, just outside of Saxony. The scholar Luther, who made his home in Saxony, learned about the sale and was prompted to

write his “Ninety Five Theses”, which he pinned to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral for all to see and sent on a copy to Albrecht and the Pope. [35]

The Fugger legacy includes a housing settlement that was set up for the “honorable” poor, interpreted as wealthy craftsman and tradesman, or those that were willing to work, in Augsburg, Germany. It still exists to this day. While the “Fuggerei” seems a noble cause, it is a perfect example of the power the wealthy have to keep the peasant masses in their place with the use of charity. The neighborhood was constructed with small, standardized private living spaces and narrow lanes. Rent was kept to a minimum and charged on an annual basis. Rental contracts also required a committed agreement to daily devotions for the Frugger family in the neighborhood’s chapel. The community was gated and by design there were no communal spaces to keep residents from diverting any energy from work and worship.[36] This is a perfect example of the “genealogy of morality” that Foucault elaborates upon in his book, The Order of Things, which was inspired by the work of Nietzsche.[37] There is a life axis that is based on the power that is assigned to it. Goodness of heart and charitable works would not necessarily mean the same thing--the intentions of the person making the decision must be taken into account. Language and the understanding of it is all in the perspective.

The Hope family, of Amsterdam, is another example of families that follow the formula of collecting and family preservation. Henry Hope, who was originally from Boston, was educated in London and apprenticed with a merchant bank. Eventually, he emigrated to the Netherlands to join the family banking business. He traded goods such as diamonds, and invested in art for both pleasure and for the good of the company. In 1794 had the contents of his home loaded onto two ships and emigrated with his family from Haarlemmerhout to London.[38] It was in London that Hope partnered with Sir Frances Baring, who was also a banker, to form one of the largest merchant banks in the world. Their claim to fame would be the funding of the Louisiana Purchase. They were also the ones to bring the art market to a fledgling United States.[39] Baring was also an avid collector and dealer in art and antiquities. The company’s connection with the East India Company meant it eventually became the main financier that pushed the British colonization of India.[40] Why is this important? While there is a distinction between arts and crafts in the Western world, there is a more nuanced relationship between them in the rest of the world: crafts are not labeled as such; the argument is a western construct. The colonization of India forced the decimation of the Swedeshi cloth industry in favor of British goods. The Indian culture believed that this particular hand made cloth could evoke so much spiritually.[41] During the late 18th until the early 20th century, the Hope Company encouraged imperialist Russia to crave capitalism during a state building campaign, getting them addicted to the art and material goods associated with Westernization as a means of forcing them into debt. The Russians fed their habit by charging the peasant class, and seizing the profits from the artisans, and artists of the day. Eventually, this forced a revolution.[42] Karl Marx predicted a class warfare because of it.[43] Looking at both of these families in depth, the political and merchant diversity ran deep, which allowed the company to continue until the 1975 when it was bought out by ABN Amro.[44]

At the school’s conception, Gropius had intended on presenting a new pedagogy that would unify art and craft once again. Within a short five-year span the school’s focus became more about industry. One of the founding pedagogies was to adapt the Prussian ideal of using the creative arts as a means to improve innovation in the manufacturing of consumer goods. At the turn of the century, the Germans fell in love with the idea that the public were intrigued with the applied arts such as ceramics, metals, and furniture. Their popularity put England on the map. The thought was, an education in the manufacturing of these things would improve craftsmanship and drive prices.[45]

There is a fundamental flaw, though, in Gropius’s argument that all forms of art are equal under industrialization. He puts architecture at the pinnacle of the equation.[46] When one examines this, in the context of the end goal, which was to bring prosperity and dignity to a post war Germany, what he is actually doing is pushing the very capitalist ideology about the arts that has been evolving since the time of Alberti, he is just shifting its primary focus away from painting and placing it upon building.[47] Rose Carol Washton Long quotes Gropius in her article: “Capitalism and power politics have dulled the creativity of our generation and the . . . intellectual bourgeois society of the old regime--indifferent and dull, unimaginative of German culture.” [48]

The statement Gropius is making contradicts his primary objective for the school if one was to base it on his argument of how the English had managed to promote themselves using craft. Walter Benjamin agrees with this assessment, stating that the industrial approach to design strips the craft of its identity, effectively destroying the culture it was set out to boost.[49] What is interesting though is that Benjamin, while dissatisfied with the pedagogy of the school, particularly when it comes to film, is fascinated by the experimentation that Moholy-Nagy is employing with photography, for some of the same reasons.[50]

As for the art world in its present state, it will always be tied up in capitalistic ideals. The separation of art and craft seems to have developed into its own discourse, which in a sense is giving capitalism social control over creativity by normalizing an argument

that should not exist in the first place. Essentially, what Alberti did, for whatever the reason may have been, is to call attention to the same things Gropius was calling attention to: that the end product of creativity needs to be well crafted and innovative to hold merit. What Gropius did achieve was to design a school of thought that essentially became the new “protector” of the contemporary art scene. Romanticized today, it has become the school of thought most artisans will use to stand their ground in the battle of art versus craft.

Footnotes

1. [Walter Sheidig, Klaus G. Beyer, Weimar Crafts of the Bauhaus: 1919-1924, an Early Experiment in Industrial Design (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1966), 6.] ↩
2. [HH Arnason and Elizabeth Mansfield, “ Bauhaus and Modernism” in History of Modern Art, 6th edition, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2010), 297-316, 298.] ↩
3. [Mark Jurdjevic. "Civic Humanism and the Rise of the Medici." Renaissance Quarterly 52, no. 4 (1999): 994-1020, accessed: doi:10.2307/2901833. 1000.] ↩
4. [Leon Battista Alberti, “Book Two,” in On Painting, ed.Rocco Sinisgalli, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 44-74.] ↩
5. Dale Kent, Cosimo de Medici and the Florentine Renaissance, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000),132. And David Graeber, Debt: the First 5000 years (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011), 285-287. Graeber explains the attitudes of the Church in terms of both social class structure and religious diversity. ↩
6. David Graeber, Debt: the First 5000 years, 289-291. Graeber explains how the move towards expunging sins for capital projects comes about with the banking houses in Northern Italy. He also explains the secularism that is returning to the rule of law within these places, which supports the following of the Civic Humanists. ↩
7. Dale Kent, “Renaissance Florence Collecting: Cosimo de’ Medici & Sons,” The Center for the History of Collecting, Money for the Most Exquisite Things: banking and collecting from the Medici to the Rockefellers, the Frick Collection, accessed: https://vimeo.com/71579856 And Tim Parks, Medici Money, (London: Profile Books, 2005, kindle,)229-290. ↩
8. Travel in Tuscany, “Benozzo Gozzoli | Procession of the Magi in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi in Florence (1459-60)”, accessed: http://www.travelingintuscany.com/ar...nofthemagi.htm ↩
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3.3.1: Using Cultural Theory to Investigate the Debate- Art vs. Craft is shared under a CC BY-NC-ND license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Lisa Floryshak, Arkansas State University - Beebe.

3.3.2: Medici Art

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Introduction

by Dr. Lisa Floryshak

The Medici were Florentine merchant bankers who rose to power just after the plague ravaged 66% of the population of Europe. They started out by making small loans out of the back of their store. They invested earnings in material goods. At first, it was in goods acquired on voyages east with the East India Trading Company and eventually as patrons of the arts. It is in this space that their influence will have a lasting impact on global trade, the Church, and the artworld. Famously, convincing the church and other merchants that they could pay off their misgivings, or indulgences, with donations. They eventually became the most affluent family in all of Europe at the time, with banking branches as far away as London, and one of the most extensive art and antiquities collections outside of royalty. Their influence was far-reaching, ranging from politics to fashion. This included the writing of the humanists, such as Alberti, who bolstered the value of specific lifestyle choices. Scholarly examination of Medici letters speaks of them as well-spoken, popular, and somewhat ruthless, influential Florentine merchants. The impact they had on the art and financial worlds could be considered timeless.

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Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, Palazzo Medici

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Virtue, Pride, and Magnificence

Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, Palazzo Medici, Florence, begun 1444; a conversation with Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

Artwork Details and Transcript below

Benozzo Gozzoli, The Medici Palace Chapel frescoes

by Dr. Rebecca Howard

Benozzo Gozzoli, frescoes on the east and south walls, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace (Palazzo Medici, also known as the Palazzo Medici Riccardi)

Inside the Medici Palace, just off the palace's central courtyard at street-level, is the Medici Chapel (or Magi Chapel). Completed in the mid-fifteenth century, this intimate room still dazzles its visitors with its vividly painted frescoes and gold leaf which is in stark contrast to the palace's rather modest exterior. One can easily imagine the glittering effect of flickering candlelight in the opulent space of the Medici Chapel.

The Medici family was a wealthy and powerful Florentine family, whose fortune was built on their banking industry. The Medici Bank was initiated in the late 14th century under Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, but the family's economic power ultimately helped them garner increased political power, and they became the rulers of Florence (and later Tuscany) for much of the fifteenth through early eighteenth centuries.

Figure 3.3.2.1: Michelozzo, Medici Palace (Palazzo Medici, also known as the Palazzo Medici Riccardi), 1445–60, Florence, Italy (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

While the patron of the Palazzo, Cosimo de' Medici ("il Vecchio"), wanted his family home to have an austere, geometric public face (so as not to be perceived as ostentatious), the family's wealth and influence was strategically displayed throughout the interior, including in the Medici Chapel. This balance reflects Cosimo's calculated efforts to maintain power and favor in Florence while avoiding conspicuous outward displays of the family's wealth. This was especially important in the fifteenth century when power in Florence was constantly oscillating between the Medici and the Florentine Republic. So, it was beneficial for the Medici to avoid appearing too pretentious and greedy in their public displays of wealth.

The design of the Medici Chapel

The small Medici Chapel was meant to function as a space of private worship for the family. For the space's fresco decoration, the Medici chose the painter Benozzo Gozzoli, who had trained under the Florentine Fra Angelico (known for his frescoes in the monastery of San Marco, a decorative program which was also funded by Cosimo il Vecchio).

The Adoration in the Forest, 1459, oil on poplar wood, 118.5 x 129.5 cm, originally in the apse of the Magi Chapel Medici Palace, north wall (Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin)

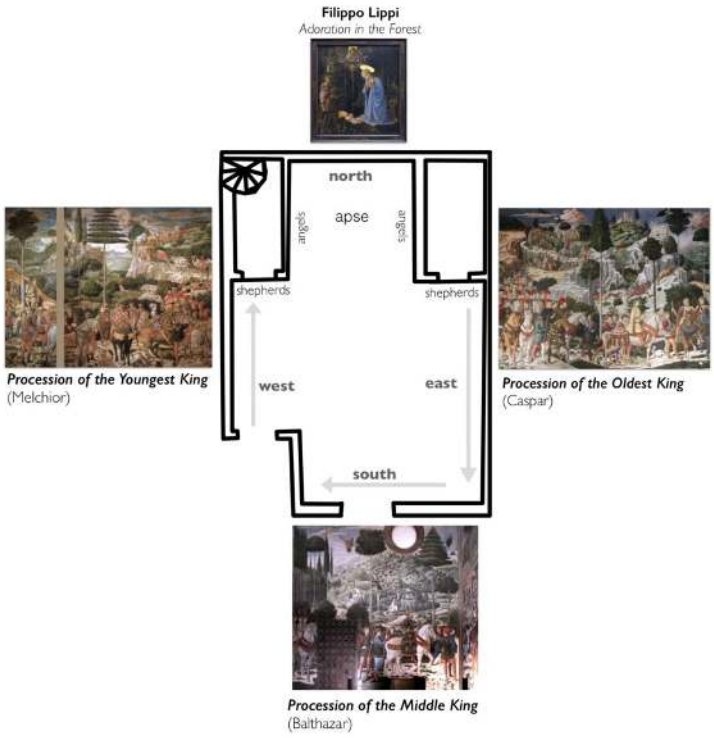
Such private spaces for worship—whether in a public setting, such as a local church, or in one's family home—were quite common for rulers and the wealthy in early modern Italy. However, papal permission for the construction of a private family chapel inside a residence was required, and the Medici had obtained this through Pope Martin V by 1442.

The completion of the chapel's decoration was mostly overseen by Cosimo's son, Piero di Cosimo de' Medici ("the Gouty"), who took over as the head of the family after his father's death in 1464. Piero also commissioned a portable family altarpiece from the Carmelite painter Fra Filippo Lippi for the chapel, which depicts the *Adoration in the Forest*, or *Mystical Nativity*. In the altarpiece, the Virgin Mary kneels beside the Christ child, who lays on a blanket of grass and flowers in a dark forest, while God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit appear above them, and Saint John the Baptist stands to their side.

Procession of the Youngest King, *Caspar*, east wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

The Magi

A feast for the eyes, Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes cover every wall of the small chapel, enveloping the viewer from all sides. Said to have been painted in about 150 days in 1459, the theme centers around three biblical kings from far-reaching lands, commonly known as the Magi or wisemen. According to Christian tradition, these men visited the Christ child shortly after his birth and brought expensive and exotic gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The three kings and their large entourage are painted with rich detail as they complete their long journeys.



Diagram, Medici Chapel

Their procession extends across the east, south, and west walls of the nearly perfectly square space, leading towards the north wall which incorporates an unusual square apse (they are most often hemispherical). With Lippi's altarpiece at its center (today a copy of the original work), the decoration of the apse denotes a separate realm, where frescoed angels appear to worship on either side of the *Adoration in the Forest* altarpiece.

Benozzo Gozzoli, detail of a figure with gold leaf applied to the sleeves of his blue shirt, south wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

The altarpiece and the frescoes were conceived of as a united program, functioning together to produce an overall effect more powerful and spiritually moving than its constituent parts. Throughout the chapel, Gozzoli alternated between *buon fresco* and *fresco secco*, and in the final stages of the project, areas of gold leaf were applied. The gold leaf adds an opulence to the imagery and its use recalls what is now referred to as the International Gothic style, long associated with princely patronage.

Medici Coat of Arms, Medici Palace exterior

The gold-leaf applied throughout the composition helped to create a shimmering, ethereal experience when viewed in candlelight. The incorporation of this expensive material, as well as the use of costly pigments like ultramarine blue, made from lapis lazuli, cast the Medici in the role of the Magi, “giving” Christ an expensive gift by way of paying for the construction and decoration of this space. This effect is reinforced by the inclusion of portraits of Medici family members in the guise of the Magi and their entourage (explored below). Spotted throughout the frescoed walls are orange trees, a common Medici symbol reflective of the *palle* (balls) of their coat of arms, lest any future visitors question the patronage of the space.

Benozzo Gozzoli, leopard (detail), west wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

Across the Chapel’s walls, the Magi travel through an incredibly rich, detailed landscape, full of carefully rendered flora and fauna. Deer, hunting dogs, rabbits, various birds, monkeys, camels, and exotic cats galivant amongst the exquisitely dressed crowds. This verdant landscape also draws influence from works of the International Gothic style in its moments of careful ornamentation and patterning, bright and rich colors, and extreme attention to every tiny detail.

Benozzo Gozzoli, landscape (detail), south wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

The perpetual procession of the Magi

Each of the three walls showing the long journey of the Magi focuses on one of the three kings: Melchior (the eldest king), Balthazar, and Caspar (the youngest). Interestingly, visitors to the chapel do not see the more commonly represented end of their journey, the moment when the three kings have actually *reached* the Holy Family and they adore the newborn Christ Child, such as we see in Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* altarpiece. The patron of Gentile da Fabriano's work, Palla Strozzi, was part of a rival Florentine banking family. In this work, the Strozzi family also associated themselves with the generous Magi. Their *Adoration*, however, was visible to the general public, located in the family's chapel in the church of Santa Trinità. Contrasting more common period depictions of the Magi having reached their destination (the newborn Christ child), in Gozzoli's private Medici Chapel frescoes, the Magi are frozen in a perpetual and unfulfilled journey across the walls of the room. Instead, it was the flesh and blood members of the Medici family who worshipped before the altar in this space who were meant to realize the goal of reaching and adoring the Holy Family.

Benozzo Gozzoli, *Adoration of the Magi*, cell of Cosimo de' Medici (San Marco, Florence, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This kind of role-play was typical of many patrons, including the Medici, who frequently liked to imagine themselves as similar to these wealthy kings of the biblical past who adorned Christ with gifts. Another example of the Medici associating themselves with the Magi is found in Cosimo il Vecchio's personal, private cell in the monastery of San Marco, also located in Florence. This room was used by Cosimo as a meditative escape, and he chose to have it decorated with a scene of the Magi giving gifts to the newborn Christ child. This image of the adoration of the Magi in his own private monastic retreat allowed Cosimo to reflect on important Christian stories while simultaneously considering his own family's "similarities" to these three kings. Notably, this particular cell in San Marco was decorated by both Fra Angelico and one of his star pupils—Benozzo Gozzoli himself.

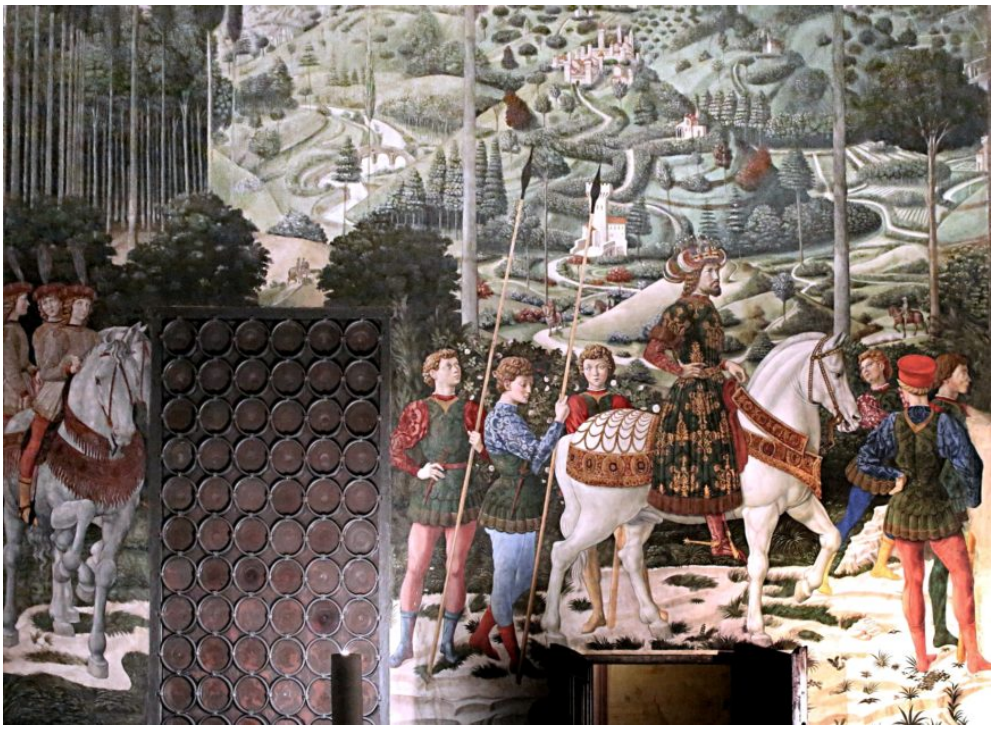
Benozzo Gozzoli, frescoes on the south and west walls, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace

The Medici become the Magi

In the Medici Chapel, accompanying the Magi and their entourage on each of the three walls, recognizable portraits of members of the Medici family can be found riding along with each group.

Melchior, the oldest king, on the far left, and a figure in the center may be the young Giuliano de' Medici. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Procession of the Oldest King*, *Melchior*, west wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

A long caravan of figures leads several camels, donkeys, and horses, whose backs all appear to be loaded with goods, if not carrying people. Behind this caravan, the oldest king, Melchior, is accompanied by a group of contemporary figures, many of whom are recognizable allies of the Medici. Dressed in blue and lingering in a princely group just in front of Melchior, a figure proposed as a portrait of the young Giuliano de' Medici rides his horse while accompanied by two exotic cats. This young man looks out towards the viewer, inviting them to contemplate this important journey. Here, Gozzoli includes his own portrait as one of the many pilgrims who travel alongside Melchior.



Benozzo Gozzoli, *Procession of the Middle King, Balthazar*, south wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace, Florence (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

The second king, Balthazar, continues the procession behind Melchior. Bearded, somewhat darker-skinned, and wearing a rich green and gold embroidered gown, Balthazar's appearance indicates the vast global range from which the three kings came.

Benozzo Gozzoli, *Procession of the Youngest King, Caspar*, east wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace, Florence (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

Benozzo Gozzoli, possibly Lorenzo dressed as Caspar (detail), east wall, Magi Chapel, Medici Palace

It is important to note that the relative age of the three Magi is changeable in works of the period. For example, Balthazar is often identified as the youngest king, and is increasingly said to hail from the African continent. However, Gozzoli's youngest king is Caspar. Taking on the role of Caspar is a young Lorenzo (il Magnifico) de' Medici, soon to become one of the greatest Medici rulers of Florence's history. He rides a white horse while leading the last part of the procession, another large group of lay people. The young Lorenzo may have been pictured as Caspar because his birthday fell on the Feast of Caspar, January 1.

Benozzo Gozzoli, Cosimo il Vecchio (left) and Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (right), east wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace, Florence (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

Next in line in the group that follows Lorenzo/Caspar is Lorenzo's father, Piero, and then his grandfather (the original patron of the Palazzo Medici), Cosimo il Vecchio. The huge group behind them includes recognizable depictions of many other important leaders of the period with close associations to the Medici, such as Sigismondo Malatesta (Lord of Rimini) and Galeazzo Maria Sforza (Duke of Milan), along with illustrious Florentines, like the humanists Marsilio Ficino and the Pulci brothers, important members of various Florentine guilds, and none other than Gozzoli himself.

Benozzo Gozzoli, self-portrait (detail), east wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace, Florence (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

Yes, the artist included his own portrait twice, just in case you missed him the first time. He looks directly out at the viewer in both instances. Here at the end of the procession, Gozzoli's red hat is inscribed in gold leaf with the words, "Opus Benotii" (the work of Benozzo), the only legible text found on anyone's attire. By incorporating these two self-portraits into the scene, Gozzoli made sure that he would be remembered long after his death, and even more importantly, that he would be remembered in connection with the powerful Medici family.

Benozzo Gozzoli, Black bowman (detail), east wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace, Florence (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

Diverse figures

Throughout the procession, viewers also find diverse characters, such as Black individuals and figures dressed in Ottoman fashion (see below). These figures are nods to the Medici's broad reach of power and a desire to display their worldliness. In 1453, the Ottoman Empire overtook the Christian city of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire fell. As a result, the relationship between Christians and Muslims became more complicated in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Extensive trade still occurred through Ottoman territories, so Medici diplomats and traders were in frequent contact with Ottoman peoples during this period.

Benozzo Gozzoli, in the middle ground figures wear Ottoman inspired clothing and accessories (detail), west wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace, Florence (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

The depiction of figures like Melchior in distinct Eastern-inspired dress, along with several turbaned figures dotting the frescoes, reflect the visibility of Ottomans in the lives and business associations of wealthy Europeans like the Medici. Importantly, the fall of the Byzantine empire to the Ottomans meant that the Holy Land was now under Islamic rule. These non-European figures, therefore, are also simply to be read as signifying the Holy Land. This is seen in other Italian works from this period, such as Carlo Crivelli's *Madonna and Child*, which incorporates turbaned figures in the background to help situate the scene in the Holy Land for Renaissance viewers. Similarly, the Black individuals that Gozzoli incorporates, such as the Black bowman walking along with

Caspar's entourage, might be read as both simple comments on the vast reach of Medici power, as well as a reflection of the prominent period belief that one of the three kings was from the African continent.

By including so many varied and recognizable faces, the Medici used this space to celebrate their political and economic power alongside a show of their piety. In fact, in an effort to convey the family as humbly as possible (despite literally comparing themselves to the wealthy kings that brought expensive and exotic gifts to the Holy Family), the family had most of their own portraits incorporated at the *end* of the procession, as part of the youngest king's retinue and therefore physically farthest from the goal of reaching the newborn Christ child.

Benozzo Gozzoli, shepherds on the left and right walls of the apse, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace, Florence

The Medici access the heavenly realm

While the painted members of the Medici family are mostly at the end of the long procession, when they knelt before the altar in the physical space of the chapel, they were actually afforded access to the space closest to Christ (depicted in Fra Filippo Lippi's altarpiece). Two shepherds in the frescoed landscape depicted on either side of the apse's entrance model the worshipful poses that would have been adopted by members of the Medici family, gazing upon the Christ child and completing the journey perpetually unrealized by the processing Magi on the surrounding walls.

Artwork details

Artwork Details

Title	Procession of the Youngest King, Caspar; Procession of the Middle King, Balthazar; Procession of the Oldest King, Melchior from the Medici Palace Chapel
Artist(s)	Benozzo Gozzoli(opens in new window)
Dates	1459
Places	Europe(opens in new window) / Southern Europe / Italy
Period, Culture, Style	Renaissance(opens in new window) / Italian Renaissance(opens in new window)
Artwork Type	Painting(opens in new window) / Mural(opens in new window)
Material	Gold(opens in new window), Pigment(opens in new window)
Technique	Fresco(opens in new window)

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Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, Palazzo Medici Video Details and Transcript

Video transcript

[0:00] [music]

Dr. Steven Zucker: [0:04] We're in Florence, looking at the Palazzo Medici.

Dr. Beth Harris: [0:07] The Medici Palace, and we're on a busy street in Florence. This is really in the heart of Florence.

Dr. Zucker: [0:13] In fact, it's situated at a point where Cosimo had to buy the properties of some 22 landowners in order to be able to build what is a magnificent and enormous palace. It's a palace that has a view of the most important religious sites in the city.

Dr. Harris: [0:28] The Duomo, the Cathedral of Florence.

Dr. Zucker: [0:30] And the Baptistery. In fact, we have a direct view down the street to the Baptistery.

Dr. Harris: [0:34] The place where all the citizens of Florence were baptized.

Dr. Zucker: [0:36] If we look the other direction, we see San Marco, which was a monastery that the Medici family underwrote. They were the primary patrons.

Dr. Harris: [0:44] We also see San Lorenzo, which is their parish church, which they also supported and endowed and had rebuilt and even had funerary chapels built there.

Dr. Zucker: [0:55] Now, in the 14th and especially in the 15th century, the city of Florence had become extremely wealthy. Its wealth came largely from manufacture and largely from the production of wool, but then increasingly banking became an important source of wealth.

Dr. Harris: [1:10] There were several leading families in Florence, the Medici being the most prominent.

Dr. Zucker: [1:15] Now, the Medici family would be in, they would be out. There were times when the Medici family was exiled. There were times when the Medici family was ruling explicitly. There were other times when the Medici family was simply pulling all the strings behind the scenes.

[1:28] I think now in the 21st century, it's easy for us to correlate somebody who has a lot of wealth [with] living in a splendid home, but in the 15th century, ostentation had a price.

Dr. Harris: [1:37] It was morally and spiritually questionable.

Dr. Zucker: [1:41] And so just because you had a lot of money didn't mean that you should necessarily spend it on a grand edifice.

Dr. Harris: [1:48] Yet Cosimo did. The citizens of Florence were intended to understand this as a way of Cosimo of the Medici family ennobling Florence itself, contributing to the beautiful appearance of the city that they were so proud of in the early 15th century.

Dr. Zucker: [2:05] One of the ways that this building pulls that off is by referencing the classical tradition. We can see these beautiful, elegant voussoir[s] rounding the arcade that was originally open. We're calling this a private home, but in fact it was a much more public space than we might expect.

[2:21] Although this building is fortress-like, although it seems tremendously solid and protective, it was meant to be a place where the city could enter, where business could be conducted.

Dr. Harris: [2:30] You used the word "fortress-like," and I think that's important because this building is looking back to a building a few blocks away, the Palazzo Vecchio, the town hall of Florence, which does look very much like a fortress, which had been built a hundred years earlier.

Dr. Zucker: [2:45] This palace refers to the Palazzo Vecchio in a very specific way, and that is the rusticated masonry. On the ground floor of this building, we see these huge blocks of stone that have not been polished, that have not been finely cut, that feel rough, that feel heavy, and the density of that material is so tangible.

[3:04] Look at the way that those stones are cut, not only to refuse the sort of clarity of a flush surface, but they're also cut irregularly so that there is no uniformity of size.

Dr. Harris: [3:15] While the ground floor has a sense of being like a fortress, there's a clear recalling of classical antiquity, of ancient Roman architecture and therefore a sense of Renaissance humanism that this building would have communicated.

Dr. Zucker: [3:29] There are classical references everywhere. There's the voussoir[s] over the Roman arches. There are Corinthian columns in the window bays and then just at the bottom of the cornice, there's egg-and-dart and dentil motifs, and then of course there's the cornice itself, which is this massive form that comes right out of the classical tradition and really stops our eye from moving past the building.

[3:51] Inside is a courtyard, which comes directly out of the Roman tradition, with a lovely Brunelleschian arcade.

Dr. Harris: [3:57] All of this within the context of the incredible wealth of the Medici family, the political power of the Medici family, looking back to the classical tradition.

Dr. Zucker: [4:07] And looking forward to a building boom in new palace architecture by wealthy Florentines. This building, in a sense, gave permission for the other great ruling families to build their own immense palaces.

[4:18] [music]

Artwork details

Artwork Details

Title	Palazzo Medici
Artist(s)	Michelozzo(opens in new window)
Dates	begun 1444
Places	Europe(opens in new window) / Southern Europe / Italy
Period, Culture, Style	Renaissance(opens in new window) / Italian Renaissance(opens in new window)
Artwork Type	Architecture(opens in new window)
Material	Stone(opens in new window)
Technique	

Cite this page

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3.3.3: The Bauhaus Design

Introduction

by Dr. Lisa Floryshak

To understand how we arrived at our intellectual insights into art and design in the 21st century, we need to look back to the research and promotion surrounding art and design done a century ago. The Industrial Revolution sparked a renaissance. At this time, there is an emergence of the middle class, and the idea that even commoners could own houses and the material goods that would fill that lifestyle. This included household décor, fine art, and exquisite fashion.

In 1919, German architect Walter Gropius set forth a radical new concept that Art and Design should be unified under one umbrella. This prompted the beginning of the Bauhaus Craft Guild, a utopian organization that combined fine art, architecture, and craft into one single expression. The result was artists and artisans who used aesthetics as part of the design process. The Bauhaus curriculum combined arts and education, immersing students in material and color studies, as well as more formal studies in aesthetics. Artists such as Paul Klee, Vasily Kandinshky, and Joseph Albers took part in this initial instruction. The workshops included formal training in metalworking, furniture, weaving, pottery, typography and mural painting. It also included a writers' studio, training designers' how to promote art and design. The goal was to meet the demands of this newfound renaissance by designing for mass production.

Resource:

Winton: Alexandria Griffith. "The Bauhaus, 1919-1933," The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Bauhaus [www.metmuseum.org], accessed February 13, 2026.

The Bauhaus, an introduction

by Dr. Charles Cramer and Dr. Kim Grant

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Left: Marianne Brandt, Kandem Bedside Table Lamp, 1928, lacquered steel, 23.5 x 18.4 cm (MoMA(opens in new window)). Right: Marcel Breuer, Chair (model B33), 1927-28, chrome-plated tubular steel with steel-thread seat and back, 83.7 x 49 x 64.5 cm (MoMA(opens in new window)). via SmartHistory.

The Bauhaus was an art and design school in Germany whose importance is astonishing given its very brief and tenuous existence. The desk lamp and chair illustrated here are so familiar and so simple that they don't seem to have required a designer, but they

were as radical in their time as they are commonplace now, and their apparent simplicity was the result of a thoughtful and meticulous design education and design process that remains a model today.

During its fourteen years of existence the Bauhaus was forced to change location three times and was ultimately closed as a result of political pressure from the Nazi party. Founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, the school originally had three aims: to abolish the "arrogant" distinction between artist and craftsperson by recognizing the knowledge and skills common to both; to mobilize all arts and crafts towards the creation of total design environments; and, to foster links between the school and local manufacturers.

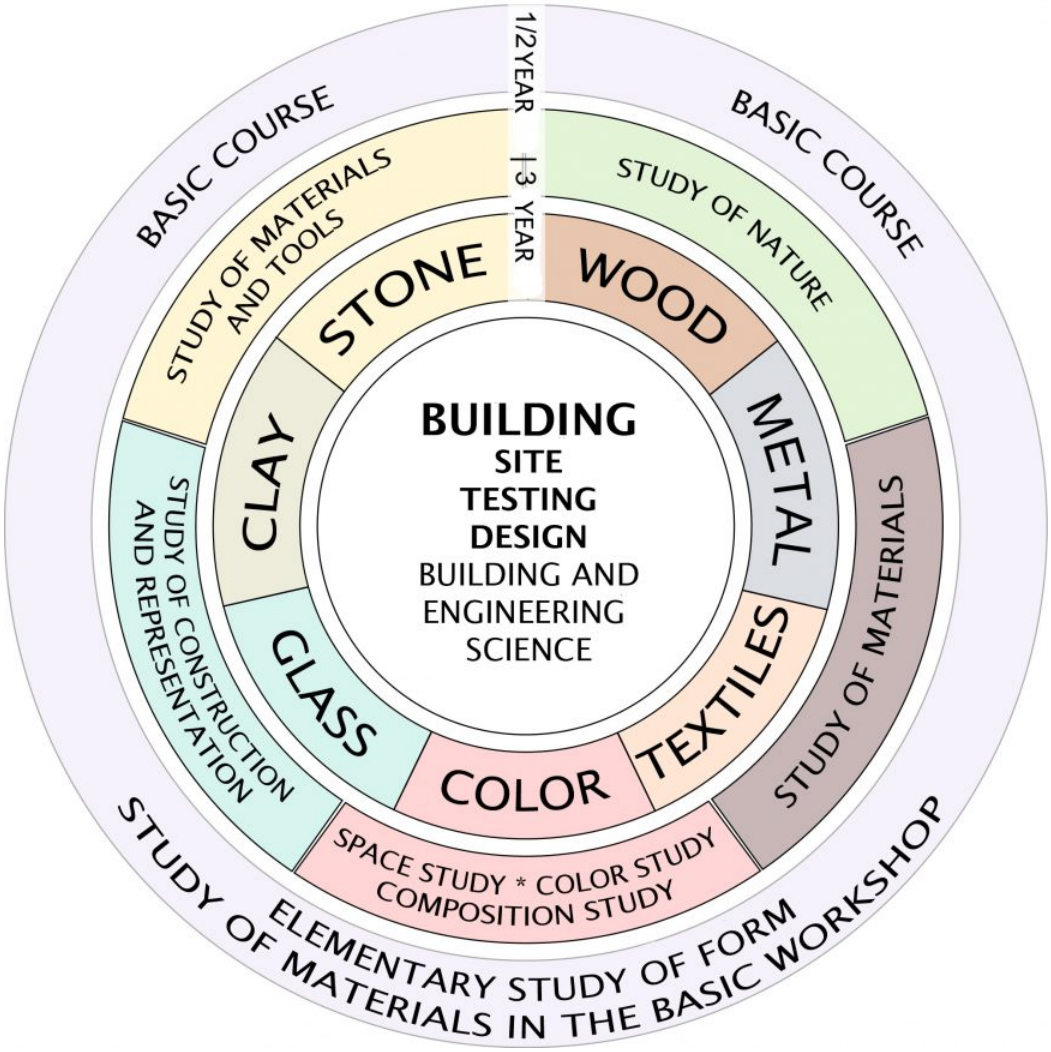

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Diagram of the Bauhaus curriculum (image: SuperManu(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 3.0) via Smarthistory.

Art education and the "Vorkurs" (preliminary course)

The Bauhaus program of study is diagrammed above as a circle. Students began in the outer ring with the half-year Vorkurs or preliminary course (later expanded to a full year) before moving into one of several workshops to concentrate on a specific medium such as ceramics, woodworking, weaving, metalworking, and so on. Once they had achieved a degree of proficiency in their chosen medium all students converged again in Bau (building), to construct total environments, designing everything from the architecture to the furniture, carpets, dishes, and flatware.

The Vorkurs, which taught skills common to all areas of art and design, was one enduring innovation of the Bauhaus. Today's art students will recognize in the Vorkurs the progenitor of their first-year 2-D Design and 3-D Design "foundations" courses. The original head of the Vorkurs was a charismatic Swiss art teacher named Johannes Itten, a follower of Mazdaznan (related to the ancient Persian religion Zoroastrianism) who wore monk-like clothing and encouraged students to meditate, do breathing exercises, and eat a vegetarian diet as aids to creativity.

Projects assigned in the Vorkurs were free-form and generally without practical application. They were intended to develop students' perception, creativity, and understanding of materials. For one typical project Itten collected disparate materials such as wool, rope, and wood shavings.

> ***The students had to feel these sequences of textures with their fingertips, their eyes closed. After a short while their sense of touch improved dramatically. I then asked them to make texture montages of contrasting materials. Fantastic structures were produced and their effects were completely novel at the time.Johannes Itten, Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus and Later (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), p. 34***

Experimental constructions

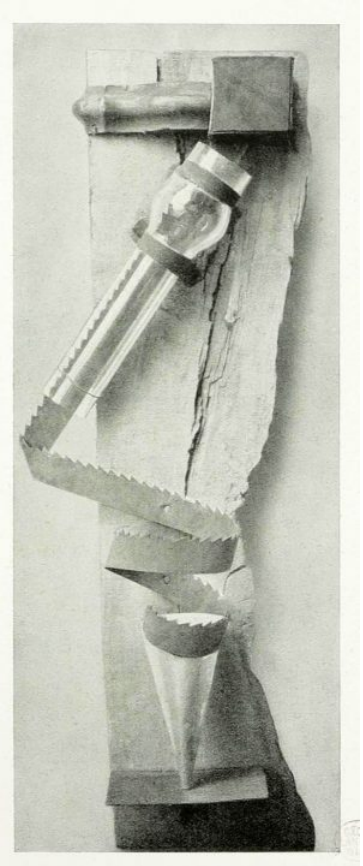

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Moses Mirkin, *Contrast study in various materials*, 1920, photo of the original work as it appeared in the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition catalog, via SmartHistory.

Very few of these Vorkurs projects have survived as they were only intended to be exercises. The work above is described in the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition catalog as a "combined contrast effect: material contrast (glass, wood, iron), contrast of expressive forms (jagged-smooth); rhythmic contrast." In addition to demonstrating these formal contrasts, its purpose was to understand the nature and potential of different materials.

For example, the wood is left rough and unfinished in order to demonstrate its grain, texture, and color variations. Similarly, the saw blade shows the dull sheen of its surface and has been curled into a spiral to demonstrate the flexibility of metal. The rust on the saw blade's surface and the knots and splits in the wood are not sanded or polished; instead, they are featured as qualities of those materials that need to be understood by the design students who will be working with them.

From craft to industry

The early Bauhaus concentrated primarily on hand-made crafts, but it soon became evident that, in order to survive, the school needed to reorient its goals toward industrial production. Bauhaus headmaster Walter Gropius asserted in the keynote address for the school exhibition of 1923, “The Bauhaus believes the machine to be our modern medium of design and seeks to come to terms with it.” [1]

Itten, whose spiritual and expressionist orientation did not fit with these aims, was replaced by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and later Josef Albers, as head of the Vorkurs. The traditional medieval titles from craft workshops initially used in the Bauhaus, where instructors were called “Masters” and students were called “Apprentices” or “Journeymen,” were replaced by the more modern titles of professor and student.

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Lyonel Feininger, *Cathedral*, cover for *Program of the State Bauhaus in Weimar*, 1919, woodcut, 41 x 31 cm (MoMA); right: Herbert Bayer, Bauhaus Exhibition poster, 1923, lithograph, 15 x 10 cm (MoMA). via SmartHistory.

The reorientation toward the modern machine age is most obvious in products designedby the Bauhaus for mass production, but it is also visible in the graphic branding of the Bauhaus itself. In 1919, the founding manifesto of the Bauhaus was published with a cover by Lyonel Feininger(opens in new window) that featured a cathedral crowned by three radiant stars. Both the medieval subject and the woodcut technique are deliberately old-fashioned, reflecting the guild structure of the school itself and its emphasis on hand making and personal expression.

By contrast, the poster designed for the 1923 exhibition is a lithograph, a more modern printmaking technology. It uses only rational geometric shapes and the primary colors red and blue, along with black and the white of the paper. Dotted lines and arcs made by a compass reinforce the overall sense of precise, mechanical execution, very different from the uneven, expressive marks of Feininger’s print. Even the letter forms reinforce the impression of clean, rationalized modernity: sans-serif, upright, and with a consistent (monoline) weight. Such “modern” typefaces are very familiar today, but were quite different from the medieval blackletter or gothic typeface that was common in Germany until the 1940s.

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Walter Gropius, Shop Wing, Bauhaus building, Dessau, 1925-26 (via SmartHistory)

The Bauhaus is dead … long live the Bauhaus

In 1925, the Bauhaus was forced to flee from its original location in Weimar, Germany. The right-wing nationalists who came to power in the region saw the school as a hotbed of foreigners sympathetic to Communism. The school lasted only seven years in its next location, Dessau, before being forced to move to Berlin. When the Nazi party came to national power under Chancellor Adolf Hitler in 1933 the Bauhaus closed for good.

Despite its relatively brief existence, the Bauhaus had an enormous influence on our contemporary visual environment. Fleeing Nazi Germany, its professors disseminated the school's curriculum and ideals across the United States. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius went on to teach at the Harvard School of Design, along with furniture designer Marcel Breuer(opens in new window). Vorkurs instructors Moholy-Nagy(opens in new window) and Josef Albers(opens in new window) also continued their influential teaching careers: Moholy-Nagy at the New Bauhaus in Chicago and Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in North Carolina and Yale University in New Haven, CT.

Generations of art and design students have absorbed their instruction not only directly, in foundation courses that adopt the aims and sometimes sometimes even exact projects of the Bauhaus Vorkurs, but also by osmosis, living in dorms, sitting in chairs, and using desk lamps that are the direct descendants of Bauhaus designs.

Footnotes

[1] Cited in William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 193.

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Important fundamentals

The Bauhaus and Bau(opens in new window)

The Bauhaus: Marianne Brandt(opens in new window)

The Bauhaus: Marcel Breuer(opens in new window)

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The Bauhaus: Marcel Breuer

by Dr. Charles Cramer and Dr. Kim Grant

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Walter Gropius, Shop Wing, Bauhaus building, Dessau, 1925-26 (via SmartHistory)

The Bauhaus(opens in new window) was an art and design school founded in Germany in 1919. In its early years, the Bauhaus concentrated primarily on hand-made crafts, but it soon became evident that, in order to survive, the school needed to reorient its goals toward industrial production. It therefore underwent a major overhaul in the early 1920s to shift its orientation toward mechanical production. Four chairs by Bauhaus student—and later professor—Marcel Breuer encapsulate the famous design school's history and changing philosophy in a nutshell.

An Expressionist chair

Made when he was still a student, Breuer's painted *African Chair* (opens in new window)exemplifies the early, expressionist phase of Bauhaus design. In keeping with the Arts and Crafts creed that hand making is superior to machine making, the carved wood in *African Chair* is left unplaned to retain a hand-hewn look. Gunta Stölzl, a fellow student in the Bauhaus textile workshop, used the chair frame itself as a loom, weaving the brightly colored geometric patterns of the seat back in place to complete the highly expressive and individualistic piece of furniture.

As its name suggests, *African Chair* participates in a primitivist aesthetic that was widespread among those seeking an antidote to the ills of urban and industrial life. African art, in particular, inspired many early twentieth-century European modernists, although

often, as here in Breuer's chair, that inspiration is vaguely evocative rather than referring to any specific African cultural tradition.

Coming to terms with industry

Breuer produced *African Chair* under the tutelage of Johannes Itten, the master of the Bauhaus carpentry workshop. The year after it was produced, the Bauhaus turned away from the expressionist aesthetic promoted by Itten and embraced a machine aesthetic. A major influence on this shift was De Stijl(opens in new window) co-founder Theo van Doesburg, who came to Germany in 1921 to offer courses on De Stijl principles of design that were attended by many Bauhaus students.

Van Doesburg's teaching drove the final wedge between two competing schools of thought at the Bauhaus: one, led by Itten, that embraced individualistic, hand-making, spiritual, and expressionist aims; and the other that thought the school should be oriented toward impersonal, rational, industrial manufacture. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius originally hoped the school could find a middle path, but in a 1922 memorandum he declared that

> ***the world of forms which emerged from and in company with the machine asserts itself … Some Bauhaus students worship a misunderstood "return to nature" à la Rousseau; they want to shoot with bow and arrow rather than with a rifle. But then why not throw stones and go about naked?Cited in Frank Whitford, Bauhaus (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 120.***

Gropius persuaded Itten to resign in 1923, and in his keynote address for the Bauhaus exhibition of that year, declared, "The Bauhaus believes the machine to be our modern medium of design and seeks to come to terms with it."[1]

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Gerrit Rietveld, *Red Blue Chair*, 1918-23, painted wood, 86.7 x 66 x 83.8 cm, (MoMA(opens in new window)), via SmartHistory

Learning from De Stijl

In practice, this meant adopting a cleaner, more rational geometric aesthetic similar to De Stijl's reduction of design to its basic elements: horizontal and vertical lines; the primary colors red, yellow, and blue; and the values black and white. Gerrit Rietveld's *Red Blue Chair* is a prime example of De Stijl design(opens in new window); all the structural members are oriented on a perfect grid, meeting at 90 degree angles in what are still called "Rietveld Joints." Only the seat and back are inclined at an angle, because it would be very uncomfortable to sit in a perfectly vertical chair. The chair was originally stained beechwood, but in 1923 Rietveld painted it the iconic primary colors of De Stijl.

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Marcel Breuer, *Armchair*, 1922, Stained oak and hand-woven wool, 94.6 x 55.9 x 57.2 cm (MoMA(opens in new window)), via SmartHistory

Breuer's armchair, designed a year after his *African Chair*, shows the clear influence of De Stijl. The structural framework is composed entirely of straight horizontal and vertical members meeting at perfect right angles. Like Rietveld, Breuer recognizes the need for some compromise with perfect geometric rationalism where the chair interfaces with the organic human body. The design is softened with a fabric seat that slopes down toward the back, and two slightly offset bands that cradle the lower back and just below the shoulder blades. Although the joinery (mortise-and-tenon, with some lap joints) would be somewhat time-consuming, the wood stock is of an even thickness and width throughout and joins meet exclusively at right angles, making the chair relatively easy to mass produce.

Turning to tubular steel

After he graduated, Breuer left the Bauhaus briefly in 1924 to work in Paris, but when the school moved to Dessau he returned to become head of the carpentry workshop. Ironically, at that time he changed materials and began producing furniture using an unabashedly industrial material: tubular steel rather than wood. Breuer's switch to tube steel was prompted by his admiration for the frame of a bicycle he bought to ride around Dessau. Extruded from a mold, the seamless tubes could be produced in any length needed, then bent around forms into any desired shape. A plumber taught Breuer how to weld the tubes together, and with the Bauhaus weaving workshop to make the fabric, all of the parts came together for what would become Breuer's signature style.

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Marcel Breuer, The B3 "Wassily" Armchair, 1925, chrome-plated steel, canvas upholstery, 76.8 × 76.8 × 67.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window)) via SmartHistory

Although it looks complex, Breuer's first version of the tube steel chair has a simple geometric basis worthy of De Stijl. The arms and legs form the armature of a cube, while the seat and back suggest a second cube nested within, tilted backwards at an ergonomic angle that almost appears to float. As with Breuer's earlier wood slat chair, within the rigid, rationalized geometric armature, the parts that interface with the human body are made of soft fabric. This is not only ergonomic, it gives an interesting

contrast between hard and soft, flexible and rigid, shiny and matte that seems to have come right out of the Bauhaus Vorkurs(opens in new window) exercises.

A design classic

Figure **3.3.3.1**: Marcel Breuer, Chair (model B33), 1927-28, chrome-plated tubular steel with steel-thread seat and back, 83.7 x 49 x 64.5 cm (MoMA(opens in new window)), via Smarthistory

Breuer continued to refine the design, and the B33 version of the tube steel chair surprisingly has no back legs. Taking advantage of the strength of the steel, the seat is cantilevered off its front legs (a cantilever occurs when a beam or plane projects beyond its vertical support). There was some dispute about who was responsible for the first cantilevered tubular steel chair. Dutch architect Mart Stam was demonstrably the first to make one, but Breuer claimed he did so after a visit to his studio, during which Breuer showed Stam his ideas for a chair based on a tubular steel table turned on its side.

Breuer had used cantilevers in his furniture design as early as 1922: notice that the arms of his wooden armchair are cantilevered and not supported in front. The cantilevered seat marks the logical conclusion of the tube-steel chair, and is widely acknowledged as a masterpiece of design. The use of a cantilever achieves several things at once. First, it allows the chair to be made of seemingly one single, continuous length of tubing, with just twelve right-angle bends, although cross braces were frequently welded beneath the seat for added rigidity. This considerably simplifies the manufacturing process in comparison to the much more complicated, multi-part, multi-weld Wassily armchair above.

Second, the cantilever takes advantage of the flexibility of the metal; when someone sits in it, the chair has a slight spring. This not only acts as a shock absorber while sitting (and provides a slight boost when standing up), it also allows the chair to maintain a rigidly rational horizontal-and-vertical form when empty, but provides a slight recline when it is occupied — simultaneously fulfilling the Bauhaus principles of geometric rationalism and ergonomic functionalism(opens in new window).

Footnotes

[1] Cited in William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 193.

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Read more about primitivism in modern art(opens in new window)

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Important fundamentals

The Bauhaus, an Introduction(opens in new window)

The Bauhaus and Bau(opens in new window)

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Considering History

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand the varied processes involved in traditional art media.
- Identify characteristics of a given period of art.
- Identify selected works of various artists.
- Identify and analyze the role of art in various cultures.
- Identify and understand current events in visual art.
- Express thoughts clearly after analyzing a work of art using terminology appropriate to the subject.

When examining works of art, it's helpful to understand how they fit within their historical context. This is so, whether that context involves a cultural tradition, a significant event, or a contemporary trend. History, much like any story, is complex and multifaceted. Recognizing this complexity allows us to appreciate that historical narratives are rarely straightforward or absolute.

Consider the following when thinking about history, culture, and heritage. The words heritage and culture, though used interchangeably by many, have significantly different meanings. Culture relates to amalgamating many histories, stories, artifacts, and built objects found in a particular region or location. Heritage is more personal. It is the conglomerate of narratives, stories, learned behaviors, artifacts, articles, and architecture that belong to one specific group. Heritage, tangible or intangible, when considered wholly, contributes to culture.

4.1: What is Cultural Heritage?

4.1.1: Supporting Images for What is Cultural Heritage?

4.2: Asia Cultures and Brief History

4.2.1: Supporting Images for Asia Cultures and Brief History

4.3: Africa Cultures and Brief History

4.3.1: Supporting Images for Africa Cultures and Brief History

4.4: Brief History of Western Culture

4.4.1: Supporting Images for Brief History of Western Culture

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4.1: What is Cultural Heritage?

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for What is Cultural Heritage? *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

What is cultural heritage?

by Elena Franchi

Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503–05, oil on panel, 30-1/4 x 21 inches (Musée du Louvre(opens in new window))

We often hear about the importance of cultural heritage. But what is cultural heritage? And whose heritage is it? Whose national heritage, for example, does the *Mona Lisa* (opens in new window)by Leonardo da Vinci(opens in new window) belong to? Is it French or Italian?

First of all, let's have a look at the meaning of the words. "Heritage" is a property, something that is inherited, passed down from previous generations. In the case of "cultural heritage," the heritage doesn't consist of money or property, but of culture, values, and traditions. Cultural heritage implies a shared bond, our belonging to a community. It represents our history and our identity; our bond to the past, to our present, and the future.

Medallion Carpet, The Ardabil Carpet, Unknown artist (Maqsud Kashani is named on the carpet's inscription), Persian: Safavid Dynasty, silk warps and wefts with wool pile (25 million knots, 340 per square inch), 1539–40 C.E., Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan or Kirman, Iran (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage

Cultural heritage often brings to mind artifacts (paintings, drawings, prints, mosaics, sculptures), historical monuments and buildings, as well as archaeological sites. But the concept of cultural heritage is even wider than that, and has gradually grown to include all evidence of human creativity and expression: photographs, documents, books and manuscripts, and instruments, etc. either as individual objects or as collections. Today, towns, underwater heritage, and the natural environment are also considered part of cultural heritage since communities identify themselves with the natural landscape.

Moreover, cultural heritage is not only limited to material objects that we can see and touch. It also consists of immaterial elements: traditions, oral history, performing arts, social practices, traditional craftsmanship, representations, rituals, knowledge, and skills transmitted from generation to generation within a community.

Intangible heritage, therefore, includes a dizzying array of traditions, music, and dances such as tango and flamenco, holy processions, carnivals, falconry, Viennese coffee house culture, the Azerbaijani carpet(opens in new window) and its weaving traditions, Chinese shadow puppetry, the Mediterranean diet, Vedic chanting, Kabuki theatre, the polyphonic singing of the Aka of Central Africa (to name a few examples).

Djingareyber Mosque, built 1327, Timbuktu, Mali. Two tombs at this mosque were attacked by Islamic extremists in 2012. (photo: Johannes Zielcke(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The importance of protecting cultural heritage

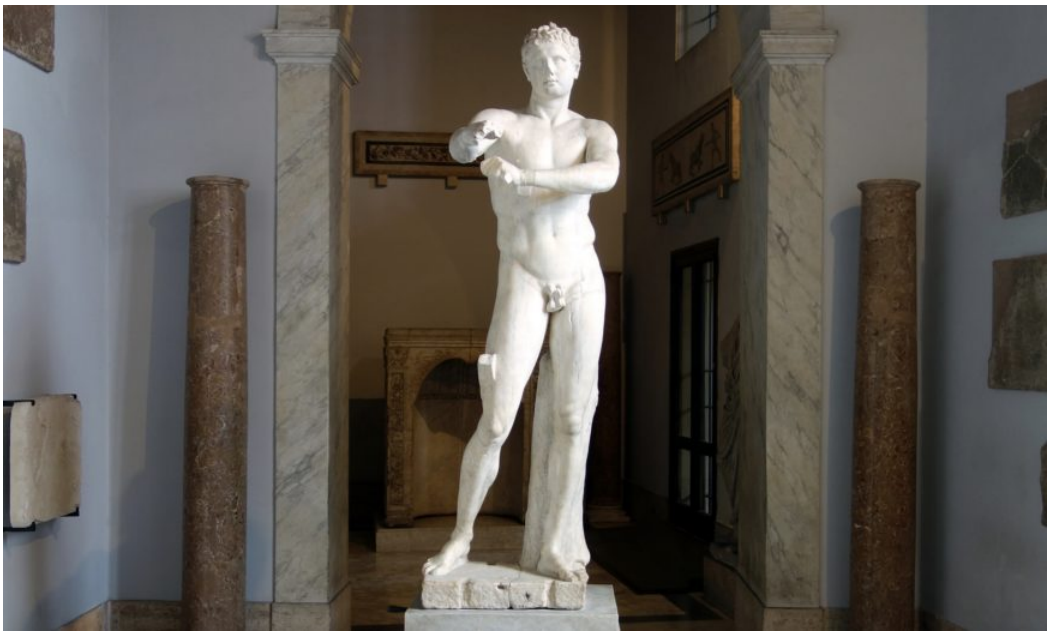
But cultural heritage is not just a set of cultural objects or traditions from the past. It is also the result of a selection process: a process of memory and oblivion that characterizes every human society constantly engaged in choosing—for both cultural and political reasons—what is worthy of being preserved for future generations and what is not.

All peoples make their contribution to the culture of the world. That's why it's important to respect and safeguard all cultural heritage, through national laws and international treaties. Illicit trafficking(opens in new window) of artifacts and cultural objects, pillaging of archaeological sites(opens in new window), and destruction of historical buildings and monuments(opens in new window) cause irreparable damage to the cultural heritage of a country. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), founded in 1954, has adopted international conventions on the protection of cultural heritage, to foster intercultural understanding while stressing the importance of international cooperation.

The protection of cultural property is an old problem. One of the most frequently recurring issues in protecting cultural heritage is the difficult relationship between the interests of the individual and the community, the balance between private and public rights.

Ancient Romans(opens in new window) established that a work of art could be considered part of the patrimony of the whole community, even if privately owned. For example, sculptures decorating the façade of a private building were recognized as having a common value and couldn't be removed, since they stood in a public site, where they could be seen by all citizens.

Lysippos of Sikyon, *Apoxyomenos (Scraper)*, c. 50 A.D., Hellenistic or Roman copy after Greek original, c. 390–306 B.C.E., 207.3 cm / 6 feet 9 inches high (Vatican Museums(opens in new window))



Lysippos of Sikyon, Apoxyomenos (Scraper), Hellenistic or Roman copy after 4th c. Greek original, c. 390–306 B.C.E., 207.3 cm high (Vatican Museums(opens in new window))

In his *Naturalis Historia*, the Roman author Pliny the Elder (23–79 C.E.) reported that the statesman and general Agrippa placed the *Apoxyomenos*(opens in new window), a masterpiece by the very famous Greek sculptor Lysippos, in front of his thermal baths. The statue represented an athlete scraping dust, sweat, and oil from his body with a particular instrument called a “strigil, or scraper. Emperor Tiberius deeply admired the sculpture and ordered it be removed from public view and placed in his private palace. The Roman people rose up and obliged him to return the *Apoxyomenos* to its previous location, where everyone could admire it.

Our right to enjoy the arts, and to participate in the cultural life of the community is included in the United Nation's 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. [1]

Whose cultural heritage?

The term "cultural heritage" typically conjures up the idea of a single society and the communication between its members. But cultural boundaries are not necessarily well-defined. Artists, writers, scientists, craftsmen, and musicians learn from each other, even if they belong to different cultures, far removed in space or time. Just think about the influence of Japanese prints(opens in new window) on Paul Gauguin(opens in new window)'s paintings; or of African masks(opens in new window) on Pablo Picasso(opens in new window)'s works. Or you could also think of western architecture in Liberian homes in Africa. When some of the freed African-American enslaved people went back to their homeland*, they built homes inspired by the neoclassical style(opens in new window) of mansions on American plantations(opens in new window). American neoclassical style was in turn influenced by the Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio(opens in new window), who had been influenced by Roman(opens in new window) and Greek architecture(opens in new window).

Let's take another example, that of the *Mona Lisa* painted in the early sixteenth century by Leonardo da Vinci, and displayed at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. From a modern point of view, whose national heritage does the *Mona Lisa* belong to?

People taking photos of the *Mona Lisa* (photo: Heather Anne Campbell(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Leonardo was a very famous Italian painter, that's why the *Mona Lisa* is obviously part of the Italian cultural heritage. When Leonardo went to France, to work at King Francis I's court, he probably brought the *Mona Lisa* with him. It seems that in 1518 King Francis I acquired the *Mona Lisa*, which therefore ended up in the royal collections(opens in new window): that's why it is obviously part of the French national heritage, too. This painting has been defined as the best known, the most visited, the most written about, and the most parodied work of art in the world: as such, it belongs to the cultural heritage of all mankind.

Cultural heritage passed down to us from our parents must be preserved for the benefit of all. In an era of globalization, cultural heritage helps us to remember our cultural diversity, and its understanding develops mutual respect and renewed dialogue amongst different cultures.

Footnotes

[1] See Article 27 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights(opens in new window)*.

Bibliography

UNESCO on falconry(opens in new window)

UNESCO on Chinese shadow puppetry(opens in new window)

UNESCO on Vedic Chanting(opens in new window)

UNESCO on Polyphonic singing of the Aka Pygmies of Central Africa(opens in new window)

More stories of protecting our heritage and fostering creativity from UNESCO(opens in new window)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the United Nations(opens in new window)

Cite this page

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4.1.1: Supporting Images for What is Cultural Heritage?

Supporting Images for What is Cultural Heritage?

In this section, students are invited to explore the featured artwork from What is Cultural Heritage. It aims to enhance understanding through guiding questions that promote deeper reflection and critique of the piece's significance and meaning.

The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Mona Lisa

Nampeyo, polychrome jar

Hileq and Bileq Haggadah

Medallion Carpet, The Ardabil Carpet

Abdoulaye Ndoye, *Ahmed Baba*

Djingareyber Mosque

Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*

Faith Ringgold, *Dancing at the Louvre*

Lysippos of Sikyon, *Apoxyomenos (Scraper)*

Plate with King Hunting Rams

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503–05, oil on panel, 30-1/4 x 21 inches (Musée du Louvre) via SmartHistory

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/380180

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Nampeyo (Hopi-Tewa), polychrome jar, c. 1930s, clay and pigment, 13 x 21 cm (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Jewish family celebrating the Passover seder, Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 20v, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/380180

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Medallion Carpet, The Ardabil Carpet, Unknown artist (Maqsud Kashani is named on the carpet's inscription), Persian: Safavid Dynasty, silk warps and wefts with wool pile (25 million knots, 340 per square inch), 1539–40 C.E., Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan or Kirman, Iran (Victoria and Albert Museum) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Abdoulaye Ndoye, *Ahmed Baba*, 2013, ink and henna on paper, 16 1/8 x 11 x 1 ¾ (dimensions when folded closed), lives and works in Dakar, Senegal (The Newark Museum of Art, © Abdoulaye Ndoye) via SmartHistory

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/380180

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Djingareyber Mosque, built 1327, Timbuktu, Mali. Two tombs at this mosque were attacked by Islamic extremists in 2012. (photo: Johannes Zielcke(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/380180

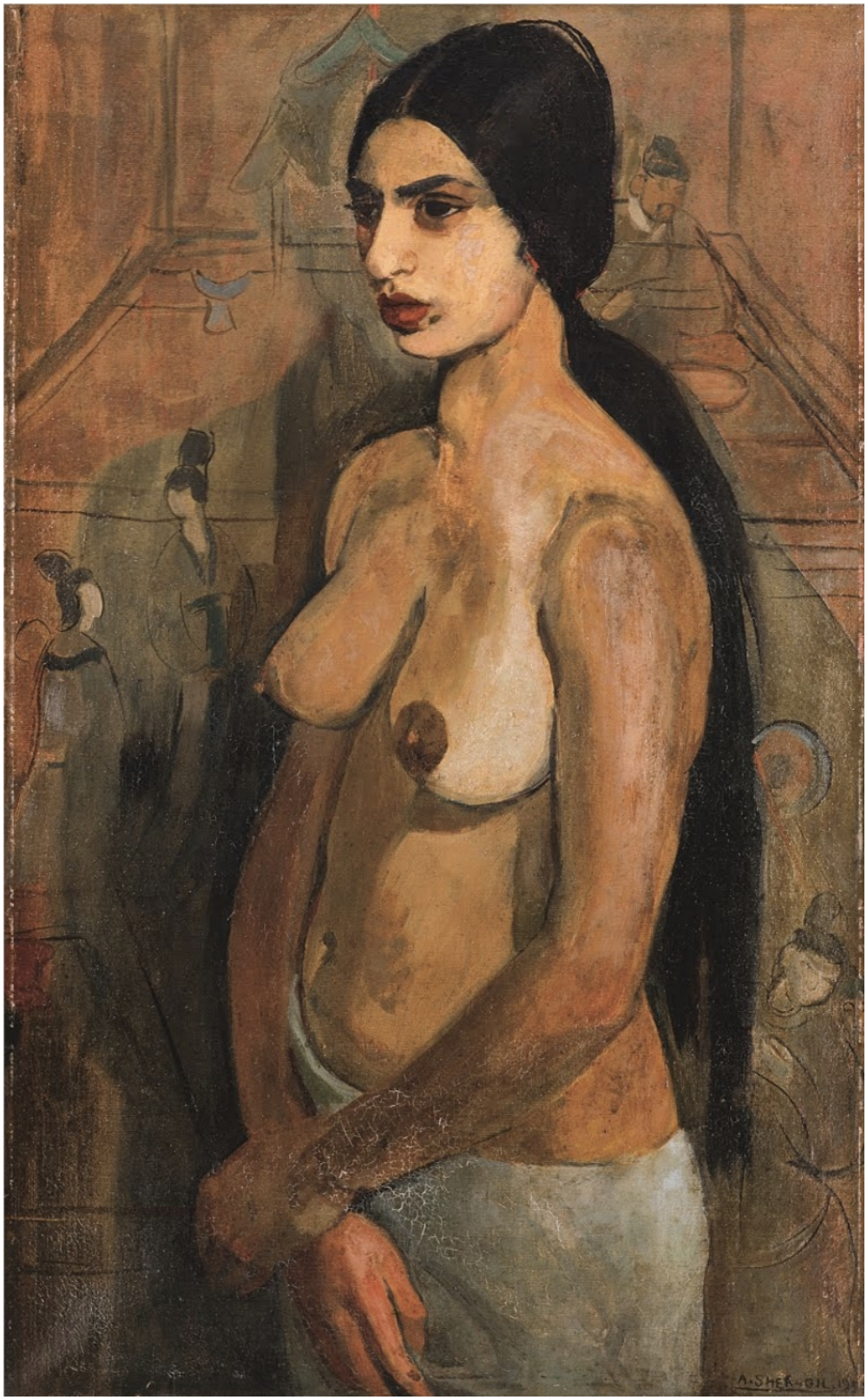

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934, 90 x 56 cm (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi)via SmartHistory

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Faith Ringgold, *Dancing at the Louvre*, 1991, acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border, 73.5 x 80″, from the series, The French Collection, part 1; #1 (Gund Gallery, Kenyon College) via SmartHistory

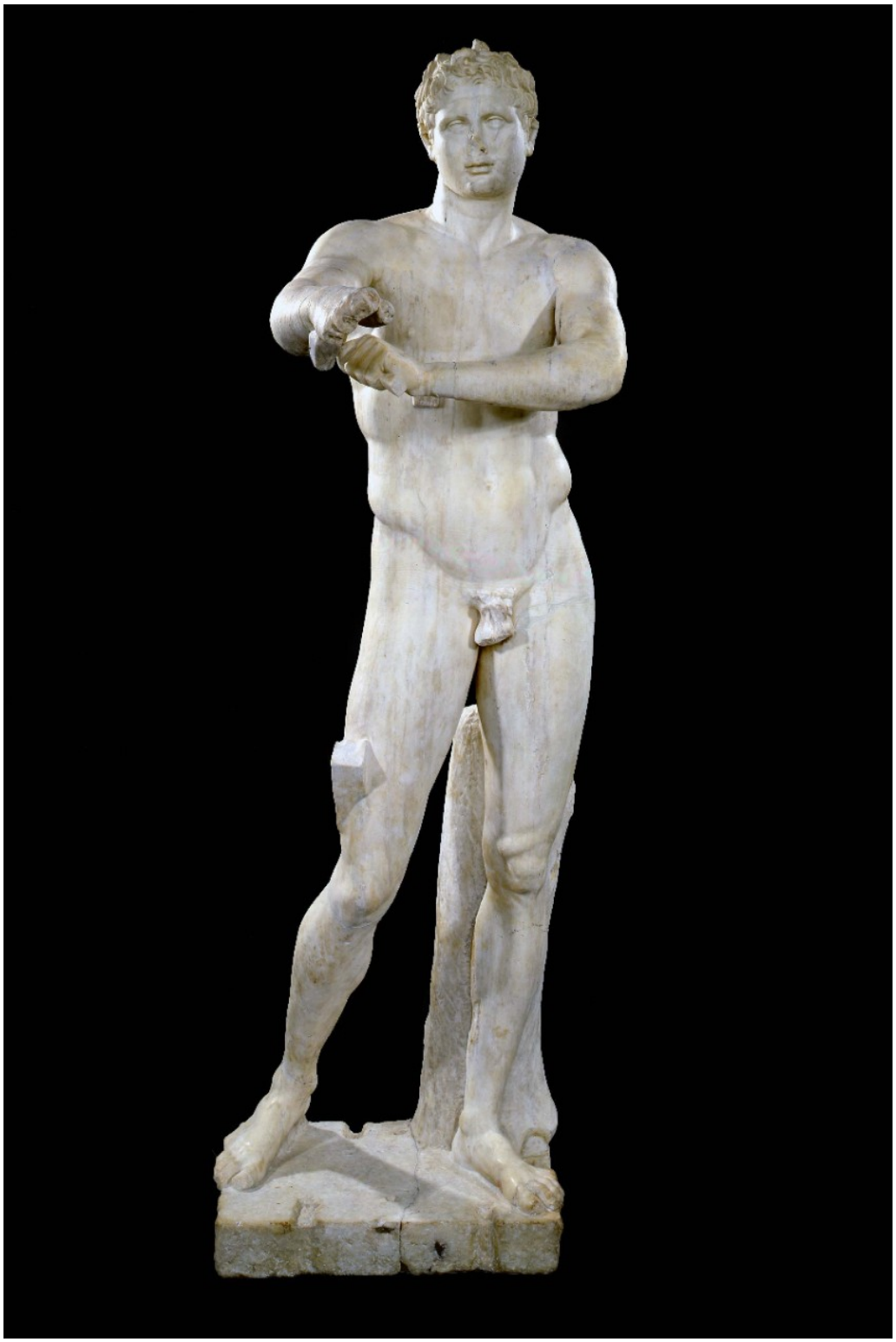

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Lysippos of Sikyon, *Apoxyomenos (Scraper)*, c. 50 A.D., Hellenistic or Roman copy after Greek original, c. 390–306 B.C.E., 207.3 cm / 6 feet 9 inches high (Vatican Museums) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.1.1.1**: Plate with King Hunting Rams, Sasanian, ca. mid-5t-6th century CE, The Met Collection, Public Domain

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4.2: Asia Cultures and Brief History

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Asia Cultures and Brief History. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

A Brief History of the Cultures of Asia

by Dr. Sonia Coman

Historians divide history into large and small units in order to make characteristics and changes clear to themselves and to students. It's important to remember that any historical period is a construction and a simplification. In Asia, because of its huge land mass and multiple diverse cultures, there are several overlapping timelines. Also, for the same reason, different regions have different histories, but they all intersect — in myriad ways — at different points in history. Below are some important basics to get you started.

Orthographic projection of Asia (image adapted from: Koyos + Ssolbergj, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Geographical divisions

Here are the major subdivisions currently used in textbooks or in curatorial departments in art museums. Keep in mind that these categories are complicated by previous divisions, some of which reflect a violent history, such as campaigns of colonization by Western or Asian countries.

Central and North Asia, comprising territories bordered by the Caspian Sea in the west, China in the east, and Afghanistan in the south (which is at times considered part of the Central Asian region).

Unfamiliar with the term "North Asia"? There is a historical explanation. North Asia is better known as Eurasia, coinciding largely with Siberia, which became a part of Russia in the 17th century. "North Asia" is still an under-explored area within studies of Asia

because historically it has been integral to studies of Russia, a transcontinental country whose leaders nevertheless endeavored to shape it as a European power.

West Asia, comprising Iraq (in ancient times, Mesopotamia), Iran (whose territory previously encompassed Persia), Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean (today's Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Gaza Strip, and West Bank), the Arabian Peninsula (comprising Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates), and Anatolia and the Caucasus (today's Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia).

East Asia, spanning Mongolia, mainland China, Macau, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and North and South Korea.

Central and West Asia are better known as the "Near East" and the "Middle East". By the same logic, East Asia has been referred to as the "Far East." All these terms are Western-centric, reflecting European geopolitics. They are problematic terms because they isolate and lionize one vantage point. For the peoples of the "Far East," for example, their territories and cultures are not "Eastern" nor "far." Quite to the contrary, they represent the "home base" from which world geography is envisioned differently, complete with its own cultural and sociopolitical biases.

South and Southeast Asia, consisting of the countries that are geographically north of Australia, south of China and Japan, and west of Papua New Guinea. These countries are Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, East Timor, Laos, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Burma, and Thailand. South Asia, also known as the Indian subcontinent, comprises the sub-Himalayan countries of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Bhutan, and the Maldives.

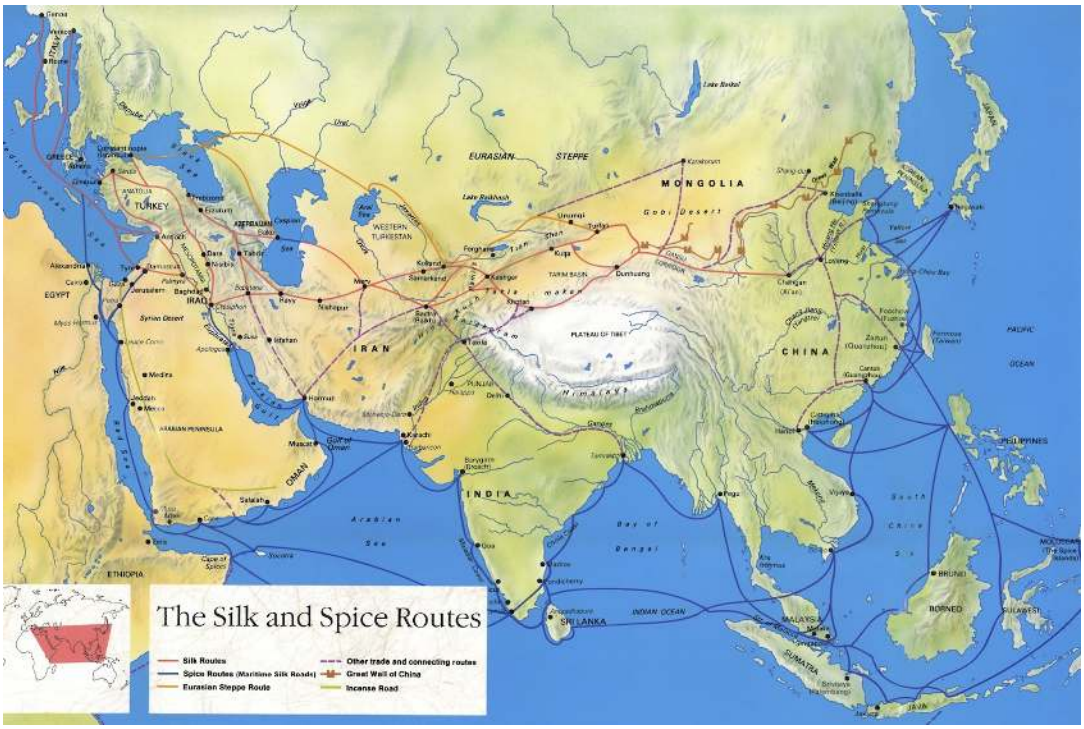
South Asia was often conflated with the vague and politically motivated category of "India," from the perspective of Western powers (Portuguese, French, Dutch, and British) who dominated and colonized parts of the region at different points in time, as outlined later in this essay.

Politcal Map of Asia(opens in new window) for a political map of Asia.

Cultural divisions

A radically different way of looking at Asia's cultural histories is to trace major transcultural phenomena — from religious to commercial — that spanned multiple periods and geographical regions. Such phenomena include:

- **Buddhism**, which developed in India in reaction to the established religion, Hinduism, and subsequently spread to other countries in South, Southeast, and East Asia. From the 6th century B.C.E. to the present day, Buddhism shaped various aspects central to these Asian cultures, from principles of government to visual and material culture.
- *See the Smarthistory resource on Hinduism + Buddhism(opens in new window).*
- **Islam**, founded by Muhammad in the early 7th century C.E. at Mecca (in modern-day Saudi Arabia), spread over the centuries in Central and Western Asia all the way to the Pacific nation of Indonesia, and reached non-Asian territories in North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula. One can trace the history of the Islamic world and its deep imprint on many Asian cultures and on pan-regional cultural phenomena within Asia and beyond.
- *See the Smarthistory resource, Introduction to Islam(opens in new window)*
- **The Silk Road**, named as such only in the 19th century, is a network of trade routes harkening back to the 2nd century B.C.E., which connected, over the centuries, territories from Eastern China to Southern Europe and North Africa. Although occasioned by trade, especially in silk, these pan-Asian routes had a significant influence on local cultures and enabled cross-cultural encounters.



Silk and Spice Routes (image: UNESCO, Silk Roads: Dialogue, Diversity & Development)

As you read the timeline below…

- keep these divisions in mind and notice changes and reconfigurations;
- think about parallel trajectories (similarly momentous developments occurring independently in different parts of the world) and points of convergence (cross-cultural encounters and developments);
- and remember that the "gray areas" of the past are typically the most complicated, but they also tend to provide some of the richest and most rewarding histories.

Note to teachers and students:
To a large extent, this periodization corresponds to that of AP World History.

Prehistoric (before c. 2500 B.C.E.)

The term "prehistoric" refers to the time before written history. In Asia as elsewhere, this is the period when the most fundamental aspects of human civilization as we know it are formed and developed. Communities transition from hunting and gathering to taming animals and cultivating land, especially as irrigation is mastered. Prehistoric men and women create complex tools, pottery, and clothing, build homes and monuments, and develop language and rituals expressed through diverse forms of art and eventually through writing.

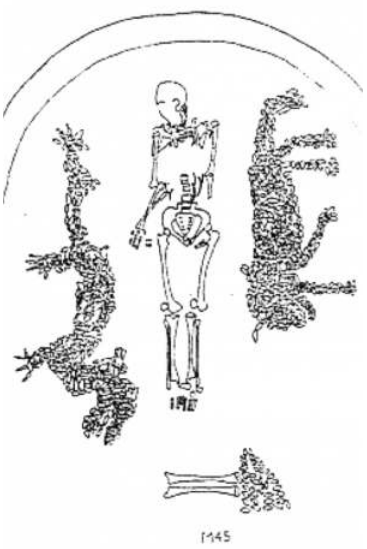
West Asia

In Mesopotamia(opens in new window) (present-day Iraq), as early as 8000 B.C.E., sedentary agricultural communities are established. By 2500 B.C.E., monumental architecture testifies to the development of hierarchies of social and political power. Writing — newly invented — provides invaluable information about city-states, rulers, and their reigns. Invented by the Sumerians, the cuneiform(opens in new window) system is the earliest writing we know. It is no coincidence that cuneiform inscriptions were impressed onto tablets made of clay -—one of the earliest and most ubiquitous mediums for cultural transmission and artistic expression.

East Asia

In China, writing is first seen as inscriptions on oracle bones(opens in new window), a hallmark of the Shang dynasty (1700-1027 B.C.E.). Made of the shoulder blades of oxen or the underbellies of turtles, oracle bones — as their designation indicates — were

used for divination (foretelling the future). Up to that point, China had already developed a rich culture ranging from pottery and clay figurines to carved jade(opens in new window) and bronze ritual vessels(opens in new window) — the latter of which would have a lasting influence on Chinese art and design. Also, a central motif of Chinese art — the paired dragon and tiger, symbolizing water and wind in Chinese cosmology — first appears during this period. The earliest known example is a river-shell mosaic representation from c. 5300 B.C.E., excavated in a royal grave at Xishuipo, Henan province.



Representations of dragon and tiger, mosaic of river clam shells, c. 5300 B.C.E., royal grave no. 45, Xishuipo, Henan province (diagram: Feng Shi, "Henan Puyang Xishuipo 45 Hao Mu de Tianwenxue Yanjiu," Wenwu, vol. 3, pp. 52-69).

Ancient – Conquests, New Empires, and New Religions (c. 2500 B.C.E. to 650 C.E.)

The ancient world is often thought of as a cradle of today's civilizations. It is home to important "firsts" and to changes that shaped cultural practices and artistic expressions. In Asia as elsewhere, it is a period of military conquests that contributed to the formation of the first great empires, which quickly became cultural hubs — sites of effervescent intellectual, spiritual and artistic life. The empires formed in this period extend across and beyond the geographical divisions outlined above.

Central and West Asia

The first of these empires is that of Cyrus the Great, who founded the multi-state Persian empire(opens in new window) in the 6th century B.C.E. and maintained control over a vast territory, that grew to encompass the (European) Balkans in the west and the Indus valley in the east. But empires come and go, and cultures transform in the process. Much of Cyrus's empire was conquered centuries later by Alexander the Great, who is known to have nurtured great admiration for Cyrus. Alexander's presence in West and Central Asia in the 3rd century B.C.E. had a lasting impact on visual representation in those regions and beyond. Known as Hellenism, this phenomenon brought characteristics of Greek art — especially its synthesis of naturalism and idealism — to local centers of cultural production, where they were emulated and transformed.

South Asia

In the ancient region of Ghandara (today's Northwest Pakistan), this compelling fusion was at work, centuries later, in devotional images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, such as the one below. Notice the subtly plump body, the expressiveness of the facial features, and the harmonious geometry of the clothing drapery. But human representations of the Buddha were not always the norm. In fact, in the earliest Indian images of the then-new religion, Buddha's presence was indicated by means of footprints or an empty space under a parasol. The Gandhara tradition was the first to develop human images of the Buddha. As Buddhism received increasingly significant patronage in South Asia, other styles emerged, marking a transition from narrative to devotional images. Known as a "Golden Age," the Gupta empire at its zenith (319 to 543 C.E.) saw the creation of "ideal" images of the Buddha, which spread along the Silk Road to China and beyond.

Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya (Buddha of the Future), c. 3rd century, Pakistan (ancient region of Gandhara), schist, 80.7 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Middle Ages – Realms and Societies (c. 650 C.E. to 1500 C.E.)

The concept of the "Middle Ages(opens in new window)" has been developed in relation to Western cultures to mark a period between antiquity and the Renaissance that presents a degree of consistency not encountered in Asia during the same period. In the "Middle Ages" as during other timeframes, different Asian regions had considerably different histories. That said, across Asia, this was a time of remarkable developments in communication and science. For example, metal movable type had been invented in China by the 12th century (about 300 years before Gutenberg's movable type press in Europe). Advances in technology and science — such as the invention and improvement of gunpowder — were put in the service of warfare, which led to the consolidation of the political power of empires. One of the most prominent was the Mongol Empire (1206–1405), founded by Genghis Khan. At its height, the Mongol empire controlled much of Eurasia and the Silk Road and saw the transcontinental dissemination of movable type printing and the flourishing of local cultures, all largely due to Mongol patronage.

Central and West Asia

Another major catalyst of cultural and artistic activity was the formation of the Islamic empire in Central and West Asia, starting around 634 C.E. It is during this period that the Islamic political structure known as the caliphate emerges. Typical of new leaders seeking to legitimize political power, the 7th– and 8th-century caliphs used art and architecture to mark their presence and shape the cultural identity of their expanding territories.

A striking example is the Great Mosque (Friday Mosque) of Damascus(opens in new window) in today's Syria — one of the oldest in the world and larger than any other mosque built before it. Constructed under the patronage of the Umayyad caliph al-Walid I (who ruled from 705–715), the mosque occupied a site that once housed a temple dedicated to a Syrian god, then a Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter, and later a church dedicated to John the Baptist. As the site itself had been considered holy during so many earlier political and cultural regimes, the Great Mosque of Damascus brought significant prestige to the caliphate. The Great Mosque has three minarets, all from different historical periods, and a prayer hall modeled on early Christian basilicas. Walls are adorned with opulent mosaics attributed to Byzantine craftsmen and possibly illustrating passages from the Qur'an.

Mosaic, Great Mosque of Damascus (photo adapted from: American Rugbier(opens in new window), CC BY-SA 2.0)

East Asia

It is in this period that Islam is introduced to (parts of) China. In fact, this is a time of significant encounters and exchanges. For example, in 607, the first Japanese envoy is received by the Chinese imperial court. This diplomatic relationship opened a channel of cultural dissemination that had a lasting influence on Japanese political thought, literature, and the arts. Shortly thereafter, the Tang dynasty is established in China, leading to a cultural "golden age." Tang-dynasty poetry is among the most extraordinary literary achievements in our world heritage, and will become an extremely rich source of subject matter for Chinese (and Japanese) painters throughout the centuries. Ultimately weakened by rebellions, the Tang dynasty gave way to a succession of dynasties that bring into focus the ethnic and cultural diversity of the vast territory controlled by China.

For example, between the Song and Ming dynasties, the Yuan dynasty was established by the Mongol Kublai Khan and maintained power for almost a century before it fell, a result of tension between its roots in the culture of the Mongol empire and its efforts to become a legitimate part of Chinese culture. Although short-lived in comparison with the relatively peaceful and prosperous Ming dynasty that would replace it, the Yuan dynasty saw the emergence of now-classical figures in Chinese visual arts, notably the so-called "four masters of the Yuan dynasty" (Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan, Wang Meng, and Wu Zhen) — experimental ink painters cultivating ideals of individual expression. Their distinctive styles — compare the restrained brushwork of Ni Zan versus the elaborate, tapestry-like compositions of Wang Meng — inspired and challenged generations of Chinese painters.

Left: Ni Zan, *Six Gentlemen* 六君子图, 14th century, ink on paper (Shanghai Museum); right: Wang Meng, *Ge Zhichuan Moving to the Mountains* 葛稚川移居圖, 14th century, ink on paper (Palace Museum, Beijing).

Southeast Asia

South of China, another remarkable society flourished, that of the Khmers. On the territory of today's Cambodia, the Khmers founded the Hindu-Buddhist Angkor empire, which grew to vassalize much of mainland Southeast Asia as well as parts of Southern China. The cultural "golden age" of the Khmers' empire, datable to the 12th century, led to the construction of one of the world's largest religious monuments, the Angkor Wat, occupying over 400 acres in the Khmer capital of Angkor. Originally dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, it gradually became a Buddhist temple as Buddhism was embraced by Khmer rulers, especially king Jayavarman VII—one of the most powerful leaders of the Angkor empire. With its many temples blending Hindu and Buddhist iconography, Angkor reflected the creative tension of a multicultural empire in its spectacular architecture.

Aerial view, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: Peter Garnhum, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Early Modern – Self-Fashioning and Transcultural Encounters (c. 1500 – c. 1850)

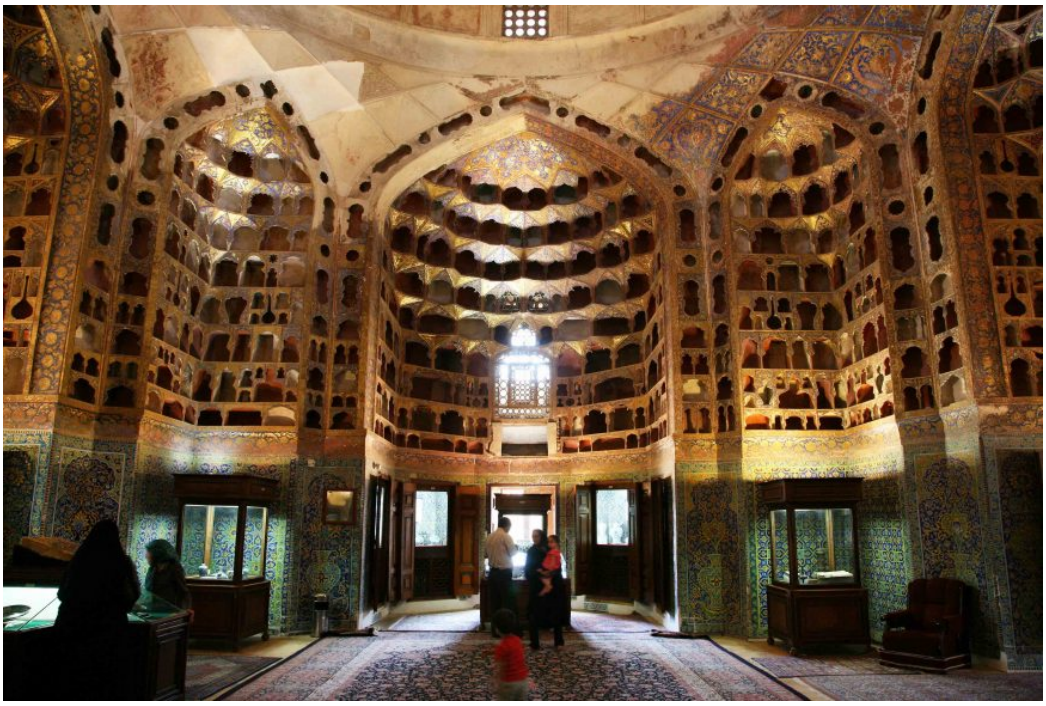
As old empires consolidated their power and new rulers and dynasties emerged, this period saw some of the most remarkable expressions of self-fashioning. Coined by art historian Stephen Greenblatt with respect to the Western Renaissance (in particular, 16th-century England), "self-fashioning" is an apt term to describe cultural processes in Asia around the same period. Self-fashioning was a response to the power struggles of a world increasingly rich in cross-cultural encounters, ranging from military tensions and diplomatic missions to commercial exchanges along the Silk Road to cultural and scientific collaborations.

West Asia

1501 marked the beginning of the Safavid rule in Persia — whose fascinating history presents a generative blend of transculturalism and self-fashioning. Safavids continued to rule for over two centuries; at its height, their empire comprised today's Iran, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Armenia, eastern Georgia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan, as well as parts of Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Over this vast territory, many cultures intersected and the Safavids utilized architecture and the arts as a means to strengthen their control. The capital of Isfahan(opens in new window) concentrated the empire's cultural power by providing resplendent examples of Safavid architecture and visual and material culture, thereby constituting a "microcosm" of the Safavid world.

A telling example of how the Safavids harnessed their multicultural reality is a curious and significant gift, presented in 1611 by the Safavid Shah Abbas in the memory of his spiritual ancestor, the Sufi Sheik Shaykh Safi al-Din, to be housed in his shrine at Ardabil. The gift consisted of over one thousand Chinese Ming-dynasty blue-and-white porcelain objects and is—to this day—one of the two most important collections of such ceramics outside China itself.

Why would a Safavid ruler donate and display Chinese artifacts in a gesture to honor the Safavids' spiritual founder? It has been argued that this is a prime example of "porcelain diplomacy." In other words, the Safavid shah sent a public message that his cosmopolitanism was a sign of his power on the world stage, signaled by his ownership of so many fine examples of coveted Chinese porcelain, now re-purposed as an offering to an important Safavid shrine. The gift was such an important part of the Ardabil architectural complex that a "Chinese [porcelain] house" (Chini Khaneh) was built to feature the ceramics in hundreds of specially-designed shelves carved into the walls.



Built-in shelves for Chinese porcelain, Chini Khaneh, Ardabil, Iran (photo: © UNESCO/Iran Images/Mohammad Tajik, Sheikh Safi al-din Khanegah Shrine Ensemble, in the City of Ardabil, Iran)

East Asia

In China, the Ming dynasty — under whose rule the production and global dissemination of blue-and-white porcelain flourished — gave way, in 1636, to the Qing dynasty. Led by Manchu emperors and ruling over a vast and culturally diverse territory, the Qing dynasty placed strategic emphasis on multiculturalism in a way that calls to mind similar efforts by the Safavids. The Qing court became an important patron of the arts, largely characterized by grandeur, opulence, and eccentricity of design.

In Japan, the early 17th century marked a turning point as the Tokugawa family took control of the country and began their long and relatively peaceful and prosperous shogunate. The Tokugawa ruled from Edo (present-day Tokyo), which gives the name for this period and where a vibrant urban culture developed. It was, to some extent, a foil to Kyoto, where the emperor continued to live, secluded in his palace.

Mostly shielded from the outside world (in contrast to Safavid Persia and Qing-dynasty China), the poets and painters of Edo-period Japan drew inspiration not only from nature and from the classics, but also from everyday life, developing the first so-called genre paintings (portrayals of common people engaged in routine activities). Within this category, a spectacular subtype was the *rakuchū rakugai zu* (“scenes in and around the capital”), depicting Kyoto and its suburbs in ways that mixed anecdotal detail from street life with vistas of the capital’s famous locations and seasonal festivals.

“Scenes in and around the capital” (rakuchū rakugai zu 洛中洛外図), Edo period, 17th century, six-panel folding screens, ink, color, gold, and gold leaf on paper, 170 x 366.2 cm each (Mary Griggs Burke Collection, Gift of the Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, 2015, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Modern (after c. 1850)

The 19th century brought major changes to Asia’s many worlds. By the mid-20th century, societies had undergone watershed transformations. In Japan, following the 1853 “black ship” expedition of American commodore Perry who demanded Japan’s “opening” to the world and the 1868 revolt that put an end to the Tokugawa shogunate and restored imperial power, the arts reflected an unprecedented broadening of styles and foreign influences, as well as imperial ambitions and rising nationalism that culminated during WWII. In China, the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912 marked the end of the country’s imperial history that had stretched for over two thousand years. The rise of the Communist Party, China’s participation in the first World War, and the Japanese aggressions in Manchuria all led to the country’s involvement in WWII and the subsequent establishment of the People’s Republic led by Mao Zedong. In response to centuries of autocratic and colonial rule, communism became a rallying point for revolutionaries in countries across Asia, each drawing on Karl Marx’s manifesto, as well as the 1918 October Revolution in Russia that had been led by Vladimir Lenin.

Central and North Asia

Soviet control altered local cultural and artistic expression to an even greater degree than the pre-revolution tsarist rule of the so-called Turkestan (comprising present-day Afghanistan, China’s Xinjiang province, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, eastern Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). Exploited for its natural resources, then subject to Soviet collectivization and mechanization, these regions struggled to maintain their multiple local identities, especially as mosques were closed, Arabic script was gradually replaced by the Latin and the Cyrillic scripts, and traditional crafts workshops were transformed into factories.

Posters and advertisements from Soviet-controlled Asia show the strong influence of modernist design (function-oriented form, bold compositions on a grid system, and visually striking typefaces) and illustrate how art was used aggressively as a tool for propaganda. Such images serve as a reminder of the power of images, which has been, and still can be, used to seduce, manipulate, and even erase and rewrite history.

Unknown artist, “Participation of women in work (…)”, Turkic text (Arabic script), book factory of the Central Publishing House of USSR Nations , 920s, print run: 2000 copies, 108.4×70 cm. (image: “Уголок Ленина,” Russian Perspectives on Islam)

South and Southeast Asia

Colonization is another phenomenon that has had enormous consequences on the cultures and societies of Asia in the modern period. During the long 19th century, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam were colonized by France; the so-called Indian subcontinent was under British rule; and today’s Indonesia became a Dutch colony known as the Dutch East Indies. Not unlike the Soviet situation in central and North Asia, the European powers in colonial South and Southeast Asia exploited resources and dictated what was produced, how it got produced, and for what purposes. In the process, colonization problematized and eroded local craftsmanship and artistic traditions. However, colonial powers also invested in learning and recording local histories, which in turn strengthened the identity and self-image of colonized societies — a phenomenon reflected in the consciously non-Western art of some 20th century artists.

For example, in India, the *swadeshi* movement encouraged artists to envision a non-Western, solely Indian art. However, in the case of the Bengal School of painting that came out of this context, European and modern developments still found their way in the underpinning concepts of the new school. The *swadeshi*-inspired Bengal School shared many characteristics with the contemporaneous *Nihonga* (literally, “Japanese painting,”) in Japan. Like the Bengal School, *Nihonga* was defined in opposition to Western painting but bore the influence of Western ideas and techniques. Some proponents and practitioners of both schools knew and inspired one another.

Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), founder of the Bengal School of painting, *The Journey's End*, c. 1913, tempera on paper (National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, accession no. 1832)

Contemporary Asian Cultures in a Global Context

Ai Weiwei, Han Jar Overpainted with Coca-Cola Logo, 1995, earthenware, paint, 25.1 × 27.9 × 27. 9 cm, © Ai Weiwei (image: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

In an interconnected art world whose online presence and international fairs and biennials make regional identities more elusive than ever before, contemporary Asian art presents an extremely diverse range of individual styles and expressions. That said, internationally acclaimed artists like Subodh Gupta (Indian, b. 1964) and Takashi Murakami (Japanese, b. 1962) continue to explore the creative tension between tradition and innovation and between the global and the local.

Working within the same paradigm, artists like Ai Weiwei (Chinese, b. 1957) combine references to traditional cultural elements with an activist agenda (which, for Ai Weiwei, has resulted on occasion in his arrest in China). Ai Weiwei(opens in new window) also exemplifies the practice, embraced by many contemporary artists across Asia, of working in a variety of mediums, ranging from site-specific installations to film and curatorial projects.

Cite this page

Cite this page as: Dr. Sonia Coman, "A brief history of the cultures of Asia," in *Smarthistory*, August 1, 2019, accessed December 17, 2025, Ali Weiwei Politics [smarthistory.org].

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Supporting Images for Asia Cultures and Brief History

In this section, students are invited to explore the featured artwork from Asia Cultures and Brief History. It aims to enhance understanding through guiding questions that promote deeper reflection and critique of the piece's significance and meaning.

The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya

Handheld Prayer Wheel

Mosaic, Great Mosque of Damascus

Torah case

Six Gentlemen 六君子图

Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design

Wang Meng, *Ge Zhichuan Moving to the Mountains* 葛稚川移居圖

Heavenly Horse from the West

Angkor Wat

Mahabodhi Temple

Scenes In and Around the Capital

Kathakali Dance

Participation of Women in Work

Timur's entry into Samarkand

Abanindranath Tagore

Khem Karan, View of the Siege of Baghdad in 1258

Han Jar Overpainted with Coca-Cola Logo

Knotted Carpet with Human Figures and Brahmi/Khotanese Inscriptions

Figure 4.2.1.1: Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya (Buddha of the Future), c. 3rd century, Pakistan (ancient region of Gandhara), schist, 80.7 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Handheld Prayer Wheel, early 20th century (central Tibet), silver, wood, semi-precious stones, 19.6 x 5 x 4.5 inches (Rubin Museum of Art, New York). via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Mosaic, Great Mosque of Damascus (photo adapted from: American Rugbier, CC BY-SA 2.0) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Torah case, 1886, Guangzhou, China, oxidized silver, silver, and silver-gilt, 92.6 x 30 cm (Center for Jewish Art) via SmartHistory

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/380181

Figure 4.2.1.1: Ni Zan, *Six Gentlemen* 六君子图, 14th century, ink on paper (Shanghai Museum) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design, 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) via SmartHistory

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/380181

Figure 4.2.1.1: Wang Meng, *Ge Zhichuan Moving to the Mountains* 葛稚川移居圖, 14th century, ink on paper (Palace Museum, Beijing) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Heavenly Horse from the West, 25–220 C.E., China (Gansu Provincial Museum; photo: G41rn8, CC BY-SA 4.0) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Aerial view, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: Peter Garnhum, CC BY-NC 2.0) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Mahabodhi Temple today, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India (photo: manbartlett, CC BY 2.0) via SmartHistory

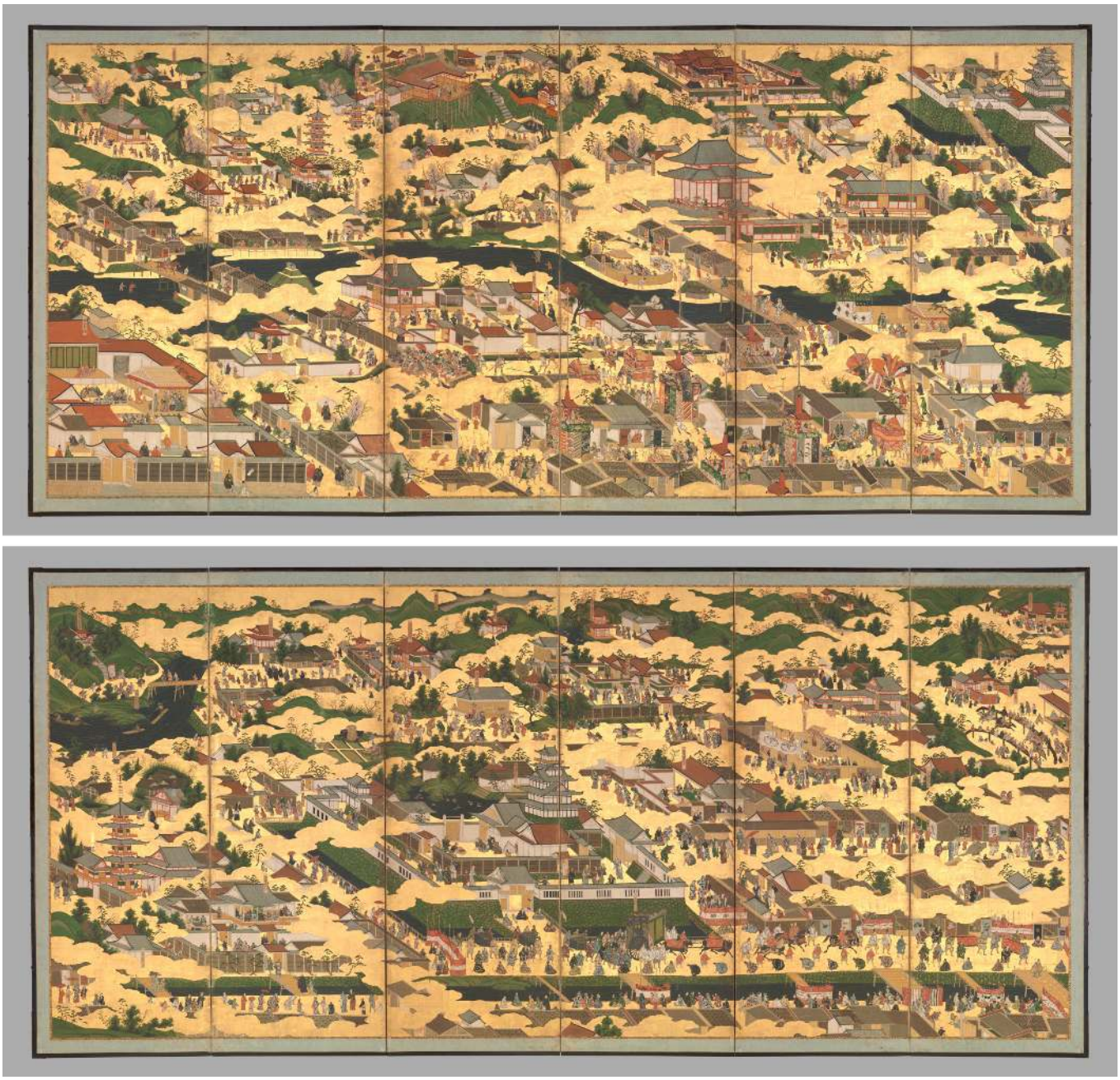

Figure 4.2.1.1: “Scenes in and around the capital” (rakuchū rakugai zu 洛中洛外図), Edo period, 17th century, six-panel folding screens, ink, color, gold, and gold leaf on paper, 170 x 366.2 cm each (Mary Griggs Burke Collection, Gift of the Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, 2015, Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Kathakali dance, 2014 (photo: Dumphasizer, CC BY-SA 2.0) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Unknown artist, “Participation of women in work (…)”, Turkic text (Arabic script), book factory of the Central Publishing House of USSR Nations , 920s, print run: 2000 copies, 108.4×70 cm. (image: “Уголок Ленина,” Russian Perspectives on Islam) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: *Timur's entry into Samarkand*, page from a copy of the *Zafarnama* by Yazdi, c. 1436, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 25.9 x 13.2 cm, Iran (Shiraz) (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.) via SmartHistory

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/380181

Figure 4.2.1.1: Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), founder of the Bengal School of painting, *The Journey's End*, c. 1913, tempera on paper (National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, accession no. 1832) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Khem Karan, view of the Siege of Baghdad in 1258, folio from an illuminated manuscript of the History of Genghis Khan, 1596, ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, Lahore, Punjab province, Pakistan, Asia, 34.9 x 22.5 cm (Saint Louis Art Museum) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Ai Weiwei, Han Jar Overpainted with Coca-Cola Logo, 1995, earthenware, paint, 25.1 × 27.9 × 27. 9 cm, © Ai Weiwei (image: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.2.1.1: Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, 5th–6th century C.E., Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: Qi Xiaoshan) via SmartHistory

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4.3: Africa Cultures and Brief History

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for Africa Cultures and Brief History. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

Africa Historical Overview: to 1600

by Dr. Christa Clarke

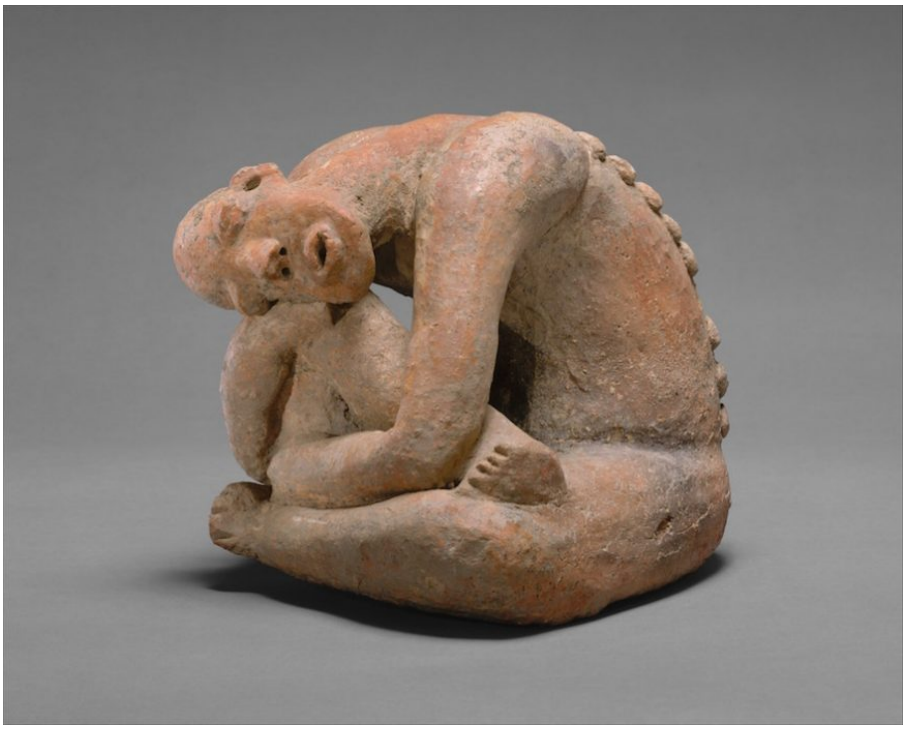
Humankind's origins and the beginnings of cultural expression may be traced to Africa. Recent discoveries in the southern tip of Africa provide remarkable evidence of the earliest stirrings of human creativity. Ocher plaques with engraved designs, made some 70,000 years ago, represent some of humankind's earliest attempts at visual expression. Although much remains to be learned about Africa's ancient civilizations through further archaeological research, such discoveries suggest tantalizing possibilities for rich insights into human as well as artistic evolution.

Paintings at Akaham Ouan Elbered (Tassili n'Ajjer National Park, Algeria; photo: András Zboray, FJ Expeditions(opens in new window))

Early civilizations

Rock paintings depicting domesticated animals provide artistic evidence of the existence of agricultural communities that developed in both the Sahara region and southern Africa by around 7000 B.C.E. As the Sahara began to dry up, sometime before 3000 B.C.E., these farming communities moved away. In the north, this led to the emergence of art-producing civilizations based along the Nile, the world's longest river. Egypt(opens in new window), one of the world's earliest nation-states, was unified as a kingdom by 3100 B.C.E. Further south along the Nile, one of the earliest of the Nubian kingdoms(opens in new window) was centered at Kerma in present-day Sudan and dominated trade networks linking central Africa to Egypt for almost one thousand years beginning around 2500 B.C.E.

A corpus of sophisticated terracotta sculptures found over a broad geographic area in present-day Nigeria provides the earliest evidence of a settled community with ironworking technology south of the Sahara. The artistic creations of this culture are referred to as Nok, after the village where the first terracotta was discovered, and date to 500 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., a period of time coinciding with ancient Greek civilization. Although Nok terracottas continue to be unearthed, no organized excavations have been undertaken and little is known about the culture that produced these sculptures. Terracotta heads, buried around 500 C.E., have also been found in north eastern South Africa.



Seated Figure, 13th century (Djenné peoples, Jenne-jeno, Mali, Inland Niger Delta region), terracotta, 25.4 x 29.9 x 28.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window), New York)

Head of staff (detail), *Linguist Staff (Okyeame)*, 19th–early 20th century (Akan peoples, Asante, Ghana), gold foil, wood, nails, 156.5 x 14.6 x 5.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window), New York)

The 1st millennium C.E. witnessed the urbanization of a number of societies just south of the Sahara, in the broad stretch of savanna referred to as the western Sudan.

The strategic location of the Inland Niger Delta, lying in a fertile region between the Bani and Niger rivers, contributed to its emergence as an economic and cultural force in the area. Excavations there at the site of Jenne-jeno ("Old Jenne," also known as Djenne-jeno) suggest the presence of an urban center populated as early as 2,000 years ago. The city continued to thrive for many centuries, becoming an important crossroads of a trans-Saharan trading network. Terracotta figures(opens in new window) and fragments unearthed in the region reveal the rich sculptural heritage of a sophisticated urban culture.

Trans-Saharan trade and the introduction of Islam

By the 9th century, trade across the Sahara had intensified, contributing to the rise of large state societies with diverse cultural traditions along trade routes in the western Sudan as well as introducing Islam into the region. Initially traversed by camel caravans beginning around the 5th century, established trans-Saharan trade routes ensured the lucrative exchange of gold mined in southern West Africa and salt from the Sahara, as well as other goods. Ghana, one of the earliest known kingdoms in this region, grew powerful by the 8th century through its monopoly over gold mines until its eventual demise in the 12th century (see the *Linguist Staff*(opens in new window)).

The present-day nation of Ghana takes its name from this ancient empire, although there is no historical or geographic connection.

A view of the Great Mosque of Djenné, Jenne-jeno, Mali, designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1988 (photo: Marco Dormino Flickr(opens in new window) [UN Photo], CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

In the early 13th century, the kingdom of Mali ascended under the leadership of Sundiata Keita, who is still revered as a culture hero in the Mande-speaking world. At its height, this Islamic empire, which flourished until the 17th century, encompassed an area larger than western Europe and established Africa's first university in Timbuktu(opens in new window). Under the Songhai empire of the 15th and 16th centuries, one of the largest in Africa, the cities of Timbuktu and Jenne(opens in new window) (also known as Djenné) prospered as major centers of Islamic learning.

Shrine head, 12th–14th century (Yoruba, Nigeria), terracotta, 31.1 x 14.6 x 18.4 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art(opens in new window))

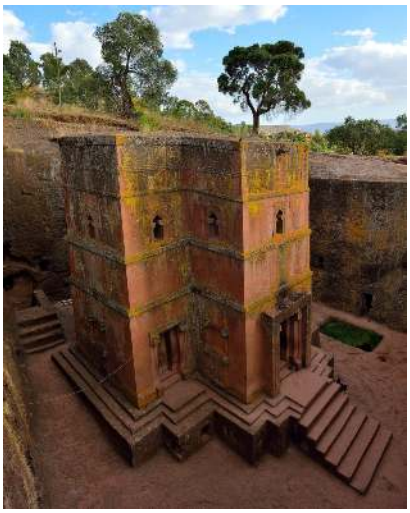
West Africa

Beyond the kingdoms of the western Sudan, other centers of cultural and artistic activity emerged elsewhere in western Africa. The art of metalworking flourished as early as the 9th century at a site called Igbo-Ukwu(opens in new window), in what is now southern Nigeria. Hundreds of intricate copper alloy castings discovered there provide artistic evidence of a sophisticated and technically accomplished culture.

Nearby to the west, the ancient site of Ife(opens in new window), considered the cradle of Yoruba civilization, emerged as a major metropolis by the 11th century. Artists working for the royal court in Ife produced a large and diverse corpus of masterful work, including magnificent bronze and terracotta sculptures renowned for their portrait-like naturalism. The rich artistic traditions of the Yoruba continue to thrive in the present day(opens in new window).

The neighboring kingdom of Benin(opens in new window), which traces its origins to Ife, established its present dynasty in the 14th century. Over the next 500 years, specialist artisans working for the Benin king created several thousand works, mostly made of luxury materials such as ivory and brass, that offer insights into life at the royal court. Other state societies emerged in the eastern and southern parts of the continent.

Queen Mother Pendant Mask (Iyoba)(opens in new window), 16th century (Edo peoples, Court of Benin, Nigeria), ivory, iron, copper, 23.8 x 12.7 x 8.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; photo: Steven Zucker(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Bet Giyorgis Church, Lalibela, Ethiopia, c. 1220 (photo: Henrik Berger Jørgensen(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

East Africa

The Aksum(opens in new window) empire (also known as Axum), one of the earliest Christian states in Africa, flourished from the 1st century C.E. into the 11th century, producing remarkable stone palaces and enormous granite funerary monoliths.

Christian faith inspired the artistic creations of later dynasties, including the extraordinary churches of Lalibela hewn from solid rock in the 13th century, and the illuminated manuscripts and other liturgical arts of the later Solomonic era.

Southern Africa

Notable among the kingdoms that emerged in southern Africa is Mapungubwe in present-day Zimbabwe, a stratified society that arose in the 11th century and grew wealthy through trade with Muslim merchants along the eastern African coast.

Just to the north are the remains of an ancient city known as Great Zimbabwe(opens in new window), considered one of the oldest and largest architectural structures in sub-Saharan Africa. This massive complex of stone buildings, spread over 1,800 acres, was constructed over 300 years beginning in the 11th century.

Conical Tower, Great Zimbabwe (photo: amanderson2(opens in new window), CC BY 2.0)

Lidded Saltcellar(opens in new window), 15th–16th century (Sierra Leone, Sapi-Portuguese), ivory, 29.8 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window), New York)

Trade with Europe

In the 15th century, the age of exploration ushered in a period of sustained engagement between Europe and Africa. The Portuguese, and later the Dutch and English, began trade with cities along the western coast of Africa around 1450. They returned from Africa with favorable accounts of powerful kingdoms as well as examples of African artistry commissioned from local sculptors. These exquisitely carved ivory artifacts, now known as the “Afro-Portuguese” ivories, were brought back from early visits to the continent and became part of the curiosity cabinets of the Renaissance nobles who sponsored exploration and trade.

Through trade, African artists were also introduced to new materials, forms, and ideas. Although historically glass and shell beads were made indigenously, trade with Europe in the 16th century introduced large quantities of manufactured glass beads that became widely used throughout Africa (see a later example here(opens in new window)). European imports of copper and coral made these

luxury materials more plentiful, and artists used them in greater quantities. Artifacts of European manufacture, such as canes and chairs, served as prototypes for the development of new prestige items for regional leaders. Along with goods imported from Europe, the travelers also brought with them their systems of belief, including Christianity. In some cases, such as in the central African kingdom of Kongo, Christianity was embraced and its iconography integrated into the artistic repertoire. In other parts of Africa, the foreign traders themselves were sometimes represented in artworks.

Crucifix, 16th–17th century (Kong Peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Angola; Republic of the Congo), solid cast brass, 27.3 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window), New York)

© 2006 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (by permission)

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by DR. CHRISTA CLARKE

Figure 4.3.1: : Seated Portuguese Male, 18th century, Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples, brass, 12.7 x 5.1 x 6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Western trade with Africa was not limited to material goods such as copper, cloth, and beads. By the sixteenth century, the transatlantic slave trade had already begun, forcibly bringing Africans to the newly discovered Americas. Slavery had existed in Africa (as it did elsewhere in the world) for centuries prior to the sixteenth, and many socially stratified African societies kept slaves for domestic work. The sheer number of slaves traded across the Atlantic, however, was unprecedented, as over 11 million Africans were brought to the Americas and the Caribbean over a period of four centuries. Driven by commercial interests, the slave trade peaked in the eighteenth century with the expansion of American plantation production, and continued until the mid-nineteenth century. While Europeans primarily profited from the slave trade, certain West African kingdoms, like Dahomey, also grew wealthy and powerful by selling captives of war. By the late eighteenth century, the slave trade began to wane as the abolitionist movement grew. Those who survived the forced migration and the notorious Middle Passage brought their beliefs and cultural practices to the New World.

Within this far-flung diaspora, certain cultures—such as the Yoruba and Igbo of today's Nigeria, and the Kongo from present-day Democratic Republic of Congo—were especially well represented. African slaves brought few, if any, personal items with them, although recent archaeological investigations have yielded early African artifacts, like the beads and shells found at the African burial grounds in New York's lower Manhattan, which date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The influence of Africans in the Americas is perhaps best seen in diverse forms of cultural expression that have enriched our society tremendously. Architectural elements such as open-front porches and sloped hip-roofs reflect African influence in the Americas. The religious practices of Haitian Vodou have roots in the spiritual beliefs of Dahomean, Yoruba, and Kongo peoples. Some elements of cuisine in the American South, such as gumbo and jambalaya, derive from African food traditions. Certain musical forms, such as jazz and the blues, reflect the convergence of African musical practices and European-based traditions.

Figure 4.3.2: Figurative Harp (Domu), 19th-20th century, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mangbetu, wood, hide, twine, brass ring, 67.3 x 21.6 x 30.5 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Although the slave trade was banned entirely by the late nineteenth century, European involvement in Africa did not end. Instead, the desire for greater control over Africa's resources resulted in the colonization of the majority of the continent by seven European countries. The Berlin Conference of 1884–85, attended by representatives of fourteen different European powers, resulted in the regulation of European colonization and trade in Africa. Over the next twenty years, the continent was occupied by France, Belgium, Germany, Britain, Spain, Italy, and Portugal. By 1914, the entire continent, with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, was colonized by European nations.

The colonial period in Africa brought radical changes, disrupting local political institutions, patterns of trade, and religious and social beliefs. The colonial era also impacted cultural practices in Africa, as artists responded to new forms of patronage and the introduction of new technologies as well as to their changing social and political situations. In some cases, European patronage of local artists resulted in stylistic change (for example the harp, left) or new forms of expression. At the same time, many artistic traditions were characterized as "primitive" by Westerners and discouraged or even banned.

Although African artifacts were brought to Europe as early as the sixteenth century, it was during the colonial period that such works entered Western collections in significant quantities, forming the basis of many museum collections today. African artifacts were collected as personal souvenirs or ethnographic specimens by military officers, colonial administrators, missionaries, scientists, merchants, and other visitors to the continent. In many of these instances of collecting, objects were gathered through voluntary trade.

In one extreme instance, an act of war initiated by Britain against one of its colonies, thousands of royal art objects were removed from the kingdom of Benin following its defeat by a British military expedition in 1897 (image below). European nations with colonies in Africa established ethnographic museums with extensive collections, such as the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium, the Völkerkunde museums in Germany, the British Museum in London, and the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (now housed at the Musée du Quai Branly). In the United States, which had no colonial ties to Africa, the nascent study of ethnography motivated the formation of collections at the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Field Museum in Chicago. In 1923, the Brooklyn Museum became the first American museum to present African works as art.

Figure 4.3.3: Plaque: Equestrian Oba and Attendants, 1550-1680, Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples, brass, 49.5 x 41.9 x 11.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Independence movements in Africa began with the liberation of Ghana in 1957 and ended with the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa during the 1990s. The postcolonial period has been challenging, as many countries struggle to regain stability in the aftermath of colonialism. Yet while the media often focuses on political instability, civil unrest, and economic and health crises, these represent only part of the story of Africa today. From its many urban centers to more tradition-based rural villages, Africa is increasingly entering the global marketplace. The proliferation of systems of communication, such as computers and cell phones, throughout Africa has facilitated increased interaction with other parts of the world. As Africa moves into the twenty-first century, hope lies in its natural and human resources and the commitment of many Africans to work toward a stable and prosperous future.

Figure 4.3.4: Martin Rakotoarimanana, *Mantle (Lamba Mpanjakas)*, 1998, Madagascar, Antananarivo or Arivonimamo, Imerina village, silk, 274 x 178.1 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

In spite of Africa's political, economic, and environmental challenges, the postcolonial period has been a time of tremendous vigor in the realm of artistic production. Many tradition-based artistic practices continue to thrive or have been revitalized. In Guinea, the revival of D'mba performances in the 1990s, after decades of censorship by the Marxist government, is one example of cultural reinvention. Similarly, in recent years, Merina weavers in the highlands of Madagascar have begun to create brilliantly hued silk cloth known as *akotofahana*, a textile tradition abandoned a century ago.

Photography, introduced on the continent in the late nineteenth century, has become a popular medium, particularly in urban areas. Artists like **Seydou Keïta**, who operated a portrait studio in Bamako, Mali, in the colonial period, set the stage for later generations of photographers who captured the faces of newly independent African countries. It is also important to mention developments in modern and contemporary African art. During the colonial period, art schools were established that provided training, often based on Western models, to local artists. Many schools were initiated by Europeans, such as the Congolese Académie des Arts, established by Pierre Romain-Desfossé in 1944 in Elisabethville, whose program was based on those of art schools in Europe. Less frequently, the teaching of modern art was initiated by indigenous Africans, such as Chief Aina Onabolu, who is credited with introducing modern art in Nigeria beginning in the 1920s. Since the mid-twentieth century, increasing numbers of African artists have engaged local traditions in new ways or embraced a national identity through their visual expression.

Artists in today's Africa are the products of diverse forms of artistic training, work in a variety of mediums, and engage local as well as global audiences with their work. In recent decades, contemporary artists from Africa, both self-taught and academically trained, have begun to receive international recognition. Many artists from Africa study, work, and/or live in Europe and the United States. Kenyan-born Magdalene Odundo, for example, was trained as an artist in schools in Kenya and in England, where she now lives. The **burnished ceramic vessels** she creates, which are purely artistic and not functional, embody her diverse sources, including traditional Nigerian and Kenyan vessels as well as Native American pottery traditions of New Mexico. The work of contemporary African artists like Odundo reveals the complex realities of artistic practice in today's increasingly global society.

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Additional resources:

The Transatlantic Slave Trade on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Trade Relations among European and African Nations on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Frederick Lamp, Frederick. "Art of the Baga: A Drama of Cultural Reinvention." *African Arts* 29.4 (1996), pp. 20-33.

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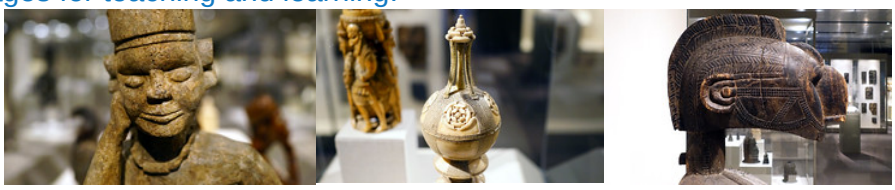

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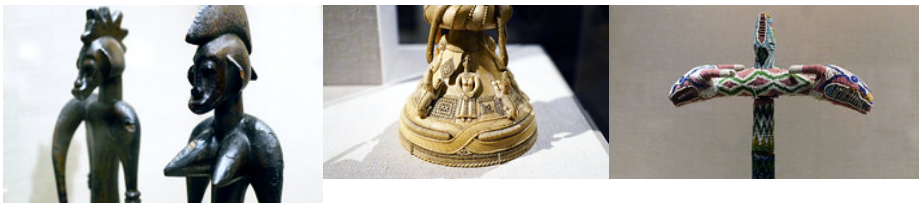

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Bibliography

African Rock Art on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Inland Niger Delta on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Trade and the Spread of Islam in Africa on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

The Empires of the Western Sudan: Ghana Empire on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

The Trans-Saharan Gold Trade (7th–14th Centuries) on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Igbo-Ukwu on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Nok Terracottas (500 B.C.–200 A.D.) on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Ife (from ca. 6th century) on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Women Leaders in African History, 17th–19th Century on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

The Monumental Stelae of Aksum (3rd–4th Centuries) on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Ethiopia's Enduring Cultural Heritage on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Mapungubwe (ca. 1050–1270) on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Great Zimbabwe (11th–15th centuries) on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Aksum from the UNESCO World Heritage Convention(opens in new window)

Holland Cotter, "Imperiled Legacy for African Art," *The New York Times*, August 2, 2012(opens in new window)

Michael Dewey, "Igbo-Ukwu," University of Iowa, Stanley Museum of Art(opens in new window)

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4.3.1: Supporting Images for Africa Cultures and Brief History

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

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Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Supporting Images for Africa Cultures and Brief History

In this section, students are invited to explore the featured artwork from AfricaCultures and Brief History. It aims to enhance understanding through guiding questions that promote deeper reflection and critique of the piece's significance and meaning.

The highlighted artwork from the text is paired with a supplemental image that offers an alternative perspective, showing how similar elements can be applied differently to create distinct moods or interpretations. By comparing the two works, students can see how choices in color temperature, compositional balance, or use of contrast alter the emotional impact and narrative of the piece, reinforcing the idea that artistic decisions are deliberate tools for communication rather than mere decoration.

Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison. Clicking on the image title will take you to the appendix to learn more about the piece and explore additional details. You can also navigate directly from the table of contents.

Paintings at Akaham Ouan Elbered

Running Horned Woman

Head of staff

Memorial Head (Ntiri)

Gold weight: Geometric

View of the Great Mosque of Djenné

Shrine head

Shell Vessel with Leopard from Igbo-Ukwu

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Paintings at Akaham Ouan Elbered (Tassili n'Ajjer National Park, Algeria; photo: András Zboray, FJ Expeditions) via SmartHistory

Queen Mother Pendant Mask

Head of an Oba

Bet Giyorgis Church

Painted wooden lion's head, Early Coptic period

Coptic Ostrakon, Early Islamic Period

Jar, late 3rd–4th century

Conical Tower, Great Zimbabwe

Power figure (Nkisi nkondi)

Lidded Saltcellar

Zlan of Belewale, Ceremonial Ladle

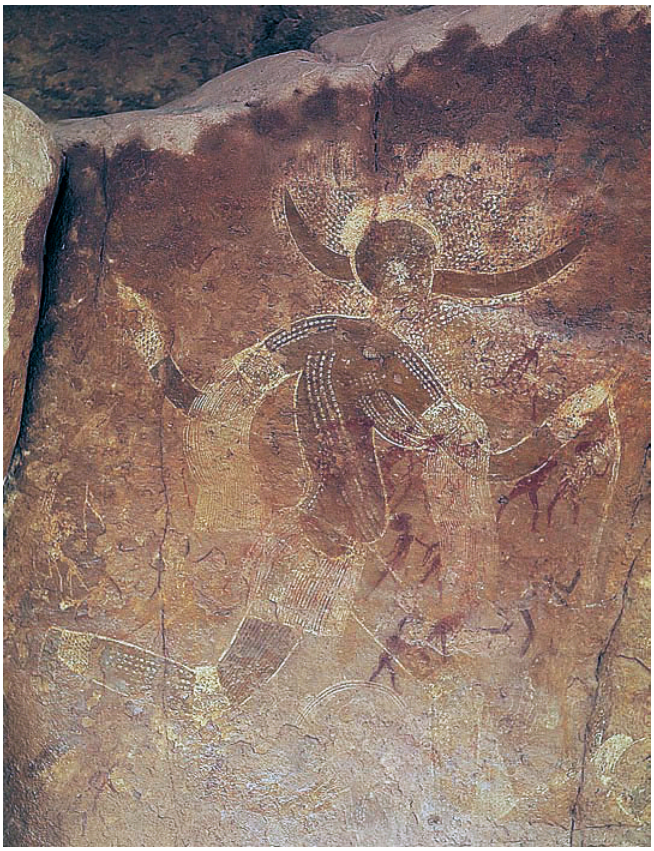

Figure **4.3.1.1**: *Running Horned Woman*, 6,000-4,000 B.C.E., pigment on rock, Tassili n'Ajjer, Algeria via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Head of staff (detail), *Linguist Staff (Okyeame)*, 19th–early 20th century (Akan peoples, Asante, Ghana), gold foil, wood, nails, 156.5 x 14.6 x 5.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)via SmartHistory

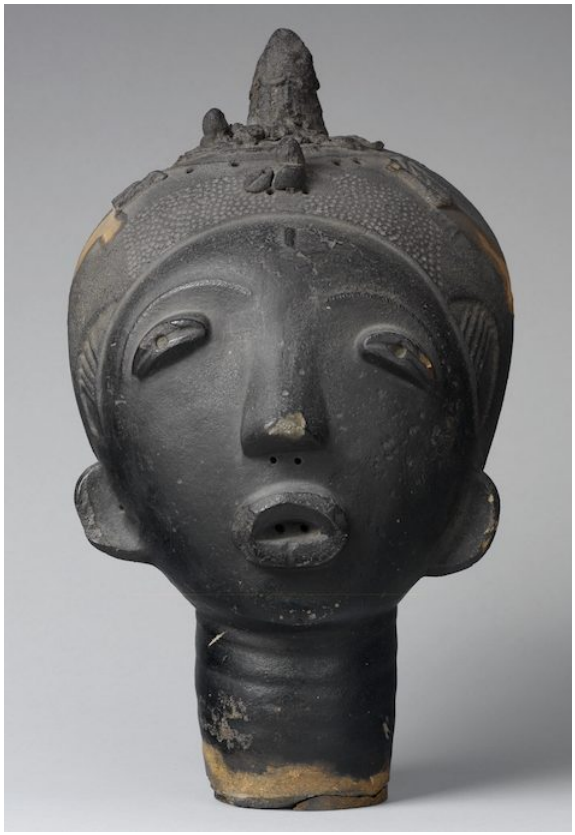

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Memorial Head (Ntiri), 17th century (?), Ghana, Adanse traditional area, Fomena, Akan peoples, 31.3 x 19 x 14.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Crucifix, 16th–17th century

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Memorial Head (Ntiri), 17th century (?), Ghana, Adanse traditional area, Fomena, Akan peoples, 31.3 x 19 x 14.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Ritual Vessel (*Aduno Koro*)

Seated Portuguese Male

Takienta

Figurative Harp (Domu)

Barkcloth, 1930

Plaque: Equestrian Oba and Attendants

Asante Kente Cloth

Cloth, 1968 (Asante people)

Mantle

Figure 4.3.1.1: A view of the Great Mosque of Djenné, Jenne-jeno, Mali, designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1988 (photo: Marco Dormino Flickr [UN Photo], CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)via SmartHistory

Kabyle fibulae (brooches)

Amazigh Ear Pendants

Figure **4.3.1.1**: *Shrine head*, 12th–14th century (Yoruba, Nigeria), terracotta, 31.1 x 14.6 x 18.4 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art)via SmartHistory

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Figure 4.3.1.1: *Shell Vessel with Leopard* from Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria, c. 9th–11th century C.E., leaded bronze, 8 ⅛ inches (National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: *Queen Mother Pendant Mask (Iyoba)*, 16th century (Edo peoples, Court of Benin, Nigeria), ivory, iron, copper, 23.8 x 12.7 x 8.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Mahabodhi Temple today, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India (photo: manbartlett, CC BY 2.0) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Bet Giyorgis Church, Lalibela, Ethiopia, c. 1220 (photo: Henrik Berger Jørgensen, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Painted wooden lion's head, Early Coptic period, 7th-10th centuries, from Qasr Ibrim, Nubia, 22.5 x 1.5 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum) via SmartHistory

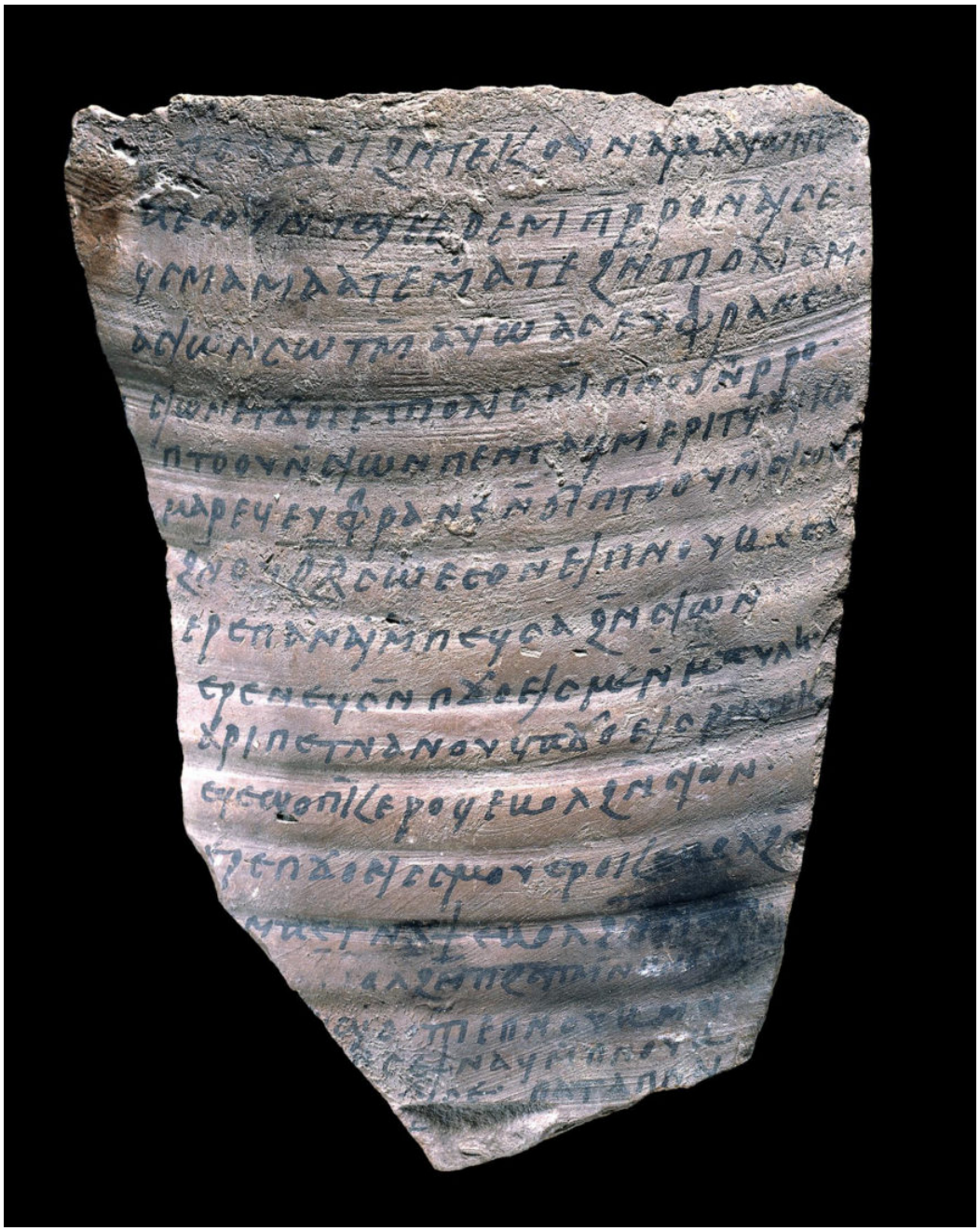

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Coptic ostrakon, Early Islamic period, perhaps 7th or 8th century, possibly from Thebes, Egypt, 13.2 x 10 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: Jar, late 3rd–4th century, ceramic, 11.8 cm high, Kingdom of Aksum (© Trustees of the British Museum) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: Conical Tower, Great Zimbabwe (photo: amanderson2, CC BY 2.0)via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: Power figure (Nkisi nkondi), Kongo peoples (Democratic Republic of the Congo). c. late 19th century, wood and metal, 36 x 18 1/2 x 14 1/4″ / 16/8 x 47 x 36.2 cm (Detroit Institute of Arts) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: *Lidded Saltcellar*, Sierra Leone, Sapi-Portuguese, 15th-16th century, ivory, 29.8 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: Unknown artist, “Participation of women in work (…)”, Turkic text (Arabic script), book factory of the Central Publishing House of USSR Nations , 920s, print run: 2000 copies, 108.4×70 cm. (image: “Уголок Ленина,” Russian Perspectives on Islam) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: *Crucifix*, 16th–17th century (Kong Peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Angola; Republic of the Congo), solid cast brass, 27.3 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Ritual Vessel (*Aduno Koro*): Horse, 16th–19th century, Mali, Dogon peoples, wood, 18.4 x 56.9 x 10.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Seated Portuguese Male, 18th century, Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples, brass, 12.7 x 5.1 x 6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Takienta, mud tower-houses, Unesco via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Figurative Harp (Domu), 19th-20th century, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mangbetu, wood, hide, twine, brass ring, 67.3 x 21.6 x 30.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Barkcloth, 1930 (Baganda people), stenciled bark, 249 x 210 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum, London) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: Plaque: Equestrian Oba and Attendants, 1550-1680, Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples, brass, 49.5 x 41.9 x 11.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

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Figure **4.3.1.1**: Asante kente cloth, 20th century, silk and cotton (Vatican Museums) via SmartHistory

Figure **4.3.1.1**: Cloth, 1968 (Asante people), stamped and embroidered cotton, 221 x 140 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum, London) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: Martin Rakotoarimanana, *Mantle (Lamba Mpanjakas)*, 1998, Madagascar, Antananarivo or Arivonimamo, Imerina village, silk, 274 x 178.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: Kabyle fibulae (brooches), late 19th–early 20th century, silver, enamel, and coral (The Newark Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Figure 4.3.1.1: Amazigh ear pendants, early 20th century (Anti-Atlas Region, Morocco), silver alloy, enamel, glass, and carnelian, 34.4 x 20.3 x 2.9 cm (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.) via SmartHistory

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4.4: Brief History of Western Culture

Note

After reading, review and explore Supporting Images for A Brief History of Western Culture. *The title of each art piece opens to more information.*

A Brief History of Western Culture

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Leonardo, Vitruvian Man from SmartHistory Perseus [ka-perseus-images.s3.amazona...522912e944.jpg]

History has no natural divisions. A woman living in Florence in the fifteenth century did not think of herself as a woman of the Renaissance. Historians divide history into large and small units in order to make characteristics and changes clear to themselves and to students. It's important to remember that any historical period is a construction and a simplification. Below are some important basics to get you started.

Western culture, the subject of this essay, is a phrase worth thinking about. West of what? West of who? The term is not geographic, and only gained in popularity in the 19th and 20th centuries. This is a concept, a lineage that ties Europe's long history to the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean and then push back to prehistory. As you read the timeline below, please keep in mind that this is only one of many stories, and that equally momentous developments have occurred in Africa, Asia, the Americas and in the Pacific.

Prehistoric (before c. 3000 B.C.E.)

Nude Woman (Venus of Willendorf), c. 28,000-25,000 B.C.E., Limestone, 4 1/4″ high (Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna), photo: Steven Zucker (opens in new window)(CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The term “prehistoric” refers to the time before written history. In the West, writing was invented in ancient Mesopotamia just before 3000 B.C.E., so this period includes visual culture (paintings, sculpture, and architecture) made before that date. The oldest decorative forms we can recognize as art come from Africa and may date back to 100,000 B.C.E. In contrast, the oldest cave paintings known are about 40,800 years old, and although we used to think that only our species, Homo Sapiens, made art—anthropologists now speculate that Neanderthals may have made at least some of these very early images.

The Neolithic revolution, one of the most profound developments in all of human history, occurs during the Prehistoric Era. This is when our ancestors learned to farm and domesticate animals, allowing them to give up their nomadic ways, and settle down to build cities and civilizations.

Ancient (c. 3000 B.C.E. to c. 400 C.E.)

This period includes the great early civilizations of the ancient Near East (think Babylonia), ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, the Etruscans, and the Romans—everything that comes after the invention of writing and before the fall of the Roman Empire. Keep in mind the disintegration of the Roman Empire took centuries, but to simplify, c. 400 will do.

Ancient Greek sculpture of Zeus or Poseidon, c. 460 B.C.E., bronze, 2.09 m high, Early Classical (Severe Style), recovered from a shipwreck off Cape Artemision, Greece in 1928 (National Archaeological Museum, Athens), photo: Steven Zucker(opens in new window) (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

It was during this period that the ancient Greeks first applied human reason to their observations of the natural world and created some of the earliest naturalistic images of human beings. This period is often credited with the birth of Western philosophy, mathematics, theater, science, and democracy. The Romans in turn created an empire that extended across most of Europe, and all the lands that surround the Mediterranean Sea. They were expert administrators and engineers and they saw themselves as the inheritors of the great civilizations that came before them, particularly, Greece and Egypt (which they conquered).

It’s important to remember that although history is often presented as a series of discrete stories, in reality narratives often overlap making history both more complex and more interesting. For example, it was also during the Roman Empire that the figure we now call Jesus lived. Jesus and his apostles were Jewish men living in what is today Israel, but which was then part of the Roman Empire.

Middle Ages (c. 400 C.E. to c. 1400 C.E.)

The first half of this thousand-year period witnessed terrible political and economic upheaval in Western Europe, as waves of invasions by migrating peoples destabilized the Roman Empire. The Roman emperor Constantine established Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) as a new capital in the East in 330 C.E. and the Western Roman Empire broke apart soon after. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the Byzantine Empire (with Constantinople as its capital), flourished.

Christ (detail), *Deësis* (Christ with the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist), c. 1261, mosaic, imperial enclosure, south gallery, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (photo: Steven Zucker(opens in new window), CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Christianity spread across what had been the Roman Empire—even among migrating invaders (Vandals, Visigoths, etc.). The Christian Church, headed by the Pope, emerged as the most powerful institution in Western Europe, the Orthodox Church dominated in the East.

Byzantine Empire in 650 from SmartHistory

It was during this period that Islam, one of the three great monotheistic religions, was born. Within little more than a century of the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 C.E., Islam had become an empire that stretched from Spain across North Africa, the Middle and Near East, to India. Medieval Islam was a leader in science and technology and established some of the world's great centers of learning (Cordoba, for example). Islamic culture played an important role in preserving and translating ancient Greek texts at a time when much of the knowledge created during the ancient world was lost.

Petrarch (a writer who lived in the 1300s) described the early Medieval period as the "Dark Ages" because to him it seemed to be a period of declining human achievement, especially when he compared it to the Ancient Greeks and Romans. The "Middle Ages" got its name because Renaissance scholars saw it as a long barbaric period that separated them from the great civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome that they both celebrated and emulated.

Young nobles in procession in the *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, (painted by the Limbourg Brothers), folio 5, verso: May, 1412-16, manuscript illumination on vellum, 22.5 x 13.6 cm (Musée Condé)

Medieval society was organized into clearly defined strata. At the top was the king. Below were lesser nobles. These lords in turn, ruled over peasants and serfs (the vast majority of the population). Serfs were laborers who were permanently bound to work the land owned by their lord. The basic unit of this system, known as Feudalism, was the lord/vassal relationship. The vassal would provide labor (in the fields or in battle) to the lord in exchange for land and protection. Mobility between strata was very rare.

Of course, the thousand years of the Middle Ages saw the creation of many great works of art and literature, but they were different from what Petrarch valued. The works of art created in the Middle Ages were largely focused on the teachings of the Church.

It is important to remember that during the Middle Ages it was rare that anyone except members of the clergy (monks, priests, etc.) could read and write. Despite expectations that the world would end in the year 1,000, Western Europe became increasingly stable, and this period is sometimes referred to as the Late (or High) Middle Ages. This period saw the renewal of large scale building and the re-establishment of sizable towns. Monasteries, such as Cluny, became wealthy and important centers of learning.

Within the Middle Ages, there are subdivisions in art history, including Early Christian, Byzantine, Carolingian, Ottonian, Romanesque and Gothic. When we look closely at much of the art and politics of the 1,000 years of the Middle Ages, we find a complex and ongoing relationship with the memory and legacy of the ancient Roman empire and this is the foundation for the Renaissance.

Renaissance (c. 1400 to 1600)

In part, the Renaissance was a rebirth of interest in ancient Greek and Roman culture. It was also a period of economic prosperity in Europe—particularly in Italy and in Northern Europe. In art history, we study both the Italian Renaissance and the Northern Renaissance. We talk about a way of looking at the world called Humanism, which—at its most basic—placed renewed value on human knowledge, and the experience of this world (as opposed to focusing largely on the heavenly realm), using ancient Greek and Roman literature and art as a model.

Plato, Aristotle and other ancient philosophers and mathematicians depicted in Raphael's School of Athens, fresco, 1509-1511 (Stanza della Segnatura, Papal Palace, Vatican)

There are only a handful of moments in history that we can point to that changed everything. The invention and adoption of the printing press was certainly one. As a result of the wider availability of books, literacy rates in Europe dramatically increased. Readers were empowered and in many ways we can trace the origin of our own information revolution to 15th-century Germany and Gutenberg's first printing press.

In 1517 a German theologian and monk, Martin Luther, challenged the authority of the Pope and sparked the Protestant Reformation. His ideas spread quickly, thanks in part to the printing press. By challenging the power of the Church, and asserting the authority of individual conscience (it was increasingly possible for people to read the bible in the language that they spoke), the Reformation laid the foundation for the value that modern culture places on the individual.

It is also during this period that the Scientific Revolution began and observation replaced religious doctrine as the source of our understanding of the universe and our place in it. Copernicus up-ended the ancient Greek model of the heavens by suggesting that the sun was at the center of the solar system and that the planets orbited in circles around it. However, there were still problems with getting this theory to match observation. At the beginning of the 17th century, Kepler theorized (correctly!) that the planets moved in elliptical orbits (not circular ones) and that the speed of the orbits varied according to the planets' distance from the sun. So much for the ideal geometries of the Greeks!

Early Modern (c. 1600–1800)

It might seem strange to date the beginning of the "modern era" to so long ago, but in many ways it was the scientific, political and economic revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that have most shaped our own society.

Art historians study the Baroque style of the seventeenth century. This was a time of extended and often violent conflict between Catholics and Protestants made all the more complex because of the growing power of Europe's great monarchies. It was a time when nations grew in size, wealth and autonomy and when national boundaries were hardened, prefiguring the countries we know today (France, Spain and England for example). This was also a period of colonization, when European powers divided and exploited the world's natural resources and people for their own benefit (think especially of the African slave trade, or the subjugation and forced conversion of the indigenous peoples of the Americas).

Hendrik Cornelisz Vroom, *The Return to Amsterdam of the Second Expedition to the East Indies*, 1599, oil on canvas (Rijksmuseum)

The 1700s is often called the Enlightenment. In many ways, it furthers the interest in the individual seen in the Italian Renaissance and more widely during the Protestant Reformation. Thinkers such as Rousseau, Voltaire and Diderot asserted our ability to reason for ourselves instead of relying on the teachings of established institutions, such as the Church. In art history we study the Rococo and Neoclassical styles.

The American and French Revolutions date to this period. The emerging middle classes (and later the working-classes) began a centuries-long campaign to gain political power, challenging the control of the aristocracy and monarchy. Successive reform movements (in this period and the nineteenth century) and revolutions gradually extended the franchise (the right to vote). Previously suffrage had been limited to males who owned land or who paid a certain amount in taxes. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries that universal suffrage became the norm in Europe and North America.

Modern (after c. 1800)

Capitalism became the dominant economic system during this period (though it had its roots in the Renaissance). Individuals risked capital to produce goods in a currency-based market which depended on inexpensive, waged labor. Labor eventually organized into unions (latter-day guilds) and in this way, asserted considerable influence. More broadly shared political power was bolstered by overall increases in the standard of living and the first experiments in public education.

Steam-powered machines and unskilled laborers in factories began to replace skilled artisans. London, Paris, and New York led the unprecedented population growth of cities during this period, as people moved from the countryside or emigrated to find a higher standard of living.

Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 × 776 cm (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid)

The twentieth century was the most violent in history. It included two world wars, the Cold War, the dismantling of colonialism and the invention of the Totalitarian state. Dictators (Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, the successive leaders of North Korea, etc.) imposed extreme political systems that caused mass starvation, mass dislocations and genocide. At the same time, the twentieth century was marked by the struggle for human rights and the rise of global capitalism.

Where artists had previously worked under the instructions of wealthy patrons associated with the church or state, in this period, art became part of the market economy, and art itself came to be seen as personal self-expression. The high value placed on the individual, which emerged in ancient Greece and Rome and then again in the Renaissance, became the primary value of Western culture. Where artistic styles (for example, Baroque) had once covered numerous artists working over broad regions and periods of time, in the late nineteenth and through the twentieth century, successive styles of art change with increasing speed and fracture into a kaleidoscope of individual artistic practices.

Where do we fit in?

We are immersed in our own time and it can be difficult to see the world around us objectively. One of the modern definitions of an artist, in fact, is someone who is particularly insightful about their own cultural moment. Thanks to global capitalism, social media and the internet, we are more interconnected and interdependent than at any other time in history. Some see this as a utopian moment. With internet access, we can all contribute to and benefit from what is being called the Information Revolution. For others, the prevalence of technology in our lives threatens our individuality and privacy, and reduces us to a data point that can be monetized by corporations like Facebook, Google, and Apple. One thing is certain, throughout the time periods sketched above, art has meant different things, and it is likely to be differently defined in the future.

The history of humanity is recorded in our visual culture. Like the fate of previous civilizations, time will eventually destroy much of the visual culture that we are familiar with today. Future art historians will seek to reconstruct the world we now live in, to better understand the nuanced meanings that are so familiar to us. Perhaps someday an art historian will puzzle over an internet meme, a Torqued Ellipse by Richard Serra, or school-yard graffiti.

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Kwame Anthony Appiah, "There is no such thing as western civilisation(opens in new window)," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2016.

Images for teaching and learning

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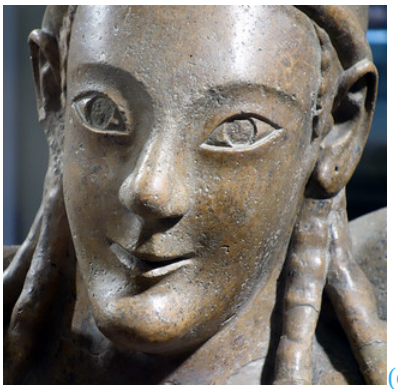
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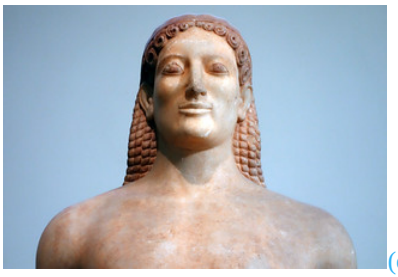 (opens in new window) (opens in new window)

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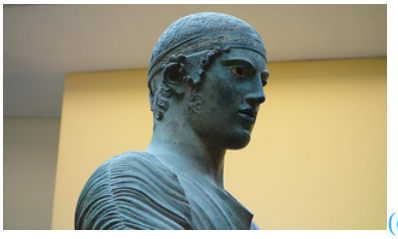 (opens in new window)

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4.4.1: Supporting Images for Brief History of Western Culture

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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5.1.1: The Old Guitarist

Introduction

Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque created cubism a few years after the opening of the new century. They developed different ideas of how objects or figures were composed, becoming one of the most influential design concepts of the 1900s. Louis Vauxcelles, an art critic, wrote of Braque's landscape painting as Cubism because the images were formed into geometric shapes or "bizarre cubiques." The Cubist artists did not believe in the usual standards of how elements appeared in nature or concepts of proper perspective or foreshortening. Instead, they redefined the shapes and objects in their paintings into geometric forms, pulled them apart, and reformed them into overlapping and interwoven sections, allowing different perspectives of the three-dimensional parts of the object. The artists also accentuated the two-dimensional flatness of the surface, obscuring the concept of depth. Braque and Picasso exchanged the traditional perspective of an imaginary distance for a way to hold the eye on the flat surface and experience three-dimensionality differently.

Cubism was comprised of two individual stages; *analytical* Cubism, the early form of Cubism in muted tones of blacks, grays, or ochres preventing color from interfering with the fragmented objects. The form also had intersecting and overlapping lines and surfaces, with multiple ways to view the object through the assemblage of deconstructed and reassembled parts. The works from 1908-12 used a palette evoking a somber feeling. By 1912 and *synthetic* Cubism, the shapes were simpler, full of bright colors, and frequently collaged with other materials. The parts were reassembled on top of each other similar to magazine displays on racks with less focus on space and the ability to understand layers of shapes. Collaging and adding other resources like paper or newsprint was one of the more essential concepts of Cubism, ideas that permeated into future modern art. The concept of how to depict space and anything in the space was defined in the Renaissance period. It had been the guiding ideal for artists until the Cubists, who blended space and objects into multiple angles. This section includes:

Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) was born in Spain; his father was an artist who recognized the ability to draw in his young son, teaching him to paint at the early age of seven. The family went to Barcelona, where Picasso studied at the art academy. After the academy, he moved to Paris and began to develop one of his many styles. From 1901-04, the first years formed his Blue Period, followed by a year of the Rose Period, when he explored color and its effects on emotions. Picasso believed a painter painted to release their spirits and visualizations, and color followed emotional changes. Then his work evolved into the development of Cubism, searching the interactions of color, lines, and planes. Picasso lived a long life, and his talent and abilities crossed through many different movements. In the late 1920s, he worked with some surrealists and became interested in sculpture in the early 1930s. Picasso was exceptionally prolific and inventive, experimenting with multiple materials and methods and influencing art in the modern world. Over his career, he created more than 20,000 paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures, ceramics, theater sets, and costume designs. [1]

Picasso went to Paris in 1900, where European art was centered, living with a roommate in poverty and occasionally burning a few paintings to stay warm. He sympathized with the people in poverty and how they struggled, and when one of his friends committed suicide, he became despondent, bringing all these feelings to his paintings and the blue period. As demonstrated in *The Old Guitarist* (5.4.1), he used heavy, dark lines to illustrate the figures or objects; the lines were filled with melancholy hues of light and dark blues. The older man has long arms and gangly legs, appearing near death with little movement, another hallmark of the blue period. The guitar was a standard Spanish instrument, one Picasso was familiar with, used in multiple pieces of his artwork. The dull brown tones of the guitar, the only color change in the painting, added a contrast to the image of the solitary old, blind man who was barely surviving. Some historians believe the painting demonstrated the struggles for survival artists encountered in their careers.

Figure 5.1.1.1: The Old Guitarist (1903-04, oil on panel, 122.9 x 82.6 cm) Public Domain

Picasso was also influenced by African art and the angular planes and contours of the statuary and masks he studied at the local ethnographic museums; the influence was reflected in his painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (5.4.2) with their angular proportions. In Barcelona, Avignon Street was then patronized by the prostitutes and their customers. The figures in the painting were larger than life-sized and posed in radical positions. The pink and peach-colored bodies were depicted with angular lines, cubic shapes, disassembled legs, and flat planes. Their faces were simplified, while the two at the far right wore faces based on African masks. The background of curtains resembles shattered glass with sharp angles enveloping the women. Critics, collectors, and friends were appalled by the painting; even his friend Georges Braque was dismayed, exclaiming, "Picasso must have drunk petroleum to spit fire onto the canvas."[2]

Figure **5.1.1.2**: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon (1907, oil on canvas, 244 x 234 cm) Public Domain

Girl with a Mandolin (5.4.3) depicts a typical Picasso image with muted browns, blues, grays, overlapping strips, and superimposed translucent planes. He used rectangular, geometric shapes for the background and carried them into the girl's face, neck, and shoulders, building flat planes. The guitar seems almost complete and ordinary except for the twisted form. The painting is an example of the early analytical form of Cubism Picasso and Braque first developed.

Figure **5.1.1.3**: Girl with a Mandolin (1910, oil on canvas, 100.3 x 73.6 cm) Public Domain

Woman in a Chemise in an Armchair (5.4.4) was painted with curvilinear lines and flat planes of color, forming a more erotic image, representing the newer concepts of synthetic Cubism. Picasso used different components to describe parts; the breast might be a pencil point, the fingers as tassels. The identities of the parts transformed into other biomorphic shapes, changing the concepts of Cubism as realism intersected with abstraction; the beginning concepts of Surrealism Picasso pursued later.

Figure **5.1.1.4**: Woman in a Chemise in an Armchair (1913-14, oil on canvas, 149.9 x 99.4 cm) Public Domain

After World War I, Picasso married his first wife, who was a ballerina. During this period, he helped design costumes and sets for the theatre, elements frequently appearing in future paintings. *Three Musicians* (5.4.5) was one of his last painted in synthetic Cubism, a large image of three musicians. He used bright colors in flat abstracted geometric shapes almost resembling pieces of cut paper. Each person was depicted as a typical entertainment character, Pierrot, in blue and white clothing, while Harlequin wears diamond-shaped orange and yellow. The dissembled faces appear as mas; their feet and hands vary in shape and size.

Figure 5.1.1.5: Three Musicians (1921, oil on canvas, 204.5 x 188.3 cm) Public Domain

Georges Braque

Georges Braque (1882-1963) was born in France and followed his father and grandfather as house painters. He continued to formally study painting, eventually working with the Fauvists and even exhibited with them. By 1908, he became interested in geometry and the idea of simultaneous perspective. Braque studied light and perspective and how to reduce them to geometrical forms by fragmenting the objects. In 1909, he began to work with Picasso to form their concepts of faceted patterns with monochromatic colors, the beginning of analytic Cubism. They continued to work together until 1914 and World War I when Braque joined the French Army. After he was wounded in the war, he continued to work and develop his styles of painting, sculptures, book illustrations, and lithographs.

Braque painted *The Viaduct at L'Estaque* (5.4.6) when he was inspired by an exhibition of a painting from Cezanne of the region, a common location for Impressionist painters. Braque created the image of the viaduct and small town at the beginning of his Cubist work; the parts of the painting are beginning to be disassembled into shapes yet still retain the basic format. The buildings are simplified, fragmented, and flattened, eliminating the concept of depth and changing the rules of perspective into reconstructed forms. Braque exclaimed, "The hard-and-fast rules of perspective…were a ghastly mistake which…has taken four centuries to redress."[3]

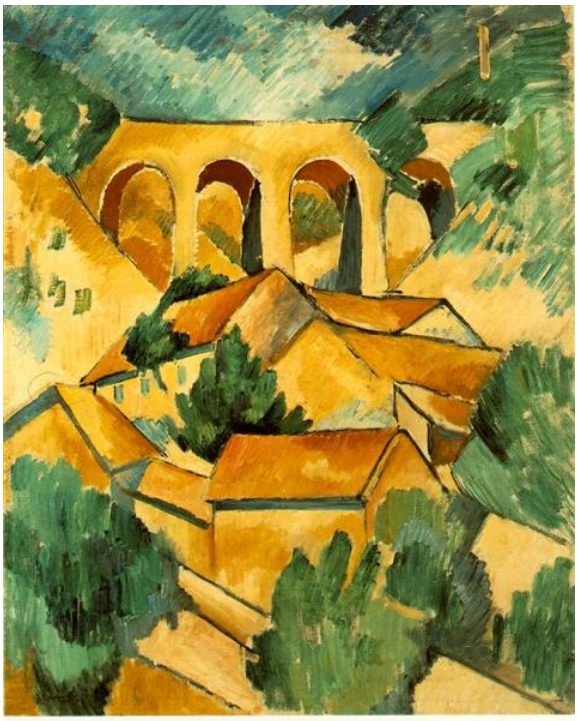

Figure 5.1.1.6: Viaduct at L'Estaque (1908, oil on canvas, 72.5 x 59 cm) Public Domain

Violin and Candlestick (5.4.7) demonstrate Braque's experiments to flatten space with a palette of browns and grays and narrow spacing. He used shading to give the perception that geometric shapes appear to overlay each other. He also incorporated curved lines in pure straight-lined geometrics. Cubists recurrently used musical instruments as part of their compositions, especially stringed instruments like guitars, violins, and clarinets. Braque was an accomplished musician and used instruments in much of his work. He placed the instruments through the center, highlighted by heavy dark lines and shadows, flattening the objects into multiple surfaces and different viewable planes. It appears the violin has been smashed into pieces while still intact, the pieces painted as the main violin.

Figure 5.1.1.7: Violin and Candlestick (1910, oil on canvas, 60.96 x 50.17 cm) Public Domain

Woman with a Guitar (5.4.8) was a later painting and based more on the synthetic style of Cubism. The image is abstracted and fractured, yet the basic form of the female's eye and mouth are visible along with the trapezoid form of the guitar. He balances the image with dark shapes possibly identified as shoulders, framing the subject. Braque used color and shading to denote each element and shape to create harmony and move the viewer around the work with little difference between the subject and the background. The woman has multiple interpretations; she appears to look at the guitar and to the right. The muted color brings a somber mood, not any indication of frivolity, and heightens the concept of what the woman is thinking. The text was also a common component in a painting by both Braque and Picasso; sometimes, the words were part of the meaning of a painting and, at other times, superficially meaningless.

Figure 5.1.1.8: Woman with Guitar (1913, oil and charcoal on canvas, 130 x 73 cm) Public Domain

Fernand Léger

Fernand Léger (1881-1955) was born in France and, as a teenager, became an apprentice to an architect before starting as a draftsman and attending classes at an art academy. Early, he was influenced by Impressionism, followed by viewing the work of Cézanne. When he moved to Paris, he worked with other Cubist artists to develop a slightly different style the critics termed "Tubism." Most of his geometric forms were based on cylindrical forms instead of rectangles, trapezoids, or squares. The abstracted forms usually contained primary colors; red, blue, yellow, black, gray, and white. During his life, he also developed artwork based on other movements with projects including ceramic sculptures, set and costume designs, and paintings.

Nude Model in the Studio (5.4.9) was completed while Picasso and Braque fully embraced analytic Cubism. Léger splintered the planes of his image to create three-dimensional objects with a more delineated form of larger parts, broad curving lines, and color. The curved and overlapped planes bring a rhythm to the painting and the concept of volume in the space. The standing female nude is positioned in a three-quarter profile, the right arm raised behind her head. He believed the human figure should be expressionless, unsentimental in his work.

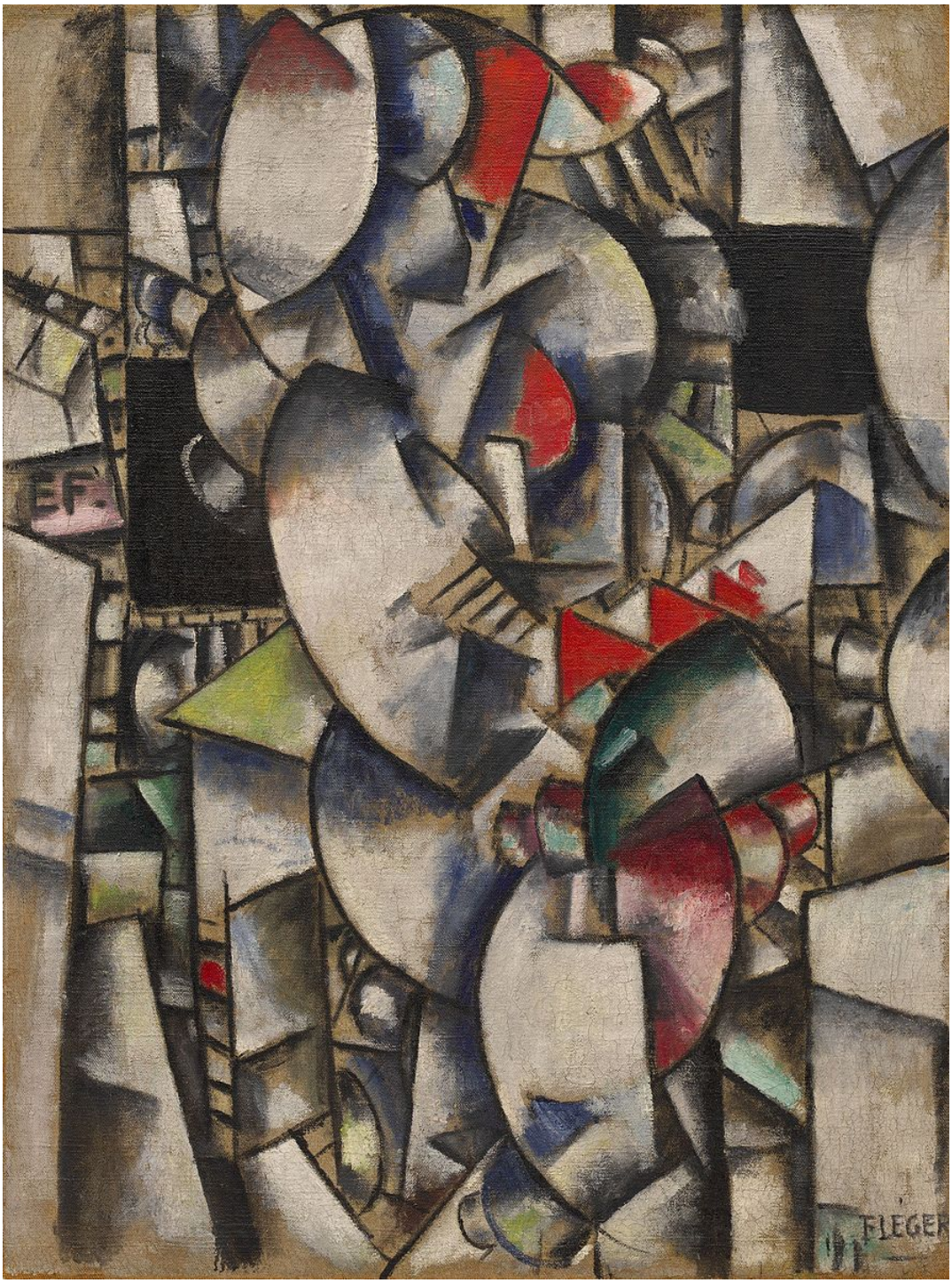

Figure **5.1.1.9**: Nude Model in the Studio (1912-13, oil on burlap, 128.6 x 95.9 cm) Public Domain

Contrast of Forms (5.4.10) is a set Léger completed using cylindrical and cubic sections to form the planes with alternating places of voids and shapes while highlighting the interaction of light and shadows. He used color to enhance the format and dimension of

the images and present the illusion of a three-dimension on two-dimensional canvas. White is applied roughly, and some of the canvas shows, aiding in the feel of dimension.

Figure **5.1.1.10**: Contrast of Forms (1913, 46 x 55 cm) Public Domain

Juan Gris

Juan Gris (1887-1927) was born in Spain, where he studied art before moving to Paris. He married, and had one child and a secondary companion. At first, he worked as a satirical cartoonist before painting seriously, then exhibited with the other Cubist painters. At first, Gris painted in the analytical style before embracing the synthetic style of Cubism. He used heavy shapes with shading between the angles, obscuring the division between the subject and background with overlapping planes. For the Ballet Russes, he designed costumes and sets while continuing to paint. Unfortunately, he suffered from cardiac complications and died at the early age of forty.

The Harlequin was a familiar character in Italian comedies from the sixteenth century. He also wore the recognizable checkered costume as a character who established his talent as a charlatan. The Harlequin was a favorite form for the Cubist artists to include in their paintings, a theme especially favored by Gris, who incorporated the subject in almost forty of his paintings. In *Harlequin with a Guitar* (5.4.11), Gris used contrasting colors to define different elements, highlighted by patches and lines of black. The face is reduced and identified with small shapes as light appears to reflect off the illuminated areas.

Figure 5.1.1.11: Harlequin with a Guitar (1917, oil on panel, 100.3 x 65.1 cm) Public Domain

Still, Life with Checkered Tablecloth (5.4.12) is almost a still life for men as the small table covered with the checkered cloth is brimming with a beer bottle, wine glasses, coffee cups, and wine bottles. The large fruit bowl holding grapes is viewed from above and on the side. The painting also portrays the paper ready for reading and the ubiquitous guitar. However, Gris added another image and dimension to the painting not as obvious; a bull's head. Gris was from Spain, and the bull was an important cultural symbol. The nose of the bull is near the bottom and formed by the coffee cup, the one eye is a black and white circle on the left side, the bottle of beer is the ear, and the side of the guitar creates the horn. "The letters "EAU" on the wine label, which ostensibly stands for "bEAUjolais" can just as easily represent "taurEAU" (bull)."[4]

Figure 5.1.1.12: Still Life with Checkered Tablecloth (1915, oil on canvas, 116.5 x 89.3 cm) Public Domain

Sonia Delaunay

Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979) was born in Ukraine and sent to live with wealthy relatives in St. Petersburg, Russia, who traveled with her throughout Europe. In school, she was classically trained before moving to Paris. Her early work in France was influenced by the Post-Impressionists and the Fauvists and their uses of color. In 1908, she married an art gallery owner who helped her exhibit work and enters the art world while he could access her dowry and have a perfect cover for his homosexuality. At the gallery, she met Robert Delaunay, divorced her husband, and married Delaunay in 1910. She said, “In Robert Delaunay, I found a poet. A poet who wrote not with words but with colours.”[5] After their son was born, she transitioned from the concepts of

perspective and the natural appearance to experimenting with Cubism and the intersection of color. The Impressionists and Post-Impressionists were influenced by Michel Eugéne Chevreuil's concepts and his law of simultaneously contrasting colors. Both Delaunays, working with the theory, started painting with the overlapping planes and lines of Cubism combined through the concentration and vibrancy of color. A friend of the Delaunays described Cubism as Orphism, a more lyrical abstraction with bright and pure colors.

One of Delaunay's first major projects was the illustration of the poem of Blaise Cendrars, who wrote *Prose of the Trans-Siberian and Little Jehanne of France*. The book was two meters long and formed into an accordion-pleated book. Delaunay combined her design with the text, as seen in the last section (5.4.13). The book and her illustrations were well received and helped establish her talents. After the Russian Revolution, she lost financial support from her family in Russia. She started designing costumes and sets for the theatre as well as a successful clothing business. Later in her life, she continued designing textiles, jewelry, clothing, and tableware until she died in 1979 at 94.

Figure 5.1.1.13: Transsiberien (1913, illustrated book with watercolor applied through pochoir and relief print on paper, 200 x 35.6 cm) Public Domain

Prismes Electriques (5.4.14) attract variations of light with color as the primary theme. The energy of the circular patterns moves throughout the painting as light is diffracted, bringing movement to the circles. The overlapping circles form curved spaces of primary colors and neighboring secondary colors. The rest of the painting has multiple geometric rectangular and oval planes. She was supposedly influenced by the glow of the electric streetlights and used Chevreuil's concept of color to produce light; she combined lighter and darker colors to create a similar pattern.

Figure **5.1.1.14**: Prismes Electriques (1914, oil on canvas, 250 x 250 cm) Public Domain

Robert Delaunay

Robert Delaunay (1885-1941) was born in France and raised by his aunt and uncle. Because he wanted to be an artist, his uncle sent him to an art school in Paris and at 19 had accumulated enough work to exhibit in the Salon des Indépendants in 1904. He formed a close friendship with Jean Metzinger, and they both experimented with Cubism techniques. After he married his wife, Sonia, they worked together and developed Orphism using bright colors and shapes. He believed painting was a visual art based on how the eye perceives color and light plus their contrasting harmonies. In 1912, at the height of Cubism, Delaunay was accused of only making decorative paintings because of his use of color. After the war, he continued to work abstractly and did some Surrealism work.

One of his early series of works was the *Windows* series, abstract formats with overlapping planes of color. He visited the cathedrals and based the series on the observation of stained-glass windows defined by how the light shines through with patches of color and divergent hues. He wrote, “Direct observation of the luminous essence of nature is for me indispensable.”[6] *Simultaneous Windows on the City Windows on the City* (5.4.15) was part of the series with corresponding blocks of light and dark color, the colors slightly muted. He made the window illusion with the rectangular black line, the light, and colors escaping around the window and into space.

Figure 5.1.1.15: Simultaneous Windows on the City (1912, oil on canvas, 40 x 46 cm) Public Domain

Hommage to Biériot (5.4.16) was dedicated to Louis Biériot, the first person to successfully fly an airplane between England and continental Europe. The disassembled images on the painting portray the helicopter, and the human with the Eiffel Tower was added to honor Bériot as a French man. Delanuany's use of Orphism is apparent in the use of primary colors, the bright red punches of color, and the seemingly joyous spirit of the concentric disks spanning in waves across the painting.

Figure **5.1.1.16**: Hommage to Biériot (1914, oil on canvas, 46.7 x 46.5 cm) Public Domain

Jean Metzinger

Jean Metzinger (1883-1956) was descended from a well-known French military family. Although his mother wanted him to become a doctor, he studied art, exhibiting at the early Salon shows with the Fauvists and then the Cubists. Metzinger originally painted in the style of the Impressionists and Pointillism with significant mosaic-like brush marks, focusing on the use and juxtaposition of colors. He frequently painted with Robert Delaunay, experimenting with new styles, especially fracturing the human form to create compound views of the same image. By 1910, he began to paint in the Analytical Cubism style, working with Delaunay, Léger, and Laurencin. In 1911, they all hung their work together in Room 41 of the Salon des Indépendants; the exhibit was deemed scandalous. Metzinger is credited with writing the first major dissertation on the new art form, *Du "Cubisme,"* presenting information about Cubism, understanding the works and why they are created in the specific dimensions. The publication was very successful, and Metzinger was credited as one of the leading artists of the new concepts. Apollinaire, a poet of the time who viewed Metzinger's work, wrote, "Graphically and compositionally, his works have all the discretion of contrasting luminosity, and a style which places them apart from, and perhaps well above, most works produced by the painters of his day."[7]

Two Nudes, Two Women (5.4.17) was part of Metzinger's association with the Analytic Cubism style. Instead of positioning the two nudes in the foreground as the traditional practice, he integrated them with the background of trees and rocks. The models are visible from multiple viewpoints, shattered into angles and shapes, bringing different spatial projections. The interlocking of spaces and shapes of the figures and background create a total environment, a three-dimensional perspective on a two-dimensional canvas. Although Metzinger muted his colors, he did include other colors in his palette, unlike Braque and Picasso. This painting was part of the Salon des Indépendants, the scandalous show, and the rise of Cubism.

Figure 5.1.1.17: Two Nudes, Two Women (1910-11, oil on canvas, 92 x 66 cm) Public Domain

L'Oiseau Bleu (The Blue Bird) (5.4.18) is one of Metzinger's most well-known works and part of his association with Braque and Picasso and the Cubist movement. The painting depicts three nude women surrounded by a variety of other elements. In the center, one figure is holding a bluebird, the reclining woman on the left is seated by a red bird and a fruit bowl, and the figure on the right is holding a yellow fan. Other birds, a steamship, and a small boat float through the scene. The striped canopy representing a Parisian cafe is left intact, not fractured. Unlike the other Cubism artists, Metzinger used a very colorful palette; however, he muted the colors similar to the other artists.

Figure 5.1.1.18: The Blue Bird (1912-13, oil on canvas, 230 x 196 cm) Public Domain

Marie Laurencin

Marie Laurencin (1883-1956) was born in Paris and originally studied ceramics before changing to oil painting. She was romantically linked to poet Guillaume Apollinaire, associated with Metzinger, Braque and Delaunay and exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in concert with the Cubists. She married a German, causing her to lose her French citizenship, a woman had to take her husband's citizenship. During World War I, the two had to flee to Germany; however, she divorced him and returned to Paris after the war. Upon returning, she adopted her new style, painting the thin, willowy, otherworldly female figures with simplified

volumes and curvilinear in muted pastel colors focusing on grays and pinks. She also painted portraits, and defined theatre and ballet sets, watercolors, and prints.

Jeune Femmes (Young Girls) (5.4.19) was one of Laurencin's first paintings exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1911. Her curvilinear lines simplified the geometric shapes, giving the painting graceful lines. She used the darker, muted tones found in early Cubism painting with a small amount of color.

Figure **5.1.1.19**: Jeune Femmes (Young Girls) (1910-11, oil on canvas, 115 x 146 cm) Public Domain

Le Bal Elegant, La Danse a la Campagne (Elegant Ball, Dance in the Country) (5.4.20) was painted a few years later, and Laurencin used her traditional lighter and more feminine palette with muted pinks and grays. The shapes are also more fragmented, following the style of Braque and Picasso. The figures have soft edges as the background shapes and lines became straighter and more fractured.

Figure **5.1.1.20**: Le Bal Elegant, La Danse a la Campagne (1913, oil on canvas, 115 x 146 cm) Public Domain

Les Désguisés (5.4.21) depicts two figures dressed in elegant apparel who appear almost ghostly. The stylized images are rendered in muted colors; the wistful duo adorned with flowing headdresses. She also added a bird on the head of the seated woman and a bouquet. Laurencin painted the images after she returned to Paris from Germany, as new avant-garde ideas were beginning. She still used flat planes of pastel colors giving the painting a look similar to the earlier Cubist works.

Figure 5.1.1.21: Les Désguisés (1926, oil on canvas) Public Domain

Most historians believe Cubism, in a short time, was the one movement to create and produce an entirely new style and form of art, transforming and influencing the future direction of new movements. The artists were dissatisfied to follow the orthodox rules of painting in the three-dimensional ideals; instead, they wanted to include multiple sensations, a total image on a flat surface. The creative and innovative artists of the movement also continued to experiment and develop new directions.

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5.1.2: Star Circle

by DR. SARAH ECKHARDT and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

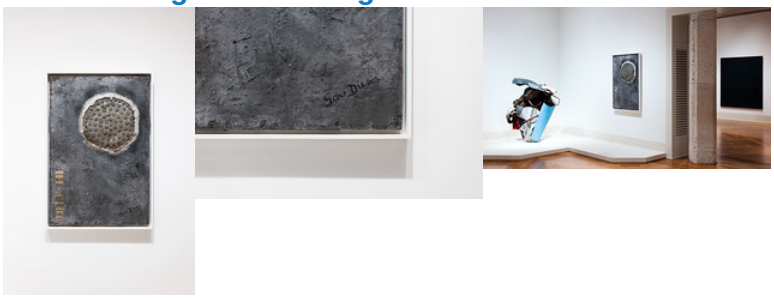
Page ID
380153

Video 5.1.2.1: Sari Dienes, *Star Circle*, 1953–59 (assembled as late as 1959), plaster and paint on foam board, 121.92 x 81.28 x 3.49 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts) © Sari Dienes Foundation

Additional resources

This work at the VMFA
The Sari Dienes Foundation

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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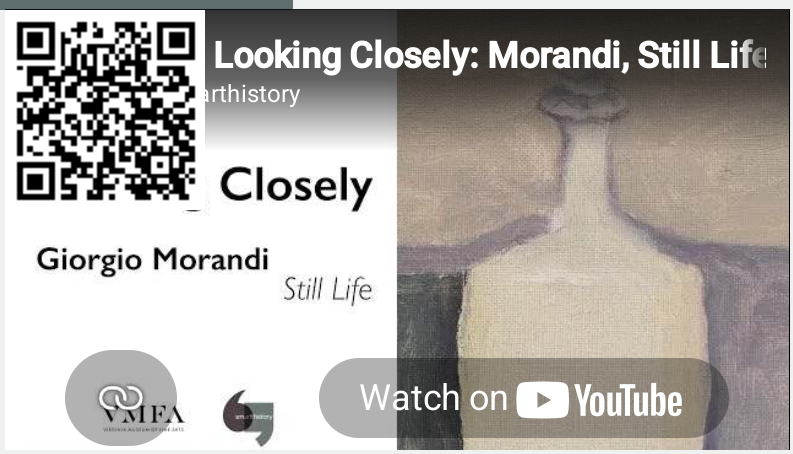
5.1.3: Still Life, Giorgio Morandi

On looking closely: Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This extraordinarily simple painting raises fundamental issues of how we see, how we describe, and even of the history of art.

On looking closely: Giorgio Morandi, Still Life



Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life*, 1959, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 35.2 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond) © estate of the artist. Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

Video transcript

0:00:05.4 Dr. Steven Zucker: One of the most important skills in art history is the skill of describing, finding the words to express the complexity of form. We've chosen a modern painting, one that was painted in 1959 by Giorgio Morandi, an Italian artist, because it seems very simple and so it should be easy to find words to describe it. Okay, so let's start. This is a relatively small painting. We actually are both standing less than three feet away, we wanna come up close and really be able to see it.

0:00:37.0 Dr. Beth Harris: It's almost square in format, and we are clearly looking at a still life. I see what look like bottles on a table top, a cup. I'm reading that light lavender as a table meeting a horizon line of the wall, which is a light grey behind it, and these objects placed on the table, even though there is no indication of their weight. They don't cast shadows. So these are things my mind is inferring.

0:01:07.6 Dr. Steven Zucker: I wanna start with the ground, before we even get to those objects, I see a little band of grey-yellow at the very bottom, this lavender field, and then above that, more of that yellowish grey. All of that is rendered with a fairly wet brush, so that you can actually see the paint strokes, and you get a sense that the oil paint is functioning almost like water color, it's been thinned out, so that there are areas where the paint is almost missing and you can actually see back to the surface of the canvas behind it.

0:01:38.5 Dr. Beth Harris: What is most apparent to me is the difference between what my mind wants to do to what I'm seeing and the very stripped down information that I'm given in the painting. In the case of the small fluted bowl in the foreground center, I have more of a sense of its placement on the table because of the darker paint that surrounds it, that acts as a shadow and gives me a sense that this is a three-dimensional object, although that lavender ground gives me no indication of recession into space.

0:02:14.8 Dr. Steven Zucker: We seem to be looking across at that bowl, and yet we're also seeing a bit of the ovoid at the top, that is, we're looking down at the bowl at the same time, so there is a little bit of a discontinuity.

0:02:28.2 Dr. Beth Harris: Although I want to read those as bottles or carafes of some sort sitting on the table, I wonder why their necks don't seem symmetrical. Why the purple paint seems to sometimes come in front of the yellowish white paint of what I assume to be these bottles.

0:02:45.4 Dr. Steven Zucker: If we look at the bottle on the left and we look at the right side of that bottle, you can see that there's a grey vertical line now that might be the table top, because it's the same color as the table top, but at the same time, I read that as a facet of the bottle itself that is of its right side receding in space. It is very slippery what's happening here as we try to make sense of these forms in space. Another example is that green rectangle that emerges from the back edge of the bowl in front and separates the two bottles. At first, we assume that that's a shadow, because after all it's in between them, and perhaps one of the bottles is casting that shadow, but the top of it is flat and it wouldn't be flat if it was a cast shadow, and so it becomes both a negative space and perhaps a form that's in part hidden behind those bottles?

0:03:36.8 Dr. Beth Harris: The bottle on the right has a few horizontal lines of white paint that read like the reflection of glass, but the one on the left doesn't have those and is painted in a very flat and matte way without any of that sense of reflectivity.

0:03:55.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: The thing that probably bothers me the most in this painting, and I should say bothers me in a good way, because it makes me question what I'm seeing, is back of the table, which I want to have a continuous arcing form as if this is the back of a large round table. But right around the shoulders of the bottles, that table edge seems to deform and seems to become a bit more parallel with what I take to be the shoulders of the bottles, so that the back of the table seems to edge up. Or, am I possibly looking down at the depth of the bottles? It's impossible to know, but when I come away with is the sense that the artist seems willing to distort what he sees for the internal logic of the canvas that he wants to end up with.

0:04:42.7 Dr. Beth Harris: For me, this is about a relationship between the painting and the viewer, because it feels so much about confounding my expectations and a kind of insistence on illegibility. And so it feels like a painting that wants to surprise me and make me engage and activate it. Why do we read those two white lines as a reflection in the glass? Our mind and our eyes work together to make sense of the world, which is maybe not giving us as much information as we think it is.

0:05:18.9 Dr. Steven Zucker: So this extraordinarily simple painting of a few objects on a table—that are not telling a story, that are not depicting a likeness—is raising fundamental issues of how we see, how we describe, and even of the history of art.

0:05:33.0 Dr. Beth Harris: But the next question, why is this something of interest at this moment, in this place where the artist is? What is it about this historical moment that is calling for this kind of questioning?

0:05:46.2 Dr. Steven Zucker: But that would be the subject of another video.

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Important fundamentals

Read a *Reframing Art History* textbook chapter, Learning to look and think critically

Modern art and reality

Cite this page

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5.1.4: Still Life , Rachel Ruysch

Rachel Ruysch

Rachel Ruysch, *Fruit and Insects*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video **5.1.4.19**: Rachel Ruysch, *Fruit and Insects*, 1711, oil on wood, 44 x 60 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure **5.1.4.79**: More Smarthistory images…

Rachel Ruysch, *Flower Still-Life*

by LYNN ROBINSON

What would you consider today's most coveted status symbols? A Mercedes or a Ferrari, a diamond Rolex or a designer handbag? A European villa? In Rachel Ruysch's day it was a simple tulip. Looking at her floral still life paintings can reveal an entire hidden world—of wealth, status, even the economics of the world's first financial crises.

Figure 5.1.4.80: Godfried Schalcken, Portrait of the artist Rachel Ruysch, c. 1643-1706, oil on canvas, 71.8 x 62. 2 cm (Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum)

Rachel Ruysch grew up in Amsterdam, into a wealthy and prominent family of Dutch artists, architects and scientists. Her father, Frederik Ruysch, was an eminent scientist and professor of anatomy and botany. He possessed a well-known collection of rare natural history specimens, which Rachel helped catalogue and record. He encouraged her artistic talents, careful observation of the natural world and scientifically accurate renderings of plants and flowers. At age fifteen, Ruysch began an apprenticeship with famous still life painter Willem van Aelst. By eighteen, she was already producing her first still life paintings and starting to establish her long and successful career.

A working mother

At twenty nine, Rusch married portrait painter Juriaen Pool, with whom she had ten children. Despite her enormous domestic responsibilities, she was remarkably prolific, producing more than 250 paintings over seven decades. Her works were in great demand, and she achieved widespread fame and international recognition. Considered one of the most successful artists of her day, contemporary Dutch writers called her “Holland’s art prodigy” and “our subtle art heroine.”

Consumer society

In 1648, the Netherlands became independent from Spain, ushering in a period of great economic prosperity. Flourishing international trade and a thriving capitalistic economy resulted in a newly affluent middle class. Wealthy merchants created a new kind of patronage and art market. Without a powerful monarchy or the Catholic Church to commission artworks (the Dutch were Protestants), artists produced directly for buyers. Like today, buyers purchased art either from professional dealers or from the artist in their studios. Subjects like big historical, mythological or religious paintings were no longer desired; buyers wanted portraits, still lifes, landscapes and genre paintings (scenes of everyday life) to decorate their homes. Proud of their newly independent country and trade wealth, they desired artworks that would reflect their success. In a competitive open market, artists began to specialize. Rachel Ruysch became known as one of the greatest flower painters of her time.

Flowers: A national passion

Figure 5.1.4.81: Great Tulip Book: Semper Augustus, 1600-1699, gouache on paper, 12-1/8 x 7-7/8″ / 30.8 x 20.0 cm (Norton Simon Museum)

Ruysch's career paralleled the growth of the Dutch horticultural industry and the science of botany. The Netherlands became the largest importers of new and exotic plants and flowers from around the world. Once valued primarily for their use as herbs or medicine, flowers became newly appreciated simply for their beauty and fragrance. They became prized luxuries and desirable status symbols for the wealthy. Botanists and gardeners sought the rarest specimens imported from overseas trade. The tulip, like the one featured prominently in Ruysch's painting below, was the most exotic.

"Tulip mania"

Coveted for their intense and unusually varied colors, tulips were introduced into the Netherlands from Turkey in the late sixteenth century. The Dutch fell madly in love with them. Because it takes so long for a tulip to be grown from seed, demand far outpaced supply. The rarest and most valuable tulips were the variegated or "flamed" tulips, those with feathers of contrasting color on their petals. This exotic coloration was actually caused by a virus that infected the tulip, shortening its life span and making it even more sought after and valuable. The stage was set for a buying craze.

Buyer beware: A cautionary tale?

Figure 5.1.4.82: Bruegel suggests the economic folly of tulip mania by depicting speculators as brainless monkeys in contemporary upper class dress (detail), Brueghel the Younger, *Satire on Tulip Mania*, c. 1640 (Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem)

The word tulip mania is often used today to refer to certain types of economic crises. It describes a financial bubble caused by large numbers of people speculating on unproved commodities or companies. Tulip bulbs were so avidly desired in the seventeenth-

century Netherlands that a “futures market” was born. Buyers bought bulbs still in the ground, speculating that they would be worth more in the future and could then be sold for a large profit. Prices rose steadily and irrationally. At the peak of tulip speculation in 1636, some bulbs sold for more than a skilled craftsman earned in ten years. A nursery catalog of the time notes that at the height of the madness, a rare “Semper Augustus” tulip sold for 5,200 guiders, more than the price of a fine house, a ship or twelve acres of land.

In February, 1637, investors suddenly decided that tulip bulbs were grossly overpriced, and began to sell. Within days, panic ensued. With more sellers than buyers, demand for tulips evaporated. Prices plummeted, tulip bulbs lost 90% of their earlier value, and the market crashed. The world had just experienced its first financial bubble.

Look closely: Microscopic detail

Figure **5.1.4.83**: Rachel Ruysch, Flower Still Life, c. 1726, oil on canvas, 75.6 x 60.6 cm (Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio)

A successful Dutch still life painting was highly valued for its degree of skillful realism. *Flowers Still Life* depicts a profusion of scientifically accurate floral details. Each petal, stem, and leaf is minutely and precisely rendered. Textures are remarkably realistic, from the delicate paper thin poppy petals to the crinkly, brittle leaves. Looking closer still, we see that Ruysch has also meticulously depicted tiny insects: a caterpillar crawls on a stem, a bee gathers pollen from the center of a poppy, a white butterfly alights on a marigold.

Mixed bouquet

Figure **5.1.4.84**: A drooping marigold and other flowers spilling out of the vase (detail), Rachel Ruysch, *Flower Still Life*, c. 1726, oil on canvas, 75.6 x 60.6 cm (Toledo Museum of Art)

Flower Still Life depicts a lush variety of different flowers, from popular common European blooms to rare overseas species. Ruysch combines a complex and intricate arrangement of poppies, snapdragons, roses, carnations, hollyhocks, marigolds, morning glories and a single red and white flamed tulip. Flowers lavishly spill out of the vase, filling the entire picture space. Some are in full bloom, others droop and wilt, as leaves and curving stems entwine throughout. While many of her contemporary flower painters used more symmetrical and formal compositions, Ruysch was known for these lively and informal looking arrangements. The flowers are asymmetrically arranged, leading the eye diagonally from the lower left drooping marigold to the upper right red poppy. Our eye is first attracted to the lightest flowers in the center, then to the brightly colored surrounding flowers, and finally out to the small darker flowers at the edges of the bouquet. Complementary colors create harmony, as warm yellows and rose balance cool blues and greens. Light alternates with shadow, enlivening the flowers as they stand out dramatically against the darker background.

"Vanitas": Hidden meanings?

Some scholars believe there is another way to view Ruysch's flower paintings. One common interpretation is to understand them in light of *vanitas*, a moral message common at the time. Taken from a passage in the Christian bible, it was a reminder that beauty fades and all living things must die. While still life paintings celebrated the beauty and luxury of fine food or voluptuous flowers, *vanitas* was a warning about the fleeting nature of these material things and the shortness of life. In *Flowers Still Life*, some flowers wilt and die while insects have eaten holes in the leaves. Wealthy Dutch consumers were being reminded to not become too attached to their material possessions and worldly pleasures; eternal salvation came only through devotion to God.

Additional resources:

Flower Still Life in the Toledo Museum of Art

Still-Life Painting in Northern Europe 1600-1800 on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.2: Understanding Art - Supporting Images

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

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5.2.3: Woman with Wax Tablets and Stylus

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5.2.5: Justinian and Attendants

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5.2.8: Lancet Windows - Reims Cathedral

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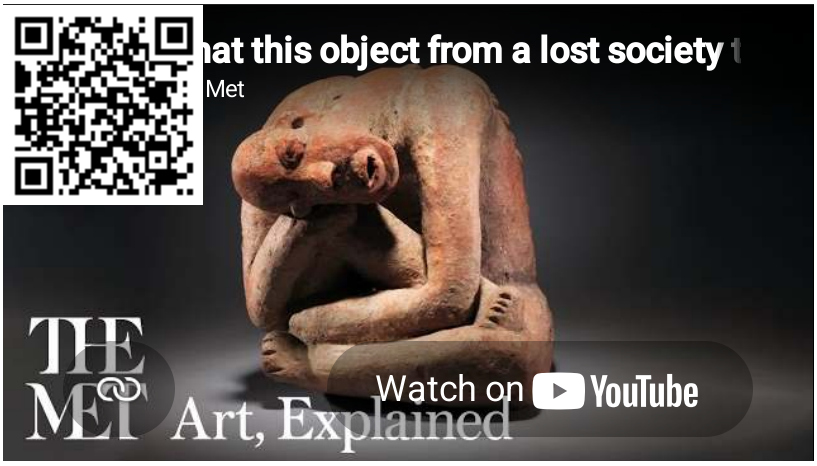
5.2.1: Seated Figure, Djenné peoples

by DR. CHRISTA CLARKE



Video 5.2.1.1: Seated Figure, terracotta, 13th century, Mali, Inland Niger Delta region, Djenné peoples, 25/4 x 29.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), 82nd & Fifth: "Bundle of Emotions" by Yaëlle Biro.

Among the earliest known examples of art from sub-Saharan Africa are terracotta figures like this one from the inland delta of the Niger River, near the present-day home of the Dogon and Bamana peoples.

In this region of Mali, the ancient city of Jenne-jeno ("Old Jenne") flourished as a center for agriculture, trade, and art from the middle of the first millennium until about 1600. The terracotta figures associated with this civilization represent men and women, singular and in pairs, in a variety of attire and poses, including sitting, kneeling, and on horseback. The diversity of imagery and the skill with which they were modeled reveal the rich sculptural heritage of a sophisticated urban culture.

Figure 5.2.1.1: Mali, Inland Niger Delta region, Djenné peoples, 13th century, terracotta, 25/4 x 29.9 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

This figure sits, hunched over, with both arms clasping an upraised leg, its head tilted sideways to rest against its bent knee. The posture evokes a pensive attitude that is reinforced by the expressiveness of the facial features: the bulging eyes, large ears, and

protruding mouth are all stylistically characteristic of works from this region.

Figure **5.2.1.2**: terracotta, 13th century, Mali, Inland Niger Delta region, Djenné peoples, 25/4 x 29.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The fluid contours of the body emphasize the long sweeping curve of the neck and back and the rhythmic play of intertwined limbs. Except for the barest suggestion of shoulder blades, fingers, and toes, the figure lacks anatomical details. On the back are three rows of raised marks and two rows of marks punched into the clay. These have been variously interpreted as scarification marks or symptoms of a disease.

Figure **5.2.1.3**: terracotta, 13th century, Mali, Inland Niger Delta region, Djenné peoples, 25/4 x 29.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Thermoluminescence tests indicate that this figure was fired during the first half of the thirteenth century. Other terracotta figures recovered (and, in many cases, looted) from various sites throughout the Inland Niger Delta have been dated from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. Artists—either men or women—modeled the figures by hand, using clay mixed with grog (crushed potsherds). Details of dress, jewelry, and body ornament were either added on or incised. Once complete, the work was polished, covered with a reddish-toned clay slip, and then fired, probably in an open-pit kiln.

The surviving figures vary in style and subject matter, suggesting that the sculptors had considerable artistic freedom. Our understanding of the use and meaning of such works remains speculative. A few controlled archaeological digs have revealed similar figures that were originally set into the walls of houses. Oral history collected recently in the region supports the archaeological evidence, as the figures are said to have been venerated in special sanctuaries and private homes. There is little consensus, however, on the meaning of the various forms of the terracotta figures. Scholars have suggested that this figure conveys an attitude of mourning. Its seated pose, shaved head, and lack of dress recall mourning customs still practiced by some in this region of western Africa.

© 2006 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (by permission)

Additional resources:

Explore this object—360 view, from The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Empires of the Western Sudan: Mali Empire on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Neil Brodie & Donna Yates, "Nok Terracottas" on *Trafficking Culture*

Holland Cotter, "Imperiled Legacy for African Art," *The New York Times* (August 2, 2012)

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5.2.2: Terracotta Warriors

Terracotta Warriors

“As the sun rose over the fields of Xi’an, Shaanxi Province on the 29 March 1974, a group of Chinese farmers set off for a day’s toil unaware of the astounding discovery they were about to make. There had been reports of fragments of terracotta figures in the past, but as the farmers dug a water well that morning, they uncovered one the greatest archaeological sites in the world. One can only imagine the intrigue and bemusement they must have felt when, after digging 5 m down into the loess sediment that had accumulated over the past 2000 years, they suddenly saw terracotta faces peering up at them. The first of an estimated 8000 Terracotta Warriors were emerging from the necropolis.”[2]

The emperor’s tomb and the outside environment took over thirty-five years from 246 to 208 BCE to construct. The tomb was made for the emperor and the support of his afterlife. Attending the emperor were about 8,000 terra cotta warriors, all standing in rows based on rank and heights beginning with the generals. Along with the warriors were almost 700 life-sized horses as well as chariots. Government officials, musician, and acrobats were also found in the complex, each one with distinctive facial features. The specific tomb holding the emperor remains sealed today and probably contains additional artifacts. Four pits (5.4.9) were excavated on the eastern side and the standing warriors appear to be guarding the emperor from an invasion on the eastern side. The pits were five to seven meters deep in the ground with the warriors arranged in long corridors or small adjacent rooms.

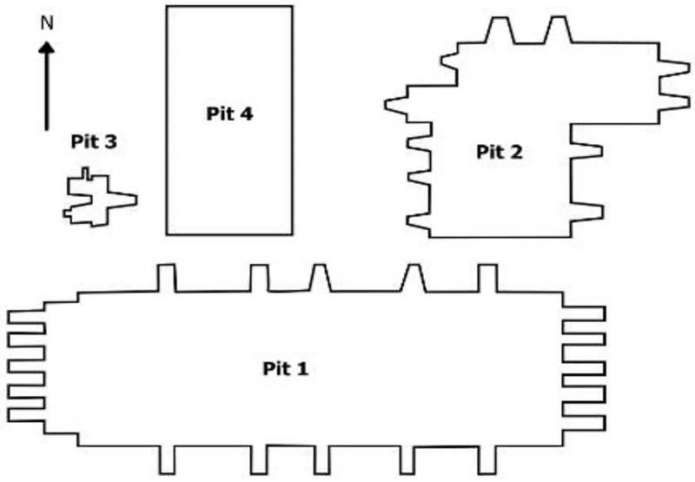

Figure 5.2.2.9: Diagram of the first four pits excavated (Alexandra Nachescu, "The Terracotta Warriors," in *Smarthistory*, August 15, 2021, accessed December 26, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/the-terracotta-warriors/.)

Pit no. 1 (5.4.10) was the largest pit and contained the main army of 6,000 soldiers (5.4.11) standing in eleven corridors made three meters wide. Small pavers covered the floor with large wooden post and beams holding up the wooden ceiling. Reed mats and layers and layers of clay and soil covered the entire project. The soil was raised two to three meters higher than the surrounding land. The view of the pit today resulted when researchers removed the roof and massive roof beams, exposing the warriors. Historians generally believe the construction of the pits started around 221 BCE when the Qin Empire was unified. “Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* records that at the time over 700,000 convicts and forced laborers were relocated to the tomb construction site. While some doubt this many laborers were used, archaeological evidence and our understanding of how the soldiers were made support this timeline. It was this massive workforce that managed to dig out Pit 1, removing what is estimated to be around 70,000 cubic meters of earth, the equivalent of the carrying capacity of 5,500 modern lorries!”[3]

Figure 5.2.2.10: Pit one (Jmhullot, CC BY 3.0)

Figure 5.2.2.11: Warriors in pit one (Maros, CC BY 3.0)

Pit no. 2 was divided into four sections. On section contained two rows of archers and spearmen and six columns of archers. Some of the archers were standing and others kneeling. Another section encompassed the sixty-four spectacular chariots including four horses for each chariot, a driver, and two aides. Another smaller set of chariots and some infantrymen were located in another section. And in the last section, archaeologists found six chariots and over one hundred cavalrymen and their horses.

Pit no. 3 was the most unusual and sparingly populated with a few infantrymen who are facing each other. They appear to be waiting for someone. In another part of the pit was an elaborately decorated chariot (5.4.12), quite different from the other chariots.

The chariot was probably for a high-level commander or maybe the emperor himself. Pit no. 4 was empty.

Figure 5.2.2.12: Pit no. 3 (頤园新居, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Terra Cotta Army

In March 1974, Chinese farmers digging a well unearthed the greatest archaeological find of the century - the buried Terracotta Army. After coming across a life-sized human head made of clay in Xi'an, China, archaeologists were called in to investigate. What they found was extraordinary. Thousands of life-like terracotta figures from the Qin dynasty, fashioned 2,000 years ago to protect the First Emperor of China in the afterlife. Archaeologist Li Xiuzhen has worked on the site since the 1980s. Her team was the first to discover that each warrior was originally painted in bright colours.

All of figures of the warriors were life-sized and were constructed with unique features. Every person had varying facial features and hair styles as though they were modeled after real people. The figures were posed to represent their rank, position, or role; a bowman was placed in a kneeling position, ready to shoot. Charioteers had their arms outstretched as though they were holding the reins in their hands and infantrymen stood with one extended arm and the other arm folded up against his chest.

Another unique feature was how the figures were dressed based on their military assignments. The chariot drivers were helmets, and the cavalry wore hats shaped like pillboxes, some of the coats were padded and others had on short pants. Because each figure was unique, artists had to create unique solutions.

The figures were constructed with the coil technique for the clay making firm, steady legs, and feet as a base. The feet and legs are thick and made by making rolls of clay similar to a drainpipe. The legs needed to hold the weight of the rest of the figure. The lower portions of the body and torsos were made with slabs or coils of clay with additional pieces added to develop the detail. Arms, heads, and hands were created by adding clay to a mold and then attaching them to the torso with a clay slip. “There was only a limited number of molds being used for every part of the body: two types have been identified for the feet, three for shoes, eight types of torsos, two types of hands, and eight types for faces”[4]. The rest of each figure was created in part and assembled. Then strips of clay were used to hold the parts together. The figures were assembled, fired, painted, and placed in their proper place.

Every figure wore extremely detailed clothing (5.4.13). In the image, the warriors appear to be wearing the same coat with strips of overlaid material and small knobs or buttons. However, the warriors have different hats and hair arrangements perhaps indicating the differences in rank. The heads and faces were made in molds and carved to achieve the uniqueness of each person regardless of age or superficial marks. The eyes on the figures might look back at the viewer or it may have closed eyes. The men usually wore their hair in a bun; however, some may have a hat on or, long hair, or a braid. Moustaches and beards might be long or thin, or cut into a specific design. A few did not have any facial hair and historians believed those people might be teens.

Figure 5.2.2.13: Detail of clothing (kevinmcgill, CC BY-SA 2.0)

“Qin’s army of clay soldiers and horses was not a somber procession, but a supernatural display swathed in a riot of bold colors: red and green, purple and yellow. Sadly, most of the colors did not survive the crucible of time—or the exposure to air that comes with discovery and excavation. In earlier digs, archaeologists often watched helplessly as the warriors’ colors disintegrated in the dry Xian air. One study showed that once exposed, the lacquer underneath the paint begins to curl after 15 seconds and flake off in just four minutes—vibrant pieces of history lost in the time it takes to boil an egg.”[5]

Figure 5.2.2.14: Recreated warriors in color (Alexandra Nachescu, "The Terracotta Warriors," in *Smarthistory*, August 15, 2021, accessed December 26, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/the-terracotta-warriors/.)

Although most of the vivid colors painted on the figures have faded away, some of the color is still visible on the crevices of their clothing. The colors highlighted every detail of the uniforms and how each warrior looked unique. Today, examples (5.4.14) of how the painted warriors appeared originally was recreated with bright colors in elaborate patterns. Each warrior had a robe painted to relate to their rank and unit they represented.

> “Some warriors wore green robes, dark blue trousers, black shoes with red laces, black armor plates with white rivets, purple cords, and gold buttons. Others wore shorter red robes, brown armor plates with red rivets, and orange cords or buttons. All their faces were flesh tone, their eyes white, and their irises, eyebrows, hair, and whiskers black.”[6

In the pits, archaeologists also found weapons which were mass produced. Spears, daggers, swords, axes, or lances were made from metal and survived intact creating a comprehensive record of the period’s weapons. Cross bows, bows and arrows and other weapons made from wood were decayed, however the metal parts survived, and researchers were able to reconstruct the weapons.

Because the clay soldiers laid in water-soaked soil for over 2,000 years, the figures started to dry causing the glaze to fall off. Today, scientists are covering the figures with a chemical used to make plastics and bombarding them with a particle accelerator to bond the coating. Currently this technique is helping preserve these important figures.[7] Historians do not know is each figure was based on an actual person or only creations. The terracotta figures were part of the emperor’s support for his journey into the afterlife.

“In 219 B.C., on the first of many inspection tours of his vast empire, the First Emperor of Qin visited Mount Yi. He ordered that a stele be erected there, and calligraphic with a text in the newly standardized script (5.4.15). The text praises the emperor for bringing peace to the world by defeating Qin’s six rival states and unifying them under his rule. Although the stele was destroyed by fire during the Tang dynasty (618–907), the inscription was passed down by scholars; the present rubbings were taken from a stele that dates from the tenth century A.D. While the calligraphic style is of that era, the balanced structure and relatively uniform size of the characters derive from the seal script established by the Qin, echoing the glorious tradition of this mighty but short-lived state.”[8]

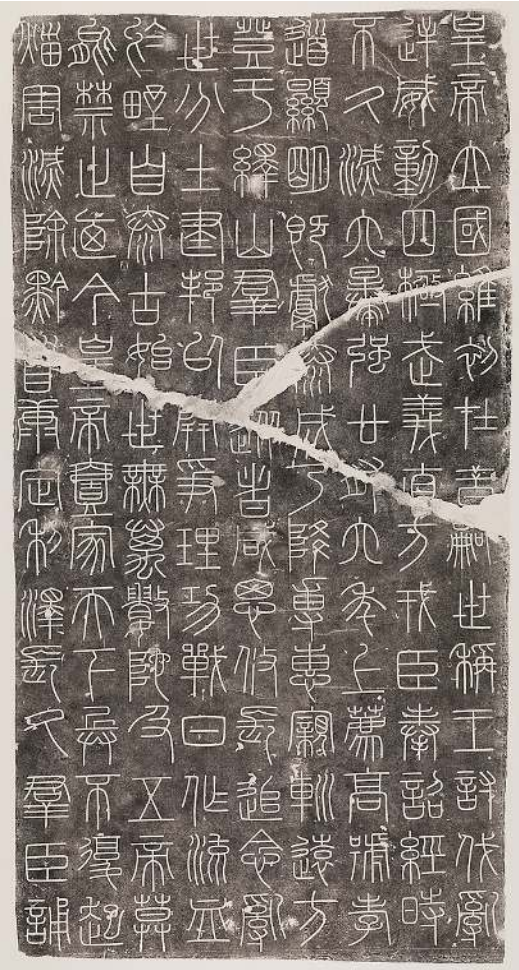

Figure 5.2.2.15: Rubbing of Mt. Yi stele (Public Domain)

The incised stones (5.4.16) were named the Stone Drums of Qin because of their unusual shape. The stones were incised with descriptions of different activities about a specific battle or hunting and fishing. The size of the stone defined the numbers of inscriptions incised in the stone. Larger stones held at least fifteen lines and smaller stones up to nine lines. The characters were carefully arranged into a grid-like pattern. Many of the lines were poetic and rhymed. The stones were inscribed in the Qin dynasty and throughout the centuries, other people have added writing or painted the stone, further damaging them.

Figure 5.2.2.16: Stone drum (Mlogic, CC BY-SA 3.0)

> "…the Qin dynasty collapsed within two decades because it did not change enough. Despite its proclamations of making a new start in a world utterly transformed, the Qin carried forward the fundamental institutions of the Warring State era, seeking to rule a unified realm with the techniques they had used to conquer it. The Qin's grandiose visions of transformation failed to confront the extensive changes that the end of permanent warfare had brought about. It fell to the Han, who took over the realm after the Qin dynasty's defeat, to carry out the major institutional programs and cultural innovations that gave form to the vision world empire."[9]

[3] Smarthistory

[4] Smarthistory

[5] Larmer, B., (June, 2012). Terracotta Warriors in Color, *National Geographic Magazine*.

[6] Schulman, H., (April, 1993). *Faces*, 9(8), p. 22.

[7]Ball. P. (November 27, 2003). Terracotta Army Saved from Crack Up, *Nature International Weekly Journal of Science*.

[8] Metropolitan Museum

[9] Lewis, M. E., (2007). *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han*, Belknap Press, p. 51

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- **5.4: Qin Dynasty (221 BCE – 206 BCE)** by Deborah Gustlin & Zoe Gustlin is licensed CC BY 4.0.

5.2.3: Woman with Wax Tablets and Stylus

Woman with Wax Tablets and Stylus

Learn more here: https://ancientrome.ru

Figure 5.2.3.1: Woman with wax tablets and stylus, c. 50 CE. Fresco. National Archaeological Museum, Naples. (Photo: Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0)

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5.2.4: Sugar Cane

by DR. MATTHEW AFFRON and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
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Video **5.2.4.1**: José Diego María Rivera, *Sugar Cane*, 1931, fresco, 145.1 × 239.1 cm © 2014 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

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- **10.9: Latin American Modernism** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.2.5: Justinian and Attendants

Byzantine art

The Roman Empire continued as the Byzantine Empire, with its capital at Constantinople.

c. 330 - 1453 C.E.

A beginner's guide

Byzantine art, an introduction

by DR. ELLEN HURST

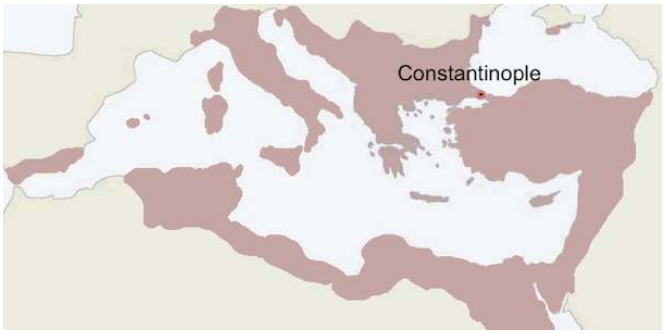

Figure **5.2.5.1**: The Byzantine Empire near its peak under the Emperor Justinian, c. 550 C.E.

To speak of “Byzantine Art” is a bit problematic, since the Byzantine empire and its art spanned more than a millennium and penetrated geographic regions far from its capital in Constantinople. Thus, Byzantine art includes work created from the fourth century to the fifteenth century and encompassing parts of the Italian peninsula, the eastern edge of the Slavic world, the Middle East, and North Africa. So what is Byzantine art, and what do we mean when we use this term?

Figure **5.2.5.2**: Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532-37 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

It’s helpful to know that Byzantine art is generally divided up into three distinct periods:

> ***Early Byzantine (c. 330–843)***
> ***Middle Byzantine (c. 843–1204)***
> ***Late Byzantine (c. 1261–1453)***

Figure **5.2.5.3**: Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George, sixth or early seventh century, encaustic on wood, 2′ 3″ x 1′ 7 3/8″ (St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt)

The Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity and in 330 moved his capital from Rome to Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), at the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. Christianity flourished and gradually supplanted the Greco-Roman gods that had once defined Roman religion and culture. This religious shift dramatically affected the art that was created across the empire.

The earliest Christian churches were built during this period, including the famed Hagia Sophia (above), which was built in the sixth century under Emperor Justinian. Decorations for the interior of churches, including icons and mosaics, were also made during this period. Icons, such as the *Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George* (left), served as tools for the faithful to access the spiritual world—they served as spiritual gateways.

Similarly, mosaics, such as those within the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna, sought to evoke the heavenly realm. In this work, ethereal figures seem to float against a gold background that is representative of no identifiable earthly space. By placing these figures in a spiritual world, the mosaics gave worshipers some access to that world as well. At the same time, there are real-world political messages affirming the power of the rulers in these mosaics. In this sense, art of the Byzantine Empire continued some of the traditions of Roman art.

Figure **5.2.5.4**: Emperor Justinian Mosaic, San Vitale, Ravenna, c. 546-56

Generally speaking, Byzantine art differs from the art of the Romans in that it is interested in depicting that which we cannot see—the intangible world of Heaven and the spiritual. Thus, the Greco-Roman interest in depth and naturalism is replaced by an interest in flatness and mystery.

Middle Byzantine (c. 850–1204)

The Middle Byzantine period followed a period of crisis for the arts called the Iconoclastic Controversy, when the use of religious images was hotly contested. Iconoclasts (those who worried that the use of images was idolatrous), destroyed images, leaving few surviving images from the

Early Byzantine period. Fortunately for art history, those in favor of images won the fight and hundreds of years of Byzantine artistic production followed.

The stylistic and thematic interests of the Early Byzantine period continued during the Middle Byzantine period, with a focus on building churches and decorating their interiors. There were some significant changes in the empire, however, that brought about some change in the arts. First, the influence of the empire spread into the Slavic world with the Russian adoption of Orthodox Christianity in the tenth century. Byzantine art was therefore given new life in the Slavic lands.

Figure 5.2.5.5: Hosios Loukas, Greece, early 11th century (photos: Jonathan Khoo, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

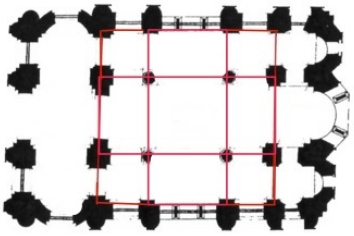

Figure 5.2.5.6: Plan of a typical cross-in-square church (cross in square indicated by red lines)

Architecture in the Middle Byzantine period overwhelmingly moved toward the centralized cross-in-square plan for which Byzantine architecture is best known.

These churches were usually on a much smaller-scale than the massive Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, but, like Hagia Sophia, the roofline of these churches was always defined by a dome or domes. This period also saw increased ornamentation on church exteriors. A particularly good example of this is the tenth-century Hosios Loukas Monastery in Greece (above).

Figure 5.2.5.7: Harbaville Triptych, ivory, traces of polychromy, 28.2 x 24.2 cm (Louvre)

Figure 5.2.5.8: Lower register (detail), *Harbaville Triptych*, ivory, traces of polychromy, 28.2 x 24.2 cm (Louvre)

This was also a period of increased stability and wealth. As such, wealthy patrons commissioned private luxury items, including carved ivories, such as the celebrated Harbaville Tryptich (above and below), which was used as a private devotional object. Like the sixth-century icon discussed above (*Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George*), it helped the viewer gain access to the heavenly realm. Interestingly, the heritage of the Greco-Roman world can be seen here, in the awareness of mass and space. See for example the subtle breaking of the straight fall of drapery by the right knee that projects forward in the two figures in the bottom register of the Harbaville Triptych (left). This interest in representing the body with some naturalism is reflective of a revived interest in the classical past during this period. So, as much as it is tempting to describe all Byzantine art as “ethereal” or “flattened,” it is more accurate to say that Byzantine art is diverse. There were many political and religious interests as well as distinct cultural forces that shaped the art of different periods and regions within the Byzantine Empire.

Late Byzantine (c. 1261– 1453)

Between 1204 and 1261, the Byzantine Empire suffered another crisis: the Latin Occupation. Crusaders from Western Europe invaded and captured Constantinople in 1204, temporarily toppling the empire in an attempt to bring the eastern empire back into the fold of western Christendom. (By this point Christianity had divided into two distinct camps: eastern [Orthodox] Christianity in the Byzantine Empire and western [Latin] Christianity in the European west.)

Figure **5.2.5.9**: Anastasis (Harrowing of Hell), c. 1310-20, fresco, Church of the Holy Savior of Chora/Kariye Museum, Istanbul

By 1261 the Byzantine Empire was free of its western occupiers and stood as an independent empire once again, albeit markedly weakened. The breadth of the empire had shrunk, and so had its power. Nevertheless Byzantium survived until the Ottomans took Constantinople in 1453. In spite of this period of diminished wealth and stability, the arts continued to flourish in the Late Byzantine period, much as it had before.

Figure **5.2.5.10**: Icon of St. George ('The Black George'), c. 1400-1450, tempera on panel, 77.4 x 57 cm (The British Museum)

Although Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453—bringing about the end of the Byzantine Empire—Byzantine art and culture continued to live on in its far-reaching outposts, as well as in Greece, Italy, and the Ottoman Empire, where it had flourished for so long. The Russian Empire, which was first starting to emerge around the time Constantinople fell, carried on as the heir of Byzantium, with churches and icons created in a distinct "Russo-Byzantine" style (left). Similarly, in Italy, when the Renaissance was first emerging, it borrowed heavily from the traditions of Byzantium. Cimabue's ***Madonna Enthroned*** of 1280–1290 is one of the earliest examples of the Renaissance interest in space and depth in panel painting. But the painting relies on Byzantine conventions and is altogether indebted to the arts of Byzantium.

So, while we can talk of the end of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, it is much more difficult to draw geographic or temporal boundaries around the empire, for it spread out to neighboring regions and persisted in artistic traditions long after its own demise.

Additional resources:

Harbaville Triptych at the Louvre

Byzantium on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

For instructors: related lesson plan on Art History Teaching Resources

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

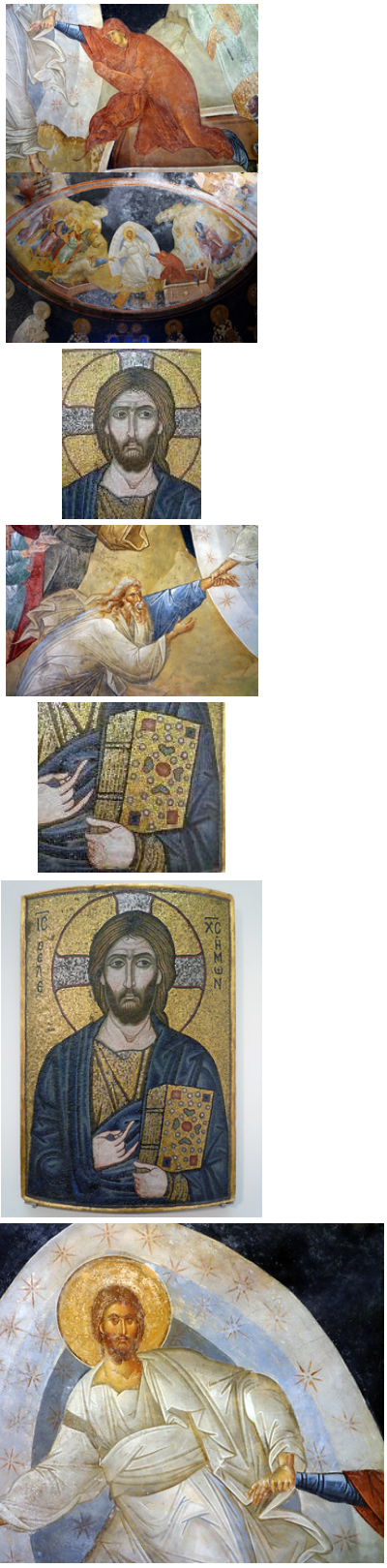

Figure 5.2.5.11: More Smarthistory images…

About the chronological periods of the Byzantine Empire

by DR. EVAN FREEMAN

This essay is intended to introduce the periods of Byzantine history, with attention to developments in art and architecture.

Figure 5.2.5.12: The Colossus of Constantine, c. 312–15 (Palazzo dei Conservatori, Musei Capitolini, Rome) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

From Rome to Constantinople

In 313, the Roman Empire legalized Christianity, beginning a process that would eventually dismantle its centuries-old pagan tradition. Not long after, emperor Constantine transferred the empire's capital from Rome to the ancient Greek city of Byzantion (modern Istanbul). Constantine renamed the new capital city "Constantinople" ("the city of Constantine") after himself and dedicated it in the year 330. With these events, the Byzantine Empire was born—or was it?

Figure 5.2.5.13: Map with Rome and Constantinople (underlying map © Google).

The term "Byzantine Empire" is a bit of a misnomer. The Byzantines understood their empire to be a continuation of the ancient Roman Empire and referred to themselves as "Romans." The use of the term "Byzantine" only became widespread in Europe after Constantinople finally fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. For this reason, some scholars refer to Byzantium as the "Eastern Roman Empire."

Byzantine History

The history of Byzantium is remarkably long. If we reckon the history of the Eastern Roman Empire from the dedication of Constantinople in 330 until its fall to the Ottomans in 1453, the empire endured for some 1,123 years.

Scholars typically divide Byzantine history into three major periods: *Early Byzantium*, *Middle Byzantium*, and *Late Byzantium*. But it is important to note that these historical designations are the invention of modern scholars rather than the Byzantines themselves. Nevertheless, these periods can be helpful for marking significant events, contextualizing art and architecture, and understanding larger cultural trends in Byzantium's history.

Early Byzantium: c. 330–843

Scholars often disagree about the parameters of the Early Byzantine period. On the one hand, this period saw a continuation of Roman society and culture—so, is it really correct to say it began in 330? On the other, the empire's acceptance of Christianity and geographical shift to the east inaugurated a new era.

Figure 5.2.5.14: Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna (Italy), c. 533–49 (apse mosaic, 6th century, triumphal arch mosaics, likely c. 7th–12th centuries) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Following Constantine's embrace of Christianity, the church enjoyed imperial patronage, constructing **monumental churches** in centers such as Rome, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. In the west, the empire faced numerous attacks by Germanic nomads from the north, and Rome was sacked by the Goths in 410 and by the Vandals in 455. The city of Ravenna in northeastern Italy rose to prominence in the 5th and 6th centuries when it functioned as an imperial capital for the western half of the empire. Several churches adorned with opulent mosaics, such as **San Vitale** and the nearby **Sant'Apollinare in Classe**, testify to the importance of Ravenna during this time.

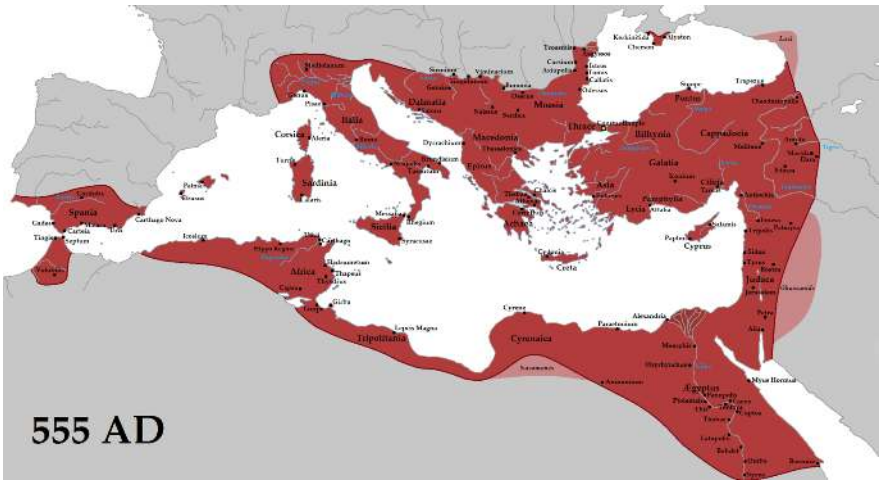

Figure 5.2.5.16: Approximate boundaries of the Byzantine Empire under emperor Justinian I, c. 555 (Tataryn, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Under the sixth-century emperor Justinian I, who reigned 527–565, the Byzantine Empire expanded to its largest geographical area: encompassing the Balkans to the north, Egypt and other parts of north Africa to the south, Anatolia (what is now Turkey) and the Levant (including including modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan) to the east, and Italy and the southern Iberian Peninsula (now Spain and Portugal) to the west. Many of Byzantium's greatest architectural monuments, such as the innovative domed basilica of **Hagia Sophia** in Constantinople, were also built during **Justinian's** reign.

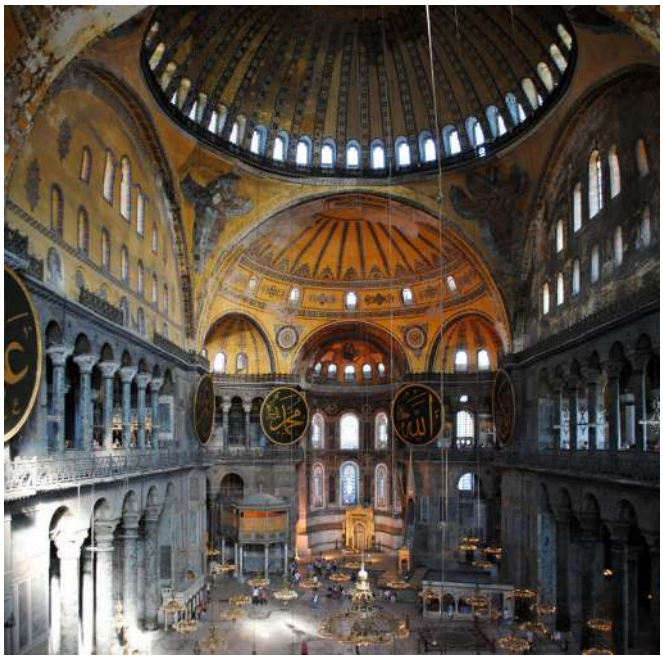

Figure 5.2.5.17: Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul), 532–37 (photo: © Robert G. Ousterhout)

Constantinople (map: Carolyn Connor and Tom Elliot, <a href="http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/free-maps/byzantine-constantinople/" target="_blank" rel="noopener"
Ancient World Mapping Center, CC BY-NC 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-49875" height="285" sizes="(max-width: 350px) 100vw, 350px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.18: Constantinople (map: Carolyn Connor and Tom Elliot, **Ancient World Mapping Center**, CC BY-NC 3.0)

Following the example of Rome, Constantinople featured a number of outdoor public spaces—including major streets, ***fora***, as well as a hippodrome (a course for horse or chariot racing with public seating)—in which emperors and church officials often participated in showy public ceremonies such as processions.

Christian monasticism, which began to thrive in the 4th century, received imperial patronage at sites like Mount Sinai in Egypt.

Figure 5.2.5.19: Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt (photo: **Joonas Plaan**, CC BY 2.0)

Figure 5.2.5.20: Apse mosaic with Virgin and Child, c. 867, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Yet the mid-7th century began what some scholars call the "dark ages" or the "transitional period" in Byzantine history. Following the rise of **Islam** in Arabia and subsequent attacks by Arab invaders, Byzantium lost substantial territories, including Syria and Egypt, as well as the symbolically important city of Jerusalem with its sacred pilgrimage sites. The empire experienced a decline in trade and an economic downturn.

Against this backdrop, and perhaps fueled by anxieties about the fate of the empire, the so-called "**Iconoclastic Controversy**" erupted in Constantinople in the 8th and 9th centuries. Church leaders and emperors debated the use of religious images that depicted Christ and the saints, some honoring them as holy images, or "icons," and others condemning them as idols (like the images of deities in ancient Rome) and apparently destroying some. Finally, in 843, Church and imperial authorities definitively affirmed the use of religious images and ended the Iconoclastic Controversy, an event subsequently celebrated by the Byzantines as the "Triumph of Orthodoxy."

Middle Byzantium: c. 843–1204

In the period following Iconoclasm, the Byzantine empire enjoyed a growing economy and reclaimed some of the territories it lost earlier. With the affirmation of images in 843, art and architecture once again flourished. But Byzantine culture also underwent several changes.

Middle Byzantine churches elaborated on the innovations of Justinian's reign, but were often constructed by private patrons and tended to be smaller than the large imperial monuments of Early Byzantium. The smaller scale of Middle Byzantine churches also coincided with a reduction of large, public ceremonies.

Figure 5.2.5.21: Katholikon church, 11th century, Hosios Loukas, Boeotia (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Monumental depictions of **Christ and the Virgin**, biblical events, and an array of various saints adorned church interiors, as seen in the sophisticated decorative programs at the monastery churches of **Hosios Loukas, Nea Moni, and Daphni** in Greece. But Middle Byzantine churches largely exclude depictions of the flora and fauna of the natural world that often appeared in **Early Byzantine mosaics**, perhaps in response to accusations of idolatry during the Iconoclastic Controversy. In addition to these developments in architecture and monumental art, exquisite examples of **manuscripts**, cloisonné enamels, stonework, and ivory carving survive from this period as well.

The Middle Byzantine period also saw increased tensions between the Byzantines and western Europeans (whom the Byzantines often referred to as "Latins" or "Franks"). The so-called "Great Schism" of 1054 signaled growing divisions between Orthodox Christians in Byzantium and Roman Catholics in western Europe.

The Fourth Crusade and the Latin Empire: 1204–1261

In 1204, the Fourth Crusade—undertaken by western Europeans loyal to the pope in Rome—veered from its path to Jerusalem and sacked the Christian city of Constantinople. Many of Constantinople's artistic treasures were destroyed or **carried back to western Europe** as booty. The crusaders occupied Constantinople and established a "Latin Empire" in Byzantine territory. Exiled Byzantine leaders established three successor states: the Empire of Nicaea in northwestern Anatolia, the Empire of Trebizond in northeastern Anatolia, and the Despotate of Epirus in northwestern Greece and Albania. In 1261, the Empire of Nicaea retook Constantinople and crowned Michael VIII Palaiologos as emperor, establishing the Palaiologan dynasty that would reign until the end of the Byzantine Empire.

Figure 5.2.5.22: The route and results of the Fourth Crusade (Kandi, CC BY-SA 4.0)

While the Fourth Crusade fueled animosity between eastern and western Christians, the crusades nevertheless encouraged cross-cultural exchange that is apparent in the arts of Byzantium and western Europe, and particularly in Italian paintings of the late medieval and early Renaissance periods, exemplified by new **depictions of St. Francis** painted in the so-called Italo-Byzantine style.

Late Byzantium: 1261–1453

Artistic patronage again flourished after the Byzantines re-established their capital in 1261. Some scholars refer to this cultural flowering as the "Palaiologan Renaissance" (after the ruling Palaiologan dynasty). Several existing churches—such as the **Chora Monastery** in Constantinople—were renovated, **expanded**, and lavishly decorated with mosaics and frescos. Byzantine artists were also active outside Constantinople, both in Byzantine centers such as Thessaloniki, as well as in neighboring lands, such as the Kingdom of Serbia, where the signatures of the painters named Michael Astrapas and Eutychios have been preserved in frescos from the late 13th and early 14th centuries.

Figure **5.2.5.23**: Mosaic of Theodore Metochites offering the Chora church to Christ, Chora monastery, Constantinople (Istanbul) c. 1315–21 (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Yet the Byzantine Empire never fully recovered from the blow of the Fourth Crusade, and its territory continued to shrink. Byzantium's calls for military aid from western Europeans in the face of the growing threat of the Ottoman Turks in the east remained unanswered. In 1453, the Ottomans finally conquered Constantinople, converting many of Byzantium's great churches into **mosques**, and ending the long history of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire.

Figure **5.2.5.24**: Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul—designed by Mimar Sinan and inaugurated 1557—was influenced by Byzantine architecture (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Figure 5.2.5.25: Andrei Rublev, *The Trinity*, c. 1410, tempera on wood, 142 × 114 cm (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow)

Post-Byzantium: after 1453

Despite the ultimate demise of the Byzantine Empire, the legacy of Byzantium continued. This is evident in formerly Byzantine territories like Crete, where the so-called "Cretan School" of iconography flourished under Venetian rule (a famous product of the Cretan School being Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as **El Greco**).

But Byzantium's influence also continued to spread beyond its former cultural and geographic boundaries, in the architecture of the Ottomans, the icons of Russia, the paintings of Italy, and elsewhere.

Additional Resources

Video 5.2.5.1: "Byzantium (ca. 330–1453)," The Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Iconoclastic controversies

by DR. DAVOR DŽALTO

Figure 5.2.5.26: Apa Abraham, c. 590-600, watercolor on panel, Egyptian (Bode Museum, Berlin)

The word “icon” refers to many different things today. For example, we use this word to refer to the small graphic symbols in our software and to powerful cultural figures. Nevertheless, these different meanings retain a connection to the word’s original meaning. “Icon” is Greek for “image” or “painting” and during the medieval era, this meant a religious image on a wooden panel used for prayer and devotion. More specifically, icons came to typify the art of the Orthodox Christian Church.

“Iconoclasm” refers to the destruction of images or hostility toward visual representations in general. More specifically, the word is used for the Iconoclastic Controversy that shook the Byzantine Empire for more than 100 years.

Open hostility toward religious representations began in 726 when Emperor Leo III publicly took a position against icons; this resulted in their removal from churches and their destruction. There had been many previous theological disputes over visual representations, their theological foundations and legitimacy. However, none of these caused the tremendous social, political and cultural upheaval of the Iconoclastic Controversy.

Figure **5.2.5.27**: Christ Pantocrator (The Ruler of the Universe), Catacombs of Commodilla, 4th century

Some historians believe that by prohibiting icons, the Emperor sought to integrate Muslim and Jewish populations. Both Muslims and Jews perceived Christian images (that existed from the earliest times of Christianity) as idols and in direct opposition to the Old Testament prohibition of visual representations. The first commandment states,

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image – any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth. You shall not adore them, nor serve them (Exodus 20:3-5).

Another theory suggests that the prohibition was an attempt to restrain the growing wealth and power of the monasteries. They produced the icons and were a primary target of the violence of the Iconoclastic Controversy. Other scholars offer a less political motive, suggesting that the prohibition was primarily religious, an attempt to correct the wayward practice of worshiping images.

The trigger for Leo III’s prohibition may have even been the huge volcanic eruption in 726 in the Aegean Sea interpreted as a sign of God’s anger over the veneration of icons. There is no one simple answer to this complex event. What we do know is that the prohibition essentially caused a civil war which shook the political, social and religious spheres of the empire. The conflict pitted the emperor and certain high church officials (patriarchs, bishops) who supported iconoclasm, against other bishops, lower clergy, laity and monks, who defended the icons.

Figure **5.2.5.28**: Khludov Psalter (detail), 9th century. The image represents the Iconoclast theologian, John the Grammarian, and an iconoclast bishop destroying an image of Christ. (State Historical Museum, Moscow)

The original theological basis for iconoclasm was fairly weak. Arguments relied mostly on the Old Testament prohibition (quoted above). But it was clear that this prohibition was not absolute since God also instructs how to make three dimensional representations of the Cherubim (heavenly spirits or angels) for the Ark of the Covenant, which is also quoted in the Old Testament, just a couple of chapters after the passage that prohibits images (Exodus 25:18-20).

Emperor Constantine V gave a more nuanced theological rationale for iconoclasm. He claimed that each visual representation of Christ necessarily ends in a heresy since Christ, according to generally accepted Christian dogmas, is simultaneously God and man, united without separation, and any visual depiction of Christ either separates these natures, representing Christ's humanity alone, or confuses them.

The iconophile (pro-icon) counter-argument was most convincingly articulated by St. John of Damascus and St. Theodore the Studite. They claimed that the iconoclast arguments were simply confused. Images of Christ do not depict natures, being either Divine or human, but a concrete person—Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. They claimed that in Christ the meaning of the Old Testament prohibition is revealed: God prohibited any representation of God (or anything that could be worshiped as a god) because it was impossible to depict the invisible God. Any such representation would thus be an idol, essentially a false representation or false god. But in Christ's person, God became visible, as a concrete human being, so painting Christ is necessary as a proof that God truly, not seemingly, became man. The fact that one can depict Christ witnesses God's incarnation.

Figure 5.2.5.29: Madonna with Christ, 9th century, mosaic, Hagia Sophia (Istanbul). This mosaic follows the iconoclastic crisis and revives stylistic elements from early Christian art.

The first phase of iconoclasm ended in 787, when the Seventh Ecumenical (universal) Council of bishops met in Nicaea. This council affirmed the view of the iconophiles, ordering all right-believing (orthodox) Christians to respect holy icons, prohibiting at the same time their adoration as idolatry. Emperor Leo V initiated a second period of iconoclasm in 814, but in 843, Empress Theodora proclaimed the restoration of icons and affirmed the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical council. This event is still celebrated in the Orthodox Church as the "Feast of Orthodoxy."

Additional resources:

Icons and iconoclasm in Byzantium on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

The power of icons

The Triumph of Images: Icons, Iconoclasm, and the Incarnation

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

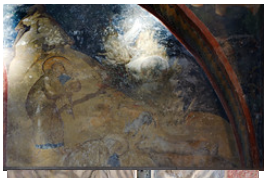
Figure 5.2.5.30: More Smarthistory images…

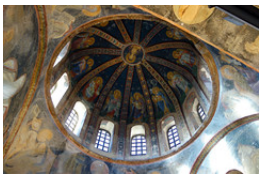
Ancient and Byzantine mosaic materials

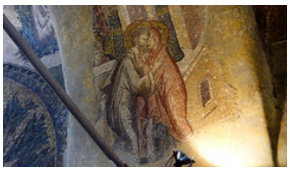
by ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Video 5.2.5.2: Video from the Art Institute of Chicago

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:







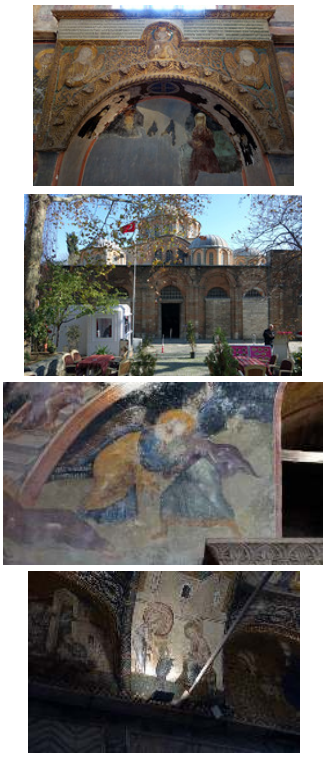


Figure **5.2.5.31**: More Smarthistory images…

Early Byzantine (including Iconoclasm)

The origins of Byzantine architecture

by DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

Periods of Byzantine history

Early Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) c. 330 – 843

Middle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

The Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

Late Byzantine 1261 – 1453

Post-Byzantine after 1453

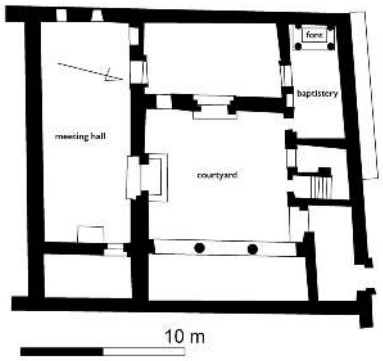


Figure **5.2.5.32**: Dura Europos, house church floor plan, c. 230 (adapted from plan by **Udimu**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Buildings for a minority religion

Officially Byzantine architecture begins with Constantine, but the seeds for its development were sown at least a century before the Edict of Milan (313) granted toleration to Christianity. Although limited physical evidence survives, a combination of archaeology and texts may help us

to understand the formation of an architecture in service of the new religion.

The *domus ecclesiae*, or house-church, most often represented an adaptation of an existing Late Antique residence to include a meeting hall and perhaps a baptistery. Most examples are known from texts; while there are significant remains in Rome, where they were known as *tituli*, most early sites of Christian worship were subsequently rebuilt and enlarged to give them a suitably public character, thus destroying much of the physical evidence.

Synagogues and mithraia from the period are considerably better preserved. A notable exception is the Christian House at Dura-Europas in Syria, built c. 200 on a typical courtyard plan. Modified c. 230, two rooms were joined to form a longitudinal meeting hall; another was provided with a *piscina* (a basin for water) to function as a baptistery for Christian initiation.

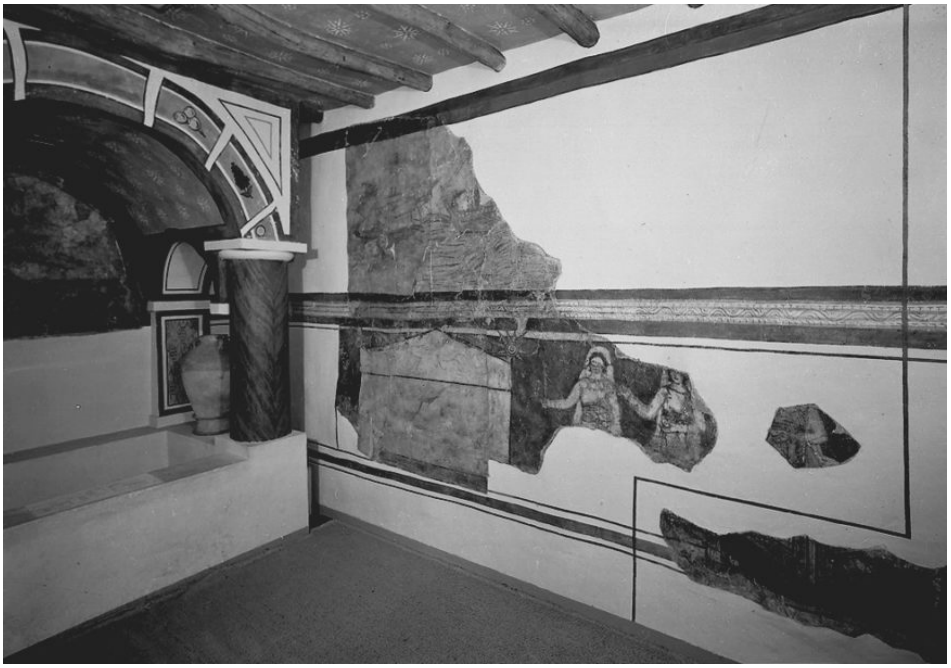


Figure **5.2.5.33**: Baptistery reconstruction, house church, Dura Europos, (Yale University Art Gallery)

Another house-church, considerably modified, was the house of St. Peter at Capharnaum, visited by early pilgrims.

Early Christian burials

Better evidence survives for burial customs, which were of prime concern in a religion that promised salvation after death. Unlike pagans, who practiced both cremation and inhumation (burial), Christians insisted upon inhumation because of the belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead at the end of days. In addition to *areae* (above-ground cemeteries) and **catacombs** (underground cemeteries), Christians required settings for commemorative banquets or *refrigeria*, a carry-over from pagan practices.

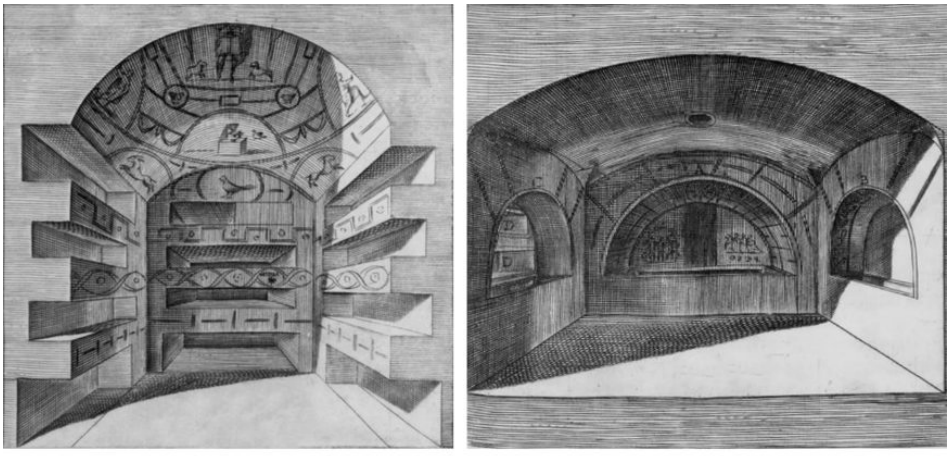


Figure **5.2.5.34**: Roman catacombs, *cubiculum* with *loculi* (left), *cubiculum* with *arcosolia* (right), adapted from Antonio Bosio, *Roma sotterranea, opera postuma di Antonio Bosio romano, antiquario ecclesiastico singolare de' suoi tempi* (Rome: 1632) (**Bibliothèque Nationale de France**)

The earliest Christian burials at the Roman catacombs were situated amid those of other religions, but by the end of the second century, exclusively Christian cemeteries are known, beginning with the Catacomb of St. Callixtus on the Via Appia, c. 230. Originally well organized with a series of parallel corridors carved into the tufa (a porous rock common in Italy), the catacombs expanded and grew more labyrinthine over the subsequent centuries. Within, the most common form of tomb was a simple, shelf-like *loculus* organized in multiple tiers in the walls of the corridors. Small *cubicula* surrounded with *arcosolium* tombs provided setting for wealthier burials and provide evidence of social stratification within the Christian community.

Above ground, a simple covered structure provided a setting for the *refrigeria*, such as the *triclia* excavated beneath S. Sebastiano, by the entrance to the catacombs.

The development of a cult of martyrs with the early church led to the development of commemorative monuments, usually called *martyria*, but also referred to in texts as *tropaia* and *heroa*. Among those in Rome, the most important was the tropaion marking the tomb of St. Peter in the necropolis on the Vatican Hill.

Figure **5.2.5.35**: Crypt of the Popes, Catacombs of Callixtus, Rome, 3rd century (photo: **Dnalor 01**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Increasing visibility

By the time of the Tetrarchy, Christian buildings had become more visible and more public, but without the scale and lavishness of their official successors. In Rome, the meeting hall of S. Crisogono seems to have been founded c. 300 as a visible Christian monument. Similarly in Nikomedia at the same time, the Christian meeting hall was prominent enough to be seen from the imperial palace. Just as the administrative structure of the church and the basic character of Christian worship were established in the early centuries, pre-Constantinian building laid the groundwork for later architectural developments, addressing the basic functions that would be of prime concern in later centuries: communal worship, initiation into the cult, burial, and the commemoration of the dead.

Figure 5.2.5.36: **The Colossus of Constantine**, c. 312-15 (Palazzo dei Conservatori, Musei Capitolini, Rome) (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

With Constantine's acceptance of Christianity as an official religion of the Roman Empire in 313, he committed himself to the patronage of buildings meant to compete visually with their pagan counterparts. In major centers like Rome, this meant the construction of huge basilicas capable of holding congregations numbering into the thousands. Although the symbolic associations of the Christian basilica with its **Roman predecessors** have been debated, it thematized power and opulence in ways comparable to but not exclusive to imperial buildings.

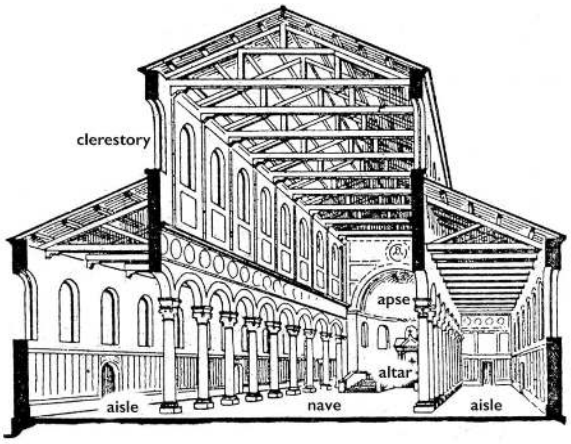


Figure 5.2.5.37: Elements of a Christian basilica, adapted from illustration of S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, in Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, 6th ed. (London: B. T. Batsford, 1921)

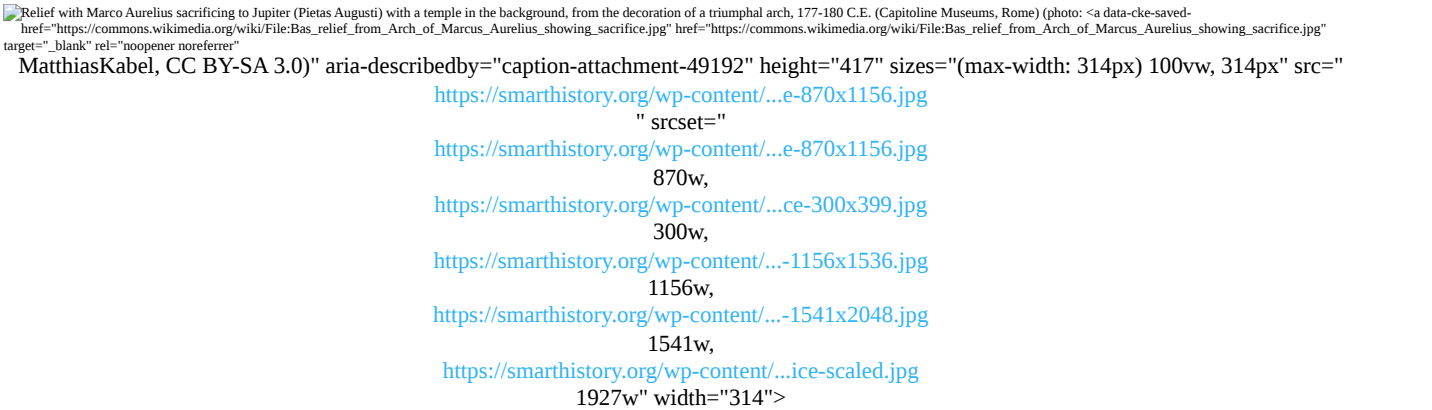


Figure 5.2.5.38: Relief with Marco Aurelius sacrificing to Jupiter (Pietas Augusti) with a temple in the background, from the decoration of a triumphal arch, 177-180 C.E. (Capitoline Museums, Rome) (photo: **MatthiasKabel**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Formally, the basilica also stood in sharp contrast to the **pagan temple**, at which worship was conducted out of doors. The church basilica was essentially a meeting house, not a sacred structure, but a sacred presence was created by the congregation joining in common prayer—the people, not the building, comprised the *ekklesia* (the Greek word for "church").

The Lateran basilica, originally dedicated to Christ, was begun c. 313 to serve as Rome's cathedral, built on the grounds of an imperial palace, donated to be the residence of the bishop. Five-aisled in plan, the basilica's tall nave was illuminated by clerestory windows, which rose above coupled side aisles along the flanks and terminated in an apse at the west end, which held seats for the clergy. Before the apse, the altar was surrounded by a silver enclosure, decorated with statues of Christ and the Apostles.

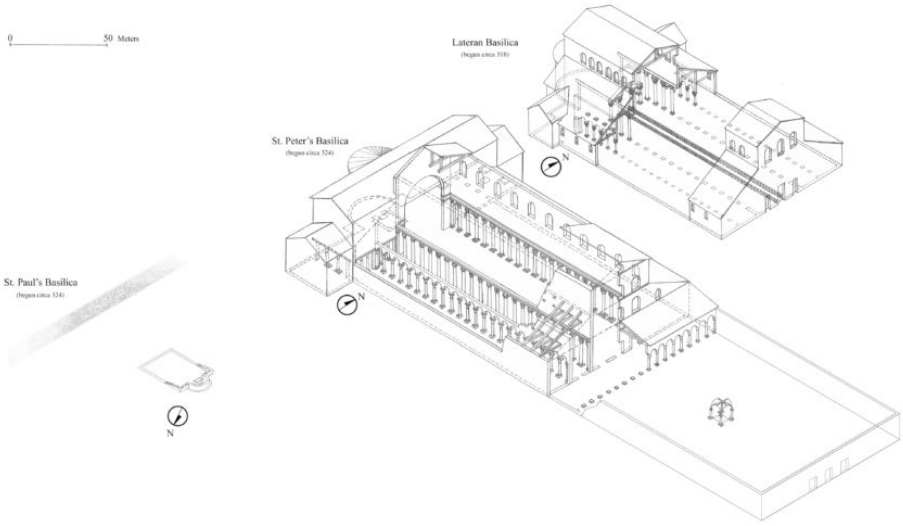


Figure 5.2.5.39: Comparative view of the Constantinian basilicas at St. Paul's, St. Peter's, and at the Lateran. Model of St. Paul's by Evan Gallitelli. Image by Evan Gallitelli includes drawings by Konstantin Brandenburg published in Hugo Brandenburg's Ancient Churches of Rome from the Fourth to the Seventh Century (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), fig. 1. (© **Nicola Camerlenghi**)

In addition to congregational churches, among which the Lateran stands at the forefront, a second type of basilica (or ambulatory basilica) appeared in Rome at the same time, set within the cemeteries outside the city walls, apparently associated with the venerated graves of martyrs. S. Sebastiano, probably originally the Basilica Apostolorum, which may have been begun immediately before the the Peace of the Church, rose on the site of the earlier *triclia*, in which graffiti testify to the special veneration of Peter and Paul at the site. These so-called cemetery basilicas provided a setting for commemorative funeral banquets. Essentially covered burial grounds, the floors of the basilicas were paved with graves and their walls enveloped by mausolea.

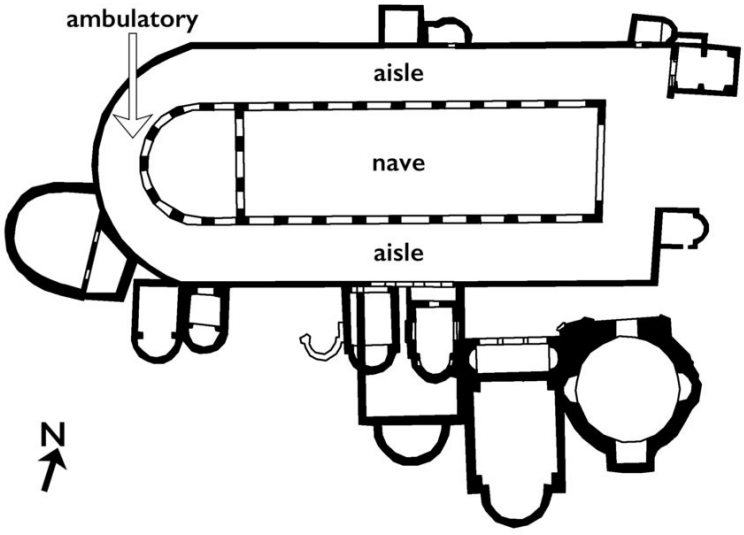


Figure 5.2.5.40: Plan of the Basilica Apostolorum (redrawn, Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

In plan they were three-aisled, with the aisle continuing into an **ambulatory** surrounding the apse at the west end. By the end of the fourth century, however, the practice of the funerary banquet was suppressed, and the grand cemetery basilicas were either abandoned or transformed into parish churches.

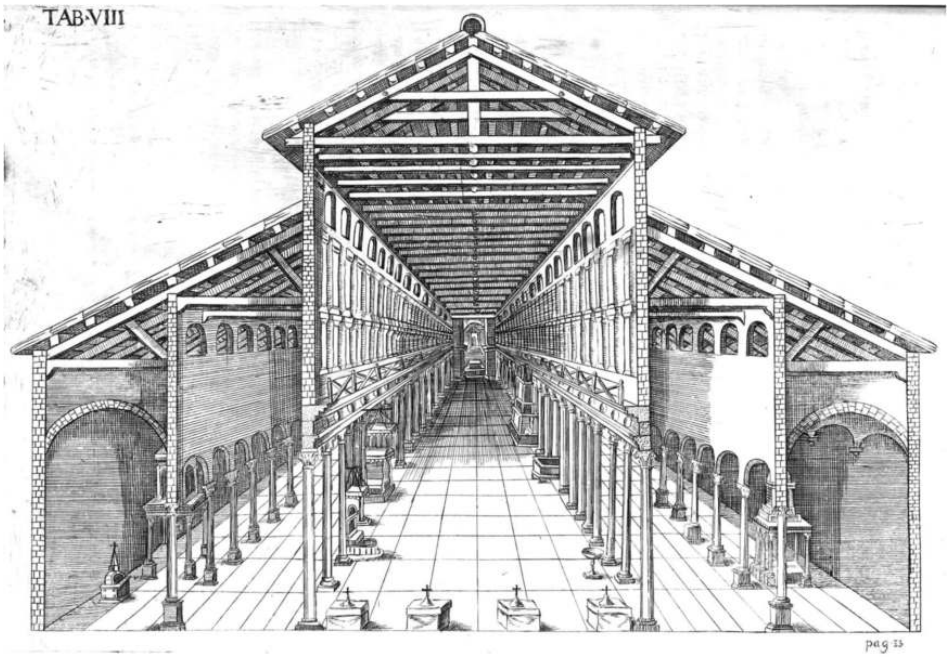


Figure **5.2.5.41**: Constantine's St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, from: Giovanni Ciampini, ***De sacris aedificiis a Constantino Magno constructis: synopsis historica***, 1693, p. 33

Figure **5.2.5.42**: Ciborium of Old St. Peter's, Werro, *Itinerarium von der saeligen Reise gegen Romeund Jerusalem im Jahr 1581* (Fribourg, Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, ms. L 181, f. 16v)

Constantine also supported the construction of monumental martyria.

Most important in the West was St. Peter's basilica in Rome, begun c. 324, originally functioning as a combination of cemetery basilica and martyrium, sited so that the focal point was the marker at the tomb of Peter, covered by a ciborium (canopy) and located at the chord of the western apse. The enormous five-aisled basilica served as the setting for burials and the *refrigeria*. To this was juxtaposed a transept – essentially a transverse, single-aisled nave—which provided access to the saint's tomb. The eastern atrium seems to have been slightly later in date.

Reconstructed plan of Constantine's St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, c. 320, adapted from Banister F. Fletcher, <em
A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method, 5th ed. (London: B. T. Batsford, 1905)." aria-describedby="caption-attachment-49156" height="346" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.43**: Reconstructed plan of Constantine's St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, c. 320, adapted from Banister F. Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, 5th ed. (London: B. T. Batsford, 1905).

In the Holy Land, major shrines similarly juxtaposed congregational basilicas with centrally-planned commemorative structures housing the venerated site. At Bethlehem (c. 324), a short five-aisled basilica terminated in an octagon marking the site of Christ's birth. At Jerusalem,

Constantine's church of the Holy Sepulchre (dedicated 336) marked the sites of Christ's Crucifixion, Entombment, and Resurrection, and consisted of a sprawling complex with an atrium opening from the main street of the city; a five-aisled, galleried congregational basilica; an inner courtyard with the rock of Calvary in a chapel at its southeast corner; and the aedicula of the Tomb of Christ, freed from the surrounding bedrock, to the west. The Anastasis Rotunda, enclosing the Tomb aedicula, was completed only after Constantine's death.

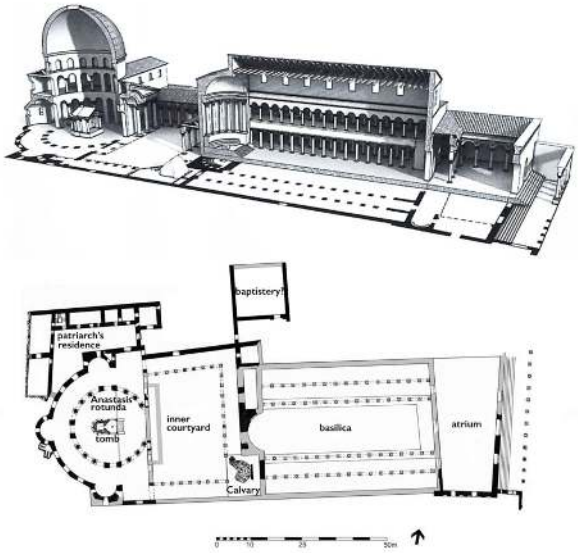

Figure 5.2.5.44: Restored plan and hypothetical section, church of the Holy Sepulchre, c. 350 C.E. (© Robert G: Ousterhout and Tayfun Öner)

Most martyria were considerably simpler, often no more than a small basilica. At Constantine's Eleona church on the Mount of Olives, for example, a simple basilica was constructed above the cave where Christ had taught the Apostles.

Pilgrims' accounts, such as that left by the Spanish nun Egeria (c. 380), provide a fascinating view of life at the shrines. These great buildings played an important role in the development of the **cult of relics**, but they were less important for the subsequent development of Byzantine architecture.

New Rome

In addition to his acceptance of Christianity, Constantine's other great achievement was the establishment of a new imperial residence and subsequent capital city in the East, strategically located on the straits of the Bosphorus. Nova Roma or Constantinople, as laid out in 324-330, expanded the urban armature of the old city of Byzantion westward to fill the peninsula between the Sea of Marmara and the Golden Horn, combining elements of Roman and Hellenistic city planning.

Figure 5.2.5.45: Map with Rome and Constantinople (underlying map © Google).

Like old Rome, the new city of Constantine was built on seven hills and divided into fourteen districts; its imperial palace lay next to its hippodrome, which was similarly equipped with a royal viewing box. As in Rome, there were a senate house, a Capitol, great baths, and other

public amenities; imperial fora provided its public spaces; triumphal columns, arches, and monuments, including a colossus of the emperor as Apollo-Helios, and a variety of dedications imparted mimetic associations with the old capital.

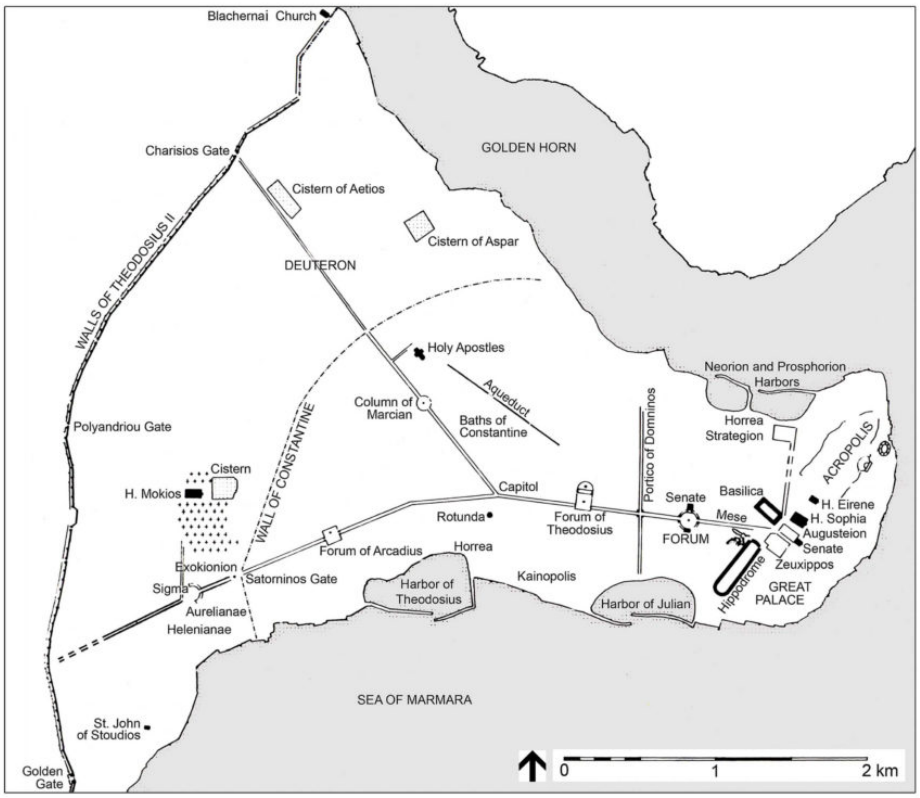

Figure 5.2.5.46: Constantinople, plan of the fifth century city (© Robert G. Ousterhout, based on Cyril Mango, *Développement urbaine de Constantinople*, 1985)

Constantine's own mausoleum was established in a position that encouraged a comparison with that of Augustus's mausoleum in Rome; the adjoining cruciform basilica—the church of the Holy Apostles—was apparently added by his sons. Beyond the much-altered porphyry column that once stood at the center of his forum, however, virtually nothing survives from the time of Constantine; the city continued to expand long after its foundation.

Figure 5.2.5.47: Ruins of the hippodrome in Constantinople, c. 1560, engraving by Étienne Dupérac, for *Onofrio Panvinio, De ludis circensibus*, 1600, probably based on a late 15th century drawing (photo: Paul K, CC BY 2.0)

Next: read about Early Byzantine architecture after Constantine

Additional Resources

Robert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

Early Byzantine architecture after Constantine

by DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

Periods of Byzantine history

Early Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) c. 330 – 843

Middle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

The Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

Late Byzantine 1261 – 1453

Post-Byzantine after 1453

Figure 5.2.5.48: Santa Sabina, Rome, 522-532 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Basilicas and new forms

Figure 5.2.5.49: Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, c. 490, Ravenna, Italy (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

After the time of Constantine, a standardized church architecture emerged, with the basilica for congregational worship dominating construction.

There were numerous regional variations: in Rome and the West, for example, basilicas usually were elongated without galleries, as at S. Sabina in Rome (522-32) or S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (c. 490).

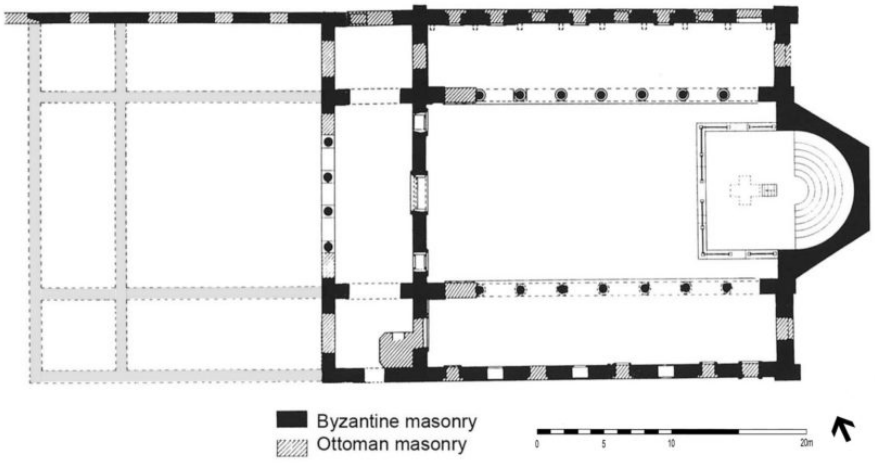

Figure **5.2.5.50**: Plan of St. John Stoudios, 458, Constantinople (Istanbul) (© Robert Ousterhout)

In the East the buildings were more compact and galleries were more common, as at St. John Stoudios in Constantinople (458) or the Achieropoiitos in Thessaloniki (early fifth century) **(view plan and elevation)**.

Figure **5.2.5.51**: Church of the Acheiropoietos, Thessaloniki, early 5th century (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

By the fifth century, the liturgy had become standardized, but, again, with some regional variations, evident in the planning and furnishing of basilicas. In general, the area of the altar was enclosed by a *templon* barrier, with semicircular seating for the officiants (the *synthronon*) in the curvature of the apse. The altar itself was covered by a ciborium. Within the nave, a raised pulpit or *ambo* provided a setting for the Gospel readings.

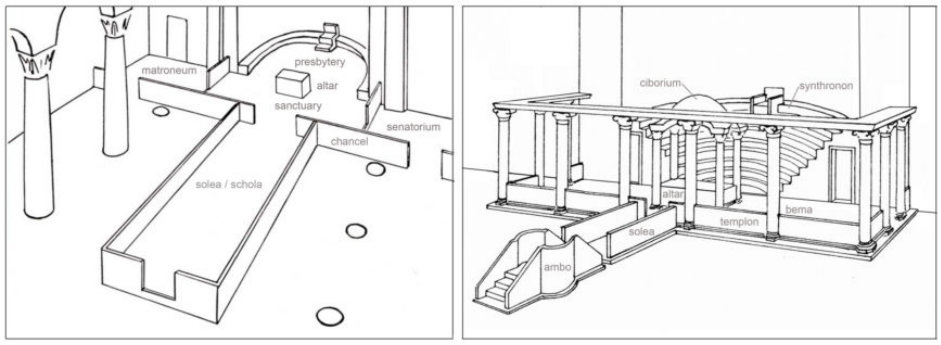

Figure 5.2.5.52: Left: diagram of an early Christian Roman sanctuary; right: diagram of an early Christian Constantinopolitan sanctuary (© Robert G. Ousterhout, adapted from T. F. Mathews, "An Early Roman Chancel Arrangement and Its Liturgical Uses," 1962, and R. Naumann and H. Belting, *Euphemia-Kirche*, 1966)

Figure 5.2.5.53: Santo Stefano Rotondo, Rome, c. 468–83 (photo: Brad Hostetler, CC BY-NC 2.0)

The liturgy probably had less effect on the creation of new architectural designs than on the increasing symbolism and sanctification of the church building. Some new building types emerge, such as the cruciform church, the tetraconch, octagon, and a variety of centrally planned structures. Such forms may have had symbolic overtones; for example, the cruciform plan may be either a reflection of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople or associated with the life-giving cross, as at S. Croce in Ravenna or SS. Apostoli in Milan. Other innovative designs may have had their origins in architectural geometry, such as the enigmatic S. Stefano Rotondo (468-83) in Rome. The aisled tetraconch churches, once thought to be a form associated with martyria, are most likely cathedrals or metropolitan churches. The early fifth-century tetraconch in the Library of Hadrian in Athens was probably the first cathedral of the city; that at Selucia Pieria-Antioch, from the late fifth century, was possibly a metropolitan church.

Figure 5.2.5.54: Church furniture, left to right: restored templon, 10th century, Holy Apostles, Athens (Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0); synthronon, 6th c., Hagia Eirene, Constantinople (Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0); ciborium by Nicolaus Ranucius & sons, Italy, c. 1150 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); reconstructed ambo, 5th century (garden, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul) (Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Figure **5.2.5.55**: Orthodox (or Neonian) Baptistery, Ravenna, c. 400-450 (photo: Kirk K, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Baptisteries

Baptisteries also appear as prominent buildings throughout the Empire, necessary for the elaborate ceremonies addressed to adult converts and catechumens. Most common was a symbolically resonant, octagonal building housing the font and attached to the cathedral, as with the Orthodox (or Neonian) Baptistery at Ravenna, c. 400-450. In Rome, the Lateran's baptistery was an independent, octagonal structure that stood north of the basilica's apse. Built under Constantine, the baptistery expanded under Pope Sixtus III in the fifth century with the addition of an ambulatory around its central structure. The inscription St. Ambrose composed for his baptistery at Milan clarifies the symbolism of such eight-sided buildings:

> ***The eight-sided temple has risen for sacred purposes***
> ***The octagonal font is worthy for this task.***
> ***It is seemly that the baptismal hall should arise in this number***
> ***By which true health returns to people***
> ***By the light of the resurrected Christinscription attributed to St. Ambrose of Milan***

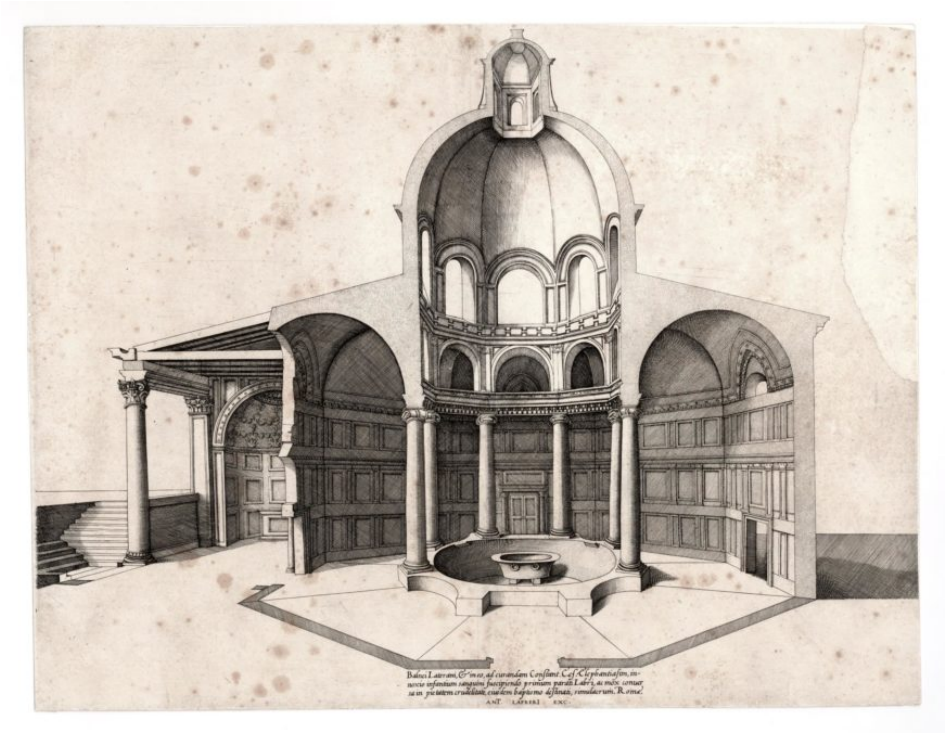

Figure 5.2.5.56: Nicolas Beatrizet, Lateran Baptistery in Rome, reconstruction, 1550s, engraving (The British Museum)

Figure 5.2.5.57: Baptismal font, Vitalis Basilica Baptistery, Sbeitla, Tunisia, 6th century (photo: Kirk K, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Associated with death and resurrection, the planning type derives from Late Roman mausolea, although not directly from the Anastasis Rotunda. Variations abound: at Butrint (in modern Albania) and Nocera (in southwestern Italy), for example, the baptisteries have ambulatories; in North Africa, the architecture tends to remain simple, while the form of the font is elaborated. With the change to infant baptism and a simplified ceremony, however, monumental baptisteries cease to be constructed after the sixth century.

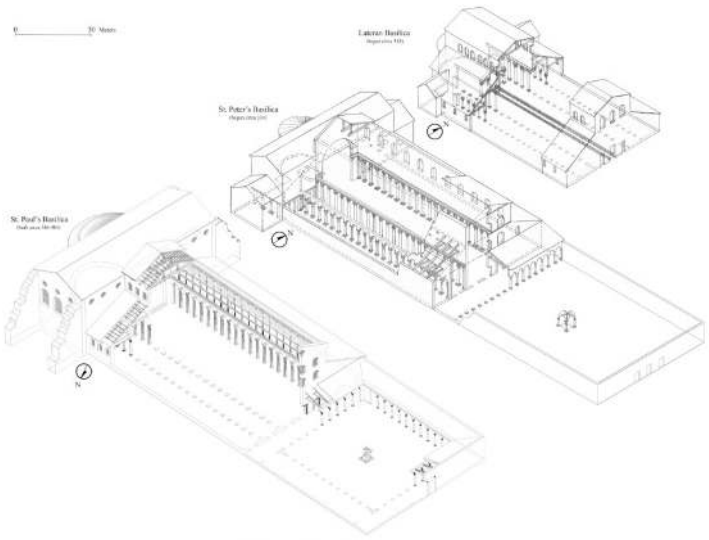

Figure 5.2.5.58: Comparative view of the Constantinian basilicas of St. Peter and at the Lateran, alongside the Theodosian basilica of St. Paul. All are depicted at the same scale. Model of St. Paul's by Evan Gallitelli. Image by Evan Gallitelli includes drawings by Konstantin Brandenburg published in Hugo Brandenburg's Ancient Churches of Rome from the Fourth to the Seventh Century (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), fig. 1. (© Nicola Camerlenghi)

Martyria and Mausolea

Although the church gradually eliminated the great funeral banquets at the graves of martyrs, the cult of martyrs was manifest in other ways, notably the importance of pilgrimage and the dissemination of relics. In spite of this, there was not a standard architectural form for the martyria, which instead seem to depend on site-specific conditions or regional developments. In Rome, for example, S. Paolo fuori le mura (St. Paul Outside the Walls), begun 384, follows the model of St. Peter's in adding a transept to a huge five-aisled basilica.

Figure 5.2.5.59: St. Paul's fuori le mura (interior looking east before destruction), begun 384, Rome (etching by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, 18th century)

Figure 5.2.5.60: St. Demetrios in his tomb, reliquary pendant, 11th century, gold and enamel, 3.7 x 4.6 x 1 cm (The British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

At Thessaloniki, the basilica of H. Demetrios (late fifth century) incorporated the remains of a crypt and other structures associated with the Roman bath where Demetrius was martyred.

At rural locations, large complexes emerged, as at Qal'at Sam'an, built c. 480-90 in Syria, which had four basilicas radiating from an octagonal core, where the stylite saint's column stood.

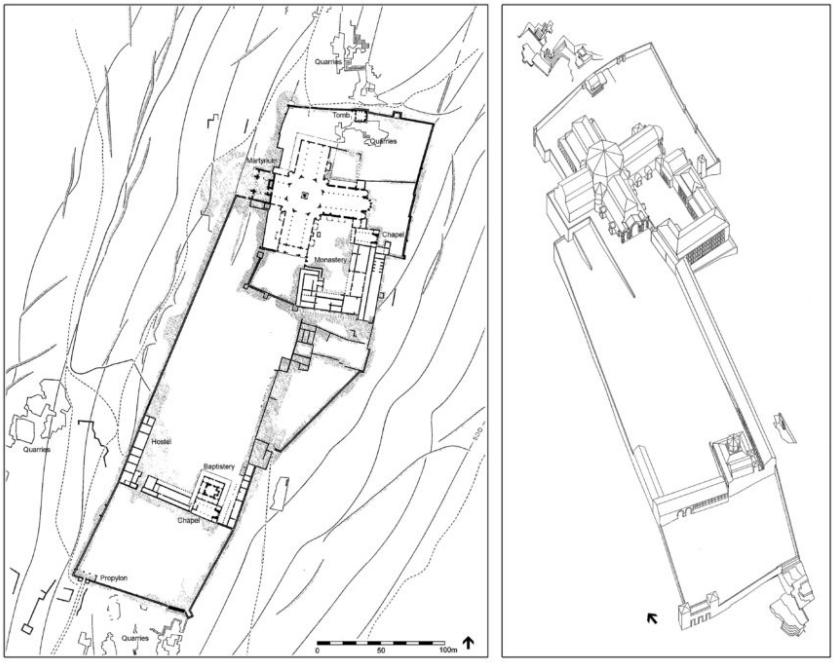

Figure 5.2.5.60: Plan and reconstruction of Qal'at Sem'an, (© Robert G. Ousterhout)

Abu Mena (CC BY 2.0 <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/cvk4hN" href="https://flic.kr/p/cvk4hN" target="_blank" rel="noopener"
Iris Fernandez, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-48961" height="300" sizes="(max-width: 400px) 100vw, 400px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.61: Abu Mena (CC BY 2.0 Iris Fernandez, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World)

An entire city (Abu Mena), with church architecture of increasing complexity, grew around the venerated tomb of St. Menas in Egypt.

At Hierapolis in Asia Minor, a large octagonal complex was built at the site of the tomb of St. Philip (view plan).

At Ephesus, a cruciform church arose at the tomb of St. John the Evangelist.

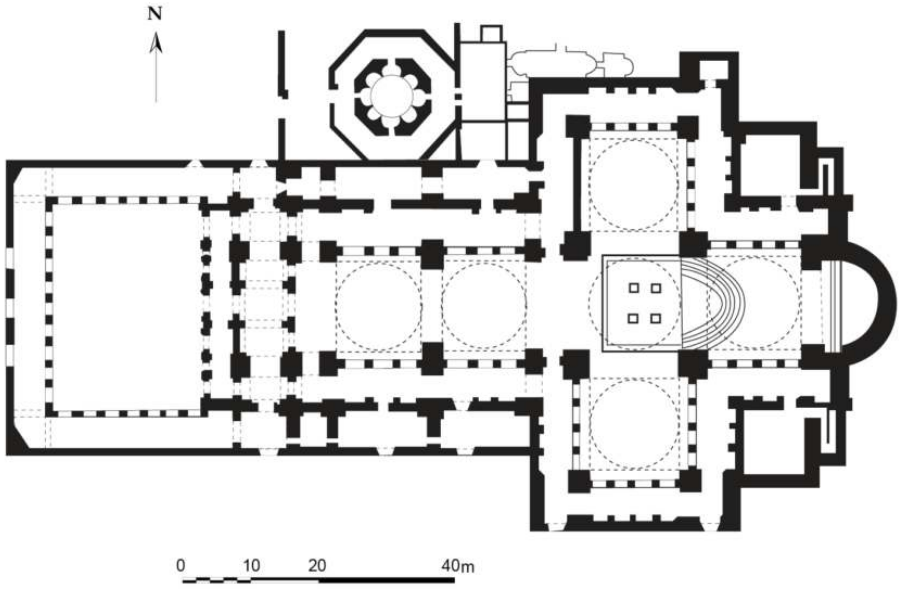


Figure 5.2.5.62: Reconstructed floor plan, church of St. John the Evangelist, Ephesus (Marsyas, CC BY 3.0)

Others were simpler in form. At the martyrium of St. Thekla at Meryemlik, c. 480, a three-aisled basilica was added above her holy cave. At Sinai, the sixth-century basilica was augmented by subsidiary chapels along its sides, but the holy site – the Burning Bush – lay outside, immediately to the east of its apse (view plan).

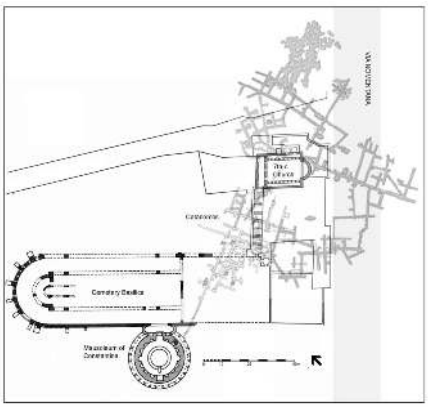


Figure 5.2.5.63: Rome, Sant'Agnese site plan: cemetery basilica with attached Mausoleum of Constantina (S. Costanza); medieval Basilica of Sant'Agnese above the catacombs (in gray) (© Robert Ousterhout)

The desire for privileged burial perpetuated the tradition of Late Antique mausolea, which were often octagonal or centrally planned. In Rome the fourth-century mausolea of Helena and Constantina were attached to cemetery basilicas.

Cruciform chapels seem to be a new creation, with a shape that derived its meaning from the life-giving Cross, a relationship emphasized in the well-preserved **Mausoleum of Galla Placidia**, built c. 425, in Ravenna, which was originally attached to a cruciform church dedicated to S. Croce.

In Constantinople, the successors of Constantine were buried in the rotunda at the church of the Holy Apostles or its dependencies.

Figure 5.2.5.64: Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, c. 425 (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Monasticism

Monasticism began to play an increasingly important role in society, but from the perspective of architecture, early monasteries lacked systematic planning and were dependent on site-specific conditions. The coenobitical system (communal monasticism) included living quarters, with cells for the monks, as well as a refectory for common dining and a church or chapel for common worship. Evidence is preserved in the desert communities of Egypt and Palestine. At the Red Monastery at Sohag, the formal spaces are contained within a fortress-like complex, although it is unclear where with or without the enclosure the monks actually lived. In the Judean Desert, a variety of hermits' cells are preserved – simple caves carved into the rough landscape.

Figure 5.2.5.65: Red Monastery church, Sohag, early 6th century (photo: Rob, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Urban Planning

In general, urban planning in this period follows Roman and Hellenistic models, as Justinian's new city of Iustiniana Prima (Caracin Grad, in modern Serbia) amply demonstrates.

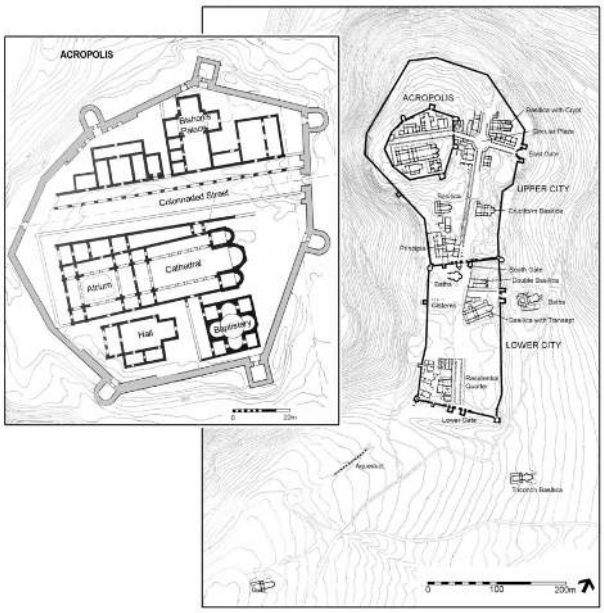


Figure **5.2.5.66**: Caričin Grad (Iustiniana Prima) site plan, with detail of the acropolis (© Robert Ousterhout)

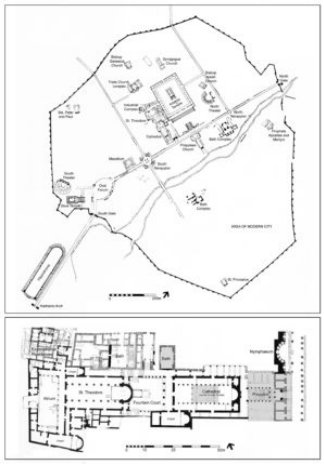


Figure **5.2.5.67**: Gerasa (Jerash), plan of the city with a detail of the Cathedral complex (© Robert Ousterhout)

At Gerasa (in modern Jordan), Thessaloniki, and elsewhere, existing city plans were reconfigured to give prominence to the new Christian structures.

In Jerusalem and Athens, there may have been an intentional visual juxtaposition of the new Christian cathedral with the abandoned Jewish or pagan temple.

While the Theodosian Code legislated the cessation of pagan worship, it recommended the preservation of the temple building and its contents because of their artistic value. The transformation of temples into churches was rare before the sixth century.

Defensive architecture followed Roman practices.

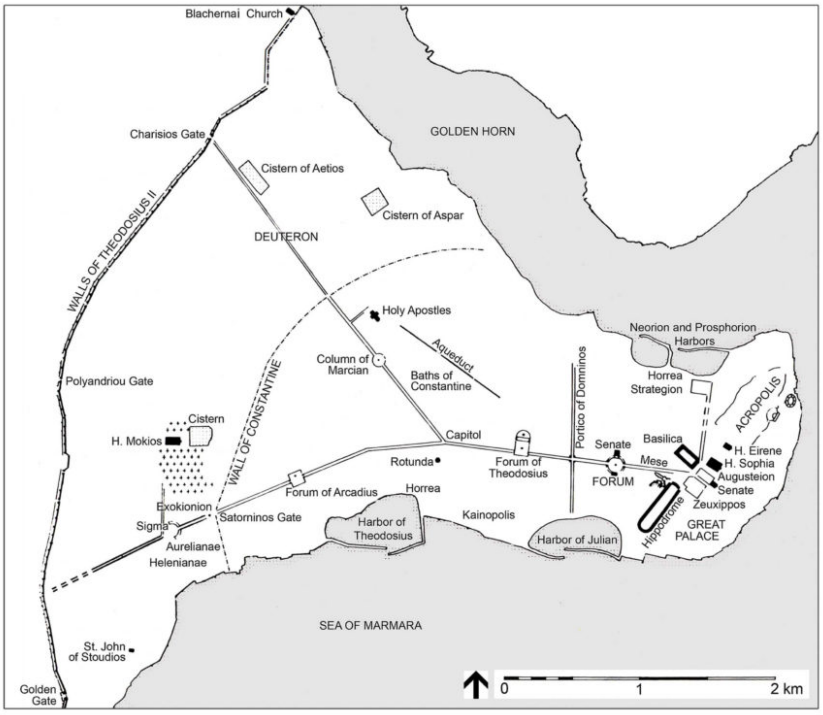


Figure 5.2.5.68: Constantinople, plan of the fifth century city (© Robert G. Ousterhout, based on Cyril Mango, Développement urbaine de Constantinople, 1985)

The walls of Constantinople, added by Theodosius II (412-13) stand as a singular achievement, combining two lines of defensive walls with a moat. In a like manner, the system of aqueducts and cisterns at Constantinople expanded upon established Roman technology to create the most extensive water system in Antiquity.

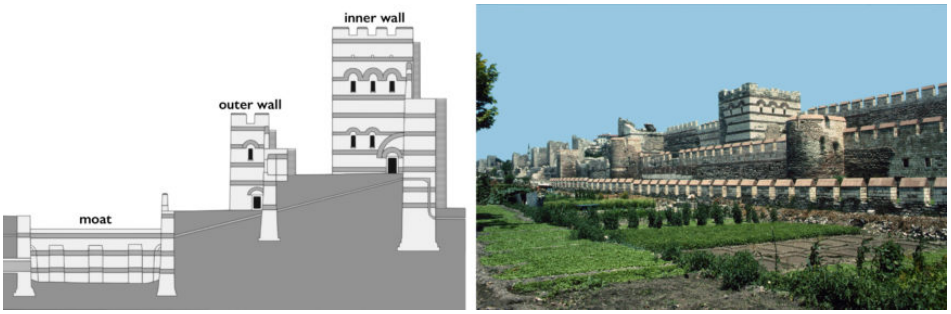


Figure 5.2.5.69: Left: diagram of the Theodosian walls, Constantinople (adapted from **Glz19**, CC BY-SA 4.0); right: partially restored Theodosian walls with garden plots in the moat, Constantinople (Istanbul), 412-413 (photo: © Robert G. Ousterhout)

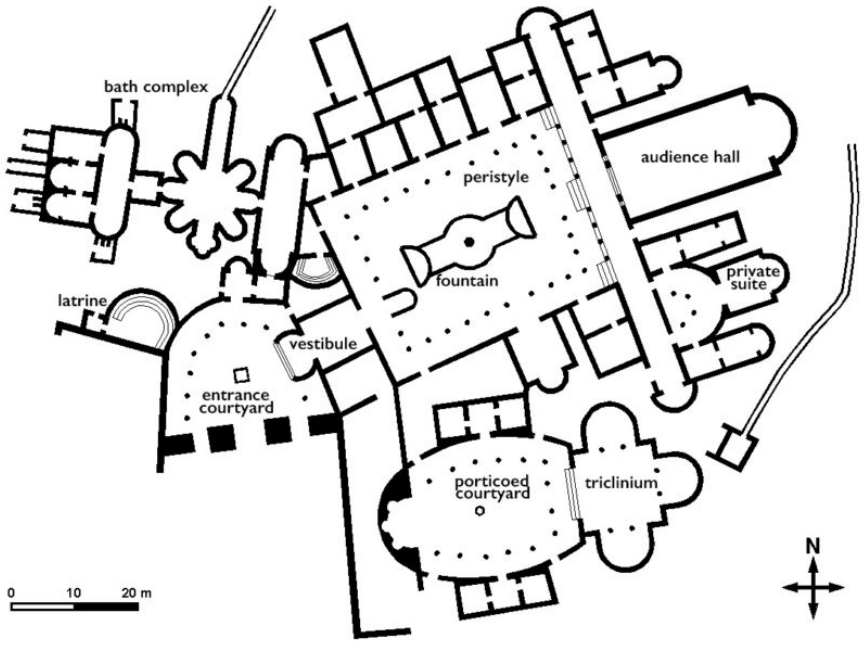


Figure **5.2.5.70**: Plan of villa, Piazza Armerina (adapted from plan by **Bjs**, CC0)

Standard planning continued in domestic architecture as well. Large houses excavated in Asia Minor (Sardis, Ephesus), North Africa (Carthage, Spaitla, Apollonia), Italy (Ravenna, Piazza Armerina), Greece (Athens, Argos), and elsewhere include porticoed gardens, audience halls, and triclinia (dining rooms). The Great Palace in Constantinople and the so-called Palace of Theodoric in Ravenna were essentially elaborations on or repetitions of the Late Roman villa. Perhaps the most significant changes in the Late Antique ***domus*** (house) were the increasing size and number of ceremonial spaces (audience halls and triclinia) – as at the early fourth century villa at Piazza Armerina (in Sicily) – and the incorporation of chapels into the domestic setting – as at the Palace of the Dux at Apollonia (in modern Libya). The latter phenomenon is indicative of the growing importance of private worship and was a source of growing concern in ecclesiastical legislation. With significant economic and social changes, however, by the end of the period under discussion, the *domus* disappeared.

Next: read about innovative architecture in the age of Justinian

Additional Resources

Robert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

Woman with Scroll

by DR. EVAN FREEMAN and DR. ANNE MCCLANAN

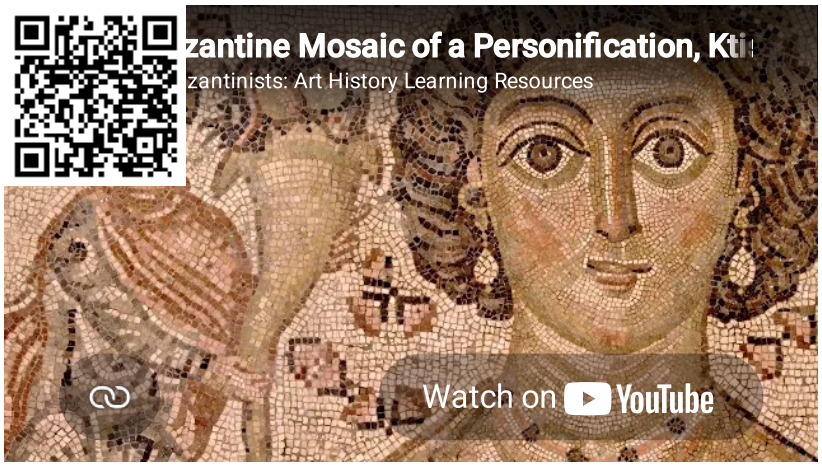
Video **5.2.5.3**: Evan and Anne discuss *Marble Portrait Bust of a Woman with a Scroll*, late 4th–early 5th century C.E., pentelic marble, 53 x 27.5 x 22.2 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection**)

Additional resources:

This sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Byzantine Mosaic of a Personification, Ktisis

by DR. EVAN FREEMAN and DR. ANNE MCCLANAN



Video **5.2.5.4**: Evan and Anne discuss *Fragment of a Floor Mosaic with a Personification of Ktisis*, ca. 500–550 C.E. (with modern restoration), marble and glass, 151.1 x 199.7 x 2.5 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Additional resources:

This mosaic at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Innovative architecture in the age of Justinian

by DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

Periods of Byzantine history

Early Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) c. 330 – 843

Middle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

The Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

Late Byzantine 1261 – 1453

Post-Byzantine after 1453

Figure **5.2.5.71**: Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul), 532-37 (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

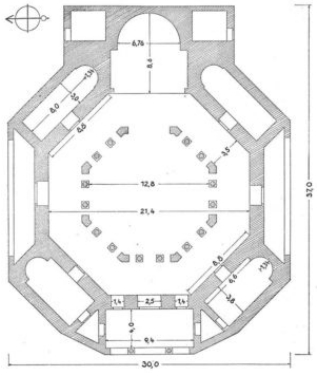


Figure **5.2.5.72**: Plan of church of the Theotokos, c. 484, Mt. Gerizim (in modern Israel) (adapted from **Schneider**)

New trends

Although standardized church basilicas continued to be constructed, by the end of the fifth century, two important trends emerge in church architecture: the centralized plan, into which a longitudinal axis is introduced, and the longitudinal plan, into which a centralizing element is introduced.

The first type may be represented by the ruined church of the Theotokos on Mt. Gerizim (in modern Israel), c. 484, which has a developed sanctuary bay projecting beyond an aisled octagon with radiating chapels; the second by the so-called Domed Basilica at Meriamlik (on the southern coast of Turkey), c. 471-94, which superimposed a dome on a standard basilican nave **(view plan)**. Both may be attributed to the patronage of emperor Zeno.

Figure 5.2.5.74: Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (Küçük Ayasofya Camii), Constantinople (Istanbul), completed before 536 (photo: © Robert G. Ousterhout)

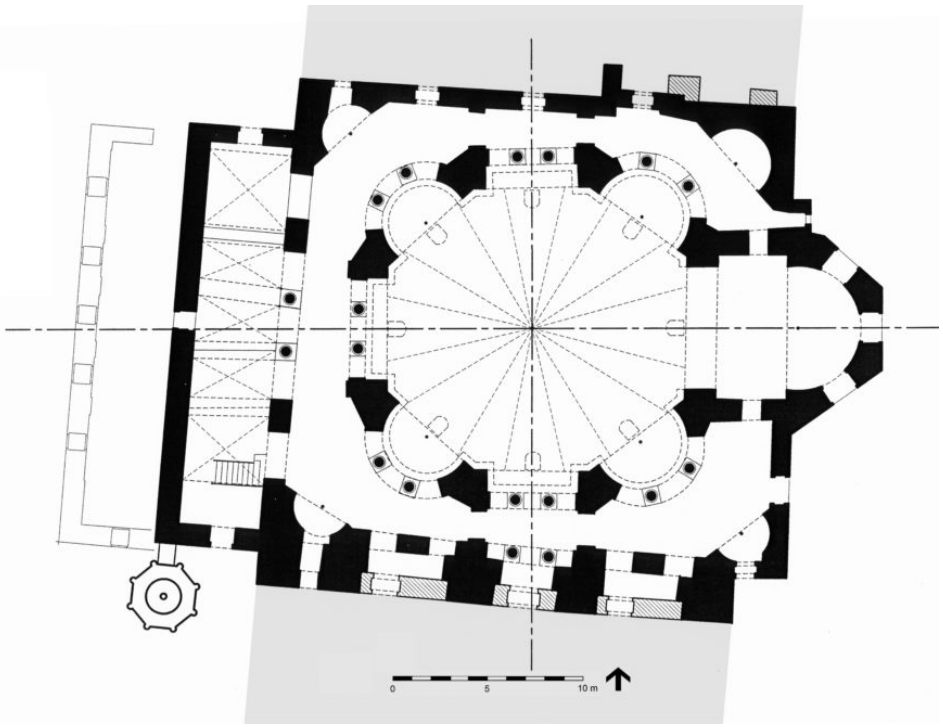


Figure 5.2.5.75: Plan of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus (Küçük Ayasofya Camii), Constantinople (Istanbul), completed before 536 (© Robert G. Ousterhout, redrawn after J. Ebersolt and A. Thiers, Les Églises de Constantinople, 1913)

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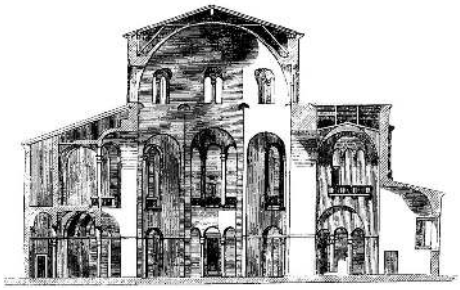


Figure 5.2.5.76: Section of San Vitale, Ravenna, from James Fergusson, *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1855), 513

The reign of Justinian

Both trends are further developed during the reign of Justinian (reigned 527 to 565). HH. Sergios and Bakchos in Constantinople, completed before 536, and **S. Vitale** in Ravenna, completed c. 546/48, for example, are double-shelled octagons **(view plan of San Vitale)** of increasing geometric sophistication, with masonry domes covering their central spaces, perhaps originally combined with wooden roofs for the side aisles and galleries.

Figure 5.2.5.77: San Vitale, c. 546/48, Ravenna (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

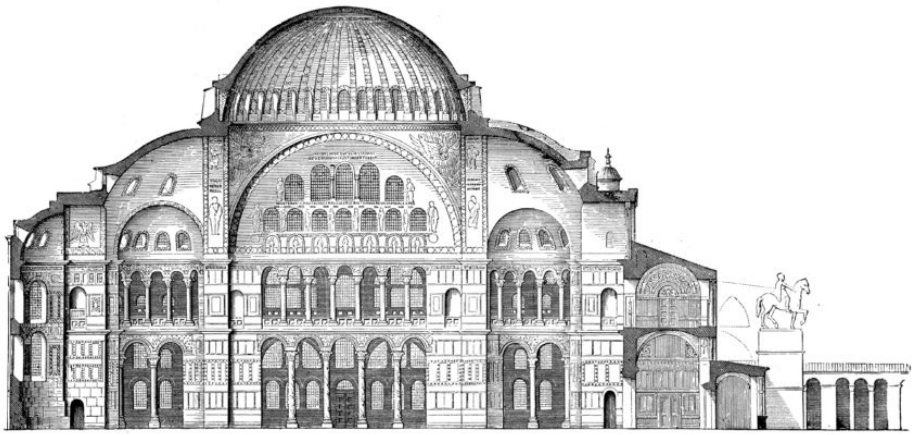


Figure 5.2.5.78: Section of Hagia Sophia by Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Istanbul, 532-37, from Wilhelm Lübke / Max Semrau: *Grundriß der Kunstgeschichte*. 14. Auflage. Paul Neff Verlag, Esslingen, 1908 **(view annotated section)**

Hagia Sophia, Constantinople

Several monumental basilicas of the period included domes and vaulting throughout, most notably at **Hagia Sophia**, built 532-37 by the *mechanikoi* Anthemios and Isidoros, which combines elements of the central plan and the basilica on an unprecedented scale.

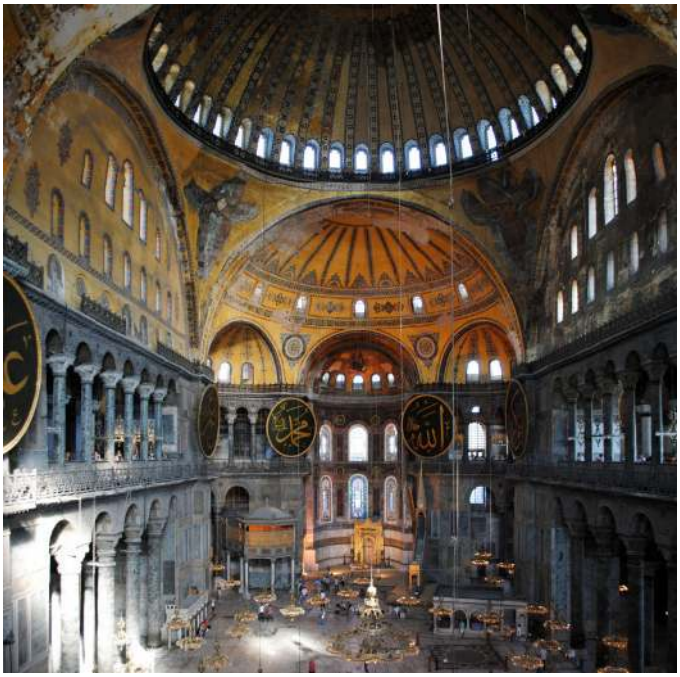


Figure 5.2.5.79: Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul), 532-37 (photo: © Robert G. Ousterhout) **(view annotated photo)**

Its unique design focused on a daring central dome of slightly more than 100 feet in diameter, raised above **pendentives**, and braced to the east and west by half-domes. The aisles and galleries are screened by colonnades (rows of columns), with exedrae (semicircular recesses) at the corners. Following the innovative trends in Late Roman architecture, the structural system concentrates the loads at critical points, opening the walls with large windows.

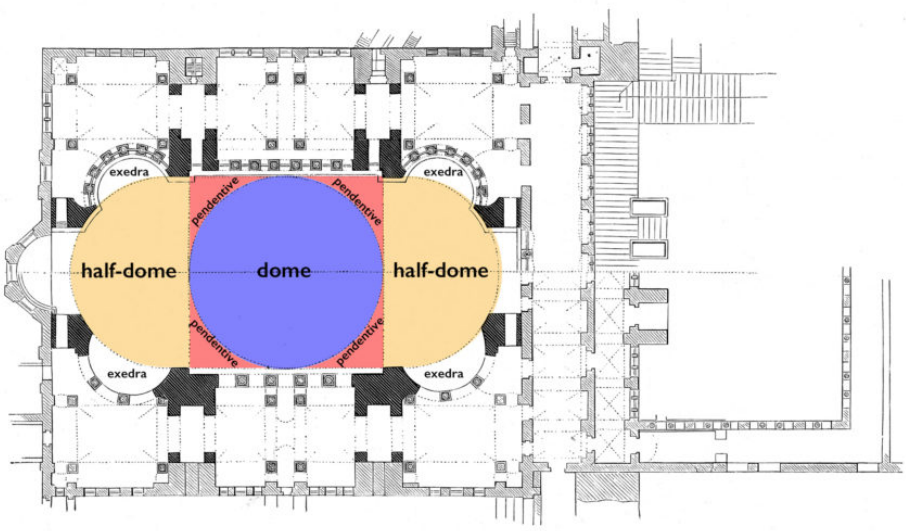


Figure 5.2.5.80: Floor plan of Hagia Sophia by Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Constantinople (Istanbul), 532-37, based on a diagram from Wilhelm Lübke / Max Semrau: *Grundriß der Kunstgeschichte*. 14. Auflage. Paul Neff Verlag, Esslingen, 1908.

With glistening marble revetments on all flat surfaces and more than seven acres of gold mosaic on the vaults, the effect was magical—whether in daylight or by candlelight, with the dome seeming to float aloft with no discernable means of support; accordingly Procopios writes that the interior impression was "altogether terrifying."

H. Eirene, Constantinople

Related to H. Sophia are the domed basilicas of H. Eirene in Constantinople, begun 532, and ruined Basilica 'B' in Philippi (Greece), built before 540, each with distinctive elements to its design. The common feature in all three buildings was an elongated nave, partially covered by a dome on pendentives, but lacking necessary lateral buttressing. All three buildings suffered partial or complete collapse in subsequent earthquakes. **Read about the redesign of H. Eirene after its collapse.**

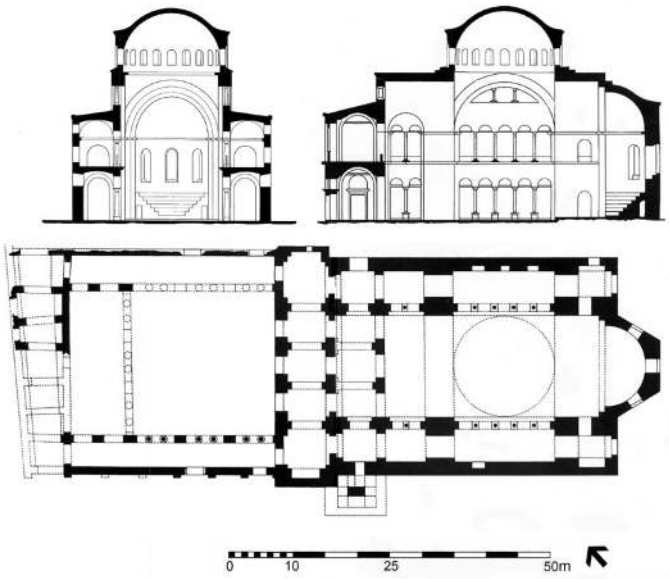


Figure 5.2.5.81: Hagia Eirene, Constantinople (Istanbul), plan and hypothetical sections of the sixth-century building (© Robert G. Ousterhout, adapted from S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 2010)

Hagia Sophia's new dome

At H. Sophia, textual accounts suggest that the first dome, which fell in 557, was a structurally daring, shallow pendentive dome, in which the curvature continued from the pendentives, but with a ring of windows at its base.

Figure 5.2.5.82: Dome of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (photo: © Robert G. Ousterhout)

A more stable, hemispherical dome replaced the original – essentially that which survives today, with partial collapses and repairs in the west and east quadrants in the tenth and fourteenth centuries.

Although H. Polyeuktos, built in Constantinople by Justinian's rival Juliana Anicia, is normally reconstructed as a domed basilica – and thus suggested to be the forerunner of H. Sophia, it was unlikely domed, although it was certainly its predecessor in lavishness.

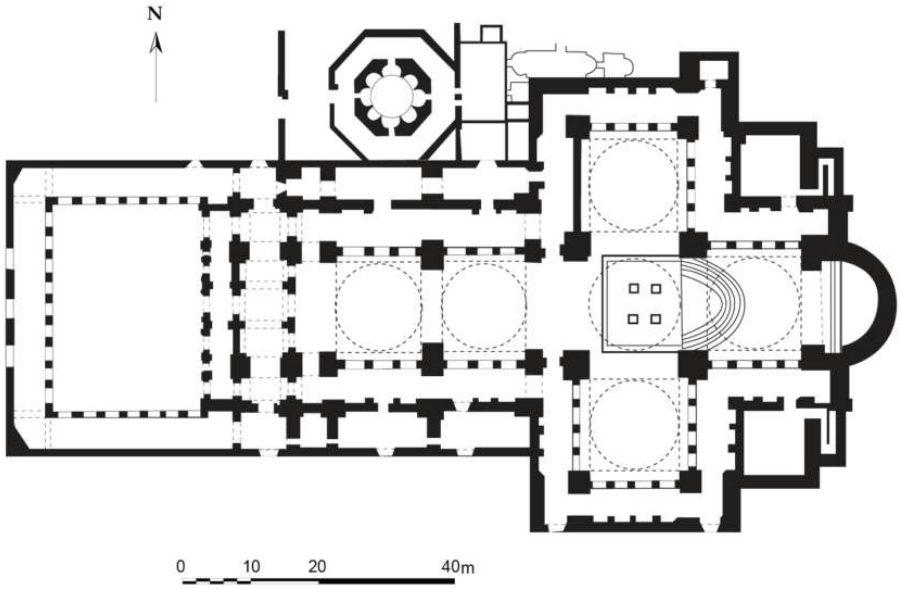


Figure 5.2.5.83: Reconstructed floor plan, church of St. John the Evangelist, Ephesus, drawn after Clive Foss, Ephesus after Antiquity: A late antique, Byzantine and Turkish City (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1979. (Cordanrad, CC BY 3.0)

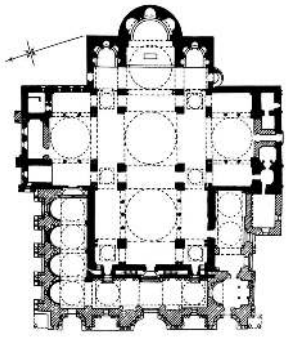


Figure **5.2.5.84**: Floor plan, Basilica of San Marco, Venice, from B. Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, 5th ed. (London: B. T. Batsford, 1905)

Five-domed churches

The spatial unit formed by the dome on pendentives could also be used as a design module, as at Justinian's rebuilding of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, in which five domes covered the cruciform building.

A similar design was employed in the rebuilding of St. John's basilica at Ephesus, completed before 565, which because of its elongated nave took on a six-domed design.

The late eleventh-century **S. Marco in Venice** follows this sixth-century scheme.

Figure **5.2.5.85**: Inside the basilica at Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai (photo: Library of Congress)

The enduring basilica

In spite of design innovations, traditional architecture continued in the sixth century with the wooden roofed basilica continuing as the standard church type.

At St. Catherine's on Mt. Sinai, built c. 540, the church preserves its wooden roof and much of its decoration. The three-aisled plan incorporated numerous subsidiary chapels flanking the aisles.

At the sixth-century Cathedral of Caricin Grad, the three-aisled basilica included a vaulted sanctuary area, with the earliest securely dated example of pastophoria: apsed chapels—known as the *prothesis* and *diakonikon*—which flanked the central altar area to form a tripartite sanctuary. This tripartite form that would become standard in later centuries.

Figure 5.2.5.86: Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki (photo: © Robert G. Ousterhout)

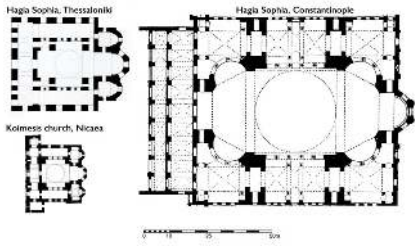


Figure 5.2.5.87: Plans drawn to the same scale, H. Sophia in Constantinople, H. Sophia in Thessaloniki, and the Koimesis church in Nicaea (© Robert G. Ousterhout)

Justinian's legacy

Church types of the subsequent period tend to follow in simplified form the grand developments of the age of Justinian. H. Sophia in Thessalonikie for example, built less than a century later than its namesake, is both considerably smaller and heavier, as is the Koimesis church at Nicaea.

Both correct the basic problems in the structural design by including broad arches to brace the dome on all four sides.

The Caucasus

In the Caucasus, Georgia and Armenia witness a flourishing of architecture in the seventh century, with numerous, distinctive, centrally planned, domed buildings, constructed of rubble faced with a fine ashlar, although their relationship with Byzantine architectural developments remains to be clarified.

Figure 5.2.5.88: Left: exterior view of the church of St. Hripsime, Vagarshapat, 618 (photo: **Rita Willaert**, CC BY 2.0); Right: interior view of St. Hripsime (photo: **Andrea Kirkby**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

The domed church of St. Hripsime at Vagarshapat has a dome rising above eight supports, set within a rectangular building.

Figure 5.2.5.89: Church of the Cross, 586–604, Jvari (Mtskheta, Georgia) (photo: **Mamuka Gotsridze**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

The church at Church of the Cross at Jvari (Mtskheta) is similar, but with its lateral apses projecting. The aisled tetraconch church of Zvartnots stands out as following Byzantine, particularly Syrian, models.

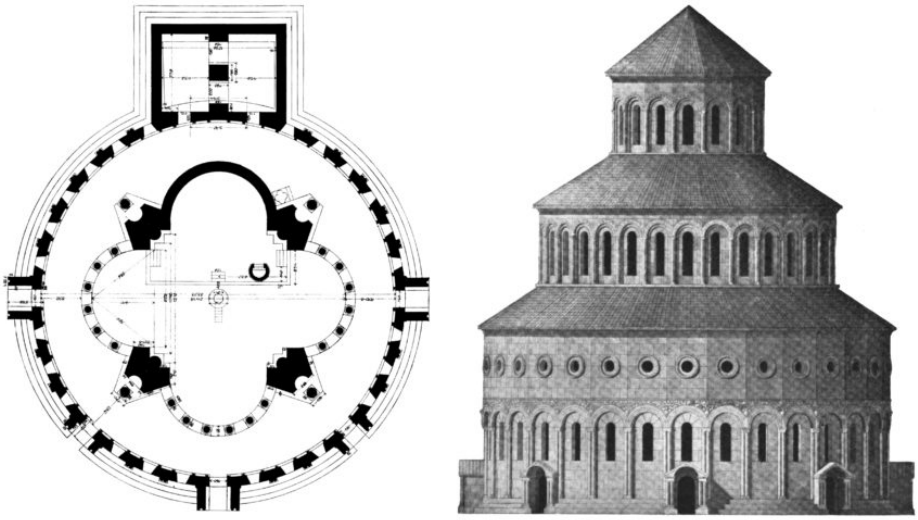


Figure 5.2.5.90: Church of the Vigilant Powers (Zvart'nots'), Vagarshapat, plan and possible reconstructed elevations, from Josef Strzygowski, Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa, vol. 1 (Vienna: A. Schroll & Co., 1918), figs. 112 and 119.

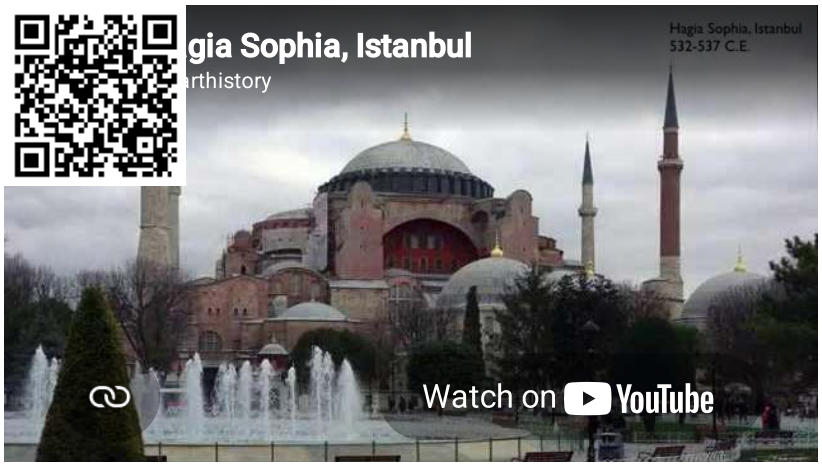
Next: read about Byzantine architecture during Iconoclasm

Additional Resources

Robert G. Ousterhout, ***Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands*** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

by DR. WILLIAM ALLEN



Video 5.2.5.5: Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles (architects), Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532-37

Figure 5.2.5.91: Constantine the Great presents the city (Constantinople) and Justinian the Great presents Hagia Sophia to the Virgin, mosaic, probably 10th Century, Southwestern Entrance, Hagia Sophia (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

A symbol of Byzantium

The great church of the Byzantine capital Constantinople (Istanbul) took its current structural form under the direction of the Emperor Justinian I. The church was dedicated in 537, amid great ceremony and the pride of the emperor (who was sometimes said to have seen the completed building in a dream). The daring engineering feats of the building are well known. Numerous medieval travelers praise the size and embellishment of the church. Tales abound of miracles associated with the church. Hagia Sophia is the symbol of Byzantium in the same way that the Parthenon embodies Classical Greece or the Eiffel Tower typifies Paris.

Figure 5.2.5.92: Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532-37 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Each of those structures express values and beliefs: perfect proportion, industrial confidence, a unique spirituality. By overall impression and attention to detail, the builders of Hagia Sophia left the world a mystical building. The fabric of the building denies that it can stand by its construction alone. Hagia Sophia's being seems to cry out for an other-worldly explanation of why it stands because much within the building seems dematerialized, an impression that must have been very real in the perception of the medieval faithful. The dematerialization can be seen in as small a detail as a column capital or in the building's dominant feature, its dome.

Let us start with a look at a column capital

Figure 5.2.5.93: Basket Capital, Hagia Sophia (photo: William Allen, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The capital is a derivative of the Classical Ionic order via the variations of the Roman composite capital and Byzantine invention. Shrunken volutes appear at the corners decorative detailing runs the circuit of lower regions of the capital. The column capital does important work, providing transition from what it supports to the round column beneath. What we see here is decoration that makes the capital appear light, even insubstantial. The whole appears more as filigree work than as robust stone capable of supporting enormous weight to the column.

Figure 5.2.5.94: Ionic Capital, North Porch of the Erechtheion (Erechtheum), Acropolis, Athens, marble, 421-407 B.C.E., British Museum (photo: Steven Zucker CC:BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Compare the Hagia Sophia capital with a Classical Greek Ionic capital, this one from the Greek Erechtheum on the Acropolis, Athens. The capital has abundant decoration but the treatment does not diminish the work performed by the capital. The lines between the two spirals dip, suggesting the weight carried while the spirals seem to show a pent-up energy that pushes the capital up to meet the entablature, the weight it holds. The capital is a working member and its design expresses the working in an elegant way.

Figure 5.2.5.95

The relationship between the two is similar to the evolution of the antique to the medieval seen in the mosaics of San Vitale. A capital fragment on the grounds of Hagia Sophia illustrates the carving technique. The stone is deeply drilled, creating shadows behind the vegetative decoration. The capital surface appears thin. The capital contradicts its task rather than expressing it.

Figure 5.2.5.96: Deep Carving of Capital Fragment, Hagia Sophia (photo: William Allen, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This deep carving appears throughout Hagia Sophia's capitals, spandrels, and entablatures. Everywhere we look stone visually denying its ability to do the work that it must do. The important point is that the decoration suggests that something other than sound building technique must be at work in holding up the building.

A golden dome suspended from heaven

We know that the faithful attributed the structural success of Hagia Sophia to divine intervention. Nothing is more illustrative of the attitude than descriptions of the dome of Hagia Sophia. Procopius, biographer of the Emperor Justinian and author of a book on the buildings of Justinian is the first to assert that the dome hovered over the building by divine intervention.

"…the huge spherical dome [makes] the structure exceptionally beautiful. Yet it seems not to rest upon solid masonry, but to cover the space with its golden dome suspended from Heaven." (from "The Buildings" by Procopius, Loeb Classical Library, 1940, online at the University of Chicago Penelope project)

The description became part of the lore of the great church and is repeated again and again over the centuries. A look at the base of the dome helps explain the descriptions.

Figure **5.2.5.97**: Hagia Sophia Dome, Semi-Dome and Cherubim in the pendentive (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The windows at the bottom of the dome are closely spaced, visually asserting that the base of the dome is insubstantial and hardly touching the building itself. The building planners did more than squeeze the windows together, they also lined the jambs or sides of the windows with gold mosaic. As light hits the gold it bounces around the openings and eats away at the structure and makes room for the imagination to see a floating dome.

Figure **5.2.5.98**: Windows at the Base of the Dome, Hagia Sophia (photo: William Allen, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

It would be difficult not to accept the fabric as consciously constructed to present a building that is dematerialized by common constructional expectation. Perception outweighs clinical explanation. To the faithful of Constantinople and its visitors, the building used divine intervention to do what otherwise would appear to be impossible. Perception supplies its own explanation: the dome is suspended from heaven by an invisible chain.

Advice from an angel?

An old story about Hagia Sophia, a story that comes down in several versions, is a pointed explanation of the miracle of the church. So goes the story: A youngster was among the craftsmen doing the construction. Realizing a problem with continuing work, the crew left the church to seek help (some versions say they sought help from the Imperial Palace). The youngster was left to guard the tools while the workmen were away. A figure appeared inside the building and told the boy the solution to the problem and told the boy to go to the workmen with the solution. Reassuring the boy that he, the figure, would stay and guard the tools until the boy returned, the boy set off. The solution that the boy delivered was so ingenious that the assembled problem solvers realized that the mysterious figure was no ordinary man but a divine presence, likely an angel. The boy was sent away and was never allowed to return to the capital. Thus the divine presence had to remain inside the great church by virtue of his promise and presumably is still there. Any doubt about the steadfastness of Hagia Sophia could hardly stand in the face of the fact that a divine guardian watches over the church.*

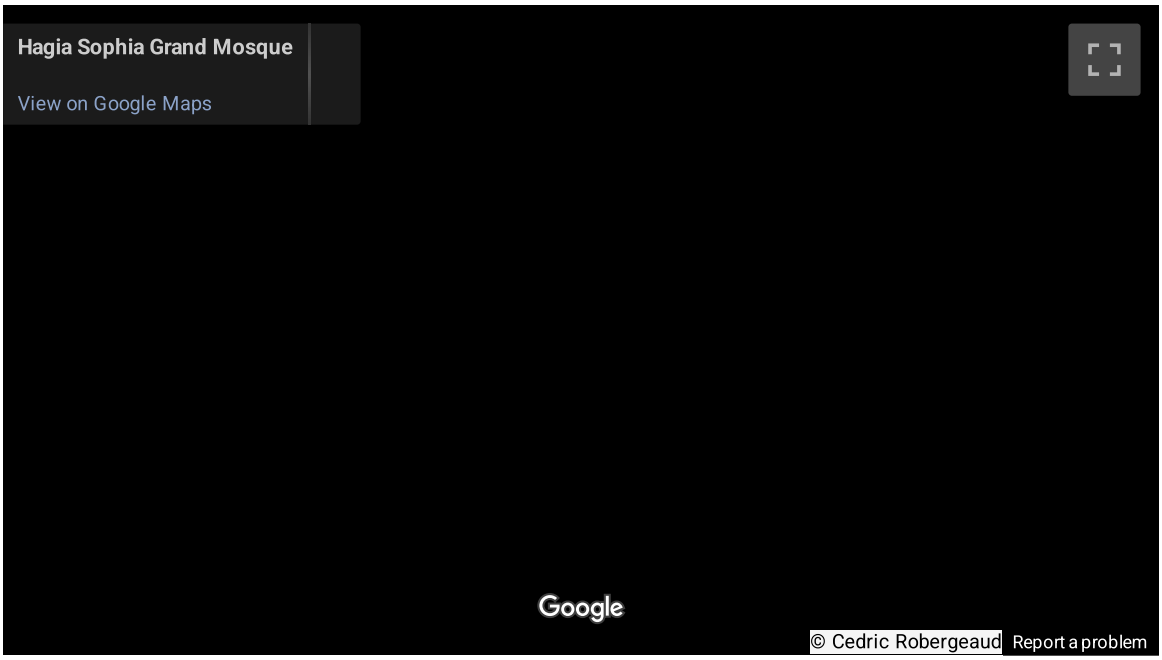
Damage and repairs

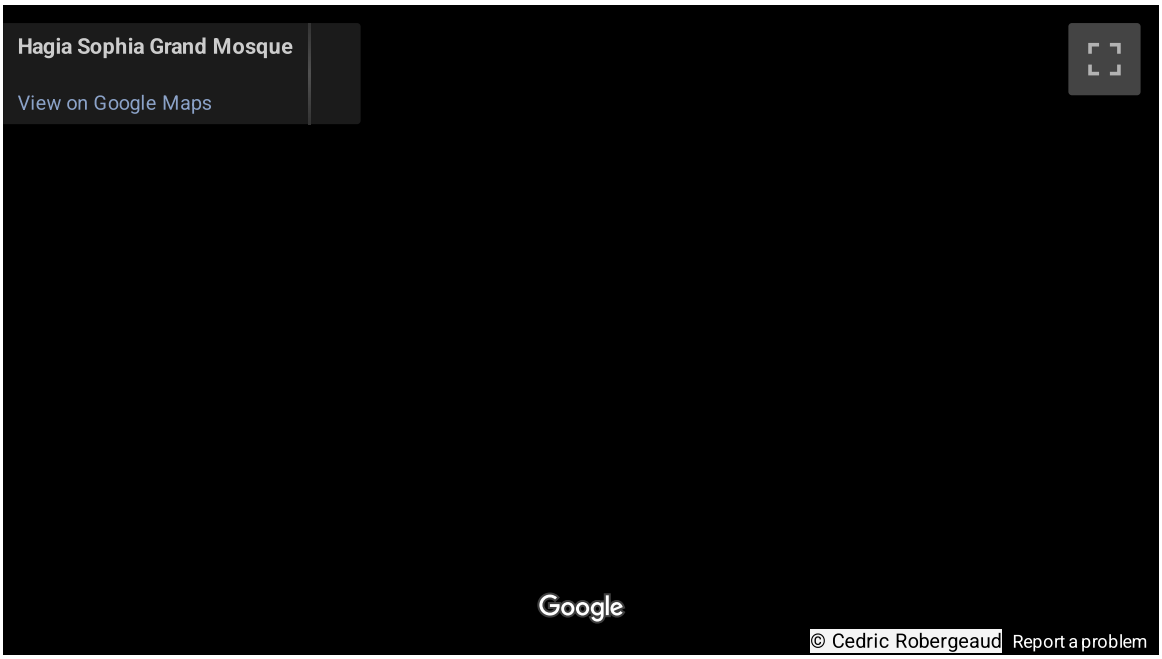
Hagia Sophia sits astride an earthquake fault. The building was severely damaged by three quakes during its early history. Extensive repairs were required. Despite the repairs, one assumes that the city saw the survival of the church, amid city rubble, as yet another indication of divine guardianship of the church.

Extensive repair and restoration are ongoing in the modern period. We likely pride ourselves on the ability of modern engineering to compensate for daring 6th Century building technique. Both ages have their belief systems and we are understandably certain of the rightness of our modern approach to care of the great monument. But we must also know that we would be lesser if we did not contemplate with some admiration the structural belief system of the Byzantine Age.

*Helen C. Evans, Ph.D., "Byzantium Revisited: The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia in the Twentieth Century," *Fourth Annual Pallas Lecture* (University of Michigan, 2006).

Historical outline: Isidore and Anthemius replaced the original 4th-century church commissioned by Emperor Constantine and a 5th-century structure that was destroyed during the Nika revolt of 532. The present Hagia Sophia or the Church of Holy Wisdom became a mosque in 1453 following the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans under Sultan Mehmed II. In 1934, Atatürk, founder of Modern Turkey, converted the mosque into a museum.

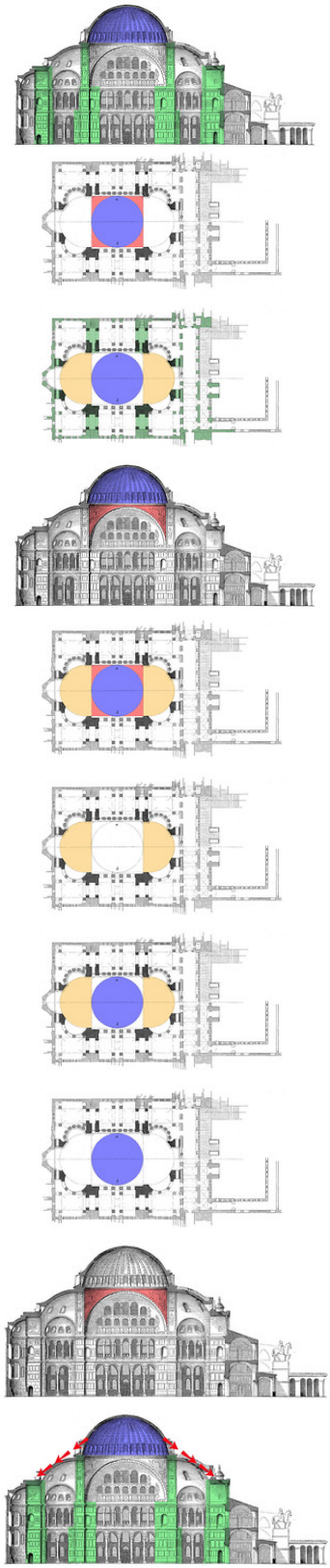




Additional resources:

Hagia Sophia on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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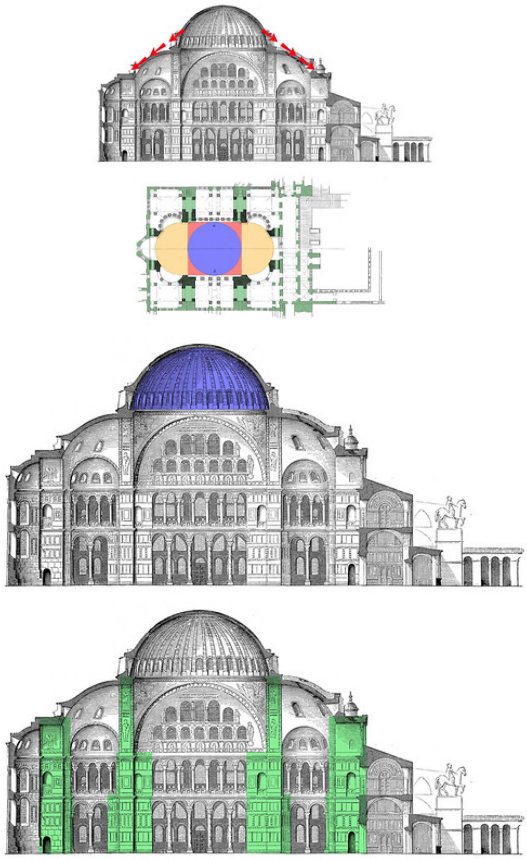
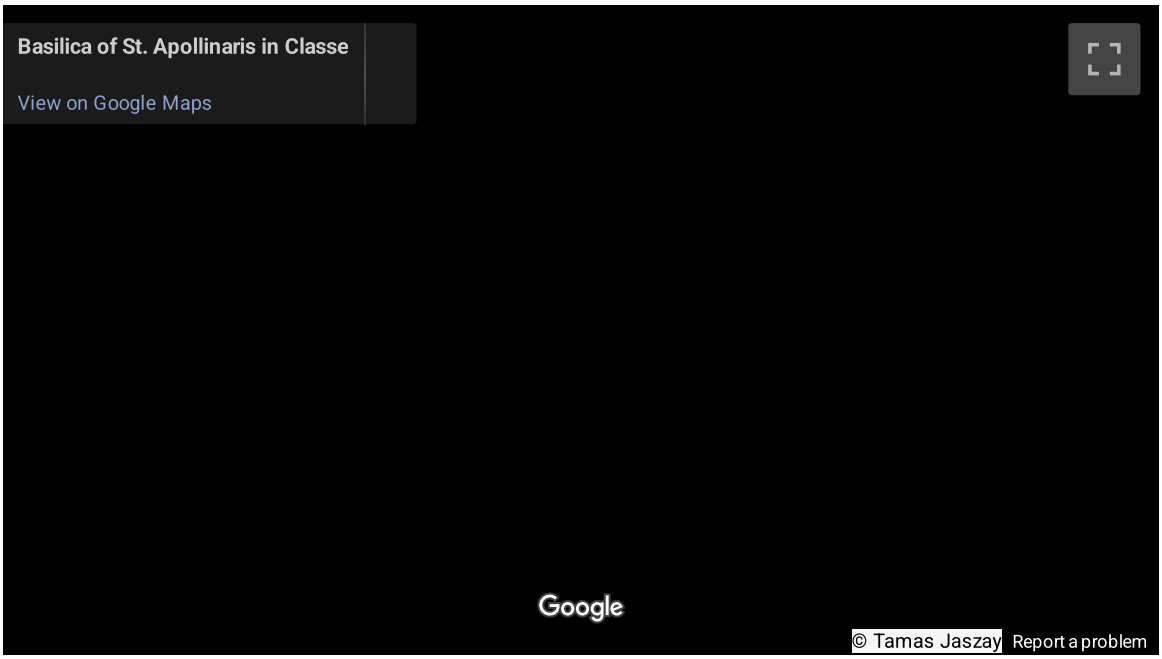


Figure 5.2.5.99: More Smarthistory images…

Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna (Italy)

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS


Basilica of St. Apollinaris in Classe
View on Google Maps
Google
© Tamas Jaszay
Report a problem

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/375385

Figure 5.2.5.100: More Smarthistory images…

San Vitale and the *Justinian Mosaic*

by DR. ALLEN FARBER

Video 5.2.5.7: San Vitale, begun c. 526-527, consecrated 547, Ravenna (Italy)

San Vitale is one of the most important surviving examples of Byzantine architecture and mosaic work. It was begun in 526 or 527 under Ostrogothic rule. It was consecrated in 547 and completed soon after.

Figure 5.2.5.101: San Vitale, consecrated 547, Ravenna (photo: Steven Zucker, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

One of the most famous images of political authority from the Middle Ages is the mosaic of the Emperor Justinian and his court in the sanctuary of the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy. This image is an integral part of a much larger mosaic program in the chancel (the space around the altar).

Figure 5.2.5.102: Apse mosaic (photo: Steven Zucker, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

A major theme of this mosaic program is the authority of the emperor in the Christian plan of history.

The mosaic program can also be seen to give visual testament to the two major ambitions of Justinian's reign: as heir to the tradition of Roman Emperors, Justinian sought to restore the territorial boundaries of the Empire. As the Christian Emperor, he saw himself as the defender of the faith. As such it was his duty to establish religious uniformity or Orthodoxy throughout the Empire.

Figure 5.2.5.103: Justinian and his attendants (photo: Steven Zucker, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Who's Who in the Mosaic and What They Carry

In the chancel mosaic Justinian is posed frontally in the center. He is haloed and wears a crown and a purple imperial robe. He is flanked by members of the clergy on his left with the most prominent figure the Bishop Maximianus of Ravenna being labelled with an inscription. To Justinian's right appear members of the imperial administration identified by the purple stripe, and at the very far left side of the mosaic appears a group of soldiers.

This mosaic thus establishes the central position of the Emperor between the power of the church and the power of the imperial administration and military.Like the Roman Emperors of the past, Justinian has religious, administrative, and military authority.

Figure 5.2.5.104: Apse detail (photo: Steven Zucker, CC: BY-NC-SA 2.0)

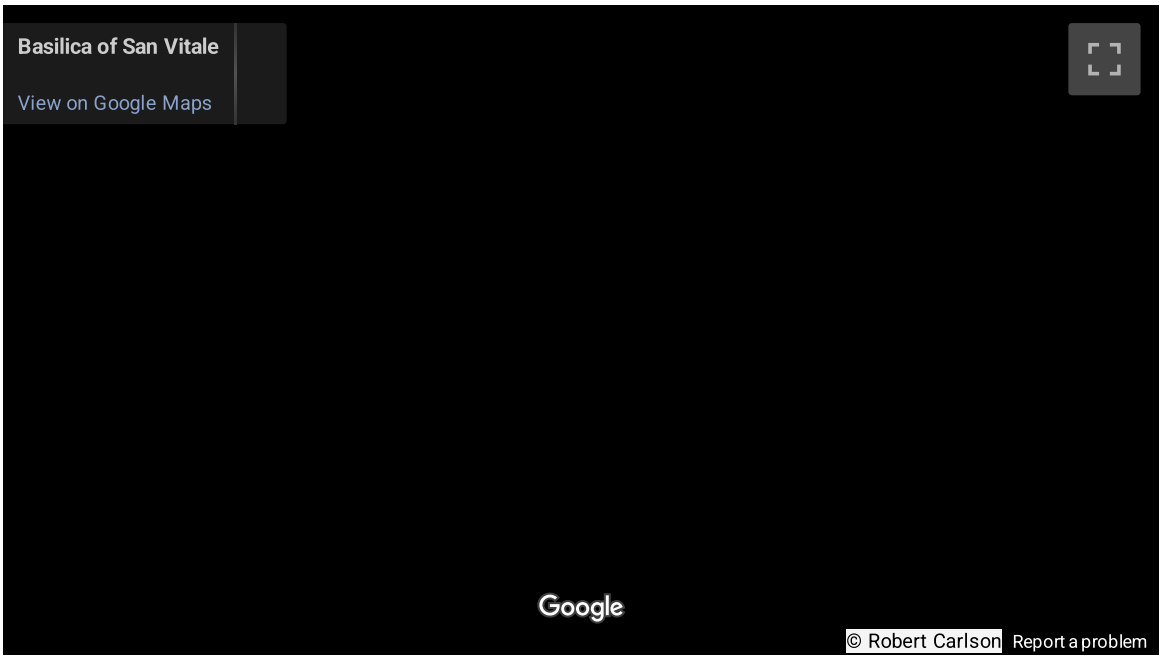
The clergy and Justinian carry in sequence from right to left a censer, the gospel book, the cross, and the bowl for the bread of the Eucharist. This identifies the mosaic as the so-called Little Entrance which marks the beginning of the Byzantine liturgy of the Eucharist.
Justinian's gesture of carrying the bowl with the bread of the Eucharist can be seen as an act of homage to the True King who appears in the adjacent apse mosaic (image left).

Christ, dressed in imperial purple and seated on an orb signifying universal dominion, offers the crown of martyrdom to St. Vitale, but the same gesture can be seen as offering the crown to Justinian in the mosaic below. Justinian is thus Christ's vice-regent on earth, and his army is actually the army of Christ as signified by the Chi-Rho on the shield.

Who's in Front?

Figure 5.2.5.105

Closer examination of the Justinian mosaic reveals an ambiguity in the positioning of the figures of Justinian and the Bishop Maximianus. Overlapping suggests that Justinian is the closest figure to the viewer, but when the positioning of the figures on the picture plane is considered, it is evident that Maximianus's feet are lower on the picture plane which suggests that he is closer to the viewer. This can perhaps be seen as an indication of the tension between the authority of the Emperor and the church.



Additional resources:

360 view of the apse (Columbia University)

360 view from the nave (Columbia University)

Nazanin Hedayat Munroe, Dress Styles in the Mosaics of San Vitale

Sarah E. Bassett, Style and Meaning in the Imperial Panels at San Vitale

Mosaics of San Vitale in Ravenna by Dr. Allen Farber

Byzantium on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History

360-degree Panorama of the Apse of San Vitale from Columbia University

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Chancel Capital (close), San Vitale, Ravenna

Underside of Triumphal Arch, San Vitale, Ravenna

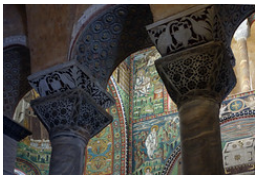
Chancel and Apse (close), San Vitale, Ravenna

View from Chancel toward Atrium, San Vitale, Ravenna

View Up to Gallery, San Vitale, Ravenna

Chancel and Apse (far), San Vitale, Ravenna

Bust of Christ Under Triumphal Arch, San Vitale, Ravenna



Mirrored Stone Facing, San Vitale, Ravenna

View from Chancel to Central Dome, San Vitale, Ravenna

Empress Theodora Mosaic, San Vitale, Ravenna

Figure 5.2.5.106: More Smarthistory images…

Art and architecture of Saint Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai

by DR. ANNE MCCLANAN

Figure **5.2.5.107**: (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt) (photo: **Joonas Plaan**, CC BY 2.0)

A monastery built on holy ground

The Monastery of Saint Catherine is the oldest active Eastern Orthodox monastery in the world, renowned for its extraordinary holdings of Byzantine art.

The location of the monastery is significant for Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, because tradition identifies it as the place of the Burning Bush, a major biblical event where Moses encountered God:

> ***Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.***

Figure 5.2.5.108: Icon with Moses before the Burning Bush, early 13th century, Byzantine (Mount Sinai?), tempera and gold on wood, 92 x 64 cm (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt)

The episode is represented in several artworks in the monastery's collection, including an early thirteenth-century icon made of tempera and gold on wood. This image represents the moment when God spoke to Moses: "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5, NRSV).

The Monastery of Saint Catherine was founded between 548–565 C.E., in the later years of the Byzantine emperor Justinian's reign, part of **a massive building program** that he had initiated across the empire.

Figure 5.2.5.109: Louis Haghe after David Roberts, *Monastery of St. Catherine beneath Mount Sinai*, 1849, colored lithograph (**Wellcome Collection**, CC BY 4.0)

The basilica

The monastery's exterior walls and main church, which pilgrims can still see today, largely survive from the original, sixth-century phase of construction. A few elements came later (for example, the belfry was added in the 19th century).

The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Katharinaklooster_R01.jpg" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Katharinaklooster_R01.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Marc Ryckaert, CC BY 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51921" height="600" sizes="(max-width: 768px) 100vw, 768px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.110: The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine (view from the northeast), Sinai, Egypt (photo: **Marc Ryckaert**, CC BY 3.0)

Plan of Saint Catherine's Monastery (adapted from plan by <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Монастырь_св.екатерины.jpg" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Монастырь_св.екатерины.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
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Figure **5.2.5.111**: Plan of Saint Catherine's Monastery with the traditional location of the Burning Bush noted (adapted from plan by **Shakko**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Figure **5.2.5.112**: The nave (central aisle) in the basilica at the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt (photo: **Library of Congress**)

Transfiguration mosaic

The church follows the pattern of a basilica, having a rectangular plan (**read more about basilica churches**). Monks have worshipped for 1,400 years inside this church.

Columns frame the central nave and above the altar is a recently-restored apse mosaic that might hint at the building's original name. The mosaic depicts a moment in the Christian New Testament called the "Transfiguration," in which Christ appears transformed by radiant light, an event witnessed by three of his apostles. The scene is set against a glimmering gold background. When the monastery was first built it might have been dedicated to the Transfiguration, which in Christian belief is like the Burning Bush in that it is a moment when God revealed himself to humanity.

Transfiguration Apse mosaic, 6th century, the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt (Photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/25F9WJi" href="https://flic.kr/p/25F9WJi" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Europa Nostra, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)
(view annotated photo)
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Figure **5.2.5.112**: Transfiguration Apse mosaic, 6th century, the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt (Photo: **Europa Nostra**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) **(view annotated photo)**, Here Jesus is shown in the center radiating light as John, Peter, and James witness the miracle. The two standing figures that frame the central group are the prophet's Elijah and Moses.

> ***Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him…***

> ***While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear.***

enaming

ter, in the 9th century, when the body of the revered Egyptian Saint Catherine of Alexandria was discovered, the monastery was given the name that it l
ot until today.

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Figure 5.2.5.113: Map with the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine (underlying map © Google)

ɔns and Iconoclasm

Figure 5.2.5.114: Iconoclasts destroying an icon of Christ, Khludov Psalter, 9th century (State Historical Museum, Moscow)

ɪring the **Iconoclastic period** of the eighth to ninth centuries, the Byzantine Empire, and particularly its capital city of Constantinople (modern Istanbu s convulsed with the question of whether religious images with human figures (called "icons") were appropriate, or whether such images were in eff ɔls, akin to the statues of gods in ancient Greece and Rome. In other words, did worshippers pray *through* icons to the holy figure represented, or did th ɪy *to* the physical image itself? The Iconoclasts (those who opposed images) attempted to ban icons and reportedly even destroyed some.

t by the time of the Iconoclastic controversy, the Sinai Peninsula, where Saint Catherine's Monastery is located, was under **Islamic** rather than Byzanti ɪtrol, enabling the monastery's icons to escape Iconoclasm. Other factors, including the monastery's isolated location, fortifications, continuc ɔupation by monks, as well as the dry climate of the region, all likely contributed to the preservation of icons at Sinai.

Figure 5.2.5.117: Christ Blessing, first half of the 6th century, encaustic on panel, 84 x 45.5 x 1.2 cm (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt)

ɪrly Byzantine Icons

Figure 5.2.5.118: Bronze statuette of Jupiter Capitolinus, 1st–2nd century C.E., bronze, 11.9 x 6 . 5.1 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

e sixth-century icon of Christ Blessing—or Christ "Pantokrator" (all-ruler), as this image would later become known—was painted using encaustic t ɜbled the artist to create a vivid sense of **naturalism**. This icon was painted by a highly skilled artist, and therefore might have been made in the capi ɣ of Constantinople.

rist raises his right hand to give a blessing. His other hand holds an elaborate manuscript, which probably takes the form of a contemporary Gospel boo
phasizing Christ's identity as the embodied "Word" of God. This bearded, mature version of Christ—just one of several ways Christ appears in
ore Iconoclasm—draws on pre-Christian traditions of rendering other male divinities such as Jupiter.

e Monastery of Saint Catherine preserves a number of rare Early Byzantine icons such as this.

ad about another Early Byzantine icon at Saint Catherine's.

Figure 5.2.5.119: Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of Saint John Climacus, late 12th century, tempera and gold on panel, 41.3 x 29.9 x 2.1 cm (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt)

ddle Byzantine Icons

ter Iconoclasm, perhaps to avoid accusations of idolatry, Byzantine icons became less naturalistic. **Compare** this Middle Byzantine icon of the Heaver dder with the Early Byzantine icon of Christ. Notice, for example, the ethereal, flat gold background in the icon of the Ladder that replaces the landsca ited at behind the halo in the sixth-century Christ "Pantokrator."

e Heavenly Ladder

is icon of the Heavenly Ladder was made at the monastery of Saint Catherine in the late 12th century, and illustrates the process of spiritual asc dertaken by monastics. The icon is based on a spiritual text of the same name, written by a monk called Saint John of the Ladder, who lived c. 579–6 l was a member of Saint Catherine's Monastery. In his writing, John warns his fellow monks about temptations of the monastic life; in the icon of dder, the artist depicts these temptations as elegantly silhouetted demons who attempt to tug the monks off the ladder as they climb toward Christ in per righthand corner.

Figure 5.2.5.120: Saint Theodosia, early 13th century, Constantinople, tempera and gold on panel (34 x 25.6 x 2.2 cm) (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt)

int Theodosia

is 13th-century icon depicts Saint Theodosia and is one of five icons at Saint Catherine's that depict the same saint. Clearly, Saint Theodosia's cult w pular at Sinai as it was elsewhere in the Byzantine world.

this image, Theodosia wears the somber dress of a nun. Although her historical status is debated (she may have been legendary rather than an act torical figure), to the Christian faithful she represents the challenges faced during Iconoclasm, when she reputedly died defending a famed icon of Chr Constantinople. The cross she holds represents her martyrdom. She was also famous in the late Byzantine period for healing miracles attributed to h ther enhancing her appeal for worshippers.

int Catherine's Monastery today

e library of this centuries-old monastery houses many important medieval manuscripts in diverse languages such as Greek, Arabic, and Syriac. ntinues to attract pilgrims from around the world—some of the current monks now in residence hail from exotic lands such as Texas.

Additional Resources

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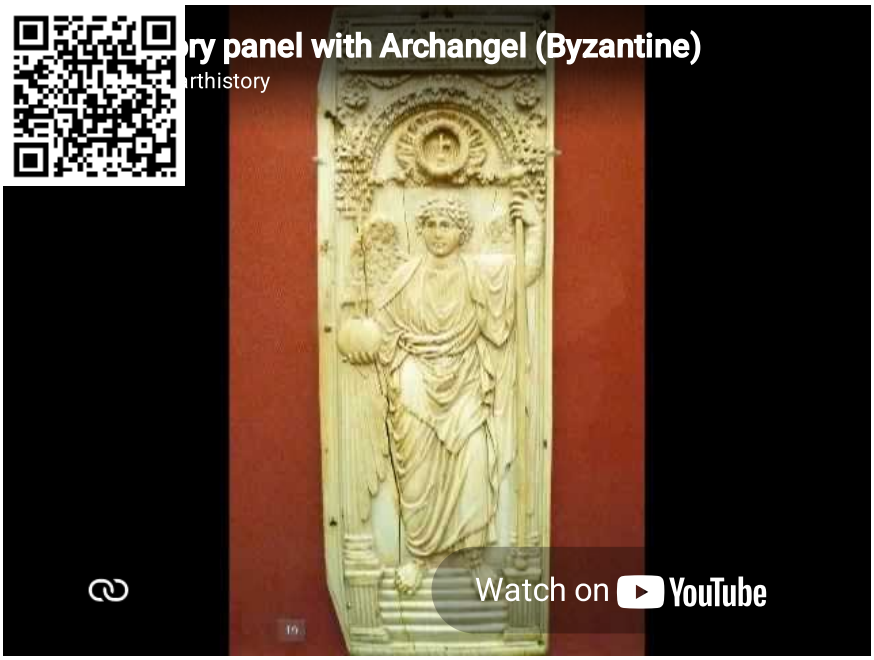
Holy Image, Hallowed Ground from Igloo Editorial on Vimeo.

Video 5.2.5.8: The Icons of Sinai, Department of Art & Archaeology, Princeton University

Robert S. Nelson and Kirsten M. Collins, eds., *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006).

ory Panel with Archangel

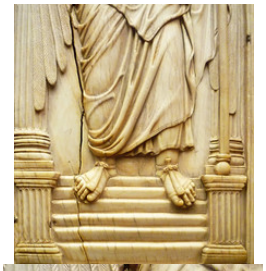
DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



ideo 5.2.5.9: Byzantine panel with archangel, ivory leaf from diptych, c. 525-50, 16.8 x 5.6 x 0.35″ / 42.8 x 14.3 x 0.9 cm, probably from Constantinop (modern Istanbul, Turkey), (British Museum, London)

e British Museum translates the text at the top of the panel as: “Receive the suppliant before you, despite his sinfulness.”

narthistory images for teaching and learning:



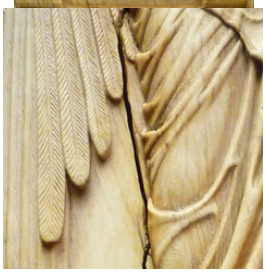


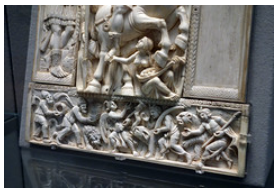
Figure 5.2.5.121: More Smarthistory images…

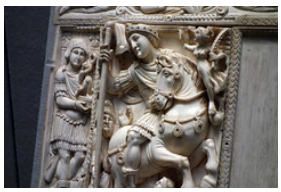
The Emperor Triumphant (Barberini Ivory)

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.2.5.10: *The Emperor Triumphant (Barberini Ivory)*, mid-6th century, ivory, inlay, 34.2 x 26.8 x 2.8 (Musée du Louvre, Paris)
Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:





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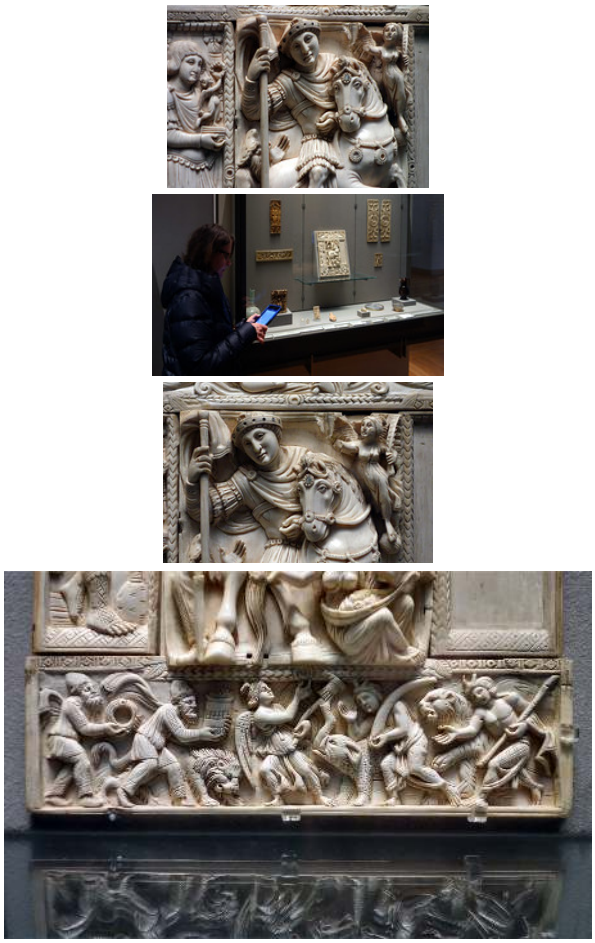


Figure **5.2.5.122**: More Smarthistory images…

'gin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George

DR. WILLIAM ALLEN

Figure **5.2.5.123**: Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George, sixth or early seventh century, encaustic on wood, 2′ 3″ x 1′ 7 3/8″ (St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt)

Mount Sinai Monastery

ıe of thousands of important Byzantine images, books, and documents preserved at St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai (Egypt) is the remarkal :austic icon painting of the Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George ("Icon" is Greek for "image" or "painting" and encaus ı painting technique that uses wax as a medium to carry the color).

e icon shows the Virgin and Child flanked by two soldier saints, St. Theodore to the left and St. George at the right. Above these are two angels who ga ward to the hand of God, from which light emanates, falling on the Virgin.

lectively classicizing

e painter selectively used the classicizing style inherited from Rome. The faces are modeled; we see the same convincing modeling in the heads of t gels (note the muscles of the necks) and the ease with which the heads turn almost three-quarters.

e space appears compressed, almost flat, at our first encounter. Yet we find spatial recession, first in the throne of the Virgin where we glimpse part of t ht side and a shadow cast by the throne; we also see a receding armrest as well as a projecting footrest. The Virgin, with a slight twist of her body, s nfortably on the throne, leaning her body left toward the edge of the throne. The child sits on her ample lap as the mother supports him with both han see the left knee of the Virgin beneath convincing drapery whose folds fall between her legs.

the top of the painting an architectural member turns and recedes at the heads of the angels. The architecture helps to create and close off the spa und the holy scene.

Figure **5.2.5.124**: Byzantine panel with archangel, Ivory leaf from diptych, ca. 525-50, 16.8 x 5.6 x 0.35 in./42.8 x 14.3 x 0.9 cm, probably from Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey), (British Museum, London)

e composition displays a spatial ambiguity that places the scene in a world that operates differently from our world, reminiscent of the spatial ambigu the earlier *Ivory panel with Archangel*. The ambiguity allows the scene to partake of the viewer's world but also separates the scene from the norm rld.

w in our icon is what we might call a "hierarchy of bodies." Theodore and George stand erect, feet on the ground, and gaze directly at the viewer w ge, passive eyes. While looking at us they show no recognition of the viewer and appear ready to receive something from us. The saints are sligh mated by the lifting of a heel by each as though they slowly step toward us.

e Virgin averts her gaze and does not make eye contact with the viewer. The ethereal angels concentrate on the hand above. The light tones of the ang l especially the slightly transparent rendering of their halos give the two an otherworldly appearance.

Figure **5.2.5.125**: Detail, *Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George*, sixth or early seventh century, encaustic on wood, 2′ 3″ x 1′ 7 3/8″ (St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt)

ɜual movement upward, toward the hand of God

is supremely composed picture gives us an unmistakable sense of visual movement inward and upward, from the saints to the Virgin and from the Virg
ward past the angels to the hand of God.

e passive saints seem to stand ready to receive the veneration of the viewer and pass it inward and upward until it reaches the most sacred realm depict
the picture.

can describe the differing appearances as saints who seem to inhabit a world close to our own (they alone have a ground line), the Virgin and Child w
elevated and look beyond us, and the angels who reside near the hand of God transcend our space. As the eye moves upward we pass through zones:
nts, standing on ground and therefore closest to us, and then upward and more ethereal until we reach the holiest zone, that of the hand of God. The
ıes of holiness suggest a cosmos of the world, earth and real people, through the Virgin, heavenly angels, and finally the hand of God. The viewer w
nds before the scene make this cosmos complete, from “our earth” to heaven.

chalice from the Attarouthi Treasure

DR. ANNE MCCLANAN *and* *DR. EVAN FREEMAN*

deo 5.2.5.11: Anne and Evan discuss a Byzantine chalice (The Attarouthi Treasure — Chalice, Silver and gilded silver, 500–650 C.E., **The Metropolita Museum of Art**)

ɔnoclastic controversies

DR. DAVOR DŽALTO

Figure 5.2.5.126: Apa Abraham, c. 590-600, watercolor on panel, Egyptian (Bode Museum, Berlin)

e word “icon” refers to many different things today. For example, we use this word to refer to the small graphic symbols in our software and to power
tural figures. Nevertheless, these different meanings retain a connection to the word’s original meaning. “Icon” is Greek for “image” or “painting” a
ring the medieval era, this meant a religious image on a wooden panel used for prayer and devotion. More specifically, icons came to typify the art of
thodox Christian Church.

onoclasm" refers to the destruction of images or hostility toward visual representations in general. More specifically, the word is used for t noclastic Controversy that shook the Byzantine Empire for more than 100 years.

en hostility toward religious representations began in 726 when Emperor Leo III publicly took a position against icons; this resulted in their remo m churches and their destruction. There had been many previous theological disputes over visual representations, their theological foundations a itimacy. However, none of these caused the tremendous social, political and cultural upheaval of the Iconoclastic Controversy.

Figure **5.2.5.128**: Christ Pantocrator (The Ruler of the Universe), Catacombs of Commodilla, 4th century

me historians believe that by prohibiting icons, the Emperor sought to integrate Muslim and Jewish populations. Both Muslims and Jews perceiv ristian images (that existed from the earliest times of Christianity) as idols and in direct opposition to the Old Testament prohibition of visi resentations. The first commandment states,

u shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image – any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the ea neath, or that is in the waters under the earth. You shall not adore them, nor serve them (Exodus 20:3-5).

other theory suggests that the prohibition was an attempt to restrain the growing wealth and power of the monasteries. They produced the icons and w rimary target of the violence of the Iconoclastic Controversy. Other scholars offer a less political motive, suggesting that the prohibition was primar igious, an attempt to correct the wayward practice of worshiping images.

e trigger for Leo III's prohibition may have even been the huge volcanic eruption in 726 in the Aegean Sea interpreted as a sign of God's anger over t neration of icons. There is no one simple answer to this complex event. What we do know is that the prohibition essentially caused a civil war wh ook the political, social and religious spheres of the empire. The conflict pitted the emperor and certain high church officials (patriarchs, bishops) w pported iconoclasm, against other bishops, lower clergy, laity and monks, who defended the icons.

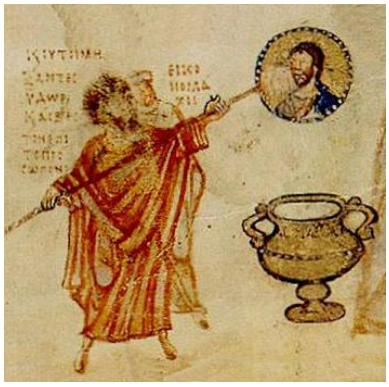


Figure **5.2.5.129**: Khludov Psalter (detail), 9th century. The image represents the Iconoclast theologian, John the Grammarian, and an iconoclast bishop destroying an image of Christ. (State Historical Museum, Moscow)

e original theological basis for iconoclasm was fairly weak. Arguments relied mostly on the Old Testament prohibition (quoted above). But it was cl t this prohibition was not absolute since God also instructs how to make three dimensional representations of the Cherubim (heavenly spirits or ange the Ark of the Covenant, which is also quoted in the Old Testament, just a couple of chapters after the passage that prohibits images (Exodus 25:18-20

nperor Constantine V gave a more nuanced theological rationale for iconoclasm. He claimed that each visual representation of Christ necessarily ends neresy since Christ, according to generally accepted Christian dogmas, is simultaneously God and man, united without separation, and any visi

piction of Christ either separates these natures, representing Christ's humanity alone, or confuses them.

e iconophile (pro-icon) counter-argument was most convincingly articulated by St. John of Damascus and St. Theodore the Studite. They claimed t iconoclast arguments were simply confused. Images of Christ do not depict natures, being either Divine or human, but a concrete person—Jesus Chr incarnate Son of God. They claimed that in Christ the meaning of the Old Testament prohibition is revealed: God prohibited any representation of G anything that could be worshiped as a god) because it was impossible to depict the invisible God. Any such representation would thus be an id sentially a false representation or false god. But in Christ's person, God became visible, as a concrete human being, so painting Christ is necessary a proof that God truly, not seemingly, became man. The fact that one can depict Christ witnesses God's incarnation.

Figure **5.2.5.130**: Madonna with Christ, 9th century, mosaic, Hagia Sophia (Istanbul). This mosaic follows the iconoclastic crisis and revives stylistic elements from early Christian art.

e first phase of iconoclasm ended in 787, when the Seventh Ecumenical (universal) Council of bishops met in Nicaea. This council affirmed the view iconophiles, ordering all right-believing (orthodox) Christians to respect holy icons, prohibiting at the same time their adoration as idolatry. Empe o V initiated a second period of iconoclasm in 814, but in 843, Empress Theodora proclaimed the restoration of icons and affirmed the decisions of venth Ecumenical council. This event is still celebrated in the Orthodox Church as the "Feast of Orthodoxy."

ditional resources:

ns and iconoclasm in Byzantium on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

e power of icons

e Triumph of Images: Icons, Iconoclasm, and the Incarnation

narthistory images for teaching and learning:

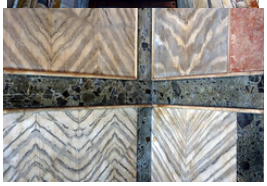
Figure **5.2.5.131**: More Smarthistory images…

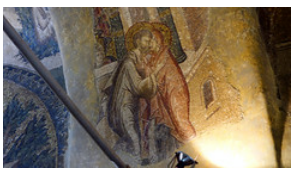
Ancient and Byzantine mosaic materials

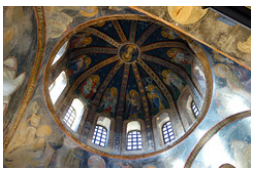
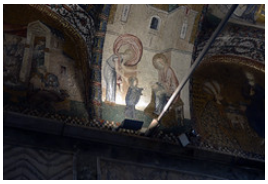
by ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Video **5.2.5.12**: Video from the Art Institute of Chicago

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:





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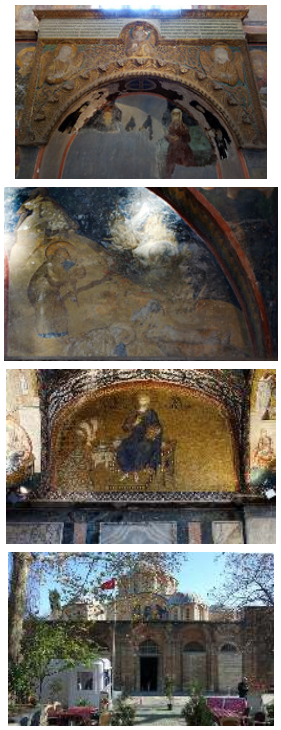
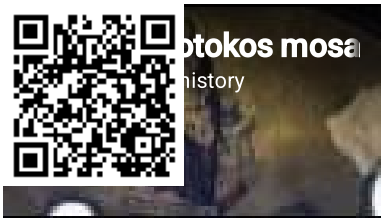


Figure 5.2.5.132: More Smarthistory images…

Middle Byzantine

Theotokos mosaic, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS



Video 5.2.5.13: *Theotokos mosaic*, 867, apse, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

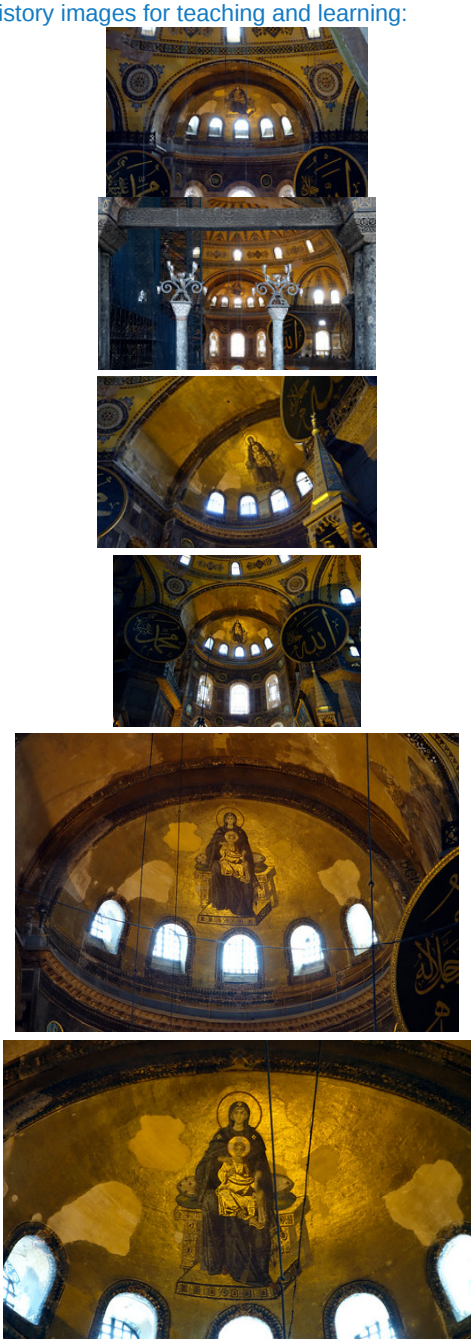


Figure 5.2.5.133: More Smarthistory images…

e *Paris Psalter*

DR. ANNE MCCLANAN

Figure **5.2.5.134**: David Composing the Psalms, from the *Paris Psalter*, c. 900 C.E. 14-1/8 x 10-1/4″ / 36 x 26 cm (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

e classical past and the medieval Christian present

ıy would a Biblical king surround himself with pagans? The *Paris Psalter* embodies a complex mixture of the classical pagan past and the medie ristian present—all brought together to communicate a political message by the Byzantine emperor.

e Byzantine Empire, which ruled areas of the eastern Mediterranean from the fourth through fifteenth centuries, left a dazzling visual legacy that l luenced other medieval Christian and Islamic societies as well as countless artists in our own time.

ıat is a psalter?

e word “Psalter” in the name of this manuscript is the term we use for books and manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible’s Book of Psalms. Psalters were c the most commonly copied works in the Middle Ages because of their central role in medieval church ceremony.

e images

Figure **5.2.5.135**: David Glorified by the Women of Israel, from *The Paris Psalter*, c. 900 C.E. 14-1/8 x 10-1/4″ / 36 x 26 cm (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

is work was unusually large and lavishly illustrated, with 14 full-page illuminations included in its 449 folios (a folio is a leaf in a book). Eight of th ages depict the life of King David, who was often seen as a model of just rule for medieval kings. Because King David was traditionally considered hor of the Psalms, he is shown here in the role of musician and composer, sitting atop a boulder playing his harp in an idyllic pastoral setting.

is manuscript so carefully follows models from prior centuries that scholars once thought it was made during the reign of the Byzantine Empe stinian in the sixth century. Only later did research demonstrate that the Paris Psalter was actually made in the tenth century as an exquisite imitation man work from the third to fifth centuries—in other words, it was part of an intentional revival of the Classical past. Classical style, as a general ter ers to the naturalistic visual representation used during periods when, for example, the Roman emperors Augustus and Hadrian ruled.

ɜssical revival

e period of classical revival that produced the *Paris Psalter* is sometimes called the Macedonian Renaissance, because the Macedonian dynasty perors ruled the Byzantine Empire at the time. This classical revival followed Byzantine Iconoclasm. The notion that this Byzantine revival of man past was a Renaissance, in the sense of a full-scale revival of classical thinking and art such as in the Italian Renaissance, has been question wever, there is no doubt that we see in this, and other contemporary works, a conscious appropriation of elements of the classical artistic vocabulary.

us we have the conundrum of the Biblical David encircled by classical personifications (a figure that represents a place or attribute). In this example, ıted woman embodies the attribute of Melody. David's seated posture with his instrument is likely based on the classical tragic figure Orpheus, usua own similarly positioned holding his lyre. Likewise the hazy buildings in the background also belong to the Greco-Roman tradition of wall painting. T aning of the personifications such as the woman, Melody, perched beside David, is intriguing—within the medieval Christian context she presumal s now become a symbol of culture and erudition as opposed to her earlier significance as a minor deity in the pagan classical world.

tice how the surroundings including plants, animals and landscape differs from the resplendent gold backgrounds used in the imperial mosaics stinian and Theodora at Ravenna or the icon we call the *Vladimir Virgin*. In contrast, David is depicted naturalistically as a youthful shepherd, rather th grand king he was to become. The classicizing, more realistic style of the figures and the landscape coupled with the overt classical allusions made personifications show the pains taken to render a coherent vision uniting subject and style.

Figure **5.2.5.136**: Rape of Europa (detail, lid), *Veroli Casket*, second half of the 10th century, wood overlaid with ivory with traces of polychrome and gilding (Victoria and Albert Museum)

nnecting with great emperors of the past?

her Byzantine art from the so-called Macedonian Renaissance, such as the ivory *Veroli Casket* (above), also show a renewed interest in classicism t led upon Late Roman artistic models. The patron of the *Paris Psalter* perhaps sought to liken himself this way with great emperors of the past iving a style that had been out of favor for hundreds of years and perhaps evoked a "golden age." Choice of artistic style could function as a tool nveying meaning within the sophisticated Byzantine society at the time.

e *Paris Psalter* was produced in Constantinople, today known as Istanbul, and takes its name from its modern location, Paris' Bibliothèque Nationa e *Paris Psalter* manuscript, like most western medieval manuscripts, was not made from paper, but from carefully prepared animal skins. Medie nuscripts were far more rare and precious than mass-produced modern printed books. Large-scale examples, such as this, made for an aristocratic if perial patron, show how Biblical art of the highest craftsmanship could serve many purposes for its medieval audience and patrons.

ddle Byzantine church architecture

DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

riods of Byzantine history

rly Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) **c. 330 – 843**

ddle Byzantine **c. 843 – 1204**

e Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire **1204 – 1261**

te Byzantine **1261 – 1453**

st-Byzantine **after 1453**

Figure 5.2.5.137: Exterior of a cross-in-square church, Fatih Mosque (H. Stephanos ?), early 9th century, Trilye in Bithynia (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

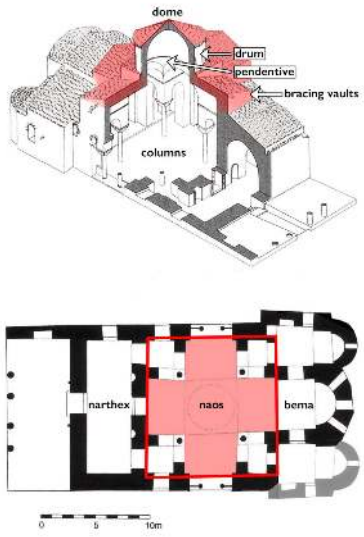


Figure 5.2.5.138: Fatih Mosque (H. Stephanos ?), plan and isometric section highlighting the elements of a cross-in-square church, early 9th century, Trilye (Zeytinbağı) in Bithynia (adapted from plan and isometric section © Robert Ousterhout)

e cross-in-square church

e end of **Iconoclasm** (the conflict regarding religious images and their removal from churches) and the development of a theology of images h ofound effects on church design, in terms of the development of a standardized program of decoration and a concomitant standardized building desi ch of which reflected the hierarchy of Orthodox belief. The pyramidal massing of forms, from a tall central dome to high crossing vaults, to lower cor ılts and walls, provides an ideal framework for **figural imagery**.

tih Mosque, Trilye

st seen in Trilye during the **Transitional Period**, the *cross-in-square* emerged as the standard church type following Iconoclasm.

Figure 5.2.5.139: Myrelaion church (Bodrum Mosque), c. 920, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

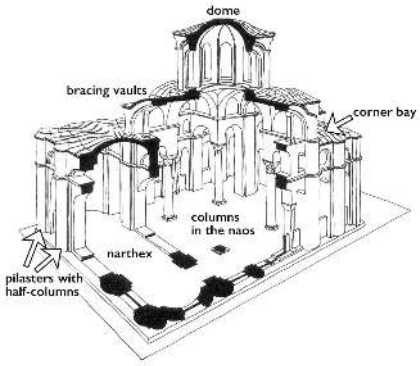


Figure 5.2.5.140: Elements of a cross-in-square church, Myrelaion church (Bodrum Mosque), c. 920, Constantinople (Istanbul)

ıe Myrelaion, Constantinople

e Myrelaion church in Constantinople, built c. 920, achieves a balance between the articulation of the structural system and the coordination of t erior spaces. Forms cascade down from the central dome like a pyramid. Four bracing vaults extend outward in the form of a cross, set within the squa the plan below. Hence the term, "cross-in-square," which defines this building type spatially, in three dimensions, rather than as a floor plan. Fc umns support the dome and **subdivide the naos into nine bays**. Those in the corners are the lowest, and correspond in height with the narthex a *stophoria*—the side chambers in the bema that flank the **central altar area**. Pilasters with half-columns on the church's exterior correspond to inter lls and supports so one can "read" the internal structure based on its exterior articulation.

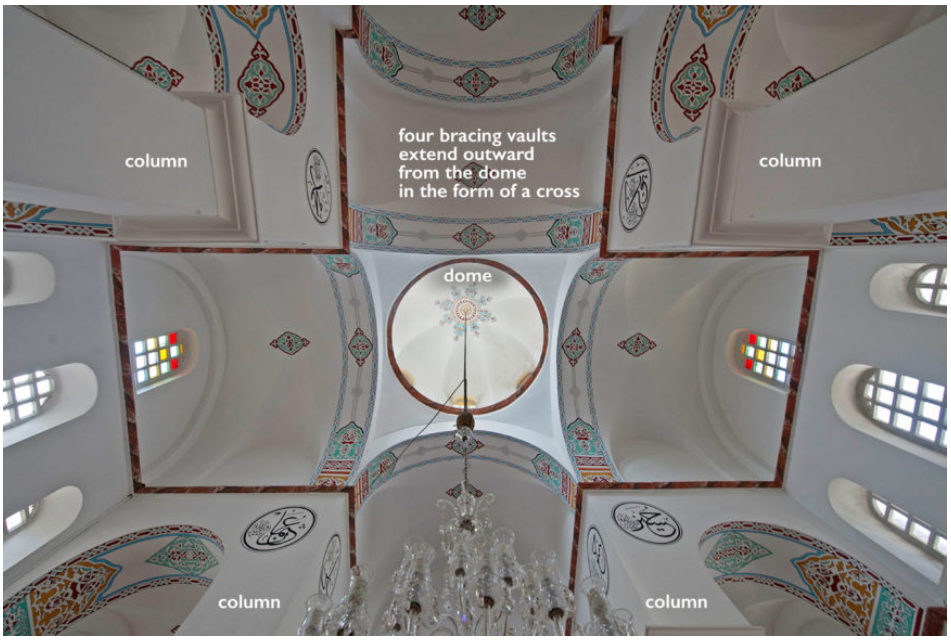


Figure **5.2.5.141**: Elements of a cross-in-square church, view of the naos, Myrelaion (Bodrum Mosque), c. 920, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: **Dosseman**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

iginally constructed as the palace chapel of Romanos Lekapenos, the building was lavishly decorated and served as the emperor's place of burial. L
ıny of the churches of Constantinople, the Myrelaion was converted into a mosque following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and
ɔwn today as the Bodrum Mosque.

Figure **5.2.5.142**: Panagia church, late 10th century, Hosios Loukas monastery, Boeotia (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

e spread of the cross-in-square

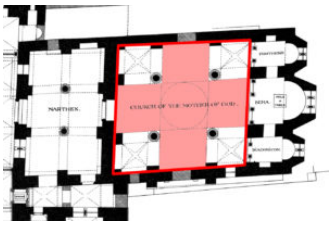


Figure **5.2.5.143**: Plan of the Panagia church (highlighting the dome, bracing vaults, and square naos), late 10th century, Hosios Loukas monastery, Boeotia

e cross-in-square type is widespread, first appearing in Greece in the late tenth century at the Panagia church at Hosios Loukas monastery. While neitl s nor the Myrelaion preserves internal decoration, the **Panagia ton Chalkeon** in Thessaloniki, dated by inscription to 1026, and the rock-cut Karan lise at Göreme, dated to the eleventh century, provide evidence of the developed interior cycle **(view plan of Karanlık Kilise Monastery)**. The sa ilding type appeared in central Anatolia, southern Italy, the Balkans, and Russia, with slight variations, and served a variety of functions, as palati mestic, monastic, parish, or funerary churches. The common denominator in all was the small scale appropriate to small groups of worshippers or priv e.

Figure 5.2.5.144: Karanlık Kilise, 11th century, Göreme, Cappadocia (photo: **Octavio L**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

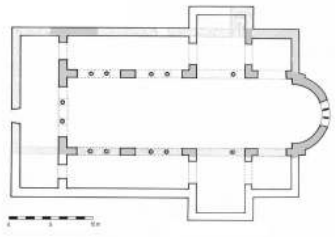


Figure 5.2.5.145: Old Metropolis basilica, reconstructed plan, 11th century, Verroia (© Robert Ousterhout).

e persistence of the basilica

th the revival of the empire beginning in the second half of the ninth century following the tumultuous **Transitional Period**, new church constructi curred most often as the result of private patronage. **Variations in church design** abound during the Middle Byzantine period (843-1204): basilicas a med basilicas continued to appear, notably when larger interior spaces were required, but in some regions, such as Kastoria in northern Greece, sm silicas persist. Occasionally, as with the ruined, three-aisled basilica at Servia and the Old Metropolis at Verroia (both in Northern Greece), there was n uitable **Early Christian basilica** to serve as the cathedral, so a basilica was built in the Middle Byzantine period.

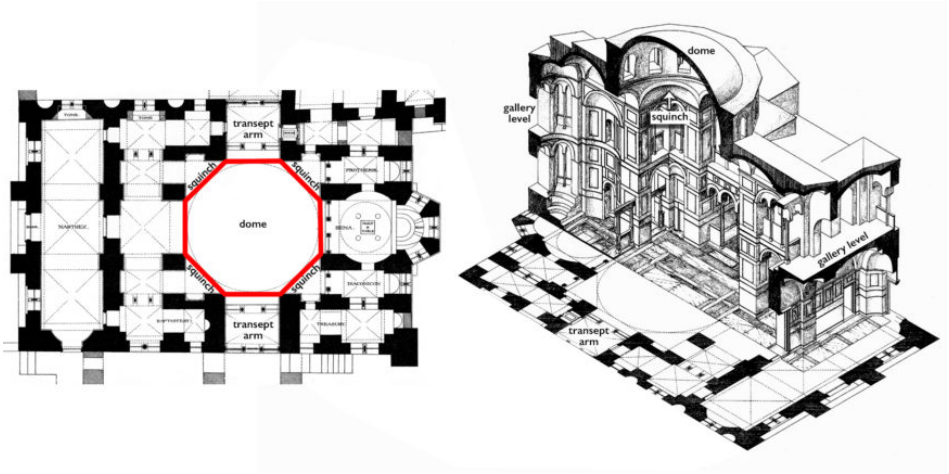


Figure 5.2.5.146: Annotated plan and isometric view of katholikon church (octagon highlighted), Hosios Loukas monastery, 11th century, Boeotia

Figure 5.2.5.147: View of dome, squinches, and octagon, katholikon church, 11th century, Hosios Loukas monastery, Boeotia (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) **(view annotated image)**.

e octagon-domed church

he limited scale of the cross-in-square church seemed too small or too plain, the *octagon-domed church* provided more elaborated interior designs a nplex surfaces for mosaic decoration, while providing eight points of support for a larger dome. With **squinches** providing the transition to the dome, sign may be derived from Arab or Caucasian models. The eleventh-century *katholika* of Hosios Loukas monastery, of Nea Moni on Chios, and stroyed church of H. Georgios ton Manganon in Constantinople suggest the degree of variations possible.

e katholikon church at Hosios Loukas

Hosios Loukas, the tall naos is extended by transept arms and is enveloped by galleries and annexed chapels on two levels; the hemispherical dor es above squinches. Lavishly decorated with marble and mosaic, the circumstances of its construction remain unclear **(view plan and isometric view e Panagia and katholikon churches at Hosios Loukas monastery)**.

eft: view of Nea Moni from the west (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:NEA_MONH_ΣTA_XIONIA.jpg&oldid=391721734#/media/File:NEA_MONH_ΣTA_XIONIA.jpg ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:NEA_MONH_ΣTA_XIONIA.jpg&oldid=391721734#/media/File:NEA_MONH_ΣTA_XIONIA.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
IOUKAS, CC BY-SA 4.0); right: plan of katholikon of Nea Moni, Chios, 11th century (© Robert Ousterhout)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-381" height="407" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.148: Left: view of Nea Moni from the west (photo: **FLIOUKAS**, CC BY-SA 4.0); right: plan of katholikon of Nea Moni, Chios, 11th century (© Robert Ousterhout)

Iosaics decorate the octaconch beneath the dome (with marble revetment lower down), Nea Moni, Chios, 11th century (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Εσωτερικό_-_Νέα_Μονή_Χίου.jpg" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Εσωτερικό_-_Νέα_Μονή_Χίου.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Meltedrainbow, CC BY-SA 4.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-49328" height="221" sizes="(max-width: 295px) 100vw, 295px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.149: Mosaics decorate the octaconch beneath the dome (with marble revetment lower down), Nea Moni, Chios, 11th century (photo: **Meltedrainbow**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

a Moni on the island of Chios

Nea Moni ("new monastery") on the Greek island of Chios, the footprint of a cross-in-square church is maintained, along with low vaults to the tripart ıctuary (bema) and narthex, while the naos appears tower-like, its dome originally nine-sided, rising above a tall drum and an octaconch at t nsitional level. The unusual design and lavish decoration with marbles and mosaics may be the result of imperial patronage by Constantine ɔnomachos and the work of artisans from Constantinople.

Georgios ton Manganon in Constantinople

so attributed to the patronage of Monomachos—and also lavishly decorated—the church of H. Georgios ton Manganon in Constantinople (n stroyed) seems to have had an octagon-domed design, with the dome raised above reentrant piers that curved at the corners of the naos, which w veloped by an ambulatory. Known from descriptions and limited excavations, however, details of its elevation remain uncertain.

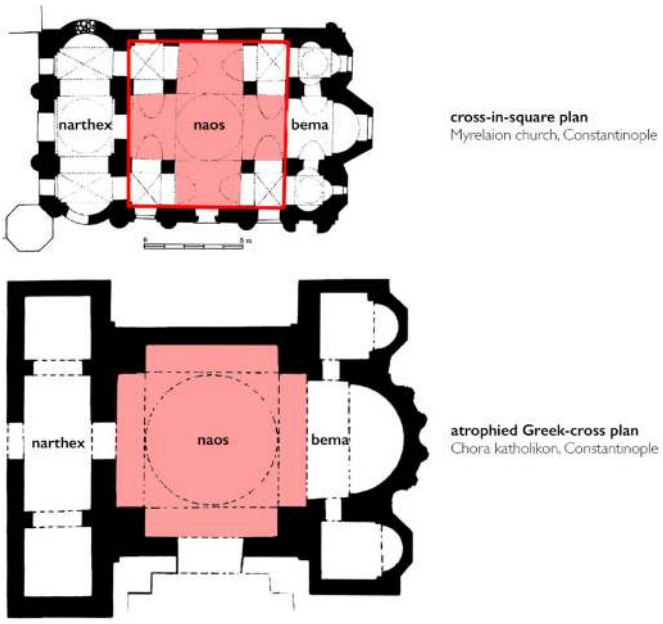

Figure 5.2.5.150: Cross-in-square and atrophied Greek-cross plans compared (adapted from plans © Robert Ousterhout)

Figure 5.2.5.151: Sv. Nikola (heavily restored), 12th century, Kuršumlija (photo: **CrniBombarder!!!**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

r churches of scale larger than a cross-in-square design could maintain, the cross-domed format could be adapted to provide a more stable structu stem and a more unified interior space, while allowing for a larger dome. Following the models developed in the **Transitional Period**, the design is ag pularized in the twelfth century, as occurred at the *katholikon* of the **Chora monastery**. Archaeology suggests that a cross-in-square church of t venth century was rebuilt in the early twelfth century on an atrophied Greek-cross plan. This design was imitated from Bithynia (H. Aberkios at Elegr Serbia (Sv. Nikola at Kursumlija) **(view plans of these atrophied Greek-cross churches)**. Such atrophied Greek-cross churches differ from cross- uare plans because of their larger domes, smaller crossarms, and lack of four supporting columns.

Figure **5.2.5.151**: Fatih Camii, plan and view of west façade, 12th century, Enez (Ainos) (plan and photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

med basilicas also reappear in the same period, as at the Fatih Camii at Enez or the **Gül Mosque** in Constantinople. Ambulatory-planned churches, su the twelfth-century Theotokos Pammakaristos in Constantinople, may have been intended to provide additional spaces for burial in close proximity naos.

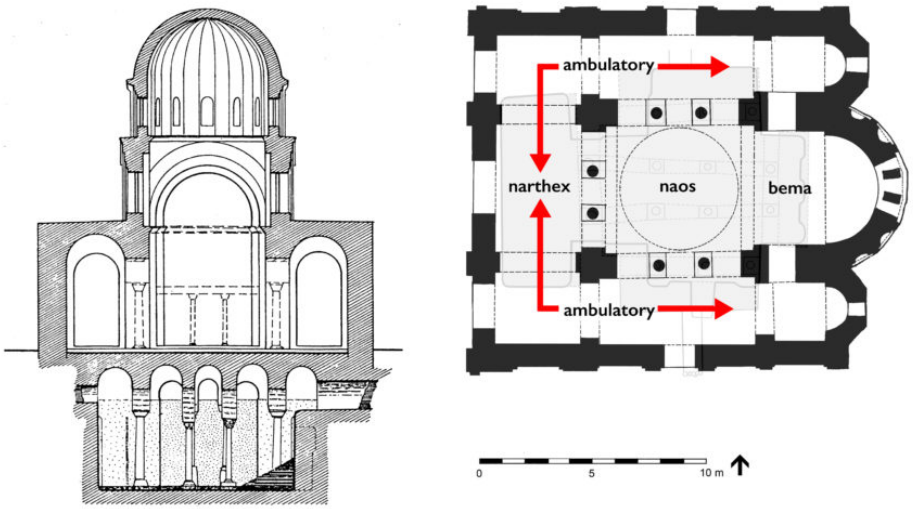

Figure **5.2.5.152**: Ambulatory plan, Theotokos Pammakaristos (Fethiye Mosque), hypothetical elevation and plan of the twelfth-century church and its cistern (shown in gray on the plan), Constantinople (Istanbul) (adapted from plan © Robert Ousterhout)

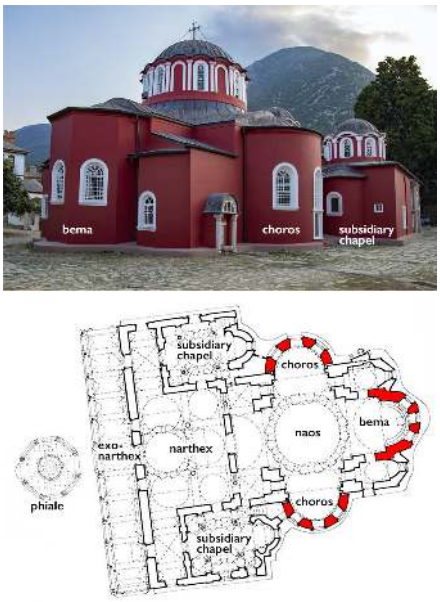

Figure 5.2.5.153: Katholikon (three apses higlighted in plan), Megisti Lavra, begun in 962, Mount Athos (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, plan © Robert Ousterhout)

conch churches

ıe katholikon at Megisti Lavra on Mount Athos

conch churches appear in the monastic environment of Mount Athos (a mountain and peninsula in northeastern Greece and an important center stern Orthodox monasticism), with the addition of lateral apses—i.e. apses on the *sides* of the church—to a standard cross-in-square plan. The late ses, called *choroi*, provided a setting for the choirs of monks who sang the liturgy. It is unclear if the new church type emerged by means of la litions or modifications, but the new feature clearly responded to the requirements of the monastic service. At Megisti Lavra, the katholikon begun 2 was expanded gradually, with the addition of lateral apses to the naos, domed subsidiary chapels flanking the narthex, an outer narthex, and a *phi* nt) **(view plan of Megisti Lavra Monastery)**.

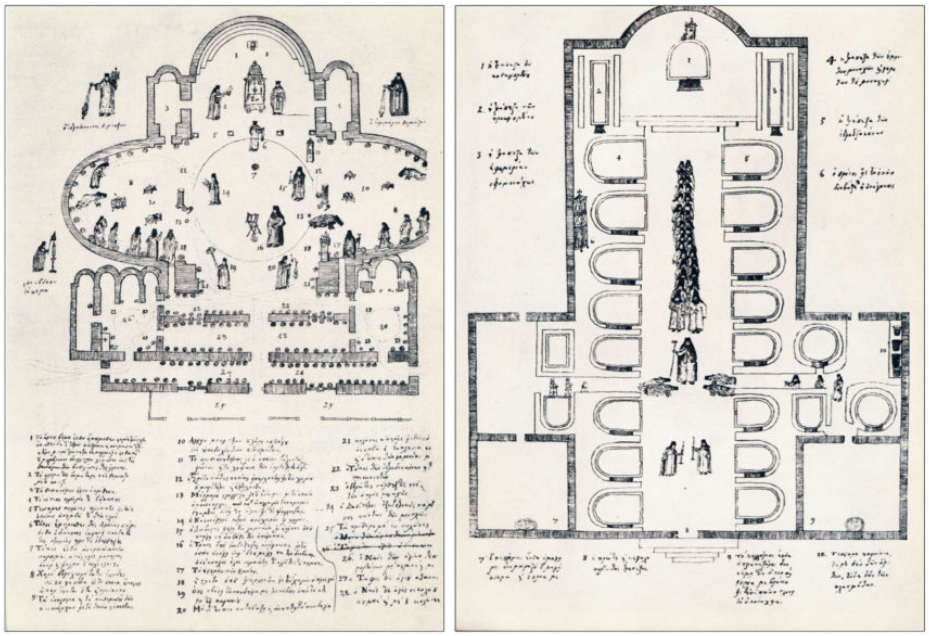

Figure 5.2.5.154: Eighteenth-century plans of the katholikon and the trapeza with ceremonies in progress, Megisti Lavra, Mount Athos (V. G. Barskii, 1885–87)

Vatopedi and elsewhere on Mount Athos, the katholika appear to have triconch plans from the inception.

Figure 5.2.5.155: Choros with windows in upper left, katholikon, Vatopedi monastery, Mount Athos (photo: Saint-Petersburg Theological Academy, CC BY-ND 2.0)

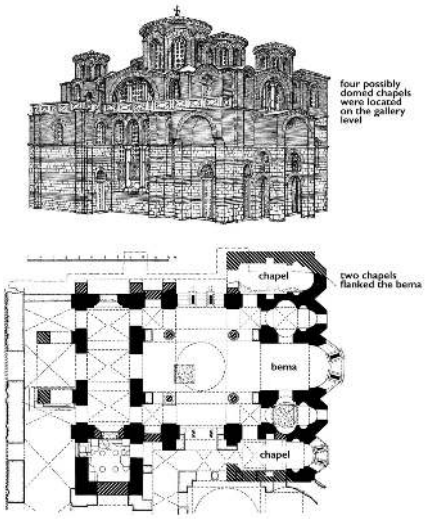

Figure 5.2.5.156: Hypothetical reconstruction (top) and plan (bottom), Theotokos tou Libos, 907, Constantinople (adapted from Megaw, "The Original Form of the Theotokos Church of Constantine Lips")

eater complexity

eotokos tou Libos, Constantinople

nexed chapels and more complex plans appear regularly in the Middle Byzantine period. The monastic church of the Theotokos tou Libos nstantinople, built c. 907 as a cross-in-square church similar in scale and detail to the Myrelaion, included six subsidiary chapels in its original desi h two flanking the bema and four tiny, possibly domed chapels on the gallery level. The katholikon of Hosios Loukas has eight chapels, organized o levels. These subsidiary spaces have been interpreted as settings for private devotions, or possibly private liturgies, or as primarily commemorati ces, but they are clearly integrated into the overall design of the building. Often a single chapel is set to one side of the building, as at Sv. Nikola ršumlija.

xt: read about regional variations in Middle Byzantine architecture

ditional Resources

bert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Pre 19)

ɛgional variations in Middle Byzantine architecture

DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

ɛriods of Byzantine history

rly Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) **c. 330 – 843**

ddle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

e Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

te Byzantine 1261 – 1453

st-Byzantine after 1453

Figure 5.2.5.157: Map showing regional variations in Middle Byzantine architecture

ɔnstantinople

Figure 5.2.5.158: Half-columns correspond to internal walls and supports at the Myrelaion church, c. 920, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

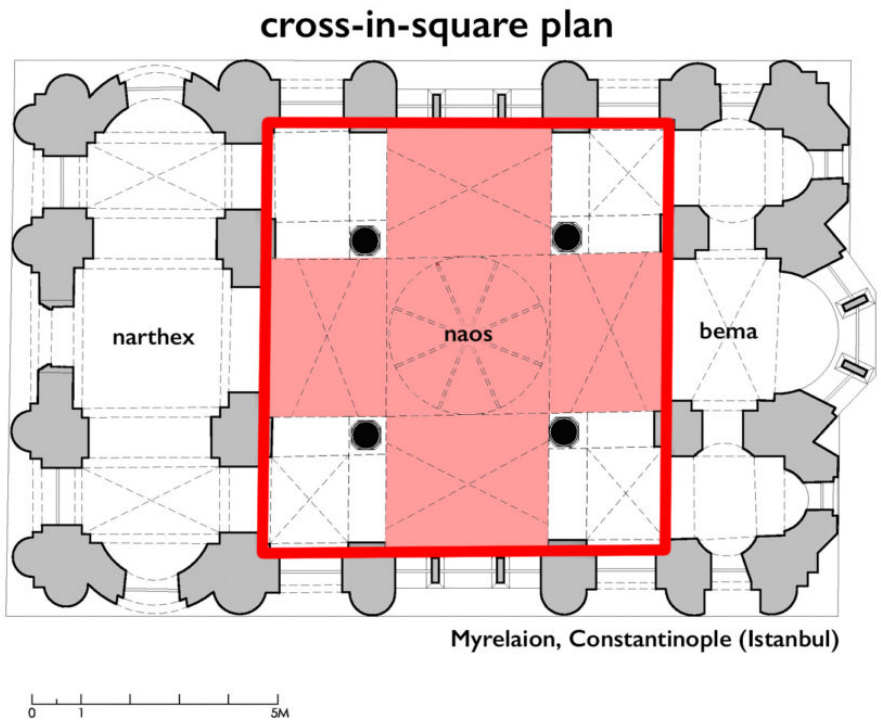

Figure 5.2.5.159: Cross-in-square plan, the Myrelaion church (Bodrum Mosque), c. 920, Constantinople (Istanbul) (adapted from plan © Vasileios Marinis)

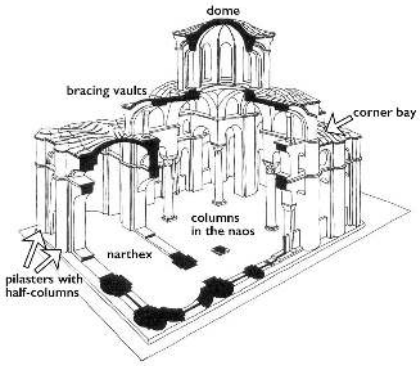

Figure 5.2.5.160: Elements of a cross-in-square church, inside the Myrelaion (Bodrum Mosque), c. 920, Constantinople (Istanbul)

urches in Constantinople from the Middle Byzantine period (843–1204), such as the tenth-century *cross-in-square* Myrelaion church (**read more abo s church type**), exhibit a balance between their various components: normally in the plan, the tripartite sanctuary is balanced by the narthex, and on t erior the structural divisions are emphasized by pilasters. In the case of the Myrelaion, half-columns have been affixed to pilasters. Some surfa ıament occurs but it is usually limited, and in many instances exterior surfaces of churches may have been plastered.

Figure **5.2.5.161**: Myrelaion church (Bodrum Mosque), c. 920, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: **Jordan Pickett**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

the interior, **groin vaults** and ribbed or pumpkin domes created undulating surfaces for mosaic decoration. However, the present appearance of t erior of the Myrelaion reflects its conversion to a mosque following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

Figure **5.2.5.162**: Pantokrator Monastery (Zeyrek Mosque), c. 1118-36, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: **Dismas87**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

ntokrator Monastery

the eleventh and twelfth centuries, large imperially-sponsored monastic complexes developed, in part as new settings for imperial and dynastic buria for example at the Pantokrator, built c. 1118-36 by John II and Eirene Komnenos. Three churches were built side by side in rapid succession **(view t ns of all three churches)**. The south church, dedicated to Christ Pantokrator, a large and lavishly decorated cross-in-square church, was the *katholik* the monastery; the north, also cross-in-square, was dedicated to the Virgin Eleousa and served the lay community. The middle church was single-ais l covered by two domes; dedicated to St. Michael, it functioned as the imperial mausoleum (referred to as the heroon in the monastic *typikon*).

Figure **5.2.5.163**: Two churches of Hosios Loukas Monastery seen from the east: the Panagia (right) and the katholikon (left), 10th and 11th centuries, Boeotia (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

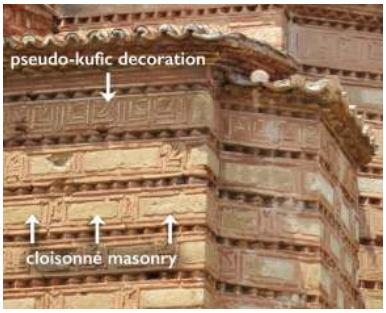

Figure **5.2.5.164**: Pseudo-kufic decoration and cloisonné masonry on the Panagia church, 10th century, Hosios Loukas, Boeotia (photo: **Brad Hostetler**, CC BY 2.0)

eece

sios Loukas Monastery

mainland Greece, vault forms were often simpler, but exterior surfaces often lavishly decorated, with cloisonné masonry and pseudo-kufic decoratio de of brick. The unusual **Greek-cross-octagon plan**, best known in the katholikon church at Hosios Loukas, inspired a number of regional examp **ad more about this church type**).

atolia

ypical of central Anatolia are churches of stone construction, such as Karagedik Kilise, 10th or 11th century, Peristrema, Turkey (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="http://gertrudebell.ncl.ac.uk/photo_details.php?photo_id=2487" ref="http://gertrudebell.ncl.ac.uk/photo_details.php?photo_id=2487" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"

Gertrude Bell)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-50512" height="262" sizes="(max-width: 350px) 100vw, 350px" src="

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Figure **5.2.5.165**: Typical of central Anatolia are churches of stone construction, such as Karagedik Kilise, 10th or 11th century, Peristrema, Turkey (photo: **Gertrude Bell**)

chitecture flourished in central **Anatolia** (which makes up the majority of modern Turkey) until the Seljuk conquest of the 1070s. Distinctive masor urches are preserved in Cappadocia and Lycaonia, but they have been overshadowed in the scholarship by the hundreds of well-preserved rock- urches, most notably those at Göreme, with their well-preserved painted programs, as at **Karanlık Kilise**. Most of these follow standardized designs, veloped in masonry architecture, but with some inventiveness evident in the detailing.

nlı Kilise

e cross-in-square church at the Çanlı Kilise (view plan) is carefully constructed of brick and stone, with design features suggesting an awareness chitecture from both Constantinople and the Caucasus.

Figure 5.2.5.166: Çanlı Kilise in 1907 (left) and 2014 (right), first phase of construction probably early 11th century, near Akhisar, Turkey (left photo: Gertrude Bell; right photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Figure 5.2.5.167: Trdat, cathedral of Ani (dome does not survive), 1001 (photo: Hansm, CC BY-SA 3.0)

menia

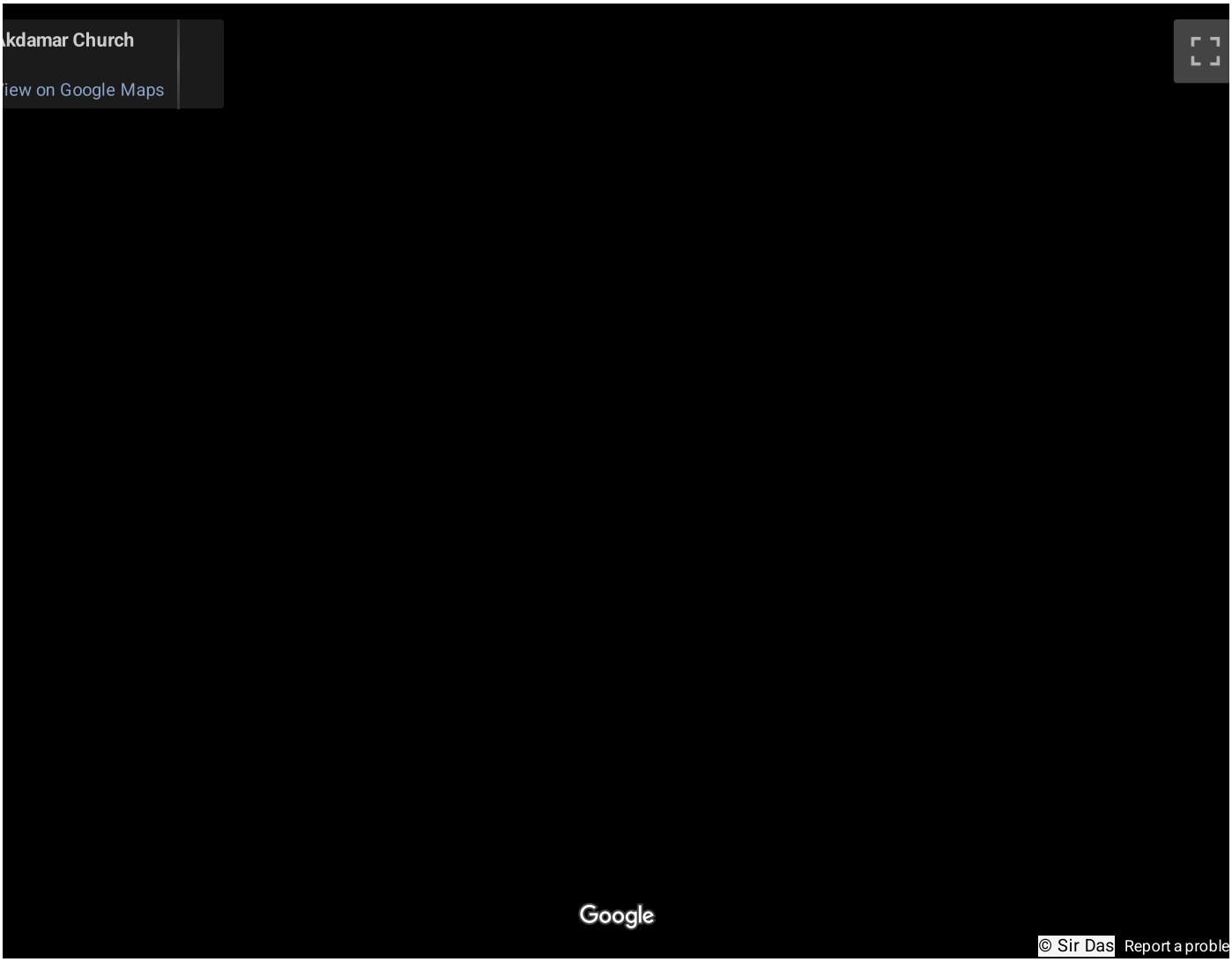
thedral of Ani

th Armenia and Georgia witnessed a revival of architecture in the tenth century. At Ani, the builder Trdat (responsible for rebuilding the dome of phia in Constantinople) built the cathedral as a domed basilica (view plan), as well as a church dedicated to St. Gregory, an aisled tetraconch followi model of Zvartnots, which is now in ruins.

urch of the Holy Cross at Ahtamar

e octagon-dome palace church of the Holy Cross at Ahtamar (915-21) (view plan and sections) follows earlier models but was lavishly decorated w ernal sculpture in contrast with most contemporary Byzantine churches.

Figure 5.2.5.168: Church of the Holy Cross, decorated with external sculpture, Ahtamar, Armenia (modern Turkey), 915-21, (left photo: Tom Klobe, CC BY-NC 2.0; right photo: Arne Schöllhorn, CC BY 2.0)



Church of the Holy Cross, Ahtamar, Armenia (modern Turkey)

Figure 5.2.5.169: Church of St. John the Baptist, c. 963-73, Öşk Vank (photo: Jean Paul Peters, CC BY-SA 2.0)

eorgia

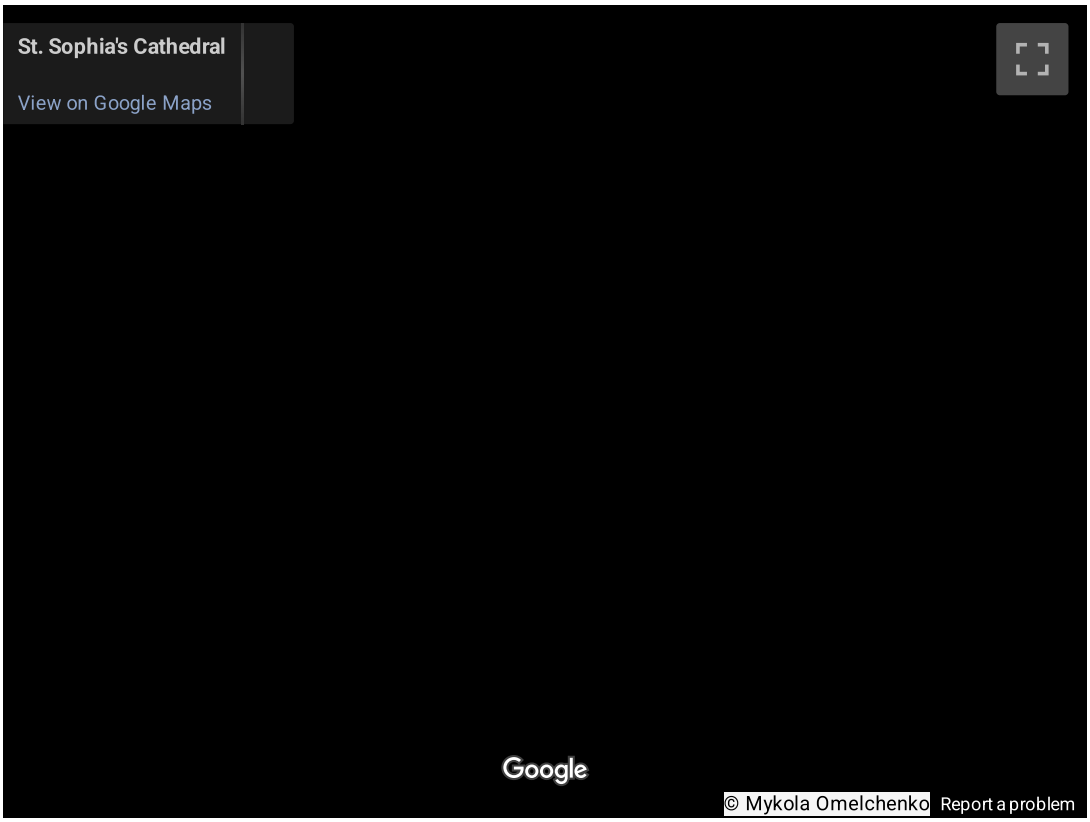
the Tao-Klarjeti region, several large domed basilicas were built in the late 10th and early 11th centuries, as at Öşk Vank, built c. 963-73 (view plan), a
ıan, completed c. 1032; both are lavishly decorated with exterior sculpture, while the interiors display unusual vault forms. Ot'ht'a Eklesia, built at
ne time is a grand, barrel-vaulted basilica. All are of distinctive stone construction.

Figure **5.2.5.170**: Sv. Panteleimon, 1164, Nerezi (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

rbia and Bulgaria

Figure **5.2.5.171**: Sv. Nikola (heavily restored), 12th century, Kuršumlija (photo: **CrniBombarder!!!**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

general, the church architecture of Serbia and Bulgaria in this period betrays close associations with Greece and Constantinople. The five-domed chu Sv. Panteleimon at Nerezi **(view plan)**, built 1164 and well known for its **exquisite frescos**, is certainly inspired by the architecture of the capital, as . Nikola at Kuršumlija. The design of the latter example was subsequently followed at Studenica and Djurdjevi Stupovi (now heavily restored). Seve ge and distinctive basilicas were constructed to meet the demands of congregational worship, as at **Sv. Sofia** in Ohrid, constructed c. 1000, or the chu Pliska.



Interior of St. Sophia, begun 1037, Kiev, Ukraine

e Rus'

Sophia in Kiev

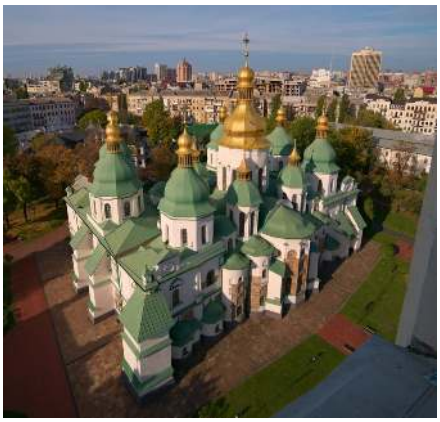


Figure **5.2.5.172**: St. Sophia, begun 1037 (with later additions), Kiev (photo: Daniel Kraft, CC BY-SA 3.0)

ter the Russian state was Christianized in 988, it similarly required large congregational churches for the recently converted population. At St. Sophia ev, begun 1037, and elsewhere, imported Byzantine masons familiar with the structural systems of the small, vaulted churches, elaborated a basic Mid zantine scheme, enveloping the tall domed core of the building with a series of ambulatories and galleries. These increased the interior space from wl uld have provided ample room for the private devotions of a few individuals to what was necessary for a large congregation. Following the init petus from Byzantium, however, as the center of power shifted northward, Russia looked to the Romanesque architecture of northern Europe piration, while maintaining the attenuated cross-in-square church as the standard type, as occurs at several twelfth-century churches in and arou adimir.

Figure 5.2.5.173: Monastery of Hosios Meletios, founded 1081, Attica (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

onasteries

onasteries of the Middle Byzantine period commonly had the church as the central element, freestanding within a walled enclosure, the latter lined w monastic cells and other buildings. Often the refectory (where the monks to their meals) was set in relationship to the church building, either opposite rallel to it. With most surviving examples, however, the original church building is preserved, but the other buildings have undergone numerc onstructions, as at Hosios Meletios, Hosios Loukas, and the monasteries on Mount Athos, as well as at Studenica in Serbia.

Figure 5.2.5.174: Studenica Monastery, founded 1190, Serbia (photo: Blago, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)

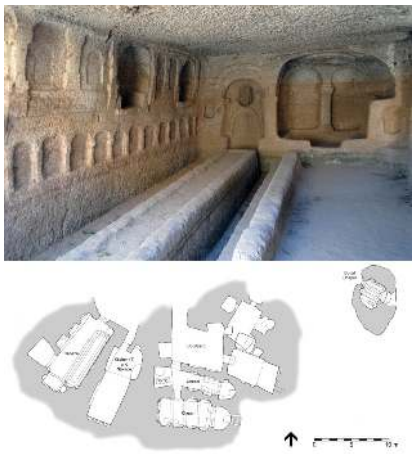


Figure 5.2.5.175: Geyikli Monastery, trapeza and plan, Soğanlı Valley, Cappadocia (photo and plan: © Robert Ousterhout)

cause of the site specificity and long construction history, it remains difficult to determine a “standard” Middle Byzantine monastery type. There are a merous well-preserved examples of monasteries in Cappadocia. At Göreme a cluster of small monastic ensembles developed in the Middle Byzanti iod, each equipped with its own church or chapel and a *trapeza* with a rock-cut table and benches. The *trapeza* at the Geyikli Kilise complex in t ğanlı Valley is lavishly carved. Planning in these examples, however, was by necessity site-specific and often similar to domestic complexes.

xt: read about Middle Byzantine secular architecture and urban planning

ditional Resources

bert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Pre 19)

saics and Microcosm: the Monasteries of Hosios Loukas, Nea Moni, and Daphni

DR. EVAN FREEMAN

Video 5.2.5.176: Daphni monastery, Chaidari, c. 1050–1150 (photo: **Mark L. Darby**, all rights reserved)

static Motion

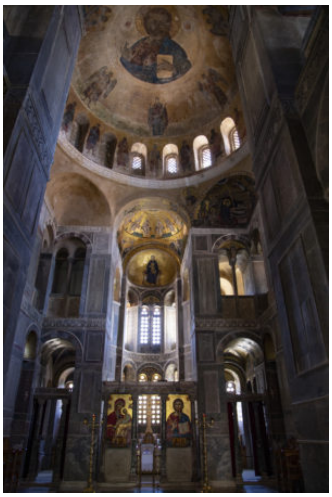
e city of Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire since its foundation by Constantine in 330 C.E., was roiled by t **noclastic Controversy** in the 8th and 9th centuries. Emperors, bishops, and many others debated whether images, or “icons,” of God and the saints w

ly or heretical. Those in favor of images triumphed in 843. Soon after, a new church was built in Constantinople's great imperial palace and adorned w
h mosaic icons. The church was dedicated to the Virgin of the *Pharos*, named with the Greek word for a lighthouse, since a lighthouse stood near
ound 864, patriarch Photios of Constantinople—the highest-ranking cleric in the empire—gushed about the church of the Pharos and its glitteri
saics: "It is as if one had entered heaven itself . . . and was illuminated by the beauty in all forms shining all around like so many stars, so is one utte
azed." Photios describes how his whirling to view the church produced the impression that the church itself was moving:

> ***It seems that everything is in ecstatic motion, and the church itself is circling round. For the spectator, through his whirling about in all directions and being constantly astir, which he is forced to experience by the variegated spectacle on all sides, imagines that his personal condition is transferred to the object.***
>
> ***Photios of Constantinople, Homily 10***

otios offers us a tantalizing impression of the Pharos church and a sense of how Byzantines viewed mosaics during this period.

Video 5.2.5.177: Map with Constantinople and the monasteries of Hosios Loukas, Nea Moni, and Daphni (map © Google)



Video 5.2.5.178: View of the naos, katholikon, 11th century, Hosios Loukas, Boeotia (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

ddle Byzantine mosaics

ıile the church of the Pharos has been lost, three churches from around the eleventh century preserve much of their original mosaic programs, wh
re likely inspired by churches like the church of the Pharos in the capital. These three monuments—Hosios Loukas, Nea Moni, and Daphni—point
nmon trends in Middle Byzantine mosaics, while also demonstrating the flexibility of church decoration during this period.

osaics are patterns or images made of *tesserae*: small pieces of stone, glass, or other materials. They commonly adorned floors in antiquity but beca
pular decoration for church walls and ceilings in Byzantium, especially among wealthy patrons such as emperors.

the Middle Byzantine period (c. 843–1204), **domed, centrally planned churches** became more popular than the long, hall-like basilicas of previc
nturies. While basilicas created a strong horizontal axis between the entrance on one end and the altar at the other, domed churches added a vertical a
t prompted viewers to look upward. New decorative programs developed in tandem with this architectural trend, covering walls and domes with mosa
l frescos of holy figures in complex, new configurations. The lower portions of churches were often decorated with marble revetment (thin panels
rble, often beautifully colored).

urch as microcosm

zantine texts interpreted the domed church as a microcosm—a three-dimensional image of the cosmos—associating the sparkling gold vaults above w
heavens, and the colored marbles below with the earth. Within this framework, images often seem to be arranged hierarchically: with a heavenly Chr
gning above, events from sacred history unfolding below, and portraits of saints surrounding the worshippers in the lowest registers. Many of the
ages took on additional meanings as church services unfolded.

deo **5.2.5.179**: Left: "spatial icon" of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple at Hosios Loukas (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0); right: Masaccio
Holy Trinity fresco at Santa Maria Novella (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

atial icons

e mosaicists who decorated these churches made no effort to create illusionistic backdrops for the holy figures, as one often finds in works from
lian Renaissance, such as Masaccio's ***Holy Trinity*** fresco. Instead, the holy figures situated in the curves and facets of these Middle Byzantine churcl
pear against a gold ground. Often, these prophets, saints, and angels seem to face and even communicate with each other across the space of the chur
ch "spatial icons"—as the art historian Otto Demus famously described them—created the impression that the holy figures occupied the same physi
ace as the worshippers.

Video 5.2.5.180: Panagia and katholikon churches seen from the east, 10th and 11th centuries, Hosios Loukas Monastery, Boeotia (© Robert Ousterhout

sios Loukas

e monastery of Hosios Loukas, located in central Greece, is probably the oldest of the three churches. It is named for St. Loukas of Steiris, a lo nastic saint who lived on this site and died in 953. Two connected churches survive here. The older church, dedicated to the Virgin and located to th, features a cross-in-square plan. The katholikon church, built to the south in the eleventh century, utilizes a larger, octagona-domed plan (**read mo out these church types**). The katholikon church retains many of its mosaics, undoubtedly the result of rich patronage. St. Luke's body was interr ween the two churches, and the monastery attracted pilgrims who sought the saint's healing.

Plan of Hosios Loukas, Boeotia, 11th century, from Robert Weir Schultz and Sidney Howard Barnsley, <em**The Monastery of Saint Luke of Stiris, in Phocis, and the Dependent monaste f Saint Nicolas in the Fields, near Skripou in Boetia (London: Macmillan, 1901)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-49322" height="615 sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Luke-plan-copy-870x615.jpg" srcset="https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Luke-plan-copy-870x615.jpg 870w, https://smarthistory.org/wp-ntent/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Luke-plan-copy-300x212.jpg 300w, https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Luke-plan-cop 1536x1086.jpg 1536w, https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Luke-plan-copy-2048x1447.jpg 2048w" width="870">**

Video 5.2.5.181: Plan of Hosios Loukas, Greece, 11th century, from Robert Weir Schultz and Sidney Howard Barnsley, *The Monastery of Saint Luke of Stiris, in Phocis, and the Dependent monastery of Saint Nicolas in the Fields, near Skripou in Boetia* (London: Macmillan, 1901)

orshippers entered the katholikon through the "narthex," a vestibule at the western end of the building. Here, they encountered portraits of saints a ge images of Christ's Passion and Resurrection: Christ washing his disciples' feet, the Crucifixion, the Anastasis, and the incredulous Thomas touchi wounds of the risen Christ.

ideo 5.2.5.182: Narthex mosaics, left: a group of women saints, right: Christ washing his disciples' feet, katholikon, Hosios Loukas, Boeotia, 11th centu (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

orshippers then passed beneath a large mosaic of Christ Pantokrator to enter the main part of the church, or "naos." Christ displays an open book t claims him to be the "light of the world" (John 8:12). The mosaic's gold tesserae reflect sunlight from the front door in the daytime, and flickeri ndlelight at night.

Video **5.2.5.183**: Christ Pantokrater mosaic, narthex, katholikon, Hosios Loukas, 11th century, Boeotia (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

large fresco of Christ surrounded by angels occupies the heavenly space of the dome in the naos. This fresco may replicate the original dome mosai ich have been lost. Four **squinches** beneath the dome displayed mosaic images from the life of Christ. The Annunciation likely once adorned t rtheast squinch but has been lost. The mosaics in the other three squinches depict Christ's Nativity, Presentation in the Jewish Temple, and Baptism.

Video **5.2.5.184**: Central dome and squiches, katholikon, Hosios Loukas monastery, Boeotia, 11th century (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

rious saints appear below. An abundance of monastic saints—including St. Loukas himself—reflects the building's function as a monastery church.

Video 5.2.5.185: Hosios Loukas (St. Luke of Steiris) mosaic near his tomb, west wall of northern crossarm, katholikon, Hosios Loukas, 11th century, Boeotia (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

›ceeding through the naos, worshippers saw an image of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost in a smaller dome above the altar. T ·gin and Child sit enthroned in the apse behind the altar, a reminder that God became a human being for the salvation of the world. During the Div urgy, this image of Christ's incarnation took on new significance as the bread and wine also became the body and blood of Christ.

'ideo 5.2.5.186: Pentecost, Virgin and Child mosaics, bema, katholikon, Hosios Loukas monastery, Boeotia, 11th century (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY SA 4.0)

·a Moni

rmit monks founded Nea Moni ("new monastery") on the island of Chios sometime before 1042, and its katholikon was built with the patronage ıperor Constantine IX Monomachos between 1049–1055. It features a rectangular plan, and its architectural design may have been adapted

:ommodate its mosaic program.

Left: view of Nea Moni from the west (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NEA_MONH_ΣTA_XIONIA.jpg" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NEA_MONH_ΣTA_XIONIA.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener"

LIOUKAS, CC BY-SA 4.0); right: Plan of katholikon of Nea Moni, Chios, 11th century (© Robert G. Ousterhout)" aria-describedby="captio attachment-49446" height="408" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/...an-870x408.jpg" srcset="https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/...an-870x408.jpg 870w, https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/...an-300x141.jpg 300w, https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/...n-1536x719.jpg 1536w, https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/...n-2048x959.jpg 2048w" width="870">

ıleo 5.2.5.187: Left: view of Nea Moni from the west (photo: FLIOUKAS, CC BY-SA 4.0); right: Plan of katholikon of Nea Moni, Chios, 11th century Robert G. Ousterhout)

Video 5.2.5.188: St. Joachim mosaic, 11th century, narthex, katholikon, Nea Moni, Chios (photo: Marmontel, CC BY-SA 2.0)

the narthex, worshippers again encountered an array of saints and large narrative images centering around Christ's Passion. In the naos, the main do ; lost its mosaics. But remnants of cherubim and seraphim, evangelists, and apostles inhabit **pendentives** beneath the dome. Further down, ei ernating conches and niches displayed a ring scenes from the life of Christ. The Virgin appears in the eastern apse behind the altar with hands upraised ıyer, flanked by the archangels Gabriel and Michael.

Video 5.2.5.189: View of the naos, Nea Moni, Chios, 11th century (photo: **Meltedrainbow**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Video **5.2.5.190**: Daphni Monastery seen from the east, Chaidari, c. 1050–1150 (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

ıphni

e monastery of Daphni, located just northwest of Athens, was likely the last of the three churches to be built, probably constructed between 1050–11
tle is known about the foundation of this cross-in-square church.

Plan and elevation of Daphni monastery, Chaidari, c. 1050–1150, from from Robert Weir Schultz and Sidney Howard Barnsley, <em**The Monastery of Saint Luke of Stiris, in Phocis, and the ependent monastery of Saint Nicolas in the Fields, near Skripou in Boetia (London: Macmillan, 1901)" aria-describedby="caption-attachmen 9323" height="466" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Daphni-pla and-elevation-horizontal-870x466.jpg" srcset="https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Daphni-plan-and-elevation-horizontal-870x466.jpg 870w, https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Daphni-plan-and-elevation-horizontal-300x161.jpg 300w, https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Schulz-Daphni-plan-and-elevation-horizontal.jpg 1395w" width="870">**

Video **5.2.5.191**: Plan and elevation of Daphni monastery, Chaidari, c. 1050–1150, from from Robert Weir Schultz and Sidney Howard Barnsley, *The Monastery of Saint Luke of Stiris, in Phocis, and the Dependent monastery of Saint Nicolas in the Fields, near Skripou in Boetia* (London: Macmillan, 1901)

√ideo **5.2.5.192**: Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple mosaic, narthex, Daphni monastery, Chaidari, c. 1050–1150 (photo: **Mark L. Darby**, all rights reserved)

re, the narthex combines scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin, suggesting the church may have been dedicated to Mary. Notably, the L pper and Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (where she was fed with heavenly bread by an angel) both appear on the eastern wall of the narth ere worshippers would have seen them as they entered the church. Such images were meant to connect past events from sacred history with t ebration of the Eucharist in the present: Christ sharing bread and wine with his apostles at the Last Supper and Virgin eating heavenly bread in t nple were both understood to prefigure and symbolize the Eucharist. The appearance of the Foot Washing in the narthexes of all three of these churcl y reflect the use of this part of the church for a ritual foot washing on Holy Thursday, when abbots imitated Christ by washing the feet of the monks.

Video 5.2.5.193: View of the naos looking east, Daphni monastery, Chaidari, c. 1050–1150 (photo: **Ktiv**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

monumental image of the heavenly Christ Pantokrator, framed by a rainbow mandorla in the central dome, dominates the naos. Photios interprets wl ıst have been a similar image in the Pharos church as Christ reigning from the heavens:

> ***You might say He is overseeing the earth, and devising its orderly arrangement and government, so accurately has the painter been inspired to represent, though only in forms and in colors, the Creator's care for us.***
>
> ***Photios of Constantinople, Homily 10***

Video 5.2.5.194: Christ Pantokrator mosaic, dome, Daphni monastery, Chaidari, c. 1050–1150 (photo: Mark L. Darby, all rights reserved)

enes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin—such as the Annunciation—unfold in the squinches below and throughout the rest of the naos. The east
se reveals another Virgin and Child, and additional saints appear throughout the naos.

Video 5.2.5.195: Annunciation mosaic, Daphni monastery, Chaidari, c. 1050–1150 (photo: Mark L. Darby, all rights reserved)

r worshippers entering these churches, mosaics offered a vision of God reigning from on high, a reminder of salvation history, and face-to-fa
counters with so many saints who had come before. No wonder Photios found himself whirling around, trying to take in the overwhelming mosaics at t
aros church, and feeling as if he had "entered heaven itself."

ditional resources

rolyn L. Connor, *Saints and Spectacle: Byzantine Mosaics in their Cultural Setting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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e Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 121-151.

omas F. Mathews, “The Sequel to Nicaea II in Byzantine Church Decoration,” *Perkins Journal* 41.3 (July 1988): 11-21.

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ktarkos Zarras, “Narrating the Sacred Story: New Testament Cycles in Middle and Late Byzantine Church Decoration,” in *The New Testament zantium*, edited by Derek Krueger and Robert S. Nelson (Washington: D.C.; Dumbarton Oaks, 2016).

ddle Byzantine secular architecture and urban planning

DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

riods of Byzantine history

rly Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) **c. 330 – 843**

ddle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

e Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

te Byzantine 1261 – 1453

st-Byzantine after 1453

Figure **5.2.5.196**: Evidence of secular architecture and urban planning in Middle Byzantium (underlying map © Google)

ıralization

hough churches such as Hagia Sophia are among Byzantium’s best known architecture, the Byzantines also built cities, palaces, houses, and pub rastructure such as aqueducts. Yet secular architecture can often be difficult to assess in the Middle Byzantine period (843 – 1204). After the si ıtury, the Byzantine Empire underwent a process of ruralization, as large centers were depopulated or abandoned, with a demographic shift to ıntryside. Often the inhabited area of a city was reduced to its fortified acropolis; at Ankara, Sardis, and Corinth, for example, the remainder of cient city was virtually abandoned. Even Constantinople—the capital of the Byzantine Empire—witnessed a cultural break in this period. Followin gue in 747, Constantine V resettled peasants from Greece and the Aegean Islands in the capital. Portions of the city fell into ruin, with public servi glected.

nagined view of Sparta, known as Lacedemonia during the Byzantine era, <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nuremberg_chronicles_-_f_28v.png"
ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nuremberg_chronicles_-_f_28v.png" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51035" height="262" sizes="(max-width: 401px) 100vw, 401px" src="
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https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/...8v-300x196.png
300w" width="401">

Figure 5.2.5.197: Imagined view of Sparta, known as Lacedemonia during the Byzantine era, **Nuremberg Chronicle**, 1493

ban revivals

cultural revival began after the middle of the eighth century (after the resolution of the Iconoclastic controversy), but cities never achieved their forn ominence. As Byzantine society became more private and inward-turning, the home and family became the dominant social focus, with pub chitecture limited almost exclusively to defense.

d cities, new names

ten cities that had been abandoned were resettled with new names, the older ones forgotten: Abdera became Polystylon; Sparta became Lacedaemor tlements that were not abandoned shrank, with smaller circuits of fortification; texts refer to these as *kastra* rather than as *poleis*.

Figure 5.2.5.198: Monemvasia, c. 1690 (**Frederik de Wit**)

Figure 5.2.5.199: Monemvasia today (photo: **Mia Battaglia**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

ew towns

e few new towns of the period developed because of their strategic or protected locations, as at Monemvasia. In Cappadocia, numerous new agricultu tlements date from the tenth and eleventh centuries, cut into the soft volcanic rock formations, but these are no more than villages. **View a plan of t tlement at Çanlı Kilise near Akhisar in Cappadocia.**

Figure 5.2.5.200: Ephesus, view looking eastward, with the ruins of the Temple of Artemis in the foreground and the hill of Ayasoluk with the Church of St. John in the distance (© Robert Ousterhout)

Figure 5.2.5.201: Map of İznik showing the walls, cardo, and decumanus of Nicaea (adapted from Google earth in 10.10.2017) (Arzu Ispalar Çahantimur and Gözde Kırlı Özer, "Space and Time Travelers Exploring Cultural Identity of the City," CC BY 3.0)

econfiguring ancient cities

Ephesus, the ancient center was gradually abandoned in favor of the more easily defended hill of Ayasoluk, several kilometers inland, fortified arou church of St. John. At Sparta, the ancient acropolis was reinhabited beginning in the ninth century. In many older sites, the main streets continued uction, but new patterns of growth emerged within the urban rubble.

Nicaea (modern İznik), both the *cardo* and *decumanus* of the ancient city continued to be used (the cardo running north-south and the decuma uning east-west), but this is an almost unique example. New areas of settlement were characterized by growth in an *ad hoc* manner; streets appeared area between private properties, unpaved and unmaintained, as at Corinth and Athens.

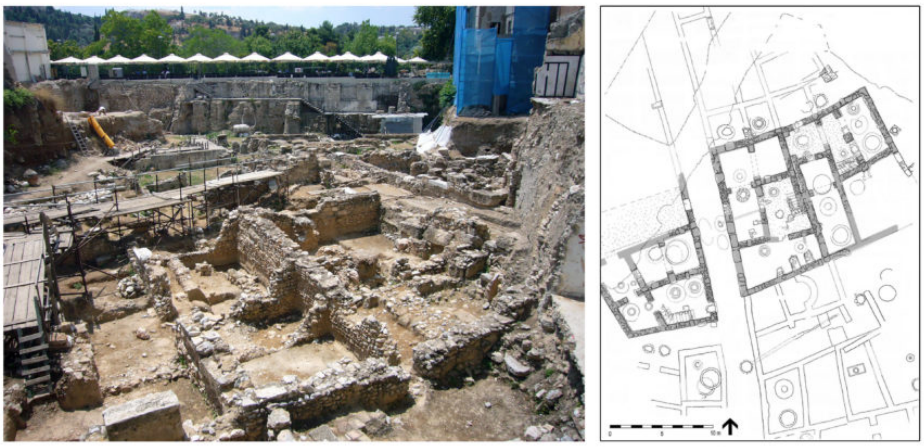


Figure 5.2.5.202: Excavations of Byzantine houses, Athens (photo and plan © Robert Ousterhout)

ıblic spaces

nilarly, public spaces were abandoned and their functions replaced by streets of mixed use, with shops, workshops, and residences together. Market fa l other large gatherings took place outside the walls, as for example the festival of St. John at Ephesus. Conversely, some activities that would have be ramural in ancient times moved within the confines of the medieval city; for example, within Constantinople, large areas were devoted to vegetal dens. More significantly, cemeteries gradually penetrated the city, many associated with religious foundations.

Figure 5.2.5.203: Aqueduct of Valens, 4th century, supplied water to Constantinople (photo: **Laima Gūtmane** CC BY-SA 3.0)

ater supplies

other element necessary to the city was water. With the declining populations, most aqueducts fell into disrepair. The aqueducts supplyi nstantinople and Thessaloniki were maintained only with difficulty. A few new aqueducts were constructed, as at Thebes, and an extensive hydrau stem was developed in some parts of Cappadocia; at Corinth and Bursa, natural springs provided water. In most cases, private systems developed, w lls or cisterns to collect rainwater.

Figure 5.2.5.204: Basilica Cistern, 6th century, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Clint, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

nstantinople

roughout the period, Constantinople remained unique in its urban character, appreciated by contemporaries for its wealth, its size, its paved streets, a presence of the imperial court. By the twelfth century, its population may have been as high as 400,000.

Figure 5.2.5.205: Constantinople (map: Carolyn Connor and Tom Elliot, Ancient World Mapping Center, CC BY-NC 3.0)

e city also retained many of the great monuments of Late Antiquity; its spacious main streets, its forums bedecked with triumphal monuments, silicas and public buildings formed the backbone of the medieval city, and they continued to function throughout the Middle Byzantine period– haps in a diminished capacity.

Figure 5.2.5.206: Triumph of Emperor Basil II in the Madrid Skylitzes, between 1126 and 1150? (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitro. 26-2, fol. 183r)

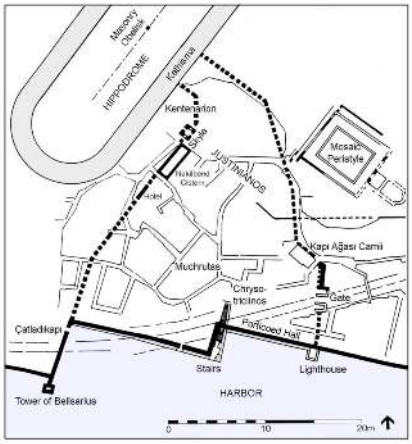


Figure 5.2.5.207: Reconstructed plan of the Boukoleon Palace, Constantinople (© Robert Ousterhout)

ough grandeur survived for emperors of the ninth and tenth centuries to stage imperial triumphs in the antique manner. The so-called Boukoleon Pala resents the reduced core of the Great Palace (originally begun by Constantine the Great and subsequently expanded and rebuilt), enclosed by tification wall, added by Nikephoros Phokas in the tenth century. By the twelfth century, the Blachernae Palace, located at the northern corner of the ci l become the primary imperial residence.

w construction of the Middle Byzantine period was privately financed and controlled, and what might be regarded as public buildings—baths, doc rehouses, hospitals, and orphanages—were frequently controlled by the monasteries. Moreover, new buildings were often of wood rather than of stone

Figure 5.2.5.208: Boukoleon Palace, sea façade, view of the great hall, enclosed by fortification wall built by Nikephoros Phokas in the 10th century, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

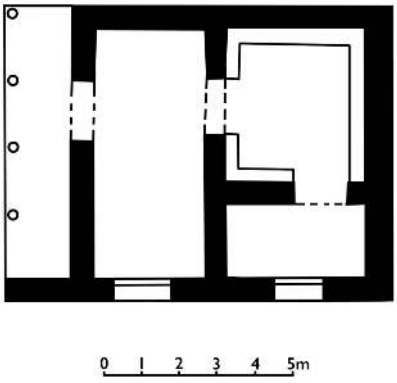


Figure 5.2.5.209: Reconstructed plan of a rural Byzantine house, Armatova, Elis, Greece (Evan Freeman, redrawn after C. Bouras, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

ımestic Architecture

ddle Byzantine domestic architecture is poorly preserved. A simple country house was excavated at Armatova in Elis, composed of small rectangu ıms and a porch. At Corinth, excavated medieval houses have courtyards with wells and ovens surrounded by rooms and storerooms. Although offerin all degree of comfort and efficiency, virtually no concern for aesthetics is evident. In Constantinople, multi-storied residences like **Roman *insulae*** s sted. In the twelfth century, John Tzetzes describes living in a three-storied tenement, with a priest, his children and pigs above him, and hay stored b mer on the ground floor.

Figure 5.2.5.210: Myrelaion church (Bodrum Mosque), c. 920, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

the Myrelaion in Constantinople, the foundations of a huge rotunda from a Late Antique palace were filled with a colonnaded cistern (for water stora form a level platform for the considerably smaller tenth-century Palace of Romanos Lekapenos, pi-shaped in plan, with a **portico** along the main faca

l with a chapel off to one side (which survives as the Bodrum Mosque today). Later, the complex was converted into a monastery.

hough known only from excavated remains, such urban forms may be reflected in the rock-cut courtyard dwellings of Cappadocia, such as those fou Çanlı Kilise near Akhisar, which similarly have the rooms organized around a courtyard, a porticoed façade, and a chapel. Often the main formal roo re given special articulation; other rooms may be identified as the kitchen, storerooms, cisterns, dovecotes, and stables.

Figure **5.2.5.211**: Remains of a rock-cut courtyard dwelling at Çanlı Kilise, Cappadocia, flourished 10th-11th centuries (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

vate estates grew in size and prominence, and by the twelfth century, the great, privately endowed monasteries and the mansions of the wealthy l come the distinguishing landmarks of the city. By the eleventh century, the monumentality of early forms was commonly replaced by complexity. Nc these great *oikoi*, with their sprawling mansions, courtyards, chapels, and gardens, survives, but their appearance is suggested a document of 12 scribing the Palace of Botaniates, which included gatehouses, two churches, courtyards, reception halls, dining halls, residential units, terraces, pavilio bles, a granary, vaulted substructures, cisterns, a bath complex, and rental properties. Wealthy estates in the countryside may have been fortified, such t described in *Digenes Akritas*, which was surrounded by gardens and defended by walls and towers, and also included a bathhouse and a church.

xt: read about Byzantine architecture and the Fourth Crusade

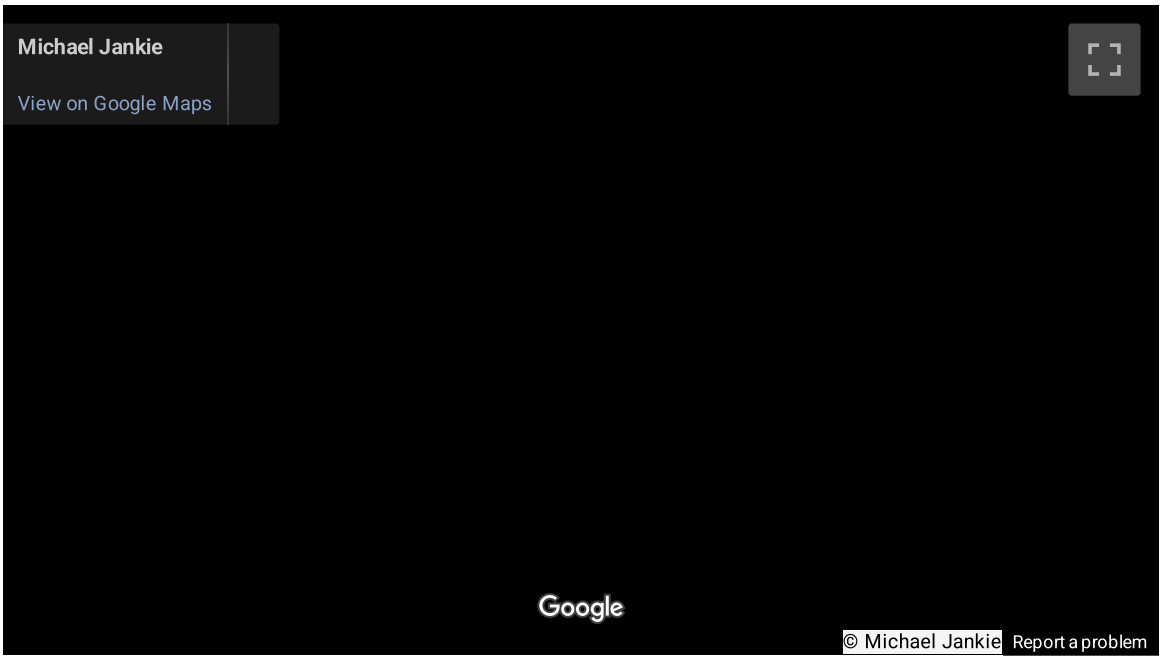
ditional Resources

bert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Pre 19)

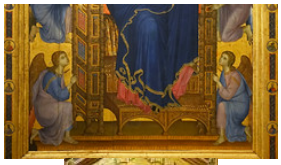
aint Mark's Basilica, Venice

DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.2.5.13: Saint Mark's Basilica, Venice, begun 1063 and Anastasis (The Harrowing of Hell) mosaic, c. 1180-1200, Middle Byzantine



narthistory images for teaching and learning:



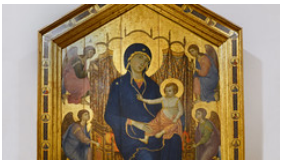


Figure 5.2.5.212: More Smarthistory images…

ıe Fourth Crusade and the Latin Empire

zantine Art and the Fourth Crusade

DR. NICOLETTE S. TRAHOULIA

Figure 5.2.5.213: Basilica of San Marco, 11th century and later, Venice (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

ou visit Venice and walk around the Church of San Marco, you might wonder why the exterior of the church appears to be a mishmash of various pie sculpture done in different styles from different periods. The answer lies in the **Crusades**, and particularly with the Fourth Crusade that began in 1202.

Figure 5.2.5.214: Isidore of Miletus & Anthemius of Tralles for Emperor Justinian, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul), 532-37 (photo: Steven Zucker)

ɔnstantinople and the Crusades

ɹen the crusaders of the First Crusade arrived in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople (modern Istanbul) in 1096, the Byzantine emperor Alexio ɔmnenos agreed to help them go through Asia Minor on their way to the Holy Land. But wary of their motivations, he first made them swear allegiance n. The crusaders went on to conquer Jerusalem from the Arabs in 1099 and established crusader states in Palestine.

Figure 5.2.5.215: Map with the First through Fourth Crusades, from *Atlas of the Middle East*, Central Intelligence Agency, 1993

1203 a fourth expedition of crusaders were on their way to the Holy Land when they were again diverted to Constantinople. Alexios Angelos—the son ɔosed emperor Isaac II Angelos—enlisted the help of the crusaders to restore his father to the throne. Although he and his father did manage to r ntly with the help of the crusaders, they were soon deposed by Alexios V Doukas Mourtzouphlos. Angered because they did not receive the rewa ɔmised by Alexios Angelos and confronted with the immense riches of what was then the grandest city known to the West, the crusaders attacked a zed Constantinople on April 13, 1204. They would occupy the city until 1261 when Michael VIII Palaiologos reclaimed the city for the Byzantines.

Figure 5.2.5.216: Horses of San Marco (ancient Greek or Roman, likely Imperial Rome), 4th century B.C.E. to 4th century C.E., copper alloy, 235 x 250 cm each (Basilica of San Marco, Venice)

oting Byzantium

ıring the almost sixty years of occupation by the crusaders (or "Latins," as the Byzantines often referred to western Europeans during this perio nstantinople was looted of countless artworks. Many of these impressive artworks are now in museums and churches all over Europe. Venice, wh ›vided the ships for the Fourth Crusade, possesses much of the art that was taken by the crusaders, such as the life-size gilt **bronze horses** that w played on the **exterior of the Basilica of San Marco**. These horses were attributed to the famous sculptor **Lysippos** who worked in the fourth centu C.E., although they may have been made later.

Figure 5.2.5.217: Portraits of the Four Tetrarchs, from Constantinople, c. 305, porphyry, 4′ 3″ high (Basilica of San Marco, Venice) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Figure 5.2.5.218: Foot from Portraits of the Four Tetrarchs, from Constantinople, c. 305, porphyry (Istanbul Archaeological Museum) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0)

ıother example of looted art is the porphyry **statues of the Tetrarchs** (four Roman emperors), now built into the side of the Basilica of San Marco nice. The missing foot of one of the Tetrarchs was found in Constantinople, confirming that this sculptural group was originally set up somewhere in t zantine capital. These statues represent a short-lived system of rule during the late Roman Empire when the emperor Diocletian was trying to stabil litical authority in a time of crisis by sharing rule among four emperors.

ımerous marble reliefs on the exterior of San Marco have been assigned a Byzantine provenance, such as the eleventh-century relief of Alexander t eat ascending in a chariot raised by griffins. This popular image of Alexander derived from the legendary *Alexander Romance* in which we read exander's bold attempt to explore the heavens in a chariot pulled by winged griffins.

Figure **5.2.5.219**: Left: Alexander the Great (top center) amidst spolia on the north wall of San Marco (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-SA 4.0); right: one of the *Pilastri Acritani* (piers from St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople) outside the Basilica of San Marco (photo: **Pi István Tóth**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

nate carved piers (known as the *Pilastri Acritani*) taken from the Church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople stand near the south-west corner of S ırco. The grand Church of St. Polyeuktos was built in the 520s by the Byzantine aristocrat Anicia Juliana and its beauty and size rivaled that of t urch of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

Figure **5.2.5.220**: Left: incense burner, 12th century, partially gilded silver, 36 x 30 cm. Right: chalice of emperor Romanos I or II, 10th century, sardonyx, silver gilt, gold cloisonné enamel, and pearls, 22.5 x 14 cm. (Treasury of San Marco, Venice) (photos: © **Regione del Veneto**)

ıcred spoils

e Treasury of San Marco is full of rich objects that must originally have come from Constantinople. Many fine examples of Byzantine metalwork a ımels are housed in the Treasury, such as the gilt-sliver incense burner in the form of a multi-domed structure that possibly represents a garden pavili e incense burner is decorated with female personifications on the exterior and mythological beasts, such as griffins. Another such object is a eucharis ılice made of a Late Antique onyx bowl set within a gilt silver frame and decorated with a series of enamels. The inscription on the chalice reads "G .p Romanos, the Orthodox Emperor," referring to either the emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (920-44) or Romanos II (959-63).

Figure 5.2.5.221: Byzantine successor states following the sack and occupation of the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, 1204-1261 (underlying map © Google)

Figure 5.2.5.222: Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou, drawing of fresco with procession with the Hodegetria, Vlacherna church near Arta, 1282-84

nstantinople reclaimed

ring the period of Constantinople's occupation by the crusaders, there were three Byzantine successor states, the Despotate of Epirus founded chael Komnenos Doukas (with Arta as its capital), the Empire of Nicaea founded by the Laskarid Dynasty, and the Empire of Trebizond founded exios Komnenos. It would be the Nicaeans who would later recapture Constantinople in 1261. In the Despotate of Epirus, the Monastery of the Panag Blachernae north of Arta contains a three-aisled basilica built in the 13th c. with a wall painting of the procession of the famous icon of the Virgin hous the Church of the Blachernae in Constantinople. The mural recreates the great city of Constantinople for the empire in exile.

on after the city was reconquered in 1261, a **mosaic** was put up in the south gallery of **Hagia Sophia**. Only the upper part survives today, but the figu re originally over twice life-size. Christ is represented in the center, flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist, a grouping called the Deësis. T saic was probably part of Michael VIII's major campaign to restore and renew Hagia Sophia after the alterations made by the crusaders. Perhaps saic was intended to celebrate the triumph of the Byzantines over the crusaders. The Deësis as a subject refers to the intercession of the Virgin and Jo h Christ on behalf of humankind. The mosaic may have stood as a kind of visual prayer to insure the city would never be taken again.

Figure **5.2.5.223**: Deësis (Christ with the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist), c. 1261, mosaic, imperial enclosure, south gallery, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

ditional Resources

eraviglie di Venezia, http://www.meravigliedivenezia.it/en/index.html

vid Buckton, ed., *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan: Olivetti, 1984)

nry Maguire and Robert S. Nelson, *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010)

under, War, and the Horses of San Marco

DR. BETH HARRIS and *DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

ideo **5.2.5.14**: *Horses of San Marco* (ancient Greek or Roman, likely Imperial Rome), 4th century B.C.E. to 4th century C.E., copper alloy, 235 x 250 c each (Basilica of San Marco, Venice), an ARCHES video

zantine architecture and the Fourth Crusade

DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

riods of Byzantine history

rly Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) **c. 330 – 843**

ddle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

e Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

te Byzantine 1261 – 1453

st-Byzantine **after 1453**

Figure **5.2.5.224**: The route and results of the Fourth Crusade (**Kandi**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

agmentation

Figure **5.2.5.225**: Crusader attacking Constantinople, pavement mosaic, c. 1213, San Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna (photo: Evan Freeman CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

1204, the Fourth **Crusade** captured the Byzantine capital of Constantinople. The Latins (as the Byzantines often referred to western Europeans duri s period) **looted and occupied** the city until the Byzantines recaptured Constantinople in 1261.

th the fragmentation of the Byzantine state following the Fourth Crusade came a concomitant fragmentation of Byzantine architecture, which beca minated by regional developments. The period of the Latin Empire (1204 – 1261) witnessed little cultural investment in Constantinople, while n zantine successor states emerged: the Empire of Nicaea in northwest Anatolia; the Empire of Trebizond in northeast Anatolia; and the Despotate irus in northwest Greece and Albania, whose capital was Arta.

church architecture, the design of the naos followed planning types established in the **Middle Byzantine period**, while architectural forms increased nplexity, both visually and in plan, with the addition of **porticoes**, **ambulatories**, galleries, annexed chapels, and belfries. A general loosening hitectural rigor is evident in the lack of relationship between interior spaces and exterior articulation, in contrast with **earlier periods**.

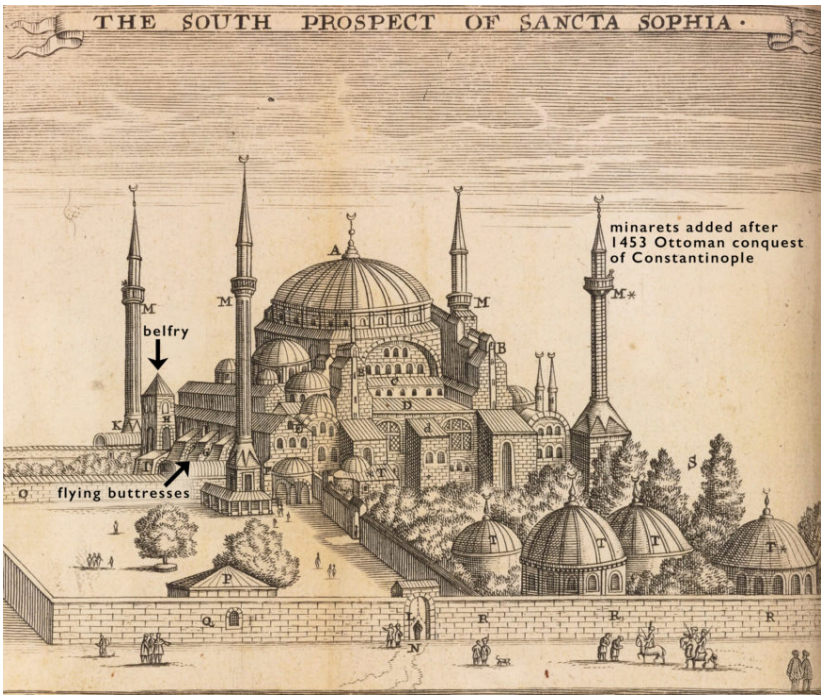


Figure **5.2.5.226**: Hagia Sophia showing the belfry rising above the buttresses, Constantinople, c. 1680, print by F. H. van Hove

ınstantinople

ıgia Sophia

idence of architecture in Constantinople in this period may be limited to the addition of **flying buttresses** and a belfry to the west façade of Ha phia, c. 1230s. Both are new elements in Late Byzantine architecture; belfries and the use of bells became common thereafter (gothic-style buttressi s so).

Figure **5.2.5.227**: Flying buttresses, c. 1230s, west façade, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (photo: Jorge Láscar, CC BY 2.0)

Figure 5.2.5.228: Byzantine successor states following the sack and occupation of the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, 1204-1261 (underlying map © Google)

npire of Nicaea

Tryphonos

e lacuna created by the Latin Occupation is difficult to fill, however, although the developments in western Asia Minor during the so-called Empire caea may help to bridge the gap. While the city of Nicaea is best known from texts, the church identified as H. Tryphonos, built under the Laskari es some impression of the construction of the period. Now in ruins, it had an atrophied Greek-cross naos, enveloped by ambulatories, perhaps followi model of the nearby Koimesis church, which was destroyed in 1922 **(read more about the atrophied Greek-cross church type)**.

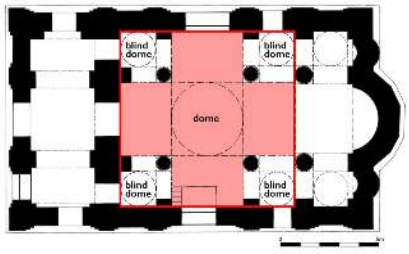


Figure 5.2.5.229: Reconstructed plan of Church E, Sardis, with cross-in-square elements highlighted (adapted from plan © Buchwald, *Churches EA and E at Sardis*, 2015)

urch E at Sardis

urch E at Sardis, a cross-in-square church **(read more about the cross-in-square church type)** known from its excavated remains, is also from t iod. Topped by five domes, with those at the corners blind, the exterior featured a variety of brick patterning.

Figure 5.2.5.230: Panagia Krina, late 12th century, Chios, Greece (photo: **Stylkontoz64**, CC-BY-SA-4.0)

urches at Latmos and on Chios

urches surviving at Latmos and on the Aegean island of Chios also may belong to this period.

Frescoed interior of Panagia Krina (photo: © <a data-cke-saved-href="https://goo.gl/maps/t6tCGcWqMG9g9fA76" href="https://goo.gl/maps/t6tCGcWqMG9g9fA76" target="_blank" rel="noopener"
Francesca Guandalini and Google)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51277" height="1164" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.231: Frescoed interior of Panagia Krina (photo: © **Francesca Guandalini and Google**)

fortunately for most examples the chronology is not secure: Panagia Krina on Chios (modeled on the Nea Mone) for which a date c. 1225 was genera cepted, now may be placed securely before the end of the twelfth century, throwing the dating of other monuments into question.

Figure 5.2.5.232: Hagia Sophia, c. 1238–63, Trebizond (Trabzon) (photo: Julien Lagarde, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Figure 5.2.5.233: Hagia Sophia, c. 1238–63, Trebizond (Trabzon) (photo: **İhsan Deniz Kılıçoğlu**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

ıpire of Trebizond

Sophia, Trebizond

th the establishment of the **Empire of Trebizond** in northeast Anatolia, the Grand Komnenoi (the title of the emperors of Trebizond) constructed phia in the city of Trebizond, c. 1238-63, to be the mortuary church of the imperial family. Built on a cross-in-square plan, its stone construction a :ailing betray its mixed origins, exhibiting both Caucasian and Seljuk features. The origin of its distinctive lateral porches remains unclear **(view plan Sophia, Trebizond)**.

Figure 5.2.5.234: Exterior and interior views of the Panagia Chrysokephalos (Fatih Mosque), 13th century with 1341 additions, Trebizond (Trabzon) (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

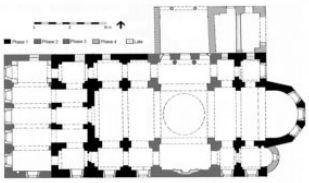


Figure 5.2.5.235: Plan of the Panagia Chrysephalos (Fatih Mosque), Trebizond (© Robert Ousterhout)

nagia Chrysokephalos

e Panagia Chrysokephalos functioned as the cathedral and coronation church; a galleried basilica of the early 13th century, a dome and transept w
led c. 1341.

Figure 5.2.5.236: Exterior and interior views of St. Eugenios (today Yeni Cuma Mosque), 11th century, remodeled 13th and 14th centuries, Trebizond (Trabzon) (top photo: **NeoRetro**, CC BY-SA 3.0; bottom photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

Eugenios

e major pilgrimage church of St. Eugenios, originally of the 11th century, underwent remodelings in the 13th century but only achieved its present fo he 14th. Significant construction continued at Trebizond into the fifteenth century.

Figure 5.2.5.237: Panagia Vlacherna, transformed c. 1225, Arta (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

Figure 5.2.5.238: Church of the Paregoretissa, 1282-89, enlarged 1294-96, Arta (photo: Jpmourez, CC BY-SA 4.0)

ta and the Despotate of Epiros

northwest Greece, Arta emerged as the capital of the **Despotate of Epiros** in this period, with numerous Byzantine churches erected or transform der the ruling families, such as the Panagia Vlacherna (transformed c. 1225), **Kato Panagia** (mid 13th c.), **H. Theodora** (enlarged 13th c.), a ntanassa Philippiadas (enlarged c. 1294), now in ruins.

urch of the Paregoretissa

e most important of these is the Paregoretissa in Arta (1282-89; enlarged 1294-96), apparently begun as a cross-in-square church but transformed duri nstruction into an octagon-domed naos enveloped by a pi-shaped ambulatory surmounted by a gallery with four additional domes **(read more about t tagon-domed church type)**.

Figure 5.2.5.239: Church of the Paregoretissa, 1282-89, enlarged 1294-96, Arta (photo: Albert Gößwein, CC BY-NC 2.0)

re and elsewhere in Epiros, the decorative brickwork of the exterior is distinctive. At the Vlacherna, as at Kypseli and Mesopotam (Albania), compl
mmetrical designs developed in multiple building phases. At Kypseli, Kato Panagia and elsewhere, the naoi feature high transverse **barrel vaults** (bar
ılts set at right angles to the main longitudinal direction of the naos) rather than domes.

Figure 5.2.5.240: St. Demetrius, 13th century, Kypseli (left) and St. Nicholas, Mesopotam (Albania) (right) (left photo: © Robert Ousterhout; right photo: **Wolfgang Sauber**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Figure **5.2.5.241**: Pointed arches in the remains of the sanctuary of the church of St. Sophia, mid 13th century, Andravida, Greece (© Robert Ousterhout)

uthern Greece

southern Greece, part of the Byzantine territory conquered by the Latins in the early thirteenth century, a number of large basilicas were constructed i thic style, to serve the needs of the new, Roman Catholic population, including a variety of mendicant orders, as at Andravida, Stymphalia, Isova, a arenza.

e numerous small, domed churches of the Peloponnese, constructed in a Byzantine style but exhibiting gothic detailing, however, were viewed within thodox Byzantine context and thus belonging to an earlier period, but this interpretation is now in question.

Figure 5.2.5.242: Church of the Koimesis, late 13th century, Merbaka, Greece (photo: © Robert Ousterhout) (view annotated photo)

ıurch of the Koimesis at Merbaka

e church of the Koimesis at Merbaka, a carefully constructed cross-in-square church, was lavishly decorated on the exterior with a combination of br :terning, spolia, carved stone, and glazed proto-maiolica bowls. The last, in combination with some gothic details, place Merbaka into the latter part thirteenth century and within the context of Latin patronage.

Figure 5.2.5.243: Church of the Panagia Katholike, 1278/79, Gastouni, Greece (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

ıe Panagia Katholike at Gastouni and the Blacherna at Elis

e churches of the Panagia Katholike at Gastouni, the Blacherna at Elis, and churches elsewhere fit into a growing picture of the architecture of south eece during this period as the product of a mixed workforce serving a heterogeneous clientele. These small buildings may have been private rather t titutional foundations, with their outward appearance indicative of social status rather than country of origin.

Figure 5.2.5.244: Church of the Blacherna, probably 13th century, Elis, Greece (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

xt: read about Late Byzantine church architecture

lditional Resources

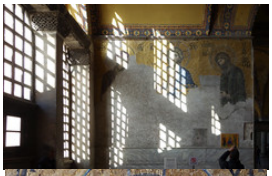
bert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Pre 19)

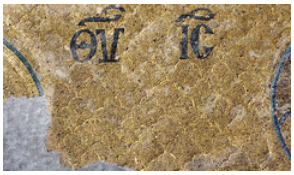
ıte Byzantine

ëësis (Christ with the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist), Hagia Sophia, Istanbul

DR. BETH HARRIS and *DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Video 5.2.5.15: *Deësis (Christ with the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist)*, c. 1261, mosaic, imperial enclosure, south gallery, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul





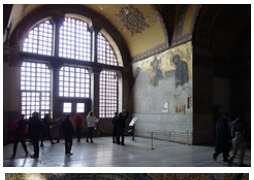


Figure 5.2.5.245: More Smarthistory images…

zantine Griffin Panel

DR. EVAN FREEMAN and DR. ANNE MCCLANAN

panel with a Griffin (a lion and an eagle — the king of birds and the king of animals — combined).

Video 5.2.5.16: Evan and Anne discuss *Panel with a Griffin*, 1250–1300, made in Greece or the Balkans (possibly), marble, 59.7 x 52.1 x 6.5 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

te Byzantine church architecture

DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

riods of Byzantine history

rly Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) **c. 330 – 843**

ddle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

e Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

te Byzantine 1261 – 1453

st-Byzantine after 1453

Figure 5.2.5.246: Map showing major centers in the Late Byzantine period (underlying map © Google)

nstantinople reclaimed

1204, **crusaders** of the Fourth Crusade **sacked and occupied** the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, beginning the period of the Latin Empire (
zantines referred to western Europeans—faithful to the pope of Rome—as "Latins" or "Franks" during this period). But in 1261, the **Empire of Nica**
Byzantine successor state, retook Constantinople and crowned Michael VIII Palaiologos as their new emperor, ending the period of the Latin Empire.

Figure 5.2.5.247: Deësis mosaic, probably installed by Michael VIII Palaiologos after retaking Constantinople from the Latins, c. 1261, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Figure 5.2.5.248: Pantokrator monastery (Zeyrek Mosque), c. 1118-36, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Dismas87, CC BY-SA 4.0) **(view plan)**

e “Palaiologan Renaissance” in Constantinople

Constantinople, church architecture was revived after the reconquest of the city in 1261.

ost constructions represent additions to existing monastic churches, probably following the model of the triple church at the Pantokrator monastery **(re ore about the Pantokrator monastery)**.

all, there is little attempt at visual integration. An impressive funeral chapel as a setting for privileged burials was a standard feature, along w ditional narthexes or ambulatories, equipped for burials. The building complexes are distinguished by an irregular row of apses along the east façа ped by an asymmetrical array of domes. The parts read individually, with a marked contrast between the **Middle** and Late Byzantine forms.

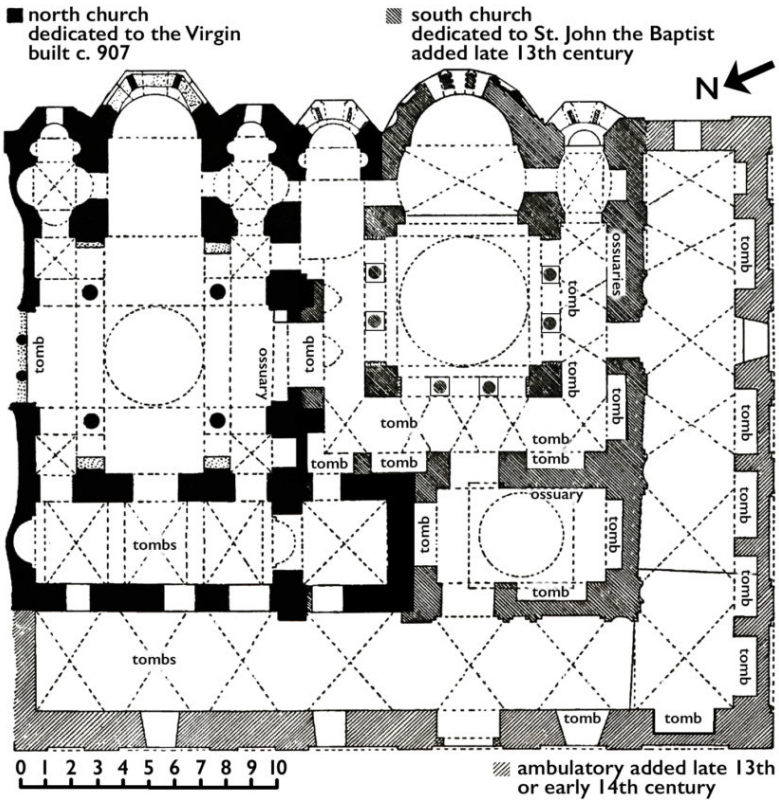


Figure 5.2.5.249: Plan of Mone tou Libos (Fenari İsa Mosque) with tomb locations (adapted from Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople*)

arcophagi under the narthex of the North Church in 1937, Mone tou Libos (<a data-cke-saved-href="http://images.doaks.org/artamonoff/items/show/140" href="http://images.doaks.org/artamonoff/items/show/140" target="_blank" rel="noopener
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cholas V. Artamonoff, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51451" height="423" sizes="(max-width: 400px) 100vw, 400px"
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1451w,
https://smarthistory.org/wp-content/...11c06815f4.jpg
1751w" width="400">

Figure **5.2.5.250**: Sarcophagi under the narthex of the North Church in 1937, Mone tou Libos (**Nicholas V. Artamonoff**, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)

e Mone tou Libos

e monastic complex known as Mone tou Libos (**first established c. 907**), for which the typikon survives, was expanded c. 1282-1303 by the widow chael VIII with the addition of an ambulatory-planned church equipped with arcosolia, where the early members of the Palaiologos imperial family w ied.

a second, closely related building campaign, an outer ambulatory was added along the south and west of the complex, with numerous additio osolia tombs.

ad more about the ambulatory-plan church type.

Figure **5.2.5.251**: Mone tou Libos (Fenari İsa Mosque), Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: **Byzantine Institute and Dumbarton Oaks**, CC0 1.0)

Figure 5.2.5.252: Pammakaristos church, 12th century, parekklesion added c. 1310, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

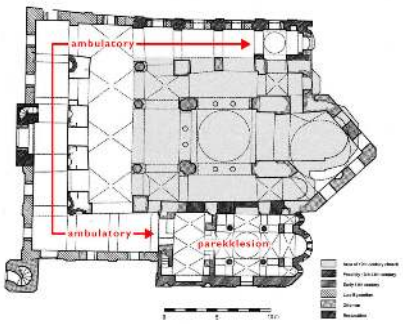

Figure 5.2.5.253: Theotokos Pammakaristos church, 12th century, parekklesion added c. 1310, Constantinople (Istanbul) (adapted from plan © Robert Ousterhout)

ɛ Theotokos Pammakaristos

the Theotokos Pammakaristos, a twelfth-century ambulatory-plan church was expanded in several stages, with chapels, a belfry, and an ou bulatory.

ɔst important is the south parekklesion, a tiny but ornate cross-in-square chapel, built c. 1310 to house the tomb of Michael Glabas Tarchaniotes.

ad more about the cross-in-square church type.

Parekklesion, c. 1310, Pammakaristos church, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/25kzVCt" href="https://flic.kr/p/25kzVCt" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
fusion-of-horizons, CC BY 2.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51737" height="572" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.254: Parekklesion, c. 1310, Pammakaristos church, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: fusion-of-horizons, CC BY 2.0)

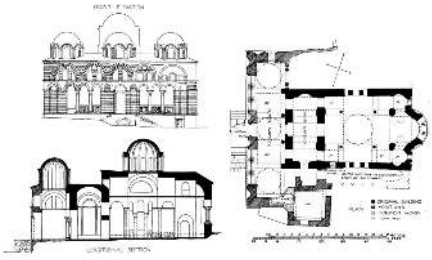

Figure 5.2.5.255: Vefa Kilise Mosque, Middle Byzantine with Late Byzantine additions, Constantinople (Istanbul) (Millingen, Byzantine Churches in Constantinople)

fa Kilise Mosque

e building now known as the Vefa Kilise Mosque was also expanded in several phases, with the addition of a two-stored annex, a belfry, and a thr ned, **porticoed** exonarthex with burial vaults beneath its floor.

Figure 5.2.5.256: Mosaic of Theodore Metochites offering the Chora church to Christ, Chora monastery, Constantinople (Istanbul) c. 1315-21 (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

e Chora Monastery

the Palaiologan monuments in Constantinople, the most important to survive is the Chora Monastery, where the additions uniquely represent a sin ase of construction.

Figure 5.2.5.257: Section and plan of the Chora Monastery (Kariye Mosque), reused portions of twelfth-century naos highlighted (© Robert Ousterhout) **(view annotated plan)**

Figure 5.2.5.258: Chora Monastery (Kariye Mosque) seen from the southeast (© Robert Ousterhout)

stored and **lavishly decorated** by the statesman and scholar Theodore Metochites c. 1316-21, the twelfth-century naos was enveloped with a two-stor
ıex to the north, two broad narthexes to the west—the inner topped by two domes, the outer opened by a portico façade, and a domed funeral chapel
ekklesion to the south, with a belfry at the southwest corner.

Figure 5.2.5.259: Interior of the parekklesion funeral chapel (deocrated with frescos) with arched tombs visible in the side walls (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

all of the Palaiologan complexes, complexity is more important than monumentality in the visual expression, and the new portions may be understood
esponse to history, an attempt to establish a symbolic relationship with the past. By 1330, however, the short-lived “Palaiologan Renaissance” had enc
the capital, at least in terms of major church construction.

Figure 5.2.5.260: H. Panteleimon, late 13th or early 14th century, Thessaloniki, Greece (photo: **Mister No**, CC BY 3.0)

essaloniki

essaloniki also saw the construction of numerous churches in the Late Byzantine period.

Figure 5.2.5.261: H. Aikaterini, late 13th or early 14th century, Thessaloniki, Greece (photo: © **The Byzantine Legacy**)

nbulatory-plan churches

H. Panteleimon, H. Aikaterini, and H. Apostoloi, all late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in date, an attenuated cross-in-square core was envelop
a pi-shaped ambulatory.

Figure 5.2.5.262: H. Apostoloi, late 13th or early 14th century, Thessaloniki, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

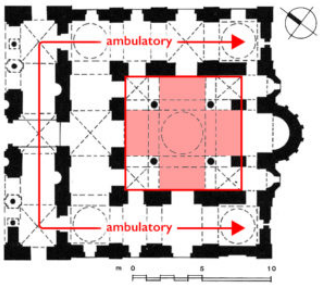

Figure 5.2.5.263: Plan of the church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki, higlighting ambulatory and cross-in-square elements

pped by multiple domes and opened by porticoes, the auxiliary spaces included subsidiary chapels.

hough their counterparts in Constantinople clearly served for burials, the functions of the ambulatory in Thessaloniki are less evident. Several simpl vaulted churches survive from the same period.

Figure 5.2.5.264: Profitis Elias, exterior (left) and view of north choros (right), c. 1360, Thessaloniki, Greece (left photo: Herbert Frank, CC BY 2.0; right photo: Evan Freeman CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

ofitis Elias

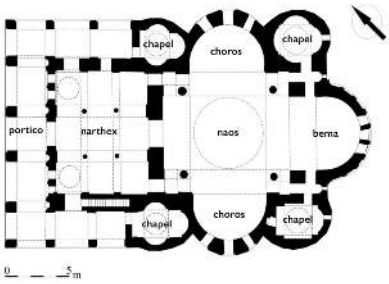

Figure 5.2.5.265: Annotated plan of Profitis Elias, Thessaloniki (adapted from plan: Archaeology Wiki, © Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki City)

e Profitis Elias, built c. 1360 on an Athonite plan (with *choroi* and subsidiary chapels), demonstrates the enduring vitality of architecture in the city

ad more about Athonite churches.

ystras

ystras (in the Peloponnese in Greece) emerged as a major Byzantine political center with the expulsion of the Latins in the mid-thirteenth centu llowing their **occupation of the region** since the time of the Fourth Crusade).

Figure 5.2.5.266: Hodegetria church, Brontochion monastery, built c. 1310-22, Mystras, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

Hodegetria church, Brontochion monastery, built c. 1310-22, Mystras, Greece (photo: © <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/2bkVRya" href="https://flic.kr/p/2bkVRya" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
The Byzantine Legacy)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51315" height="225" sizes="(max-width: 300px) 100vw, 300px" src="
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2048w" width="300">

Figure 5.2.5.267: Hodegetria church, Brontochion monastery, built c. 1310-22, Mystras, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

odegetria Church at Brontochion Monastery

veral churches of the so-called “Mystras type” (named for their location in Mystras, Greece) combine a basilican ground plan with a cross-in-squa e-domed gallery, the whole enveloped by porticoes, a belfry, and additional subsidiary spaces.

e Hodegetria (or Aphentiko) church at the Brontochion monastery, built c. 1310-22, betrays evidence of an ad hoc creation, begun as a simple cross- iare church.

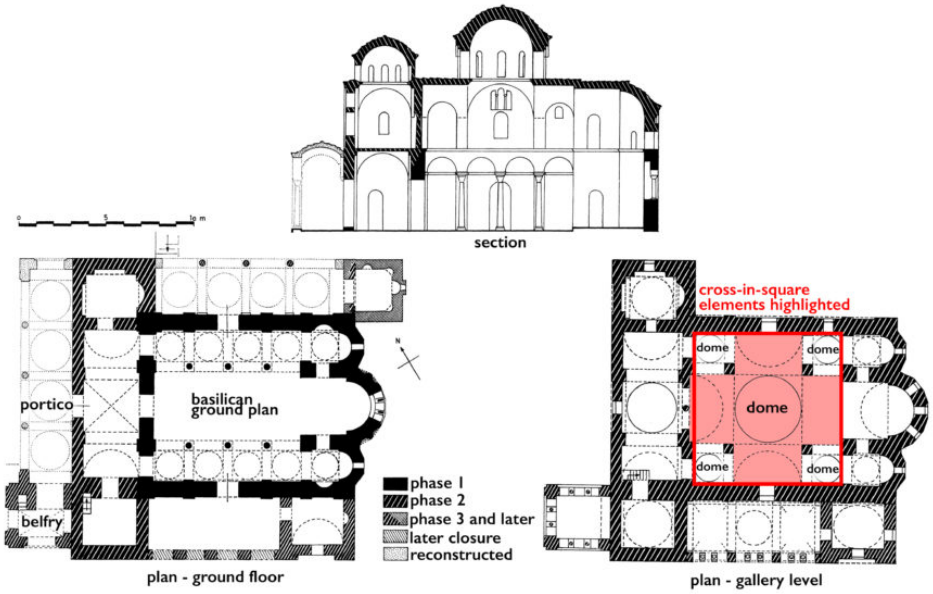

Figure 5.2.5.268: Hodegetria church, Brontochion monastery (adapted from Hallensleben, “Untersuchungen zur Genesis und Typologie des ‘Mistratypus'”)

ntanassa monastery

e type is repeated as late as 1428 in the church of the Pantanassa monastery.

Figure 5.2.5.269: Pantanassa monastery, 1428, Mystras, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

urches of the *octagon-domed church* and cross-in-square types were also constructed in this period **(read more about octagon-domed churche** chitectural detailing suggests close connections with both Constantinople and Italy.

 ator church, mid-14th century Nesebar, Bulgaria (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Church_of_Christ_Pantocrator_Nesebar.jpg" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Church_of_Christ_Pantocrator_Nesebar.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Chrumps, CC BY-SA 4.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51481" height="647" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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2048w" width="870">

Figure **5.2.5.270**: Pantokrator church, mid-14th century Nesebar, Bulgaria (photo: **Chrumps**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

lgaria

haps most significant in this period is the emergence of neighboring powers as creative centers of architecture. **Bulgaria** remained closest to Byzantiu its architectural developments.

Figure **5.2.5.271**: Sv. Ivan Aliturgetos, mid-14th century, Nesebar, Bulgaria (photo: **MrPanyGoff**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

etail of east façade, Pantokrator church, Nesebar (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sunny_Beach_Nesebar_centre_2.jpg" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sunny_Beach_Nesebar_centre_2.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Wizzard, CC0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51480" height="238" sizes="(max-width: 400px) 100vw, 400px" src="
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1633w" width="400">

Figure **5.2.5.272**: Detail of east façade, Pantokrator church, Nesebar (photo: **Wizzard**, CC0)

e Pantokrator and Sv. Ivan Aliturgetos at Nesebar

hough more robust in terms of their surface decoration, the late churches of Nesebar, for example, follow the construction techniques and façı amentation of Constantinople. The coastal town passed repeatedly between Byzantine and Bulgarian control.

e churches of the Pantokrator and Sv. Ivan Aliturgetos date to the mid-fourteenth century and are most distinctive for their colorful exteriors, combini ck and stone decoration with glazed ceramic disks and rosettes.

Figure 5.2.5.273: Sopoćani Monastery, c. 1265, Serbia (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

rbia

edieval **Serbia** experienced some western European influence from the Dalmatian coast in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (as at Sopoćani, c. 126 t as close ties and political rivalry with Byzantium developed in the fourteenth century, Serbian architecture generally followed Byzantine developmer porting both ideas and masons.

Figure 5.2.5.274: Gračanica Monastery, before 1321, Gračanica (modern Kosovo) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

ıside Gračanica Monastery (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gracanica_Fresco_2.JPG" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gracanica_Fresco_2.JPG" target="_blank" el="noopener"
Julian Nyča, CC BY-SA 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51496" height="306" sizes="(max-width: 400px) 100vw, 400px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.275**: Inside Gračanica Monastery (photo: **Julian Nyča**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

ačanica Monastery

many ways, King Milutin's church at Gračanica, built before 1321, represents the culmination of Late Byzantine architectural design. Integrating ghly attenuated cross-in-square naos with a pi-shaped ambulatory, the whole is topped by five domes. With simplified façade arcading and a pyrami ssing of forms, the building exhibits an external clarity that belies its complexity.

esnovo Monastery, 1341-47, Lesnovo (modern North Macedonia) (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Св.Архангел_Михаил.JPG" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Св.Архангел_Михаил.JPG" target="_blank" rel="noopener"
Tosee, CC BY-SA 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51231" height="580" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.276**: Lesnovo Monastery, 1341-47, Lesnovo (modern North Macedonia) (photo: **Tosee**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

snovo

e reigns of both Milutin and Stefan Dušan witnessed a great deal of construction, often similar to developments in northern Greece. The monastic chu Lesnovo (in modern North Macedonia) built 1341-47, for example, is a grand cross-in-square church with a domed narthex. It would not seem out ce in Late Byzantine Thessalonike in its scale, construction technique, or style.

Figure **5.2.5.277**: Ravanica Monastery, 1370s, Serbia (photo: **Petar Milošević**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

ıvanica Monastery

ter architecture in Serbia, notably that of the so-called Morava School, is smaller and more decorative, often utilizing the so-called Athonite plan (w
ɔroi and subsidiary chapels), as at Ravanica (1370s), with five domes, or the smaller and simpler Kalenić (after 1407).

Figure 5.2.5.278: Kalenić Monastery, after 1407, Serbia (photo: **Ванилица**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

ɔmania

ɪmania represents a latecomer to the scene. Wallachia (a historical region in southeastern Romania), liberated from Hungary in 1330, came under t luence of Serbian architecture, while Moldavia (a historical region in northeastern Romania), liberated in 1365, shows a greater originality.

Figure 5.2.5.279: Voroneț Monastery, c. 1488, Moldavia (modern Romania) (photo: Eugen Naiman CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Detail of frescos on exterior of Suceviţa Monastery church (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/22fV8BM" href="https://flic.kr/p/22fV8BM" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Alex Berger, CC BY-NC 2.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51461" height="267" sizes="(max-width: 401px) 100vw, 401px" src="
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1536w" width="401">

Figure 5.2.5.280: Detail of frescos on exterior of Suceviţa Monastery church (photo: Alex Berger, CC BY-NC 2.0)

teenth-century churches like that at Voroneţ, built c. 1488, or Suceviţa, built c. 1485, have steeply pitched, heavy overhanging roofs and a diminish me above a triconch plan, the walls entirely frescoed on the exterior. The origin of this distinctively hybrid architecture is unclear.

Figure 5.2.5.281: Suceviţa Monastery, 1485, Moldavia (modern Romania) (photo: Ava Babili, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

ıssia was destabilized in the thirteenth century by the invasion of the Mongols, with the notable exceptions of Novgorod and Pskov, where medie
ırches survive from the twelfth century onward.

Figure 5.2.5.282: Saviour-on-the-Ilyina-Street, 1374, Novgorod, Russia (photo: **Ludvig14**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

ormition Cathedral, c. 1399, Zvenigorod (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uspensky_Cathedral_-_Zvenigorod,_Russia_-_panoramio.jpg" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uspensky_Cathedral_
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Sergey Ashmarin, CC BY-SA 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51465" height="400" sizes="(max-width: 342px) 100vw, 342px" src="
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300w,
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1185w" width="342">

Figure 5.2.5.283: Dormition Cathedral, c. 1399, Zvenigorod (photo: **Sergey Ashmarin**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Novgorod, churches like the Saviour-on-the-Ilyina-Street (1374), are steep-roofed and roughly built.

Russia recovered from the Mongol invasions, Muscovy developed its own distinctive architecture, first seen perhaps in the Dormition Cathedral
enigorod (c. 1399).

ɔscow emerged as the most important center, and following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, it assumed the role of spiritual leader of the Orthod
ırld.

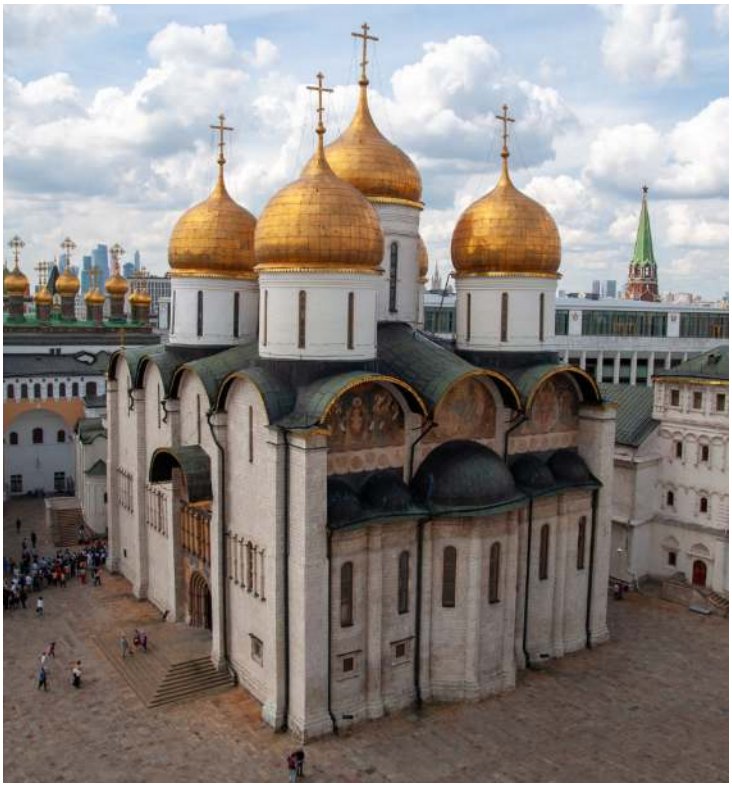

Figure 5.2.5.284: Aristotele Fioravanti, Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin, 1475-79, Moscow (photo: **Don-vip**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

athedral of the Dormition, 1158-60, expanded 1185-89, Vladimir (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Владимир_Успенский_собор_2008.JPG" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Владимир_Успенский_собор_2008.JPG" target="_blank" rel="noopener"

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Figure 5.2.5.285: Cathedral of the Dormition, 1158-60, expanded 1185-89, Vladimir (photo: **Булатов Даниил**, CC0)

the late fifteenth century, a new architectural impetus arrived from Italy, in the form of imported Italian architects.

e Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin, constructed 1475-79 under the direction of Aristotele Fioravanti, combined details derived from t thedral of Vladimir with an Italian Renaissance modular plan, topped by five domes; it became the coronation church.

Figure 5.2.5.286: Interior of the Cathedral of the Annunciation, 1484-89, Moscow (photo: **Wikimedia Commons**, CC0)

thedrals of the Annunciation and of the Archangel were added to the Kremlin shortly thereafter.

Cathedrals of the Annunciation (let) and the Archangel Michael (right) (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/wqaMwz" href="https://flic.kr/p/wqaMwz" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Jorge Láscar, CC BY 2.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51484" height="580" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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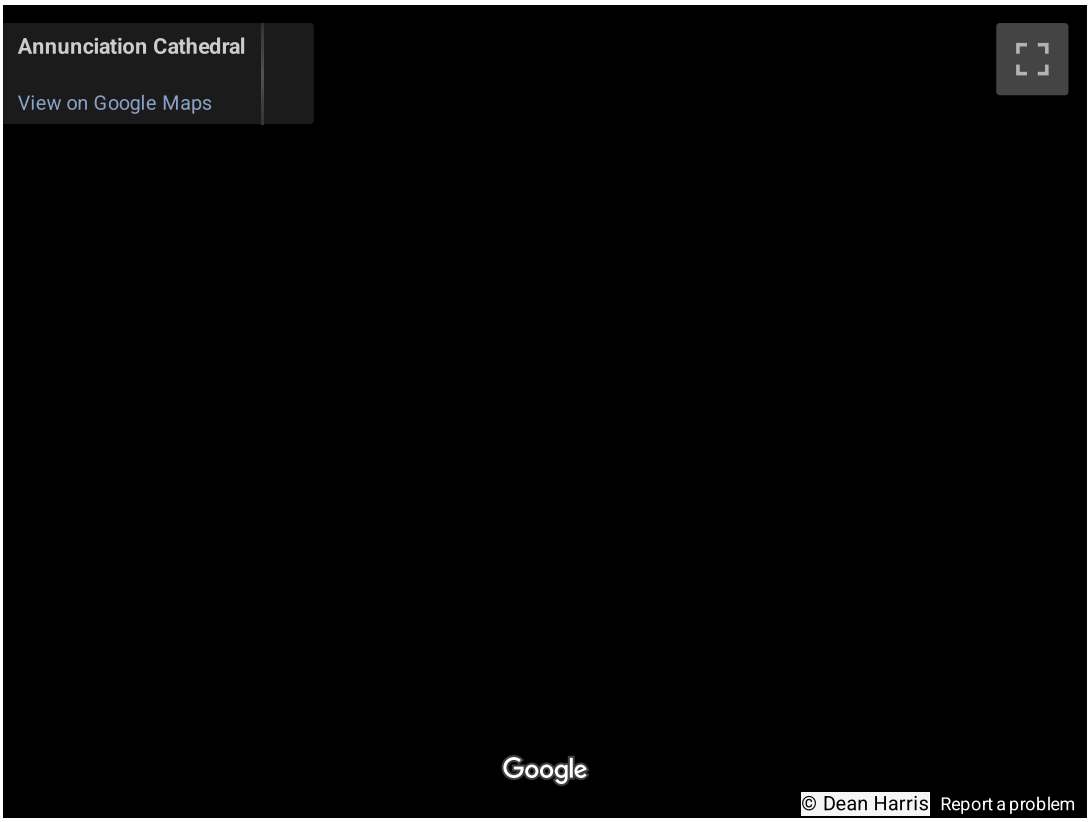
Figure 5.2.5.287: Cathedrals of the Annunciation (let) and the Archangel Michael (right) (photo: **Jorge Láscar**, CC BY 2.0)



Cathedral Square facing the Archangel Cathedral (left) and Annunciation Cathedral, Moscow (right) (© Google)

atolia

th the defeat at Manzikirt in 1071, much of **Anatolia** passed into the control of the Seljuks and other Turkic beyliks, but this does not mark the end ristian architecture in the region.

Figure **5.2.5.288**: Tatlarin Kilisesis, Church A, north nave, 13th century, Cappadocia (modern Turkey) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

the thirteenth century, there is evidence of rock-cut architecture in the Christian communities of Cappadocia (in central Anatolia), as for example larin, Gülşehir, and Belisırma.

Figure **5.2.5.289**: Church of St. John (Karşı Kilise), Gülşehir, Cappadocia (modern Turkey) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

the early fourteenth century, the Ottomans emerged as the dominant power in northwest Anatolia, and by the 1320s-1330s, the former nomads w
ively building, and in a manner technically and stylistically following local, Byzantine practices, although plans and vaulting forms may be more clos
gned with the architecture of the Seljuks.

rhan Mosque, late 1330s, Bursa (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bursa_Orhan_Gazi_Mosque.jpg" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bursa_Orhan_Gazi_Mosque.jpg"
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Figure **5.2.5.290**: Orhan Mosque, late 1330s, Bursa (photo: **Adbar**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Church of the Pantobasilissa, late 1330s, Trilye (photo: © <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/216u3d2" href="https://flic.kr/p/216u3d2" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
The Byzantine Legacy)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51522" height="316" sizes="(max-width: 375px) 100vw, 375px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.291**: Church of the Pantobasilissa, late 1330s, Trilye (photo: © **The Byzantine Legacy**)

e Orhan Mosque in Bursa of the late 1330s corresponds closely to contemporaneous works of Byzantine architecture in its mixed brick and stone w
ıstruction and its decorative details.

ıny of the same features appear at the church of the Pantobasilissa in nearby Trilye, also from the late 1330s, suggesting that the same workshops w
ıstructing both churches and mosques. At Bursa, the first Ottoman capital (conquered in 1326), two Byzantine churches were appropriated for use as
ıusolea of Osman and Orhan.

onasticism follows **Middle Byzantine models**, as for example at Hilandar on **Mount Athos**, founded by Milutin c. 1303.

Figure 5.2.5.292: Hilandar Monastery, Mount Athos (photo: **Саша Шљукић**, CC BY 3.0)

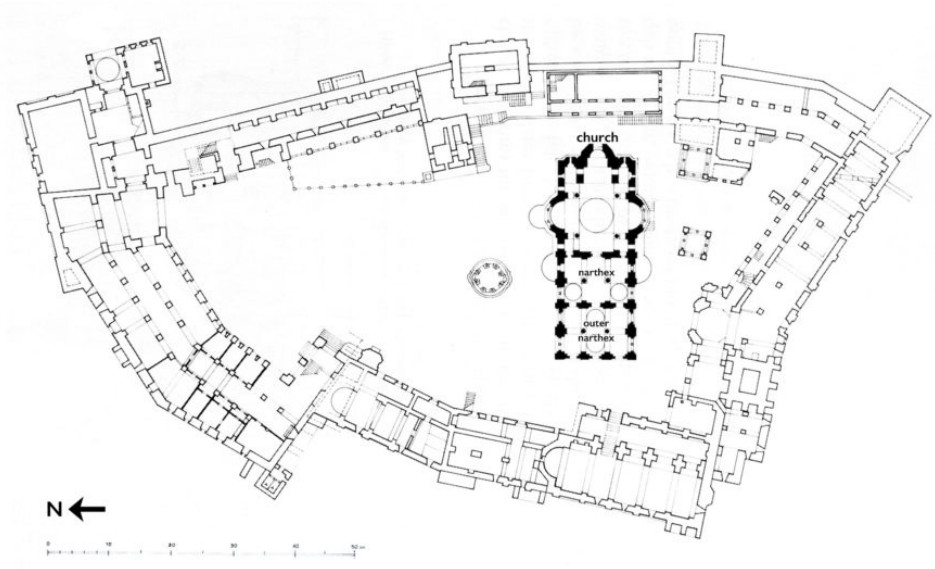

Figure 5.2.5.293: Plan of Hilandar Monastery (adapted from plan in Ćurčić, "Hilandar Monastery: An Archive")

Figure 5.2.5.294: Katholikon, Hilander Monastery, c. 1303, Mount Athos (photo: **Zeljkokiss**, CC0)

e freestanding, Athonite-plan katholikon included a large, twin-domed narthex or lite, subsequently expanded with a large, domed outer narthex in t ter part of the century. Both reflect the increased role of the narthex in monastic worship.

rtified, with the monastic cells lining the wall, the monastery has its refectory set opposite the entrance to the katholikon, with a phiale or holy water fe the courtyard to one side. Similarly planned monasteries appear throughout the Balkans.

xt: read about Late Byzantine secular architecture and urban planning

ditional Resources

bert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Pre 19)

zantine Griffin Panel

DR. EVAN FREEMAN and DR. ANNE MCCLANAN

panel with a Griffin (a lion and an eagle — the king of birds and the king of animals — combined).

Video 5.2.5.16: Evan and Anne discuss *Panel with a Griffin*, 1250–1300, made in Greece or the Balkans (possibly), marble, 59.7 x 52.1 x 6.5 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

te Byzantine church architecture

DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

riods of Byzantine history

rly Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) **c. 330 – 843**

ddle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

e Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

te Byzantine 1261 – 1453

st-Byzantine after 1453

Figure 5.2.5.246: Map showing major centers in the Late Byzantine period (underlying map © Google)

ınstantinople reclaimed

1204, **crusaders** of the Fourth Crusade **sacked and occupied** the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, beginning the period of the Latin Empire (
zantines referred to western Europeans—faithful to the pope of Rome—as "Latins" or "Franks" during this period). But in 1261, the **Empire of Nica**
Byzantine successor state, retook Constantinople and crowned Michael VIII Palaiologos as their new emperor, ending the period of the Latin Empire.

Figure 5.2.5.247: Deësis mosaic, probably installed by Michael VIII Palaiologos after retaking Constantinople from the Latins, c. 1261, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Figure 5.2.5.248: Pantokrator monastery (Zeyrek Mosque), c. 1118-36, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Dismas87, CC BY-SA 4.0) **(view plan)**

e “Palaiologan Renaissance” in Constantinople

Constantinople, church architecture was revived after the reconquest of the city in 1261.

ost constructions represent additions to existing monastic churches, probably following the model of the triple church at the Pantokrator monastery **(re ore about the Pantokrator monastery)**.

all, there is little attempt at visual integration. An impressive funeral chapel as a setting for privileged burials was a standard feature, along w ditional narthexes or ambulatories, equipped for burials. The building complexes are distinguished by an irregular row of apses along the east faça oped by an asymmetrical array of domes. The parts read individually, with a marked contrast between the **Middle** and Late Byzantine forms.

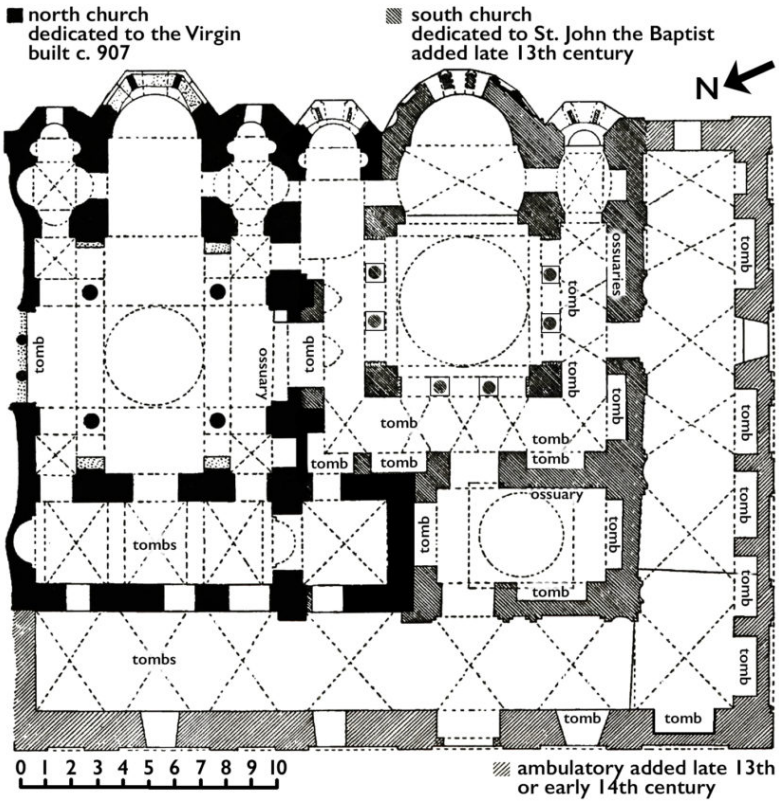

Figure 5.2.5.249: Plan of Mone tou Libos (Fenari İsa Mosque) with tomb locations (adapted from Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople*)

arcophagi under the narthex of the North Church in 1937, Mone tou Libos (<a data-cke-saved-href="http://images.doaks.org/artamonoff/items/show/140" href="http://images.doaks.org/artamonoff/items/show/140" target="_blank" rel="noopener referrer"
cholas V. Artamonoff, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51451" height="423" sizes="(max-width: 400px) 100vw, 400px"
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Figure **5.2.5.250**: Sarcophagi under the narthex of the North Church in 1937, Mone tou Libos (**Nicholas V. Artamonoff**, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)

e Mone tou Libos

e monastic complex known as Mone tou Libos (**first established c. 907**), for which the typikon survives, was expanded c. 1282-1303 by the widow chael VIII with the addition of an ambulatory-planned church equipped with arcosolia, where the early members of the Palaiologos imperial family w ied.

a second, closely related building campaign, an outer ambulatory was added along the south and west of the complex, with numerous additio osolia tombs.

ad more about the ambulatory-plan church type.

Figure **5.2.5.251**: Mone tou Libos (Fenari İsa Mosque), Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: **Byzantine Institute and Dumbarton Oaks**, CC0 1.0)

Figure **5.2.5.252**: Pammakaristos church, 12th century, parekklesion added c. 1310, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

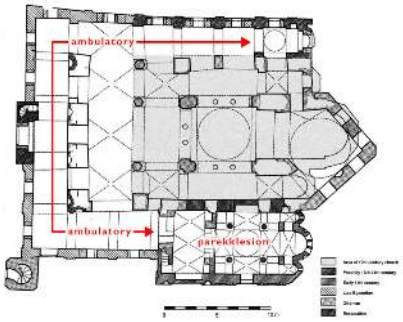

Figure **5.2.5.253**: Theotokos Pammakaristos church, 12th century, parekklesion added c. 1310, Constantinople (Istanbul) (adapted from plan © Robert Ousterhout)

ıe Theotokos Pammakaristos

the Theotokos Pammakaristos, a twelfth-century ambulatory-plan church was expanded in several stages, with chapels, a belfry, and an ou ıbulatory.

ɔst important is the south parekklesion, a tiny but ornate cross-in-square chapel, built c. 1310 to house the tomb of Michael Glabas Tarchaniotes.

ad more about the cross-in-square church type.

Parekklesion, c. 1310, Pammakaristos church, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/25kzVCt" href="https://flic.kr/p/25kzVCt" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
fusion-of-horizons, CC BY 2.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51737" height="572" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.254**: Parekklesion, c. 1310, Pammakaristos church, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: **fusion-of-horizons**, CC BY 2.0)

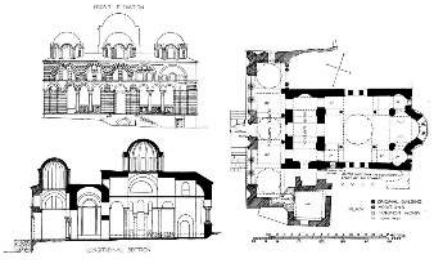

Figure 5.2.5.255: Vefa Kilise Mosque, Middle Byzantine with Late Byzantine additions, Constantinople (Istanbul) (Millingen, Byzantine Churches in Constantinople)

fa Kilise Mosque

e building now known as the Vefa Kilise Mosque was also expanded in several phases, with the addition of a two-stored annex, a belfry, and a thr med, **porticoed** exonarthex with burial vaults beneath its floor.

Figure 5.2.5.256: Mosaic of Theodore Metochites offering the Chora church to Christ, Chora monastery, Constantinople (Istanbul) c. 1315-21 (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

e Chora Monastery

the Palaiologan monuments in Constantinople, the most important to survive is the Chora Monastery, where the additions uniquely represent a sin ase of construction.

Figure 5.2.5.257: Section and plan of the Chora Monastery (Kariye Mosque), reused portions of twelfth-century naos highlighted (© Robert Ousterhout) **(view annotated plan)**

Figure 5.2.5.258: Chora Monastery (Kariye Mosque) seen from the southeast (© Robert Ousterhout)

stored and **lavishly decorated** by the statesman and scholar Theodore Metochites c. 1316-21, the twelfth-century naos was enveloped with a two-stor
ıex to the north, two broad narthexes to the west—the inner topped by two domes, the outer opened by a portico façade, and a domed funeral chapel
ekklesion to the south, with a belfry at the southwest corner.

Figure 5.2.5.259: Interior of the parekklesion funeral chapel (deocrated with frescos) with arched tombs visible in the side walls (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

all of the Palaiologan complexes, complexity is more important than monumentality in the visual expression, and the new portions may be understood
esponse to history, an attempt to establish a symbolic relationship with the past. By 1330, however, the short-lived “Palaiologan Renaissance” had enc
the capital, at least in terms of major church construction.

Figure 5.2.5.260: H. Panteleimon, late 13th or early 14th century, Thessaloniki, Greece (photo: Mister No, CC BY 3.0)

essaloniki

essaloniki also saw the construction of numerous churches in the Late Byzantine period.

Figure 5.2.5.261: H. Aikaterini, late 13th or early 14th century, Thessaloniki, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

nbulatory-plan churches

H. Panteleimon, H. Aikaterini, and H. Apostoloi, all late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in date, an attenuated cross-in-square core was envelop
a pi-shaped ambulatory.

Figure 5.2.5.262: H. Apostoloi, late 13th or early 14th century, Thessaloniki, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

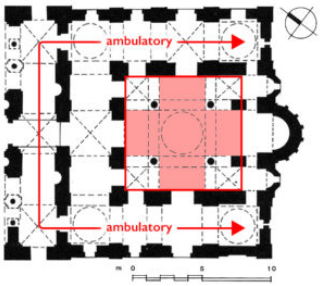

Figure 5.2.5.263: Plan of the church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki, higlighting ambulatory and cross-in-square elements

pped by multiple domes and opened by porticoes, the auxiliary spaces included subsidiary chapels.

hough their counterparts in Constantinople clearly served for burials, the functions of the ambulatory in Thessaloniki are less evident. Several simpl vaulted churches survive from the same period.

Figure 5.2.5.264: Profitis Elias, exterior (left) and view of north choros (right), c. 1360, Thessaloniki, Greece (left photo: Herbert Frank, CC BY 2.0; right photo: Evan Freeman CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

ofitis Elias

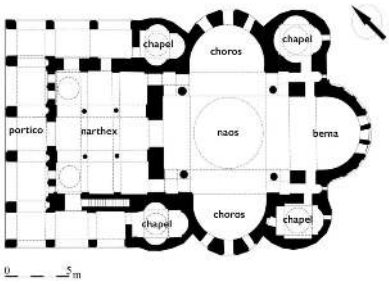

Figure 5.2.5.265: Annotated plan of Profitis Elias, Thessaloniki (adapted from plan: Archaeology Wiki, © Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki City)

e Profitis Elias, built c. 1360 on an Athonite plan (with *choroi* and subsidiary chapels), demonstrates the enduring vitality of architecture in the city

ad more about Athonite churches.

ystras

ystras (in the Peloponnese in Greece) emerged as a major Byzantine political center with the expulsion of the Latins in the mid-thirteenth centu llowing their **occupation of the region** since the time of the Fourth Crusade).

Figure 5.2.5.266: Hodegetria church, Brontochion monastery, built c. 1310-22, Mystras, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

Hodegetria church, Brontochion monastery, built c. 1310-22, Mystras, Greece (photo: © <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/2bkVRya" href="https://flic.kr/p/2bkVRya" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
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Figure 5.2.5.267: Hodegetria church, Brontochion monastery, built c. 1310-22, Mystras, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

ıdegetria Church at Brontochion Monastery

veral churches of the so-called “Mystras type” (named for their location in Mystras, Greece) combine a basilican ground plan with a cross-in-squa e-domed gallery, the whole enveloped by porticoes, a belfry, and additional subsidiary spaces.

e Hodegetria (or Aphentiko) church at the Brontochion monastery, built c. 1310-22, betrays evidence of an ad hoc creation, begun as a simple cross- iare church.

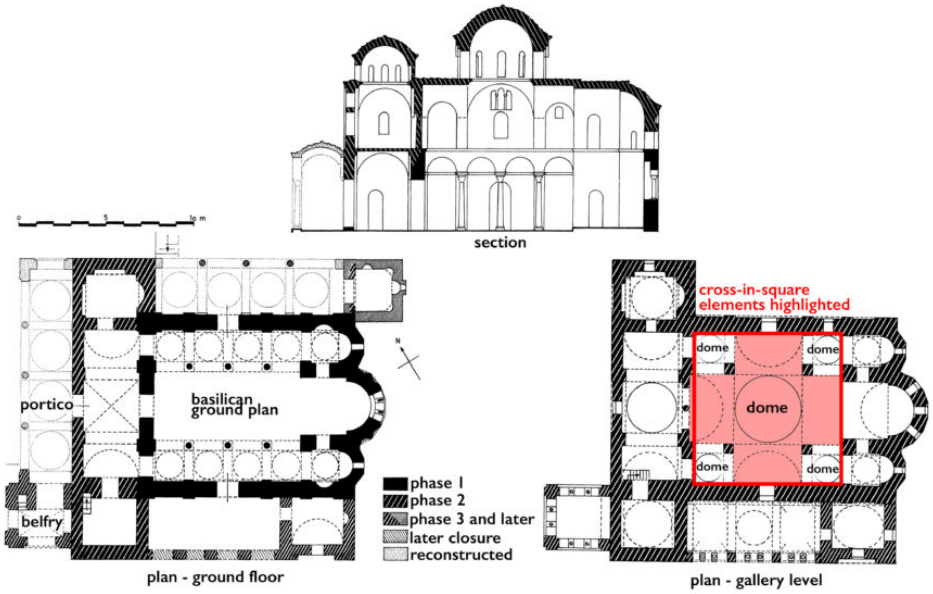

Figure 5.2.5.268: Hodegetria church, Brontochion monastery (adapted from Hallensleben, “Untersuchungen zur Genesis und Typologie des ‘Mistratypus'”)

ntanassa monastery

e type is repeated as late as 1428 in the church of the Pantanassa monastery.

Figure 5.2.5.269: Pantanassa monastery, 1428, Mystras, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

urches of the *octagon-domed church* and cross-in-square types were also constructed in this period (read more about octagon-domed churche chitectural detailing suggests close connections with both Constantinople and Italy.

 ator church, mid-14th century Nesebar, Bulgaria (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Church_of_Christ_Pantocrator_Nesebar.jpg" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Church_of_Christ_Pantocrator_Nesebar.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Chrumps, CC BY-SA 4.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51481" height="647" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.270**: Pantokrator church, mid-14th century Nesebar, Bulgaria (photo: **Chrumps**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

lgaria

haps most significant in this period is the emergence of neighboring powers as creative centers of architecture. **Bulgaria** remained closest to Byzantiu its architectural developments.

Figure **5.2.5.271**: Sv. Ivan Aliturgetos, mid-14th century, Nesebar, Bulgaria (photo: **MrPanyGoff**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

etail of east façade, Pantokrator church, Nesebar (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sunny_Beach_Nesebar_centre_2.jpg" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sunny_Beach_Nesebar_centre_2.jpg" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Wizzard, CC0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51480" height="238" sizes="(max-width: 400px) 100vw, 400px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.272**: Detail of east façade, Pantokrator church, Nesebar (photo: **Wizzard**, CC0)

e Pantokrator and Sv. Ivan Aliturgetos at Nesebar

hough more robust in terms of their surface decoration, the late churches of Nesebar, for example, follow the construction techniques and façı amentation of Constantinople. The coastal town passed repeatedly between Byzantine and Bulgarian control.

e churches of the Pantokrator and Sv. Ivan Aliturgetos date to the mid-fourteenth century and are most distinctive for their colorful exteriors, combini ck and stone decoration with glazed ceramic disks and rosettes.

Figure 5.2.5.273: Sopoćani Monastery, c. 1265, Serbia (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

rbia

edieval **Serbia** experienced some western European influence from the Dalmatian coast in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (as at Sopoćani, c. 126 t as close ties and political rivalry with Byzantium developed in the fourteenth century, Serbian architecture generally followed Byzantine developmer porting both ideas and masons.

Figure 5.2.5.274: Gračanica Monastery, before 1321, Gračanica (modern Kosovo) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

ıside Gračanica Monastery (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gracanica_Fresco_2.JPG" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gracanica_Fresco_2.JPG" target="_blank" el="noopener"
Julian Nyča, CC BY-SA 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51496" height="306" sizes="(max-width: 400px) 100vw, 400px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.275**: Inside Gračanica Monastery (photo: **Julian Nyča**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

ačanica Monastery

many ways, King Milutin's church at Gračanica, built before 1321, represents the culmination of Late Byzantine architectural design. Integrating hly attenuated cross-in-square naos with a pi-shaped ambulatory, the whole is topped by five domes. With simplified façade arcading and a pyrami ssing of forms, the building exhibits an external clarity that belies its complexity.

esnovo Monastery, 1341-47, Lesnovo (modern North Macedonia) (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Св.Архангел_Михаил.JPG" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Св.Архангел_Михаил.JPG" target="_blank" rel="noopener"
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Figure **5.2.5.276**: Lesnovo Monastery, 1341-47, Lesnovo (modern North Macedonia) (photo: **Tosee**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

snovo

e reigns of both Milutin and Stefan Dušan witnessed a great deal of construction, often similar to developments in northern Greece. The monastic chu Lesnovo (in modern North Macedonia) built 1341-47, for example, is a grand cross-in-square church with a domed narthex. It would not seem out ce in Late Byzantine Thessalonike in its scale, construction technique, or style.

Figure 5.2.5.277: Ravanica Monastery, 1370s, Serbia (photo: **Petar Milošević**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

ıvanica Monastery

ter architecture in Serbia, notably that of the so-called Morava School, is smaller and more decorative, often utilizing the so-called Athonite plan (w
ɔroi and subsidiary chapels), as at Ravanica (1370s), with five domes, or the smaller and simpler Kalenić (after 1407).

Figure 5.2.5.278: Kalenić Monastery, after 1407, Serbia (photo: **Ванилица**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

ɔmania

ɪmania represents a latecomer to the scene. Wallachia (a historical region in southeastern Romania), liberated from Hungary in 1330, came under t luence of Serbian architecture, while Moldavia (a historical region in northeastern Romania), liberated in 1365, shows a greater originality.

Figure 5.2.5.279: Voroneț Monastery, c. 1488, Moldavia (modern Romania) (photo: Eugen Naiman CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Detail of frescos on exterior of Suceviţa Monastery church (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/22fV8BM" href="https://flic.kr/p/22fV8BM" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Alex Berger, CC BY-NC 2.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51461" height="267" sizes="(max-width: 401px) 100vw, 401px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.280: Detail of frescos on exterior of Suceviţa Monastery church (photo: Alex Berger, CC BY-NC 2.0)

teenth-century churches like that at Voroneţ, built c. 1488, or Suceviţa, built c. 1485, have steeply pitched, heavy overhanging roofs and a diminish me above a triconch plan, the walls entirely frescoed on the exterior. The origin of this distinctively hybrid architecture is unclear.

Figure 5.2.5.281: Suceviţa Monastery, 1485, Moldavia (modern Romania) (photo: Ava Babili, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

ıssia was destabilized in the thirteenth century by the invasion of the Mongols, with the notable exceptions of Novgorod and Pskov, where medie
ırches survive from the twelfth century onward.

Figure 5.2.5.282: Saviour-on-the-Ilyina-Street, 1374, Novgorod, Russia (photo: **Ludvig14**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

ormition Cathedral, c. 1399, Zvenigorod (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uspensky_Cathedral_-_Zvenigorod,_Russia_-_panoramio.jpg" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uspensky_Cathedral_
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Sergey Ashmarin, CC BY-SA 3.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51465" height="400" sizes="(max-width: 342px) 100vw, 342px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.283: Dormition Cathedral, c. 1399, Zvenigorod (photo: **Sergey Ashmarin**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Novgorod, churches like the Saviour-on-the-Ilyina-Street (1374), are steep-roofed and roughly built.

Russia recovered from the Mongol invasions, Muscovy developed its own distinctive architecture, first seen perhaps in the Dormition Cathedral
enigorod (c. 1399).

ɔscow emerged as the most important center, and following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, it assumed the role of spiritual leader of the Orthod
ırld.

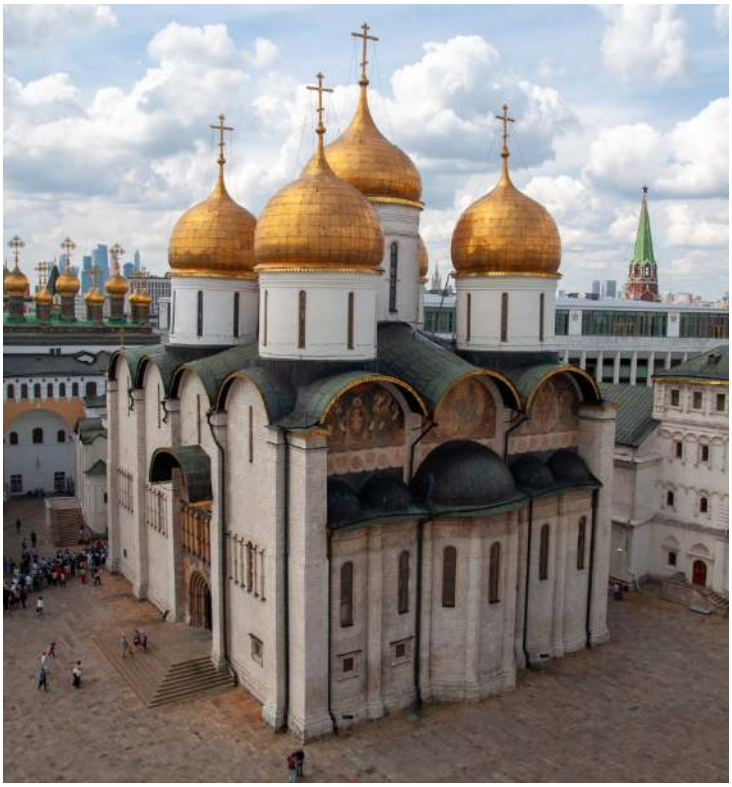

Figure 5.2.5.284: Aristotele Fioravanti, Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin, 1475-79, Moscow (photo: **Don-vip**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

athedral of the Dormition, 1158-60, expanded 1185-89, Vladimir (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Владимир_Успенский_собор_2008.JPG" ref="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Владимир_Успенский_собор_2008.JPG" target="_blank" rel="noopener"

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Figure 5.2.5.285: Cathedral of the Dormition, 1158-60, expanded 1185-89, Vladimir (photo: **Булатов Даниил**, CC0)

the late fifteenth century, a new architectural impetus arrived from Italy, in the form of imported Italian architects.

e Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin, constructed 1475-79 under the direction of Aristotele Fioravanti, combined details derived from t thedral of Vladimir with an Italian Renaissance modular plan, topped by five domes; it became the coronation church.

Figure 5.2.5.286: Interior of the Cathedral of the Annunciation, 1484-89, Moscow (photo: **Wikimedia Commons**, CC0)

thedrals of the Annunciation and of the Archangel were added to the Kremlin shortly thereafter.

Cathedrals of the Annunciation (let) and the Archangel Michael (right) (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/wqaMwz" href="https://flic.kr/p/wqaMwz" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
Jorge Láscar, CC BY 2.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51484" height="580" sizes="(max-width: 870px) 100vw, 870px" src="
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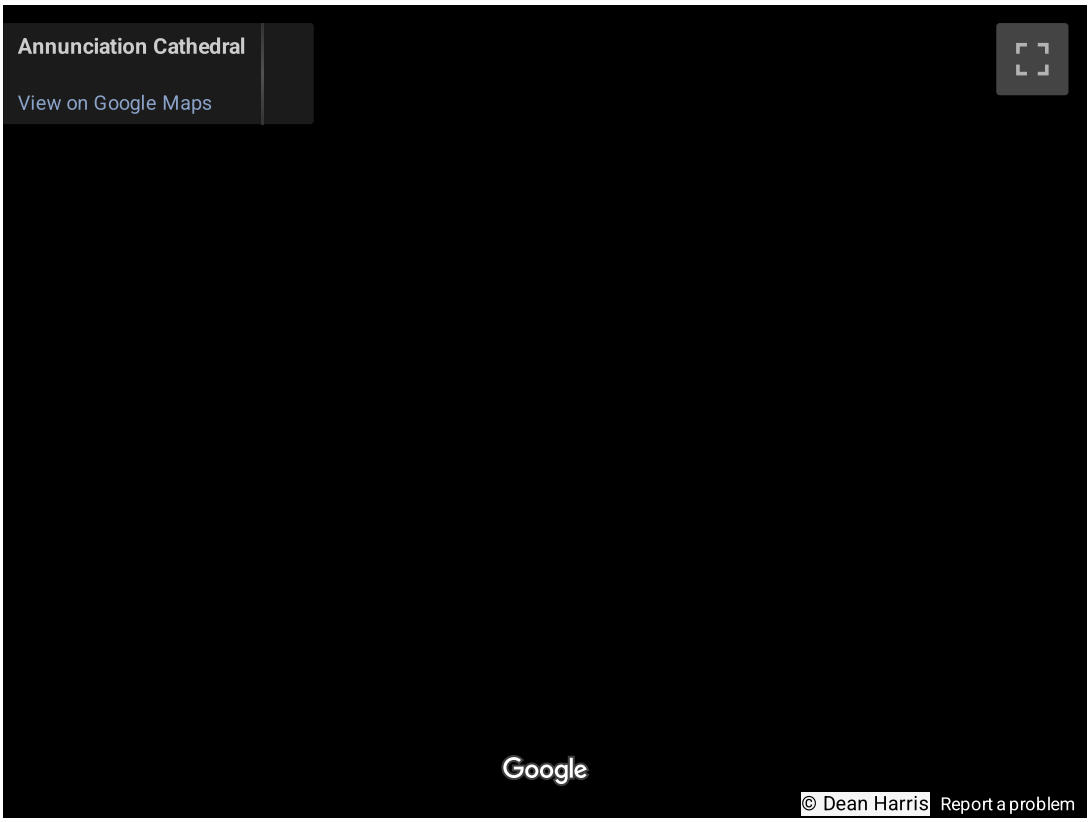
Figure 5.2.5.287: Cathedrals of the Annunciation (let) and the Archangel Michael (right) (photo: **Jorge Láscar**, CC BY 2.0)



Cathedral Square facing the Archangel Cathedral (left) and Annunciation Cathedral, Moscow (right) (© Google)

atolia

th the defeat at Manzikirt in 1071, much of **Anatolia** passed into the control of the Seljuks and other Turkic beyliks, but this does not mark the end ristian architecture in the region.

Figure **5.2.5.288**: Tatlarin Kilisesis, Church A, north nave, 13th century, Cappadocia (modern Turkey) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

the thirteenth century, there is evidence of rock-cut architecture in the Christian communities of Cappadocia (in central Anatolia), as for example larin, Gülşehir, and Belisırma.

Figure **5.2.5.289**: Church of St. John (Karşı Kilise), Gülşehir, Cappadocia (modern Turkey) (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

the early fourteenth century, the Ottomans emerged as the dominant power in northwest Anatolia, and by the 1320s-1330s, the former nomads w ively building, and in a manner technically and stylistically following local, Byzantine practices, although plans and vaulting forms may be more clos gned with the architecture of the Seljuks.

rhan Mosque, late 1330s, Bursa (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bursa_Orhan_Gazi_Mosque.jpg" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bursa_Orhan_Gazi_Mosque.jpg" rget="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
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Figure **5.2.5.290**: Orhan Mosque, late 1330s, Bursa (photo: **Adbar**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Church of the Pantobasilissa, late 1330s, Trilye (photo: © <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/216u3d2" href="https://flic.kr/p/216u3d2" target="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
The Byzantine Legacy)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51522" height="316" sizes="(max-width: 375px) 100vw, 375px" src="
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Figure **5.2.5.291**: Church of the Pantobasilissa, late 1330s, Trilye (photo: © **The Byzantine Legacy**)

e Orhan Mosque in Bursa of the late 1330s corresponds closely to contemporaneous works of Byzantine architecture in its mixed brick and stone w ɪstruction and its decorative details.

ɪny of the same features appear at the church of the Pantobasilissa in nearby Trilye, also from the late 1330s, suggesting that the same workshops w ɪstructing both churches and mosques. At Bursa, the first Ottoman capital (conquered in 1326), two Byzantine churches were appropriated for use as t ɪusolea of Osman and Orhan.

onasticism follows **Middle Byzantine models**, as for example at Hilandar on **Mount Athos**, founded by Milutin c. 1303.

Figure 5.2.5.292: Hilandar Monastery, Mount Athos (photo: **Саша Шљукић**, CC BY 3.0)

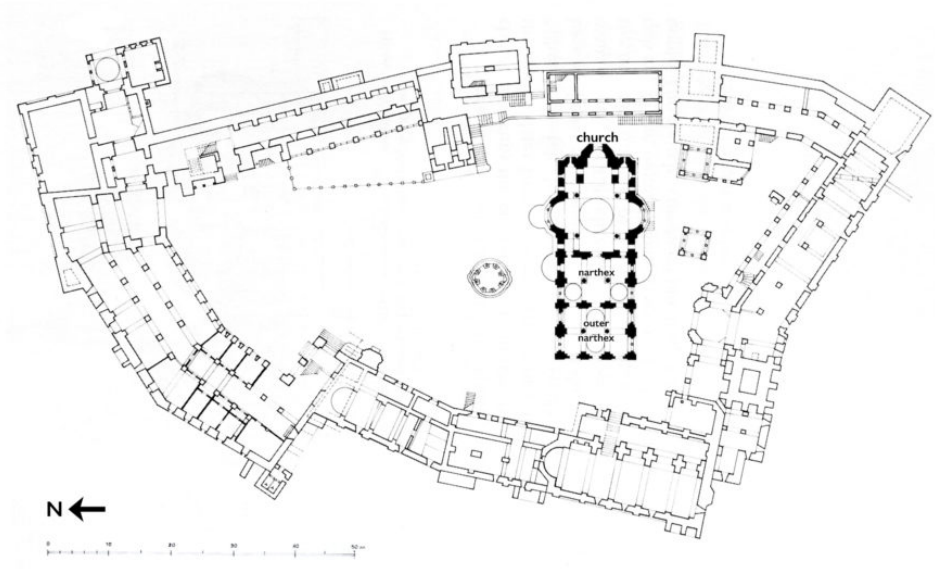

Figure 5.2.5.293: Plan of Hilandar Monastery (adapted from plan in Ćurčić, "Hilandar Monastery: An Archive")

Figure 5.2.5.294: Katholikon, Hilander Monastery, c. 1303, Mount Athos (photo: **Zeljkokiss**, CC0)

e freestanding, Athonite-plan katholikon included a large, twin-domed narthex or lite, subsequently expanded with a large, domed outer narthex in t ter part of the century. Both reflect the increased role of the narthex in monastic worship.

rtified, with the monastic cells lining the wall, the monastery has its refectory set opposite the entrance to the katholikon, with a phiale or holy water fe the courtyard to one side. Similarly planned monasteries appear throughout the Balkans.

xt: read about Late Byzantine secular architecture and urban planning

ditional Resources

bert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Pre 19)

icturing salvation — Chora's brilliant Byzantine mosaics and frescos

DR. BETH HARRIS and *DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Video **5.2.5.17**: Chora Church (Kariye Müzesi), Istanbul, renovated c. 1315 – 1321

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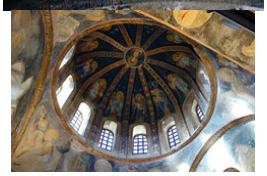

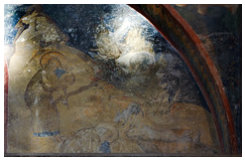

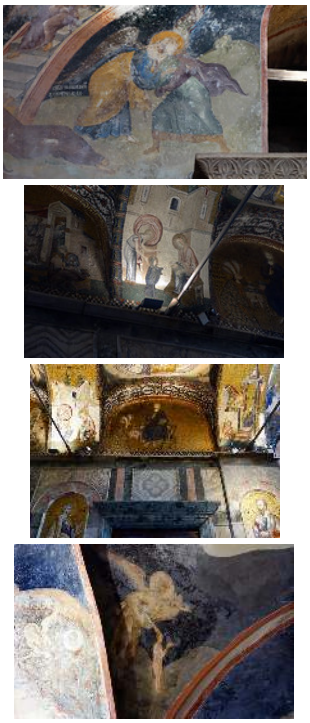

Figure 5.2.5.295: More Smarthistory images…

te Byzantine secular architecture and urban planning

DR. ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

riods of Byzantine history

rly Byzantine (including Iconoclasm) **c. 330 – 843**

ddle Byzantine c. 843 – 1204

e Fourth Crusade & Latin Empire 1204 – 1261

te Byzantine 1261 – 1453

st-Byzantine after 1453

Figure 5.2.5.296: The route and results of the Fourth Crusade (Kandi, CC BY-SA 4.0)

e Fourth Crusade and the Latin Empire

1204, the **crusaders** of the Fourth Crusade (western Europeans faithful to the pope in Rome, whom the Byzantines referred to as “Latins” or “Frank **cked and occupied** the Byzantine Capital of Constantinople. In the years that followed, the crusaders established a “Latin Empire” that also incluc

merly Byzantine regions such as the Pelopponese in southern Greece. In terms of urban developments, the period of Latin control encouraged so nstruction in the Peloponnese, while having an adverse effect on Constantinople. For all, the physical evidence is limited.

ad about the impact of the Fourth Crusade on Byzantine church architecture.

Figure **5.2.5.297**: Location of the Church of the Holy Apostles, Constantinople (map: Carolyn Connor and Tom Elliot, Ancient World Mapping Center, CC BY-NC 3.0)

ban planning in Constantinople

ter retaking **Constantinople** for the Byzantines in 1261, emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos's refounding of the capital city may have been m nbolic than actual. It included a unique triumphal column positioned before the Church of the Holy Apostles (one of the great churches of the Byzant pital, which no longer survives), topped by a statue group of the emperor kneeling before St. Michael. Since Constantine (the **founder nstantinople**) was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles, Michael's new column may have represented an attempt to present himself as a "n nstantine" or second founder of the city of Constantinople. Unfortunately, the column does not survive and is only known from historical descriptions.

Figure **5.2.5.298**: Mosaic of Theodore Metochites (left) offering the Chora church to Christ, Chora monastery, Constantinople (Istanbul) c. 1315-21 (photo: Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

eodore Metochites, a Byzantine statesman who as a young man had written an encomium lauding the city of **Nicaea**, strikes a very different tone in *zantios*, an oration on Constantinople. While recognizing the diminished state of affairs, he attempts to give it a positive spin: Constantinople rene self, so that ancient ruins are woven into the city's fabric to assert their ancient nobility. While the intended message is of unchanging greatness, lities of ruin and desolation are all too apparent.

ad about Theodore Metochites' rebuilding of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople.

Figure 5.2.5.299: Mystras with reconstructed Palace of the Despots (left) and Frankish castle (upper right) (photo: Guillén Pérez, CC BY-ND 2.0)

Figure 5.2.5.300: Frankish castle built by William II of Villehardouin, 1249, Mystras, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

ban planning in the Peloponnese

ystras, a new city of the period, gives a better picture of urban planning.

ategically situated on a hill above the ancient Greek city of Sparta in the Peloponnese (in souther Greece), Mystras developed beneath a Frankish cas built by Latin occupiers in 1249 following the Fourth Crusade—which the Byzantines captured in 1262.

e rugged site with its steep slope offered excellent defenses and did not require a complete ring of walls.

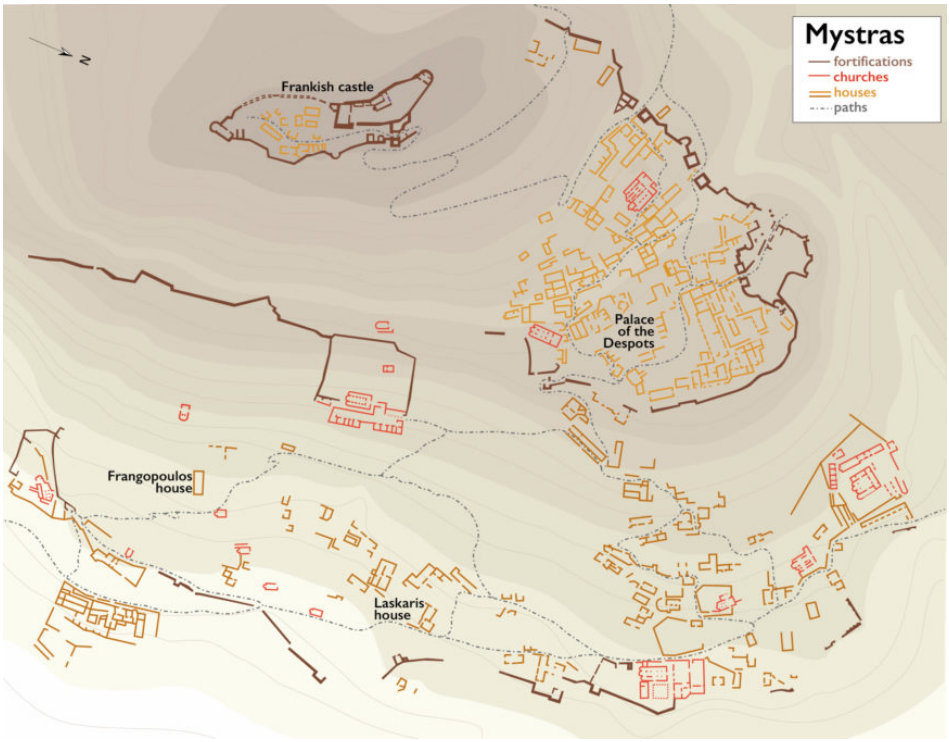

Figure 5.2.5.301: Plan of Mystras (adapted from **Marsyas**, CC BY 3.0)

bdivided internally into an upper and lower city, the streets are often no more than footpaths and too steep for wheeled vehicles; urban planning was mercy of the topography. Indeed, many areas within the walls were too steep for construction. Houses often required extensive substructures, and ly sizeable terrace within the city was given over to the Palace of the Despots (more on this below). Markets were probably located outside the walls.

e situation at Late Byzantine **Geraki** seems to have been similar. Located southeast of Mystras in the Pelopponese, Geraki developed beneath anotl ankish hilltop fortress, which was ceded to the Byzantines in 1263.

Figure 5.2.5.302: Geraki, Greece (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

omestic architecture

cavations at Pergamon

e evidence for Late Byzantine domestic architecture is similarly limited. The excavations at **Pergamon** provide some sense of a neighborhc velopment.

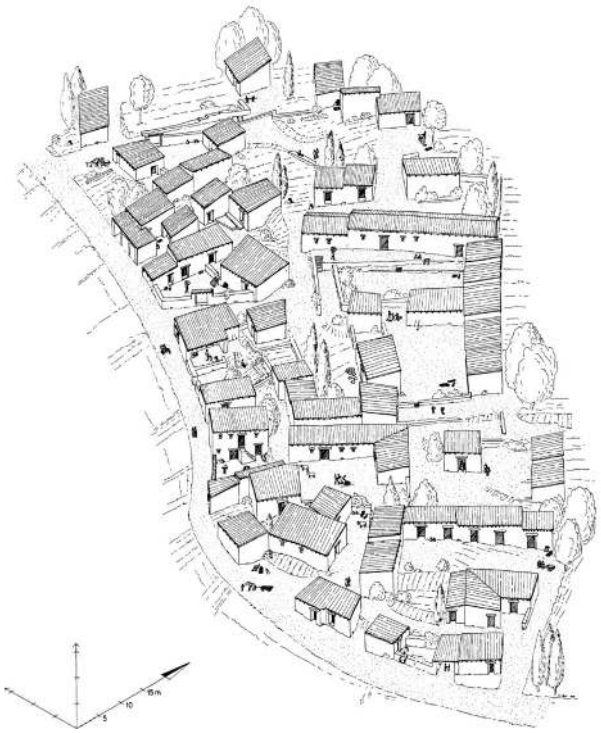

Figure 5.2.5.303: Reconstruction of a Byzantine neighborhood, Pergamon (© Klaus Rheidt)

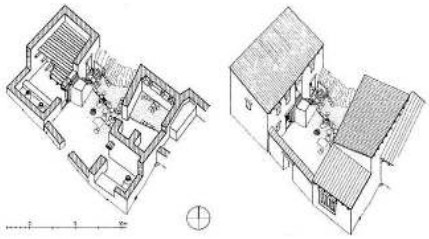

Figure 5.2.5.304: Reconstruction of a Byzantine house, Pergamon (© Klaus Rheidt)

re the houses consist of several rooms, often with a **portico**, arranged around a courtyard set off the irregular pattern of alleys and cul-de-sacs.

nilar house forms have been noted in other urban situations, with the focus of the house away from the street.

Figure 5.2.5.305: The so-called Laskaris House (with the Pantanassa monastery and the Frankish castle in the background), early 15th century, Mystras, Greece (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

ystras

ystras also provides several good examples, such as the so-called Frangopoulos House and Laskaris House (named for those believed to have inhabi m), both probably from the early fifteenth century. Set into the steep slope, both had vaulted substructures of utilitarian function—cistern, stab reroom—to create a level platform for the residence, which consisted of one large room, with a fireplace to the rear and a terrace or balcony facing w.

wer of Apollonia

the countryside, fortified towers often functioned as residences, as at **Apollonia** (near Amphipolis) and elsewhere in mainland Greece.

Figure 5.2.5.306: Tower of Apollonia, 14th century, Greece (photo: **Ggia**, CC BY 3.0)

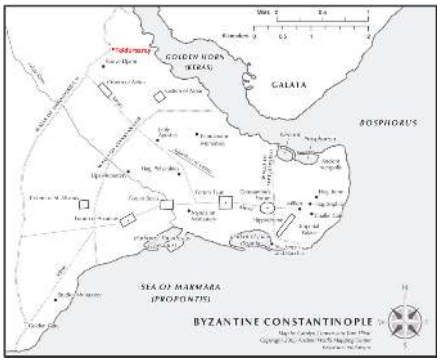

Figure 5.2.5.307: Location of the Tekfursaray, Constantinople (map: Carolyn Connor and Tom Elliot, **Ancient World Mapping Center**, CC BY-NC 3.0)

nstantinople

Constantinople, nothing survives of the main imperial residence at the Blachernae Palace, except the so-called Tekfursaray, which may have beer vilion associated with it.

ilt as a three-storied block set between two lines of the land wall, the lowest level was opened to the courtyard by an **arcade**. The mid level w parently subdivided into apartments, with the upper level functioning as a large audience hall, with appended balcony and a tiny chapel.

Figure 5.2.5.308: Tekfursaray, north façade of the main palace block before restoration, c. 1261–91, Constantinople (Istanbul) (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

alace at Nymphaeon (modern Kemalpaşa, Turkey) (photo: <a class="nolightbox" data-cke-saved-href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laskaris_Palace_05.jpg" href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laskaris_Palace_05.jpg" rget="_blank" rel="noopener noreferrer"
BSRF, CC BY-SA 4.0)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51589" height="263" sizes="(max-width: 350px) 100vw, 350px" src="
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Figure 5.2.5.309: Palace at Nymphaeon (modern Kemalpaşa, Turkey) (photo: **BSRF**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

association with Venetian palaces has been suggested, but the ruined palace at Nymphaeon of c. 1225 provides a useful precedent.

Mystras, the Palace of the Despots grew over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as several adjoining but independent units. Its l jor addition, the Palaiologos wing, follows a three-storied format like that of the Tekfursaray, with an enormous audience hall on the uppermost lev h apartments and storerooms below.

Figure 5.2.5.310: Palace of the Despots, probably begun mid-13th century and expanded in the early 15th century, Mystras, Greece (photo: © The Byzantine Legacy)

Double walls of Nicaea (modern İznik, Turkey) (photo: <a data-cke-saved-href="https://flic.kr/p/21zoXG7" href="https://flic.kr/p/21zoXG7" target="_blank" rel="noopener"
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Figure 5.2.5.311: Double walls of Nicaea (modern İznik, Turkey) (photo: Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0)

rtifications

th the increasing insecurity and fragmentation of the empire, defense became a growing concern in the last centuries of the empire.

ty walls

caea was provided with a second line of walls in the thirteenth century, and the Laskarids built a series of visually-connected fortresses in an attempt ure their Aegean territories.

Figure 5.2.5.312: Chlemoutsi Castle, Kastro-Kyllini, 1220-23 (photo: Ronny Siegel, CC BY 2.0)

Figure 5.2.5.313: Plan of Chlemoutsi Castle, Kastro-Kyllini, 1220-23, in R. Traquair, "Mediaeval Fortresses in the North-Western Peloponnesus," *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, 12 (1906-1907): 274

ankish fortresses in the Peloponnese

llowing the Fourth Crusade, the Franks also constructed fortresses across the Peloponnese in an attempt to secure control of the region, as at Chlemou
l Glarentza (now in ruins).

zantine fortresses

th the reconquest of Constantinople by the Byzantines, fortresses were either strengthened and expanded (as at Yoros on the Bosphoros) or construc
ew to protect the city against the rising power of the Ottomans to the east.

Figure 5.2.5.314: Yoros Castle, expanded during Late Byzantine period, near Anadolu Kavağı (photo: **Moonik**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Figure **5.2.5.316**: Yoros Castle, expanded during Late Byzantine period, near Anadolu Kavağı (photo: **Guilhem Vellut**, CC BY 2.0)

ıong the smaller fortifications of the period, the **castle at Pythion** in Thrace is noteworthy. Built by John VI Kantakouzenos c. 1331, a large fortifi ver quickly expanded with the construction of a second tower and gateway, with inner and outer enceintes. The four-bayed plan of the main tower, w ck vaulting at all levels, and the extensive use of stone **machicolations** (floor openings through which stones or other materials could be dropped ackers) mark Pythion as unique among Byzantine fortifications and at the cutting edge of military technology in the fourteenth century.

Figure **5.2.5.317**: Castle, c. 1331, Pythion, Thrace (photo: © Robert Ousterhout)

ıditional Resources

bert G. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Pre 19)

ɔn with the Triumph of Orthodoxy

PIPPA COUCH and *RACHEL ROPEIK*

Video 5.2.5.18: *Icon with the Triumph of Orthodoxy* (Byzantine), c. 1400, tempera and gold on wood, 39 cm x 31 cm (British Museum, London)

narthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.2.5.318: More Smarthistory images…

ost-Byzantine

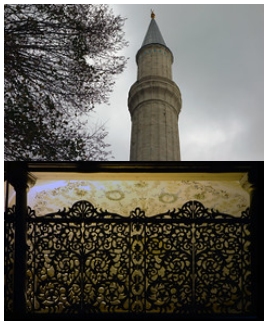
agia Sophia as a mosque

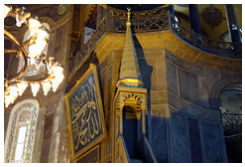
DR. ELIZABETH MACAULAY-LEWIS and *DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

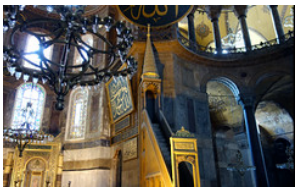
Video 5.2.5.19: Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles (architects), Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 532-37

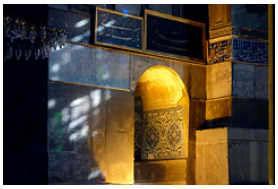
is video focuses on Hagia Sophia after the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453.

narthistory images for teaching and learning:









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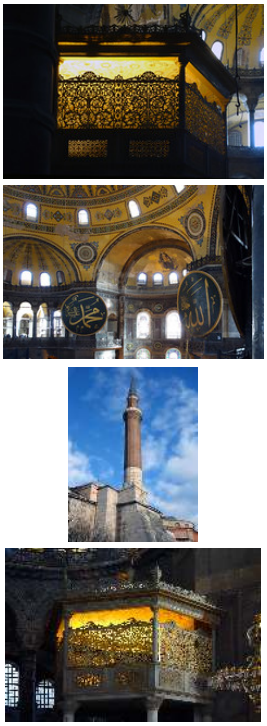

Figure 5.2.5.319: More Smarthistory images…

ıurch of St. Nicholas, Balinesti

DR. VLAD BEDROS

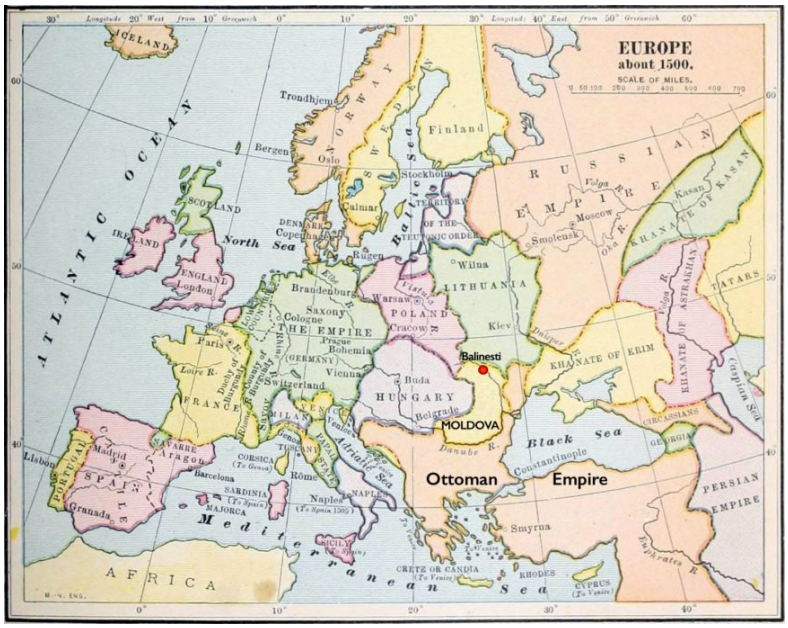

Figure 5.2.5.320: Map of Europe and West Asia, c. 1500

Bălinești (part of the historical region of Moldova, in present-day Romania) stands the bulky silhouette of the private chapel of St. Nicholas.

Figure **5.2.5.321**: Church of St. Nicholas, Balinesti, Romania, built in 1499 (image: Vlad Bedros, 2019)

e chapel was built by a high-level minister in the service of the prince of Moldova — Ioan Tăutu (his official title was “Logothete”). Tautu also served iplomat in negotiations with neighboring powers such as the Ottoman Empire and his high standing is reflected in the lavish character of St. Nicholas.

e chapel stands among the finest examples of Moldavian architectural decoration (carved stone elements and polychrome glazed ceramic fixtures) a ırgical painting.

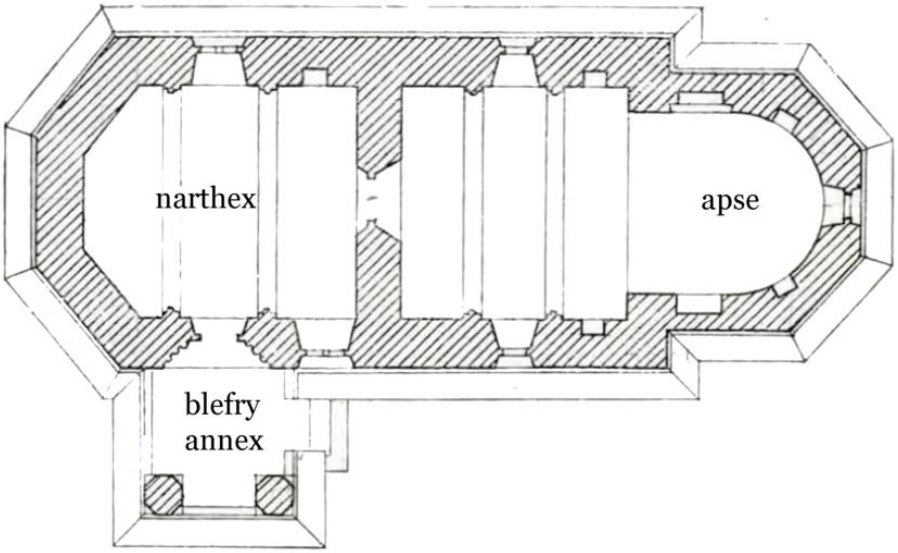

Figure **5.2.5.322**: Annotated plan, Church of St. Nicholas, Balinesti, Romania, built 1499 (image: Vlad Bedros)

Figure 5.2.5.323: Gothic-style stone carving, St. Nicholas church, 1499 (image: Vlad Bedros)

e chapel has a nave with a protruding horseshoe-shaped apse, balanced by a Western European structure, namely the trapezoid ending of the narthex. (southern wall, a porch surmounted by a belfry marks the entrance and creates a picturesque tower-like annex.

e hybrid nature of this architectural solution — uniting both Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Gothic) church forms — echoes similar private chapels region.

e carved stone details on the church walls are most telling of the infusion of the elegant Gothic style. These carvings are most clearly seen in quisite vault of the porch and on its railing, adorned with quatrefoils.

e interior architectural details show Gothic features, too, such as the supporting arches for the barrel vaults in the nave and narthex, which rest up ndled pilasters. Such transfers from the Western architectural repertoire into the Post-Byzantine tradition (the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottomans 53) were typical of local building practices. For this reason, scholars labeled the architecture of 15th- and 16th-century Moldova as “Byzantine edifi cted by Gothic hands.”

Figure 5.2.5.324: Barrel vaults on fasciculated (bundled) pilasters, Church of St. Nicholas, 1499, Bălineşti (image: Vlad Bedros)

Figure 5.2.5.325: Rows of glazed ceramic discs on the outer wall of the church, under the eaves (image: Vlad Bedros)

other marker of hybridity is the use of glazed ceramic discs displayed in rows under the eaves.

e glazed ceramic medium was used to draw attention to the main outlines of the building. This use of glazed ceramic elements was not new in L zantine practices; it could be seen throughout the Byzantine world, from Constantinople to the Balkans. But the generous diameter of the ceramic dis choice of colors (alternating dark green with ochre and grayish brown), and the inclusion of figural decoration (only present, however, during the l cade of the 15th century) are all unique features of Moldavian ceramic decoration.

Figure 5.2.5.326: Close-up of glazed ceramic discs on the church's outer wall

Figure 5.2.5.327: Two-tailed mermaid, glazed ceramic disc, outer wall, St. Nicholas Church, 1499, Balinesti, (image: Vlad Bedros)

e Moldavian glazed ceramic discs depict motifs such as the Mermaid, the Manticore, the Lion Rampant, and Moldova's coat of arms, featuring ochs' head. These motifs helps link this uniquely Moldavian practice to a Late Gothic workshop active in the Moldavian principality at the end of t h century.

equently, the exteriors were decorated with an iconographic program of outer wall paintings (a typical choice for Moldavian churches). Such paintir l the churches' carefully staged stone, brick, and ceramic exterior.

Figure **5.2.5.328**: St. George Church, Voronet Monastery, covered in outer mural painting (image: **Stanislav Dusik**, CC 4.0)

is is the case with logothete Tăutu's church in Bălinești, too, whose entire exterior received a coat of fresco decoration, preserved today only on t uthern sides of the apse, on the belfry, and on the western ending of the narthex.

Figure **5.2.5.329**: Fragments of mural painting on the exterior of the church of St Nicholas, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

avril, monk and priest, wrote this"

the western wall of the nave, to the right, stands the majestic votive portrait of the donor (Tăutu) and his family, introduced by the patron saint cholas) to the enthroned Christ, gleaming in gilded robes and attended by a host of angels.

Figure 5.2.5.330: Interior mural painting, Church of St. Nicholas, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

edievalist scholar Sorin Ulea found an inscription on the painted footstool: *писахь гавриль їрмонах* (*pisah' gavril' irmonah*, lit. *I, Gavril, monk a est, wrote this*). According to this scholar, this inscription is the signature of the master painter.

Figure 5.2.5.331: Signature inscription on mural painting, Church of St. Nicholas, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

holars have long endeavored to identify the names of the church painters and the stylistic changes they engendered. Such painters were Gavril eromonk and Toma from Suceava, both identified by scholar Sorin Ulea, as well as the better-known George from Trikala and Dragoş Coman fr ceava. These painters were agents of artistic development of the so-called "Moldavian school." However, recent methodological approaches are m ıtious of these identifications; they are also skeptical of the concept of the idea of a "national school" such as the "Moldavian school."

e inscription from the church in Bălineşti makes use of the verb *nucamu*, *pisati*, i.e. *to write*, unusual for a painter's statement. Using "to write" instead paint" to describe the painter's activity may emphasize the prescribed nature of the depicted images as well as their "official" status, de-emphasizing e of the painter's subjective interpretation. However, placed at the feet of Christ, who is depicted as Rightful Judge of the Second Coming, this bar ible inscription also functions as a perpetual prayer of salvation addressed to Christ by one of the members of the workshop that painted the chapel.

Figure 5.2.5.332: Post-conservation mural painting of St. Nicholas church, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

e recent restoration of the frescoes (by a team supervised by Professor Oliviu Boldura and led by Geanina Deciu and Cristian Deciu) brought to light t
l gamut of stylistic and iconographic refinement of this ensemble of paintings, which had already been praised—since the very beginnings of lo
toriography—as one of the most exquisite examples of post-Byzantine wall painting in Moldova. Meticulously restored, the paintings demonstrate
ique blend of South-Eastern Late Byzantine tradition and a discrete Late Gothic imprint.

Figure 5.2.5.333: Paintings of the genealogy of Christ. Upper image showing crowned figures. St. Nicholas Church, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

zantine heritage on the edge of the Orthodox world

the arch that joins the sanctuary to the one-aisled naos, four enigmatic scenes create an autonomous cycle. Each depicts a central character flanked
nmetric groups, and one of the four scenes features crowned figures.

is iconography was identified through a comparison with similar scenes from the contemporaneous wall paintings in the church of Voroneț Monaste
ere preserved inscriptions reveal that they illustrate the genealogy of Christ.

e actual source of these images came to light only in 1992, when scholar Constanța Costea showed that they copy miniatures from the Gospels of T
n Alexander (now in the **British Library**), illustrating the first chapter from the Gospel according to Matthew. The circulation of this manuscript

oldova explains its dissemination as model.
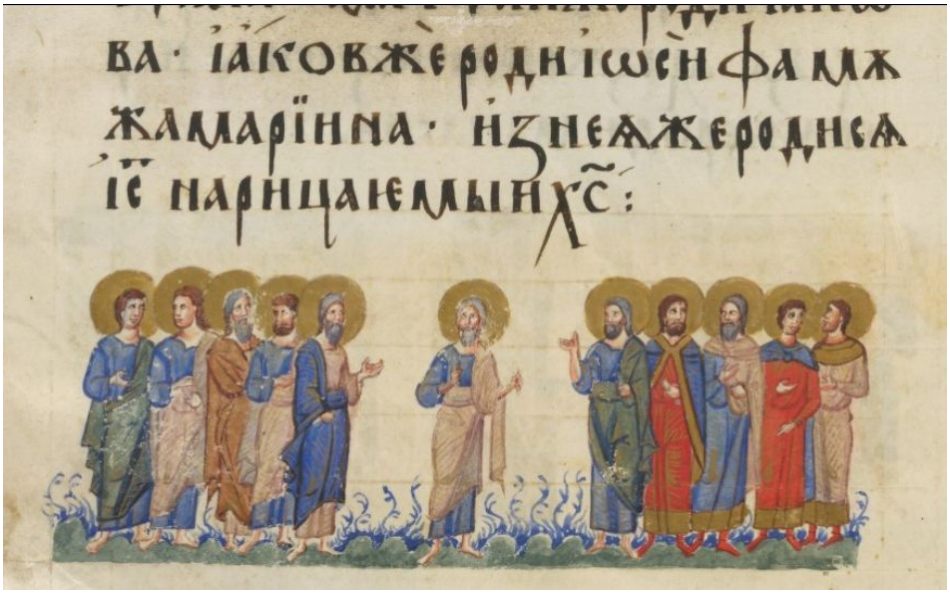
Figure **5.2.5.334**: Miniature from the first chapter from the Gospel according to Matthew, Gospels of Tsar Ivan Alexander, 1355-56 (**British Library**)

stea also showed that the influence of this manuscript was so copiously present in the iconography of the wall paintings that she described the chu nters' reliance on it as a "bookish tendency." In fact, many of the Moldavian wall paintings created in churches between 1490 and 1530 exemplified nsposition of miniatures from Gospel Books into the realm of fresco decoration. This cross-medium iconographic practice echoes the erudite tendency te Byzantine art.

low the belt of images depicting the genealogy of Christ, the lowermost register is dedicated to standing portraits of saints. The section at the eastern e the southern wall features courtly representations of saints George and Demetrius, enthroned together on a bench. They brandish their weapons, wh orge emphatically squeezes a serpent-like monster under his feet—a reference to Psalm 90/91:13, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder." An an pears from above to grant crowns of victory to both martyrs.

Figure **5.2.5.335**: Painting of St. George and St. Demetrius, Church of St. Nicholas, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

Figure **5.2.5.336**: St. George trampling the monster, double-sided icon, 15th century, Neamt Monastery (image: Vlad Bedros)

e iconography of martyrs enthroned and/ or of martyrs trampling monsters was developed in Late Byzantine art. It first appeared in Moldova in the ea th century, introduced by a double-sided icon at Neamț Monastery. The imagery was soon reiterated in frescoes and embroidery.

similar influence of South-Eastern models is seen in the depiction of the two saints Theodore (Theodore the General and Theodore the Recru resented as a pair of figures in prayer.

is iconography was created at the end of the 13th century in the Balkan area of Kastoria and Ochrid but rarely encountered outside of that perimeter.

Figure **5.2.5.337**: Saints Theodore the General and Theodore the Recruit, shown as a pair in prayer. St. Nicholas Church, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

the same Balkan origin is a peculiar episode from the cycle of the Passions, depicting Pontius Pilate mounted on a horse, assisted by other riders, all om were following the cortege leading Christ to crucifixion. Pilate is shown carrying, in his raised hand, the scroll containing the verdict that w ntually be affixed on top of the cross. In a uniquely Byzantine approach to this biblical narrative, the text is slightly altered: instead of “The king ws,” it reads, “The king of Glory.”

own as the “Cavalcade of Pilatus,” this episode is depicted in almost all Moldavian wall paintings, which provides further evidence for the presence te-Byzantine Balkan-area workshops in Moldova since the late 15th century.

Figure 5.2.5.338: Pilate following Christ to crucifixion, painting from cycle of the Passions, St. Nicholas Church, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

spite all these purely Late Byzantine traits, the paintings at Bălinești are not linked solely to the South-Eastern European tradition. They also show t
ar influence of the Late Gothic style, which was pervasive in Northern and Western Europe. The golden stars stamped on blue backgrounds in a regu
tern, the ornamental bands of foliage in hues of dark brown, green, and ochre, the imitation of diamond-shaped polychrome stones, the rainbow mo
d for the medallions encircling the portraits from the vault—all of these elements point to the lofty and courtly Late Gothic style. At the end of the 1
ıtury, this style was still active in Central and North-Eastern Europe, areas with which Moldova sustained close political and economic ties.

Figure 5.2.5.339: Elements of Late Gothic style: ornamental foliage bands; imitation of diamond-shaped polychrome stones; and rainbow motif encircling medallion portraits of saints. 1499, Balinesti (images: Vlad Bedros)

is Gothic imprint is also present on a more profound level, subtly altering the Late Byzantine models through the inclusion of Gothic-style details. F
ımple, in the conch of the sanctuary, the enthroned Virgin stands on a delicate Gothic-inspired bench that curves so as to follow the concavity of t
ılting.

Figure 5.2.5.340: Gothic-inspired furniture element in painting of enthroned Virgin, St. Nicholas Church, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

Figure 5.2.5.341: Saint depicted in contrapposto, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros)

Figure 5.2.5.342: Scroll of St. Nicholas, 1499, Balinesti (image: Vlad Bedros, detail)

so, the graceful silhouette of the martyr Procopius introduces a Gothic **contrapposto** in the otherwise typically Late-Byzantine portrayal of this saint.

r another example, the scroll held by saint Nicholas in the votive portrait whirls and bends, echoing the taste for whimsical details so strongly present te Gothic art.

ersected traditions

e church of St. Nicholas in Bălinești epitomizes the strength of the "periphery" as agent of cultural innovation. Situated on the frontier between t thodox Post-Byzantine and the Western Late-Medieval worlds, the arts of the principality of Moldova adopted a hybrid visual identity, merging artis ıctices from both sources.

ntinuing research into identifying the agents of these transfers and the processes involved in this cultural hybridity will shed further light onto the visı :anglements so characteristic of Moldavian artistic production at the end of the 15th century and in the first half of the 16th century.

ınslation from Romanian by Dr. Sonia Coman

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5.2.6: Sol

Mosaic decoration at the Hammath Tiberias synagogue

by Dr. Ariel Fein

Figure **5.2.6.1**: Sol, Hammath Tiberias Synagogue, 286–337 C.E. (Center for Jewish Art)

Tiny cube-shaped pieces of cut stone and glass combine to form a mosaic image of a god, a beautiful young male with curly hair and a radiant crown of seven rays of light. He raises his right hand as if signaling his mastery of the cosmos. In his left hand, he holds an orb (representing the sun) and a whip to urge his horses forward. He once stood in a quadriga, a chariot pulled by four horses, now destroyed by the later addition of a wall, though their hooves can still be seen. This 4th-century mosaic depicts the indomitable Roman sun god Sol, known in Greek as Helios.

Sol and empire

Sol became an especially popular solar deity in the later Roman Empire. There was a long imperial tradition of worshiping the sun god, and by the 3rd century, emperors frequently associated themselves with Sol, referring to the god with the epithet “Invictus,” meaning invincible. As the Roman emperors expanded their territory and defended their borders, the sun god’s attributes of eternity and dominion proved an irresistible model for representing imperial triumph. As a result, the image of Sol Invictus frequently appeared in imperial coinage and monuments.

The early fourth-century emperor Constantine I was a particularly fervent adherent of the cult of the sun. Nearly three-quarters of his coinage included portraits of himself with Sol's rayed crown and raised right hand, and the inscription SOLI INVICTO COMITI (to the invincible sun, companion [of the emperor]).Roman coin of Constantine I with Sol Invictus on the reverse, 307–318 C.E. (Anja Rohde, CC BY-SA 4.0)

However, this mosaic image of Sol does not adorn an imperial monument, or even a Roman temple or bath; rather it is found at the center of an ancient synagogue floor, a Jewish house of worship in Hammath Tiberias in the Roman-controlled territories of northern Israel.

Hammath Tiberias Synagogue, 286–337 C.E. (Zev Radovan, 1994, Center for Jewish Art)

In Hammath Tiberias, the personified sun god appears at the center of a large mosaic floor divided into three panels featuring dedicatory inscriptions, personifications of the seasons and the twelve signs of the zodiac, and motifs associated with the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. What prompted the fourth-century Jewish community of Hammath Tiberias, a monotheistic community, to adorn their house of worship with an image of Sol, a prominent Roman deity? The mosaics of Hammath Tiberias can only be understood in the context of Late Antique and early Byzantine Jewish history and culture, Greco-Roman and early Christian artistic traditions, and the dramatic political, religious, and social circumstances of the 4th through 7th centuries.

Judea in the Roman Empire, 117 CE (underlying map © Google)

Roman expansion and religious pluralism in the eastern Mediterranean

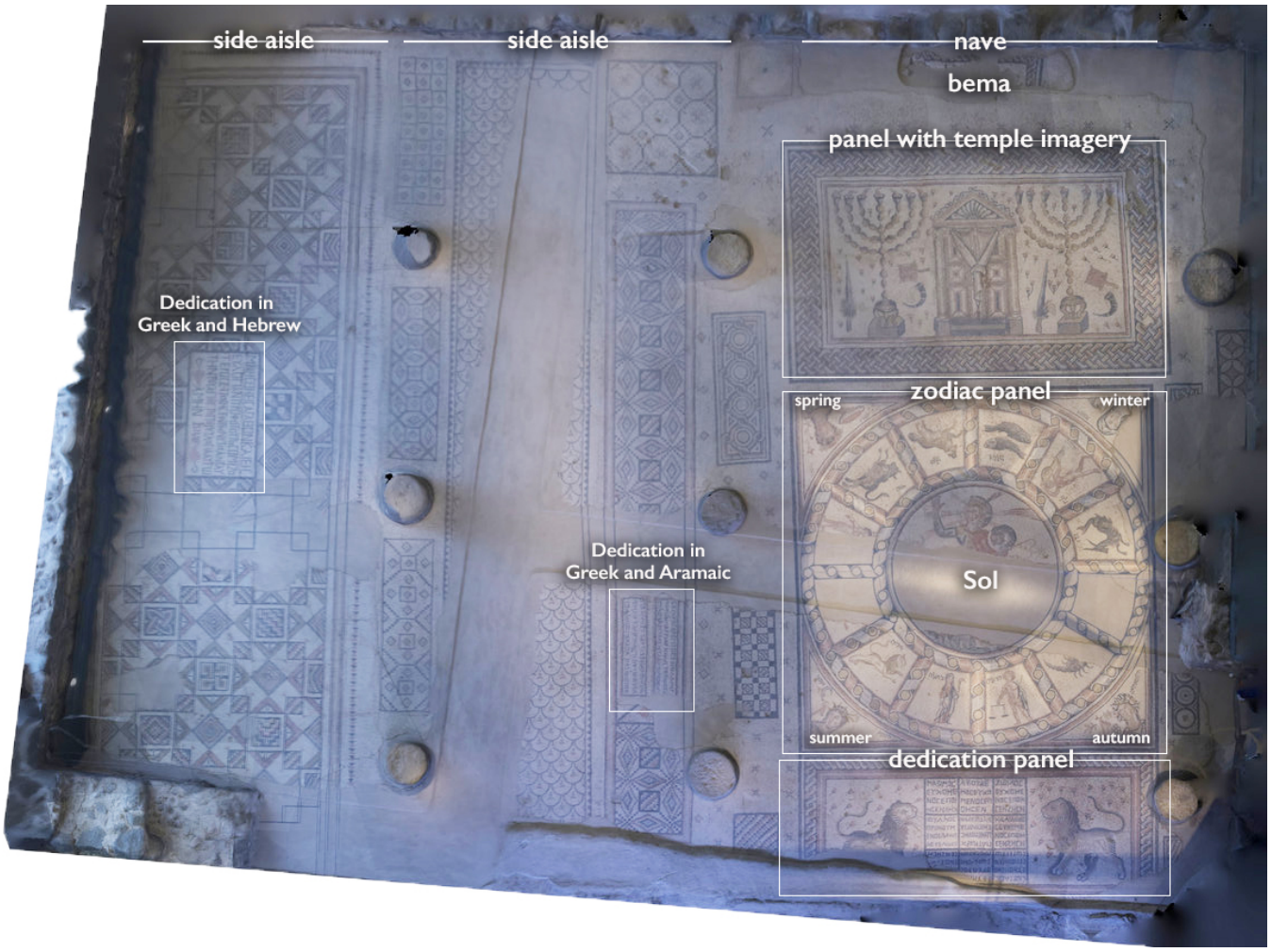
From the early days of the Roman Republic on, the Romans continuously expanded their territory as they came into conflict with surrounding city-states, kingdoms, and empires. By the second century C.E., the Roman Empire had reached its greatest extent, with its territory stretching across modern-day western Europe, north Africa, and western and central Asia. Judea (the Land of Israel) was among the many new regions conquered by the Romans, including the city of Tiberias, founded by Roman Emperor Herod Antipas in 19–20 C.E. on the fertile shores of the Sea of Galilee. To its south lies a small suburb, Hammath Tiberias, well known for its therapeutic baths fed by natural hot springs.

As the Romans conquered Judea and other territories, for the most part, these new cities and regions were allowed to maintain their existing cultural and political institutions. Although religious practice of the Roman Empire centered on the pantheon of Roman gods, the Jewish communities living in the Roman-controlled Judea and in the Diaspora were permitted freedom of religious worship. This likewise extended to other religious communities, such as Zoroastrians, and Christians, among others, living in the territories of the Roman Empire.

Having lived under Roman rule from at least the 2nd century B.C.E., the Jewish population had acculturated and developed a deep knowledge and appreciation of Greco-Roman traditions and artistic forms. Alongside reading Hebrew, the language of the Hebrew Bible, and speaking and writing in Aramaic, the literary and spoken language of the Jewish community in the land of Israel, many Jews also spoke and wrote in Greek, widely used throughout the Roman Empire.

Left: terracotta oil lamp with Sol, Cyprus, c. 75–125 C.E. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); middle: terracotta oil lamp with chi-rho, Cyprus, 4th-5th century C.E. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); terracotta oil lamp with menorah, c. 375–500 C.E., Carthage, Tunisia (The British Museum)

Beginning in the 4th century, the Eastern Mediterranean underwent a period of dramatic political, economic, and cultural change, including the rapid Christianization of the region. As the religious majority changed, Jews and Christians lived side by side, in dialogue and in competition. This was especially the case in their artistic output. Jews and Christians drew upon a common visual language that emerged out of the dominant Roman visual tradition. Although they shared art forms, materials, and techniques, they adapted these elements to express their own theologies and histories. For example, clay oil lamps dating to the 2nd through 4th centuries reflect this shared heritage—some oil lamps display Roman deities, such as the sun god Sol, while others include Christian symbols such as the chi-rho, or Jewish symbols, such as the menorah. As much as artistic production reflected their collective cultural experience, it also became an indispensable tool for each religious community to define itself vis-a-vis the other.



Hammath Tiberias synagogue, 286–337 C.E., Israel (Brad Erickson, CC BY-NC 4.0)

The Hammath Tiberias mosaics

Located on a bluff overlooking the Sea of Galilee, the Hammath Tiberias synagogue was built in the first half of the 3rd century following a basilica plan with a central nave and two side aisles, a layout commonly used for Roman public buildings. Following its partial destruction by an earthquake in 306 C.E., the local residents renovated the synagogue, retaining much of its original structure, while also outfitting it with a new mosaic floor.

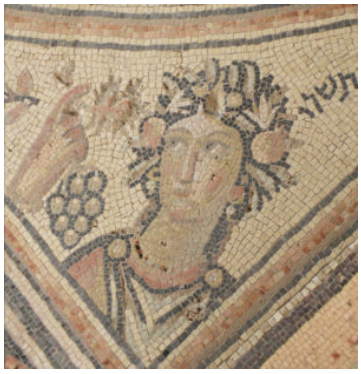
Left: Greek dedicatory inscription; right: Greek and Aramaic dedicatory inscriptions, side aisles, Hammath Tiberias, 286–337 C.E. (Manar al Athar)

Upon entering from the east, worshippers encountered three dedicatory inscriptions, two in Greek and one in Aramaic naming the synagogue's main donors and blessing other members of the community who had or would donate to the synagogue. Several inscriptions mention "Severos, student of the illustrious patriarch," suggesting that the synagogue may have been closely aligned with the Patriarchate, which acted as the official channel of communication between the Roman Empire and its Jewish subjects. With their ties to the patriarch, the reconstruction and lavish decoration of the synagogue would have offered Severos and other local elites the opportunity to communicate their wealth, power, and distinctly Jewish identity to a broader public.

Panel with Greek dedicatory inscriptions, Hammath Tiberias, 286–337 C.E. (Manar al Athar)

The mosaics of the side aisles, although mostly destroyed, contained continuous geometric patterns and dedicatory panels. In contrast, the mosaics of the nave are divided into three panels featuring figural imagery. To the north, a pair of mosaic lions flank a dedicatory panel, divided into nine squares and inscribed in Greek with the names of the synagogue's donors, including two squares devoted to the patronage of Severos.

Personifications of the four seasons, zodiac, and Sol, Hammath Tiberias, 286–337 C.E. (fabcom)

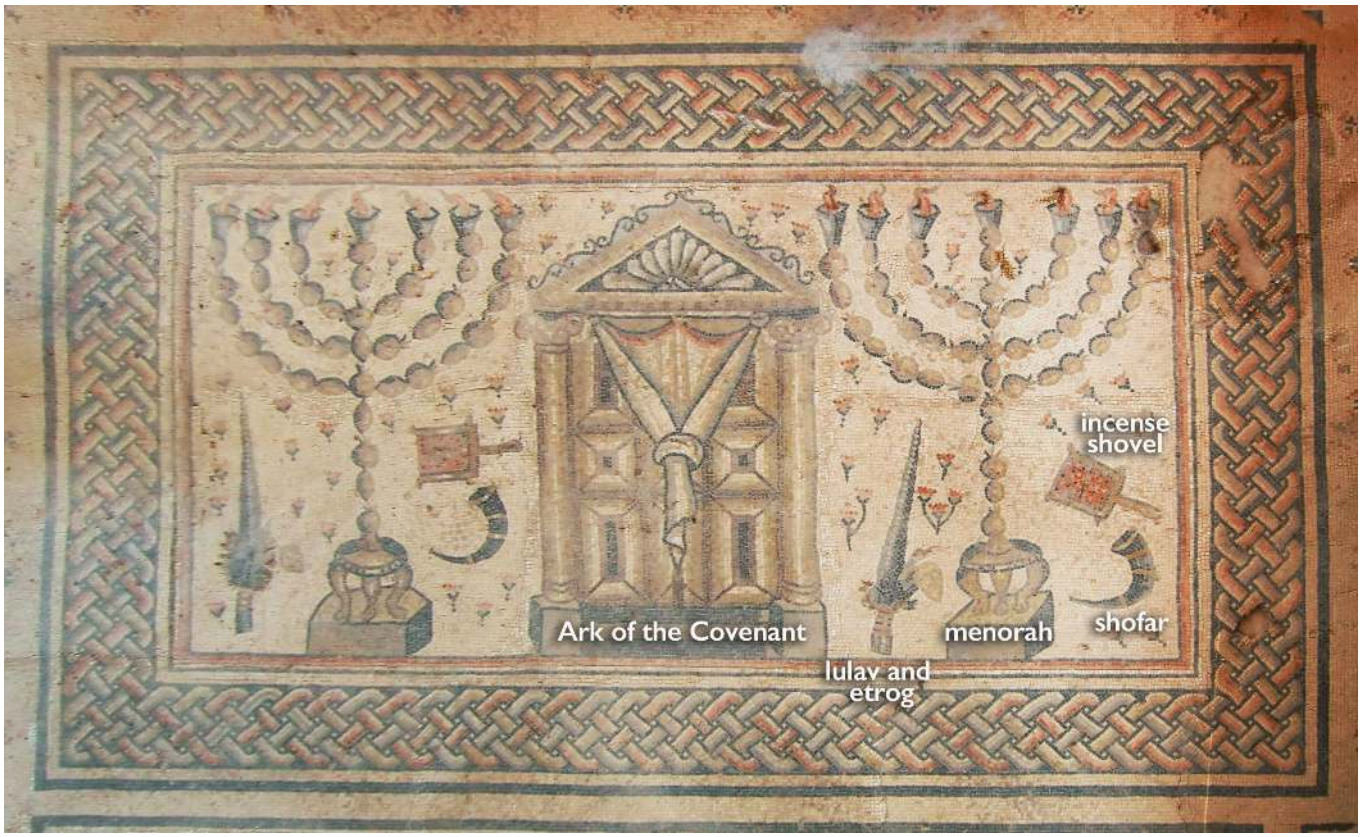


Personification of Autumn, Hammath Tiberias, 286–337 C.E. (Manar al Athar)

The center of the room features a large panel with personifications of the seasons labeled in Hebrew in each of its four corners. Each of the personifications bears attributes representing the agricultural activities of the season: Spring for example wears a sleeveless tunic, a wreath of flowers, and carries a bowl of flower buds; Autumn wears a wreath of leaves with figs and pomegranates and carries a vine branch with grapes and possibly olives, symbolizing the fall harvest.

These personifications frame two concentric circles that contain images of the twelve astrological signs of the zodiac in the outer circle, also labeled in Hebrew, with the sun god Sol in the inner circle. Like Sol, the form of the zodiac and its individual figures draw

on contemporary Roman artistic traditions. The astrological sign for Virgo, for example, appears similar to the goddess Kore-Persephone, whose cult was popular in Roman Israel.



Mosaic panel with Temple imagery, Hammath Tiberias, 286–337 C.E. (Manar al-Athar)

At the southern end of the synagogue, a bema (raised platform) with a Torah ark (an architectural shrine housing the Torah scrolls), demarcated the sacred locus of the synagogue. Just before the bema, is a mosaic image of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. At its center is an architectural façade, with two wooden doors covered by a curtain (the *parochet*, the curtain described in the Hebrew Bible as hanging before the Ark of the Covenant). It is flanked by two large menorot, or seven-branched candelabras, as well as smaller depictions of the lulav and etrog, shofar, and incense shovels—all objects derived from the rituals of the ancient Temple.

Detail of personifications of the four seasons, zodiac, and Sol, Tzippori synagogue, Galilee, 5th century C.E. (Manar al-Athar)

The mosaic floors, with their combination of Jewish religious imagery and motifs adapted from Greco-Roman traditions, powerfully evoked the sacred atmosphere of the ancient synagogue. While the mosaics at Hammath Tiberias are the first known instance of this iconography, this composition, with its imagery of the ancient Temple and vision of sacred time, clearly presented a compelling message for the Jewish community. Variations with the zodiac, temple implements, and biblical scenes, which further emphasize God's covenant with the Jewish people, appear in five later extant synagogue floors across northern Israel, all dating to the 5th and 6th centuries: Beth Alpha, Huseifa, Susiya, Na'aran, and Tzippori.

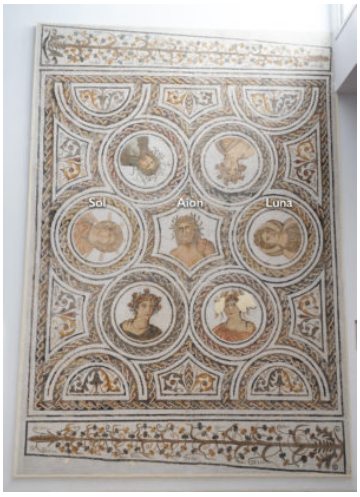
Sol, Hammath Tiberias Synagogue, 286–337 C.E. (Manar al-Athar)

Sol or God the Creator?

View of the western wall of a model of the Dura-Europos Synagogue with view of its narrative wall paintings and Torah shrine as it may have appeared between 244 and 256 C.E. The paintings are based on photographs taken prior to 1967. The model was created by Displaycraft in 1972 (collection of Yeshiva University Museum, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Since its discovery in 1961, the Hammath Tiberias mosaics have drawn significant attention. On the one hand, these images defy the widely held assumption that Judaism is a non-visual tradition, either not producing visual art at all or creating only non-figural images, due to the Second Commandment prohibition against the creation of graven images. The Hammath Tiberias mosaics, along with the discovery of several other ancient synagogue floors filled with figural imagery and the extensive figural paintings of the contemporaneous Dura-Europos synagogue in Syria, emphatically dispel this notion.

During the late Roman and early Byzantine periods in which the synagogue mosaics were produced, through to the present day, Jewish communities have interpreted the Second Commandment liberally, not considering figural images to be idolatrous. Nevertheless, the question remains, how did the Jewish community of Hammath Tiberias reconcile their Jewish faith with the personification of the sun god Sol at the center of their most sacred space?



Mosaic with Sol, Luna, Aion, and the four seasons, House of Silenus, Thysdrus (Tunisia), late 3rd–early 4th century C.E. (Ariel Fein, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

No singular interpretation can fully explain the figure of Sol in Hammath Tiberias and other Galilean synagogues; however, the range of possibilities reflect the complexity of Jewish communal life in late antiquity. Some interpretations understand Sol at Hammath Tiberias as nothing more than an image of the sun. Although Sol is a god, Sol differs from almost all other Roman gods; after all, the sun is a natural, visible phenomenon. So, while some images represented Sol as a god in a traditional sense, including in cult statues and depictions of mythological scenes, Sol also appeared as a representation of the sun and the heavens. For example, a mosaic floor from the house of Silenus in Thysdrus (modern-day Tunisia), includes busts of Sol, Luna (personification of the moon), and Aion, a Roman deity associated with cyclical time, alongside personifications of the four seasons. Shown together, they evoke the heavens and the annual passage of time. According to this interpretation, the mosaic image of Sol at Hammath Tiberias, along with the surrounding moon and stars, and the figures of the zodiac, may depict the Jewish heavens or a calendar, taking part in a complex visualization of the Jewish cycle of sacred time.

On the other hand, it is possible that the representation of Sol may in fact reflect the actual worship of the cult of the Sun God in Jewish circles in the 3rd century. By this time, sun worship, focusing on the Roman deity Sol, was embedded in Roman religious practices. At the same time as the cult of the sun took center stage amongst the Roman polytheistic population, Jewish laws composed and compiled by the rabbis reflected a real fear that Jews would worship the sun and moon. A Jewish magic book from the late 3rd or early 4th century, for example, includes a prayer in honor of Helios (the Greek name for Sol). Perhaps the synagogue floor mosaics represent an aspect of popular Jewish worship, practiced by Greek-speaking Jews who were familiar with local cult practices.

Temple and Zodiac panel with Sol, Hammath Tiberias, 286–337 C.E. (Manar al-Athar)

More likely, rather than evidence of Jewish sun worship, the synagogue's mosaics (both the figure of Sol as well as the imagery of the zodiac), suggest the level of acculturation of the Jewish community to their Roman neighbors. Having lived under Roman rule for centuries, Jews were intimately familiar with the institutions of Roman life. They borrowed and adapted the visual formulae used in Roman art and architecture within their own constructions. First and foremost, the patrons of the Hammath Tiberias Synagogue decorated their holy space with mosaics—a ubiquitous medium throughout the Roman Empire, found in bathhouses, marketplaces, temples, churches, and private homes, meant to impress and convey wealth and prestige.

Triumph of Neptune, Roman mosaic from La Chebba, Tunisia, late 2nd century C.E. (Tony Hisgett, CC BY 2.0)

Moreover, in the selection of geometric and figural imagery, the Hammath Tiberias floors drew heavily upon the local Roman and the later Eastern Roman "Byzantine" Empire's mosaic repertoires. For example, a comparable image of Sol leading his chariot through

the universe can be seen in a mosaic from a 3rd-century Roman villa, as well as representations of other deities ruling from their chariots, such as the god Neptune in a late 2nd-century mosaic from La Chebba (modern-day Tunisia).

In the Hammath Tiberias floors, the representation of the sun god may have been conceived of as a Judaized Sol Invictus—the Jewish god as the single, invincible ruler of the universe. The purple color of the young god's tunic and his globe are reminiscent of Roman imperial images. Moreover, Jewish sources in late antiquity referred to God's supremacy by connecting his power with symbols of authority, such as riding a horse or chariot. By adapting this imperial motif of Sol Invictus, the synagogue floor conveyed the God of Israel's absolute power over the universe—the land and sea from which the chariot emerges—and all of time, captured in the surrounding zodiac.

Visualizing time

For the Jewish community worshiping within the Hammath Tiberias synagogue, the images of the mosaic floor, combined with the synagogue's furnishings, may have offered a vision of Jewish time—past, present, and a hope for a messianic future. The synagogue's representation of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, depicted the Jewish past. During the The First Jewish-Roman War, in which the Jewish population rebelled against the Romans, the Roman army laid siege to the city of Jerusalem, destroying the Temple and leaving the Jewish people without a religious center to bind them together. Over time, new institutions and leaders arose to fill that void. Synagogues offered new spaces where the Jewish community could gather to read the Hebrew Bible, pray, and form a sacred community with their God.

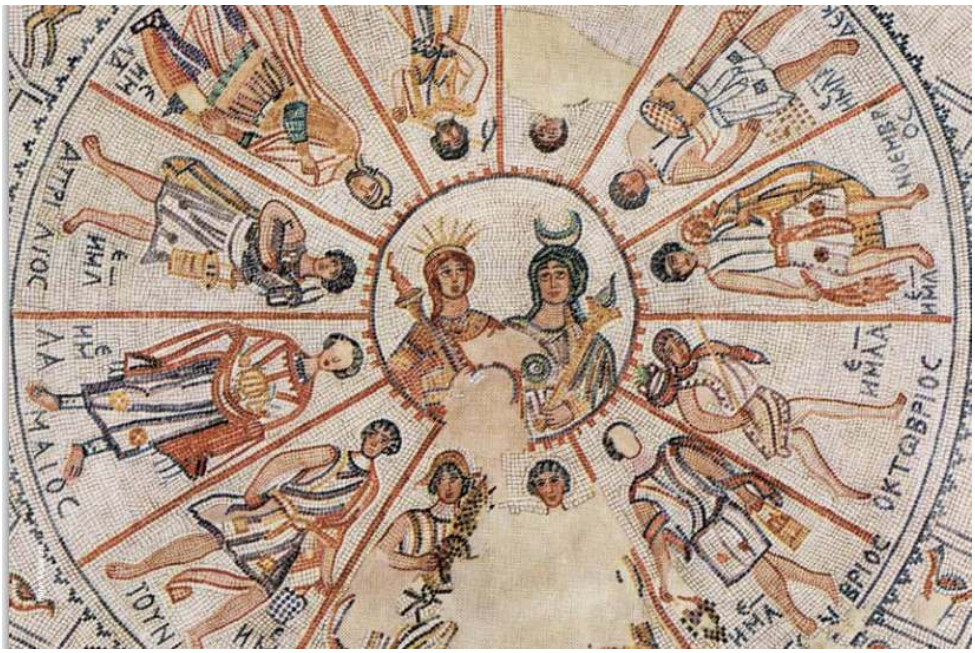
Left: Menorah from a second synagogue in the town of Hammath Tiberias, known as Hammath Tiberias A, 5th–6th century C.E., limestone (Israel Museum); right: Torah Ark lintel, Nabratein synagogue, 3rd century C.E. (Davidbena, CC BY 4.0)

The Hammath Tiberias mosaics representing the ancient Temple appeared just before the part of the synagogue where the the Torah shrine was located. Although few Torah shrines have survived intact, a stone lintel of a Torah shrine from a 6th-century synagogue in the Jewish village of Neburaya in the upper Galilee, gives us a sense of what the original shrine in the Hammath Tiberias Synagogue would have looked like. Its arched form closely resembles Hammath Tiberias's mosaic image of the ancient Ark of the Covenant. Moreover, just as in the mosaic floor, Hammath Tiberias's Torah shrine likely would have been flanked by two seven-branched stone menorahs, like the menorah uncovered at a 5th- or 6th-century synagogue in the same town. Framed by stone candelabras, the near mirror image between the Hammath Tiberias mosaic floor and its furnishings would have reflected an attempt to associate the synagogue with the ancient Temple, as both descending from and replacing the now-obsolete Temple rituals. The mosaic may have also symbolically signaled a longing for the future rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of its cult practices. According to Jewish tradition, with the coming of a messiah, the temple will be rebuilt and its rituals restored. Thus, the Temple panel and the synagogue's bema visualized past, present, and future Jewish worship.

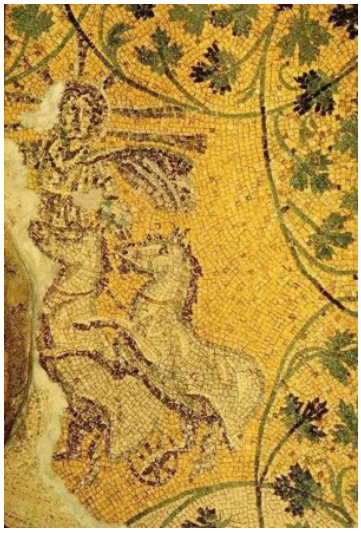
This concept of time is anchored in the imagery at the center of the synagogue—the four seasons, the zodiac, and the sun (Sol), moon, and stars. Together they presented a Jewish vision of daily, monthly, and annual cycles of time, offering a multilayered affirmation of God's covenant with the Jewish people throughout history. Such themes would have been especially appropriate for the Jewish community living under Roman rule. It would have emphasized the legitimacy of Jewish monotheistic tradition in the face of the polytheistic Roman cults.

By the 5th century, this imagery became even more relevant, as the Jewish community faced a rising threat—Christianity. These two monotheistic religions had rival claims to a covenant with God. While both sought their foundations in the text of the Hebrew Bible,

Christianity conceived of Judaism as a tradition it had superseded. For Christian readers, Hebrew scriptures recount the history and prophecies of God's original chosen people and foreshadow God's new covenant with the Christian people.

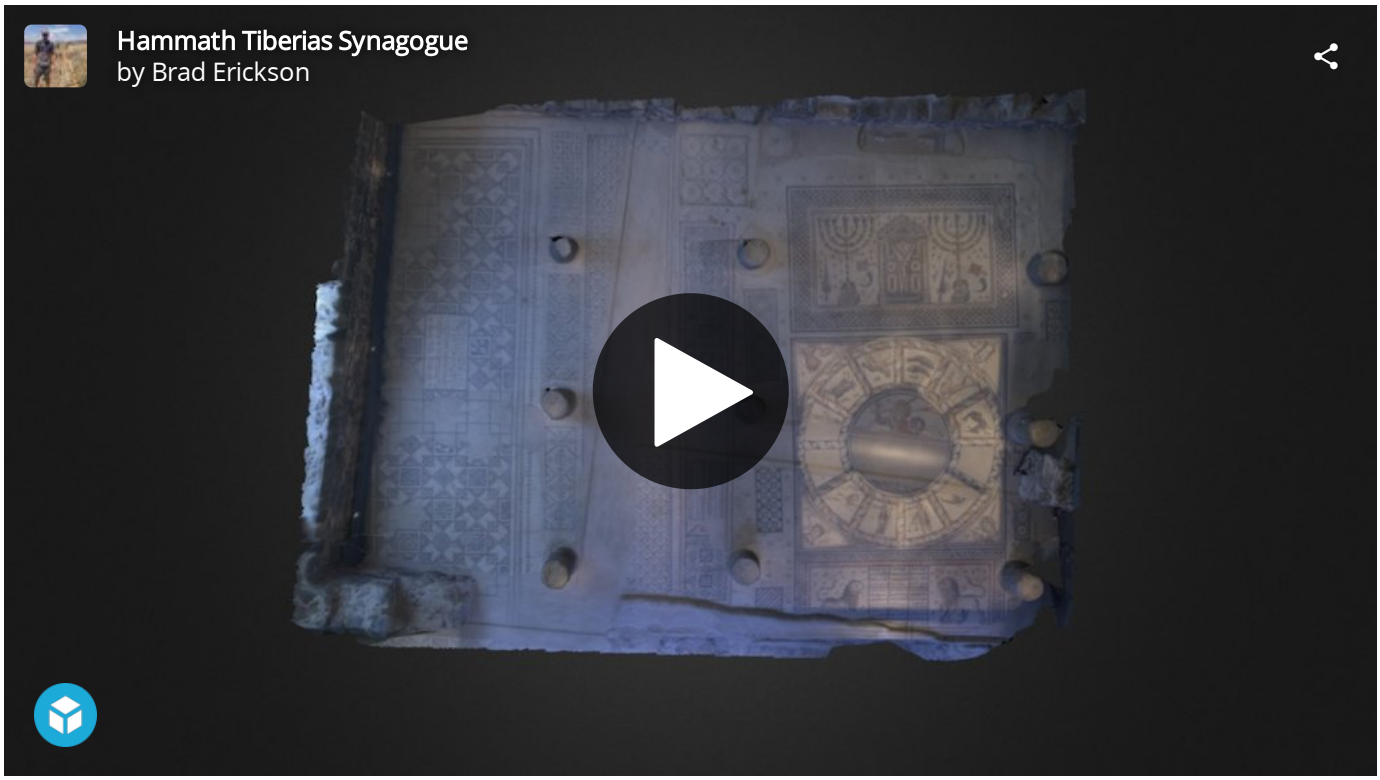


Mosaic with Helios (Sol) and Selene (goddess of the moon) and the labors of the month, Monastery of Lady Mary, Scythopolis, 6th century, watercolor by A. Bentwich (Penn Museum)



Christ as Sol Invictus, 3rd–4th century C.E., Tomb of the Julii (Mausoleum M), Vatican Necropolis (Tablar)

With their competing universal claims, the Jewish and Christian communities looked to the same visual language to express their legitimacy. Just as at Hammath Tiberias, Christian patrons transformed Jesus into the solar emperor of the universe, Sol Invictus. In a mausoleum beneath St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, for example, we see a possible Christianized Sol Invictus, a figure bearing a cross-shaped nimbus riding on a chariot with a sunburst halo. Similarly, the 6th-century monastery of Scythopolis (Beth Shean) in the Galilee also includes a floor mosaic of the zodiac with Sol and a personification of the moon at its center. As the new Christian religion developed, gaining imperial support and followers, the Jewish community needed to define and defend their own legitimacy as inheritors of God's promise to the Jewish people. By visually staking a claim to the Jerusalem Temple and God's covenant, and using Sol Invictus as a symbol of the Jewish God's infinite powers, they declared that the messiah described in Christian doctrine had not yet come, emphasizing that the Jews, and not the Christians, are the chosen people of the Hebrew Bible.



Hammath Tiberias Synagogue by **Brad Erickson** on **Sketchfab**

Artwork details

Title	Mosaic decoration at the Hammath Tiberias synagogue
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	286–337 C.E.
Places	Asia / West Asia / Israel/Palestine
Period, Culture, Style	Ancient Roman / Late Roman Empire
Artwork Type	Mosaic
Material	Stone, Glass
Technique	

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5.2.7: Adoration of the Magi

The conservator's eye: a stained glass Adoration of the Magi

by SARAH BARACK and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.2.7.26: Circle of Peter Hemmel von Andlau (Strassburger Werkstattgemeinschaft), *Adoration of the Magi*, 1507 or earlier (Munich), pot metal and colorless glass, vitreous paint, and silver stain, 72.4 x 45.7 x 1 cm (The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

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5.2.8: Lancet Windows - Reims Cathedral

Gothic art

The Gothic style brought both divine light and soaring height to medieval churches.

c. 1200 - 1400

A beginner's guide

Gothic architecture, an introduction

by VALERIE SPANSWICK

Figure **5.2.8.1**: East end of Salisbury Cathedral.

Forget the association of the word “Gothic” to dark, haunted houses, *Wuthering Heights*, or ghostly pale people wearing black nail polish and ripped fishnets. The original Gothic style was actually developed to bring sunshine into people’s lives, and especially into their churches. To get past the accrued definitions of the centuries, it’s best to go back to the very start of the word Gothic, and to the style that bears the name.

The Goths were a so-called barbaric tribe who held power in various regions of Europe, between the collapse of the Roman Empire and the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire (so, from roughly the fifth to the eighth century). They were not renowned for great achievements in architecture. As with many art historical terms, “Gothic” came to be applied to a certain architectural style after the fact.

Figure **5.2.8.2**: Early Gothic arches, Southwell Minster.

The style represented giant steps away from the previous, relatively basic building systems that had prevailed. The Gothic grew out of the Romanesque architectural style, when both prosperity and relative peace allowed for several centuries of cultural development and great building schemes. From roughly 1000 to 1400, several significant cathedrals and churches were built, particularly in Britain and France, offering architects and masons a chance to work out ever more complex and daring designs.

The most fundamental element of the Gothic style of architecture is the pointed arch, which was likely borrowed from Islamic architecture that would have been seen in Spain at this time. The pointed arch relieved some of the thrust, and therefore, the stress on other structural elements. It then became possible to reduce the size of the columns or piers that supported the arch.

Figure **5.2.8.3**: Nave of Salisbury Cathedral.

So, rather than having massive, drum-like columns as in the Romanesque churches, the new columns could be more slender. This slimness was repeated in the upper levels of the nave, so that the gallery and clerestory would not seem to overpower the lower arcade. In fact, the column basically continued all the way to the roof, and became part of the vault.

In the vault, the pointed arch could be seen in three dimensions where the ribbed vaulting met in the center of the ceiling of each bay. This ribbed vaulting is another distinguishing feature of Gothic architecture. However, it should be noted that prototypes for the pointed arches and ribbed vaulting were seen first in late-Romanesque buildings.

Figure **5.2.8.4**: Open tracery at Southwell Minster.

The new understanding of architecture and design led to more fantastic examples of vaulting and ornamentation, and the Early Gothic or Lancet style (from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) developed into the Decorated or Rayonnant Gothic (roughly fourteenth century). The ornate stonework that held the windows–called *tracery*–became more florid, and other stonework even more exuberant.

The ribbed vaulting became more complicated and was crossed with *lierne* ribs into complex webs, or the addition of cross ribs, called *tierceron*. As the decoration developed further, the Perpendicular or International Gothic took over (fifteenth century). Fan vaulting decorated half-conoid shapes extending from the tops of the columnar ribs.

Figure **5.2.8.5**: Lierne vaults Gloucester Cathedral.

The slender columns and lighter systems of thrust allowed for larger windows and more light. The windows, tracery, carvings, and ribs make up a dizzying display of decoration that one encounters in a Gothic church. In late Gothic buildings, almost every surface is decorated. Although such a building as a whole is ordered and coherent, the profusion of shapes and patterns can make a sense of order difficult to discern at first glance.

Figure 5.2.8.6: Gothic windows at Gloucester Cathedral.

After the great flowering of Gothic style, tastes again shifted back to the neat, straight lines and rational geometry of the Classical era. It was in the Renaissance that the name Gothic came to be applied to this medieval style that seemed vulgar to Renaissance sensibilities. It is still the term we use today, though hopefully without the implied insult, which negates the amazing leaps of imagination and engineering that were required to build such edifices.

Additional resources:

Gloucester Cathedral

Salisbury Cathedral

Gothic art in France

c. 1200 - 1400

Birth of the Gothic: Abbot Suger and the ambulatory at St. Denis

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.2.8.1: Ambulatory, Basilica of St. Denis, Paris, 1140-44

Reims Cathedral

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.2.8.4: Reims Cathedral (Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Reims), begun 1211, Reims, France

Reims Cathedral and World War I

by CHRISTINE M. BOLLI

Figure 5.2.8.14: Shell bursting on the cathedral at Reims, from *Collier's New Photographic History of the World's War*, 1918

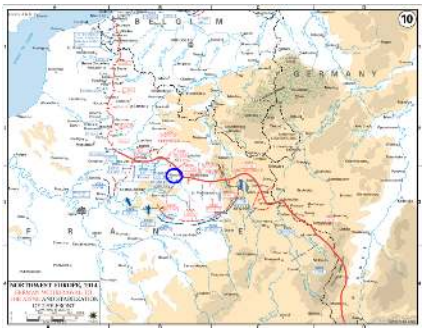


Figure 5.2.8.15: Map of the Western Front, 1914, with Reims circled in blue (map: **The History Department of the United States Military Academy**, CC0)

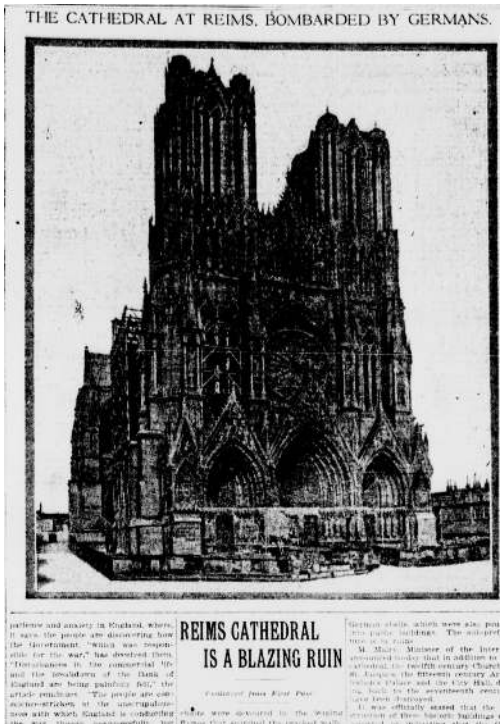
The facts…?

World War I officially started July 28, 1914. Originally it was believed that the "situation" would clear itself up by no later than Christmastime. Instead, it took over four long and grueling years, and resulted in more than 15 million deaths. Early on in the conflict, the German army moved into northeastern French territory. This was the beginning of the Western Front. The expeditious

land grab by the Germans included the city of Reims. Reims had a well-established history, from its days as a bustling hub of the Roman Empire, to becoming a center of French culture in the early Middle Ages. Additionally, Reims was the "Coronation Capital," so to speak, the traditional location for the coronation of French kings. It was also home to a magnificent high Gothic cathedral, **Notre-Dame de Reims**. By early September, the French had forced the Germans to retreat and though the French regained the town, the Germans stayed close by for the entirety of the war.

Figure **5.2.8.16**: View of Reims cathedral over the rooftops of the city in 2014 (photo: **Dr. Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The city of Reims saw significant destruction, and both civilian and military casualties. But no event ignited indignation as did the bombing of the much-venerated Notre-Dame de Reims. The cathedral was first hit by shell fire on September 19th, 1914. Wooden scaffolding that was in place for ongoing repairs caught fire, and contributed to the damage, as did several smaller fires that resulted from the attack. Though the cathedral would be struck again and again as the war continued, it was this initial shelling that sparked a firestorm of outrage, horror, and prodigious propaganda—surely here was damning proof that the Germans were indeed "barbarians," so lacking in culture themselves that they were compelled to destroy the beauty of another culture out of sheer spite and jealousy. The propaganda insisted that there was no reason to bomb the church since it had no strategic military value, and was a place of sanctuary. The French and their allies stressed that there was no justification to shell the cathedral especially given that was being used to house the wounded (mainly German soldiers callously left behind by their fleeing brothers-in-arms).


THE CATHEDRAL AT REIMS, BOMBARDED BY GERMANS.

REIMS CATHEDRAL IS A BLAZING RUIN

Figure 5.2.8.17: "Reims Cathedral is a Blazing Ruin," *The Sun* (New York City), September 21, 1914 (Library of Congress)

War crimes

It was acknowledged, even at the time, that the Germans were committing more horrendous acts than the bombardment of Reims Cathedral. So why should a building create more outcry and indignation than the killing of innocent civilians, or other kinds of wartime savagery? Perhaps it was in part that the cathedral, literally meaning the seat of the bishop, could be seen as representing the French nation as a whole, its cruciform shape evoking a sacrificial body. Or, on a more practical note, it was a story that could be easily sensationalized and discussed *ad infinitum*—cultural war damage was far easier to get past the censors. In the words of Maurice Landrieux, a former priest at Reims but later the Bishop of Dijon "…but it was the most ignoble, because it was at once sacrilegious and stupid, and because it reveals, by its uselessness, the blackest depth of German misdoing." There was a pervasive belief that the Germans had come to France with the express intention of destroying the cathedral from the outset of the war.

Figure **5.2.8.18**: "The great arches at Notre Dame: The wars of seven centuries had passed over Reims, and still all armies spared the beautiful cathedral. Is is now but a wonderful ruin." from *Collier's Photographic History of the European War*, by Francis J. Reynolds and C. W. Taylor, c. 1917

There are two sides to every story, and so it is here. The Germans did shell the cathedral—that is irrefutable. Their explanation as to why they did so was wildly at odds with the French account, and they claimed to be horrified just as deeply as the French, at the damage done to this architectural masterpiece.

The French story was that is that the Germans, before their hasty retreat, had covered the floors of the cathedral with straw, to make it more combustible and that they intentionally left their wounded knowing they would be brought into the church by the French to be tended. A Red Cross flag was raised, a further signal that the cathedral was off-limits as a military target. However, the Germans later claimed the cathedral was being used for military intelligence: a signal station, telephone equipment, and an observation post had been espied in one of the towers during a German fly-by—along with a large cache of weapons. If true, according to international law, the cathedral was a viable military target—a wolf wrapped in sheep's clothing.

Figure 5.2.8.19: "Cathedral before removal of sandbags (upper right); Reims Cathedral; side view of cathedral" (**New York Public Library Digital Collections**)

The church was severely damaged—roofs had burned, statues melted, stonework was no longer viable, and more. Nonetheless, the structure was still essentially in good condition after the attack, all things considered. The local French authorities were actually taken to task by their own administrators for not doing a better job putting out the fire, which caused the majority of the damage. The Germans claimed it pained them to commit such an act, but the cunning French had left them no choice. These claims gained little traction.

The result was that—for the French—the German reputation for philosophical thought and general erudition, were suddenly erased—they were viewed once again as one of the "barbarian hordes" of the migration era. German art historians were quick to point out they had been one of the primogenitors of that discipline, and they highly appreciated art from around the globe. German art historians and professors were even dispatched to the front, joining various army units to help provide protection to valuable art on both sides, but to no avail. The mud would not unstick.

Figure 5.2.8.20: Harry R. Hopps, *Destroy this mad brute Enlist – U.S. Army*, 1918, color lithograph, 106 x 71 cm (**Library of Congress**)

Culture wars

Reims Cathedral continued to be used as propaganda for the whole of the war. Its burnt image was printed on posters and postcards. German soldiers were depicted gun-wielding and slavering at the jaw to seeking to destroy the next great work of art they saw. Meanwhile, the Germans lampooned the French, accusing them of using their own great works of art for nefarious ends without compunction. One well-known cartoon read, "The cunning French have used Reims cathedral as a shooting platform—next they'll be building trenches with the contents of the Louvre."

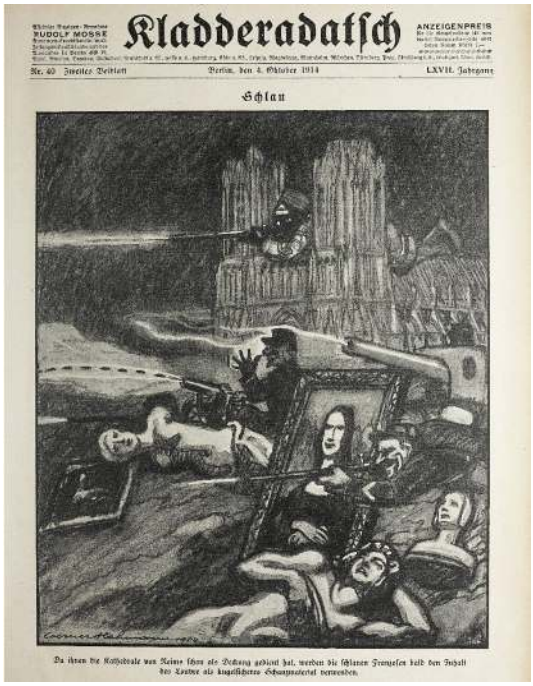


Figure 5.2.8.21: "The cunning French have used Reims cathedral as a shooting platform—next they'll be building trenches with the contents of the Louvre," Werner Hahmann, *Schlau (Sly)*, from **Kladderarsch**, no. 40 (cover, October 1914)

Beyond the trenches, the battle for cultural superiority was on. The French had the upper hand when it came to the events at Reims that fateful night. They could claim eyewitnesses, and they also photographed the cathedral in ways intended to most incite a viewer.

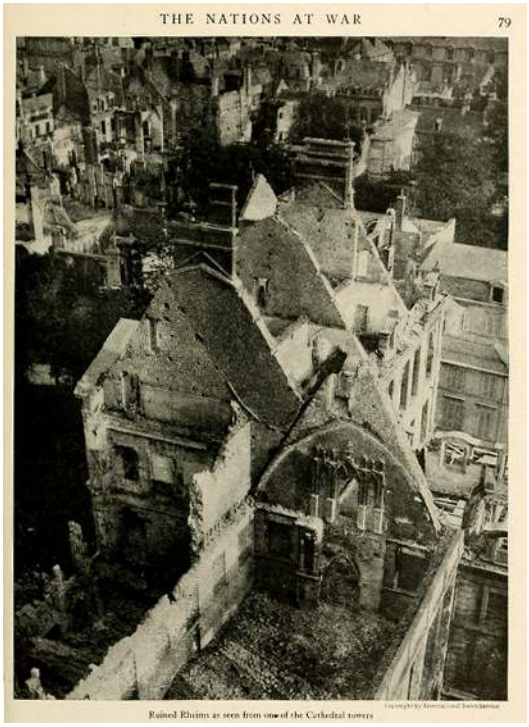


Figure **5.2.8.22**: "Ruined Reims as seen from one of the Cathedral towers," from *The Nations at War* by Willis John Abbot, 1917

The Germans did try hard though, despite their lack of handy visual evidence, to underscore that they had been the only country to carry out any form of art protection. *Kunstschutz* (the German term for the principle of preserving cultural heritage and artworks during armed conflict) was said to protect art on both sides of the war. It was even said to be endorsed by Kaiser Wilhelm II himself. The Germans emphasized that the bombing of the cathedral at Reims had not been part of a systematic effort, instead, it was one of the many sad byproducts of the war.

Figure 5.2.8.23: E. Lemielle, *Souvenez-vous! 1914. Rien d'Allemand!!! Des Allemands (Remember! 1914. Nothing German! Nothing from the Germans)*, 1919, color lithograph, 83 x 60 cm (Library of Congress)

Neither side held back, each was determined to show that while one was on the side of the angels, the other was ruthlessly attempting to profit by the destruction of art. Meanwhile, the Germans claimed that as they were the creators of the Gothic style, and so the cathedral was just as much part of their cultural heritage as it was France's, and they again attempted to remind the world of their integral role in the creation of art history. Again, this gained no traction with the French, nor with most nations.

THE CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE DAME AT RHEIMS, AFTER REPEATED BOMBARDMENTS

Nearly every building in the neighborhood crumbled under the terrific bombardments which began September 18, 1914. The walls of the cathedral stand, though its matchless stained-glass windows and many fine carvings were destroyed. This magnificent building, dating from the 13th century, was considered one of the most beautiful in the world. It was here that Kings of France were crowned and Joan of Arc believed her mission ended when Charles VII had been crowned at Rheims

Figure 5.2.8.24: "The cathedral of Notre Dame at Reims, after repeated bombardments," from *Collier's Photographic History of the European War*, by Francis J. Reynolds and C. W. Taylor (c. 1917)

By the end of the war Reims, which had been targeted multiple times, was the ruin the French had claimed after the initial attack. The continued attacks on the cathedral called into doubt the veracity of the Germans' initial account. After the first bombardment, it was certain that the cathedral was no longer being used for any military purpose—if it ever had been. Again, a cultural landmark of this kind could only become subject to brute force with good reason, so the continued bombing only furthered the French position of German brutality and outright vandalism. J.W. Garner, in his *International Law and the World War*, states, "Monuments of this stature are not only entitled to respect because of their sanctity but are especially protected because of the Law of Nations" (p. 445).

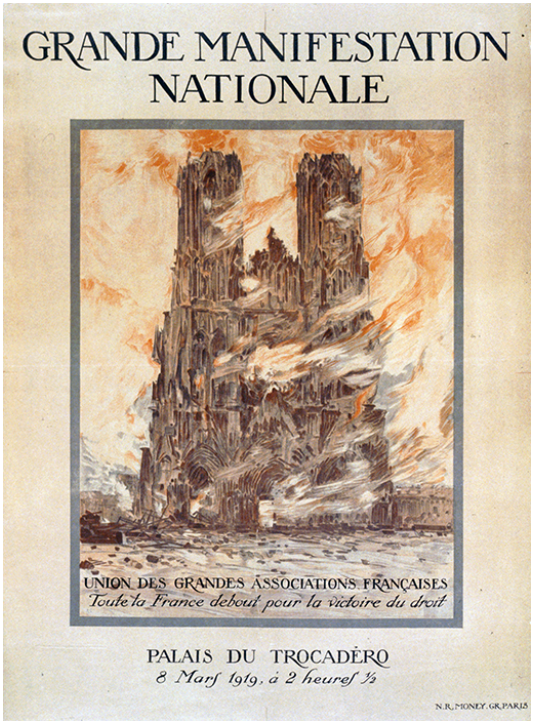


Figure **5.2.8.25**: Grande Manifestation Nationale, 1919, color lithograph, 80 x 59 cm (**Library of Congress**)

Restoration on the cathedral began almost immediately after the end of the war, funded in part by the Rockefeller family. The cathedral reopened in 1938, though work continues to this day. Recently, the world looked on aghast when, in April of 2019, the iconic Notre-Dame de Paris burned. Even more recently, the lesser-known Cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Nantes, another Gothic jewel, caught on fire. In these cases there appears to be no terrorism involved, only age and human error. Perhaps then, the. most important take-away from the bombing of Reims Cathedral is that blame is, to a degree, irrelevant, at least after the fact. The real lesson is that we must do better at preserving our cultural heritage the world over.

Figure 5.2.8.26: Marc Chagall, stained glass windows replacing war-damaged ones, Reims Cathedral, 1967-1985 (photo: **Dr. Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Additional resources:

The official website of Notre-Dame de Reims

Explore Reims Cathedral at Mapping Gothic France

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5.2.9: Portrait of Wally Neuzil

by DR. ERIN THOMPSON and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
375420

Video 5.2.9.1: Egon Schiele, *Portrait of Wally Neuzil*, 1912, oil on panel, 32 × 39.8 cm (Leopold Museum, Vienna) Speakers: Dr. Erin Thompson and Dr. Beth Harris

Additional resources:

"Two Schiele Drawings Ordered Returned to Heirs of Nazi Victim," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2018

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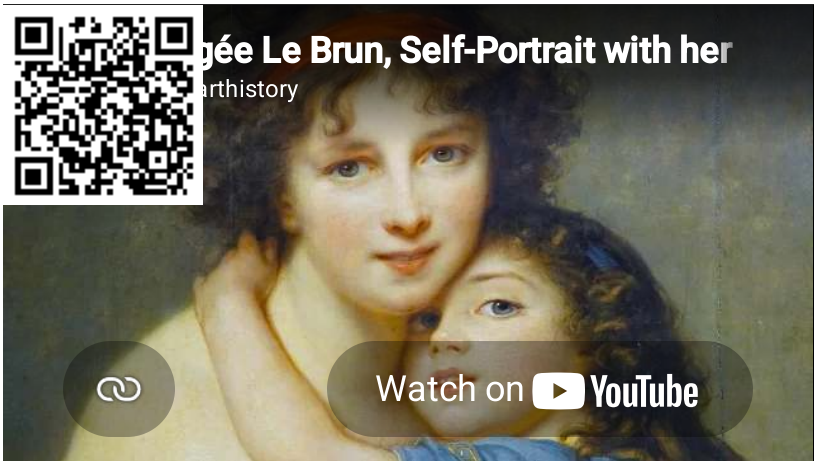
5.2.10: Self-Portrait with her Daughter

Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun

Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait with her Daughter*

by DR. INGRID E. MIDA



Video 5.2.10.3: Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait with her Daughter, Julie*, 1789, oil on canvas, 130 x 94 cm (Musée du Louvre). Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Figure 5.2.10.24: Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie (à l'Antique)*, 1789, oil on wood, 130 x 94 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

During the course of her lifetime, **Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun** painted many self-portraits, including her 1789 *Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie (à l'Antique)*. In this intimate painting, she is seated on a bench as her daughter Julie leans into her body, and the arms of mother and daughter circle around each other. What differentiates this work from other self-portraits is her choice of attire. In this work, she appears to be wearing a one-shouldered dress that resembles the ancient Greek *chiton*, a garment not worn since antiquity. Why would the artist dress this way?

What is she wearing?

Figure **5.2.10.25**: Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Self-Portrait*, 1790, oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

While other self-portraits by Vigée Le Brun show her wearing fashionable but modest dress (see for example her self-portrait from 1790), this garment exposes one shoulder and the upper chest area of her body. Although Vigée Le Brun wrote in her memoirs that she often "wore white dresses in muslin or linen lawn," [1] she is not wearing an actual dress in this self-portrait, but one that has been formed from a length of white cloth wrapped over one shoulder and around her body. The cloth is held in place with a red scarf that is bound twice around her torso and fastened underneath her bust. A length of green silk is draped across her legs and a red ribbon is tied around her unpowdered hair. The artist's considerable skill in rendering cloth is evident but there is another message intended by her choice of dress in this work.

Why would she dress this way for her self-portrait?

As a woman artist in eighteenth century France, Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun had to work harder to gain access to the profession than a man with comparable skills, especially since women were not permitted access to life drawing classes. At the time, the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture (Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture) governed the profession of art in France, such that only members of the Academy had the right to publicly exhibit their work in the official salons. Although Vigée Le Brun was initially denied membership to the Academy, in 1783 the king of France ordered an exception be made and the artist became one of four female members.

Figure **5.2.10.26**: Raphael, *The Small Cowper Madonna*, c. 1505, oil on panel, 59.5 x 44 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)

An artist's self-portrait is a form of calling card that not only demonstrates skills in achieving a likeness but may also be designed to convey messages about the artist's identity and inner life. Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun's design of her 1789 self-portrait with her daughter echoes that of the Renaissance painter Raphael, a much-admired artist in eighteenth century France. Vigée Le Brun's pose with her daughter creates a triangular composition that is reminiscent of Raphael's Madonna and Child in *The Small Cowper Madonna*. In Raphael's work, the arms of baby Jesus encircle his mother's neck and the colours red, blue and green predominate. In addition, the manner in which the drapery falls across the lap in Le Brun's work also seems to emulate Raphael.

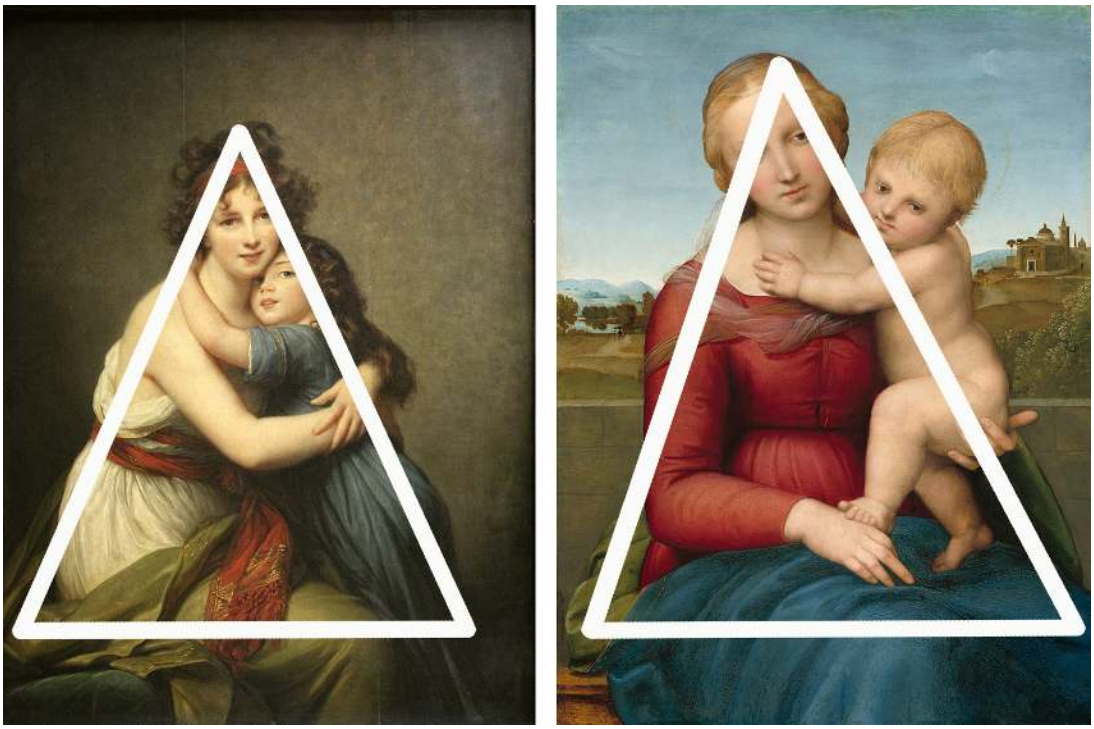


Figure 5.2.10.27: Comparison of the compositions of Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun's *Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie (à l'Antique)*, left and Raphael's *Small Cowper Madonna*, right

Aside from the reference to Raphael, the draped cloth worn by Vigée Le Brun also creates a timeless quality that harkens back to the classical period. Although a more informal and lightweight type of long-sleeved dress was worn in the 1780s by women including the artist and her clients, the dress worn by the artist in this particular self-portrait is quite different from the the *chemise á la reine*. The garment worn by Vigée Le Brun in this work bares one shoulder and, in this way, closely resembles a chiton, a sleeveless and form-fitting dress created from draped cloth. Many examples of the chiton can be seen ancient Greek sculpture, including a marble statue of Aphrodite from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 5.2.10.28: Marble statue of Aphrodite, the so-called Venus Genetrix, 1st-2nd century C.E., marble , height 151.1 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**, New York)

In creating a visual link to the classical era (ancient Greece and Rome) through her choice of dress, Elizabeth Vigée Le Brun may have wanted to reference legendary figures from that time. According to a Greek myth recounted by Pliny the Elder, the Corinthian

maiden Dibutadis created the first drawing when she traced the shadow of her lover on a wall; this tale, in which the origin of drawing was linked to a desire to remember, was well known to artists in the eighteenth century. By wearing a form of dress linked to that time, Elizabeth Vigée Le Brun suggests that she is equally worthy of being remembered. Or she may have wanted the viewer to link her to the renowned painter Apelles of Kos from the fourth century B.C.E who Pliny the Elder considered superior to all other artists of the time. Either way, in dressing herself in a manner that is suggestive of classical antiquity, the artist invites viewers to equate her artwork to that of the artistic legends of the past.

Reading the clues of dress in a self-portrait

Figure **5.2.10.29**: Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie (à l'Antique)*, 1789, oil on wood, 130 x 94 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

When an artist creates a self-portrait, they can choose to wear whatever they feel best reflects their identity. In reading such works, it is important to consider the fact that the artist's choice of attire may or may not reflect what was actually worn at the time but instead be a deliberate reference to another artist and/or another time period. Such is the case in Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun's *Self-Portrait with Her Daughter Julie (à l'Antique)* in which she references the classical period in her manner of dress in order to cast herself as equal to legendary masters from the past.

Notes:

1. Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun, *Memoirs of Madame Vigée-Lebrun*, translated by Lionel Strachey, 1903 (London: Dodo Press, 2017), p. 42

Additional resources:

Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

See a portrait by Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun of Marie Antoinette wearing a *chemise á la reine* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Read about "The Chiton, Peplos, and Himation in Modern Dress" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Joseph Baillio, Katharine Baetjer, Paul Lang, *Vigée Le Brun* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2016).

Ingrid E. Mida, *Reading Fashion in Art* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

Mary D. Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun, *Memoirs of Madame Vigée-Lebrun*, Translated by Lionel Strachey, 1903. (London: Dodo Press, 2017).

Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait*

by DR. APRIL RENÉE LYNCH

Figure **5.2.10.19**: Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Archduchess Marie Antoinette, Queen of France*, 1778, oil on canvas, 273 x 193.5 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

There is an oft-quoted saying misattributed to Marie-Antoinette, Queen of France, during a famine suffered by her subjects: If they have no bread, "then let them eat cake."

In fact, this statement (which showed flagrant disregard for the suffering of the people) was never uttered by the Queen that we know from so many sumptuous portraits. These portraits are largely the work of Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, a celebrated French artist known especially for her lavish portraits of Marie-Antoinette and other European monarchs and nobles as well as for her many self-portraits.

Figure **5.2.10.20**: Detail, Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Archduchess Marie Antoinette, Queen of France*, 1778, oil on canvas, 273 x 193.5 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

Patron Queen

Vigée-LeBrun first met Queen Marie-Antoinette at the royal palace at Versailles in 1778. The Queen had heard of the young painter's successes and had her own likeness painted *en robe a paniers* (in a hoopskirt). The painting is a majestic full-length display of power. Marie-Antoinette stands facing the viewer, with the exception of her head, which is turned slightly to the viewer's left so that she looks past us.The Queen is dressed in an elaborate golden white dress. Her hair is piled high and she wears a feathery headdress. All around her are the accoutrements of her station: huge columns, a marble bust of her husband, Louis XVI, displayed high atop a pedestal and behind a table on which sits a crown. The painting was originally meant for the queen's brother, Emperor Joseph II of Austria, but Marie-Antoinette was so pleased with it that she ordered copies made for Catherine the Great of Russia and her own apartments at Versailles.

Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, painter

Figure **5.2.10.21**: Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Self-Portrait*, 1790, oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

The artist who created this opulent showpiece became famous and wealthy as Queen Marie-Antoinette's official court painter. She was born to Louis Vigée and Jeanne Maissin in a bustling section of Paris. In her autobiography *Souvenirs* written towards the end of her life, Vigée-LeBrun wrote that her father, a minor portraitist, doted on her, wishing his daughter fame and good fortune; and that he cherished her early efforts at drawing. Vigée-LeBrun wrote that her mother thought her awkward and ugly. Nevertheless, she grew up to be intelligent, beautiful, rich, and talented, characteristics on display in her *Self-Portrait* of 1790.

Created soon after her swift departure from France at the onset of the French Revolution, Vigée-LeBrun's *Self-Portrait* in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, is one of her best-known pictures. It is a late example of the Rococo style. Rococo epitomized a fashionable ideal, wherein perpetual youth was libertine and pleasure-loving, its sexual gratification taken without guilt or consequence. Despite this, the artist, like her royal patron, was extremely conservative in her politics.

Figure 5.2.10.22: Detail, Elizabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Self-Portrait*, 1790, oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi).

This self-portrait was painted in Rome; one of the first cities in which Vigée-LeBrun stayed during her decade-long exile from France. The artist sits in a relaxed pose at her easel and is positioned slightly off center. She wears a white turban and a dark dress—in the free-flowing style that Marie-Antoinette had made popular at the French court—with a soft, white, ruffled collar of the same material as her headdress. Her belt is a wide red ribbon. Vigée-LeBrun holds a brush to a partially finished work; the subject is probably Marie-Antoinette—perhaps intended as a tribute to her favorite sitter. Slightly used brushes are at the ready along with a palette, she has everything cradled in her arm close to the viewer.

The painting expresses an alert intelligence, vibrancy, and freedom from care. This, despite the fact that Vigée-LeBrun had been forced to flee France in disguise and under cover of darkness during the early stages of the Revolution. As she painted this portrait, her Queen was being driven from power by revolutionaries who hated the profligate lifestyle of the nobility and would later execute both Marie-Antoinette and her husband, King Louis XVI. Given these circumstances, Vigée-LeBrun—a working painter, wife, and mother—displays an extraordinarily sanguine persona.

Figure 5.2.10.23: Detail with palette and brushes, Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Self-Portrait*, 1790, oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

Additional resources:

Eighteenth-Century Women Painters in France on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Gita May, *Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun: The Odyssey of an Artist in an Age of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Madame Perregaux*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video **5.2.10.4**: Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Madame Perregaux*, 1789, oil on oak panel, 99.6 x 78.5 cm (Wallace Collection, London)

Figure 5.2.10.30: More Smarthistory images…

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- **7.14: c. 1700 - 1775- Rococo** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.2.11: Oath of the Horatii

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker provide a description, historical perspective, and analysis of David's *Oath of the Horatii*.

The link to this video is provided at the bottom of this page.

Jacques-Louis David, Painter to the King, the Revolution, and the Emperor

David was trained in the classicism favored by the Academy but here creates the far more severe style, Neo-Classicism. He ultimately became the painter of the Revolution and even served on the committee that voted for the beheading of the King (he would later spend time in jail for this). David was friends with Robespierre and Marat, leaders of the Reign of Terror, the revolution's most violent aspect. After the revolution, when Napoleon became Emperor of France, David served as his official painter.

David Wins the Prix de Rome: A New Style Emerges

David was raised in the wealthy and powerful family of his uncle, a minister to the King of France. The young David was at first trained in the studio of the great Rococo master François Boucher, a distant relative who also counted Fragonard amongst his students. After several failed attempts, David would win the coveted Prix de Rome, a prize given annually to one advanced art student (somewhat equivalent to a Master of Fine Arts degree student today) in each of the three beaux-arts (pronounced "bow-zart," fine arts in English), painting, sculpture and architecture.

The competition was open to the alumni of the École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts), the preeminent art school in France. The prize financed the study of art in Rome for a period of five years. Traditionally, winners took note of the works of Antiquity (ancient Greek and Roman art) and of the High Renaissance (the legacy of Raphael & Michelangelo for example) but devoted their attention primarily to selected masters of the Baroque.In contrast, David reversed this hierarchy focusing on the art of antiquity, the renaissance and the classicizing baroque artist, Nicolas Poussin (see especially Poussin's *Burial of Phocion* of 1648).

What emerged in David's painting was a sharp rejection of the Rococo style. Gone is the fluid brushwork, soft color, and the amorphous organic compositions of Boucher and Fragonard. Of equal import was the shift in subject. A telling document of the ancien regime, Fragonard's *The Swing*, celebrates the pleasures of love and of the experience of the ruling class. This is a painting intended to indulge the viewer's senses with rich, almost aromatic sights and textures.

A Story of Sacrifice

In contrast, David tells the story of three brothers that make an oath to their father that they will die in the defense of their city (this is a legend about the founding of Rome). Most Neo-Classical paintings take their subjects from Ancient Greek and Roman history and the *Oath of the Horatii* is no exception. In this painting the three Horatii brothers have been chosen to represent the city of Rome in a battle against three brothers from the neighboring city of Alba.

Figure **5.2.11.2**. Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, oil on canvas, 1784 (Musée du Louvre)

Here, the three Horatii brothers are swearing an oath on their swords which their father presents to them to fight until they die for their country.Here's the catch: one of the Horatii sisters (pictured on the right) is married to one of the men on the other side (the Curiatii). When one of the Horatii brothers returns home from the battle—the only one surviving—this sister greets him with condemnation for killing her husband and the father of her children. Because she puts herself and her family before the good of her country, her brother kills her. The idea here is that one must be willing to sacrifice—even sacrifice one's life and family members—for the state.

A Rational Style

Eschewing the Rococo style, David organizes the canvas with a geometric precision that recalls the innovation of the ancient Greeks and of the Italian Renaissance that harked back to the rationalism of antiquity. David divides the linear perspectival interior into a balanced nine-part square. This rigorous structure frames the three sets of figures as does the triple screen of doric columns and arches at the far end of the room. The angle of the light heightens the muscularity of the male figures as it rakes across the surface of their bodies. This light, which enters the room from the upper left, sharply delineates mass and volume, a kind of modified tenebrism and creates, as in the work of Caravaggio, a strong sense of physicality.

As was traditional, David's *Oath of the Horatii* was commissioned by the King as the summation of David's five years of study in Rome. Such a work was to be exhibited in an annual exhibition of new art held in a large room or salon in the monarch's palace in Paris, the Louvre (now the museum). In part because of some crafty self-promotion but primarily because of the radical style and especially because of the political implications of the painting, David's early masterpiece quickly became a sensation.

Contributors

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5.2.12: Cornelia Pointing to Her Children as Her Treasures

Angelica Kauffmann, *Cornelia Pointing to her Children as Her Treasures*

by DANA MARTIN

A moment of moralizing

This Swiss-born artist painted Roman stories with moralizing messages. Here, Cornelia provides a model of virtue.

Angelica Kauffman

Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi

Angelica Kauffman, Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to Her Children as Her Treasures, c. 1785, 101.6 x 127 cm (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond). Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker - See end of page for transcript.

To the artists of eighteenth-century Europe, it was not enough to simply paint a beautiful painting. Yes one could marvel at your use of colors, proportions, and how masterfully you draped the fabric on your figures, but this was just not enough. The story that is represented must also improve the viewer and impart a moralizing message. This was a common theme even before the emergence of the Neoclassical trend (for example, Chardin's canvases of simple French country life or Hogarth's painted commentaries on the wealthy classes of England). When interest in the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean—more specifically Rome—arose in the mid eighteenth century the moralizing theme segued to also include stories from classical antiquity.

Figure **5.2.12.36**: Angelica Kauffmann, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as Her Treasures*, c. 1785, oil on canvas, 40 x 50″ (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

The Swiss-born painter Angelica Kauffmann is just one artist to contribute to this genre. Painted in 1785, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to Her Children as Her Treasures*, is her subject. Roman architectural influences frame two women portrayed wearing what one can imagine is typical of ancient Roman dress, along with three children, also wearing masterfully draped togas with thin leather sandals. They look like they might have stepped directly off a temple's pediment.

Figure **5.2.12.37**: Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus (detail), Angelica Kauffmann, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as Her Treasures*, c. 1785, oil on canvas, 40 x 50″ (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

An example of virtue

If you compare Kauffmann's simple presentation to the previous Rococo genre, with the lush landscapes, frothy pastel pink frocks, and chubby frolicking cherubs, it is clear that art is going in a different direction. This painting is an exemplum virtutis, or a model of virtue. The story that Kauffmann painted is that of Cornelia, an ancient Roman woman who was the mother of the future political leaders Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. The brothers Gracchi were politicians in second-century B.C.E. Rome. They sought social reform and were seen as friends to the average Roman citizen. So where did these benefactors of the people learn their exemplary ethics? That would be their mother, Cornelia.

Figure **5.2.12.38**: Detail, Angelica Kauffmann, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as Her Treasures*, c. 1785, oil on canvas, 40 x 50″ (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)

The scene that we see in Kauffmann's painting illustrates one such example of Cornelia's teachings. A visitor has come to her home to show off a wonderful array of jewelry and precious gems, what one might call treasures. To her visitor's chagrin, when she asks Cornelia to reveal her treasures she humbly brings her children forward, instead of running to get her own jewelry box. The message is clear; the most precious treasures of any woman are not material possessions, but the children who are our future. You can almost feel the embarrassment when you look at the face of the visitor, who Kauffmann has smartly painted with a furrowed brow and slightly gaped mouth.

The lure of ancient Rome

Figure **5.2.12.39**: Angelica Kauffmann, *Angelica Kauffmann*, c. 1770-75, oil on canvas, 73.7 x 61 cm (National Portrait Gallery, London)

Born in 1740, Angelica Kauffmann received a first-rate artistic education from her father, who was a Swiss muralist. She traveled through her native Switzerland, Austria, and eventually Italy where she was able to see the work of the ancient artists with her own eyes. She was following in the tradition of the Grand Tour, the educational excursion that many wealthy Europeans took to marvel and study the art, architecture, and history of ancient Rome.

The interest in ancient Mediterranean cultures was fueled not just by the cultural productions of Rome, but also by the newly discovered remains of the ancient Roman cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii, which were excavated beginning in 1738 and 1748, respectively. Covered by the volcanic ash of Mount Vesuvius in August 79 CE, an almost perfect scene of typical ancient life was preserved. These findings did not just spark a renewed interest in classical antiquity in eighteenth-century art and architecture, but also inspired new fashions, interior design, and even gardens and tableware. This was a find that one must see in person, and Angelica Kauffman was lucky enough to take the Grand Tour like so many of her fellow artists.

Enlightenment ideals

While the geometric symmetry and simplicity of the arts in antiquity might have greatly inspired the work of Kauffman and other Neoclassical artists, these ancient societies also aligned with Enlightenment ideals, which were often seen as the zenith of human civilization. Greece and Rome—it was felt—were the cultures that gave us the enlightened political systems of democracy and republicanism, as opposed to the modern monarchies, which would be increasingly criticized as corrupt and arbitrary in the mid and late eighteenth century. The ancients could instruct modern audiences in patriotism, civic virtue, and ethics, and Kauffmann's moralizing message is a wonderful example of this trend.

This revival of classical antiquity was a cultural phenomenon that affected not just artistic practices, but also shaped the modern mind. Angelica Kauffman would eventually settle in England where she enjoyed great success as a portrait artist and history painter. In an age that can be described as patriarchal at its best and chauvinistic at its worst, Kauffmann played a major role in the British art scene. She was a regular exhibitor at the prestigious Royal Academy and had many aristocratic and even royal patrons. *Cornelia Pointing to Her Children as Her Treasures* is truly one of Kauffmann's most famous treasures, and permanently positioned her as a pioneer of the Neoclassical movement.

Additional resources:

This painting at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Angelica Kauffmann on the BBC's "Your Paintings"(opens in new window)

Works by Angelica Kauffmann in the National Portrait Gallery(opens in new window)

Angelica Kauffman Video Transcript

Dr. Beth Harris: We're in the galleries at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts looking at one of their most important paintings. This is such a fascinating work from the end of the 18th century and by a woman artist, Angelica Kauffman, who was a history painter, something very rare for women artists.

Dr. Steven Zucker: And she was phenomenally successful as a professional artist, which required her to navigate a very complicated political and social landscape. But let's begin with the painting.

Dr. Beth Harris: So we have a story of an ancient Roman woman. Her name is Cornelia. She's standing here at the center on her left holding the hand of her daughter, Sempronia, and with her right hand gesturing to her two sons. The older one, Tiberius, was known to be mild-mannered in the sources from ancient Rome, and the younger brother more impetuous. Both brothers will grow up to be reformers in the politics of the ancient Roman Republic. To her left sits a woman who's dressed in very rich red clothing and wearing jewelry, who seems to be showing Cornelia her jewels. And the friend asks Cornelia, where are your jewels? And Cornelia points to her sons and says, "These are my jewels." So Cornelia has the right values that rearing her children, educating her children, is so much more a value than the jewelry displayed by her friend.

Dr. Steven Zucker: The little Sempronia seems so enchanted by the jewels. She's looking down and taking hold of the pearls and seems completely enchanted.

Dr. Beth Harris: And I think there's another juxtaposition between the jewelry box and the sewing box. So we have these humble domestic tools compared with these ostentatious jewels.

Dr. Steven Zucker: Cornelia is painted in such opposition to the woman who is seated. First of all, she's upright, almost like the pillars behind her. She's dressed in white. But look at the neckline. It's straight as opposed to the curve of the woman who's seated beside her. Cornelia is represented as an image of rectitude, a moral center in this painting. There's even a distinction between the activity of the seated woman that is in contrast to the sense of quiet stillness that Cornelia represents.

Dr. Beth Harris: The uprightness of her body, the way the drapery falls almost like the fluting of a column, projects her confidence about her role as a mother. And in fact, we know that in the ancient Roman Republic, a statue was erected in honor of Cornelia and her dedication to the education of her children.

Dr. Steven Zucker: So Cornelia was an important symbol in ancient Rome and then again in Europe in the 18th century.

Dr. Beth Harris: Artists, writers, Enlightenment thinkers looked back to the ancient Roman Republic as this period of civic virtue, raising ideas of what is a virtuous kind of government. And here we are in between the American Revolution and the French Revolution, which will ultimately bring about a republic in France.

Dr. Steven Zucker: The United States was founded on the Roman ideal of a republic. And so these are ideas that are being discussed in Britain. They're ideas that are being discussed on the continent. And at this moment, they're actually being enacted in the young United States. And so, this painting would have been an opportunity to discuss these issues, to discuss the kind of moral foundation upon which a state should be founded. The figures are set in this grand architectural space. And there's a lovely way that the angle formed by the architecture creates a separation between the female figures on the right and the male figures on the left.

Dr. Beth Harris: And Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau held that men were able to make the kinds of sacrifices that were necessary for the good of the republic, but that women were incapable of those kinds of sacrifices because for them, family came first. But what the story of Cornelia so brilliantly did was to show that women could serve the needs of the state by being exemplary mothers. The really fascinating thing is that although these examples of virtue drawn from ancient history did serve the needs of the revolutionaries, it also could serve the needs of Angelica's varied patrons from the English businessman, George Bowles, who commissioned this painting, to the Queen of Naples. And she painted a version of Cornelia for the Queen of Naples. So these examples of virtuous behavior could really be adopted by anyone along the political spectrum.

[music]

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- **7.15: Late 18th century- Neoclassicism** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.2.13: Buddha Shakyamuni or Akshobhya

Buddha Shakyamuni or Akshobhya

Learn more at the Met Museum

Figure **5.2.13.1**: Buddha Shakyamuni or Akshobhya, the Buddha of the East, 11th–12th century, Tibet, gilt copper, 58 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

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5.2.14: Beaker with Inverse Face

by **PEGGY GOEDE MONTALVÁN**

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Figure **5.2.14.1**: Three views of a *Keru* cup, Inka, Peru, lacquered wood, 7-3/8 x 6-15/16 inches / 18.7 x 17.6cm (Brooklyn Museum)

Figure **5.2.14.2**: Lands governed by the Viceroyalty of Peru, c. 1650

On a vibrantly colored *keru* cup from colonial Peru, exotically dressed figures, apparently a royal Inka couple, stand surrounded by flowers, vivid designs, and even a rainbow. A *keru* is a ceremonial Andean beaker that was an important part of Inka culture prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. This vessel was produced in the **Viceroyalty of Peru**, a Spanish colonial administrative district created in 1542 that included large parts of South America. It might surprise us to find Inka on a colonial vessel—a time after the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors (conquerors). But, although we speak of a Spanish "conquest" of the Andes, which started in the 1530s, Inka society did not disappear after the European invasion. Aspects of social and political bonds, religion, cults, and art—although often reduced or mixed with European characteristics—persisted. Even with the clash of cultures, the Inka (among other peoples) adapted to the new circumstances, as did the European intruders. The Spaniards were challenged to understand an indigenous society where nature was sacred, the sun, moon, stars, mountains, and rivers were venerated as gods and even the ruler, the Sapa Inka, was deified.

The Inka continued to use these types of cups in the early viceregal era, but soon the Spaniards grew suspicious. Why did the Andeans insist on continuing to use them? Were they somehow powerful? Was it possible to hide secret messages in their

mysterious iconography that could evoke rebellions against Spanish rule? The Spaniards ultimately decided to destroy *kerus* in massive campaigns in the later sixteenth century.

A cup not made merely for drinking

Keru (also spelled *kero* or *quero*) vessels are typically associated with Inka culture (15th-16th century), but they originated with the Tiwanaku culture (6th – 9th century) in present-day Bolivia. They can also be found in other Andean societies like the Wari (8th – 10th century), Sicán (10th – 11th century—see the image below), Chancay (12th-14th century) or Chimú (14th – 16th century) in the territory of what is today Peru.

Figure **5.2.14.3**: Aquillas, Sicán (Lambayeque), 10th – 11th century, gold (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), photo: Steven Zucker (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

The Andean Quechua term *keru* primarily specified a “wooden cup.” While wood is the most common material of these vessels, there are also examples made of gold or silver (correctly, although not commonly, called *aquillas*), stone, or ceramic. Although precious metals like gold and silver did not have the same meaning for Andeans as for Europeans, the material did matter. Associated with the luminous sun, golden *kerus* were reserved for the Inka ruler. Venerating nature, especially the sun and the moon, the Inka saw their ruler as the descendant of the sun god and his wife as the daughter of the moon. In the same way, the silver cups, reflecting divine moonlight, had a high value in Andean society. Wooden or stone cups could also elevate a person’s status, depending on the degree of craftsmanship and decoration. In contrast, simple or undecorated vessels were used by the common population in their daily lives or in small ceremonies during which they prayed for fertility or the benevolence of the gods.

Kerukamayoq (*querocamayoc*) were responsible for the production of the kerus. These specialists had an exceptional position in Andean society that came with privileges, such as exemption from farming. Even after the Spanish conquest, the production of *kerus* was restricted to these indigenous artisans.

Figure **5.2.14.4**: Kero, Inka, 15th – early 16th century, wood, 14.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

In pre-Hispanic times, the decoration of Inka *kerus*, if there was any, consisted solely of monochromatic carved geometric patterns, for example rectangles, rhombs, triangles, and lines. A few later exceptions showed abstract figures like llamas or even faces. It is possible that there is a deeper meaning behind these designs—they may refer to religious beliefs or traditions or may have revealed details about their owner.

In pre-Hispanic as in colonial times, the *keru* was not a mere drinking vessel but rather a ceremonial beaker, used during rituals and political ceremonies to establish and fortify important religious, social, and political relations. It had enormous symbolic power, even after the arrival of the Spaniards. To demonstrate the divine nature of rulers, rituals were performed in public during which the Sapa Inka exchanged identical *keru* pairs filled with *chicha* (maize beer) with his "father," the sun, in a divine toast. The symbolic power of the *kerus* was transferred to secular issues, so that the exchange of *kerus* also took place between two Andean rulers, commonly the Sapa Inka and a soon-to-be ally, to formalize an agreement.

Figure **5.2.14.5**: The Inka is toasting to his father, the sun. From Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, ***The First New Chronicle and Good Government***, c. 1615 (**The Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen**)

With the arrival of the Spaniards in the Inka region around 1530, new pictorial conventions were introduced to the Andes. Adapting to the European traditions, traditionally abstract *keru* decoration began to incorporate figurative scenes. The meaning of the images may have been easier to comprehend by the new colonial society as they contained recognizable figures, symbols, and narratives. Representations of daily Andean life now appeared on the *kerus*, as well as newly introduced colonial rituals, such as the branding of the cattle. These images also contained symbolism only decipherable by Andean insiders, like the *kerukamayoq*.

A world of powerful symbolism

Figure **5.2.14.6**: Keru cup, Inka, lacquered wood, colonial, Peru, 18.7 x 17.6 cm (Brooklyn Museum)

Let's have a closer look at this particular Inka cup from the Brooklyn Museum. The iconography is quite common for colonial *kerus*. Its imagery is divided into three registers (bands)—like a comic strip. At the bottom, we see Andean flowers, likely Kantuta, which were symbolically connected to the Inka elite. Above, we find a strip with geometric patterns, similar to *tocapu* designs, which are also associated with Inka nobility. These designs were found **on textiles** as well, especially on the elaborate tunics, called *unkus* (also spelled *uncus*), of the Inka elite. As mentioned above, these motifs might have contained hidden meanings, as the Inka did not use a writing system, at least not in the strict sense of the term.

A figurative scene (image below) dominates the top register of the cup. We clearly recognize a man and a woman whose traditional apparel indicates that we are looking at representations of an Inka ruler, the Sapa Inka, and his wife, the coya. The ruler, addressing the observer in full frontal view, is wearing an *unku* and is crowned with the imperial headdress, the *mascaypacha* (also spelled *mascapaycha* or *mascapaicha*). The shield and spear in his hands characterize him as a leading warrior and are a reminder of his military power. At his side, the coya is likewise dressed in indigenous clothes, including a wrap dress (*anacu*) and a cloak (*lliclla*). The two individuals form a pair, symbolizing the complementary duality of opposites, in this case male and female, that formed Andean cosmology. As mentioned above, *kerus* were always produced in almost identical pairs that were then exchanged between two parties.

Figure **5.2.14.7**: Detail, *Keru* Cup, Inka, lacquered wood, colonial, Peru, 18.7 x 17.6 cm (Brooklyn Museum)

The figures on this *keru* stand under a rainbow, with light spots around and in between them, possibly depicting raindrops. Water was scarce and therefore a vital good in the often arid regions of the Andes. The rainbow thus connected the Inka with fertility and consequently with the power over life and death. Furthermore, the rainbow offered the Inka ruler a bridge to the heavenly realms as it connected the earth with Inti, the divine sun, the Sapa Inka's father. On similar *keru* examples, the rainbow rises from the mouth of a feline, a frightful, strong and elegant animal that, owing to its attributes, is also associated with the Sapa Inka.

The royal pair is surrounded by potent symbols of military power, fertility, strength, and divine descent—all justifying Inka rulership. The iconography of this *keru* reflects its use in important religious and political rituals. While the rainbow indicates the ties between the Sapa Inka and Inti during the ceremonial toast to the sun god, the *keru* representation of the ruler as the leading Inka warrior with the power over life and death reminded political authorities during the official keru exchange with the Inka of the advantages, but also the possible menaces, resulting from forming or refusing alliances with the Inka.

Eliminating the threat

Over the years, the Spaniards realized that the *kerus* were not simple cups, but meaningful objects that continued to be used in Andean rituals. The Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church both suspected a possible threat emerging from these enigmatic vessels. For them, *kerus* formed part of a dangerous side of Andean culture that had to be transformed and controlled, so as not to undermine colonial rule or conflict with evangelization.

Figure 5.2.14.8: Portrait of Francisco Álvarez de Toledo, Viceroy of Peru, 16th century, oil (National Museum of the Archaeology, Anthropology, and History of Peru)

Francisco de Toledo, a viceroy of colonial Peru, gained notoriety in this context. In a time of financial struggles and continuous indigenous rebellions, Toledo carried out extensive reforms in the 1570s and 1580s to reestablish and secure Spanish royal power in the colonies. Everything Andean was viewed as a potential threat under his leadership. In the course of an extended campaign to erase any traditional indigenous beliefs and traditions, many *kerus* were destroyed along with other Inka objects like *unkus*, and the many religious figurines made of precious metals that where melted into easily transportable ingots. The *kerus* made of gold or silver were melted down, but wooden vessels survived, mainly because the cups were very popular in colonial society. Like modern souvenir hunting, Europeans loved these “indian” vessels and ordered their production for personal use, gifts, or trade.

Unfortunately, this love for the exotic endures today, so that *kerus* form a large part of the objects sold on the black market. The relatively few cups remaining for the use in a scientific context are spread all over the world in the different museums and collections. Unfortunately, many of the wooden examples have deteriorated over time. The exceptionally well-conserved *keru* at the Brooklyn Museum therefore represents a precious example and provides us with insights into a complex and fascinating society.

Additional resources:

This work at the Brooklyn Museum

Colonial *Kero* Cups on the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Kero in the collection of The National Museum of the American Indian

Kero on the Google Art Project

Thomas Cummins, *Toasts with the Inca. Andean Abstraction and Colonial Images on Quero Vessels* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2002)

Diane Fane, ed., *Converging Cultures. Art and Identity in Spanish America* (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1996)

Jorge A Flores Ochoa, Elizabeth Kuon Arce, et al., *Queros. Arte Inka en vasos ceremoniales* (Lima, Banco de Crédito del Perú, 1998)

by DR. SARAHH SCHER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.2.14.1: Inverse-Face Beaker, 10th-11th century, Sicán (Lambayeque), Peru, gold, 20 x 18.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Key points:

- The Sicán culture was located on the north coast of Peru, and is sometimes referred to as Lambayeque.
- We have lost a significant amount of knowledge of Sicán culture due to systematic looting and grave-robbing. These looted objects were smuggled out of Peru and many find their way to private collections and museums in North America and Europe.
- This inverse-face beaker, made of hammered gold, shows a face in a position that would have been upside-down when it was used. This inversion may suggest the underworld, or contact with spirit forces.

Additional resources:

This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Donna Yates, Batán Grande on Trafficking Culture

Izumi Shimada, “Sicán Elite Tombs and Their Broader. Implications” (Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 1992)

Izumi Shimada, “Precious Metal Objects of the Middle Sicán,” *Scientific American* (2005)

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- **11.5: South America before c. 1500** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
- **14.6: Destruction, looting, and trafficking** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.2.15: Sistine Chapel

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker provide a description, historical perspective, and analysis of Michelangelo's *Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel*.

The link to this video is provided at the bottom of this page.

Michelangelo, *Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel*, fresco, 1508–1512 (Vatican City, Rome)

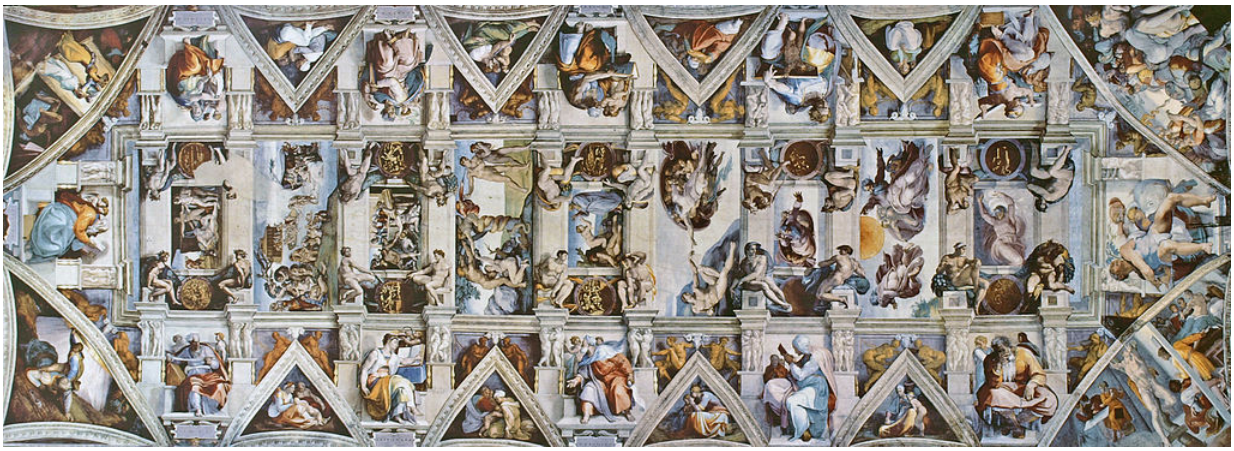


Figure 5.2.15.1. Michelangelo, *Sistine Chapel Ceiling* (center only), 1508–12 (Vatican, Rome)

Figure **5.2.15.2**. The interior of the Sistine Chapel showing the ceiling in relation to the other frescoes.

To any visitor of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, two features become immediately and undeniably apparent: 1) the ceiling is really high up, and 2) there are a lot of paintings up there.

Because of this, the centuries have handed down to us an image of Michelangelo lying on his back, wiping sweat and plaster from his eyes as he toiled away year after year, suspended hundreds of feet in the air, begrudgingly completing a commission that he never wanted to accept in the first place.

Fortunately for Michelangelo, this is probably not true. But that does nothing to lessen the fact that the frescoes, which take up the entirety of the vault, are among the most important paintings in the world.

For Pope Julius II

Michelangelo began to work on the frescoes for Pope Julius II in 1508, replacing a blue ceiling dotted with stars. Originally, the pope asked Michelangelo to paint the ceiling with a geometric ornament, and place the twelve apostles in spandrels around the decoration.

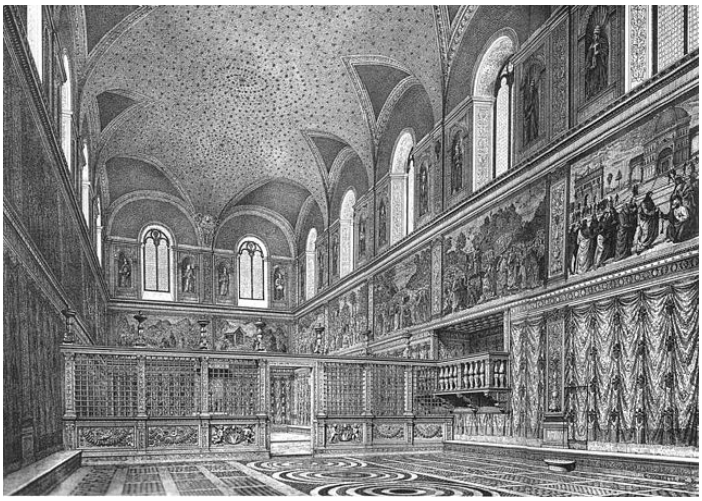


Figure **5.2.15.3**. Reconstruction of the chapel prior Michelangelo's frescos.

Michelangelo proposed instead to paint the Old Testament scenes now found on the vault, divided by the fictive architecture that he uses to organize the composition.

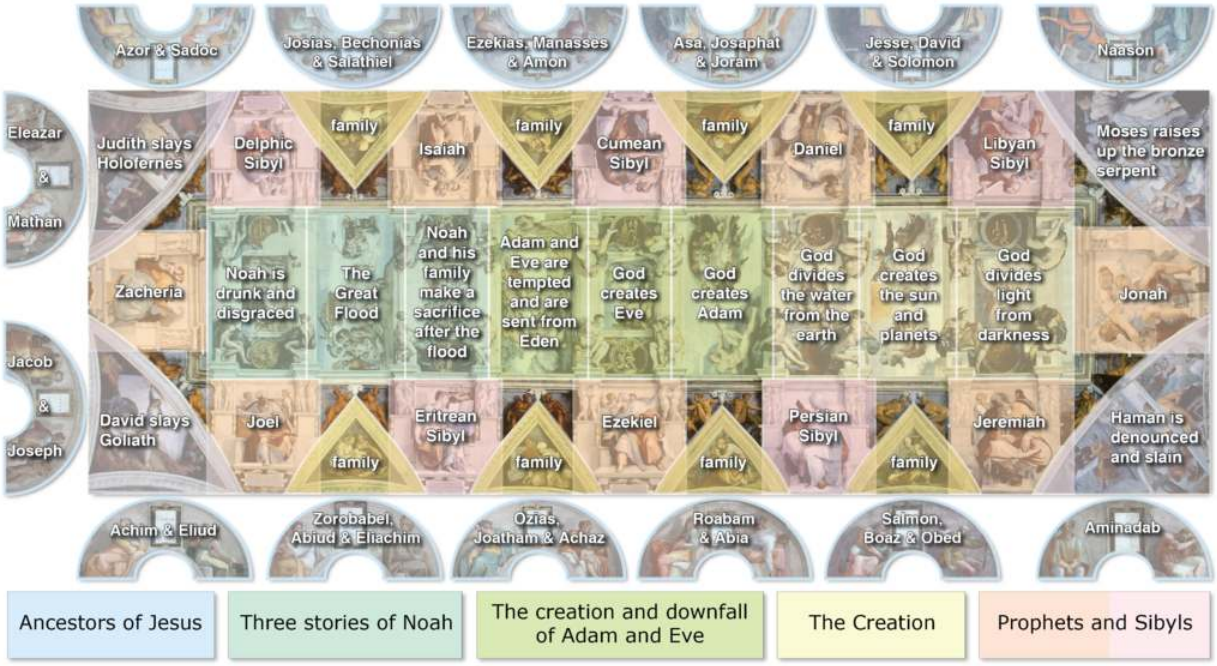


Figure **5.2.15.4**. Sistine Chapel ceiling diagram

The Subjects of the Frescoes

The narrative begins at the altar and is divided into three sections. In the first three paintings, Michelangelo tells the story of *The Creation of the Heavens and Earth*; this is followed by *The Creation of Adam and Eve* and the *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*; finally is the story of *Noah and the Great Flood*.

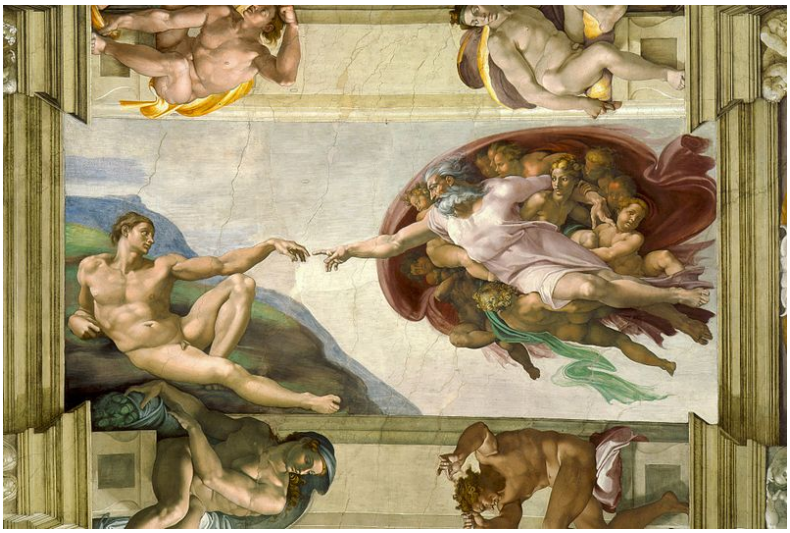


Figure **5.2.15.5**. Michelangelo, *The Creation of Adam*, Sistine Chapel Ceiling, 1508-12

Ignudi, or nude youths, sit in fictive architecture around these frescoes, and they are accompanied by prophets and sibyls (ancient seers who, according to tradition, foretold the coming of Christ) in the spandrels. In the four corners of the room, in the pendentives, one finds scenes depicting the Salvation of Israel.

The Deluge

Although the most famous of these frescoes is without a doubt, *The Creation of Adam*, reproductions of which have become ubiquitous in modern culture for its dramatic positioning of the two monumental figures reaching towards each other, not all of the frescoes are painted in this style. In fact, the first frescoes Michelangelo painted contain multiple figures, much smaller in size, engaged in complex narratives. This can best be exemplified by his painting of *The Deluge*.

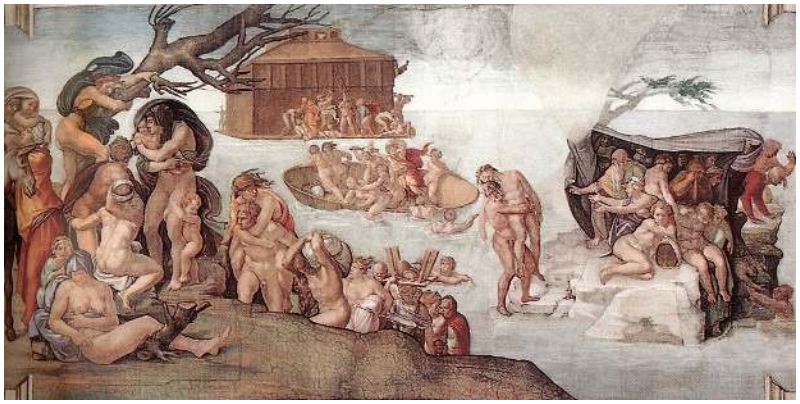


Figure **5.2.15.6**. Michelangelo, *The Deluge*, Sistine Chapel ceiling, c. 1508–09

Figure **5.2.15.6**. Detail of *The Deluge*

In this fresco, Michelangelo has used the physical space of the water and the sky to separate four distinct parts of the narrative.

- On the right side of the painting, a cluster of people seeks sanctuary from the rain under a makeshift shelter.
- On the left, even more people climb up the side of a mountain to escape the rising water.
- Centrally, a small boat is about to capsize because of the unending downpour.
- In the background, a team of men work on building the arc—the only hope of salvation.

Up close, this painting confronts the viewer with the desperation of those about to perish in the flood and makes one question God's justice in wiping out the entire population of the earth, save Noah and his family, because of the sins of the wicked.

Unfortunately, from the floor of the chapel, the use of small, tightly grouped figures undermines the emotional content and makes the story harder to follow.

Figure **5.2.15.7**. Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel ceiling, 1508–12, creation scenes.

A Shift in Style

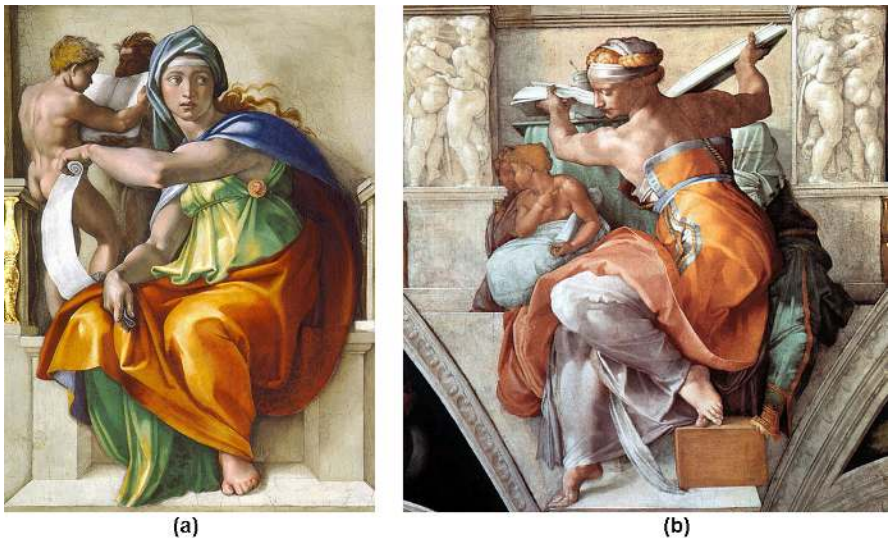
In 1510, Michelangelo took a year long break from painting the Sistine Chapel. The frescoes painted after this break are characteristically different from the ones he painted before it, and are emblematic of what we think of when we envision the Sistine Chapel paintings. These are the paintings, like *The Creation of Adam*, where the narratives have been paired down to only the essential figures depicted on a monumental scale. Because of these changes, Michelangelo is able to convey a strong sense of emotionality that can be perceived from the floor of the chapel. For example, one feels the shame and despair of Eve who cowers from the angel in *The Expulsion from the Garden*. Indeed, the imposing figure of God in the three frescoes illustrating the separation of darkness from light and the creation of the heavens and the earth radiates power throughout his body, and his dramatic gesticulations help to tell the story of Genesis without the addition of extraneous detail.

The Sibyls

This new monumentality can also be felt in the figures of the sibyls and prophets in the spandrels surrounding the vault, which some believe are all based on the *Belvedere Torso* , an ancient sculpture that was then, and remains, in the Vatican's collection. One of the most celebrated of these figures is the *Delphic Sibyl* (figure 8a).

The overall circular composition of the body, which echoes the contours of her fictive architectural setting, adds to the sense of the sculptural weight of the figure.

Her arms are powerful, the heft of her body imposing, and both her left elbow and knee come into the viewer's space. At the same time, Michelangelo imbued the Delphic Sibyl with grace and harmony of proportion, and her watchful expression, as well as the position of the left arm and right hand, is reminiscent of the artist's *David*.



(a) (b)

Figure 5.2.15.8. (a) The Delphic Sibyl; (b) The Libyan Sibyl

The Libyan Sibyl (figure 8b) is also exemplary. Although she is in a contorted position that would be nearly impossible for an actual person to hold, Michelangelo nonetheless executes her with a *sprezzatura* (a deceptive ease) that will become typical of the Mannerists who closely modeled their work on his.

Figure 5.2.15.9. Raphael, *School of Athens*, 1509–11, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican

It is no wonder that Raphael, struck by the genius of the Sistine Chapel, rushed back to his *School of Athens* in the Vatican Stanze and inserted Michelangelo's weighty, monumental likeness sitting at the bottom of the steps of the school (see figure 9).

Legacy

Michelangelo completed the Sistine Chapel in 1512. Its importance in the history of art cannot be overstated. It turned into a veritable academy for young painters, a position that was cemented when Michelangelo returned to the chapel twenty years later to execute the *Last Judgment* fresco on the altar wall.

The chapel recently underwent a controversial cleaning, which has once again brought to light Michelangelo's jewel-like palette, his mastery of chiaroscuro, and additional iconological details which continue to captivate modern viewers even five hundred years after the frescoes' original completion. Not bad for an artist who insisted he was not a painter.

Contributors

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5.2.16: La Mozquita

by DR. SHADIEH MIRMOBINY

Figure 5.2.16.1: Great Mosque of Cordoba from the Air, Córdoba, Spain, begun 786 and enlarged during the 9th and 10th centuries (photo: **Ulamm**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Known locally as Mezquita-Catedral, the Great Mosque of Córdoba is one of the oldest structures still standing from the time Muslims ruled Al-Andalus (Muslim Iberia including most of Spain, Portugal, and a small section of Southern France) in the late 8th century. Córdoba is a two hour train ride south of Madrid, and draws visitors from all over the world.

Temple/church/mosque/church

The buildings on this site are as complex as the extraordinarily rich history they illustrate. Historians believe that there had first been a temple to the Roman god, Janus, on this site. The temple was converted into a church by invading Visigoths who seized Córdoba in 572. Next, the church was converted into a mosque and then completely rebuilt by the descendants of the exiled Umayyads—the first Islamic dynasty who had originally ruled from their capital Damascus (in present-day Syria) from 661 until 750.

A new capital

Following the overthrow of his family (the Umayyads) in Damascus by the incoming Abbasids, Prince Abd al-Rahman I escaped to southern Spain. Once there, he established control over almost all of the Iberian Peninsula and attempted to recreate the grandeur of Damascus in his new capital, Córdoba. He sponsored elaborate building programs, promoted agriculture, and even imported fruit trees and other plants from his former home. Orange trees still stand in the courtyard of the Mosque of Córdoba, a beautiful, if bittersweet reminder of the Umayyad exile.

Figure 5.2.16.2: Hypostyle hall, Great Mosque at Córdoba, Spain, begun 786 and enlarged during the 9th and 10th centuries

The hypostyle hall

The building itself was expanded over two hundred years. It is comprised of a large hypostyle prayer hall (hypostyle means, filled with columns), a courtyard with a fountain in the middle, an orange grove, a covered walkway circling the courtyard, and a minaret (a tower used

to call the faithful to prayer) that is now encased in a squared, tapered bell tower. The expansive prayer hall seems magnified by its repeated geometry. It is built with recycled ancient Roman columns from which sprout a striking combination of two-tiered, symmetrical arches, formed of stone and red brick.

Figure 5.2.16.3: Mihrab, Great Mosque at Córdoba, Spain (photo: jamesdale10, CC BY 2.0)

The mihrab

The focal point in the prayer hall is the famous horseshoe arched mihrab or prayer niche. A mihrab is used in a mosque to identify the wall that faces Mecca—the birth place of Islam in what is now Saudi Arabia. This is practical as Muslims face toward Mecca during their daily prayers. The mihrab in the Great Mosque of Córdoba is framed by an exquisitely decorated arch behind which is an unusually large space, the size of a small room. Gold tesserae (small pieces of glass with gold and color backing) create a dazzling combination of dark blues, reddish browns, yellows and golds that form intricate calligraphic bands and vegetal motifs that adorn the arch.

The horseshoe arch

The horseshoe-style arch was common in the architecture of the Visigoths, the people that ruled this area after the Roman empire collapsed and before the Umayyads arrived. The horseshoe arch eventually spread across North Africa from Morocco to Egypt and is an easily identified characteristic of Western Islamic architecture (though there are some early examples in the East as well).

The dome

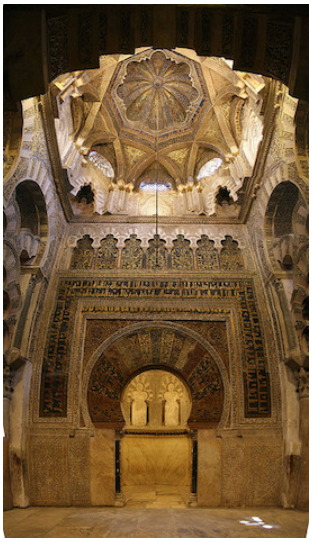
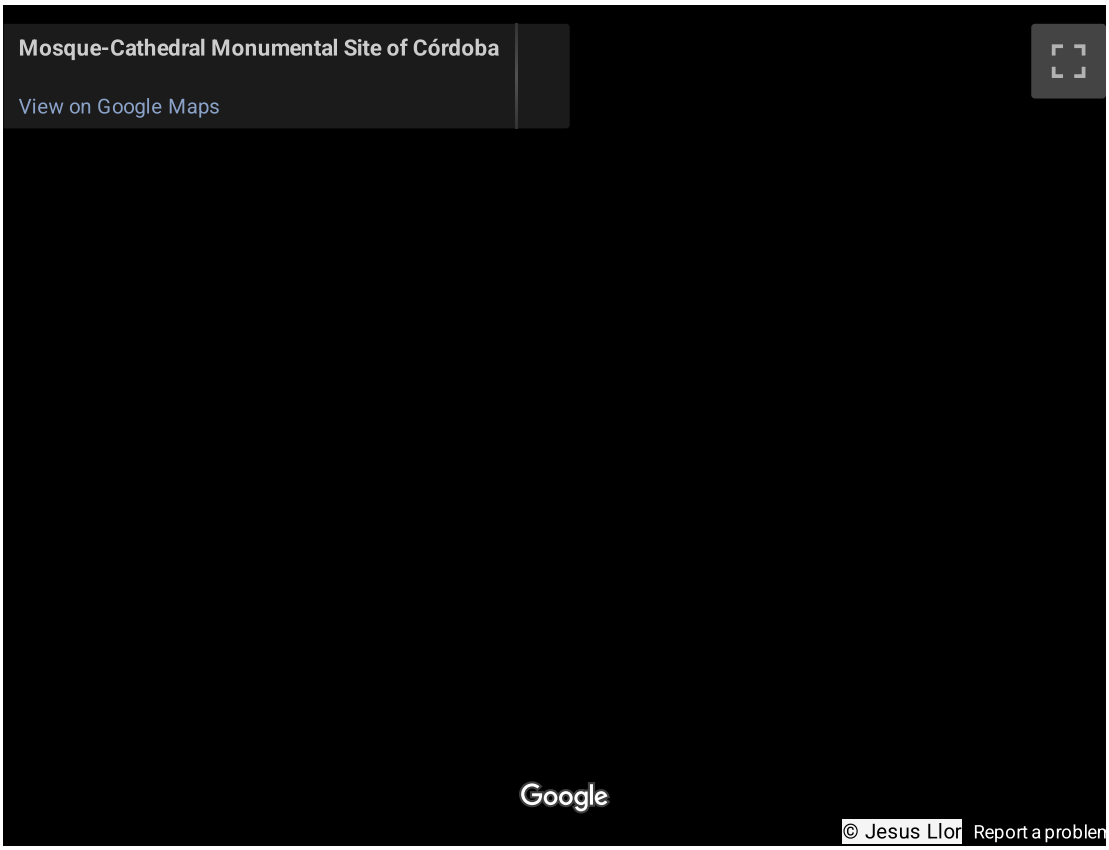


Figure 5.2.16.4: Mihrab dome, Great Mosque at Cordoba, Spain (photo: **bongo vongo**, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Above the mihrab, is an equally dazzling dome. It is built of crisscrossing ribs that create pointed arches all lavishly covered with gold mosaic in a radial pattern. This astonishing building technique anticipates later Gothic rib vaulting, though on a more modest scale.

The Great Mosque of Córdoba is a prime example of the Muslim world's ability to brilliantly develop architectural styles based on pre-existing regional traditions. Here is an extraordinary combination of the familiar and the innovative, a formal stylistic vocabulary that can be recognized as "Islamic" even today.



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SECTION OVERVIEW

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- 5.3.1.3: Peasant Mother
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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.3.1: Color and Value

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

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5.3.1.1: Mother and Child

Mother and Child

More information at The Cleveland Museum of Art

Figure 5.3.1.1.1: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Mother and Child*, 1886, pastel, 79.1 x 63.5 cm (Cleveland Museum of Art)

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5.3.1.2: Young Woman Watering a Shrub

Young Woman Watering a Shrub

Learn more at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

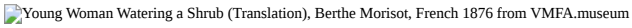

Figure **5.3.1.2.1**: Young Woman Watering a Shrub (Translation), Berthe Morisot, French 1876 from VMFA.museum

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5.3.1.3: Peasant Mother

Peasant Mother

> Learn more information at Artchive

Figure **5.3.1.3.1**: David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Peasant Mother*, 1962. Oil on burlap, 249 x 180 cm. Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City. (© David Alfaro Siqueiros) (Photos via Smarthistory)

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5.3.1.4: The Banjo Lesson

by FARISA KHALID

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Figure 5.3.1.4.1: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893, oil on canvas, 49 × 35.5 inches / 124.5 × 90.2 cm (Hampton University Museum, Hampton, VA)

Henry Ossawa Tanner was the United States' first African-American celebrity artist. His training at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (under the guidance of **Thomas Eakins**) and at the Académie Julian in Paris (with Jean-Léon Gérôme) put him in the unique position of having experienced two vastly different approaches to painting— American Realism and French academic painting. He was also one of the few artists to have had such training at a time when there were many barriers to education for African-Americans. Though Tanner lived most of his life in France and became well known for his lush biblical paintings, *The Banjo Lesson* is his most famous work and the painting that has become emblematic with his oeuvre.

Henry Tanner painted *The Banjo Lesson* in 1893 after a series of sketches he made while visiting the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina four years before. Tanner had been studying and working in Paris until he developed a bout of typhoid fever and was advised to return to the United States to recover his health and dwindling finances. While taking up a teaching post at Clark University in Atlanta, Tanner's doctor told him to take in some mountain air. His trip to North Carolina opened his eyes to the poverty of African-Americans living in Appalachia.

The legacy of slavery

The United States had abolished slavery only twenty-four years before, in 1865, and the physical and psychological wounds of that brutal institution would continue to be a palpable presence in African-American communities—especially so in the South. Though Tanner was born in Pittsburgh within the tight-knit world of highly-educated members of America's burgeoning African-American intelligentsia, Tanner's mother Sarah had been born a slave and had escaped north to Pennsylvania through the Underground Railroad. His middle name, Ossawa, was chosen by his father, Benjamin Tucker Tanner, a Methodist minister and abolitionist, after Osawatomie, Kansas—the site of the abolitionist John Brown's bloody confrontation with pro-slavery partisans on August 30, 1856.

Figure 5.3.1.4.2: Left: Henry Ossawa Tanner, photographic study for *Harper's Young People* illustration, 1893; right: illustration by Henry Ossawa Tanner for *Harper's Young People* 16, no 736 (December 1893), p. 81.

Throughout his education and advancement in the art world in both the United States and Europe, the legacy of slavery haunted Tanner as he tried to establish a niche for himself as painter to be regarded on his own terms. *The Banjo Lesson* grew out of a set of photographs and illustrations (above) that Tanner made for the periodical *Harper's Young People* in 1893. The illustration is of an elderly man teaching a young boy how to play the banjo, accompanied a short story by Ruth McEnery Stuart called "Uncle Tim's Compromise on Christmas," in which the titular character imparts his most prized possession, a banjo, to his grandson on Christmas morning.

Figure 5.3.1.4.3: Left: William Sidney Mount, *The Banjo Player*, 1856, oil on canvas, 36 x 29 inches (The Museums at Stoney Brook); right: Thomas Eakins, *Study for "Negro Boy Dancing," The Banjo Player*, probably 1877, oil on canvas on cardboard, 49.5 x 27.9 cm (The National Gallery of Art)

American realism + the European tradition

Tanner had spent years been refining a style of his own that combined elements of American Realism and the European Old Master tradition. *The Banjo Lesson* has its roots in the genre paintings of African-Americans by William Sidney Mount and Thomas Eakins (above) and in Renaissance and Flemish paintings, notably Domenico Ghirlandaio's *An Old Man and His Grandson* and Johannes Vermeer's *Woman with a Lute* (below).

Figure **5.3.1.4.4**: Right: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *An Old Man and His Grandson*, c. 1490, tempera on wood, 62 x 46 cm / 24.4 x 18.1 inches (Louvre Museum); Johannes Vermeer, *Woman with a Lute*, c. 1662-63, oil on canvas, 51.4 x 45.7 cm / 20 1/4 x 18 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

While studying in Paris, Tanner was also inspired by the works of the French Realists, namely **Gustave Courbet** and **Jean-François Millet**, in their depictions of the rural poor. Millet's *The Angelus*, with its quiet, intensely spiritual portrayal of a farmer and his wife praying amid the fields at dusk, is a palpable influence on Tanner's *The Banjo Lesson*.

Figure **5.3.1.4.5**: Jean-François Millet, *The Angelus*, 1857-59, oil on canvas, 55.5 × 66 cm / 21.9 × 26 inches (Musée d'Orsay)

A radically different image

This theme of spiritual solace that Tanner encountered in the paintings of French Realists like Millet resonated with his own upbringing as the son of a Methodist minister. He hoped to find a way of highlighting the dignity and grace of poor African-Americans in the manner that he had seen in France—an approach that would be radically different from stereotypical images of the overly servile "Uncle Tom" figure (named after the main character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's iconic 1852 novel) that was familiar to Americans in countless advertisements (like **this one**, for Ayer's Cathartic Pills [The Country Doctor], c. 1883) and popular magazines.

In *The Banjo Lesson*, Tanner's desire to show us his vision of the resilience, spiritual grace, and creative and intellectual promise of post-Civil War African-Americans is fully realized. The scene is staged within the small confines of a log cabin with the cool glow of a hearth fire casting the scene's only light source from right corner, enveloping the man and the boy in a rectangular pool of light across the floor. The boy holds the banjo in both hands, his downward gaze a reflection of his focused concentration on his grandfather's instructions. The older man holds the banjo up gently with his left hand so that the boy is not encumbered by its weight, yet the staging shows us that the man wants the boy to come into the realization of the music and its rewards through his own intuition and hard work.

Figure **5.3.1.4.6**: Detail, Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893, oil on canvas, 49 × 35.5 inches / 124.5 × 90.2 cm (Hampton University Museum, Hampton, VA)

The contrast between the man's age and the boy's adds to the narrative tension within in the painting as in the Ghirlandaio, a counterpoint between age and experience, and youth and the promise of achievement. The boy is bathed in the glow of the fire's warmth with a glimmer of white light shining across his forehead, the center of knowledge and understanding. The older man is submerged in the cool shadows of the room. This carefully orchestrated play of warm and cool, of shadow and light, conveys that the success of future generations is built upon the legacy of previous ones. Bathed in muted cool tones of grays and blues, the grandfather is the past, the old America of slavery and The Civil War, of oppression, racism, and poverty, while the boy, caught in the warm glow of the fire's light, is the new America, of renewed opportunities, advancement, education, and new beginnings.

Banjos, minstrel shows, and stereotypes of African-Americans

Certainly Tanner would have seen a great deal of his own life played out in this tender scene. As the educated son of a former slave and a minister and abolitionist, Tanner was always striving to live up to his potential as an artist in the post-Civil War, post-Reconstruction era America. It is also important that the instrument that leads the boy towards enlightenment is the banjo, an instrument highly significant to African-American slave culture and the music of the American South. The banjo evolved from the gourd instruments of Africa and the West Indies and became integral to slave music throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

By Tanner's time, it was a mainstay of minstrel shows, popular variety entertainment that featured white actors in blackface performing songs and skits. In minstrel shows, it was the custom to portray African-Americans as boisterous, jaunty, buffoonish, and dim-witted. This portrayal fed into the preconceived notions of white racial superiority—that African-Americans, even if they were no longer slaves, would still be infantile and incapable of self-determined action or remarkable achievements. The entire visual and popular culture of Uncle Tom imagery and minstrel shows were part of the pernicious psychological chains of slavery that persisted in America throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The shows also depicted African-Americans as having an innate musicality, which acknowledged their talent but undermined their intelligence.

For Tanner, painting this image of generational torch-passing, was a way of debunking the entrenched derogatory stereotypes of African-Americans propagated by minstrel shows. In Tanner's painting we see the grandfather and the boy as intelligent, noble, graceful people engaged in an intimate act of sharing creative knowledge. Their lesson becomes emblematic of the larger African-American journey of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, from Emancipation, Reconstruction, the terrors and injustices of the Jim Crow laws, the exodus of the **Great Migration**, and the foment and dynamism of the Harlem Renaissance.

Figure **5.3.1.4.7**: Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Thankful Poor*, 1894, oil on canvas, 90.3 x 112.5 cm / 35 1/2 x 44 1/4 inches (collection of William and Camille Cosby)

An American artist

After painting *The Banjo Lesson* and *The Thankful Poor* (above), Tanner moved back to Paris where he would remain for most of his life. Tanner felt that France was less encumbered with the baggage of racial prejudice towards people of color than the United States. "In America, I'm Henry Tanner, Negro artist, but in France, I'm '*Monsieur Tanner, l'artiste américaine.*'"[1]

Figure **5.3.1.4.8**: L. Matthes, *Henry Ossawa Tanner with a palette*, c. 1935, photographic print (Archives of American Art)

His desire to be recognized by the quality of his talent would inspire him to paint prolifically throughout his life, traveling through the Middle East and North Africa in search of authentic imagery for biblical paintings that would become the hallmark of his later career. When World War I was declared in Europe, Tanner enlisted in the Red Cross, serving as a medical volunteer as well as making numerous sketches and various paintings of the soldiers in France and Belgium. In 1923, he was awarded the Legion of Honour by the French government for his service during the war.

But it is *The Banjo Lesson* that has become the iconic painting of his entire career. Its economy of scale, its emotional delicacy, its nuanced orchestration of light and shadow and symbolism situates it in a resonant space in American art history. Both *The Banjo Lesson* and *The Thankful Poor* were remarkable achievements for Tanner—works that according to the art historian Judith Wilson, "invest their ordinary, underprivileged, Black subjects with a degree of dignity and self-possession that seems extraordinary for the times in which they were painted."[2] It is a testament to Tanner's vision as an artist, and his personal convictions as an African-American, amid the possibilities offered by twentieth century, that these two paintings continue to speak so profoundly to us now.

[1] Marcia M. Matthews, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: American Artist* (University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 90.

[2] Judith Wilson, "Lifting "The Veil": Henry O. Tanner's The Banjo Lesson and The Thankful Poor," Contributions in Black Studies: vol. 9, article 4 (1992)

Additional resources:

Henry O. Tanner, exhibition subsite from the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Anna O. Marley, ed. *Henry Ossawa Tanner: Modern Spirit* (University of California Press: 2012).

Marcia M. Matthews, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: American Artist* (University of Chicago Press: 1995).

Kristin Schwain, *Signs of Grace: Religion and American Art in the Gilded Age* (Cornell University Press: 2007).

Will South, "A Missing Question Mark: The Unknown Henry Ossawa Tanner," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, vol. 8. issue 2 (Autumn 2009).

Judith Wilson, "Lifting 'The Veil': Henry O. Tanner's *The Banjo Lesson* and *The Thankful Poor*," *Contributions in Black Studies: A Journal of African and Afro-American Studies*, volume 9, article 4.

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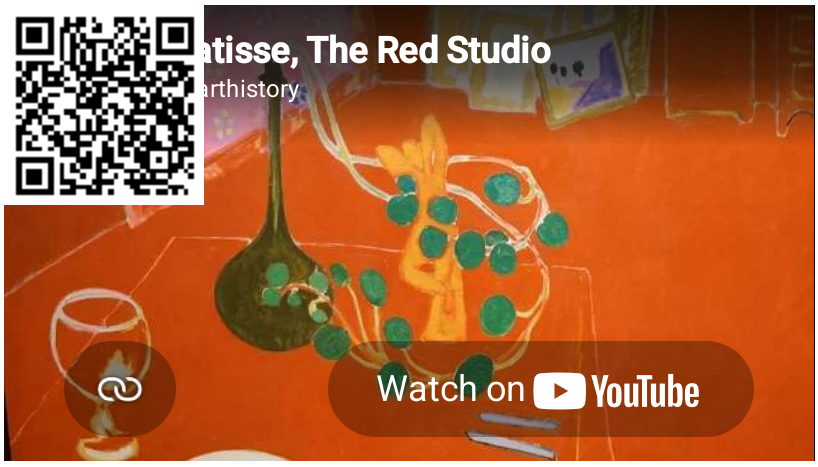
5.3.1.5: Red Room

Red Room

Learn more information at HenriMatisse.org

Figure **5.3.1.5.1**: Henri Matisse, *Red Room (Harmony in Red)*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 180.5 x 221 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia. (Photo via Smarthistory)

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **5.3.1.5.1**: Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 219.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

Figure 5.3.1.5.1: Henri Matisse, The Red Studio, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 219.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Dismantling spatial illusion

Since Manet (and Degas, Monet, and Cezanne), artists have sought to undermine the illusion of space that had ruled painting since about 1425. Spatial illusion was increasingly seen as a defect that reduced the integrity of painting. But as the earlier painters of the avant-garde have shown, ridding a painting of illusion is almost impossible. The audience is trained to expect three dimensional space and sees it given the opportunity. This is Matisse's challenge. He meets this challenge–the destruction of spatial illusion, in three stages.

Figure 5.3.1.5.2: Henri Matisse, *The Pink Studio*, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 221 cm (Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, Moscow)

The color red

Figure **5.3.1.5.3**: Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 219.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Red is often thought of as the most aggressive color. It has the most punch, and that's what Matisse needed here. This canvas was a part of a series, there is, for instance, a *Pink Studio* too. But that canvas was concerned with different issues. Here, the red is an attempt to find a color that is forceful enough to resist the illusion of deep space by pushing to the surface. The red is, of course painted onto the flat canvas but actually fails to remain there visually. Instead, the red becomes the walls and furnishing of the room seen in space. Illusion triumphs–Matisse is thwarted.

Illusionism

This triumph of illusion is due in part to the linear perspective that defines the table, chairs, and the walls and floor of the studio. But look! Matisse has constructed some of the worst linear perspective ever seen. Receding lines should converge, but look at the chair on the lower right. The lines widen as they go back. And look to rear left corner of the room. The corner is defined by the edge of the pink canvas but above that painting, the line that must define the corner is missing! Matisse is literally dismantling the perspective of the room but it makes no difference, we still see the room as an inhabitable space. Illusion still triumphs.

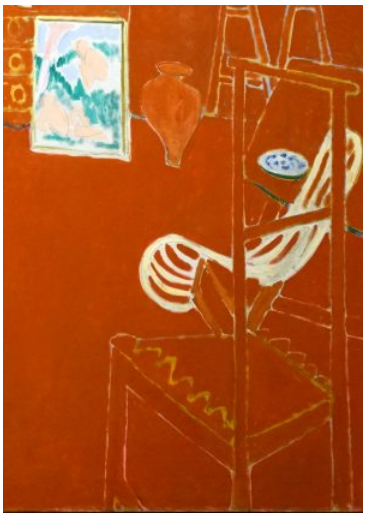


Figure **5.3.1.5.4**: Chair (detail), Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 219.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Figure-Ground Relationship

Although it is very difficult to see in reproduction, if seen in person at MoMA, it is clear that the whitish lines that define form in the red field are not painted on top of the red. Instead, they are reserve lines. In other words, the white lines are actually the canvas below. Matisse painted the red planes up to the line on either side, leaving a narrow gap of white canvas in between. This is really IMPORTANT. Stay with me on this. The white line is actually emerging from below the red. It is beneath. The red is of course painted on top of the white canvas.

Okay, now pay attention. Matisse has realized that illusion is almost certain to triumph no matter how aggressively he tries to undermine it. We, as the audience, will see space if given the slightest opportunity. So if we see illusion at such a basic level, what hope does Matisse have of destroying it? In fact, his reserve line are his really brilliant solution. The chairs, the dresser, the clock, each object, or figure in *The Red Studio* is constructed out of the canvas below. At the same time, the ground which supports those figures, is constructed out of a plane of red that is physically above the canvas. What Matisse has done then is reverse the figure ground relationship. He has made the figure out of the ground (the canvas) and made the ground out of the figure (the red paint on top). When seen in person, the recognition of this does finally destroy illusion, Matisse triumphs!

5.3.1.5: Red Room is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

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5.3.1.6: Color Structure

by **DR. GILLIAN SNEED**

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Figure 5.3.1.6.1: Joaquín Torres-García, *Color Structure*, 1930, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

During his decades spent living in Europe, Uruguayan artist and theorist Joaquín Torres-García experimented with several different artistic modes, including making representational paintings (depicting recognizable images) in a Neoclassical style or with bright colors and bold brushstrokes. While living in Paris, he would also come into contact with European geometric abstraction (abstract art based on geometric forms) and created a group with other artists he encountered there. He transitioned from making small toys and representational paintings to making geometric abstractions. He eventually returned to Uruguay and helped influence artists in Argentina, Brazil, and later, Venezuela to make art in this new modern style.

Figure 5.3.1.6.2: South American countries where geometric abstraction was popular (underlying map © Google)

Geometric Abstraction rose to prominence in South America between the 1930s and the 1970s. Prior to this period, traditional representational art styles rooted in the traditions of academic painting were officially sanctioned and considered respectable in the region. This radical departure toward geometric abstraction was embraced by artists and state powers across Latin America as a way of culturally distancing themselves from the colonial past (c. 16th to early 19th century), while signifying their alignment with a new modern, economically independent future.

Joaquín Torres-García in Paris

Figure 5.3.1.6.3: Joaquín Torres-García, *Color Structure*, 1930, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Like many Latin American artists of his generation, who lived, worked, and studied in Paris between World War I and II, Torres-García came to Paris because it was seen as the artistic capital of the West. While living there in the 1920s and early 1930s, he met Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian, the Dutch founders of the art movement De Stijl (also known as Neoplasticism). Together, they formed the artistic group "Circle and Square," which promoted geometric abstraction in opposition to Surrealism, an art movement based on dream-like imagery and the subconscious that was well known in France at the time. Torres-García was inspired by Mondrian, but was critical of De Stijl's strict austerity. He wanted to propose a more "human" approach to geometric abstraction that would engage his interests in Latin American Pre-Columbian and European ancient and Classical art.

Figure 5.3.1.6.4: Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Torres-García's *Color Structure*, made in Paris in 1930, demonstrates his interest in many of the same principles as the Neoplasticists, including the grid, a reduced palette of primary colors, and the use of the Golden Ratio. These qualities are also evident in Mondrian's ***Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*** (made the same year as Torres-Garcia's *Color Structure*), a non-objective painting divided asymmetrically by thick black lines into squares of various sizes filled with flat planes of white and primary colors, the largest one, a bright red. Torres-García was inspired by De Stijl's emphasis on the grid and **Constructivism**'s geometry, as well as what he believed to be the "universalism" of nonobjective art—in other words, he believed that geometric abstraction, which does not depict recognizable figurative imagery, could be visually understood across all cultures. In Torres-Garcia's *Color Structure*, we also see a grid composed of different sized of rectangles in blue, yellow, white, and red, arranged vertically and horizontally.

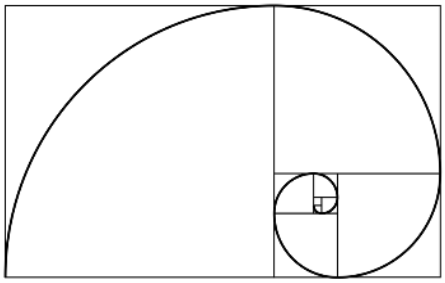


Figure 5.3.1.6.5: A Fibonacci spiral that approximates the Golden ratio (diagram: **Dicklyon**)

Torres-García also adopted van Doesburg's and Mondrian's use of the Golden Ratio, an important concept to him, which he felt would help his art become integrated with natural and cosmic forces. But, unlike Mondrian, Torres-García emphasizes *Color Structure*'s imperfections: the grid is drawn freehand with wavy lines and the colors are muddy and include tonal variation and rough brushwork.

Constructive Universalism in Uruguay

Figure 5.3.1.6.6: Sun Gate, 500 and 900 C.E., Tiwanaku, Bolivia (photo: Brent Barrett, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

When Torres-García returned home to Uruguay in 1934 (for financial reasons and the encouragement of friends), after more than forty years living abroad, he sought to bring geometric abstraction to Latin America as a way to reconcile this style with the region's own cultural histories and artistic traditions. Dissatisfied with what he saw as a lack of emotion or humanity in

Constructivism and De Stijl, he developed his own style called *Universalismo Constructivo* (Constructive Universalism), which sought to combine the "reason" of Constructivism's and De Stijl's geometry with the sources of abstract art found in the arts and crafts of ancient civilizations from around the world. He incorporated pictographs (simplified images or symbols) related to the cultures of various ancient civilizations (including Pre-Columbian cultures), into his images. He felt these pictographs communicated common ideas to people everywhere, making them "universal."

As a cultural nomad who lived abroad in the U.S. and Europe for 43 years before returning to Uruguay, Torres-García was interested in the concept of "universalism" because he wanted to find visual elements that were shared by all cultures, underpinning his belief in the metaphysical wholeness of the universe. He also wanted to show how the geometric principles of pre-Columbian, Indigenous artistic styles actually anticipated later European geometric abstraction. His ideas paralleled psychologist Carl Jung, who believed that archetypal images could connect individuals to collective cultures and universal experiences. Torres-García was not relating to Jung directly, and for him, the metaphysical was much more important than the psychological. His search for the universal was not based on the psyche of the individual, but rather the universal collective.

Figure 5.3.1.6.7: Joaquín Torres-García, *Arte universal (Universal Art)*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 106 cm x 75 cm (Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales de Uruguay)

We find an expression of these impulses in his painting *Universal Art*, a composition in earthy browns depicting many interconnected rectangular compartments filled with pictographs, including shapes, symbols, and recognizable images such as the sun, the moon, scales, fish, a heart, a house, boats, and people, that appear as if they are carved into wood or stone. Like his earlier works that borrow from Mondrian, Torres-García creates an asymmetrical grid based on the Golden Ratio with a reduced color palette, but his earth tones convey more warmth, and his rough, painterly strokes and shading appear more "crafty" and reveal a human touch.

Later, Torres-García founded an arts and crafts workshop called the Taller Torres-García to disseminate his artistic theories to a younger generation of Uruguayan artists, whose style came to be known as the School of the South. Following Torres-García's innovations in the 1930s and 1940s, artists across Latin America—especially in Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela—began working in geometric abstraction, which would dominate the painting and sculpture in those countries until the 1960s and 1970s.

Figure 5.3.1.6.8: The cover of *Arturo* by artist Tomás Maldonado, an organic, abstract **automatist** woodcut, contradicts the kinds of constructive geometric abstraction being advocated inside the magazine's pages, and demonstrates that this was still early on in the process of theorizing and practicing the new style. Tomás Maldonado, *Arturo* magazine cover, 1944

AACI and Madí in Argentina

In 1944, a group of Argentine and Uruguayan artists based in Buenos Aires published the first and only issue of a magazine about abstract art titled *Arturo*, with texts and reproductions of artworks by Torres-García, Mondrian, and the Russian abstract artist **Wassily Kandinsky**. The magazine was intended to promote Concrete Art (a term first used by Theo van Doesburg to describe nonobjective geometric abstraction) in Argentina.

Two Argentine Concrete Art groups emerged from the magazine: the Association of Concrete-Invention (AACI) and the Madí Group. These developments took place during the first term of the presidency of the Argentine populist Juan Domingo Perón, whose administration officially sanctioned naturalistic, figurative art styles, which these Concrete art movements fought against.

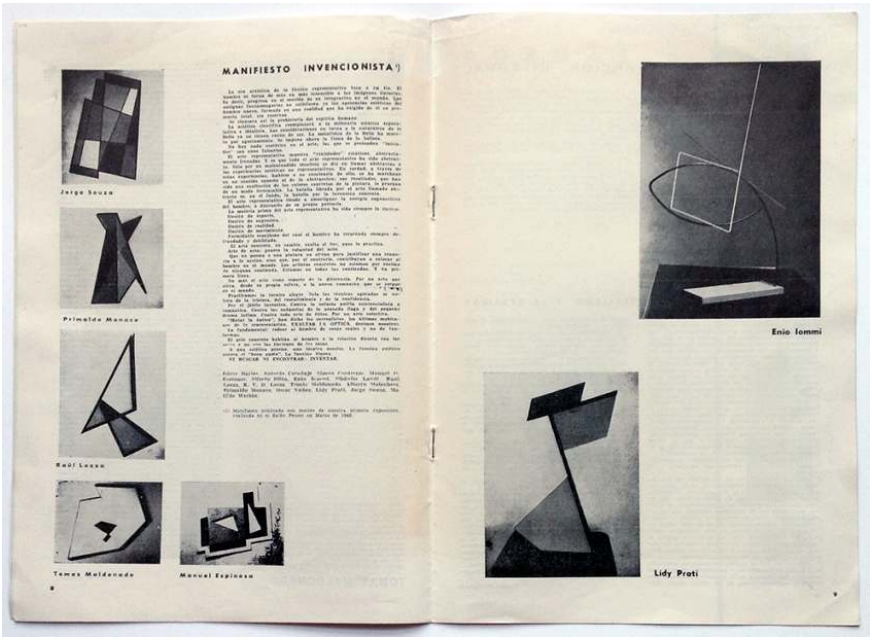


Figure 5.3.1.6.9: Inventionist manifesto alongside photographs of artworks, included inside the catalogue for the group's first exhibition

AACI

The AACI was founded in 1945 by Argentine artist Tomás Maldonado and poet Edgar Bayley. The catalogue for the group's first exhibition included their manifesto—a written statement declaring the group's intentions, motives, and views—titled the "**Inventionist Manifesto**." It called for artists to "invent" their own images, rather than trying to copy what they see, and justified Concrete art through Marxist political theories. [1]

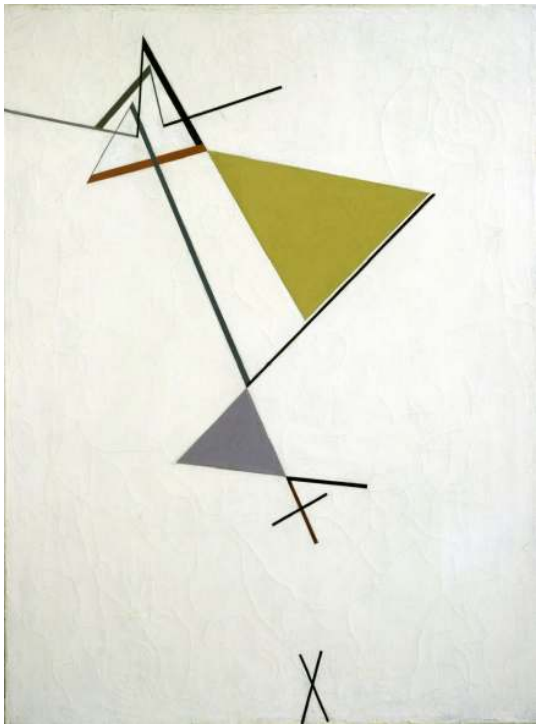


Figure 5.3.1.6.10: Tomás Maldonado, Development of a Triangle, 1949. Oil on canvas, 31 3/4 x 23 3/4 in (**Museum of Modern Art)**

Embracing Mondrian's and van Doesburg's strict Concrete aesthetics while rejecting Torres-García's emphasis on symbolism and a hand-made aesthetic, the AACI emphasized a rigorous, mathematical, even mechanical-looking approach to geometric abstraction with flat, planar colors. These principles are on display in Maldonado's *Development of a Triangle* a composition on a white ground of intersecting straight and angular lines and a series of triangles, one yellow and another violet. [2]

Madí Group

In 1946 the Madí Group was formed by artists Rhod Rothfuss, Carmelo Arden Quin, and Gyula Kosice. [1] Like the AAIC, Madí endorsed making nonobjective artworks with flat planes of bright color. But, unlike the AAIC, Madí art was more playful and experimented with three-dimensions and unusual materials such as Plexiglas and neon.

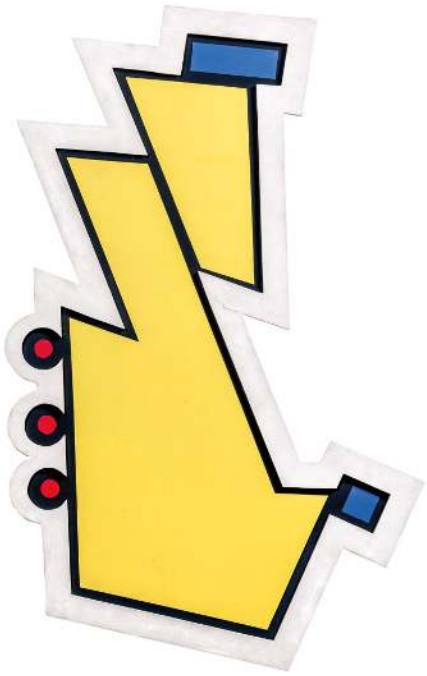


Figure 5.3.1.6.11: Rhod Rothfuss, *Tres círculos rojos (Three Red Circles)*, 1948, filler and enamel on wood, 100 x 70 cm (Museu de Arte Latino-Americana de Buenos Aires)

Madí artists often rejected the traditional rectangular picture frame in favor of an irregularly-shaped canvas, known as a *marco recortado* (cutout frame). The cutout frame was first conceived by Rothfuss in an essay he wrote for *Arturo*, in which he argued that irregularly-shaped canvases would allow artworks to function like other objects in the world, rather than as windows framing views of another world. One example of the cutout frame is Rothfuss's *Three Red Circles*, a bright yellow geometrically-shaped composition with shapes delineated with thick black lines, a blue rectangle at the top and on the side, and three small red circles on the left.

Figure 5.3.1.6.12: Max Bill, *Tripartite Unity*, 1948–1949, stainless steel, 113,5 cm x 83 cm x 100 cm (Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Universidade de São Paulo)

Concrete and Neo-Concrete Art in Brazil

Max Bill

In 1951, Swiss Concrete artist and former Bauhaus student Max Bill won the grand prize for sculpture at the First São Paulo Biennial (a large international exhibition occurring every two years) in Brazil, for his metallic sculpture of flowing, intertwining ribbon-like forms, called *Tripartite Unity*. This sculpture would influence a young generation of Concrete artists in the country, including the Grupo Ruptura in São Paulo and the Grupo Frente in Rio de Janeiro. Concrete art captured the values of science and mathematical precision heralded in Brazil in the 1950s, a period of rapid industrial growth, modernization, and the development of a new capital in Brasília defined by architect Oscar Niemeyer's futuristic International Style architecture.

The Grupo Ruptura

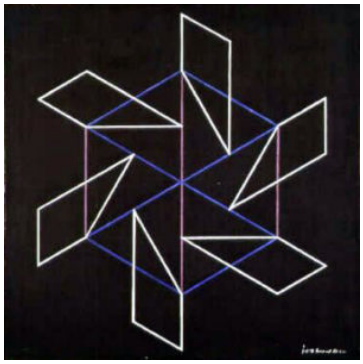


Figure 5.3.1.6.13: Judith Lauand, *Espaço Virtual (Virtual Space)*, 1960. Tempera on canvas, 45 cm x 45 cm x 2.7 cm (Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Universidade de São Paulo)

The Grupo Ruptura was formed in 1952 with an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo. The group's name meant "rupture," and it sought to break with traditional art styles, namely naturalistic painting, which was seen as elitist (though this break was not specifically tied to political radicalism). Their works were characterized by flat colors and a reduced palette, geometry, and industrialized media like enamels and mechanical techniques like spray painting that would not reveal the hand of the artist. Their

works also incorporated Gestalt psychological theory (a perceptual theory about how the brain forms a whole image from many component parts) by training the viewer's eye on outlines as contours of a solid shape, as in Judith Lauand's *Virtual Space*, a painting of a pinwheel-like shape of white and purple lines in a field of black. Lauand was also the only woman in the Grupo Ruptura.

The Grupo Frente and Neo-Concrete art

The Grupo Frente was founded by artist and teacher Ivan Serpa in Rio de Janeiro in 1954. Many of the artists involved were his former students at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. They rejected the Grupo Ruptura's strict adherence to purity, science, and math and promoted instead more creative intuition in geometric abstraction. This shift in the Grupo Frente's brand of Concrete art eventually led to a new style altogether, known as Neo-Concrete art, pioneered by artists **Lygia Clark**, Lygia Pape, and later, **Hélio Oiticica**.

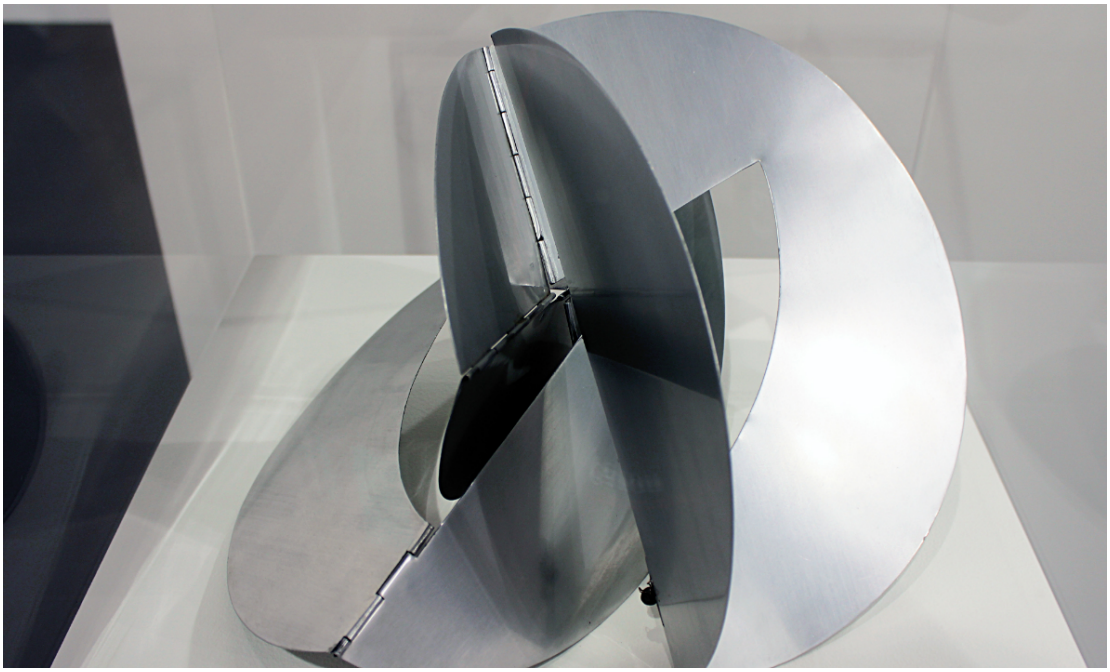


Figure 5.3.1.6.14: Lygia Clark, *Bicho*, 1962, aluminum (photo: trevor.patt, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The principles of Neo-Concrete art were theorized by poet Ferreira Gullar in his "**Neo-Concrete Manifesto**" (1959), which called for more sensuality, freedom, and feeling in Concrete art. Like Torres-García who sought to infuse geometric abstraction with more emotion, the manifesto sought to distance the new movement from the dogmatic rationalism of European Concrete art styles like Neo-plasticism and Constructivism.

Gullar also developed the theory of what he termed the "non-object," by which he meant an art object that would function as a mediator between the spectator and the physical experience of the object. This is exemplified by Lygia Clark's *Bicho* (Critter), a metal sculpture made of moveable flaps intended to be manipulated and rearranged by the spectator-participant (or someone who observes and participates). As Clark's *Bicho* suggests, Neo-Concrete art adapted Concrete art's geometric shapes and transformed them into organic three-dimensional objects to be handled by spectators, or environments to be physically entered, which helped to break down boundaries between art and life in Brazilian art of the 1960s.

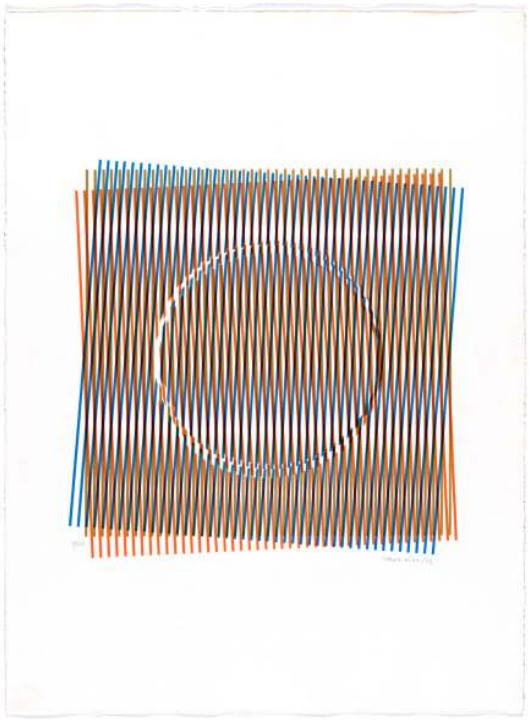


Figure 5.3.1.6.15: Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Chromo-Interference (Cromo Interferencia)*, from *AGPA 73: Pan American Graphic Arts* (*AGPA 73: Artes gráficas panamericanas*), 1973, screenprint, 43 x 42.5 cm (Museum of Modern Art)

Optical and Kinetic Art in Venezuela

Two other forms of geometric abstraction, known as Optical (or Op, a style of abstract art based on patterns and optical illusions) and Kinetic art (objects that have moving parts), became popular in Venezuela in the 1950s and 1960s. These styles were dominated by three artists in the country: Carlos Cruz-Diez, Alejandro Otero, and Jesús Soto. Their works included small and large-scale abstract sculptures and public artworks made of bright colors and industrial materials that moved, or appeared to move.

Video 5.3.1.6.1: Jesús Rafael Soto, Penetrable BBL Bleu, conceived 1999, given to LACMA in 2020 (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

A famous example are Soto's "penetrables," tubes of colored plastic suspended from the ceiling in box-like shapes, into which participants could enter and play. While Brazilian Neo-Concretists sought to move away from the purely optical toward the experiential and sensual, the Venezuelans still embraced the visual, but also created participatory and sensually experiential environments and objects to be interacted with, like Soto's penetrables.

The Op and Kinetic works by these artists received corporate and government support from the Venezuelan regime of Colonel Marcos Pérez Jiménez's dictatorship of the 1950s, as well as later democratically elected administrations in the 1960s and 1970s, and resulted in the commissions of several large-scale public artworks. The state and corporate leaders believed such works helped position Venezuela on the world stage as a modern, forward thinking, and technologically advanced country. This was important to them as they were growing their oil industry for international export. These works were used by corporations and the state as propaganda promoting Venezuela as an international modern center of industry, revealing how state-patronage and nationalist interests intervened in the so-called "avant-garde" art in the country during the period.

Figure 5.3.1.6.16: Gego (Gertrude Goldschmidt), *Reticulárea (ambientación)*, 1969, installation view Museo de Bellas Artes Caracas, 1969 (photo: Paolo Gasparina © Fundación Gego)

Another important artist in the history of Venezuelan abstraction was Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt), a German emigrant, who developed her own approach to geometric abstraction, creating delicate sculptures and environments (sculptures that occupy entire gallery spaces) made of wire. Gego's large *Reticulárea* (Reticular), created at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas in 1969, comprises a sprawling wire grid that filled the gallery's floor, walls, and ceiling, into which spectators could enter and walk around.

Contributions and Legacy

Latin American geometric abstraction united international principles of modernist abstraction with local cultural traditions, and led to more participatory forms of art. It also served as an ideological tool for both Latin American artists and nation-states to signal a break with traditional art styles—associated with their colonial past—and to assert a new, modern, and often utopian industrialized future. Latin American geometric abstraction is probably most notable for the large number of women artists who were leaders in these movements and who achieved successful artistic careers in their lifetimes, something that was much less common with mid-twentieth century art movements in the U.S. and Europe. [3]

Notes:

[1] Their formulation of "Concrete-Invention" was rooted in their commitment to Marxist materialism and anti-idealist revolutionary and collective art.

[2] The term "Madí" has various purported origins: it may have represented the combination of the first syllables (in Spanish) of the term "dialectic materialism," it may have been an abbreviation of "Madrid," or it could have been an acronym for "Carmelo Arden Quin."

[3] In addition to the women artists mentioned in this article, Judith Lauand, Lygia Pape, Lygia Clark, and Gego, were many others, including Lydi Prati, Mira Schendel, Fanny Sanín, María Freire, Amalia Nieto, and Mercedes Pardo.

Additional resources:

Check out installation photos from MoMA's S*ur moderno* exhibition

Watch three videos from the Getty about Concrete art that discuss **breaking the frame**, **painting in an industrial age**, and the **challenge of a straight line**

Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, "**Concrete Art in Latin America**." Grove Art Online, March 26, 2018.

David Fernando Cortés Saavedra, "**Geometric Abstraction and Concrete Art in South America**." Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism, September 5, 2016.

Alexander Alberro, *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth-Century Latin American Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Mónica Amor, *Theories of the Nonobject: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, 1944–1969* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

Yve-Alain Bois, et al. *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

Dan Cameron, *Kinethesia: Latin American Kinetic Art, 1954–1969* (Palm Springs, CA: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2017).

María Amalia García, *Abstract Crossings: Cultural Exchange between Argentina and Brazil* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

Aleca Le Blanc and Pia Gottschaller. *Making Art Concrete: Works from Argentina and Brazil in the Twentieth Century in the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2017).

by **DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Video 5.3.1.6.1: Joaquín Torres-García, *Composition*, 1931, oil on canvas, 91.7 x 61 cm (The Museum of Modern Art) © estate of the artist

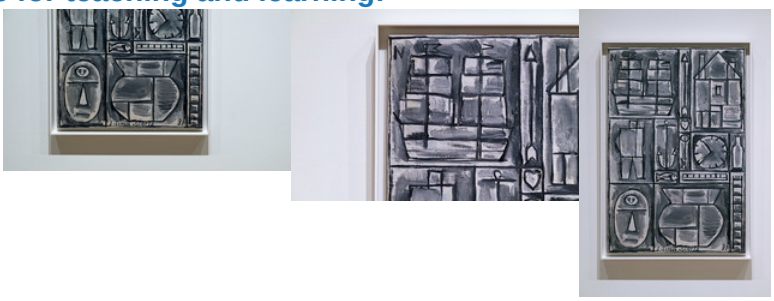
Additional resources

This work at the Museum of Modern Art

Joaquín Torres-García catalogue rasionné, a scholarly resource dedicated to the documentation of the paintings and sculptures

Torres-García on Google Arts and Culture

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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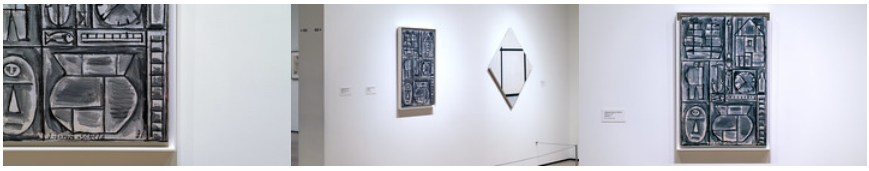

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5.3.1.7: Peach Blossom Spring

Peach Blossom Spring

> Learn more information at the Saint Louis Art Museum

Figure 5.3.1.7.1: Zhou Chen, *Peach Blossom Spring*, 102.5 X 161.5 cm (Suzhou Museum)

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5.3.1.8: Bridalveil Fall

by **DR. CHRIS BALASCHAK**

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Figure 5.3.1.8.1: Binh Danh, *Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite CA, May 31, 2012*, 2012, daguerreotype. 6.5 x 8.5 inches

Can we ever really see and experience a site without comparing it to the photographs of the same scene?

Do we inevitably experience a place as a picture?

These questions are central to the daguerreotypes the Vietnamese-American photographer Binh Danh made of the Yosemite Valley in 2012. As Danh stated in an interview that same year:

> ***As a kid, I had always wanted to visit Yosemite; I discovered it by viewing the photographs of Ansel Adams. [Yosemite], like the Vietnam War, only existed in my imagination, because I only saw the landscape in photographs.[1]***

Seeing Yosemite through photographs

Danh created a body of work precisely about the dissonance between his knowledge of the tourist site—gleaned entirely through viewing photographs of it—and the experience of the place itself. His daguerreotypes of Yosemite draw our awareness to the ways in which photography informs our experience of celebrated locations.

Established as a National Park in 1890, on land of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation in what is now California, Yosemite's modern history is marked by the colonizing force of sightseeing. From the forced removal of indigenous populations from the Valley in the mid-19th century, to the establishment of tour operations when the area came under state protection in 1864, Yosemite has been a site of tourism premised on the displacement of its original inhabitants. Danh's photographs of Yosemite attest to the region's social and natural history. As Danh's view of Bridalveil Falls attests, the area is a lush wilderness, featuring sequoia groves, granite cliffs, and waterfalls. Captured from the valley floor, which is coursed by the Merced River, Danh's photograph discloses how Yosemite's natural contours lend themselves to picturesqueness. Danh's work, though, seems to point us less to lessons about the Yosemite

Valley's natural features, than how the repeated imaging of the Yosemite Valley since the mid-19th century—its status as an icon — has shaped the ways in which we see this place.

Figure 5.3.1.8.2: Ansel Adams, *Eagle Peak and Middle Brother, Winter, Yosemite National Park*, negative 1968; print 1980, gelatin silver print, 25.4 x 33.8 cm (The J. Paul Getty Museum, © The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust)

Figure 5.3.1.8.3: Carleton E. Watkins, *Tasayac, the Half Dome, 5000 ft., Yosemite*, 1865–66, albumen silver print (Stanford University Libraries)

The photographs that informed Danh's image of Yosemite are some of the most remarkable works of American photography. Photographs made of Yosemite by Ansel Adams, as well as those by Carleton Watkins, and Eadweard Muybridge in the nineteenth century, documented exploration and tourism and sought to communicate the grandeur of the American West. These photographers and countless other amateur and professional photographers, and painters (Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran), have captured views of the same sites in Yosemite over the past two centuries. Such an immense archive, often experienced by viewers far removed from the park itself, speaks to how Yosemite has been overexposed, even predetermined, by images.

This is likewise the key to defining Yosemite's iconic presence in American photography. The term iconic implies almost instant recognizability, to the degree that our experience of the place, such as the Bridalveil Falls in Yosemite Valley, is always informed by images produced of it. This was on Danh's mind as he made his photographs. Danh's work thus reminds us of a fundamental aspect of modern life: a photograph depicts life at a remove. However, by investing his own experience and memory into images that replicate well-known and widely photographed scenes of Yosemite, Danh's work serves as a response to the lack of cultural diversity in the history of landscape photography. Watkins's views, for example, envisioned Yosemite as an untouched landscape, despite the area's Indigenous population, the Southern Sierra Miwuk. Revisiting the subject matter a half-century later, Adams's photographs only reinforce the notion that 19th- and 20th-century images of Yosemite represented a point of view (white, male) that failed to recognize histories and cultures outside of Euro-American conventions. Watkins and Adams approached the landscape with much the same technology, large format view cameras, and while their compositions may have dramatic differences, their subjects—peaks, falls, valleys—reinforced the primacy of the sites still esteemed today.

Figure **5.3.1.8.4**: Eadweard Muybridge, *Tenaya Canyon from Union Point, Valley of the Yosemite*, 1872, albumen print, 43 x 53.8 cm (National Gallery of Art)

"Louis" and photography's history

Recalling Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.'s 1859 assertion that photography is a "mirror with a memory," and employing an obsolete early photographic method (**the daguerreotype**), Danh's photographs look like mirrors because the daguerreotype image is imprinted on a metal plate, creating a reflective surface. [2] As such, they bring the viewer's likeness, literally, into the picture. Danh savored the irony of seeing his own face in the image of a space that he suggested was a "white" space: "Camping for me was what white people did; it was not for people who ran through the jungles at night to get onto a fishing boat and head into the South China Sea. As a family, we already camped in a refugee camp before coming to the United States. So it never made sense to my parents to take the family out into the woods and expose us to the elements." [3]

Brought to the United States at the age of 2, as part of the second wave of Vietnam refugees in the late 1970s, Danh's family found their new home in northern California. Though his family lived within hours of Yosemite, they never visited. Nevertheless, the young Danh became enamored with images of the place, and with this series sought to photograph Yosemite in such a manner as to open its imagery to a diverse range of viewers. As Danh has stated, "I want viewers, when they look at my work, that they see themselves in the picture," continuing, "that they also become part of this land; that they, in a way, merge with the land—but they don't quite disappear into the land. That they still see themselves in it." [4] Notable for its reflective surface, among other unique qualities, the daguerreotype allows for viewers to quite literally "see themselves" in images of Yosemite.

Figure 5.3.1.8.5: John Whipple, William Bond, and George Bond, *The Moon, No. 37, 1851*, daguerreotype made through Great Refractor Equatorial Mount Telescope, Harvard College Observatory

First publicly announced in 1839 after a decade of experimentation by Nicéphore Niépce and Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, daguerreotypes are silver-coated copper plates that are exposed in the camera, and developed in a chemical bath. Like Daguerre's exposures in the 19th century, Danh's take a minute or more to capture the image, and are prone to error. All of Danh's photographs from Yosemite were created in a van-turned-darkroom that he nicknamed "Louis," after Daguerre, and are similar to the darkroom-wagons employed by his 19th-century forebearers. Made on-location, Danh employed a photographic process that was outmoded by quicker, less precious, and inherently reproducible techniques as soon as the late 1850s. Danh's decision to work in an outmoded medium creates a distinct means of both literally and figuratively reflecting on photographic history. While we see ourselves reflected in his images, Danh's daguerreotypes instill a sense for the recentness of photography's invention, and all of the history the technology has allowed us to indirectly witness.

Fragility and resilience

Figure 5.3.1.8.6: Binh Danh, *Immortality, The Remnants of the Vietnam and American War,* 2006 series

Danh's Yosemite daguerreotypes are not his only forays into experimental and alternative photographic processes. In his 2006 series, *Immortality, The Remnants of the Vietnam and American War,* Danh appropriated images of the Vietnam War, and used the natural process of photosynthesis to print the images on leaves. These chlorophyll prints were then embedded in resin, adding permeance and resilience to inherently fragile materials. The work is at once terrifying and vulnerable. Recycling press photography from the Vietnam War, Danh's unique process adds a new and humanizing dimension to the originals. We view a man holding the body of an injured child, a look of desperation on his face, while we also note the leaf's delicate surface. In the context of a war in which a biological agent—Agent Orange—caused widespread defoliation as well as irreparable harm to civilians as evidenced in increased birth defects, Danh's *Immortality* aptly conveys the callousness of the war. As with his daguerreotypes, the foliage prints provoke viewers to consider their own tactile, material, political, and visual associations to the images at hand.

While acknowledging the human tragedy captured in *Immortality*, we see here a common concern with Danh's work in Yosemite: fragility. The daguerreotype is an imperfect medium, its surface prone to scratching, fingerprints, and even erasure. Both in their

prime and today, daquerreotypes are often housed and displayed in velvet-line cases, the image set behind glass. (Danh's are shown in frames, behind glass.) The luminosity of Danh's *Yosemite* work, not unlike the delicacy of *Immortality*, indicate a profound care for the photographic image as an object. For all the cultural history at the center of Danh's *Yosemite* daquerreotypes, their materiality reminds us of the potentially fleeting character of that history, and the documents that uphold it.

Notes:

[1] Boreth Ly, "Conversation Between Binh Danh and Boreth Ly, August 2012, On the Subject of Yosemite," in *Binh Danh: Yosemite* (San Francisco: Haines Gallery, 2012), p. 5.

[2] Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1859). Appears in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg. (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980), pp. 71–82.

[3] Ly, "Conversation Between Binh Danh and Boreth Ly," pp. 5–6.

[4] Neda Ulaby, "National Park Daguerreotypes Invite Viewers to 'Merge With the Land,'" National Public Radio (July 5, 2016). Accessed Feb. 27, 2022.

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5.3.1.9: Green_Wheat_Fields,_Auvers

Green Wheat Fields, Auvers

More information at the National Gallery of Art

Figure 5.3.1.9.1: Green Wheat Fields, Auvers 1890 Vincent van Gogh, 28 1/2 X 36 in., National Gallery of Art Public Domain

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5.3.1.10: A Piece of Wood II / From Knot of Wood

A Piece of Wood II/ From Knot of Wood

Georgia O'Keeffe, *A Piece of Wood II/From Knot of Wood*

by Laura Vookles, Chair, Curatorial Department, Hudson River Museum and Dr. Steven Zucker

O'Keeffe achieves breathtaking complexity in her painting of simple colors and forms from nature.

Georgia O'Keeffe, *A Piece of Wood II/From Knot of Wood*, 1942, oil on canvas, 62.9 x 50.2 cm (Art Bridges) © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Speakers: Laura Vookles, Chair of Curatorial Department, Hudson River Museum, and Steven Zucker, Smarthistory

Art Bridges

Video Transcript

0:00:05.2 Steven Zucker: We're in the Hudson River Museum looking at a painting by Georgia O'Keeffe called A Piece of Wood II. And it's from the Knot of Wood series. There are four canvases. I would assume that what the artist has done is to find a knot in a piece of wood and to see its turns and its complexities, and then to begin to paint an abstract image that is referencing that natural phenomenon, blowing it out of scale and perhaps transforming it and making it into a painting. One that is still rooted in that direct observation of this small detail in nature.

0:00:42.1 Laura Vookles: She wasn't taking nature and distilling it down to something geometric, but it was more like it was an abstraction that evoked her feelings of being in presence with that natural object. So it's large, it's living, it's full of movement and different colors that she is bringing to the fore so that you see it too.

0:01:05.1 Steven Zucker: And like with her flower paintings, when we look at this painting of a knot in a piece of wood, I get the sense that her interest is not in fidelity to that flower, to this piece of wood. She's taking that as a jumping off point. She's looking at the forms of nature and then creating a work of art from that. And look at the way that on this flat surface, she's able to, with just a few different tones of gray and brown, create this incredible sense of volume, a sense of smoothness. It's a kind of breathtaking complexity that she's able to wring out of the simplest colors and the simplest forms.

0:01:47.5 Laura Vookles: It's also interesting that it flows off of the canvas. So you get a sense of it extending beyond, and then you're not sure where it stops, if you're looking inward. I think it's a piece that everyone can look at and take something else away from. Maybe something different every time. I was just thinking when you were describing the colors, how evocative they are of flesh, and the painterliness of them is almost like the softness of flesh. And I started thinking of the center as being a womb. That is probably nothing that Georgia O'Keeffe intended. But these shapes and these forms are so universal. Everyone can get something out of it.

0:02:26.3 Steven Zucker: One of the things that Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings of nature do, I think so successfully, is they get us to slow down. And just as she's looking carefully, she gets us to slow down and for us to look carefully. And the composition here is allied with that. It is bringing us from the periphery into the center. But it's not a single center. There are, in fact, two knots within this, one that seems to revolve around the other. In fact, so much so that this almost becomes not so much a piece of wood as almost biological, something at the cellular level.

0:03:00.1 Laura Vookles: There's a famous quote about the flowers where she said, well, "I made you take time to look at what I saw, and when you took time to really notice my flower, you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower, and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower and I don't." That tells you a little bit about Georgia O'Keeffe. I mean, she made these universal images that we all have so many reactions to. But she also was a very private person who sort of had her own thought of what she was bringing to her art.

0:03:33.1 Steven Zucker: But nevertheless, she's inviting us to see what she sees.

0:03:36.6 Laura Vookles: Like she said, "I'll paint what I see, what the flower is to me, but I'll paint it big. And they will be surprised into taking time to look at it. I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers."

Artwork Details

Title	A Piece of Wood II/From Knot of Wood
Artist(s)	Georgia O'Keeffe
Dates	1942
Places	North America / United States
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms
Artwork Type	Painting
Material	Oil paint, Canvas
Technique	

Bibliography

This work at Art Bridges

Georgia O'Keeffe on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Barbara Buhler Lynes and Jonathan Weinberg, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Circling Around Abstraction*, exhibition catalogue (Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills Press, 2007).

Lisa Mintz Messinger, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001).

Important fundamentals

1898–1945 in the United States, an introduction

Modern art and reality

Laura Vookles, Chair, Curatorial Department, Hudson River Museum and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Georgia O'Keeffe, *A Piece of Wood II/From Knot of Wood*," in *Smarthistory*, April 28, 2025, accessed December 15, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/georgia-okeeffe-piece-wood-ii/.

Figure **5.3.1.10.1**: Georgia O'Keeffe, (1887-1986), A Piece of Wood II/ From Knot of Wood, 1942, oil on canvas, 24 3/4 X 19 3/4 in. Art Bridges. Photo: Steve Panceccasio

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5.3.1.11: Atlantic Ocean, Cliffs of Moher

Atlantic Ocean, Cliffs of Moher

Learn more at The Met

Figure **5.3.1.11.1**: Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Atlantic Ocean, Cliffs of Moher*, 1989. Offset lithograph, 24 x 31 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. (© Hiroshi Sugimoto)(Photos via Smarthistory)

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5.3.1.12: The Bay

by FARISA KHALID

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376355

Figure **5.3.1.12.1**: Helen Frankenthaler, *The Bay*, 1963, acrylic on canvas, 6′ 8-7/8″ x 6′ 9-7/8″ (Detroit Institute of Arts)

Violet to Indigo

At first glance, it's hard to know what to make of Helen Frankenthaler's heaving, atmospheric painting, *The Bay*.

We see an imposing fluid blue promontory suspended in front of us. Its colors ranging from violet to indigo run into one another with a clear zone of navy near the top of the canvas that draw our eyes up to it. The blurring of the colors gives an immediate sense of the artist's process: paint poured onto the canvas when it was wet. We can almost watch as the blues meld into one another during this early stage giving the image its blurred and smooth finish.

Is its subject what the title suggests—a landform of some kind with certain emblematic associations? Is the swelling amorphous blue mass floating amid that moss green and cream border meant to stand for something beyond itself? With many Abstract Expressionist paintings of the 1950s and 60s, it's important not to get too caught up with possible social and historical contexts and biography, but to focus on what's before us—the physical elements of the work itself because those elements can tell us so much about the painting.

When Helen Frankenthaler painted *The Bay*, she was already a well-regarded artist. She'd been the subject of a *LIFE Magazine* profile in 1956 and was one of the handful of women among the traditional all-boys' club of the New York Abstract Expressionists. *The Bay* was chosen as one of the paintings for the American pavilion of the 1966 Venice Biennale. Looking closely you can see that the shades of blues that run into one another are part of a specific process of pouring paint on to the canvas rather than painting the colors onto the surface with a brush, as the leading Abstract Expressionist painters, like Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline, were so famous for doing.

Soak-stain

Frankenthaler's approach here was to use a soak-stain method with diluted acrylic paint. Acrylics gave her more flexibility with viscosity and movement than oils, and allowed her more control as she poured that thinned paint onto the taut unprimed canvas so that it would get absorbed into the weave of the fabric. As a substitute for the action of the brush, Frankenthaler would lift the canvas and tilt it at various angles so that the paint would flow across the surface. She had to account for gravity and the ebb and flow of a liquid across a flat surface, so a fascinating aspect of Frankenthaler's method is the blend of the artist's control paired with the unpredictability of the forces of nature.

This kind of painting is often classified as Color Field painting, painting characterized by simplicity of line and a focus on color as the subject rather than as an add-on. The first generation of Abstract Expressionists, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman were the first important Color Field painters, while Helen Frankenthaler is often classified as a second-generation member of the group.

Frankenthaler was inspired by the drip method of Jackson Pollock who began painting on the floor in the late 1940s, but she knew she wanted to work differently. Pollock and other artists such as de Kooning and Franz Kline had made the painted gesture too famous and recognizable by the early 1950s. In 1952, at the age of 23, Frankenthaler's experiments lead her to produce her first major painting, *Mountains and Sea*, an expansive luminous depiction of the landscape of Nova Scotia, where she'd recently taken a holiday.

Figure 5.3.1.12.2: Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952, charcoal and oil on canvas, 220 x 297.8 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washingon D.C.)

Devotion to color

Mountains and Sea in turn inspired other painters to use this soak-stain method to great success, painters like Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis and Paul Feeley, whose canvases of floating thinned color heralded in a new era of abstract painting. The sense of natural spontaneity and devotion to color is part of what makes *The Bay* and the work of the Color Field painters so compelling. The basic formal elements of a painting speak for themselves as the viewer experiences the work in a fundamental, direct manner.

The influential mid-20th century art critic, Clement Greenberg, a close friend of Frankenthaler (and Pollock), believed that if art made after the trauma of the second world war was going to have any real impact on the social consciousness of Americans it would have to radically change and move towards the abstract. For Greenberg, abstraction could reach a more universal and expansive mode of visual communication.

In a 1965 interview for *Artforum Magazine* with the art critic Henry Geldzahler, Helen Frankenthaler described her process of conceptualizing her work:

> ***When you first saw a Cubist or Impressionist picture there was a whole way of instructing the eye or the subconscious. Dabs of color had to stand for real things. It was an abstraction of a guitar or a hillside. The opposite is going on now. If you have bands of blue, green and pink, the mind doesn't think sky, grass and flesh. These are colors and the question is what are they doing with themselves and with each other. Sentiment and nuance are being squeezed out.***

That last sentence, "sentiment and nuance are being squeezed out," is crucial. The colors on the canvas don't have to represent something in particular, but can have a more ambiguous, emblematic quality for the viewer. The basic act of responding to color, the way one would respond to a sunset, or to light from a stained-glass window, simplicity and pure emotion through clarity of color and form.

The same year she painted *The Bay*, Frankenthaler painted a series of similar soak-stain paintings with titles referring to water and geography: *Canal*, *Low Tide*, *Blue Tide*, inspired by the landscape of her country home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. As Frankenthaler said, it's important for us not to be too encumbered by context and speculation when we look at her work. We're to take from it what we will on our own terms.

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5.3.1.13: Calla Lily

Calla Lily

> Learn more information here at the Whitney Museum of American Art or the Guggenheim

Figure **5.3.1.13.1**: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Calla Lily*, 1987, gelatin silver print, 17.94 × 17.78 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art) © Robert Mapplethorpe / The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

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5.3.1.14: Fotogramm

by **DR. KAREN BARBER**

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376357

Figure **5.3.1.14.1**: László Moholy-Nagy, *Fotogramm* (Photogram), 1926, gelatin silver print, 9 7/16 × 7 1/16 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Looking at Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy's abstract photogram (a photograph made without a camera) we are left pondering what it is, precisely, we are looking at. At first glance, we can make out the outline of an outstretched hand that has traced itself by light onto the sensitized paper surface. Superimposed over the hand are a series of diagonal lines, that vary in tone from nearly white to dark gray to nearly black. Above these abstract lines is the outline of what appears to be a paintbrush filled with disembodied fingers, positioned as if to suggest that it was once held in the hand observed below.

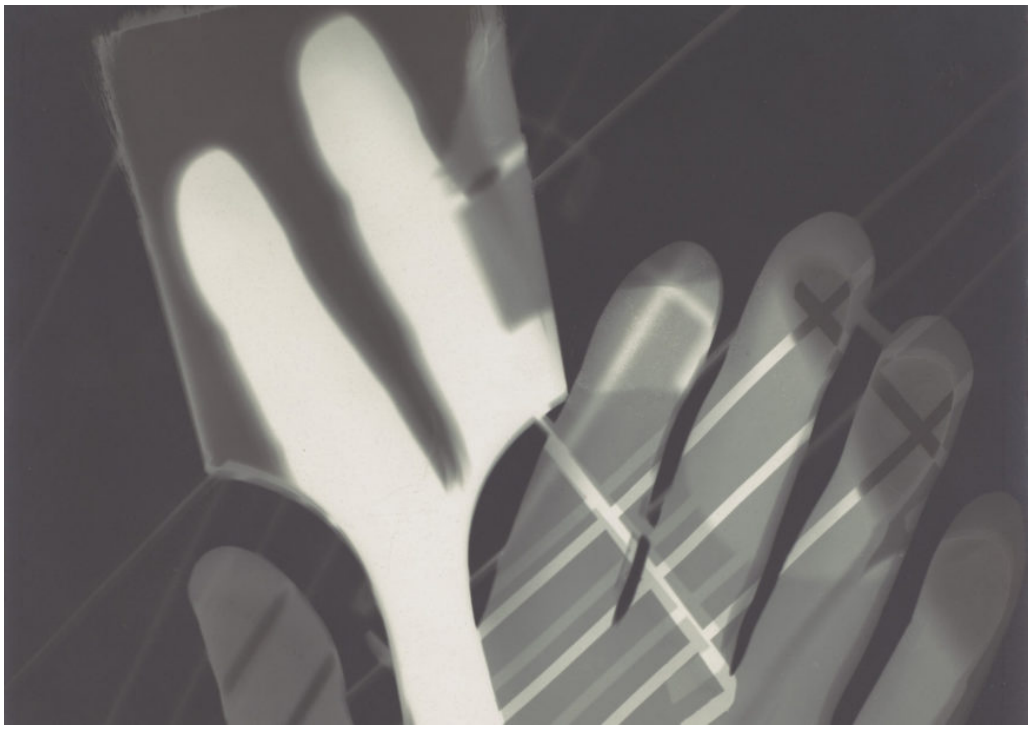

Figure **5.3.1.14.2**: Detail, László Moholy-Nagy, *Fotogramm (Photogram)*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 9 7/16 × 7 1/16 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The photogram is the end result of a sophisticated darkroom practice. It features a series of shadows layered one atop another, suggesting that the photogram was not made in a single moment, but in a series of moments. Taken as a whole, the composition is at once abstract and representational, richly toned and starkly black and white, it is darkness and light, suggestive of photography but also divorced from photography's presumed truth to appearance. This is not the sort of view typically produced by the camera. Instead, it forces the viewer to question what a photograph is and what sort of vision this "new" form of photography produces.

For Moholy-Nagy, the photogram was exemplary of a new experimental, and inherently modern, approach to photography that he called the New Vision, which put the technological medium of photography on par with **abstract painting**.

Figure **5.3.1.14.3**: László Moholy-Nagy, *Yellow Circle*, 1921, oil on canvas, 135 x 114.3 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Fotogramm's date and its abstraction from observed reality situates it within the larger context of interwar avant-garde art and photography, but its resistance to the clearly defined categories of painting or photography gets to the ambivalent nature of this cameraless form of photography. Moholy-Nagy's photograms from this period reflect his preoccupation with overlapping, often intersecting, geometric forms of varying transparencies seen in his **earlier paintings**.

Moholy-Nagy's experimentation with cameraless photograms brought together his interests in technology, in materials (taken from the Constructivist *faktura* and the Bauhaus emphasis on materials), in new ways of seeing, and in his belief that art could bring about a positive change in the world.

Like the other avant-garde artists who took up photograms in the interwar period (Christian Schad, Man Ray, El Lissitzky, Alice Lex-Nerlinger, and Rosa Rolanda), Moholy-Nagy was not a professional photographer with an established professional or studio practice. Instead, like his colleagues (who were affiliated with Dada, Surrealism, Constructivism, and the Bauhaus), he was a painter seeking to break from the constraints of traditional easel painting.

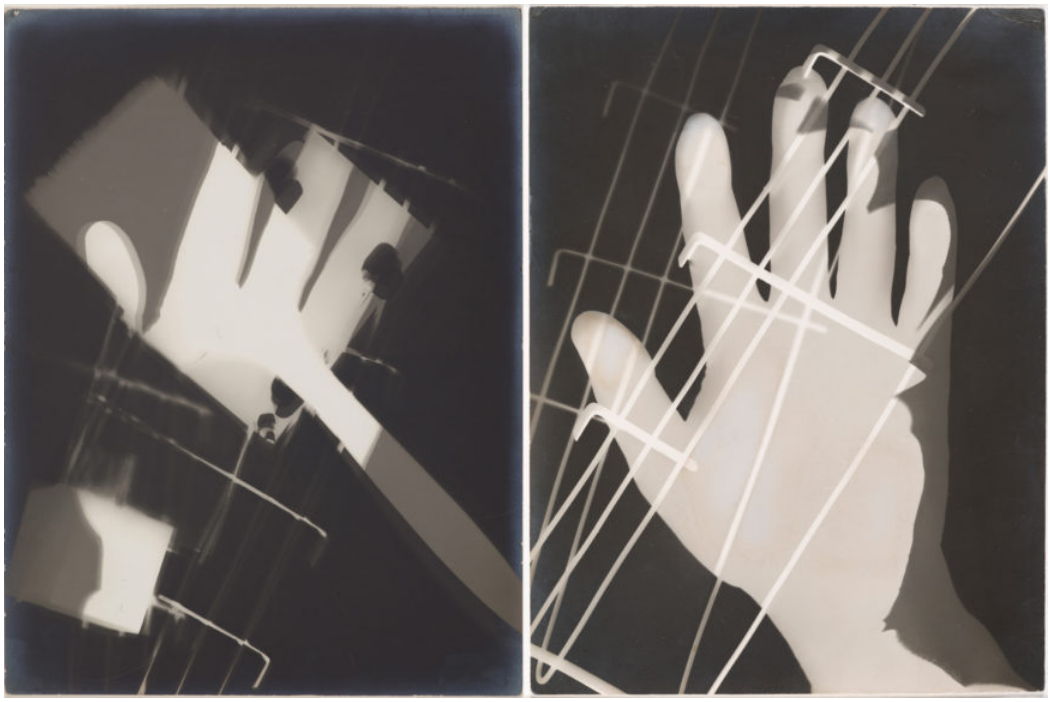

Figure 5.3.1.14.4: Left: László Moholy-Nagy, *Photogram*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 23.9 x 18 cm (Museum Folkwang, Essen; photo: Moholy-Nagy Foundation); right: László Moholy-Nagy, *Photogram*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 23.97 × 17.94 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

What did photography offer that painting and sculpture did not? For Moholy-Nagy, photography, especially its cameraless form, represented a new way of seeing and experiencing the world, and a means of expanding our sensory perception by bringing it into alignment with the modern world—the world of industry, technology, new materials, and a burgeoning mass media that bombarded people as never before with images in the pages of magazines and illustrated newspapers. By showing us a new way of looking at the world, photograms, Moholy-Nagy believed, could aid in expanding our visual literacy, making us more critical consumers of visual culture.

What is a photogram?

Although the literature on photograms in the 1920s speaks frequently of "invention," recounting dramatic origin stories by self-serving avant-garde artists, the practice of placing sundry objects on sheets of (light) sensitized paper is as old as photography itself. In fact, it's older. Experiments with cameraless image making date to the late 18th century, and were described by Thomas Wedgwood and Humphry Davy in 1802, several decades before the announcement of the invention of the medium of photography:

> ***When the shadow of any figure is thrown upon the prepared surface, the part concealed by it remains white, and the other parts speedily become dark.[1]***

Figure **5.3.1.14.5**: Anna Atkins, *Spiraea aruncus (Tyrol)*, 1851–54, cyanotype, 35.1 x 24.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Figure **5.3.1.14.6**: An example of pictorialism. Alfred Stieglitz, *Winter, Fifth Avenue*, 1893, printed 1894, carbon print, mount: 55.8 × 45.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

The basic process for creating a photogram, later taken up by William Henry Fox Talbot, Anna Atkins, and countless others, remained largely unchanged throughout the 19th and into the 20th centuries. Maintained through the decades by amateurs and scientists in the form of hand and leaf prints, the photogram took on a new life and new subject matter in the 1920s.

At a moment when modern art fully embraced abstraction, "art" photography in the early part of the 20th century was decidedly less modern and still in the throes of pictorialism. In Moholy-Nagy's eyes, pictorialist-inspired photography "misunderstood" the basic tenets of the medium and was too much like Impressionism to be of use to the modern artist. [2] Instead, he proposed a novel approach: photography should make use of those materials fundamental to itself—light and the sensitive surface.

> ***The photosensitive layer—plate or paper—is a tabula rasa where we can sketch with light in the same way that the painter works in a sovereign manner on the canvas with his own instruments of paint-brush and pigment. . . . Whoever obtains a sense of writing with light by making photograms without a camera, will be able to work in the most subtle way with the camera as well.[3]***

For Moholy-Nagy, photograms were the true basis for photography, not the camera. Therefore, for Moholy-Nagy, photography was about more than just photographic semblance and the use of a camera to reproduce nature. Photography was about light. Despite

eschewing the camera, photograms could still evoke the technological (and modernity) through the use of electric light. Light was the medium and the message.

Figure **5.3.1.14.7**: Lucia Moholy, *László Moholy-Nagy*, 1925, gelatin silver print, 9.3 x 6.3 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Production—Reproduction

In July 1922, before Moholy-Nagy and his then-wife, Lucia Moholy, began experimenting with photograms, he published the essay "Production—Reproduction," in which he advocated for the "productive" use of media traditionally used for reproduction—photography, film, and the phonograph/gramophone. [4] Moholy-Nagy believed that photography was only capable of moving forward if it was used in innovative ways to expand sensory perception and allow for new visual experiences. By using light sensitive plates or paper (without the aid of the camera) to create images that captured light effects produced by mirrors and lenses (and a range of other substances like oils and gels), photograms could bring about new relationships and new ways of seeing—a "new vision." He believed that this "New Vision" was more closely aligned with the rapidly changing experience of the modern world. Moholy-Nagy's "truth to materials" approach echoed the goals of Constructivism, his teaching at the Bauhaus, and his utopian views about art's capacity to initiate positive change in society if utilized in a "productive" way.

Painting, Photography, Film

Figure **5.3.1.14.8**: László Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei, Photographie, Film (Painting, Photography, and Film)*, Bauhaus Bücher 8 (Bauhaus Books), 1927 (The Museum of Modern Art

The cameraless photograph was key to Moholy-Nagy's theorization of photography in his book *Malerei, Photographie, Film (Painting, Photography, and Film)*, which was published in 1925 by Bauhaus Books. The book was concerned with teaching people to see the modern world in new ways through the "productive" use of photographic techniques that offered new perspectives. The photogram was key to this new approach to photography, which he linked visually, and in writing, to such practices such as the X-ray and astronomical photography. Although a number of artists had been working with photograms since

the early 1920s, *Painting, Photography, and Film* helped bring Moholy-Nagy's "new vision" for photography, with photograms at its center, to the broader public, thus initiating a conversation about photography as a modern art form.

Notes:

[1] Thomas Wedgwood and Sir Humphry Davy, "An Account of a Method of Copying Paintings Upon Glass, and of Making Profiles, by the Agency of Light Upon the Nitrate of Silver" (1802), in *Photography: Essays & Images*, ed. Beaumont Newhall (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 15.

[2] László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography Film*, trans. Janet Seligman (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1969), p. 49.

[3] László Moholy-Nagy, "Photography is Creation with Light," in Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

[4] László Moholy-Nagy, "Production—Reproduction," in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 79–82.

[5] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography Film*, p. 30.

Additional resources

Read more about the New Vision from the Tate.

Geoffrey Batchen, *Emanations: The Art of the Cameraless Photograph* (New York: Prestel, 2016).

Oliver A. I. Botar, "László Moholy-Nagy's New Vision and the Aestheticization of Scientific Photography in Weimar Germany," *Science in Context* 17, no. 4 (2004): pp. 525–56.

Andreas Haus, *Moholy-Nagy: Photographs and Photograms*, trans. Frederic Samson (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

Renate Heyne and Floris Michael Neusüss, eds. *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms: Catalogue Raisonné* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

Eleanor M. Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

Andrea Nelson, "László Moholy-Nagy and Painting Photography Film: A Guide to Narrative Montage," *History of Photography* 30, no. 3 (2006): pp. 258–269.

Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

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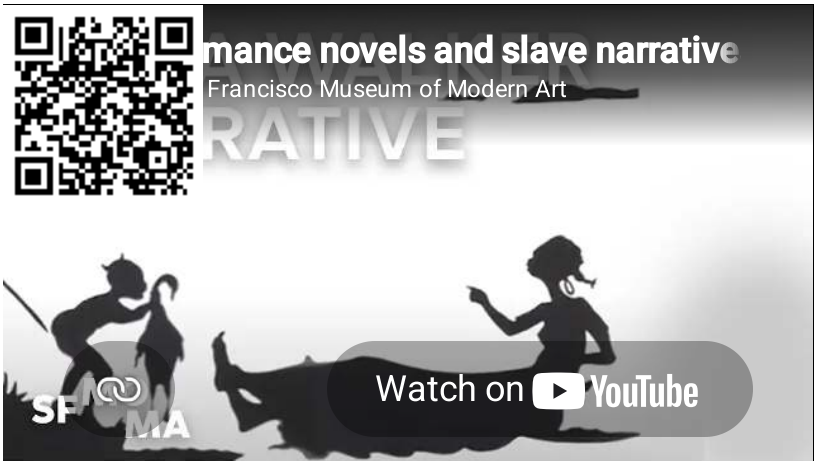
5.3.1.15: Untitled (from Testimony)

- by **SFMOMA**

Page ID

376358

Artist Kara Walker talks about on the often-violent subject matter of her work, and wonders what her imagination reflects about society as a whole.



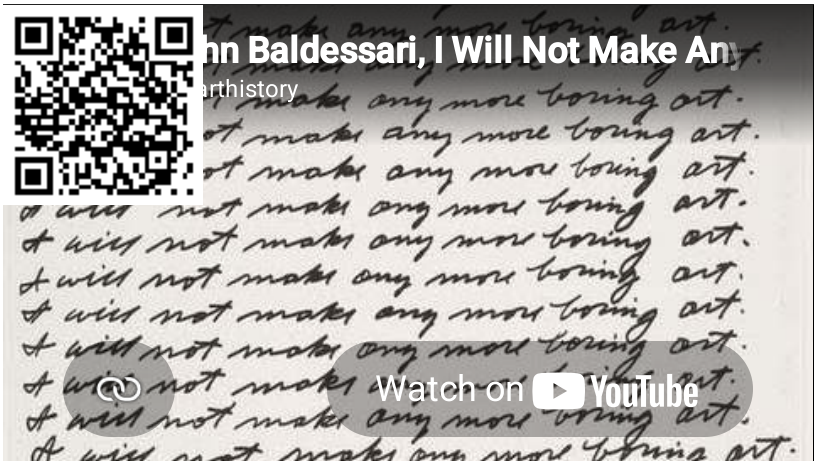
Artist Kara Walker discusses her interest in popular literature, including romance novels, slave narratives, and even Thomas F. Dixon's 1905 novel *The Clansman*, and how all of these have influenced her work.

This page titled 5.3.1.15: Untitled (from Testimony) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by SFMOMA, "An interview with Kara Walker," in Smarthistory, December 21, 2020, accessed December 22, 2022, https://smarthistory.org/an-interview-with-kara-walker/..

5.3.1.16: I will not make boring art

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
376359



Video 5.3.1.16.1: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971, lithograph, 22-7/16 x 30-1/16″ (MoMA), images © John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist

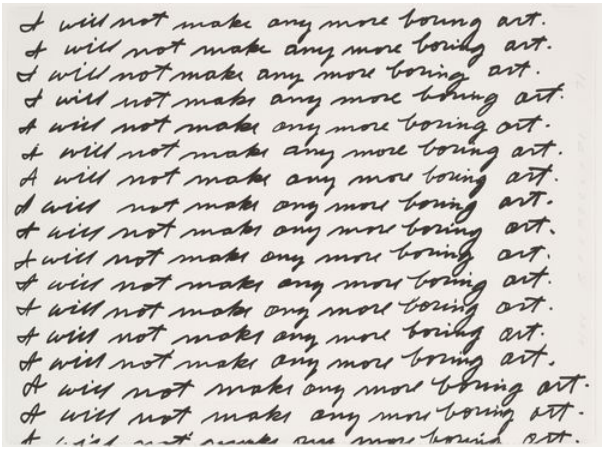


Figure 5.3.1.16.2: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971, lithograph, 57 x 76.4 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (© John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist)

Serious Humor

"I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art," repeated in a neat cursive script down the length of a sheet of lined paper is clearly reminiscent of an old-fashioned school-room punishment. But just who is it that the artist, John Baldessari, is punishing? The lines are stark and simple, and like so much of John Baldessari's art, employs a wry humor that turns on the art world, only in this case, the blackboard is a canvas.

Only a year earlier, in 1970, Baldessari underlined a key rupture in his career and one that was taking place in the art world as well at that time. Since the 1950s, Abstract Expressionism had been the dominant avant-garde style in galleries and art schools. For example, Jackson Pollock's huge canvases, dense with paint he applied directly, were understood (however inaccurately) to be a direct expression of his internal emotional state.

Cremation Project

As a young artist, Baldessari had also painted abstractions. But in 1970, a year before *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, Baldessari, together with friends and students from University of California at San Diego, gathered paintings he had made as a young artist and drove them to a crematorium where they burned them. The artist then placed the ashes into an urn with a bronze plaque inscribed,

JOHN ANTHONY BALDESSARI

MAY 1953 MARCH 1966

The urn and plaque, together with documenting photographs of the cremation constitute Baldessari's *Cremation Project*, 1970. The previous year, the artist had written of this project as an act to,

> ***…rid my life of accumulated art….It is a reductive, recycling piece. I consider all these paintings a body of work in the real sense of the word. Will I save my life by losing it? Will a Phoenix arise from the ashes? Will the paintings having become dust become materials again? I don't know, but I feel better.[1]***

In *Cremation Project*, Baldessari defined the clearest possible demarcation between his early and mature work. By sacrificing his early paintings, by burning them, he emphasized their physicality. They existed as a thing in the world that could be destroyed. But he shifts our frame of reference from the physical, the material, by creating a work of art that relied on the physical artifact, the ashes and urn, only as a way to draw the viewer to the larger conceptual issues—including the construction of a division in his career.

With the *Cremation Project*, John Baldessari staked his place in the highly intellectualized space of 1960s and 70s conceptual art practice. By 1970, Conceptual art had established a place for itself in the art world. The stark machined repetitions created by the artist Donald Judd and the grids painted by Agnes Martin laid the groundwork for artists like Sol Lewitt who created written instructions for lines drawn with mathematical precision onto a wall to create dazzling geometries. Lewitt had created conceptual works of art that asked the Platonic question, where is the art itself actually located? Does it exist as the completed drawing on the wall? Does it exist in the originary act of writing the instructions? Is the art embedded in the performance of the work when assistants do the drawing? What happens when the wall drawing is painted over and is remade somewhere else? This was the world of ideas into which Baldessari entered.

Word Paintings

In Baldessari's art, words, photographs and paint offer visual statements that are so flat, so bald-faced in their directness and sincerity that they become ironic visual statements aimed at the very definition of what art is. And because these statements are on canvas or within a galley context, they challenge the most sacred theories of modern art, what the artist calls "received wisdom."

Baldessari's word paintings of the late 1960s and early 1970s are a case in point. Many were hand-lettered onto stretched canvas by sign painters that Baldessari had hired to render statements that that he had not even written but had only read. These are often statements that naively set out define the most elusive of questions that confront artists. And they are rendered in the clearest most direct lettering possible, the lettering found on a sign, the most earnest typography that directs and informs in the most straightforward manner possible. We cannot help but trust what these sign paintings tell us, even when Baldessari's word paintings offer audaciously innocent solutions to the complex theory-soaked issues that define modernism.

Works of art such as *What is Painting*, 1966-68, *Everything is purged from this painting but art, no ideas have entered this work*, 1966-68 and *Composing on a Canvas*, 1966-68 are brilliantly ambitious. They layer the false objectivity of didactic grammar and clear careful hand lettering over impossibly trite yet seductive solutions at the very core of art's definition.

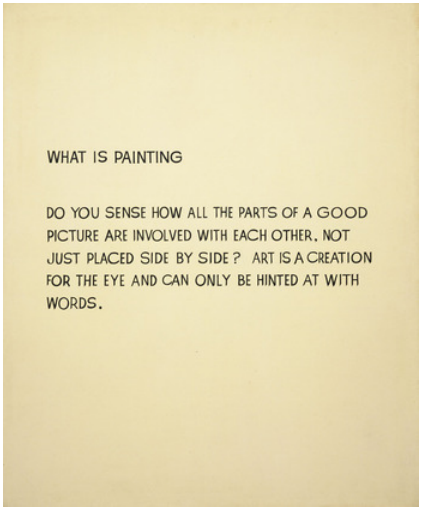


Figure 5.3.1.16.3: John Baldessari, *What is Painting*, 1966-68, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 172.1 x 144.1 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) (© 2014 John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist)

For example, *What is Painting* tries to define what painting is and does so in only three short sentences. But these sentences are written on a canvas and so inherit a fraught five hundred year history of art making. What makes these issues all the more pleasantly absurd is that Baldessari is at least as well known for his long career as a teacher as he is as an artist. So when he offers paintings with statements such as, "Everything is purged from this painting but art, no ideas have entered this work," the allegedly instructive nature is given more weight and is ultimately more absurd.

Nova Scotia College of Art and Design

Soon after the *Cremation Project*, Baldessari was asked by the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design to exhibit his work there. Instead of sending art, Baldessari sent instructions to the school in the form of a letter for the initial iteration of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, a work based on a sentence Baldessari had written to himself in a notebook he then kept. The letter reads in part,

…I have no idea what your gallery looks like of course, and I know that you do not have much money for shows so that conditions my ideas of course….I've got a punishment piece. It will require a surrogate or surrogates since I cannot be there to… impose punishment. But that's ok, since the theory is that punishment should be instructive for others. And there is a precedent for it, Christ being punished for our sins, and many others. So some student scapegoats are necessary. If you can't induce anybody to be sacrificial and take my sins upon their shoulders, then use whatever funds there are, fifty dollars, to pay someone as a mercenary.

The piece is this, from floor to ceiling should be written by one or more people, one sentence under another, the following statement: I will not make any more bad art.

At least one column of the sentence should be done floor to ceiling before the exhibit opens and the writing of the sentence should continue everyday, if possible, for the length of the exhibit. I would appreciate it if you could tell me how many times the sentence has been written after the exhibit closes. It should be hand written, clearly written with correct spelling….[2]

By the end of the exhibit the walls were covered with Baldessari's statement of sacrificial punishment and he allowed the school to create a lithograph of the work for their fundraising based on his own handwriting.

A Strategist

Baldessari has called himself "purely a strategist" and in *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* he references the fundamental modernist tension between the word and image that Magritte had exposed in *The Treachery of Images* and the cool, spare, self-referential repetitions of the minimalists. John Baldessari has spent his career coaxing beauty and complexity from our prosaic visual culture.

Special thanks to Sandy Heller, The Heller Group, LLC

1. Excerpt from, John Baldessari, *Cremation Piece*, 1969 in Donald Kuspit, "**Semiotic Anti-Subject**," *Artnet*, originally from three Getty lectures delivered at the School of Fine Arts at the University of Southern California, April 4, 6 and 10, 2000.

2. Excerpt transcribed from video, "**Curator Chrissie Iles on John Baldessari's *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art***," Whitney Museum of American Art, December 2010.

Additional Resources:

The artist's website

Baldessari on Art 21

Whitney Museum recreation of *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*

Baldessari essay and podcast on NPR

Yale Books Blog on the Cremation Project

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5.3.1.17: The Two Disciple at the Tomb

The Two Disciples at the Tomb

More information at the Art Institute Chicago

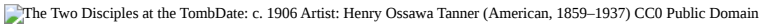
The Two Disciples at the TombDate: c. 1906 Artist: Henry Ossawa Tanner (American, 1859–1937) CC0 Public Domain

Figure **5.3.1.17.1**: The Two Disciples at the Tomb Date: c. 1906 Artist: Henry Ossawa Tanner (American, 1859–1937) CC0 Public Domain

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5.3.1.18: The Supper at Emmaus

Baroque Introduction

After the Crusades, famines, and plagues of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance period brought new changes in the possibility of human invention and exploration. By the Baroque period, European societies were expanding, conquering other territories, and urbanizing their cities. The Italian towns acted more like states, led by wealthy merchant family associations and generally linked to the Papal establishment, both actively and lavishly funded artists with generous commissions. By the end of the 1500s, the revolt against the Catholic church's excesses and the upheaval from the success of Martin Luther establishing an alternative religious manifesto led to the Council of Trent by the Catholic church. The council defined new requirements, outlining forbidden books, building new churches, instituting austerity and piety within the church, and starting the Inquisition. The conflict between Protestant and Catholic factions led to turmoil and wars throughout Europe.

By the early 1600s, the Catholic church was reestablishing itself and wanted to rebuild Rome, its center, using pictorial and architectural visuals as grandeur pathways. Rome was built on the contours of Imperial Rome with haphazard expansion over the centuries. The pope wanted to change Rome and build new grand avenues, monuments, and churches. Throughout the 17rh century, new churches, fountains comparable to the Fountain of the Four Rivers, roads, paths became walks like the Spanish Steps, and remodeled buildings were part of the ambitious projects. Painters also brought a religious experience to their works; biblical stories brought alive, animated, and moving.

Baroque art reflected the social turmoil existing in Europe and the Catholic church's influence, stressing images of intense piety. Artists developed strong styles with dramatic colors, using the effects of light and theatrical physical poses. Baroque art is well-known for the artists who used the techniques of chiaroscuro and tenebrism, creating intense dark spaces punctuated by light features.

The Renaissance focused on classical symmetry, the central thrust of energy appearing in the center, a significant figure contrasted on the left and right. "The whole picture is so planned that the central figure has no counterpart but only favourable contrasts."[1] In Baroque art, contrast became radical; spatial symmetry is broken, becoming asymmetrical. The eye may start at the center and be compelled by the power of asymmetry, then forcefully moved to other sections of the overlapping, twisted figures. The faces of the figures displayed grandiose visions of rapture, bereavement, or mortality. Throughout the centuries, artists have used the concept of folded and draped material to create depth, light, and dark. "Yet the Baroque trait twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other. The Baroque folds unfurl all the way to infinity."[2]

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) was born in the town of Caravaggio in northern Italy. At 21, he moved to Rome, the artistic center of Italy abounding with architectural marvels and paintings. His talent was recognized by Cardinal del Monte, who supported Caravaggio, introducing him to others and the opportunity for new commissions. His work was considered inventive, and compelling, and his audacious innovation in using light dramatically changed art history. Caravaggio's success propelled him to become one of the top-ranked painters early in his life, only to fall and become an outcast because of his unusual lifestyle and sometimes violent behavior resulting in multiple arrests, including murder. He used biblical and mythological stories of the past, painting them in the modern style of his time. Caravaggio focused on the poverty and spirituality of the biblical images, painting them in tattered clothing, an unkempt look against a background of other people dressed in contemporary clothing.

Supper at Emmaus (2.3.17) is an example of Caravaggio's unique style; a theatrical display of a moment in time, a frozen, intense light counter-positioned to dark shadows. Ancient biblical figures are converted into familiar living humans with modern clothes, scrubby hair, or well-worn features. The painting portrays a biblical scene when Christ appears as an ordinary man to the followers. Only at the moment when he raises his hand to bless the bread do they recognize him. The standing innkeeper is not a believer and doesn't show any emotion as the two disciples instantly react; one man pushes back his chair as the other stretches out his arms in disbelief. None of the figures are idealized; dirt shows on their hands, some of the clothing is tattered, all exhibit the look of ordinary people. All of the food in the still life has religious symbolism supporting the values of the church.

Figure 5.3.1.18.17: Supper at Emmaus (1601, oil on canvas, 141 x 196.2 cm) Public Domain

The Calling of Saint Matthew (2.3.12) and the *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* (2.3.13) are two of Caravaggio's early paintings commissioned for Contarelli Chapel in the church San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. In 1600, both paintings illustrated biblical stories of St. Matthew and established Caravaggio as a master painter. He used light to create the sense of stopped action, with deeply shadowed non-reflective spaces and bright reflective areas illuminated by an unknown light source. The Saint Matthew paintings highly influenced younger artists, and many of them became Carvaggistis, taking the concepts to other countries. One influential art historian declared, "With the exception of Michelangelo, no other Italian painter exercised so great an influence."[8]

Figure 5.3.1.18.12: The Calling of Saint Matthew (circa 1599-1600, oil on canvas, 322 x 340 cm) Public Domain

In *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, Levi (2.3.13), the tax collector, is seated around the table and his aides as they count the money received from the day's work. Light suddenly illuminates their faces from the open door as Christ, pointing at Levi, and Saint Peter walks into the room; everyone froze in action. The dramatic diagonal of the line along the wall moves the viewer from the set of figures in contemporary clothing to the two shoeless figures in cloaks as the pointed arm of Christ moves the viewer back to the group. The window is covered, providing no direct light; Caravaggio uses the light from the door to reflect on the faces and lighter parts of their clothing, submerging much of the room in dark shadows. He also used red to highlight each person in strong opposition to the light and dark colors.

The biblical stories of St. Matthew end in the painting *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew*. When the king of Ethiopia wanted to marry his niece, Saint Matthew would not allow the marriage. The king ordered Matthew killed. The scene is set against the dark

interior by the baptismal pool with waiting converts assembled around the pool. The executioner stands in the middle, Matthew lying on the ground, his hand raised as though asking the executioner to stop. The angel hangs over the two men, reaching a palm branch to Matthew while the other figures appear to try escaping. Light seems to be coming from the side and scattered across the painting, emphasizing the jumble of bodies struggling to move away from the scene. The triangle of the executioner's left arm, Matthew's right arm, and the angel's arm form the triangular positions of light and depth. The figure far in the background is a self-portrait of Caravaggio as though watching the spectacle unfold.

Figure 5.3.1.18.13: The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew (1599-1600, oil on canvas, 323 x 343 cm) Public Domain

Caravaggio based his painting of *Narcissus* (2.3.14) on Ovid's story in *Metamorphosis*, the young man who became enamored with his reflection, eventually dying from the desire for himself. Caravaggio used his image of the adolescent boy, well-dressed in stylish clothing, and bent over the pond to adore his likeness. The painting represents Caravaggio's regular use of chiaroscuro, the light source shining on the boy's selective parts, emphasizing tenebrism. The bottom half of the painting is bathed in darkness, the boy's reflection barely visible in the depth of the water; the dark, gloomy background surrounding the boy adds to the melancholy, hopeless feeling of the painting.

Figure 5.3.1.18.14: Narcissus at the Source (1594-1596, oil on canvas, 110 x 92 cm) Public Domain

The pope's treasurer-general commissioned the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* for a reconstructed church in Rome as a companion piece on the altar of *The Conversion of Saint Paul*. Both Peter and Paul were considered the foundation disciples of the Catholic church and strongly connected to Rome and the papacy. The two paintings were positioned as devotional works surrounding one of the Virgin Mary. The first versions of the paintings were rejected, and Caravaggio painted the second versions. Although there is some confusion about what happened to each painting, most historians believe these two are the originals.

In *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (2.3.15), Caravaggio used the deep darkness of tenebrism to enunciate St. Peter as he is being crucified upside down, insisting on the unusual position, so he did not imitate the crucifixion of Jesus. Caravaggio places the others trying to lift the cross, their faces hidden, perhaps guilty about what they are about to do. Movement and drama are achieved using

strong diagonal lines, the position of the cross, St. Peter, and one person in juxtaposition to the man under the cross as the other one forcefully pulled the rope. The colors are muted, the unknown light shining directly on St. Peter, displaying the anguish on his turned face away from the viewers, his hands bleeding, his body twisting. Caravaggio was a master of point-in-time images. The cross is partially up in the air, the others pushing and pulling, the movement apparent, yet in a few more minutes, St. Peter will be hanging upside down on the cross, dying.

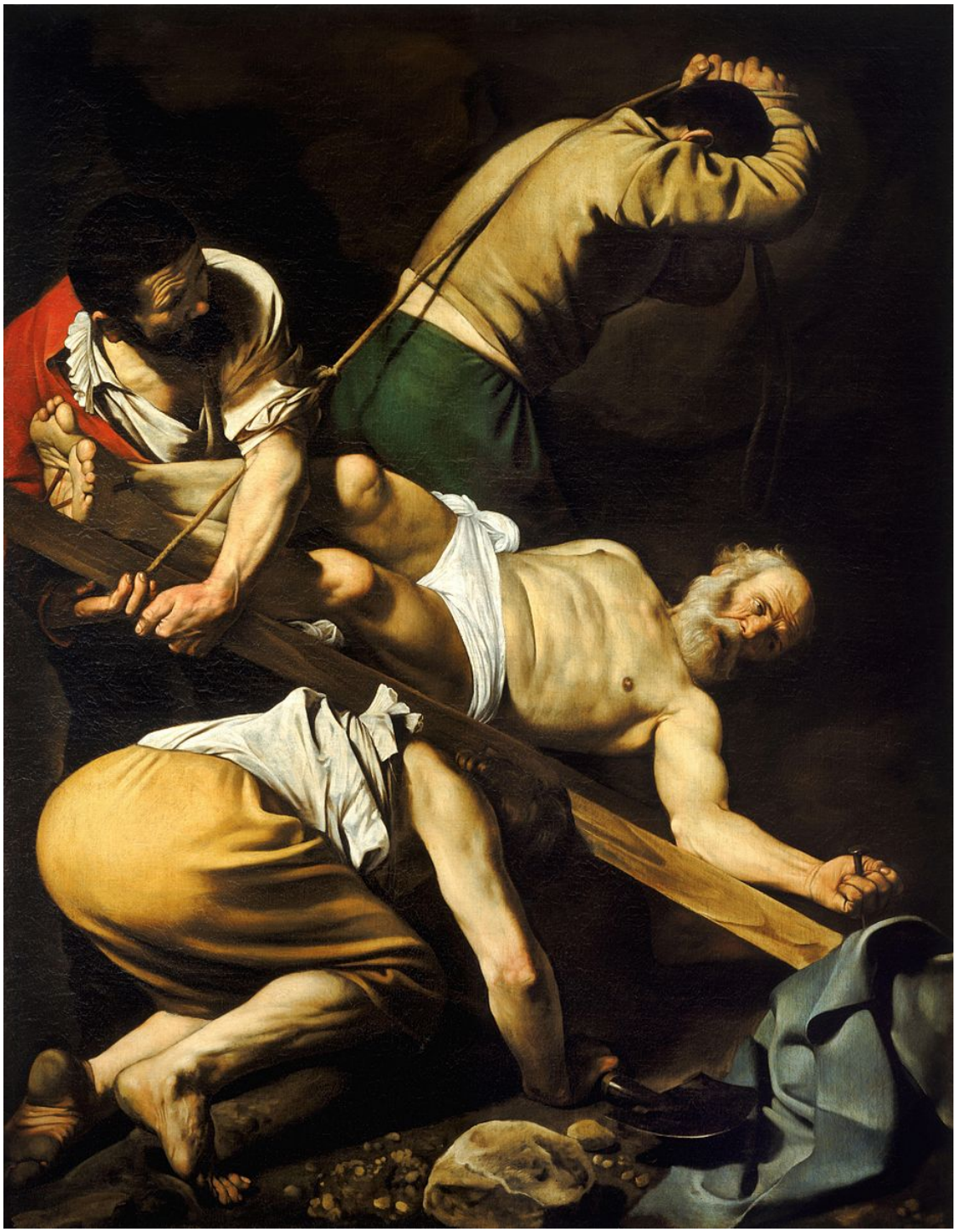

Figure 5.3.1.18.15: Crucifixion of Saint Peter (1600, oil on canvas, 230 x 175 cm) Public Domain

The Conversion of Saint Paul (2.3.16) illustrates Saul of Tarsus (renamed Paul) as a soldier on his way to destroy a Christian group. The painting is about a moment in time when Saul is blinded by light while hearing a voice. The other soldiers appear to be frightened by the light as they all turn in different directions reflecting the turmoil erupting in the scene. Caravaggio uses small

reflective patches of light on other parts of the painting, defining the soldiers, giving them volume while the darkness pushes them into the background. Saul's horse in the middle of the scene is uncontrolled, and, in many paintings, it would be the focal point; here, the dark shadowy horse is recessed as the groom tries to control it. The blinding light shines solidly on Saul as he lies on the ground, his clothing beside him, his red robe helping define the body.

Figure 5.3.1.18.16: The Conversion of Saint Paul (1600, oil on panel, 230 x 175 cm) Public Domain

[1] Brown, M. (1982). The Classic Is the Baroque: On the Principle of Wölfflin's Art History. *Critical Inquiry, 9*(2), 379-404. Retrieved April 3, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/1343327

[21] Mann, J. (1997). CARAVAGGIO AND ARTEMISIA: TESTING THE LIMITS OF CARAVAGGISM. *Studies in Iconography, 18*, 161-185. Retrieved April 15, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/23924073

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5.3.1.19: Battlefield

Battlefield

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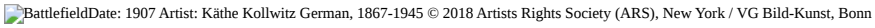

Figure **5.3.1.19.1**: Battlefield, Date 1907, Artist Käthe Kollwitz German, 1867-1945 © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

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5.3.1.20: Migrant Mother

Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*

by Dr. Kris Belden-Adams

Behind the icon, Dorothea Lange's Migrant Mother

Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo California*, 1936, printed later, gelatin silver print, 35.24 x 27.78 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, PG.1997.2). Speakers: Eve Schillo, Assistant Curator, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Steven Zucker

Video transcript

[0:00] [music]

Dr. Steven Zucker: [0:06] We're in the LACMA Study Center for Photography and Works on Paper, looking at one of the most famous images in American history, "Migrant Mother." This is a photograph that was taken by Dorothea Lange during the Dust Bowl, during the Depression.

Eve Schillo: [0:21] The Great Depression was instigated by a financial crisis, but there was also an agricultural crisis, which was the overplanting that happened in the Midwest. Those fields became non-fertile, and Dust Bowls were created. That entire farming community was at risk, simultaneous to the rest of the United States seriously spiraling because of the stock market crash.

[0:47] Florence Owens Thompson was a migrant worker, which meant — as it does today — that she moved to areas where the picking was, in this case, in northern California, when Dorothea Lange was visiting a pea-picker camp.

Dr. Zucker: [1:01] It's hard to overstate the trauma of this moment at its height in 1932, just four years before this photograph was taken. 25 percent of Americans were unemployed, a quarter of the workforce.

Eve: [1:12] Many of the migrant workers that came to California were those that had to leave the Dust Bowl, famously referred to as Okies, because most of them were from Oklahoma and surrounding regions.

Dr. Zucker: [1:24] That was a derogatory term that was applied to these migrant workers by people who already lived in California.

Eve: [1:29] They were nearly destitute, making a trek west, but Florence Owens Thompson came west with her husband prior to the Dust Bowl.

[1:39] So when Dorothea and Florence crossed paths, Dorothea Lange is on assignment by the Resettlement Administration, which eventually became what is known as the Farm Security Administration. Both of those entities were run by the US government. It was the Roosevelt New Deal that put forth many of these new policies.

Dr. Zucker: [2:02] We're seeing an overlay of two stories, a larger economic and political story but also a very deeply personal biographical story.

Eve: [2:09] We have available to us, through the Farm Security Administration records, all the iterations of the photo shoot she had on the fly, on the road, just outside this pea-picker camp. She was lucky to find Florence there because there was a freeze overnight, and Florence was there because she was not working.

[2:30] You can see the options that she had to tell an empathetic tale, a realistic tale. Any photographic image inherently carries a wealth of truth to the viewer that is not necessarily an actual fact. It's a creation of the photographer's.

[2:46] She has waited for that moment for Florence to be gazing rather forlornly into the distance and the two children huddled by her side.

Dr. Zucker: [2:55] And if you look closely, you can just make out a third child, a baby at her breast. She is literally framed by these children who depend on her.

Eve: [3:04] During the Depression, in the cities it was very obvious with food lines and the workers' strikes that there was a lot of strife and everyone was suffering. What wasn't really known was the migrant worker and the small farming endeavors. The object was to paint a picture and make sure that they were also taken care of during this time.

Dr. Zucker: [3:25] This raises an issue which is central to the identity of photography. Does photography document? Can photography be fine art as well?

Eve: [3:33] I think both. She obviously could have chosen to have distance. That would be more of a document because you have more context. What she's chosen to do is create her own narrative, the story of the caring mother who is carrying the weight of the world, her many children.

Dr. Zucker: [3:49] That close lens, that creates an intimacy that makes me even more empathetic. And it's important to remember that the 1930s, in the first years of the New Deal, was a moment when people could starve in the United States, where social programs were just now being put into place as a kind of social safety net.

Eve: [4:07] Dorothea Lange is on assignment. She's being given a directive by Roy Stryker. He assigned her very broad topics: cooking, sleeping, praying, and socializing. Then you see what she produced. That goes to your point about a document versus a fine art photograph. One can be both.

Dr. Zucker: [4:26] This is art that was meant to move us emotionally. It was meant to rally support for the work that the government was doing. And this photograph did have an immediate impact. It was reproduced almost immediately in newspapers in San Francisco and Sacramento. The pea pickers, who were on the edge of starvation, were given aid.

Eve: [4:46] Then it just became an image that was everywhere. We had someone to be empathetic about, that allowed us to feel emotional about the situation but yet hopeful.

Dr. Zucker: [4:55] Dorothea Lange really succeeded. She was trying to produce an image that would capture this particular woman, but would also create a universal symbol. She was so successful that it has become the image that comes to mind first when we think of the Dust Bowl, when we think of the Great Depression, when we think of migrant labor.

Eve: [5:14] When we think of America pulling itself out of troubles, too. It reminds me also of Dorothea's background, which is a third-generation American. She was able to go to Columbia in New York and study photography, but she also had a lot of personal problems.

[5:29] She suffered from polio. She has a great quote when she refers to her ailment, which left her with a pretty serious limp. "It formed me, guided me, instructed me, helped me, and humiliated me. I've never gotten over it and I'm aware of the force and power of it."

Dr. Zucker: [5:46] It does seem to me that somebody who suffered polio might have a kind of highly developed empathy, and that empathy seems to have informed photographs like this. This image has come to represent migratory labor in the United States during the Depression, but the story is actually a little more complicated than that.

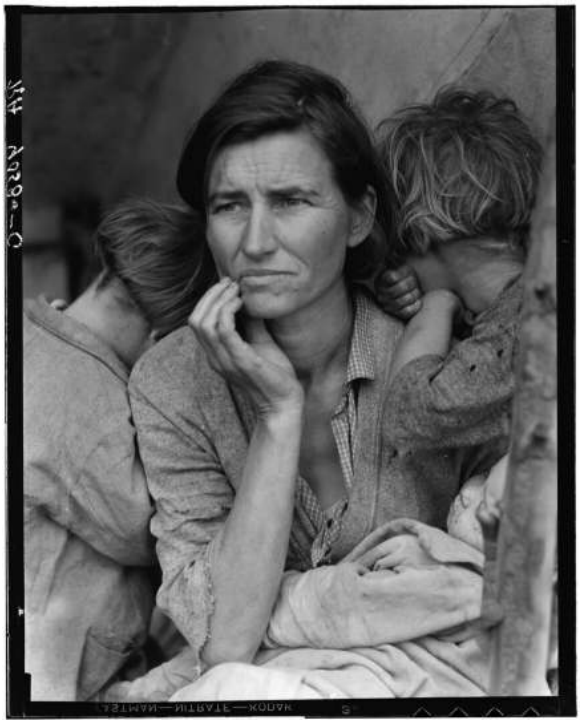
[6:03] The subject of this photograph was part of a larger story of migration. She was Cherokee. The reason that she had been born in Oklahoma is most likely because of the forced migration of Cherokees from the southeastern United States early in the 19th century into what was then known as Indian Territory. This we call the Trail of Tears.

[6:25] And so although this photograph is understood to represent the migrations of the 1930s, it also represents the migrations of the 1830s.

Eve: [6:33] It's to be questioned how this would have been perceived if the title of this image was not as anonymous as "Migrant Mother."

[6:42] [music]

Migrant Mother, Dorothea Lange



Florence Owens's grandson, Roger Sprague, identified the subjects, from left to right, as: "Katherine Owens age 4, Florence Owens (later known as Thompson) age 32, Ruby Owens age 5. Baby on mother's lap is Norma age 1 year." [1] Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother / Destitute Pea Pickers in California, Mother of Seven Children. Age Thirty-Two. Nipomo, California*, 1936, digital reproduction from retouched negative (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

Writing in *Popular Photography* three decades after taking this photograph, Dorothea Lange explained that the making of *Migrant Mother*—arguably among the most famous photographs ever taken—almost did not happen. [2] It was raining, and the dirt roads were flooding. Lange already had a full box of rolls of film to mail to her Washington, D.C.-based Resettlement Administration supervisor, and her work on that month-long assignment was finished. Her bags were packed in the car, and Lange was tired and eager to get home to her husband in Berkeley. Upon seeing the crude sign reading "PEA-PICKERS CAMP," Lange confessed:

> ***I didn't want to stop, and didn't. I didn't want to remember that I had seen it, so I drove on and ignored the summons. … Having well convinced myself for twenty miles that I could continue on, I did the opposite. Almost without realizing what I was doing, I made a U-turn on the empty highway.[3]***

She eventually did turn around, and toward the camp of 2,500 out-of-work migratory agriculture workers. At that moment, Lange noticed what she described as a "hungry and desperate mother" surrounded by her children and crowded under a makeshift tent. She took seven photographs—only five were deemed by Lange to be good enough to send to Washington, D.C., after she retouched the negative to make a thumb at the right edge of the picture plane of the *Migrant Mother* less apparent to viewers. [4]

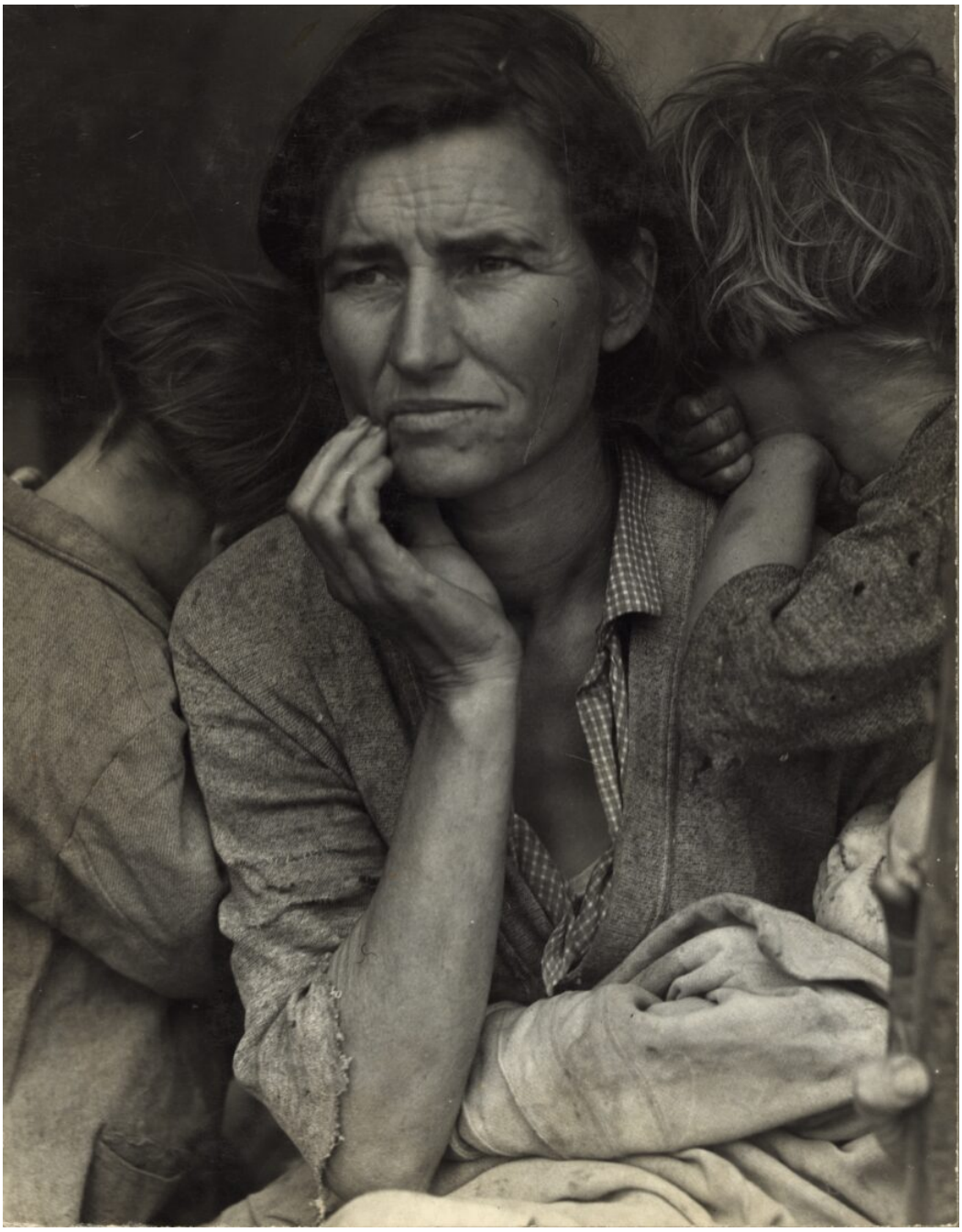
Dorothea Lange, four other frames from the *Migrant Mother* shoot, 1936 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.: upper left; upper right; lower left; lower right)

In an account written in 1960, Lange describes her interaction with the central figure of the photograph (originally titled *Destitute Pea Pickers in California. Mother of Seven Children. Age Thirty-Two. Nipomo, California*), a newly widowed, Cherokee woman, Florence Owens, who shortly would become known as "Migrant Mother":

> ***I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it. The pea crop at Nipomo had frozen and there was no work for anybody. But I did not approach the tents and shelters of other stranded pea-pickers. It was not necessary; I knew I had recorded the essence of my assignment.[5]***

The making of an iconic photograph

The essence of Lange's assignment—and the mission of all Resettlement Administration/Farm Security Administration photographers' work—was to capture iconic, memorable images of agricultural workers that roused support for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal relief programs. *Migrant Mother*—which reveals an anxious mother holding a baby as two of her other children bury their heads on her shoulders—draws on the familiar trope of the Madonna and Child in Christian art as it evokes sympathy and, ideally, a spirit of humanitarian generosity toward its subjects.



Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, digital file of black-and-white film copy negative of unretouched file print showing thumb holding a tent pole in the lower right corner (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

Lange's supervisor, Roy Stryker, believed this image encapsulated the goals of RA/FSA most succinctly:

> ***When Dorothea took that picture, that was the ultimate. She never surpassed it. To me, it was the picture of Farm Security. The others were marvelous but that was special.[6]***

As an icon, the photograph *Migrant Mother* is larger than one woman's story. Instead, the pictured mother stands for the plight of suffering, poverty, and uncertainty among rural laborers during the Great Depression. *Migrant Mother* immediately was (and still is) circulated by the U.S. government, free of charge, to the press and the public. [7]

Tuesday, March 10, 1936 — THE SAN FRANCISCO NEWS — Page 3

REDUCTION IN P. G. E. RATES HELD ILLEGAL

3 Federal Judges Throw Out $2,100,000-a-Year Cut by Rail Board

'CONSTITUTION VIOLATED'

Opinion Based on Method of Determining Cost of Properties

Ragged, Hungry, Broke, Harvest Workers Live in Squallor

Scores of weary, discouraged and hungry families such as these today awaited the arrival of food at a pea pickers' camp near Nipomo after fighting starvation for six weeks following crop failures.

FOOD RUSHED TO STARVING FARM COLONY

Thousand Jobless Pea Pickers Che'' as Six Weeks of Want Are Ended

WEARY OF LIFE

HENRY ORLEY

"I can't live without Lucile"

Shoots Self as Romance Ends

'I'm Sorry I Botched the Job,' Moans Youth, Recovering From Wound

INCREASE IN ARMY PLANES IS REPORTED

House Committee Approves Boost to 4000 Ships; Air Bases Also Sought

TESTIMONY BY GOFF ATTACKED

Old Police Reports Produced by Defense at Mooney Hearing

My Day By Eleanor Roosevelt

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich.

16,440 HARVEST JOBS IN SIGHT

Employment Will Take Care of Discharged WPA Workers, Says McLaughlin

11 INDICTED IN L. A. FOR SWINDLING NAVY

Federal Grand Jury Finds Conspiracy in Commissary

WATCH FOR Gorgeous

HEIRESS UNTANGLES MARITAL AFFAIRS

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

THE NEWS TODAY

TUESDAY, MAR. 10

This was among the first publications of photographs from Lange's *Migrant Mother* series, which were taken in late February or early March of 1936. *The San Francisco News*, March 10, 1936

Beyond iconicity: misrepresenting *Migrant Mother's* story

Migrant Mother provided such a persuasive, straightforward, and iconic image of a destitute, worried mother concerned about providing for her children that a sympathetic public and government sent a total of $200,000 in aid and free medical care to the pea-picker's camp three days later. [8] Sadly, by that time, Owens and her children already had moved on to find other work. She never got to take advantage of the "help" Lange promised the photograph would bring.

Despite caption information provided by Lange, Owens's family did have a car, which her soon-to-be future husband (Jim Hill) had taken to buy parts and repair. [9] That car had all of its tires, and Hill would return in it to retrieve Owens and her 6 (not 7) children, so they could leave the 2,500-person pea-picker's camp, which would shortly be raided by locals who arrested and beat its remaining inhabitants. [10]

As historian Milton Meltzer noted, Lange's caption-writing and note-taking habits were lax, and tracking the details of her subjects and their circumstances frequently took a backseat to photographing. [11] Lange acknowledged these allegations of misrepresenting Owens, and claimed that the image did more good than harm.

Living in the shadow of the photograph's iconicity

Although Owens and her children were not abandoned to starve to death, and would survive the Great Depression, she resented being associated with the *Migrant Mother* photograph for the rest of her life, her daughter attests: "She was a very strong woman. She was a leader. I think that's one of the reasons she resented the photo — because it didn't show her in that light." [12] Rather, the iconic image transcended Owens's actual story and became a part of a U.S. macro-narrative of suffering and motherly fortitude during the Great Depression.

Owens—a woman of color—felt forever stereotyped as the destitute, suffering mother, trapped in poverty by the repeated reproductions of her image that appeared in newspapers, magazines, art exhibitions, on the pages of our history books, and on

postage stamps, t-shirts, parodic magazine illustrations, and trinkets. In 1958, after *Migrant Mother* was included in exhibitions and published widely for two decades, Owens wrote a letter to one publication, *U.S. Camera*, and insisted on being consulted about future plans to publish the image. She asked for all copies of that issue of *U.S. Camera* to be recalled. [13] Because neither Lange nor any of the publications made money from the photograph, they did not offer Owens compensation. Instead, Lange apologized and offered sympathy to the woman whose individual story and likeness were co-opted to fulfill a political program's narrative.

Artwork details

Title	Migrant Mother
Artist(s)	Dorothea Lange
Dates	1936
Places	North America / United States
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms
Artwork Type	Photograph
Material	
Technique	Gelatin silver process

Footnotes

[1] Roger Sprague, "Migrant Mother: The Story as Told By Her Grandson."

[2] Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 184. In this essay, Rosler suggests that *Migrant Mother* was the most widely reproduced photograph in the world.

[3] Dorothea Lange, "The Assignment I'll Never Forget," *Popular Photography* (Feb. 1960), pp. 42–43, 128. Reprinted in *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present*, edited by Liz Heron and Val Williams (New York: I.B. Taurus, 1996), pp. 151–52.

[4] Sarah Meister, "Piecing Together Dorothea Lange's Migrant Mother," Museum of Modern Art (Feb. 6, 2020).

[5] Lange, "The Assignment I'll Never Forget" (1960), in *Illuminations* (1996) pp. 151–52. In many accounts, Florence Owens is identified as Florence Owens Thompson. However, she would not marry George Basil Thompson until 1949, and kept the name Owens after the death of her first husband, Cleo Owens, in 1931: "Florence Owens Hills," April 16, 1940, Census Records, Kern County, California, Sheet 8B, S.D. No.10, E.D. Nos. 15–44, Line 75. Department of Commerce—Bureau of the Census.

[6] Milton Meltzer, *Dorothea Lange: A Photographer's Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1978), p. 133. Italics are Meltzer's emphasis.

[7] See "Dorothea Lange's 'Migrant Mother' Photographs in the Farm Security Administration Collection," Library of Congress.

[8] Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), p. 237. The photograph was first published in *The San Francisco News* on March 10, 1936.

[9] Sprague, "Migrant Mother."

[10] Gordon (2009), pp. 236–37.

[11] Meltzer (1978), p. 131.

[12] Owens's unnamed daughter is quoted in: Geoffrey Dunn, "Photographic License," *San Jose Metro* (January 19–25, 1995), p. 22.

[13] Gordon (2009), p. 241.

Bibliography

This photograph at LACMA

This photograph at the Library of Congress

Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009).

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 53–67 (excerpt here).

Sarah Meister, *Dorothea Lange: Migrant Mother* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2019).

Sally Stein, *Migrant Mother, Migrant Gender* (London: MACK Books, 2020).

Read more quotes by Dorothea Lange about making *Migrant Mother* and see more of her photographs at the Library of Congress

Explore an online exhibition on the Great Depression and Roosevelt's New Deal

Explore the types of photographs sponsored by the FSA

Read more about Dorothea Lange at MoMA

Watch an interview with two of Florence Owens Thompson's children.

Read and see a clip from Ken Burns' *The Dust Bowl* about Lange's role in its documentation.

Read more about the New Deal

Citation

Dr. Kris Belden-Adams, "Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*," in *Smarthistory*, August 14, 2023, accessed December 15, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/dorothea-lange-migrant-mother/.

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5.3.1.21: Monument for V. Tatlin

"monument" for V. Tatlin

More information at the Art Institute Chicago

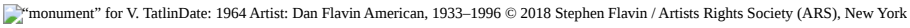

Figure 5.3.1.21.1: “monument” for V. TatlinDate: 1964 Artist: Dan Flavin American, 1933–1996 © 2018 Stephen Flavin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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5.3.1.22: The Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths

by JP MCMAHON

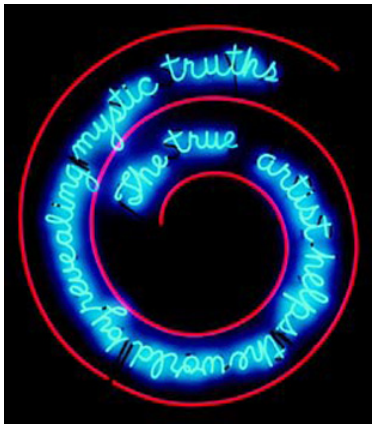

Figure **5.3.1.22.1**: Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967, neon and clear glass tubing suspension supports; 149.86 x 139.7 x 5.08 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Bruce Nauman's neon sign asks a multitude of questions with regard to the ways in which the 20th century conceived both avant-garde art and the role of the artist in society. If earlier European modernists, such as Mondrian, Malevich, and Kandinsky, sought to use art to reveal deep-seated truths about the human condition and the role of the artist in general, then Bruce Nauman's *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* questions such transhistorical and universal statements. With regard to this work, Nauman said:

> ***The most difficult thing about the whole piece for me was the statement. It was a kind of test—like when you say something out loud to see if you believe it. Once written down, I could see that the statement […] was on the one hand a totally silly idea and yet, on the other hand, I believed it. It's true and not true at the same time. It depends on how you interpret it and how seriously you take yourself. For me it's still a very strong thought.***

The medium and the message

By using the mediums of mass culture (neon signs) and of display (he originally hung the sign in his storefront studio), Nauman sought to bring questions normally considered only by the high culture elite, such as the role and function of art and the artist in society, to a wider audience. While early European modernists, such as Picasso, had borrowed widely from popular culture, they rarely displayed their work in the sites of popular culture. For Nauman, both the medium and the message were equally important; thus, by using a form of communication readily understood by all (neon signs had been widespread in modern industrial society) and by placing this message in the public view, Nauman let everyone ask and answer the question.

While it is perhaps the words that stand out most, the symbolism of the spiral (think of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 1969), also deserves attention having been used for centuries in European and other civilizations, such as megalithic and Chinese art, both as a symbol of time and of nature itself.

Transcendence?

Theosophy is interesting in this regard and was an important aspect of the early European Avant-garde. In particular, Theosophists believed that all religions are attempts to help humanity to evolve to greater perfection, and that each religion therefore holds a portion of the truth. Through their materials, artists had sought to transform the physical into the spiritual. In this sense, Malevich, Mondrian, and Kandinsky sought to use the material of their art to transcend it: Nauman, and other of his generation, did not.

Process over product

Instead, Nauman's work transgresses many genres of art making in that his work explores the implications of minimalism, conceptual, performance, and process art. In this sense we could call Nauman's art "Postminimalism," a term coined by the art critic Robert Pincus-Witten, in his article "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime" (*Artforum* 10, number 3, November 1971). Artists such as Nauman, Acconci, and Hesse, favored process instead of product, or rather the investigation over the end result. However, this is not to say they did not produce objects, such as the neon-sign by Nauman, only that within the presentation of the object, they also retained an examination of the processes that made that specific object.

In this sense, Nauman's neon sign isn't only an object, it's a process, something that continues to make us think about art, artist, and the role that language plays in our conception of both. The words continue to ask this of each beholder who encounters them. Does the artist, the "true artist" really "reveal mystical truths"? Or confined to the specific culture that it was made in? If we are to believe the statement (remember, it is not necessarily Nauman's, he merely borrows it from our shared culture), then we might, for example, recognize Leonardo da Vinci as a Neo-Platonic artist who showed us ultimate and essential truths through painting. On the other hand, if we reject the statement, then we would probably recognize the artist as just another producer of a specific set of objects, that we call "art."

This type of logic and analytical thinking was influenced by Nauman's reading of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). From Wittgenstein, Nauman took the idea that you put forth a proposition/idea in the form of language and then examine its findings, irrespective of its proof or conclusion. Nauman's "language games," his neon-words, his proposition about the nature of art and the artist continue to resonant in today's art world, in particular with regard to the value we place on the artist's actions and findings.

Additional resources:

This work of art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Art:21 page about Nauman's *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truth*

Philadelphia Museum of Art biography of the artist

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)

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- **12.5: Ritual, spirituality, and transcendence** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

SECTION OVERVIEW

5.3.2: Line, Shape, and Form

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

5.3.2.1: The Four Horsemen, from The Apocalypse

5.3.2.2: The Tetons - Snake River

5.3.2.3: In the Car

5.3.2.4: Navigation Chart

5.3.2.5: The Virgin of the Rocks

5.3.2.6: Improvisation 28

5.3.2.7: Joinville Soldier Walking

5.3.2.8: Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red

5.3.2.9: The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II

5.3.2.10: Ta Moko

5.3.2.11: Muqarnas

5.3.2.12: Ceramic Lantern, 13th Century Syria

5.3.2.13: Korwar

5.3.2.14: West Buddha, Bamiyan

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5.3.2.1: The Four Horsemen, from The Apocalypse

Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*

by DR. SALLY HICKSON

Figure **5.3.2.1.72**: Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1498, woodcut, 15-1/4 x 11-7/16″ / 38.8 x 29.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Cowboy movies

Albrecht Dürer's woodcut, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, always reminds me of my lifelong love of Hollywood cowboy movies. American westerns are almost all predicated on Christian themes, and riddled with simple symbolic numbers. Maybe you are familiar with the 1960 Western *The Magnificent Seven* and their connection to the Seven Virtues? And in terms of the Seven Vices, in the 2007 remake of *3.10 to Yuma*, the 'villain,' Ben Wade, is trailed by six members of his outfit who try to free him from his captors—his release would restore their numbers to seven (and need I point out that ten minus three—the 3.10 of the title— is seven?). In the original poster for *High Noon*, Gary Cooper confronts four villains. This is why, for me, Durer's *Four Horsemen*, drawn from the *Book of Revelation* (the last book of the New Testament which tells of the end of the world and the coming of the kingdom of God), have always been the sinister apocalyptic cowboys of world-ending destruction; Conquest, War, Pestilence (or Famine) and Death itself.

Of course, that's not at all what Dürer intended. The image was made as one of a series of fifteen illustrations for a 1498 edition of the *Apocalypse*, a subject of popular interest at the brink of any new millennium. In 1511, after the world had failed to end, the plates were republished and further cemented Dürer's enduring fame as a print-maker.

Figure 5.3.2.1.73: Detail, Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1498

The horsemen

In the text of *Revelation*, the main distinguishing feature of the four horses is their color; white for conquest, red for war, black for pestilence and/or famine, and pale (from 'pallor') for death (Clint Eastwood, *Pale Rider*, anyone?). The riders each arrive armed with a rather obvious attribute; conquest with a bow, war with a sword, and a set of balances for pestilence/famine. Dürer's pale rider carries a sort of pitchfork or trident, despite the fact that he's given no weapon in the Biblical account; he simply unleashes hell.

Here's the text from *Revelation*, chapter 6:

> ***The First Seal—Rider on White Horse***
>
> ***Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.***
>
> ***The Second Seal—War***
>
> ***When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.***
>
> ***The Third Seal—Famine***
>
> ***When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand…"***
>
> ***The Fourth Seal—Death***
>
> ***When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.***

The quality of Dürer's woodcut is breathtaking; one hears and feels the furor of the clattering hooves and the details, shading and purity of form are astonishing. Dürer's unique genius as a woodcut artist was his ability to conceive such complex and finely detailed images in the negative—woodcut is a relief process in which one must cut away the substance of the design to preserve the outlines. Before Dürer it was often a rather crude affair. No one could draw woodblocks with the finesse of Dürer (much of the cutting was done by skilled craftsmen following Dürer's complex outlines). The images are astonishingly detailed and textural, as finely tuned as drawings. So influential was Dürer's graphic output, in both woodcut and engraving, that his prints became popular models for succeeding generations of painters. He was no mean painter himself, producing a varied and articulate array of self-portraits, as well as religious works, and turning his mind and his hand to the production of an influential book on perspective. He was a humanist, painter, print-maker, theorist and keen observer of nature and is therefore often referred to in popular discourse as the 'Leonardo of the North'—although his actual output was considerably greater than that Italian Renaissance master.

Figure **5.3.2.1.74**: Detail, Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1498

Dürer's particular genius here is the translation of the distinctive colors of the horses into a black-and-white medium, which he achieves by very distinctly drawing their various weapons and by placing them in order from background to foreground, slightly overlapping, so that they ride across the composition in the same order as they appear in the text. This places the apparition of Death, a skeletal monster on a skeletal horse, in the foreground, trampling the figures in his path.

Figure **5.3.2.1.75**: Detail, Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, 1498

In the wake of Death's trampling hooves, a monstrous, fanged reptilian creature noshes on the mitre of a Bishop, a prefiguration, perhaps, of the imminence of the Protestant Reformation that would sweep across northern Europe in opposition to the excesses of the church and papacy.

In this context, the thundering hooves of the horses could presage religious reform (Dürer's *Four Apostles*, painted for Nuremberg's town hall, bears inscriptions from the texts of Martin Luther), although Luther himself did not approve of the visionary nature of *Revelation*, declaring it, "neither apostolic nor prophetic."

An introduction to the Northern Renaissance in the sixteenth century

by DR. BONNIE NOBLE

The Renaissance north of the Alps.

1500 - 1600 (Northern Renaissance and after)

Figure 5.3.2.1.1: Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1504, engraving, fourth state, 25.1 x 20 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

While the Renaissance was happening in Italy, great artistic and social changes occurred in Germany and the Low Countries.

A bias in favor of Italian art among earlier generalizations of scholars made Italy the focus of artistic invention and the Northern Renaissance a less sophisticated imitation of the real thing. One might debate whether the North experienced a Renaissance, but the artistic, institutional, and intellectual changes are evident.

The 16th century: Dürer

Albrecht Dürer is the indisputable rock star of the German Renaissance. In addition to being a successful painter, Dürer built his reputation on his prints, both woodcut and engravings. Because prints can be made in multiples, he had an unusually broad audience. Mechanically reproducible media such as woodcuts and engraving not only helped Dürer disperse his ideas, they also made it possible for Northern artists to see Italian art without traveling.

Dürer likely had his first exposure to Italian art in Germany, in woodcut or engraved copies of Italian works. Looking at an Italian work of art in Germany may seem unremarkable to us. However, until prints were available all works of art were one of a kind, and the only way to see a new work of art was to travel. Prints were typically far less expensive than paintings and much lighter and therefore more portable. The switch from one-of-a-kind works of art to prints is in some ways comparable to the switch from buying or borrowing picture books to searching for images on Google.

Germany and England

Cranach, Dürer, and Holbein—and all other artists after 1517—lived in a world forever changed by the Protestant Reformation.

1500 - 1600

Albrecht Dürer

Who was Albrecht Dürer?

by MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART

Figure 5.3.2.1.63: Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514, engraving, 23.81 x 18.57 cm (Mia)

Albrecht Dürer was born in Nuremberg on May 21, 1471. His father, a talented goldsmith, taught him the basics of drawing and metalworking, including the skill of engraving. The boy's aptitude led to his being apprenticed from 1486 to 1489 to Nuremberg's leading painter, Michael Wolgemut.

In addition to being a painter, Wolgemut was a prolific designer of woodcut prints, primarily used for book illustrations. His principal client was Anton Koberger, one of the leading publishers in Europe, as well as Dürer's godfather.

Figure **5.3.2.1.64**: Michael Wolgemut, *View of the City of Nuremberg*, 1493, from *The Nuremberg Chronicle* (Nuremburg: Anton Koberger) (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Following his apprenticeship, Dürer set out as a journeyman, traveling to great art centers in Germany and the Netherlands. His tour lasted four years. He had hoped to go to Colmar to meet Martin Schongauer, a famous painter and the leading engraver in Germany, but by the time Dürer arrived in Colmar, Schongauer had died. Fortunately, Schongauer's brothers gave Dürer access to the prints and drawings in his studio. Dürer went on to work with another of the brothers, a goldsmith in Basel.

Figure **5.3.2.1.64**: Martin Schongauer, German, about 1450-91, *Saint Sebastian*, c. 1480-90, engraving (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Dürer returned to Nuremberg in 1494. Within six months he had married and set off again, this time for Italy. During a sojourn of several months, he came into direct contact with the art and artists of the burgeoning Italian Renaissance. His studies of the works of Antonio Pollaiuolo, **Andrea Mantegna**, **Giovanni Bellini**, and others brought changes to his own art. He began to combine the structure and corporeality of Italian art with the profuse detail and emotive narration of northern European art.

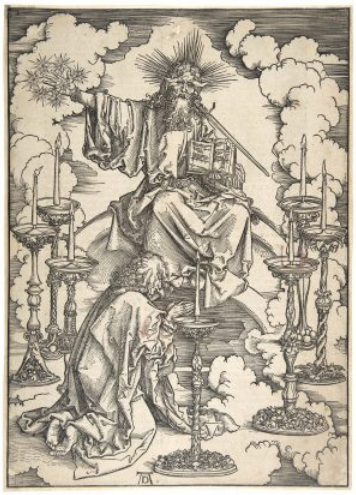

Figure 5.3.2.1.65: Albrecht Dürer, *The Seven Golden Candlesticks and the Seven Stars* from *The Apocalypse*, 1511, originally published 1498, woodcut, 39.53 x 28.26 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

During the later 1490s his most remarkable project was an illustrated edition of *The Apocalypse of Saint John*, the Bible's *Book of Revelations*. The book, with its visionary, full-page woodcut prints, made Dürer one of the most famous men in Europe.

At the same time, Dürer perfected his skills in other disciplines, including both oil and watercolor painting, drawing, and above all, engraving. By his 30th birthday, Dürer was an engraver without peer, and remains so today. His studies of nature, proportion, and perspective, reaching their apogee in his studies of human anatomy, laid the foundation for brilliant engravings such as *Adam and Eve*, his self-conscious masterpiece of 1504.

Figure 5.3.2.1.66: Albrecht Dürer, Adam and Eve, 1504, engraving, 24.92 x 19.21 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

Dürer traveled to Italy again from 1505 to 1507, possibly in an attempt to shut down copyists who were stealing his ideas. His renewed contact with Italian artists deepened his fascination with art theory, and he soon began intensive studies that would lead to the publication of detailed treatises on human proportion, applied geometry, and military fortification. Though the geometry treatise would not appear until 1525, he was working on it in the early 1510s, while also studying nature and preparing ***Melencolia I***. The wings of the angel in *Melencolia I* bring to mind his famous watercolor of a bird's wing (below), which he drew in 1512. *Melencolia I* is sometimes called Dürer's "summa" because it brings together so many of his interests and ideas.

Dürer's patrons included the uppermost reaches of society, including Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, who awarded Dürer's annual pension. Yet Dürer avoided becoming exclusively a court artist, preferring entrepreneurship. He continued to paint, but he clearly realized that the printing press was a more reliable source of income. As early as 1508, he wrote to a patron, "I shall stick to my engraving, and if I had done so before I should today be a richer man by 1,000 florins." Dürer employed agents, including his wife, Agnes, to sell his prints, thus freeing him to work on time-consuming projects.

In July 1520, not long after the death of the emperor, Dürer departed for a year-long trip to the Netherlands. He hoped to persuade the new Emperor Charles V to renew his pension. Along the way he basked in the great celebrity accorded him in city after city. He met other great artists, royals, and intellectuals. His diary from this trip reveals that he often gave prints, occasionally including *Melancolj* (as he called it) as gifts.

Figure **5.3.2.1.67**: Albrecht Dürer, German, 1471-1528, *Wing of a Blue Roller*, 1512, watercolor (The Albertina Museum, Vienna)

After his return to Nuremberg, Dürer complained of his failing eyesight and stiffening hands. In later years, his productivity as an engraver slowed, but he continued to publish his prints. His earlier engravings have been found printed on papers from the 1520s. He died in 1528, leaving Agnes an estate of 6,874 florins, more than ten times the annual salary of the mayor of Nuremberg. The reprinting of Dürer's engraved plates and woodblocks continued for centuries, though they became increasingly incapable of producing such beautiful impressions as the one on display here.

Additional resources:

Works by Albrecht Dürer at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia)

Essay on Albrecht Dürer from The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Essay on Albrecht Dürer from the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

"The Strange World of Albrecht Dürer" from the Clark Institute

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5.3.2.1: The Four Horsemen, from The Apocalypse is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **7.9: Northern Europe in the 16th century- Renaissance and Mannerism** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.3.2.2: The Tetons - Snake River

by **EMILIA MICKEVICIUS**

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Figure 5.3.2.2.1: Installation view, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*, 1975, George Eastman Museum

When you think of "landscape photography," what comes to mind? Whatever pictures you're imagining, they likely look different from the photographs in the 1975 exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape*. Organized at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York, the show featured ten photographers who examined the American landscape in a new way.[1] Instead of focusing on pristine or exceptional scenery found at national parks, they trained their cameras on the byproducts of postwar suburban expansion: freeways, gas stations, industrial parks, and tract homes. They furthermore rendered these banal subjects with a style that suggested cool detachment. While visiting the exhibition, people voiced a range of reactions:

> ***"I don't like them—they're dull and flat. There's no people, no involvement, nothing."***
>
> ***"At first it's stark nothing, but then you look at it, and it's just about the way things are."***
>
> ***"I don't like to think there are ugly streets in America, but when it's shown to you—without beautification—maybe it tells you how much more we need here."[2]***

Preserved within these comments are the expectations these visitors held about the American landscape and its representation. Given that people largely found the work off-putting and difficult to interpret, how did *New Topographics* come to be regarded as one of the most important photography exhibitions of the 20th century?

Landscape as the built environment

On the one hand, *New Topographics* represented a radical shift by redefining the subject of landscape photography as the built (as opposed to the natural) environment. To comprehend the significance of this, it helps to consider the type of imagery that previously dominated the genre in the United States.

Beginning in the 1920s, Ansel Adams cultivated an approach to landscape photography that posited nature as separate from human presence. Consistent with earlier American landscape painting, Adams photographed scenery in a manner intended to provoke feelings of awe and pleasure in the viewer. He used vantage points that emphasized the towering scale of mountain peaks, and embraced a wide tonal range from black to white to record texture and dramatic effects of light and weather.

Figure 5.3.2.2.2: Ansel Adams, *"The Tetons—Snake River," Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming*, 1942 (National Archives)

Adams wanted his pictures' viewers to feel as uplifted as he had when looking at the scenery in person. His heroic, timeless photographs contributed to the cause of conservationism—the environmental approach that seeks to preserve exceptional landscapes and protect them from human intervention.

Figure 5.3.2.2.3: Robert Adams, *Tract house, Boulder County, Colorado*, 1973, gelatin silver print (George Eastman Museum, © Robert Adams)

By contrast, when visitors walked into *New Topographics*, they encountered subject matter that was all too commonplace, represented in an unfamiliar manner. Consider Robert Adams's (no relation to Ansel) 1973 image *Tract house, Boulder County, Colorado*. The photograph pictures a two-story house whose half-timber framing appears decorative rather than structural, a kitschy imitation of an earlier architectural style.[3] Recorded under bright noon sunlight, the house's shadow barely extends into its grassless yard. The flag on the mailbox is up, perhaps to signal the presence of outgoing mail, but there are few other signs of habitation. The hazy, organic contour of the distant mountain range—which the house's roofline nearly interrupts—appears more durable than the newly constructed neighborhood. The sense of place is Colorado, but this is not the open frontier of myth. Here—as in John Schott's photographs along Route 66, or Frank Gohlke's views of paved-over Los Angeles—postwar suburban sprawl has overtaken nature (both Schott's and Gohlke's work was represented in the exhibition).

Figure 5.3.2.2.4: Frank Gohlke, *Landscape, Los Angeles*, 1974 (George Eastman House, © Frank Gohlke)

What was both novel and challenging about *New Topographics* was not only the photographs' content, but how they made viewers feel. By foregrounding, rather than erasing human presence, the photographs placed people into a stance of responsibility towards the landscape's future—a position that resonated with ecology, the branch of environmental thought that was gaining traction in the 1970s.

Figure 5.3.2.2.5: John Schott, *Untitled (from Route 66 Motels)*, 1973, gelatin silver print, 19.3 x 23.9 cm (George Eastman Museum, © John Schott)

A "Neutral" style

In addition to subject matter, style was a major component of what distinguished *New Topographics* photography. In the exhibition's catalog, curator William Jenkins described the photographs as "neutral" and "reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion, and opinion."[4]

He wondered: was it possible to make pictures without style? The exhibition's photographers all engaged with this question and pursued it through a variety of means.

Working in square format, Joe Deal photographed new homes and construction sites in Albuquerque, New Mexico from the steep foothills of nearby mountains. Eliminating the horizon from his pictures, he filled each square frame with a dense patchwork of surfaces: driveways, newly cut roads, empty lots, and expanses of brush yet to be tamed. The effect was that the terrain appeared compressed into flatness, encouraging viewers to study the photographs as if looking at topographical maps. Their eyes suspended in a state of scanning, viewers could read the landscape as bearing traces of human decision-making. Moments of too-perfect symmetry in the patterns of rocks and bushes expose the landscaping as unnatural. Traces of ongoing development in the form of construction sites are juxtaposed with piles of refuse and empty lots that suggest the wastefulness of abandoned projects. By framing the land in this way, Deal enabled his viewers to consider the cost of rapid growth in the fragile desert.

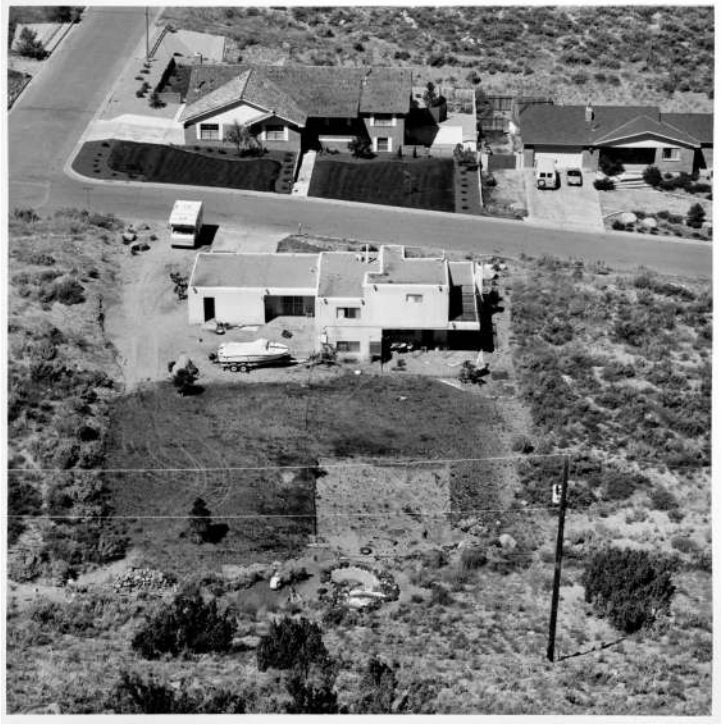

Figure 5.3.2.2.6: Joe Deal, *Untitled View (Albuquerque)*, 1973, gelatin silver print (George Eastman Museum, © Estate of Joe Deal)

New Topographics established that neutrality is as much a matter of convention as the expressivity of Ansel Adams's photographs. If the photographs looked "neutral," it was because they simultaneously resembled visual materials we associate with anonymity and information (such as topographical maps or real estate photographs), and activated the kind of looking we typically deploy to interpret those materials. Other *New Topographics* photographers also referred to fine art sources to inform their "neutral" style. For example, Lewis Baltz's photographs of new industrial parks in Southern California invoked Minimalism. By photographing blank, corporate façades head-on, Baltz placed his viewers into a subtly critical confrontation with the homogeneity they represented.

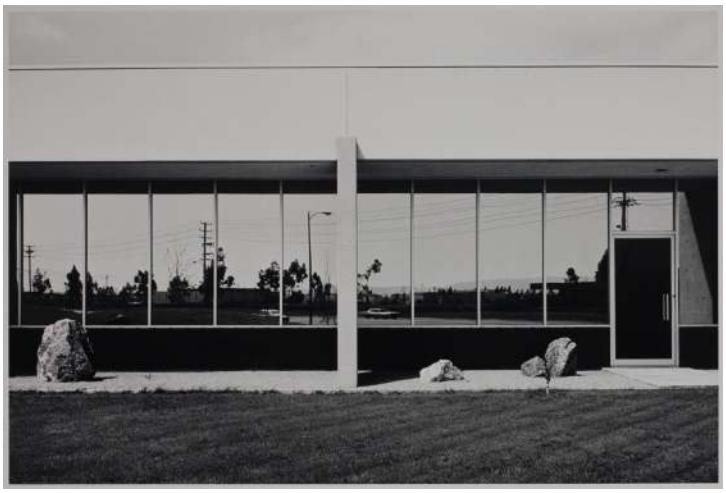

Figure 5.3.2.2.7: Lewis Baltz, *South Wall, Mazda Motors, 2121 East Main Street, Irvine*, 1974, gelatin silver print (George Eastman Museum, © Estate of Lewis Baltz)

Influence and legacy

Though it received a lukewarm reception in 1975, *New Topographics* has been enormously influential in contemporary photography, both in terms of its attention to vernacular architecture and its cool, cerebral style. The exhibition was restaged in its entirety at multiple museum venues in 2009, a testament to its historical importance. Its photographers never considered themselves a school or movement, but the name of the show has come to serve as a kind of shorthand for the approach to landscape photography that they initiated. Many younger photographers collected and shared the exhibition's catalog over the past several decades, and the ideas from the exhibition circulated among photography students—particularly influential were Stephen Shore (the exhibition's sole color photographer) and Bernd and Hilla Becher (the only international photographers in the show). The Bechers' students at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in Germany became known as the Düsseldorf School of Photography, and include the photographers Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, and Thomas Struth, who have each photographed the built environment using a similarly detached, unsentimental style that also harkens back to the New Objectivity tradition.

Figure 5.3.2.2.8: Stephen Shore, *Church and 2nd Streets, Easton, Pennsylvania, June 20, 1974*, 1974, chromogenic color print, © Stephen Shore

What *New Topographics* reinvented was both the subject matter of landscape and the kind of response we can have to such pictures: not just awe or uplift, but a sense of responsibility. As long as humans continue to intervene upon nature, this will remain a vital avenue of inquiry in contemporary photography.

Notes:

[1] The New Topographics photographers were Robert Adams, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, and Henry Wessel Jr.

[2] Tape-recorded interviews conducted by Bess Abel, a photography student of Joe Deal, on December 13 and 14, 1975. Tape and transcripts: Joe Deal Archive, Center for Creative Photography.

[3] For more on the phenomenon of contemporary architecture referencing history, see Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966). *New Topographics* photographer Stephen Shore in fact created several of his most well-known photographs while on a summer 1975 cross-continental road trip commissioned by Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, who subsequently included Shore in their 1976 exhibition “Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City” at the Smithsonian Institution’s Renwick Gallery.

[4] William Jenkins, “Introduction,” in *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape* (Rochester: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, 1975), p. 5.

Additional resources

Britt Salvesen, ed. *New Topographics*, ed. Britt Salvesen and Alison Nordström (Göttingen: Steidl; Tucson, AZ: Center for Creative Photography; Rochester, NY: George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film, 2009).

Reframing the New Topographics, eds. Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2010).

Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

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5.3.2.3: In the Car

In the Car

Figure **5.3.2.3.1**: Roy Lichtenstein, *In the Car*, 1963. Oil and magna on canvas, 172.00 x 203.50 cm. National Galleries, Scotland. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/DACS 2018. (Photo: National Galleries of Scotland, via Smarthistory)

Roy Lichtenstein

Born in New York, Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) was a child of upper-middle-class parents. In school, he was interested in music and art, frequently attending jazz concerts and sketching portraits of the musicians. Lichtenstein studied at Ohio State University until the Army drafted him during World War II. In the Army, he was trained in languages until the program was cut. Subsequently, he was sent to engineering school, and that program was eliminated, so he trained as a pilot until the program was also discontinued. Lichtenstein finally became a draftsman and was sent to Europe, where he studied the art of the masters until the end of the war when he went home. Lichtenstein returned to Ohio State, completing his bachelor's and master's degrees, teaching at the university for ten years. In 1957, Lichtenstein, his wife, and two sons moved back to upstate New York to teach at the university and work on his own Abstract Expressionism art. By 1960, he taught at Rutgers University and found an environment of pop imagery.

Lichtenstein created his first works based on comics and commercial advertising, even painting mundane items like tennis shoes and golf balls. The works were created by mirroring the crude printing methods used by newspapers. His success grew, and he painted some of his most famous and successful works, including *Drowning Girl* and *Whaam*. Much of his work was based on styles found in comic books and commercial art, initially not considered worthy of the standards found in fine art. Lichtenstein took the trivial and created art. His first break with the abstract world occurred when he inserted comic book characters into his abstracted backgrounds. Lichtenstein wanted to illustrate the comic world more closely. He started using Ben-Day dots (6.6.5), a tiny mechanical pattern generally found in engraving to represent texture and progressions of color. He created the dots by using perforated dot patterns in which his paintbrush would skim across the top and drop paint into the stencil circles. The dots were generally cyan, yellow, magenta, and black, their spacing and combinations used to produce different colors and shading. (The same concept used by modern computer printers.) His use of dots became a trademark. Lichtenstein copied a foundation image by hand, altering parts of the image, then tracing the drawing onto the canvas. He stated, "As directly as possible…From a cartoon, photograph, or whatever, I draw a small picture—the size that will fit into my opaque projector…I don't draw a picture to reproduce it—I do it in order to recompose it…I project the drawing onto the canvas and pencil it in and then I play around with the drawing until it satisfies me."[2] He manually applied the dots by hand, frequently using templates for different color patterns based on primary colors outlined with heavy black lines. Lichtenstein's subject matter and the use of dots brought the mechanical appearance of the commercial and comic world into the arena of fine art.

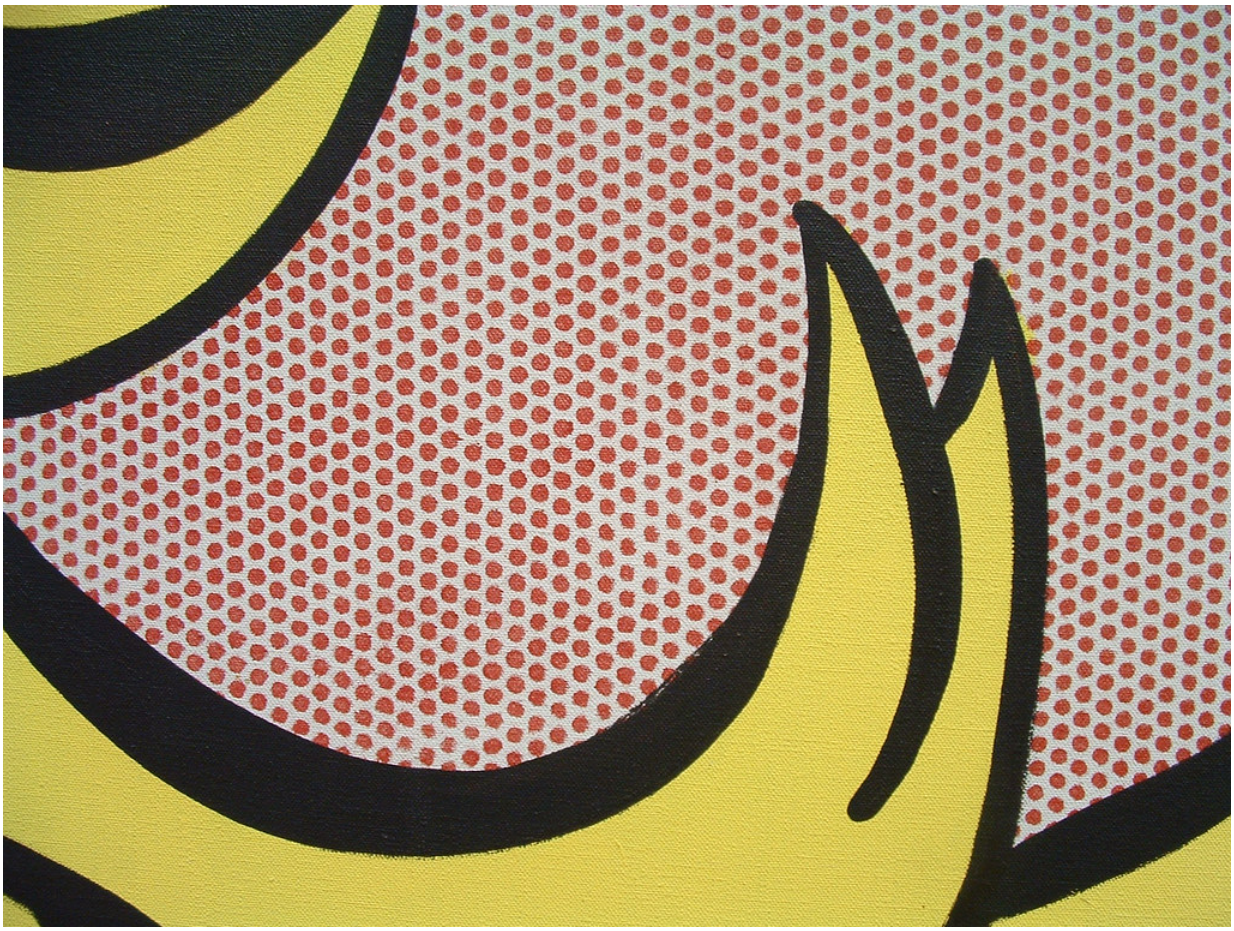

Figure 5.3.2.3.5: Close up of painting technique, by Max Braun, CC BY-SA 2.0

In *Girl with Tear III* (6.6.6), Lichtenstein used his dot process in a Surrealist setting. In one series, the incomplete face is focused on the eye, the origination of the tear, a parody of Dali or Picasso. He used red dots for the face against the slanted dark stripes in the background. The column mimics the stripes, except wider and vertical. The swoop of blond hair brings the different elements together. The single eye and tear focused outward in the center.

Figure **5.3.2.3.6**: Girl with Tear III (1973, oil and magna on canvas, 289.4 x 336.4 cm) by Bob Ramsak, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

The *Drowning Girl* (6.6.7) was based on an original image by DC Comics, an image Lichtenstein altered significantly by altering the picture he created using Ben-Day dots. The girl's boyfriend was in the original as he clung to a boat. Lichtenstein cropped the image, so only the girl was visible, waves threatening to engulf her as she fights for survival. She appears to be emotionally distressed as tears flow from her eyes. Lichtenstein also changed the caption and the boy's name in the text bubble to amplify the girl's distress alone in the water. He used a cool palette and dark colors to represent the potential dangers of the waves and water.

Figure **5.3.2.3.7**: Drowning Girl (1963, oil and polymer on canvas, 171.6 x 169.5 cm) by Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Like Monet's set of paintings of the Rouen Cathedral, Lichtenstein also created a series based on photographs he viewed of Monet's work. Instead of painting the cathedrals in different lights and times of day, Lichtenstein's cathedrals (6.6.8) were divided into binary colors of dots. He wanted to use the concepts of Pop Art and its repetition with an iconic image, an image; "cheapened by overexposure, and reinvesting it with renewed, ironic vigor and relevance."[3] Lichtenstein used two colors in each painting; the red and yellow dots are interlocked to develop a clear image of the daylit cathedral (6.6.9, 6.6.10). The center painting is an illusion of a hazy morning, while the dark painting demonstrates the darkness of night. The Ben-Day dots reproduction dots, looking like the proofs from a printing press, create the symbolism of different light developed in mass reproduction. Monet investigated the various permutations of light on a single source, while Lichtenstein explored the reproductive values of the mass media.

Figure 5.3.2.3.8: Rouen Cathedral (1969, oil and magna on canvas, 161.6 x 360.3 cm) by wallyg, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/376388

Figure 5.3.2.3.9: Rouen Cathedral close up, by profzucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

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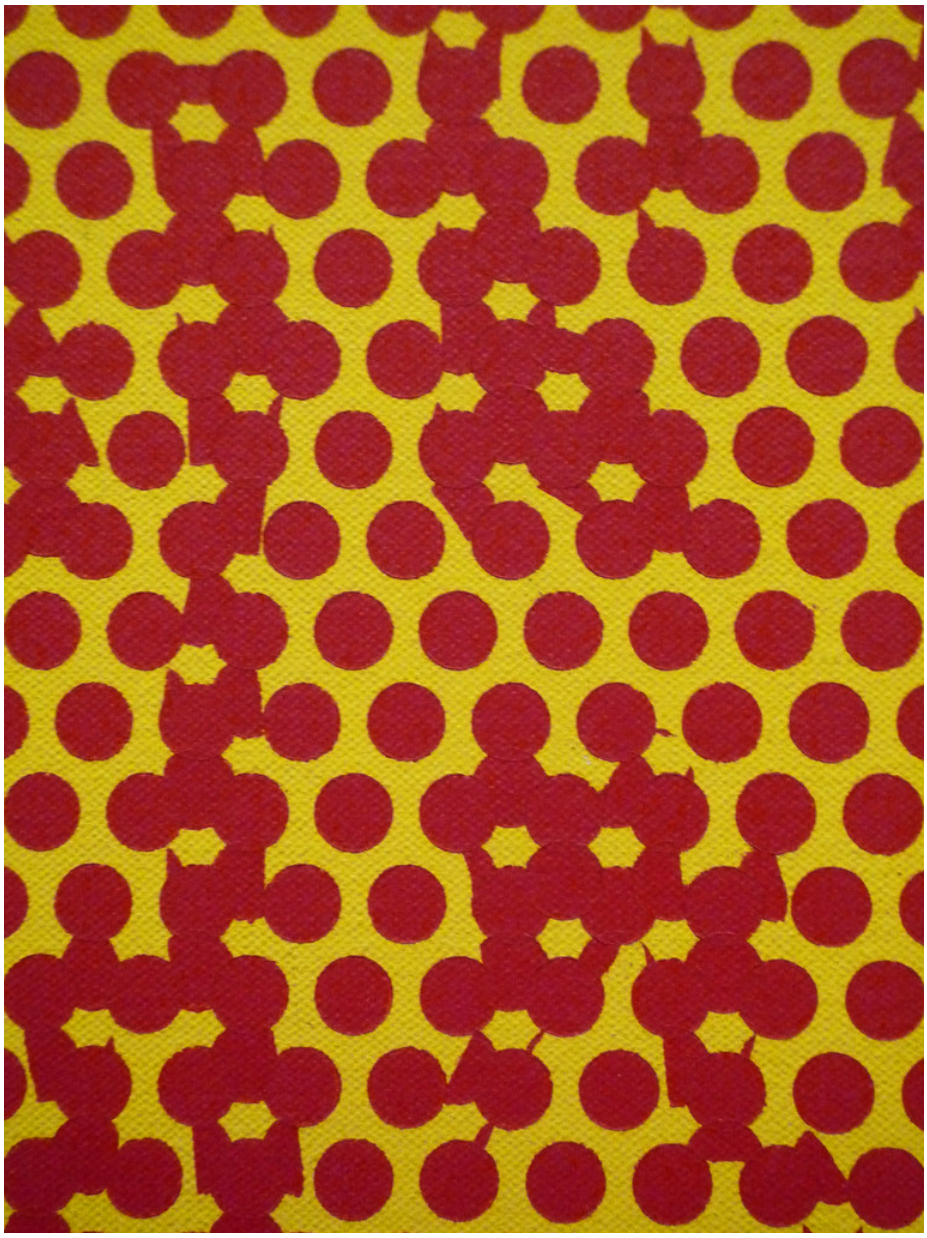

Figure 5.3.2.3.10: Rouen Cathedral Ben-Day dots, by profzucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

[2] Lanchner, C. (2009). Roy Lichtenstein (MOMA Artist Series), The Museum of Modern Art, p. 5.

[3] Retrieved from https://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/monetlichtenstein-rouen-cathedrals

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5.3.2.4: Navigation Chart

by DR. JENNY NEWELL and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Navigation Chart Video

Video 5.3.2.4.1: Navigation Chart, late 19th century, Marshall Islands, wood, fiber, and shells (American Museum of Natural History). Speakers: Jenny Newell, Steven Zucker and Tina Stege

Master sailors fashioned these maps from sticks and cowrie shells, registering relationships between land and sea.

Video Transcript

[0:00] [music]

Dr. Steven Zucker: [0:11] One of the practices from the Pacific islands that I find most intriguing is mapmaking from the Marshall Islands.

Dr. Jenny Newell: [0:13] The Marshall Islands see themselves as being the greatest navigators in the world. One of the things that you can see as a material representation of this is the wonderful maps. They're called meddo, or rebbelib. They're made of sticks and shells, and put together as mental maps of the Marshall Islands and the currents and the swells that link those islands.

Dr. Zucker: [0:34] The maps aren't used in the way that we use GPS in a car currently, or the way that we used to use a paper map. These aren't things that the navigators would have taken with them in boats. This is a memory aid.

Dr. Newell: [0:48] It's a thing that will help you to create a mental map — a good, solid map — so it was only ever used on shore.

Dr. Zucker: [0:50] The Marshall Islands represents an enormous number of islands and atolls in the Pacific. It's the first major island group that you reach if you're traveling southwest from Hawaii.

Dr. Newell: [1:01] The Marshall Islands are a set of 29 atolls made up of 1,200, roughly, islands. It takes up a space of about 2 million square kilometers.

Dr. Zucker: [1:13] This is almost all water. It's interesting that this is a map, not of land, but it's a map of the relationship between land and sea.

Dr. Newell: [1:19] The sea is very much the element that Marshall Islanders live with all the time. It's a very intimate part of who they are, and their daily lives and their cosmologies. This ocean links them, it's the unifying element.

Dr. Zucker: [1:30] I think of the ocean as a barrier, but this is the reverse. The ocean is the thing that creates a relationship between the atolls and the islands.

Dr. Newell: [1:38] The great Tongan scholar, Epeli Hau'ofa, has written very eloquently and powerfully about this. That this is our "sea of islands." The way they're all connected, they're connected by the ocean, they're not separated by it.

Dr. Zucker: [1:49] I love that the cowrie shells represent the islands, and they're really small. Most of the chart is wood, it's sticks. It beautifully expresses how isolated those islands are, but brought together within this greater matrix of the wood, of the ocean.

Dr. Newell: [2:03] Each one of these charts is different because it's made by a navigator to represent the way he sees this ocean with its islands, and how to get between them. This one here is one that was collected by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Dr. Zucker: [2:15] The author?

Dr. Newell: [2:16] That's right. He and his family traveled to the Marshalls. He bought this here, or was given it, and then later on it was sold in his estate.

Dr. Zucker: [2:24] It seems impossible that you could create a map of the open ocean, but the way that these function, in a general sense, is that they're registering the swells, the currents, the landmarks of the open sea.

Dr. Newell: [2:36] In most of the charts, you'll see there's these curving sticks. Those ones are like the echoes of the swells and the waves out from an island. When they hit an island, they then echo back out. Then you can see the longer sticks are the ones which are currents, and there's also sticks which are like the pathways from one place to another that the navigators wanted to emphasize.

Dr. Zucker: [2:54] It makes sense that the chart is recording the way in which the water is responsive to the islands, since these islands are low and probably can't be seen until you're right up against them.

Dr. Newell: [3:09] That's one of the great skills of Marshallese, and other Micronesian, navigators, is that as soon as you are just a little way beyond your atoll, your island, you can't see landforms anymore, you have to just be able to read the sea.

Dr. Zucker: [3:21] It's a reminder of how treacherous the ocean could be for somebody who was not a skilled navigator, and how important passing knowledge from a senior navigator to somebody who's just learning that craft is.

Dr. Newell: [3:29] The master navigators would take the younger men out on the canoes, and they would have them lie down in the canoe and feel the waves. You can feel when there's one current intersecting another, and you can feel the way the boat rocks differently.

[3:47] These are very beautifully designed outrigger canoes. They are very highly attuned to their specific lagoon and sea environment and working in all sorts of difficult sailing conditions.

Dr. Zucker: [0:00] That relationship with the sea is changing rapidly now.

Dr. Newell: [3:56] The big issue for the Marshall Islanders now is climate change. You know, in the past it's been nuclear testing.

Dr. Zucker: [4:08] In the 1940s and the 1950s, this was a place where the United States tested its hydrogen bombs, most famously at the Bikini Atoll.

Dr. Newell: [4:11] Marshall Islanders are still living with that legacy. There's still testing going on, but not of nuclear weapons, it's more ballistic missiles now.

[4:23] Part of what has come out of that is that there's this Compact of Free Association between the Marshall Islands and United States, which means that the people from the Republic of the Marshall Islands can live and work in the States.

Dr. Zucker: [4:29] One can only imagine what a contemporary map would look like now, one that spanned not only islands, but nations.

Dr. Newell: [4:37] Certainly these maps are now fulfilling a very different role. They're much more about navigating identities and connections to place. They are put on people's walls, so if someone from Majuro, the capital of the Marshalls, moves out to New York, they might take one of these.

[4:59] I've been working with Tina Stege from the Marshall Islands for a number of years. She wrote a beautiful piece to talk about climate change. I wanted her to read it out for us.

Tina Stege: [5:00] I called this "We Are Navigating Threatening Seas." Our ancestors sailed to the Marshall Islands over 1,000 years ago in canoes. It was a feat of wayfinding that sustains and inspires those of us now looking for a way forward in threatening seas.

[5:16] This is also a story of our children, and the generations to come. What will it mean to them to be Marshallese? Will they know the names of their home islands and the wato, the land parcels that bind us to the earth and to each other?

[5:31] Will they think of the ocean as a part of themselves? Will it be a source of sustenance and a vast network of waves, each with names leading like roads to other islands? Will they know the smell of maan, the pandanus fiber we use to weave everything,

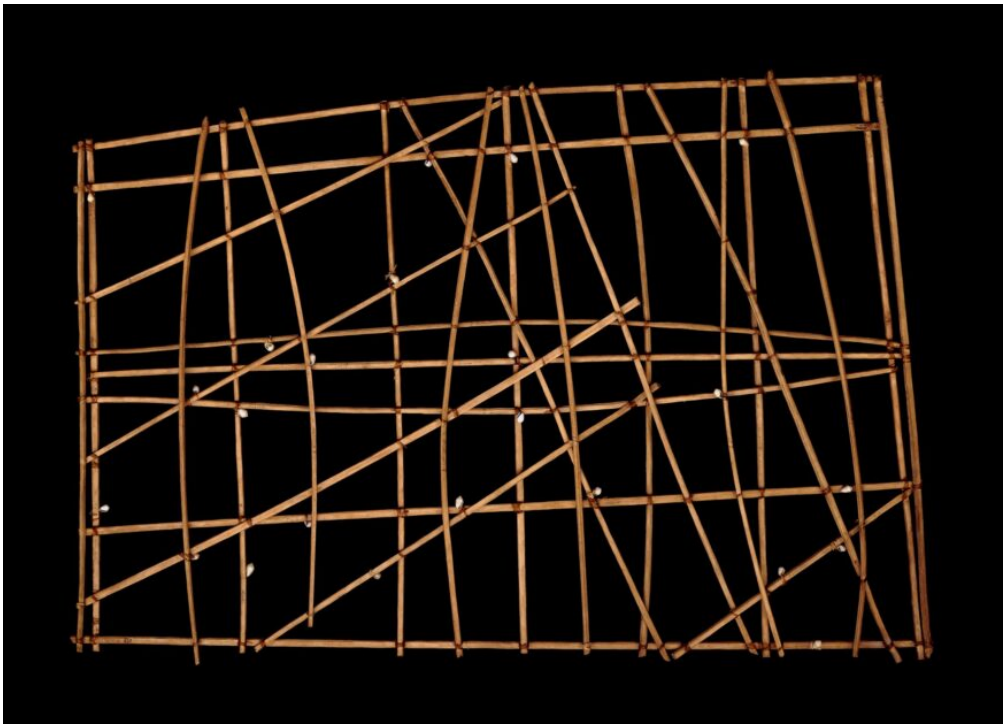
clothing, mats, baskets, the small flowers we wear in our hair. What will the world be like for them?

[0:00] [music]

Navigation between the islands

The Marshall Islands in eastern Micronesia consist of thirty-four coral atolls consisting of more than one thousand islands and islets spread out across an area of several hundred miles. In order to maintain links between the islands, the Marshall Islanders built seafaring canoes. These vessels were both quick and manouverable. The islanders developed a reputation for navigation between the islands—not a simple matter, since they are all so low that none can be seen from more than a few miles away.

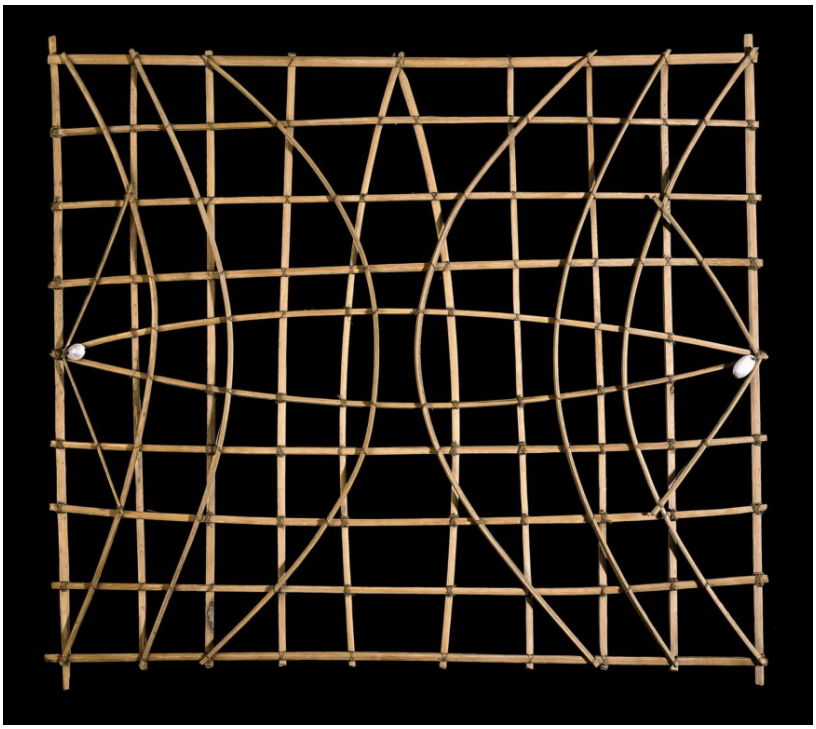
In order to determine a system of piloting and navigation the islanders devised charts that marked not only the locations of the islands, but their knowledge of the swell and wave patterns as well. The charts were composed of wooden sticks; the horizontal and vertical sticks act as supports, while diagonal and curved ones represent wave swells. Cowrie or other small shells represent the position of the islands. The information was memorized and the charts would not be carried on voyages.



Navigation chart (*rebbelib*), probably 19th century C.E. (Marshall Islands, Micronesia), wood, shell, and fiber, 67.5 x 99 x 3 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum, London)

Rebbelib

This chart is of a type known as a *rebbelib*, which cover either a large section or all of the Marshall Islands. Other types of chart more commonly show a smaller area. This example represents the two chains of islands which form the Marshall Islands. It was collected by Admiral E.H.M. Davis during the cruise of HMS Royalist from 1890 to 1893.



Navigation chart (*mattang*), probably 19th or early 20th century C.E. (Marshall Islands, Micronesia), wood, shell, and fiber, 64 x 58 x 1.7 cm (© The Trustees of the British Museum, London)

Mattang

This chart is of the type known as a *mattang*, specifically made for the purpose of training people selected to be navigators. Such charts depict general information about swell movements around one or more small islands. Trainees were taught by experienced navigators.

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Artwork details

Title	Navigation Chart
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	late 19th century
Places	Oceania / Micronesia / Marshall Islands
Period, Culture, Style	Micronesian
Artwork Type	Map / Woodwork
Material	Wood, Plant fiber, Shell
Technique	

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A.C. Haddon and J. Hornell, *Canoes of Oceania* (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum Special Publications, reprinted as one volume, 1975), pp. 27–29.

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The British Museum, "Navigation Chart, Marshall Islands," in *Smarthistory*, April 1, 2017, accessed December 15, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/chart-marshall/.

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5.3.2.5: The Virgin of the Rocks

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker provide a description, historical perspective, and analysis of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks*.

The link to this video is provided at the bottom of this page.

Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1491–1508, oil on panel, 189.5 × 120 cm (The National Gallery, London)

Two Versions

There are two versions of Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks*. Figure **5.3.2.5.1** (located in Paris) is Leonardo's original *Virgin of the Rocks* (c. 1483–86) in the Louvre. The other is in London and is the subject of the video you just watched. These two paintings are a good place to start to define the qualities of the new style of the High Renaissance. Leonardo painted both in Milan, where he had moved from Florence.

Figure **5.3.2.5.1**. Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin on the Rocks*

Normally when we have seen Mary and Christ (in, for example, paintings by Lippi and Giotto), Mary has been enthroned as the queen of heaven. Here, in contrast, we see Mary seated on the ground. This type of representation of Mary is referred to as the

Madonna of Humility. Mary has her right arm around the infant Saint John the Baptist who is making a gesture of prayer to the Christ child. The Christ child in turn blesses St. John. Mary's left hand hovers protectively over the head of her son while an angel looks out and points to St. John. The figures are all located in a fabulous and mystical landscape with rivers that seem to lead nowhere and bizarre rock formations. In the foreground we see carefully observed and precisely rendered plants and flowers.

We immediately notice Mary's ideal beauty and the graceful way in which she moves, features typical of the High Renaissance.

This is the first time that an Italian Renaissance artist has completely abandoned halos. We saw how Fra Filippo Lippi reduced the halo to a narrow ring around Mary's head. Clearly the unreal, symbolic nature of the halo was antithetical to the realism of the Renaissance. It was, in a way, a necessary holdover from the Middle Ages: how else to indicate a figure's divinity?

But Leonardo found another way to indicate divinity — by giving the figures ideal beauty and grace. After all, we would never mistake this group of figures for an ordinary picnic, the way the Lippi's painting of the Madonna and Child with Angels almost looks like a family portrait. We are clearly looking at a mystical vision of Mary, Christ, John the Baptist and an angel in heaven.

The Unified Composition

If we look closely we can see that Leonardo grouped the figures together within a geometric shape of a pyramid (I say pyramid instead of triangle because Leonardo is very concerned with creating an illusion of space—and a pyramid is three dimensional). He also has the figures gesturing to each other and looking at each other. Both of these innovations serve to unify the composition. This is an important difference from paintings of the Early Renaissance where the figures often looked separate from each other. Sometimes this is referred to as a unified composition.

Another way to think about this is to go back to our discussion of Leonardo's angel in his teacher's painting. There, we talked about the more complex pose of the body of Leonardo's angel. Remember this is the High Renaissance, and things that artists were just learning how to do in the Early Renaissance (like contrapposto) are now easy for the artists of the High Renaissance.

As a result, they can do more with the body—make it more complex, more elegant and more graceful. Similarly, the compositions of the paintings of the High Renaissance are more complex and sophisticated than the compositions of the Early Renaissance. Figures interact more, groups of figures are united into pyramidal compositions.

Contributors

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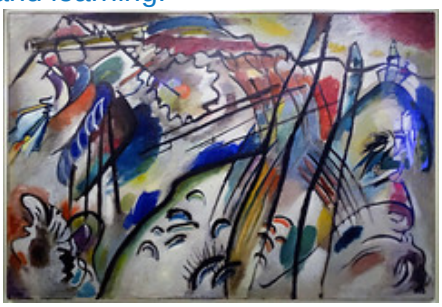
5.3.2.6: Improvisation 28

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
376385

Video **5.3.2.6.1**: Vasily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 28* (second version), 1912, oil on canvas, 111.4 x 162.1 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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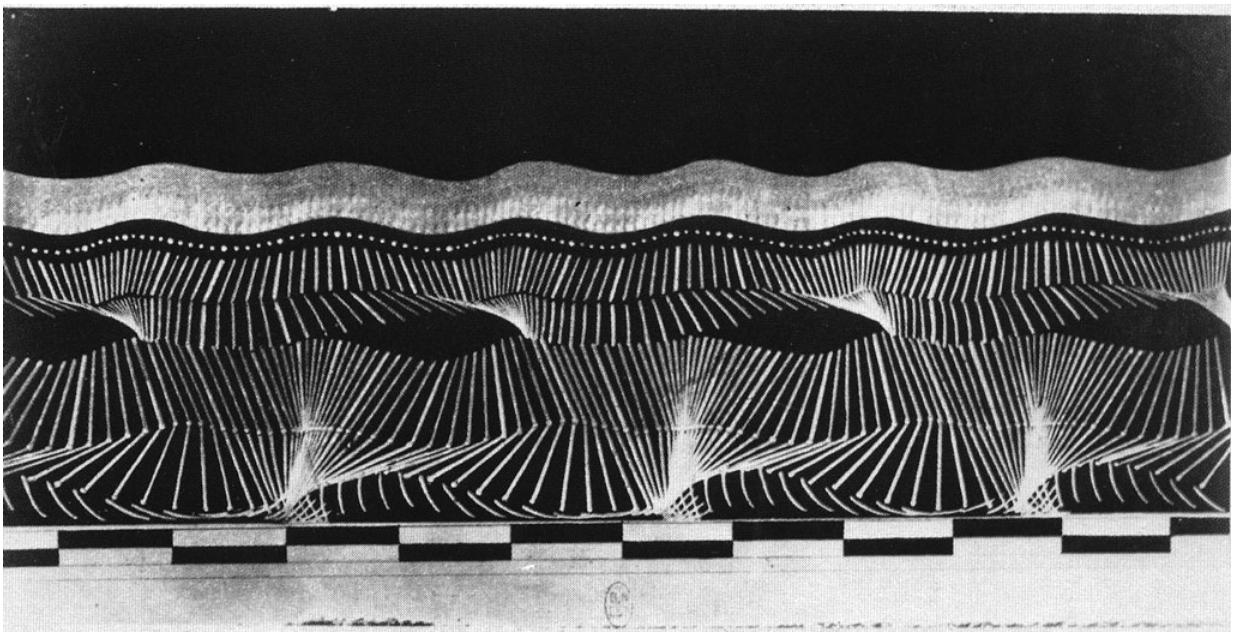
5.3.2.7: Joinville Soldier Walking

Marey, Joinville Soldier Walking

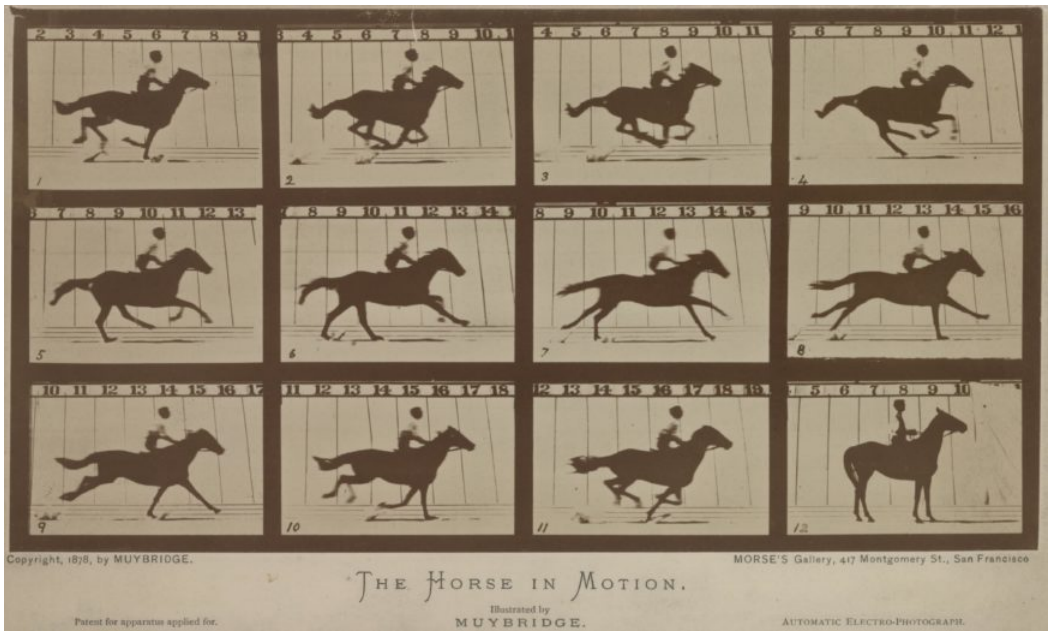
by Dr. Kris Belden-Adams



Jules Etienne Marey, *Joinville Soldier Walking*, 1883, geometric chronophotograph (Paris College de France)

A series of slanted gray lines and a row of dots appear against a black background in wavy bands that reach the side edges of the picture plane. A thick gray stripe undulates along the top. The title of the photograph, *Joinville Soldier Walking*, suggests that this image of lines and dots in wavy bands represents a walking soldier. But how?

After seeing the publication of photographs of moving horses by Eadweard Muybridge in periodicals in 1878, French physiologist/medical doctor/ Étienne-Jules Marey looked to photography as a tool for graphing the movement of objects across space and time, for later scientific analysis.

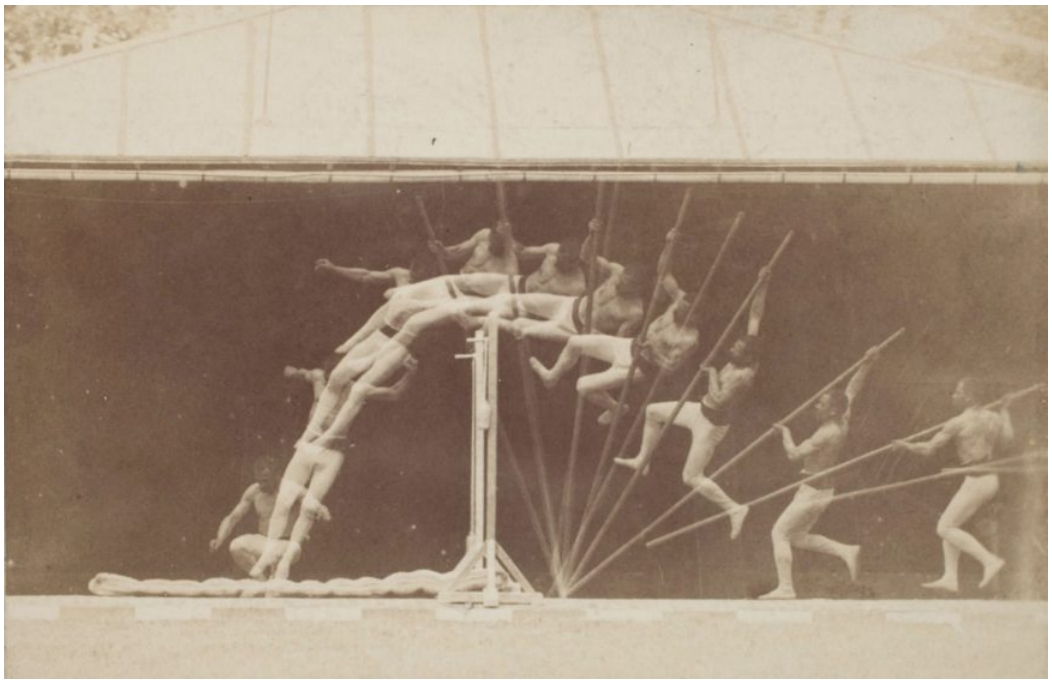


Eadweard Muybridge, gravure of *Horse in Motion*, published in *La Nature* (Dec. 1878). Muybridge's published images often (but not always) featured sequential images of the same subject. For example, the bottom right corner image of Horse in Motion was spliced into the series, and was not from a photograph made 1/1000th-of-a-second after the image directly to its left. Unlike Marey, who sought scientific precision in photography, Muybridge's chief concern was giving closure to the horse's run. (Library of Congress)

Muybridge's published images often (but not always) featured sequential images of the same subject. For example, the bottom right corner image of *Horse in Motion* was spliced into the series, and was not from a photograph made 1/1000th-of-a-second after the image directly to its left. Unlike Marey, who sought scientific precision in photography, Muybridge's chief concern was giving closure to the horse's run.

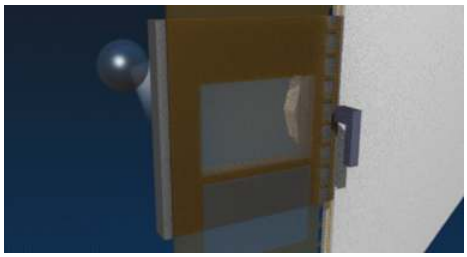
Photography, Marey noted, could halt thin slices of time's passage, and these "atomized" views that surpassed the sensitivity of unaided human vision might prove useful for analyzing the mechanics of human and animal movement. [1] Marey's goal, like that of other late-nineteenth-century motion photographers such as Muybridge, was to find a new understanding of time—a universal experience, but also one that is impossibly fleeting and elusive even as its passage is felt, and its effects apparent all around us. Making lasting images of the mechanics of moving bodies, Marey hoped, would lead to a better understanding of human locomotion. This might allow for the greater of body mechanics, in order to maximize both human movement and time.

In 1882, Marey invented , the capturing of multiple separate and sequential movements of an object. Marey took two approaches to chronophotography, one involving multiple pictures of the same naturalistic and recognizable subject superimposed and overlapping on the same plate, exemplified by *Chronophotographic Study of Man Pole Vaulting*.



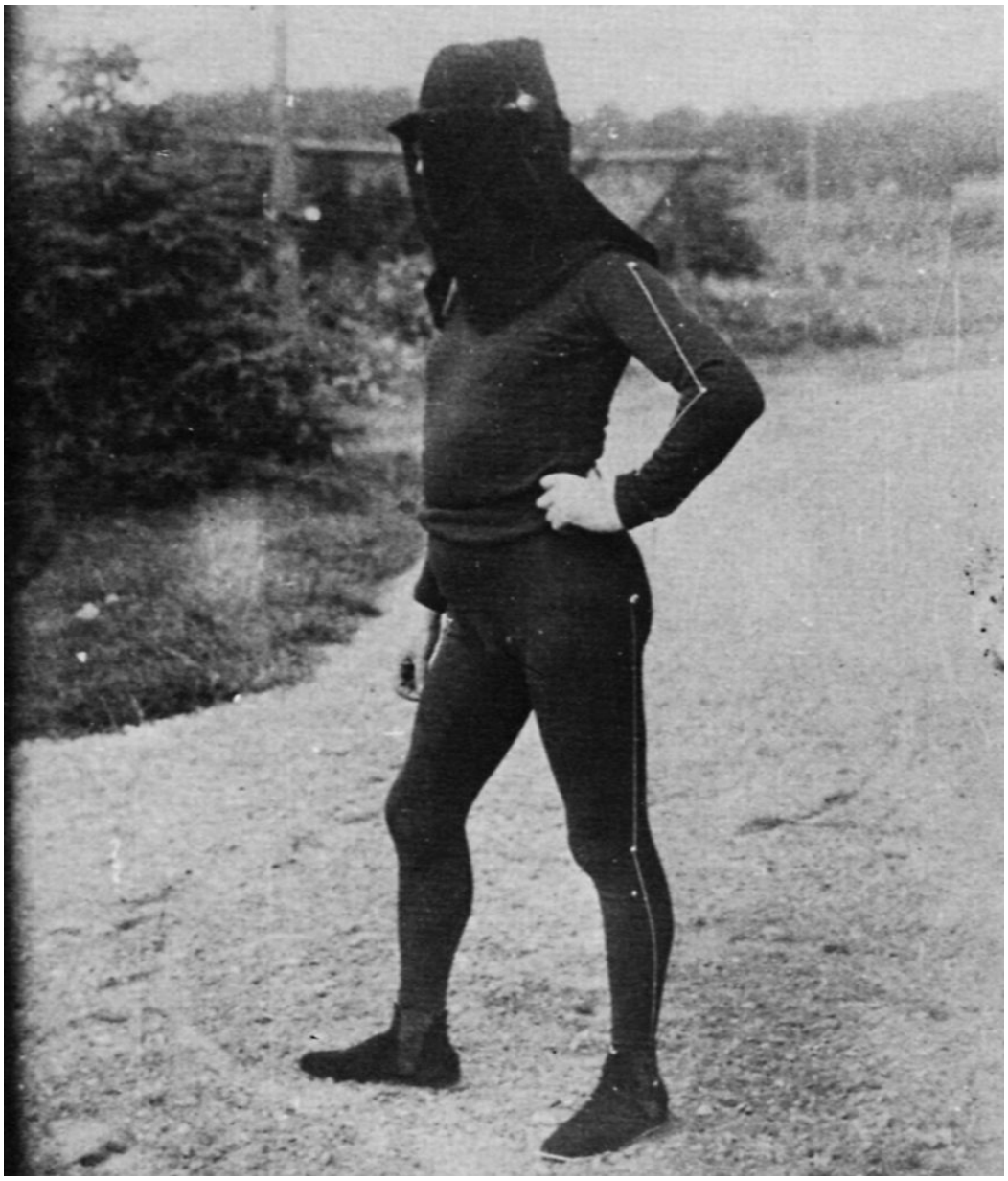
Étienne Jules Marey, *Chronophotographic Study of Man Pole Vaulting*, c. 1890, albumen silver print, 6.9 × 10.6 cm (Eastman Museum)

To make *Chronophotographic Study of Man Pole Vaulting* and *Joinville Soldier Walking*, Marey used a camera with a single, light-sensitive plate, equipped with a motor-driven rotary-disc shutter that turned and rapidly opened and closed the shutter, controlling the flow of light, intermittently. The camera recorded the appearance, in a fractions of a second, of an object sequentially moving across a picture plane.



Rotary disk shutter (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Marey's other approach to chronophotography, "geometric chronophotography," still included multiple overlapping exposures of a single subject, taken sequentially, as it moved across the frame. But in "geometric chronophotographs" like *Joinville Soldier Walking*, the subject appears as an abstract pattern of lines and dots. To achieve this effect, Marey photographed a subject wearing a black "motion suit" with white stripes down the sleeves and legs, and spots on the heads and active joints of the body, as we see in Marey's photograph of assistant Georges Demenÿ. The suited subject walked or ran in front of a black backdrop as the camera recorded sequential movements. Instead of seeing whole bodies frozen in sequential superimposed motions, geometric chronophotographs revealed abstracted expressions of movement as undulating stripes of slanted lines, dots, and wavy bands as we see in *Joinville Soldier Walking*.



Étienne-Jules Marey, Georges Demenÿ in a black suit with a white stripe down side, 1884.

Marey and Demenÿ made *Joinville Soldier Walking* at a military school in Joinville, France, to analyze the fit young men's walking and running movements to determine their efficiency, and adjust training programs, as needed. With the support of the French Ministry of War, they hoped to help gather data at Joinville to evaluate the effectiveness of military training. [2] However, Marey's intended purpose for the photographs—to rigorously and scientifically study the biomechanics of human movement by analyzing the pictures like graphs—eluded him. Frustrated, Marey commented that the photographs failed as scientific inscriptions because they only offered "an approximate idea of the sequence of the various phases of movement, because its record is one of intermittent indications, instead of the continuous record of a curve." [3]

Marey's influence on fine art: capturing motion, the Unseen

Even though the chronophotographs were not as scientifically valuable as he would have liked, Marey's experiments unintentionally inspired not only the creation of cinema, but a generation of fine artists. [4] His work influenced the motion-implying, abstraction-embracing Orphic Cubists Robert and Sonia Delaunay, and František Kupka, as well as Suprematists Kazimir Malevich and Natalia Goncharova, who evoked the fourth dimension (time) in their work. [5]

In addition, as the Italian Futurists sought to visually arrest the dynamism and energy of the industrial/machine age, they looked to Marey's repeated forms, abstracted shapes, and linear dynamism as a means of implying motion on a still surface (see the artwork of Luigi Russolo, Umberto Boccioni, or Giacomo Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* from 1912).

Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (No. 2), 1912, oil on canvas, 151.8 x 93.3 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* revealed a dynamic, brown-toned Cubo-Futurist rendition of the successive steps of abstracted movement of a body fractured into successive planes that simultaneously appear as it descends several steps of stairs. [6] Limbs are fractured, abstracted, and repeated in Duchamp's painting, just as the slanted bands of wavy lines likewise are fractured, reduced to a vocabulary of geometries, and reiterated in Marey's *Joinville Soldier Walking*.

Chronophotographs such as *Joinville Soldier Walking* were, to Marey, only somewhat useful for the scientific analysis of biomechanics. Despite their limitations, they freed the imaginations of many artists and their legacy arguably was far greater.

Notes:

[1] Martha Blassnigg, *Time, Memory, Consciousness and the Cinema Experience* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 77.

[2] Laurent Guido, "Rhythmic Bodies/Movies: Dance as Attraction in Early Film Culture," in Wanda Strauven, ed. *The Cinema of Attractions, Reloaded* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 140, 143. Guido cites these popular sports magazines: *La Vie au Grand Air*, No. 757 (March 22, 1913): p. 213.; *La Vie au Grand Air*, No. 791 (Nov. 15, 1913): p. 213.; Ute Holl, "Psycho-Motor Activity," in *Cinema, Trance and Cybernetics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), p. 190.

[3] Étienne-Jules Marey, *Movement*, Eric Pritchard. trans. (London: D. Appleton, 1895), p. 287.

[4] To read more about Marey's role in the history of cinema, see: Mary Ann Doane, "Temporality, Storage, Legibility: Freud, Marey, and the Cinema," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Winter 1996), pp. 313-343. For more on Marey's influence over visual artists, see: Ute Holl, "Psycho-Motor Activity," in *Cinema, Trance and Cybernetics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), p. 189.

[5] Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "XRays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists," *Art Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Winter 1988), pp. 323–340.; Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[6] Although Duchamp was not a Futurist, he would have seen that group's work in early 1912, at the Italian Futurists' exhibition at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in Paris.

Additional resources

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Essay by Dr. Kris Belden-Adams

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5.3.2.8: Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red

by DR. STEPHANIE CHADWICK

Page ID 376393

Pure abstract art becomes completely emancipated, free of naturalistic appearances.
—Piet Mondrian, 1929[1]

Figure **5.3.2.8.1**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Walking up to Piet Mondrian's painting, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow* can be a baffling experience (see image at left). The canvas is small and uses only the simplest of colors: red, blue, yellow, white and black. The composition is similarly reduced to the simplest of rectilinear forms, squares and rectangles defined by vertical and horizontal lines. One would hardly suspect that we are seeing the artist's determination to depict the underlying structure of reality.

Neo-Plasticism

Mondrian called his style Neo-Plasticism or "The New Plastic Painting," the title of his famous 1917 essay promoting abstraction for the expression of modern life. Don't be confused by Mondrian's use of the term "plastic." He uses it to refer to the plastic arts—media such as sculpture, that molds three-dimensional form, or, in Mondrian's case, painting on canvas. For centuries, European painters had attempted to render three-dimensional forms in believable spaces—creating convincing illusions of reality (**click here** for an example—Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*). In contrast, Mondrian and other modernists wanted to move painting beyond naturalistic depiction to focus instead on the material properties of paint and its unique ability to express ideas abstractly using formal elements such as line and color.

Mondrian believed his abstraction could serve as a universal pictorial language representing the dynamic, evolutionary forces that govern nature and human experience. In fact, he believed that abstraction provides a truer picture of reality than illusionistic depictions of objects in the visible world. Perhaps this is why Mondrian characterized his style as "abstract real" painting.

Abstraction and human progress

Mondrian's earliest paintings were quite traditional in both subject and style. He studied at the art academies in the Hague and in Amsterdam in his home country of the Netherlands. Then, as with many artists during the early twentieth century, he began to emulate a variety of contemporary styles, including **Impressionism**, **Neo-Impressionism**, and **Symbolism** in an effort to find his own artistic voice. The impact of these modern movements can be seen in the development of Mondrian's painting which, over time, shows the dissolution of recognizable objects into increasingly pared-down structures (see the three depictions of trees below). His emphasis on line, color, and geometric shape sought to highlight formal characteristics.

Figure **5.3.2.8.2**: Three trees by Piet Mondrian: *Study for the Gray Tree* (left), 1911, charcoal on paper, 58.4 x 86.5 cm; *The Grey Tree* (center), 1911, oil on canvas, 79.7 x 109.1 cm; Flowering Apple Tree (right), 1912, oil on canvas, 78.5 x 107.5 cm (all in the collection of the Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag)

Mondrian was inspired by **Cubism**, a movement led by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque that explored the use of multiple perspectives. Mondrian began experimenting with abstracted forms around the time he moved to Paris in 1912.

Figure **5.3.2.8.3**: Piet Mondrian, *Ocean 5*, 1914, charcoal and gouache on paper/Homosote panel, 87.6 x 120.3 cm (Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

His famous "Pier and Ocean" series (see above), which reduces the landscape to arrangements of vertical and horizontal lines, exemplifies this period in Mondrian's career. He wanted to push beyond Cubism's strategy of fragmenting forms (café tables were a favorite subject), and move toward pure abstraction. However, this change in Mondrian's process did not take place overnight and he continued to work in a studied, methodical way. In fact, his production of paintings within a series of canvases was part of Mondrian's method, and how he worked through thematic and compositional issues. Because Mondrian continued to rely on the series throughout his career, we can see the progression of his pictorial language even in his later, purely abstract work.

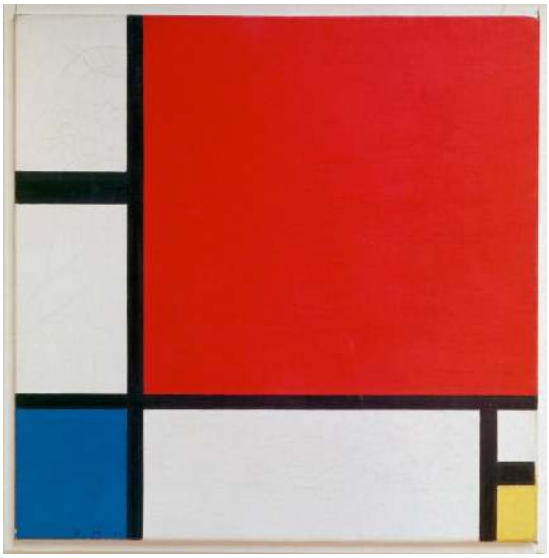

Figure **5.3.2.8.4**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

His use of the term “composition” (the organization of forms on the canvas) signals his experimentation with abstract arrangements. Mondrian had returned home to the Netherlands just prior to the outbreak of the First World War and would remain there until the war ended. While in the Netherlands he further developed his style, ruling out compositions that were either too static or too dynamic, concluding that asymmetrical arrangements of geometric (rather than organic) shapes in primary (rather than secondary) colors best represent universal forces. Moreover, he combined his development of an abstract style with his interest in philosophy, spirituality, and his belief that the evolution of abstraction was a sign of humanity’s progress.

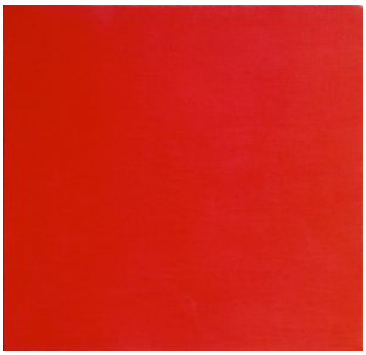

Figure **5.3.2.8.5**: Piet Mondrian, Red (detail), *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Philosophy & Theosophy

Some art historians have viewed Mondrian’s painting as an expression of his interest in dialectical relationships, ideas advanced by the early nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel that art and civilization progress by successive moments of tension and reconciliation between oppositional forces. For Mondrian then, composing with opposites such as black and white pigments or vertical and horizontal lines suggest an evolutionary development.

Mondrian’s painting may also reflect his association with the Theosophical Society, an esoteric group that had a strong presence in Europe. Theosophists were interested in opposites as an expression of hidden unity. During WWI, Mondrian stayed in Laren, a village with a thriving art community near Amsterdam. He lived near M.H.J. Schoenmaeker, a prominent Theosophist who used terms such as “New Plastic” to promote his ideas on spiritual evolution and the unification of the real and the ideal, the physical and immaterial. In Theosophy**,** lines, shapes, and colors symbolized the unity of spiritual and natural forces.

De Stijl

While in Holland, Mondrian founded the movement called *De Stijl* (The Style) with the artist Theo van Doesburg. The two shared many ideas about art as an expression of relationships, particularly the relationships between art and life. Because these artists believed that the evolution of art coincided with the modern progression of humankind, they thought that New Plasticism could, and should, encompass all of human experience. Van Doesburg founded the journal *De Stijl* to promote these ideas and demonstrate that their geometric abstraction, based on their theory of spiritual and pictorial progress, could form a total environment, and impact modern life. Although Mondrian and van Doesburg eventually parted ways, their movement to combine modern art and living was so influential that the abstract, geometric principles and use of primary colors they applied in painting, sculpture, design, and architecture still resonate today.

Figure **5.3.2.8.6**: Piet Mondrian (detail), *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Dynamic contrasts

Mondrian's *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow* demonstrates his commitment to relational opposites, asymmetry, and pure planes of color. Mondrian composed this painting as a harmony of contrasts that signify both balance and the tension of dynamic forces. Mondrian viewed his black lines not as outlines but as planes of pigment in their own right; an idea seen in the horizontal black plane on the lower right of the painting that stops just short of the canvas edge (see image above). Mondrian eradicates the entire notion of illusionistic depth predicated on a figure in front of a background. He achieves a harmonious tension by his asymmetrical placement of primary colors that balance the blocks of white paint. Notice how the large red square at the upper right, which might otherwise dominate the composition, is balanced by the small blue square at the bottom left. What's more, when you see this painting in a person you can discern just how much variation is possible using this color scheme—and that Mondrian used varying shades of blacks and whites, some of which are subtly lighter or darker. Seen up close, this variety of values and textures create a surprising harmony of contrasts. Even the visible traces of the artist's brushwork counter what might otherwise be a rigid geometric composition and balance the artist's desire for a universal truth with the intimately personal experience of the artist.

[1]Piet Mondrian, "Pure Abstract Art, 1929" in *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, edited and translated by Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (Boston: G.K. Hall& Co.), p. 224.

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Yve-Alain Bois, et.al., *Piet Mondrian, 1872-1944* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1994).

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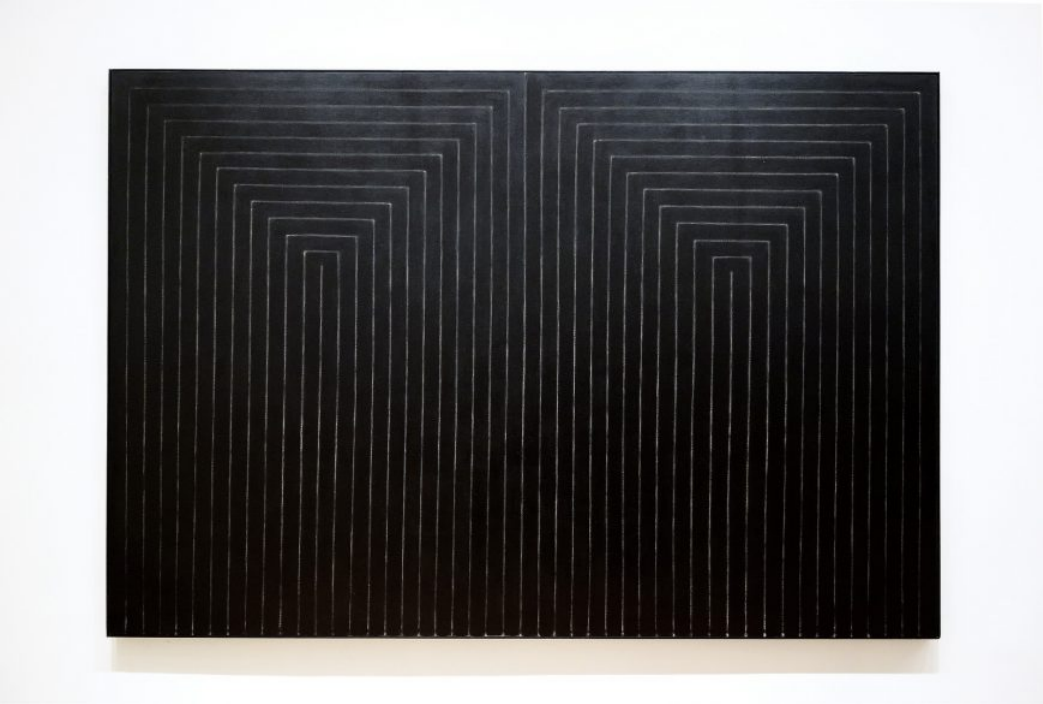
5.3.2.9: The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II

Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor*

by Dr. Virginia B. Spivey

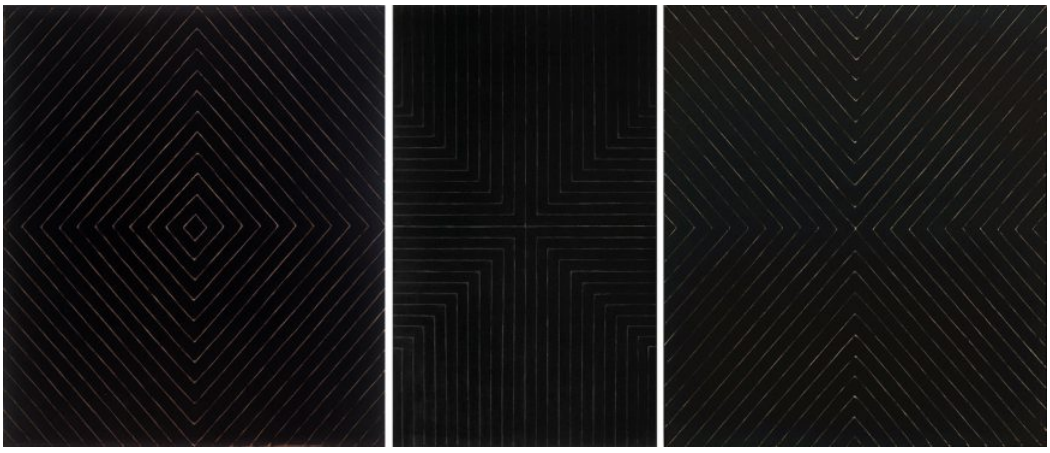


Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.5 x 337.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

The best known American abstract painting of the 1950s was gestural and emotionally expressive (see below). This art, known as Abstract Expressionism was just that. It was abstract, but more to the point, it was subjective—it was about the experience and the very being of the artist. Frank Stella's early series, the "Black Paintings" of 1958-1959 (below), was none of these things. *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II*, one of that series, is characterized by thick black lines painted to alternate repeatedly with thin "stripes" of exposed canvas—with no room for gesture. The series features an array of designs made by differently arranging these same elements in symmetrical rectilinear patterns.

Willem de Kooning, *Woman I*, 1950-52, oil on canvas (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Stella's early paintings are often associated with Minimalism which also begins at about this time. Like the Minimalists, Stella heralds the literal presentation of spare abstract forms. His technical approach—constructing each stroke with a wide housepainter's brush and enamel house paint—highlights the shift among many artists of the time to reject the gestural style of action painting typical of Abstract Expressionism, the preeminent American art movement of the 1950s. By contrast, works like *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II* exhibit a controlled sensibility that speaks to the systematic planning and conceptual framework that belie their simplistic appearance.



Selected Black Paintings (from left to right): Frank Stella, *Jill*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 229.6 x 200 cm (Buffalo AKG Art Museum); Frank Stella, *Die Fahne Hoch!*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 308.9 × 184.9 cm (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York); Frank Stella, *Zambezi*, 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.51 x 200.03 cm (SFMOMA)

Rejecting emotion

Stella wanted to eliminate the personal reference and symbolic meaning associated with modernist abstract painting. In this way, his paintings differ from those of European modernists like Piet Mondrian who used reductive geometrical forms to communicate spiritual ideals. Stella criticized the work of these earlier painters as too "relational," a term he used to describe their subjective process of arranging distinct parts in relation to one another in order to create what they saw as a harmonious and balanced composition. [1]

Jasper Johns was an important influence on Stella in these formative years. Working in the 1950s, Johns had also rejected the metaphysical overtones of Abstract Expressionism in his ironic use of encaustic, an ancient media that requires careful application to build up layers of wax and pigment, and reference to everyday objects. Johns' deliberate mark-making denied action painting's insistence on the spontaneity of individual expression, and his rendering of easily recognizable targets and flags mocked one of Abstract Expressionism's claims—to communicate universal meaning through archetypal images.

Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1954–55 (dated on reverse 1954), encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, three panels, 107.3 x 153.8 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

For Stella, Johns's art hinted at a way to eliminate the subjectivity inherent to the artist's task. Representing an existing object meant that the appearance and structure of the thing itself determined the painted imagery. Johns's use of repetition further appealed for its visible adherence to the artist's subject matter, and suggested to Stella a systematic, detached approach to artmaking based on a predetermined motif.

"What you see is what you see"

Stella adapted these ideas for his own non-objective imagery (images that don't depict recognizable forms) by looking to the rectangular shape of the canvas as the basis for his compositions. He explained this rationale in 1960 to students at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn:

> ***I had to do something about relational painting . . . . The obvious answer was symmetry —make it the same all over. The question still remained though, of how to do this in depth. A symmetrical image or configuration symmetrically placed on an open ground is not balanced out in the illusionistic space. The solution I arrived at . . . forces***

> ***illusionistic space out of the painting at constant intervals by using a regulated pattern. The remaining problem was simply to find a method of paint application which followed and complemented the design solution. This was done by using the house painter's technique and tools.[2]***

Although painted by hand, the image's methodical regularity erased any sign of the artist's individuality or emotional investment in his work. In adopting "the house painter's technique and tools," Stella replaced the romanticized notion of an artist's creative act with the actual labor used to make a painting. In this way, the Black Paintings challenged the assumption that a painting must represent an ideal or communicate profound meaning to the viewer—a position summed up best in Stella's famous quip, "What you see is what you see."

Gallery view: Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II,* 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.5 x 337.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

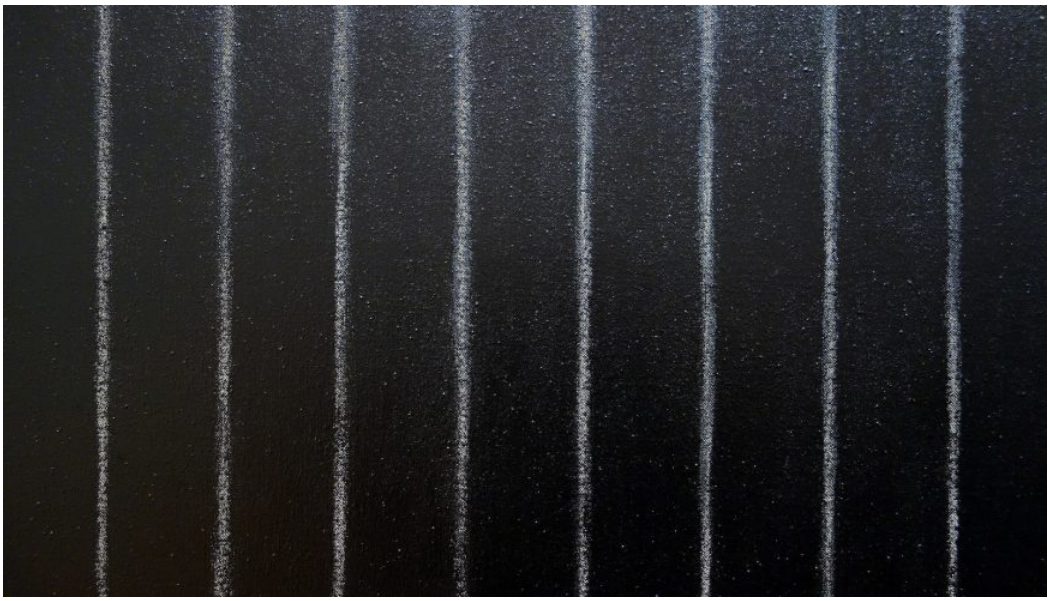
Stella's solution not only eliminated the subjectivity of abstract painting, it also forced the viewer's attention to the materials of the painting itself. Repeating the striped pattern to fill the canvas emphasized the flatness of the painted surface, an effect heightened by building up thick layers of dense black enamel to obscure brushstrokes and texture. The result was to deny the viewer the illusion of depth usually perceived in paintings, and to highlight the symmetrical design that echoed the rectangular shape of the canvas itself.

For artists like Donald Judd, who also wanted to rid art of its metaphysical meaning and illusionistic tradition, Stella's Black Paintings appealed for their object-like appearance. Stella used deep stretcher bars which caused his paintings to stand out further from the wall. Judd, who is best known for his Minimalist sculpture, argued that Stella's paintings emphasized the three-dimensionality of the painting as a real object that extended into the space of the gallery itself. Likewise, the human scale of the canvas seemed to heighten the art's physical relationship to the viewer, a characteristic of Minimalism in sculpture. Stella rejected these interpretations, however, insisting that his primary interest was the viewer's optical experience.

The title

For all of Stella's emphasis on painting's formal properties (that is how the painting looks as opposed to what it represents), the provocative titles of his Black Paintings compel speculation about deeper meaning. These includes Nazi references such as *Arbeit Macht Frei* and *Die Fahne Hoch*, and places such as Arundel Castle (a favorite subject of English Romantic painters). The general

tendency of the titles to reflect what Stella called "'downbeat' and 'depressed political' situations" suggests they say more about the artist and the world around him than the paintings themselves. [3] In the case of *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II*, Stella's orderly pairing of identical halves plays on the contrasting terms in the title. It was Carl Andre, Stella's long-time friend and fellow artist, who first invented the title in 1957 for a series of his own pastel drawings that he destroyed. Because both men agreed the phrase was an apt characterization of their lives as artists in New York City, Andre suggested Stella use the title for his painting. [4]



Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor, II* (detail), 1959, enamel on canvas, 230.5 x 337.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Art historian Caroline Jones believes *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II* sums up contradictions that are pervasive throughout all the Black Paintings. She writes, "It is precisely the marriage of reason and squalor—the union of control and flow, the matings between differences, the pleasures of conjugation—that allows the procreation of meaning in the Black Paintings (to pursue Andre's analogy.)" [5] Noting that the painting was the second of two versions of the same composition, Jones shows that, despite Stella's mechanical stance, close looking (see detail above) reveals tell-tale signs of the artist's hand: small drips of paint, blurred edges in the black lines, varying widths of the white space in between, and tonal shifts in the layers of color. She even points out how the overall configuration pulls ever so slightly to the right as evidence of Stella's dominant hand at work. [6]

Like Pop Art, which developed around the same time, Stella's Black Paintings challenge viewers by representing imagery that is self-evident and lacks expressive impact. For art historians like Jones, this detached approach to art making reflects the economic shift toward mass production and the growing commodity culture of the United States in the 1960s. However, by asking us to consider Stella's creative process and his motivations for so strongly denying it, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor II* also forces us to treat the painting like a traditional work of art, demanding focused attention to its visual effect and intellectual engagement with the conceptual issues it raises.

Artwork details

Title	The Marriage of Reason and Squalor
Artist(s)	Frank Stella
Dates	1959
Places	North America / United States
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms / New York School / Color field
Artwork Type	Painting
Material	Enamel paint, Canvas
Technique	

Footnotes

[1] Bruce Glaser, “Questions to Stella and Judd.” *Art News* 65.5 (1966), pp. 55–61.

[2] Frank Stella, “The Pratt Lecture,” reprinted in Brenda Richardson, *Frank Stella: The Black Paintings* (The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976), p. 78.

[3] William Rubin, *Frank Stella* (NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), quoted in Brenda Richardson, *Frank Stella: The Black Paintings* (The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976), p. 3.

[4] Richardson, 46.

[5] Caroline Jones, *The Machine in the Studio* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 149.

[6] Ibid., p. 148.

Bibliography

This painting at MoMA

Frank Stella 1972, YouTube

Frank Stella, Black Series I (Prints), National Gallery of Art

Important fundamentals

Abstract Expressionism, an introduction

What is: Abstract Expressionism?

The Impact of Abstract Expressionism

Dr. Virginia B. Spivey, "Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor*," in *Smarthistory*, September 10, 2016, accessed December 15, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/stella-marriage/.

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5.3.2.10: Ta Moko

Maori Art in New Zealand

Traditional New Zealand art consists of the art of the Māori people, who first settled the island between 1250–1300 CE.

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- New Zealand art includes traditional Māori art and more recent forms taking inspiration from Māori, European, and other traditions. Polynesians settled New Zealand in 1250–1300 CE and developed a distinctive Māori culture.
- Charcoal drawings, estimated between 500 and 800 years old, can be found on limestone rock shelters in the center of the South Island, with over 500 sites stretching from Kaikoura to North Otago.
- Māori visual art of New Zealand consists primarily of four forms: carving, tattooing (ta moko), weaving, and painting.
- Carving was done in wood, bone, and stone, and carvings were used to create jewelry and decorate houses, fence poles, containers, and other objects.
- Ta moko is the art of traditional Māori tattooing, done with a chisel. Men were tattooed on many parts of their bodies, including faces, buttocks, and thighs, while women were usually tattooed only on the lips and chin.
- Weaving was used to create numerous things, from decorative wall panels in important buildings to functional clothing and bags.

Key Terms

- **koru**: A spiral shape based on the shape of a new unfurling silver fern frond and symbolizing new life, growth, strength, and peace; an integral symbol in Maori art, carving, and tattoos.
- **Māori**: The indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand, originating with settlers from eastern Polynesia who arrived in New Zealand in several waves of canoe voyages at some time between 1250 and 1300 CE.

Overview: New Zealand

New Zealand is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. The country geographically comprises two main landmasses —that of the North and South Islands—and numerous smaller islands. Because of its remoteness, it was one of the last lands to be settled by humans. Polynesians settled New Zealand in 1250–1300 CE and developed a distinctive Māori culture. Europeans first made contact in 1642 CE. The British and Irish immigrants brought aspects of their own culture to New Zealand and heavily influenced Māori culture, particularly with the introduction of Christianity. More recently, American, Australian, Asian, and other European cultures have exerted influence on New Zealand.

New Zealand art includes traditional Māori art, which was developed in New Zealand from Polynesian art forms, and more recent forms, which take their inspiration from Māori, European, and other traditions.

Early Charcoal Drawings

Charcoal drawings can be found on limestone rock shelters in the center of the South Island, with over 500 sites stretching from Kaikoura to North Otago. The drawings are estimated to be between 500 and 800 years old and portray animals, people, and fantastic creatures. Some of the birds pictured are long extinct and were drawn by early Māori; however by the time Europeans arrived, local inhabitants did not know the origins of the drawings.

Traditional Māori Art

Māori visual art consists primarily of four forms: carving, tattooing (ta moko), weaving, and painting. Traditional Māori art was highly spiritual and conveyed information about ancestry and other culturally important topics. Most traditional Māori art was highly stylized and featured motifs such as the spiral, the chevron, and the *koru*. The colors black, white, and red dominated.

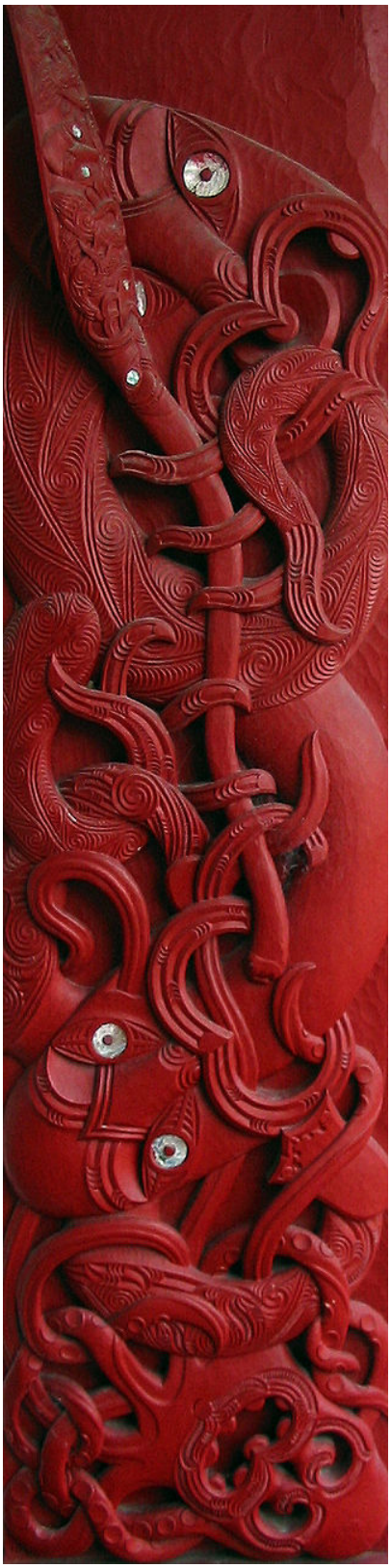
Portrait of Hinepare of Ngāti Kahungunu by Gottfried Lindauer, showing chin moko, pounamu hei-tiki, and woven cloak: This portrait shows traditional jewelry (known as hei-tiki), woven cloth, and chin moko, or tattooing.

Ta moko

Ta moko is the art of traditional Māori tattooing, done with a chisel. Men were tattooed on many parts of their bodies, including faces, buttocks, and thighs. Women were usually tattooed only on the lips and chin. Moko conveyed a person's ancestry. The art declined in the 19th century following the introduction of Christianity, but in recent decades it has undergone a revival.

Carving

Carving was done in wood, bone, and stone. Wood carvings were used to decorate houses, fence poles, containers, and other objects. Both stone and bone were used to create jewelry such as the *hei-tiki*. The introduction of metal tools by Europeans allowed more intricacy and delicacy, causing stone and bone fish hooks and other tools to become purely decorative.



Māori carving: Late 20th century red carved house post depicting the navigator Kupe. Although an essentially traditional style, this carving was created using metal tools and uses modern paints, creating a form distinct from that of pre-European times.

Weaving

Weaving was used to create numerous things, including wall panels in meeting houses and other important buildings, as well as clothing and bags (known as *kete*). While many of these were purely functional, others were true works of art, taking hundreds of hours to complete and often given as gifts to important people. In pre-European times, the main medium for weaving was flax; however, following the arrival of Europeans, cotton, wool, and other textiles were also used.

Painting

In classical Māori art, painting was not an important art form. It was mainly used as a minor decoration in meeting houses, in stylized forms such as the *koru*. Europeans introduced Māori to their more figurative style of art, and in the 19th century, less stylized depictions of people and plants began to appear in place of traditional carvings and woven panels.

European Art in New Zealand

European contact with New Zealand heavily influenced traditional Māori art of the region.

Learning Objectives

Describe the influences of European art in New Zealand

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Europeans first made contact with New Zealand in 1642 CE, and the British and Irish invaders heavily influenced Māori culture and art, particularly with the introduction of Christianity.
- Europeans began producing art in New Zealand as soon as they arrived, with landscape art and painting becoming very popular.
- From the late 19th century, many Pākehā (New Zealanders not of Māori origin, usually of European ancestry) attempted to create a distinctive New Zealand style of art, sometimes appropriating Māori artistic styles.
- From the early 20th century, politician Apirana Ngata fostered a renewal of traditional Māori art forms, establishing a school of Māori arts in Rotorua. Many Māori artists became highly successful in blending elements of Māori culture with European modernism.

Key Terms

- **koru**: A spiral shape based on the shape of a new unfurling silver fern frond and symbolizing new life, growth, strength, and peace; an integral symbol in Māori art, carving, and tattoos.
- **Māori**: The indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand, originating with settlers from eastern Polynesia who arrived in New Zealand in several waves of canoe voyages some time between 1250 and 1300 CE.

Background: New Zealand Art

Because of its remoteness, New Zealand was one of the last lands to be settled by humans. Polynesians settled New Zealand in 1250–1300 CE and developed a distinctive Māori culture, and Europeans first made contact in 1642 CE. The British and Irish invaders brought aspects of their own culture to New Zealand and heavily influenced Māori culture, particularly with the introduction of Christianity. More recently, American, Australian, Asian, and other European cultures have exerted influence on New Zealand.

European Influence on Art

Early Landscapes and Portraiture

Europeans began producing art in New Zealand as soon as they arrived, with many exploration ships including an artist to record newly discovered places, people, flora, and fauna. Landscape art was popular among early invaders, with prints used to promote further settlement and invasion of New Zealand. Notable landscape artists included Augustus Earle and William Fox. However, the

most successful artists of this period, Charles Goldie and Gottfried Lindauer, were noted primarily for their portraits of the indigenous Māori people.

Early European Portraits: Portrait of a New Zealand man, Sydney Parkinson, 1784, probably from a sketch made in 1769.

19th Century

From the late 19th century, many Pākehā (New Zealanders not of Māori origin, usually of European ancestry) attempted to create a distinctive New Zealand style of art. Many, such as Rita Angus, continued to work on landscapes, with attempts to depict New Zealand's harsh light. Others appropriated Māori artistic styles; Gordon Walters created many paintings and prints based on the *koru*. New Zealand's most highly regarded 20th century artist was Colin McCahon, who attempted to use international styles such as cubism in New Zealand contexts.

Portrait of Hinepare of Ngāti Kahungunu by Gottfried Lindauer (1890), showing chin moko, pounamu hei-tiki, and woven cloak: Gottfried Lindauer was known for his portraits of the Māori people.

20th Century

From the early 20th century, politician Apirana Ngata fostered a renewal of traditional Māori art forms, establishing a school of Māori arts in Rotorua. The visual arts flourished in the later decades of the 20th century, with the increased cultural sophistication of many New Zealanders. Many Māori artists became highly successful in blending elements of Māori culture with European modernism. Ralph Hotere is New Zealand's highest selling living artist. Others include Shane Cotton and Michael Parekowhai.

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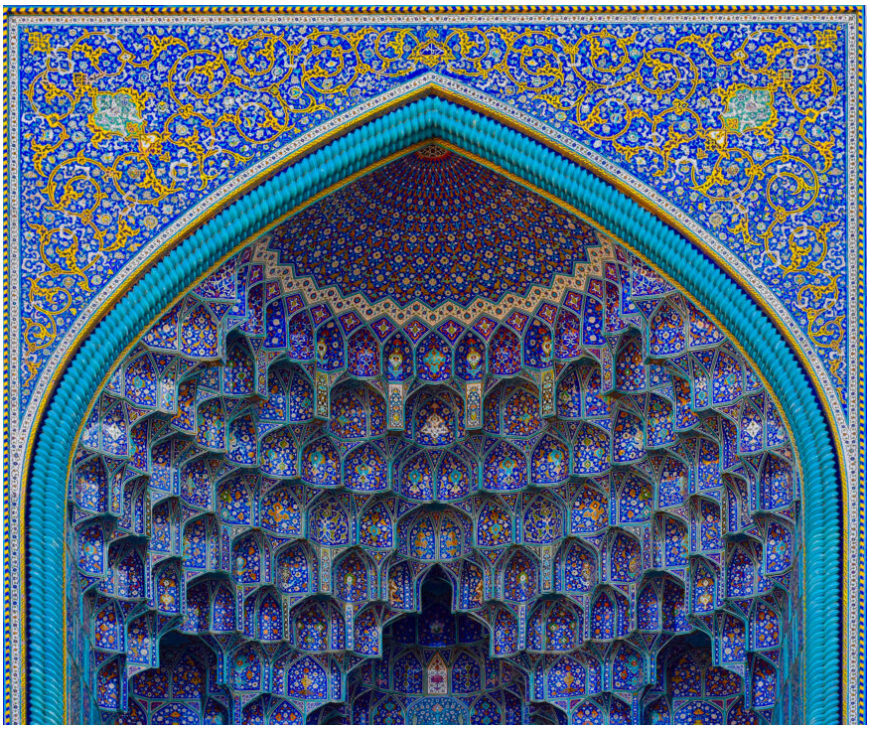
5.3.2.11: Muqarnas

Muqarnas, an introduction

by Dr. Courtney Lesoon



***Muqarnas* from the façade of Masjid-i Imām, Isfahan, Iran, 1612–38 (photo: Farzan95, CC BY-SA 4.0)**

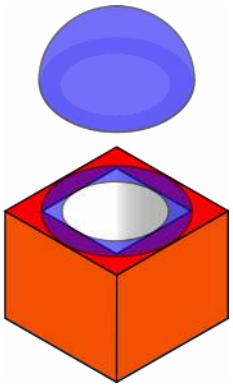
The architectural feature known as a *muqarnas* (pl. *muqarnas* or *muqarnases*) is easy to identify but difficult to describe. [1] You could compare it to stalactites, dripping down from a cavernous ceiling above. Or you could say that it resembles a honeycomb, filling the nooks and crevices of an interior space. But the complex geometry of its many cells seems to create a conversation between light and shadow that neither the metaphors of stalactites nor honeycombs capture. To offer my own metaphor, I might say that a *muqarnas* is the architectural equivalent of an echo, a reverberation of form that is repeated but not replicated.

***Muqarnas* (detail), Alhambra, Granada, Spain, 13–14th century (Nasrid) (photo: Lawrence Murray, CC BY 2.0)**

If one symbol has come to represent Islamic art and architecture writ large, it would be the *muqarnas*. This is because the *muqarnas* is a common design feature across the Islamic world and a uniquely Islamic innovation. It was developed in Iraq or Iran sometime in the 9th or 10th century. And from there it spread quickly to places as far away as Spain and India, appearing in mosques, madrasas, palaces, mausoleums, private homes, public fountains, and commercial spaces. When a *muqarnas* appears outside of an Islamic context, it points to a cultural hybridity or close contact with the Islamic world (for example in the Norman Cappella Palatina). Today, the *muqarnas* is globally recognized as emblematic of Islamic design.

Art historians agree that *muqarnas* developed out of the simple architectural element known as a "squinch."

Three examples of squinches. Left: squinch that resembles a smooth concavity from the Palace of Ardashir, Iran, 224 C.E. (photo: public domain); center: squinch that resembles a stylized semi-circular niche from Mashhad al-Husayn, Aleppo, Syria, 12th–13th century, reconstructed in the 20th century (photo: Yasser Tabbaa/AKDC at MIT); right: squinches that resemble tiered steps from Darya Khan Ghumat, Ahmedabad, India, 1453 (photo: Yappe)



Isometric rendering of how a dome would fit on a square room with no squinches (Courtney Lesoon, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

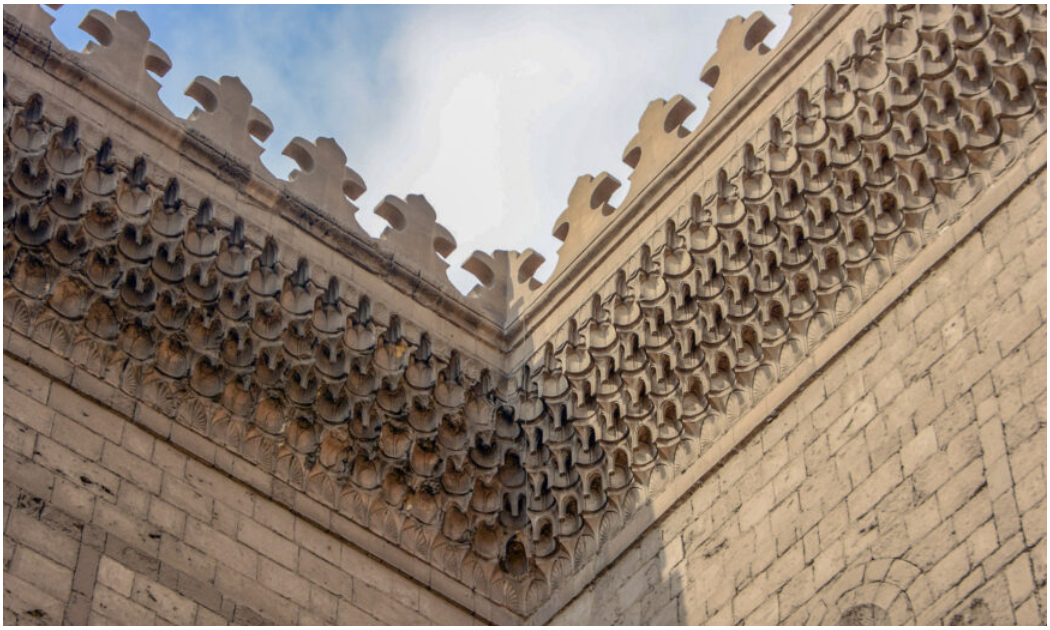
Squinches

A squinch is a solution to the problem caused by putting a dome on a square room (as opposed to putting a dome on a cylindrical room). [2] If a dome is simply placed on a square, the dome's round edges are left exposed and unsupported at the square's corners.

Squinches serve as bridges between the round-edged domes and the 90-degree angles below, forming a sort of "zone of transition." Squinches vary in style, sometimes resembling smooth concavities, niches, or even tiered steps. But they all serve a structural function by transferring the weight of the dome outwards onto the load-bearing walls of the square base. And they provide an opportunity for decorative elaboration too.

View of tripartite "stacked squinch," Shrine of Davazdah Imam, Yazd, Iran, 1036–37 (Abbasid/Buyid) (photo: akhodadadi, CC BY 3.0)

Sometime in the 9th or 10th century, the *muqarnas* was developed out of the squinch. Instead of one squinch in each corner of a dome's square base, builders implemented stacks of squinches in each corner. These stacks of squinches helped to distribute the weight of the dome even better than one squinch could. An extant example of this can be seen in the Shrine of Davazdah Imam in Yazd, Iran. These stacked squinches, with rounded tops and square bottoms, visually integrate the round dome with the square structure below it.



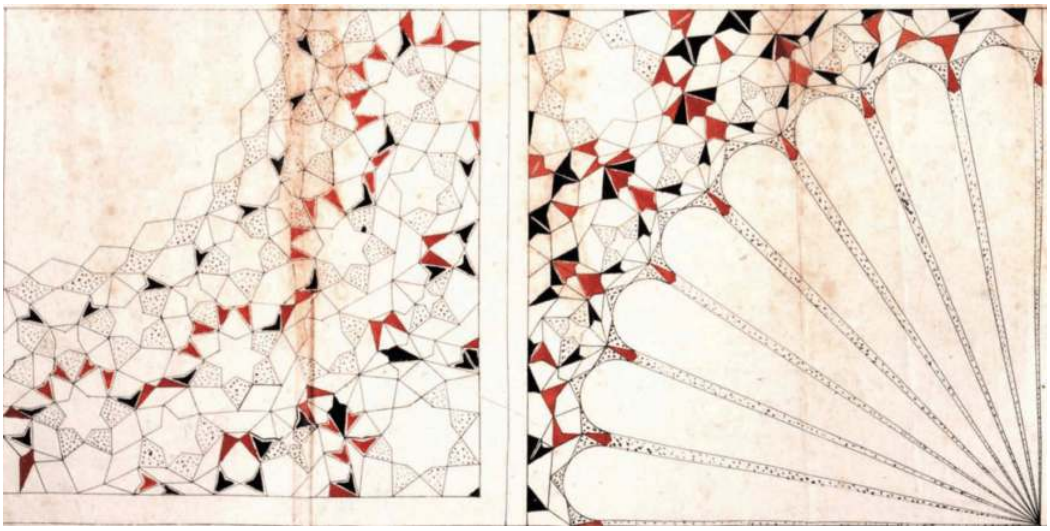
***Muqarnas* on the underside of a cornice, Madrasa and Friday Mosque of Sultan Hasan, Cairo, Egypt, 1356–63 (Mamluk) (photo: courtesy of Bruce Allardice © All Rights Reserved)**

***Muqarnas* on a column capital (detail), Apak Khoja Mausoleum, Kashi, China, 17th–20th century (photo: Zossolino, CC BY-SA 4.0)**

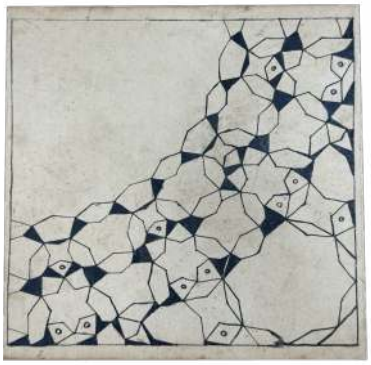
The versatility of *muqarnas*

From the simple "stacked squinch," *muqarnas* developed quickly into a modular and flexible feature that could be employed in any "zone of transition." *Muqarnas* were applied to surfaces such as pendentives, cornices, column capitals, the ceilings of *iwans*, and arched doorways. In all of these cases, the *muqarnas* aided in the transition between a horizontal surface (such as the underside of a cornice or the ledge of a capital) and a vertical surface (such as a wall or a column).

Some *muqarnas* are structural, while others are additively applied to a substrate. Structural *muqarnas* elements are usually made of brick or stone. Additive *muqarnas* elements can be made of any lightweight material, including wood, ceramic, stucco, plaster, or even glass mirrors.



Schematic drawing of *muqarnas* (detail), from *The Topkapi Scroll*, late 15th or early 16th century (Iran) (from Gülrü Necipoglu, *The Topkapi Scroll*, p. 209, plates 6 and 7)



Schematic drawing of *muqarnas*, from the "Tashkent Scrolls," 16th century (Uzbekistan), 25 x 24 cm (Abu Rayhan Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, TA-46, Drawing #3; photo: Marika Sardar, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Knowledge of *muqarnas* design was transmitted from master to student via sketches, three-dimensional models, and hands-on training. Detailed drawings of *muqarnas* patterns that survive from the 15th–19th centuries demonstrate how these artisans planned their three-dimensional patterns on paper. [3] Travel was easy in the medieval Islamic world, and expert craftsmen often traveled far distances for work, bringing with them their tools, techniques, and aesthetic sensibilities.

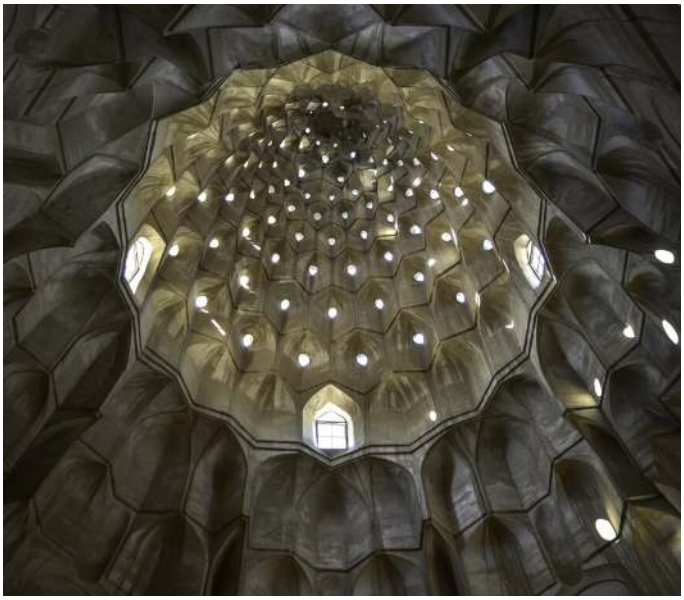
Interior view of *muqarnas* dome, Qubbat Imam Dur (now destroyed), Samarra, Iraq, 1085–86 (Abbasid) (photo: Yasser Tabbaa / Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT)

Qubbat Imam Dur (now destroyed), Samarra, Iraq, 1085–86 (Abbasid) (photo: Mustafa Wahhudi, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Muqarnas domes

In some especially elaborate cases, *muqarnas* were used to construct whole domes by repeating and stacking *muqarnas* cells on top of one another until they met in the middle of the vault.

The oldest examples of *muqarnas* domes are on tombs, such as Qubbat Imam Dur (or "The Dome of Imam Dur"). This was an 11th-century Abbasid-era mausoleum outside of Samarra, Iraq. Before its destruction in 2014, five levels of *muqarnas* were visible from the exterior. But on the interior of the dome, these cells seemed to kaleidoscope into a complex three-dimensional geometry intended to impress. One scholar who visited the tomb wrote that the *muqarnas* here made "the dome appear insubstantial" because "the play of light" on its interior surfaces "dissolved" the dome's mass. [4]



Interior of *muqarnas* dome, Turba Zumurrud Khatun, Baghdad, Iraq, late 12th century (Abbasid) (photo: Mustafa Waad Saeed, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Exterior of *muqarnas* dome, Turba Zumurrud Khatun, Baghdad, Iraq, late 12th century (Abbasid) (photo: Mustafa Waad Saeed, CC BY-SA 4.0)

A similar "play of light" can be seen in the *muqarnas* dome of Turba Zumurrud Khatun (or "The Tomb of Zumurrud Khatun"). Built by an Abbasid caliph for his mother's burial, the many tiny perforations in its *muqarnas* cells allow a constellation of light to move across the interior's surface. Its tall conical form, which looks remarkable like a beehive, stands out in the cemetery where it is located to mark this particular tomb as belonging to an especially important person.

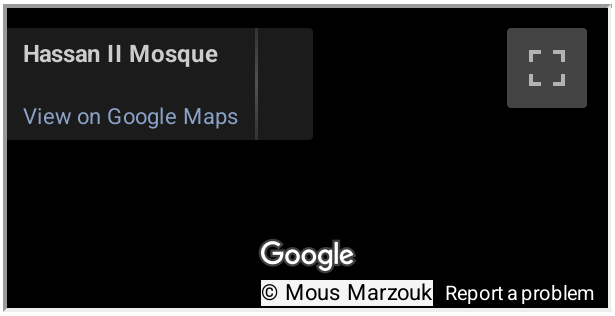
***Muqarnas* dome in the Hall of the Two Sisters, Alhambra, Granada, Spain, 13–14th century (Nasrid) (photo: courtesy of Daniel Catalá Pérez © All Rights Reserved)**

Long before *muqarnas* existed, there was a long tradition of domes symbolizing the heavens. With this in mind, art historians suggested more specific meanings for the *muqarnas* domes. For example, art historian Yasser Tabbaa argued that early *muqarnas* domes represented an atomizing of the universe, an idea that aligned with developments in Islamic philosophy in that period. [5] And art historian Oleg Grabar cited poetry on the walls of Alhambra that referenced "rotating heavens" to argue that the dome in its "Hall of the Two Sisters" was filled in with *muqarnas* to convey the spatial impression of "rotating heavens." [6] While it is difficult to say if these ideas were the intention of the builders or patrons, it is not hard to imagine thinking of "an atomized universe" or "rotating heavens" when you look up into these vaults of seemingly impossible geometry.

Azra Akšamija and Joel Lamere, *Unity*, 2012, textile installation. Architecture Forum Upper-Austria, Linz, Austria (photo: Future Heritage Lab / Azra Akšamija, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Muqarnas today

The meaning of *muqarnas* today is clear. *Muqarnas* has come to represent Islamic art and architecture writ large, even lending its name to the title of a prominent journal of Islamic art history. [7] *Muqarnas* has become a popular motif in contemporary art and architecture; it is a feature that signals for many something that is "Islamic."



360 View (c. March 2024) of interior of Mosque of Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco, 1993 (© Mous Marzouk / Google)

For example, in the 1993 Mosque of Hassan II in Casablanca, Morocco, the French architect Michel Pinseau designed a mosque with more or less the plan of a French cathedral. But, he filled the space with decorative elements that, to him and to his audience, signaled Islamic architecture. First among these elements was *muqarnas*.

If you visit a mosque in New York, Moscow, Paris, or Johannesburg, chances are you will encounter a *muqarnas* inside. Perhaps it will drip down from a ceiling like a stalactite. Or it might fill the nooks and crevices of an interior space like a honeycomb. Or even maybe, you might look around and take in the *muqarnas* as an echo of the forms around it.

Footnotes

[1] Note that the word *muqarnas* is not an Anglicized plural. The "s" at the end of *muqarnas* is part of the original Arabic word and cannot be dropped to make a singular noun. In English usage, some scholars opt for "*muqarnases*" as the plural. Others treat the word *muqarnas* as a "zero plural noun" (like sheep and sheep or aircraft and aircraft) that refers to the architectural feature in both the singular and the plural. It is also an adjectival noun. For example, "Because the dome itself is entirely constructed of *muqarnas*,

we call it a *muqarnas* dome." If you are speaking abstractly about one unit of a *muqarnas*, you can call it a "*muqarnas* cell." Or if you are referring to a particular material example of one such unit, you can call it a "*muqarnas* element."

[2] Another solution is known as a pendentive. If the square structure below a dome is punctuated by large wide arches, more of the dome's weight must be channeled directly into the main load bearing pillars at each corner of the square. This can be accomplished via triangular-shaped transitions called pendentives. A great example of pendentives can be found in the 6th-century Hagia Sophia.

[3] Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 1995).

[4] Yasser Tabbaa, "The Muqarnas Dome: Its Origin and Meaning," *Muqarnas*, volume 3 (1985), p. 63.

[5] See Tabbaa (1985), p. 68.

[6] Oleg Grabar, *The Alhambra* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 147.

[7] The scholarly journal *Muqarnas* is jointly published by Harvard University and Brill.

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Important fundamentals

Arts of the Islamic world

The complex geometry of Islamic design

Mosque architecture, an introduction

Read a *Reframing Art History* textbook chapter, Framing Islamic art

Citations

Dr. Courtney Lesoon, "*Muqarnas*, an introduction," in *Smarthistory*, November 7, 2025, accessed December 15, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/muqarnas/.

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5.3.2.12: Ceramic Lantern, 13th Century Syria

Ceramic Lantern, 13th Century Syria

More information at the Met Museum

Figure 5.3.2.12.1: Ceramic Lantern early 13th century On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 454, Public Domain

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5.3.2.13: Korwar

Korwar

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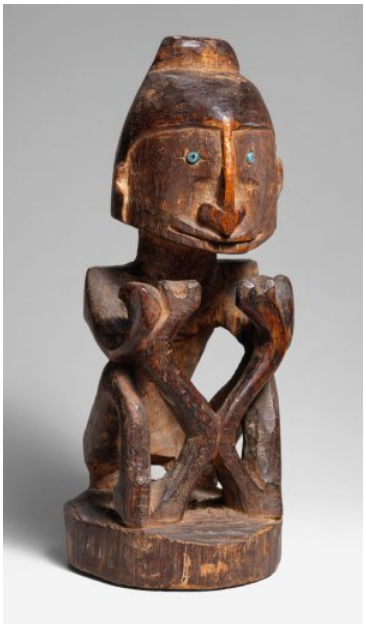

Figure **5.3.2.13.1**: Ancestor Figure (*Korwar*), Indonesia, Papua Province (Irian Jaya), Cenderawasih Bay region, in northwest New Guinea, late 19th–early 20th century. Wood and glass beads, 26 cm high. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo via Smarthistory)

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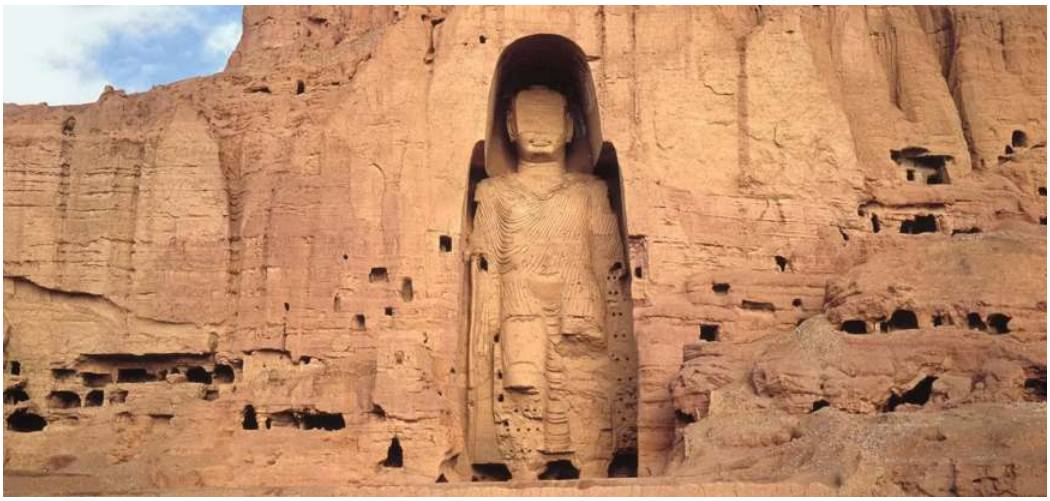
5.3.2.14: West Buddha, Bamiyan

Bamiyan Buddhas

by Dr. Melody Rod-ari



West Buddha surrounded by caves, c. 6th–7th century C.E. (Bamiyan, Afghanistan), stone, stucco, paint, 175 feet high, destroyed 2001 (photo: Afghanistan Embassy) © Afghanistan Embassy

Prior to their recent destruction, the 6th-to-7th-century, rock-cut Buddha sculptures in the Bamiyan Valley of central Afghanistan were considered the largest in the world. Known collectively as the Bamiyan Buddhas, the two monumental sculptures have amazed both Buddhist and non-Buddhist visitors for more than a 1,000 years. Like many of the world's great ancient monuments, little is known about who commissioned the Bamiyan Buddhas or the sculptors who carved them. However, their very existence points to the importance of the Buddhist faith and the Bamiyan Valley during this period.

Buddhism along the Silk Route

Bamiyan is located between the Indian subcontinent (to the southeast) and Central Asia (to the north), which made it an important location close to one of the most important branches of the Silk Route. The Silk Route was an ancient series of linked trade routes that connected China to West Asia and Europe and carried both material wealth and ideas. Bamiyan's central location along the Silk Route, along with its fertile plains amid harsh terrain, made it an ideal location for merchants and missionaries to stop during their travels. Many of the missionaries and merchants in this area during the middle of the 1st millennium were practitioners of the Buddhist faith. Buddhism had long been an important religion in the region, having been introduced during the early Kushan period.

Map showing Bamiyan and contemporary contiguous nations (underlying map © Google)

Buddhism spread, in part, because it was not location specific. Believers did not need to worship at a particular temple or at a particular site as part of their practice. Worship could take place anywhere and at anytime. This freedom resulted in the emergence of Buddhist cave architecture throughout Asia. Indeed, if one visits Bamiyan today, one will see nearly 1000 Buddhist caves carved along 1300 meters of cliff face. [1] It is against this backdrop of carved caves that the two monumental Buddha images were carved.

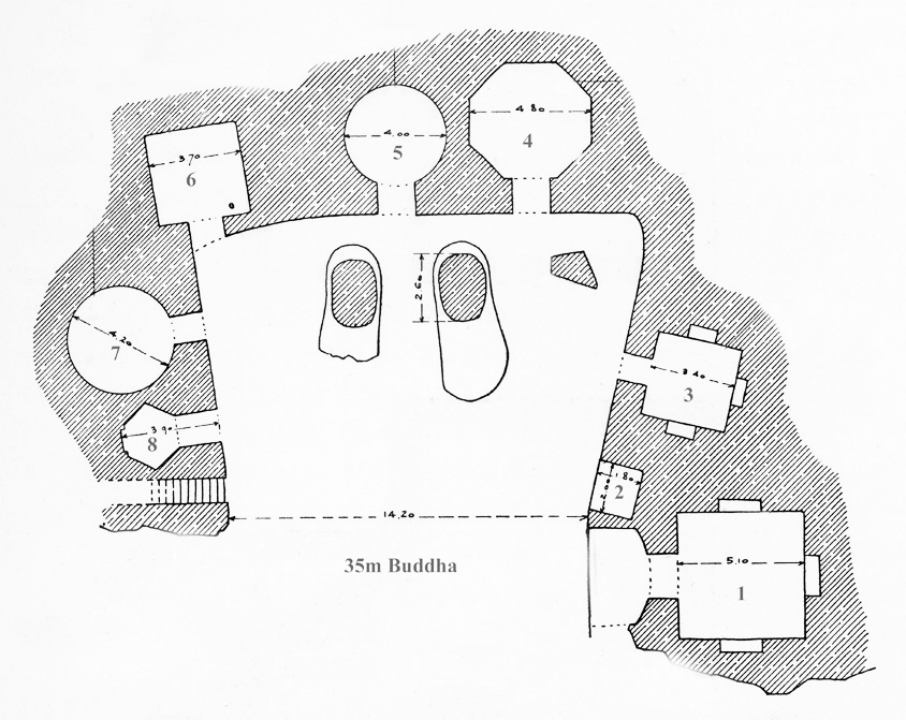
Landscape and archaeological remains of the Bamiyan Valley (photo: Graciela Gonzalez Brigas, CC BY 3.0 IGO) © UNESCO/G. Gonzales Brigas

Monumental Buddhas

Prior to their destruction in 2001, two monumental Buddha sculptures could be seen carved into the cliff facing the Bamiyan Valley. The larger of the two figures, located on the western end (on the right in the photo above), measured 175 feet in height. The

art historian Susan Huntington has argued that it represented the Buddha Vairochana. The smaller of the two monumental statues, located to the east, depicted the Buddha Shakyamuni. This figure was also enormous and measured 120 feet in height.

Both images were carved into niches of the cliff side in high relief. The area near the heads of both Buddha figures and the area around the larger Buddha's feet were carved in the round, allowing worshippers to circumambulate. Circumambulation, which is the act of walking around an object such as a stupa (a reliquary mound) or an image of the Buddha, is a common practice in Buddhist worship.



Plan of larger Buddha showing feet carved in the round and smaller cave chapels. André Godard, Y. Godard, and Joseph Hackin, *Les Antiquites Bouddhiques de Bamiyan* (Paris and Brussels: les Editions G. Van Oest, 1928), figure 18

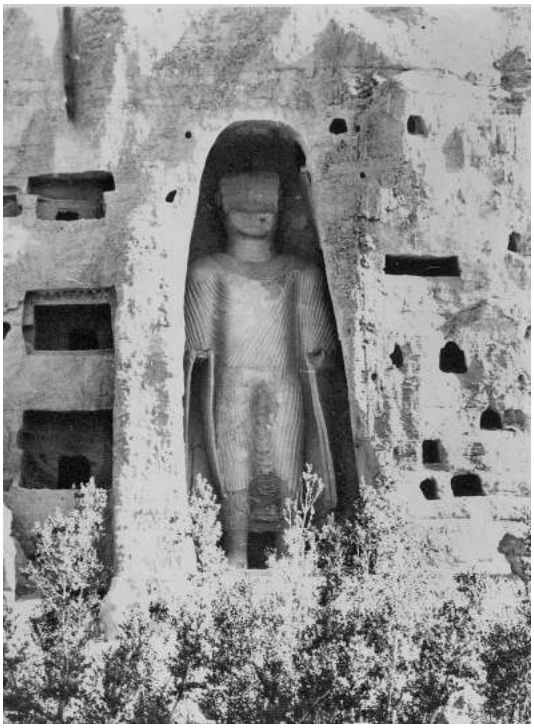
The two large Buddha images reflected the international environment of the Bamiyan Valley and were influenced by the art and cultures of India, Central Asia, and even ancient Greek culture. For example, both Buddhas wore flowing robes and have been described as having wavy curls of hair. This hairstyle and the flowing drapery are elements rooted in early Gandharan Buddhist imagery that combined Hellenistic Greek traditions of representation with Indian subject matter. [2]

East Buddha (detail with drapery in 1975), c. 6th–7th century C.E. (Bamiyan, Afghanistan), stone, stucco, painted, 120 feet high, destroyed 2001 (photo: Pierre Le Bigot, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Much of what we know about the monumental Buddha sculptures comes from the Chinese monk Xuanzang (Hsuan-Tsang) who traveled to Bamiyan in 643 and documented his travels in the text *The Great Tang Records of the Western Regions (Da Tang Xiyu Ji)*. As the earliest text describing the Buddha images, Xuanzang's writings provide us with remarkable descriptions of the sculptures and the vibrant communities that inhabited the region. He wrote:

> ***When merchants coming and going happen to witness visions of heavenly deities, whether as good omens or as predictions of disaster, they worship the deities to pray for blessedness. There are several tens of monasteries with several thousand monks, who follow the Hinayana teachings of the Lokottaravada school. To the northeast of the city, there is at a corner of the mountains a rock statue of the Buddha standing, one hundred forty or fifty feet in height, a dazzling golden color and adorned with brilliant gems. To the east there is a monastery built by a previous king of the country. To the east of the monastery there is a copper statue of the Buddha standing, more than one hundred feet tall. It was cast in separate pieces and then welded together into shape.***

[3]



East Buddha, c. 6th–7th century C.E. (Bamiyan, Afghanistan), stone, stucco, painted, 120 feet high, destroyed 2001 (photo: © Dr. H. Crane)

Xuanzang's descriptions of the Buddhas provide us great insight into not only what they might have looked like in the 7th century but also how they were engaged with the community around them. Perhaps most surprising to our modern experience with Buddha imagery is that the monumental rock-cut sculptures are described by Xuanzang as being adorned with metal, color, and gems—not stripped down as we often see them in museums and galleries.

Scholars agree that both images were covered in pigments of various hues so that they appeared to be made of metal and other materials, but that they were not cast entirely of "copper" as Xuanzang suggests of the smaller Buddha image. However, scholars such as Deborah Klimburg-Salter have argued that both of the monumental Buddhas' faces were constructed of masks made of wood clad by a thin layer of brass, which were inserted onto ledges that appeared above the lower lips of both images. [4] Finbarr Barry Flood argues that the cuts to the faces were a later iconoclastic act. [5]

While there is debate over the material and treatment of the Buddha's faces, we know that pigments were applied to the stucco that covered the stone surfaces of the sculptures. Stucco helped to even out the textured rock surface. One can imagine what a powerful impression these monumental Buddhas would have made on passersby and worshippers.

Backstory

In 2001, Mullah Omar ordered Taliban forces to demolish the Bamiyan Buddhas. As reported in *The Guardian*, the destruction took several weeks, and the two figures "proved remarkably solid. Anti-aircraft guns had little effect, so the engineers placed anti-tank mines between their feet, then bored holes into their heads and packed them with dynamite." Only outlines of the figures and a few details now remain in place; fragments of them (including about 30% of the smaller Buddha) are piled nearby.

The Taliban's direction to destroy the Buddha images was motivated, in part, by the group's extreme iconoclastic campaign as well as their disdain for the fact that money from Western countries was being spent on protecting the images while there was an intense and growing need for humanitarian aid in the region. It was also unquestionably an act designed to gain global media attention, as video and photographs of the destruction circulated quickly and were seen all over the world.

Two women walk past the site of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, June, 2012 (photo: Sgt. Ken Scar)

Bamiyan is now listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in Danger, and debates over how to restore the site connect to both national and international issues around what constitutes proper preservation, interpretation, and remembrance at former sites of violence. The questions that must now be answered about Bamiyan are: how do we preserve what is left at the site from further destruction or deterioration? How do we do so in a way that takes into account the needs and desires of the local, national, and international communities for whom this site holds meaning? And how do we properly memorialize the tragedy of the Buddhas' recent destruction?

The Taliban's claim that destroying the Buddha sculptures was an Islamic act is belied by the fact that Bamiyan had become predominantly Muslim by the 10th century and that the sculptures had up until 2001 remained a largely intact. Distinct, non-Buddhist local traditions had grown up around the two sculptures, with a legend characterizing them as doomed lovers who had pledged to live out their commitment to one another by standing together in stone for eternity. "Local people had completely forgotten they were figures of the Buddha," said the head of historical monuments in Bamiyan province.

Scaffolding for reconstructing the Buddha of Bamiyan (photo: Tracy Hunter, CC BY 2.0)

Preservation efforts by an international team have been ongoing since 2001. The porous sandstone that makes up the site makes it vulnerable to quick erosion, and the niches, the cliff face, and the surrounding caves have needed to be shored up with props and grouting to prevent collapse. There has also been an ongoing debate over how and whether to reconstruct parts of the site. One proposal, backed most heavily by the German arm of ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites, an international organization that supports preservation and monument protection) supports using the original fragments along with new material to reconstruct the smaller Buddha figure. Other experts oppose this idea, saying that the niches ought to be preserved as empty memorials to the sculptures' violent destruction, similar to other sites like the Genbaku dome in Hiroshima or the Gedächtniskirche in Berlin. In 2015, two Chinese documentary filmmakers used 3-D technology to project holograms of the Buddhas into their niches as a temporary monument to their loss, but no permanent solutions have yet been pursued. Work by a German ICOMOS team at Bamiyan was stopped in 2013 because it was suspected that they were already rebuilding the feet of the smaller Buddha from scratch, violating both an official 2011 decision to not rebuild the sculpture, as well as the terms of the international 1964 Venice Charter, which specifies that original material must be used in reconstructions. [6]

Recently, however, the government of Afghanistan has requested that the reconstruction of the smaller statue be undertaken, citing, among other reasons, the dire need for tourist income to Bamiyan. The Bamiyan area, one of the poorest in Afghanistan, is home to a distinct ethnic group, the Hazara, who resisted Taliban influence and have also long resented what they see as discrimination by the country's leaders in Kabul. However, how to reconstruct the Buddha figure is still the subject of debate. A UNESCO meeting of international experts in 2017 concluded that "any consideration of recovery and reconstruction should be based on thorough multi-disciplinary research and scientific analysis, to ensure an understanding of the structural, material and other characteristics of the damaged heritage property"—in other words, ample funding and time are needed in order to ensure that the work takes place in proper and ethical ways.

Mural in one of the newly-discovered grottoes (photo: Jerrye and Roy Klotz, MD, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas was a huge loss for our understanding of human history. However, even in darkness light has a way of emerging. Since their destruction, several new discoveries have been made near the sites of the Bamiyan Buddhas including the discovery of fragments of a 62-foot long reclining Buddha, as well as several caves with murals that may be the world's earliest examples of oil paint.

As the UNESCO 2017 report states, "the Bamiyan World Heritage property should be considered a place of collective identity and memory, particularly for the local communities; the archaeological remains cannot be separated from their natural and cultural landscape nor from local perspectives."

Backstory by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee

Artwork details

Title	Bamiyan Buddhas
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	c. 6th–7th century C.E.
Places	Asia / South Asia / Afghanistan
Period, Culture, Style	Gandharan
Artwork Type	Sculpture / Relief sculpture
Material	Sandstone, Rock, Pigment
Technique	Carving

Footnotes

[1] Takayasu Higuchi and Gina Barnes, "Bamiyan: Buddhist Cave Temples in Afghanistan," *World Archaeology*, volume 27, number 2, *Buddhist Archaeology* (October, 1995), pp. 282–302.

[2] Llewelyn Morgan, *Buddhas of Bamiyan: Wonders of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 7.

[3] Xuanzang, *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*, translated by Li Rongxi (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1996), p. 38.

[4] Deborah Klimburg-Salter, *The Kingdom of Bamiyan: Buddhist Art and Culture of the Hindu Kush* (Naples and Rome: Instituto Universitario Orientale and Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1989), pp. 87–92.

[5] Finbarr Barry Flood, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum," *Art Bulletin*, volume 84, number 4 (December, 2002), p. 648.

[6] Constance Wyndham, "Reconstructing Afghan Identity: Nation-building, International Relations, and the Safeguarding of Afghanistan's Buddhist Heritage," *Museums, Heritage and International Development*, edited by Paul Basu and Wayne Modest (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), p. 126.

Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley (UNESCO)

UNESCO Bamiyan photo gallery

UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites in Danger

Unesco video on the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley

Pre–Angkor Traditions: The Mekong Delta and Peninsular Thailand on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

"Taliban blow apart 2,000 years of Buddhist history," *The Guardian*, March 3, 2001

"Disputes damage hopes of rebuilding Afghanistan's Bamiyan Buddhas," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2015

"Afghanistan's Buddhas Rise Again," *The Atlantic*, June 10, 2015

"See the Buddhas of Bamiyan, Destroyed by the Taliban, Resurrected as Holograms," *Artnet News*, June 12, 2015

1964 Venice Charter

UNESCO technical meeting and International Symposium on "The Future of the Bamiyan Buddha Statues"

Conclusions on the Future of the Bamiyan Buddha Statues: Technical Considerations and Potential Effects on Authenticity and Outstanding Universal Value

Citation

Dr. Melody Rod-ari, "Bamiyan Buddhas," in *Smarthistory*, November 21, 2015, accessed December 15, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/bamiyan-buddhas/.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.3.3: Space

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/376800

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5.3.3.17: Still Life with Oysters, Cookies, and Comfits

5.3.3.18: Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray

5.3.3.19: Airplane Flying- Suprematist Composition

5.3.3.20: Altar Group with Oba Akenzua I

5.3.3.21: The Gates

5.3.3.22: Storyteller with Twenty Figures

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5.3.3.1: La Donna Velata

La Donna Velata

Learn more information by visiting Artchive.

Grand Cany

Figure **5.3.3.1.1**: Raphael, *La Donna Velata*, 1514-15. Oil on canvas, 82 x 60.5 cm. Palazzi Pitti, Florence

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5.3.3.2: Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone

by **DR. ELEANOR JONES HARVEY** and **DR. BETH HARRIS**

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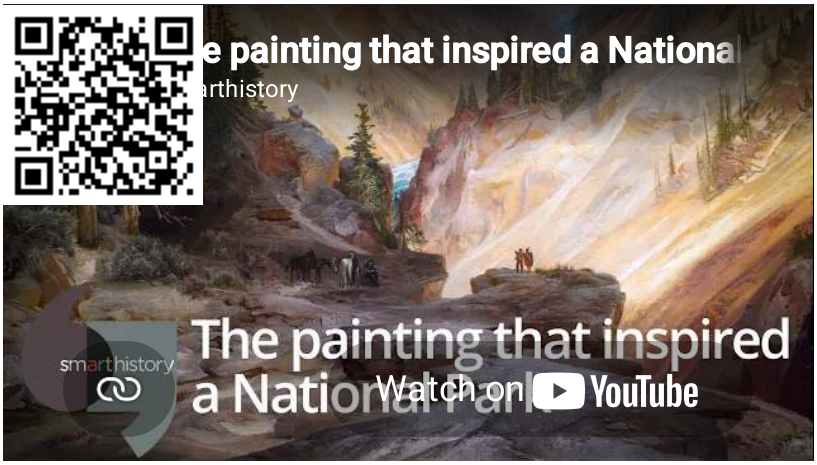


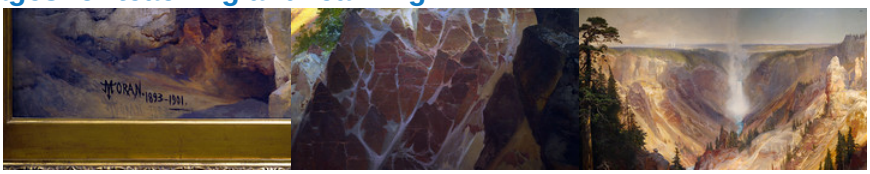
Thomas Moran, *Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, 1872, oil on canvas mounted on aluminum, 213 x 266.3 cm (Smithsonian American Art Museum) Speakers: Dr. Eleanor Jones Harvey, Senior Curator, Smithsonian American Art Museum and Dr. Beth Harris

Additional resources

This painting at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

***The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone* – American Experience in the Classroom (The Smithsonian American Art Museum)**

SmartHistory images for teaching and learning:



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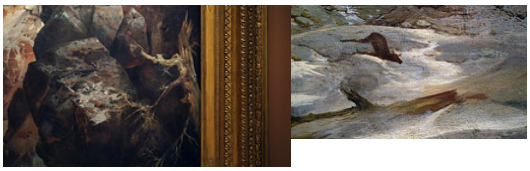

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5.3.3.3: St. John the Evangelist in the Lindisfarne Gospels

A medieval monk takes up a quill pen, fashioned from a goose feather, and dips it into a rich, black ink made from soot. Seated on a wooden chair in the scriptorium of Lindisfarne, an island off the coast of Northumberland in England, he stares hard at the words from a manuscript made in Italy. This book is his exemplar, the codex (a bound book, made from sheets of paper or parchment) from which he is to copy the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. For about the next six years, he will copy this Latin. He will illuminate the gospel text with a weave of fantastic images—snakes that twist themselves into knots or birds, their curvaceous and overlapping forms creating the illusion of a third dimension into which a viewer can lose him or herself in meditative contemplation.

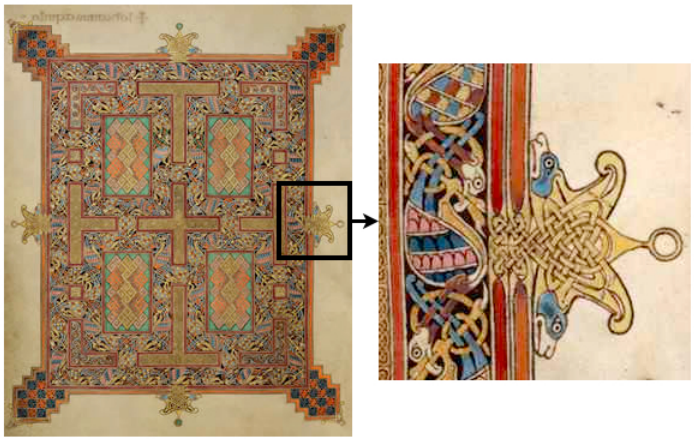

Figure **5.3.3.3.1**. Lindisfarne Gospels, John cross-carpet page f 210v (British Museum)

The book is a spectacular example of Insular or Hiberno-Saxon art—works produced in the British Isles between 500–900 CE, a time of devastating invasions and political upheavals. Monks read from it during rituals at their Lindisfarne Priory on Holy Island, a Christian community that safeguarded the shrine of St Cuthbert, a bishop who died in 687 and whose relics were thought to have curative and miracle-working powers.

A Northumbrian monk, very likely the bishop Eadfrith, illuminated the codex in the early eighth century. Two-hundred and fifty-nine written and recorded leaves include full-page portraits of each evangelist; highly ornamental “cross-carpet” pages, each of which features a large cross set against a background of ordered and yet teeming ornamentation; and the Gospels themselves, each introduced by an historiated initial. The codex also includes sixteen pages of canon tables set in arcades. Here correlating passages from each evangelist are set side-by-side, enabling a reader to compare narrations.

In 635 CE Christian monks from the Scottish island of Iona built a priory in Lindisfarne. More than a hundred and fifty years later, in 793, Vikings from the north attacked and pillaged the monastery, but survivors managed to transport the Gospels safely to Durham, a town on the Northumbrian coast about 75 miles west of its original location.

We glean this information from the manuscript itself, thanks to Aldred, a tenth-century priest from a priory at Durham. Aldred’s colophon—an inscription that relays information about the book’s production—informs us that Eadfrith, a bishop of Lindisfarne in 698 who died in 721, created the manuscript to honor God and St. Cuthbert. Aldred also inscribed a vernacular translation between the lines of the Latin text, creating the earliest known Gospels written in a form of English.

Figure **5.3.3.3.2**. Lindisfarne Gospels, St Matthew, Cross-Carpet page, f.26v

Matthew's cross-carpet page (f.26v) exemplifies Eadfrith's exuberance and genius. A mesmerizing series of repetitive knots and spirals is dominated by a centrally-located cross. One can imagine devout monks losing themselves in the swirls and eddies of color during meditative contemplation of its patterns.

Compositionally, Eadfrith stacked wine-glass shapes horizontally and vertically against his intricate weave of knots. On closer inspection many of these knots reveal themselves as snake-like creatures curling in and around tubular forms, mouths clamping down on their bodies. Chameleon-like, their bodies change colors: sapphire blue here, verdigris green there, and sandy gold in between. The sanctity of the cross, outlined in red with arms outstretched and pressing against the page edges, stabilizes the background's gyrating activity and turns the repetitive energy into a meditative force.

Figure **5.3.3.3.3**. Lindisfarne Gospels, St Luke, incipit page, f.139

Likewise, Luke's incipit (incipit: it begins) page teems with animal life, spiraled forms, and swirling vortexes. In many cases Eadfrith's characteristic knots reveal themselves as snakes that move stealthily along the confines of a letter's boundaries.

Blue pin-wheeled shapes rotate in repetitive circles, caught in the vortex of a large Q that forms Luke's opening sentence—Quoniam quidem multi conati sunt ordinare narrationem. (Translation: As many have taken it in hand to set forth in order.)

Figure 5.3.3.3.4. Lindisfarne Gospels, St Luke, incipit page, f.139

Birds also abound. One knot enclosed in a tall rectangle on the far right unravels into a blue heron's chest shaped like a large comma. Eadfrith repeats this shape vertically down the column, cleverly twisting the comma into a cat's forepaw at the bottom. The feline, who has just consumed the eight birds that stretch vertically up from its head, presses off this appendage acrobatically to turn its body 90 degrees; it ends up staring at the words RENARRATIONEM (part of the phrase -re narrationem).

Eadfrith also has added a host of tiny red dots that envelop words, except when they don't—the letters "NIAM" of "quoniam" are composed of the vellum itself, the negative space now asserting itself as four letters.

Figure 5.3.3.3.5. Lindesfarne Gospels, St. Luke, portrait page (137v)

Luke's incipit page is in marked contrast to his straightforward portrait page. Here Eadfrith seats the curly-haired, bearded evangelist on a red-cushioned stool against an unornamented background. Luke holds a quill in his right hand, poised to write words on a scroll unfurling from his lap. His feet hover above a tray supported by red legs. He wears a purple robe streaked with red, one that we can easily imagine on a late fourth or fifth century Roman philosopher.

The gold halo behind Luke's head indicates his divinity. Above his halo flies a blue-winged calf, its two eyes turned toward the viewer with its body in profile. The bovine clasps a green parallelogram between two forelegs, a reference to the Gospel. According to the early eighth century Northumbrian monk Bede from the nearby monastery in Monkwearmouth (d. 735), this calf, or ox, symbolizes Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

According to the historian Bede from the nearby monastery in Monkwearmouth (d. 735), this calf, or ox, symbolizes Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Bede assigns symbols for the other three evangelists as well, which Eadfrith duly includes in their respective

portraits: Matthew's is a man, suggesting the human aspect of Christ; Mark's the lion, symbolizing the triumphant and divine Christ of the Resurrection; and John's the eagle, referring to Christ's second coming.

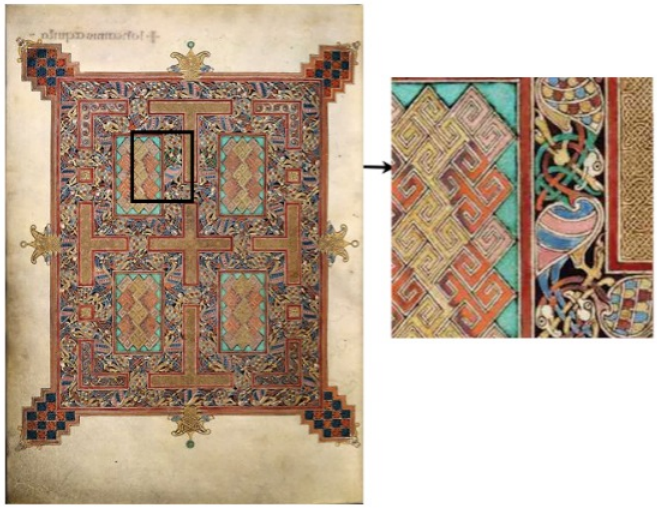

Figure **5.3.3.3.6**. Lindisfarne Gospels, John's cross-carpet page, folio 210v.

A dense interplay of stacked birds teem underneath the crosses of the carpet page that opens John's Gospel. One bird, situated in the upper left-hand quadrant, has blue-and-pink stripes in contrast to others that sport registers of feathers. Stripes had a negative eassociation to the medieval mind, appearing chaotic and disordered. The insane wore stripes, as did prostitutes, criminals, jugglers, sorcerers, and hangmen. Might Eadfrith be warning his viewers that evil lurks hidden in the most unlikely of places? Or was Eadfrith himself practicing humility in avoiding perfection?

All in all, the variety and splendor of the Lindisfarne Gospels are such that even in reproduction, its images astound. Artistic expression and inspired execution make this codex a high point of early medieval art.

Contributors and Attributions

- The Lindisfarne Gospels. **Authored by**: Louisa Woodville. **Provided by**: Khan Academy. **Located at**: https://web.archive.org/web/20140215030838/http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/the-lindisfarne-gospels.html. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike*

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5.3.3.4: The Ultrecht Psalter

Carolingian Illustrated Books in the Early European Middle Ages

The most common surviving works of the Carolingian era are illuminated manuscripts, which further developed the Insular book style.

Illuminated manuscripts are the most common surviving works of the Carolingian era. This includes a number of luxury manuscripts, mostly Gospel books. They are decorated with a relatively small number of full-page miniatures , often including evangelist portraits and lavish canon tables drawn from Insular art in Britain and Ireland. Carolingian narrative images and cycles are rare but do exist. They tend to be mostly of the Old Testament, while New Testament scenes are typically found on the ivory reliefs on the covers.

Early Carolingian Manuscripts

Carolingian illustrators adopted the oversized, heavily decorated initials of Insular art and developed the historiated decorated initial to produce small narrative scenes. These were seen for the first time toward the end of the period, most notably in the *Drogo Sacramentary* (850-855). The historiated initial, a harmonious union of classical lettering with narrative scenes, had influence into the Romanesque period.

Figure **5.3.3.4.1**: Drogo Sacramentary: Drogo Sacramentary (c. 850) depicts a historiated initial “C” which contains the Ascension of Christ. The text is in gold ink. Drogo Sacramentary. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Drogo_Sacramentary. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

Carolingian luxury manuscripts were given treasure binding, rich covers with jewels set in gold and carved ivory panels. As in Insular art, these were prestige objects kept in the church or treasury . By contrast , working manuscripts featured a few decorated initial and pen drawings and were kept in libraries. One exception is the *Utrecht Psalter*, a heavily illustrated library version of the Psalms done in pen and wash and almost certainly copied from a much earlier manuscript. This was perhaps the most important of all Carolingian manuscripts for its innovative and naturalistic figure line drawings that became the most influential innovation of Carolinian art.

Figure **5.3.3.4.1**: Ultrecht Psalter: From the Utrecht Psalter, ninth century. Naturalistic and energetic figurine line drawings were entirely new and became the most influential innovation of Carolinian art in later periods. Utrecht Psalter. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Utrecht_Psalter. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

Carolingian Manuscript Workshops

Carolingian manuscripts are presumed to have been produced largely or entirely by clerics in a few workshops around the Carolingian Empire. Each of these workshops practiced its own style that developed based on the artists and influences of that particular location and time. The earliest workshop was the Court School of Charlemagne, then the Rheimsian workshop (which became the most influential of the Carolingian period), the Touronian style, the Drogo style, and the Court School of Charles II (the Bald).

The Court School of Charlemagne

The Court School of Charlemagne (also known as the Ada School) produced the earliest manuscripts, including the *Godescalc Evangelistary* (781–783), the *Lorsch Gospels* (778–820,), the *Ada Gospels*, the *Soissons Gospels*, the *Harley Golden Gospels* (800-820), and the *Vienna Coronation Gospels*. The Court School manuscripts were ornate and elaborate, reminiscent of sixth-century ivories and mosaics from Ravenna, Italy. The Court School of Charlemagne initiated a revival of Roman classicism, yet maintained Migration-Period artistic (Merovingian and Insular) traditions in their linear presentation, with no concern for volume and spatial relationships.

Figure **5.3.3.4.1**: Lorsch Gospels: Ivory book cover with carvings. The Lorsch Gospels reflect its origin in the Court School of Charlemagne with its Late Antiquity Imperial scenes adapted to a Christian theme.

The Rheims School

In the early ninth century, Archbishop Ebbo of Rheims assembled clerical artists and transformed Carolingian art. The expressive animations of the Rheims School would have influence on northern medieval art for centuries to follow, far into the Romanesque period. One example was the Gospel *Book of Ebbo* (816–835), painted with swift, fresh, vibrant brush strokes that evoked an inspiration and energy unknown in classical Mediterranean forms. This emotionalism was new to Carolingian art. Figures in the *Ebbo Gospels* are represented in nervous, agitated poses. The illustration uses an energetic, streaky style with swift brush strokes. The style directly influenced manuscript illumination for decades, as seen in the *CodexAureus of St. Emmeram*. The evangelist portrait of Matthew in the *Ebbo Gospels* is similar to the illustration of the psalmist in the first psalm of the *Utrecht Psalter*.

Figure **5.3.3.4.1**: Saint Matthew, from the *Ebbo Gospels* (816-835): Portrait of Matthew, depicting him sitting and writing in the foreground. The wavy lines that form the details on Matthew's clothing and the diagonal lines adding detail to the background and foreground are examples of the energetic subject matter in the *Ebbo Gospels*. Ebbo Gospels. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebbo_Gospels. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

Other books associated with the Rheims school include the *Utrecht Psalter* and the *Bern Physiologus* (825-850), the earliest Latin edition of the Christian allegorical text on animals. Many of its miniatures are set unframed into the text block, which was a characteristic of Late-Antique manuscripts. For this reason, it is believed to be a copy of a fifth-century manuscript. This is one of the oldest extant illustrated copies of the *Physiologus*.

Figure **5.3.3.4.1**: Bern Physiologus, Folio 12v (825-850).: Image of the text and drawings from the *Bern Physiologus*, showing the miniatures drawn unframed into the text block. This is typical of late Antique manuscripts, leading scholars to believe that it is a copy of a fifth-century original. Bern Physiologus. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Bern_Physiologus. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

St. Martin of Tours

Another style developed at the monastery of St. Martin of Tours in which large Bibles were illustrated based on late Antique Bible illustrations. Three large Touronian Bibles were created. One of the best examples was the *Vivian Bible* (c. 846), commissioned by Count Vivien, the lay abbot of St. Martin of Tours, and presented to Charles the Bald. The Tours School was cut short by the invasion of the Normans in 853, but its style had already left a permanent mark on other centers in the Carolingian Empire.

Charles the Bald Court School

Charles the Bald established a Court School that fused Touronian, Rhemsian, and Charlemagne Court School styles. Several manuscripts are attributed to this institution, and the *Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram* (870) was the last and most spectacular. The

school's location at the time is unknown as its previous base at St Martin's Abbey in Tours was destroyed in 853, but it had probably moved to the Basilica of St. Denis outside Paris by the time of the production of the *Codex*. Seven full-page miniatures show the four evangelists, Charles the Bald enthroned, the Adoration of the Lamb, and a Christ in Majesty.

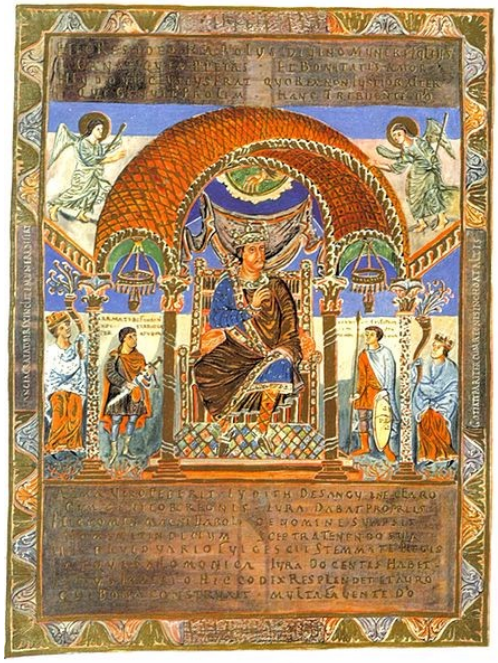

Figure **5.3.3.4.1**: Charles the Bald, from the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram (c. 870): Depiction of Charles the Bald enthroned, surrounded by angels and saints. The Hand of God reaches down from beneath the red canopy, hovering over the emperor's head.

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5.3.3.5: The Harley Psalter

The Harley Psalter

Figure 5.3.3.5.1: Harley Psalter, illustration to Psalm 15(16):5, Harley MS 603, fol. 8r, (detail), Canterbury, England, first half of the 11th century. Colored inks on parchment, 380 x 310 mm. British Library, London, England. (Photo: The British Library, public domain)

The Utrecht Psalter and its influence

Editors' Note: Most of the manuscripts art historians study are copies of other manuscripts. Sometimes connections can be drawn between multiple manuscripts; one striking example is the use of the Early Medieval Psalter now in the library of Utrecht University as a model for the images in two Psalters made hundreds of years later. Remember that a Psalter is a Christian book, which sets translations of the Hebrew Psalms in their Christian liturgical context. There are now two ways of numbering the Psalms. The Hebrew number appears first in captions here, with the Vulgate number in parentheses next to it.

Transcript of a conversation between Dr. Kathleen Doyle of The British Library and Dr. Beth Harris.

Beth Harris: We're in the British Library, very fortunate to be looking at the Utrecht Psalter. It's especially fascinating today in this Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms exhibition to see this book near other manuscripts that it influenced.

Kathleen Doyle: I'm tremendously excited to conclude the exhibition with the extraordinary Utrecht Psalter and two of its early copies. It was made in France during the reign of Louis the Pious. So, in the early 9th century.

Beth Harris We're referring to the time when Charlemagne and his successors ruled much of Europe.

Kathleen Doyle: And this must be one of the most elaborate and creative and interesting manuscripts ever made.

Beth Harris We may be used to seeing manuscript illuminations where you have, for example, an evangelist page, a page that introduces the text of manuscript.

Figure **5.3.3.5.90**: Lindisfarne Gospels, folio 137v, Evangelist Portrait of Luke, early 8th century, Northumbria. Ink and paint on parchment. British Library, Cotton MS Nero D IV. (Photo: British Library, via Smarthistory)

But here what's so wonderful about The Utrecht Psalter is that we have these illustrations that tie very tightly to the text and really bring it alive.

Figure **5.3.3.5.91**: Utrecht Psalter, fol. 8r, illustration to Psalm 15(16):5, about 825. Ink on parchment 330 x 255 (244 x 222) mm. Utrecht University Library, Netherlands. (Utrecht University Library, via Smarthistory)

Kathleen Doyle: It's revolutionary approach. Every Psalm gets its own, it's almost like a comic strip kind of layout. This horizontal register of images and this is a combination of quite literal depictions of a word of phrase in the relevant Psalm and also, a more Christological interpretation, an understanding of the Psalms as a prefiguration of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. For example, at the bottom of this page you see a man who's touching his lips and he's holding a cup. And this refers to a phrase in the Psalm [15(16):5] which says, “the Lord is my inheritance and my cup.”

Figure 5.3.3.5.92: Utrecht Psalter, fol. 8r illustration to Psalm 15(16):5 (detail) about 825. Ink on parchment. Utrecht University Library, Netherlands. (Utrecht University Library via Smarthistory)

So it's a very direct picking up of that phrase, but other images are much more interpretive. We have a man leaning down to pull two figures out of a hole. This is probably the Harrowing of Hell, Christ rescuing Adam and Eve. And comes from another verse in the Psalm. That verse [15:1] is, “because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.”

Beth Harris: So what we're seeing here is this Old Testament--this Jewish Bible--Psalm, interpreted in the light of Christianity, of Christ's descent into hell and bringing out souls from hell including those of Adam and Eve. And what I love especially about these illustrations is these lovely fluid lines that have a lot of energy, but they're also very expressive of human emotion. And so Adam and Eve reaching up to Christ to save them from the mouth of hell or, one of my favorites, is in Psalm 13 one of the lines is, “You have confounded the counsel of the poor man.”

Figure 5.3.3.5.93: Utrecht Psalter, fol. 7v, illustration to Psalm 13(14):6, about 825. Ink on parchment. Utrecht University Library, Netherlands. (Utrecht University Library via Smarthistory)

And we see what looks like a woman with smaller figures, perhaps children and a sense of their being neglected. They seem in need of pity and sympathy, which the woman in front of them is pleading with the ruler to provide to them, but he is involved in evil and we see those serpents twining around the canopy that he sits under and the violence around him. These are people who are not listening to the word of God. And we see God above them surrounded by angels.

Kathleen Doyle: This agitated, gestural, very emotional, as you say, style had an incredible impact on the art of Anglo-Saxon England, which is why it's in the exhibition.

And we can see the influence of this in the book that's placed right next to it: the Harley Psalter. The figures and what they're doing, the way they look is exactly the same. Almost an exact copy of the Utrecht Psalter.
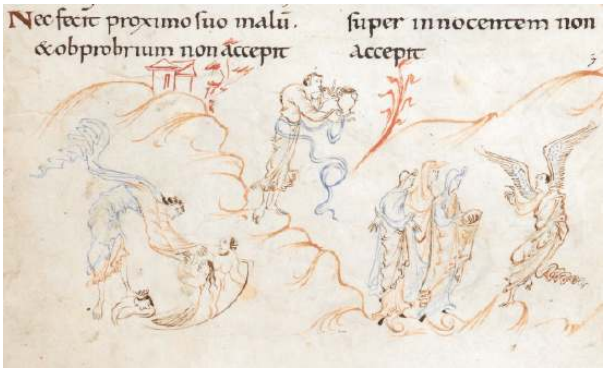
Figure **5.3.3.5.94**: Harley Psalter, illustration to Psalm 15(16):5, Harley MS 603, fol. 8r, (detail), Canterbury, England, first half of the 11th century. Colored inks on parchment, 380 x 310 mm. British Library, London, England. (Photo: The British Library, public domain)

So this is the evidence that that earlier book was in England by around the year 1000 when this book was made. However, there's an immediate difference.

Beth Harris: Ink in different colors.

Kathleen Doyle: Right. So we've gone from the text in all capitals in the earlier book and all of the illustrations have this very delicate ink line drawing, but the ink was all black. Here it's been enlivened and the ink is in red, green, blue and it transforms how it looks on the page.

Beth Harris: And we see again that kind of fluttering drapery.

Kathleen Doyle: Exactly

Beth Harris: And the enlarged hands which are very expressive. So we can really read the story.

Kathleen Doyle: They're very sophisticated books, as you've just articulated. Some of the visual commentary on the Psalms are quite complicated. Moreover, we've got a change in the actual text itself. By tradition, Saint Jerome, working at the behest of the pope, made three translations of the Psalms into Latin. The first one is the version that's here in the Harley Psalter, which is known as the Roman version because it was adopted by the church in Rome. It was, in the Anglo-Saxon period, the version that most often occurred in English Psalters. In contrast, the Utrecht Psalter has the Gallican version that was adopted in Gaul.

In the Eadwine Psalter, we've moved another century later. Here three versions appear in parallel columns so the Gallicanum, the Roman, and the Hebraicum, but moreover, you've got two more versions.

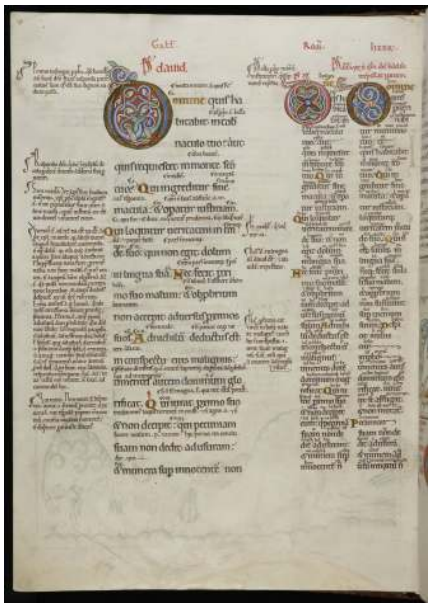

Figure **5.3.3.5.95**: Eadwine Psalter, fol. 23v, text of Psalm 13(14), Canterbury, England, around 1150. Colored inks and paint on parchment, 46 x 33 cm. Trinity College, Cambridge, England. (Photo: Trinity College, CC BY-NC 4.0)

In the column closest to the gutter, you have little translations of the Latin words written in Anglo-Norman French.

Figure **5.3.3.5.96**: Eadwine Psalter, fol. 23v (detail) text of Psalm 13(14), Canterbury, England, around 1150. (Photo: Trinity College, CC BY-NC 4.0)

So this is the language, after the Norman Conquest, of the new aristocracy. Next to it, above the Romanum version, you have little words in old English. This is the language of the old aristocracy. And then all around are words and phrases and marginal glosses, which is a Latin commentary explaining, in many cases, the Christological understanding of the Psalms. So this is an extraordinarily complex book.

Beth Harris: Although we see a lot of similarities to the earlier illustrations, we do see some differences here.

Kathleen Doyle: This is a much bigger book. So Psalm 14, instead of taking half a page, takes a whole page and a half. So on this one, you only get one illustration. It's colored, it's line drawings, but we're seeing them move into what we sometimes refer to as Romanesque art.

Figure **5.3.3.5.97**: Eadwine Psalter, fol. 24r (detail), illustration of Psalm 13(14), Canterbury, England, around 1150. (Photo: Trinity College, CC BY-NC 4.0)

The fluttering draperies you mentioned, they're gone. Everything's straight, it's linear, it's more patterned, It's more static. The illustration has been put in a box so it's separated from the text. We're entering into, again, a different aesthetic, but again, faithfully, keeping the sort of details: the man holding his cup, Christ reaching down to rescue Adam and Eve. Every time I come in and look at the details I see something new.

Beth Harris: What a treat to see these three manuscripts side-by-side here in this remarkable exhibition of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms in the British Library. It's really wonderful to be here.

Kathleen Doyle: Thank you.

Durham Cathedral: A Conversation

by Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

This conversation took place in Durham Cathedral (Durham, England), begun c. 1093. Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris. The transcription has been abbreviated; watch the full video here.

Figure **5.3.3.5.98**: Interior of Durham Cathedral, Durham, England, begun c. 1093. (Photo: Michael D. Beckwith, CC0 1.0)

Steven: We're in Durham Cathedral at the top of a hill in north eastern England. This is one of the great early cathedrals.

Beth: And it's built less than three decades after the Norman Conquest, that is, after William the Conqueror crossed the channel with his army and invaded and took over England in a rather brutal invasion and replaced the old order of Anglo-Saxon England for this new Norman order, and built many churches, among the first of which is Durham Cathedral.…

Steven: English history is complicated. We have native peoples here that were conquered by the Romans who then left in the early fifth century. The political vacuum was then filled by invaders from what is now southern Denmark and northern Germany, peoples that we call the Angles and the Saxons, or the Anglo-Saxons.

Beth: And then Anglo-Saxon England is supplanted by Norman England and this is one of the first Anglo-Norman churches, and we feel the ancientness of this building. It is heavy, it feels fortified, and in that way we know that we're standing in a Romanesque church.

Steven: This was some of the earliest large-scale architecture to take place since the Romans had left, and we call it Romanesque because this architecture was dependent on the technology that the Romans had originally used, that is the round arch.

Beth: One of the things that one notices immediately was how decorative the surfaces are, that is a key feature of Anglo-Norman Romanesque that differentiates it from what was going on on the French continent.

Steven: We're standing in the nave and we're surrounded by these massive piers that hold up the heavy vaulting above us, and there are basically two types of piers that alternate. One is a simple cylindrical pier, and the other is a more complex and larger compound pier that has attached columns.

Beth: And the cylindrical piers are the ones that carry this amazing linear decoration. When we walk in from the west and we see fluted columns. As we make our way east towards the holiest end of the church we see cylindrical piers decorated with chevrons, these zig-zag shapes. And then we come upon lozenge shapes, and in each case really deeply cut creating dark shadows that were likely originally painted.

Figure **5.3.3.5.99**: Durham Cathedral, begun c. 1093. (Photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And if you look closely you'll notice that ingeniously the stonemasons created a kind of mass production, each stone is identical to another and yet when they fit together they create these continuous patterns.

Beth: And this is a testament to the increasing skill of stonemasons during the Romanesque period.…

Steven: The inter-elevation is three-part. Above the nave arcade is this broad, heavy gallery.

Beth: I'm struck by the depth of the archway and the rolls of molding that lead our eye up to that gallery and we can see that in some cases that molding is decorated with that chevron zig-zag pattern in these wonderfully complex ways.

Steven: And we see that chevron zig-zag everywhere in this church. It creates the most lively pattern that activates the surfaces of stones.

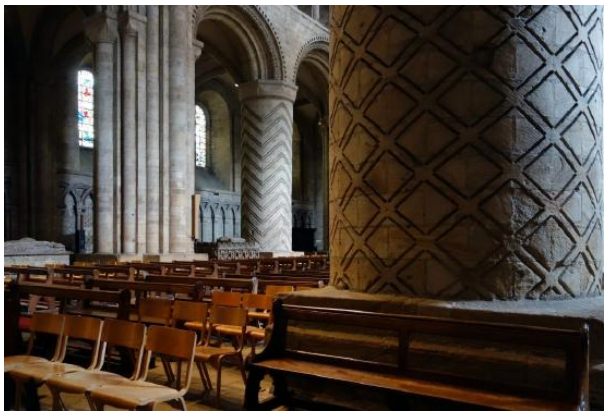

Figure **5.3.3.5.100**: Durham Cathedral, begun c. 1093. (Photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: Now the church is relatively dark as most Romanesque churches are. We can see a clerestory which is rather small and interestingly those windows are slightly inset, again we have a sense of the depth of the wall.

Steven: There is in fact a narrow walkway that moves just in front of those windows.

Beth: So this idea of emphasizing the depth of the wall, this interesting decorative carving, these are all things that art historians sees carrying through after the Romanesque into the English Gothic.

Steven: And one of my favorite decorative aspects of the church can be seen in the aisles. We see these doubled attached columns with these interlacing arches just above. It's almost musical.

Beth: We have to imagine these painted in reds and greens and yellows so they would have really stood out. Art historians believe that these might be influenced by the art of Islamic Spain.

Steven: For example, in the great mosque at Cordoba we see interlacing similar to this. An aspect of this church that fascinates art historians is the vaulting, because here we see the precocious early use of ribbed vaulting.

Beth: Ribbed vaulting does in some form go back to the ancient Romans, but its use here is very important because we know what's going to follow in the Gothic. Before stone vaulting, churches had been covered with wood, sometimes even flat wood ceilings. And so not only was stone vaulting more fireproof, it allowed for a shaping of space that was far more decorative.

Beth: If we follow the lines of the vault, we notice that it leads our eye down a shaft which is attached to the compound pier, and so you have this unifying of the nave from the ground all the way up through and across the transverse arch that takes to the other side of the nave. This unification of space is something that will become very important in the Gothic era…

Articles in this section:

- Boundless Art History, "The Vikings" (CC BY-SA)
- Victoria Valdes, "https://smarthistory.org/ottonian-art-an-introduction/," in *Smarthistory*, December 25, 2015 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Andreas Petzold, "Gospel Book of Otto III," in *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015 (CC BY-NC-SA)
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- Dr. Diane Reilly, "The Romanesque churches of Tuscany: San Miniato in Florence and Pisa Cathedral," in *Smarthistory*, May 11, 2018. (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Kristine Tanton, "The Bayeux Tapestry," in *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Dr. Kathleen Doyle, The British Library and Dr. Beth Harris, "The Utrecht Psalter and its influence," in *Smarthistory*, February 8, 2019 (CC BY-NC-SA)
- Euan McCartney Robson, "Durham Cathedral," in *Smarthistory*, April 9, 2021 (CC BY-NC-SA)

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5.3.3.6: The Eadwine Psalter

The Eadwine Psalter

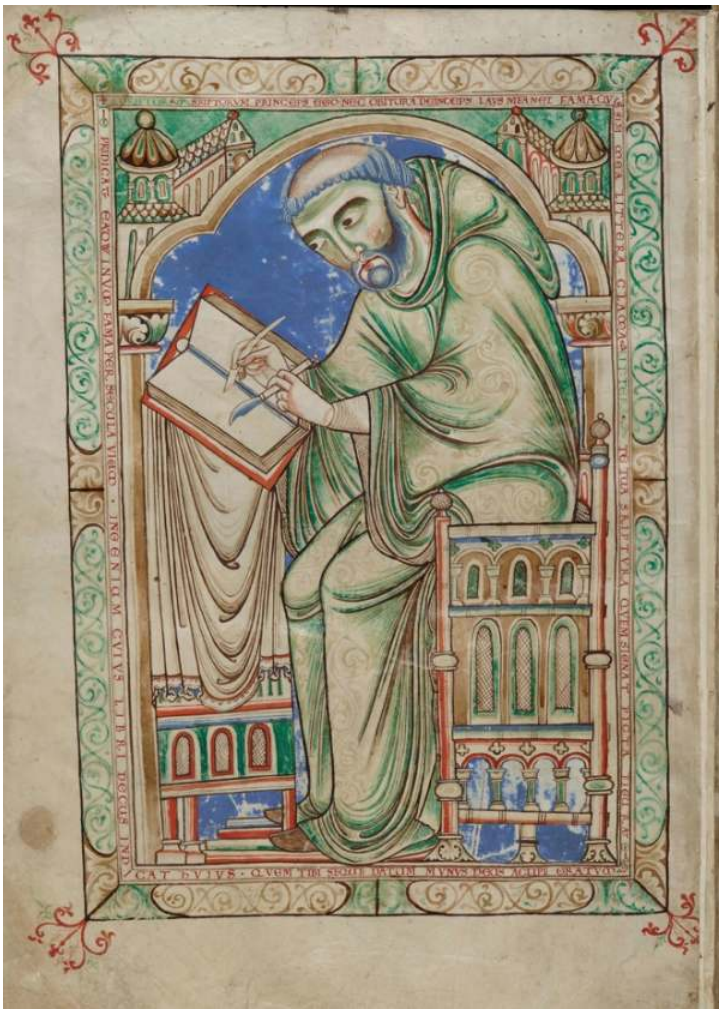

Figure 5.3.3.6.1: Tripartitum Psalterium Eadwini (The Eadwine Psalter) This work is copyright the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License CC-BY-NC

The Utrecht Psalter and its influence

by DR. KATHLEEN DOYLE AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video **5.3.3.6.6**: The Utrecht Psalter, c. 825, Hautvilliers, near Reims, France, 380 x 310 mm (Universiteitsbibliotheek, Utrecht, MS 32, ff. 7v–8r), courtesy Universiteitsbibliothek, Utrecht; The Harley Psalter, early 11th century, Christ Church, Canterbury, 380 x 310 mm (British Library, BL, Harley MS 603, ff. 7v 8r), © 2019 British Library, used by permission; and the The Eadwine Psalter, c. 1150, Christ Church, Canterbury, 460 x 330 mm (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 17.1, ff. 23v–24r) A conversation with Dr. Kathleen Doyle, Lead Curator, Illuminated Manuscripts, British Library and Dr. Beth Harris

Additional resources:

This manuscript in the Utrecht University Library

This manuscript in the British Library's Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms exhibition

The Harley Psalter at the British Library

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5.3.3.7: Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter

Italy: 15th century

The Italian city-states were filled with art—all powered by thriving merchant economies.

1400 - 1500 (Early Renaissance)

How to recognize Italian Renaissance art

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.3.7.1: A brief introduction to Italian Renaissance art

Alberti's revolution in painting

by DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK and DR. HEATHER GRAHAM

Figure 5.3.3.7.8: Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*, Sistine Chapel, 1481–83, fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet (Vatican, Rome)

In a fresco high on one wall of the Sistine Chapel, the aged Saint Peter kneels as he humbly accepts the keys of heaven from Jesus Christ standing before him. These two central figures are joined in the immediate foreground by a group of men to either side, some dressed in ancient styles, others in cutting-edge fifteenth-century fashion. They all have volumetric bodies that suggest gentle movement and expressions of solemn concentration. A wide piazza opens behind them, with figures and the piazza's paving stones receding in scale to suggest a deep space. Forms on the distant horizon fade into an atmospheric haze. A massive building and two triumphal arches, set at even intervals in the background, convey a sense of balance and geometric solidarity.

Pietro Perugino's **biblical** scene displays many of the key elements identified as necessary for a successful painting by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise about painting, including:

1. Convincing three-dimensional space
2. Light and shadow to create bodies that look three-dimensional
3. Figures in varied poses to create a compelling narrative

Alberti's *De Pictura* (*On Painting*, 1435) is the first theoretical text written about art in Europe. Originally written in Latin, but published a year later in the Italian vernacular as *Della Pittura* (1436), this was the first artistic treatise to describe **linear perspective** and is the first known text in Europe to discuss the purpose of painting. **Filippo Brunelleschi's experiments in linear perspective** had occurred earlier in the 1420s, but Alberti codified these ideas in writing. It was during his time living in Florence that Alberti developed his thoughts on painting as he interacted with artists such as **Brunelleschi**, **Donatello**, **Lorenzo Ghiberti**, **Masaccio**, and others.

Figure **5.3.3.7.9**: Masaccio, frescoes for the Brancacci Chapel, 1427 (Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence; photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

These artists experimented with linear perspective before Alberti wrote his text, as we see in Masaccio's frescoes in the **Brancacci Chapel** or Donatello's bronze ***The Feast of Herod***. Alberti encountered first-hand works like Masaccio's fresco cycle on the life of Saint Peter where biblical characters are convincingly three-dimensional, walk upon solid ground casting shadows, and interact emotionally to tell a story. He dedicated the Italian version of *On Painting* to the artists from whom he had learned his practical ideas. Alberti's treatise was more ambitious than simply telling painters how to construct convincing three-dimensional space though. For him, painting "contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present . . . but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive." [1]

Creating three-dimensional space

> ***Know that a painted thing can never appear truthful where there is not a definite distance for seeing it.***
>
> ***Alberti, On Painting, book 1:46***

Alberti believed that good and praiseworthy paintings need to have convincing three-dimensional space, such as we see in Perugino's fresco. In the first section of *On Painting*, he explains how to construct logical, rational space based on mathematical principles. It is here that he writes about linear perspective and how to construct a geometrically calculated vanishing point around which a painting's composition is centered.

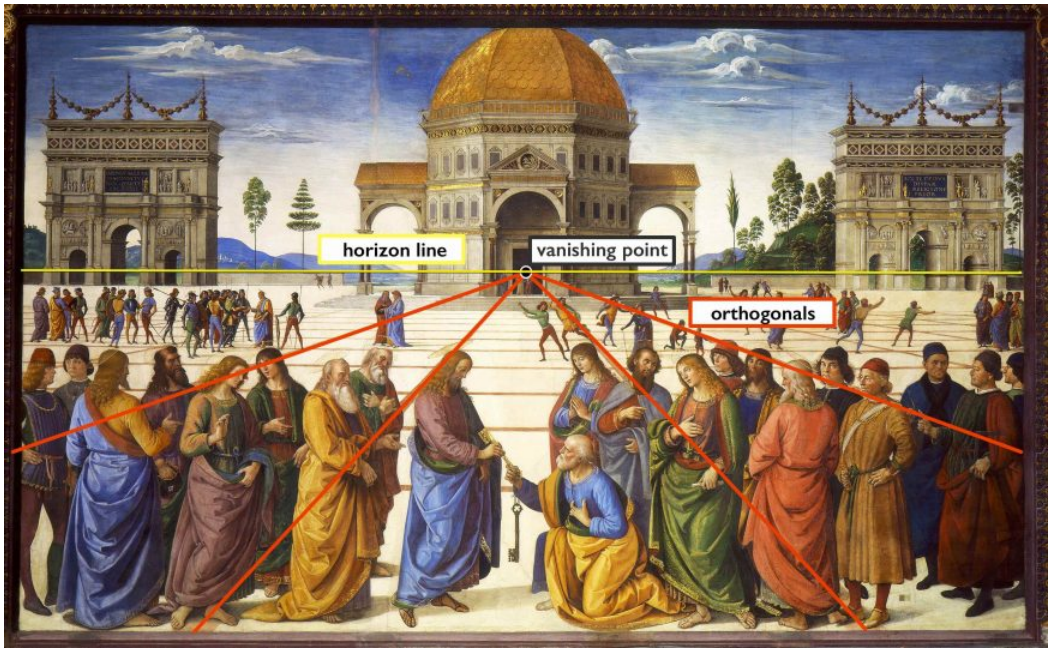

Figure **5.3.3.7.10**: Perspective diagram, Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83, fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet (Vatican, Rome)

A painting attributed to Luciano Laurana of an ideal city envisions Alberti's ideas. The painting shows a perfectly symmetrical and mathematically defined cityscape. All of the forms within the painting appear to recede away from the viewer and converge at a single point at the center of the horizon line. By having a single vanishing point, Alberti was instructing viewers to look at a painting like *The Ideal City* as if it were viewed through a window frame.

Figure **5.3.3.7.11**: Luciano Laurana (attributed), *View of an Ideal City*, c. 1475, oil on panel (Galleria Nazionale della Marche)

Making figures look real

> ***There are some who use much gold in their istoria. They think it gives majesty. I do not praise it. Even though one should paint Virgil's Dido whose quiver was of gold, her***

> ***golden hair knotted with gold, and her purple robe girdled with pure gold, the reins of the horse and everything of gold, I should not wish gold to be used, for there is more admiration and praise for the painter who imitates the rays of gold with colors.***
>
> ***Alberti, On Painting, book 2:83***

Figure 5.3.3.7.12: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of the Virgin*, c. 1485-90, fresco, 24′ 4″ x 14′ 9″ (Cappella Maggiore, Santa Maria Novella, Florence)

For Alberti, the ultimate artistic goal of painting was to rival Nature in the depiction of visual reality. Forms within a painting should be modeled with light and shade to appear sculptural, as though they stand out from the two-dimensional surface like the forms in ancient relief sculpture. **Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco depicting the birth of the Virgin Mary** includes precisely the kind of convincing naturalism Alberti desired. In the scene, women cast shadows, and the deep folds and pleats in their dresses give the impression that their bodies take up space in the two-dimensional fresco.

Figure 5.3.3.7.13: Pietro Lorenzetti, *Birth of the Virgin*, c. 1342, tempera on panel, 6′ 1″ x 5′ 11″, for the altar of St. Savinus, Siena Cathedral (now in Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena)

Alberti also wanted human bodies to appear anatomically correct, and the movements and facial expressions of figures to suggest their emotions. The second part of Alberti's treatise lays out these ideals, advising painters on how to most effectively tell a story (what he calls an *istoria*, or narrative) in their art using variety in figure types and gestures. Alberti wanted viewers to be able to relate to the stories portrayed in art and to empathize with painted characters, but he also wanted paintings to present an idealized vision of human behavior. In Ghirlandaio's scene, women stand, kneel, or sit. Two women in the background lean toward one another to embrace. We also see how Ghirlandaio paints women looking in different directions to create a sense that they are interacting with one another, offering viewers a more compelling narrative than simply showing Saint Anne reclining in bed.

> ***For their own enjoyment artists should associate with poets and orators who have many embellishments in common with painters and who have a broad knowledge of many things whose greatest praise consists in the invention.***
>
> ***Alberti, On Painting, book 3:89***

Why would Alberti go to such great lengths to talk about painting and its purpose? He wished for painting to be viewed as a liberal art, one similar to mathematics or music, rather than as manual labor. His goal was to elevate the status of painting, and painters along with it. One of the ways that he tried to prove that painting was an intellectual endeavor was to look to sources from antiquity. [2] He draws on the ideas of Roman authors such as Pliny the Elder, Quintillian, Cicero, Plutarch, and Lucian, turning to them for their discussions of ancient forms of painting and the artists who made them. He cites Pliny when talking about how artists like **Praxiteles** or **Phidias** were so skilled at painting that any work made by the Greek artists was valued more than costly materials like gold and silver. This inclusion and assumed familiarity with classical authors demonstrated his humanist learning and helped to initiate the formal transformation of the visual arts from manual skill to intellectual endeavor.

De Pictura encapsulates many of Alberti's life pursuits. During his lifetime, he was a humanist, the author of an important architectural treatise, and a literary author who wrote plays, philosophical dialogues, and poetry in addition to working as a practicing architect and artist.

The reception of Alberti's ideas

Despite the fame of Alberti's ideas on painting today, this was not the case in his lifetime. Initially, *On Painting* was not printed—the European printing press wasn't invented until around 1450. This means that Alberti's ideas did not have a wide reception until later. Furthermore, renaissance artists would not have been able to read the 1435 Latin version of *On Painting*. Latin was the language of the educated elite, the language of the class of people who patronized art, not those who made it. It is likely that his initial intent was to share his ideas with a privileged audience, a reminder to us that artists worked at the pleasure of their **wealthy employers**. When he translated the text, he made it accessible to the people who might actually use his ideas directly.

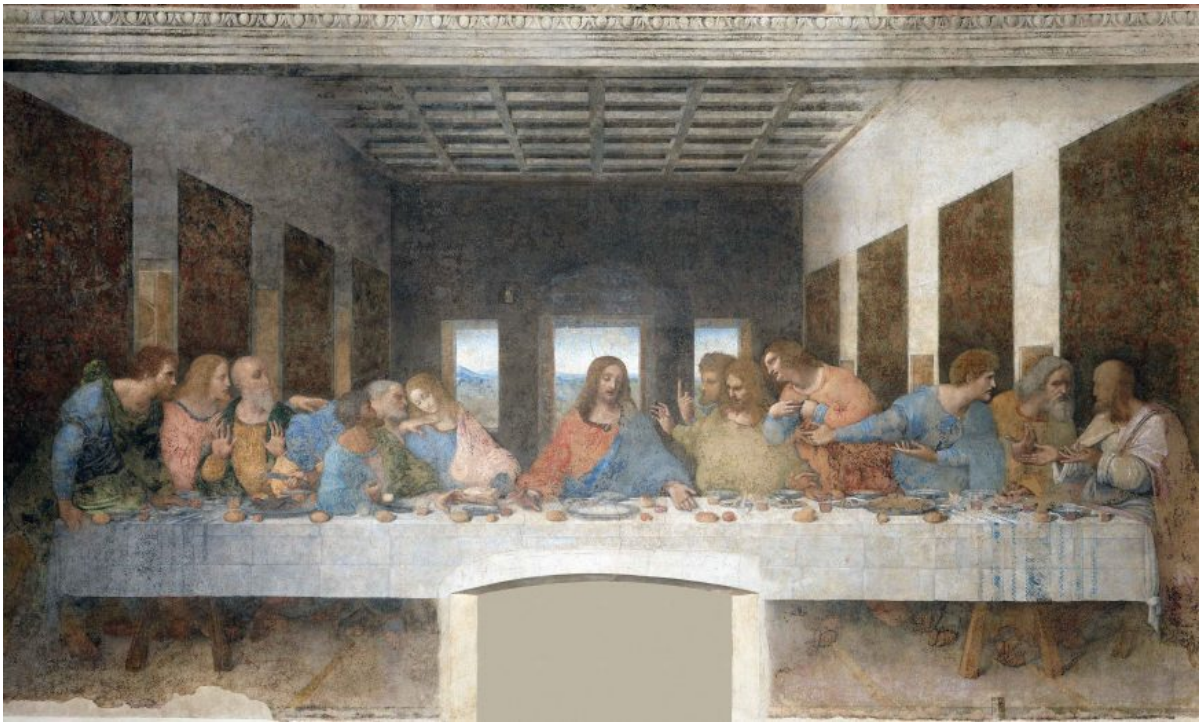

Figure **5.3.3.7.14**: Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper*, oil, tempera, fresco, 1495-98 (Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan)

Alberti's ideas about painting influenced later generations of artists, including the giants of high renaissance art, **Leonardo da Vinci**, **Michelangelo**, and **Raphael**. Even those who disagreed with Alberti's ideas such as northern renaissance artist **Albrecht**

Dürer, proceeded to write down their own ideas about perspective and painting.

Figure 5.3.3.7.15: René Magritte, *The Human Condition*, 1933, oil on canvas, 100 x 81 x 1.6 cm (The National Gallery of Art)

Alberti's ideas would go on to have lasting influence on the history of art. Works of art by many early twentieth-century modern painters, such as Pablo Picasso's ***Demoiselles d'Avignon***, purposefully reject the illusion of deep space. They were avant-garde precisely because they challenged traditions of painting set in place since the time of Alberti. A painting like René Magritte's *The Human Condition* also playfully engages with Alberti's notion of a painting as a window through which a viewer perceives the world.

Notes:

[1] Alberti, trans. John R. Spencer, rev. ed. (1966), II:62

[2] While the Italian version differs in some respects from the Latin text, the translated work retains the classical references found throughout the Latin version.

Additional resources

Learn more about Alberti as an architect

Virtually explore the Papal Palace and the Sistine Chapel with Smarthistory as your guide

Check out Alberti's *On Painting*

Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*

by DR. SHANNON PRITCHARD

Figure 5.3.3.7.62: View of the north wall of the Sistine Chapel with Perugino's *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter* outlined in red, 1481-83, fresco, 10′ 10″ x 18′ (Vatican, Rome) (photo: **Clayton Tang**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

St. Peter—keeper of the keys

Pietro Perugino's *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter* is an exemplar of Italian Renaissance painting. The work was part of a large decorative program commissioned by Pope Sixtus IV in 1481 for the walls of the Sistine Chapel (the name "Sistine" being derived from Sixtus' own name), which was then, as it is today, the pope's private chapel in the Vatican, in Rome. This large scale fresco, measuring 10'10" x 18', is part of the New Testament narrative cycle depicting events from the life of Christ on the north wall of the chapel (the south wall illustrates the Old Testament life of Moses).

Figure 5.3.3.7.63: Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83, fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet (Vatican, Rome) (**view large public domain image**)

The painting shows the moment when Christ, standing in the center dressed purple and blue garments, gives the keys of the heavenly kingdom to the kneeling St. Peter. This episode comes from the Gospel of Matthew (16:18-19) as Christ said to Peter: "And I tell you that you are Peter (*Petros*), and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my church… I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven…." The pair of gold and silver keys became Saint Peter's attribute (an attribute, in this sense, is an object associated with a saint that aids the viewer in identifying the saint). More about Peter

However, there is one element that is incongruous with the rest, which is the addition of contemporary Roman and Florentine men at the far edges of the groups on either side of Peter and Christ. These figures are clearly not part of the biblical figures based on their dress— and there is even a portrait of the artist himself, who looks directly out to the viewer on the right hand side (the fifth figure from the right edge—see the image above) ! The inclusion of the artist and / or contemporary people associated with the project was common during the Italian Renaissance, and in this case, Perugino's presence acts as his visual signature to his work.

Figure 5.3.3.7.65: Left side (detail), Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83, fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet (Vatican, Rome)

In the middle-ground, the figures are much smaller than those in the foreground, suggestive of their spatial distance. Not merely passersby, these figures are part of two additional stories from the life of Christ. On the left is the Tribute Money from the Gospel of Matthew (17:24-27) where the Roman tax collector demands Christ pay the Emperor's tax. (This scene was famously represented by **Masaccio in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence**). On the right is the Stoning of Christ from the Gospel of John (8:48-59). The addition of these two scenes creates a pictorial device known as a continuous narrative, where two or more related events are shown occurring simultaneously in one composition.

The space

The background is comprised of three architectural structures at the edge of the open piazza (plaza), with an ideal landscape extending far into the distance behind. In order to create such a believable sense of three-dimensional space, Perugino utilized two types of perspective.

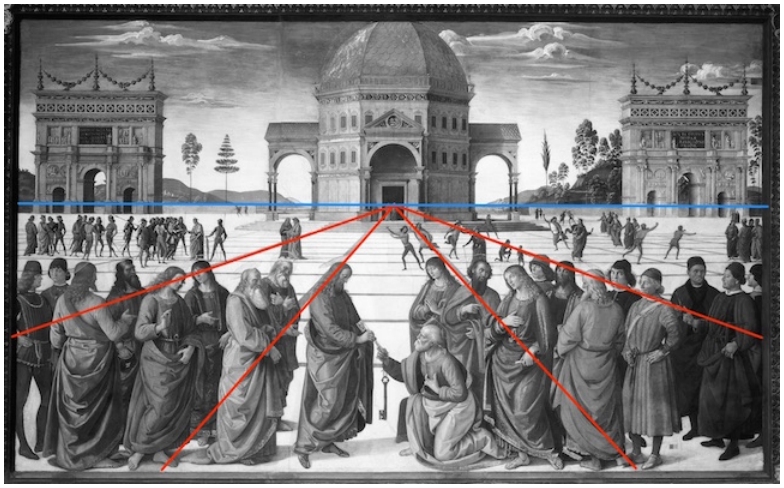

Figure 5.3.3.7.66: Perspective diagram, Perugino, *Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter*, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83, fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet (Vatican, Rome)

5.3.3.7: Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **7.4: Italy in the 15th century- Early Renaissance (I)** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.3.3.8: Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria

Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria

Figure **5.3.3.8.59**: Gentile Bellini and Giovanni Bellini, *Saint Mark Preaching in a Square of Alexandria in Egypt*, 1504-07, oil on canvas, 347 x 770 cm (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan)

Gentile Bellini, *St Mark Preaching in Alexandria, Egypt*, 1504-07

The Scuola Grande di San Marco commissioned Gentile Bellini to paint *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria, Egypt*, but the artist died before the painting was completed, so it was finished by his brother Giovanni Bellini (who, like Gentile, had never been to Alexandria). For the costumes and architectural details, Gentile drew inspiration from his stay in Constantinople and from travelers' accounts. The layout of the painting is reminiscent of *Procession in St. Mark's Square*, where the figures in the foreground are represented in profile.

Figure **5.3.3.8.60**: Saint Mark (detail), Gentile Bellini and Giovanni Bellini, *Saint Mark Preaching in a Square of Alexandria in Egypt*, 1504-07, oil on canvas, 347 x 770 cm, (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan)

The saint, who will become the patron saint of Venice, preaches from a small podium placed between the *scuola* brothers and the Arabs, while in the background stands a great temple whose façade, divided into three parts, brings to mind the meeting house of the Scuola Grande di San Marco, the **Basilica of San Mark** and the **Hagia Sophia in Constantinople**. Nearby is an obelisk engraved with hieroglyphics and several minarets. In the square, alongside the inhabitants, a number of exotic animals stroll by, including camels and giraffes.

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5.3.3.9: Life as a Picture - A Picture of Life Series

Life as a Picture - A Picture as Life Series

For more information about Wolf Vostell visit The Museum of Modern Art

Figure **5.3.3.9.1**: Wolf Vostell, *No: Life as a Picture—A Picture as Life* series, 1963. Photograph. (Photo via Smarthistory)

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5.3.3.10: Perspective Painting of the Lake to the East

Perspective Painting of the Lake to the East

For more information visit MIT Visualizing Cultures or Gettys Images

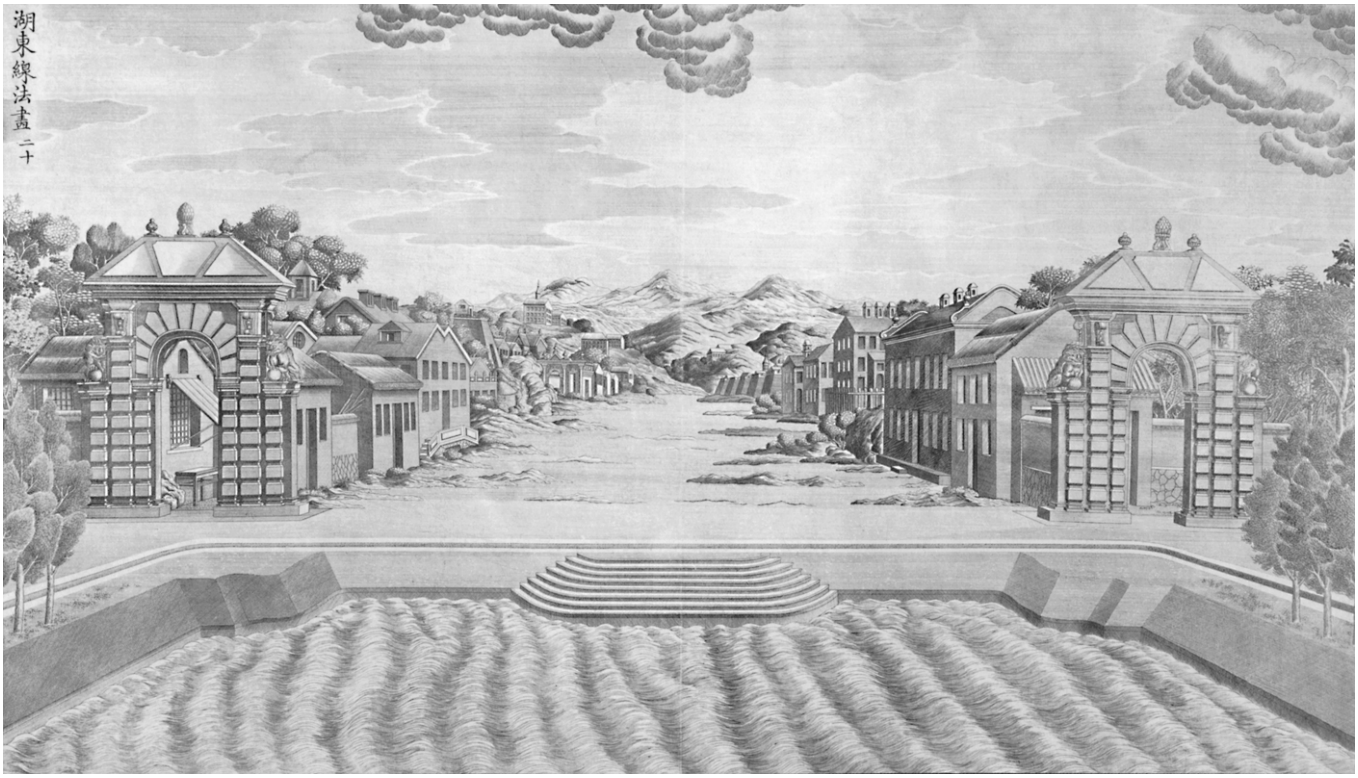

Figure **5.3.3.10.1**: Perspective paintings east of the lake
Hudong xianfahua 湖東線法畫 Image Source: https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/..._visnav02.html

5.3.3.10: Perspective Painting of the Lake to the East is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.3.3.11: The Clivus Scauri in Rome

The Clivus Scauri in Rome

> For more information vist the interactive RijksCollection

Figure **5.3.3.11.1**: Tobias Verhaecht, *The Clivus Scauri in Rome*. Chalk, graphite and ink on paper, 22 x 17.1 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands. (Photo via Smarthistory)

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5.3.3.12: Chamber of the Sphinx

The rediscovery and impact of the Domus Aurea

by Jessica Mingoia

“Chamber Of The Sphinx,” rediscovered in 2019, Domus Aurea, Rome (photo: Parco archeologico del Colosseo)

Rediscovery

The air was frigidly cold, and the space narrow, low, and dirty. It was also completely dark except for the torchlight that made fantastical creatures come alive on the walls. These are the conditions under which the luxurious palace of the ancient Roman Emperor Nero (known in Latin as the Domus Aurea, or Golden Palace) was explored during the Renaissance. Beginning in the 1480s, more than a millennium after it was built, explorers crawled through the rooms. This was often painful, and yet also incredibly exciting, and visitors would often bring food with them to picnic in the depths of the structure. We can still get a sense of the high ground level they experienced as they crawled through these spaces thanks to a portion of the palace discovered in 2019, the so-called “Chamber of the Sphinx.”

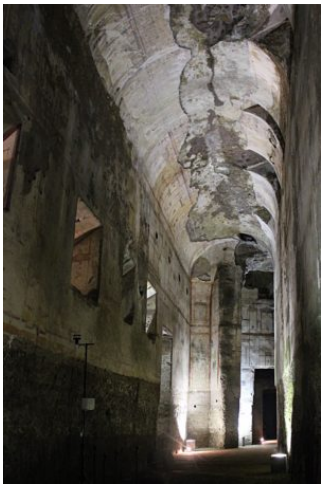
The Domus Aurea once contained 300 rooms, grand gardens, an artificial lake, and even a rotating dining room. The palace complex spanned at least 50 hectares (123 acres) in the heart of the city of Rome. Though it was the most opulent imperial place constructed at that time, much of it was destroyed when the emperor Nero’s suicide resulted in a year of chaos before the Flavian emperors seized control and restored stability. At that time, the upper levels of Nero’s palace were destroyed and the lower levels were filled with earth. The abandoned palace later became the foundation for Baths built by the Emperor Trajan. It was these earth-filled rooms that people would crawl through.

Legend has it that the remains of the palace were discovered by a young boy who fell into what he described as painted caves. Though it is unknown who exactly was the first to start properly exploring this space, it quickly drew the attention of many notable Italian figures from the 15th and 16th centuries, including Michelangelo, Raphael and his apprentice Giovanni da Udine, painter Domenico Ghirlandaio, and author Casanova, among others. Many of these visitors carved their names into the walls and ceilings, making it easy to identify some of the explorers.

Initially, this structure was misidentified as the “Palace of Titus;” it is adjacent to the Bath complex built by Emperor Titus (78–80 C.E.). Raphael is often credited for correctly identifying the complex after he visited in 1514.

Holes from Renaissance explorers in the ceiling of the "Golden Vault" and graffiti with Renaissance explorers' names. Domus Aurea, Rome, 65–68 C.E. (photo: Jessica Mingoia, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Explorers in the 15th and 16th centuries traveled through what seemed at the time like a labyrinth of rooms and corridors. In some places, the debris was so high that they tunneled through walls to access other rooms, causing extensive damage along the way. Because there was no known entrance into the structure at the time, tunnels were cut through vaulted ceilings, damaging the ancient structure. Visitors would then lower themselves through the ceiling using ropes and pulleys. These holes are still recognizable in the ceilings today, such as in the so-called "Golden Vault," which was one of the most popular rooms to visit. The cryptoporticus, or long vaulted passageway, was another frequently visited area.



Cryptoporticus, Domus Aurea, 65–68 C.E., Rome

Emergence of the grotesque

When the palace was discovered, most of the walls were hidden below ground, but explorers were able to get up close and personal with the ceilings. Because the painted vaulting had been cut off from air for so long, the frescoes and stuccoed ceiling designs were incredibly well preserved. The buried Domus Aurea was, of course, pitch black. The torches visitors carried made everything seem strange and mysterious and made the fantastical creatures in the wall paintings surrounding them appear to come alive. Because of

this, the structure was quickly labeled a grotto, and it is from this term that grotesque is derived. Today we use the term “grotesque” to refer to a style of art featuring fanciful, ugly, bizarre, and/or mythical creatures or human forms of the sort found painted in the Domus Aurea.

Grotesques, Domus Aurea, Rome, Italy (photo: sébastien amiet;l, CC BY 2.0)

The frescoes of the Domus Aurea fall under what we now call the Fourth style of Roman wall painting, which became popular in the mid-1st century C.E. around the time that the palace was constructed. This was the most eclectic of the Roman wall painting styles, incorporating everything from thin colonettes, garlands, and candelabra, to mythical animals and creatures.

The walls and ceiling were divided into separate panels, sometimes bordered by architectural frames and at other times by delicate floral frames. Figures were often free-floating in the central space of these panels. Very little ancient painting was known prior to the rediscovery of this building, so it was especially fascinating to the people of Renaissance Rome. While there was great interest in unearthing ancient sculptures throughout the city (which quickly became part of wealthy families’ private collections), these typically no longer retained their once vibrant polychromy, so the vivid compositions of the palace were particularly intriguing.

Starting during the Italian Renaissance, artists imitated the grotesque motifs, figures, and framing devices found on the ancient walls of the Domus Aurea with compositions often containing candelabras, acanthus tendrils, and mythical creatures. These were not identical replications but rather new works heavily influenced by the frescoes discovered in the ancient palace. This was directly related to the fascination at the time with producing works *all’antica*, meaning “in the style of antiquity”, an Italian term applied to works that revived and incorporated the styles of ancient Rome. The grotesque was just one of the ways artists emulated the characteristics of classical antiquity.

Though this began in Italy, thanks to trade and colonization, the *all’antica* spread over time becoming a global phenomenon. While these grotesque motifs (*grotteschi)* appeared in a variety of works of art, two Italian Renaissance examples in particular are especially notable for their similarities to the Domus Aurea.

The Stufetta of Cardinal Bibbiena

The impact of the Domus Aurea frescos can be seen first in The Stufetta of Cardinal Bibbiena, constructed in the Apostolic Palace of the Vatican in 1516. This was the first time that grotesque forms were used to decorate an entire room since antiquity. The Cardinal was a lifelong supporter of the arts and friends with Raphael, who designed the *stufetta*, or warm bathing room. Raphael’s pupil, Giovanni da Udine, also had a hand in the design and execution of the washroom.

Initially, Raphael was not drawn to the Domus Aurea. However, Giovanni da Udine convinced Raphael to visit the structure in 1514 and eventually take up grotesque forms himself. Giovanni, who was especially fascinated with the Domus Aurea and the techniques of the ancients, succeeded in recreating the ancient Roman technique for stucco, using white travertine, lime, and powdered white marble.

Arcuated niche, Stufetta of Cardinal Bibbiena, 1516, fresco (Apostolic Palace in the Vatican, public domain)

The main color used throughout the Stufetta of Cardinal Bibbiena is red, a color used more sparingly in the Domus Aurea. Though no one yet knew it at this time, this particular shade of red (comprised of a red ochre with high iron oxide content), would later be found in abundance in the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, eventually earning it the name “Pompeiian Red.”

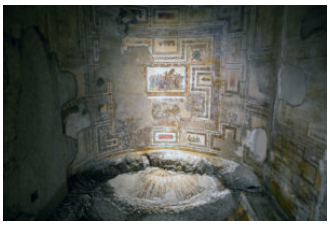
This corresponds to a fresco in the Stufetta. Attributed to Giulio Romano, *Venus and Cupid*, red chalk over stylus underdrawing, 21.1 x 17.2 cm (Royal Collection Trust)

As in the paintings of the Domus Aurea, the walls were divided into separate panels by architectural frames or delicate garlands. Some frames depict mythological scenes from Ovid while others feature free-floating grotesques.

Despite being constructed for a Catholic Cardinal at the Vatican, the room was filled with erotic, pagan imagery. There are playful nymphs and satyrs, aroused and nude mythological figures, and multiple details from the life of Venus, the Roman goddess of love, including her birth and a later image of her with Cupid and dolphins. Other panels include winged putti and mythological creatures interspersed with real animals and other pagan deities.

Cardinal Bibbiena, who was also a risqué playwright, chose to emulate these sensual and sometimes bawdy images without censorship. Even in the context of the Vatican, erotic *grotteschi* appear because these images help emulate the *all’antica*, that desire

to imitate the style of the ancient Romans as closely as possible. However, these images were still relegated to a private bathroom and not on public view. Despite this, many of the more salacious images were destroyed or replaced in later eras.



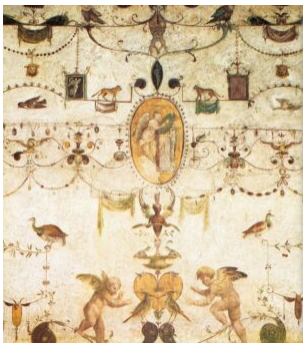
Overhead view of stuccoed and painted vaulting, "Hall of Achilles," Domus Aurea, 65–68 C.E. © ERCO GmbH

Frescoes continue on the ceiling. The back wall contained an arcuated (arched) niche shaped like a seashell, which was often used in Roman architecture in apses and niches, especially grottos, fountains, and other water features. A similar, but much larger, seashell shaped apse ceiling was found in one of the rooms of the Domus Aurea, the so-called Hall of Achilles, a room explored in the Renaissance.

Raphael, Loggetta of Cardinal Bibbiena, 1517, fresco, Vatican (public domain)

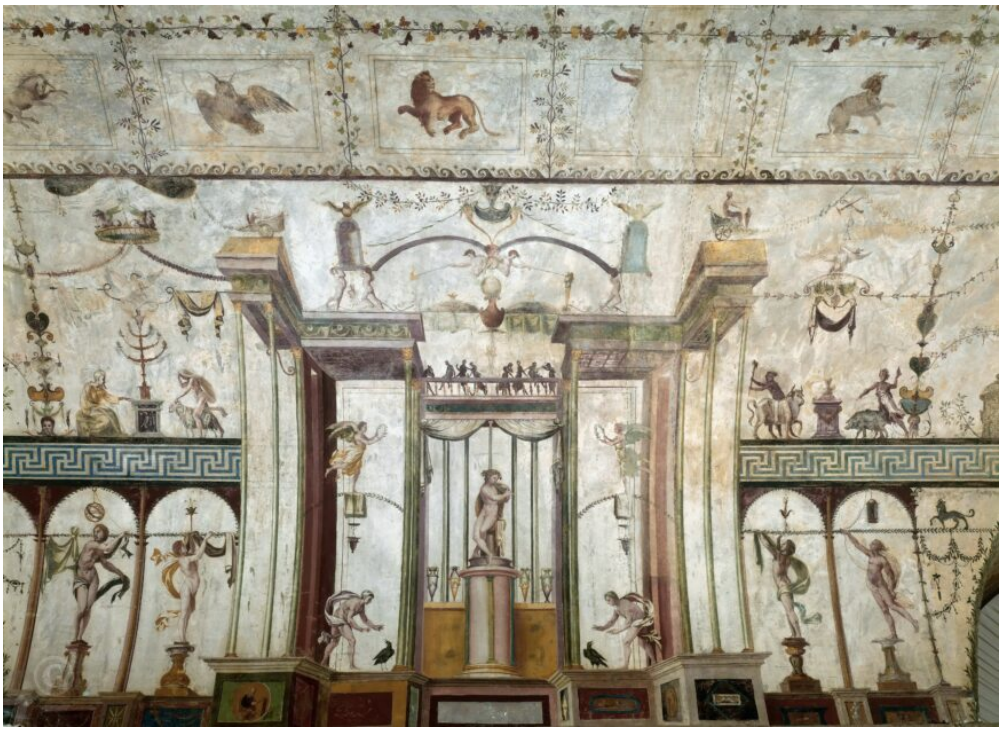
The Loggetta of Cardinal Bibbiena

One year later, in 1517, Raphael and Giovanni created the frescoes for Cardinal Bibbiena's Loggetta, or loggia, which is a covered corridor also located in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. Raphael is credited with the overall design while Giovanni is responsible for working on individual motifs. This corridor, in particular, imitated the cryptoporticus (long, covered hallway) of the Domus Aurea. Just like in the ancient structure, the walls and vaults are covered with frescoes divided into separate panels each containing a candelabra, grotesque, or other free-floating figures framed by delicate colonettes. Garlands and plant tendrils connect the framing devices to the grotesques in the middle. Despite the varied nature of the motifs within the fresco, it is well organized and symmetrical.



Giovanni da Udine, Loggetta of Cardinal Bibbiena, 1517, fresco (Apostolic Palace in the Vatican)

As with the cryptoporticus, the dominant wall color of the Loggetta is white. It also features a groin vault, as in the Domus Aurea, and each section of the vault contains a different vignette from the myths of the Greek god Apollo. One side of the Loggetta featured three windows which allow natural light to flood the passageway. At each end of the corridor is a doorway, above which is a seashell, also derived from what was seen in the Domus Aurea. Even in a space as light as the Loggetta, the seashell motif hearkens back to the concept of a grotto.



Raphael, Loggetta of Cardinal Bibbiena, 1517, fresco, Vatican

Unlike the Stufetta which contained only pagan images, the Loggetta contained a mix of grotesque and pagan figures combined with motifs from the Bible. There are a series of narrative scenes from both the Old and New Testament across the vaults, including the creation, the burning bush, and the Last Supper. The Loggetta seamlessly blends Christian imagery with grotesque beasts, delicate foliage, decorative candelabra, and real animals, like birds, snails, and mice. Though it may sound as if these motifs do not belong together, this space epitomizes how the grotesque could appear integrated alongside Christian religious imagery in a private context. The appropriateness (or lack thereof) of this iconographical pairing would receive much debate over the next two centuries.

The grotesques depict various figures, including symbols of the Four Continents, the Four Elements, the Four Seasons of the Year, the Zodiac Signs, as well as representations of various occupations, such as the work on the land, the gardening and also play. The Dining Room, Eating Room, Arabesque Room in the White Pavilion, Warsaw (The Royal Łazienki Museum in Warsaw)

The legacy of the Domus Aurea

Grotesque forms revived an appealing ancient heritage, but also offered a novel form of decorative expression. For Renaissance artists and collectors fascinated with anything ancient Roman, the rediscovery of the Domus Aurea was like striking gold. Until the rediscovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the 18th century, this was the largest assemblage of ancient Roman paintings that had been found.

The visual influence of the Domus Aurea was profound. Many of the painting motifs from the Domus Aurea would continue to appear in other artistic movements including Neoclassicism centuries later. Swirling plant tendrils and thin colonettes would not only make their way into other types of Renaissance paintings and engravings, but also frequently appear as a wallpaper motif in Neoclassical houses. With its grotto-like hallways and rooms, vibrant polychromy, mythical creatures, and fanciful vegetal motifs, the Domus Aurea captured the imagination of artists for centuries, making it as one of the most influential ancient Roman structures in the history of art.

Artwork details

Title	Domus Aurea
Artist(s)	Severus, Celer, Famulus
Dates	65–68 C.E.
Places	Europe / Southern Europe / Italy
Period, Culture, Style	Ancient Roman / Early Roman Empire
Artwork Type	Architecture / Painting / Mural
Material	Stone, Pigment, Plaster
Technique	Fresco

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5.3.3.13: Cloister of St. Trophime

Édouard Baldus, *Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles*

by Dr. Kris Belden-Adams

Edouard Baldus, *Notre-Dame*, abside (left) and façade (right), 1860s, albumen silver print from glass negative, left: 21.7 x 28.6 cm, right: 27.6 x 21.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

After hordes of angry mobs and French Revolutionaries looted structures such as the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris for being symbols of the power and monarchy of France, the government became acutely aware of the vulnerability of the country's irreplaceable historic buildings. The widespread fear of losing even more touchstones to an enduring, shared past after three revolutions promoted a public- and government-supported veneration for monuments and French history, and a desire to preserve or commemorate history. The Mission Héliographique, established by France's Historic Monuments Commission in 1851, was a project with a lofty goal: to use photography to provide an accurate, unifying, historically rooted sense of national identity that simultaneously conveyed "the permanence of the past, the viability of the future, or a sweet marriage of the two in the present . . . equivalent incidents in an optical voyage into the enterprise that was modern France." [1]

A government-sponsored photography project

The Mission Héliographique was the earliest known large-scale government-sponsored photography project, and it was formed a little over a decade after the public announcement of the invention of the medium in 1839. Perhaps understandably, photography's processes evolved as the members of the Mission worked, and they frequently adapted to new modes of making images.

Édouard Baldus, *Arles, Amphithéâtre*, 1851, salted paper print from paper negative, 44.8 x 50.2 cm (© Ministère de la Culture (France), Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Diffusion RMN-GP)

Among the photographers hired by the Mission Héliographique was the German-born Édouard Baldus, a painter who only had taken up photography a couple of years earlier. Nevertheless, Baldus quickly established himself as a noteworthy architectural photographer with the Mission Héliographique, and this work helped him get hired for other later government projects, too. [2] For the Mission, Baldus was assigned a territory south and east of Paris, which included photographing monuments and structures at Fontainebleau, Lyon, the Rhône valley, and Provençe, including Arles—a town that about four decades later would become the home to painter Vincent van Gogh.

Édouard Baldus, *Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles*, 1851, salted paper print from paper negatives, with applied media, 17 5/8 x 19 3/4 inches (© Ministère de la Culture (France), Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Diffusion RMN-GP)

Baldus in Arles

While Baldus was in Arles to photograph its ancient Roman amphitheater, he visited the medieval cloister of the church of Saint-Trophime (constructed from 1165–80 C.E.). [3] As he stood at the corner of the cloister's gallery, feeling the smooth stone blocks of brick worn by centuries of monks' footsteps, he undoubtedly sized up the substantial photographic challenge of capturing the multiple detailed figurative carvings, barrel-vaulted ceiling, decorative columns, and carved capitals with detail—despite their strong back-lighting from the cloister garden. Nevertheless, as Metropolitan Museum of Art curator Malcolm R. Daniel noted, Baldus wanted to make this photograph for several reasons. Not only was the cloister under consideration for national contribution to a restoration project, but the structure also was a site commonly represented in prints, and had become synonymous with French history and nationhood:

> ***Here, indeed, was a scene worthy of representation: a physical space of arresting appearance; the type of site that might have been romantically depicted by earlier lithographers; a part of the national patrimony, the protection and restoration of which might later be discussed by a circle of architects and historians gathered around the careful photographic documentation Baldus hoped to make.Malcolm R. Daniel [4]***

Édouard Baldus, *Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles, with Joins Between Negatives Marked in White Lines*, 1851. Musée National des Monuments Francais, Paris.

To create the "impossible photograph" (the one illustrated at the top of this page)— that did not appear to have been overtly manipulated, yet revealed well-illuminated views of all of the ornate detailed carvings and other architectural details, Baldus took at least a dozen photographs of the cloister under different lighting conditions. He cut, pasted, and collaged together fragments from ten different paper negatives, carefully adjoining them along the meeting points of contours of cornices, columns, or masonry joins. When photography's exposures still failed to reveal a satisfactory degree of surface detail in shadowy areas, Baldus took his paintbrushes and ink and painted-in sections. The ceiling, which appears to be a photograph, was one of his painted additions. (All of the ceiling exposures were washed over in shadow by the photographic process, and Baldus declared them unusable.) He also retouched edges, clarified details, and created more tonal contrasts with ink. The end result is a photographic image that accurately represents the scene's architectural details—but one that would never have appeared to a viewer in that space.

Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles, thus exemplified what Jules-Claude Ziegler—one of Baldus's contemporaries and a fellow "painter-photographer"—called a unique artistic sensibility shared by artists with skills in both media:

> ***The choice of viewpoint, of the precise hour when that subject will have the best light, the pose of the model, the determination of the shadows of a statue—all demand the eye and sensibility of the artist. . . . [In these elements] one can easily recognize a print***

> ***made by a man who is practiced in the fine arts or who is naturally talented.Jules-Claude Ziegler [5]***

It also reflects Baldus's unique experimental approach to the medium. In addition to collaging hand-made imagery into his photographs, he moved freely between the paper-based calotype process, printing on albumen paper, and the wet-plate collodion processes if he felt it would help him achieve the best image.

Oscar Gustave Rejlander, *The Two Ways of Life*, 1857, albumen print, 10.5 x 19.7 cm (Princeton University Art Museum)

Constructing nationhood

Not only is Baldus's *Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles* an early example of the technical mastery of the paper-based calotype process, but it is one of the earliest manipulated photographs involving multiple negatives and painting. His work predates the constructed scenes of later "painter-photographers" including the Swedish-born English photographer Oscar Rejlander (whose *The Two Ways of Life*, 1857, was a montage of 32 collodion glass negatives in a single albumen print); Frenchman Gustave Le Gray (whose *Grande Lame – Mediterranee – No. 19*, 1857 included different sea and sky scenes, joined at the horizon); and Englishman Henry Peach Robinson (whose *Fading Away*, 1858, was an albumen photograph made from five collodion glass negatives). Like Baldus's *Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles*, these images all approach the making of the photograph as a construction—an image in which the desired visual expression matches the scene imagined in the *mind's eye*—rather than the one visible through the lens.

Édouard Baldus, *Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles*, 1851, salted paper print from paper negatives, with applied media, 17 5/8 x 19 3/4 inches (© Ministère de la Culture (France), Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Diffusion RMN-GP)

Such an approach to *Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles*, however, is perhaps fitting to the task of the Mission Héliographique project, which sought to reunite a fractured patchwork of populations across the country of France as a central and cohesive nation with a shared history. The Mission's desired construction of nationhood, then, proves no different from the idealism of Baldus's *Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles:* both aspired to use photography to make an imagined reality visible, tangible, and therefore achievable.

Artwork details

Title	Cloister of St. Trophîme, Arles
Artist(s)	Édouard Baldus
Dates	1851
Places	Europe / Western Europe / France
Period, Culture, Style	Early photography / Romanesque
Artwork Type	Photograph / Painting / Architecture
Material	Stone, Marble
Technique	Calotype, Carving

Footnotes

[1] Philippe de Montebello and Phyllis Lambert, "Foreward," In Malcolm R. Daniel, ed. *The Photographs of Edouard Baldus* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 9.

[2] Baldus later was hired to photograph the construction projects at the Louvre (1854–1869), to document flooding on the Rhône River (1856), and to photograph structures engineered along various railway lines (1855, 1859).

[3] Baldus was assigned to photograph "historic structures" in this region of France. Baldus and the other photographers enjoyed some interpretive freedom to decide what fit that description. But the emphasis was on Roman structures, then medieval buildings

—if an area had some. Exterior photos (of Saint Trophîme) were typical, but “interiors” (like the cloister) were not a big part of the project. The Cloister seems to have been a side-project of Baldus’s to conquer photography’s limitations. He returned to re-photograph this scene between 5–8 times.

[4] Malcolm R. Daniel, “The Photographs of Edouard Baldus,” *The Photographs of Edouard Baldus* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 25.

[5] Ziegler is quoted in: Daniel, “The Photographs of Edouard Baldus,” 22. As soon as photography’s invention was announced to the public in 1839, its capacity to potentially replace or aid naturalistic approaches to art-making was hotly debated, as was photography’s capacity to be a medium of “high art.” These debates about photograph’s utility to art were raised to a broad audience of practitioners in Sir William J. Newton’s essay “Upon Photography in an Artistic View, and Its Relation to the Arts,” *Journal of the Photographic Society*, Vol. 1 (1853): 6.

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Mission Héliographique, 1851 on the Heilbrunn Timeline

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5.3.3.14: Landscape with St. John on Patmos

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker provide a description, historical perspective, and analysis of Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with Saint John on Patmos*.

Transcript

- Current transcript segment:**0:00**[PIANO MUSIC PLAYING]
- **0:06**STEVEN ZUCKER: In the middle of the 17th century,
- **0:08**Rome was reborn.
- **0:09**There was a tremendous building campaign.
- **0:11**Think about the extravagant spaces
- **0:13**of the Church of Il Gesu, with this extraordinary
- **0:16**illusionistic ceiling.
- **0:18**This was operatic, it was theatrical.
- **0:20**BETH HARRIS: It's hard to imagine
- **0:21**how, at the very same time that we have that Baroque
- **0:24**theatricality, we have the classicism, the repose,
- **0:28**the peacefulness, the rationalism of Poussin.
- **0:32**STEVEN ZUCKER: We're in the Art Institute of Chicago.
- **0:34**And we're looking at Nicholas Poussin's "Landscape
- **0:36**with Saint John on Patmos."
- **0:38**This is a painting that really is
- **0:40**about classical order and measured reality.
- **0:44**We know this is Saint John because of the eagle
- **0:46**that stands beside him, which is a traditional symbol
- **0:49**of this evangelist.

- **0:50**BETH HARRIS: We're looking at Saint John seated
- **0:52**in the foreground writing the "Book of Revelation,"
- **0:56**writing about the end of time, the second coming of Christ.
- **1:01**A really violent moment, but within this incredibly
- **1:04**serene and peaceful landscape.
- **1:06**STEVEN ZUCKER: And of course, it's
- **1:08**Poussin who has been credited with inventing
- **1:11**the ideal landscape.
- **1:12**And that's exactly what we have here.
- **1:14**BETH HARRIS: And it's going to be very important for art
- **1:16**history, for actually centuries to come.
- **1:18**Artists will look back at the classical landscape
- **1:21**and reinterpret it.
- **1:22**STEVEN ZUCKER: And in fact, Poussin's style
- **1:24**was so influential that it became the standard
- **1:26**for the French Academy.
- **1:27**BETH HARRIS: And those who painted landscapes in this way,
- **1:30**with a sense of rigor and order and rationalism,
- **1:33**and a kind of ideal landscape, became
- **1:35**known as the Poussinists.
- **1:36**STEVEN ZUCKER: So what has he actually done here?
- **1:38**He's placed the main figure in the foreground,
- **1:41**but he's really quite small in relationship to the landscape.
- **1:44**He sits in a very classicized pose.
- **1:47**In fact, we think that Poussin took this pose directly
- **1:50**from representations of river gods from ancient Rome.
- **1:54**And of course, Poussin, although he was French,
- **1:56**was in Rome for most of his life.
- **1:58**BETH HARRIS: And that figure of Saint John
- **2:00**is illuminated in the foreground.
- **2:02**It's surrounded by the ruins of classical antiquity.
- **2:05**We see ruins to his left and to his right.

- **2:08**And also in the background, where
- **2:10**we see the ruins of a classical temple and an ancient obelisk.
- **2:14**So he's in this landscape that has
- **2:16**a sense of the passage of time as he's
- **2:19**writing his book about the end of time.
- **2:21**STEVEN ZUCKER: The notion of passage, I think,
- **2:23**is important to understanding the way
- **2:24**that Poussin constructs a landscape.
- **2:27**Saint John is placed in the very foreground,
- **2:29**right at the bottom of the painting.
- **2:31**But we can't race back to the middle ground
- **2:34**where that temple is that you had mentioned.
- **2:36**Instead, we have a couple of visual paths.
- **2:38**We might try to go down and straight back.
- **2:41**But there we see water, not once but twice.
- **2:43**BETH HARRIS: And also, a curtain of trees.
- **2:45**STEVEN ZUCKER: And so that way seems too difficult.
- **2:48**So instead, our eye meanders over to the right.
- **2:50**And we see a road that seems to go back,
- **2:52**that it draws our eye slowly through this landscape,
- **2:55**so that we slow down and enjoy the space that he's created.
- **2:59**BETH HARRIS: And at each point in the landscape,
- **3:01**he gives us something to look at-- the foreground with Saint
- **3:04**John, and the ruins.
- **3:05**That pathway, punctuated by trees.
- **3:09**Into the middle ground, with that temple and obelisk.
- **3:12**And then again, into the background, with the mountains.
- **3:16**And then further back, with the aerial perspective
- **3:19**and more mountains and clouds.
- **3:21**At each place, our eye has a place to rest in the landscape.
- **3:25**STEVEN ZUCKER: The landscape is not a specific place.
- **3:28**This is very much a collage of ideal forms.

- **3:31**And this makes sense for an artist whose aesthetic
- **3:33**is being shaped by Rome, which itself is layers of cultures.
- **3:37**Look, for instance, in this painting,
- **3:38**where you've got the classical Greek or Roman temple.
- **3:41**But it's next to an Egyptian obelisk.
- **3:43**We're actually seeing references to two cultures, both of which
- **3:46**had ruled, but had both fallen.
- **3:48**BETH HARRIS: The idea here, by showing those ruins,
- **3:51**is to show that there's the new Christian order that
- **3:55**will be eternal, foretold by Saint John's
- **3:58**"Book Of Revelation."
- **3:59**The landscape is carefully, rigorously composed.
- **4:02**Everything has a sense of order and structure and geometry.
- **4:05**STEVEN ZUCKER: But that is so counter
- **4:07**to what we expect when we think about Saint John writing
- **4:10**the apocalypse.
- **4:11**This is a wildly violent vision.
- **4:13**It is the end of time.
- **4:15**It's an important reminder that this artist was actually
- **4:18**studying Stoic philosophy from ancient Greece.
- **4:21**This idea that the control of emotion
- **4:24**was of the utmost importance.
- **4:26**BETH HARRIS: And not just Poussin,
- **4:27**but the circle of patrons that he found in Rome.
- **4:30**We need to remember that there was more going on
- **4:32**in Rome than the Pope's commissioning
- **4:34**these theatrical works of art in the churches of the Counter
- **4:37**Reformation.
- **4:38**Poussin found a circle of patrons, many of whom
- **4:42**were interested in Stoic philosophy.
- **4:44**And that he painted canvases like this one.
- **4:47**STEVEN ZUCKER: So Poussin has accomplished

- **4:48**what seems to be nearly impossible.
- **4:50**He's created poetry out of the rational, out of the ideal.
- **4:54**[PIANO MUSIC PLAYING]

The link to this video is provided at the bottom of this page.

Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with Saint John on Patmos*, 1640, oil on canvas, 100.3 × 136.4 cm (39-1/2 × 53-5/8 inches), (Art Institute of Chicago).

Contributors

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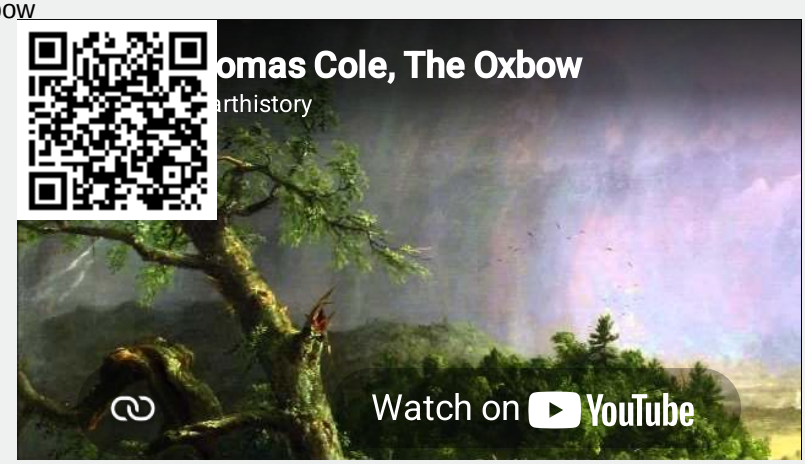
5.3.3.15: The Oxbow

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker provide a description, historical perspective, and analysis of Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow*.

Thomas Cole, The Oxbow



The link to this video is provided at the bottom of this page.

Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836, oil on canvas, 51 1/2″ × 76″ (130.8 cm × 193 cm), (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

An American Painter Born in England

During the nineteenth century—an expanse of time that saw the elevation of landscape painting to a point of national pride—Thomas Cole reigned supreme as the undisputed leader of the Hudson River School of landscape painters. It is ironic, however, that the person who most embodies the beauty and grandeur of the American wilderness during the first half of the nineteenth century was not originally from the United States, but was instead born and lived the first seventeen years of his life in Great Britain. Originally from Bolton-le-Moor in Lancashire (England), the Cole family immigrated to the United States in 1818, first settling in Philadelphia before eventually moving to Steubenville, Ohio, a locale then on the edge of wilderness of the American west.

Elevated Landscapes (Not History Paintings)

Cole worked briefly in Ohio as an itinerant portraitist, but returned to Philadelphia in 1823 at the age of 22 to pursue art instruction that was then unavailable in Ohio. Two years later, Cole moved to New York City where he exchanged his aspirations of painting large-scale historical compositions for the more reasonable artistic goal of completing landscapes. For instruction, Cole turned to a book, William Oram's *Precepts and Observations on the Art of Colouring in Landscaping* (1810), an instructional text that had a profound effect on Cole for the remainder of his artistic career.

Cole found quick success in New York City. In the year of his arrival, 1825, John Trumbull, the patriarch of American portraiture and history painting, and the president of the American Academy of Design 'discovered' Cole, and the older artist made it an immediate goal to promote the talented landscape painter. In the months to follow, Trumbull introduced Cole to many of the wealthy and prominent men who would become his most influential patrons in the decades to follow. One such man was Luman Reed, an affluent merchant who, in 1836, commissioned Cole to paint the five-canvas series *The Course of Empire*.

Landscapes Imbued with a Moral Message

It is in this series—and in many of the paintings to follow—that Thomas Cole found the aesthetic voice to lift the genre of landscape painting to a level that approached history painting. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, great artists aspired to complete large-scale historical compositions, paintings that often had an instructive moral message. Landscape paintings, in contrast, were often though more imitative than innovative. But in *The Course of Empire*, Cole was able to take the American landscape and imbue it with a moral message, as was often found in history paintings. Indeed, the landscapes Cole began to paint in

the 1830s were not entirely about the land. In these works, Cole used the land as a way to say something important about the United States.

The Oxbow: More than a Bend in the Connecticut River

A wonderful illustration of this is Cole's 1836 masterwork, *A View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm*, a painting that is generally (and mercifully) known as *The Oxbow*. At first glance this painting may seem to be nothing more than an interesting view of a recognizable bend in the Connecticut River. But when viewed through the lens of nineteenth-century political ideology, this painting eloquently speaks about the widely discussed topic of westward expansion.

Figure **5.3.3.15.1**. Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, oil on canvas, 1836 (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

When looking at *The Oxbow*, the viewer can clearly see that Cole used a diagonal line from the lower right to the upper left to divide the composition into two unequal halves. The left-hand side of the painting depicts a sublime view of the land, a perspective that elicits feelings of danger and even fear. This is enhanced by the gloomy storm clouds that seem to pummel the not-too-distant middle ground with rain. This part of the painting depicts a virginal landscape, nature created by God and untouched by man. It is wild, unruly, and untamed.

Figure **5.3.3.15.2**. *The Oxbow* detail

Within the construction of American landscape painting, American artists often visually represented the notion of the untamed wilderness through the “Blasted Tree” (figure 2), a motif Cole paints into the lower left corner. That such a formidable tree could be obliterated in such a way suggests the herculean power of Nature.

If the left side of this painting is sublime in tenor, on the right side of the composition we can observe a peaceful, pastoral landscape that humankind has subjugated to their will. The land, which was once as disorderly as that on the left side of the painting, has now been overtaken by the order and regulation of agriculture. Animals graze. Crops grow. Smoke billows from chimneys. Boats sail upon the river. What was once wild has been tamed. The thunderstorm, which threatens the left side of the painting, has left the land on the right refreshed and no worse for the wear. The sun shines brightly, filling the right side of the painting with the golden glow of a fresh afternoon.

Manifest Destiny

When viewed together, the right side of the painting—the view to the east—and that of the left—the west—clearly speak to the ideology of Manifest Destiny. During the nineteenth century, discussions of westward expansion dominated political discourse. The Louisiana Purchase of 1804 essentially doubled the size of the United States, and many believed that it was a divinely ordained obligation of Americans to settle this westward territory. In *The Oxbow*, Cole visually shows the benefits of this process. The land to the east is ordered, productive, and useful. In contrast, the land to the west remains unbridled. Further westward expansion—a change that is destined to happen—is shown to positively alter the land.

A Self-Portrait

Figure **5.3.3.15.3**. *The Oxbow* detail

Although Cole was the most influential landscape artist of the first half of the nineteenth century, he was not completely adverse to figure painting. Indeed, a close look at *The Oxbow*, reveals an easily overlooked self-portrait in the lower part of the painting (figure 3). Cole wears a coat and hat and stands before a stretched canvas placed on an easel, paintbrush in hand. The artist pauses, as if in the middle of the brushstroke, to engage the viewer. This work, then, in a kind of ‘artist in his studio’ self-portrait—is akin, in many ways, to Charles Willson Peale’s 1822 work *The Artist in His Museum*. In each, the artist depicts himself in his own setting. For Peale, this was his natural history museum in Philadelphia. For Cole, this was the nature he is most well known for painting.

Lasting Influence

Although he only formally accepted one pupil for instruction—this was, of course, Frederic Edwin Church—Thomas Cole exerted a powerful influence on the course of landscape painting in the United States during the nineteenth century. Not content to merely paint the land, Cole elevated the landscape genre to approach the status of historical painting. The landscape painters who followed during the middle of the nineteenth century—Church, Durant, Bierstadt, and others—would often follow the trail that Cole had blazed.

Contributors

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5.3.3.16: For Sunday's Dinner

For Sunday's Dinner

> For more information, visit the Art Institute Chicago.

For Sunday’s DinnerDate: 1888 Artist: William Michael Harnett (American, born Ireland, 1848–1892) CC0 Public Designation

Figure **5.3.3.16.1**: For Sunday’s Dinner Date: 1888 Artist: William Michael Harnett (American, born Ireland, 1848–1892) CC0 Public Designation

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5.3.3.17: Still Life with Oysters, Cookies, and Comfits

Still Life with Oysters, Cookies, and Comfits

For more information visit MFA Boston.

Figure 5.3.3.17.1: Still Life with Oysters, Cookies, and Comfits Osias Beert (Flemish, about 1580–1623)about 1610 MFABoston

Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray

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5.3.3.18: Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray

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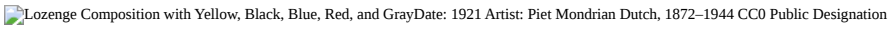
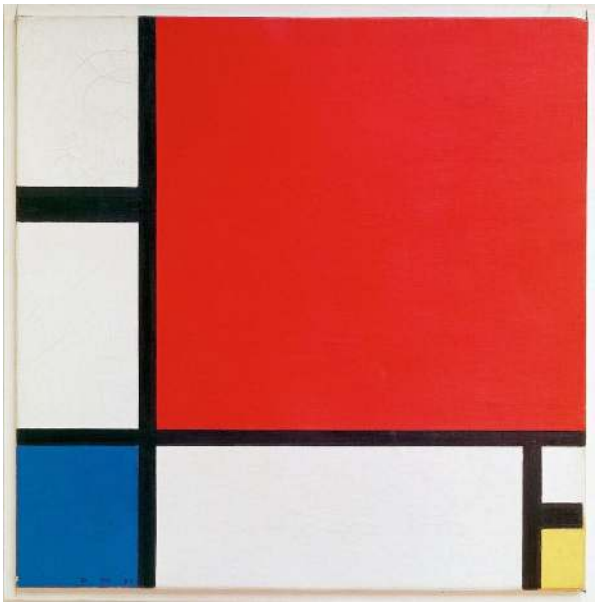


Figure : Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and GrayDate: 1921 Artist: Piet Mondrian Dutch, 1872–1944 CC0 Public Designation

Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*

by Dr. Stephanie Chadwick

Pure abstract art becomes completely emancipated, free of naturalistic appearances.—*Piet Mondrian, 1929 [1]*



Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Walking up to Piet Mondrian's painting, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow* can be a baffling experience. The canvas is small and uses only the simplest of colors: red, blue, yellow, white and black. The composition is similarly reduced to the simplest of rectilinear forms, squares and rectangles defined by vertical and horizontal lines. One would hardly suspect that we are seeing the artist's determination to depict the underlying structure of reality.

Neo-Plasticism

Mondrian called his style Neo-Plasticism or "The New Plastic Painting," the title of his famous 1917 essay promoting abstraction for the expression of modern life. Don't be confused by Mondrian's use of the term "plastic." He uses it to refer to the plastic arts—media such as sculpture, that molds three-dimensional form, or, in Mondrian's case, painting on canvas. For centuries, European painters had attempted to render three-dimensional forms in believable spaces—creating convincing illusions of reality (click here for an example—Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*). In contrast, Mondrian and other modernists wanted to move painting beyond naturalistic depiction to focus instead on the material properties of paint and its unique ability to express ideas abstractly using formal elements such as line and color.

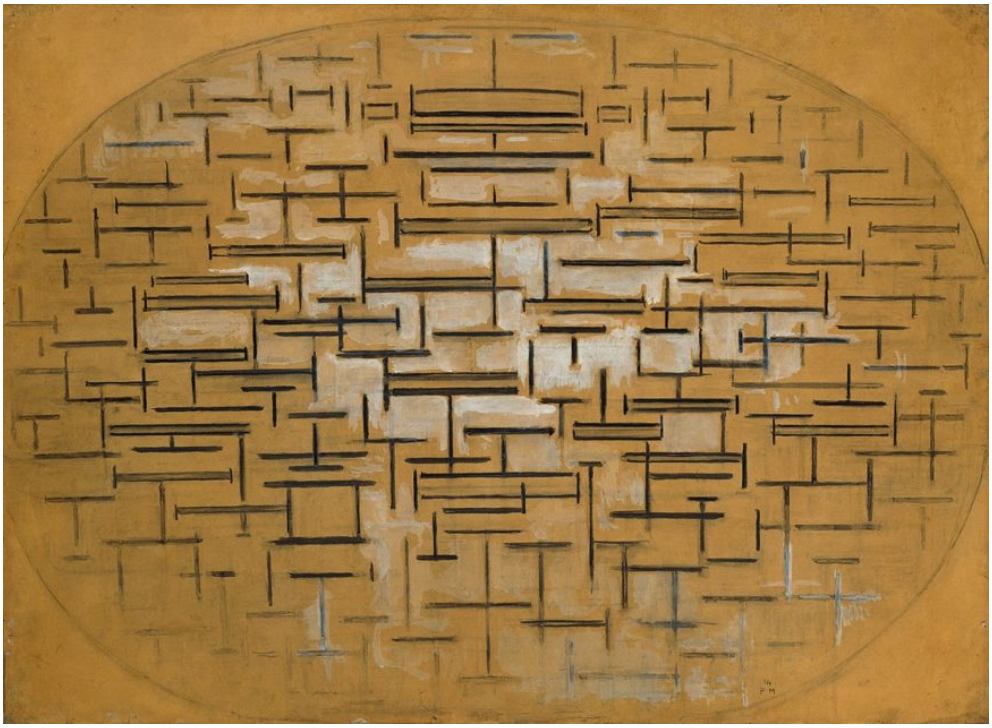
Mondrian believed his abstraction could serve as a universal pictorial language representing the dynamic, evolutionary forces that govern nature and human experience. In fact, he believed that abstraction provides a truer picture of reality than illusionistic depictions of objects in the visible world. Perhaps this is why Mondrian characterized his style as "abstract real" painting.

Abstraction and human progress

Mondrian's earliest paintings were quite traditional in both subject and style. He studied at the art academies in the Hague and in Amsterdam in his home country of the Netherlands. Then, as with many artists during the early twentieth century, he began to emulate a variety of contemporary styles, including Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Symbolism in an effort to find his own artistic voice. The impact of these modern movements can be seen in the development of Mondrian's painting which, over time, shows the dissolution of recognizable objects into increasingly pared-down structures (see the three depictions of trees below). His emphasis on line, color, and geometric shape sought to highlight formal characteristics.

Three trees by Piet Mondrian: *Study for the Gray Tree* (left), 1911, charcoal on paper, 58.4 x 86.5 cm; *The Grey Tree* (center), 1911, oil on canvas, 79.7 x 109.1 cm; Flowering Apple Tree (right), 1912, oil on canvas, 78.5 x 107.5 cm (all in the collection of the Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag)

Mondrian was inspired by Cubism, a movement led by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque that explored the use of multiple perspectives. Mondrian began experimenting with abstracted forms around the time he moved to Paris in 1912.

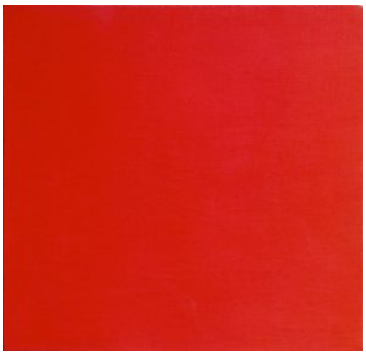


Piet Mondrian, *Ocean 5*, 1914, charcoal and gouache on paper/Homosote panel, 87.6 x 120.3 cm (Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

His famous "Pier and Ocean" series (see above), which reduces the landscape to arrangements of vertical and horizontal lines, exemplifies this period in Mondrian's career. He wanted to push beyond Cubism's strategy of fragmenting forms (café tables were a favorite subject), and move toward pure abstraction. However, this change in Mondrian's process did not take place overnight and he continued to work in a studied, methodical way. In fact, his production of paintings within a series of canvases was part of Mondrian's method, and how he worked through thematic and compositional issues. Because Mondrian continued to rely on the series throughout his career, we can see the progression of his pictorial language even in his later, purely abstract work.

Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

His use of the term "composition" (the organization of forms on the canvas) signals his experimentation with abstract arrangements. Mondrian had returned home to the Netherlands just prior to the outbreak of the First World War and would remain there until the war ended. While in the Netherlands he further developed his style, ruling out compositions that were either too static or too dynamic, concluding that asymmetrical arrangements of geometric (rather than organic) shapes in primary (rather than secondary) colors best represent universal forces. Moreover, he combined his development of an abstract style with his interest in philosophy, spirituality, and his belief that the evolution of abstraction was a sign of humanity's progress.



Piet Mondrian, Red (detail), *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Philosophy & Theosophy

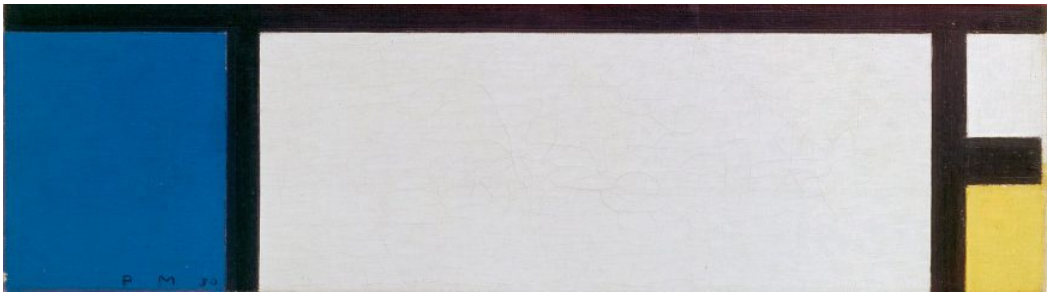
Some art historians have viewed Mondrian's painting as an expression of his interest in dialectical relationships, ideas advanced by the early nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel that art and civilization progress by successive moments of tension and reconciliation between oppositional forces. For Mondrian then, composing with opposites such as black and white pigments or vertical and horizontal lines suggest an evolutionary development.

Mondrian's painting may also reflect his association with the Theosophical Society, an esoteric group that had a strong presence in Europe. Theosophists were interested in opposites as an expression of hidden unity. During WWI, Mondrian stayed in Laren, a village with a thriving art community near Amsterdam. He lived near M.H.J. Schoenmaeker, a prominent Theosophist who used

terms such as “New Plastic” to promote his ideas on spiritual evolution and the unification of the real and the ideal, the physical and immaterial. In Theosophy**,** lines, shapes, and colors symbolized the unity of spiritual and natural forces.

De Stijl

While in Holland, Mondrian founded the movement called *De Stijl* (The Style) with the artist Theo van Doesburg. The two shared many ideas about art as an expression of relationships, particularly the relationships between art and life. Because these artists believed that the evolution of art coincided with the modern progression of humankind, they thought that New Plasticism could, and should, encompass all of human experience. Van Doesburg founded the journal *De Stijl* to promote these ideas and demonstrate that their geometric abstraction, based on their theory of spiritual and pictorial progress, could form a total environment, and impact modern life. Although Mondrian and van Doesburg eventually parted ways, their movement to combine modern art and living was so influential that the abstract, geometric principles and use of primary colors they applied in painting, sculpture, design, and architecture still resonate today.



Piet Mondrian (detail), *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Dynamic contrasts

Mondrian’s *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow* demonstrates his commitment to relational opposites, asymmetry, and pure planes of color. Mondrian composed this painting as a harmony of contrasts that signify both balance and the tension of dynamic forces. Mondrian viewed his black lines not as outlines but as planes of pigment in their own right; an idea seen in the horizontal black plane on the lower right of the painting that stops just short of the canvas edge (see image above). Mondrian eradicates the entire notion of illusionistic depth predicated on a figure in front of a background. He achieves a harmonious tension by his asymmetrical placement of primary colors that balance the blocks of white paint. Notice how the large red square at the upper right, which might otherwise dominate the composition, is balanced by the small blue square at the bottom left. What’s more, when you see this painting in a person you can discern just how much variation is possible using this color scheme—and that Mondrian used varying shades of blacks and whites, some of which are subtly lighter or darker. Seen up close, this variety of values and textures create a surprising harmony of contrasts. Even the visible traces of the artist’s brushwork counter what might otherwise be a rigid geometric composition and balance the artist’s desire for a universal truth with the intimately personal experience of the artist.

Artwork details

Title	Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow
Artist(s)	Piet Mondrian
Dates	1930
Places	Europe / Western Europe / France
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms / De Stijl
Artwork Type	Painting
Material	Oil paint, Canvas
Technique	

Footnotes

[1] Piet Mondrian, “Pure Abstract Art, 1929” in *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, edited and translated by Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (Boston: G.K. Hall& Co.), p. 224.

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Piet Mondrian, Harry Holtzman, and Martin S. James, *The New Art–the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986).

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5.3.3.18: Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.3.3.19: Airplane Flying- Suprematist Composition

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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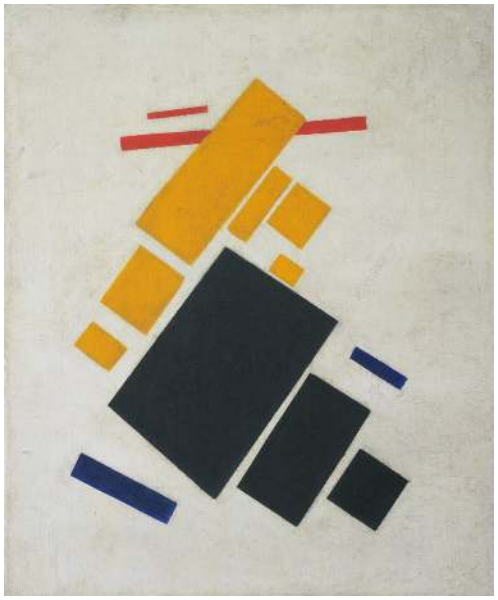

Figure **5.3.3.19.1**: Kasimir Malevich, *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition*, 1915, oil on canvas, 58.1 x. 48.3 cm, (MoMA)

Kasimir Malevich's *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition* does not depict an airplane. Instead, it was intended to convey the sensation of mechanical flight using thirteen rectangles in black, yellow, red, and blue placed in dynamic relationships on a white ground. Movement is created by the diagonal orientation of the rectangles in relation to the edges of the canvas. Groups of individual colors suggest distinct objects shown at varying distances as they increase or diminish in scale. Ascension is implied by the point of the yellow rectangle centered at the top of the composition, while the bright yellow and red rectangles float above the heavier dark blue and black rectangles.

Figure **5.3.3.19.2**: Photograph of The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10, St Petersburg, Russia, 1915

The Last Futurist Exhibition

Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition was first shown in 1915 at "The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10" in St. Petersburg, Russia. It was not the most important painting in this first display of Malevich's Suprematist paintings. That was *Black Square*, which was hung in a position of honor up by the ceiling in the corner of the room, the traditional location of a Christian icon in a Russian peasant's house. In keeping with this exalted placement Malevich described *Black Square* as "the first step of

pure creation in art”[1] and “the embryo of all potentials.”[2] The 38 other paintings of geometric forms, including *Airplane Flying*, were implicitly generated from this basic form.

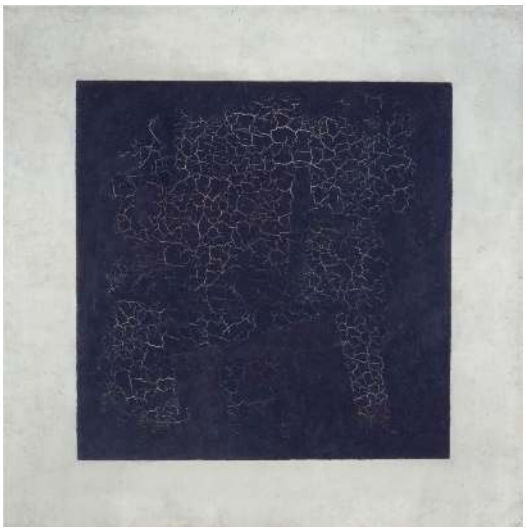

Figure **5.3.3.19.34**: Kasimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915, oil on linen, 79.5 x 79.5 cm (State Tretyakov Gallery)

Suprematism as a new realism

Malevich declared Suprematism was a new “realism” in painting, a statement that may seem puzzling given that the paintings are all basic geometric forms on a white background. By making this claim Malevich rejected the conventional understanding of realism in painting as the representation of the world we see.

There are two different ways to understand Malevich’s alternative conception of realism. The first is formal: the painter’s basic formal elements of surface, color, shape, and texture are real things in themselves. They are not signs referring to anything else or images representing real things outside the painting. *Black Square* is a black square of paint on canvas, nothing more, nothing less. It makes no reference to any other object; it is a real thing in itself.

This formalist approach is a defining aspect of modernist art and literature, and it was a major concern of the Russian Futurist poets with whom Malevich often collaborated. They invented ***zaum***, a “transrational” language that used linguistic forms — phonetic sounds, letters, syllables and words divorced from referential meaning — to communicate directly by means of feeling. Reduction to basic forms of verbal or visual language was intended to liberate the writer or artist from the conventions of the past and the limitations of the world as it exists. *Zaum* would pave the way to a new world and a new mode of being.

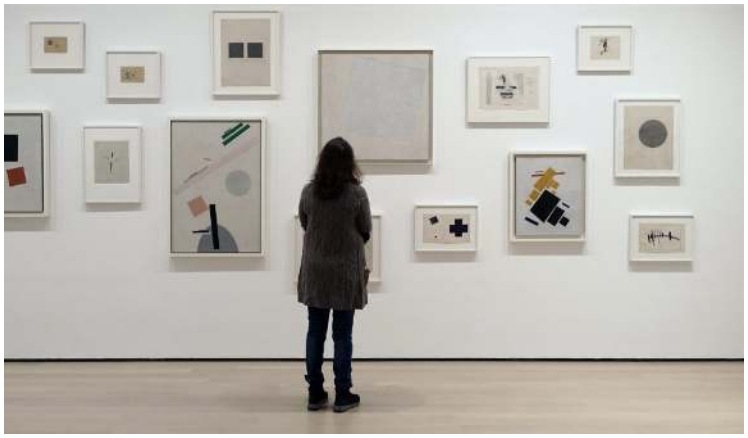

Figure **5.3.3.19.4**: Looking at Kasimir Malevich’s paintings in the Museum of Modern Art

The second way to understand Suprematism as a “new realism” is in relation to a reality beyond the one we normally experience. **Mystical traditions** and theories of multi-dimensional, non-Euclidean space were popular within artistic and literary circles in the early 20th century. Malevich was particularly interested in the mystical geometry of Peter Ouspensky, who believed artists were

able to see beyond material reality and communicate their visions to others. In a pamphlet written for The Last Futurist Exhibition, Malevich echoes this conception of the artist:

> ***I transformed myself in the zero of form . . . I destroyed the ring of the horizon and escaped from the circle of things, from the horizon-ring that confines the artist and the forms of nature.T. Anderson, ed. K. S. Malevich: Essays on Art 1915-1933, vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1969), p. 19.***

This is a description of the artist as a superior being who leads the way to a new consciousness. Suprematism was the result, a non-objective art of "pure feeling," unconcerned with representation of the visible world.

Kasimir Malevich as a pioneer of abstraction

Malevich has long been considered, with Kandinsky and Mondrian, one of the **pioneers of non-representational painting** in the early twentieth century. A number of other artists also developed non-representational painting in this period, but for varying reasons their work was not widely known. Malevich, Kandinsky and Mondrian were prominent and active participants in the world of modern avant-garde art and published multiple texts explaining their theories. This greatly increased their visibility and influence.

All three were committed to the notion of the artist as a spiritual leader who perceives a greater metaphysical reality and whose art guides society towards its realization. They also all believed that they could communicate this spiritual reality using the basic formal means of painting.

Malevich's approach was, however, different from the multi-year, carefully reasoned progression from naturalistic representation to non-objective painting undertaken (separately) by Kandinsky and **Mondrian**. Malevich leaped from **a style** closely related to Synthetic Cubism to Suprematism within a few months, and his explanatory texts were written afterwards to support what was largely an intuitive discovery.

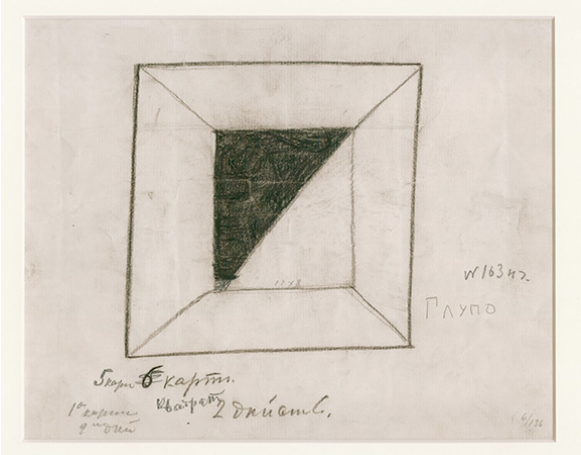

Figure **5.3.3.19.5**: Kazimir Malevich, Set Design for *Victory over the Sun*,1913, graphite on paper, 21.5 x 27.5 cm (State Museum of Theater and Music, St. Petersburg)

Suprematism's beginnings

Malevich retrospectively located the origin of *Black Square* in the basic geometric shapes of the stage designs he made in 1913 for the Cubo-Futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun*. This opera, created in collaboration with the Futurist poets Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh, told a story of time travelers overcoming old concepts of time and gravity. The theme of space travel and the character of the Aviator are directly relevant to Suprematist painting, which also reflects forms in aerial photographs widely reproduced in Russian newspapers during the early years of World War I.

The title of *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition* makes direct reference to this subject, but all Suprematist paintings depict geometric forms on a white ground in a manner that suggests abstracted objects floating in space. Malevich related this white

ground to the cosmic infinite and the void that represents transformed consciousness. Combining mystic spiritualism with modern technology was common practice among Cubists and Futurists in Europe as well as Russia.

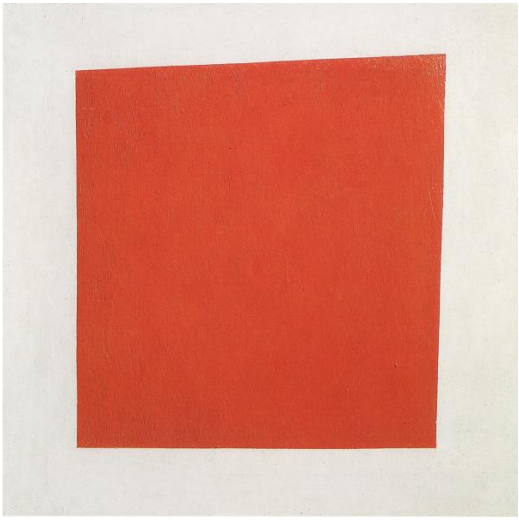

Figure **5.3.3.19.6**: Kasimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions* (*Red Square*), 1915, oil on canvas, 53 x 53 cm (State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg)

What's in a name?

The titles of Malevich's paintings in The Last Futurist Exhibition indicated that Suprematism was not a carefully refined and consistent theory of non-objective painting. Some works had non-referential titles such as *Quadrilateral*, while others referred to specific objects or people as in *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions.* Whether a painting received a referential title or not often seems random: *Quadrilateral* is the original title of *Black Square*, while *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman* is a similar painting of a red square.

The referential titles in Malevich's early Suprematist paintings contradict his initial claim to have escaped the world of material things and reached a world of pure non-objective form. Although the works are non-representational, Suprematist paintings often refer to feelings provoked by specific material things. We have seen how non-representational forms may convey the sensation of flight in *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition* at the beginning of this essay. What sensations do the forms of Malevich's *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack. Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* provoke in you?

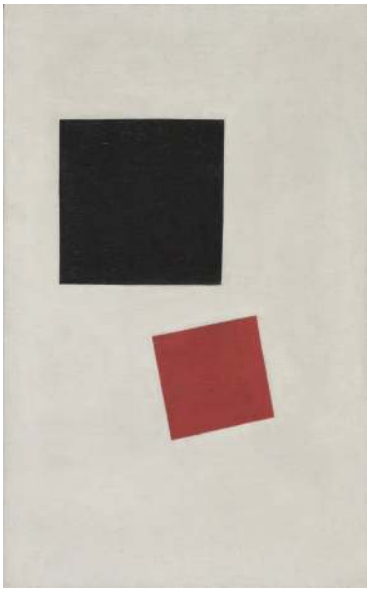

Figure **5.3.3.19.7**: Kasimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack. Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*, 1915, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 44.5 cm (MoMA)

Notes:

1. Kasimir Malevich, From *Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting*. (Moscow, 1916).
2. Letter to Mikhail Matyushin (1915) quoted in John Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry* (New Haven, 1996), p. 127.

Additional resources:

John Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1920-1934*. Revised Edition. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2017.

Charlotte Douglas, *Kazimir Malevich* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994).

The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932 (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992).

John Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

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5.3.3.20: Altar Group with Oba Akenzua I

Altar Group with Oba Akenzua I

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For

Figure : Altar group with Oba Akenzura I, Benin, Nigeria, eighteenth century. Brass, 63 cm. Ethnological Museum, Berlin, Germany. (Photo via Smarthistory)

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5.3.3.21: The Gates

by **DR. DORIS MARIA-REINA BRAVO**

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Figure **5.3.3.21.1**: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-2005 (view across the pond looking southeast) © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Nearly thirty years after the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude first conceived of *The Gates*, this logistically complex project was finally realized over a period of two weeks in New York's Central Park. Each gate, a rectilinear three-sided rigid vinyl frame resting on two steel footings, supported saffron-colored fabric panels that hung loosely from the top. The gates themselves matched the brilliant color of the fabric. The statistics are impressive: 7,503 gates ran over 23 miles of walkways; each gate was 16 feet high, with widths varying according to the paths' width. Despite a brief exhibition period—February 12th through 27th 2005—*The Gates* remains a complex testament to two controversial topics in contemporary art: how to create meaningful public art and how art responds to and impacts our relationship with the built environment.

Figure **5.3.3.21.2**: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-2005 (aerial photo: Roy Smith) © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Wrapped, surrounded, suspended

Since the 1960s, Christo and Jeanne-Claude have introduced eye-catching color into the landscape, for example pink in *Surrounded Islands*, 1980-83 in Biscayne Bay, Florida.

Figure **5.3.3.21.3**: Christo and Jeanne-Claude Surrounded Islands, Biscayne Bay, Greater Miami, Florida, 1980-83 Photo: Wolfgang Volz © 1983 Christo

The saffron color in *The Gates* was used to create "a golden ceiling creating warm shadows"[1] for the visitor walking along the Central Park path. The same color also appeared in an earlier work by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Valley Curtain* (1970-72), in Rifle, Colorado.

Figure **5.3.3.21.4**: Christo, *Valley Curtain*, Rifle, Colorado 1970-72, © 1972 Christo

In contrast to many of their works that directly intervene in urban structures like the Pont Neuf in Paris or the German Parliament building in Berlin, where architectural masses are literally wrapped, *Surrounded Islands* and *Valley Curtain* engage, rather than seek to contain nature: a pink border of fabric floating around islands or a curtain suspended across a remote valley.

A public art

The Gates respond to spaces designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux within the dense urban grid of Manhattan. The artists complicate an environment that was, in fact, entirely invented in the mid-19th century to express the Victorian ideal of the pastoral and picturesque landscape.

This intrusion into Manhattan's "natural environment" left many visitors uneasy, as in the case of Joanne Landy:

> ***Whoever…wrote about the way the exhibit draws aesthetic attention to the park itself is off the mark, in my experience anyway. The flags just draw attention to themselves, period, and there appears to be no particular relationship to the shapes and colors of the park. That's part of the problem.*** [2]

Figure **5.3.3.21.5**: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-2005, © 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude

A point of contrast can be seen at the Storm King Art Center, a renowned sculpture park 52 miles north of New York City that has successfully cultivated a dialogue between sculptures and their landscape for over fifty years. Whereas sculptures are installed within the meadows and rolling hills of Storm King's grounds, *The Gates* were tied to the paths that meander through the park. This was done for two reasons: to avoid drilling thousands of holes into the soil and potentially harming the root systems of adjacent trees, and because Christo and Jeanne-Claude were inspired by the way the city's pedestrians navigate its paths. Thus, in contrast to the works in Biscayne Bay and Rifle that divide and isolate forms in the landscape, *The Gates* aligned itself along pre-existing pathways of movement.

Pathways

A path cut into a pristine natural environment is very much an intervention, as evidenced in Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967 and Walter De Maria's *One Mile Long Drawing*, 1969.

Figure **5.3.3.21.6**: Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking England*, 1967 © Richard Long

However Central Park, a much-loved urban oasis, is one of the most famous examples of urban planning. The Gates reinforce and highlight pre-existing routes within this manmade environment. Critiques of *The Gates* that are rooted in the issue of the artwork's relationship with nature are therefore curious since the Park itself is not an untouched natural space.

This installation alters the experience of seeing and walking along the paths that run throughout the park. The title alludes to a threshold, a point of exit and entrance. In fact, in some places, the structures form an oval. There is no starting point and no end point and moreover, no favored point from which to view the work. It is an installation made for the pedestrian in motion and not a static object that asks us to stand still before it.

Bureaucratic collaborators

The Gates cost 21 million dollars and both the artists and the supporting institutions (the City of New York and the Central Park Conservancy) were quick to emphasize that Christo and Jeanne-Claude financed the project themselves and that the installation was free to the public. The artists sold preparatory drawings related to *The Gates*, and other works, before the exhibition opened; they rely on this method to independently fund their projects since they do not accept sponsors. Though the City and the Central Park Conservancy did not use public money to support this project, their approval and support were seen as an invaluable currency by many critics. Months before *The Gates* debuted, both institutions had worked in concert to prevent United for Peace from holding an antiwar demonstration in Central Park to coincide with the Republican National Convention which was held in New York that year.

Figure 5.3.3.21.7: Christo, *The Gates (Project for Central Park, New York City)*, 2003, 38 x 244 cm and 106.6 x 244 cm, pencil, charcoal, pastel, crayon, fabric sample, aerial photograph (Whitney Museum of American Art) © 2003 Christo

Christo, *The Gates (Project for Central Park, New York City)*, 2003, 38 x 244 cm and 106.6 x 244 cm, pencil, charcoal, pastel, crayon, fabric sample, aerial photograph (Whitney Museum of American Art) © 2003 Christo

It is important to remember that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's favorable turn with the powers that be was 26 years in the making. The artists submitted proposals, attended meetings, and made presentations throughout this period, persisting even after they received a 251-page official rejection only three years into their campaign. Many consider the 2001 mayoral election of Michael Bloomberg—a Christo and Jeanne-Claude collector—as the turning point in this saga. The artists are accustomed to bureaucratic battles, an inevitability given subjects that reshape iconic structures such as their *The Pont Neuf, Wrapped*, 1975-1985, *Wrapped Reichstag*, 1971-1995, and *The Gates*.

Figure 5.3.3.21.8: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Reichstag*, 1971-95, © Christo (photo: Jotefa, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Reichstag*, 1971-95, © Christo (photo: Jotefa, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Art designed to end

It might seem odd that Christo and Jeanne-Claude invest so much time, effort, reputation, and money in creating ephemeral non-collectible artwork. Yet they are completely devoted to this kind of artistic practice: “The temporary quality of the projects is an aesthetic decision. Our works are temporary in order to endow the works of art with a feeling of urgency to be seen, and the love and tenderness brought by the fact that they will not last. Those feelings are usually reserved for other temporary things such as childhood and our own life. These are valued because we know that they will not last. We want to offer this feeling of love and tenderness to our works, as an added value (dimension) and as an additional aesthetic quality.” [3]

Figure **5.3.3.21.9**: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-05, © Christo, Jeanne-Claude

Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates*, 1979-05, © Christo, Jeanne-Claude

In the end the show took about six weeks to install and *The Gates* came down the day after the exhibition ended, with most of the materials headed for recycling. The artists maintain a thorough archive of their work on their website; along with projects that never materialized (including several for New York City) and current projects (not surprisingly these are decades in the making). With Jeanne-Claude's passing in 2009, this **archive** of the past, present, and future is poignant in its meticulous documentation and optimism—evidence of the duo's perseverance and monumental dreams.

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1. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, ***The Gates***

2. Jesse Lemish, "**Art for the People, Christo and Jean-Claude's *The Gates***," *New Politics* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2005)

3. Christo and Jeanne-Claude in Their Own Words, NYC.gov, 2005

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5.3.3.22: Storyteller with Twenty Figures

Storyteller with Twenty Figures

For more information visit the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Figure : Helen Cordero, Storyteller with Twenty Figures, ca. 1985, fired clay with slip and beeweed, 11 1⁄8 x 7 7⁄8 x 11 in. (28.3 x 20.0 x 27.9 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Chuck and Jan Rosenak and museum purchase made possible by Mrs. Gibson Fahnestock, 1997.124.148

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.3.4: Texture and Pattern

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

5.3.4.1: Balloon Dog

5.3.4.2: Chair

5.3.4.3: Fangding Ritual Food Vessel with Abstract Decor

5.3.4.4: Crater Moon

5.3.4.5: Still Life, Claesz

5.3.4.6: Buffalo

5.3.4.7: Vairocana Buddha

5.3.4.8: Bowl

5.3.4.9: Hypostyle Hall

5.3.4.10: Bowl with a Majlis Scene by a Pond

5.3.4.11: Autumn Rhythm - Number 30

5.3.4.12: Small Wood Where I Met Myself

5.3.4.13: Garbhadhatu (Taizokai) Mandala (Womb World)

5.3.4.14: Mulholland Drive

5.3.4.15: The Block

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5.3.4.1: Balloon Dog

Jeff Koons

Jeffrey “Jeff” Koons (born January 21, 1955) is an American artist known for working with popular culture subjects and reproducing banal objects, such as balloon animals produced in stainless steel with mirror-finish surfaces. His works have sold for substantial sums, including at least one world record auction price for a work by a living artist.

Koons gained recognition in the 1980s and subsequently set up a factory-like studio in a SoHo loft on the corner of Houston Street and Broadway in New York. It was staffed with over 30 assistants, each assigned to a different aspect of producing his work, in a similar mode as Andy Warhol’s Factory (notable because all of his work is produced using a method known as art fabrication). Today, he has a 16,000-square-foot factory near the old Hudson rail yards in Chelsea, working with 90 to 120 regular assistants. Koons developed a color-by-numbers system so that each of his assistants could execute his canvases and sculptures as if they had been done “by a single hand”.

Balloon Dog (Magenta), Jeff Koons, 1994–2000: One of five unique versions (Blue, Magenta, Orange, Red, Yellow). Made from mirror-polished stainless steel with transparent color coating, the Orange version was sold in 2013 for a record price for a living sculptor.

Koons is a good example of a postmodern sculptor because his works elevate the mundane, contain a heavy dose of kitsch, and project an element of ambiguous cynicism often seen in postmodern works.

The “Puppy” topiary sculpture by Jeff Koons, on the outdoor terrace at Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain.: Koons’ “Puppy” presents a large scale puppy on the terrace of the Guggenheim, Bilbao.

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5.3.4.2: Chair

by DR. EMILY ORR and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
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Video 5.3.4.2.1: Chair, c. 1948, attributed to Henry Turchin, design direction by Louis Dierra, manufactured by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA), slumped plate glass, metal, woven textile (Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York City)

This video was produced in cooperation with the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

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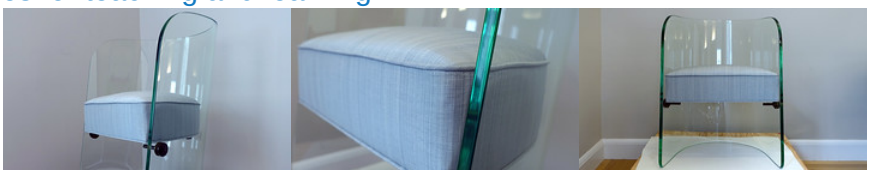

Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)

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This page titled 5.3.4.2: Chair is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Emily Orr and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Glass Chair at the 1939 New York World's Fair," in Smarthistory, November 12, 2015, accessed August 29, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/glass-chair-at-the-1939-new-york-worlds-fair/.

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5.3.4.3: Fangding Ritual Food Vessel with Abstract Decor

Fangding Ritual Food Vessel with Abstract Decor

> For more information, visit Harvard Art Museums.

Figure : Fangding Ritual Food Vessel with Abstract Decor, Shang dynasty, China, 14th-11th century BCE. Cast bronze, 21.7 x 17.1 x 15.2 cm. Harvard Art Museums. (Photo: Harvard Art Museums, via Smarthistory)

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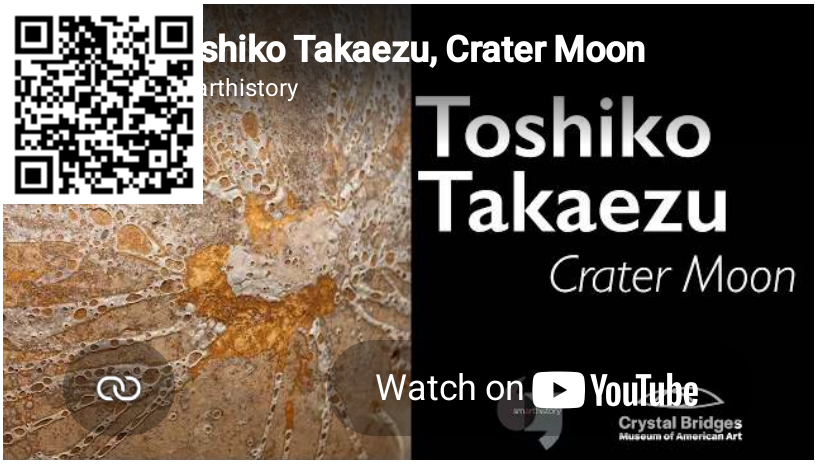
5.3.4.4: Crater Moon

Toshiko Takaezu, *Crater Moon*

by Dr. Jennifer Padgett, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

Takaezu's ceramics reflect her belief that art should have "mystery, an unsaid quality; it contains a spirit and is alive."



Toshiko Takaezu, *Crater Moon*, 1990s, stoneware, 55.9 cm diameter (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville) © Toshiko Takaezu. Speakers: Dr. Jen Padgett, Windgate Curator of Craft, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

Video transcript

[music]

0:00:04.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: We're in the galleries at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, looking at one extraordinary and very unusual, I can't quite call it a "pot" as I would almost any other piece of ceramic, because it has no visible opening. It is a completely closed sphere.

0:00:24.7 Dr. Jen Padgett: This is Crater Moon by the artist Toshiko Takaezu. Takaezu was born in Hawai'i to parents that were from Okinawa, Japan, and her earliest training was in utilitarian wares or functional ceramics. But from that early training, learning how to make cups, teapots, bowls, she began to experiment with the sculptural possibilities of ceramics, challenging the belief that ceramics should be functional.

0:00:53.7 Dr. Steven Zucker: The surface is absolutely gorgeous, but it's so complicated. You can make out the matte surface of the fired clay itself, where the glaze is not completely wrapped around the object. And then there are delicate areas that are so fitting for the title "Crater Moon" because they are like craters with little edges that seem so fragile. And it does absolutely remind me of the surface of the moon.

0:01:18.3 Dr. Jen Padgett: Takaezu worked in a variety of materials. So, she did weavings and paintings, work in bronze, but it was that opportunity to create a really rich textured surface across a three-dimensional form that compelled her. She once said when comparing painting to ceramics, "I didn't want a flat surface to work on, but a three-dimensional one."

0:01:38.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: So, this is painting on a spherical canvas. And in fact, in documentary film of her glazing, she works the surface with a kind of quickness and sureness that is remarkable. It is as if she's painting like an Abstract Expressionist.

0:01:54.9 Dr. Jen Padgett: She once described, "You are not an artist simply because you paint or sculpt or make pots that cannot be used. An artist is a poet in his or her own medium. And when an artist produces a good piece, that work has mystery, an unsaid quality; it contains a spirit and is alive."

0:02:12.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: At the wheel, she talked about the way in which the clay had a life of its own; that she had to be, in a sense, gentle in terms of asserting her intention, because she wanted to listen to what the clay itself had to say. And then that was true again in the glazing, and I think especially in the firing. There is something wonderful and mysterious about what happens in

the kiln. You load the kiln up, you've glazed your ceramics, you break it up, you light the fire, and then you have to wait. And when the kiln is disassembled and the pieces are taken out, I think the artist had a tremendous reverence for the chance, and in a sense, almost for the intention that the kiln had brought to the piece itself.

0:02:53.4 Dr. Jen Padgett: Takaezu was interested in those elements of chance, or the idea that the work wasn't just created through her determination; that there was this back and forth with nature.

0:03:02.9 Dr. Steven Zucker: And throughout her career, especially in the latter decades, she brought other people into that process. Her studio became a place where she brought her students. She was a professor at Princeton University for many decades.

0:03:15.1 Dr. Jen Padgett: Takaezu's home and studio in Quakertown, New Jersey was perhaps one of the best contexts to see her work, not only because of the beautiful natural surroundings, but also because of these rich groupings where she would often have a cluster of works together. And the opportunity to see them all in relation to each other was one of the things that really makes them dynamic, and gives that sense of a dialogue between the works.

0:03:38.3 Dr. Steven Zucker: And that's true even in this exhibition at Crystal Bridges, where we see, not one, but actually two of the moons set in front of these taller, thinner works.

0:03:48.6 Dr. Jen Padgett: For the tall forms, those closed forms, you could see rings and get a sense of her working on the wheel; so, she would've thrown these on a potter's wheel. In contrast, the moons were works that she made using molds; so, creating large slabs of clay within molds that she then allowed to dry the two halves and then connect.

0:04:07.2 Dr. Steven Zucker: But of course, these are stoneware, so they're heated to a very high temperature in a kiln, and you can't have a truly closed form. And so in this case, just underneath there is a small aperture, which would've allowed the hot gases to escape during its firing.

0:04:22.7 Dr. Jen Padgett: The environment of the kiln can be both exciting in terms of the transformation in materials that happens, and then also potentially disastrous when something, maybe a work that was so carefully made, cracks or explodes within the kiln. So, by having that small hole, that aperture for the gas to escape, lessens the risk of a potential catastrophe.

0:04:44.9 Dr. Steven Zucker: And it's a reminder that each work of ceramic is, in some ways, a small miracle: that it has survived its time in the kiln.

0:04:52.1 Dr. Jen Padgett: She would return to the same kinds of forms. So, the closed forms and the moons as two examples, but each one is different. Each one is unique, not only because of the way that she made it and glazed it, but also because of those effects from the kiln.

[music]

Artwork details

Title	Crater Moon
Artist(s)	Toshiko Takaezu
Dates	1990s
Places	North America / United States
Period, Culture, Style	Contemporary
Artwork Type	Sculpture / Ceramics
Material	Stoneware
Technique	Wheel throwing

Bibliography

This work at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

Learn more about the artist from the Toshiko Takaezu Foundation

Watch a short interview with Toshiko Takaezu

Glenn Adamson, Dakin Hart, and Kate Wiener, editors, *Toshiko Takaezu: Worlds Within* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024).

Peter Held, editor, *The Art of Toshiko Takaezu: In the Language of Silence* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

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Dr. Jennifer Padgett, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Toshiko Takaezu, *Crater Moon*," in *Smarthistory*, December 4, 2024, accessed December 16, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/toshiko-takaezu-crater-moon/.

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5.3.4.5: Still Life, Claesz

Still Life, Claesz

Figure : Pieter Claesz, *Still Life*, c. 1625. Oil on panel, 48 × 76.9 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois. (Photo via Smarthistory)

Symbolism and meaning in Dutch still life painting

by Dr. Christopher D.M. Atkins, Van Otterloo-Weatherbie Director, Center for Netherlandish Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Dr. Steven Zucker

Willem Claesz. Heda, *Still Life with Glasses and Tobacco*, 1633, oil on panel, 50.8 x 75.6 cm (Center for Netherlandish Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Video transcript

[0:00] [music]

Dr. Steven Zucker: [0:06] We're in the galleries of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in a room that's devoted to Dutch art, looking at one of the genres of painting that we strongly associate with Dutch painters in the 17th century. This is a still life by an artist named Heda.

Dr. Christopher Atkins: [0:24] What we see is a tabletop with a variety of edibles and goods. These are the types of things that would have been in a 17th century Dutch home.

Dr. Zucker: [0:32] Let's talk about symbolism.

Dr. Atkins: [0:34] There has been a tendency to read individual objects and look for what that particular object might mean. For example, if we look at the pipe that's broken, or the rope that is lit in order to light a pipe, we might be inclined to read them as some sort of emblem of transience, of the passing of time, but I'm not sure that that's right in this picture.

Dr. Zucker: [0:56] There's a good reason that we might look to symbolism to try to explain a painting. There's an entire type of still life in Holland that is known as the vanitas, and that is very specifically about the transience of life and the fact that no one can escape death.

[1:11] There are many types of still lifes, and not all of them put symbolism front and center. If this is not about larger moral meanings, then what is it about?

Dr. Atkins: [1:21] We can look at the accumulation of objects and place it within the context in which it was made, in a hyper-capitalist and consumer society, which the 17th century Dutch Republic was. There's also the context of the artist showing off how he could render all of these different surfaces and textures.

Dr. Zucker: [1:38] We see examples of the wealth of 17th century Dutch society. We see what is probably a solid silver tazza — that is, the toppled silver tray — or that beautiful delicate Venetian glass.

Dr. Atkins: [1:53] Those were expensive luxury items. Those were not the types of things that were accessible to every person.

Dr. Zucker: [1:59] Looking at the objects that were chosen for this still life can give us more access to Dutch life in the 17th century.

[2:06] Some of these objects, like that glass, is from Venice. Some of these materials, such as the tobacco, undoubtedly came from Virginia. These were imports, and they spoke to the mercantile international culture of Holland at this time.

Dr. Atkins: [2:19] The metal, the silver of the tazza, probably came from a mine most likely in South America or possibly in Germany, and we want to imagine whose table is this.

Dr. Zucker: [2:29] By extension, who was this painting made for? It was probably made for the inventory of the artist, who would then hope to sell it. The object itself, this painting, was very much a mercantile object, just like the things that are represented within it.

Dr. Atkins: [2:43] For Heda, working within that economic context, he invested this picture, like his others, with tremendous technical skill to show off and create a distinctive approach to still life painting that said that he, Heda, was a master of the genre.

Dr. Zucker: [2:58] Look at the subtlety of color. It is mindblowing how close the tonalities are and yet how distinct each color is, and the way in which that silver tazza has been hammered and crafted. I can almost sense what it would feel [like] to hold that object.

Dr. Atkins: [3:13] The way Heda positioned the tazza also created an artistic challenge for him. To be able to create a foreshortened object, to create the illusion of it receding into space, was extremely difficult. At the same time, he accomplishes it with absolute mastery. If we look at the left-hand edge, we can see a single line of highlight that is just gorgeously executed.

Dr. Zucker: [3:34] Then look at the right corner. You have the overlapping, almost the weaving in and out of that waxed rope whose end is a burning ember, but it's weaving in and out of those clay pipes, creating almost a grid scene in perspective. This painting is a triumph, but it's a triumph not only of the artist's skill but also of the sophistication of the market for whom he was painting.

Dr. Atkins: [3:57] On the part of the viewer, they were sophisticated. They could tell quality, they could use their eye of evaluating goods and apply that to pictures.

Dr. Zucker: [4:07] There are some extraordinary passages here. I think one of my favorite is the way in which the contour of the lemon is echoed by the plate that surrounds it.

Dr. Atkins: [4:16] It's about how the different objects interrelate; how, for example, the brown of the nuts moves our eye as we pick it up with the tobacco, to the rope, and finally to the beer in the background. He's carefully distributing the color to have our eye

move around and encompass all of those wonderful things that he's put before us.

Dr. Zucker: [4:34] This is a celebration of the wealth, of the economic power of the Netherlands in the 17th century.

[4:41] [music]

Artwork details

Title	Still Life with Glasses and Tobacco
Artist(s)	Willem Claesz. Heda
Dates	1633
Places	Europe / Northern Europe / The Netherlands
Period, Culture, Style	Baroque / Dutch Baroque
Artwork Type	Painting / Still life
Material	Oil paint, Panel
Technique	

Bibliography

This work at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The Center for Netherlandish Art at the MFA Boston

Cite this page

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5.3.4.6: Buffalo

Buffalo

For more information, visit the Met Museum.

Figure :Title: Buffalo figure Date: 19th century Geography: Republic of Benin, Abomey Culture: Fon peoples, Danhomè Kingdom Medium: Silver, iron, copper alloy, wood Dimensions: H. 13 3/16 × W. 9 × D. 18 3/4 in. (33.5 × 22.9 × 47.6 cm) Classification: Metal-Ornaments Credit Line: Gift of Anne d'Harnoncourt and Joseph Rishel, in memory of Rene and Sarah Carr d'Harnoncourt and Nelson A. Rockefeller, 2002 Object Number: 2002.517.1 Curatorial Department: The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing

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5.3.4.7: Vairocana Buddha

Vairocana Buddha

Figure : Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog*, 1994-2001. Transparent color coating, stainless steel, 320 x 380 x 120 cm. (Photo: Kim, CC BY-SA 2.0)

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5.3.4.8: Bowl

Bowl

For more information, visit the British Museum.

Figure :© **The Trustees of the British Museum**. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

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5.3.4.9: Hypostyle Hall

The building itself was expanded over two hundred years. It is comprised of a large hypostyle prayer hall (hypostyle means, filled with columns), a courtyard with a fountain in the middle, an orange grove, a covered walkway circling the courtyard, and a minaret (a tower used to call the faithful to prayer) that is now encased in a squared, tapered bell tower. The expansive prayer hall seems magnified by its repeated geometry. It is built with recycled ancient Roman columns from which sprout a striking combination of two-tiered, symmetrical arches, formed of stone and red brick.

Figure **5.3.4.9.3**: Mihrab, Great Mosque at Córdoba, Spain (photo: jamesdale10, CC BY 2.0)

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- **2.6: The Great Mosque of Córdoba** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://smarthistory.org/islamic/.

5.3.4.10: Bowl with a Majlis Scene by a Pond

Bowl with a Majlis Scene by a Pond

> For more information visit The Met Collection.

Figure :Bowl with a Majlis Scene by a Pond Abu Zayd al-Kashani Iranian dated 582 AH/1186 CE - Public Domain @TheMetCollection

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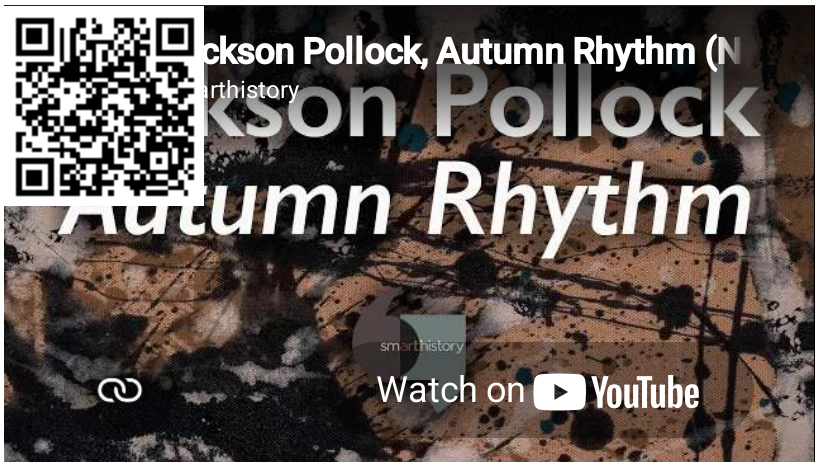
5.3.4.11: Autumn Rhythm - Number 30

by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID
376594

Jacks



Video **5.3.4.11.1**: on Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950, enamel on canvas, 266.7 x 525.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, © Pollock-Krasner Foundation)

Additional Resources

This painting at the The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Pollock Krasner Foundation

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5.3.4.12: Small Wood Where I Met Myself

Small Woods Where I Met Myself

> For more information, visit the Art Institute Chicago

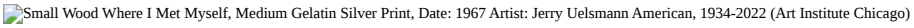

Figure :Small Wood Where I Met Myself, Medium Gelatin Silver Print, Date: 1967 Artist: Jerry Uelsmann American, 1934-2022 (Art Institute Chicago)

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5.3.4.13: Garbhadhatu (Taizokai) Mandala (Womb World)

Garbhadhatu (Taizokai) Mandala (Womb World)

For more information visit the Harvard Art Museums.

Figure 5.3.4.13.1: Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog*, 1994-2001. Transparent color coating, stainless steel, 320 x 380 x 120 cm. (Photo: Kim, CC BY-SA 2.0)

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5.3.4.14: Mulholland Drive

Mulholland Drive

David Hockney: Painter's Museum Visit (LACMA)

Painter Lauryn Welch discusses David Hockney's use of color, his painting techniques, and approach to landscape with Art Prof Clara Lieu at LACMA in California.

Figure : Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio David Hockney (England, Bradford, active United States, born 1937) England, 1980 Paintings Acrylic on canvas 86 × 243 in. (218.44 × 617.22 cm) © David Hockney (LACMA)

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5.3.4.15: The Block

Trains, Snakes, and Guitars: The Collages of Romare Bearden

In rare archival footage, Romare Bearden sheds light on his concepts and process, and how certain motifs in his art illuminate the African American experience.From |Bearden Plays Bearden|, a Third World Cinema Production © 1980

More information can be found at https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/trains-snakes-and-guitars-the-collages-of-romare-bearden/

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.3.5: Balance and Movement

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

5.3.5.1: Chiswick House

5.3.5.2: The Ideal City

5.3.5.3: Temple of Artemis

5.3.5.4: Villa Savoye

5.3.5.5: Four Mandalas of the Vajravali

5.3.5.6: Doryphoros

5.3.5.7: The Mulberry Bend

5.3.5.8: Akbar on horseback, hunting animals within an enclosure

5.3.5.9: Silver Upper White River

5.3.5.10: Storm King Wavefield

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5.3.5.1: Chiswick House

Richard Boyle with William Kent, Chiswick House

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Stripping away the ornament of the Baroque, Chiswick House celebrates the formal ideal found in ancient Roman and Palladian architecture.

Chiswick House

Stripping away the ornament of the Baroque, Chiswick House celebrates the formal ideal found in ancient Roman and Palladian architecture.

Chiswick House, London, 1726–29, designed by Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington and 4th Earl of Cork (with William Kent). Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Video transcript

0:00:06.4 Dr. Steven Zucker: We've come out to Chiswick House in West London, this early 18th-century architectural experiment. Was it possible to use the theories and the forms of ancient Rome here in modern London?

0:00:18.8 Dr. Beth Harris: Well, we are in modern London, but we also couldn't be blamed for thinking we were in northern Italy looking at one of the villas designed by Palladio.

0:00:29.6 Dr. Steven Zucker: The Third Earl of Burlington, Richard Boyle, was an amateur architect and studied ancient Roman architecture, specifically the books on architecture by Vitruvius, but also studied the work of Palladio, this Renaissance interpretation of ancient Rome. And he wanted to bring those ideas here to his home. Now, Lord Burlington did what many wealthy British men did. He went on the Grand Tour. That is, he went to visit the great historical sites in Europe. And that almost always meant going to Italy. And there he studied ancient Roman architecture and the work of Palladio. But he also met a man named William Kent.

0:01:10.4 Dr. Beth Harris: And it was working with William Kent that Boyle built Chiswick House.

0:01:15.2 Dr. Steven Zucker: The early 18th century was a moment when the prevalent architecture for the wealthy in England and in France and Italy was the Baroque. And that architectural style, which we can see, for example, at the Palace at Versailles, is characterized by heavy ornamentation. The idea was to strip away the ornament of the Baroque and instead to celebrate a kind of formal ideal, that is, shapes and geometries that had been revered by the ancient Greeks and later by the ancient Romans.

0:01:43.9 Dr. Beth Harris: So as we look at Chiswick House, we get a sense of carefully considered proportions where there's a sense of balance, of harmony, of symmetry. I think it's important, too, to remember that Palladio was building villas and this, too, is a villa. So the idea of places for leisure, to escape the city, to house one's art collection, and that's precisely what Boyle did here.

0:02:10.7 Dr. Steven Zucker: This really was a private gallery. It was meant to show off his artwork. But mainly it was meant to be a work of art in and of itself. And it was meant to be framed by both formal and informal gardens that surrounded it. In fact, Kent, who was not only a furniture designer, an architect, but also a garden designer, helped Boyle design the extensive gardens that surround this house.

0:02:33.2 Dr. Beth Harris: In fact, garden historians point to the work that Kent did here as the beginning of an English style of garden.

0:02:40.6 Dr. Steven Zucker: But it's not just the strict geometry that recalls ancient Greece and ancient Rome here. It's the individual architectural elements as well.

0:02:48.9 Dr. Beth Harris: Well, the front of the building in so many ways recalls the ancient Roman temple of the Pantheon. We see a kind of Greek temple front with six columns with lovely Corinthian capitals, fluted columns above that a frieze, and a pediment. And then behind that, a dome.

0:03:08.3 Dr. Steven Zucker: And it may seem presumptuous to take a dome, which we might associate with the temple architecture of ancient Rome, and put it in a domestic house. But Boyle, through his research, realized that ancient Roman villas could indeed include domes.

0:03:24.2 Dr. Beth Harris: The ground level of the front entrance includes a stairway on either side and then rusticated stone, which could remind us of ancient Roman architecture, but also the Renaissance architecture of palaces. For example, the Medici Palace in Florence.

0:03:40.2 Dr. Steven Zucker: Or the Italians' love of the grotto, where you also find rusticated elements. And in that way, the rusticated stones on the façade of the building link to the grotto and waterfall that's just off to the side in the gardens.

0:03:55.0 Dr. Beth Harris: Windows on either side of the front entrance have pediments above them. We have all the forms of ancient Greek and ancient Roman architecture here.

0:04:03.1 Dr. Steven Zucker: And the result was so stunning that people interested in architecture traveled from across Europe, and even from America, to see this building. So these are architectural forms that began in ancient Greece, were adopted by the ancient Romans, were adopted again in the Renaissance era, and transformed during the Baroque. And then here, in the early 18th century, this is an attempt to strip away the unnecessary ornamentation that had accumulated during the Baroque era to try to find those pure classical forms. What Boyle believed was a cultural high point. And that proved very powerful. We see neoclassical architecture then in the 18th, the 19th, and even being built into the early 20th centuries.

Artwork details

Title	Chiswick House
Artist(s)	Richard Boyle, William Kent
Dates	1726–29
Places	Europe / Western Europe / England
Period, Culture, Style	Neoclassicism
Artwork Type	Architecture
Material	Limestone, Plaster
Technique	

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Learn more from Chiswick House & Gardens Trust

Read an essay on Andrea Palladio's La Rotonda

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Important fundamentals

Classic, classical, and classicism explained

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5.3.5.2: The Ideal City

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5.3.5.3: Temple of Artemis

by DR. JEFFREY A. BECKER

Identify the classical orders—the architectural styles developed by the Greeks and Romans used to this day.

Video **5.3.5.3.1**

An architectural order describes a style of building. In classical architecture each order is readily identifiable by means of its proportions and profiles, as well as by various aesthetic details. The style of column employed serves as a useful index of the style itself, so identifying the order of the column will then, in turn, situate the order employed in the structure as a whole. The classical orders—described by the labels Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian—do not merely serve as descriptors for the remains of ancient buildings, but as an index to the architectural and aesthetic development of Greek architecture itself.

The Doric order

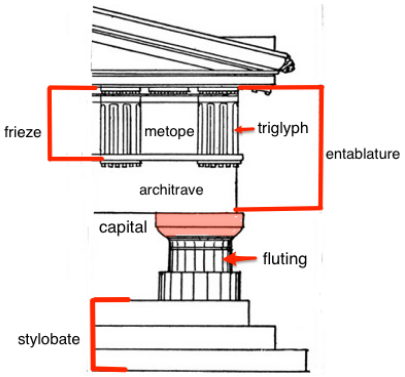

Figure **5.3.5.3.1**: Doric order

The Doric order is the earliest of the three Classical orders of architecture and represents an important moment in Mediterranean architecture when monumental construction made the transition from impermanent materials (i.e. wood) to permanent materials, namely stone. The Doric order is characterized by a plain, unadorned column capital and a column that rests directly on the stylobate of the temple without a base. The Doric entablature includes a frieze composed of trigylphs (vertical plaques with three divisions) and metopes (square spaces for either painted or sculpted decoration). The columns are fluted and are of sturdy, if not stocky, proportions.

Figure **5.3.5.3.2**: Iktinos and Kallikrates, The Parthenon, 447 – 432 B.C.E., Athens

The Doric order emerged on the Greek mainland during the course of the late seventh century B.C.E. and remained the predominant order for Greek temple construction through the early fifth century B.C.E., although notable buildings of the Classical period—especially the canonical Parthenon in Athens—still employ it. By 575 B.C.E the order may be properly identified, with some of the earliest surviving elements being the metope plaques from the Temple of Apollo at Thermon. Other early, but fragmentary, examples include the sanctuary of Hera at Argos, votive capitals from the island of Aegina, as well as early Doric capitals that were a part of the Temple of Athena Pronaia at Delphi in central Greece. The Doric order finds perhaps its fullest expression in the Parthenon (c. 447-432 B.C.E.) at Athens designed by Iktinos and Kallikrates.

The Ionic order

Figure **5.3.5.3.3**: Ionic capital, north porch of the Erechtheion, 421-407 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens

As its names suggests, the Ionic Order originated in Ionia, a coastal region of central Anatolia (today Turkey) where a number of ancient Greek settlements were located. Volutes (scroll-like ornaments) characterize the Ionic capital and a base supports the column, unlike the Doric order. The Ionic order developed in Ionia during the mid-sixth century B.C.E. and had been transmitted to mainland Greece by the fifth century B.C.E. Among the earliest examples of the Ionic capital is the inscribed votive column from Naxos, dating to the end of the seventh century B.C.E.

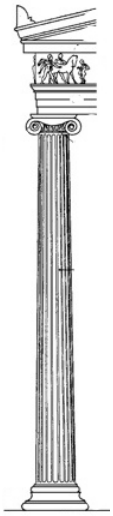

Figure 5.3.5.3.4: Ionic order

The monumental temple dedicated to Hera on the island of Samos, built by the architect Rhoikos
c. 570-560 B.C.E., was the first of the great Ionic buildings, although it was destroyed by earthquake in short order. The sixth century B.C.E. Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, a wonder of the ancient world, was also an Ionic design. In Athens the Ionic order influences some elements of the Parthenon (447-432 B.C.E.), notably the Ionic frieze that encircles the cella of the temple. Ionic columns are also employed in the interior of the monumental gateway to the Acropolis known as the Propylaia (c. 437-432 B.C.E.). The Ionic was promoted to an exterior order in the construction of the Erechtheion (c. 421-405 B.C.E.) on the Athenian Acropolis (image below).

Figure 5.3.5.3.5: North porch of the Erechtheion, 421-407 B.C.E., marble, Acropolis, Athens

The Ionic order is notable for its graceful proportions, giving a more slender and elegant profile than the Doric order. The ancient Roman architect Vitruvius compared the Doric module to a sturdy, male body, while the Ionic was possessed of more graceful, feminine proportions. The Ionic order incorporates a running frieze of continuous sculptural relief, as opposed to the Doric frieze composed of triglyphs and metopes.

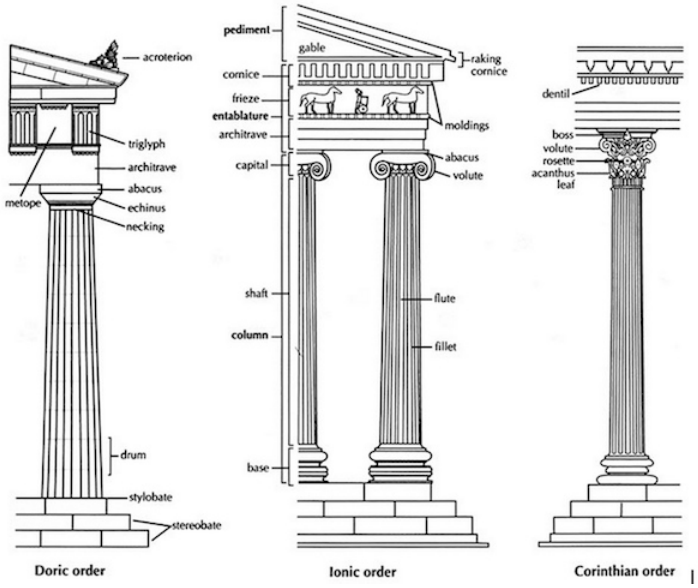

Figure 5.3.5.3.6: The Greek orders

The Corinthian order

Figure 5.3.5.3.7: Corinthian capital

The Corinthian order is both the latest and the most elaborate of the Classical orders of architecture. The order was employed in both Greek and Roman architecture, with minor variations, and gave rise, in turn, to the Composite order. As the name suggests, the origins of the order were connected in antiquity with the Greek city-state of Corinth where, according to the architectural writer Vitruvius, the sculptor Callimachus drew a set of acanthus leaves surrounding a votive basket (Vitr. 4.1.9-10). In archaeological terms the earliest known Corinthian capital comes from the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae and dates to c. 427 B.C.E.

Figure 5.3.5.3.8: Acanthus leaf

The defining element of the Corinthian order is its elaborate, carved capital, which incorporates even more vegetal elements than the Ionic order does. The stylized, carved leaves of an acanthus plant grow around the capital, generally terminating just below the abacus. The Romans favored the Corinthian order, perhaps due to its slender properties. The order is employed in numerous notable Roman architectural monuments, including the Temple of Mars Ultor and the Pantheon in Rome, and the Maison Carrée in Nîmes.

Legacy of the Greek architectural canon

The canonical Greek architectural orders have exerted influence on architects and their imaginations for thousands of years. While Greek architecture played a key role in inspiring the Romans, its legacy also stretches far beyond antiquity. When James "Athenian" Stuart and Nicholas Revett visited Greece during the period from 1748 to 1755 and subsequently published *The Antiquities of Athens and Other Monuments of Greece* (1762) in London, the Neoclassical revolution was underway. Captivated by Stuart and Revett's measured drawings and engravings, Europe suddenly demanded Greek forms. Architects the likes of Robert Adam drove the Neoclassical movement, creating buildings like Kedleston Hall, an English country house in Kedleston, Derbyshire. Neoclassicism even jumped the Atlantic Ocean to North America, spreading the rich heritage of Classical architecture even further—and making the Greek architectural orders not only extremely influential, but eternal.

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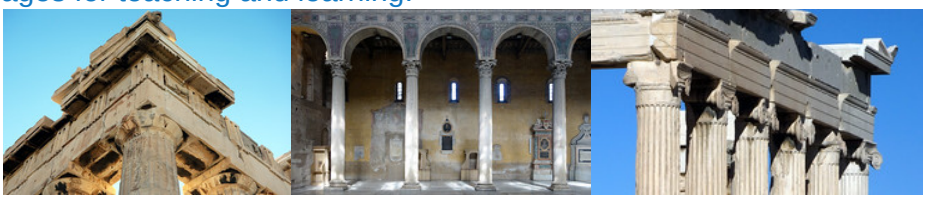

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5.3.5.4: Villa Savoye

by DR. MALKA SIMON

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"The house is a box in the air,…"
—Le Corbusier, Précisions

Figure **5.3.5.4.1**: Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: **Renato Saboya**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Villa Savoye at Poissy, designed by Le Corbusier in 1929, represents the culmination of a decade during which the architect worked to articulate the essence of modern architecture. Throughout the 1920s, via his writings and designs, Le Corbusier (formerly Charles-Edouard Jeanneret) considered the nature of modern life and architecture's role in the new machine age. His famous dictum, that "The house should be a machine for living in," is perfectly realized within the forms, layout, materials, and siting of the Villa Savoye.

Located just outside Paris, the Villa Savoye offered an escape from the crowded city for its wealthy patrons. Its location on a large unrestricted site allowed Le Corbusier total creative freedom. The delicate floating box that he designed is both functional house and modernist sculpture, elegantly melding form and function.

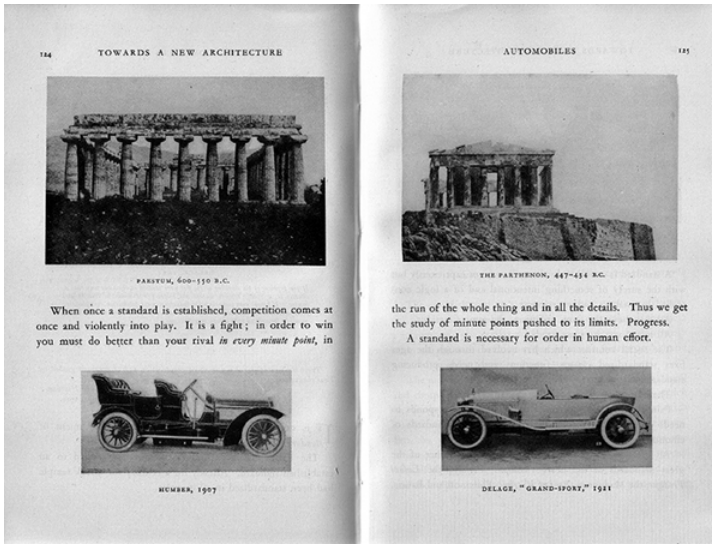

Figure **5.3.5.4.2**: Le Corbusier, Vers une architecture (Toward an Architecture), 1923

Le Corbusier had been developing his theories on modern architecture throughout the previous decade. In 1920, he founded the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*, and many of the essays he published there would eventually be incorporated into his landmark collection

of essays, *Vers une architecture (Toward an Architecture)* in 1923. This book celebrated science, technology, and reason, arguing that modern machines could create highly precise objects not unlike the ideal platonic forms valued by the ancient Greeks. Le Corbusier lavished praise on the totems of modernity—race cars, airplanes, and factories—marveling at the beauty of their efficiency. However, he also argued that beauty lay not only in the newest technology but in ancient works such as the Parthenon, whose refined forms represented, in his view, the perfection of earlier Archaic systems. Le Corbusier sought to isolate what he called type forms, which were universal elements of design that can work together in a system. He found these across time and across the globe, in the fields of architecture and engineering. The many images embedded throughout the text drew striking visual parallels and eloquently expressed his search for modern perfection through universal forms.

Figure **5.3.5.4.3**: Le Corbusier House, Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart, Germany, 1927 (photo: **Andreas Praefcke**, CC: BY 3.0)

During the 1920s, Le Corbusier designed a series of houses (above) which allowed him to develop his ideas further. By 1926, he had devised his Five Points of Architecture, which he viewed as a universal system that could be applied to any architectural site. The system demanded pilotis (slender columns) to raise the building off the ground and allow air to circulate beneath; roof terraces, to bring nature into an urban setting; a free plan that allowed interior space to be distributed at will; a free façade whose smooth plane could be used for formal experimentation; and ribbon windows, which let in light but also reinforced the planarity of the wall.

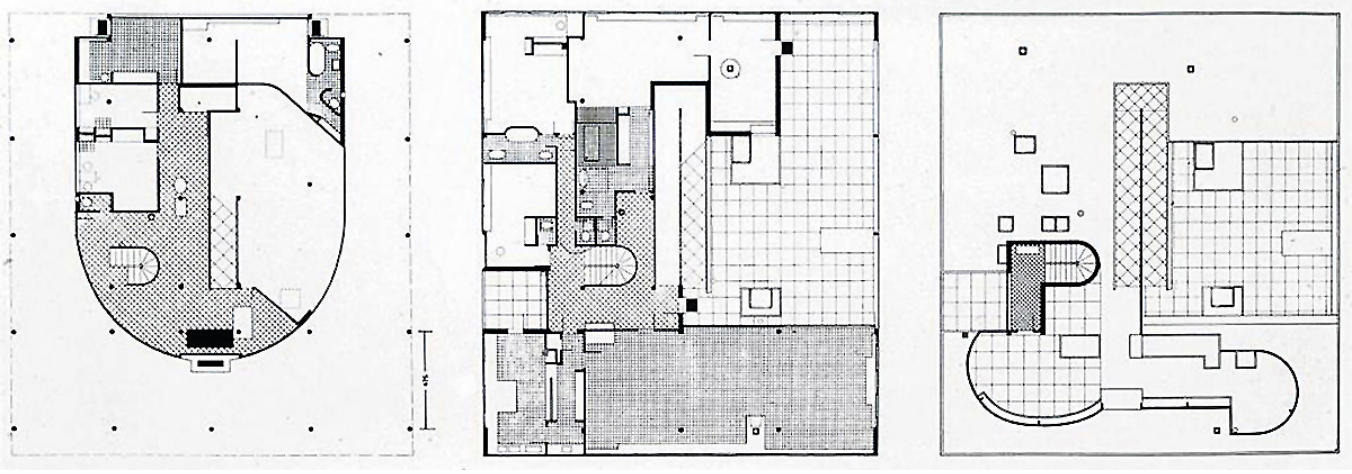

Figure **5.3.5.4.4**: Ground plan (left), first story (center), atrium and roof garden (right), Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929

The Villa Savoye incorporated these principles, and also realized many of the concepts expressed in *Vers une Architecture*. Made of reinforced concrete, the ground floor walls are recessed and painted green so that the house looks like a box floating on delicate pilotis. Visitors arrive by car, in true machine-age fashion. The stark white exterior wall, with its strips of ribbon windows, has a

remarkably smooth, planar quality. This stands in contrast to the fluidity of the interior, which is organized by a multistory ramp that leads the viewer on a gently curving path through a building that is nearly square. The contrast between the sharp angles of the plan and the dynamism of the spaces inside charge the house with a subtle energy.

Figure 5.3.5.4.5: Ramp and spiral staircase, Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: Scarletgreen, CC BY 2.0)

The ramp winds from the entrance up to the salon, a formal interior space that flows seamlessly into the roof terrace outside. Corbu, as he is also known, treated the terrace as a room without walls, reflecting his desire to fully integrate landscape and architecture. The ramp finally culminates in the curved solarium crowning the house, whose rounded enclosure appears to be an abstract sculpture when viewed from below. Seen from the roof terrace, the ramp and cylinder of the solarium echo the forms of the ocean liners lauded in *Vers une Architecture*. Le Corbusier and Madame Savoye believed in the health benefits of fresh air and sunshine, and considered leisure time spent outdoors one mark of a modern lifestyle. The Villa Savoye's integration of indoor and outdoor spaces allowed the family to spend time outdoors in the most efficient way possible—the house was, in a sense, a machine designed to maximize leisure in the machine age.

Figure **5.3.5.4.6**: Solarium viewed from the roof terrace, Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, France, 1929 (photo: **a-m-a-n-d-a**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Villa Savoye can be understood as Le Corbusier's refinement of his architectural system, his own personal Parthenon. Its essential geometric volumes embody his concept of the type form, and its careful consideration of procession and proportion connect the building to Classical ideals. At the same time, its clean simplicity and its use of concrete evoke the precisely-calibrated works of engineering so admired by the architect. The Villa Savoye represents Le Corbusier's re-conception of the very nature of architecture, his attempt to express a timeless classicism through the language of architectural modernism.

Additional resources:

Centre des monuments nationaux

Columbia University interactive

Model at The Museum of Modern Art

Fondation Le Corbusier

Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007).

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5.3.5.5: Four Mandalas of the Vajravali

Wangguli and five additional Newar artists, *Four Mandalas of the Vajravali Cycle*

by Dr. Karl Debreczeny and Dr. Steven Zucker

Four Mandalas of the Vajravali Cycle

Each perfectly geometric, these mandalas are a graphic representation of the Buddhist conception of the cosmos.

Wangguli and five additional Newar artists, *Four Mandalas of the Vajravali Cycle* (Ewam Choden Monastery, Tsang Province, Central Tibet), 1429–56, pigments on cloth, 88.9 x 73.7 cm; Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art; C2007.6.1 (HAR 81826). Speakers: Dr. Karl Debreczeny, Senior Curator, Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

In Buddhism, a mandala refers to a cosmic abode of a deity, usually depicted as a diagram of a circle with an inscribed square that represents the deity enthroned in their palace. Mandalas are used by Buddhist practitioners for visualization during meditation. The Rubin's Senior Curator Dr. Karl Debreczeny and Smarthistory's Dr. Steven Zucker delve into one of the most important paintings in the Rubin's collection, Four Mandalas of the *Vajravali* Cycle.

The Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art has teamed up with Smarthistory to bring you an "up-close" look at select objects from the Rubin's preeminent collection of Himalayan art. Featuring conversations with senior curators and close-looking at art, this video series is an accessible introduction to the art and material culture of the Tibetan, Himalayan, and Inner Asian regions. Learn about the living traditions and art-making practices of the Himalayas from the past to today.

Video transcript

[music]

0:00:07.2 Dr. Steven Zucker: We're at the Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art looking at a magnificent example of Tibetan visual art. This is Four Mandalas of the Vajravali cycle. It dates to the 15th century.

0:00:19.0 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: So this is one of the most important, well studied, and well documented paintings in the Rubin Museum collection. And it depicts four mandala. The Sanskrit word mandala in Tibetan dkyil 'khor means circle with a center, or center and periphery, and by extension, a deity and their retinue.

0:00:36.9 Dr. Steven Zucker: Mandalas are used in the practice of visualization during meditation, it's a kind of graphic representation of the Buddhist conception of the cosmos, and it's made of perfect geometries, a perfect square within a perfect circle.

0:00:51.8 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: In each mandala, you have a deity sitting in the center surrounded by their retinue.

0:00:57.3 Dr. Steven Zucker: And if you look closely, you can see that there are four gates.

0:01:00.1 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: And each gate marks a quadrant, which represents a particular element, a cardinal direction, and a Buddha that represents a specific enlightened quality.

0:01:10.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: We are seeing an enormous number of figures here drawn from a text that was made in India several hundred years before this painting was made, which is called the Vajravali.

0:01:20.5 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: There's an inscription which tells us this is the 13th painting in a set of Vajravali paintings. The Vajravali was a compendium of esoteric teachings compiled in India in the 11th century and widely transmitted in Tibet, and is one of the early attempts to systematize and provide iconographic guides for very complex mandalas used in various tantras. An inscription identifies this as being a commission to fulfill the wishes of Lama Sabzang Papka, which allows us to trace this painting to a set commissioned by the founder of Ngor Monastery, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, one of the great artistic patrons in memory of his deceased teacher, Sabzang Papka Zhonnu Lodro, around the timing of the founding of Ngor Monastery in 1429 or shortly afterwards.

0:02:09.1 Dr. Steven Zucker: And to me it's incredible that we have literal resources that actually speak to this particular set of paintings.

0:02:16.0 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: Ngorchen was one of the main students of Sabzang Papka, and he received the Vajravali cycle of teachings from him. So there's a connection between the commissioning in memory of his teacher and the subject matter. Ngorchen's biographer provides very specific details for the set's creation. Soon after, Ngorchen had the thought of commissioning a complete set of the mandalas of the Vajravali. Six new art painters, including the famous painter Wangguli, and his brother showed up one day at Ngor without any prior arrangements.

0:02:46.8 Dr. Steven Zucker: So the Newar are the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley and were revered for their metalworking and especially for their painting.

0:02:56.4 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: One of the artists recalled that this group had suddenly decided to come to Tibet to the son of Lama Pakpa (meaning Ngorchen), and along the way they were given many better offers to paint, including to be paid in gold. However none of the artists took an interest in this, they were drawn to the remote hermitage of Ngor, and I quote, "as if summoned by the power of Lama Kunga Zangpo's meditation." Ngorchen's biographer concludes that the Newar artists have been summoned to Ngor against their will by the power of Ngor's protective deities. This represents the culmination of Newar artisanship in Tibet, and its refinement can be seen in the precision and the various delicate scrolling patterns filling the background, the very powerful and dominant red palette, and the arcades with lotus columns along the top row, as well as, for instance, the shape of the stupa on Marichi's chariot indicate that these were done by Newar artists.

0:03:53.7 Dr. Steven Zucker: Let's take a close look at one of the mandalas.

0:03:56.9 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: At the center of the mandala is the primary deity. In this mandala, we have Marichi, the goddess of the dawn, being pulled on her chariot of seven sows, or pigs. Around her is her retinue, and the walls of her palace, and each cardinal direction is marked by a gate, and the entire mandala is circumscribed by layers of lotus petals, vajras, and flames.

0:04:25.1 Dr. Steven Zucker: The innermost circle defines a form that looks very much like a stupa, and if you look closely, you can see two eyes, very much in the style that you would recognize on stupas from the Kathmandu Valley, and so a further reference to the origins of the artist. That stupa is bound by these beautiful garlands that fall down on either side and then contained within a white field with this very delicate scroll work.

0:04:53.8 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: When a practitioner is visualizing themselves as the deity, for instance, in deity yoga, where the objective is to take on the enlightened qualities of the deity depicted, one actually moves through a three-dimensional space.

0:05:09.3 Dr. Steven Zucker: So this is not simply a painting, it's not simply a set of iconographies, it is also a map that we are meant to understand ourselves moving through.

0:05:17.4 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: It's a two-dimensional rendering of a three-dimensional architectural space.

0:05:20.6 Dr. Steven Zucker: But this painting is not a single mandala. It's actually four principle mandalas, each filled with its own iconography.

0:05:27.6 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: In the left, we have the Vajradhatu, or diamond sphere mandala, with Vairochana at the center. At the top right, we have the Durgati-parishodhana mandala, which comes from the Sarva Durgati Parishodhana Tantra, or the

elimination of all bad rebirths, which is especially important for funerary rituals. And at the center, you have a form of Buddha Shakyamuni, who's understood here to be a form of Vairochana. At the bottom left, you have Bhutadamara, who is a form of Vajrapani, who subdues elemental spirits. And in the bottom right, you have Marichi, goddess of the dawn.

0:06:05.7 Dr. Steven Zucker: Each of these four mandalas are completely uniquely constructed, and when we look at the other surviving paintings from this series, we see that there is no replication, that each of these is completely unique.

0:06:19.1 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: And then along the top, there are the 16 bodhisattvas of the fortunate eon, and our eon is considered fortunate because this is the eon that the Buddha appeared in. And each of them is color-coded to the direction of the mandala they're associated with.

0:06:33.9 Dr. Steven Zucker: But we have a second row of figures down at the bottom of the painting.

0:06:37.1 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: And the bottom, there are 16 gatekeepers of the Saravid Vairochana mandala or the all-knowing Buddha.

0:06:43.5 Dr. Steven Zucker: When I stand back and look at these four principle mandalas and all of the figures, there is a kind of optical dynamism that comes from the scroll work, comes from the color, and simply comes from the complexity of the image. But there's also a geometric rigor that creates a sense of clarity and stability. And that stability is especially enhanced by the crossed Vajras that underlie each of the four principle mandalas.

0:07:09.8 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: Cross Vajras is a symbol of unshakable stability.

0:07:12.7 Dr. Steven Zucker: And a reminder that this is based on the Vajravali, which translated literally means diamond garland.

0:07:20.6 Dr. Karl Debreczeny: A garland of vajras, as this is a part of a compendium of many different teachings.

[music]

Artwork details

Title	Four Mandalas of the Vajravali Cycle
Artist(s)	Wangguli and five additional Newar artists
Dates	1429–56
Places	Asia / East Asia / China / Tibet
Period, Culture, Style	Tibetan / Newar
Artwork Type	Painting
Material	Pigment
Technique	

Bibliography

This work at the Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art

View the Himalayan Art Up Close series

Subscribe to the Rubin Museum YouTube channel

Learn more about mandalas on Project Himalayan Art, a resource from the Rubin for learning about Himalayan, Tibetan, and Inner Asian art and cultures:

Read more about Newar artists of the Kathmandu Valley working in Tibet

Read about a similar painting by Tibetan painters inspired by Newar works like this

Learn more about mandalas

Cite this page

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5.3.5.6: Doryphoros

Polykleitos, *Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer)*

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

For the ancient Greeks, the human body was perfect. Explore this example of the mathematical source of ideal beauty.

Polykleitos, Doryphoros

Polykleitos, *Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer)*, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original from c. 450–440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples). Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

Video transcript

[0:00] [music]

Dr. Steven Zucker: [0:04] So much ancient Greek art and literature has been lost, and often we only have echoes of the original. That's the case with one of the most famous works of art to come down to us from antiquity, Polykleitos' "Canon," which is known in the modern world as the "Doryphoros," which means "Spear-bearer."

Dr. Beth Harris: [0:25] Polykleitos wrote a book called "The Canon" in the 5th century B.C.E., where he defined what beauty was in sculpture, and he made a sculpture in bronze to go with this book to illustrate its precepts, but neither the book nor the sculpture survive. All we have are echoes, and we're looking at one here today in the museum in Naples.

Dr. Zucker: [0:50] It's a Roman copy in marble, and it's one of dozens and dozens of copies of the original lost Doryphoros.

Dr. Harris: [0:58] This particular one was found in the palestra in Pompeii, that is, a place where athletes would work out. You can see why. We have a beautiful nude figure. It's something for athletes to aspire to, something perfect. That was exactly Polykleitos' idea.

Dr. Zucker: [1:16] We think that the original "Canon," that is, the book that described Polykleitos' ideas, thought about beauty as rooted in a kind of mathematical precision, in the relationship of one part of the body to another part of the body, one part of the body to all other parts of the body. It was the relationship in a balance, the harmony between these elements, that created beauty.

Dr. Harris: [1:39] This mathematical underpinning echoes the work of Pythagoras. One of the things that Pythagoras wrote about was how, in music, what makes harmony is the mathematical relationships between notes.

[1:54] Pythagoras theorized that that kind of mathematical thinking, that those ratios, if they created harmony in music, they might also be the key to understanding harmony and beauty in the human body.

Dr. Zucker: [2:07] So what we're seeing, in essence, is an illustration of a set of philosophical and mathematical ideas that reveals to us so much about ancient Greece. It's so tantalizing to look at this sculpture and believe that this is very close to what Polykleitos produced. The problem is, there are variations among all of the copies that have been made, and we don't know which is closer to the original.

Dr. Harris: [2:32] But we do know that we're looking at a male figure who is ideally beautiful, not only in his proportions but also in his musculature, the way that his ribs are articulated, his pectoral muscles, the muscles in his arms. There's an attention to the human body and the potential for movement.

Dr. Zucker: [2:52] The original sculpture was made at a point in ancient Greek history that art historians often call the early Classical, when sculptures are moving out of this stiffer, more symmetrical, more abstracted representation of the human body and moving to a newfound naturalism, moving to a carefully observed body.

[3:13] We're not seeing an individual here, this is not a portrait. This is an ideal representation, something that the Greeks were really interested in: what would the most perfect body look like?

[3:24] His weight has shifted onto his right leg and is moving off of his left leg. It is that transitional moment when he is about to lift that leg and perhaps move it forward as he begins to walk. This is a system of representation that we call contrapposto, which literally means the shifting of the axes of the body against each other.

[3:42] Contrapposto beautifully reflects the Greek interest in the human body in all of its complexity. Look at the way that the weight leg, the right leg's, hip thrusts upward and compresses the torso on that side. In opposition to that, look at the way that the left hip hangs down, just above the leg with the bent knee.

Dr. Harris: [4:01] It's more than just the harmony of the parts of the body. It's also about this relationship between weight-bearing and not weight-bearing, of tension and relaxation.

[4:13] If we think of the Archaic figures, where the body is much more symmetrical, the weight is equally placed on both legs. Those figures have a sense, to me, of transcendence, of not quite being in the same world that I exist in. But this figure, which is asymmetrical, appears to exist in my world.

Dr. Zucker: [4:35] But it's important to remember that we're seeing a Roman marble copy of an older bronze sculpture from ancient Greece. And there are some changes that had to be made. Marble is heavy and it cracks much more easily, so it has to be supported in a way that bronze sculptures do not.

[4:52] And so we see a support that's been added, a kind of tree trunk that's necessary to help support the great weight of this stone. In addition, you can see that there's a bridge that attaches the right wrist to the right hip, and this is to help stabilize the sculpture.

[5:06] In fact, you can see that despite that, the hand had been broken off. Then finally, the original bronze sculpture would have held a spear in his left hand that would likely have just rested against his left shoulder.

Dr. Harris: [5:19] I think a good question is, why are there so many Roman copies of this sculpture by Polykleitos? The answer to that is, the ancient Romans loved Greek art and collected it and copied it, and the wealthy elites of ancient Rome put sculptures like this in their gardens, in their villas, to display their erudition, their sense of being cultured.

Dr. Zucker: [5:47] And in this case, in a palestra, in a kind of gymnasium, to inspire Roman athletes to this Greek ideal.

[5:52] [music]

Artwork details

Title	Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer)
Artist(s)	Polykleitos
Dates	Greek original c. 450–440 B.C.E.; Roman copy before 79 C.E.
Places	Europe / Southern Europe / Italy
Period, Culture, Style	Ancient Greek / High Classical / Ancient Roman
Artwork Type	Sculpture
Material	Marble
Technique	Carving, Contrapposto

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Doryphoros at the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Doryphoros on Art Through Time

Important fundamentals

Roman copies of ancient Greek art

Cite this page

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5.3.5.7: The Mulberry Bend

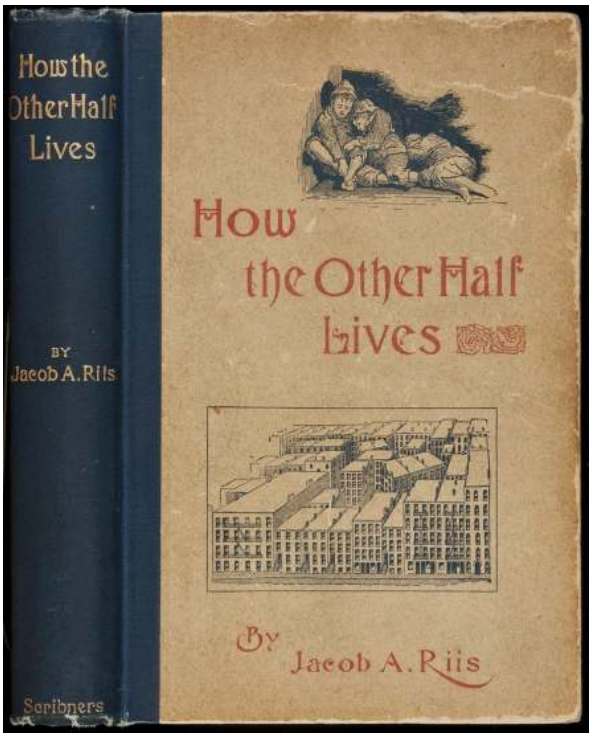
Jacob Riis, *"Knee-Pants" at Forty-Five Cents a Dozen—A Ludlow Street Sweater's Shop*, from *How the Other Half Lives*

by Miriam Bader

Jacob August Riis, *"Knee-pants" at forty five cents a dozen—A Ludlow Street Sweater's Shop,* c. 1890, 7 x 6″, from *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1890 (The Museum of the City of New York)

The slums of New York

Jacob Riis documented the slums of New York, what he deemed the world of the "other half," teeming with immigrants, disease, and abuse. A police reporter and social reformer, Riis became intimately familiar with the perils of tenement living and sought to draw attention to the horrendous conditions. Between 1888 and 1892, he photographed the streets, people, and tenement apartments he encountered, using the vivid black and white slides to accompany his lectures and influential text, *How the Other Half Lives*, published in 1890 by Scribner's. His powerful images brought public attention to urban conditions, helping to propel a national debate over what American working and living conditions should be.



Jacob August Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1890

A Danish immigrant, Riis arrived in America in 1870 at the age of 21, heartbroken from the rejection of his marriage proposal to Elisabeth Gjørtz. Riis initially struggled to get by, working as a carpenter and at various odd jobs before gaining a footing in journalism. In 1877 he became a police reporter for *The New York Tribune*, assigned to the beat of New York City's Lower East Side. Riis believed his personal struggle as an immigrant who "reached New York with just one cent in my pocket"[1] shaped his involvement in reform efforts to alleviate the suffering he witnessed.

As a police reporter, Riis had unique access to the city's slums. In the evenings, he would accompany law enforcement and members of the health department on raids of the tenements, witnessing the atrocities people suffered firsthand. Riis tried to convey the horrors to readers, but struggled to articulate the enormity of the problems through his writings. Impressed by the newly invented flash photography technique he read about, Riis began to experiment with the medium in 1888, believing that pictures would have the power to expose the tenement-house problem in a way that his textual reporting could not do alone. Indeed, the images he captured would shock the conscience of Americans.

Jacob August Riis, *The Mulberry Bend*, c. 1890, 7 x 6″, from *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1890 (The Museum of the City of New York)

Midnight rounds

At first Riis engaged the services of a photographer who would accompany him as he made his midnight rounds with the police, but ultimately dissatisfied with this arrangement, Riis purchased a box camera and learned to use it. The flash technique used a combination of explosives to achieve the light necessary to take pictures in the dark. The process was new and messy and Riis made adjustments as he went. First, he or his assistants would position the camera on a tripod and then they would ignite the mixture of magnesium flash-powder above the camera lens, causing an explosive noise, great smoke, and a blinding flash of light. Initially, Riis used a revolver to shoot cartridges containing the explosive magnesium flash-powder, but he soon discovered that showing up waving pistols set the wrong tone and substituted a frying pan for the gun, flashing the light on that instead. The process certainly terrified those in the vicinity and also proved dangerous. Riis reported setting two fires in places he visited and nearly blinding himself on one occasion.

Jacob August Riis, *"A man atop a make-shift bed that consists of a plank across two barrels,"* c. 1890, 7 x 6″, from *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1890 (The Museum of the City of New York)

Home and work

While it is unclear if Riis' pictures were totally candid or posed, his agenda of using the stark images to persuade the middle and upper classes that reform was needed is well documented. A major theme of Riis' images was the terrible conditions immigrants lived in. In the 1890s, tenement apartments served as both homes and as garment factories. "Knee-Pants at Forty-Five Cents a Dozen—A Ludlow Street Sweater's Shop" depicts the intersection of home and work life that was typical. Note the number of people crowded together making knickers and consider their ages, gender, and role. Each worker would be paid by the piece produced and each had his/her own particular role to fill in the shop which was also a family's home.

Detail, Jacob August Riis, *"Knee-pants" at forty five cents a dozen—A Ludlow Street Sweater's Shop*, c. 1890, 7 x 6″, from *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1890 (The Museum of the City of New York)

While Riis did not record the names of the people he photographed, he organized his book into ethnic sections, categorizing the images according to the racial and ethnic stereotypes of his age. In this regard, Riis has been criticized for both his bias and reducing those photographed to nameless victims. "Knee-Pants," appears in the chapter Jewtown and one can assume that the individuals are part of the large wave of Eastern European Jewish migration that flooded New York at the turn of the twentieth century.

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Detail of the "Table of Contents," Jacob August Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1914

They are likely conversing in Yiddish and share some type of familial or neighborly connection. Some of the workers depicted might have lived in a neighboring New York City apartment or next door back in the old country. Home life, family relations and business relations, are intertwined. Just as it is impossible to know the names of the people captured in Riis' image, and what Riis actually thought of them, one also cannot know their own impressions of the workplace, or their hopes and day-to-day challenges.

Jacob August Riis, *"12 year old boy at work pulling threads. Had sworn certificate he was 16—owned under cross-examination to being 12. His teeth corresponded with that age,"* c. 1890, 7 x 6″, from *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1890 (The Museum of the City of New York)

The work performed in tenements like these throughout the Lower East Side made New York City the largest producer of clothing in the United States. Under the contracting system, the tenement shop would be responsible for assembling the garments, which made up the bulk of the work. By 1910, New York produced 70% of women's clothing and 40% of men's ready-made clothing. That meant that the knee-pants and garments made by the workers captured in this Ludlow Street sweatshop were shipped across the nation. Riis' photographs helped make the sweatshop a subject of a national debate and the center of a struggle between workers, owners, consumers, politicians, and social reformers.

The Progressive Era

Riis' photographs are part of a larger reform effort undertaken during the Progressive Era, that sought to address the problems of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Progressives worked under the premise that if one studies and documents a problem and proposes and tests solutions, difficulties can ultimately be solved, improving the welfare of society as a whole. Progressives like Riis, Lewis Hine, and Jessie Tarbox Beals pioneered the tradition of documentary photography, using the tool to record and publicize working and housing conditions and a renewed call for reform. These efforts ultimately led to government regulation and the passage of the 1901 Tenement House Law, which mandated new construction and sanitation regulations that improved the access to air, light, and water in all tenement buildings.

Jessie Tarbox Beals, Child on Fire Escape, c. 1918, for the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (Columbia University Libraries)

In the introduction to the *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis challenged his readers to confront societal ills, asking "What are you going to do about it? is the question of to-day." It was a question of the past, but one that endures.

Artwork details

Title	"Knee-pants" at forty five cents a dozen—A Ludlow Street Sweater's Shop
Artist(s)	Jacob Riis
Dates	c. 1890
Places	North America / United States
Period, Culture, Style	Gilded Age
Artwork Type	Photograph / Documentary photography
Material	
Technique	Gelatin silver process

Footnotes

[1] Jacob Riis, *The Making of An American*, 2: 18.

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5.3.5.8: Akbar on horseback, hunting animals within an enclosure

Akbar on horseback, hunting animals within an enclosure

For more information, visit the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Figure : Akbar on horseback, hunting animals within an enclosure, illustration from the *Akbarnama*, Mughal Empire, India, c. 1590-95. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 32.1 x 18.8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England. (Photo via Smarthistory)

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5.3.5.9: Silver Upper White River

by ALEJO BENEDETTI, CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.5.9.1: Maya Lin, *Silver Upper White River*, 2015, recycled silver, 332.7 x 609.6 x 1 cm (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, © Maya Lin) Speakers: Alejo Benedetti, Assistant Curator, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and Steven Zucker, a Seeing America video

Additional resources

This sculpture at Crystal Bridges

What Is Missing?

Maya Lin, *Folding the Chesapeake*, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Maya Lin, Pin River-Yangtze at the United States Embassy in Beijing

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- **12.6: Histories, real and imagined** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.3.5.10: Storm King Wavefield

Storm King Wavefield

> For more information, visit Maya Lin Studio.

Figure :Storm King Wavefield, 2009 Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, NY 240,000 square feet 410’ x 490’ x 15’ tall Photography: Jerry Thompson, courtesy Storm King Art Center

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.3.6: Naturalism, Realism, Abstraction, and Idealization

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

5.3.6.1: The Doubting of Thomas

5.3.6.2: Saint Paul the Hermit

5.3.6.3: Portrait of Daruma

5.3.6.4: Two Lovers

5.3.6.5: Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension

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5.3.6.7: Boxes

5.3.6.8: The Second of the Sixteen Rakan

5.3.6.9: Portrait of a Man in Red Chalk

5.3.6.10: Slab Man

5.3.6.11: Father

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5.3.6.1: The Doubting of Thomas

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5.3.6.2: Saint Paul the Hermit

Baroque

While the Protestants criticized the cult of images, the Catholic Church ardently embraced them.

1600 - 1700

Beginner's guide: Baroque art

Bernini, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Ruben, Velázquez and more.

1600 - 1700

Though there are some commonalities, what we call "Baroque art" in Catholic Italy, Spain and Flanders is different from what we see in the Protestant Dutch republic.

Baroque art, an introduction

by DR. ESPERANÇA CAMARA

Figure 5.3.6.2.1: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, View to Cathedra Petri (or Chair of St. Peter), 1647-53, gilded bronze, gold, wood, stained glass (Apse of Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome) (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Rome: From the "Whore of Babylon" to the resplendent bride of Christ

When Martin Luther tacked his 95 theses to the doors of Wittenberg Cathedral in 1517 protesting the Catholic Church's corruption, he initiated a movement that would transform the religious, political, and artistic landscape of Europe. For the next century, Europe would be in turmoil as new political and religious boundaries were determined, often through bloody military conflicts. Only in 1648, with the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia, did the conflicts between Protestants and Catholics subside in continental Europe.

Martin Luther focused his critique on what he saw as the Church's greed and abuse of power. He called Rome, the seat of papal power, "the whore of Babylon" decked out in finery of expensive art, grand architecture, and sumptuous banquets. The Church responded to the crisis in two ways: by internally addressing issues of corruption and by defending the doctrines rejected by the Protestants. Thus, while the first two decades of the 16th century were a period of lavish spending for the Papacy, the middle decades were a period of austerity. As one visitor to Rome noted in the 1560s, the entire city had become a convent. Piety and asceticism ruled the day.

Figure **5.3.6.2.2**: View of the Cerasi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome with Annibale Carracci's altarpiece, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1600-01, oil on canvas, 96 × 61″, and paintings by Caravaggio on the side walls (*The Crucifixion of St. Peter* on the left, and *The Conversion of Paul* on the right)

By the end of the 16th century, the Catholic Church was once again feeling optimistic, even triumphant. It had emerged from the crisis with renewed vigor and clarity of purpose. Shepherding the faithful—instructing them on Catholic doctrines and inspiring virtuous behavior—took center stage. Keen to rebuild Rome's reputation as a holy city, the Papacy embarked on extensive building and decoration campaigns aimed at highlighting its ancient origins, its beliefs, and its divinely-sanctioned authority. In the eyes of faithful Catholics, Rome was not an unfaithful whore, but a pure bride, beautifully adorned for her union with her divine spouse.

The art of persuasion: To instruct, to delight, to move

While the Protestants harshly criticized the cult of images, the Catholic Church ardently embraced the religious power of art. The visual arts, the Church argued, played a key role in guiding the faithful. They were certainly as important as the written and spoken word, and perhaps even more important, since they were accessible to the learned and the unlearned alike. In order to be effective in its pastoral role, religious art had to be clear, persuasive, and powerful. Not only did it have to instruct, it had to inspire. It had to move the faithful to feel the reality of Christ's sacrifice, the suffering of the martyrs, the visions of the saints.

Figure **5.3.6.2.4**: Caravaggio, *The Crowning with Thorns*, 1602-04, oil on canvas, 165.5 x 127 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

The Church's emphasis on art's pastoral role prompted artists to experiment with new and more direct means of engaging the viewer. Artists like Caravaggio turned to a powerful and dramatic realism, accentuated by bold contrasts of light and dark, and tightly-cropped compositions that enhance the physical and emotional immediacy of the depicted narrative.

Other artists, like **Annibale Carracc**i (who also experimented with realism), ultimately settled on a more classical visual language, inspired by the vibrant palette, idealized forms, and balanced compositions of the High Renaissance (see image above). Still others, like **Giovanni Battista Gaulli**, turned to daring feats of illusionism that blurred not only the boundaries between painting, sculpture, and architecture, but also those between the real and depicted worlds. In so doing, the divine was made physically present and palpable. Whether through shocking realism, dynamic movement, or exuberant ornamentation, seventeenth-century art is meant to impress. It aims to convince the viewer of the truth of its message by impacting the senses, awakening the emotions, and activating, even sharing the viewer's space.

Giovanni Battista Gaulli, also known as il Baciccio, <em
The Triumph of the Name of Jesus, 1672-1685, Il Gesù ceiling fresco (Rome, Italy)" height="500" src="
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" width="833">

Figure **5.3.6.2.5**: Giovanni Battista Gaulli, also known as il Baciccio, *The Triumph of the Name of Jesus*, 1672-1685, Il Gesù ceiling fresco (Rome, Italy)

The Catholic monarchs and their territories

The monarchs of Spain, Portugal, and France also embraced the more ornate elements of seventeenth century art to celebrate Catholicism. In Spain and its colonies, rulers invested vast resources on elaborate church facades, stunning, gold-covered chapels and tabernacles, and strikingly-realistic polychrome sculpture.

In the Spanish Netherlands, where sacred art had suffered terribly as a result of the **Protestant iconoclasm** (the destruction of art), civic and religious leaders prioritized the adornment of churches as the region reclaimed its Catholic identity. Refurnishing the altars of Antwerp's churches kept **Peter Paul Rubens'** workshop busy for many years. Europe's monarchs also adopted this artistic vocabulary to proclaim their own power and status. Louis XIV, for example, commissioned the splendid buildings and gardens of Versailles as a visual expression of his divine right to rule.

Figure **5.3.6.2.6**: Peter Paul Rubens, *Elevation of the Cross*, 1610, oil on wood, 15′ 1-7/8″ x 11′ 1-1/2″ (originally for Saint Walpurgis, Antwerp (destroyed), now in Antwerp Cathedral)

The Protestant North

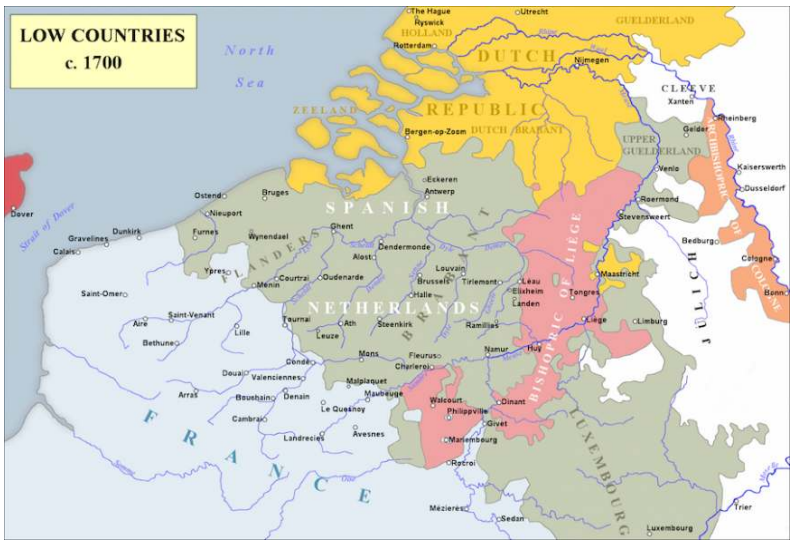


Figure **5.3.6.2.7**

In the Protestant countries, and especially in the newly-independent Dutch Republic (modern-day Holland), the artistic climate changed radically in the aftermath of the Reformation. Two of the wealthiest sources of patronage—the monarchy and the Church—were now gone. In their stead arose an increasingly prosperous middle class eager to express its status, and its new sense of national pride, through the purchase of art.

By the middle of the 17th century a new market had emerged to meet the artistic tastes of this class. The demand was now for smaller scale paintings suitable for display in private homes. These paintings included religious subjects for private contemplation, as seen in Rembrandt's poignant paintings

and prints of biblical narratives, as well as portraits documenting individual likenesses.

Figure **5.3.6.2.8**: Judith Leyster, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1630, oil on canvas, 651 x 746 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

But, the greatest change in the market was the dramatic increase in the popularity of landscapes, still-lifes, and scenes of everyday life (known as genre painting). Indeed, the proliferation of these subjects as independent artistic genres was one of the 17th century's most significant contributions to the history of Western art.

In all of these genres, artists revealed a keen interest in replicating observed reality—whether it be the light on the Dutch landscape, the momentary expression on a face, or the varied textures and materials of the objects the Dutch collected as they reaped the benefits of their expanding mercantile empire. These works demonstrated as much artistic virtuosity and physical immediacy as the grand decorations of the palaces and churches of Catholic Europe.

In the context of European history, the period from c. 1585 to c. 1700/1730 is often called the Baroque era. The word "baroque" derives from the Portuguese and Spanish words for a large, irregularly-shaped pearl ("barroco" and "barrueco," respectively). Eighteenth century critics were the first to apply the term to the art of the 17th century. It was not a term of praise. To the eyes of these critics, who favored the restraint and order of Neoclassicism, the works of Bernini, Borromini, and Pietro da Cortona appeared bizarre, absurd, even diseased—in other words, misshapen, like an imperfect pearl.

Figure **5.3.6.2.9**: Francisco de Zurbarán, *Saint Francis of Assisi According to Pope Nicholas V's Vision*, c. 1640, oil on canvas, 110.5 x 180.5 cm (Museum Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain)

"Baroque" – the word, the style, the period

By the middle of the 19th century, the word had lost its pejorative implications and was used to describe the ornate and complex qualities present in many examples of 17th-century art, music and literature. Eventually, the term came to designate the historical period as a whole.

In the context of the painting, for example, the stark realism of Zurbaran's altarpieces, the quiet intimacy of Vermeer's domestic interiors, and restrained classicism of Poussin's landscapes are all "Baroque" (now with a capital "B" to indicate the historical period), regardless of the absence of the stylistic traits originally associated with the term.

Scholars continue to debate the validity of this label, admitting the usefulness of having a label for this distinct historical period, while also acknowledging its limitations in characterizing the variety of artistic styles present in the 17th century.

Additional resources:

Baroque Rome on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Annibale Carracci on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

For instructors: related lesson plan on Art History Teaching Resources

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.2.10: More Smarthistory images…

How to recognize Baroque art

by BETH HARRIS and STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.2.1

Francis Bacon and the Scientific Revolution

by DR. KATHRYN WOLFORD

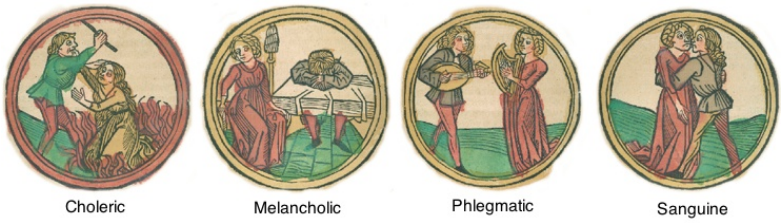


Figure 5.3.6.2.11: The Four Humors, from Deutche Kalendar, 1498 (Pierpont Morgan Library)

How do we know that something is true?

The word science comes from the latin root *scientia*, meaning knowledge. But where does the knowledge that makes up science come from? How do you ever really know that something is true?

For instance, modern science tell us that some types of disease spread through tiny organisms. Medieval people believed instead that sickness arose from an imbalance of the body's four humors. How do we know with certainty that modern science is correct? Microscopes enable us to see the germs that cause sickness, but when we look through microscopic lenses to examine microbes, how do we know our understanding of what they are and what they are doing is true? Of course, medieval philosophers did not have microscopic lenses—but if they did, they very likely would have disagreed with our modern understanding of disease. Believing in the inaccuracy of the human senses, and moreover of the human mind's inability to correctly judge anything, medieval knowledge instead privileged ancient texts as the best way of making sense of the world.

Sir Francis Bacon

Figure 5.3.6.2.12: Francis Bacon, c. 1622, oil on canvas, 470 x 610 cm (Dulwich Picture Gallery)

In 1620, around the time that people first began to look through microscopes, an English politician named Sir Francis Bacon developed a method for philosophers to use in weighing the truthfulness of knowledge. While Bacon agreed with medieval thinkers that humans too often erred in interpreting what their five senses perceived, he also realized that people's sensory experiences provided the best possible means of making sense of the world.

Because humans could incorrectly interpret anything they saw, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt, Bacon insisted that they must doubt everything before assuming its truth.

Testing hypotheses

In order to test potential truths, or hypotheses, Bacon devised a method whereby scientists set up experiments to manipulate nature, and attempt to prove their hypotheses wrong. For example, in order to test the idea that sickness came from external causes, Bacon argued that scientists should expose healthy people to outside influences such as coldness, wetness, or other sick people to discover if any of these external variables resulted in more people getting sick. Knowing that many different causes for sickness might be missed by humans who are unable or unwilling to perceive them, Bacon insisted that experiments must be consistently repeated before truth can be known: a scientist must show that patients exposed to a specific variable more frequently got sick again, and again, and again.

Figure 5.3.6.2.13: Frontispiece for the *Opere di Galileo Galilei*, 1656, etching, 17.8 x 24.9 (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston). Galileo is shown kneeling before personifications of mathematics (holding a compass), astronomy (with the crown of stars) and optics.

Although modern scientists have revised many of the truths subsequently adopted by Bacon and his contemporaries, we still utilize the method of proving knowledge to be true via doubt and experimentation that Bacon laid out in 1620. Bacon's philosophical work marks a very significant breakthrough for the study of the world around us, but it is important to stress that this method of investigation was not completed in a vacuum. Rather, Bacon's work should be seen as a part of a widespread cultural revolution accelerated by the rise of the printing press in the fifteenth century.

Importance of the printing press

Advances in the ability to disseminate new ideas by making standardized letters, numbers, and diagrams repeatable allowed for an unprecedented level of cooperation among philosophers who could now build on each other's ideas over long periods of time. It would be difficult to overstate the effect of the print revolution. Astronomers such as Copernicus and Galileo began to share and build upon their experiments, and religious reformers began to publicize new (and increasingly radical) Protestant ideas. In a mutually beneficial relationship the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution encouraged philosophers to discover all they could about nature as a way to learn more about God, an undertaking that promoted a break with past authorities.

A direct engagement with nature

Artisans and craftspeople soon began engaging in the new "natural philosophy," exemplifying the fact that a monumental shift in what constituted evidence for truth was under way. Not only did renaissance artisans create lenses to see, tools to measure, and artworks to replicate the natural world, but by the sixteenth century, they began to publish philosophical treatises asserting that through the imitation and reproduction of nature in their arts, they were able to achieve a state of direct engagement with nature. Rather than taking knowledge from ancient sources, they argued that true knowledge came from direct experience. Alchemists likewise prioritized direct engagement with nature. In using fire to divide elements into their "smallest" components (and discovering that there were more than four of them), alchemists promoted the revolutionary idea that observation of nature itself, rather than reliance on ancient authorities, provided the best foundation for knowledge.

Figure 5.3.6.2.14: Attributed to Bernard Palissy, *Oval Basin*, c. 1550, lead-glazed earthenware, 18 7/8 x 14 1/2″ (The J. Paul Getty Museum)

The Royal Society

These new ideas crystallized with the work of Francis Bacon. In his work as a politician he called for the development of an institution that would promote and regulate the acquisition of knowledge derived from observation. After considerable delay, caused by a civil war and the execution of King Charles I, the Royal Society for Improving Natural Knowledge was founded in 1660. A gentleman's club composed of tinkering aristocrats, the Royal Society promoted Bacon's principles of exact observation and measurement of experiments in its periodical Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, generally credited as being the first scientific journal.

Figure 5.3.6.2.15: Frontispiece to Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal-Society of London*, etching by Winceslaus Hollar, after John Evelyn, 1667. "The book was a manifesto of the Society's aims and methods….primarily aimed at the king in the (unrealised) hope that he would fund their future activities. The frontispiece flatters Charles II by presenting him as a classical bust being wreathed by an allegorical figure of Fame. The Society President, Viscount Brouncker, points to the Latin inscription 'Charles II founder and Patron of the Royal Society.' Francis Bacon, gesturing towards an array of scientific instruments, is indentified as the 'Renewer of Arts'." (National Portrait Gallery, London)

Once Bacon's philosophies regarding experimentation and observation came to be accepted, people began using them to harness nature for profit. The study of nature came to be less about changing traditional attitudes and beliefs, and more about stimulating the economy. By the end of the following century, the Scientific Revolution had given birth to an Industrial Revolution which dramatically transformed the daily lives of people around the world. Western society has been moving forward on Bacon's model for the past three hundred years. Perhaps though, we are in danger of forgetting the vital role doubt played in Bacon's philosophy. Even with powerful microscopes, there is still a lot that human senses miss.

Additional resources:

In Our Time podcast on Baconian Science

Baroque art in Italy

Dramatic lighting, movement, art that activate the viewer's space.

1600 - 1700

Restoring ancient sculpture in Baroque Rome

by LAURIE PORSTNER

Figure 5.3.6.2.16: In this drawing, both the *Apollo Belvedere* (on the left) and the *Laocoön* on the right, are depicted with their 16th-century "restorations." Federico Zuccaro, *Taddeo in the Belvedere Court in the Vatican Drawing the Laocoön*, c. 1595, pen and brown ink, brush with brown wash, over black chalk and touches of red chalk, 17.5 x 42.5 cm (The J. Paul Getty Museum)

Early Modern fascination with the "Antique"

In this late 16th-century drawing by Federico Zuccaro, we see the artist's older brother, Taddeo, surrounded by Greek and Roman sculptures in the Vatican's Belvedere courtyard in Rome. Taddeo is seated on a cloth spread upon the ground, hunched slightly forward, with his sketchpad resting on his thighs, concentrating on drawing the famous ancient sculpture, the *Laocoön*. His back is to yet another very famous ancient sculpture, the *Apollo Belvedere*. Both of these sculptures were unearthed during the Renaissance, and of course, given that more than 1,000 years had passed, they were discovered buried and broken. Both were restored by Renaissance and Baroque artists. While today's museums contain limbless torsos, solitary hands and feet, and disembodied heads, in the 16th and 17th centuries, it was fashionable to present sculptures with fully formed bodies, whether or not the work of art was actually preserved that way. Restoration was the process by which ancient Greek and Roman fragments of sculpture were provided with new components to make them "whole" once again.

The *Laocoön* is an interesting case in point. It was discovered early in the 16th century (according to one source, Michelangelo was called to be present for its excavation) and depicts the priest Laocoön and his sons being strangled by snakes. The sculpture—which was very important for Renaissance and Baroque artists—was found in pieces, and when reconstructed, the most important missing component was an arm belonging to the priest.

Figure 5.3.6.2.17: Left: Photograph of the *Laocoön* with reconstructed arm raised upward, and right, the *Laocoön* with its original arm bent backward as it appears today. Left: James Anderson, *Laocoön*, c. 1845–55, albumen silver print, 39 x 29.5 cm (The J. Paul Getty Museum); right: Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes, *Laocoön and his Sons*, early first century C.E., marble, 7'10 1/2″ high (Vatican Museums)

Pope Julius II, who brought the sculpture to the Vatican's Belvedere courtyard, was not content to display the sculpture as it had been found. He first commissioned Jacopo Sansovino, followed by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli (a student of Michelangelo), to create the missing arm. These additions (or restorations), to the *Laocoön* each consisted of a dramatically upraised arm, visible in many reproductions of the sculpture (and in the drawing by Zuccaro above). It was only in the beginning of the 20th century when the sculpture's real missing arm was discovered. It turns out this arm was not upraised at all, but was bent backward. This proved that Montorsoli's original restoration, as well as a later 18th-century restoration (also with an upraised arm), were incorrect. It is the original, bent arm that is visible on the *Laocoön* today.

Figure **5.3.6.2.18**: Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican Museums today, shown with a detail of the drawing above by Federico Zuccaro where we can see a restored bow in Apollo's left hand. Apollo Belvedere (Roman copy of a Greek(?) original), original late 4th century B.C.E. marble, 2.3 m high (Vatican Museums, Rome)

Going back to Zuccaro's drawing, we see the Apollo Belvedere holding a bow—yet another of Montorsoli's reconstructions (you won't see this when you visit the sculpture in the Vatican today). Restoration became a steady source of employment for sculptors, especially for those who could not always attract wealthy patrons. Even the greatest of Baroque sculptors, such as **Gianlorenzo Bernini** and Alessandro Algardi, received commissions for restorations, although this was usually at earlier stages in their careers and with much less frequency than other, less successful sculptors. Restorations in the Renaissance and Baroque periods might not always have produced sculptures that were "correct" in terms of classical (Greco-Roman) iconography. But even when carried out correctly, restorations have added a new level of meaning to the works that was not present in antiquity.

Not every artist in Renaissance and Baroque Rome had access to ancient Greek and Roman statues. Drawings depicting artists with antiquities—like the one by Federico Zuccaro—are testaments to the status of a particular artist. It was a privilege to be allowed to view works of art in the papal or other princely collections face-to-face. In later periods, artists would come into contact with famous antiquities mainly through prints, or less commonly, plaster casts made in Rome and shipped throughout Europe. But these were poor replacements for the prestige of owning actual antiquities. While popes, cardinals, and princes had been the owners of collections of ancient statuary since the Renaissance, as more and more wealthy non-Italians came to Rome on the Grand Tour, they desired collections of their own. The allure of the classical, in sculptural fragments or architectural ruins, continued into the 18th century and **helped give shape to the modern world**. This passion for collecting encouraged the growth of the restoration industry, resulting in Rome, Florence, Paris, and London becoming centers for the buying and selling of ancient sculpture.

A treatise on restoration

The most complete primary source for restoration in the 17th century is *Observations Concerning Ancient Sculpture* by Orfeo Boselli. This treatise emphasized classical sculpture's place as the starting point in the education of a Baroque sculptor. According to Boselli, since many ancient sculptural figures were found lacking their identifying attributes (often the item that they carried; for example, Apollo often holds a lyre or a bow), it was important for restorers to learn the attributes of each pagan god in order to make correct restorations. Just as a sculpture lacking attributes sometimes made it difficult for a restorer to accurately determine the identity of some mythological figures, adding an incorrect attribute could change the identity of the figure in the sculpture. Baroque restorers also needed to study the proportions of the surviving ancient fragments so the new pieces they were making would match. Pins (sometimes made of lead) and clamps held blocks of marble together; these bits of hardware had to be concealed to keep up the illusion that the sculpture was anything less than "complete."

Figure 5.3.6.2.19: Ludovisi Ares, Pentelic marble, Roman copy after a Greek original from c. 320 B.C.E. with some restorations in Cararra marble by Gianlorenzo Bernini, 1622 (Museo Nazionale Romano di Palazzo Altemps; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Figure 5.3.6.2.20: Ludovisi Ares (detail), Pentelic marble, Roman copy after a Greek original from c. 320 B.C.E. with some restorations in Cararra marble by Gianlorenzo Bernini, 1622 (Museo Nazionale Romano di Palazzo Altemps; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Restoration was a serious subject according to Boselli, and it was not for second-rate artists. But Boselli's ideal restorer was largely a fantasy—restoration was a way for Baroque sculptors to make ends meet, whether or not they had the talent to carry out the work as carefully as Boselli outlined.

Boselli's praise for a restoration by Bernini, the *Ludovisi Ares*, is surprising. Boselli generally disliked the famous sculptor as well as the type of overtly Baroque elements that Bernini inserted in the *Ludovisi Ares*: the head and arm of the small Eros (Cupid) who playfully peeks out from behind Ares' outstretched leg; and the hilt of the sword, with a human-like face with a wide open mouth that recalls Bernini's bust of a *Damned Soul*, one of Bernini's own self-portraits.

The ancient portions of the *Ludovisi Ares* were made from Pentelic marble from Greece, while Bernini's restorations used Carrara marble from Italy. These marbles are different colors, which makes it easy to tell where repairs were made. Bernini was a highly skilled sculptor, and this was no accident. It was a choice.

Bernini brought an ancient work into his era with the clear intention of updating it for his own generation. He was quite capable of restoring in a conservative manner had he, or his patron, wished. Boselli's praise for Bernini's restoration of the *Ludovisi Ares* suggests that even a staunch advocate for more conservative restorations could be impressed with the fusion of both the classical and the Baroque. Although Boselli was in favor of authenticity, not all Baroque sculptors agreed.

Figure 5.3.6.2.21: Nicolas Cordier, *The Gypsy Girl (La Zingarella)*, early 17th century, marble and bronze, 140 cm high (Galleria Borghese)

Some of the most dramatic restorations undertaken in the 17th century were made for Cardinal Scipione Borghese by Nicolas Cordier. Look closely at the *The Gypsy Girl (La Zingarella)*. The exotic elements—colored marbles and gilded bronze accessories—are restorations that hide a fragment of a draped woman (probably something like the **Roman Herculaneum Women**). *The Gypsy Girl (La Zingarella)* is clearly an early modern invention. Cordier's restorations exhibit a taste that stands in opposition to Boselli's view that restoration should complement the original sculpture.

In another restoration for Cardinal Borghese, Bernini added a pillow and mattress to the classical *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, which depicts a figure with both masculine and feminine sexual characteristics reclining horizontally. Bernini's restoration for Cardinal Borghese did not make drastic changes to the pose or figure. As seen in the *Ludovisi Ares*; Bernini's restorations are something neither wholly classicizing nor wholly Baroque.

Figure 5.3.6.2.22: Sleeping Hermaphroditos, Roman copy of a Greek original from the 2nd century C.E. (Louvre) (photo: **Dennis Jarvis**, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Bernini's restoration received mixed reviews in the following century. French writer Charles de Brosses noted that to "pass one's hand over it [the mattress], it is no longer marble, it is a real mattress of white leather or of satin which has lost its sheen." For de Brosses, the mattress was a positive addition, encouraging someone to want to reach out and touch it. Yet, Francesco Milizia was appalled; he thought the mattress looked as if it had been filled with rocks.

Figure **5.3.6.2.23**: Rondanini Faun, torso and right thigh antique; extensively restored or "completed" during the Baroque by François Duquesnoy, c. 1625–30 (**The British Museum**)

To De-Restore or Re-Restore?

In the early 20th century, many ancient sculptures that had been restored in early modern times (such as the *Apollo Belvedere*), had their restorations removed. Beginning in the late 20th century, there has been a growing awareness of the impact that restorations had upon the understanding of a particular work of art. In some cases, restorations that were removed in the early 20th century for the sake of greater "accuracy" have been returned.

One of the most interesting examples of de-restoration occurred early on: when the "real" ancient legs of the ***Farnese Hercules*** were discovered, and the replacement legs made by Guglielmo della Porta, a student of Michelangelo, were removed. Today, della Porta's legs can still be seen in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, no longer on the sculpture, but mounted in a case nearby.

While many 20th century art historians and conservators did not look fondly upon restoration efforts, the start of the 21st sees a renewed interest in the interactions between the early modern period and classical antiquity.

The British Museum's *Rondanini Faun* consists of an antique torso and right thigh, while the remaining sculpture was created in the early 17th century by François Duquesnoy. The sculpture underwent conservation in 2004 and was then displayed as a product of the 18th century, rather than in the rooms allotted to the Greek and Roman collection. This acknowledges both the classical inspiration for the artwork, as well as the new meaning given by its restorer.

Additional resources:

The Roman Forum: Part 2, Ruins in modern imagination (The Renaissance and after)

Biography of Jacopo Sansovino from The J. Paul Getty Museum

Essay about the Grand Tour from The Metropolitan Museum of Art

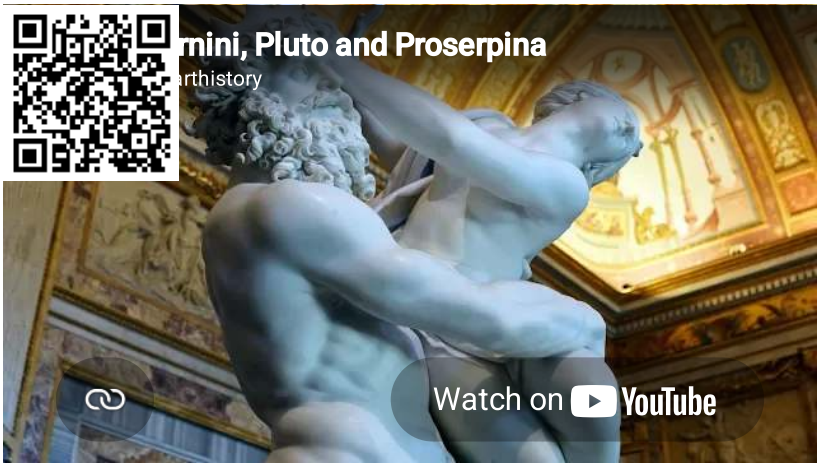
Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500–1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982)

Jennifer Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989)

Gian Lorenzo Bernini

Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pluto and Proserpina* (or *The Rape of Proserpina*)

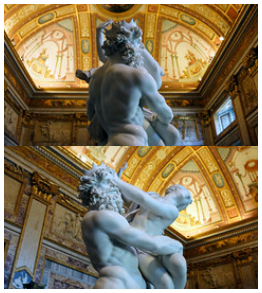
by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS



Video 5.3.6.2.2: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pluto and Proserpina* (or *The Rape of Proserpina*), 1621-22, marble (Galleria Borghese, Rome)

Proserpina is the Latin variant of the mythic Greek Persephone.

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



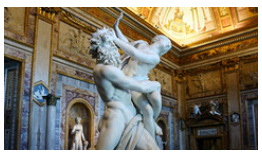
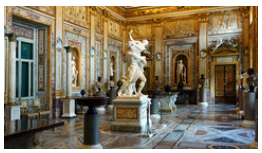



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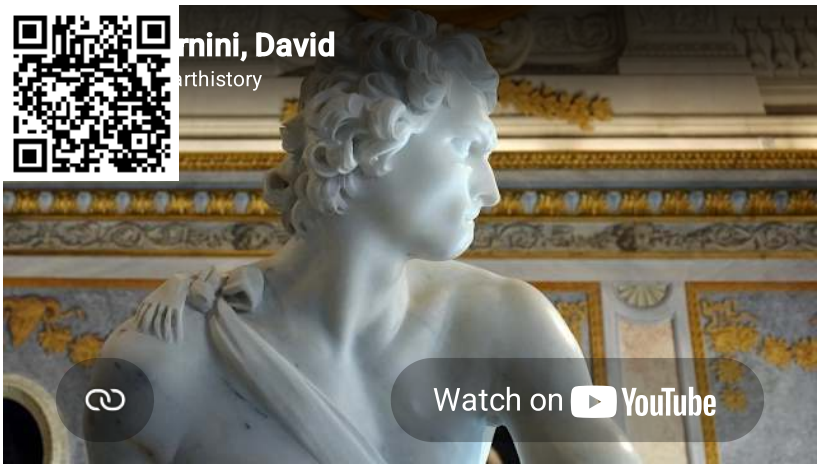
Figure 5.3.6.2.24: More Smarthistory images…

Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *David*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video 5.3.6.2.3: Gianlorenzo Bernini, *David*, 1623, marble, 5 feet, 7 inches high (Galleria Borghese, Rome)

Figure 5.3.6.2.25: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *David*, 1623-24, marble, 170 cm (Galleria Borghese, Rome) (photo: Salvador Fornell CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Empathy

Bernini's *David* is like a major league pitcher winding up to throw a 95 miles an hour fastball. The pitcher gathers all of his strength for each pitch and puts everything he has into it.

Baroque art wants us to be able to relate to the image in our bodies, not just in our minds. Bernini's *David* uses the space around it—reaching out into the space of the viewer. Bernini's *David* is not content—the way Michelangelo's *David* is—to remain separate from us. When looking at Bernini's *David*, we immediately start to feel what David is feeling. This empathy is very important to Baroque art.

Diagonals

In the High Renaissance we saw the composition in the form of a pyramid—a very stable shape. But in the Baroque era we see compositions in the shape of diagonal lines, as in Bernini's *David*.The diagonal line immediately suggests movement and energy and drama—very different from the immobility of the pyramid shape.

Three Davids

Donatello shows us an early moment in the Renaissance—the beginnings of Humanism when artists were first discovering contrapposto and the beauty of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. His young figure of David symbolizes the Republic of Florence, which saw itself—like David—as blessed by God. Donatello shows David victorious standing on the head of Goliath.

Michelangelo's *David* is ideally beautiful. David contemplates his upcoming fight with Goliath, staring at his foe. While Bernini shows us a less ideal, and more real David—one who, with God's help, is actively fighting Goliath (perhaps the way the church itself felt as they were battling against Luther).

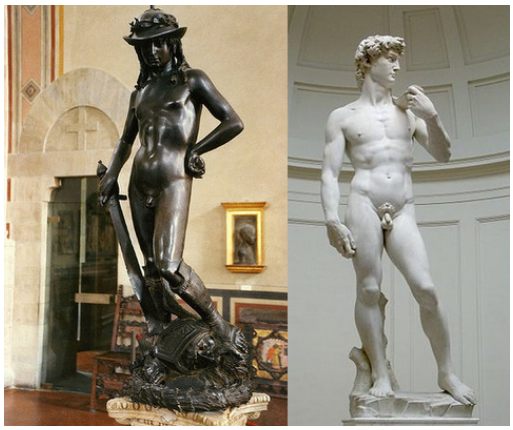


Figure **5.3.6.2.26**: Left: Donatello, *David*, c. 1440s, bronze, 158 cm (Bargello, Florence) (photo: Patrick CC BY-SA 2.0); right: Michelangelo, *David*, 1501-04, marble, 518 cm (Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence) (photo: **Rico Heil**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The path to God

Michelangelo seems to be asking us to contemplate the incredible beauty of David, and through contemplating beauty (the beauty of man, God's greatest creation), we come to know God. On the other hand, there is no time for contemplation with Bernini's *David*, there is only time for ducking out of the way—our reaction is in our bodies, not in our minds.

Figure **5.3.6.2.27**: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, three views of *David*, 1623-24, marble, 170 cm (Galleria Borghese, Rome)

The path to God in the Baroque era is more direct, more emotional, more bodily, and that of course relates to the embattled position of the Church, which wanted to appeal directly to the faithful.

Additional resources:

This sculpture at the Galleria Borghese

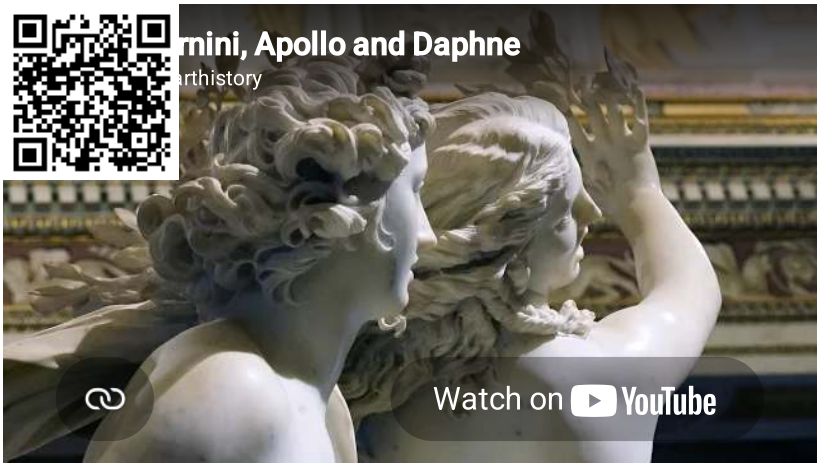
Bernini at The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.2.28: More Smarthistory images…

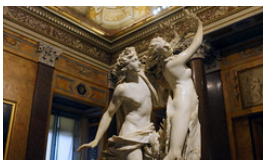
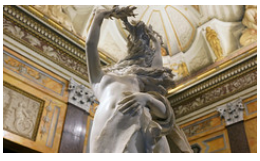
Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Apollo and Daphne*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video 5.3.6.2.4: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Apollo and Daphne*, 1622-25, Carrera marble, 243 cm high (Galleria Borghese, Rome) A conversation with Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

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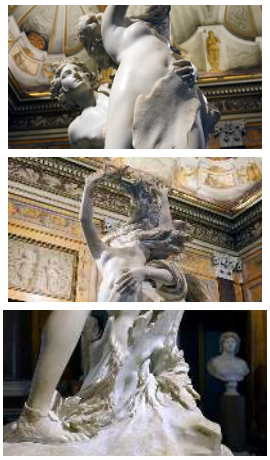
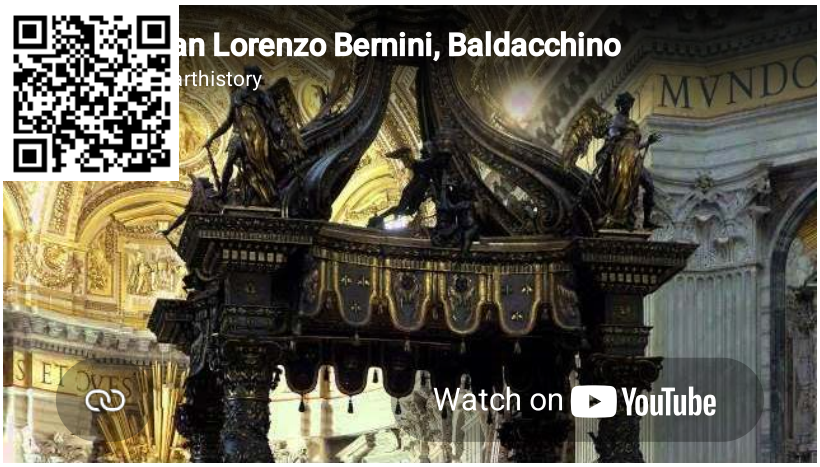


Figure 5.3.6.2.29: More Smarthistory images…

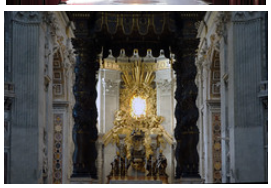
Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Baldacchino, Saint Peter's

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video 5.3.6.2.5: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Baldacchino, 1624-33, 100′ high, gilded bronze (Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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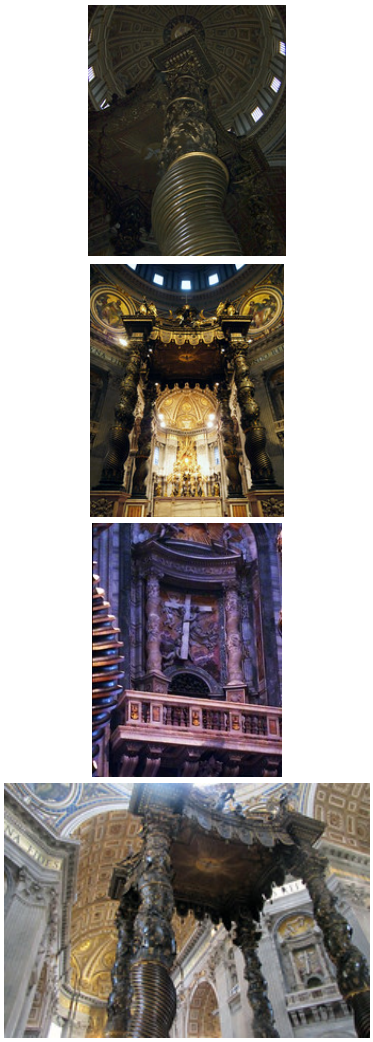

Figure 5.3.6.2.30: More Smarthistory images…

Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Bust of Medusa*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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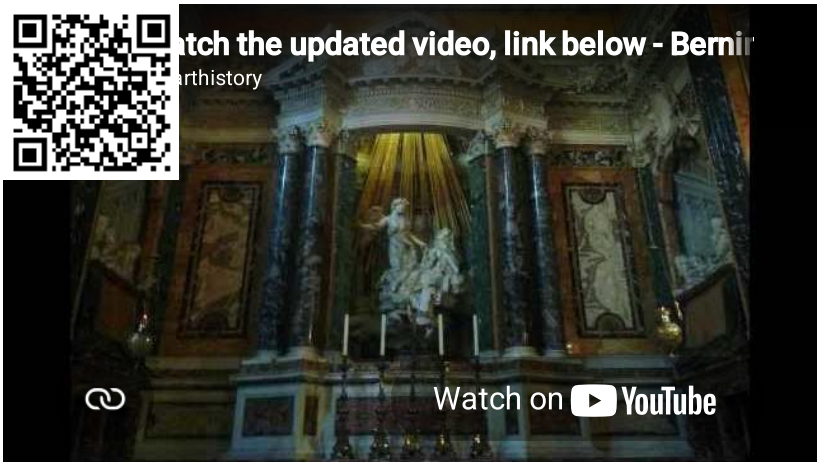
Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.2.31: More Smarthistory images…

Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



This is Saint Teresa's description of the event that Bernini depicts:

> ***Beside me, on the left, appeared an angel in bodily form…. He was not tall but short, and very beautiful; and his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest rank of angels, who***

seem to be all on fire…. In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul content with anything but God. This is not a physical but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it—even a considerable share.

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

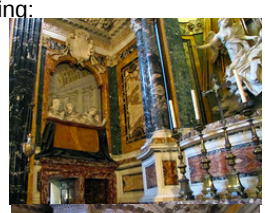


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Figure **5.3.6.2.32***: More Smarthistory images…*

Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cathedra Petri (Chair of St. Peter)

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

According to tradition, St. Peter himself, the founder of the institution of the Church and considered the first pope, sat on the ancient wooden chair that is encased within this larger bronze and gold chair.

Jasmine Keane

Sep 27, 2020, 4:42 PM

*Cite this page as: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Cathedra Petri (Chair of St. Peter)," in Smarthistory, November 18, 2015, accessed September 27, 2020, **https://smarthistory.org/bernini-cathedra-petri-chair-of-st-peter/**.*

Gian Lorenzo Bernini, St. Peter's Square

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.2.9: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, St. Peter's Piazza (Piazza San Pietro), Vatican City, Rome, 1656-67

Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, Rome

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.3.6.2.10: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, 1658-70, Rome; commissioned by Cardinal Camillo Francesco Maria Pamphili for the nearby Jesuit seminary

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

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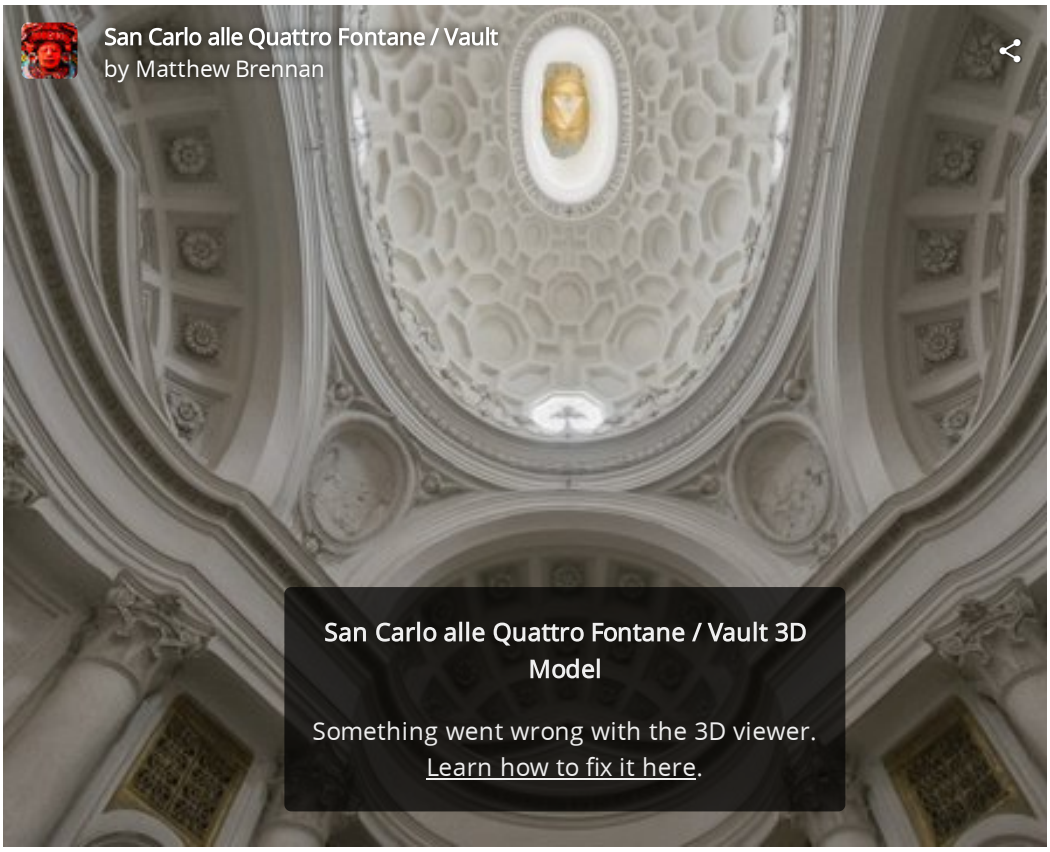
Figure 5.3.6.2.33*: More Smarthistory images…*

Francesco Borromini, San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Geometry and motion in Borromini's San Carlo

Video 5.3.6.2.10*: Francesco Borromini, San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane ("Carlino"), Rome. Commissioned by Cardinal Francesco Barberini in 1634 for the Holy Order of the Trinity; construction began in 1638 and the church was consecrated in 1646.*



San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane / Vault by *Matthew Brennan* on *Sketchfab*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

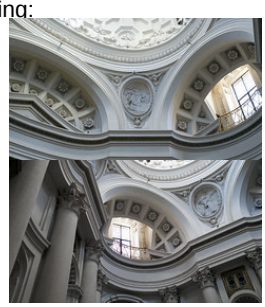


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Figure 5.3.6.2.34*: More Smarthistory images…*

Annibale Carracci, *Christ Appearing to Saint Peter on the Appian Way*

by DR. MELISA PALERMO

Figure 5.3.6.2.35*: Annibale Carracci, Christ Appearing to Saint Peter on the Appian Way (also known as Domine quo vadis), 1601-02, oil on wood, 77.4 x 56.3 cm (The National Gallery)*

Baroque beginnings and Renaissance ideals

The Carracci—Annibale, his brother Agostino, and their cousin Ludovico—are often credited with initiating the first phase of Baroque art. In reaction to the artificiality of Mannerism, the style that dominated central Italian art during the mid-sixteenth century, the Carracci advocated a return to greater naturalism. They founded a painting academy (Accademia degli Incamminati) in Bologna, Italy around

1580 that focused both on the study of the best artistic models of the Renaissance and on the direct study of nature.

The Carracci developed a new style that blended the rich color, soft chiaroscuro, and warm lighting seen in the art of Northern Italian artists, like Titian and Correggio with the balanced compositions, firm drawing, and idealized forms that characterize the art of central Italian artists like Raphael and Michelangelo. Annibale further developed this style in Rome, where, with Christ Appearing to Saint Peter on the Appian Way, he created a work whose emotional immediacy signals the emergence of Baroque art.

Domine, Quo Vadis? (Lord, where are you going?)

According to Catholic tradition, St. Peter and St. Paul were both executed in Rome around the year 67 C.E. during the reign of the infamous emperor Nero. The story (found in early Christian writings but not in the New Testament), states that Peter was freed from prison in Rome after he and Paul converted their jailers. Peter was then persuaded by fellow Christians who were concerned for his safety, to flee Rome. As he left, Peter encountered the resurrected Jesus. Astonished, Peter asked "Domine quo vadis?" (Lord, where are you going?). Jesus replied "I go to Rome to be crucified anew." When he heard these words, Peter understood that his actions were cowardly and that he must return to Rome. There, he was arrested and crucified upside down at his request because he did not feel worthy of dying as Jesus had.

Drama and gesture

In Christ Appearing to Saint Peter on the Appian Way, the two principle figures are set against the muted earth tones of the landscape, dotted with delicate trees and Roman architecture. Initially Peter stood more erect and closer to Jesus, but Annibale modified his pose in order to more dramatically express his emotional reaction. Jesus appears in his resurrected body; it is muscular but bears the wounds of the crucifixion. He wears a white loin cloth and a red mantle over his shoulder (red symbolizes his humanity and the blood shed at his Passion). Other references to the passion are the crown of thorns on his head and the cross that he carries over his left shoulder. Peter is identified by his traditional blue and yellow robes, gray hair and beard, and the keys that hang at his waist (see below on why keys are Peter's attribute). He is taken aback by the muscular figure of Jesus. Peter's hands are up in a protective mode as he recoils in astonishment.

Figure **5.3.6.2.36***: Detail, Annibale Carracci, Christ Appearing to Saint Peter on the Appian Way (also known as Domine quo vadis), 1601-02, oil on wood, 77.4 x 56.3 cm (The National Gallery)*

While the Carracci advocated a return to Renaissance ideals of clarity and the direct study of nature (which they felt the Mannerist artists had rejected), this work is distinguished from the Renaissance in its psychological involvement of the viewer. Although Jesus turns his head to address Peter, he steps boldly forward toward the viewer as he points to his destination, which lies implicitly in front of the picture. Even the placement of the cross is expressive; one arm of the cross pierces the clear blue sky while the lower part projects out to the viewer. In these ways Annibale places the viewer directly in Jesus's path and breaks the boundary between the painting and viewer's space—engaging the viewer with an immediacy typical of Baroque art.

Christ Appearing to Saint Peter on the Appian Way also depicts the most dramatic and expressive moment of the encounter. Peter is shocked and ashamed and Jesus' physical strength reflects his moral strength as he strides forward confidently. The gestures and body language of the figures are posed at their most expressive—also anticipating the drama of Baroque art. The artistic renewal begun by the Carracci coincided with the spiritual renewal of the Catholic Church, known as the Counter-Reformation.

Peter and the papacy

Figure **5.3.6.2.37***: Perugino, Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter, 1481-83, fresco, 10 feet 10 inches x 18 feet (Vatican, Rome)*

This depiction of Jesus and St. Peter would call to mind for contemporary viewers Jesus's earlier conversations with Peter, in particular, the Gospel of John, 13:36-37, where Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, where art thou going?" and Jesus replies, "I am going where thou canst not follow me now, but shalt follow me afterwards." Then Peter said to him, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I am ready to lay down my life for thy sake."

And in the Gospel of Matthew 16: 18-19, Jesus says to Peter,

> ***thou art Peter, and it is upon this rock that I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; and I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.***

With the metaphor of the keys, Jesus was understood to have bestowed upon Peter the office of the Papacy and the authority to lead the Church. The Catholic Church considers St. Peter to be first bishop of Rome and, as such, the first pope.

Annibale's painting can be interpreted as a commentary on the authority of the papacy and the centrality of Rome as the headquarters of the Catholic Church. Many early Christians were martyred in Rome and St. Peter's basilica was itself built over a crypt believed to contain the tomb of St. Peter.

The painting was commissioned by Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini (whose name saint was Saint Peter) when the Church was still heavily invested in affirming doctrines contested by the Protestants. With its emphasis on Jesus, Peter, and Rome, the painting reinforced the idea that Jesus himself had instituted the office of the Papacy (an idea refuted by Protestants) and that Peter was willing to die for the faith.

Additional resources:

Video on the history of the Church of Domine, Quo Vadis

Mannerism: Bronzino (1503–1572) and his Contemporaries on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Annibale Carracci: on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

The Protestant Reformation

Caravaggio

Caravaggio, *Narcissus at the Source*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

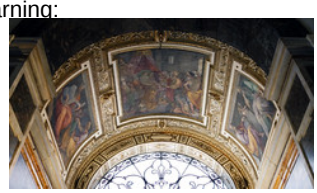
Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.2.38*: More Smarthistory images…*

Caravaggio, *Calling of St. Matthew*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



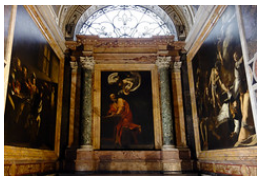


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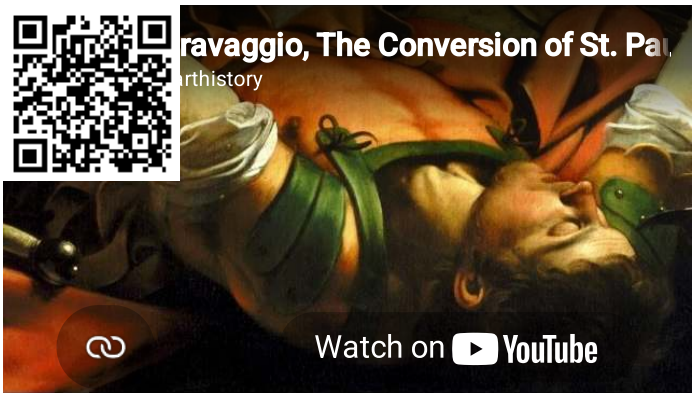
Figure 5.3.6.2.39*: More Smarthistory images…*

Caravaggio, *The Conversion of St. Paul* (or *The Conversion of Saul)*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video 5.3.6.2.13*: Caravaggio, The Conversion of St. Paul (also known as The Conversion of Saul), c. 1601, oil on canvas, 230 x 175 cm (Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome)*

Caravaggio, *Crucifixion of St. Peter*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.2.14*: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Crucifixion of St. Peter, 1601, oil on canvas (Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome)*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.2.40*: More Smarthistory images…*

Caravaggio, *The Supper at Emmaus*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.2.15*: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, The Supper at Emmaus, 1601, oil on canvas, 55 x 77" / 141 x 196.2 cm (National Gallery, London)*

Caravaggio, *Deposition* (or *Entombment*)

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Figure **5.3.6.2.41***: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Deposition (or Entombment), c. 1600-04, oil on canvas, 300 x 203 cm (Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City)*

A police record

With most artists we know about their lives and personalities from biographies that friends or contemporaries wrote about them. In the case of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, however, we know about his life primarily from police records! From these accounts, we learn that he had a bad temper and could be violent, and that he was frequently arrested and imprisoned for assault. He appears on the police records for mild offenses like carrying weapons without permission, as well as more serious ones where he is involved in violent fights. He was even questioned once because he "gave offense" to a woman and her daughter—one wonders what that could mean! Ultimately, he killed a man over a bet and spent the last few years of his life on the run from the police.

The subject

After the crucifixion, some of Christ's followers (Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene) along with his Mother, remove Christ's body from the cross and place it in the tomb.

The darkness (and the light)

One of the first things you might notice about Caravaggio's style, and we see it here in his painting of The Entombment, is the darkness. There's actually a word for it: tenebroso, which means dark or gloomy. Caravaggio painted this scene as though it was happening in the black of night with almost a spot-light effect on the figures (doesn't it look like a dark stage that has been illuminated with a spotlight?).

There are several things that are important about this. There is no background—only darkness. No architecture, no landscape, and so as a result, we focus on the figures who are all located in the foreground of the painting. The spotlight effect of the lighting is very dramatic, and so we have very stark contrasts of light and dark. In other words, where modeling is usually a slow movement from light to dark, here we have very dark shadows right next to areas of bright illumination. The effect is very dramatic.

Figure **5.3.6.2.42***: Detail, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Deposition (or Entombment), c. 1600-04, oil on canvas, 300 x 203 cm (Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City)*

The space

Everything is located very much in the foreground of the painting, very close to us in fact. Look at Christ's body—its so close we feel like we can touch it. And look at the ledge of the tomb, it is foreshortened and so it juts out into our space. And look at the elbow of the figure in orange carrying Christ's legs—it is foreshortened, too, and so it pops into our space. One of the main characteristics of Baroque art is the breaking down of the barrier between our space and the space of the painting, so we feel like we're part of it. Baroque artists use foreshortening frequently.

The composition

Baroque artists were also interested in movement. Here we see the moment when Christ is being lowered into his tomb. It's a process happening before our eyes—so we have a caught moment in time. We see that the figures form a diagonal line—another very common feature of Baroque art. In the High Renaissance, we saw compositions in the shape of a pyramid—a very stable shape. Here in Baroque art we see diagonals, or sometimes interlocking diagonals in the shape of an X.

Caravaggio organized the composition so that it looks like the body of Christ is being lowered right into our space, as though we were standing in the tomb. One of the most important goals of Baroque art is to involve the viewer.

Realism

Baroque art also tends to be very real—not only do the figures look "regular," but the artist is giving us a very real sense of this moment. The body of Christ looks truly dead, the figures struggle to hold the dead weight of his body and ease him down gently into his tomb.

Figure **5.3.6.2.43***: Christ's torso (detail), Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Deposition (Entombment), c. 1600-04, oil on canvas, 300 x 203 cm (Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City)*

The figures are all very ordinary looking, they are not idealized at all, like the figures of the High Renaissance. Look at the figure holding Christ's legs. He almost looks like a homeless person. Look at his feet and legs—they are so ordinary looking—you can almost imagine the bottom of his feet being dirty. Even Christ looks rather like an ordinary man. They are figures we can relate to more —unlike the perfect figures of the High Renaissance.

One of my favorite things about this painting is the figure who carries Christ's shoulders. He has his arm under Christ's torso and his fingers, as they reached around Christ, slipped into the wound that he received when he was on the cross (Christ was stabbed by a Roman soldier in the ribs). This may cause us to feel squeamish—but that's the idea. Baroque art wants to get to you in your body—so you really feel it. When you know something in your mind it is one thing—but when you experience it with your body it is really different. Baroque art often wants you to have an experience that's located in your body.

Additional resources:

This painting at the Vatican Museums

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

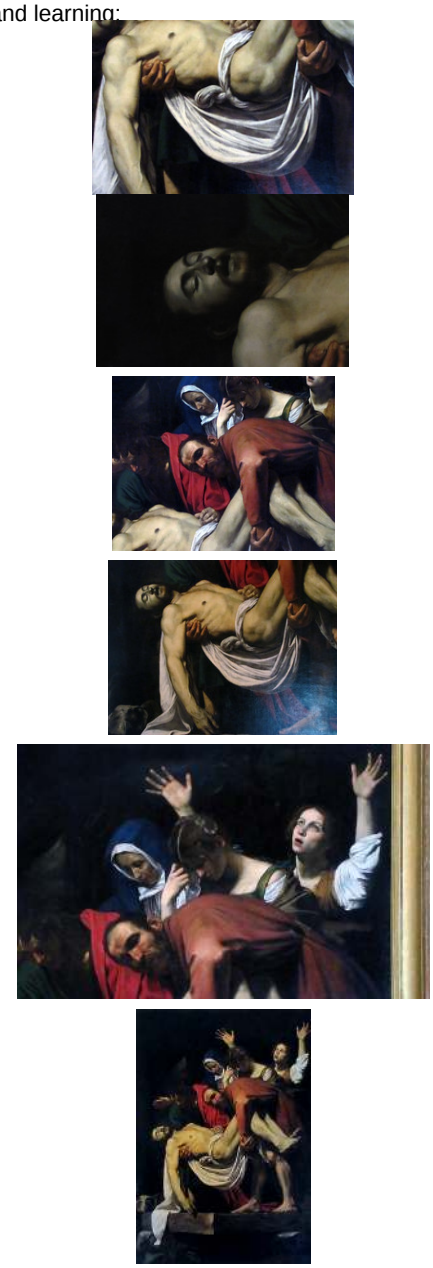
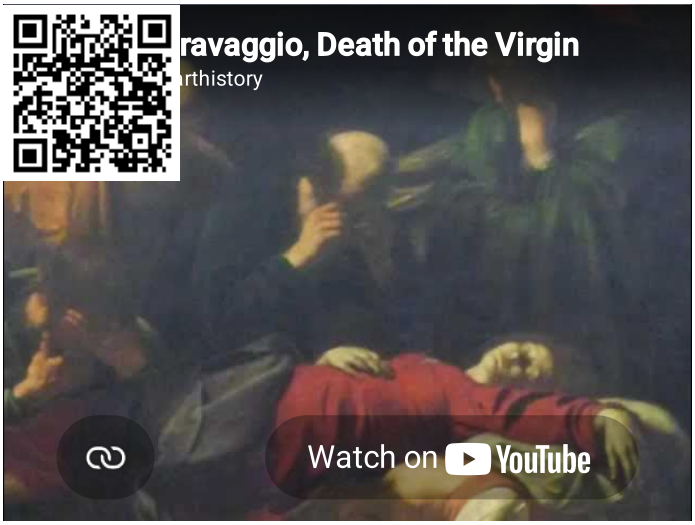


Figure 5.3.6.2.44*: More Smarthistory images…*

Caravaggio, *Death of the Virgin*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **5.3.6.2.16***: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Death of the Virgin, 1605-06, oil on canvas, 12' 10" x 8' / 369 x 245 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)*

This was painted for the altar of a family chapel in the church of Santa Maria della Scala del Trastevere, Rome.

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

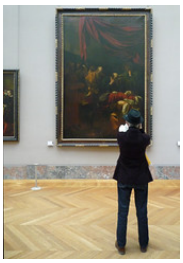


Figure 5.3.6.2.45*: More Smarthistory images…*

Caravaggio and Caravaggisti in 17th-century Europe

by OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS and DR. ERIN BENAY

Figure **5.3.6.2.46***: Caravaggio, Concert of Youths (or The Musicians), oil on canvas, c. 1595, 92.1 x 118.4 cm (Metropolitan Museum of Art)*

One of the most widely imitated artists

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio was famously sensitive when it came to matters of artistic originality: he threatened both the painter Guido Reni and artist and biographer Giovanni Baglione for copying his style. Despite his best efforts to protect his singular style, however, Caravaggio became one of the most widely imitated artists in the history of Western art.

After his untimely death in 1610, many Italian and non-Italian artists alike came to be considered his "followers," even though they had never met the artist or worked alongside him. Unlike the typical Renaissance master-follower relationship, these artists could claim no direct descent from the studio of Caravaggio (since he did not have one), and in some cases they had not even seen his paintings first-hand. Some artists imitated Caravaggio for only a brief phase of their careers – Baglione, Carlo Saraceni, and Guercino for example – while others remained committed to Caravaggio's stylistic model for the duration of their lives.

Nevertheless, these painters, often labeled Caravaggisti, emulated aspects of Caravaggio's style, technique, and choice of subjects and were responsible for the dissemination of Caravaggism across the European continent.

A distinctive style

These followers, whether Italian, Spanish, French, or Netherlandish, were especially attracted to Caravaggio's tenebrism—the use of dark shadows to obscure parts of the composition. Caravaggio's employment of tenebrism and chiaroscuro, the strong contrast of light and dark, lends his paintings a dramatic effect that has been likened to a spotlit stage.

By combining this theatrical dynamism with careful observation from life, Caravaggio achieved a gritty naturalism in both genre and religious scenes. His subdued palette, half-length figures, and magnification of the picture-plane to create intimate, relatable compositions contributed to Caravaggio's widespread appeal during the first three decades of the seventeenth century in Europe.

The unusual darkness and life-like realism of Caravaggio's paintings accounted in part for his popularity. On the other hand, the types of subject matter and revision of traditional iconographies popularized by Caravaggio had a significant impact on the development of international Caravaggism.

Figure **5.3.6.2.47***: Georges de La Tour, The Fortune Teller, probably 1630s, oil on canvas, 101.9 x 123.5 cm (Metropolitan Museum of Art)*

New themes: Rogues and revelers

During his early years in Rome, Caravaggio worked as an assistant in the illustrious workshop of the Cavaliere d'Arpino, but he also completed some of his best-known easel paintings (independent, portable canvases) and sold them on the open market. These paintings included depictions of themes that were uncommon in Roman art at the time and became ubiquitous with the help of the Caravaggisti.

These followers were particularly interested in Caravaggio's renderings of the seedy underbelly of Roman street-life in the form of The Cardsharps and The Fortune Teller, two of Caravaggio's most copied paintings, or in the artist's depiction of music-making as in the Musicians (above) and The Lute Player. Italian artists like Bartolomeo Manfredi, and Antiveduto Grammatica, French painters such as Valentin de Boulogne, Georges de La Tour, Nicolas Régnier, and Simon Vouet and Dutchmen Hendrick Ter Brugghen and Gerrit van Honthorst all replicated these subjects or similar themes in obvious admiration of Caravaggio's original paintings.

Figure **5.3.6.2.48***: Caravaggio, The Cardsharps, c. 1595, oil on canvas, 94.2 x 130.9 cm (Kimbell Art Museum, Texas)*

These followers were undoubtedly struck by Caravaggio's ability to enliven such subjects with a dignity not necessarily befitting the lowly actions depicted. In The Cardsharps, for instance, a fresh-faced boy is tricked by two professional cheats. The viewer is privy to the deception—the figure at the far right of the composition exposes the stolen cards behind his back—and we are brought close to the ruse and the precariously balanced backgammon board, teetering on the edge of an ornate, brocade-covered table. In

versions of the theme by Boulogne, Manfredi, or Nicholas Tournier, earthy scenes of revelry might replace cardplaying.

These sometimes-elaborate compositions do not seek to reproduce the quiet intimacy of Caravaggio's paintings, but they succeed in transposing the artist's tenebristic backgrounds and embolden the disenfranchised populations they depict. In Pietro Paolini's rendering of drinkers and revelers in his Allegory of the Senses, he superimposes the dark, somber tonality of Caravaggio's later religious paintings on the themes Caravaggio painted in his youth. The combination is striking: the levity of gambling or musical merriment is sobered by the reddish ground and stronger chiaroscuro common in the second half of Caravaggio's career, when he had long since left such subjects behind.

Figure 5.3.6.2.49*: Pietro Paolini, Allegory of the Five Senses, c. 1630, oil on canvas, 125.1 x 173 cm (Walters Art Museum, Baltimore)*

Selective adoptions

Since followers of Caravaggio had no formal indoctrination by the master himself (unlike painters in the school of the Carracci for instance), they were free to take from Caravaggio whatever aspects of the painter's style and method they were most interested in. Painters like Cecco del Caravaggio, Orazio Gentileschi and his daughter, Artemisia Gentileschi, or Grammatica, who knew Caravaggio personally, did have the benefit of direct contact with the source of their inspiration, but their work retains a character all its own.

The Gentileschi—both father and daughter—produced more lyrical paintings than did Caravaggio. Incorporating the cold blues, yellows, and violets that were notably absent from Caravaggio's palette, their paintings, particularly those of Orazio, often reflected local influences. Nevertheless—and crucial to the discussion of Caravaggism in Europe—their work reveals an absorption not only of Caravaggio's tenebrism, but of his approach to religious iconography.

Figure **5.3.6.2.50***: Orazio Gentileschi, Saint Francis in Ecstasy, c. 1607, oil on canvas, 126 x 98 cm (Prado, Madrid)*

In his depictions of St. Francis in Ecstasy (painted in 1607 and again 1612–13), Orazio favors the intimate saint-angel relationship first struck by Caravaggio in his Hartford St. Francis. In her gory Judith Beheading Holofernes, Artemisia Gentileschi further highlights the violent struggle of decapitation emphasized in Caravaggio's painting of 1599. In both cases, the mixed horror and conviction apparent in Judith's face humanizes her violent yet selfless act, all while blood drips mercilessly into the viewer's space.

A new kind of religious imagery

Other Caravaggisti were also influenced by Caravaggio's humanizing depictions of devotional subjects. In their representations of the Doubting Thomas, for instance, Ter Brugghen, Honthorst, and Mattias Stomer reproduced the extraordinary half-length figures in semi-circular groupings and visceral depiction of Thomas's finger in Christ's side from Caravaggio's c. 1602 painting for Benedetto Giustiniani. In fact, these Northern artists were likely responsible for the sudden surge in popularity of Doubting Thomas imagery in the Netherlandish city of Utrecht during the first half of the seventeenth century.

Similarly, Jusepe de Ribera is credited with the spread of the Caravaggesque style to Spain, where it in turn may have influenced the work of Diego Velázquez. Ribera's paintings of half-length saints, such as the St. Jerome and Sts. Peter and Paul, and large-scale devotional paintings such as the Lamentation over the Dead Christ reflect his years spent in Rome and Naples, where the art of Caravaggio fostered Ribera's tenebrism and intimate portrayal of hallowed religious subjects.

Figure **5.3.6.2.51***: Jusepe de Ribera, St Paul the Hermit, c. 1638, oil on canvas,132.7 x 106.7 cm (Walters Art Museum, Baltimore)*

In 1612, two years after Caravaggio's death, a young Ribera asked his Roman landlord for permission to cut a hole in his roof. Allowing natural light to illuminate models in Ribera's studio, this makeshift

skylight stands as unusual evidence of the lengths Caravaggisti might go to achieve the first-hand observation, dramatic lighting, and incisive realism that characterized this new approach to art.

This content was first developed for Oxford Art Online and appears courtesy of Oxford University Press.

Additional resources:

Caravaggio in the Google Art Project

Caravaggio and His Followers in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Biography of the artist from the National Gallery

Caravaggisti in Wikipedia

Guido Reni, *Aurora*

by DR. SHANNON PRITCHARD

Figure **5.3.6.2.52***: Guido Reni, Aurora, 1613-14, ceiling fresco (Casino dell'Aurora, Rome)*

Paintings on ceilings

The period known as the Baroque (the 1600s) produced many new and innovative pictorial modes of expression and none more so than the painted ceiling. Patrons and artists began turning their eyes upward, and came up with inventive ways of decorating ceilings with a variety of motifs—from the classical gods and goddesses to the apotheosis of saints and the glorification of family lineage. Who says paintings are just for walls!

Figure **5.3.6.2.53***: Aurora, goddess of the dawn, bringing forth a new day (detail), Guido Reni, Aurora, 1613-14, ceiling fresco (Casino dell'Aurora, Rome)*

A painting for a summer house

One of the most beautiful and elegant of these ceilings is Guido Reni's Aurora, painted in 1614 for the Roman Cardinal Scipione Borghese for the ceiling of his small summer house known as the Casino dell'Aurora. This casino (not the gambling sort) was part of the Cardinal's larger palace residence located on the Quirinal Hill in Rome. The fresco represents Aurora (left), goddess of the dawn, bringing forth a new day as she leads the way for Apollo (below), god of light (among many other things), who follows behind in his golden quadriga (a four-horse chariot). That Aurora is bringing the dawn is evident through the change in the sky we see between the two gods: a darkish silvery gray before Aurora that turns into a bright, golden light filled sky before Apollo.

Below the edges of the clouds is a distant landscape slowly being illuminated by the dawn, with small sailboats barely visible out on the sea beyond. Aurora's gauzy drapery flutters around her figure as she seems to be preparing to drop the sprays of flowers she carries in her hands onto the landscape below.

Figure **5.3.6.2.54***: Apollo in his chariot surrounded by female figures, The Hours (detail), Guido Reni, Aurora, 1613-14, ceiling fresco (Casino dell'Aurora, Rome)*

Apollo, clothed only in a light purple wrap, is enveloped in a warm, golden halo of light. Hovering between Aurora and Apollo is a torch bearing putto (a winged child similar in appearance to Cupid, but not Cupid), identified as Phosphorus, an ancient personification of the Morning Star (detail, below). Elegant female figures, known as Hours, dance alongside the chariot, representing the passage of time, with their diaphanous draperies blown gently by the wind.

The figures are represented in an ideal manner as their physiognomies and physiques are flawless and perfect in their beauty. They are timeless and ageless, never to be marred by old age and decrepitude. Moreover, Reni's soft pastel color palette lends an idyllic, mythic quality to the scene.

Figure **5.3.6.2.55***: Borghese Dancers, c. 2nd- 3rd centuries, marble, 72 x 188 cm (Louvre)*

Figure **5.3.6.2.56***: Torch-bearing putto (detail), Guido Reni, Aurora, 1613-14, ceiling fresco (Casino dell'Aurora, Rome)*

Baroque classicism

As the Aurora is an exemplar of Baroque classicism, a style within the Baroque period that purposefully recalls art from ancient Greece and Rome, it is not surprising to find that Reni's fresco makes many references to actual works of art from Classical Antiquity. For example, the figures of the Hours bear close resemblance to the female figures in a Roman relief known today as the Borghese Dancers (above), which was originally part of Cardinal Borghese's collection of antiquities. Similarly, the figure of Phosphorus may have been influenced by a tondo (circular form) on the east side of the ancient Roman Arch of Constantine, which represents Sol, the sun god, similarly being led by a torch bearing putto (below).

Figure **5.3.6.2.57***: Tondo with Sun God, c. 315 C.E., marble frieze (Arch of Constantine, Rome)*

Quadro riportato—painting taken elsewhere

Let us now consider the experience of viewing the Aurora in the Casino dell'Aurora. The fresco is a singular scene, isolated in the center of the ceiling, surrounded by a physical (not simply painted) frame of molded stucco that is decorated with gold leaf (a process known as gilding). Reni's use of a frame around his fresco is a pictorial device known as quadro riportato, or "painting taken elsewhere." The idea was to the trick the viewer into thinking that an easel painting, a framed painting we would normally expect to find hanging on a wall, had actually been placed on the ceiling (keep in mind that Aurora is a fresco, painted right on the ceiling).

Figure **5.3.6.2.58***: Annibale Carracci, Farnese Gallery Ceiling, 1597-1608, fresco (Palazzo Farnese, Rome)*

Reni was not the first to do this, as there was already another famous ceiling in Rome that also used quadro riportato—the Farnese Gallery Ceiling painted by Annibale Carracci (above). In the case of the Farnese ceiling, however, the frames are not physical frames, but were painted illusions—a technique

known as trompe l'oeil (literally to "trick the eye"). Thus, in comparison, we might say that Reni's use of an actual frame was a very direct interpretation of quadro riportato!

Figure **5.3.6.2.59***: Guercino, Aurora, c. 1621, fresco (Casino di Villa Boncompagni Ludovisi, Rome)*

Illusionism

In addition to the "framing" of paintings on ceilings, artists used another illusionistic technique of visually breaking the ceiling so the image appears to be in the sky above, not inside the room. An example of this is another painting with the subject of Aurora, this one by the artist Guercino (above). Painted just a few years after Reni's Aurora, Guercino extended the architecture of the room onto the vaulted ceiling and then "opened" it up so the viewer would see Aurora and her entourage racing by in the sky above. The painted illusionistic architecture, known as quadrattura, was also a popular illusionistic pictorial device used in several other Roman ceilings in the seventeenth century (including Pozzo's Glorification of Saint Ignatius—a ceiling fresco in the church of Sant'Ignazio in Rome).

Figure **5.3.6.2.60***: Giorgio Vasanzio and Carlo Maderno, Casino dell'Aurora Pallavicini, the façade, 1611–16 (Rome)*

The classical past

In the end, Guido Reni's fresco, classicizing in both style and subject, with its golden stucco frame, was a perfect choice for the Casino dell'Aurora. Set in the gardens of Cardinal Borghese's estate, the summer house was specifically intended to allude to, if not actually recreate, elements of the Classical past. Its façade was (and still is) decorated with ancient Roman sarcophagi and reliefs further enhancing its intended atmosphere. Perhaps we can imagine Cardinal Borghese looking up at Aurora bringing in the new day as he escaped the hot Roman summer sun in his own personal version of arcadia.

Additional resources:

Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, Rome

Short biography of the artist from the Getty Museum

Reni at The National Gallery

Guido Reni on the Google Art Project

Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*

by DR. ESPERANÇA CAMARA

Video **5.3.6.2.17***: Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Slaying Holofernes, 1620-21, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence). Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris*

> ***Lord God, to whom all strength belongs, prosper what my hands are now to do for the greater glory of Jerusalem; for now is the time to recover your heritage and to further my plans to crush the enemies arrayed against us.***
>
> ***— Judith's prayer before beheading Holofernes (Judith 13:4-5)***

Figure **5.3.6.2.61***: Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Slaying Holofernes, 1620-21, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy)*

The story of Judith

Rivulets of blood run down the white sheets, as Judith, a pious young widow from the Jewish city of Bethulia, beheads Holofernes, general of the Assyrian army that had besieged her city. Moved by the

plight of her people and filled with trust in God, Judith took matters into her own hands. She coiffed her hair, donned her finest garments and entered the enemy camp under the pretense of bringing Holofernes information that would ensure his victory. Struck by her beauty, he invited her to dine, planning later to seduce her. As the biblical text recounts, "Holofernes was so enchanted with her that he drank far more wine than he had drunk on any other day in his life" (Judith 12:20). Judith saw her opportunity; with a prayer on her lips and a sword in her hand, she saved her people from destruction.

The story of Judith and Holofernes is recounted in the Book of Judith, a 2nd century text deemed apocryphal by the Jewish and Protestant traditions, but included in Catholic editions of the Bible. Like the story of David and Goliath, it was a popular subject of art in the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

Artemisia and Caravaggio

This particular painting, executed by Artemisia Gentileschi in Florence c. 1620 and now in the Uffizi, is one of the bloodiest and most vivid depictions of the scene, surpassing the version by Caravaggio, arch-realist of Baroque Rome, in its immediacy and shocking realism. Artemisia was certainly familiar with Caravaggio's painting of the subject; her father Orazio, who was responsible for her artistic training, was Caravaggio's friend and artistic follower. Caravaggio's painting inspired, and perhaps even challenged, the young Artemisia.

A comparison between the two reveals not only her debt to the older artist, but also a series of pointed modifications that heighten the intensity of the physical struggle, the quantity of blood spilled, and the physical and psychological strength of Judith and her maidservant, Abra. In Artemisia's painting (below, right) the bloody sheets are in the immediate foreground, close to the viewer's space. Holofernes's muscular body projects dynamically into the depicted space as bold areas of light and dark draw attention to his powerful limbs.

Figure **5.3.6.2.62***: Left: Caravaggio, Judith beheading Holofernes, 1598-99, oil on canvas, 145 x 195 cm (Palazzo Barberini, Rome); and right: Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith and Holofernes, 1620-21, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)*

And, most importantly, whereas Caravaggio (above, left) pairs his delicate Judith with a haggard attendant who merely looks on, her eyes wide with disbelief, Artemisia depicts two strong, young women working in unison, their sleeves rolled up, their gazes focused, their grips firm. Caravaggio's Judith gracefully recoils from her gruesome task; Artemisia's Judith does not flinch. Instead, she braces herself on the bed, as she presses Holofernes's head down with one hand and pulls a large sword through his neck with the other. The creases at her wrists clearly show the physical strength required. Holofernes struggles in vain, the thrust of his arms countered by the more forceful movement of Abra, Judith's accomplice in this grisly act.

A composition perfected

The Uffizi Judith Slaying Holofernes is Artemisia's second telling of this narrative. The first, executed in Rome c. 1611-12 and now in the Capodimonte Museum in Naples (below, left), introduced the dynamic composition centered on the thrust and counter thrust of extended limbs. Artemisia refined the composition in the second (Uffizi) version. Small but significant adjustments reveal her growth in technical skill, her awareness of the local Florentine taste for sumptuous fabrics, and her thoughtful consideration of the expressive potential of each detail. Awkward passages of anatomy and proportion (such as Holofernes' head) have been corrected, the colors and textures of the fabrics are now richer (notice the red velvet draped over Holofernes and the golden damask of Artemisia's Judith's dress), and Judith's hair is more elaborately curled, in keeping with the biblical text's emphasis on her self-adornment.

Figure 5.3.6.2.64*: Left: Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith beheading Holofernes, 1611-12, oil on canvas, 159 x 126 cm (Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples); and right: Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith and Holofernes, 1620-21, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)*

Most striking, however, is the portrayal of the blood. The Capodimonte version (above, left) omits the blood that violently spurts from the neck of Holofernes. Like Caravaggio's, the Uffizi painting places particular emphasis on this detail, and does so with even greater realism.

Figure **5.3.6.2.65***: Beheading (detail), Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Slaying Holofernes, 1620-21, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)*

Framed by Judith's arms, jets of blood now arc and descend in droplets that bespeckle her arms and dress. The pattern described by the spurting blood suggests Artemisia may have been familiar with her friend Galileo Galilei's research on parabolic trajectories. Artemisia also modified the sword in the Uffizi version. The sword, here longer and held more vertically, prominently marks the painting's central axis which extends from Abra's arm to the blood that runs down the edge of the bed. This powerful visual axis reinforces the strength of the women and the violence of the deed. It is no accident that Judith's sword-clenching fist is at the very center of the composition; imbued with divine strength, this widow's hand is now the hand of God protecting the Israelites from their enemies.

Figure **5.3.6.2.66***: Bracelet (detail), Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Slaying Holofernes, 1620-21, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)*

Judith—Artemisia's alter ego?

Artemisia's unique portrayal of Judith and Abra has prompted scholars to argue that Artemisia identified with the protagonist of the story in a way her male counterparts did not. This association stems not only from their shared gender, but also from Artemisia's own traumatic experience. Artemisia was raped at the age of 17 by the artist Agostino Tassi, a close friend of her father. When Tassi failed to marry her, as the social dictates of the time demanded, her father sought recourse in court. During the trial, Artemisia describes her struggle against Tassi and her attempt to attack him with a knife. She also recalls the sense of betrayal she felt when she realized her female chaperone had colluded with Tassi and arranged to leave the two alone.

The first version of Judith Slaying Holofernes dates to this difficult period in the artist's life. The memory of this event likely colored Artemisia's engagement with the story of Judith. Especially significant is Artemisia's portrayal of Abra as youthful, strong and fully engaged in the assisting Judith, in striking contrast to the chaperone who purposefully abandoned Artemisia in her hour of need. In the Uffizi

painting Artemisia adds a small detail that supports her identification with Judith. One of the cameos on Judith's bracelet appears to depict Artemis, the ancient goddess of both chastity and the hunt.

Judith—A symbol of the Church Militant

While the story of Judith likely held personal significance for Artemisia, it is important to note its broader cultural valence. The story of Judith was especially popular in the Baroque period, not only in the visual arts but also in literature, theater, and music. An example of the victory of virtue over vice, of God's protection of his chosen people from their enemies, Judith was also seen as an Old Testament antetype of the Virgin Mary and, by extension, as a symbol of the Church. This association partly explains the increase in portrayals of Judith in late 16th through the 17th centuries, when the Catholic Church was engaged in conflicts with both the Protestants and the Ottoman Turks, whose eastern origins facilitated their identification with Holofernes. Artemisia and her contemporaries capitalized on this popularity, frequently portraying not only the moment of the beheading itself, but also the moment right after it, when Judith and her maidservant escape from the enemy camp. The dramatic potential of the story made it as ideal subject for the powerful theatricality of Baroque art.

Figure **5.3.6.2.67***: Donatello, Judith and Holofernes, 1460, bronze, 236 cm (Palazzo Vecchio, Florence)*

A horrifying masterpiece

The Uffizi Judith was likely either commissioned by or gifted to the Medici, Florence's ruling family, the same family that commissioned Donatello's famous bronze sculpture of Judith and Holofernes in the late 15th century (left).

Artemisia Gentileschi was clearly proud of the Uffizi Judith Slaying Holofernes, signing it in the lower right corner. In it she demonstrated her mastery of the language of Baroque realism, exploiting its emphasis on proximity to the picture plane, strong chiaroscuro, and realistic details to create an especially potent depiction of the story's dramatic climax.

The bold immediacy of this finely-tuned composition succeeded all too well, for in the late 18th century, disgusted by the horror of the scene, the Medici duchess banished this masterpiece to a dark corner of the Uffizi, where it remained until the late twentieth century. To this day, it strikes its viewers with both revulsion and awe at the skill of the artist who so convincingly transformed paint into blood.

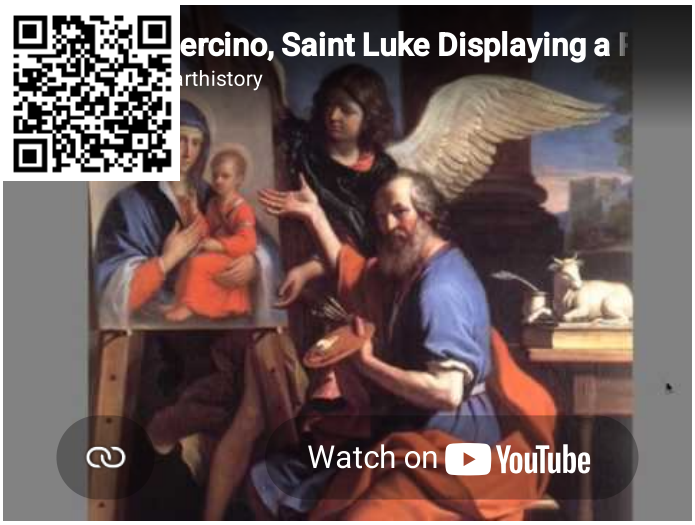
Additional resources:

Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes (Uffizi) at the Google Art Project

Violence and Virtue: Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes (from the Art Institute of Chicago)

Guercino, *St. Luke Displaying a Painting of the Virgin*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. DAVID DROGIN



Jasmine Keane
Sep 27, 2020, 5:39 PM

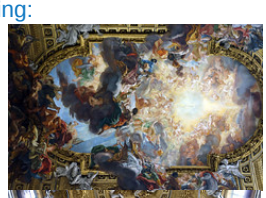
*Cite this page as: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. David Drogin, "Guercino, St. Luke Displaying a Painting of the Virgin," in Smarthistory, November 13, 2015, accessed September 27, 2020, **https://smarthistory.org/guercino-st-luke-displaying-a-painting-of-the-virgin/**.*

Il Gesù, Rome

by FRANK DABELL, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.2.19: Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola and Giacomo della Porta, Church of Il Gesù, Rome (consecrated 1584, ceiling fresco, The Triumph of the Name of Jesus, by il Baciccio, also known as Giovanni Battista Gaulli, 1672-1685). This video was produced in cooperation with our partners at Context Travel.

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/376736

Figure 5.3.6.2.68*: More Smarthistory images…*

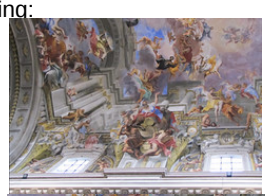
Andrea Pozzo

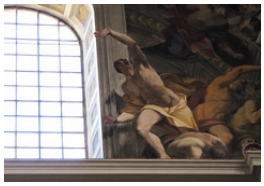
Andrea Pozzo, *Glorification of Saint Ignatius*

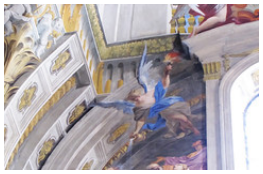
by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

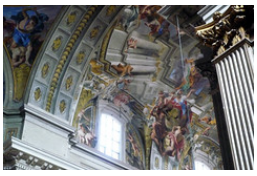
Video 5.3.6.2.20*: Fra Andrea Pozzo, Glorification of Saint Ignatius, ceiling fresco in the nave of Sant'Ignazio, Rome, 1691-94*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:









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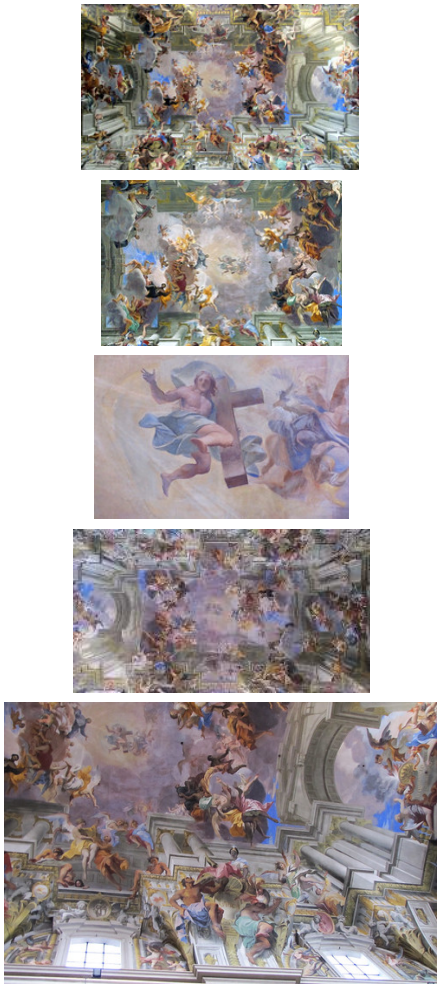


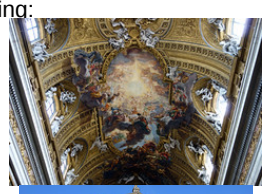
Figure **5.3.6.2.69***: More Smarthistory images…*

Andrea Pozzo, St. Ignatius Chapel, Il Gesù, Rome

by FRANK DABELL, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video **5.3.6.2.21***: Andrea Pozzo, Saint Ignatius Chapel in the left transept of the church, Il Gesù, Rome (commissioned in 1695). Many artists contributed, including Alessandro Algardi, Pierre Legros, Bernardino Ludovisi, Il Lorenzone and Jean-Baptiste Théodon. Materials include bronze, gold, silver, and many semiprecious stones, most notably lapis lazuli. This video was produced in cooperation with our partners at Context Travel.*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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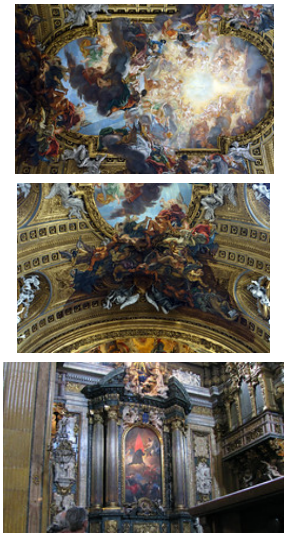


Figure 5.3.6.2.70*: More Smarthistory images…*

Pierre Le Gros the Younger, *Stanislas Kostka on His Deathbed*

by FRANK DABELL, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.2.22*: Pierre Le Gros the Younger, Stanislas Kostka on His Deathbed, 1703, upstairs at Bernini's Sant'Andrea al Quirinale. Frank Dabell appears in this video courtesy of Context Travel.*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure **5.3.6.2.71***: More Smarthistory images…*

Baroque art in Flanders

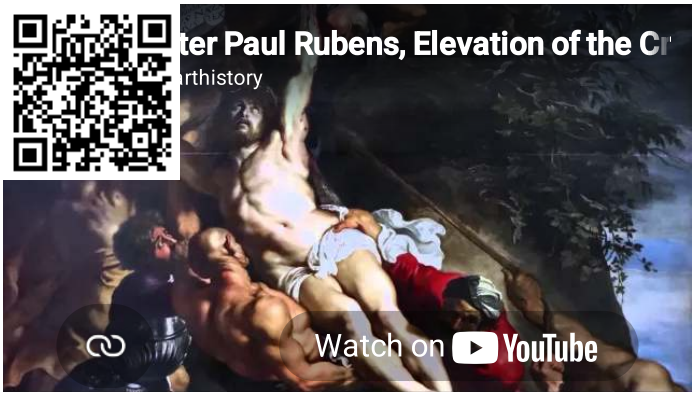
Rubens—a painter to Europe's most wealthy and powerful—is the star.

1600 - 1700

Peter Paul Rubens

Peter Paul Rubens, *Elevation of the Cross*

by DR. SHANNON PRITCHARD



Video **5.3.6.2.22***: Peter Paul Rubens, Elevation of the Cross, from Saint Walburga, 1610, oil on wood, center panel: 15' 1-7/8" x 11' 1-1/2" (now in Antwerp Cathedral)*

Figure **5.3.6.2.72***: Peter Paul Rubens, Elevation of the Cross, from Saint Walburga, 1610, oil on wood, center panel: 15 feet 1-7/8 inches x 11 feet 1-1/2 inches (now in Antwerp Cathedral)*

An enormous triptych

The Elevation of the Cross altarpiece is a masterpiece of Baroque painting by the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens. The work was originally installed on the high altar of the Church of St. Walburga in Antwerp (since destroyed), and is now located in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp.

This triptych (a painting—usually an altarpiece—comprised of two outer "wings" and a central panel) is impressive in its size, measuring 15 feet in height and 21 feet wide when open. The original frame, unfortunately lost, would have made the painting even more impressive in size! Due to its very size, Rubens actually painted it on-site behind a curtain. Four saints associated with the church of St. Walburga can be found on the exterior of the wings (visible when the altarpiece is closed): Saints Amandus and Walburga on the left and Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Eligius on the right.

Baroque dynamism

Rubens was one of the most prolific and sought after painters of the Baroque period, generally (although not always) defined in painting and sculpture by the representation of action and emotion in ways meant to inspire the Catholic faithful (this triptych was painted less than a century after Martin Luther's challenge to the authority of the Catholic Church).

In the central panel, we see the dramatic moment when the cross of Christ's crucifixion is being raised to its upright position. Rubens created a strong diagonal emphasis by placing the base of the cross at the far lower right of the composition and the top of the cross in the upper left—making Christ's body the focal point. This strong diagonal reinforces the notion that this is an event unfolding before the viewer, as the men struggle to lift the weight of their burden.

Figures raising the cross (detail), Peter Paul Rubens, Elevation of the Cross, from Saint Walburga, 1610, oil on wood, center panel: 15 feet 1-7/8 inches x 11 feet 1-1/2 inches (now in Antwerp Cathedral)

Adding to this dynamic tension is the visual sensation that the two men in the lower right are about to burst into the viewer's space as they work to pull the cross upward (see image above). The viewer is caught in a moment of anxiety, waiting for the action to be complete.

In the left panel (below, left) are St. John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary, who, standing in the shadow of the rocky outcrop above them, look to their left at what unfolds before their eyes. Shown in quiet resignation and grief over the fate of Christ, the group of women below is a stark contrast of overwrought emotion. Here too Rubens uses a diagonal along the line of the women from the lower right to the mid-left, setting John and Mary apart, allowing the viewer to focus on their reaction.

Figure **5.3.6.2.75***: Side panels, Peter Paul Rubens, Elevation of the Cross, from Saint Walburga, 1610, oil on wood, center panel: 15 feet 1-7/8 inches x 11 feet 1-1/2 inches (now in Antwerp Cathedral)*

The right panel (above, right) continues the narrative event as Roman soldiers prepare the two thieves for their fate as they will be crucified alongside Christ. One thief—already being nailed to the cross on the ground—is foreshortened back into space, while the other—just behind him with his hands bound—is being forcefully led away by his hair. The diagonal Rubens created here runs the opposite direction as that in the left panel, moving from the lower left to the upper right along the line created by the leg and neck of the gray horse. These opposing diagonals further create tension across the composition, heightening the viewer's sense of drama and chaotic action.

A unified narrative and biblical accuracy

In addition to the powerful figural composition, the three panels are visually unified through the landscape and sky. The left and central panels share a rocky outcropping covered with oak trees and vines (both of which have Christological significance). Notice that St. John, the Virgin Mary and the Roman soldiers just to the left of the cross are standing on the same ground-line.

Figure **5.3.6.2.74***: Peter Paul Rubens, Elevation of the Cross, from Saint Walburga, 1610, oil on wood, center panel: 15 feet 1-7/8 inches x 11 feet 1-1/2 inches (now in Antwerp Cathedral)*

The unification of the central and right panels is accomplished through the sky, which begins to darken in the central panel, moving to the impending eclipse of the sun on the right, an event recounted in the Gospel of Matthew (27:45): "From noon on, darkness came over the whole land…." This attention to biblical accuracy is also seen in the text on the scroll at the top of the cross, which reads: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," written in Greek, Latin, and Aramaic, as told in the Gospel of John (19:19-21). In both cases, Rubens was adhering to one of the primary mandates of the Council of Trent (1545-63), which called for historical accuracy in the representation of sacred events (at the Council of Trent, church authorities essentially decided theological questions raised by Martin Luther and the Protestants, the period following the Council is known as the Counter-Reformation—the Catholic Church's response to Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation).

Figure **5.3.6.2.75***: Caravaggio, Crucifixion of St. Peter, oil on canvas, 1601 (Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome)*

The Elevation of the Cross altarpiece was the first commission Rubens received after returning to Antwerp from his Italian sojourn from 1600 to 1608/9 where he worked in the cities of Mantua, Genoa, and Rome.

Given his extended time in Italy, it is not surprising that we see a number of Italian influences in this work. The richness of the coloration (notice the blues and reds throughout the composition) and Rubens' painterly technique recalls that of the Venetian master Titian, while the dramatic contrasts of light and dark bring to mind Caravaggio's tenebrism (darkness) in his Roman compositions, such as the Crucifixion of St. Peter (left). And indeed, we can clearly see Rubens' interest in his Italian counterpart in the sense of physical exertion, the use of foreshortening—where figures push past the boundaries of the picture plane into the space of the viewer, and in the use of the diagonal.

In terms of the muscularity and physicality of Ruben's male figures, a clear connection can be drawn to Michelangelo's nude males (the ignudi) on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. In addition to looking at the works of past and contemporary masters, we know Rubens was also interested in the study of classical antiquity (ancient Greece and Rome). In fact, the figure of Christ seems to have been based on one of the most famous works of antiquity, the Laocoön, which ***Rubens made drawings*** *of during his time in Rome.*

Figure **5.3.6.2.75***: Christ (detail), Peter Paul Rubens, Elevation of the Cross, from Saint Walburga, 1610, oil on wood, center panel: 15 feet 1-7/8 inches x 11 feet 1-1/2 inches (now in Antwerp Cathedral)*

Elevation: altarpiece and high altar

When the Elevation of the Cross altarpiece was placed on the high altar, there was a specific connection being forged between the subject of the painting and the function of the altar. The act of raising an object up is known in Latin as elevatio. During the Mass performed by the priest at the high altar, there is a moment when the Eucharistic wafer (miraculously transformed into the body of Christ) is elevated. Thus, when the congregation faced the high altar, they not only saw the elevatio of Christ's cross but the elevation of the wafer, and thus the altarpiece and the ritual of the mass performed in front of it visually reinforced the message of Christ's sacrifice on behalf of mankind.

Additional resources:

Photographs of the triptych

A study for the figure of Christ in the Harvard Art Museums

Biography of the artist from The National Gallery

Rubens on the Google Art Project

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/376736

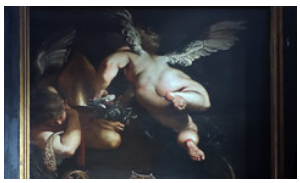


Figure **5.3.6.2.76***: More Smarthistory images…*

Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video **5.3.6.2.23***: Peter Paul Rubens, The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus, 1617-18, oil on canvas, 224 x 210.5 cm (Alte Pinakothek, Munich)*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

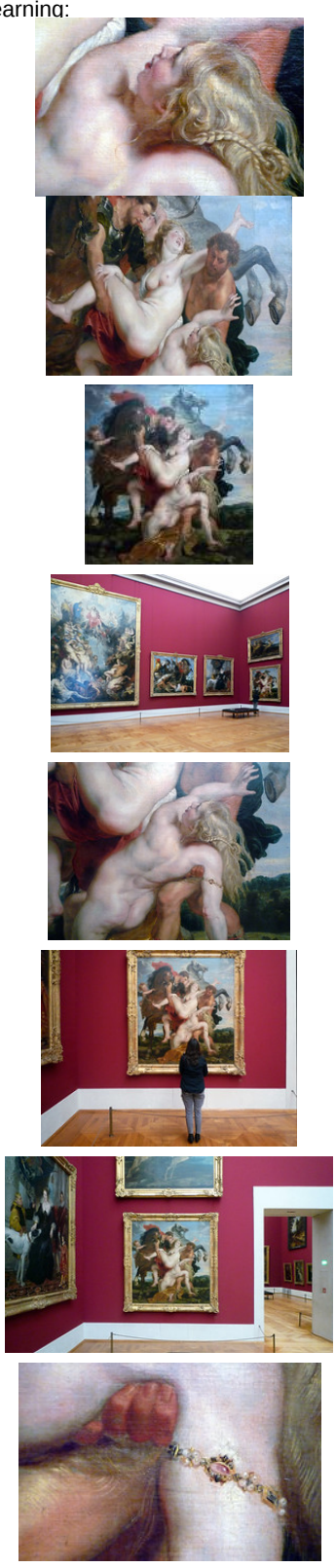


Figure **5.3.6.2.77***: More Smarthistory images…*

Peter Paul Rubens, *The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de' Medici*

by DR. ESPERANÇA CAMARA

Video 5.3.6.2.24*: Peter Paul Rubens, The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de' Medici, c. 1622-1625, oil on canvas, 394 x 295 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)*

Figure 5.3.6.2.78*: Peter Paul Rubens, The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de' Medici, c. 1622–1625, oil on canvas, 394 x 295 cm (Musée du Louvre)*

Cupid's arrow hits its mark

A young woman in a bejeweled dress with a stiff lace collar gazes confidently out of a simply-framed, bust-length portrait placed at the very center of a large canvas. Her name is Marie de' Medici, daughter of the Grandduke of Tuscany.

The ancient gods of marriage and love—Hymen and Amor (Cupid), to the left and right, respectively—hover in midair as they present this portrait to Henry IV, the king of France. Hymen holds in his left hand a flaming torch, symbolizing the ardor of love, while Cupid extols the virtues of the Medici princess. Cupid's arrow has hit its mark; the king is smitten. He gazes up in gratitude, his left hand extended as he expresses his delight in his bride-to-be.

From the heavens above, Jupiter and Juno, the king and queen of the Olympian gods, look down with approval, their own hands touching in a tender gesture of marital union. Jupiter's fierce eagle, seen in the top left corner, looks away from the couple and clenches its lightening bolts in its talons. In contrast, Juno's tamed peacock looks at the divine couple, while his mate cranes her neck to look at the portrait. A pink silk ribbon binds them together. The peahen perches on Juno's chariot, directly above a golden relief of Cupid who balances a yoke-shaped garland (a symbol of marriage) on his shoulders as he playfully dances on the wings of a proud eagle. The message is clear: even the king of the gods can be subdued by love. Following Jupiter's lead, Henry must also turn his attention to marriage.

Figure **5.3.6.2.79***: Jupiter and Juno (detail), Peter Paul Rubens, The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de' Medici, c. 1622–1625, oil on canvas, 394 x 295 cm (Musée du Louvre)*

However, this match is about politics as well as love. Behind Henry stands the personification of France, wearing a blue silk garment embroidered with gold fleur-de-lys (the coat of arms of the French monarchy) and an elaborate plumed helmet encircled by a gold crown. She gently touches Henry's shoulder and whispers in his ear, assuring him that a match with the Medici princess is indeed good for the kingdom. France urges Henry to turn away from the field of battle, the aftermath of which is visible in the burning town in the background, and attend to hearth and home, for domestic matters are no less important to the survival of the monarchy than military exploits. Henry obliges; his helmet and shield—now the playthings of two tender cherubs—lie at his feet.

Figure **5.3.6.2.80***: View of the Marie de Medici cycle by Peter Paul Rubens in the Louvre (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-SA 2.0)*

This canvas is the sixth in a series of twenty-four paintings on the life of Marie de' Medici commissioned by the queen herself from Peter Paul Rubens in 1622 to adorn one of the two galleries in the Luxembourg Palace, her newly-built home in Paris. In both scale and subject matter, this cycle is unprecedented. Not only is it unique in its dedication to the major life events of a queen, but it also includes events that were both quite recent and quite humiliating. After Henry was assassinated in 1610, Marie—acting as regent for their young son, Louis XIII—ruled the kingdom of France for seven years. The position suited her; but many French nobles begrudged her power. Divisions in the court, including tensions with her own son, led to Marie's exile from the Paris in 1617. The commission of the biographical cycle marked her reconciliation with Louis and her return to the capital city in 1620. It vindicated her reign as the queen of France.

Figure **5.3.6.2.81***: Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de' Medici (at left), Marie de Medici cycle in the Louvre*

The cycle idealizes and allegorizes Marie's life in light of the peace and prosperity she brought to the kingdom, not through military victories but through wisdom, devotion to her husband and her adopted country, and strategic marriage alliances—her own as well as the ones she brokered for her children. This, at least, is the message she wished to convey and she worked closely with her advisors and Rubens to ensure her story was told as she saw fit.

The Presentation of the Portrait forms part of this agenda; it is an idealized portrayal of the conclusion in April of 1600 of marriage negotiations that were two years in the making. The painting presents Henry's bethrothal to Marie de Medici as a union ordained by the gods, counseled by France, and inspired by Marie's beauty and virtues. In reality, the merits of the union were extolled not by a soft-haired, fleshy Cupid but by the alliance's French and Italian proponents, one of whom reported that the portrait presented by the Florentine negotiators "pleased His Majesty exceedingly." Henry, for his part, was distracted from the negotiations by his new mistress, whom he had promised to marry. Nevertheless, he recognized the political and financial necessity of the Medici marriage. When his advisor announced the finalization of the marriage contract, Henry exclaimed: "By God, let it be; there is nothing to be done about it, because for the good of my kingdom and my peoples, you say that I must be married, so I simply must be."

Figure **5.3.6.2.82***: Cupid and King Henry discussing the portrait of Marie de Medici (detail), Peter Paul Rubens, The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de' Medici, c. 1622-1625, oil on canvas, 394 x 295 cm (Musée du Louvre)*

For Henry, a Protestant who had converted to Catholicism upon ascending to the throne in 1593, a Catholic wife would assuage any concerns about his loyalty to the Catholic Church in France. Additionally, Marie's hefty dowry eased Henry's large debt to the Medici, major financial backers of his military activities. And, perhaps most importantly, Henry was nearing the age of 50 and had yet to father an heir, putting France's future stability in danger. A fruitful union with Marie was key to this stability. In this matter, the 27-year old Marie did not disappoint, giving birth to a son one year after the wedding, and five additional children, four of whom survived to adulthood. Rubens asserts Marie's successful role

as wife and mother by establishing a dominant vertical axis through the center of the composition from Juno, with her exposed, full breasts, through Marie's portrait to the chubby cherub directly below. Of all of the figures in the painting, Marie and the cherub are the only ones who look out at the viewer, pointedly reaffirming the centrality of Marie de' Medici and of her royal progeny to the future of France.

The theme of peace, which runs throughout the cycle, was indeed furthered not only in France but in Europe by the marriage alliances brokered by Marie for her children: Louis XIII married a daughter of the Spanish king, her daughter Elisabeth married the heir to the Spanish throne (the future King Philip IV), and her daughter Henrietta married Charles I of England.

Figure **5.3.6.2.83***: Luxembourg Palace (garden façade), Paris (France)*

The pictorial cycle was installed in the Luxembourg Palace by 1625, in time for the Henrietta's wedding festivities, thus enabling Marie to showcase her accomplishments to her many guests. Marie's truce with her son Louis however was short lived and she died in exile in 1631. Despite the challenges of her life as she struggled to regain the power and influence she once had, Marie de' Medici lived to hear herself proclaimed mother of three sovereigns, certainly an impressive legacy for the orphaned daughter of the Grandduke of Tuscany.

Additional resources:

Key moment in the Medici cycle from the Louvre

Sarah R. Cohen, "Rubens's France: Gender and Personification in the Marie de Médicis Cycle," The Art Bulletin, Vol. 85, No. 3 (Sept 2003), p. 490-522.

The paintings of Rubens and Van Dyck on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

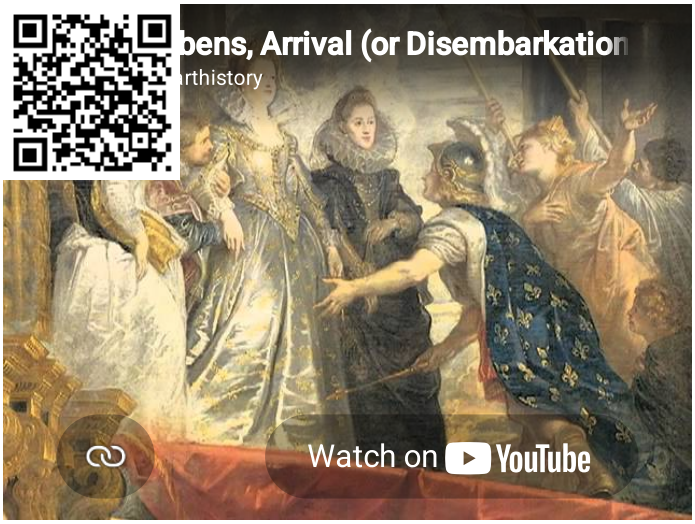
Smarthistory images of Rubens's work

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.2.84*: More Smarthistory images…*

Peter Paul Rubens, *Arrival (or Disembarkation) of Marie de Medici at Marseilles*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **5.3.6.2.25***: Peter Paul Rubens, Arrival (or Disembarkation) of Marie de Medici at Marseilles, 1621-25, oil on canvas, 394 x 295 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)*

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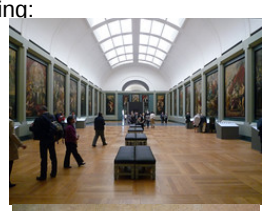

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Figure 5.3.6.2.85*: More Smarthistory images…*

Peter Paul Rubens, *The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency of Marie de' Médici*

by MATTHEW WILSON

Figure 5.3.6.2.86*: Peter Paul Rubens, The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency of Marie de' Médici, c. 1622–25, oil on canvas, 394 x 727 cm (**Musée du Louvre**, Paris)*

This is a painting about the events of a single day: May 14th, 1610. That date witnessed two seismic incidents in French history: a cold-blooded political assassination, and the investiture of one of the seventeenth century's most powerful women. Rubens's vast canvas turns the day's news into an epic Baroque dramatization, and a persuasive piece of propaganda.

Death and destiny

*On that fateful May morning in 1610, King Henry IV of France was murdered in broad daylight on the streets of Paris by a Catholic zealot named François Ravaillac. France was plunged into a dilemma of succession: Henry's eldest son Louis was too young to take the throne, and his wife Marie de' Medici couldn't rule as Queen, since French **Salic Law** forbade women to be monarchs. The solution was decided*

within just two hours of the assassination: Marie was appointed regent and therefore de facto ruler of France. This positioned her in a seat of power previously only ever held by men.

*Twelve years after these momentous affairs, Marie commissioned one of Europe's most renowned artists, **Peter Paul Rubens**, to paint a series of 24 paintings about her life (today we refer to these as the Medici Cycle). These were designed to decorate the Luxembourg Palace—her enormous new residence in Paris. The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency of Marie de' Médici is the middle image in the cycle. It is more than twice the width of the other paintings and it concerns the events of May 14th, 1610. But there's no attempt to show either the murder or Marie's royal promotion realistically. Instead the artist has translated them into a large-scale drama, radically simplifying and the events and turning them into a grand spectacle.*

*Figure 5.3.6.2.87: Salomon de Brosse, Luxembourg Palace, 1615–1645 (photo: **Luis Miguel Bugallo Sánchez**, CC BY_SA 4.0)*

The power of allegory

One aspect of this non-realistic approach is the painting's use of symbols. For example, a snake at the bottom left hand corner — synonymous with evil in Christian iconography—stands in for the murderer Ravaillac. Above it, Henry is shown rising to heaven flanked by the Roman deities Jupiter (with his attribute an eagle) and Saturn (who holds a sickle) and ascending towards other gods in the heavens above.

Figure 5.3.6.2.88*: Peter Paul Rubens, The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency of Marie de' Médici, detail, c. 1622-1625, oil on canvas, 394 x 727 cm (**Musée du Louvre, Paris**)*

The center of the composition is filled with the Roman deities Victoria (goddess of Victory) in gold drapery who holds a palm leaf to symbolize martyrdom, and an unarmed and nude Bellona (goddess of war) who despairs at the death of the peace-bringing Henry. The dogs just behind Bellona are symbols of faithfulness in marriage.

Figure 5.3.6.2.89*: Peter Paul Rubens, The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency of Marie de' Médici, detail, c. 1622–1625, oil on canvas, 394 x 727 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)*

On the right side of the composition Marie is shown in the black attire of a widow, with the nobility of France shown gathering around her dais, imploring her to accept the gifts being offered to her. These are

being proffered by several allegorical and mythological characters such as a kneeling personification of France holding up an orb of leadership, and a flying allegory of Divine Providence giving her a ship's rudder to signify her duty to steer the nation in a moment of crisis. Prudence stands beside Marie advising her to accept the symbols of authority, and behind the throne is the Roman goddess of wisdom Minerva. Even the architecture is symbolic: the columns around Marie are twisting Solomonic columns that are reputed to have flanked the throne of the legendary King Solomon of the Bible. A ***triumphal arch*** *(signifying success) in the background perfectly frames Marie's body.*

Rubens would have learned how to depict such allegories from textbooks on symbolism published at the time. The most famous was the recently released Iconologia by Cesare Ripa, but there were many other emblem books, or emblemata, available for consultation.

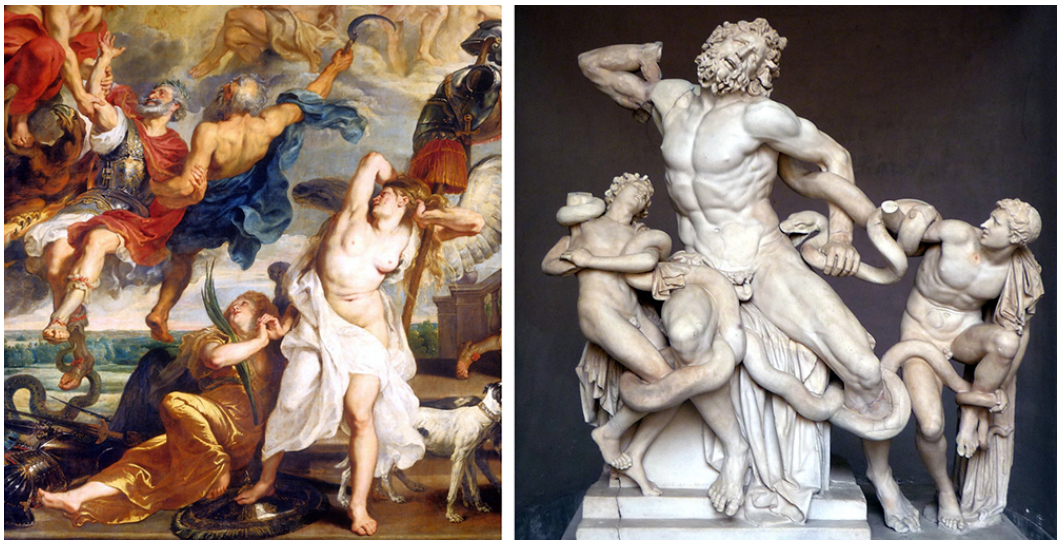

Figure **5.3.6.2.90***: Left: Peter Paul Rubens, The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency of Marie de' Médici, detail of Henry IV and Bellona, c. 1622–1625, oil on canvas, 394 x 727 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris); Right: Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes, Laocoön and his Sons, early first century C.E., marble, 7'10 1/2" high (Vatican Museums)*

As you may have also noticed the language of allegory and many of the figures that Rubens used are all connected with ***ancient Rome****. By making such associations, Rubens was aiming to connect French royalty with what was considered to be the greatest civilization of the past. There are also sly stylistic references to classical art. The poses of Bellona and Henry, for example, recall* ***Laocoön and his sons****, perhaps the most famous and well-respected sculptural group from antiquity.*

Figure **5.3.6.2.91***: Caravaggio, Madonna of the Rosary, 1607, oil on canvas, 364.5 cm × 249.5 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)*

But the painting also betrays influence from more modern developments in art: the right-hand section, for example bears a very similar composition to Caravaggio's Madonna of the Rosary. In commissioning Rubens, Marie de' Medici was probably getting the most intellectual and artistically knowledgeable artist in Europe to enshrine her legacy.

The language of allegory and allusions to ancient Rome were characteristic tactics used by artists of the early seventeenth century. What makes the painting unusual for its time is the predominance of powerful women (real and allegorical) among the cast of characters.

Propaganda

As was previously mentioned, the real events of May 14, 1610 (from Henry's undignified stabbing in a constricted carriage to Marie's hasty inauguration as regent) were not the concern of Rubens, who shows us an ideal—a concept, rather than a reality. This fits the painting's intentions perfectly. The Medici Cycle, after all, was conceived by Marie de' Medici, and therefore designed to reassure her of her own right to rule, and to persuade others of it too. More than this—it was principally commissioned to compensate for Marie's own flaws and unpopularity.

Marie suffered the hatred of the French aristocracy not only because she was a woman, but because she was Italian and surrounded herself with foreign advisers. She was no doubt the victim of inherent misogyny and jingoism, but she was also guilty of various intrigues and political misjudgments. Marie unscrupulously maintained political control in France even after her son Louis's coming of age in 1614. She mismanaged the nation's revenues and undermined aspects of her deceased husband's foreign policy. Louis eventually gained his rightful rule of France by force in 1617, exiling his mother from court and having her two favored advisers killed.

Thus, the whole Medici Cycle was an attempt to justify Marie's original right to rule and persuade us of her pure intentions. This may be why she is shown as a loyal, grieving wife who has to be implored by a chorus of supporters to take the regency, despite her reluctance. To put it simply, the painting is an overwhelming and learned piece of artistic propaganda.

Figure **5.3.6.2.92***: The Medici Cycle paintings in the Musée du Louvre (photo: Dr. Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

Afterlife

The 24 paintings of the Medici Cycle are now in the Louvre in Paris, in a special gallery where The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency of Marie de' Médici hold pride of place. It has influenced many later artists, most famously Eugène Delacroix who adapted Rubens's Bellona for the central female figure in ***Liberty Leading the People*** *(1830). Delacroix was clearly smitten by this vision of powerful, commanding and righteous femininity, albeit for entirely contrary political purpose.* ***Paul Cézanne*** *was also infatuated with the painting and repeatedly studied it in the Louvre, also re-using the pose and statuesque qualities of Bellona in his own nude studies. In the twentieth century, Rubens's epic allegorical approach to current affairs can even be seen as influencing works of art like Pablo Picasso's* ***Guernica*** *(1937).*

Additional resources:

The Medici Cycle at the Louvre

Download a copy of Iconologia by Cesare Ripa

Peter Paul Rubens, *Venus, Mars and Cupid*

by HELEN HILLYARD

Figure **5.3.6.2.93***: Peter Paul Rubens, Venus, Mars and Cupid, c.1630-1635, oil on canvas, 195.2 x 133 cm (Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, DPG285)*

The defeat of war by love

The goddess Venus is shown in her boudoir feeding her son Cupid, who clings to his mother's arm while clutching at her drapery. The pair is watched by Venus's lover, Cupid's father, Mars (the god of War). His expression is one of tenderness as he is quite literally disarmed, he has removed his helmet and his shield lies abandoned on the floor. Cupid's own bow and arrows also lie on the ground. The painting can be interpreted symbolically as the defeat of war by love, a reading that is further underlined by the presence of ***the ghostly putti*** *who play beside Mars's head.*

Venus, Mars and Cupid was painted in the early 1630s and the composition is closely related to Rubens' large-scale Peace and War (below). This is particularly evident in the figure of Peace who takes a similar pose and, like Venus, feeds milk to her child. The figures' hair is also similarly dressed. Because of these broad similarities, it has been proposed that the histories of the two works might be interconnected.

Peace and War was executed in England in 1629-30, illustrating Rubens's hopes for the peace he was trying to negotiate between England and Spain in his role as diplomatic envoy on behalf of Philip IV of Spain. Rubens eventually presented the finished work to Charles I of England as a gift.

Given these similarities as well as the theme of the subject matter—the triumph of love over war—it has been proposed that the Dulwich painting was likewise a diplomatic gift. In fact, a work fitting the description of the Dulwich painting is recorded in the inventory of Spanish nobleman Juan Gaspar de Cabrera, 10th Admiral of Castile; which might indicate the paintings were given to both England and Spain to commemorate the peace talks.

Figure **5.3.6.2.94***: Peter Paul Rubens, Minerva Protects Pax from Mars ("Peace and War"), 1629–30, oil on canvas, 203.5 × 298 cm (The National Gallery, London, presented by the Duke of Sutherland, NG46)*

What a technical analysis and an X-ray reveals

Recent technical analysis has shown that the materials used by Rubens were commonly found in Antwerp, indicating that the Dulwich painting was likely made after Peace and War, once the artist had returned from England, before being sent onward to Spain. Rubens frequently revised his works during the course of painting, and these changes are revealed in an X-ray of the work. X-rays can pass through most solid objects but are obstructed by certain materials, including lead-based pigments. This means that changes made by Rubens using lead white paint are made visible, allowing us to trace the development of the painting, and gain an invaluable insight into his thought processes and working methods. In the X-ray we can see that the position of Venus's head was changed and the red curtain made larger, so as to cover more of the sky. Cupid's left leg was bent so that his foot rested behind Venus's knee; his right leg has also been altered slightly and his head raised. Venus's left leg originally stretched out from the knee towards the right of the picture.

Figure **5.3.6.2.95***: Left: Peter Paul Rubens, Venus, Mars and Cupid, c.1630-1635, oil on canvas, 195.2 x 133 cm (Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, DPG285) and rIght: X-Ray of the same painting.*

The X-ray also reveals that the drapery was once more taut, an effect now disguised by the degraded condition of the blue pigment. This would have counteracted the impression that Cupid was falling backwards and he would instead appear to be pulling himself upward.

Rubens and his workshop

Although the painting is today attributed to Rubens, it is unclear to what extent his studio was involved in its production. Rubens managed a large workshop with many assistants, which enabled the artist to meet the immense demand for his work. It is often difficult to decipher where the studio's involvement ends and where the work of the master begins. For instance, Rubens would frequently retouch and "finish" studio versions of a painting in order to ensure that they were of a sufficiently high standard and works would certainly not leave the workshop without his approval. Such works are regarded as being "by Rubens" even if not entirely by his own hand. In the case of Venus, Mars and Cupid, it is tempting to think that the assistants might have sketched in the majority of the painting with Rubens himself applying those crucial finishing touches.

*This essay was produced in conjunction with the "**Making Discoveries**" display series at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London. The displays coincide with the release of the Gallery's Dutch and Flemish Schools Catalogue, to be published fall 2016, and aims to disseminate important findings from this major research project.*

Peter Paul Rubens, *The Consequences of War*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.3.6.2.26*: Peter Paul Rubens, The Consequences of War, 1638-39, oil on canvas (Palatine Gallery, Palazzo Pitti, Florence)*

Rubens, explaining his painting, The Consequences of War (from a letter to Justus Sustermans, translated by Kristin Lohse Belin, in Rubens, Phaidon, 1998):

> ***The principal figure is Mars, who has left open the temple of Janus (which in time of peace, according to Roman custom, remained closed) and rushes forth with shield and blood-stained sword, threatening the people with great disaster. He pays little heed to Venus, his mistress, who, accompanied by Amors and Cupids, strives with caresses and emraces to hold him. From the other side, Mars is dragged forward by the Fury Alekto, with a torch in her hand. Near by are monsters personifying Pestilence and Famine, those inseparable partners of War. On the ground, turning her back, lies a woman with a broken lute, representing Harmony, which is incompatible with the discord of War. There is also a mother with her child in her arms, indicating that fecundity, procreation and charity are thwarted by War, which corrupts and destroys everything. In addition, one sees an architect thrown on his back, with his instruments in his hand, to show that which in time of peace is constructed for the use and ornamentation of the City, is hurled to the ground by the force of arms and falls to ruin. I believe, if I remember rightly, that you will find on the ground, under the feet of Mars, a book and a drawing on paper, to imply that he treads underfoot all the arts and letters. There ought also to be a bundle of darts or arrows, with the band which held them together undone; these when bound form the symbol of Concord. Beside them is the caduceus and an olive branch, attribute of Peace; these are also cast aside. That grief-stricken woman clothed in black, with torn veil, robbed of all her jewels and other ornaments, is the unfortunate Europe who, for so many years now, has suffered plunder, outrage,***

> ***and misery, which are so injurious to everyone, that it is unnecessary to go into detail. Europe's attribute is the globe, borne by a small angel or genius, and surmounted by the cross, to symbolize the Christian world.***

Anthony van Dyck

Anthony van Dyck, *Charles I at the Hunt*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.2.27*: Anthony van Dyck, Charles I at the Hunt, c. 1635, oil on canvas, 2.66 x 2.07 m (Musée du Louvre, Paris)*

The inscription reads: "Carolus.I.REX Magnae Britanniae" ("Charles I rules Great Britain").

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

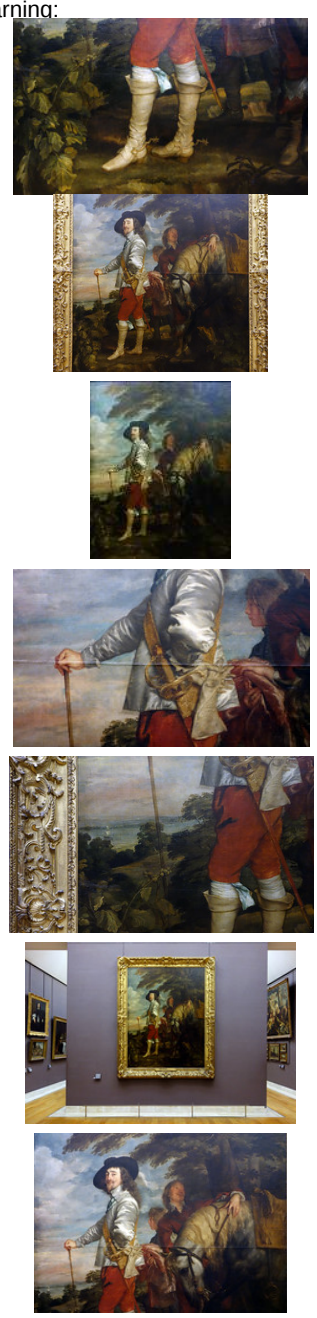

Figure 5.3.6.2.96*: More Smarthistory images…*

Anthony Van Dyck, *Samson and Delilah*

by HELEN HILLYARD

A calm before a storm

In his painting Samson and Delilah, Anthony van Dyck presents a moment filled with tension—a calm before a storm. Instead of depicting the climax of this Old Testament story, he represented the moment immediately before the action takes place. The heroic Samson is about to have his hair cut—removing the source of his superhuman strength. Lulled to sleep by his lover Delilah, the Philistine guards lie in wait ready to capture and imprison him as soon as the deed is done.

Figure **5.3.6.2.97***: Anthony van Dyck, Samson and Delilah, c. 1618-20, oil on canvas, 152.3 x 232 cm. (Dulwich Picture Gallery, London)*

In Van Dyck's scene, however, the focus is not the hero—Samson—but Delilah. The light within the painting is focused on her, while the edges of the canvas recede into darkness. She is shown bejewelled and in a state of undress, draped in luxurious silk and lounging on a bed covered with rich, brocaded fabric. Delilah's soft and milky-white skin is in complete contrast to the swarthy Samson, who is covered with only a fur loincloth. All the action within the scene appears to rest on her as she raises a silencing finger, both to hush the guards and to command them into action.

The two women behind Delilah look on with interest and apprehension, waiting to see whether Samson will wake from his slumber. The guards, too, watch with anxiety, knowing that even their combined strength would be no match for the superhuman Samson. Van Dyck heightens the drama further by giving the barber what appear to be giant sheep shears, when normal scissors would do the same job.

Van Dyck and Rubens

Samson and Delilah was painted early in Van Dyck's career, around 1618-21. During this time, Van Dyck was active in the Antwerp studio of the Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens, 22 years his senior. It is not known exactly when or under what terms Van Dyck entered Rubens' studio, whether he was a pupil (or student) or rather an associate, contracted to work on specific commissions. In any case, Rubens had a definite impact upon Van Dyck's work, revealed most clearly through Samson and Delilah.

Figure **5.3.6.2.98***: Peter Paul Rubens, Samson and Delilah, c. 1609-1610, oil on panel, 185 x 205 cm. (The National Gallery, London)*

Samson and Delilah appears to be a response to Rubens earlier version of the same subject (above). Van Dyck takes a number of elements directly from Rubens—most notably the composition: the side-on-view, with the muscular Samson slumped in a heap on Delilah's lap. However, Van Dyck reverses the grouping, perhaps indicating that he based his own painting on prints after the painting—where the composition is always reversed—rather than the original.

Figure **5.3.6.2.99***: Jacob Maltham (printmaker), after Peter Paul Rubens, Samson and Delilah, c. 1612, engraving (The British Museum, London)*

Van Dyck also borrows from Rubens in more stylistic terms, for example, in the portrayal of flesh and musculature. This is particularly evident in Delilah's décolletage and Samson's muscled back. A fascination with textures and textiles is shared by both Rubens and Van Dyck, and the gold-brocaded

*fabric appears to have been a studio prop, appearing in other paintings by both Rubens and Van Dyck, including Rubens' **St. Ambrose and the Emperor Theodosius** (Kunsthistoriches Museum, Vienna) and Van Dyck's **The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria** (Museo del Prado, Madrid).*

Greater drama

Yet, Van Dyck's Samson and Delilah also departs from Rubens' model in a number of important ways and, as such, can be considered a challenge to the master's example with Van Dyck asserting his position as the foremost painter of his generation.

Figure 5.3.6.2.100: Left: Detail, Peter Paul Rubens, Samson and Delilah, c. 1609-1610, oil on panel, 185 x 205 cm. (The National Gallery, London); right: detail, Anthony van Dyck, Samson and Delilah, c. 1618-20, oil on canvas, 152.3 x 232 cm. (Dulwich Picture Gallery, London)

Rubens sets his version of the story in a bed chamber at night. In complete contrast, Van Dyck chooses to set his scene outside and in bright daylight. Van Dyck's decision to depict the moment before Samson's hair is cut is also an important divergence, since in Rubens' painting the action is already underway. Van Dyck's aim is seemingly to exploit this moment of tension to create a greater sense of drama within the picture. Van Dyck gives greater agency to the figure of Delilah who, with her raised finger, orchestrates the entire company of characters. Within this context, he is also able to include the exaggerated and theatrical reactions of the supporting cast—especially that of the younger woman who stands behind Delilah. This was evidently something Van Dyck gave considerable thought to and to which he returned at various stages during the course of painting, as evidenced by an X-ray of the work (below), which shows that Van Dyck adjusted the fingers of the woman, splaying them out further so as to create a more dramatic silhouette against the blue sky.

Figure **5.3.6.2.101***: X-ray, Anthony van Dyck, Samson and Delilah, c. 1618-20, oil on canvas, 152.3 x 232 cm. (Dulwich Picture Gallery, London)*

Provenance and attribution

Little is known about the early history of ownership of Samson and Delilah: either who owned it or where it was displayed. Yet, the position of the figures—peering down—might suggest that it was hung high. Moreover, the presence of a ledge at the bottom of a painting could have an architectural significance, indicating perhaps that the work was hung over a mantel. By the early 18th century the painting was recorded in Amsterdam, and was later bought by Noel Desenfans (the founder of Dulwich Picture Gallery) at a London sale in 1783. The painting formed part of the core collection of Dulwich Picture Gallery, when it opened in 1811. Yet, until 1880, it was considered to be the work of Peter Paul Rubens. Today, the painting's attribution is restored to Van Dyck and stands as an important example of the artist's early work and the influence of Rubens on his career.

Special thanks to the ***Dulwich Picture Gallery, London***

This essay was produced in conjunction with the ["Making Discoveries"] (http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org...veries-lineup/) display series at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London. The displays coincide with the release of the Gallery's Dutch and Flemish Schools Catalogue, to be published fall 2016, and aims to disseminate important findings from this major research project.

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5.3.6.3: Portrait of Daruma

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5.3.6.4: Two Lovers

Japan

From Shinto shrines and Buddhist gardens to the images of Hiroshige and Mariko Mori.

6th century C.E. - present

A beginner's guide

A brief history of the arts of Japan: the Jomon to Heian periods

by DR. SONIA COMAN

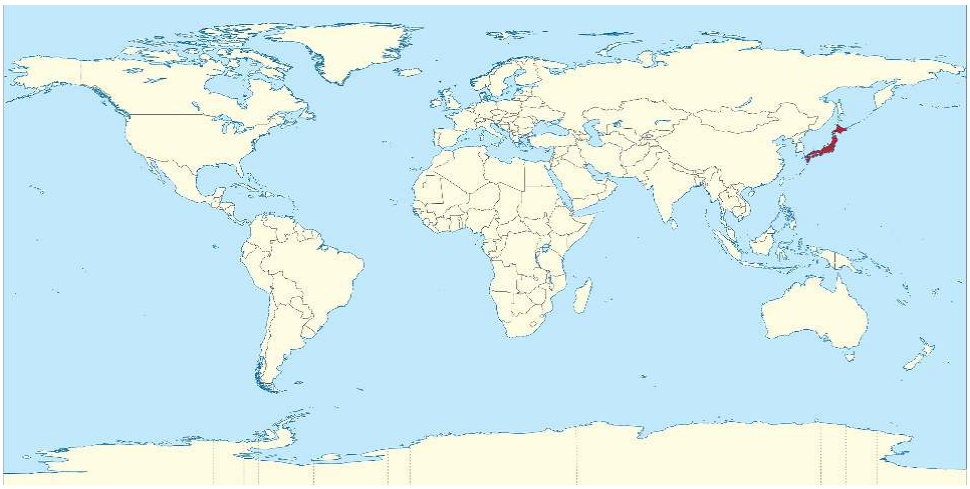


Figure **5.3.6.4.1**: Animated map of Japan in the world (image: adapted from **Wikimedia Commons**)

The arts of Japan are profoundly intertwined with this country's long and complex history. They are also often in dialogue with artistic and cultural developments in other parts of the world. From the earliest aesthetic expressions of the Neolithic period to today's contemporary art—here is a brief survey to get you started.

Please note that while the material is organized chronologically, it highlights major themes and introduces makers and objects recognized as especially influential.

Jōmon period (c. 10,500 – c. 300 B.C.E.): grasping the world, creating a world

Figure **5.3.6.4.2**: "Flame-rimmed" deep bowl, Middle Jomon period (c. 3500–2500 B.C.E.), earthenware with cord-marked and incised decoration, 13 inches tall (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

The Jōmon period is Japan's Neolithic period. People obtained food by gathering, fishing, and hunting and often migrated to cooler or warmer areas as a result of shifts in climate. In Japanese, jōmon means "cord pattern," which refers to the technique of decorating Jōmon-period pottery.

As in most Neolithic cultures around the world, women made pots by hand. They would build vessels from the bottom up from coils of wet clay, mixed with other materials such as mica and crushed shells. The pots were then smoothed both inside and out and decorated with geometric patterns. The decoration was achieved by pressing cords on the malleable surface of the still moist clay body. Pots were left to dry completely before being fired at a low temperature (most likely, just reaching 900 degrees Celsius) in an outdoor fire pit.

Later in the Jōmon period, vessels presented ever more complex decoration, made through shallow incisions into the wet clay, and were even colored with natural pigments. Jōmon-period cord-marked pottery illustrates the remarkable skill and aesthetic sense of the people who produced them, as well as stylistic diversity of wares from different regions.

Figure **5.3.6.4.3**: "Goggle-eyed"-type dogū figurine, late Jōmon period (1,000- 400 B.C.E.), excavated in Tsugaru city, Aomori prefecture, Japan, clay, H. 34.2 cm (**Tokyo National Museum, Japan**)

Also from the Jōmon period, clay figurines have been found that are known in Japanese as dogū. These typically represent female figures with exaggerated features such as wide or goggled eyes, tiny waists, protruding hips, and sometimes large abdomens suggestive of pregnancy. They are unique to this period, as their production ceased by the 3rd century B.C.E. Their strong association with fertility and mysterious markings "tattooed" onto their clay bodies suggest their potential use in spiritual rituals, perhaps as effigies or images of goddesses. Besides dogū, this period also saw the production of phallic stone objects, which may have been a part of the same fertility rituals and beliefs.

Images of the female body as symbols of fertility are encountered in many parts of the world in the Neolithic period, presenting features unique to the regions and cultures that produced them. The preoccupation with fertility was increasingly twofold, namely the fertility of women and that of the land, as people began cultivating it and transitioning to a settled agricultural society.

Yayoi period (300 B.C.E. – 300 C.E.): influential importations from the Asian continent (I)

Figure **5.3.6.4.4**: Jar, Yayoi period, c. 100-300 C.E., earthenware with incised decoration, 10 inches tall. (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

People from the Asian continent who were cultivating crops migrated to the Japanese islands. Archaeological evidence suggests that these people gradually absorbed the Jōmon hunter-gatherer population and laid the foundation for a society that cultivated rice in paddy fields, produced bronze and iron tools, and was organized according to a hierarchical social structure. The Yayoi period's name comes from a neighborhood of Tokyo, Japan's capital, where artifacts from the period were first discovered.

Yayoi-period artifacts include ceramics that are stylistically very different from the cord-marked Jōmon-period ceramics. Although the same techniques were used, Yayoi pottery has sharper and cleaner shapes and surfaces, including smooth walls, sometimes covered in slip slip, and bases on which the pots could stand without being suspended by rope. Burnished surfaces, finer incisions, and sturdy constructions that suggest an interest in symmetry are characteristic of Yayoi pots.

Definition: Slip

Slip is a liquid clay mixture used in the production and decoration of pottery.

Figure **5.3.6.4.5**: Bronze bell (dōtaku 銅鐸), Yayoi period, H. 126.5 cm (Saitama Prefectural History & Folklore Museum, **Google Arts & Culture**)

Some studies suggest that Yayoi pottery is linked to Korean pottery of the time. The Korean influence extends beyond ceramics and can be seen in Yayoi metalwork as well. Notably, Yayoi period clapper-less bronze bells closely resemble much smaller Korean bells that were used to adorn domesticated animals such as horses.

These bells, together with bronze mirrors and occasionally weapons, were buried on hilltops. This practice was seemingly linked to ritual and may have been considered auspicious, perhaps for the fertility of the land in this primarily agricultural society. The magical or ritualistic function of the bells is further suggested by the fact that the bells were not only clapper-less, but they also had walls that were too thin to ring when hit.

The bells became larger later in the Yayoi period, and it is believed that the function of these larger bells was ornamental. Across regions and over the span of a few centuries, such bells varied in size from approximately 10 cm to over 1 meter in height.

Kofun period (ca. 3rd century – 538): influential importations from the Asian continent (II)

The Kofun 古墳 period is so named after the burial mounds of the ruling class. The practice of building tomb mounds of monumental proportions and burying treasures with the deceased arrived from the Asian continent during the 3rd century. Originally unadorned, these tombs became increasingly ornate; by the 6th century, burial chambers had painted decorations. The burial mounds were encircled with stones; hollow clay earthenware, known in Japanese as ***haniwa*** 埴輪, were scattered for protection on the land surrounding the mounds. *Kofun* were typically keyhole-shaped, had several tiers, and were surrounded by moats. The resulting structure amounted to an impressive display of power, advertising the control of the ruling families. The largest *kofun* is the Nintoku mausoleum, measuring 486 meters!

Figure 5.3.6.4.6: The Nintoku mausoleum in Sakai, Osaka prefecture, Japan, part of the Mozu-Furuichi group of ancient burial sites known as kofun (image: KYODO, Japan Times)

The hollow clay objects, *haniwa*, that were scattered around burial mounds in the Kofun period, have a fascinating history in their own right. Initially simple cylinders, *haniwa* became representational over the centuries, first modeled as houses and animals and ultimately as human figures, typically warriors. The later pieces have been of great help to anthropologists and historians as tokens of the material culture of the Kofun period, offering a glimpse into that society. Whether offerings for the dead or protective barriers meant to guard the tombs, *haniwa* have a strong aesthetic identity that continues to be a source of inspiration for Japanese ceramists.

Figure 5.3.6.4.7: Haniwa. Left to right: Cylindrical haniwa, 5th century, excavated in Kaga-shi, Ishikawa, earthenware (Tokyo National Museum, image: Steven Zucker); haniwa house, 5th century, excavated in Sakura-shi, Nara, earthenware (Tokyo National Museum); haniwa horse, 5th-6th century, Japan, earthenware, partially restored, H. 94 cm (Tokyo National Museum); haniwa of a female shrine attendant, 6th-7th century, Japan, earthenware, 88.9 cm high (Yale University Art Gallery)

Figure **5.3.6.4.8**: Shallow cup on tall pedestal foot, Kofun period, 6th century, Japan, Sue ware, unglazed stoneware, H. 15.1 cm (Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1907.525, **Freer Gallery of Art**)

Through gradual consolidation of political power, the Kofun-period Yamato clan became a kingdom with seemingly remarkable control over the population. In the 5th century, its center moved to the historical Kawachi and Izumi provinces (on the territory of present-day Osaka prefecture). It is there that the largest of the *kofun* burial mounds testify to a thriving Yamato society, one that was increasingly more secular and military.

Simultaneously, the potter's wheel was used for the first time in Japan, likely transmitted from Korea, where it had been adopted from China. This new technology was used to produce what is known as Sue ware—typically bluish-gray or charcoal-white footed jars and pitchers that had been fired in sloped-tunnel, single-chamber kilns (*anagama* 穴窯) at temperatures exceeding 1,000 degrees celsius. Like other types of ancient Japanese pottery, Sue ware continues to be a source of inspiration for ceramists, in Japan and beyond.

Asuka period (538-710): the introduction of Buddhism

The Asuka period is Japan's first historical period, different from the prehistoric periods reviewed so far because of the introduction of writing via Korea and China. With the Chinese written language also came standardized measuring systems, currency in the form of coins, and the practice of recording history and current events. Standardization and record-keeping also encouraged the crystallization of a centralized, bureaucratic government, modeled on the Chinese.

All this was imported when a new religion—**Buddhism**—was introduced in Japan, significantly changing Japanese culture and society. Unlike Japan's indigenous "way of the gods" (Shintō), Buddhism had anthropomorphic representations of deities. After the introduction of Buddhism, we see a shift in the visual and material culture of Shintō. If, before Buddhism, Shintō gods were associated with sacred objects such as mirrors and swords (the imperial insignia), after the introduction of the new religion they began to be represented in anthropomorphic images, although such images were hidden in the inner sanctuaries of **Shintō shrines**.

Definition: Shintō

Japan's indigineous religion, Shintō entails belief in the sacred power of animate and inanimate things, as well as ritual practices for the worship of ancestors and gods, known as *kami*.

Figure 5.3.6.4.9: 5-story pagoda and main hall, Hōryūji, Nara (image: Wikimedia Commons)

By the time Buddhism reached Japan, it had spread from India to China and had undergone several changes in imagery and styles. In Japan, Buddhism profoundly influenced indigenous culture, but it was equally shaped by it, resulting in new forms and modes of expression. The imperial household embarked on major Buddhist commissions. One of the earliest and most spectacular is a temple in Nara, Hōryūji or the "temple of flourishing law." The founding of Hōryūji is attributed to the ailing emperor Yomei, who died before seeing the temple completed; Yomei's consort, empress Suiko, and regent Prince Shōtoku (574-622) carried out the late emperor's wishes. Given the influence of empress Suiko's Buddhist patronage, the Asuka period is also referred to as the Suiko period. **Prince Shōtoku**, too, is celebrated as one of the earliest champions of Buddhism in Japan. In fact, a century after his death, he began to be worshipped as an incarnation of the historical Buddha.

Figure 5.3.6.4.10: Entasis columns, Chūmon kairō (cloister-gallery of Central Gate), mid-6th century – early 8th century, Hōryūji (image: Hōryūji, Nara)

Like the enduring legend and legacy of Prince Shōtoku, Hōryūji has had a long and complex life well past the Asuka Period. With structures that vanished in fires and earthquakes as early as the 7th century to the temple's pagoda that was dismantled and reassembled during World War II, Hōryūji underwent numerous changes and its buildings currently date from the Asuka period to the late 16th century! A complex site with some of the world's oldest wooden structures, Hōryūji exemplifies ancient Japanese architectural techniques and strategies, including the slight midpoint bulging of round columns, which has been compared to the similar practice of entasis in ancient Greek architecture.

Definition: Entasis

Entasis refers to a slightly convex curve in the shaft of a column, used to correct the visual illusion of concavity that occurs with straight shafts.

Figure **5.3.6.4.11**: Front and back views from before 1917, Kudara Kannon, carved 7th century, camphor wood, Hōryūji, Nara (image adapted from: **Wikimedia Commons**)

Hōryūji houses one of the best known, albeit mysterious, Buddhist representational sculptures of the Asuka period—the so-called Kudara Kannon 百済観音, a slim and life-size image of the **bodhisattva of compassion**, sculpted in camphor wood. The first cultural property in Japan to be designated as a "national treasure," this sculpture first appeared in Japanese records in the 17th century. The "Kudara" in its name, assigned well after the Asuka period, is the Japanese term for Baekje, one of the three historical kingdoms of Korea. The sculpture's astounding grace derives from its slight smile, slim frame, and flowing lines.

Figure **5.3.6.4.12**: Face and right hand of Great Buddha of Asuka, c. 609, cast bronze, 9 feet high (Asuka temple, image: **Wikimedia Commons**)

Hōryūji was not the only major temple developed in the Asuka period. When the capital was transferred from Asuka to Nara, a temple known as Hōkōji was relocated as well. In its new location, the temple grew significantly under the name of Gangōji. One of the temple's treasures is the *Asuka daibutsu* 飛鳥大仏 or the Great Buddha of Asuka—a devotional image that testifies to the early Buddhist representational tradition in Japan. It is also the oldest of the *daibutsu* or 'great Buddhas'—large sculptural devotional images of the Buddha.

Of the original, cast in 609 and attributed to a sculptor of Korean descent, only the face and the fingers of the right hand remain. These details, however, reveal the Chinese-inspired style of Tori Busshi, with soft features, smooth surfaces, and simple and elegant lines.

Figure **5.3.6.4.13**: The four Heavenly Kings (Shitennō 四天王), Hakuhō period, painted wood, roughly 133.5 cm high (Hōryūji, image adapted from: **j_butsuzo**)

The late Asuka period, also referred to as the Hakuhō period (late 7th century), saw a momentous transformation of Japanese society, prompted by the so-called Taika reforms. Implemented after the death of Prince Shōtoku, these reforms were modeled on the Chinese system of government and led to a greater centralization of Japanese imperial power. In the realm of Buddhist

sculpture, the Hakuhō period marked a rapid expansion and dissemination of Buddhist imagery across Japan. Full-bodied sculptures, like the four Heavenly Kings at Hōryūji, are more visually assertive than the Kudara Kannon and announce the influence of Tang-dynasty Chinese culture. In that, the Hakuhō period can also be considered the first segment of the subsequent era—the Nara period.

Nara period (710-794): the influence of Tang-dynasty Chinese culture

Figure **5.3.6.4.14**: Fragment of the *Flower Garland Sutra*, known as *Nigatsudō Burned Sutra* 二月堂焼経, c. 744, silver ink on indigo-dyed paper, 9-3/4 inches high (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

China's Tang dynasty concentrated such a diverse range of foreign influences that its artistic and cultural characteristics are often referred to as the "Tang international style." This style had a major impact in Japan as well. Featuring an eclectic and exuberant mix of Central Asian, Persian, Indian, and Southeast Asian motifs, Tang-dynasty visual culture comprised paintings, ceramics, metalware, and textiles.

As these foreign imports were shaping Chinese artistic expression at home, Tang-dynasty artifacts and techniques spread beyond China to neighboring states and along the Silk Road. In Japan, the lavish Tang style was intertwined with Buddhist devotional art.

Elegantly transcribed sutras, calligraphed in silver ink on indigo-dyed paper, exemplify this form of Tang-inspired Nara-period art. The painstaking practice of copying Buddhist sacred texts by using precious materials was deemed to earn spiritual merit for everyone involved, from those preparing the materials to the patrons.

The intermingling of political power and Buddhism in the Nara period found its utmost expression in the building of **the "great eastern temple" or Tōdaiji** and, within this temple, in the casting of the "great Buddha"—a gigantic bronze statue that stood approximately 15 meters/ 16 yards tall and necessitated all available copper in Japan to produce the casting metal.

Figure **5.3.6.4.15**: The Great Buddha (daibutsu 大仏), 17th century replacement of an 8th century sculpture, Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan (photo: **throgers**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Although the current statue is a later replacement of the Nara-period artifact, it nonetheless suggests the effect of opulence and awe that it must have achieved in its day. Tōdaiji continued to transform and adapt through the centuries, but its identity is still inextricably linked to the grand scale and commensurate ambition of Nara-period culture.

Sociopolitical power was concentrated, during the Nara period, in the new Heijō capital (today's city of Nara). Surrounded by Buddhist temples, the Heijō palace was the primary site of imperial power. It also housed subsidiary ministries, modeled on the Chinese centralized government. Generous spaces characterized the palace complex. These spaces accommodated outdoor celebrations, like those of the New Year, but also served to emphasize a sense of distance and therefore the due reverence to the emperor. The palace complex was designed to separate the realm of the emperor from the outside world. That principle of

separation was reflected within the palace compound itself, where the emperor's living quarters were set apart from government buildings. The architectural configuration of the palace reflected the hierarchical configuration of power.

Little of the palace survives today, as various structures within the complex suffered the vicissitudes of nature and history, while others were transferred to the new capital, Heian, for which the next period was named.

Heian period (794-1185): courtly refinement and poetic expression

The new capital, Heian or Heian-kyō, was the city known today as Kyoto. There, during the Heian period, a lavish culture of refinement and poetic subtlety developed, and it would have a lasting influence on Japanese arts. The approximately four centuries that comprise the Heian period can be divided into three sub-periods, each of which contributed major stylistic developments to this culture of courtly refinement. The sub-periods are known as Jōgan, Fujiwara, and Insei.

The so-called Jōgan sub-period, spanning the reigns of two emperors during the second half of the 9th century, was rich in architectural and sculptural projects, largely spurred by the emergence and development of the two branches of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. Two Buddhist monks, Saichō and Kūkai (also known as Kobo Daishi), traveled to China on study missions and, upon their respective returns to Japan, went on to found the two Japanese schools of esoteric Buddhism: Tendai, established by Saichō, and Shingon, established by Kūkai.

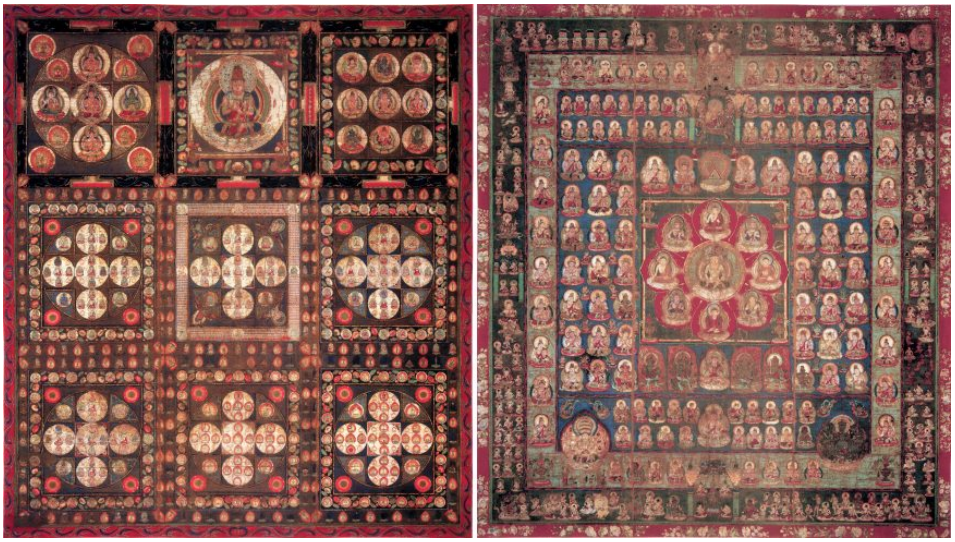


Figure **5.3.6.4.16**: Ryōkai mandala 両界曼荼羅 ("the mandala of the two worlds"). Left: Kongōkai mandala 金剛界曼荼羅 (diamond realm mandala); right: Taizōkai mandala 胎蔵界曼荼羅 (womb realm mandala), 9th century, color on silk, 183 x 154 cm (Tōji, Kyoto, image: adapted from **Wikimedia Commons**)

Figure **5.3.6.4.17**: In Esoteric Buddhist ritual, the Womb realm mandala is hung on the East wall, while the Diamond realm mandala is hung on the West wall. The mandalas face each other.

Among the many ideas and objects that they had brought back from China was the Mandala of the Two Worlds, a pair of mandalas that represent the central devotional image of Japan's schools of esoteric Buddhism. Comprised of the "Womb World Mandala" (mandala of principle) and the "Diamond World Mandala" (mandala of wisdom), the Mandala of the Two Worlds was first assembled as a pair by Kūkai's teacher in China. One such pair, still housed in Kūkai's temple in Kyoto (Tōji, the "eastern temple") represented a blueprint for countless mandalas made in Japan over the centuries.

Definition: Mandalas

Mandalas are diagrams of the universe in Hindu and Buddhist symbolism.

It is believed that the consequential trip to China of Saichō and Kūkai was enabled by a member of the Fujiwara, the family that gives the name of one of the Heian sub-periods. The influence of the Fujiwara clan was paramount in the Japanese political and artistic world of the 9th and 10th centuries. Their power was bolstered by the ever-growing shōen system and ensured by their control of the imperial line, as Fujiwara daughters were married to imperial heirs.

Definition: Shōen system

Shōen were tax-exempt private estates that undermined state control.

Figure **5.3.6.4.18**: Phoenix Hall/ Hōōdō 鳳凰堂 (Byōdō-in, Uji, Japan, image: **Kansai Odyssey**)

Figure **5.3.6.4.19**: Phoenix statue on roof of Phoenix Hall, replaced in 1968 (image: **Byōdō-in**)

One of the only surviving structures from the Fujiwara period, the Phoenix Hall of the Byōdō-in (a Buddhist temple in Uji, outside Kyoto) is one of Japan's most valuable cultural assets, with a fascinating, multi-layered story. The Phoenix Hall derives its name from the statues of phoenixes—auspicious mythological birds in East Asian cultures—on its roof.

Completed in 1053, the Phoenix Hall was sponsored by a member of the Fujiwara family—Fujiwara no Yorimichi—a pious believer in yet another type of Buddhism, known as Pure Land. This occurred at a time when many imperial villas like the Byōdō-in were converted into Buddhist temples. Having spread to Japan through the efforts of the monk Hōnen, the Pure Land School of Buddhism taught that enlightenment could be achieved by invoking the name of Amida, the Buddha of infinite light. Practitioners engage in the ritualistic invocation of Amida's name—the *nenbutsu* 念仏—hoping to be reborn in Amida's Pure Land, or the Western Paradise, where they can continue their journey towards enlightenment undisturbed.

Figure **5.3.6.4.19**: Jōchō, Amida, 1053, gilded wood (Byōdō-in, Uji, Japan, image: **Byōdō-in**)

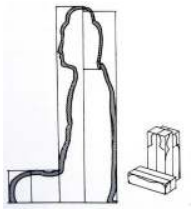


Figure **5.3.6.4.20**: Yosegi-zukuri 寄木造 technique. Different parts of the sculpture are independently carved from multiple wood blocks, then joined (image adapted from: **kanagawa-bunkaken**)

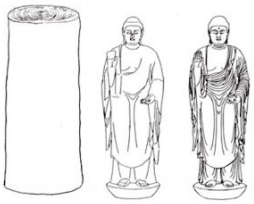


Figure **5.3.6.4.21**: Ichiboku-zukuri 一本造 technique. Left to right: block of wood; sculpture carved in rough form out of the wood block; fine details are further carved (image adapted from: **Nara National Museum**)

The Amida sculpture in the Phoenix Hall at Byōdō-in is the only work still extant by Jōchō, an influential sculptor who was awarded remarkable distinctions, worked on various commissions from the Fujiwara family, and organized fellow sculptors into a guild. Jōchō's Amida at Byōdō-in reflects the sculptor's *yosegi-zukuri* 寄木造 technique, in which the sculpture is formed from multiple joined pieces of wood. This technique was different from the *ichiboku-zukuri* 一本造 technique, according to which the sculpture is carved out of a single block of wood.

During the Heian period, the style known as *yamato-e* (大和絵 or 倭絵) is born. Understood as "Japanese" as opposed to "Chinese" or otherwise "foreign," *yamato-e* encompasses a wide range of technical and formal characteristics but refers to specific formats—folding screens (*byōbu* 屏風) and room partitions (*shōji* 障子)—and specific choices of subject matter—landscapes with recognizably Japanese features and illustrations of Japanese poetry, history, mythology, and folklore.

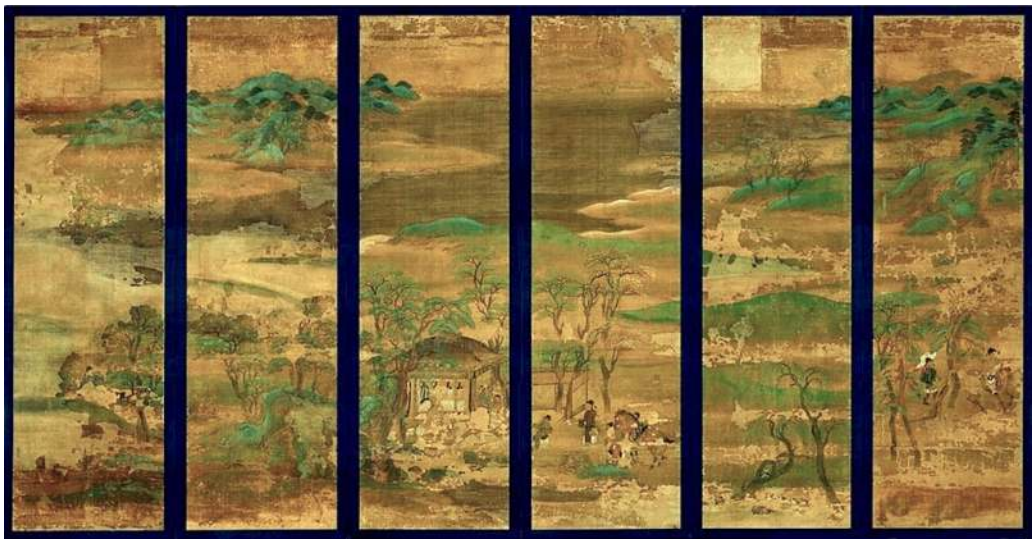


Figure 5.3.6.4.22: One of the earliest examples of Heian-period *yamato-e* landscape painting. *Senzui byōbu* 山水屏風 (lit. "folding screen(s) with (imagery of) mountains and waters), six-fold screen, 11th century, color on silk, 146.4 x 42.7 cm, designated National Treasure (**Kyoto National Museum**)

Figure 5.3.6.4.23: Detached segment of illustrated scroll of the *Tale of Genji*, 12th century, opaque colors on paper (**Tokyo National Museum**)

A favorite subject for late-Heian-period *yamato-e* was the ***Tale of Genji*** (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語), written in the first years of the 11th century and attributed to a lady-in-waiting at the imperial court, Murasaki Shikibu. A complex novel that focuses on the romantic interests and entanglements of the prince Genji and his entourage, the *Tale* also provides a fascinating entryway into Heian-period court life, complete with the aesthetic principles and practices that resided at its core.

The earliest illustrations of the *Tale* came in **handscroll format**. Surviving fragments exemplify the *yamato-e* mode of narrative painting: illustrations by episode interspersed with passages of text; roofless buildings, multiple viewpoints (typically both frontal and from above), and schematic renditions of faces (*hikime kagihana* 引目鉤鼻, literally translated as "drawn-line eyes, hook-shaped nose.")

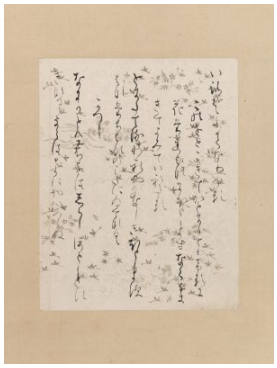


Figure 5.3.6.4.24: "Lady Ise Collection", poetry calligraphy, early 12th century, book page mounted as hanging scroll, ink on decorated paper (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

A brief review of the Heian period cannot be complete without mention of the development of Japanese poetry, *waka* in particular. *Waka* was an integral part of the *Tale of Genji*, and Murasaki Shikibu came to be known as one of the 6 immortal poets (all of whom were from the Heian period).

Definition: Waka

Waka are 5-line poems that speak to the confluence of human emotions and observations about the natural world, divided into 2 sections, namely a 2-line part responding to a 3-line part.

Permeating the spirit of Heian-period Japanese poetry and the imagery it inspired was a heightened sense of refinement, expressed in elegant verse, stylized visual motifs, precious materials, and embellished surfaces.

The Insei rule—the third and last of the Heian sub-periods —refers, literally, to the imperial practice of ruling from within a (monastery) compound. During Insei, cloistered emperors had a higher degree of political control. It was during this period that a sense of aesthetic and ethical congruence developed, according to which the beautiful and the good are intrinsically interconnected.

Definition: Cloistered emperors

Cloistered emperors retired and counterbalanced the power of the Fujiwara regents from the quarters of a Buddhist monastery, while their chosen successors fulfilled official duties.

Additional resources

JAANUS, an online dictionary of terms of Japanese arts and architecture

e-Museum, database of artifacts designated in Japan as national treasures and important cultural properties

On Japan in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Richard Bowring, Peter Kornicki, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

A brief history of the arts of Japan: the Kamakura to Azuchi-Momoyama periods

by DR. SONIA COMAN

Kamakura period (1185-1333): new aesthetic directions

The Insei rule gave way to an extra-imperial, although imperially sanctioned, military government, known in Japanese as *bakufu*. Military leaders—called *shōguns*—first came from the Minamoto family (whose headquarters in Kamakura gave the name to the period), then power concentrated in the (related) Hōjō family. Eventually, the Minamoto and Hōjō shōguns lost their respective control to internal struggles, the pressure of other clans, and an economy bankrupted by coastline fortifications undertaken in response to two (thwarted) Mongol and Korean invasions.

This binary system of government, comprising the shōgun's rule and the (nominal) rule of the emperor, significantly contributed to a shift in aesthetic interests and artistic expression. The taste of the new military leaders was different from the aesthetic refinement that dominated Heian-period court culture. They embraced instead a sense of honesty in representation and sought works that emanated robust energy. This new development toward life-likeness and a form of idealized realism is particularly evident in portraiture, both two-dimensional and sculptural.

Figure **5.3.6.4.25**: Left: Kamakura-period portrait of a revered monk (Portrait of Jion Daishi, 14th century, ink and color on silk, **The Metropolitan Museum of Art**). Right: Heian-period portrayal of courtier (Segment of illustrated scroll of the Tale of Genji, 12th century, opaque colors on paper, Tokyo National Museum). Note the difference in how the faces are depicted.

More detailed portraits of lay and religious leaders contrasted with the *hikime kagihana* (a line for the eye, a hook for the nose) practice of the Heian period, while narrative handscrolls differed from Heian-period Genji-themed pictures in their intricately detailed depictions of historical events. There is no better example than the episode of the **"Night Attack on the Sanjō Palace" from the *Scroll of Heiji Era Events***; here, the visual richness resulting from the imagination of the scroll's painter(s) makes the depiction appear brutally frank and viscerally impactful.

Figure **5.3.6.4.26**: "Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace" (detail), *Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era* (*Heiji monogatari emaki*), second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Figure **5.3.6.4.27**: Anonymous sculptor, portrait of Buddhist monk Chōgen, 1206, polychrome wood (Tōdaiji, image: **Wikimedia Commons**)

Figure 5.3.6.4.28: Unkei, Muchaku (Asanga), c. 1208-1212, polychrome wood (Kōfukuji, Nara, image: Sutori)

In sculpture, portrayals of revered monks reach an unprecedented degree of realism, whether modeled on the depicted figures or simply imagined. Sometimes the statues would have **rock-crystal inlaid eyes**, which heightened the immediacy of the figure's presence.

The sculptor Unkei and his successors, especially Jōkei, created Buddhist sculptures, carved from multiple blocks of wood, whose facial and bodily features expressed not only an interest in life-likeness, but also a sense of monumentality, sheer energy, and visceral force.

During the Kamakura period, the confluence or syncretism of Buddhism and the indigenous Shintō deepened. Paintings like the 14th-century Kumano shrine mandala contain representations of both Buddhist and Shintō deities, divided into registers that illustrate the fusion of the two world-views against the backdrop of famous sacred sites of Japan.

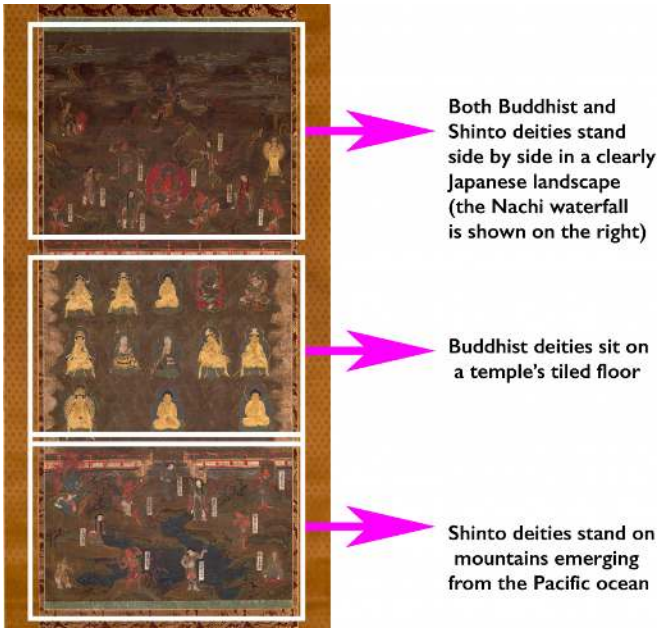


Figure 5.3.6.4.29: Kumano Shrine Mandala 熊野曼荼羅圖 (annotated), early 14th century, hanging scroll, ink, color, and gold on silk, image 131.9 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Nanbokuchō (1333 – 1392) and Muromachi (1392 – 1573) periods: Zen principles, ink painting, and elegant beauty

The Muromachi period, coinciding with the rule of Ashikaga shōguns, was one of the most turbulent and violent in Japanese history. It started with the Nanbokuchō ("the period of the southern and northern courts"), during which political power was split between the Ashikaga-controlled "northern" court and the "southern" and short-lived court of emperor Go-Daigo. The Muromachi period also included the Sengoku ("the age of the country at war"), a period of warfare and chaos in the aftermath of the Ōnin war (1467-1477), triggered by rivalry between provincial warlords.

Figure **5.3.6.4.30**: Zen Buddhist temple Rokuonji, commonly known as Kinkakuji/ Golden Pavilion, originally a villa, first built 1397, reconstructed 1955 (Kyoto, image: **Foto Captor**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Two of the Ashikaga shōguns, Yoshimitsu (14th century) and Yoshimasa (15th century), are associated with the Kitayama and Higashiyama cultures, respectively—two sub-periods of cultural efflorescence that nurtured important developments in Japanese arts across mediums. Kitayama culture, so named after an area north of Kyoto where Ashikaga Yoshimitsu had a golden pavilion—Kinkakuji 金閣寺—built for his retirement, is known for the emergence of Noh and the increased influence of Zen Buddhism and Chinese ink painting.

Definition: Noh

Noh is a type of slow and ritualized dramatic performance with roots in Chinese dramatic arts and infused with Buddhist ideals.

Art coming from contemporaneous Ming-dynasty China as well older Chinese art—dating from the Song and Yuan dynasties, such as the works of Muqi (Mokkei 牧谿 in Japanese)—deeply influenced Japanese arts, especially the emerging local tradition of ink landscape painting.

Figure **5.3.6.4.31**: Muqi (active 13th century), *Kannon framed by Crane and Gibbons*, three hanging scrolls, ink and light color on silk, 174.2 cm x 98.8 cm (Kannon). Japanese artists like Hasegawa Tōhaku, who traced their stylistic roots to Sesshū, had opportunities to study these paintings at a Buddhist temple in Kyoto where they have been housed for centuries (Daitokuji)

The most influential Japanese ink master, the 15th-century painter and Zen monk **Sesshū Tōyō** combined, in his works, Zen principles and lessons learned from **Song-dynasty Chinese ink painting**—most notably a double sense of austerity and immediacy, highly admired by the Ashikaga shōguns and the samurai class who embraced Zen Buddhism.

Figure 5.3.6.4.32: Sesshū, *Splashed-Ink Landscape* (or *Broken-Ink Landscape*, *haboku sansui zu*破墨山水図), 1495, ink on paper, 148.6 × 32.7 cm (full scroll) (Tokyo National Museum, image: Wikimedia Commons)

Sesshū was a celebrated artist in his own lifetime and continued to be revered as a model by later generations of painters. He became a Zen Buddhist monk at a young age and his master taught him both about Zen and about Chinese ink painting. To perfect his understanding of both, Sesshū traveled to China, where he was honored as a distinguished guest. It is believed that he painted in both palatial and monastic contexts. Upon his return to Japan, he laid the foundation for a new era of Japanese ink painting that straddled religious and lay patronage and combined Chinese and Japanese stylistic elements.

Over the centuries, painters emulated Sesshū's style, especially his "splashed ink" or "broken ink" technique, and its roots in the **literati tradition**, some even affixing the painter's seal to their works, all in an attempt to follow into the footsteps of a revered artist and to attract patrons. The Unkoku school strategically considered its painters to be in the direct lineage of Sesshū. The Hasegawa school similarly traced its stylistic genealogy to Sesshū. These two schools are just two of many examples of Japanese artists embracing a stylistic lineage, whether real or construed, leading back to Sesshū or another master. Legitimizing genealogies are a hallmark of Japanese art history.

Definition: "Splashed ink" or "broken ink" technique

In the "splashed ink" or "broken ink" technique, ink is spattered from a brush or directly from the hand to render texture and create a sense of volume.

The advancement of ink painting under the influence of Sesshū is part and parcel of the second Ashikaga-patronized sociocultural sub-period—the so-called Higashiyama culture, named after an area east of Kyoto, where the shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimasa had a silver pavilion—Ginkakuji 銀閣寺—built for his retirement.

The Higashiyama culture entailed programmatic patronage of the arts. During this period, the Kanō school of painting is established and its founder, Masanobu, is appointed official shogunal painter in the late 15th century. At this early stage, Kanō school painting is particularly indebted to Chinese ink painting and the Chinese bird-and-flower tradition. Masanobu's son, Kanō Motonobu, widened the school's painting repertoire by introducing color and indigenous motifs and thereby laid the foundation for an appealing synthesis of Chinese and Japanese elements.

Figure 5.3.6.4.33: Kano Motonobu, *Birds and Flowers of the Four Seasons*, 16th century, pair of folding screens, ink, color, and gold on paper, 162.4 × 360.2 cm each (**Hakutsuru Fine Art Museum**, Kobe)

The imperial court had its own favored line of painters, who worked in the *yamato-e* tradition and often specialized in pictures drawn from the *Tale of Genji*. (Both *yamato-e* and the *Tale of Genji* are described in the section on Heian-period art.) These painters are known as the Tosa school; the earliest mention of a painter named Tosa dates from the early 15th century and refers to a painter who was also the governor of the Tosa province. Contemporaneous with the beginnings of the Kanō school was **Tosa Mitsunobu**, who expanded his school's repertoire much like Kanō Motonobu did for his school, except in opposite directions: while the Kanō artist added elements of traditional Japanese painting, the Tosa artist began to incorporate elements of Chinese painting. In this sense, the two schools created separate versions of a Chinese-Japanese stylistic synthesis, with the Tosa relying more heavily on the Japanese tradition and the Kanō, on the Chinese.

Figure **5.3.6.4.34**: Storage jar, 14th-15th century, stoneware with natural ash glaze, Shigaraki, 46.7 cm high (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

At the same time, the tea ceremony (*chanoyū* 茶の湯) emerged as a ritualized form of preparing and enjoying powdered green tea. For this ritual, domestic ash-glazed stoneware vessels, coiled by hand and fired in wood-burning kilns, began to be favored for their austere elegance or sense of *sabi* 寂—an important Japanese aesthetic concept that stands for seeking beauty in what is simple, solitary, and withered.

These different art forms and mediums—painting, ceramics, dramatic performances, collaborative poetry-writing parties, and tea rituals—converged in shogunal residences like the Golden and Silver Pavilions and especially in the decor of these residences, governed by the aesthetic principle of *fūryū* 風流—another enduring aesthetic notion in Japan, referring to a refined taste that favors rarified elegance and sensual beauty.

Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573-1615): palatial opulence, bold expression, and the beauty of the imperfect

Figure **5.3.6.4.35**: Reconstruction of main keep of Azuchi Castle (Ise Azuchi-Momoyama Bunka Mura, image: **Wikimedia Commons**)

The Azuchi-Momoyama period gets its name from the opulent residences of two warlords who attempted to unify Japan at the end of the Sengoku ("warring states") era, namely Oda Nobunaga's Azuchi Castle and Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Fushimi or Momoyama Castle. Both castles were not only martial structures for strategic warfare and defense, but also luxurious mansions meant to impress and intimidate political rivals. The architectural style of these residences derived from that of the pavilions built by Ashikaga shōguns during the previous historical period. Also, both castles' locations were carefully selected for their optimal proximity to the capital—Nobunaga's castle was built just outside of Kyoto on the shores of lake Biwa, while Hideyoshi's was in Kyoto itself, in the southeastern ward of Fushimi.

That the two castles were built only 20 years apart reveals the rapid succession of consequential political events that defined the Momoyama period: Oda Nobunaga rose to power starting in 1560 and by 1582, when he was betrayed by his own retainers, he had managed to gain control of most of Japan's main island of Honshū.

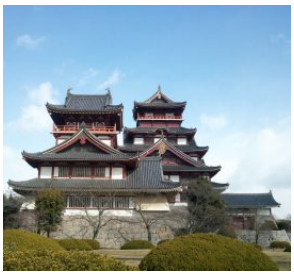


Figure **5.3.6.4.36**: Fushimi-Momoyama castle, built 1594, rebuilt 1964 (Fushimi Ward, Kyoto, image: **Wikimedia Commons**)

Nobunaga's warrior, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, succeeded him and used his strategic thinking and negotiation skills to continue the efforts of unification, besides twice invading Korea (in 1592 and 1597). He was succeeded by another former retainer of Oda Nobunaga, Tokugawa Ieyasu, who managed to secure unprecedented power in 1600, winning the most important of Japanese feudal battles, that of Sekigahara.

Only three years later, Tokugawa Ieyasu was appointed shōgun by the emperor and spent the remainder of his years consolidating the Tokugawa shōgunate, which would become a 250-year rule of relative peace and prosperity. Only forty years had passed from Nobunaga's ascension to power to Ieyasu's appointment as shōgun, but these were years filled with momentous change.

Like other opulent residences of its time, the Azuchi castle comprised numerous buildings in the *shoin* 書院 architectural style, developed in the Momoyama period. This style entailed a main area flanked by aisles, wall-to-wall tatami-mat flooring, square pillars, and various types of sliding doors and walls that partitioned and reconfigured space. *Shoin* also featured an alcove in the reception room, known as *tokonoma*, and elements developed in the Muromachi period for shogunal residences such as staggered shelves and a built-in desk.

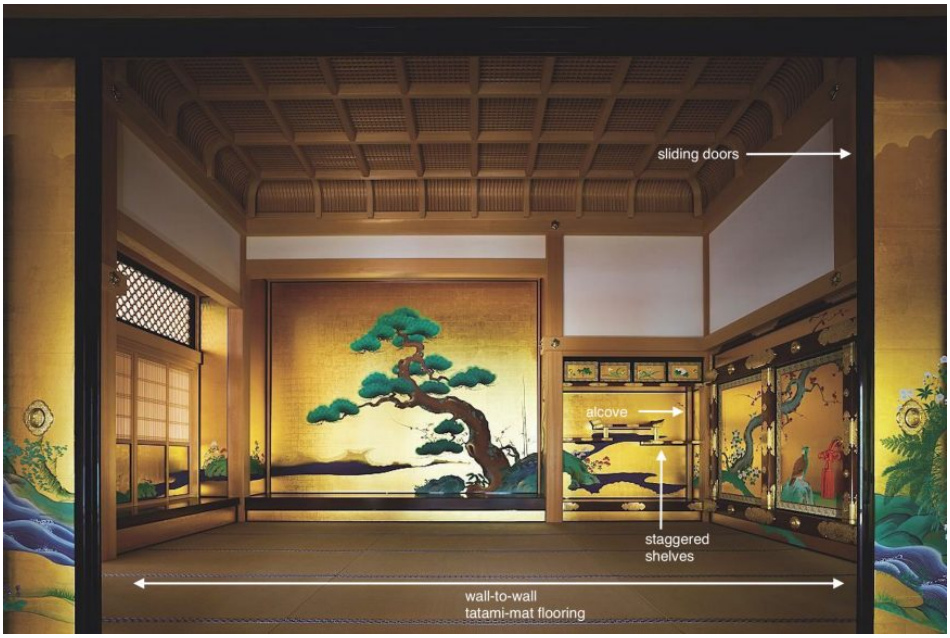


Figure **5.3.6.4.37**: Jodan-no-ma (feudal lord's audience chamber), Honmaru Palace, Nagoya Castle, first built 1615 for Tokugawa Ieyasu's son, reconstructed 2009-18 (image adapted from: **japan-guide**)

Figure **5.3.6.4.38**: Kano Eitoku, *Chinese lions*, 16th century, six-fold screen, color and gold on paper, 223.6×451.8 (**Sannomaru, Imperial Household Agency**, Japan)

In addition to displaying the power of their owners, Nobunaga's and Hideyoshi's castles featured the bold and expressive art that characterized the Momoyama period, perhaps mirroring the energy and courage of the era's military leaders.

Nobunaga's Azuchi castle was adorned with the highly expressive paintings of Kanō Eitoku, the grandson of Motonobu, the Kanō painter who established the synthetic Chinese-Japanese aesthetic of the shōgun-patronized school. The very few surviving paintings of Eitoku exemplify this painter's innovative approach to painting, characterized by dynamic compositions, bold and expressive brushwork, oversized animals, and imagery drawn from nature but set against an opulent golden background that would shimmer in the relatively dark interiors of the warlords' residences. It can be said that Eitoku's style matched the power that the painter's patrons had and wished to put on display.

Figure 5.3.6.4.39: Hasegawa Tōhaku, *Pine trees*, 16th century, ink on paper, pair of six-fold screens, 156.8 x 356 cm (Tokyo National Museum)

A rival of the Kanō school emerged in the person of Hasegawa Tōhaku, who may have studied both with Kanō painters and with a pupil of Muromachi-period ink master Sesshū. Tōhaku eventually claimed to be a descendant of Sesshū and developed a bold and highly expressive style, working typically in monochrome ink. His ties to influential tea masters and Zen teachers helped him secure important commissions. Another artist who received major commissions, alongside Kanō Eitoku and Hasegawa Tōhaku, was Kaihō Yūshō, whose military experience and Zen Buddhist training influenced his unique brand of highly charged compositions combining dramatic ink washes and unusually long brushstrokes.

Figure 5.3.6.4.40: Kaihō Yūshō, *Dragons and clouds*, 1599, ink on paper (Ken'ninji, Kyoto, image: Japan Times)

Figure 5.3.6.4.41: Clog-shaped tea bowl with plum-blossom motifs and geometric patterns, early 17th century, stoneware with iron-black glaze, Mino ware, black Oribe type, 7.6 x 14.3 cm, diameter of foot 5.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

At the intersection of impressive palatial architecture and powerful ink paintings was another art form, nascent in the Muromachi period—the tea ceremony or *chanoyu* 茶の湯. In the second half of the 16th century, the tea master Sen no Rikyū revolutionized the practice of tea by modeling it on *wabi*, an aesthetic concept closely related to that of *sabi*. *Wabi* refers to finding beauty in simple, even humble things. Embracing the spirit of *wabi* and *sabi*, a disciple of Sen no Rikyū, Furuta Oribe, actively supported a new type of local ceramics that became so intertwined with Oribe's style and efforts that they came to be known as Oribe ware. These new ceramics were radically different in a number of ways. First, they were locally produced and became popular enough to compete with Chinese ceramics in the aesthetic hierarchies of tea masters. Second, they are characterized by a distinctive practice of intentionally distorting the shapes of the vessels in response to the *wabi* aesthetic that valued the imperfect.

Definition: Chanoyu 茶の湯

Chanoyu refers to the rituals surrounding the preparation and enjoyment of powdered green tea or matcha.

Definition: Sabi

Sabi is an important Japanese aesthetic concept that stands for seeking beauty in what is simple, solitary, and withered.

The Momoyama period is also remembered for intensified contact with other cultures. Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch ships landed in the Southern island of Kyushu and brought to Japan previously unknown markets, objects, and concepts; firearms, for example, were introduced by the Portuguese as early as 1543. International trade and the spread of Christianity were regarded with suspicion and therefore short-lived, culminating in the self-isolation policy instituted by the Tokugawa. However, trade continued with the Chinese and the Dutch, and a small number of Christians continued to practice in secret.

Figure **5.3.6.4.42**: Nanban folding screen (one of a pair), *Arrival of the Europeans*, first quarter of the 17th century, ink, color, and gold on paper, 105.1 × 260.7 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Despite its brevity and limitations, the late 16th-century encounter with Europeans had a lasting influence. In the port of Nagasaki, Japanese artists were able to observe the foreign visitors' dress, manners, and habits, and a new painting genre emerged, the so-called *nanban* (literally, "Southern barbarians," the name given in Japan to the Europeans who arrived from India via a Southern sea route). *Nanban* paintings depict not only European priests and traders, but also Goanese sailors, who traveled with the merchants and missionaries, and even Caucasian women, although there were no women among those who landed in Japan at the time. *Nanban* screens became very popular and many copies were made, increasingly more removed from first-hand observations and reliant upon the painters' imagination.

Figure **5.3.6.4.43**: Writing box with Nanban figures, 1633, black lacquer with gold and silver maki-e, polychrome lacquer, and gold and silver foil inlay, 4.76 × 22.23 × 20.96 cm (**Minneapolis Institute of Art**)

Nanban imagery was not confined to painted folding screens; we encounter *nanban* motifs in other mediums such as ceramics and lacquerware. The inside of the writing box shown here presents images of Portuguese and Indian or African figures, while the outside is decorated with traditional Japanese motifs of fallen cherry blossoms. Objects such as this writing box exemplify not only the integration of *nanban* imagery in Japanese visual culture, but also an important Japanese aesthetic principle, that of *kazari*. Translated as both "ornament" and "the act of decoration," *kazari* is also a mode of display—and so much more than that. Above all, *kazari* is an organizing principle of aesthetic and social dimensions that seeks visually and conceptually stimulating juxtapositions that transform the appearance of both objects and spaces, activating the viewer's own creativity and imagination.

Additional resources:

JAANUS, an online dictionary of terms of Japanese arts and architecture

e-Museum, database of artifacts designated in Japan as national treasures and important cultural properties

On Japan in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Richard Bowring, Peter Kornicki, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

A brief history of the arts of Japan: the Edo period

by DR. SONIA COMAN

Edo period: artisans, merchants, and a flourishing urban culture

Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory and territorial unification paved the way to a powerful new government. The Tokugawa shogunate would rule for over 250 years—a period of relative peace and increased prosperity. A vibrant urban culture developed in the city of Edo (today's Tokyo) as well as in Kyoto and elsewhere. Artisans and merchants became important producers and consumers of new forms of visual and material culture. Often referred to as Japan's "early modern" era, the long-lived Edo period is divided in multiple sub-periods, the first of which are the Kan'ei and Genroku eras, spanning the period from the 1620s to the early 1700s.

Figure **5.3.6.4.44**: Kanō Sanraku, *Dragon and Tiger*, early Edo period, 17th century, pair of folding screens, color and gold on paper, 178 x 357 cm each (Myoshinji temple, Kyoto, image: **Wikimedia Commons**)

Figure **5.3.6.4.45**: Kanō Tan'yū, *Landscape in Moonlight*, after 1662, one of three hanging scrolls, ink on silk, 100.6 x 42.5 cm. The signature mentions the painter's Hōin title, "Seal of the Buddhist Law." (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

During the Kan'ei era, the Kanō school of painting, founded in the Muromachi period, flourished under the leadership of three of its most characteristic painters: Kanō Tan'yū, Kanō Sanraku, and Kanō Sansetsu. Their styles both emulated and departed from the formidable painting of Kanō Eitoku (discussed in the Momoyama-period section). Tan'yū was Eitoku's grandson, Sanraku was his adopted son, and Sansetsu was Sanraku's son-in-law (whom Sanraku eventually adopted as heir).

Their respective styles shared a creative tension between two diverging artistic directions: on the one hand, they were deeply influenced by the boldly expressive and monumental painting style of Eitoku; on the other hand, they adopted a less dramatic and subtly elegant manner, including a return to Chinese models and the earlier style of the Kanō school.

Tan'yū, in particular, spearheaded this conservative turn. His move to Edo as the painter of the Tokugawa shōgun marked a break with the Kyoto-based Kanō painters (including Sanraku and Sansetsu), one that was reflected in contemporaneous treatises that opined on issues of hierarchy and legitimacy within the school.

A versatile artist steeped in the Chinese tradition, Tan'yū was a connoisseur and collector of Chinese paintings. Drawing on his erudite visual vocabulary, Tan'yū painted both poetic landscapes in monochrome ink, typically evocative of classical subjects, and polychrome paintings in the Japanese style, accommodating large-scale commissions for palatial settings. In appreciation of his work, he was awarded, at age 61, the honorific title Hōin ("Seal of the Buddhist Law").

Figure **5.3.6.4.46**: Dish depicting lady with parasol, c. 1734–37, Hizen ware, Imari, design attributed to the Dutch Cornelis Pronk, porcelain with cobalt blue under clear glaze, 26.7 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

The Kan'ei and Genroku eras witnessed major developments in another medium, namely porcelain. The pioneers of Japanese porcelain were Korean potters brought to Japan after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's incursions into Korea during the Momoyama period. These potters settled in Kyushu and paved the way for one of the world's most innovative and prolific porcelain centers. Arita,

Imari, Kakiemon are now household names, in part because of the 17th-century export of such wares from Northern Kyushu via the Dutch East India Company. This international trade company had contributed significantly to the global appeal of Chinese porcelain, particularly the blue-and-white variety. Despite the Tokugawa's policy of self-isolation, the exception of allowing some Chinese and Dutch agents to continue international trade, combined with the political turmoil in China caused by the downfall of the Ming dynasty, created the optimal context for the Dutch to replace Chinese blue-and-white porcelain with Japanese porcelain in global trade. Japanese export ware, often referred to as Imari ware, emulated Chinese blue-and-white porcelain and reflected the Western tastes to which it catered.

Figure **5.3.6.4.47**

Figure **5.3.6.4.48**: Plate depicting autumn grasses and lozenge-shaped mist, Nabeshima ware, porcelain with underglaze blue and celadon glaze, 20.32 cm (**Minneapolis Institute of Art**)

Among the different porcelain kilns of northern Kyushu, Nabeshima ware was not for export but produced exclusively for the domestic market. The lord of Nabeshima, who had brought the Korean potters to his domain, embraced the local production that developed in the 17th century and patronized a special kiln whose porcelain he offered as strategic gifts to the shogun and other feudal lords. With its production processes kept secret, Nabeshima porcelain is distinguishable by its exquisite surfaces, adorned with delicate motifs drawn not from Chinese or European sources, but from the traditional Japanese visual repertory.

With its smooth surfaces and well-defined shapes, porcelain was markedly different from the stoneware produced in other ceramic centers of Japan, like the Oribe ware for tea rituals (described in the section on the Momoyama period). During the Edo period, the tea ceremony—both *chanoyu* and *sencha*, a different type of ritual for the preparation and enjoyment of steeped leaf tea—continued to flourish. *Sencha*, in particular, was integral to the literati culture. Japanese literati or *bunjin* modeled themselves on Chinese scholar-philosophers who were well-versed in painting, calligraphy, and writing poetry. As scholars with artistic pursuits, *bunjin* were not professional painters, but used painting—especially spontaneous renderings of landscapes, poems, and Chinese and Japanese traditional motifs in ink wash—as ways of expressing the inner energy of cultivated spirits that sought to achieve excellence by removing themselves from society and even defying societal norms. This model of reclusion was particularly embraced in periods of political unrest, which was definitely the case in Japan at the end of the 16th century during the turmoil that characterized Momoyama, the 40-year span that led to the Edo period. Gradually, literati practices developed a core tension

between the rebellious and the highly individualistic, on the one hand, and the ritualistic and the normative, on the other, as traditions and lineages began to became more rigid over time.

Figure **5.3.6.4.49**: Ike no Taiga and Yosa Buson, *Ten Conveniences and Ten Pleasures*, 1771, paired albums, color on paper, 17.7 x 17.7 cm (in the collection of the late Kawabata Yasunari, Kawabata Foundation, Kanagawa prefecture, image adapted from: **Web Japan**)

Bunjinga, literally translatable as "literati painting," refers to painting practiced by these learned men. Literati painting often brought together references to both classical Chinese themes and local and contemporaneous literary sources, especially poems, often written by the painters themselves. The 18th-century *haikai-no-renga* poet Yosa Buson was also an accomplished painter and, in the collaborative spirit of *haikai-no-renga*, co-authored, with Ike no Taiga, a pair of albums on the Chinese theme of the "ten conveniences" and "ten pleasures" of life, combining idealized depictions of nature (mostly by Buson) with anecdotal renditions of human activities (mostly by Taiga). The collaboration between Buson and Taiga was both collegial and competitive, calling to mind the centuries-old Japanese tradition of poetry and picture contests that showcased talent and skill.

Figure **5.3.6.4.50**: Maruyama Ōkyo, *Pine Trees in Snow*, between 1781 and 1789, left screen of a pair of folding screens, ink, color, and gold on paper (Mitsui Memorial Museum, image: **Wikimedia Commons**, public domain)

A foil to Buson's and Taiga's approach to painting was the renewed search for realism of painter Maruyama Okyo. His naturalistic rendition of birds and animals, human figures, and landscapes contrasted with the literati mode by focusing on a rational regimen of visual representation, grounded in observation of the natural world. Trained in the European techniques of shading and one-point perspective, Okyo nonetheless created a synthesis of western-inspired naturalism and traditional Japanese techniques, styles, and subject matter. Okyo's mode of painting was transmitted via the Maruyama-Shijō school, that Okyo first established as the Maruyama school. It was continued by Matsumura Goshun (whose studio was on the Shijō street in Kyoto), a painter who first studied with Buson and then turned to Okyo. These two closely related schools have been referred to as one entity since the late

Edo period, when the distinctions between the two had faded. One of the most notable painters in the lineage of Goshun was Shibata Zeshin, a disciple of one of Goshun's students, and an innovative painter and lacquer artist.

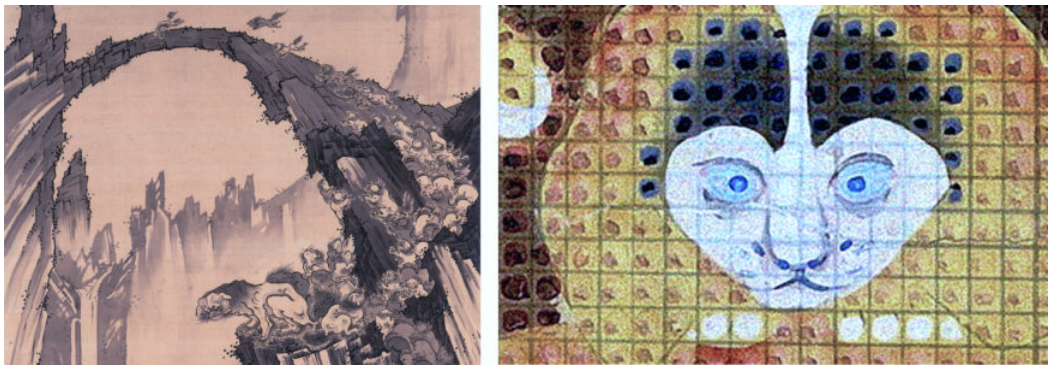


Figure **5.3.6.4.51**: Left: Soga Shōhaku, *Lions at the Stone Bridge of Mount Tiantai*, 1779, hanging scroll, ink on silk, 114 × 50.8 cm, detail (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, full size image available **here**). Right: Itō Jakuchū, *Birds, Animals, and Flowering Plants in Imaginary Scene*, 18th century, pair of six-panel folding screens, ink and colors on paper, 137.5 × W355.6 cm, detail (Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, full size image available **here**)

Painters working outside established schools like the Tosa and the Kanō diverged from established modes of painting to varying degrees. Those whose styles were particularly unconventional have been recently re-evaluated as forming a "lineage of eccentrics" by Japanese art historian Tsuji Nobuo. Included in this "lineage" are Iwasa Matabei, Kano Sansetsu, Ito Jakuchu, Soga Shohaku, Nagasawa Rosetsu and Utagawa Kuniyoshi—each of whom had individual trajectories in their respective processes of maturing as visual artists. What they shared was a highly personal approach to painting, often characterized by unusual techniques and atypical subject matter. In *Lions at the Stone Bridge at Mt. Tiantai*, Soga Shōhaku chose a rarely depicted Buddhist theme and imagined it in novel ways, adding a whimsical dimension to it. In *Birds, Animals, and Flowering Plants in Imaginary Scene*, Itō Jakuchū painstakingly painted no fewer than 43,000 colored squares to create a fantastical, mosaic-like composition.

During the Edo period, a bustling urban culture developed. Merchants, craftsmen, and entertainers helped shape cultural and artistic tastes through their products and programs. Collaborative linked-verse parties and new forms of entertainment like kabuki theater became staples of the urban lifestyle. Tourism, too, gained in popularity as travelers went on pilgrimages to shrines, temples, and famous sites (*meisho* 名所), often associated with classical poems and traditional tales. All these cultural practices were mirrored in the popular paintings and prints known collectively as *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵. Literally "pictures of the floating world," *ukiyo-e* can be best defined as genre painting for and about "common people" (*shōmin* 庶民)—members of the middle class of Edo-period Japanese society.

Figure **5.3.6.4.52**: Hishikawa Moronobu, *Two Lovers*, c. 1675–80, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 22.9 x 33.7 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Trained in his family's textile business, 17th-century painter Hishikawa Moronobu was the earliest of the *ukiyo-e* masters. He focused on images of beautiful women (*bijin* 美人) and worked both in painting and **woodblock printing**. His depiction of women and lovers in Edo's pleasure quarters deeply influenced subsequent *ukiyo-e* painters and print designers, notably Miyagawa Chōshun. Initially educated in the Tosa school, Chōshun signed his works by adding "yamato-e" to his name—a practice indicating that in its early days, *ukiyo-e* was regarded as a successor to the *yamato-e* style.

Figure **5.3.6.4.53**: Iwasa Matabei, *The Tale of Yamanaka Tokiwa*, 17th century, handscroll, ink and color on paper, total length of over 70 meters, detail (Important Cultural Property, **MOA Museum of Art**, Atami, Shizuoka, Japan)

Contemporaneous with the ukiyo-e master Hishikawa Moronobu was the painter Iwasa Matabei, who, like Moronobu and his followers, saw himself as an heir to the *yamato-e* and Tosa-school traditions. Given his anecdotal painting style and his allegiance to Japanese subjects and painting techniques, Matabei is often regarded as a founding figure of *ukiyo-e* along with Moronobu. Matabei drew inspiration for his paintings from the classics of Japanese literature such as the Tale of Genji. However, in the spirit of *ukiyo-e*, his paintings are infused with a sense of everyday life and personal experience. The highly personal dimension of his art made others think of Matabei as one of the "eccentrics" (used here in the sense previously explained in relation to Shōhaku and Jakuchū, and aligned with the definition of art historian Tsuji Nobuo). Whether Tosa, *ukiyo-e*, or eccentric, Matabei broke with tradition by focusing on contemporaneous experiences and aspects of everyday life. Often, these themes were playfully intertwined with classical subject matter, resulting in a visual simile, which was at times parody, known as *mitate*. Realities of the present were superimposed over classical or mythic themes of the past. This practice ranges in Edo-period painting from an emphasis on the mundane and the anecdotal, as seen in Matabei's compositions, to playful depictions of contemporaneous figures (such as beautiful

women and kabuki actors) in the guise of legendary or historical figures such as poets and warriors, as seen later in the works of 18th- and 19th-century ukiyo-e artists like Andō (Utagawa) Hiroshige and **Utagawa Kunisada**.

Figure **5.3.6.4.54**: Hokusai, *Random Sketches* (*Manga*), 1834, eight volumes of woodblock printed books, ink and color on paper, 22.9 x 15.9 cm, two-page spread (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**). Hokusai's *Manga* create a microcosm of Edo-period culture and have been a major source of inspiration for European artists in the 19th century.

Figure **5.3.6.4.55**: Hokusai, *Woodcutter*, 1849, ink and color on silk, 113.6 × 39.6 cm (Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1904.182, **Freer Gallery of Art**)

Ukiyo-e images were made available in a variety of formats, from paintings and *surimono* to picture books (*ehon* 画本) and loose woodblock prints, often conceived in series (e.g. **thirty-six views of Mount Fuji**, **seven episodes in the life of 9th-century poetess Ono no Komachi**). One of the best known *ukiyo-e* masters and an emblem for Japanese art in the western world, Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) not only designed woodblock print series and picture books, but also authored numerous paintings. Leading a frugal life and living in unkempt abodes, Hokusai was remarkably prolific over his long life, adopting various monikers and carefully dating his works by indicating how old he was when he painted them. Hokusai is deservedly famous for his exceptional draughtsmanship and exuberant imagination, coupled with a fine understanding of Japanese life and culture, both classical and contemporaneous. Like other Edo-period painters, he often inserted himself in his own work via quasi-self-portraits and reflections on impermanence and old age.

The Edo period saw an intensified circulation of visual vocabulary and aesthetic principles between mediums (paintings, ceramics, lacquerware, and textiles often shared the similar motifs) and crossing different registers of culture from design to popular culture to nostalgia for a romanticized pre-modern past. These intersections were further enabled by collaborations between artists of different specializations. One of the most consequential of these collaborations was that between the Kyoto-based, 17th-century painter Tawaraya Sōtatsu and calligrapher and ceramist Hon'ami Kōetsu.

Figure **5.3.6.4.56**: Tawaraya Sōtatsu (painting), Hon'ami Kōetsu (calligraphy), *Poems from the Kokin wakashū*, early 1600s, handscroll, ink, gold, silver, and mica on paper, 33 cm high, detail (Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1903.309, **Freer Gallery of Art**)

Figure **5.3.6.4.57**: Hon'ami Kōetsu 本阿弥光悦, Tea bowl named *Mino-game* ("long-tailed tortoise"), earthenware with black Raku glaze, 8.7 x 12.5 x 12.5 cm (**Freer Gallery of Art**)

Their combined practice entailed an elegant aesthetic emphasizing traditional cultural references shared across painting, poetry, calligraphy, lacquer, ceramics, and tea ritual.

Along with potter Nonomura Ninsei, Kōetsu was among the first to sign their pottery in Japan. He would shape his tea bowls, then send them to the Raku-ware workshop to have the bowls glazed and fired. Kōetsu worked across multiple media and his collaborations with painters and potters contributed to a more unified visual culture. As is the case with Japanese art across the ages, lineages played a vital role in the survival and transformation of Sōtatsu's and Kōetsu's aesthetic programs.

Figure **5.3.6.4.58**: Ogata Kenzan's Narutaki workshop (1699-1712), Incense container with imagery from *Tales of Ise*, stoneware, underglaze cobalt and overglaze enamels, 2.5 x 10 x 7.3 cm (Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1907.84a-b, **Freer Gallery of Art**)

The intertwined styles of these two 17th-century artists were emulated and consolidated by the early-18th-century artists Ogata Kōrin and his brother Ogata Kenzan, who became school leaders in their own right. A familial relationship doubled this stylistic genealogy: Kōrin and Kenzan's great-grandmother was an elder sister of Kōetsu. And the two brothers collaborated on occasion. Kōrin specialized in painting, while Kenzan became one of the most influential names in Kyoto-area ceramics. Later generations of potters emulated and even copied Kenzan's style, while Kōrin gave his name to a new school, Rinpa ("Rin 琳" from "Kōrin 光琳" + "pa/ ha 派", meaning "school"), that traced its aesthetic origins to Kōrin's and Kenzan's models, namely Sōtatsu and Kōetsu.

Rinpa artists' refined and ingenious designs were based on traditional themes and motifs, and rendered in gold, silver, and bold colors. They worked across mediums and genres ranging from painting to lacquer and from episodes in the *Tale of Genji* to depictions of the four seasons.

Figure **5.3.6.4.59**: Left: Ogata Kōrin, *Irises at Yatsuhashi (Eight Bridges)*, after 1709, one of a pair of folding screens, ink, color, and gold on paper, 163.7 x 352.4 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**). The depicted motifs evoke the classical Japanese text, the *Tales of Ise*. Right: Sakai Hōitsu, *Summer and Autumn Flowers*, right screen of a pair of screens, 164.5 x 181.8 cm (**Tokyo National Museum**). Hōitsu was a Rinpa artist who revived Kōrin's style in the late 18th and early 19th century.

Additional resources

JAANUS, an online dictionary of terms of Japanese arts and architecture

e-Museum, database of artifacts designated in Japan as national treasures and important cultural properties

On Japan in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Nobuo Tsuji, translated by Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere, *History of Art in Japan* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2019)

Richard Bowring, Peter Kornicki, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

A brief history of the arts of Japan: the Meiji to Reiwa periods

by DR. SONIA COMAN

From the Meiji restoration (1868) to the first year of Reiwa (2019): modern and contemporary art, part I

Meiji period (1868-1912)

Figure **5.3.6.4.60**: Nanri Kajū II, pair of vases, c. 1875, porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze enameling and gilding, 75.7 cm high (**Philadelphia Museum of Art**)

1868 was a watershed year for Japan. After over two centuries of shogunal rule, practical political power was restored to the emperor (Meiji). 15 years earlier, the American commodore Matthew Perry led a military and diplomatic expedition to Japan, opening the country to foreign trade and thereby ending the Tokugawa-imposed self-isolation policy. The effects of this forcible "opening" were manifold and deeply affected Japan's social and cultural fabric. Japan began to participate in World's Fairs, curating displays of samples of Japanese cultural tradition designed for the outside world to see, and often taking the form of new porcelain vases that impressed through their monumental scale, technical excellence, and intricate decoration.

In the realm of painting, the 1870s saw a new mode of image-making that embraced western styles and techniques, known in Japanese as *yōga* 洋画 ("Western-style painting.") A pioneering *yōga* artist, Takahashi Yuichi assisted Antonio Fontanesi, the "foreign advisor" appointed by the Meiji government to teach oil painting at the newly established Technical Fine Arts School in

Tokyo. Further developed by painters like Kuroda Seiki, who studied extensively in Paris and worked in Japan into the 1920s, *yōga* largely embraced contemporaneous styles of French painting, from the Barbizon School to **Impressionism**, and their connected practices, from painting from nature to favoring subject matter drawn from the here and now.

Definition: The Barbizon School

The Barbizon School comprised French artists who moved toward realism in the landscapes they painted in the environs of the Fontainebleau forest outside Paris, beginning in the 1830s, deeply influenced by English painter John Constable.

Figure **5.3.6.4.61**: Kuroda Seiki, *Lakeside*, 1897, oil on canvas, 69 x 84 cm (Important Cultural Property, **Tokyo National Museum**)

As a foil to *yōga*, other Japanese visual artists developed a parallel mode of painting, known as *nihonga* 日本画 (literally, "Japanese painting.") Rejecting a straightforward adoption of techniques and styles from Euro-American pictorial traditions, *nihonga* was not a direct continuation of the earlier *yamato-e* either. Instead, *nihonga* broadened the traditional themes of *yamato-e*, created new blends of Japanese stylistic traditions like Kanō and Rinpa, and even incorporated western modes of pictorial realism in its reinvention of Japanese painting.

Definition: *Yamato-e*

Born in the Heian period, *yamato-e* is a painting style understood as "Japanese" as opposed to "Chinese" or otherwise "foreign." It refers to specific formats, i.e. folding screens and room partitions, and specific themes, i.e. landscapes with recognizably Japanese features and illustrations of Japanese poetry, history, and mythology.

Figure 5.3.6.4.62: Yokoyama Taikan, *Kutsugen (The Legendary Chinese Poet Qu Yuan)*, 1898, hanging scroll, colors on silk, 132.7 × 289.7 cm (Itsukushima shrine, Hiroshima, image: public domain). This painting is thought to express the painter's loyalty to his teacher—the influential, if controversial, thinker Okakura Kakuzō. Resentful against oppressive authority, this classical Chinese poet becomes here a surrogate for Okakura, who had just resigned from the new Tokyo Fine Arts School because of internal frictions.

Two artists who significantly shaped *nihonga* were Kanō Hōgai and Yokoyama Taikan. Remembered as the last great master of the Kanō school, Kanō Hōgai helped pioneer *nihonga* alongside fellow painter Hashimoto Gahō, himself trained in the Kanō style, and Ernest Fenollosa, an American poet and art critic who assumed important cultural positions in Meiji-period Japan, as professor of philosophy and curator at the newly established Tokyo Imperial University and Imperial Museum, respectively. Modeled on European and American universities and museums, such institutions altered the old structures of the Japanese cultural field. New words became necessary in the Japanese language to translate and use foreign concepts such as "fine art" or "artist." Thinkers like Fenollosa or Okakura Kakuzō—a sort of cultural ambassador who explained, through his subjective lens, Japanese culture to elite American audiences—affected both the production and the reception of what constituted "Japanese art" in the Meiji period. Born out of Okakura's teachings on traditional Japanese culture was the quintessentially *nihonga* style of painter Yokoyama Taikan. His paintings combine canonically Japanese and western-inspired elements with unconventional techniques and high symbolic content.

Figure 5.3.6.4.63: Otagaki Rengetsu, Sencha cups with poems, 19th century, white stoneware, 4.13 × 6.51 × 6.35 cm (**Minneapolis Institute of Art**)

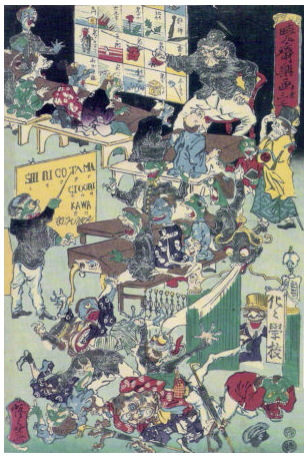


Figure 5.3.6.4.64: Kawanabe Kyosai, *School for Demons and Ghosts*, 1870s, woodblock print (image: public domain). Here, Kyosai imagines demons and other fantastical creatures learning new vocabulary—a commentary on the newly instituted Meiji-period compulsory education.

Yet other modes of painting co-existed with the strong *yōga* and *nihonga* trends. Somewhat aligned with Euro-American post-Impressionism, the artist Tomioka Tessai created his individualistic style through an inventive blend of influences, largely drawn from classical Japanese and Chinese sources. Tessai's mentor, friend, and frequent collaborator was Otagaki Rengetsu, an artist and Buddhist nun who expressed her unique style via pottery, poetry, painting, and calligraphy. Another idiosyncratic artist of the period was Kawanabe Kyōsai, who "translated" his experience of the drastic changes that Japan underwent in the 19th century into caricatures within an exuberantly inventive pictorial realm. Through such artists, the Meiji period furthered the spirit of centuries of poetic and playful interplay among mediums and styles in Japanese arts.

Spurred by new ideas about the nation-state and by the reconfiguration of society in the modern era, Japanese urban life was transformed in the Meiji period. With this transformation came different modes of living and new architectural styles for buildings that housed newly established public institutions and for family homes, influenced by western-centric concepts of domesticity. Modeled on western architecture, buildings were built with brick and stone instead of the traditional wood. Merging international and indigenous elements, an eclectic architectural style emerged, championed by architects like Itō Chūta, who also helped establish cultural preservation laws for ancient structures such as temples and shrines.

Figure 5.3.6.4.65: Itō Chūta, Main Gate, Tokyo Imperial University (currently the University of Tokyo), built 1912. This gate is emblematic of Meiji-period architecture as it combines Euro-American elements—note the use of steel and granite—and Japanese elements—note the traditional gate style, known as *kabuki-mon* (photo: XIIIfromTOKYO, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Taishō period (1912-1926)

The Taishō period continued the process of adoption and transformation of foreign models. During this period Japan participated in World War I and continued its colonial rule of Korea and Taiwan, occupations dating from the Meiji period. In the cultural field, the eclectic style that had emerged in architecture continued to flourish, with structures emulating modernist trends like Bauhaus and

Art Deco. The Great Kantō earthquake of 1923, a natural disaster of catastrophic proportions, not only destroyed buildings and other cultural properties, but marked a shift in Japanese society from the optimism of the Taishō period to the radicalized nationalism of subsequent decades.

Figure **5.3.6.4.66**: Yasuda Auditorium, architect: Uchida Yoshikazu, patron: Yasuda Zenjiro, built 1925, renovated after 1968 (image: **Kakidai** CC BY-SA 4.0)

The Yasuda auditorium, built in 1925 on the campus of the University of Tokyo, epitomizes the brief but consequential Taishō period. Designed in an Art Deco mode and reminiscent of the campus of the University of Cambridge, the Yasuda auditorium was sponsored by one of the founders of the Yasuda *zaibatsu*. It was intended as a temporary resting facility for the emperor when he visited the university. As such, the auditorium embodied the socio-cultural influence of the new financial magnates, the rising nationalism concentrated in the persona of the emperor, the adoption of the European Art-Deco architectural style, and the affirmation of the university as a modern research center.

Definition: *Zaibatsu*

Zaibatsu refers to Japanese industrial and financial conglomerates whose economic and socio-political influence dominated Japan from the Meiji period to the end of World War II.

Figure **5.3.6.4.67**: Yoshida Hiroshi, *Sailing Boats: Evening Glow*, 1921, *shin hanga*, woodblock print, ink and colors on paper (Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Robert O. Muller Collection)

Nihonga, or (modern) Japanese painting, continued to develop at the intersection of Japanese tradition, western techniques, and individual styles. The *Nihonga* painter Yokoyama Taikan resurrected the *Nihon Bijutsuin* (Japan Art Institute) after it had lapsed following the death of its leader, the controversial but influential thinker Okakura Kakuzō. Such developments ensured a

continuation of Meiji-period discourses on the arts, entailing the adoption of western notions and terms and the formulation and crystallization of new concepts, all reflected in newly coined Japanese-language words.

An equivalent to *Nihonga* was the *shin hanga* phenomenon, namely the formation of new modes and styles of printmaking that simultaneously revitalized *ukiyo-e* (as defined in the section on Edo-period arts) and incorporated elements of modern design and western-inspired realism. While *shin hanga* largely preserved the multiple hands traditionally involved in the design and production of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, another mode of Japanese printmaking that emerged in the 1910s, known as *sōsaku hanga*, emphasized individual expression and featured a sole creator in charge of all aspects of the print's production (from drawing to carving to printing). *Sōsaku hanga* resonated, and drew upon, contemporaneous thinkers and writers like Natsume Sōseki who advocated self-expression.

From the Meiji restoration (1868) to the first year of Reiwa (2019): modern and contemporary art, part II

Shōwa period (1926-1989)

Figure **5.3.6.4.68**: Hirai Teruschichi, *Fantasies of the Moon*, 1938, gelatin silver print, painted collage (© Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture, image: **Tokyo Digital Museum**)

The years leading to Japan's involvement in World War II saw the rise of militarism, ultra-nationalism, and increasing imperialistic ambitions, fueled in part by Japan's emulation of western colonialism. In the 1920s and 30s, Japanese poets, photographers, and painters who had studied abroad developed, in Japan, styles aligned with contemporaneous global art movements, combining elements of **surrealism**, absurdist **Dada**, and **futurism**. For example, the paintings of Fukuzawa Ichirō combined surrealist imagery with political commentary; Hirai Terushichi made use of color painting and photomontage to create photographic prints that blurred the boundary between reality and imagination.

Figure **5.3.6.4.69**: Leonard Tsuguharu Foujita, *Battle on the Bank of the Halha*, 1941, oil on canvas (National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo)

Such artists were silenced in 1941 by the Japanese "thought police" that aimed to control any and all ideologies that seemed to pose a threat to the ideals and agenda of the Nazi-allied Empire of Japan. War-time painting depicting military men and battles came to be heavily criticized after the war for their political charge, but recent scholarship by Ikeda Asato suggests that seemingly apolitical paintings of the pre-war period, which romanticized subjects of "authentic" Japanese culture such as Mount Fuji or *bijin* ("beautiful women"), can also be understood as having supported the militaristic state ideology of the time.

Postwar Japan was a period of unprecedented change. From the end of the war in 1945 to 1952, Japan was occupied by the victorious Allied forces, led by American General Douglas MacArthur. From 1952 to the death of the Shōwa emperor (Hirohito) in 1989, Japan witnessed a successful U.S.-influenced economic redevelopment. In the cultural sphere, as early as 1954, the newly

established Gutai art association promoted “concrete” or “embodied” artistic expressions, pushing abstraction to its limits and foreshadowing the performance and conceptual art of the 1960s and 70s.

Figure 5.3.6.4.70: Sekine Nobuo, *Phase: Mother Earth*, 1968, earth and cement, 220 x 270 cm (equally sized hole and cylinder) (Kobe Suma Rikyū Park Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition, 1968, image: **Murai Osamu**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

In those later decades, the exploration of materiality continued to preoccupy artists of the so-called *mono-ha* (literally “school of things”), including the Korean Lee Ufan. Mono-ha artists created works that tested the tension between natural and manmade materials and between their chosen materials and the environment in which they were placed. Mono-ha artists may have been influenced by the sociopolitical climate of distrust, protest, and counterculture that dominated the 60s and 70s. Referring to one of his most influential works, *Phase: Mother Earth*, consisting of a deep and wide hole in the ground and an equally sized cylinder of the excavated earth, the Mono-ha artist Sekine Nobuo affirmed:

> ***“If you dig a hole in the earth and keep digging forever, (…) and if you go on to pull out all the earth, [the Earth] will be reversed into a negative version of itself.”Sekine Nobuo cited in Reconsidering Mono-ha, The National Museum of Art, Osaka, 2005, p. 74***

The Great Kantō earthquake of 1923 and the ravages of war created successive scenes of destruction and contributed to a collective memory of ruins, used as evocative subject matter by Japanese painters and photographers to this day.

In the postwar period, reconstruction was not only political and economic, but also literal, in the urban and architectural sense. Modernism was adopted as the language of this reconstruction. The architect Tange Kenzo, who worked for Maekawa Kunio, one of **Le Corbusier**’s disciples, became one of the most consequential postwar modernists both as an architect and as an urban planner.

Figure 5.3.6.4.71: Kurokawa Kisho, the Nakagin Capsule Tower, Tokyo, completed 1972, detail of exterior view of prefabricated units (image: City Lab)

Tange's unrealized "Plan for Tokyo 1960" heavily influenced the Metabolist movement, which Tange himself supported. Emblematic of Metabolism is the Nakagin Capsule Tower in Shinbashi, Tokyo, whose capsule-like rooms are prefabricated units meant to be replaced once they wore out. The "capsules" were designed as integral to a megastructure of both permanent and impermanent parts, built in the spirit of organic growth.

Definition: Metabolist movement

Metabolism is the name of a postwar architectural movement whose core ideas entailed a rapprochement between interconnected architectural structures and the principles and appearances of organic growth.

Heisei period (1989-2019)

Corresponding to the reign of emperor Akihito, the Heisei (literally, "achieving peace") was a period of peace, but one that nonetheless witnessed economic stagnation and natural disasters. In the cultural sphere, the Heisei period saw the establishment of new art museums and the adoption of new means of expression among Japanese artists, although always in dialogue with the recent or more distant past.

Figure 5.3.6.4.72: Yoshitomo Nara, *Untitled (Eye Patch)*, 2012, woodcut with collage additions, 68.7 x 48.3 cm, Pace Editions, Inc. (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Manga and anime exploded in popularity and influence during this period, although both have deep histories. Manga refers generally to comics and its roots harken back to medieval narrative picture scrolls. Anime refers, of course, to animation, which

goes back to the early 20th century and includes, in Japan, the controversial history of its use as a propaganda tool during World War II. In the 1990s, the anime industry grew via revivals and sequels of popular 1970s productions as well as via new genres.

Popular both domestically and internationally, anime and manga are closely related to the principle of *kawaii*, translated as "cute." This culture of "cuteness" has often been understood as a form of escapism from the harsh realities of the postwar period and of a country often threatened by calamitous natural disasters. Artists like Yoshitomo Nara and Murakami Takashi use elements from manga and anime to explore the darker underside of *kawaii*.

Artists like Murakami Takashi refer not only to the contemporaneous culture of manga and anime in their works, but also to older lineages and genealogies of Japanese art history. Murakami is a case in point with his personal and often provocative interpretations of Edo-period "eccentric" painters whose works nonetheless became integral to the canon of Japanese visual arts. Like **Andy Warhol** or more recently **Jeff Koons**, Murakami complements his works in painting, sculpture, and installation with merchandise and publications produced by his company, Kaikai Kiki.

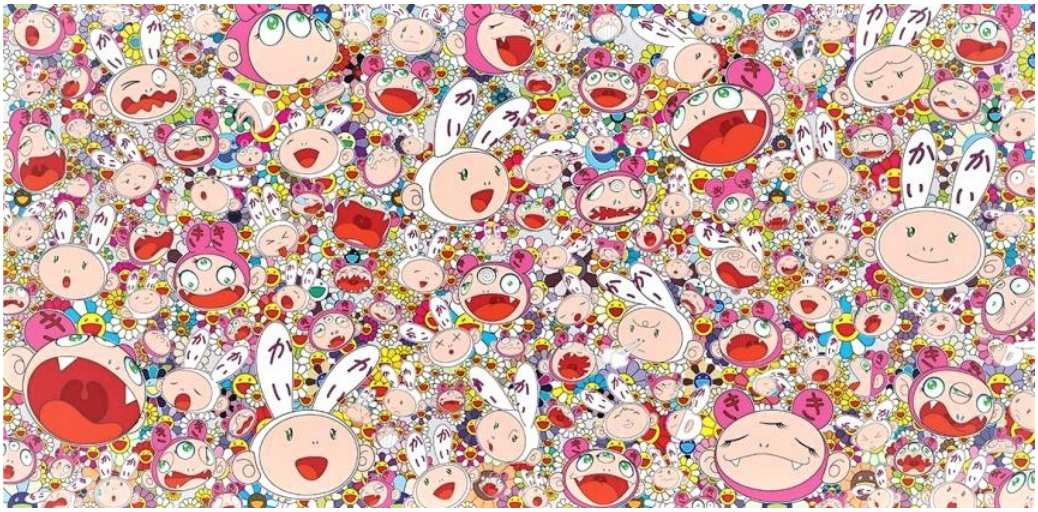


Figure **5.3.6.4.73**: Takashi Murakami, *Lots, lots of Kaikai and Kiki*, 2009, acrylic and platinum leaf on canvas on aluminum frame, 300 x 608 cm (private collection, © Takashi Murakami, Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd.) In this painting, the seemingly inescapable accumulation of otherwise "cute" anime-like figures creates a disquieting realm, one that can serve as playful commentary both on the "flat" representation of traditional Japanese painting and on the overwhelming presence of commercial imagery.

Contemporary Japanese artists use a variety of mediums to express their vision or to focus on the perfection and re-invention of a medium. For example, Sugimoto Hiroshi has gained international acclaim for his contemplative photographs of seascapes as well as for his site-specific sculptural and architectural works. **Mariko Mori** epitomizes the multidisciplinary artist, exploring her sense of identity and developing her surreal imagery through photography, video, sculpture, installation, and performance. Distinct from artists like Sugimoto and Mori, many contemporary Japanese ceramists devote themselves exclusively to the materials and practices of ceramic art; and similar to artists like Murakami, they produce new works that both honor and challenge tradition.

Figure **5.3.6.4.74**: Mariko Mori, *Esoteric Cosmos (Pure Land)*, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer, 305 x 610 x 2.2 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, © Mariko Mori)

As of May 1st, 2019, when emperor Akihito's son, Naruhito, ascended the throne, we entered a new era for Japan, namely the Reiwa (translatable to "beautiful harmony"). In Japan as elsewhere, the art of today continues to resonate with the past, while carving its own path forward.

Additional resources

JAANUS, an online dictionary of terms of Japanese arts and architecture

e-Museum, database of artifacts designated in Japan as national treasures and important cultural properties

On Japan in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Richard Bowring, Peter Kornicki, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Japanese art: the formats of two-dimensional works

by THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Japanese two-dimensional works of art can take a number of different formats—printed books (*ehon*), single- or multi-sheet prints (*hanga*), paintings in the form of hanging-scrolls (*kakemono*) and handscrolls (*emaki*), moveable folding screens (*byōbu*), usually in pairs, sliding door paintings (*fusuma-e*) and smaller scale fan paintings and album leaves. The screens and sliding doors also served to exclude draughts or divide rooms, and were changed according to the season. Hanging-scrolls were displayed, sometimes in pairs or sets of three in the *tokonoma* (ceremonial alcoves) of reception rooms of mansions and, again, could be changed according to the season, or to honor a special visitor. All such works were viewed seated at floor level on tatami mats.

Figure **5.3.6.4.75**: *Shaka no honji (The Story of Sakyamuni)*, from a set of three hand scrolls, ink and color on paper, 17th-18th century, 32.9 x 1703.4 cm, Tosa School, Edo Period, Japan © The Trustees of the British Museum. The story, which evolved in medieval Japan, interweaves the basic religious message of the life of Prince Siddhartha Gautama through his enlightenment to become the Buddha Shakyamuni (Japanese: Shaka), with the more human story of his relationship to his mother Queen Maya. In this scene he gains enlightenment.

Handscrolls (like the one above) were usually placed on a low table and unrolled from right to left to show a narrative story or seasonal sequence. Print series, small-scale paintings or fan paintings were often mounted in albums. Individual prints, especially the Ukiyo-e portraits of popular actors or courtesans, might be pasted to a screen. The size of the print was limited by the size of cherry-wood block available. Often two, three or more sheets were arranged side by side to depict a wider scene. Books were printed two pages to one sheet of paper, which was then folded, and the sheets sewn together at the spine with a plain cover.

Hanging Scrolls

Kakemono (hanging scrolls) were originally used to display Buddhist paintings, and calligraphy. The painting in ink and colors on either silk or paper was backed with paper and given silk borders chosen to harmonize with the painting. Finally, a roller was affixed to the bottom. Scrolls were kept in specially made paulownia wooden boxes to protect them from dust, changing climate conditions and insect damage.

Figure 5.3.6.4.76: Gan Ku, *Tiger*, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk. 169 x 114.5 cm, Japan © The Trustees of the British Museum

Suggested readings:

L. Smith, V. Harris and T. Clark, *Japanese art: masterpieces in The British Museum* (London, The British Museum Press, 1990)

© Trustees of the British Museum

Kofun period (300-552 C.E.)

Haniwa Warrior

by DR. YOKO HSUEH SHIRAI

Video 5.3.6.4.1: Haniwa warrior in keiko armor (Kofun period), c. 6th century, excavated in lizuka-machi, Ota City, Gunma, Japan, terracotta, 130.5 cm high (Tokyo National Museum)

Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

Figure 5.3.6.4.77: *Haniwa: Tomb Sculpture of a Seated Warrior*, Japan, late Tumulus period, c. 500-600 C.E., coil-built eathenware with applied decoration, 31 x 14 3/8 x 15 inches / 78.7 x 36.5 x 38.1 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

Funerary objects meant to be seen

Haniwa ("clay cylinder" or "circle of clay" in Japanese) are large hollow, earthenware funerary objects found in Japan. Massive quantities of *haniwa*—many nearly life sized—were carefully placed on top of colossal, mounded tombs, known as *kofun* ("old tomb" in Japanese). During the Kofun Period (c. 250 to c. 600 C.E.), *haniwa* evolved in many ways—their shape, the way they were placed on the mounded tombs and, presumably, their specific function or ritual use.

We don't know much about *haniwa* or the Kofun Period because there was no writing system in Japan at the time. However, there is general agreement that *haniwa* were meant to be seen. That is, instead of being buried deep underground with the deceased, *haniwa* occupied and marked the open surfaces of the colossal tombs. However, it is unlikely that they were readily visible to any person who happened to pass by since the tombs were sacred, ritualized spaces that were usually surrounded by one or more moats. As a result, close visual contact with *haniwa* would not have been easy for unauthorized visitors. So who was the intended audience of *haniwa*? Let's explore further.

Monumental tombs and early Japan

Unlike many other ancient civilizations, we cannot rely on written records to inform us about the names or locations of the earliest kingdoms in Japan. Yet study of *kofun* indicate that a powerful state had emerged by around 250 C.E. This state is identified by various names (such as the Yamato polity), and was generally centered in what is now Nara, Kyoto, and Osaka prefectures.

We know that a powerful state emerged since vast resources were needed to construct these monumental tombs—starting with the economic means to sacrifice valuable flat land that could otherwise be used for farming and growing rice. Hundreds of workers were also necessary, and archaeologists excavating *kofun* have recovered pottery from neighboring locations such as present day Nagoya—suggesting that people came from elsewhere to Yamato to serve the needs of this early state.

Many monumental tombs (*kofun*) were constructed in the shape of a keyhole—otherwise known as *zenpō kōen fun* ("front squared, rear rounded tomb"). The square part is the front end while the round section is the rear and contains the body (eventually bodies) of the deceased. Keyhole-shaped tombs were adopted as a kind of signature style of this state. Keep in mind that the tombs could have been made in any particular shape—perhaps an octagon—but it was this keyhole shape that was appropriated and then replicated in other regions. Clearly, a formidable political center had emerged with the ability both to build their own colossal tombs and to extend their funerary practices to distant regions. In other words, the gradual adoption of keyhole-shaped colossal

tombs over a wide range attests to the existence of a large, organized state with the authority to compel other, competing kingdoms to adopt their practices, likely through the formation of alliances or perhaps by military coercion.

Figure **5.3.6.4.78**: Hashihaka Kofun, Sakurai city, 3rd century (photo: Google earth, Imagery ©2015 Google, Map Data, ©2015 Zenrin)

Most of the earliest surviving keyhole-shaped colossal tombs dating to the 3rd century are found in Nara prefecture. One of these is the famous Hashihaka kofun in Sakurai city—measuring about 280 meters in length and 30 meters in height (image above). As a point of comparison, the pyramid of Khufu in Giza measures about 230m in length and 146m in height.

Three periods in tomb-building practices

Scholars identify three major chronological periods or shifts in *kofun*-building practices, changes that might correlate to changes in the political climate. Not only did the physical shape and size of the tombs transform, so did the type of *haniwa*, sarcophagi, and other features used in conjunction with the tombs.

- Early Kofun period: c. 250 C.E. – c. 400 C.E.
- Middle Kofun period: c. 400 – c. 500 C.E.
- Late Kofun period: c. 500 – c. 600 C.E.

Figure **5.3.6.4.79**: Daisen-Kofun, the tomb of Emperor Nintoku, Osaka, Kofun period, late 4th to early 5th century (photo: copyright © National Land Image Information, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism)

The colossal tombs reach a maximum size during the Middle Kofun period, and a well-known example is the Daisenryō kofun (also referred to as the Emperor Nintoku tomb) in Sakai city, Osaka prefecture (image, left).

This is the largest, extant *kofun* and one of the world's largest funerary monuments, measuring roughly 486m in length, 36m in height, and may have had 15,000 *haniwa* placed on top.

This trend towards building *kofun* that were increasingly larger seems to reflect the increasingly powerful rulers of this kingdom; however, by the Late Kofun period the size of the tombs begin to shrink in size. This may have resulted from the unsustainable practice of using up valuable farming land for tombs. Another factor may have been the arrival of new immigrant groups, primarily via the Korean peninsula, who could effectively challenge the authority and dominance of the Yamato monarchs.

By 600 C.E. or so, mounded tombs were no longer made in the keyhole shape, were considerably smaller, and often took a rounded form. Manufacture of *haniwa* also ended when keyhole-shaped *kofun* ceased to be built.

Evolution and placement of *haniwa*

When *kofun* were newly completed, the surfaces of the mounds were bare of vegetation—the forests that now cover these tombs are the natural consequence of centuries of neglect. Instead, gravel (or other hard stones), or *haniwa*, were elaborately arranged on the surfaces. Each *haniwa* was hand-created.

Figure **5.3.6.4.80**: Cylindrical Haniwa, 6th century, clay (Saitama Prefectural Museum of the Sakitama Ancient Burial Mounds)

The earliest *haniwa*, from c. 250 C.E. to around the 450s, were simple forms and most were cylindrical. There were also *haniwa* whose upper section was not cylindrical but made to replicate shapes based on ritual or military objects.

While the arrangement of *haniwa* varied from one tomb to another, consecutive *haniwa* were often lined up along the outermost perimeter of the tomb surface, as if to mark boundaries. In addition to this chain of *haniwa* on the outer perimeter, inner sections located near the center of the tomb have also been outlined by *haniwa* as if to designate a special or main staging area.

Haniwa in the form of animals, people and buildings

Figure **5.3.6.4.81**: Haniwa Horse, c. 300–645, red earthenware, 14 7/8 inches (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston)

Figure **5.3.6.4.82**: Haniwa, standing female, 6th–7th century, reddish earthenware, 88.9 x 26.7 x 20.3 cm / 35 x 10 1/2 x 8 inches (Yale University Art Gallery) "The round clay pieces attached to her neckline appear to be the remnant of a necklace, which suggests she could represent a miko, a maiden serving in Shinto rituals." (**source**)

A major shift occurred around 450 C.E., corresponding to the time when *kofun* reached their maximum size. The upper section of the *haniwa* were modeled after animals and people (such as female ritual specialists and male warriors). The reason behind this innovation is not known, but presumably reflects changes in funerary practice.

Figure 5.3.6.4.83: House-shaped Haniwa, 6th century, clay (Museum of the Sakitama Ancient Burial Mounds)

Haniwa modeled after residential or other kinds of buildings were also made and these were often located above the burial chamber in the rounded section of the tomb. While the outer perimeter might still be predominated by cylindrical *haniwa*, a few house-shaped *haniwa* in the center might resemble a miniature village.

Archaeologists have also unearthed *haniwa* in the form of ritual specialists and warriors standing in parade-like fashion in front of the houses, as if to stand guard and conduct special ceremonies for the benefit of the deceased.

What role did *haniwa* play?

This now leads us to the question of function and intended audience. What role did *haniwa* play? Who or what was the intended audience? No one knows for sure, but a number of theories have been proposed. It is also important to remember that function and meaning changed over time and place. The most common understanding is that *haniwa* were initially used to define the perimeter of the sacred tomb, separating and magically protecting the deceased from the profane space of the living.

With the development of *haniwa* modeled after humans, the ritual specialists were probably arranged on the tomb to re-enact funerary ceremonies seeking to protect the deceased from harm in the supernatural world, while warriors likely stood guard against enemies—whether human or not. In this sense, *haniwa* may have been intended to be seen by the un-living, perhaps demons or vengeful ghosts. At the same time, some scholars believe *haniwa* were also intended to be seen by the living (even if only a highly selective few). The range and kinds of *haniwa* representing aspects from the life of the deceased may have served to indicate the high status and wealth of the tomb's occupants. Inclusion of animal-shaped *haniwa* could be explained as an attempt to replicate a kind of exotic zoo or pleasure garden stocked with animals acquired by the deceased, but this is highly speculative.

Figure 5.3.6.4.84: Haniwa (Hollow Clay Sculpture) of a Warrior, Kofun period, Japan, 5th – early 6th century, earthenware with painted, incised and applied decoration (Kanto region) (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Style

As for stylistic aspects, the anthropomorphic (human-shaped) *haniwa* have a distinct appearance, consisting of a small head and blank, minimalist face with cutout openings for eyes and almost no attempt to portray a body with any degree of realism. Yet,

oddly, there is a tremendous amount of detail on accessories and wardrobe, often appearing as lifelike replicas of actual weaponry, metal ornaments, and clothing. This somewhat bizarre contrast between the general and the specific is puzzling. One theory suggests that faces and heads were kept small and plain to keep each *haniwa* as light as possible on top, preventing the clay figure from toppling over. The large holes that perforate various sections may have had a similar function, to reduce overall weight and to facilitate uniform drying of the wet clay as a way to prevent cracks. In this sense, although physical, bodily attributes could be compromised, the correct tools and wardrobe that both identify and empower individuals to fulfill their job requirements were of utmost importance.

Among the *haniwa*, it could be said that the most precise, careful attention to detail was reserved for warriors and their horses, reminding us of the critical role played by the military during the Kofun period—a time of massive armed conflict. We now turn to the only *haniwa* that has received designation as a National Treasure in Japan—the *Haniwa Warrior* from Gunma prefecture currently housed at Tokyo National Museum.

Figure **5.3.6.4.85**: Haniwa Armored Man, National treasure, excavated in Iizuka-machi, Ota City, Gunma Prefecture, Kofun period/6th century 130.5 cm (Tokyo National Museum) **zoomable image** ©National Institutes for Cultural Heritage

Closeup of the Warrior Haniwa

This national treasure (TNM J-36697) is one of several *haniwa* unearthed from the vicinity of Ōta city in Gunma prefecture, which tells us that this was an advanced, regional center for *haniwa* manufacture (Gunma is located to the north of Tokyo, quite far from Nara). This *haniwa* offers viewers a rare opportunity to see the detailed armor and weaponry (sword, bow, and quiver) of an ancient clay warrior from this region during the late Kofun period.

Starting with the visorless helmet, especially fascinating is the series of small, evenly spaced half-spherical rivets that appear on a raised section on top of the helmet, in addition to raised strips that connect the sides and front to a narrow band that circles around the forehead and continues behind the head. These rivets are believed to represent metal rivets, suggesting that the warrior's head was protected by a metal helmet. Attached to the helmet are thick protective ear flaps, seemingly made of padded fabric or leather, while a sheet of thinner material wraps around the rest of the head and neck. Rivets also appear on the narrow quiver, containing four or more arrows, strapped to the warrior's back.

The short-sleeved body armor that flares outward near the hips does not have rivets, but is covered by thin, vertically incised markings. Two large looped ties found on the chest suggest that this armor was laced together; whether the armor was made by stringing together thin iron plates is unclear based on the visual evidence, but remains as a possibility.

On both forearms, the clay warrior wears padded, protective guards. A wide, sheathed sword falls diagonally across the front of the body, apparently hanging from the waist: the warrior has his right hand on the hilt, ready to the draw the sword at a moment's notice. The fingers of the left hand gently clasp a thin, vertical object that seems to be a bow; fastened just above the wrist on this hand is a thick, sausage-like object that may be a device to protect his hand from the bowstring.

Figure **5.3.6.4.86**: Helmet (detail), *Haniwa Armored Man*, National treasure, excavated in Iizuka-machi, Ota City, Gunma Prefecture, Kofun period/6th century 130.5 cm (Tokyo National Museum) ©National Institutes for Cultural Heritage

Figure **5.3.6.4.88**: Face (detail), *Haniwa Armored Man*, National treasure, excavated in Iizuka-machi, Ota City, Gunma Prefecture, Kofun period/6th century 130.5 cm (Tokyo National Museum) ©National Institutes for Cultural Heritage

Standing upright with a mask-like, emotionless face (two narrow slits for eyes, an even more narrow slit for the mouth, and a protruding nose), you might not feel immediately threatened by this warrior. Yet, after observing how this *haniwa* warrior is, in fact, extremely well-armed with his formidable armor, a weapon in each hand, and supply of arrows on his back—clearly prepared to quickly strike down any enemy that comes his way—you might become a bit more apprehensive.

The intended function of this particular *haniwa* is not ambiguous, but the question of whether all *haniwa*—both figurative and non-figurative—were believed to protect the tomb's occupants in similar fashion is one that is difficult to answer, inviting us to keep pondering the secrets that were buried both inside and outside *kofun* in ancient Japan.

Additional resources:

Haniwa Armored Man, zoomable images from the e-Museum for the National Treasures & Important Cultural Properties of National Museums, Japan

Kofun Period on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Haniwa at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Haniwa on the Google Art Project

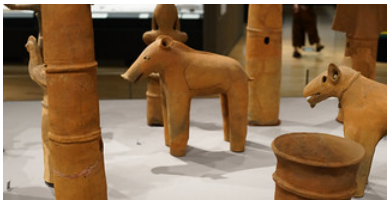
Haniwa Horse at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Haniwa at LACMA

Museum of the Sakitama Ancient Burial Mounds

Haniwa at the Asian Art Museum

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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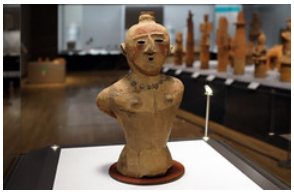


Figure 5.3.6.4.89: More Smarthistory images…

Nara period (710-794)

Tōdai-ji

by DR. DEANNA MACDONALD

Figure **5.3.6.4.90**: Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall), Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan, 743, rebuilt. c. 1700 (photo: author, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Built to impress, twice

When completed in the 740s, Tōdai-ji (or “Great Eastern Temple”) was the largest building project ever on Japanese soil. Its creation reflects the complex intermingling of Buddhism and politics in early Japan. When it was rebuilt in the twelfth century, it ushered in a new era of Shoguns and helped to found Japan’s most celebrated school of sculpture. It was built to impress. Twice. What is a shogun?

Definition: Shogun

"The term shogun...is an ancient military term that was adopted in the twelfth century for the dominant warlord who held political and martial power in Japan while the emperor in Kyoto maintained his position as figural head of state and cultural leader. The members of the Minamoto, Ashikaga, and Tokugawa families who held the position of shogun successively from the twelfth to nineteenth centuries varied greatly in the extent and security of their authority and the stability and prosperity of the realm under their command." (Department of Asian Art. "Shoguns and Art". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shga/hd_shga.htm (October 2004))

Buddhism, Emperor Shomu and the creation of Tōdai-ji

The roots of Tōdai-ji are found in the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the sixth century. Buddhism made its way from India along the Silk Route through Central Asia, China and Korea. Mahayana Buddhism was officially introduced to the Japanese Imperial court around 552 by an emissary from a Korean king who offered the Japanese Emperor Kimmei a gilded bronze statue of the Buddha, a copy of the Buddhist sutras (sacred writings) and a letter stating: “This doctrine can create religious merit and retribution without measure and bounds and so lead on to a full appreciation of the highest wisdom.” About Mahayana Buddhism and the Silk Road

Definition: Mahayana Buddhism and the Silk Road

Two major schools of Buddhist thought are Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. According to Theravada Buddhists, each person is responsible for their own enlightenment. Mahayana Buddhism was a school that arose c. 100 C.E. Mahayana literally means: the big vehicle. It is a big “vehicle” that transports more sentient beings across the ocean of existence, from the wheel of Samsara (reincarnation) to enlightenment and nirvana. The cornerstone of Mahayana Buddhism is belief in bodhisattvas, altruistic enlightened beings who delay their own final nirvana until every sentient being reaches enlightenment. (explanation by Dr. Melody Rod-ari)

"**The Silk Road** is a metaphor for long-distance trade across Asia that first developed from around 300 B.C. to roughly 200 A.D. It was not, in fact, a "road," but rather a collection of land and sea routes linking cities, trading posts, caravan watering places, and hostels between the eastern Mediterranean and China." ("The Silk Road." New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions.../the-silk-road (June 2009))

Figure 5.3.6.4.91: The Great Buddha (Daibutsu), 17th century replacement of an 8th century sculpture, Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan (photo: author, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Buddhism quickly became associated with the Imperial court whose members became the patrons of early Buddhist art and architecture. This connection between sacred and secular power would define Japan's ruling elite for centuries to come. These early Buddhist projects also reveal the receptivity of Japan to foreign ideas and goods—as Buddhist monks and craftspeople came to Japan.

Buddhism's influence grew in the Nara era (710-794) during the reign of Emperor Shomu and his consort, Empress Komyo who fused Buddhist doctrine and political policy—promoting Buddhism as the protector of the state. In 741, reportedly following the Empress' wishes, Shomu ordered temples, monasteries and convents to be built throughout Japan's 66 provinces. This national system of monasteries, known as the Kokubun-ji, would be under the jurisdiction of the new imperial Tōdai-ji ("Great Eastern Temple") to be built in the capital of Nara.

Building Tōdai-ji

Why build on such an unprecedented scale? Emperor Shomu's motives seem to have been a mix of the spiritual and the pragmatic: in his bid to unite various Japanese clans under his centralized rule, Shomu also promoted spiritual unity. Tōdai-ji would be the chief temple of the Kokubun-ji system and be the center of national ritual. Its construction brought together the best craftspeople in Japan with the latest building technology. It was architecture to impress—displaying the power, prestige and piety of the imperial house of Japan.

However the project was not without its critics. Every person in Japan was required to contribute through a special tax to its construction and the court chronicle, the *Shoku Nihon-gi*, notes that, "…the people are made to suffer by the construction of Tōdai-ji and the clans worry over their suffering."

Bronze Buddha

Tōdai-ji included the usual components of a Buddhist complex. At its symbolic heart was the massive *hondō* (main hall), also called the *Daibutsuden* (Great Buddha Hall), which when completed in 752, measured 50 meters by 86 meters and was supported

by 84 massive cypress pillars. It held a huge bronze Buddha figure (the *Daibutsu*) created between 743 to 752. Subsequently, two nine-story pagodas, a lecture hall and quarters for the monks were added to the complex.

Figure **5.3.6.4.92**: The Great Buddha (Daibutsu), 17th century replacement of an 8th century sculpture, Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan (photo: **throgers,** CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The statue was inspired by similar statues of the Buddha in China and was commissioned by Emperor Shomu in 743. This colossal Buddha required all the available copper in Japan and workers used an estimated 163,000 cubic feet of charcoal to produce the metal alloy and form the bronze figure. It was completed in 749, though the snail-curl hair (one of the 32 signs of the Buddha's divinity) took an additional two years.

When completed, the entire Japanese court, government officials and Buddhist dignitaries from China and India attended the Buddha's "eye-opening" ceremony. Overseen by the Empress Koken and attended by the retired Emperor Shomu and Empress Komyo, an Indian monk named Bodhisena is recorded as painting in the Buddha's eyes, symbolically imbuing it with life. The Emperor Shōmu himself is said to have sat in front of Great Buddha and vowed himself to be a servant of the Three Treasures of Buddhism: the Buddha, Buddhist Law, and Buddhist Monastic Community. No images of the ceremony survive but a Nara period scroll painting depicts a sole, humbly small figure at the Daibutsu's base suggesting its awe-inspiring presence.

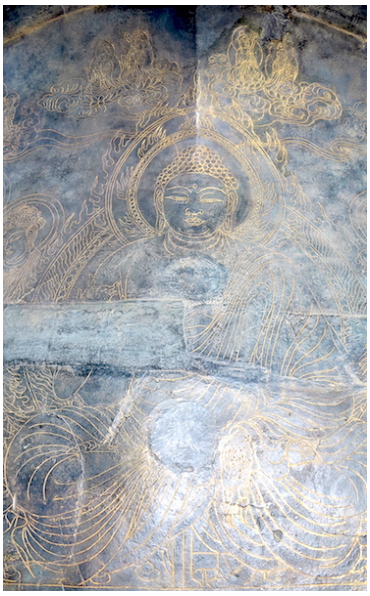


Figure 5.3.6.4.93: Great Buddha, lotus petal (detail), 17th century replacement of an 8th century sculpture, Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan

The Daibutsu sits upon a bronze lotus petal pedestal that is engraved with images of the Shaka (the historical Buddha, known also as Shakyamuni) Buddha and varied Bodhisattvas (sacred beings). The petal surfaces (image left) are etched with fleshy figures with swelling chests, full faces and swirling drapery in a style typical of the elegant naturalism of Nara era imagery. The petals are the only reminders of the original statue, which was destroyed by fire in the twelfth century. Today's statue is a seventeenth-century replacement but remains a revered figure with an annual ritual cleaning ceremony each August.

Chogen and the rebuilding of Tōdai-ji in the Kamakura Era (1185-1333)

The Genpei Civil War (1180-85) saw countless temples destroyed as Buddhist clergy took sides in clan warfare. Japan's principal temple Tōdai-ji sided with the eventually victorious Minamoto clan but was burned by the soon-to-be defeated Taira clan in 1180.

The destruction of this revered Temple shocked Japan. At the war's end, the reconstruction of Tōdai-ji was one of the first projects undertaken by Minamoto Yoritomo who, as the new ruling Shogun, was eager to present the Minamoto as national saviors. The aristocracy and the warrior elite contributed funds and the Buddhist priest Shunjobo Chogen was placed in charge of reconstruction. Tōdai-ji again became the largest building project in Japan.

Figure 5.3.6.4.94: Nandaimon (Great South Gate), end of the 12th century ,Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan

Figure 5.3.6.4.95: Brackets, Nandaimon (Great South Gate), end of the 12th century , Tōdai-ji, Nara, Japan (photo: author, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Chōgen was unique in his generation in that he made three trips to China between 1167-1176. His experience of Song Dynasty Buddhist architecture inspired the rebuilding of the temples of Nara, in what became know as the “Great Buddha” or the “Indian” style.

The key-surviving example of this style is Tōdai-ji’s Great South Gate—Nandaimon—which dates to 1199. An elaborate bracketing system supports the broad-eaved, two-tiered roof. The Nandaimon holds the 2 massive wooden sculptures of Guardian Kings (Kongō Rikishi) by masters of the Kei School of Sculpture.

Kei School of Sculpture

The large scale rebuilding after the Genpei Civil War created a multitude of commissions for builders, carpenters and sculptors. This concentration of talent led to the emergence of the Kei School of sculpture—considered by many to be the peak of Japanese sculpture. Noted for its austere realism and the dynamic, muscularity of its figures, the Kei School reflects the Buddhism and warrior-centered culture of the Kamakura era (1185–1333).

Unkei is considered the leading figure of the Kei school, with a career spanning over 30 years. His distinctive style emerged in his work on the refurbishment of the many Nara temples/shrines, most particularly Tōdai-ji. Unkei’s fierce guardian figure Ungyō in the Nandaimon is typical of Unkei’s powerful, dynamic bodies. It stands in dramatic contrapposto opposite the other muscular Guardian King, Agyō, created with Kaikei and other Kei sculptors.

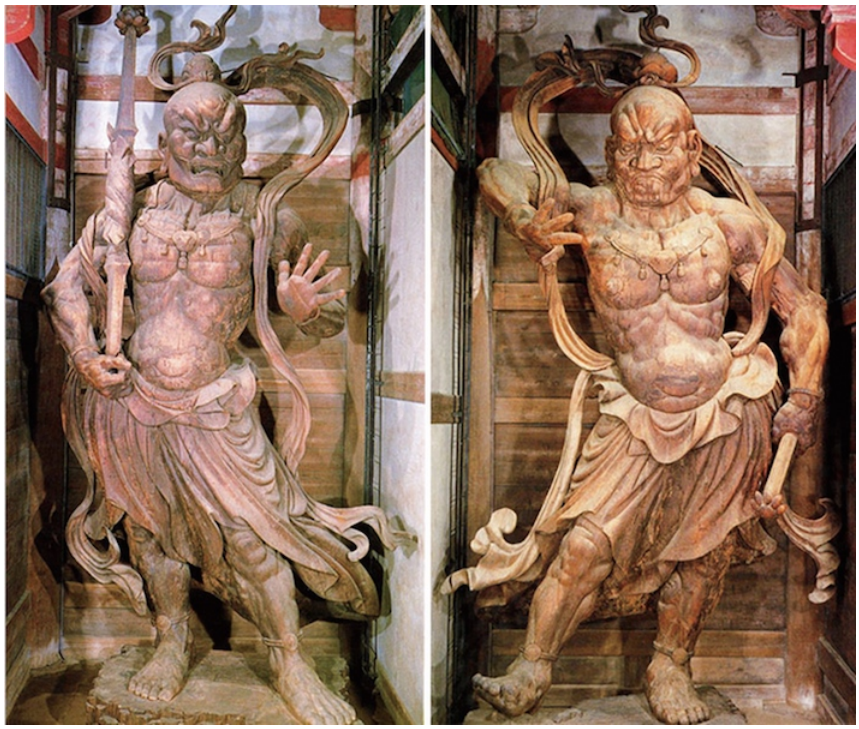


Figure 5.3.6.4.96: Left: Ungyō, right: Agyō, both c. 1203, Nandaimon (Great South Gate), Tōdai-ji Nara, Japan (Asahi Shimbun file photo)

Both figures are fashioned of cypress wood and stand over eight meters tall. They were made using the joint block technique (*yosegi zukuri*), that used eight or nine large wood blocks over which another layer of wooden planks were attached. The outer wood was then carved and painted. Only a few traces of color remain.

Ecology, craftsmanship & early Buddhist art in Japan

The grand Buddhist architectural and sculptural projects of early Japan share a common material—wood–and are thus closely linked to the natural environment and to the long history of wood craftsmanship in Japan.

When Korean craftsmen brought Buddhist temple architecture to Japan in the sixth century, Japanese carpenters were already using complex wooden joints (instead of nails) to hold buildings together. The Korean's technology allowed for the support of larger, tile-roof structures that used brackets and sturdy foundation pillars to funnel weight to the ground. This technology ushered in a new, larger scale in Japanese architecture.

Monumental timber framed architecture requires enormous amounts of wood. The wood of choice was cypress, which grows up to forty meters tall and has a straight tight grain that easily splits into long beams and is resistant to rot.

The eighth-century campaign to construct Buddhist temples in every Japanese province under Imperial control (mostly in the Kinai area, today home to Osaka and Kyoto) is estimated to have resulted in the construction 600-850 temples using three million cubic meters of wood. As the years progressed Kinai's old growth forests were exhausted and builders had to travel farther for wood.

Figure **5.3.6.4.97**: Model, Nara-era (8th century) Tōdai-ji

By far the most prestigious and wood-demanding project was the Imperial monastery of Tōdai-ji. Eighth-century Tōdai-ji had two 9-storey pagodas and a 50 x 86 meter great hall supported by 84 massive cypress pillars that used at least 2200 acres of local forest. After Tōdai-ji's destruction in 1180, it was rebuilt under the supervision of the monk Chogen, who solicited aid from all over Western Japan. Builders had to travel hundreds of kilometers from Kinai to find suitable wood. Whole forests were cleared to find tall cypresses for pillars, which were then transported at great cost: 118 dams were built to raise river levels in order to transport the massive pillars. And that was only the pillars—wood for the rest of the structure came from at least ten provinces.

Tōdai-ji's reconstructed main hall was only half the size of the original and its pagodas several stories shorter. The availability or scarcity of quality local wood was a major factor in the design and evolution of architecture in Japan. For example, the growing scarcity of cypress of structural dimensions led to innovations that allowed carpenters to work with less straight-grained woods, like red pine and zelkova.

Additional resources:

Historic monuments of Ancient Nara (UNESCO)

Video from UNESCO on the great Buddha sculpture

Japan, 500-100 A.D. on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

The Shōsōin Repository and its treasure

by DR. MARIACHIARA GASPARINI

Shōsōin Repository

Figure **5.3.6.4.98**: Shōsōin Repository (photo: **z tanuki**, CC BY 3.0)

In the Japanese city, Nara, on the northwest rear corner of **Tōdai-ji Temple's** Daibutsuden Hall stands a building largely unaltered since the 8th century. Of age-darkened cypress and deceptively plain, its distinctively ribbed walls, punctuated by large flat

rectangular doors, find an echo in the linear grooves of its deeply eaved, flaring roof of ceramic tiles. Poised on forty columns and lacking stairs, its simple box shape seems to float. This vision of austere, geometric elegance is the Shōsōin Repository.

Figure **5.3.6.4.99**: Map of the Silk Roads (various overland routes across Eurasia)

For almost 1200 years, until the twentieth century, it preserved in excellent condition approximately nine thousand artifacts from China, Southeast Asia, Iran, and the Middle East—a miscellany connecting ancient Japan to the cultural trade and artistic exchange of the Eurasian continent. While other collections worldwide hold treasures from the ancient Silk Roads, the Shōsōin is unique as a time capsule of the entire known world of its time—when Nara-period Japan glowed as a star in the brilliant cultural cosmos of **Tang-dynasty China** (618-907).

Figure **5.3.6.4.100**: The Daibutsu, Vairocana, at Tōdai-ji, Nara (photo: **JahnmitJa**, CC BY-SA 2.0)

The structure and its context

Despite its grand spiritual setting, the Shōsōin itself is practical, and not intrinsically religious. It typifies a renowned form of storehouse called an *azekura zukuri*, developed by ancient Japanese village carpenters to hold grain and other foodstuffs that formed the lifeblood of their agrarian society. Often referred to as of "log cabin style," this two thousand-year-old design is not the

primitive, drafty pile the expression typically calls to mind. Nor is it simply a matter of taste. Its appearance owes to sophisticated structural engineering that makes brilliant use of wood's basic property to expand and contract according to weather conditions. The precisely planed, triangular logs interlock to form a flat wall on the interior and the uniquely ribbed exterior.

The ceramic tiles and hip-and-gable design of the roof both shed water and repel fire. The columns that raise it from the ground stand on natural stone. In all, this creates a natural climate regulation system that lessens the dampness of Japan's humid climate, and discourages infestation by vermin. The absence of permanent stairs deters thieves. The wooden chests in which most of the objects were kept provided additional protection, preventing light and pollution from damaging the organic materials. The secure, ventilated conditions proved ideal for protecting the prized possessions of Japan's Buddhist monastic communities. The Shōsōin is the oldest extant example of such treasure houses.

Figure 5.3.6.4.101: Azekura zukuri interlocking technique (photo: ignis, CC BY-SA 2.5)

The Shōsōin interior contains three rooms on two floors, each with an entrance door. Despite the lack of written sources confirming its dating, a recent analysis of the timbers has confirmed a middle-8th century construction date (note that the middle room walls with additional flat beams that are different from those of the other two, is likely not original). Restorations done during the much later Edo period (1603 – 1868), including iron strips added to the columns and copper plates added to protect the floor edging, do not significantly impact the repository.

Objects as Buddhist offerings

Founded by early emperors, Tōdai-ji was one Japan's highest-ranking Buddhist monastic communities and remains an important religious center. Patronage from members of imperial and noble families, as acts of piety, made it among the wealthiest. The Shōsōin mainly served to house personal possessions donated by Empress Kōmyō to the Daibutsu Vairocana, a Buddha that is the world's largest cast-bronze statue. These gifts were made after the death of her husband, Emperor Shōmu in 756, in order to ensure the protection of his soul. These offerings were stored in the Northern room.

Senior monks used the Middle and Southern rooms for ceremonial objects, and in the 10th century, articles and documents were added from another smaller repository nearby. While the Southern room remained accessible until the Meiji period (1868-1912), sometime in the 12th century, Japan's Imperial household sealed the Middle and Northern rooms. High-ranking ministers took responsibility for their security. From this point on the Shōsōin was rarely opened and over the centuries it survived both war and fire, leaving virtually all the ancient cultural treasures intact.

The treasure at the Shōsōin Repository

The thousands of items preserved in the Shōsōin repository include manuscripts, musical instruments, textiles, shoes, banners, ceramics and glass, metalwork, and lacquerware. These objects showcase the high level of craftsmanship and the complex techniques available to the imperial household during this early period, some of which are now lost.

We also benefit from the meticulous records of these objects kept by ancient caretakers. Thanks to an inscription on each, today we know its date, usage, and sometimes its provenance—all of which help to put the objects in context. The material preserved in the repository is particularly important because it created the foundation for the Japanese art and style that followed, which originated in this era against the backdrop of China's Tang Dynasty (which has long been seen as a golden age of art, music, and literature, and economic and political influence across East Asia). Nara was modeled after Chang'an (now Xi'an in China) the Tang capital, and a self-proclaimed center of Buddhism. It was especially between the 7th and 8th centuries that Japan, welcoming foreign people and sending envoys abroad, studied, preserved, and developed its own artistic culture.

Silk Roads

The unquestionable beauty and finesse of the mulberry wood lute inlaid with mother of pearl makes evident Tang China's wide, complex cultural impact. Known in Japan as a *Kuwanoki no genia* and in China as a *pipa*, this pear-shaped 5-string instrument was likely introduced originally to China from Central Asia in the 1st or 2nd century C.E., and would attain a lasting popularity. This particular 8th century example from the Shōsōin very much recalls the type of *pipa* depicted on murals of the 3rd-4th century Buddhist cave complexes of Dunhuang and Yulin in what is now Gansu Province, China—vestiges of a chain of major monastic centers that once spread Buddhism and served as junctions for the interchange of ideas, goods and peoples along the northern Silk Roads.

Figure **5.3.6.4.102**: *Kuwanoki no genia* (a composite image showing front and back), Tang Dynasty, 8th century, (Shōsōin Repository, Nara) (front and back)

Figure **5.3.6.4.103**: Mother-of-pearl inlaid bronze and lacquer mirror (Shōsōin Repository, Nara)

Far east across the Yellow Sea, the Sea of Japan, and the ancient kingdoms of the Korean peninsula, the route concluded with the imperial monasteries of Nara-era Japan, including Tōdai-ji.

The large floral motif embellishing the *Kuwanoki no genia* and other objects in the repository, such as mirrors, boxes, and ritual rugs offer further links. Typical of the late Tang period, this motif is generally recognized as an emblem of the Tang dynasty; and in Japan it is known as *kara-hana*, meaning "Tang flower."

Figure **5.3.6.4.104**: Musicians (pipa at the bottom right and held by the central dancing character behind the shoulders) from the Western Paradise of Amitaba, Dunhuang Cave 112, Middle Tang Period, 8th century

Sasanian influence

Correspondence with visual material from these Chinese caves confirms that many objects in the Shōsōin enjoyed actual use. The repository artifacts likewise make very tangible the Silk Route's far-flung connections and the complexities. For example, a handsome glass bowl with cut hollow facets finds an echo in a 9th century banner discovered in the **Mogao caves at Dunhuang**.

Figure 5.3.6.4.105: Left: Hakururi no wan from the Shōsōin Repository; right: Banner (detail) of a Bodhisattva holding a glass (British Museum)

The banner portrays an important deity, a Bodhisattva, holding a similar bowl his hand (in Japanese the bowl is called a *Hakururi no wan*). This type of glass is commonly known as "Sasanian glass," referring to the last pre-Islamic Iranian dynasty that, from the 3rd to the 7th century, dominated a vast Eurasia territory (from Central Asia to Iraq). But this type of glass was already being produced before the Sasanian period, and also elsewhere in the Middle East. A similar, much earlier type also was discovered in **Palmyra** (in modern Syria).

Ancient fabrics were among the most highly prized of luxury items in ancient times and represent the majority of the artifacts from the Shōsōin. Similar patterned textiles remain among the important possessions of other Buddhist communities established during the era of imperial Nara (such as Hōryū-ji). Almost entirely made of silk and ramie, they belong to the second period of textile development in Japan, which like other items in the Shōsōin, reflect Tang China's influence in their motifs, such as the floral medallion made in weft-faced compounds (generally known in the West as samite). An earlier, first phase can be dated to between the 4th or 5th centuries, possibly when early emperors invited textile weavers to Japan from Korean kingdoms and China, societies that were then far more sophisticated.

Figure 5.3.6.4.106: Reproduction of a silk twill textile, woven in Japan, imitating a Sasanian Persian original, from the Shōsōin repository in Nara (originally held in Horyuji Temple), 6th–7th century (private collection)

In particular, a clan of artisans called the *Nishiki* is mentioned in early Japanese historical accounts, most famously "A Record of Ancient Things" (*Kojiki*) and "Chronicles of Japan" (*Nihon Shoki*). Not by coincidence, the term *nishiki* has long referred to Japanese polychrome patterned weavings.

Amongst the Iranian or Iranian-inspired artifacts in Nara, there is a particular *nishiki* fragment, now considered a national treasure, which shows the artistic collaboration among a diverse group of artisans of different ethnic groups who combined their artistic and technical expertise. Its design consists of a repetition of beaded roundels enclosing pairs of mirrored hunters on a winged horse, drawing a bow at a rearing lion. All the pictorial elements in the composition (crown, roundel, flower, etc.) link to Sasanian motifs, though the Chinese characters in the bodies of the horses suggest possible Chinese-Central Asian production. Such collaborations were quite frequent along the Silk Road, especially in the area between Sogdiana (a colony of the Eastern Sasanian Empire) and Turfan in the Xinjiang Province. The composition often appears on Sasanian metalwork in collections worldwide.

Today

In 1997, the Shōsōin building was designated as a National Treasure and registered as part of the World Heritage. Its contents are no longer kept there but in two secure buildings built nearby in 1953 and 1962, called the Eastern and the Western Repository. Every autumn, for about two weeks, fifty to sixty items are exhibited in the Nara National Museum (with a related catalog), giving the public the opportunity to admire and learn about many of the Buddhist-inspired artifacts preserved by the Shōsōin that characterize the "Nara period." The Shōsōin's treasure as a whole represents the cultural transfers that occurred along the Silk Road, which stretched in the East through China and Korea, and placed Japan in an ancient global context.

Additional resources:

History of Shōsōin from the Imperial Household Agency shosoin.kunaicho.go.jp/en-US/Home/About/History

Collections of Persian Art in Japan

Complete list of SHOSOIN Collection solid objects 'Shosoin Tanabetu MOKUROKU', Nara, Japan

Japan's Oldest Archive: A Workshop on the Shosoin

Heleanor Feltham, "Lions, Silks and Silver: The Influence of Sasanian Persia," Victor H. Mair, editor, Sino-Platonic Papers, 2010.

Traveling the Silk Road from the American Museum of Natural History

Ry-Oichi Hayashi. *The Silk Road and the Shoso-In* (The Heibonsha Survey of Japanese Art ; V. 6. Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 1980).

Kaneo Matsumoto, *Jōdai –Gire: 7th and 8th Century Textiles in Japan from the Shōsō-in and Hōryū-ji* (Kyoto: Shikosha Publishing Co. Ltd., 1984).

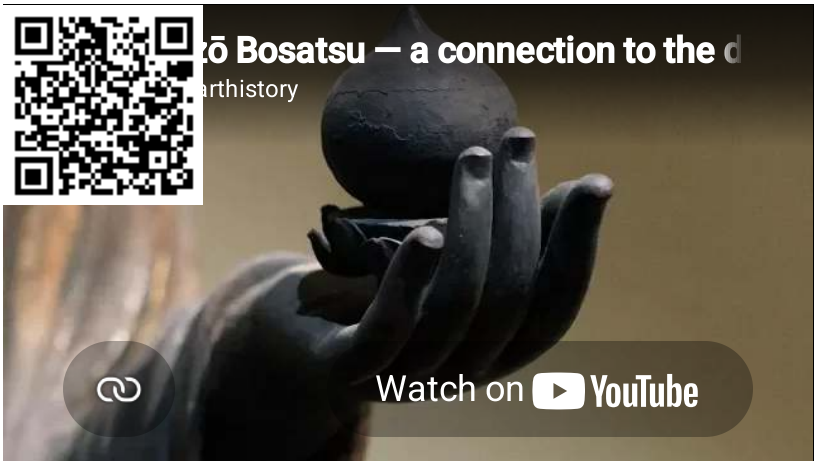
Kamakura period

The shoguns (military leaders) gradually gained power over the nobility during this turbulent period.

1185 - 1333

Jizō Bosatsu

*by **DR. HANNAH SIGUR** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER***



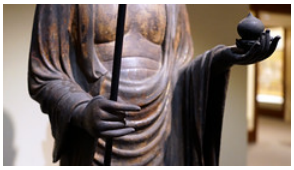
Video **5.3.6.4.2**: Jizō Bosatsu, late 12th to mid-13th century, Kamakura period, Japan, wood with lacquer, gold leaf, cutout gold foil decoration, and color, 181.6 x 72.4 x 57.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) Speakers: Dr. Hannah Sigur and Dr. Steven Zucker

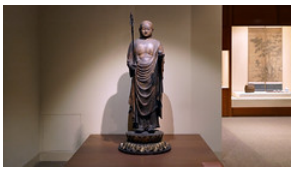
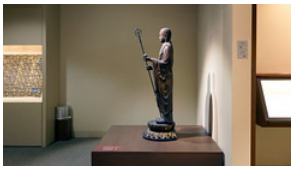
Additional resources:

This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Kamakura and Nanbokucho Periods on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



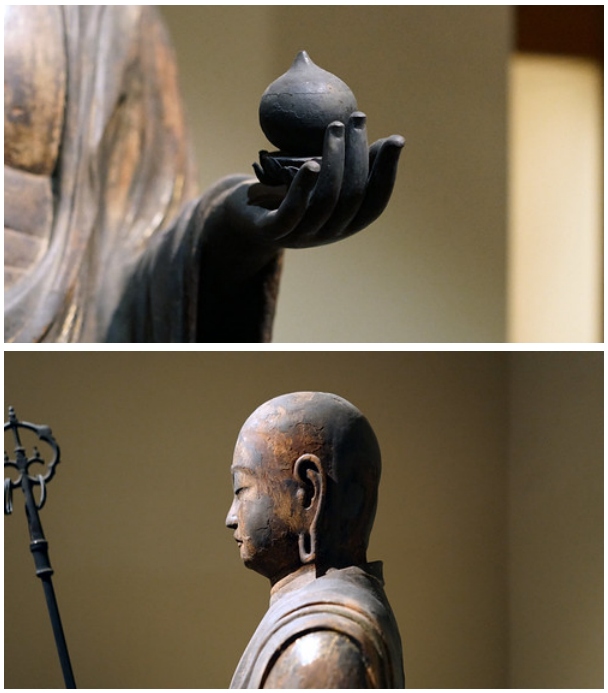
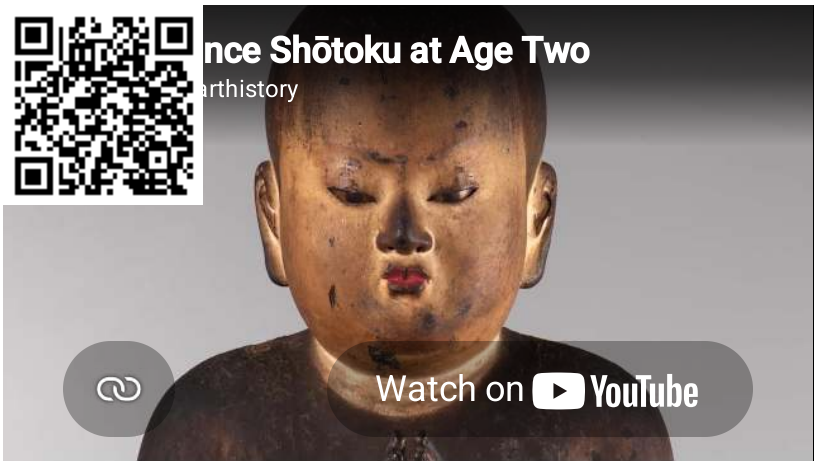


Figure 5.3.6.4.107: More Smarthistory images…

Prince Shōtoku at Age Two

by DR. RACHEL SAUNDERS and ANGELA CHANG



Video 5.3.6.4.3: Prince Shōtoku at Age Two, Kamakura period, c. 1292, Japanese cypress, assembled woodblock construction with polychromy and rock-crystal inlaid eyes (Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum)

Speakers:
Rachel Saunders, Ph.D., Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Associate Curator of Asian Art, Harvard Art Museums
Angela Chang, Conservator of Objects and Sculpture, Assistant Director, Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Harvard Art Museums
Steven Zucker, Ph.D.

Additional resources:

This work at the Harvard Art Museums

Research on Prince Shōtoku from Harvard's East Asian Art program

Illustrated Biography of Prince Shōtoku at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace

by DR. HANNAH SIGUR

Figure 5.3.6.4.108: Burning Palace (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

It is hard to imagine an image of war that matches the visceral and psychological power of the *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*. This thirteenth-century portrayal of a notorious incident from a century earlier appears on a hand scroll, a common East Asian painting format in Japan called an *emaki*. It also is a prime example of the action-packed *otoko-e*, "men's paintings," created in the Kamakura period.

Definition: Hand scroll

A handscroll is meant to be held and unrolled section by section horizontally in contrast to a scroll that is intended to be hung and is vertically oriented.

Definition: Kamakura period

The **Kamakura period** lasted from 1185 until 1333. It was initiated by the Shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo and marked the beginning of feudal Japan and the samurai caste.

Figure 5.3.6.4.109: Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace fully unrolled (right side above, left side below), Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Designed to be unrolled in sections for close-up viewing, it shows the basic features of this pictorial form: a bird's eye view of action moves right-to-left (between a written introduction and conclusion). In vibrant outline and washes of color, the story (one

event in an insurrection—more on this below) unfolds sequentially, so the main characters appear multiple times. The attention to detail is so exact that historians consider it a uniquely valuable reference for this period: from the royal mansion's walled gateways, unpainted wooden buildings linked by corridors, bark roofs, large shutters and bamboo blinds that open to verandas, to the scores of foot soldiers, cavalry, courtiers, priests, imperial police, and even the occasional lady—each individualized by gesture and facial expression from horror to morbid humor, robes, armor, and weaponry easily identifiable according to rank, design, and type.

Figure **5.3.6.4.110**: Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace without framing text, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Unfurled this work stands apart. Its now-forgotten artist used the expressive potential of the long, narrow *emaki* format with such interpretive brilliance that he perhaps considered that on occasion it might be fully open. He organized a jumble of minutiae into a cohesive narrative arc.

Figure **5.3.6.4.111**: Opening text and ox cart (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Beginning from a point of ominous calm, a single ox carriage transports the eye to a tangle of shoving and colliding carts and warriors. With escalating violence, the energy pulses, swells, and then rushes to a crescendo of graphic hand-to-hand mayhem—decapitations, stabbings and hacking, the battle's apex marked at the center by the palace rooflines slashing through the havoc like a bolt of lightening followed by an explosion of billowing flame and women fleeing for their lives amid the din.

Figure **5.3.6.4.112**: Palace (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The chaos ebbs as victors and dazed survivors stream through the rear gate, and ends in grisly, surreal calm with the dressed and tagged heads of vanquished nobles on pikes, a disorderly cluster of foot soldiers and cavalry surrounding the ox carriage, their general trotting before them in victorious satisfaction over the smoking wreckage and bloody atrocity left behind.

Figure **5.3.6.4.113**: Warriors enter palace below a zig-zag roofline (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The *Night Attack at Sanjô Palace* arrests even the casual viewer with its sheer comprehensibility. Although the artist would likely not have imagined an audience beyond the world he knew, his vision has enthralled viewers across centuries and cultures, making this painting not only among the very finest picture scrolls ever conceived, but also among the most gripping depictions of warfare —creating an irresistible urge to examine the work closely. But in depicting an event that really happened, it comes fully to life only when we know something of what it so vividly portrays.

Figure **5.3.6.4.114**: One of numerous violent confrontations within the palace (detail), *Attack Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

This begins in a brief introduction to a complicated yet fascinating chapter in Japanese history. Incredibly, the appalling incident at Sanjô Palace depicted on the scroll was but one chapter in the vicious Heiji Insurrection of 1159-60. This short war, with two other famous conflicts before and after, punctuated a brutal epoch that came to a close in 1192 with the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate. The stories of these flashpoints of blood thirst, collectively called *gunki monogatari*, or “war tales,” have inspired a huge body of art over the centuries. *The Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, once part of a larger set that pictorialized the entire Heiji incident, survives with two other scrolls, one of them only in remnants.

Definition: Kamakura shogunate

Shōgun refers to the rule of a military leader. Shōgun warlords ruled Japan from 1192 until 1867 though they were, in theory, appointed by the emperor. Their rule is known as the shogunate.

Figure **5.3.6.4.115**: First half of the handscroll, *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (Heiji monogatari emaki) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Stories of romanticized martial derring-do, *gunki monogatari* are history recounted by the victors. They celebrate Japan's change from a realm controlled by a royal court to one ruled by samurai. But the events originated in the unusual, even unique, nature of Japan's imperial world. Centered in the city of Kyôto, in some ways it resembled many ancient kingdoms. It was prey to shifting loyalties, betrayals, and factional divisions among ambitious families who would stop at nothing in the quest for power. As elsewhere, emperors had several consorts, and noble daughters served as tools in political marriages to elevate the power of their families, and above all their clan head.

Figure **5.3.6.4.116**: Second half of the handscroll, *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace* (detail, left half), Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Unusually, a few patriarchs managed over time to displace imperial authority, relegating emperors to stultifying ceremonial functions. And possibly uniquely, Japanese emperors found a way to reclaim some of that lost power: by abdicating in favor of a successor. Freed from onerous rituals, a "retired" emperor could assert himself. Which prince from which wife of which current or previous emperor would succeed to the throne stood highest among the disputes. By the twelfth century, nobles as well as current and retired emperors had all turned to samurai clans to resolve their bitter rivalries.

Figure **5.3.6.4.117**: Fire (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The cast of characters in the *Night Attack at the Sanjô Palace* came from this treacherous world. Sanjô Palace was the home of former Emperor Go-Shirakawa, known for a career as the wiliest and longest-lived of retired royals. He had recently abdicated in favor of his son Emperor Nijô. The two emperors backed vying sides of the Fujiwara clan, a conspiratorial family unsurpassed in subjugating and sometimes choosing a succession of emperors. One member of this clan, Fujiwara no Nobuyori,[1] plotted against everyone. The Taira and the Minamoto clans served powerful interests in all of these disputes, while also pursuing their own ambitions as bitter rivals of the other.

Who were the Minamoto and the Taira samurai clans?.

Definition: The Minamoto and the Taira samurai clans

The Taira and Minamoto samurai clans may have originated in the early 9th century when emperors demoted members of their families to the lesser rank of noble.

The samurai Taira clan (also known as Heike) was one of four powerful families during this period.

The samurai Minamoto clan (also known as Genji) was another of the four noble families of this period.

Figure 5.3.6.4.118: Dead archer (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Simply put the Night Attack was part of Fujiwara no Nobuyori's bid to seize power by abducting both the emperor and the retired emperor. Backed by Minamoto no Yoshitomo, head of that clan, Nobuyori saw an opportunity when the head of the Taira clan, who supported Emperor Nijō, left Kyōto on a pilgrimage. The *emaki* depicts the seizing of the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa. Three key elements appear multiple times, orienting the eye and organizing the sweep of events: guided by a groom inside, the elegant ox carriage that will carry off Go-Shirakawa opens the action.

Figure **5.3.6.4.119**: Tumult at the palace gate, note the two women (top left) distinguished by flowing hair and aided by an attendent, fleeing the battle as fast as their voluminous robes will allow (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

We see it knocked about with others in the crush of fighting at the palace wall, on the veranda where Nobuyori in colorful armor orders Go-Shirakawa into it, and finally in the surge of departing victors where two soldiers lolling on top lending an air of indignity and insult to the monarch. Nobuyori, now in court robes and on horseback, appears in front, glancing back at the carriage. A mounted Minamoto Yoshitomo, distinguished by red armor and a distinctive horned helmet, appears twice—behind the carriage as it crashes onto the veranda, and brandishing a bow and arrow, cantering behind it in the departing crowd.

Figure **5.3.6.4.120**: Palace gate (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace* (detail, left center), Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

The remainder of the Heiji Rebellion story appeared on other *emaki* in the set, now mostly lost: the kidnapping of Emperor Nijô, the slaughter of another noble household, Nobuyori forcing Nijô to appoint him chancellor, Taira Kiyomori's return to decimate the schemers, and finally Kiyomori's mistake—banishing rather than executing several of Minamoto sons. Minamoto no Yoritomo and his brother Yoshitsune would return years later to destroy the Taira clan in the Gempei War and found the first of four military

governments of the Shōgunate that ruled Japan from 1192 until 1867. Emperors and nobles remained in Kyoto, but were politically powerless. Feudal culture came to a violent end in 1868 at the hands of other samurai clans. They brought the young emperor Meiji into a new role as the monarch (really a figurehead) of a modern nation. Over the Meiji era's early tumultuous decades many spectacular works of art left Japan to join important collections in the West. The *Night Attack at Sanjô Palace*, once owned by a powerful samurai family, came into the possession of an influential American who brought it home to Boston. It has been a highlight of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston since 1889.

Figure **5.3.6.4.121**: Closing sequence (detail), *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era (*Heiji monogatari emaki*) Japanese, Kamakura period, second half of the 13th century, 45.9 x 774.5 x 7.6 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

[1] Japanese surnames come first and given names come second. Fujiwara and Taira are surnames. The Chinese characters used have different pronunciations that can appear at different times. "Minamoto" can be "Genji;" "Taira" can be "Heike."

Additional resources:

This Handscroll at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Interactive scroll, Bowdoin College

The scroll's text:

At about the hour of the ox (2 am) on the ninth day, Lord Nobuyori proceeded with several hundred mounted soldiers to the Sanjō Palace, the residence of the Retired Emperor, and said, "Since I have heard that I am to be struck down, I intend to go to the east. I have served you close at hand for years and have been favored more than others by Your Majesty, and so it is indeed sad for me to part from my lord and abruptly leave the capital."

Then the Retired Emperor said, "What sort of an affair is this? Who would strike you?" But without hearing him out, soldiers hastily brought up the Imperial carriage. "You must hasten into the Imperial carriage. Now, set fire to the Palace," ordered Nobuyori, and His Majesty unwillingly got into the Imperial carriage. Jōsaimon'in had already gotten in. It was Lord Moronaka who had brought up the Imperial carriage. Nobuyori, Yoshitomo, Shigenari, the Sado Vice-Minister of Ceremonial, Minamoto Mitsumoto, the Commisioner of the Police, Suezane, the former Commisioner of Police, and the others surrounded the Imperial carriage and took it to the Imperial Palace. They shoved him into the Palace Single-Copy Library, where Shigenari and Mitsumoto guarded him.

Soldiers blockaded the Palace on all four sides and set fire to it. Those who fled out they shot or hacked to death. Many jumped into the wells, hoping that they might save themselves. The ladies-in-waiting of high and low rank and the girls of the women's quarters, running out screaming and shouting, fell and lay prostrate, stepped on by the horses and trampled by the men. It was more than terrible. No one knows the number of persons who lost their lives.

Some said that Yoshitomo had raised a rebellion and had broken into the Sanjō Palace in a night attack and set it on fire and that even the Retired Emperor had not escaped the flames. Some also shouted that His Imperial Highness had gone to the Imperial Palace. Consequently, the "Great Lord" the Lord Chancellor, and all the other nobles and courtiers came in a crowd. the noise of their horses and carriages rushing back and forth was like thunder, and greatly did it resound both in heaven and on earth.

At the hour of the tiger (4 am) the same night, they seized the dwelling of the Shinzei at Anegakoji Nishinotoin and set fire to it. For the past three or four years arms had been banned, and the Empire had been at peace, but now suddenly this disturbance had broken out, and both the Imperial Palace and the capital were filled with soldiers. The noble and lowly lamented together, wondering what had happened.

Translation from Reischauer & Yamagiwa, *Early Japanese Literature*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1951, p. 451-453

Video **5.3.6.4.4**

Muromachi period

Named for a part of Kyoto, this period produced some of Japan's most treasured art and architecture.

1392 - 1573

Bamboo in the Four Seasons: painting and poetry in Japan

by DR. SONIA COMAN and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video **5.3.6.4.5**: *Bamboo in the Four Seasons*, attributed to Tosa Mistunobu, late 15th to early 16th century (Muromachi period), Japan, ink, color and gold leaf on paper, each screen 157 x 360 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Speakers: Sonia Coman and Steven Zucker

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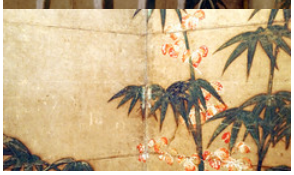

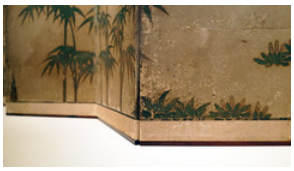

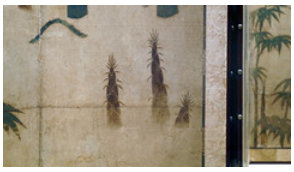

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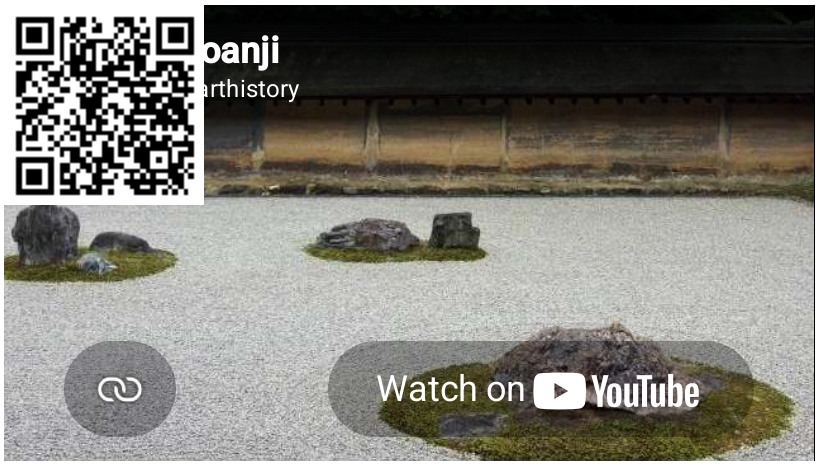
Figure 5.3.6.4.122: More Smarthistory images…

Ryōanji (Peaceful Dragon Temple)

by DR. YOONJUNG SEO



Video 5.3.6.4.6: Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Zen Buddhism and the rock garden of Ryōanji

Ryōanji is a temple located in north Kyoto, Japan affiliated with a branch of Zen Buddhism. The followers of Zen Buddhism pursued “enlightenment” or “awakening” by means of self-introspection and personal experience in daily life. The quintessence and aesthetics of Zen is epitomized in the rock garden and architecture of Ryōanji.

Ryōanji thrived as a great Zen center for the cultural activities of the elite from the late sixteenth through the first half of the seventeenth century under the patronage of the Hosokawa family. The temple and its gardens are listed as one of the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto. In the late 1990, the garden attracted over a million visitors annually and is regarded as an expression of Zen art and a symbol of Zen Buddhism and Japanese culture.

Figure 5.3.6.4.123: Rock garden, Ryōanji, Kyoto, Japan (photo: Vincent Briccoli, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

When visitors pass through main gate, they encounter the Mirror Pond (Kyōyōchi) on the left with a scenic view of surrounding mountains. Walking along the pilgrim's path and entering the second gate, visitors arrive at the main building of the monastery, the hōjo (abbot's residence). The rock garden is located in the front of the hojo and is viewed either from the wooden veranda embracing the building or from inside the room. What is Zen Buddhism?

Dry Landscape Garden (*karesansui*) in Ryōanji

Figure 5.3.6.4.124: Rock garden, Ryōanji, Kyoto, Japan (photo: Mr Hicks46, CC BY-SA 2.0)

The Ryōanji garden is the one of the most famous examples of a rock garden—a form which developed during the Muromachi period (1392-1573) with the efflorescence of Zen Buddhism in medieval Japan. This type of garden consists of rocks and pebbles

rather than vegetation and water, and was mainly created on the grounds of temples for encouraging contemplation. White gravel often symbolizes flowing elements such as waterfalls, rivers, creeks, or sea, while rocks suggest islands, shores, or bridges.

Figure 5.3.6.4.125: Muqi Fachang, *Fishing Village at Sunset*, a section of "Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers," 13th-century handscroll, cut and remounted as eight hanging scrolls (Nezu Museum, Tokyo)

The garden may have been inspired by aspects of both Japanese and Chinese culture. For instance, Shinto, an indigenous religion of Japan, focuses on the worship of deities in nature. Also, Zen Buddhism, which derived from Chan Buddhism in China, emphasizes meditation as a path toward enlightenment. Medieval Chinese landscape paintings associated with this sect of Buddhism often displayed a sparse, monochromatic style that reflected a spontaneous approach to enlightenment (see the example, left). Together, these concepts promoted the aesthetic values of rustic simplicity, spontaneity, and truth to materials that came to characterize Zen art. Today, the sea of gravel, rocks, and moss of the rock garden and the earthy tones of the clay walls contrast with the blossoming foliage beyond—evoking stillness and contemplation suitable for meditation.

Like other Japanese rock gardens, the Ryōanji garden presents stones surrounded by raked white gravel with a minimal use of plants. Fifteen rocks of different sizes are carefully arranged in groups amidst the raked pebbles covering a 250 square-meter rectangle of ground. The stones are carefully arranged so that one can only see no more than fourteen of the fifteen at once from any angle. Staring from the largest group on the far left, a visitor's eyes rhythmically move through the garden from the front to the rear and back, and then from the front to the right upper corner.

The garden is located on the south side of the hōjō, the main building used for the abbot's personal study and living quarters. The hōjō is divided into six rooms by sliding doors called *fusuma*; three rooms on the south (a reception, a lecture room and a meeting room) and those on the north (a study, a changing room and a central room consisting of three subdivisions of a serving chamber, alter, and sleeping room). The hōjō also includes gardens on each side of the building—a moss garden called the West Garden, a stone and moss garden, and a garden with a tea house.

Figure 5.3.6.4.126: Rock garden, Ryōanji, Kyoto, Japan (photo: Andy H, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0))

Date? Creator?

Scholars debate the exact dating of the garden, but the consensus is that it was originally created in the fifteenth century and that its present design dates from the Edo period ((1615–1868). The identity of the garden's creator is also controversial, as no records of the rock garden can be found prior to the early 1680s. Early descriptions explain that the garden has nine big stones representing "tiger cubs crossing the water" and attribute the design to Matsumoto, the chief patron of Ryōanji, or Sōami, the connoisseur, painter, and garden designer attending the Ashikaga shogunate. An inscription carved on the back of one stone bears witness to the

involvement of professional laborers in the garden's architecture—the stone has two names, Kotaro and Hikojiro, who were known as *sensui kawaramono* (riverbank workers) belonging to the lower social strata. As the garden has fifteen stones today, it is certain that the arrangement we see now cannot be the same as the original medieval design (which had nine stones). Although it remains unclear who designed the garden, or what it originally looked like, it is evident that the Ryōanji garden has changed throughout time.

The meaning of the garden

Many different theories on the garden's meaning have been suggested—some say it represents islands floating on an ocean, or a mother tiger carrying cubs over the sea, while others say it symbolizes the Japanese aesthetic concept of *wabi* (refined austerity) and *sabi* (subdued taste), or the fundamental ideal of Zen philosophy. A more recent theory argues that it is an expression of a pure form of abstract composition meant to incite meditation. Whether originally intended to represent pictorial images or symbolize metaphysical concepts, it is certain that the rustic austerity and minimalist rock garden at Ryōanji has played a significant role in art and architecture from medieval times to the present in Japan.

Art and architecture in Ryōanji

Figure **5.3.6.4.127**: Kyōyōchi (Mirror Pond,) Ryōanji, Kyoto, Japan (photo: **jpellgen**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The fame of the stone garden at Ryōanji is so imposing that it has overwhelmed the other parts of the temple, including *Kyōyōchi* (Mirror Pond, located in the lower part of the site), a small west garden, and a rear garden with a teahouse. The Mirror Pond is reminiscent of courtly gardens from the Heian period (794 to 1185), while the teahouse and garden date back to the seventh century. Near the teahouse is a famous stone water basin.

Figure **5.3.6.4.128**: Appreciation of Painting, from a set of the "Four Accomplishments," Kano school, Momoyama period, c. 1606, four of eight panels mounted on sliding-door panels, ink, color, gold and gold leaf on paper, 72 inches x 24 feet / 182/9 x 731.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The wall door paintings that once decorated the *hōjō* are preserved today in Japanese and overseas collections. Among them, two large panels depicting “Chinese Immortals” and the “Four Elegant Accomplishments” (above) belonged to Ryōanji’s main hall and once faced its rock garden. They were removed from Ryōanji and sold in 1895, when Buddhism was persecuted during the new Meiji regime. These works entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1989. Contrary to the austere monochrome ink paintings of landscapes and bird-and-flower paintings decorating the abbot’s quarters in Zen temples dating from the Muromachi period, they depict Chinese narrative themes rendered with extravagant colors on golden backgrounds. This permits a glimpse into a radical shift in the interior program of the Zen monastery during the late Momoyama and early Edo periods, led by the rise of samurai warlords as prominent patrons of art and formidable political entities.

Figure **5.3.6.4.129**: Hōjō, Ryōanji, Kyoto, Japan (photo: **Eddy Chang**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Ryōanji and Zen culture in the modern era

Recent scholars criticize the romanticized notion of Zen art and culture as a symbol of Japanese aesthetic—pointing out that this interpretation is largely a product of the twentieth century, fueled by growing nationalism in Japan.

Furthermore, Zen Buddhism was disseminated in the West and filtered through modernist artists, who were fascinated by the minimalistic perspectives and abstracted forms of Japanese rock gardens. Whatever the skepticism one reserves for existing assumptions about the Zen garden and culture, no one can deny the cultural and historical significance of Ryōanji and its rock garden.

Additional resources:

Ryoan-ji website

Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto (Kyoto, Uji and Otsu Cities) video from UNESCO

History of Gardens in East Asia: Online Resources (Bard Graduate Center)

François Berthier and Graham Parkes, *Reading Zen in the Rocks: the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Kendall H. Brown and David M. Cobb, *Quiet Beauty: Japanese Gardens of North America* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2013).

Wybe Kuitert, *Themes in the History of Japanese Garden Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).

Hiroshi Onish, “Immortals and Sages: Paintings from Ryoanji Temple,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, v. 51, no. 1 (Summer, 1993).

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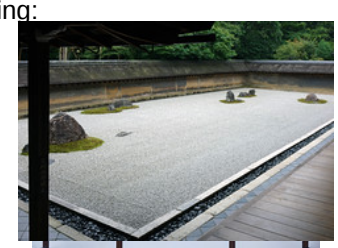

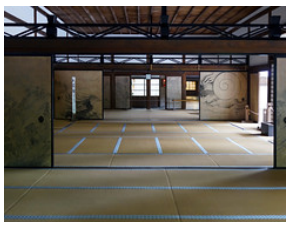

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Figure 5.3.6.4.130: More Smarthistory images…

Muromachi to Momoyama period Negoro ware ewer

by DR. MARIBETH GRAYBILL and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video **5.3.6.4.7**: Negoro ware ewer, Negoro workshop, Muromachi period (1392-1573) to Momoyama period (1573-1615) second half of 16th century, lacquered wood, Wakayama prefecture, Japan (Portland Art Museum). This video was produced in cooperation with Portland Art Museum.

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

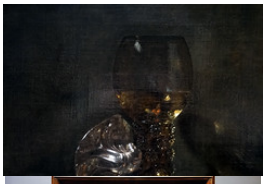

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Figure 5.3.6.4.131: More Smarthistory images…

Edo period

Strict feudal rule and a rising middle class characterizes this period.

1615 - 1868

A portrait of St. Francis Xavier and Christianity in Japan

*by **DR. RACHEL MILLER***

Figure **5.3.6.4.132**: Unknown Japanese painter, *St. Francis Xavier*, late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, Japanese watercolors on paper, 61 x 48.7 cm (Kobe City Museum)

A Discovery in Takatsuki

In 1920, researchers from the Kyoto Imperial University in Japan made a miraculous discovery. They found a locked chest—seemingly unopened for centuries—tied to a beam in the ceiling of an old house. When they opened it, they discovered a small collection of Christian artworks and texts. These were rare survivors from the European missions that sought to convert the Japanese people (who traditionally practiced Shinto and Buddhism) to Catholicism. This effort dramatically came to an end in 1614 when the Tokugawa government outlawed Christianity and expelled all European missionaries.

The two paintings in the chest—likely created by unknown Japanese-Christian artists—depicted the Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary and St. Francis Xavier, the first Catholic missionary in Japan and a member of the Society of Jesus. Unfortunately, the box contained no documentary records that could tell us when this image of Francis Xavier was created, where or who it was made for, or how it was used. Although many of the basic facts about the painting remain the subject of debate, it is clear that the painting is an invaluable record of cultural, religious, and artistic interaction between Europe and Japan in the early modern period.

Definition: The Society of Jesus

Members of the Society of Jesus are called the Jesuits. They are a Roman Catholic religious order founded during the 16th century.

The Failed Mission to Japan

In July 1549, Francis Xavier arrived in Japan, hoping to find success converting the Japanese to Christianity. Xavier initially struggled due to his lack of knowledge of the Japanese language and his inaccurate understanding of Japanese Buddhism. Still, he laid the foundation for a successful mission that continued to grow after he left Japan to return to India two years later. Scholars have estimated that more than 300,000 people in Japan converted to Christianity over the next fifty years. However, this brief Christian experiment ended in 1614 when the Tokugawa government outlawed the religion, beginning a period of persecution that resulted in the torture and execution of more than a thousand Japanese Christians and European missionaries. At this time, all Christian churches that had been built in Japan were destroyed, along with the works of art that had decorated them.

Figure 5.3.6.4.133: Maria-Kannon, Dehua porcelain from Fujian Province, China, imported to Japan for Christian veneration (Nantoyōsō Collection, Japan; photo: **Iwanafish**)

A sizeable portion of these Christians managed to continue to practice their faith despite the constant danger of detection by government officials. Christian works of art played an important role in helping them maintain their devotional practices, and create a sense of religious community and identity. For example, statues of the bodhisattva Kannon in a feminine form holding a child (such as the one above) appeared Buddhist on the surface, but due to similarities in iconography, could be regarded as images of the Virgin and Child by secret Christians. Devotional images with obvious Christian iconography that had no Buddhist counterpart, such as the Kobe painting of St. Francis Xavier, were more dangerous. In many cases, they had to be hidden away.

Figure 5.3.6.4.134: Left: Unknown Japanese painter, *St. Francis Xavier*, late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, Japanese watercolors on paper, 61 x 48.7 cm (Kobe City Museum); right: Hieronymus Wierix, *St. Francis Xavier*, 1596, engraving, 84 mm x 61 mm (**Rijksmuseum**)

The Kobe painting of St. Francis Xavier is undeniably a product of both Japanese and European visual culture. The materials are Japanese, but the artist demonstrates some familiarity with European pictorial techniques like modeling in light and shade. The artist has also based the composition on prints of Xavier, such as those by Flemish printmakers Theodoor Galle and Hieronymus Wierix. European prints were sent to overseas missions to instruct converts in their new faith and also served as source material for non-European artists. They were a common means by which artistic knowledge circulated throughout the early modern world.

Figure 5.3.6.4.135: Unknown Japanese painter, *St. Francis Xavier*, detail, late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, Japanese watercolors on paper, 61 x 48.7 cm (Kobe City Museum)

The Kobe painting of Xavier follows the basic format of the Wierix and Galle prints by depicting the saint from the waist up in a three-quarter pose. His physical appearance is consistent with textual descriptions written by those who knew him in life. These accounts stress his light complexion, beard, dark hair, and eyes always uplifted towards heaven. In his left hand, he holds a flaming heart from which a crucifix emerges. In the upper right portion of the painting, the background, a neutral dark blue field in most of the painting, transforms into dark clouds that part to reveal a golden aura that surrounds the crucifix.

Emerging from Xavier's mouth is the Latin phrase "Satis est, Domine, satis est," meaning "It is enough, O Lord, it is enough." Many sources record that Xavier, when he thought no one was observing him, would open his cassock to try to cool his burning heart and would utter this phrase, marveling at the generous consolations God had sent him.

Definition: Cassock

A cassock is an ankle-length garment worn by members of the clergy in the Catholic or Anglican Church.

Below the image of Xavier is an inscription in Latin identifying him as a saint and a member of the Society of Jesus. His name is repeated once more, in the bottom-most portion of the painting, where Chinese characters are used to write out the words "St. Francis Xavier Sacrament" phonetically. The painting is also signed "Gyofu Kanjin," a confusing signature that is not really a name, but instead translates to "fisherman."

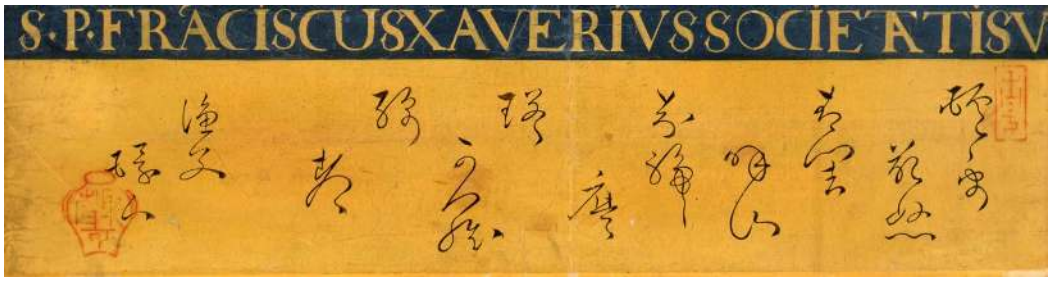

Figure **5.3.6.4.136**: Unknown Japanese painter, *St. Francis Xavier*, detail, late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, Japanese watercolors on paper, 61 x 48.7 cm (Kobe City Museum)

The only other clue to the artist's identity is a red seal in the lower left portion of the painting, shaped like a pot. This is the seal of the Kanō school, a painting workshop that dominated the artistic scene of the Tokugawa period. One scholar has hypothesized that the Kobe portrait of Francis Xavier was painted by a Japanese artist who had initially trained with the Kanō, but then converted to Christianity and became a priest. This might explain the signature on the portrait, which refers to the artist as a "fisherman" perhaps meaning a "fisher of men." [1] For the time being, however, this remains speculation.

Japanese Devotion to St. Francis Xavier

Early modern Japanese Christians were especially devoted to Xavier since he had been the first Catholic missionary to bring knowledge of the **Gospel** to Japan and had supposedly worked several miracles in the Japanese islands. One of the most prominent Xavierian devotees was Ōtomo Yoshishige, a sixteenth-century daimyo who, after his baptism, had taken the Christian name Francisco in honor of Xavier. In 1585, he wrote a letter to Rome asking that Xavier be canonized, so that Japanese Christians could build churches dedicated to Xavier, set up images depicting him on altars, celebrate his Mass, and pray to him for intercession. We know nothing about where the Kobe painting of Xavier was originally displayed, but if it was painted before the prohibition against Christianity, it is possible that it would have been put up in a church on an altar. One scholar has proposed that it was publicly displayed in the Jesuit church in Kyoto and later taken to Takatsuki to be concealed after Christianity was prohibited.[2] Like most things related to the Kobe *St. Francis* painting, this is just an educated guess.

Definition: Daimyo

A daimyo is a Japanese feudal lord.

We do have a few scattered mentions of other images of St. Francis Xavier in letters written by the Jesuit missionaries who remained in hiding in Japan after the 1614 prohibition. A 1625 letter written by a Jesuit who managed to evade the authorities mentions that he brought an image of St. Francis Xavier to a group of hidden Christians in Yamaguchi. These brief, but tantalizing,

references demonstrate that although its survival was extraordinary, the painting of Francis Xavier itself was not unique. At the time it was created, it was but one example of the vibrant visual and material culture of Japanese Christianity that celebrated Francis Xavier, the "Apostle of Japan" whose mission had inaugurated the Japanese Catholic Church.

Notes

[1] Grace Vlam, "The Portrait of S. Francis Xavier in Kobe," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 42, no. 1 (1979): pp. 48-60.

[2] Vlam, "The Portrait of S. Francis Xavier in Kobe," pp. 48-60.

Additional Resources

Read more about the **Tokugawa period in Japan on Smarthistory**

Read more about printmakers **like Theodoor Galle on Smarthistory**

Read more about the **Kobe City Museum** in Japan

Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542–1742* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbic Books, 1994).

Junhyoung Michael Shin, "Avalokiteśvara's Manifestation as the Virgin Mary: The Jesuit Adaptation and the Visual Conflation in Japanese Catholicism after 1614," *Church History* 80, no. 1 (2011): 1-39.

Grace Vlam, "The Portrait of S. Francis Xavier in Kobe," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 42, no. 1 (1979): 48-60.

Ogata Kōrin, *Red and White Plum Blossoms*

by DR. HANNAH SIGUR

Figure **5.3.6.4.137**: Ogata Kōrin, *Red and White Plum Blossoms*, Edo period, 18th century, pair of two-fold screens, color and gold leaf on paper, 156 ×172.2 cm each, National Treasure (MOA Museum in Atami, Japan)

A landscape transformed

In *Red and White Plum Blossoms*, Ogata Kôrin transforms a very simple landscape theme—two flowering trees on either side of a brook—into a dream vision. Executed in black ink and blotchy washes of gem-like mineral color on a pair of folding screens, the image seems both abstract and realistic at the same time. Its background, a subtle grid of gold leaf, denies any sense of place or time and imbues everything with an ethereal glow. The stream's swelling metallic curls and spirals are a make-believe of flowing water, and its sharply tapered serpentine contour lines angle the picture plane in an unnatural upward tilt. The trunks of the trees are nothing more than pools of mottled color without so much as an outline. These forms and spaces appear flat to the eye. Yet the artist's intimate knowledge of how a plum tree grows can be seen in their writhing forms and tangle of shoots and branches.

Figure **5.3.6.4.138**: Right side, red blossoms (detail), Ogata Kōrin, *Red and White Plum Blossoms*, Edo period, 18th century, pair of two-fold screens, color and gold leaf on paper, 156 ×172.2 cm each, National Treasure (MOA Museum in Atami, Japan)

Enveloping us in spring

In planning its imagery Kôrin closely considered the function of the folding screen within the traditional Japanese interior. The two sections would have been positioned separately yet near enough to each other to define an enclosed space. At 156 cm (or approximately 67 inches) in height, they towered over the average Japanese person of the day. Kôrin depicted only the lower parts of the trees, as if viewed from very near: the tree with red blossoms thrusts upward from the ground and out of sight; the white pushes leftward out of view and then, two slender branches appear to spring back diagonally downward from the top corner and jab upward. With each screen standing hinged at its central fold, a viewer experiences these exaggerated two-dimensional images in three dimensions. Stopping us in our tracks by confounding logic with this combination of pure design and intimate naturalism, Kôrin envelops us in the pulsing vitality of early spring.

Rinpa, or “School of Kôrin”

An acknowledged masterpiece painted toward the end of his life, *Red and White Plum Blossoms* exemplifies a style that for many epitomizes Japanese art. It has profoundly impacted modernism in the West, most famously in the work of Gustav Klimt. Since the 19th century this combination of abstraction and naturalism, monumental presence, dynamism and gorgeous sensuality has commonly been referred to as *Rinpa*, or “School of Kôrin.” But Kôrin neither originated this aesthetic, nor presided over a formal school; more accurately he stood at the forefront of a loose movement of like-minded artists and designers in various media. Rinpa first appeared a century earlier, in the brilliant relationship of a gifted calligrapher, connoisseur, and intellectual named Hon’ami Kôetsu, and an equally gifted painter of fans and screens, Tarawaya Sôtatsu, who created works that aimed to satisfy the luxurious tastes of 17th century Kyoto’s aristocrats and wealthy merchants (below).

Figure **5.3.6.4.139**: Tawaraya Sōtatsu, *Waves at Matsushima*, c. 1600–40, right side of a pair of six-panel folding screens, ink, color, gold, and silver on paper (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.)

Entranced by a few of Sôtatsu's paintings that he saw in the collection of a patron, Kôrin taught himself the techniques: images pared to bare essentials and then dramatically magnified, emphasis on the interplay of forms, colors, and textures, and unconventional adaptations of ink painting methods. These methods included *tarashikomi*, or dilute washes of color blended while very wet, and *mokkotsu*, or "bonelessness," which creates forms without exterior outlines. Some scholars now use terms such as Sôtatsu-Kôrinha, Kôetsuha, and Kôetsu-Kôrinha rather than Rinpa, in recognition of its actual origins. Yet Kôrin is owed a great debt as the one who revived a dazzling creative approach from obscurity and whose vibrant works firmly established his own reputation.

Figure **5.3.6.4.140**: Left side, white plum blossoms (detail), Ogata Kōrin, *Red and White Plum Blossoms*, Edo period, 18th century, pair of two-fold screens, color and gold leaf on paper, 156 ×172.2 cm each, National Treasure (MOA Museum in Atami, Japan)

A profligate who squandered his family's enormous wealth, Kôrin benefitted from the wide design experience afforded by its position as one of Kyoto's most distinguished producers and purveyors of fine textiles. This he combined with painting studies in one of Japan's preeminent studios. His numerous works in this sophisticated style thus encompass many media, formats and

subjects—paintings in color and ink on large screens, small albums, fans, hanging and hand scrolls, printed books, lacquers, ceramics and even textiles.

Initially inspired by Japanese classical literature, the Rinpa movement's attention soon extended to themes from nature, including Chinese motifs that may have influenced Kôrin's choice of plum trees for this painting. Looking now at the impact of his work from over three centuries ago, it seems incredible that a vision so dramatic, luxurious and radical could ever have fallen into obscurity.

Additional resources:

Rinpa Painting Style on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Utagawa Kunisada I, *Visiting Komachi*, from the series *Modern Beauties as the Seven Komachi*

by DR. SONIA COMAN

Figure **5.3.6.4.141**: Utagawa Kunisada I (Toyokuni III), *Visiting Komachi (Kayoi Komachi)*, from the series *Modern Beauties as the Seven Komachi (Tōsei Bijin Nana Komachi)*, c. 1821-22, published by Kawaguchiya Uhei (Fukusendō), woodblock print: ink and color on paper, 36.5 x 25.5 cm (**Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**)

Wearing a striped outer robe over her kimono, a young woman lingers near an empty carriage, her hand delicately touching its roof. The green of the carriage (in this case, actually a litter) matches the color of the woman's kimono, suggesting a link between the person and the vehicle. The outer robe and headscarf indicate that the scene must occur in cold weather. What we are seeing, then, is perhaps a woman who left her house to take a look at her carriage. But why is she looking at it? And why is her expression downcast, even despondent?

Definition: Litter

A litter is a wheelless, human-powered vehicle.

Figure 5.3.6.4.142: Utagawa Kunisada I (Toyokuni III), *Visiting Komachi (Kayoi Komachi)* (detail), from the series *Modern Beauties as the Seven Komachi (Tōsei Bijin Nana Komachi)*, c. 1821-22, published by Kawaguchiya Uhei (Fukusendō), woodblock print: ink and color on paper, 36.5 x 25.5 cm (**Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**)

From the title of this print by *ukiyo-e* master Utagawa Kunisada I, written in white characters on a black background in the top right corner, we learn that the image is one of a series of seven depictions of contemporaneous women (literally, "modern beauties" or *tōsei bijin*).

The genre of *ukiyo-e* (literally translatable as "pictures of the floating world") comprises paintings and prints, though woodblock prints were its main medium. It flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries, supported by Japan's middle class. *Ukiyo-e* works were collaborations between painters, publishers, carvers, and printers, with subject matter drawn from the transitory (thus "floating"), but enjoyable worlds of pleasure quarters, the popular theater, and urban life, especially the streets of Edo. *Ukiyo-e* also featured parodies of classical themes set in contemporaneous circumstances.

Definition: Edo

Edo, which was renamed Tokyo in 1868, was the most powerful city in Japan from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.

A legendary poetess

Here, Kunisada, the artist, represents a modern beauty in the guise of ninth-century poetess Ono no Komachi, the only woman amongst the "six poetry immortals" (*rokkasen)*. Each scene in Kunisada's "Seven Komachi" series relates a story or anecdote associated with Komachi's life.

Definition: "Six poetry immortals" (rokkasen)

The "six poetry immortals" was an idea introduced in the tenth century in one of Japan's most influential imperial poetry anthologies, the *Kokin Wakashū*.

Utagawa Kunisada I (Toyokuni III), <em
Visiting Komachi (Kayoi Komachi) (detail), from the series
Modern Beauties as the Seven Komachi (Tōsei Bijin Nana Komachi)
, c. 1821-22, published by Kawaguchiya Uhei (Fukusendō), woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 36.5 x 25.5 cm (
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
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Figure 5.3.6.4.143: Utagawa Kunisada I (Toyokuni III), *Visiting Komachi (Kayoi Komachi)* (detail), from the series *Modern Beauties as the Seven Komachi (Tōsei Bijin Nana Komachi)*, c. 1821-22, published by Kawaguchiya Uhei (Fukusendō), woodblock print: ink and color on paper, 36.5 x 25.5 cm (**Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**)

In this print, the empty carriage helps us identify that the specific story being illustrated, out of the aforementioned seven, is the one known as “Visiting Komachi” (*Kayoi Komachi*). According to legend, Komachi, renowned for her beauty and talent, attracted the attention of many suitors, including General Fukakusa, who sought to become her lover. Komachi tested his devotion by asking him to spend 100 nights outside her door, in the garden, irrespective of weather conditions. He agreed and marked each night on the shaft of her carriage, but died on the last night because of the harsh winter. The scene illustrated in Kunisada’s print may be from the very end of the story, when Komachi learns about his death and goes to see the carriage. Other versions of this story circulated orally in Japan over the centuries, and some were used as plotlines for plays in the Japanese Noh tradition of musical drama.

Definition: Noh

Dating from the Muromachi period (the fourteenth century), Noh is a traditional form of dramatic performance that combines music, spoken word, ritualized movement, elaborate costumes, and character-specific masks, performed on a bare stage that includes a bridge-like passageway. Noh plays featured narratives about gods, famed warriors, elegant women, madwomen, and supernatural creatures, many of which were derived from classical literature.

This image leaves it to the viewer to imagine the inner life of the heroine. Is she remorseful? Is she mourning? However, the print’s title reminds us that the depicted woman is not actually Komachi herself, but someone else, from a later era, who is enacting the role of the poetess. The image refers to the “Visiting Komachi” story through her accoutrements and props (especially the carriage as a stand-in for the missing lover). Considering the multilayered aspect of the subject matter, the gaze of the depicted woman may actually suggest that she is engrossed in thinking about the *real* Komachi. In providing these references to a larger cultural tradition, Kunisada adds conceptual depth to his portrayal of a beautiful woman.

Pictures within pictures, stories within stories

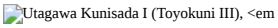

Figure **5.3.6.4.144**: Utagawa Kunisada I (Toyokuni III), *Visiting Komachi (Kayoi Komachi)* (detail), from the series *Modern Beauties as the Seven Komachi (Tōsei Bijin Nana Komachi)*, c. 1821-22, published by Kawaguchiya Uhei (Fukusendō), woodblock print: ink and color on paper, 36.5 x 25.5 cm (**Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**)

The artifice of the image is further complicated by the inclusion of a cartouche, or image-within-image (known as *gachūga*). The *gachūga* functions like a legend for the “main” image, depicting the “real” Komachi, also clad in outerwear, as well as a poem attributed to her. The choice of color for her outer robe— the same green as the carriage and as the kimono of the “modern beauty”—weaves the two images together and creates a visual rhyme between the historical Komachi and the contemporaneous Komachi. This visual link illustrates the process of channeling the spirit of the poetess.

Placed in the top left corner of the print and framed with floral motifs, the *gachūga* provides access to another visual realm and calls into question the nature of the space behind the central figure. Is this image-within-image floating in space, as it were, or is it a flat picture affixed to a wall-like surface behind the centrally positioned woman? This ambiguous spatial quality of the image-within-image contributes to the overall richness of the print’s visual message.

A ghostly presence

This form of communication could have also indicated a supernatural dimension, considering the frequent inclusion, in Noh drama, of ghost characters, many of which became subject matter for paintings, prints, and ceramic and lacquer decoration. In the case of Komachi, the ghost character was especially popular because of stories that contrasted her beauty as a young woman with her decaying image in old age; other stories described her as a cold-hearted woman (or “femme fatale”). These characterizations set the

stage for plots where Komachi's ghost returned to the world to act on her inner conflicts. In this print, the inclusion of an image of Komachi and of a woman in the guise of Komachi calls to mind the spectral presence of this legendary character and its plotlines from Noh drama.

In the image-within-image, the figure of Komachi is framed by a *waka* poem attributed to her. It reads:

> ***iro miede / 色みへて***
> ***utsurou mono wa / うつろふものは***
> ***yo no naka no / 世の中の***
> ***hito no kokoro no / 人のこゝろの***
> ***hana ni zo arikeri / 花にぞありけり***

I propose the following prose translation as one way of interpreting these lines: "It is by their changing colors that we know the flowers of men's hearts to fade in this transient world."

Republished in collections of ancient poems and paired with images of Komachi herself, as in this print, the poem speaks to the connection between the ephemerality of outer appearances and the changes that characterize matters of the heart. This poetic message is at the core of what Komachi came to signify over the centuries in Japanese literary and visual culture.

Layers of legend

Figure **5.3.6.4.145**: Utagawa Toyokuni I, *Komachi at Sekidera Temple (Sekidera Komachi)*: Actor Sawamura Tanosuke II, from the series *Present-day Actors as the Seven Komachi (Imayô yakusha nana Komachi)*, 1812, woodblock print: ink and color on paper, 39.2 x 26.3 cm (**Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**)

The other stories in the "Seven Komachi" series resonate with this poetic message, too. For example, "*Sekidera Komachi* " invokes a story according to which an aged Komachi forgets about her fading beauty by dancing with a child on the occasion of the stars festival (*Tanabata*). The episode serves as a reminder of the ephemeral and cyclical nature of life, and it was also used by multiple artists, including Kunisada, as a pretext for depicting beautiful women in guise of the poetess.

With no historical evidence to prove the accuracy of any of these narratives, the poems, plays, and images representing Ono no Komachi merged in the Japanese collective imagination, to form a composite legendary character. The Komachi motif occasioned visual representations that playfully combined it with contemporaneous elements, as is the case with Kunisada's *Kayoi Komachi* print.

Kunisada's series is only one of several *ukiyo-e* series that use Komachi-associated stories in conjunction with some aspect of contemporaneous life and society (for instance, courtesans in guise of Komachi, young theater actors in the role of Komachi, or pairs of beautiful women in landscapes that evoke the seven stories). Such images spanned multiple centuries and media, from folding screens to painted shells to lacquer boxes, epitomizing the wide circulation of staple motifs and the intimate connection between literature and the visual arts in Japanese culture.

Figure **5.3.6.4.146**: Shûôsai Hidemasa, Clam-shell with the Vindication of Ono No Komachi, early 19th century, stained ivory, 3.1 x 4.4 x 3 cm (**Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**)

Additional Resources:

This work at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Japanese woodblock prints at Ukiyo-e.org

Other prints in Kunisada's *Modern Beauties as the Seven Komachi* series

Biography of Utagawa Kunisada I (Toyokuni III)

Example of another version of the "Visiting Komachi" story

Example of another visual representation of the Kayoi Komachi episode by Suzuki Harunobu

A lacquer inkstone box featuring the Komachi motif

A resource on Noh drama, including synopsis of Komachi-themed play

Hokusai

Hokusai, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa (The Great Wave)*

by LEILA ANNE HARRIS

Figure **5.3.6.4.147**: Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa oki nami ura)*, also known as *The Great Wave*, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei)*, c. 1830-32, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10 1/8 x 14 15 /16″ / 25.7 x 37.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Katsushika Hokusai's *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, also called *The Great Wave* has became one of the most famous works of art in the world—and debatably the most iconic work of Japanese art. Initially, thousands of copies of this print were quickly produced and sold cheaply. Despite the fact that it was created at a time when Japanese trade was heavily restricted, Hokusai's print displays the influence of Dutch art, and proved to be inspirational for many artists working in Europe later in the nineteenth century.

Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji

Figure **5.3.6.4.148**: Fishing boats (detail), *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, c. 1830-32, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 10 1/8 x 14 15 /16″ / 25.7 x 37.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Under the Wave off Kanagawa is part of a series of prints titled *Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, which Hokusai made between 1830 and 1833. It is a polychrome (multi-colored) woodblock print, made of ink and color on paper that is approximately 10 x 14 inches. All of the images in the series feature a glimpse of the mountain, but as you can see from this example, Mount Fuji does not always dominate the frame. Instead, here, the foreground is filled with a massive cresting wave. The threatening wave is pictured just moments before crashing down on to three fishing boats below. Under the Wave off Kanagawa is full of visual play. The mountain, made tiny by the use of perspective, appears as if it too will be swallowed up by the wave. Hokusai's optical play can also be lighthearted, and the spray from top of the crashing wave looks like snow falling on the mountain.

Figure **5.3.6.4.149**: Katsushika Hokusai, *Fine Wind, Clear Weather*, Also known as *Red Fuju*, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, c. 1830-31, woodblock print, ink and color on paper, 9 5/8 x 15″ / 24.4 x 38.1 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Hokusai has arranged the composition to frame Mount Fuji. The curves of the wave and hull of one boat dip down just low enough to allow the base of Mount Fuji to be visible, and the white top of the great wave creates a diagonal line that leads the viewers eye directly to the peak of the mountain top.

Across the thirty-six prints that constitute this series, Hokusai varies his representation of the mountain. In other prints the mountain fills the composition, or is reduced to a small detail in the background of bustling city life.

Who was Katsushika Hokusai?

Hokusai was born in 1760 in Edo (now Tokyo), Japan. During the artist's lifetime he went by many different names; he began calling himself Hokusai in 1797. Hokusai discovered Western prints that came to Japan by way of Dutch trade. From the Dutch artwork Hokusai became interested in linear perspective. Subsequently, Hokusai created a Japanese variant of linear perspective. The influence of Dutch art can also be seen in the use of a low horizon line and the distinctive European color, Prussian blue.

Hokusai was interested in oblique angles, contrasts of near and far, and contrasts of manmade and the natural. These can be seen in

Under the Wave off Kanagawa through the juxtaposition of the large wave in the foreground which dwarfs the small mountain in the distance, as well as the inclusion of the men and boats amidst the powerful waves.

Why Mount Fuji?

Figure **5.3.6.4.150**: Mount Fuji, Japan

Mount Fuji is the highest mountain in Japan and has long been considered sacred. Hokusai is often described as having a personal fascination with the mountain, which sparked his interest in making this series. However, he was also responding to a boom in domestic travel and the corresponding market for images of Mount Fuji. Japanese woodblock prints were often purchased as souvenirs. The original audience for Hokusai's prints was ordinary townspeople who were followers of the "Fuji cult" and made pilgrimages to climb the mountain, or tourists visiting the new capital city. Although the skyscrapers in Tokyo obscure the view of Mount Fuji today, for Hokusai's audience the peak of the mountain would have been visible across the city.

The making of Ukiyo-e Prints

Ukiyo-e is the name for Japanese woodblock prints made during the Edo Period. Ukiyo-e, which originated as a Buddhist term, means "floating world" and refers to the impermanence of the world. The earliest prints were made in only black and white, but later, as is evident from Hokusai's work, additional colors were added. A separate block of wood was used for each color. Each print is made with a final overlay of black line, which helps to break up the flat colors. Ukiyo-e prints are recognizable for their emphasis on line and pure, bright color, as well as their ability to distill form down to the minimum.

Hokusai moved away from the tradition of making images of courtesans and actors, which was the customary subject of ukiyo-e prints. Instead, his work focused on the daily life of Japanese people from a variety of social levels. Such as the quotidian scene of fishermen battling the sea off the coast of Mount Fuji that we see in The Great Wave. This change of subject matter was a breakthrough in both ukiyo-e prints and in Hokusai's career.

Popularity of Ukiyo-e prints in Europe

Beginning in 1640, Japan was largely closed off to the world and only limited interaction with China and Holland was allowed. This changed in the 1850s, when trade was forced open by American naval commodore, Matthew C. Perry. After this, there was a flood of Japanese visual culture into the West. At the 1867 International Exposition in Paris, Hokusai's work was on view at the Japanese pavilion. This was the first introduction of Japanese culture to mass audiences in the West, and a craze for collecting art called Japonisme ensued. Additionally, Impressionist artists in Paris, such as Claude Monet, were great fans of Japanese prints. The flattening of space, an interest in atmospheric conditions, and the impermanence of modern city life—all visible in Hokusai's prints—both reaffirmed their own artistic interests and inspired many future works of art.

Additional resources:

This print at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Ukiyo-e Techniques

Art of the Pleasure Quarters and The Ukiyo-e Style on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Woodblock Prints in the Ukiyo-e style on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Japanese woodblock print search

The Floating World of Ukiyo-e, a Library of Congress exhibition site

Beyond the Great Wave — Hokusai at 90

by DR. FRANK FELTENS, FREER GALLERY OF ART and DR. BETH HARRIS

A fisherman and a woodcutter — at age 90, the great Japanese artist Hokusai painted these moving images of contentment.

Video 5.3.6.4.8: A conversation with Dr. Frank Feltens, The Japan Foundation Assistant Curator of Japanese Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Dr. Beth Harris, in front of Katsushika Hokusai, *Fisherman*, 1849, ink and color on silk, 113 x 39.6 cm and *Woodcutter*, 1849, ink and color on silk, 113.6 × 39.6 cm (Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Charles Lang Freer in 1920, F1904.181 and 1904.182)

Additional resources:

These paintings at the Freer Gallery of Art (the Fisherman and the Woodcutter)

Upcoming exhibition at the Freer Gallery of Art: Hokusai: Mad about Painting

20th century

Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*

*by **KATRINA KLAASMEYER***

Floating on a lotus blossom

Set within a golden landscape, a female figure serenely floats above a lotus blossom while six alien musicians whirl by on bubbly clouds. Her pink robes mirror the predominantly pale orange, yellow and pink of the water, land and sky—firmly embedding her within the tranquil scene. *Pure Land*, a photograph set within glass, is the counterpart of Mori's three-dimensional video installation, *Nirvana*, 1997. *Nirvana* animates the imagery we see in *Pure Land*. Viewed within a darkened room with the aid of three-dimensional glasses, *Nirvana's* audience was limited to a group of 20 people at a time. During the seven minute video, the central female figure would hum and whisper echoed rhythms as if meditating, while the little musicians floated around her. At the conclusion, a fan came on and blew cool, scented air into the audience's faces. Through the integration of sensory elements such as three-dimensional imagery, sound, scent, and the gentle touch of a breeze, combined with the limited viewing audience, *Nirvana* created an immersive, intimate experience. As its photographic counterpart, *Pure Land* captures a moment of this experience, enabling the viewer a longer, perhaps more meditative, relationship with the work.

Figure **5.3.6.4.151**: Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer, 305 x 610 x 2.2 cm

Figure **5.3.6.4.152**: Mariko Mori, *Enlightenment Capsule*, 1996-1998, plastic, solar transmitting device, fiber optic cables, 108 x 83 x 83 inches

Symbolism and spiritual allusions

Every element we see here has significance that may not be apparent at first glance—the serene landscape, with its golden sky, smooth pink land masses, and perfectly still water, is rich with symbolism. *Pure Land* is set during sunrise in the landscape of the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, called "dead" because the high salinity of its water does not support fish or plant life. In Shinto tradition, salt is used as an agent of purification. Floating in the water is a lotus blossom—symbol of purity and rebirth into paradise. This blossom resembles one in Mori's 1998 sculptural installation, *Enlightenment Capsule* (left), which featured a rainbow-colored acrylic lotus blossom set within a space-age capsule illuminated by sunlight. In both *Enlightenment Capsule* and *Pure Land* Mori blends traditional symbolism with futuristic elements. On the right hand side of the background of *Pure Land*is a fantastical object which resembles a playful futuristic spacecraft with arms. This may be a variation of a **Tibetan stupa**—a sacred Buddhist monument originally used as a burial mound. Through her imaginative reinterpretation of symbols steeped in tradition, the artist creates a timeless setting appropriate for meditation on death, purification, and rebirth.

Immersion

The distant horizon line, combined with the larger island in the foreground that seems to continue into the viewer's space, create a sense of immersion, as if one were present with these fantastical figures. Perhaps this feeling of personal involvement ties in with the title itself, *Pure Land*, which is the paradise of Amida (or Amitabha) Buddha who descends to greet devotees at the moment of their death and takes them back to his "Pure Land of Perfect Bliss."

Figure 5.3.6.4.153: *Descent of Amitabha and the Heavenly Multitude*, Heian period, 12th century, National Treasure (Yushi Hachiman Ko)

Beginning with the eleventh century in Japan, several paintings and sculptures were made on this theme, such as the *Descent of Amida and the Heavenly Multitude* (above). In this type of imagery, Amida Buddha, resting on a lotus blossom and holding his hands in a symbolic gesture known as a mudra, is typically surrounded by celestial attendants in a sea of swirling clouds. These attendants are boddhisattvas, enlightened beings who act out of great compassion to help others achieve enlightenment. In a sculptural example from Byodo-in Temple, 52 boddhisattvas fly on clouds on either side of Amida Buddha (below); some are seated quietly with their hands joined in prayer, some hold a lotus blossom to receive the soul of the deceased, while others are playing musical instruments.

Figure 5.3.6.4.154: Jōchō, Amida Buddha, Heian Period, c. 1053, wood covered with wood leaf, 295 cm (Phoenix Hall, Byodo-in, Kyoto)

Figure **5.3.6.4.155**: Mariko Mori, *Oneness*, on exhibit in 2007 at the Grand Duke Jean Museum of Modern Art, Luxembourg (MUDAM) (**photo: Mark Weston**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

In Mori's version, these celestial attendants are pastel-colored alien figures with large pointy heads and delicate bodies. Each figure plays a different instrument as they float on their light blue bubbly clouds. The two musicians in the foreground are blurred, as if they are flying quickly toward the viewer. These muscians appear again in a later sculptural installation by Mori, *Oneness*, 2003 (left). In this work, the six aliens are given three-dimensional form, complete with soft, flesh-like material. They stand in a circle facing outward as they hold each other's hands. The viewer becomes an active participant in the work—when a person hugs one of the figures, its eyes light up and you feel its heartbeat. As in the Nirvana video installation upon which *Pure Land* is based, Mori seems to want to engage more than just the viewer's sense of sight and for each participant to have a direct experience with the artwork. Perhaps more significantly, *Oneness* is a metaphor for bringing in the outsider, achieved through revealing commonalities of experience. The binding together of seemingly disparate realities is a central theme throughout Mori's work.

Artist as object

Another element typical in Mori's work is for the artist to cast herself in the principle role, and *Pure Land* is no exception. The central female figure is the artist herself, wearing an elaborate costume and headdress, both of her own design. Born in Tokyo in 1967, Mori studied design at Tokyo's Bunka Fashion College and worked part-time as a fashion model, which she originally considered a form of personal creativity. However, she found modeling an inadequate medium in which to express herself fully, so she began to stage elaborate tableaux, taking full creative control of the process, acting as director, producer, set and costume designer, and model. This recalls the practices of other photographers, most notably **Cindy Sherman**, as well as **Yasumasa Morimura**, the Japanese photographer notorious for substituting himself for figures in famous paintings throughout art history.

In the *Pure Land* photograph, Mori's light blue, pupil-less eyes, gaze serenely somewhere beyond our vision. Like the Amida Buddha, she rests above a lotus blossom and holds her right hand in a mudra of blessing and teaching; the circle formed by the index finger and thumb is the sign of the Wheel of Law. In her left hand she holds a *hojyu*, or magical wishing jewel, in the shape of a lotus bud. This figure is inspired by Kichijoten, originally the Indian goddess, Shri Lakshmi, who was eventually incorporated into Buddhism, and typically represents fertility, fortune, and beauty. Here Mori bares comparison with a well-known eighth-century painting of Kichijoten from Yukushi-ji Temple in Nara. Similarities include the serene elegance, softly fluttering gown, and wish-granting jewel. The eighth-century painting depicts the clothing and appearance of an elegant lady of the Chinese Tang Dynasty, and it may have been an object of veneration during the annual New Year event when devotees prayed for happiness and fertility. In this manner, a beautiful, elegant woman was seen to embody the ideas of good fortune and prosperity and became an object of worship.

Figure 5.3.6.4.156: Left: Kichijoten from Yukushi-ji Temple in Nara, 8th century, color on hemp, 53 x 31.7 cm; right: Mariko Mori, Pure Land, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer, 305 x 610 x 2.2 cm

By taking on this ancient persona, Mori dissolves her own identity and is transformed into the elegant Tang lady and goddess of fortune, while simultaneously performing the welcoming role of Amida Buddha. Mori's enlightened self-representation descends to guide the viewer into a "Pure Land of Perfect Bliss" of her own creation. Perhaps more significantly, the artist seeks to lead the viewer into her immersive paradise. In both formats, the multi-sensory video *Nirvana* and purely visual *Pure Land* photograph, the message is clear: enlightenment is for all.

Additional resources:

Mariko Mori at the Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art

Video—The Artist Project: Mariko Mori (from The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Scott Indriskek, "Mariko Mori wants to bring her nature-loving art to six continents," *Modern Painters* (May 2011)

Visualizing an Endless Universe: Mariko Mori Makes the Cosmos Life-Size

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5.3.6.5: Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension

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5.3.6.6: Electrical Prisms

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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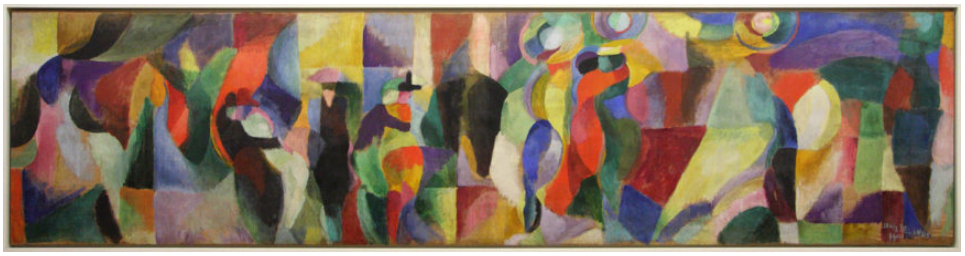


Figure **5.3.6.6.1**: Sonia Delaunay, *Bal Bullier*, 1913, oil on canvas, 97 x 336.5 cm (MNAM Centre Pompidou)

Almost eleven feet wide, Sonia Delaunay's *Bal Bullier* creates an overwhelming impression of brilliant color and movement. The composition juxtaposes rectangular geometric forms and circles with more fluid curved shapes, loosely structured across the canvas in a rhythmic pattern of dark and light verticals.

A modern dance hall

The *Bal Bullier* was a dance hall in Paris that Delaunay frequently visited with her husband, Robert. Her painting shows a scene of modern urban life comparable to those painted by the Impressionists in the late 19th century, such as Auguste Renoir's ***Moulin de la Galette***.

If you look closely at the dark shapes in the center you will see the abstracted forms of couples dancing the tango. The dance, which originated in sailors' bars in Argentina, was very popular in Paris in the early 20th century. It is renowned for its erotic intensity and requires a very tight embrace between partners, which Delaunay represents in the interlocking curves of the figures.

Figure **5.3.6.6.2**: Sonia Delaunay, *Electrical Prisms*, 1914, oil on canvas, 250 x 250 cm (MNAM Centre Pompidou)

Sonia's *Electrical Prisms* is both a display of color relationships and an abstracted depiction of her first experience of electric streetlights on a Paris boulevard. The streetlights become discs of radiating color that permeate the entire canvas, but there are also suggestions of solid forms. A tall kiosk with books or magazines is on the left, and parts of some shadowy figures appear in the lower half of the painting, almost completely absorbed into the brilliant colors of the electric light.

Intuition vs. intellect

While Robert studied scientific color theory, they both described Sonia's approach to their new style as intuitive. This is a cliché of traditional Western gender roles — the male as rational and intellectually inclined, the female as naturally gifted and intuitive — but it is a cliché that they both embraced.

Interestingly, in Western art theory color is thought to appeal directly to the senses, in contrast to drawing's supposed appeal to the intellect; thus, Sonia's purportedly intuitive approach to color was aligned with traditional Western conceptions of color's role in art. It should be noted, however, that Sonia formally studied art for several years in a German academy and an art school in Paris, while Robert's formal artistic training was limited to a two-year apprenticeship with a theatrical designer in Paris.

The influence of craft

Sonia's use of color was also sometimes explained by another cliché of the early 20th century, the influence of peasant crafts on her work. Since the late 19th century, modern artists such as Gauguin had admired, and appropriated, the purportedly naive, untutored styles of peasant art, which were often vividly colored and non-naturalistic.

Figure **5.3.6.6.3**: Sonia Delaunay, Blanket, 1911, fabric, 109 x 81 cm (MNAM, Centre Pompidou)

Sonia herself claimed that the patchwork blanket she made for her son in 1911 was inspired by peasant blankets she remembered seeing in Russia as a child. Its irregular grid of largely rectangular geometric forms was also similar to contemporary Cubist painting. Sonia saw her blanket as an important influence on her and Robert's subsequent development of Simultanist paintings.

Abstraction and decoration

Sonia's blanket and its influence raises a key issue for modern abstract art — its relationship to crafts and the decorative arts. The use of non-representational forms and patterns has a long history in Western crafts and decorative arts; it was the so-called fine arts of painting and sculpture that traditionally relied on representational subject matter. When modern painters began to use non-naturalistic colors and abstract forms in the early 20th century, one of their primary concerns was to prove that their paintings were not "mere" decoration. This is one reason why many of the first modern artists to embrace pure abstraction took so long do so and wrote extensive justifications, often claiming **exalted spiritual motivations** for their abstraction.

Abstraction and representation

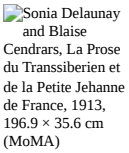
Unlike many of their contemporaries who developed abstract painting styles that progressed from representation to pure abstraction, the Delaunays painted representational and non-representational Simultanist works at the same time. Modern objects such as the Eiffel Tower and airplanes as well as scenes of dance halls and rugby games were enveloped in the prismatic color planes of Simultanism. Like the **Italian Futurists**, the Delaunays created a post-Cubist style appropriate to the modern city, and Sonia expanded her art beyond the limits of the easel painting to engage with everyday life.

Figure **5.3.6.6.4**: Sonia Delaunay wearing her Simultaneous Dress in 1913

The same year that she painted *Bal Bullier* Sonia made herself a **Simultaneous Dress**. Like her earlier blanket, it was a colorful patchwork of geometric shapes, but the dress was made to be seen in public. She wore it to the dance hall with Robert, who also wore clothes in vivid contrasting colors. By attiring themselves in the colors and forms of their painting they became living, moving artworks, Simultanist human beings.

Sonia dreamed of transforming everything around her, and she created and exhibited bookbindings, home furnishings, and posters in the Simultanist style in 1913. After World War I, she became a very successful designer of clothing and interior furnishings, and colorful contrasts of geometric forms remained characteristic of her work.

A Simultanist book



Sonia Delaunay and Blaise Cendrars, La Prose du Transsiberien et de la Petite Jehanne de France, 1913, 196.9 × 35.6 cm (MoMA)

Figure **5.3.6.6.5**: Sonia Delaunay and Blaise Cendrars, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France*, 1913, 196.9 × 35.6 cm (**MoMA**)

One of Sonia's most famous early creations is the Simultanist book she designed in collaboration with the poet Blaise Cendrars titled *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France*.

Unfolded, the book is six feet long. Delaunay and Cendrars initially intended to publish 150 copies, which opened together in a line would have equaled the height of the Eiffel Tower. The text of Cendrars' poem is printed in multiple colors and varied fonts on the right, while Delaunay's largely abstract Simultanist designs parallel it on the left, with panels of lighter colors also interspersed throughout the text.

The poem combines disjointed thoughts, repeated refrains, and references to a trip on the Trans-Siberian railroad, of which there is a map at the top. Time and place shift throughout the text, with Paris as a constant presence. Sonia's colorful abstract forms swirl down the long sheet, looping into circles that visually echo the poem's evocation of the train's rolling motion.

The poem ends with a Paris scene next to the only clear representational form in the design – a red Eiffel Tower accompanied by a circle reminiscent of the giant Paris ferris wheel.

When fully unfolded, the designs on the left side seem to ascend like clouds of brightly colored smoke from the Eiffel Tower to the beginning of the poem at the top, where the viewer is led to read the poem down the right side. Thus, the open book creates a continuous circuit with the tower standing like an anchor at the bottom.

Figure **5.3.6.6.6**: Sonia Delaunay and Blaise Cendrars, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France*, 1913, detail (**MoMA**)

Simultanism was developed in a collaboration between Sonia and Robert Delaunay, but it extended well beyond that initial relationship. It became an approach to modern art and style that worked to bridge the distances between the visual arts and literature, the fine and decorative arts, and the art and spectacles of the modern urban world.

Additional resources:

Read more about Sonia Delaunay at the Tate Modern

A detailed look at *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* at the National Gallery of Art

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5.3.6.8: The Second of the Sixteen Rakan

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5.3.6.9: Portrait of a Man in Red Chalk

Italy: 16th century

One of the most tumultuous periods in Western culture—primarily due to the Protestant Reformation.

1500 - 1600 (The High Renaissance and Mannerism)

A beginner's guide

Toward the High Renaissance, an introduction

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.9.1: Andrea del Verrocchio (with Leonardo), *Baptism of Christ*, 1470-75, oil and tempera on panel, 70 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches or 180 x 152 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence); Andrea del Verrocchio (with Leonardo), *Baptism of Christ*, 1470-75, oil and tempera on panel, 70 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches or 180 x 152 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

When you think of the Renaissance, the names that come to mind are probably the artists of this period (the High Renaissance): Leonardo and Michelangelo, for instance. And when you think of the greatest work of art in the western world, Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling might come to mind. This is a period of big, ambitious projects.

How is the High Renaissance different from the Early Renaissance?

Fra Filippo Lippi, <em

Madonna and Child with Two Angels, ca. 1455 - 1466, tempera on wood (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)" height="450" src="
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" width="299">

Figure 5.3.6.9.1: Fra Filippo Lippi, *Madonna and Child with Two Angels*, ca. 1455 – 1466, tempera on wood (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

As the Humanism of the Early Renaissance develops, a problem arises. Have a look at Fra Filippo Lippi's *Madonna and Child with Angels*. We see a Madonna and Christ Child that have become so real—the figures appear so human—that in some ways we can hardly tell that these are divine figures (except perhaps for the faint outline of a halo, and Mary's sorrowful expression and hands clasped in prayer). On the other hand, in the Middle Ages, the need to create transcendent spiritual figures, meant a move toward abstraction—toward flatness and elongation.

In the Early Renaissance then, a tension arises. To create spiritual figures, your image can't look very real, and if you want your image to appear real, then you sacrifice some spirituality. In the late 15th century though, Leonardo da Vinci creates figures who are physical and real (just as real as Lippi's or Masaccio's figures) and yet they have an undeniable and intense spirituality. We could say that Leonardo unites the real and spiritual, or soul and substance.

Figure 5.3.6.9.2: Andrea del Verrocchio (with Leonardo), *Baptism of Christ*, 1470-75, oil and tempera on panel, 70 3/4 x 59 3/4″ / 180 x 152 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

The best way to see this is in this painting by Verrocchio—an important Early Renaissance artist who Leonardo was apprenticed to when he was young. Verocchio asked Leonardo to paint one of the angels in his painting of the *Baptism of Christ* (above).

Figure 5.3.6.9.3: Andrea del Verrocchio (with Leonardo), *Baptism of Christ*, 1470-75, oil and tempera on panel, 70 3/4 x 59 3/4″ / 180 x 152 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

Can you tell which angel is Leonardo's? One angel should look more like a boy—that's the Early Renaissance angel (the one painted by Verrocchio) and the other angel should look like truly divine, sent by God from heaven (that's Leonardo's angel).

The angel on the left is Leonardo's.

Leonardo's angel is ideally beautiful and moves in a graceful and complex way, twisting her upper body to the left but raising her head up and to the right. Figures that move elegantly and that are ideally beautiful are typical of the High Renaissance.

Additional resources:

Explore Leonardo from The National Gallery

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

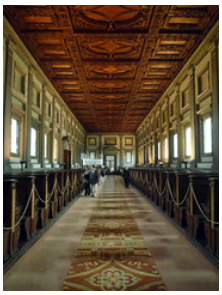

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Figure 5.3.6.9.4: More Smarthistory images…

Mannerism, an introduction

by Dr. Heather Graham and Dr. Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank

What is mannerism, and why did it develop in the 16th century?

Parasitic. Original. Derogatory. Refined. Hyper-decorative. Courtly. Anti-classical. Classicizing. All of these words (and many more!) have been used to describe mannerist art, which begins in the 16th century. But what *is* it, and how could it possibly prompt so many contradictory descriptors?

Figure **5.3.6.9.5**: Parmigianino, *Madonna of the Long Neck*, 1530–33, 73 x 60 cm (Uffizi, Florence)

What is mannerism?

Parmigianino's ***Madonna of the Long Neck*** is a famous example of mannerist art. It was painted for the funerary chapel of an Italian noblewoman. In the center, the Virgin's lower body seems to swell, her impossibly long legs swathed in billowing fabric that then clings sensuously to her rapidly tapering torso, revealing her navel and a protruding nipple. Her head, seeming too small for her body, is precariously balanced upon an elongated neck rising from narrow, sloping shoulders. Christ's spindly, bare body stretches across her lap. Pressed closely to her right are sensuous yet bizarrely proportioned angels, compressed into the foreground. One angelic figure, showing a long bare leg, holds an elegant antique vase with the tips of his impossibly long fingers. On the right side, a diminutive figure in the lower corner mysteriously holds up a scroll, while the background recedes dramatically into a deep, unfinished space. The architectural space is designed to appear illogical (though it can be reconciled) and the within it figures are mis-proportioned, yet the overall impression is one of elegance and carefully contrived artifice. This effect is enhanced by the use of rich jewel tones and the absence of visible brush marks.

Figure 5.3.6.9.6: Raphael, *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1505–06, oil on panel, 885 x 1130 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

Parmigianino takes us to an otherworldly realm in which the laws of proportion, naturalism, and mathematics do not apply. It is a far cry from the rational classicism of earlier works like **Raphael's** *Madonna of the Meadow* (from what is traditionally called the "**high renaissance**"). Here, the Virgin and Christ child, accompanied by the infant John the Baptist, are rendered in classical proportions and occupy an idealized though believable space. The Virgin's body is demurely clothed and the children's plump forms suggest playful vitality. Nowhere do we find the sensuous ambiguity or the irrational geometry of Parmigianino's creation. Something new is happening in the mannerist image.

Figure 5.3.6.9.7: Rosso Fiorentino, ***The Dead Christ with Angels***, c. 1524–27, oil on panel, 133.4 x 104.1 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Towards a definition of mannerism

The term “mannerism” is not easily defined. It has been used to designate art that is overtly artificial, often ambiguous, and conspicuously sophisticated. However, these are by no means the only stylistic traits associated with this designation. Mannerist imagery frequently pushes the boundaries of fantasy and imagination with artists looking to art, rather than nature, as a model, as Parmigianino was clearly doing in his painting. Mannerism is therefore a confusing term, subject to radically different interpretations. When the term was first widely used in the 17th century, it was intended as a pejorative label. It was used to negatively characterize Italian renaissance art created between 1520 and 1600 that was seen by these later audiences as overly stylized and tasteless, a debased departure from the classicism of Raphael and the high renaissance. With the rise of **expressionism** and **abstraction** in the 20th century, such negative views of this generation of artists subsided. Today, the English term “mannerism” is used to broadly designate 16th-century art throughout Europe (and even in places like the Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries) that is conspicuously artificial, often emotionally provocative, and designed to impress.

In sixteenth-century Italy, where what we now call mannerism is first evident, the term “mannerism” did not exist. What we do find is “*maniera*,” a term rooted in the word *mano* (hand). It was used in a straight forward way by contemporaries to simply designate style. The styles that the word *maniera* was used to describe were as varied as way the word style might be used today. Audrey Hepburn had style. So did David Bowie.

Maniera was also used in the 16th century to suggest “stylishness” itself, a self-conscious, artificial artistry that at times privileged fantasy over reality. Artists displaying *maniera* may consciously exploit their technical skill but ideally did so with seeming effortlessness, like we see in Parmigianino’s *Madonna of the Long Neck*. Artistic departures from visual reality were intended to demonstrate invention and refinement, learning and grace. One way to understand mannerism, popularized by late 20th-century scholars, is to think of it as the “stylish-style.”

Figure **5.3.6.9.8**: Left: Alonso Berruguete, *Abraham and Isaac*, 1526–1532, polychromed wood, (89 x 46 x 32 cm) (Museo Nacional de Escultura, Valladolid; photo: **Iglesia en Valladolid**, CC BY-SA 2.0); right: Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes, *Laocoön and His Sons*, early first century C.E., marble, 7’10 1/2″ high (Vatican Museums; photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Rather than seeing such images as breaking with renaissance visual developments, scholars now recognize mannerist imagery as continuing those explorations in new ways. While the artworks might seem to diverge from classical forms, these artists did actually invent new ways of engaging with the ancient past. One of the most influential artworks for mannerist artists was the Hellenistic sculpture of **Laocoön and his sons**, whose twisting, contorted bodies appealed to a variety of artists of this time, including the Burgundian artist Juan de Juni (who worked in Spain), Domenicos Theotokopoulos (known as El Greco), Alonso

Berruguete, and Francesco Primaticcio. Berruguete frequently adapted aspects of the *Laocoön* in his sculpture to heighten the emotional expressiveness of his saintly figures, such as we find in his ***Abraham and Isaac***.

Why mannerism?

Why do these elegant explorations take place after 1520? While there is no easy answer for the style's emergence at this time, historical and religious developments, the tastes of powerful **patrons**, and the rising social status of the artist may all be key factors. Mannerism first developed in central Italy in the cities of Rome and Florence and it quickly spread. The reasons are many. The early and mid-16th century was a period of enormous social, economic, and political change witnessing the spread of **Protestantism** and the wars of religion that followed. The rise of capitalism and absolutism, colonization and exploitation of new lands and peoples, and new developments in the science of anatomy and optics also add to the era's complexity. Some have attributed the new stylistic explorations of the period to a general neurosis resulting from this shifting context. The new contorted and exaggerated forms are deliberately unbalanced like the 16th century itself.

Figure **5.3.6.9.9**: Agnolo di Cosimo Bronzino, *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid*, c. 1545, oil on panel, 146.1 x 116.2cm (**National Gallery, London**)

While mannerist qualities are found in secular works, like Bronzino's ***Allegory with Venus and Cupid***, this otherworldly, fantastical stylishness may have served a particular function for sacred subjects. The distortion, ambiguity, and supernatural beauty of many mannerist works may have heightened their emotional appeal to Christian audiences, inspiring a deeply personal devotional experience appropriate to this era of religious upheaval. On the **Iberian Peninsula**, mannerist artists like Berruguete or the painter Luis de Morales forged an expressive visual language that encouraged profoundly emotional and ecstatic religious devotion.

Figure 5.3.6.9.10: Luis de Morales, *Piedad*, 1565 oil on panel, 1.25 x .96 m (Louvre, Paris; photo: MOSSOT, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Mannerist art has been associated with the tastes of aristocratic patrons, particularly those within court circles where displays of wealth and appreciation for beautiful things helped cultivate an elite persona. The self-conscious artifice and deliberate complexity of these works would have appealed to patrons who were familiar with recent artistic developments and eager to show off their knowledge and good taste. The general rise in the status of the artist—particularly in central Italy where mannerism first developed over the course of the renaissance, may also have contributed to a rising taste in art that reflected an artist's individual style. Previously, artists were regarded as humble craftsmen, practitioners of the "mechanical arts." By the 1520s—thanks in part to high renaissance artists like **Michelangelo**, **Raphael**, **Albrecht Dürer** and others—visual artists could claim status as practitioners of a "liberal art," placing them alongside scholars, poets, and other humanists. The stylistically specific creations of individual visual artists were increasingly valued as precious records of their individual ingenuity and intellect, it meant something to own a "Dürer" or a "Titian." The pronounced stylishness of mannerist imagery unmistakably marked these works as creations of a unique maker.

Figure 5.3.6.9.11: Left: Giulio Romano, Wall and partial ceiling of the *Sala dei Giganti*, 1528–30, Palazzo Tè, Mantua (photo: Web Gallery of Art); right: Giulio Romano, Ceiling of the *Sala dei Giganti*, 1528–30, Palazzo Tè, Mantua (photo: **Livioandronico2013**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

The first mannerist artists

Mannerist visual strategies have local beginnings (from what we can tell) in Central Italy, although they begin to spread rapidly after their introduction. We find elements of the *maniera* among Raphael's followers, such as in the work of Giulio Romano, who, along with Gian Francesco Penni, took over Raphael's workshop in Rome upon the master's untimely death. His work at Palazzo Tè (the pleasure villa of Federico II Gonzaga of Mantua), like the frescoes in the *Sala dei Giganti* (Hall of the Giants), is a creative interpretation of and playful riff upon the classical tradition, continuing renaissance fascination with the ancient past. Powerful, elongated figures writhe across painted walls and ceiling that are reminiscent of ancient **sarcophagi**. At the Palazzo, Romano even developed architectural spaces that appear to dissolve in place like ancient ruins.

Figure **5.3.6.9.12**: Michelangelo, *Last Judgment*, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome) (photo: **Ramon Stoppelenburg** CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

While Michelangelo is typically associated with what is called high renaissance art, he also helped to shape the powerful visual language of what we now call the *maniera*. Michelangelo's ***Last Judgement***, painted upon the altar wall of the **Sistine Chapel**, is a complicated and intentionally terrifying vision of the end of time. With disconcerting jumps in scale, nude figures in contorted poses are spread across a blue sky, their souls and bodies bared before God as they either rise in glory or are crushed in despair. Michelangelo's figures are heavy, their musculature overemphasized—these are the bodies of the afterlife, rooted in the artist's imagination and the brawny nudes of antiquity rather than reality. His *maniera* is unmistakable.

Figure **5.3.6.9.13**: Pontormo, *Entombment* (or Deposition from the Cross), oil on panel, 1525–28, Capponi Chapel, Santa Felicità, Florence (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Figure **5.3.6.9.14**: Fra Angelico, Descent from the Cross, 1432–34, tempera on panel, 69 in × 73 in (National Museum of San Marco, Florence: photo: **Sailko,** CC BY 3.0)

Early mannerist qualities are found in the work of Florentine painter Andrea del Sarto, and his followers Jacopo Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino. Pontormo's ***Deposition (or Entombment)***, created for the Capponi Chapel, has figures swirling across the picture plane, dislocated in time and space. No narrative elements, like the cross and concrete environment of Fra Angelico's 1432 *Deposition*, serve to ground and clarify the image. The contorted figures and bizarre use of color recall more the work of Michelangelo than they do visual reality.

Ambiguous compositions, like Pontormo's *Deposition*, seem to require sophisticated audiences already familiar with both visual and spiritual traditions. At the same time, a case may be made for the broader public appeal of such imagery. While the references to and departures from artistic tradition may not have been readily appreciated by non-elites, the disorienting effect of the image may have indeed spoken to any viewer familiar with the unsettling effects of grief.

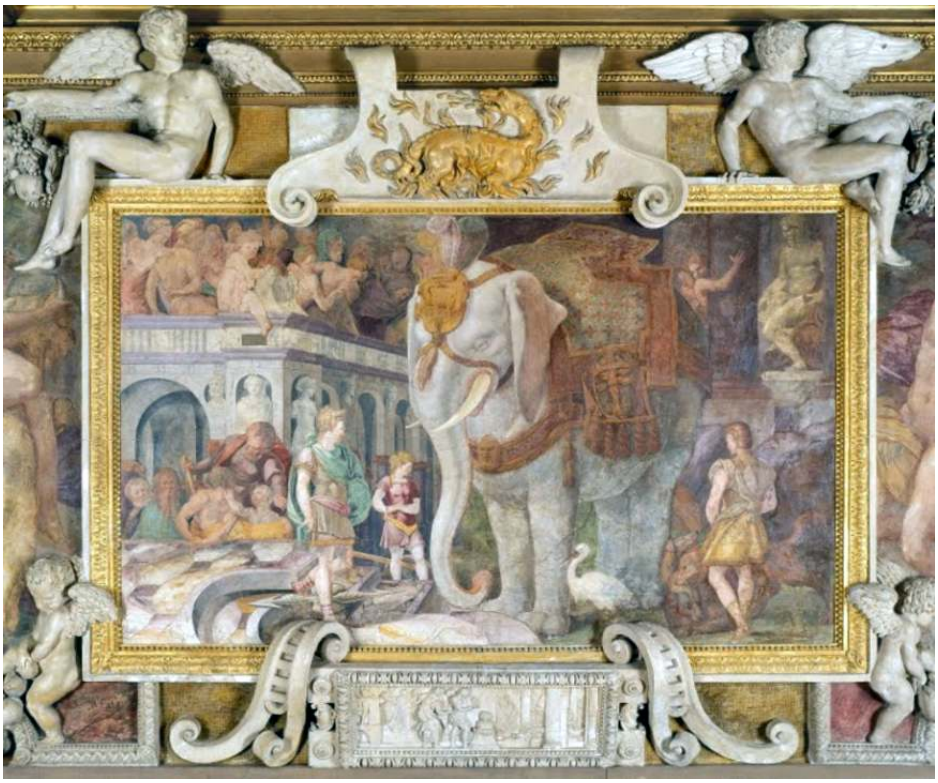

Figure **5.3.6.9.15**: Workshop of Rosso Fiorentino, *The Royal Elephant*, Gallery of Francis I, Château de Fontainebleau, 1528–1540, fresco (photo: **cea +**, CC BY 2.0)

Mannerism on the move

The forms explored by mannerist artists spread rapidly to other parts of Italy and to parts of northern Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, the Americas, and even Asia. In each area, mannerism developed differently, reflecting regional visual traditions, as well as cultural, political, and religious formations.

Figure **5.3.6.9.16**: Gallery of Francis I, Château de Fontainebleau, 1528–1540 (photo: **Mbzt** , CC BY-SA 4.0)

After the sack of Rome in 1527, the French King, Francis I, brought mannerist art to France by importing the Florentine artists Rosso Fiorentino and Benvenuto Cellini, as well as Francesco Primaticcio (who had trained with Giulio Romano). Under Francis's patronage, these artists helped transform a rugged hunting lodge into the spectacular **palace of Fontainebleau**, and where a new form of mannerism would influence generations of French artists. The Italian Jesuit artist **Bernardo Bitti** would emigrate to Lima in the **Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru**, and paint large-scale paintings with the classicizing visual language of the *maniera*.

Figure **5.3.6.9.17**: Luis de Vargas, *The Purification in the Temple*, c. 1560, oil on wood, Church of Santa Cruz, Seville (Museo de Bellas Artes, Sevilla; photo: **Paul Hermans**)

Artists from other European regions also trained in Italy, absorbing mannerist tendencies. Spanish artist Luis de Vargas spent time in Italy with artists like Sebastiano del Piombo and Giorgio Vasari (among others), bringing back what he learned and adapted to the Iberian Peninsula. Vargas would create elaborate retablos (altarpieces) filled with painting and sculpture, for the Cathedral and the Church of Santa Cruz in Seville.

Adrian Collaert (engraver) after Maarten de Vos (drawing), Sight (Visus) from the Five Senses, 16th century, engraving, 21.3 x 26 cm (<a href="https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/383751"
The Metropolitan Museum of Art)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-51111" height="602" sizes="(max-width: 729px) 100vw, 729px" src="
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Figure **5.3.6.9.18**: Adrian Collaert (engraver) after Maarten de Vos (drawing), *Sight (Visus) from the Five Senss*, 16th century, engraving, 21.3 x 26 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Likewise, the Flemish painter Maarten de Vos, who is thought to have spent time in the workshop of **Tintoretto** (a Venetian mannerist artist), created images infused with rich color, elegant elongated figures, and an overtly decorative style. Engravings of De Vos's works circulated across Europe, and eventually found their way across the Atlantic Ocean to the Spanish viceroyalties.

Figure **5.3.6.9.19**: Hendrik Goltzius, *Apollo*, 1588, engraving, 26.4 x 34.9 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

In Prague, under the patronage of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II, the Dutch printmaker Hendrik Goltzius produced numerous engravings, such as *Apollo*, 1588, notable for their dramatic gestures, flamboyant figure treatment, and conspicuous display of artistic virtuosity. Goltzius would become one of the most influential mannerist printmakers of his day. Goltzius borrowed mannerist strategies from Bartholomaeus Spranger, a Flemish artist who studied and traveled in Italy, and brought drawings and ideas back to Rudolph II's court.

Simply put, the spread of mannerism was global.

Why mannerism matters

The ambiguity of mannerism and often sensuous treatment of figures proved problematic for some. The Reformation brought with it a new scrutiny of religious images. The Augustinian monk Martin Luther and other Protestant leaders were concerned that images could mislead or be treated as idols. While the Catholic Church never wavered in its commitment to the validity of images as tools for religious practice, the style of religious art did become an issue. At the Council of Trent (1545–1563), a series of meetings intended to solidify Catholic doctrine and strengthen the threatened church, it was declared that religious images must be clear, unambiguous, and lead viewers to faithful contemplation. Art should be for celebrating and instructing in the faith, not for showcasing artistic skill. The sensuosity, ambiguity, and conspicuous artistry of mannerism was not to be tolerated in sacred art.

Figure 5.3.6.9.20: El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos), *Adoration of the Shepherds*, c. 1612–1614, oil on canvas, 126 x 71″ / 319 x 180 cm (**Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid**)

This call for conservatism in art on the part of the Catholic **Counter Reformation**, the movement behind the Council of Trent, did not bring an end to mannerist explorations. The style continued in new ways and across the global Catholic landscape. Devout Catholics, such as the Duke of Florence, Cosimo I de'Medici (who was eager to garner the Pope's approval in his quest to become Grand Duke of Tuscany), continued to patronize mannerist forms in paint and stone—and even tapestries. El Greco, an artist who is thought to almost perfectly embody the Counter-Reformation Church's desire to produce emotionally affective religious works, borrowed a great deal from mannerism. In fact, El Greco's work demonstrates that mannerism extends beyond the sixteenth century, attesting once again to the ways in which visual strategies ebbed and flowed differently in various parts of the world.

Later artists are indebted to the mannerists. The dynamic compositions, rich color choices, and dramatic brushwork of later **Baroque** traditions all owe a debt to mannerist experimentation.

Additional resources

Lynette M. F. Bosch, *Mannerism, Spirituality and Cognition: The Art of Enargeia* (Routledge, 2020).

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Stephen J. Campbell, "Counter Reformation Polemic and Mannerist Counter-Aesthetics: Bronzino's 'Martyrdom of St. Lawrence' in San Lorenzo," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 46, Polemical Objects (Autumn, 2004), pp. 98–119.

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Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

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Renaissance woman: Isabella d’Este

by DR. LISA BOUTIN VITELA

Figure **5.3.6.9.21**: Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Isabella d’Este*, c. 1499-1500, chalk on paper, 61 x 46.5 cm (**Musée du Louvre, Paris**)

In European history classes, we often hear about renaissance men: Cosimo de’ Medici, Leonardo da Vinci, and Niccolò Machiavelli. Where were the women? The most famous female patron of the Italian renaissance was Isabella d’Este Gonzaga (1474–1539), marchioness of a territory in northern Italy called Mantua. Despite the restrictions women faced, her art collections demonstrate important renaissance themes: possessing the ancient world through the collection of antiquities, demonstrating erudition through the acquisition of classical narratives, and fashioning an identity through portraiture and symbols.

A desire for antiquities

Isabella’s letters reveal a longing for ancient art objects and sculptures. A bust of the Roman emperor Octavian, an onyx vase, a Venus given by Cesare Borgia (the possible illegitimate son of Pope Alexander VI), and a Cupid attributed to the ancient Greek sculptor Praxiteles were documented in her collection. Isabella displayed the Praxitelean *Cupid* next to a *Sleeping Cupid* by the renaissance artist Michelangelo in order to compare these ancient and modern sculptures.

Figure **5.3.6.9.22**: Antico, *Hercules and Antaeus*, 1519, bronze, 43.2 cm high (**Kunsthistorisches Museum**)

When Isabella d'Este could not acquire an ancient sculpture, she turned to the sculptor known as Antico to create statuettes in gold and bronze in an antique style. One bronze sculpture depicted the Greco-Roman hero Hercules lifting and crushing the giant Antaeus in a nude wrestling contest. Cast in 1519, Isabella's *Hercules and Antaeus* is noteworthy for its depiction of musculature. The bronze sculpture was marked with an inscription of ownership, D / ISABEL / LA / M E MAR (Divine Isabella, Marchioness of Mantua). Isabella's *Hercules and Antaeus* measures about 15 inches tall. Scholars have considered how these small sculptures could be examined closely and demonstrate the interactive nature of early modern art reception.

Figure **5.3.6.9.23**: Giancristoforo Romano, *Portrait medal of Isabella d'Este* [obverse], 1507, bronze, .039 cm diameter (National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection)

A careful patron of portraits

Surviving portraits of Isabella d'Este and accounts of her commissions indicate her careful control of representations of her physical appearance. The sculptor and medallist Gian Cristoforo Romano cast bronze medals featuring an idealized Isabella in profile on the obverse and zodiac symbols on the reverse. The profile portrait shows Isabella wearing a substantial necklace framed by a low, angular neckline and her hair tied back in braids and looped locks surrounded by her name and title. The **reverse** features a personification of a figure in sheer drapery and contrapposto stance, who has been interpreted as Virgo, Astrology, Hygeia, or Victory, with the sign of Sagittarius above surrounded by the inscription BENEMERENTIUM ERGO (variously translated as "On

account of great merit"[1], "Because of merit" [2], "Because of the deserving [stars]"[3]). Isabella distributed bronze versions of the medal to those she favored and retained one medal created in gold and embellished with diamonds and enamel.

Figure **5.3.6.9.24**: Giancristoforo Romano, *Portrait medal of Isabella d'Este* [obverse], 1495 – 1498, gold with diamonds and enamel, 7 cm diameter (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

Leonardo da Vinci also drew an idealized version of Isabella d'Este's likeness (top of page). While never completed as a painting, Leonardo's drawing of Isabella (c. 1499–1500) provides a detailed depiction of the marchioness with a profile view of her face and frontal view of her shoulders. Leonardo disguised Isabella's substantial figure in her billowing sleeves. The attention to her garment reveals Isabella's interest in fashion, which was a frequent subject of her letters. A drawing after Leonardo's original reveals that both of Isabella's hands may have been visible and that one hand gestured toward a book, an attribute of erudition, before Leonardo's original drawing was cropped along the bottom edge.

Figure 5.3.6.9.25: View to the Corte Vecchia, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, Italy (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Spaces for Collecting

Soon after Isabella's marriage to Francesco II Gonzaga, the marchioness developed a space for a painting gallery – her *studiolo* – and a room to display her growing collections – the *grotta*. Isabella's original *studiolo* and *grotta* were constructed within the Castello di San Giorgio, the medieval castle that forms part of the Ducal Palace in Mantua. Later, these rooms were moved to the Corte Vecchia of the Ducal Palace. The ground-floor location of these later rooms allowed for the addition of a secret garden and easier access for Isabella, who struggled with mobility as she aged.

Figure 5.3.6.9.26: Andrea Mantegna, *Mars and Venus (or Parnassus)*, 1497, tempera and gold on canvas, 159 cm × 192 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

Isabella sought paintings with mythological themes from significant renaissance artists for her *studiolo*. The program, which scholars continue to debate, was developed in consultation with the humanist scholar Paride da Ceresara. While seven paintings have been interpreted as allegories of virtue conquering vice, another interpretation emphasizes the paintings' roles within the space of the *studiolo* and within the context of humanist literature at the Mantuan court.[4] The painter Andrea Mantegna delivered the first two paintings *Mars and Venus* (or *Parnassus*) in 1497 and ***Pallas expelling the Vices*** in 1502. After much correspondence with Isabella, in 1505, the painter Pietro Perugino delivered the third painting for the studiolo *The Combat of Love and Chastity* (or *Battle between Lasciviousness and Chastity*) featuring Pallas and Diana fighting Venus and Cupid. Perugino's painting did not please Isabella; she wrote that it appeared deficient in comparison to Mantegna's canvases.

Figure **5.3.6.9.27**: Pietro Perugino, *The Combat of Love and Chastity (or Battle between Lasciviousness and Chastity)*, 1505, oil on canvas, 160 x 191 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

Following Mantegna's death, the new Gonzaga court painter, Lorenzo Costa, created a coronation scene, variously titled *Coronation of a Woman Poet* or *Allegory of Isabella d'Este's Coronation* (c. 1504–06), and a second painting entitled ***The Reign of Comus*** (c. 1507–11). Antonio da Correggio contributed *Allegory of Virtue* and *Allegory of Vice* (c. 1528–30) once the *studiolo* was established in the Corte Vecchia. The paintings feature mythological goddesses, especially Pallas Athena, Diana, and Venus, demonstrating Isabella's humanist knowledge and her preference for female figures who exemplified desirable characteristics for the marchioness.

Figure **5.3.6.9.28**: Antonio da Correggio, *Allegory of Virtue* (left), 1528-30, tempera on canvas, 142 x 86 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris); *Allegory of Vice* (right), 1528-30, tempera on canvas, 149 x 88 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

In her later rooms in the Corte Vecchia, Isabella's *studiolo* was connected to her *grotta* through a carved marble doorway attributed to Gian Cristoforo Romano. The *grotta* also featured Isabella's personal symbols or *imprese* (emblems) ornamenting the ceiling. Gian Cristoforo Romano's gold medal and Antico's *Hercules and Antaeus* (mentioned above) were also on display in the *grotta*. The inventory conducted after Isabella's death revealed the extensive collections acquired over her lifetime.

Beyond the Ducal Palace

While the Ducal Palace provided spaces to display her collections, Isabella looked forward to leaving its dark, damp environment. Her suburban villa, the Palazzo di Porto, provided an opportunity for escape with its gardens, fruit trees, and loggia. This environment was ideal for displaying and possibly using Isabella's maiolica service, as earthenware dishes were preferred to silver in country villas. Decorated with mythological and **Old Testament** narratives, as well as her coat-of-arms and emblems, the twenty-three surviving dishes of the maiolica service used classical imagery to emphasize Isabella's personal virtue in a manner that echoed her collections in the Ducal Palace.

Figure **5.3.6.9.29**: Nicola da Urbino, Armorial Plate (tondino): The story of King Midas, c. 1520–25, maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware), 27.5 cm diameter (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

While often identified as the most significant female collector of the renaissance, Isabella d'Este is notable among *all* early modern patrons, both male and female, due to the variety of her collections, which span a broad range of materials, iconographic sources, and historical periods. Although Isabella's paintings and art objects have long been dispersed from their original locations, the marchioness's rooms in the Corte Vecchia remain in Mantua, Italy and allow us to imagine the original splendor of this collection.

Notes

[1] Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 333.

[2] Eleonora Luciano, "Isabella d'Este," cat. 92 in *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini*, ed. Keith Christiansen and Stefan Weppelmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), pp. 139-141.

[3] J. Graham Pollard, "Text and Image" in *Perspectives on the Renaissance Medal*, ed. Stephen Scher, pp. 149-164.

[4] Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Essay based on Lisa Boutin Vitela, "Isabella d'Este and Art," in IDEA: Isabella d'Este Archive, November 2017, http://ideaart.web.unc.edu/isabella-deste-art/

Additional Resources:

Isabella d'Este Archive: Virtual Studiolo project

Isabella d'Este Archive: The Illustrated Credenza

Louvre: Portrait of Isabella d'Este

Louvre: Isabella d'Este's Studiolo

National Gallery of Art and the Oxford University Press: Isabella Collects

Francis Ames-Lewis, *Isabella and Leonardo: The Artistic Relationship between Isabella d'Este and Leonardo da Vinci, 1500-1506* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

Clifford Brown, *Isabella d'Este in the Ducal Palace in Mantua: An overview of her rooms in the Castello di San Giorgio and the Corte Vecchia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005).

Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

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The Medici collect the Americas

by DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK

Figure **5.3.6.9.30**: Woodcut of the Wunderkammer room, from Ferrante Imperato, "Dell'historia naturale…" Libri XXVIII (Naples, 1599) (photo: **Wellcome Collection**, CC BY 4.0)

Americana and cabinets of curiosities

After Christopher Columbus landed on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola in 1492 and the subsequent **Spanish invasion and colonization** of much of the Americas, material objects, flora, and fauna from these faraway lands were shipped back to Europe where many people perceived them as exotic items of wonder and fascination. Americana—objects sent from the Americas—were found in numerous cabinets of curiosities (also known as ***Wunderkammern***). Cabinets of curiosities first appeared in sixteenth-century Europe as a way to display items perceived as exotic, curious, and wondrous. The strategy of collecting Americana and displaying it in cabinets of curiosities offered a way to engage with the Americas for those who might never undertake the voyage. In a sense, we might even say that this allowed Europeans to take possession of these distant lands.

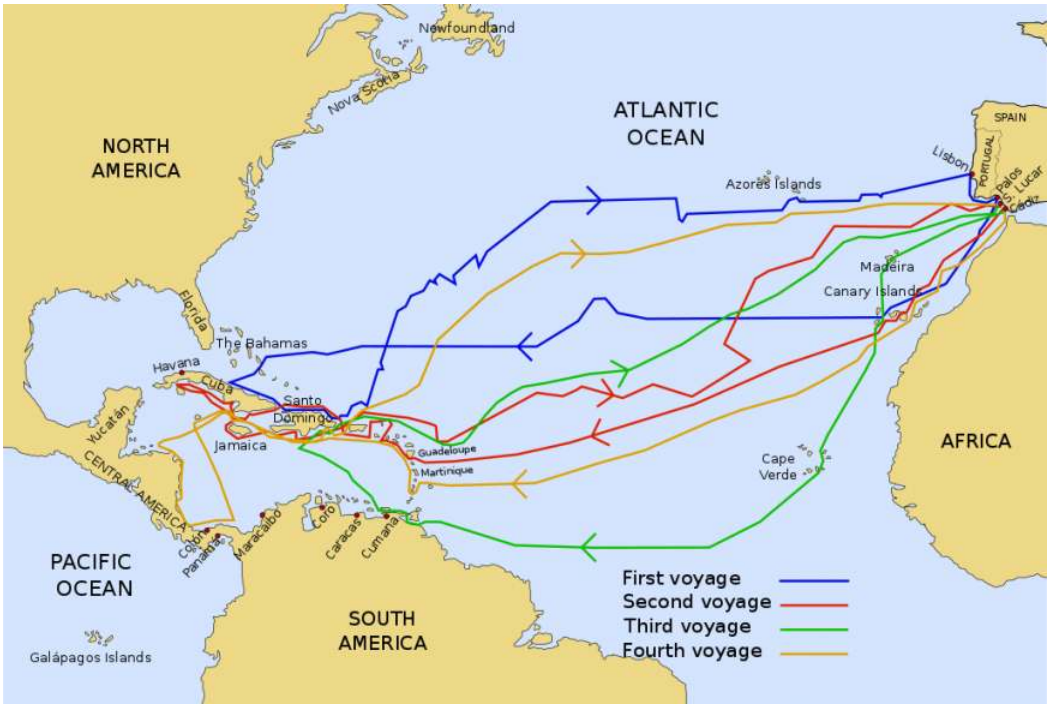


Figure **5.3.6.9.31**: Map of Christopher Columbus's voyages to the Americas

The origin of cabinets of curiosities in the sixteenth century coincides with the discovery, by Europeans, that the world was much larger than they previously believed. It also coincides with the invasion and the **colonization** of the Americas and the millions of people who lived there. Technological and scientific advancements in mapping and navigation spurred interest in collecting items from around the globe, as well as the instruments needed to create maps and sail the seas.

Cabinets of curiosity created a microcosm of a world that could be studied, ordered, and understood, but they were not spaces in which just anyone could encounter and study such objects, these were personal spaces for the elite (and anyone they invited). They often combined human-made (*artificialia*), natural elements (*naturalia*), and scientific objects and instruments (*scientifica*), as we see in Ferrante Imperato's 1599 illustration of a *Wunderkammern*.

Of the *naturalia* sent from the Americas, living animals—especially birds—were among the most popular. Turkeys, parrots, and macaws were among the birds that arrived in Europe. The armored appearance of armadillos were also a continuous source of wonder; and their shell retained its shape, even if they died on the transatlantic voyage. Apparently, some were even gilded and displayed on pillars in Europe.

Among the human-made items from the Americas found in Renaissance curiosity cabinets are **Olmec masks**, Mesoamerican codices (such as the ***Codex Vaticanus A***), **New Spanish featherworks**, Brazilian hammocks, Taíno objects, and more. Among the most exceptional objects to first enter European *Wunderkammern* were those sent by Hernán Cortés in 1519, as gifts to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Turquoise masks, golden figurines, featherworks, and more were met with excitement and amazement by people in Toledo, Valladolid, and eventually Brussels. Albrecht Dürer even remarked that "In all my life I have seen nothing that made my heart rejoice so much as these things. Here I have found wonderful, costly things and I have marveled at the subtle ingenuity of people in strange lands."[1]

The Medici Popes

Among the most avid collectors of Americana were members of the powerful Florentine Medici family. Medici popes Leo X (Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, who reigned as Pope from 1513–21) and Clement VII (Giulio di Giuliano de' Medici, who reigned from 1523–34) collected Americana—and in fact were some of the earliest to do so. They never traveled across the Atlantic, yet their desire to understand these lands increased, especially with ongoing evangelization attempts. **Leo X** commissioned frescoes filled with American flora and fauna. For instance, he commissioned the artist Giovanni di Udine to paint maize (also known as corn and first domesticated by indigenous peoples in southern Mexico about 10,000 years ago) in festoons in the Loggias (designed by **Raphael**) in the Vatican palace.

Figure 5.3.6.9.32: Giovanni da Udine, Loggia of Cupid and Psyche, Villa Farnesina, Rome (with detail of festoon showing maize), 1506-10, built for Agostino Chigi, treasurer for Pope Julius II (photo: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, CC BY 2.0)

Udine had, though, painted the first known depictions of maize earlier, between 1515–17, in the festoons around frescoes by Raphael in the Loggia of Psyche within the Villa Farnesina in Rome, which belonged to the wealthy Sienese banker Agostino Chigi. Pope Clement VII was likewise among the earliest patrons to commission artworks that depicted subjects related to this foreign world which he had never seen with his own eyes. In his Villa Madama (Sala di Giulio Romano, c. 1520) in Rome, he had Udine paint a naturalistic turkey along with other birds like peacocks.

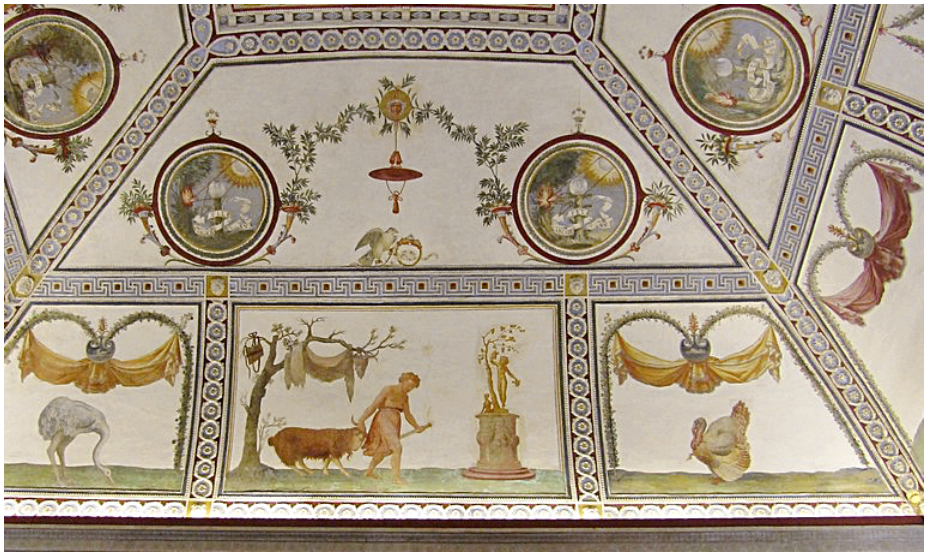


Figure 5.3.6.9.33: Giovanni da Udine, Villa Madama, Rome, 1523-27

Popes Leo X and Clement VII also actively acquired Americana as well. In 1514, the Portuguese king, Manuel I, sent Leo X a gift of flora and fauna from the Americas and India. It is likely that part of this gift included plants like maize and beans from the Americas, as well as the special gift of an elephant, called Hanno, from India, of whom Leo was extremely fond.

The Ñudzavui (Mixtec) *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I*, one of the few surviving pre-conquest Mesoamerican screenfold codices, was owned by Clement VII. The King of Portugal reportedly sent it to Clement VII, along with other gifts from the Americas, sometime before 1523. A decade later, the Medici pope received another gift of objects from the Spanish Dominican friar, Domingo de Betanzos, who had traveled to New Spain to aid in evangelizing the indigenous populations. The Dominican friar apparently gifted the pope featherworks, Ñudzavui turquoise masks, and codices.

Figure **5.3.6.9.34**: Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus 1, image from a **facsimile edition** (original in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Austria)

Figure **5.3.6.9.35**: Bernardino de Sahagún, General History of the Things of New Spain: *The Florentine Codex*, Book 11, volume 3, p. 748.

The First Grand Duke: Cosimo I de' Medici

Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici (who reigned from 1537–1574) and his wife, Duchess Eleanora di Toledo, like their Medici family members, never traveled to the Americas. But they too continued to acquire plants, animals, and other objects from these far-away lands. They also commissioned artworks that made visual reference to the Americas, possibly as a way to participate in a vicarious conquest of these foreign peoples and places. Cosimo was partly able to collect Americana because of his marriage to Eleanora, a noblewoman of the Spanish court. Their marriage in 1539 helped to cement a Medici alliance with Spain, which would aid Cosimo in his collecting practices. The two grew maize, and apparently even started to cultivate tomatoes and medicinal plants (also introduced from the Americas). Cosimo had live birds, including turkeys, at Medici estates. Beyond their interest in living flora and fauna, the Medici Duke and Duchess also had also obtained a number of objects from the Americas, including **mosaic masks**, objects made of jade, and feather cloaks.

How items such as these were listed in Medici inventories reveals the challenges that Europeans faced when classifying Amerindian objects. In a 1553 inventory, Aztec masks were listed under 'jewelry' (*goia*), but not long thereafter in another inventory they were listed as "theatrical masks" (*maschera*) in an attempt to compare them with recognizable European forms with clear functions. At this time there was also an interest in Greco-Roman theatrical masks, so perhaps the Aztec masks were

eventually believed to function in a similar capacity. This reframing of Mesoamerican masks—from jewelry to masks—could also relate to broader ways in which Europeans were trying to understand and reconcile American objects, many of which were unfamiliar to them. [2]

Grand Dukes Francesco I (1574 to 87) and Ferdinando I (1587 to 1609)

Figure **5.3.6.9.36**: Jacopo Ligozzi, *Psittacus Ararauna* (Blue and Gold Macaw), c. 1580-1600, 67 x 45.6 cm (Uffizi)

Cosimo and Eleanora's eldest son, Francesco, was similarly drawn to the *naturalia* and *artificialia* of the Americas, sharing his father's keen interest in birds and plants. At one point, he commissioned Jacopo Ligozzi to create naturalistic drawings of local and exotic plants and animals, some of which came from the Americas. Among the most remarkable are his depictions of a pineapple, a macaw, and the American century plant (*Agave americana*), all drawn circa 1570.

Figure **5.3.6.9.37**: Jacopo Ligozzi, Pineapple (*Bromelia ananas*) and *Agave americana*, c. 1570

Ligozzi had live models on which to base his clearly articulated images, and his almost microscopic details were praised. Francesco's interest in the American *naturalia* extended to his experiments as well. In the Casino di San Marco in Florence which had workshops, including the Medici porcelain factory, Francesco conducted experiments and studied his collection of plants and animals. Like his father, he continued to grow plants, some of them from the Americas, in a nearby botanical garden. He would use some in his alchemical experiments, creating medicines and other distillations. Francesco often gifted objects and *naturalia* from the Americas to other high-ranking individuals who were similarly fascinated with items from distant lands. One sumptuous gift was given to Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria in 1572, and it included featherworks, gold and silver figurines, parrots, food items, and more.

Francesco's younger brother, Ferdinando, also had a desire to collect Americana. As a cardinal in Rome, he acquired numerous objects, such as multiple featherworks, one of which was a bishop's mitre. He also came into ownership of the **Florentine Codex**, an encyclopedia produced between 1575 and 1577 under the direction of the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagun along with indigenous collaborators. This twelve volume text included discussion of cochineal, which produced a highly coveted red dye, along with other types of resources from the Americas. One can imagine Ferdinando's interest in possibly learning from the Florentine Codex how to manufacture cochineal.

Figure **5.3.6.9.38**: Jacopo Ligozzi, *Passiflora coerulea*

When Francesco died in 1587, and Ferdinando became Grand Duke of Florence, he moved from Rome to Florence with his collection. Ligozzi, who had remained in the employ of the Medici court even after Francesco's death, would then paint, at the request of Ferdinando, one of his most well-known and final botanical images: the *Passiflora coerulea*, or the passion flower (or Granadilla or maracot originally). Previously unknown to Europeans, it had only recently become known, and sent across the Atlantic to Europe. The plant sparked immense curiosity because of the manner in which it visually evoked the crown of thorns, and so became a powerful Christian symbol.

Knowing the unknown

Medici fascination with Americana in the sixteenth century was certainly not unique. Across Europe, many powerful individuals sought to acquire objects taken from the Americas, as a way to know the unknown, to exert some control over the colonial processes underway, and to possess exotic and rare things. The Medici popes and three grand dukes provide a more focused example of the ways in which Americana intersected with European interests in conquest and colonization, science and alchemy, and collecting and visual culture in the sixteenth century.

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to Lydia Parker.

Footnotes

[1] Adriana Turpin, “The New World collections of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici and their role in the creation of a Kunst- and Wunderkammer in the Palazzo Vecchio,” *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. R.J.W. Evans and Alexander Marr (London: Ashgate, 2006), p. 64.

[2] Isabel Yaya, “Wonders of America: The Curiosity Cabinet as a Site of Representation and Knowledge,” *Journal of the History of Collections* (2008), pp. 1–16.; Turpin, p. 73.

Additional resources

The Medici Collections of the Museo Galileo, on Google Arts and Culture

Collecting for the Kunstkammer on The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Christian F. Feest, “The Collecting of American Indian Artifacts in Europe, 1493–1750,” in America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 324–60.

J. Janick and G. Caneva, “The First Images of Maize in Europe,” *Maydica* 50 (2005), pp. 71–80.

Eloise Quiñones Keber, “Collecting Cultures: A Mexican Manuscript in the Vatican Library,” in *Reframing the Renaissance*, ed. Claire Farago (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 229–42.

Lia Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence* (Penn State University Press, 2016).

Peter Mason, “From Presentation to Representation: Americana in Europe,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 6 (1994), pp. 1–20.

Larry Silver, “Europe’s Global Vision,” in *Blackwell Companions to Art History: A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art*, ed. Babette Bohn and James M. Saslow (Wiley, 2013).

Adriana Turpin, “The New World collections of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici and their role in the creation of a Kunst- and Wunderkammer in the Palazzo Vecchio,” *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. R.J.W. Evans and Alexander Marr (London: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 63–85.

Isabel Yaya, “Wonders of America: The Curiosity Cabinet as a Site of Representation and Knowledge,” *Journal of the History of Collections* (2008), pp. 1–16.

Galileo Galilei

by DR. JOSEPH DAUBEN

Figure **5.3.6.9.39**: Ottavio Leoni, *Portrait of Galileo*, 1624, engraving and etching (Fitzwilliam Museum)

Renaissance artists—painters, sculptors and architects—had been observing nature with a special interest in depicting it faithfully and realistically from the early 15th century on. In fact, by turning to the problem of art and science in the Renaissance, it is possible to find the roots for Galileo's own peculiarly realistic—and idealistic—approach to nature. The values and attitudes Galileo held were ones he shared with Italian humanists, including philosophers, artisans, and even musicians.

The experiment at Pisa

Galileo Galilei was born near Pisa in 1564—the same year in which Shakespeare was born and the year in which Michelangelo and Calvin died. After studying at the University of Pisa, he was appointed to the chair of mathematics—and as the photograph below reminds us, it was in Pisa that the famous leaning tower might well have suggested Galileo's most famous experiment.

Figure **5.3.6.9.40**: Bell tower, Pisa (photo: **bombman**, CC BY 2.0)

First of all, the theory that virtually everyone accepted at the time, was the traditional theory of Aristotle—who believed that heavier objects fall more quickly than lighter ones. Consider, for example, two objects—one twice as heavy as the other. Imagine Aristotle at the top of the leaning tower of Pisa, dropping off two cannonballs, one twice as heavy as the other. According to Aristotle, it should fall twice as fast. If it were four times heavier, it should fall four times faster.

But in fact, what the leaning tower of Pisa type of experiment demonstrates, when actually performed, is that Aristotle was wrong, that no matter what the difference in weight, two heavy objects will fall simultaneously at virtually the same speed. If Aristotle were right, this could only happen if the larger stones were dropped from a higher point in the clouds—but at virtually the same time—or that the lighter ones started falling earlier than the heavier ones—neither of which seemed very probable to Galileo. Instead, the simplest explanation was simply that heavy or light, all stones fell simultaneously with the same speed.

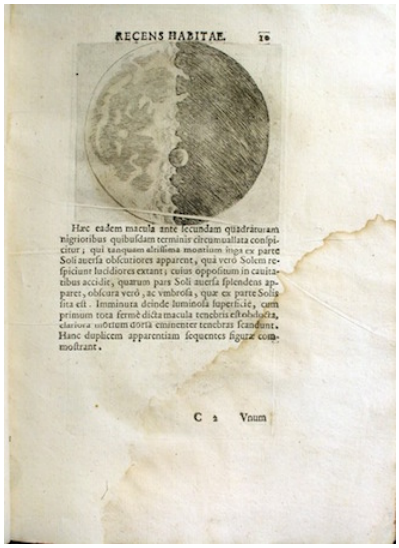


Figure **5.3.6.9.41**: Image of the moon, from Galileo's presentation copy of the *Sidereus nuncius* (1610) (image: courtesy History of Science Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries)

In any case, Galileo's interest soon turned from falling bodies to astronomy. Rumors of an invention made by a Dutch spectacle-maker reached Venice, and these led Galileo to construct his first telescope in July of 1609. It wasn't long before Galileo began to make a series of startling observations, including the discovery of innumerable stars never seen before, mountains on the moon, the movements of which he carefully plotted from day to day.

He was soon to publish these discoveries in a book, the *Siderius Nuncius (Starry Messenger)* which caused an overnight sensation. Galileo named the moons of Jupiter the "medicean planets"—in honor of his former student Cosmo and the famous Medici family—thanks to which he was shortly thereafter appointed Chief Mathematician and Philosopher to the Grand Duke of Tuscany in Florence.

The heavens are imperfect

All of these discoveries—and others—posed yet more direct challenges to Aristotle's idea of the perfection of the heavens (namely that the heavens were perfect, immutable, unchanging). Some Aristotelian astronomers refused to look through Galileo's telescope, others tried to deny what he had seen. The Roman Catholic Church, however, was becoming increasingly concerned—and a young Dominican, Tommaso Caccini, was the first to denounce Galileo officially and the Copernican theory his observations seemed to support from the pulpit during a sermon in Santa Maria Novella.

Arrest and trial

A few years later, as concerns mounted, Galileo was officially advised by Cardinal Bellarmino on the Pope's behalf to proceed cautiously and speak only hypothetically about the Copernican theory, but not as if it were actually real.

Galileo returned to Florence and continued work on his book, but now he gave more emphasis to mathematical arguments rather than to experimental or physical arguments—as the Pope wished. But when the book finally appeared in 1632, it raised an immediate storm of protest leading immediately to Galileo's arrest and famous trial by the Inquisition in Rome that found him guilty of having published a heretical book. In the end, Galileo had no choice but to repent and confess that he had gone too far.

Figure 5.3.6.9.42: Bust of Galileo (detail), Giambattosta Foggini, *Tomb of Galileo*, 1727, Santa Croce, Florence, Italy

He was sentenced to life imprisonment, which he spent, for the most part, at his own villa at Arcetri near Florence, under the surveillance of the Inquisition. Even so, Galileo, in his last years, now undertook his last and perhaps greatest work, his *Discourses on the Two New Sciences*, which has been described as "the cornerstone of modern physics." When Galileo died in 1642, totally blind and almost 78 years old, Pope Urban VIII did not forget his feud with Galileo, and refused to permit his burial with a suitable monument—instead, Galileo was buried unceremoniously in the Church of Santa Croce, in Florence. A few hundred years later were his remains moved to their present magnificent tomb, opposite that of Michelangelo, near the entrance to the church.

Nature is mathematical

Galileo believed that nature was inherently mathematical, that mathematics was the language of nature—that mathematics was the key to understanding the reality behind the appearance of natural phenomena (for example, accelerated and parabolic motions). What Galileo achieved in revolutionizing physics was to show how observation, careful measurement, and attention to the structure of a given event—all led to an appreciation of hidden causes that ultimately expressed the pervasive mathematical unity of all nature.

Galileo and Renaissance art

by DR. JOSEPH DAUBEN

Renaissance artists had contributed greatly to man's knowledge by the time Galileo was doing his first work at Pisa. The humanist artists of the Italian renaissance had performed their own dissections to promote the study of anatomy, they had invented mathematical perspective to make possible the accurate, realistic portrayal of physical space. The literary humanists had managed to revive all sorts of classics, in particular the works of Plato. Christopher Columbus had directly challenged the limits to the finite European world of Ptolemy's geography. In short, the bounds of human knowledge were expanding at a rapid rate.

Figure 5.3.6.9.43: Virgin Mary (detail) "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet" (Apocalypse 12:1), Ludovico Cigoli, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1612, fresco (Pauline Chapel, Santa Maria Maggiore, Italy)

Thus it comes as no surprise that Italian artists of Galileo's day responded favorably, even enthusiastically, to the new discoveries that science itself was making. It was Galileo's friend, Lodovico Cigoli, who incorporated the latest discoveries of his telescope, hot off the press in Galileo's *Siderius Nuncius* (1610) in his own version of the *Assumption of the Virgin* painted just two years later in 1612. In Cigoli's painting, notice the treatment of the moon at the Virgin's feet—rendered as though it were seen though the telescope, exactly as Galileo had recorded it in his own pen and ink drawing only a few years earlier.[1]

Mathematics is the language of nature

In closing, how can we draw together all of the diverse strands of renaissance artistic realism, especially Brunelleschi's discovery of perspective, with Galileo's experiments on acceleration and his analysis of projectile motion?

It is clear that renaissance artists were seeking a new world, thanks in part to mathematics and the new perspective, literally, that mathematics provided. Galileo not only inherited this perspective, but a philosophical sense as well that had been inspired by renaissance philosophers (especially Neoplatonists), namely that the underlying reality of the world we perceive is essentially mathematical.

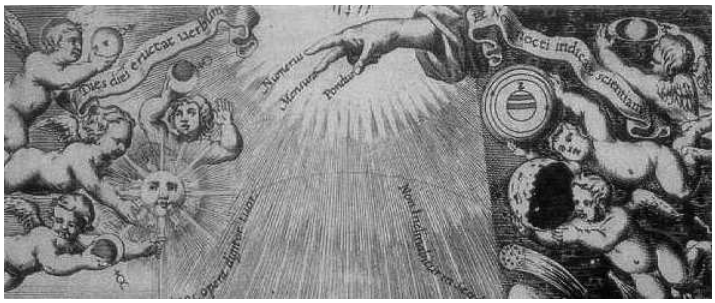


Figure 5.3.6.9.44: Hand of God (detail), G.B. Riccioli, frontispiece, *Almagestum Novum* (1651)

This was exactly the point made in Riccioli's dramatic depiction of the hand of God, creating the world according to mathematical principles, number and weight and measure written clearly on his fingers to make no mistake about the inherent, essential mathematical character of the physical world.

Renaissance artists and architects had already succeeded in translating physical space into the mathematical terms of proportion and perspective to produce works that tricked the eye and rivaled nature.

Galileo used mathematics with equal skill to reveal the underlying structure of physical space and motion to show that these, too, could be reduced to mathematical analysis. In connecting physical space and real motion—which could be observed experimentally—with the ideal and uniform change of his neo-platonic, mathematical world, Galileo also serves to bridge the early stages of the

scientific revolution in Europe—and figures like Copernicus and Kepler—with the later unifying achievements of Descartes, Newton and Leibniz.

Thus in a very direct way, it was mathematics that not only facilitated the art of renaissance perspective, but provided the key as well to Galileo's new science of nature. In both cases, the essence of physical reality was understood in terms that could be reduced to basic mathematical principles.

1. See Steven F. Ostrow, "Cigoli's Immacolata and Galileo's Moon: Astronomy and the Virgin in early seicento Rome," *Art Bulletin*, vol. LXXVIII, no. 2 (June 1996), pp. 218-235 (**online here**). Ostrow writes:

> ***Edgerton has argued that Cigoli's moon was 'no doubt inspired by one of Galileo's original drawings, but a comparison between them immediately reveals that the painter did not, in fact, faithfully copy any of the drawings or, for that matter, any of the engravings published in the Sidereus nuncius.' In light of Cigoli`s professed difficulty with Latin, it is also unlikely that he relied on Galileo's written description. We do know, however, that by early 1612 Cigoli was in possession of a telescope, through which, as he proudly informed Galileo, he saw the moon 'very well.' He may, therefore, have made his own drawings of the moon in conjunction with his work on the fresco, inspired by what he had learned from Galileo and perhaps, too, in an effort to corroborate his friend`s discoveries in the face of mounting criticism in Rome.***

Additional resources:

David L. Butts, "Galileo and the Telescope: Naturalistic Representations in Visual Astronomy," *Journal of Art History*, vol. 1 (2006).

The Partnership of Art and Science: The Moon of Cigoli and Galileo

See Steven F. Ostrow, "Cigoli's Immacolata and Galileo's Moon: Astronomy and the Virgin in early seicento Rome," *Art Bulletin*, vol. LXXVIII, no. 2 (June 1996), pp. 218-235 (online here).

Central and Northern Italy in the 16th century

This is a period of ambitious commissions—the Sistine Chapel ceiling, the Tomb of Pope Julius II...

1500 - 1600

Leonardo da Vinci

About Leonardo

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

> ***The heavens often rain down the richest gifts on human beings, but sometimes they bestow with lavish abundance upon a single individual beauty, grace and ability, so that whatever he does, every action is so divine that he distances all other men, and clearly displays how his greatness is a gift of God and not an acquirement of human art. Men saw this in Leonardo. (Vasari, Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects)***

Leonardo: From Florence to Milan

Leonardo was born illegitimate to a prominent Tuscan family of potters and notaries. He may have traveled from Vinci to Florence where his father worked for several powerful families including the Medici. At age seventeen, Leonardo reportedly apprenticed with the Florentine artist Verrocchio. Here, Leonardo gained an appreciation for the achievements of Giotto and Masaccio and in 1472 he joined the artists' guild, Compagnia di San Luca.

Figure 5.3.6.9.45: Leonardo da Vinci, *Head of Leda*, c. 1504-06, pen and ink over black chalk, 14.7 x 17.7 cm (Royal Collection trust, UK)

Because of his family's ties, Leonardo benefited when Lorenzo de' Medici (the Magnificent) ruled Florence. By 1478 Leonardo was completely independent of Verrocchio and may have then met the exiled Ludovico Sforza, the future Duke of Milan (Ludovico ruled as regent from 1481-94, before becoming Duke). In 1482, Leonardo arrived in Milan bearing a silver lyre (which he may have been able to play), a gift for Ludovico Sforza from the Florentine ruler, Lorenzo the Magnificent. Ludovico sought to transform Milan into a center of humanist learning to rival Florence.

Figure 5.3.6.9.46: Leonardo da Vinci, *Superficial anatomy of the shoulder and neck*, c. 1510, pen and ink over black chalk, 29.2 x 19.8 cm (Royal Collection trust, UK)

Leonardo flourished in this intellectual environment. He opened a studio, received numerous commissions, instructed students, and began to systematically record his scientific and artistic investigations in a series of notebooks. The archetypal "renaissance man," Leonardo was an unrivaled painter, an accomplished architect, an engineer, cartographer, and scientist (he was particularly interested in biology and physics). He was influenced by a variety of ancient texts including Plato's *Timaeus*, Ptolemy's *Cosmography*, and Vitruvius's *On Architecture*. Leonardo is credited with having assisted Luca Pacioli with his treatise, *Divina Proportione* (1509). Joining the practical and the theoretical, Leonardo designed numerous mechanical devices for battle, including a submarine, and even experimented with designs for flight.

In a now famous letter (likely written in the early 1480s), Leonardo listed his talents to the future Duke, focusing mostly on his abilities as a military engineer. The letter begins:

> ***Having until now sufficiently studied and examined the experiments of all those who claim to be experts and inventors of war machines, and having found that their machines do not differ in the least from those ordinarily in use, I shall make so bold, without wanting to cause harm to anyone, as to address myself to Your Excellency to divulge my secrets to him, and offer to demonstrate to him, at his pleasure, all the things briefly enumerated below.***

In ten short paragraphs, Leonardo enumerated the service he could perform—he said (among other things) that he could build bridges, tunnels, fortresses, and "make siege guns, mortars and other machines, of beautiful and practical shape, completely different from what is generally in use." What might seem amazing to us is that it is not until the very last paragraph that Leonardo mentions art, and he mentions it so modestly! Here is what he wrote:

> ***In time of peace, I believe I am capable of giving you as much satisfaction as anyone, whether it be in architecture, for the construction of public or private buildings, or in bringing water from one place to another. Item, I can sculpt in marble, bronze or terracotta; while in painting, my work is the equal of anyone's.***

Return to Florence, then France

In 1489, Leonardo secured a long awaited contract with Ludovico and was honored with the title, "The Florentine Apelles," a reference to an ancient Greek painter revered for his great naturalism. Leonardo returned to Florence when Ludovico was deposed by the French King, Charles VII. While there, Leonardo would meet the Niccolò Machiavelli, author of *The Prince* and his future patron, François I (who ruled France from 1515-47). In 1516, after numerous invitations, Leonardo traveled to France and joined the royal court. Leonardo died on May 2, 1519 in the king's chateau at Cloux.

Leonardo's death and the changing status of the artist

Vasari, who wrote *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550), had this to say about Leonardo's death:

> ***Finally, having grown old, he remained ill many months, and, feeling himself near to death, asked to have himself diligently informed of the teaching of the Catholic faith, and of the good way and holy Christian religion; and then, with many moans, he confessed and was penitent; and although he could not raise himself well on his feet, supporting himself on the arms of his friends and servants, he was pleased to take devoutly the most holy Sacrament, out of his bed. The King, who was wont often and lovingly to visit him, then came into the room; wherefore he, out of reverence, having raised himself to sit upon the bed, giving him an account of his sickness and the circumstances of it, showed withal how much he had offended God and mankind in not having worked at his art as he should have done. Thereupon he was seized by a paroxysm, the messenger of death; for which reason the King having risen and having taken his head, in order to assist him and show him favour, to then end that he might alleviate his pain, his spirit, which was divine, knowing that it could not have any greater honour, expired in the arms of the King.***

This story is a good indication of the changing status of the artist—Leonardo, who spent the last years of his life in France working for King Francis I, was often visited by the King (remember that the artist was considered only a skilled artisan in the Middle Ages and for much of the Early Renaissance). In the High Renaissance, in contrast, we find that artists are considered intellectuals, and that they keep company with the highest levels of society. Quite a change! All of this has to do with Humanism in the Renaissance of course, and the growing recognition of the achievement of great individuals. Artists in the Early Renaissance insisted that they should be considered intellectuals because they worked with their minds as well as with their hands. They defended this position by

pointing to the scientific tools that they used to make their work more naturalistic—the study of human anatomy, of mathematics and geometry, of linear perspective. These were clearly all intellectual pursuits.

Figure **5.3.6.9.47**: Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of a man in red chalk (self-portrait)*, c. 1512, red chalk on paper (Biblioteca Reale, Turin)

Look closely at this self-portrait. Isn't it clear that Leonardo thought of himself as a thinker, a philosopher, an intellectual?

Leonardo's naturalism

Ancient Greek physicians dissected cadavers. The early church's rejection of the science of the classical world, along with the possibility of bodily resurrection led to prohibitions against dissection. Both Leonardo and Michelangelo performed them—probably exclusively on the bodies of executed criminals. According to his own count, Leonardo dissected 30 corpses during his lifetime.

Additional resources:

Universal Leonardo

Vitruvian Man from Stanford University

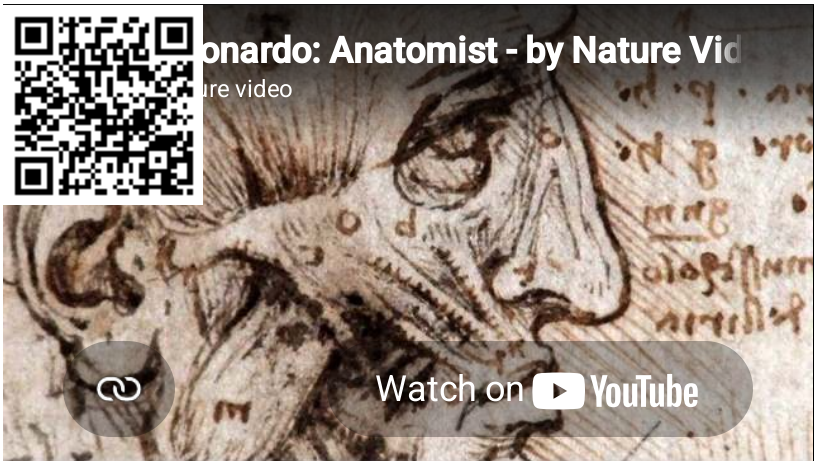
Leonardo, Letter to the Duke of Milan

by DR. DAVID DROGIN

Video **5.3.6.9.2**: Leonardo da Vinci, Letter to the Duke of Milan

Leonardo: Anatomist

by NATURE VIDEO



Video **5.3.6.9.3**: Video from Nature Video

Leonardo and his drawings

by THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Born near the town of Vinci in 1452, Leonardo trained in the Florentine workshop of Andrea Verrocchio (1435-88). His first masterpiece was the unfinished *Adoration of the Magi* (1481, Uffizi, Florence). In 1481-2 he travelled to Milan to work for the Duke, where he painted the ***Virgin of the Rocks*** (Musée du Louvre, Paris-a later version exists in the National Gallery, London) and the ***Last Supper*** (1495-7; Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie (Refectory), Milan). In 1499 he travelled to Mantua and Venice, arriving back in Florence in 1500.

Figure **5.3.6.9.48**: Leonardo da Vinci, Studies of horsemen for the *Battle of Anghiari*, pen and brown ink, c. 1503, 8.2 x 12 cm, Italy
© Trustees of the British Museum.

In 1503 he began the cartoon of the *Battle of Anghiari* with its scenes of ferocious fighting for the wall in the Great Council Chamber of the Palazzo Vecchio, but this work was never completed. He returned to Milan in 1506 for seven years and in 1513 he moved to Rome. The French king, Francis I, invited him to his court and about 1516, Leonardo settled in the manor of Cloux, near Amboise in the Loire valley. Leonardo died there in 1519.

Leonardo is arguably the greatest draughtsman in Western art. He was technically superb in whichever medium he used: silverpoint, pen and ink, black and particularly red chalks. Driven by his scientific curiosity, he studied the world around him in minutest detail, making botanical and anatomical studies. In his drawings and paintings he created figures which lived, breathed, moved and gave expression to their emotions.

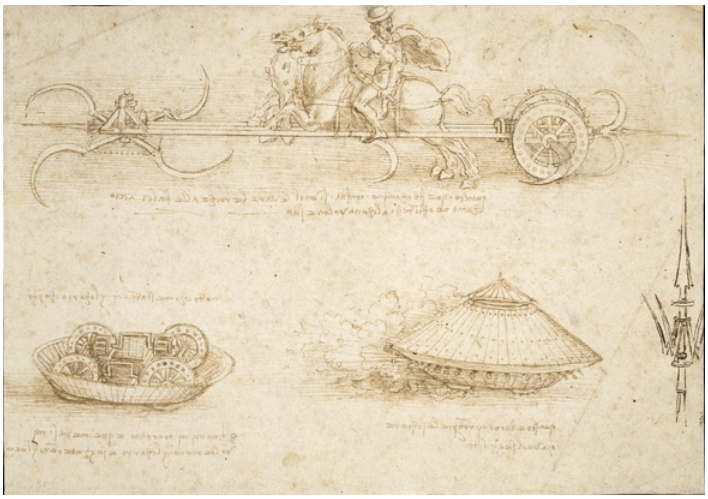


Figure **5.3.6.9.49**: Leonardo da Vinci, *Military Machines*, drawing from a notebook, c. 1487, 173 x 245 cm, Italy © Trustees of the British Museum

This is one of a number of sheets of drawings by Leonardo in which he designed instruments of war. He drew them while working for Ludovico Sforza, duke of Milan (1494–99). Under each drawing in ink and brown wash, Leonardo has written words of explanation in his characteristic reversed writing (that is it needs to be read in a mirror).

At the top of the sheet is a chariot with scythes on all sides. Below it Leonardo has written: “when this travels through your men, you will wish to raise the shafts of the scythes so that you will not injure anyone on your side.” At lower left is an upturned armored car without its roof, showing “the way the car is arranged inside” with the line “eight men operate it and the same men turn the car and pursue the enemy.” At lower right, the same tank-like vehicle is shown moving and firing its guns, with the line below: “this is good for breaking the ranks, but you will want to follow it up.” At the far right is a more conventional weapon of the time, a large pike or halberd, perhaps more ceremonial than practical.

Leonardo’s fertile imagination and scientific knowledge are here combined in the creation of war machines for his warlike patron. It is highly unlikely, however, that any of these machines were ever made or used in contemporary warfare. Indeed, as Leonardo himself wrote in his Notebooks, such new weapons were often as dangerous to their users as to the enemy.

Suggested readings:

M. Kemp and J. Roberts, *Leonardo da Vinci* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1989).

A.E. Popham and P. Pouncey, *Italian Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum: Raphael and His Circle* (London, The British Museum Press, 1950).

M. Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci* (London, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1981).

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Leonardo, *Adoration of the Magi*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.3.6.9.4: Leonardo da Vinci, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1481, oil on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

Leonardo, *The Virgin of the Rocks*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.9.5: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1491-1508, oil on panel, 189.5 x 120 cm (The National Gallery, London)

Figure **5.3.6.9.50**: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1483-86, oil on panel, 199 x 122 cm (Louvre, Paris)

There are two versions of Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* (the version in the Louvre was painted first). These two paintings are a good place to start to define the qualities of the new style of the High Renaissance. Leonardo painted both in Milan, where he had moved from Florence.

Normally when we have seen Mary and Christ (in, for example, paintings by Lippi and Giotto), Mary has been enthroned as the queen of heaven. Here, in contrast, we see Mary seated on the ground. This type of representation of Mary is referred to as the Madonna of Humility.

Figure **5.3.6.9.51**: Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1491-1508, 189.5 x 120 cm, oil on panel, (National Gallery, London)

Mary has her right arm around the infant Saint John the Baptist who is making a gesture of prayer to the Christ child. The Christ child in turn blesses St. John. Mary's left hand hovers protectively over the head of her son while an angel looks out and points to St. John. The figures are all located in a fabulous and mystical landscape with rivers that seem to lead nowhere and bizarre rock formations that recall the Dolomite mountains of northeastern Italy. In the foreground we see carefully observed and precisely rendered plants and flowers.

Figure **5.3.6.9.52**: Mary, St. John, Christ and an angel (detail), Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1483-86, oil on panel, 199 x 122 cm (Louvre, Paris)

We immediately notice Mary's ideal beauty and the graceful way in which she moves, features typical of the High Renaissance.

Figure **5.3.6.9.53**: Filippo Lippi, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1465, tempera on panel, 92 x 63.5 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

This is the first time that an Italian Renaissance artist has completely abandoned halos. Fra Filippo Lippi reduced the halo to a narrow ring around Mary's head. Clearly the unreal, symbolic nature of the halo was antithetical to the realism of the Renaissance. It was, in a way, a necessary holdover from the Middle Ages: how else to indicate a figure's divinity?

But Leonardo found another way to indicate divinity—by giving the figures ideal beauty and grace. After all, we would never mistake Leonardo's group of figures for an ordinary picnic—the way the Lippi's painting of the *Madonna and Child with Angels* almost looks like a family portrait. With Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks*, we are clearly looking at a mystical vision of Mary, Christ, John the Baptist and an angel in heaven.

The unified composition

We can see that Leonardo grouped the figures together within a geometric shape of a pyramid (a pyramid instead of triangle because Leonardo is very concerned with creating an illusion of space—and a pyramid is three dimensional). He also has the figures gesturing and looking at each other. Both of these innovations serve to unify the composition. This is an important difference from paintings of the Early Renaissance where the figures often looked more separate from one another.

Figure 5.3.6.9.54: Andrea del Verroccio and Leonardo da Vinci, *Baptism of Christ*, 1472-1475, oil on wood, 177 x 151 cm (Uffizi, Florence)

Another way to think about this is to look at the angel that Leonardo painted in this work by his teacher Verocchio. Leonardo's angel has a more complex pose. Things that artists were just learning how to do in the Early Renaissance (like contrapposto) are now easy for the artists of the High Renaissance.

Figure 5.3.6.9.55: Leonardo's angel (detail), Andrea del Verroccio and Leonardo da Vinci, *Baptism of Christ*, 1472-1475, oil on wood, 177 x 151 cm (Uffizi, Florence)

As a result, artists of the High Renaissance can do more with the body—make it more complex, more elegant and more graceful. Similarly, the compositions of the paintings of the High Renaissance are more complex and sophisticated than the compositions of the Early Renaissance—figures interact with gestures and glances, and are often interwoven and set within the shape of a pyramid.

Additional resources:

This painting at the National Gallery

This painting at the Louvre

Videos on Leonardo (from The National Gallery, London)

National Gallery page on the conservation of the painting in London

National Gallery video on the restoration of the painting in London

National Gallery video/podcast on the two versions of this painting

Coline Milliard, "Analyzing 5 Differences Between Da Vinci's Twin "Virgin of the Rocks" Masterpieces" from *Artinfo* 22/08/2011.

Leonardo, The Virgin and Child with St. Anne and St. John the Baptist (Burlington House Cartoon)

by BETH HARRIS and STEVEN ZUCKER

Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Jasmine Keane
Sep 23, 2020, 9:27 AM

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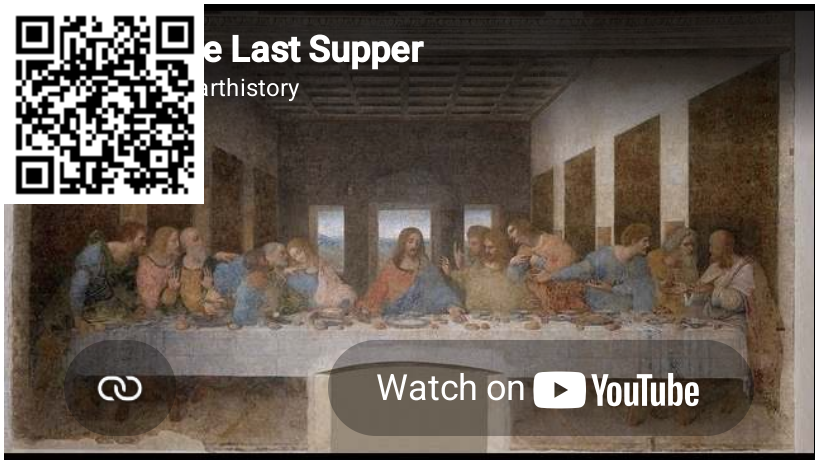
Leonardo, *Last Supper*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS



> ***"Leonardo imagined, and has succeeded in expressing, the desire that has entered the minds of the apostles to know who is betraying their Master. So in the face of each one may be seen love, fear, indignation, or grief at not being able to understand the meaning of Christ; and this excites no less astonishment than the obstinate hatred and treachery to be seen in Judas."***
>
> ***(Georgio Vasari, Lives of the Artists, 1568; translated by George Bull)***

Figure **5.3.6.9.56***: Leonardo da Vinci, Last Supper, 1498, tempera and oil on plaster (Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan) (photo: public domain)*

Subject

The subject of the Last Supper is Christ's final meal with his apostles before Judas identifies Christ to the authorities who arrest him. The Last Supper (a Passover Seder) is remembered for two events:

Figure **5.3.6.9.57***: Philip (detail), Leonardo da Vinci, Last Supper, 1498, tempera and oil on plaster (Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan)*

Christ says to his apostles, "One of you will betray me," and the apostles react, each according to his own personality. Referring to the Gospels, Leonardo depicts Philip asking, "Lord, is it I?" Christ replies, "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me" (Matthew 26). We see Christ and Judas simultaneously reaching toward a plate that lies between them, even as Judas defensively backs away.

Leonardo also simultaneously depicts Christ blessing the bread and saying to the apostles, "Take, eat; this is my body" and blessing the wine and saying "Drink from it all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26). These words are the founding moment of the sacrament of the

Eucharist (the miraculous transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ).

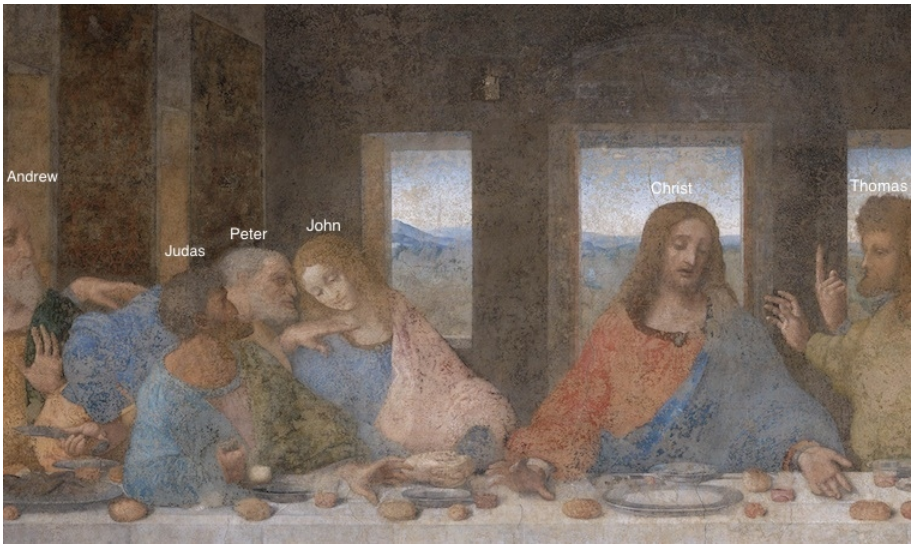


Figure 5.3.6.9.58*: Detail, Leonardo da Vinci, Last Supper, 1498, tempera and oil on plaster (Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan)*

Apostles identified

Leonardo's Last Supper is dense with symbolic references. Attributes identify each apostle. For example, Judas Iscariot is recognized both as he reaches toward a plate beside Christ (Matthew 26) and because he clutches a purse containing his reward for identifying Christ to the authorities the following day. Peter, who sits beside Judas, holds a knife in his right hand, foreshadowing that Peter will sever the ear of a soldier as he attempts to protect Christ from arrest.

Figure 5.3.6.9.59*: Christ (detail), Leonardo da Vinci, Last Supper, 1498, tempera and oil on plaster (Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan)*

Suggestions of the heavenly

The balanced composition is anchored by an equilateral triangle formed by Christ's body. He sits below an arching pediment that, if completed, traces a circle. These ideal geometric forms refer to the renaissance interest in Neo-Platonism (an element of the humanist revival that reconciles aspects of Greek philosophy with Christian theology). In his allegory, "The Cave," the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato emphasized the imperfection of the earthly realm. Geometry, used by the Greeks to express heavenly perfection, has been used by Leonardo to celebrate Christ as the embodiment of heaven on earth.

Leonardo rendered a verdant landscape beyond the windows. Often interpreted as paradise, it has been suggested that this heavenly sanctuary can only be reached through Christ.

The twelve apostles are arranged as four groups of three and there are also three windows. The number three is often a reference to the Holy Trinity in Catholic art. In contrast, the number four is important in the classical tradition (e.g. Plato's four virtues).

The Last Supper in the Early Renaissance

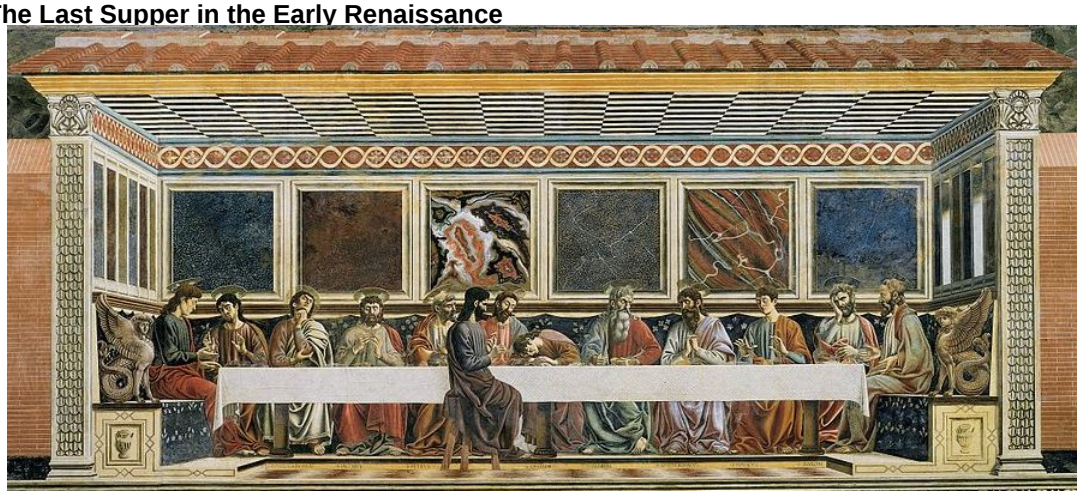


Figure **5.3.6.9.60***: Andrea del Castagno, Last Supper, 1447, tempera on plaster (Sant'Apollonia, Florence)*

Andrea del Castagno's Last Supper (1447) is typical of the Early Renaissance. The use of linear perspective in combination with ornate forms such as the sphinxes on the ends of the bench and the marble paneling tend to detract from the spirituality of the event. In contrast, Leonardo simplified the architecture, eliminating unnecessary and distracting details so that the architecture can instead amplify the spirituality. The window and arching pediment even suggest a halo. By crowding all of the figures together, Leonardo uses the table as a barrier to separate the spiritual realm from the viewer's earthly world. Paradoxically, Leonardo's emphasis on spirituality results in a painting that is more naturalistic than Castagno's.

Backstory

During World War II, in August of 1943, the Allies launched a massive bombing campaign on Milan and its outskirts. The explosions and the ensuing fires killed over 700 people and destroyed many of the city's most important buildings and monuments, including a significant portion of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Miraculously, the wall with the painting survived, probably because it had been shored up with sandbags and mattresses, but the roof of the refectory was blown off and the other walls were decimated. For several months, the Last Supper remained exposed to the elements, covered only with a tarp, until the refectory (the dining room of the monastery where the Last Supper was painted) was rebuilt and a team of restorers began working to preserve and restore the painting.

But Leonardo's work was already in a sad state well before bombs threatened to destroy it completely. Soon after it was completed on February 9, 1498, it began to deteriorate. Because Leonardo sought greater detail and luminosity than could be achieved with traditional fresco, he covered the wall with a double layer of dried plaster. Then, borrowing from panel painting, he added an undercoat of lead white to enhance the brightness of the oil and tempera that was applied on top. This experimental technique allowed for chromatic brilliance and extraordinary precision but because the painting is on a thin exterior wall, it amplified the effects of humidity, and the paint failed to properly adhere to the wall. Mold grew between the paint and the surface, and the presence of moisture caused constant peeling. By the second half of the sixteenth century, Giovanni Paulo Lomazzo stated that "the painting is all ruined." The first restoration efforts took place beginning in 1726, and over the centuries they were followed by several more.

Over the past five hundred years the painting's condition has been seriously compromised by these early restoration efforts, as well as by its location (the church is in an area prone to severe flooding); the materials and techniques Leonardo used; occupation by Napoleon's army (who stabled horses in the refectory and reportedly lobbed bricks at the apostles' heads); humidity, dust, and air pollution; and, most recently, the cumulative effect of crowding tourists.

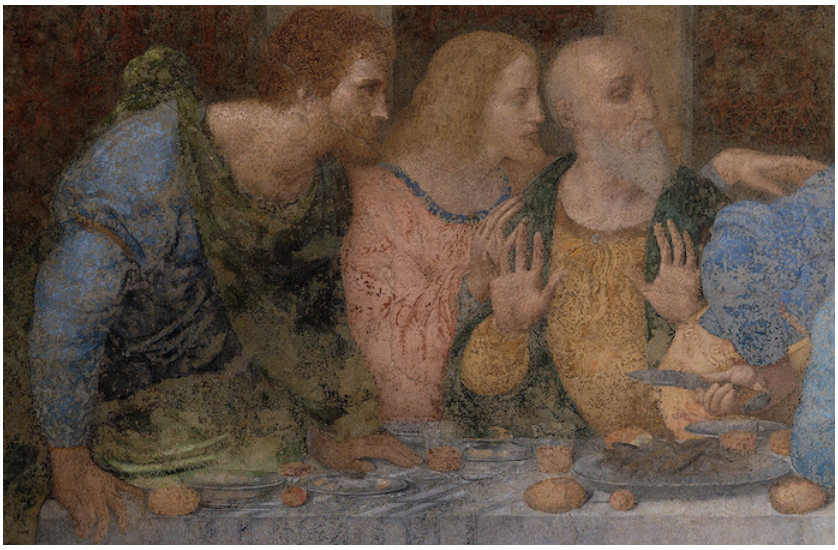


Figure **5.3.6.9.61***: Bartholomew, James Minor, and Andrew (detail), Leonardo da Vinci, Last Supper, 1498, tempera and oil on plaster (Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan)*

After the destruction wrought by the bombing in World War II, restorers covered the painting with a thick layer of shellac (a kind of resin) in order to combat the moisture problems and keep the paint from peeling. They then began scraping away some of the layers of paint that had been applied over the years, uncovering what they believed to be Leonardo's original brushstrokes. Finally, in 1977, the Italian government teamed with private corporations to fund a massive project to fully uncover the original painting. It took head restorer Pinin Brambilla Barcilon over twenty years to complete the effort, meticulously scraping away at the painting's surface centimeter by centimeter with surgical tools and microscope. In 1999, when the fully restored painting—in its new, climate-controlled environment—was officially unveiled, critics around the globe ***argued*** *as to whether it is now true to the original, or irrevocably deformed, as only about 42.5% of the present surface is Leonardo's work, 17.5% is lost, and the remaining 40% was added by previous restorers. (Most of this repainting can be found in the painting's wall hangings and ceiling).*

The Last Supper is a prime example of how public and professional attitudes toward restoration efforts are not only often contentious, but change over time. Whereas in the nineteenth century and earlier, restorations focused on overpainting in order to present the illusion of a perfectly finished work, modern approaches tend to favor the exposure of missing pieces, and to make all additions visible and explicit. The current version of the Last Supper resembles little of what Leonardo created in 1498, but it makes visible the painting's miraculous and tortured history.

Condition statistics

> ***Number of years after its completion that deterioration was noted: 18***

Number of bombs that have hit the refectory: 1
Number of years needed to complete the recent conservation project: 22
Number of years that Leonardo needed to complete the painting: 4
Number of research studies produced during conservation project: 60
Number of hours spent on the conservation project: 50,000
Percentage of the surface that is lost: 17.5
Percentage of the surface painted during the seven previous restorations: 40
Percentage of the surface that was painted by Leonardo: 42.5

Backstory by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee

Additional resources:

Ross King, Leonardo and the Last Supper (Walker & Company, 2012)

Critical assessment of the restoration from ArtWatchUK

"After a 20-Year Cleanup, a Brighter, Clearer 'Last Supper' Emerges," The New York Times, May 27, 1999

UNESCO page for Santa Maria delle Grazie

UNESCO-sponsored video about the most recent restoration

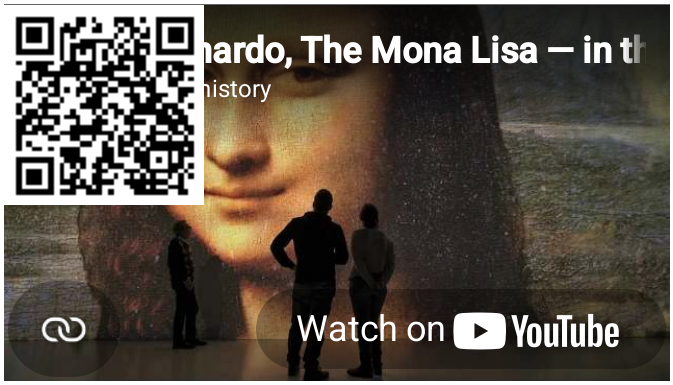
Last Supper from Universal Leonardo

The Crucifixion and Passion of Christ in Italian Painting from The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History

360-degree panorama of the refectory in Santa Maria della Grazie

Leonardo, *Mona Lisa*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS



Video 5.3.6.9.8*: Leonardo da Vinci, Portrait of Lisa Gherardini (known as the Mona Lisa), c. 1503–19, oil on poplar panel, 77 x 53 cm (Musée du Louvre)*

Portraits were once rare

We live in a culture that is so saturated with images, it may be difficult to imagine a time when only the wealthiest people had their likeness captured. The wealthy merchants of Renaissance Florence could commission a portrait, but even they would likely only have a single portrait painted during their lifetime. A portrait was about more than likeness, it spoke to status and position. In addition, portraits generally took a long time to paint, and the subject would commonly have to sit for hours or days, while the artist captured their likeness.

The most recognized painting in the world

Figure 5.3.6.9.62*: Leonardo da Vinci, Portrait of Lisa Gherardini (known as the Mona Lisa), c. 1503–19, oil on poplar panel, 77 x 53 cm (Musée du Louvre)*

The Mona Lisa was originally this type of portrait, but over time its meaning has shifted and it has become an icon of the Renaissance—perhaps the most recognized painting in the world. The Mona Lisa is a likely a portrait of the wife of a Florentine merchant. For some reason however, the portrait was never delivered to its patron, and Leonardo kept it with him when he went to work for Francis I, the King of France.

The Mona Lisa's mysterious smile has inspired many writers, singers, and painters. Here's a passage about the Mona Lisa, written by the Victorian-era writer Walter Pater:

> ***We all know the face and hands of the figure, set in its marble chair, in that circle of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea. Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least. The presence that thus rose so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed!***

Figure **5.3.6.9.63***: Piero della Francesca, Portrait of Battista Sforza, c. 1465-66, tempera on panel, (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: public domain)*

Piero della Francesca's Portrait of Battista Sforza (c. 1465-66) is typical of portraits during the Early Renaissance (before Leonardo); figures were often painted in strict profile, and cut off at the bust. Often the figure was posed in front of a birds-eye view of a landscape.

A new formula

With Leonardo's portrait, the face is nearly frontal, the shoulders are turned three-quarters toward the viewer, and the hands are included in the image.

Leonardo uses his characteristic sfumato—a smokey haziness, to soften outlines and create an atmospheric effect around the figure. When a figure is in profile, we have no real sense of who she is, and there is no sense of engagement. With the face turned toward us, however, we get a sense of the personality of the sitter.

Figure **5.3.6.9.64***: Hans Memling, Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer, c. 1485-1494, oil on oak panel (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid)*

Northern Renaissance artists such as Hans Memling (see the Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer, c. 1485-1494, left) had already created portraits of figures in positions similar to the Mona Lisa. Memling had even located them in believable spaces. Leonardo combined these Northern innovations with Italian painting's understanding of the three dimensionality of the body and the perspectival treatment of the surrounding space.

A recent discovery

An important copy of the Mona Lisa was recently discovered in the collection of the Prado in Madrid. The background had been painted over, but when the painting was cleaned, scientific analysis revealed that the copy was likely painted by another artist who sat beside Leonardo and copied his work, brush-stroke by brush-stroke. The copy gives us an idea of what the Mona Lisa might look like if layers of yellowed varnish were removed.

Figure **5.3.6.9.65***: Left: Unknown, Mona Lisa, c. 1503-05, oil on panel (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid); right: Leonardo da Vinci, Mona Lisa, c. 1503-19, oil on panel 30-1/4 x 21" (Musée du Louvre)*

Additional resources:

This painting at the Louvre

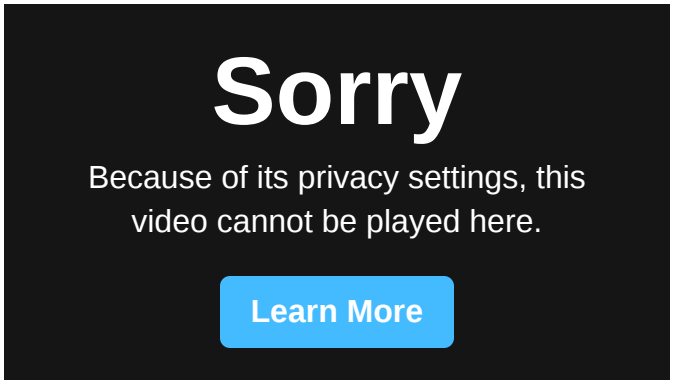
Louvre Feature: A Closer Look at the Mona Lisa

Not Just Another Fake Mona Lisa from New York Times Interactive

Mona Lisa at Universal Leonardo

Leonardo, *The Mona Lisa*

by ***HENI TALKS***



Martin Kemp - The Mona Lisa: Painting beyond Portraiture from HENI Talks on Vimeo.

The Mona Lisa is an extraordinary painting; so much so that the small portrait of a bourgeois Florentine woman has been the subject of many myths and conspiracy theories. But Leonardo da Vinci expert Martin Kemp is keen to emphasise the very ordinary circumstances of the portrait's commission and the sitter's life.

Over the course of his career, Kemp has debunked many of the myths the iconic painting has given rise to and has helped to identify the people instrumental to its creation. But he also argues that the painting became more than 'just a small portrait' for Leonardo: the

artist poured all he knew about science and the poetry of painting into the commission. How did this work change the way artists painted portraits for centuries afterwards?

Michelangelo

Michelangelo was known as il divino, (in English, "the divine one") and it is easy for us to see why.

About Michelangelo

"Who was Michelangelo?"

by DR. TAMARA SMITHERS

Figure **5.3.6.9.66***: Attributed to Daniele da Volterra, Michelangelo Buonarroti, c. 1545, oil on wood, 88.3 x 64.1 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)*

*Michelangelo Buonarotti—the Italian **Renaissance** painter, sculptor, architect, and poet—was called "Il Divino" (The Divine One) by his contemporaries because they perceived his artworks to be otherworldly. His art was in high demand, and thought to have terribilità, poorly translated as "terribleness" and better described as powerfulness. He was mythologized by followers, emulated by artists, celebrated by humanists, and **patronized** by a total of nine popes. As commemorations, over one hundred portraits of him were created during the sixteenth century alone, far more than any other artist at the time. Despite three biographies written about the artist during his own lifetime, we know the most about the sometimes-generous and often-humorous perfectionist through his letters. Not only do we have more primary sources on Michelangelo than any other historical artist, he is one of the most written-about artists of all time. In today's terms, Michelangelo was a workaholic homebody whose cats missed him when he was away. He did not like to debate art, waste time, or show his work before he was ready. Despite a few*

mid-career collaborations, Michelangelo was careful and guarded, never running a typical workshop, locking his studio, and burning drawings. He also complained a lot, and, at times, could be overconfident, curt, and blunt, once resulting in a punch in the nose.

Better late than never

Although he became an artistic superstar, Michelangelo's start was different from most artists of his time. His initial success can be credited to his family's connections to the powerful, noble Florentine family, the Medici. In the early 1490s, he learned carving under the tutelage of a student of ***Donatello****, Bertoldo di Giovanni, at the Medici sculpture garden. Upon entering the workshop of the painter* ***Domenico Ghirlandaio****, Michelangelo began his official professional training at the age of thirteen, several years later than usual (and unlike typical apprentices who had to pay to study under a master, Michelangelo was paid, perhaps due to his family's relations to the Medici or his innate talent). However, he desired to sculpt instead, stating that he drank in his love of stone carving from his wet nurse, who came from a family of simple pastoral stonecutters.[1] To emphasize this aspect of himself for the first few decades of his career, he signed his letters "Michelangelo Sculptor." Also important to his formative years was the dissection of cadavers to learn anatomy. The challenging conditions—after hours by candlelight and without refrigeration—called to only the most dedicated artists.*

Figure **5.3.6.9.67***: Michelangelo, Pietà, marble, 1498–1500 (Saint Peter's Basilica, Rome. Photo:* ***Stanislav Traykov****, CC BY 2.5)*

At twenty-three years old, Michelangelo accepted his first large-scale public project: to carve two full-scale figures within one piece of stone, a very difficult task. St. Peter's

Pietà, commissioned for the tomb of Cardinal Bilhères de Lagraulas, initiated his rise to fame. The pressure was on: the contract stated that the sculpture was to be the most beautiful work in Rome. After six months at the quarries to find the perfect marble, Michelangelo began carving the Pietà. When the sculpture was put on display in Old St. Peter's Basilica (before the rebuilding initiated by Pope Julius II), pilgrims questioned who had made such a beautiful work. As the story goes, the sculptor overheard a group incorrectly attribute the work to another sculptor. Michelangelo snuck back in late that night with a lantern, hammer, and chisel to carve his name on the Virgin's sash. It is the only work he ever signed, and he later regretted this act of excessive pride.

Already famous

Figure 5.3.6.9.68: Michelangelo, David, marble, 1501–04 (Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence)

Soon after, Michelangelo received an important commission in Florence. A figure of David was desired for up high on an outside buttress of the Duomo. He was tasked to re-use a nearly twenty-foot tall piece of marble nicknamed "The White Giant" that another artist had attempted but failed to carve forty years prior. Michelangelo stepped up to the challenge, completing the colossal statue in two years. In the end, the sculpture was placed outside the Palazzo Signoria.

The success of David led to a large-scale civic commission inside the palazzo to paint a battle scene for the Florentine government, the Battle of Cascina. This arrangement placed him in direct competition with Leonardo, who was already at work on the Battle of Anghiari on the opposite wall. While neither painting was ever finished, copies of both survive. Michelangelo's cartoon (a full-scale preparatory drawing for the fresco), served as a sort of art school for younger artists who came to copy his figures. His drawings from this period are some of his most superbly rendered figures, with a distinct cross-hatching chiaroscuro technique. Disegno, or drawing, was considered both a manual

pursuit and an intellectual endeavor and was the most important part of his practice. Sketching from the male nude was central to his art making.

Figure 5.3.6.9.69*: Michelangelo, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (detail), 1508–12 (Vatican, Rome)*

In his next major fresco project, the ceiling of the ***Sistine Chapel*** *commissioned by* ***Pope Julius II****, the main narrative represents nine stories of the Book of Genesis, such as the Creation of Adam. Michelangelo's bulky, muscular figures were inspired by the ancient* ***Laocoön****, which he witnessed being unearthed in Rome in 1506. The study for the* ***Libyan Sibyl*** *is an exquisite preparatory drawing from this time, revealing his use of a male model for a female figure.*

Figure **5.3.6.9.70***: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Studies for the Libyan Sibyl (recto), c. 1510–11, red chalk, with small accents of white chalk on the left shoulder of the figure in the main study, 28.9 × 21.4 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)*

Michelangelo began painting the ceiling with the traditional method of using cartoons to transfer the design onto the wet plaster, but he became so proficient towards the end, he worked freehand. He also claimed to work without assistants (despite evidence otherwise), and preferred to keep his work private until finished. One story relays that he threw planks at Pope Julius II from the scaffolding, mistaking him for a spy![2]

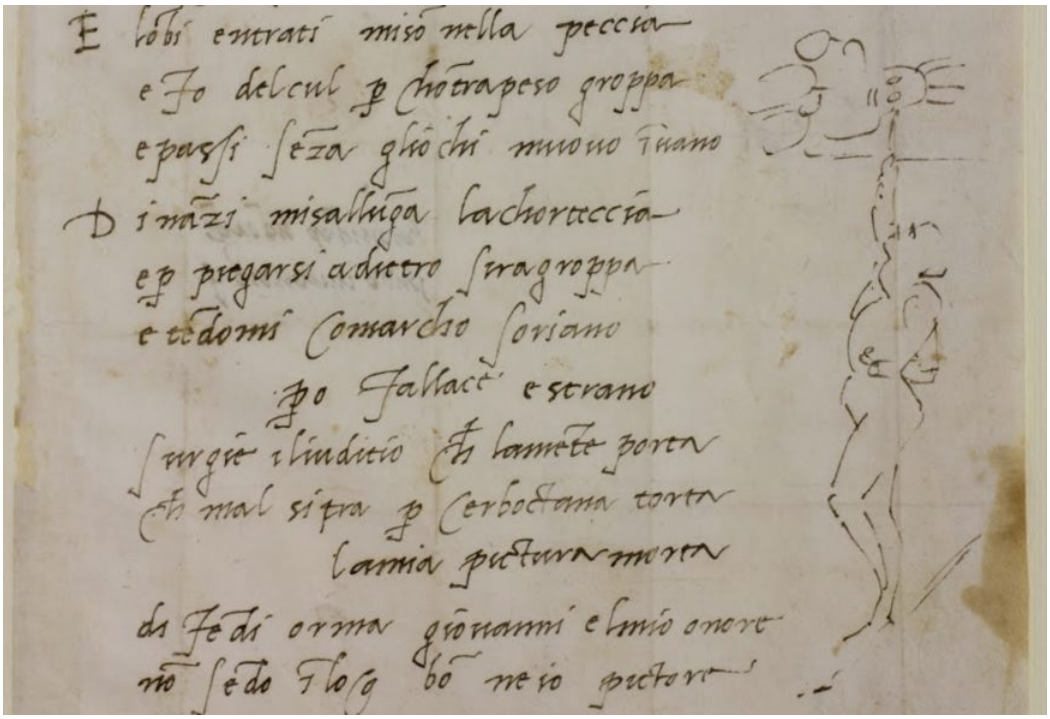


Figure **5.3.6.9.71***: Michelangelo, AB XIII, 111 Sonnet and self-portrait, 1509/1512 (Casa Buonarotti, Florence)*

The ceiling took Michelangelo over four years to paint. Initially, he did not want the commission, claiming that painting was not his art. He wrote a satirical poem about his personal struggle paired with a caricature of himself standing to paint: "With my beard towards heaven… I am bent like a Syrian bow…."[3]

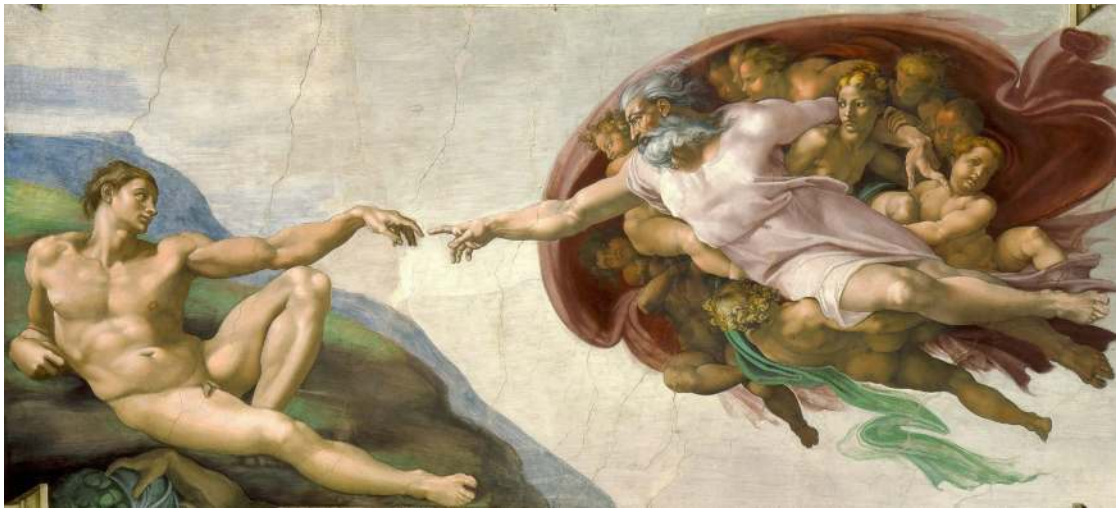


Figure **5.3.6.9.72***: Michelangelo, Creation of Adam, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (detail), 1508–12, Vatican, Rome*

Mid-Career but not middle of the pack

Michelangelo was initially called to Rome in 1505 to carve the tomb of Julius II intended for the center of ***New St. Peter's Basilica****, soon to be under construction. If fully realized, the monument would have contained over forty life-size figures, impossible for*

Michelangelo to ever have finished. The memorial was finally erected, in a reduced form in 1545, as a wall tomb in S. Pietro in Vincoli in Rome.

Figure **5.3.6.9.73***: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Moses, 1513–15, Carrara marble, 254 cm (8 feet, 3 inches) high, Tomb of Pope Julius II (della Rovere), 1505–45, San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome (photo: **Jörg Bittner Unna**, CC BY 3.0)*

*The monumental **Moses**, intended for an upper corner, is now featured as the main figure. Two series of figures were never placed in the final arrangement: two bound "**slaves**" in the Louvre Museum in Paris and four struggling "captives" in the Accademia Museum in Florence. The Captives, likely carved in the 1520s, are bulky, block-like, and rough, where one can see the artist's cross-hatching marks made with the gradina, a multi–toothed **chisel**. His preferred tool, the cane, a dog-toothed chisel, left distinct groove lines on the surface of the marble. Because of the roughness, these, and other sculptures, have been labeled non-finito, or unfinished, a topic much debated in scholarship.*

Figure 5.3.6.9.74*: From left to right: Michelangelo, Slaves (commonly referred to as the Dying Slave and the Rebellious Slave), 1513–15, marble, 2.09 m high (Musée du Louvre, Paris, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0); Captives (commonly referred to as the Atlas Captive and the Bearded Captive), c. 1530–34, marble, 2.77 m and 2.63 m high (Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

Michelangelo traveled back and forth from Rome and Florence during the late 1510s and 20s. In Florence, he worked for Julius' successor, Pope Leo X de' Medici, on the façade of the family's church, San Lorenzo, which was never completed. It was here, though, where he honed his entrepreneurial skills, managing hundreds of workers under his direction. Michelangelo continued Medici employment under Pope Clement VII, designing the ***Laurentian Library*** *and the* ***New Sacristy****.*

Figure **5.3.6.9.75***: Michelangelo, Tomb of Giuliano de' Medici, 1526-33, marble, 630 x 420 cm (New Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

In 1527, during a period of political turmoil, the Florentine Republic took back control from the Medici. Two years later, the city came under siege by troops of Holy Roman Empire and the Medici were reinstalled. Despite his longtime connections to the family, Michelangelo, a republican at heart, left Florence forever in 1534.

Figure **5.3.6.9.76***: Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534–1541 (Vatican City, Rome) (photo: Richard Mortel, CC BY 2.0)*

Late life in the Eternal City

Michelangelo's second fresco in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, the ***Last Judgment****, was commissioned by Pope Paul III and was painted between 1535 and 1541. It also functioned as a study tool for artists. Giorgio Vasari, the* ***sixteenth-century*** *artist and biographer, claimed that artists no longer needed to study live models from nature since every conceivable human position was represented in Michelangelo's fresco. To*

accomplish this, Michelangelo positioned tiny wax models to help develop the complex, large-scale composition. Reliance on Michelangelo's contorted figures by later artists resulted in a sense of artificiality, a prized characteristic of ***Mannerism****. The artist was constantly developing new working practices. For example, in order to extend working hours, Michelangelo made a headlamp with a special wax candle so he could paint into the late hours of the night, often forgetting to eat. Long days proved dangerous though, and he took a bad fall off the scaffolding, nearly breaking his leg.*

Figure **5.3.6.9.77***: Left: Michelangelo, Piazza and palazzi of the Capitoline Hill, Rome, 1536–1546 (photo:* ***Lawrence OP****, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0); Right: Michelangelo, Dome of St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome, 1546–1564 (photo:* ***Steven Zucker****, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

Michelangelo became a Roman citizen in 1537, and it was here that he established his legacy as an architect. During the last two decades of his long life, Michelangelo focused on architectural commissions, sculpting only for himself. His major projects included renovating the Capitoline Hill and overseeing the construction of St. Peter's (without pay for not only the salvation of his soul but also to retain complete creative control). As a devout Christian, Michelangelo made pilgrimage to all of Rome's seven martyr churches during his old age. As he aged, he became more and more stubborn, riding his horse in the rain, for example. Owning horses was seen as an aristocratic endeavor, a status the artist became increasingly concerned with over the years. In his 1553 biography by Ascanio Condivi written with the artist's consultation, Michelangelo emphasized his family's nobility as a descendent of the counts of Canossa.

Figure 5.3.6.9.78*: Michelangelo, Pietà for Vittoria Colonna, c. 1538–44, black chalk on paper, 28.9 x 18.9 cm (**Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum**, Boston)*

The artist never had children (he claimed his artworks were his children), or even proper students. Instead, he sought to groom his nephew Lionardo as the sole Buonarotti heir. Michelangelo also established many great friendships such as that with Vittoria Colonna, whom he gifted a devotional Pietà drawing. He turned to this theme for his own tomb memorial, now known as the Florentine Pietà. Michelangelo attempted to carve four figures out of one marble block, a nearly impossible task. This act was in direct competition with the famed ancient Laocoön, which, despite legend, was discovered by the artist to have been made of several pieces of stone. Here, Mary holds the dead Christ with Mary Magdalene on the left and Nicodemus behind them, figures who each witnessed the death of Christ. Michelangelo carved his self-portrait in the face of Nicodemus, placing himself over Christ in a last wish for salvation. In the end, this image did not adorn his tomb. However, he continued to carve almost daily up until his death in 1564; an onlooker described the eighty-something year old's blows with a hammer as incredible.

Figure 5.3.6.9.79*: Michelangelo, Deposition (The Florentine Pietà), c. 1547–55, marble, 2.26 m high (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence, photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen, CC-BY 2.5)*

The Florentine Art Academy, founded under the leadership of Vasari a year before Michelangelo died, erected the largest funerary memorial for an artist to date, naming him the father of the arts. Artists throughout the ages—from Caravaggio to Bernini, to Reynolds to Rodin, to Picasso to Hockney—looked to the art of Michelangelo as the founder of a forceful, new figural style. Michelangelo elevated the status of the artist more than any other artist of his time. He valued artistic freedom and personal expression, making art his way. Only with this in mind, can his creative vision and legend truly be appreciated.

Figure **5.3.6.9.80***: Michelangelo's tomb, Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence (photo:* ***Walwyn****, CC BY-NC 2.0)*

Notes:

1. *Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, vol. IX, translated by Gaston du C. de Vere (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1912, p. 4–5).*
2. *Ibid, p. 25.*
3. *James Saslow, trans. The Poetry of Michelangelo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 70.*

Additional resources:

Vasari's Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects in English translation at Project Gutenberg

Second edition of Vasari's Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects in Italian at Archive.org

Virtual tour of the Sistine Chapel

Michelangelo's design for the Tomb of Pope Julius II della Rovere at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

See more pictures of the Medici Chapel (New Sacristy)

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_____, Lives of the Artists. 2. vols. Translated by George Bull (London: Penguin, 1965)

William E. Wallace, Michelangelo, God's Architect: The Story of his Final Years and Greatest Masterpiece. Princeton: Princeton University, 2019.

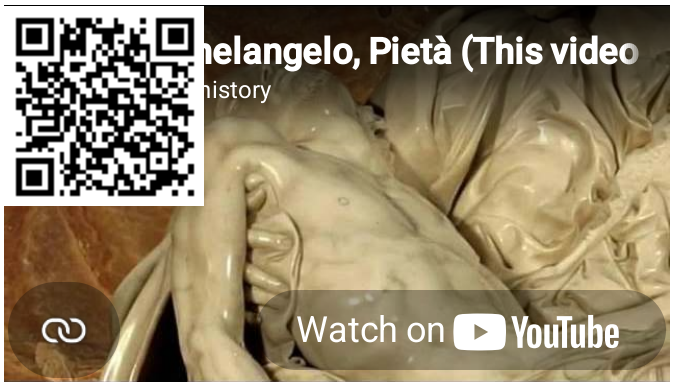
_____, Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man and His Times (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

_____, Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture, Painting, Architecture (New York: Universe, 2009)

_____, ed. Michelangelo, Selected Scholarship in English: Life and Early Works. 5 vols. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995)

Michelangelo, *Pietà*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



The Pietà was a popular subject among northern european artists. It means "Pity" or "Compassion," and represents Mary sorrowfully contemplating the dead body of her son which she holds on her lap. This sculpture was commissioned by a French Cardinal living in Rome.

Look closely and see how Michelangelo made marble seem like flesh, and look at those complicated folds of drapery. It is important here to remember how sculpture is made. It was a messy, rather loud process (which is one of the reasons that Leonardo claimed that painting was superior to sculpture!). Just like painters often mixed their own paint, Michelangelo forged many of his own tools, and often participated in the quarrying of his marble — a dangerous job.

When we look at the extraordinary representation of the human body here we remember that Michelangelo, like Leonardo before him, had dissected cadavers to understand how the body worked.

Jasmine Keane
Sep 23, 2020, 9:46 AM

*Cite this page as: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker, "Michelangelo, Pietà," in Smarthistory, November 18, 2015, accessed September 23, 2020, **https://smarthistory.org/michelangelo-pieta/**.*

Michelangelo, *David*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Jasmine Keane
Sep 23, 2020, 9:51 AM

*Cite this page as: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris, "Michelangelo, David," in Smarthistory, December 5, 2015, accessed September 23, 2020, **https://smarthistory.org/michelangelo-david/**.*

The many meanings of Michelangelo's *David*

by TED-ED

Video **5.3.6.9.11***: Video from TED-Ed. Speaker: James Earle.*

Michelangelo, *Moses*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.9.12*: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Moses, 1513-15, Carrara marble, 254 cm (8 feet, 3 inches) high, Tomb of Pope Julius II (della Rovere), 1505-45, San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome*

The Tomb of Pope Julius II

When Michelangelo finished sculpting David, it was clear that this was quite possibly the most beautiful figure ever created—exceeding the beauty even of Ancient Greek and Roman sculptures. Word of David reached Pope Julius II in Rome, and he asked Michelangelo to come to Rome to work for him. The first work Pope Julius II commissioned from Michelangelo was a tomb for the pope.

This may seem a bit strange to us today, but great rulers throughout history have planned fabulous tombs for themselves while they were still alive—they hoped to ensure that they would be remembered forever.

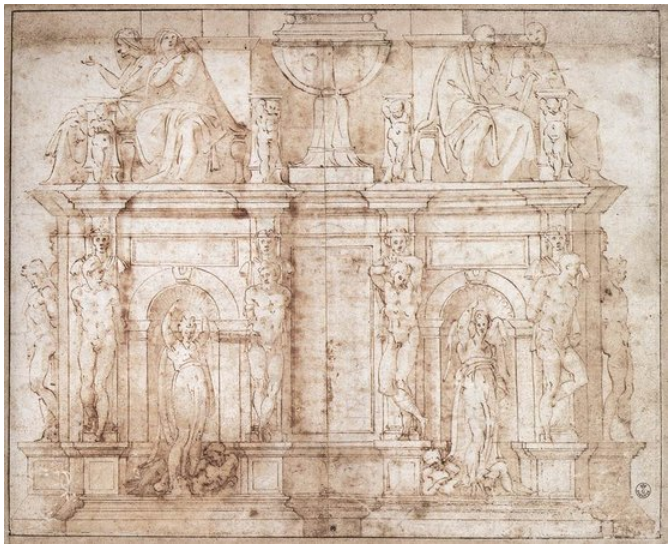


Figure 5.3.6.9.81*: Michelangelo, drawing for the Tomb of Pope Julius II, c. 1505, pen and ink (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)*

When Michelangelo began the Tomb of Pope Julius II, his ideas were quite ambitious. He planned a two-story structure decorated with more than 20 sculptures—each of these life sized. This was more than one person could do in a lifetime.

Figure **5.3.6.9.82***: Michelangelo, Tomb of Pope Julius II, 1505-1545, marble (San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome (photo: **Jean-Christophe BENOIST**, CC BY 3.0)*

Pope Julius II asked Michelangelo to pause his work on the tomb to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and he was never able to complete his plan for the tomb. After experiencing trouble with Julius' heirs, Michelangelo eventually completed a much scaled-down version of the tomb, which was installed in San Pietro in Vincoli (and not in St. Peter's Basilica as planned).

Moses

Moses is an imposing figure—he is nearly eight feet high sitting down! He has enormous muscular arms and an angry, intense look in his eyes. Under his arms he carries the tablets of the law—the stones inscribed with the Ten Commandments that he has just received from God on Mt. Sinai. You might marvel at Moses' horns. This comes from a mistranslation of a Hebrew word that described Moses as having rays of light coming from his head.

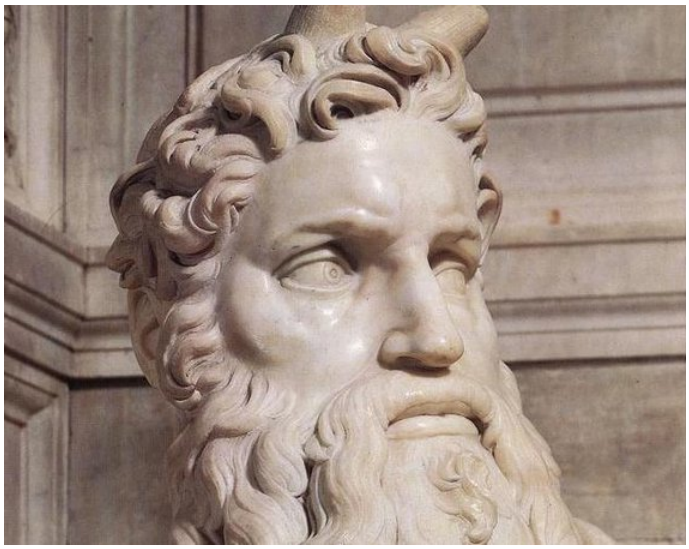


Figure **5.3.6.9.83***: Moses (detail), Michelangelo, Tomb of Pope Julius II, c. 1513-1515, marble, 235 cm (San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome)*

Figure 5.3.6.9.84*: Michelangelo, Moses from the Tomb of Pope Julius II, c. 1513-1515, marble, 235 cm (San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome)*

In this story from the Old Testament book of Exodus, Moses leaves the Israelites, who he has just delivered from slavery in Egypt, to go to the top of Mt. Sinai. When he returns, he finds that the Israelites have constructed a golden calf to worship and make sacrifices to. They have, in other words, been acting like the Egyptians and worshipping a pagan idol.

One of the commandments Moses received is "Thou shalt not make any graven images," so when Moses sees the Israelites worshipping this idol and betraying the one and only God who has just delivered them from slavery, he throws down the tablets and breaks them. Here is the passage from the Hebrew Bible:

> ***Then Moses turned and went down the mountain. He held in his hands the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. These stone tablets were God's work; the words on them were written by God himself. When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting below them, he exclaimed to Moses, "It sounds as if there is a war in the camp!" But Moses replied, "No, it's neither a cry of victory nor a cry of defeat. It is the sound of a celebration." When they came near the camp, Moses saw the calf and the dancing. In terrible anger, he threw the stone tablets to the ground, smashing them at the foot of the mountain.***
>
> ***(Exodus 32: 15-19)***

We can see the figure's pent-up energy. The entire figure is charged with thought and energy. It is not entirely clear what moment of the story Michelangelo shows us. Moses sits with the tables of the ten commandments under his right arm. Is he about to rise in anger after seeing the Israelites worshiping the golden calf?

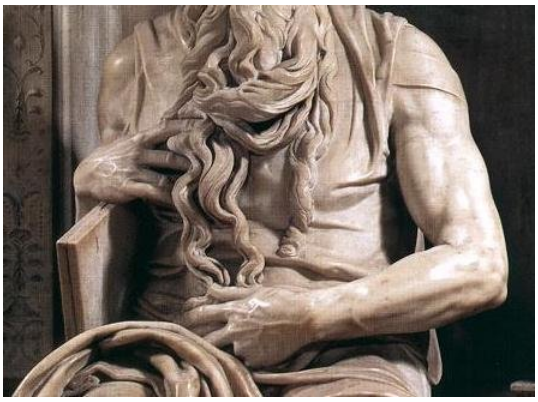


Figure **5.3.6.9.85***: Michelangelo, Moses from the Tomb of Pope Julius II, c. 1513-1515, marble, 235 cm (San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome)*

Moses is not simply sitting down; his left leg is pulled back to the side of his chair as though he is about to rise. And because this leg is pulled back, his hips also face left. Michelangelo, to create an interesting, energetic figure—where the forces of life are pulsing throughout the body—pulls the torso in the opposite direction. And so his torso faces to his right. And because the torso faces to the right, Moses turns his head to the left, and then pulls his beard to the right.

Michelangelo managed to create an intense, energetic figure even though Moses is seated. While the marble itself is still, it seems as though his beard is moving and flowing and that his muscular arms and torso are about to shift.

Figure **5.3.6.9.86***: Donatello, St. John, c. 1408-15, marble (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence)*

In comparing Michelangelo's Moses to an Early Renaissance sculpture by Donatello, it is easy to see the difference between the Early and High Renaissance ideals. Donatello's relaxed figure St. John really lacks the power and life of Michelangelo's sculpture. Think about how you're sitting right now at the computer. Perhaps your legs are crossed, as mine are as I write this. What about if you were not at the computer? And what to do with the hands? You can see that this could be a rather uninteresting position. Yet Michelangelo has given the entire figure energy and movement, even in a sitting position.

In Michelangelo's dynamic figure of Moses we have a clear sense of the prophet and his duty to fulfill God's wishes. Moses is not a passive figure from the distant biblical past, but a living, breathing, present figure that reflects the will and might of God.

Additional resources:

Another drawing for the Tomb of Pope Julius II in the British Museum

Another drawing for the Tomb of Pope Julius II in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.9.87*: More Smarthistory images…*

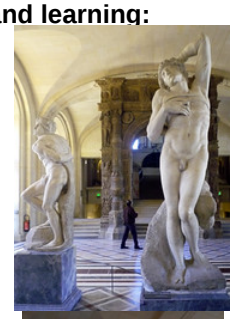
Michelangelo, *Slaves*

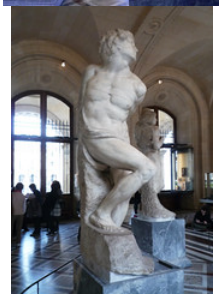
by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

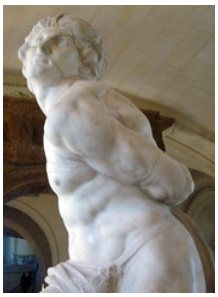
Video **5.3.6.9.13***: Michelangelo, Slaves (commonly referred to as the Dying Slave and the Rebellious Slave), 1513-15, marble, 2.09 m high, (Musée du Louvre, Paris)*

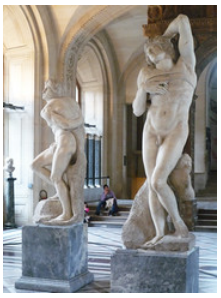
Usually considered unfinished, these sculptures were originally intended for the tomb of Pope Julius II. According to the Louvre, the artist gave the marbles to Roberto Strozzi who presented them to the King of France.

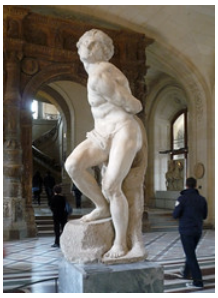
Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

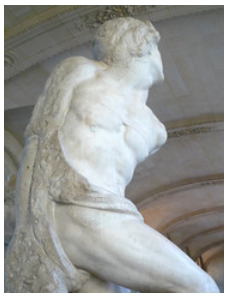


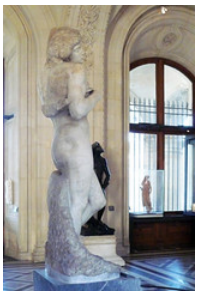


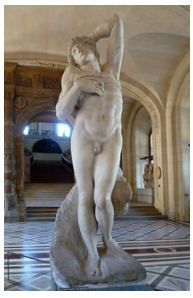












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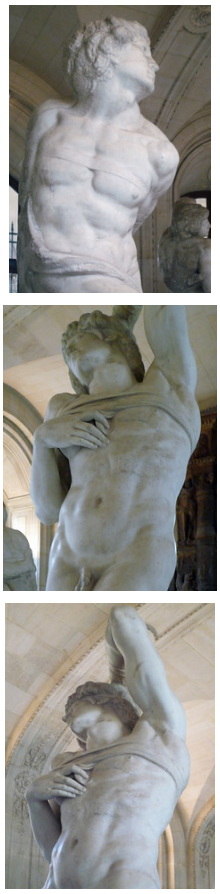

Figure **5.3.6.9.89***: More Smarthistory images…*

Quarrying and carving marble

by BETH HARRIS and DR. DAVID DROGIN

Video **5.3.6.9.14***: Michelangelo, The Awakening Slave (unfinished), c. 1530, marble, 263 cm high (Accademia di Belle Arti, Florence)*

Carving marble with traditional tools

by THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

Video 5.3.6.9.15*: Video from the J. Paul Getty Museum.*

Watch a sculptor demonstrate the use of traditional tools—such as the tooth chisel, the point chisel, the drill, and the rasp—as he creates a finished figure from a block of marble.

Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

by CHRISTINE ZAPPELLA

Video 5.3.6.9.16*: Michelangelo, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508-12, fresco (Vatican, Rome)*

Visiting the Chapel

Figure 5.3.6.9.90*: Michelangelo, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508-1512, fresco (Vatican City, Rome) (photo: Scott Sherrill-Mix, CC BY-NC 2.0)*

To any visitor of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, two features become immediately and undeniably apparent: 1) the ceiling is really high up, and 2) there are a lot of paintings up there. Because of this, the centuries have handed down to us an image of Michelangelo lying on his back, wiping sweat and plaster from his eyes as he toiled away year after year, suspended hundreds of feet in the air, begrudgingly completing a commission that he never wanted to accept in the first place.

Fortunately for Michelangelo, this is probably not true. But that does nothing to lessen the fact that the frescoes, which take up the entirety of the vault, are among the most important paintings in the world.

Figure 5.3.6.9.91*: Michelangelo, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508-1512, fresco (Vatican City, Rome)*

For Pope Julius II

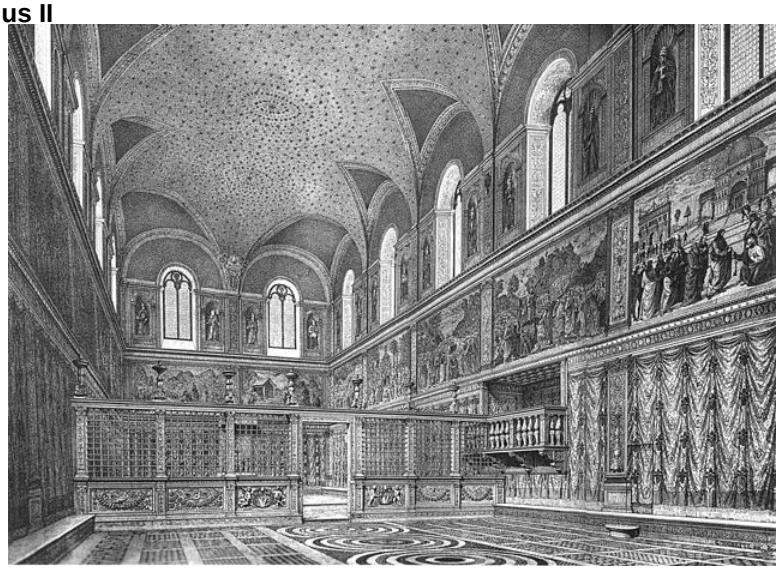

Figure 5.3.6.9.92*: Reconstruction of the Sistine Chapel prior to Michelangelo's frescoes (photo: public domain)*

Michelangelo began to work on the frescoes for Pope Julius II in 1508, replacing a blue ceiling dotted with stars. Originally, the pope asked Michelangelo to paint the ceiling with a geometric ornament, and place the twelve apostles in spandrels around the decoration. Michelangelo proposed instead to paint the Old Testament scenes now found on the vault, divided by the fictive architecture that he uses to organize the composition.

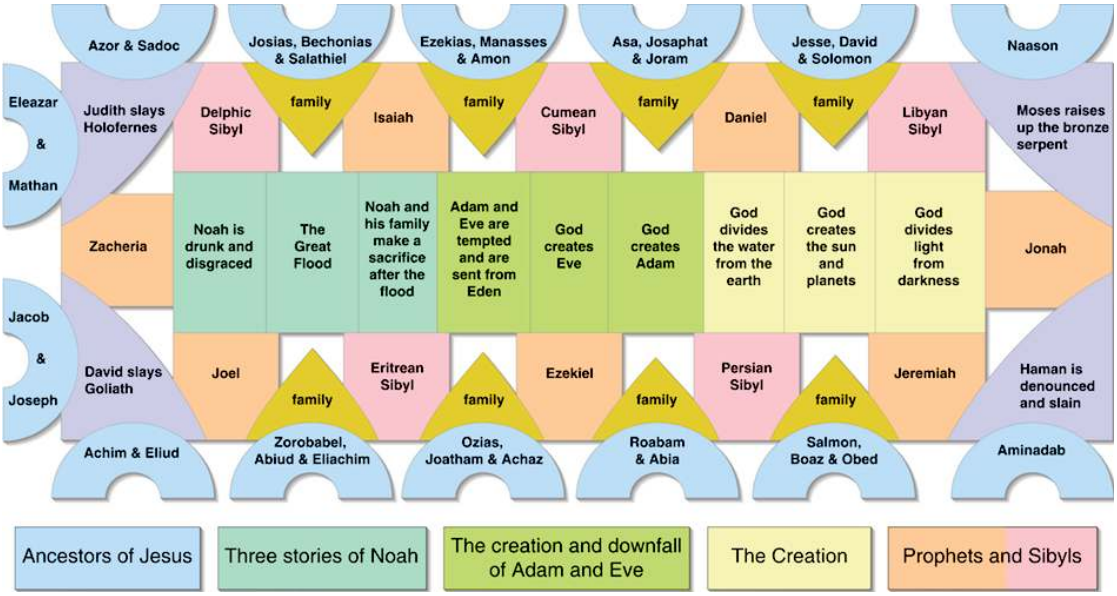

Figure 5.3.6.9.93*: Diagram of the subjects of the Sistine Chapel*[1]

The subject of the frescoes

The narrative begins at the altar and is divided into three sections. In the first three paintings, Michelangelo tells the story of The Creation of the Heavens and Earth; this is followed by The Creation of Adam and Eve and the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden; finally is the story of Noah and the Great Flood.

Ignudi, or nude youths, sit in fictive architecture around these frescoes, and they are accompanied by prophets and sibyls (ancient seers who, according to tradition, foretold the coming of Christ) in the spandrels. In the four corners of the room, in the pendentives, one finds scenes depicting the Salvation of Israel.

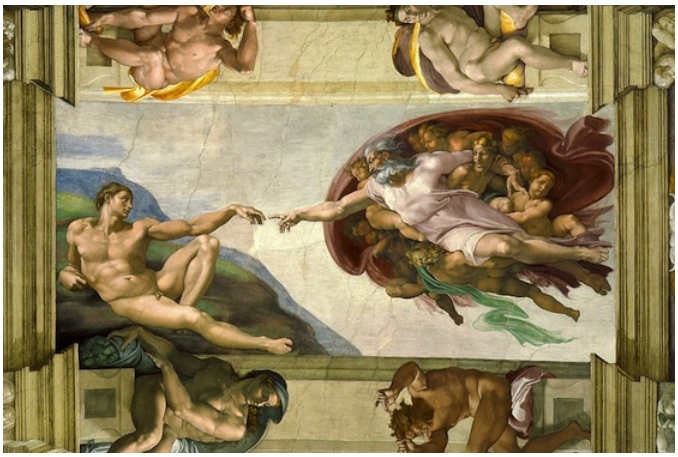

Figure **5.3.6.9.94***: Michelangelo, The Creation of Adam, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508-1512, fresco (Vatican City, Rome)*

The Deluge

Although the most famous of these frescoes is without a doubt, The Creation of Adam, reproductions of which have become ubiquitous in modern culture for its dramatic positioning of the two monumental figures reaching towards each other, not all of the frescoes are painted in this style. In fact, the first frescoes Michelangelo painted contain multiple figures, much smaller in size, engaged in complex narratives. This can best be exemplified by his painting of The Deluge.

Figure **5.3.6.9.95***: Michelangelo, The Deluge, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508-1512, fresco (Vatican City, Rome)*

Figure **5.3.6.9.96***: Detail, Michelangelo, The Deluge, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508-1512, fresco (Vatican City, Rome)*

In this fresco, Michelangelo has used the physical space of the water and the sky to separate four distinct parts of the narrative. On the right side of the painting, a cluster of people seeks sanctuary from the rain under a makeshift shelter. On the left, even more people climb up the side of a mountain to escape the rising water. Centrally, a small boat is about to capsize because of the unending downpour. And in the background, a team of men work on building the arc—the only hope of salvation.

Figure **5.3.6.9.97***: Michelangelo, Creation scenes, Sistine Chapel Ceiling, 1508-12, fresco (Vatican City, Rome) (photo: **Dennis Jarvis**)*

Up close, this painting confronts the viewer with the desperation of those about to perish in the flood and makes one question God's justice in wiping out the entire population of the earth, save Noah and his family, because of the sins of the wicked. Unfortunately, from the floor of the chapel, the use of small, tightly grouped figures undermines the emotional content and makes the story harder to follow.

A shift in style

In 1510, Michelangelo took a yearlong break from painting the Sistine Chapel. The frescoes painted after this break are characteristically different from the ones he painted before it, and are emblematic of what we think of when we envision the Sistine Chapel

paintings. These are the paintings, like The Creation of Adam, where the narratives have been pared down to only the essential figures depicted on a monumental scale. Because of these changes, Michelangelo is able to convey a strong sense of emotionality that can be perceived from the floor of the chapel. Indeed, the imposing figure of God in the three frescoes illustrating the separation of darkness from light and the creation of the heavens and the earth radiates power throughout his body, and his dramatic gesticulations help to tell the story of Genesis without the addition of extraneous detail.

The Sibyls

Figure 5.3.6.9.98*: Michelangelo, Delphic Sibyl, Sistine Chapel Ceiling, 1508-12, fresco (Vatican City, Rome)*

This new monumentality can also be felt in the figures of the sibyls and prophets in the spandrels surrounding the vault, which some believe are all based on the Belvedere Torso, an ancient sculpture that was then, and remains, in the Vatican's collection. One of the most celebrated of these figures is the Delphic Sibyl (left).

The overall circular composition of the body, which echoes the contours of her fictive architectural setting, adds to the sense of the sculptural weight of the figure.

Her arms are powerful, the heft of her body imposing, and both her left elbow and knee come into the viewer's space. At the same time, Michelangelo imbued the Delphic Sibyl with grace and harmony of proportion, and her watchful expression, as well as the position of the left arm and right hand, is reminiscent of the artist's David.

Figure **5.3.6.9.99***: Michelangelo, Libyan Sibyl, Sistine Chapel Ceiling, 1508-12, fresco (Vatican City, Rome)*

The Libyan Sibyl (left) is also exemplary. Although she is in a contorted position that would be nearly impossible for an actual person to hold, Michelangelo nonetheless executes her with a sprezzatura (a deceptive ease) that will become typical of the Mannerists who closely modelled their work on his.

Figure **5.3.6.9.100***: Heraclitus, whose features are based on Michelangelo's and his seated pose is based on the prophets and sibyls from Michelangelo's frescoes on the Sistine Chapel Ceiling (detail), Raphael, School of Athens, 1509-11, Stanza della Segnatura (Vatican City, Rome)*

It is no wonder that Raphael, struck by the genius of the Sistine Chapel, rushed back to his School of Athens in the Vatican Stanze and inserted Michelangelo's weighty, monumental likeness sitting at the bottom of the steps of the school.

Legacy

Michelangelo completed the Sistine Chapel in 1512. Its importance in the history of art cannot be overstated. It turned into a veritable academy for young painters, a position that was cemented when Michelangelo returned to the chapel twenty years later to execute the Last Judgment fresco on the altar wall.

The chapel recently underwent a controversial cleaning, which has once again brought to light Michelangelo's jewel-like palette, his mastery of chiaroscuro, and additional

iconological details which continue to captivate modern viewers even five hundred years after the frescoes' original completion. Not bad for an artist who insisted he was not a painter.

1.The diagram neglects the subject of the four corner paintings indicated in lavender. The four scenes represent the salvation of the Jewish people.

Additional resources:

This painting at the Vatican Museums

Panorama of the Sistine Chapel from the Vatican

Michelangelo, Studies for the *Libyan Sibyl* (recto); Studies for the *Libyan Sibyl* and a small *Sketch for a Seated Figure* (verso)

by THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Video **5.3.6.9.17***: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Studies for the Libyan Sibyl (recto); Studies for the Libyan Sibyl and a small Sketch for a Seated Figure (verso), ca. 1510–11, chalk, 11 3/8 x 8 7/16" / 28.9 x 21.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Video from The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

This is the most magnificent drawing by Michelangelo in the United States. A male studio assistant posed for the anatomical study, which was preparatory for the Libyan Sibyl, one of the female seers frescoed on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (Vatican Palace) in 1508-12. In the fresco, the figure is clothed except for her powerful shoulders and arms, and has an elaborately braided coiffure. Michelangelo used the present sheet to explore the elements that were crucial in the elegant resolution of the figure's pose, especially the counterpoint twist of shoulders and hips and the manner of weight-bearing on her toe. Recent research shows that this sheet of studies was owned by the Buonarroti family soon after Michelangelo's death. The "no. 21" inscribed on the verso of the sheet (at lower center) fits precisely into a numerical sequence found on many other drawings by the artist that have this early Buonarroti family provenance.

Michelangelo, *Last Judgment*, Sistine Chapel

by DR. ESPERANÇA CAMARA

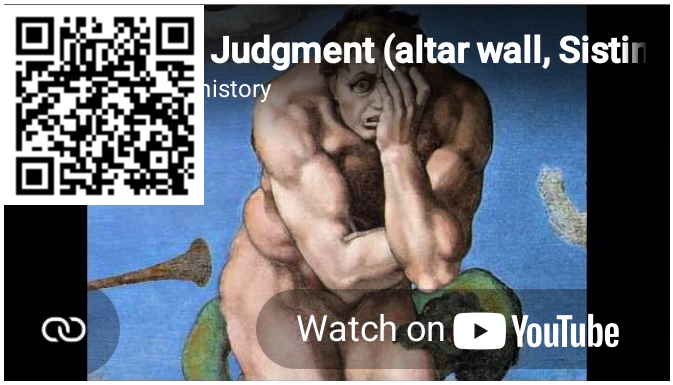

Figure **5.3.6.9.101***: Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534–1541 (Vatican City, Rome) (photo: Ramon Stoppelenburg CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

> ***"He will come to judge the living and the dead"***
>
> ***(from the Apostle's Creed, an early statement of Christian belief)***

This is it. The moment all Christians await with both hope and dread. This is the end of time, the beginning of eternity when the mortal becomes immortal, when the elect join Christ in his heavenly kingdom and the damned are cast into the unending torments of hell. What a daunting task: to visualize the endgame of earthly existence – and furthermore, to do so in the Sistine Chapel, the private chapel of the papal court, where the leaders of the Church gathered to celebrate feast day liturgies, where the pope's body was laid in state before his funeral, and where—to this day—the College of Cardinals meets to elect the next pope.

No artist in sixteenth-century Italy was better positioned for this task than Michelangelo, whose completion of the chapel's ceiling in 1512 had sealed his reputation as the greatest master of the human figure—especially the male nude. Pope Paul III was well aware of this when he charged Michelangelo with repainting the chapel's altar wall with the Last Judgment. With its focus on the resurrection of the body, this was the perfect subject for Michelangelo.

Figure **5.3.6.9.102***: Titian, Portrait of Pope Paul III, c. 1543, oil on canvas, 113.3 x 88.8 cm (Museo di Capodimonte, Naples)*

The Last Judgment was one of the first art works Paul III commissioned upon his election to the papacy in 1534. The church he inherited was in crisis; the Sack of Rome (1527) was still a recent memory. Paul sought to address not only the many abuses that had sparked the Protestant Reformation, but also to affirm the legitimacy of the Catholic Church and the orthodoxy of its doctrines (including the institution of the papacy). The visual arts would play a key role in his agenda, beginning with the message he directed to his inner circle by commissioning the Last Judgment.

The decorative program of the Sistine Chapel encapsulates the history of salvation. It begins with God's creation of the world and his covenant with the people of Israel (represented in the Old Testament scenes on the ceiling and south wall), and continues with the earthly life of Christ (on the north wall). The addition of the Last Judgment completed the narrative. The papal court, representatives of the earthly church, participated in this narrative; it filled the gap between Christ's life and his Second Coming.

The composition

Michelangelo's Last Judgment is among the most powerful renditions of this moment in the history of Christian art. Over 300 muscular figures, in an infinite variety of dynamic poses, fill the wall to its edges. Unlike the scenes on the walls and the ceiling, the Last Judgment is not bound by a painted border. It is all encompassing and expands beyond the viewer's field of vision. Unlike other sacred narratives, which portray events of the past, this one implicates the viewer. It has yet to happen and when it does, the viewer will be among those whose fate is determined.

Figure **5.3.6.9.102***: Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

Despite the density of figures, the composition is clearly organized into tiers and quadrants, with subgroups and meaningful pairings that facilitate the fresco's legibility. As a whole, it rises on the left and descends on the right, recalling the scales used for the weighing of souls in many depictions of the Last Judgment.

Figure **5.3.6.9.103***: Christ, Mary, and Saints (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

Figure 5.3.6.9.104*: Angels (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

Christ is the fulcrum of this complex composition. A powerful, muscular figure, he steps forward in a twisting gesture that sets in motion the final sorting of souls (the damned on his left, and the blessed on his right). Nestled under his raised arm is the Virgin Mary. Michelangelo changed her pose from one of open-armed pleading on humanity's behalf ***seen in a preparatory drawing****, to one of acquiescence to Christ's judgment. The time for intercession is over. Judgment has been passed.*

Directly below Christ a group of wingless angels (left), their cheeks puffed with effort, sound the trumpets that call the dead to rise, while two others hold open the books recording the deeds of the resurrected. The angel with the book of the damned emphatically angles its down to show the damned that their fate is justly based on their misdeeds.

The elect (those going to heaven)

On the lower left of the composition (Christ's right), the dead emerge from their graves, shedding their burial shrouds. Some rise up effortlessly, drawn by a invisible force, while others are assisted by herculean angels, one of whom lifts a pair of souls that cling to a strand of rosary beads. This detail reaffirms a doctrine contested by the Protestants: that prayer and good works, and not just faith and divine grace, play a role in determining one's fate in the afterlife. Directly below, a risen body is caught in violent tug of war, pulled on one end by two angels and on the other by a horned demon who has escaped through a crevice in the central mound. This breach in the earth provides a glimpse of the fires of hell.

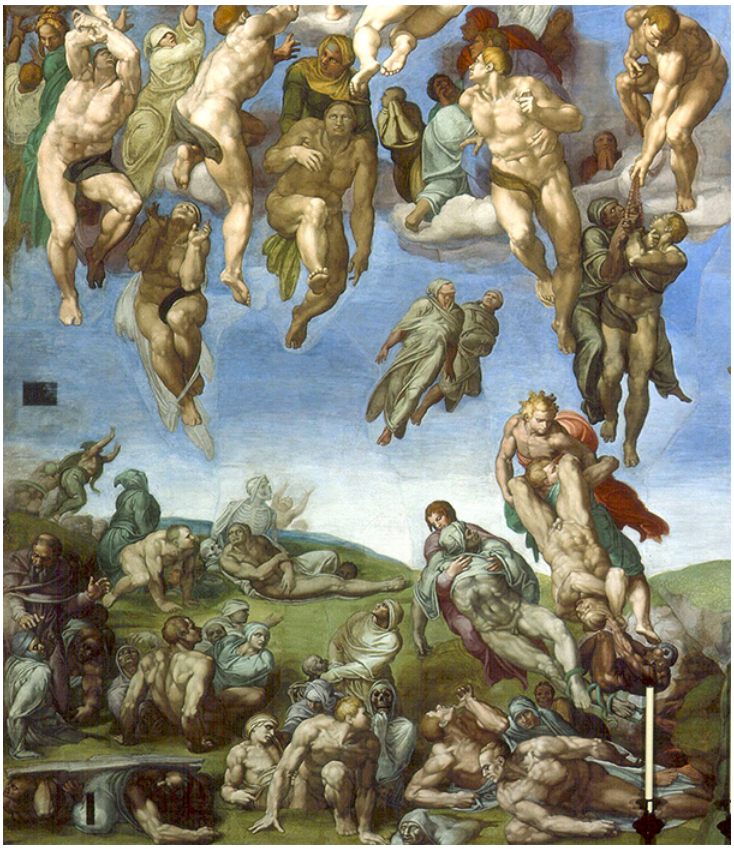

Figure **5.3.6.9.105***: The dead rise from their graves and float to heaven, some assisted by angels. In the upper right, a couple is pulled to heaven on rosary beads, and just below that a risen body is caught in violent tug of war (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome) fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

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The damned (those going to hell)

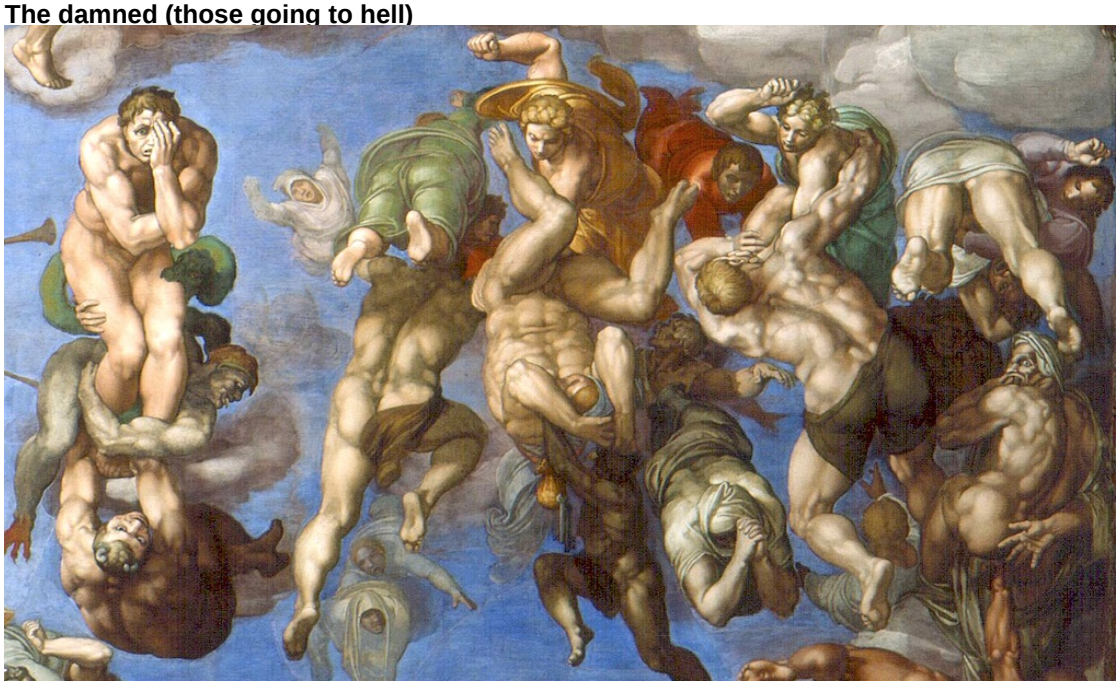

Figure 5.3.6.9.106*: Demons drag the damned to hell, while angels beat down those who struggle to escape their fate (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

On the right of the composition (Christ's left), demons drag the damned to hell, while angels beat down those who struggle to escape their fate (image above). One soul is both pummeled by an angel and dragged by a demon, head first; a money bag and two keys dangles from his chest. His is the sin of avarice. Another soul—exemplifying the sin of pride—dares to fight back, arrogantly contesting divine judgment, while a third (at the far right) is pulled by his scrotum (his sin was lust). These sins were specifically singled out in sermons delivered to the papal court.

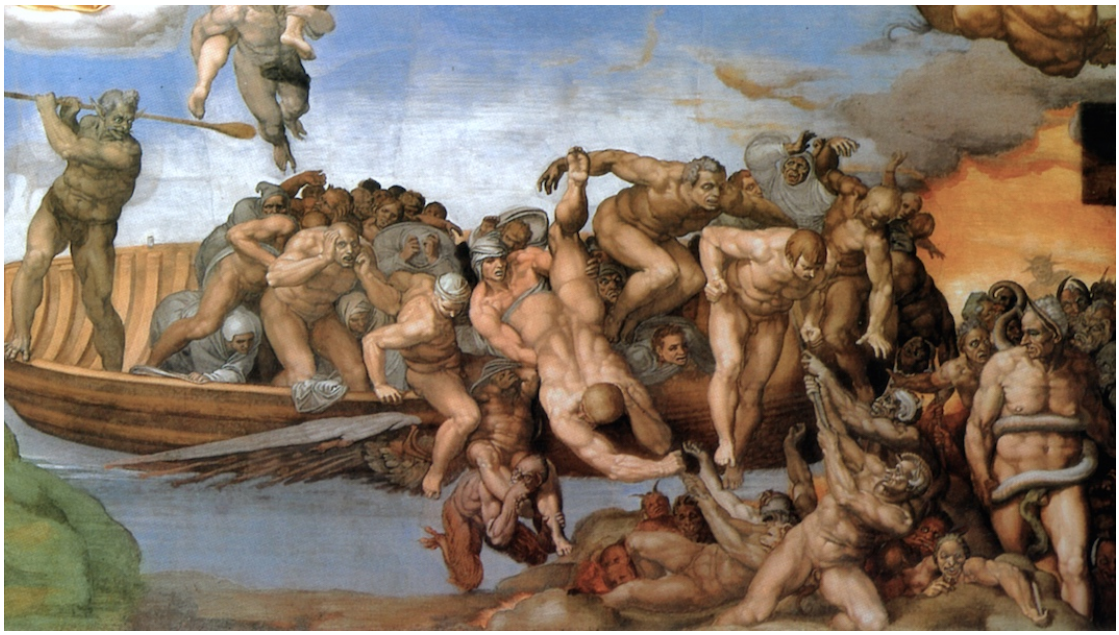

Figure **5.3.6.9.107***: Charon drives the damned onto hell's shores and in the lower right corner stands the ass-eared Minos (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, altar wall, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

In the lower right corner, Charon—the ferryman from Greek mythology who transports souls to the underworld—swings his oar as he drives the damned onto hell's shores (image above). In the lower right corner stands another mythological character, the ass-eared Minos, his own carnal sinfulness indicated by the snake that bites his genitals. He stands at the very edge of hell, judging the new-comers to determine their eternal punishment.

In the company of Christ

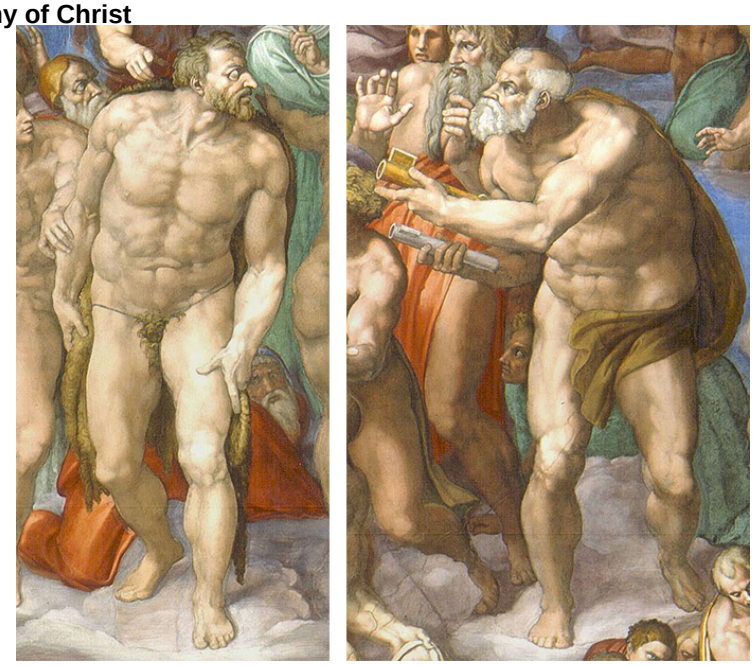

Figure 5.3.6.9.108*: Left: St. John the Baptist; right: St. Peter (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, altar wall, Sistine Chapel, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

While such details were meant to provoke terror in the viewer, Michelangelo's painting is primarily about the triumph of Christ. The realm of heaven dominates. The elect encircle Christ; they loom large in the foreground and extend far into the depth of the painting, dissolving the boundary of the picture plane. Some hold the instruments of their martyrdom: Andrew the X-shaped cross, Lawrence the gridiron, St. Sebastian a bundle of arrows, to name only a few.

Especially prominent are St. John Baptist and St. Peter who flank Christ to the left and right and share his massive proportions (above). John, the last prophet, is identifiable by the camel pelt that covers his groin and dangles behind his legs; and, Peter, the first pope, is identified by the keys he returns to Christ. His role as the keeper of the keys to the kingdom of heaven has ended. This gesture was a vivid reminder to the pope that his reign as Christ's vicar was temporary—in the end, he too will to answer to Christ.

In the lunettes (semi-circular spaces) at the top right and left, angels display the instruments of Christ's Passion, thus connecting this triumphal moment to Christ's sacrificial death. This portion of the wall projects one foot forward, making it visible to the priest at the altar below as he commemorates Christ's sacrifice in the liturgy of the Eucharist.

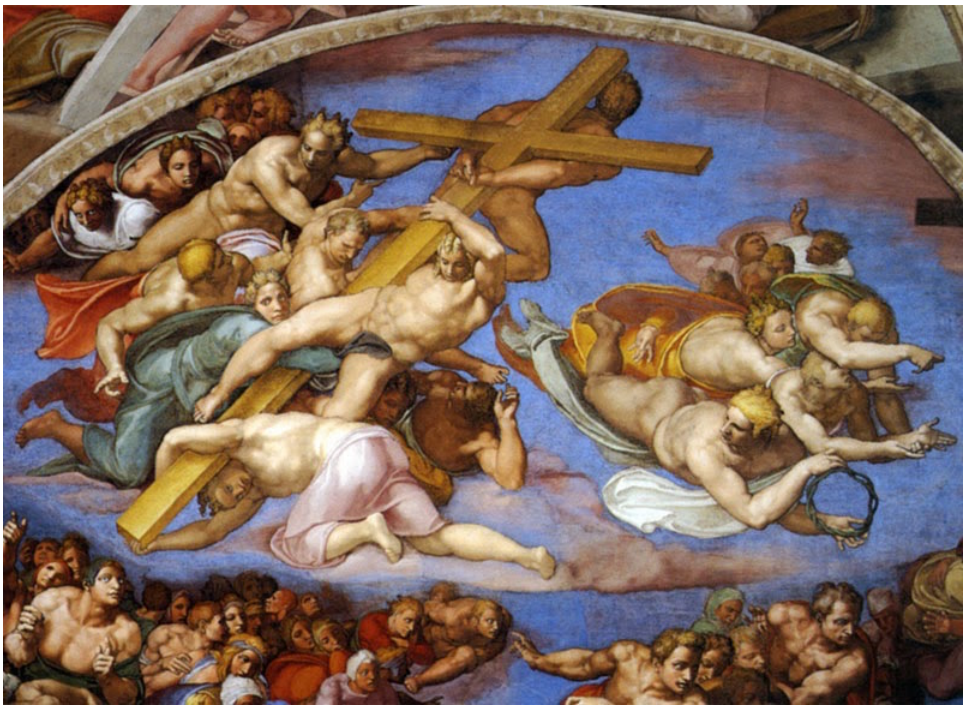

Figure **5.3.6.9.109***: Lunette with angels carrying the instruments of the Passion of Christ, (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

Critical response: masterpiece or scandal?

Shortly after its unveiling in 1541, the Roman agent of Cardinal Gonzaga of Mantua reported: "The work is of such beauty that your excellency can imagine that there is no lack of those who condemn it. . . . [T]o my mind it is a work unlike any other to be seen anywhere." Many praised the work as a masterpiece. They saw Michelangelo's distinct figural style, with its complex poses, extreme foreshortening, and powerful (some might say excessive) musculature, as worthy of both the subject matter and the location. The sheer physicality of these muscular nudes affirmed the Catholic doctrine of bodily resurrection (that on the day of judgment, the dead would rise in their bodies, not as incorporeal souls).

Others were scandalized—above all by the nudity—despite its theological accuracy, for the resurrected would enter heaven not clothed but nude, as created by God. Critics also objected to the contorted poses (some resulting in the indecorous presentation of buttocks), the breaks with pictorial tradition (the beardless Christ, the wingless angels), and the appearance of mythology (the figures of Charon and Minos) in a scene portraying sacred history. Critics saw these embellishments as distractions from the fresco's spiritual message. They accused Michelangelo of caring more about showing off his creative abilities than portraying sacred truth with clarity and decorum. Religious art was the "book of the illiterate" and as such should be easy to understand.

Figure **5.3.6.9.110***: Left: Apollo Belvedere, Right: Christ (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

Michelangelo's Last Judgment, however, was not painted for an unlearned, lay audience. To the contrary, it was designed for a very specific, elite and erudite audience. This audience would understand and appreciate his figural style and iconographic innovations. They would recognize, for example, that his inclusion of Charon and Minos was inspired by Dante's Inferno, a text Michelangelo greatly admired. They would see in the youthful face of Christ his reference to the Apollo Belvedere, an ancient Greek Hellenistic sculpture in the papal collection lauded for its ideal beauty. Thus, Michelangelo glosses the identity of Christ as the "Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2).

A self-portrait

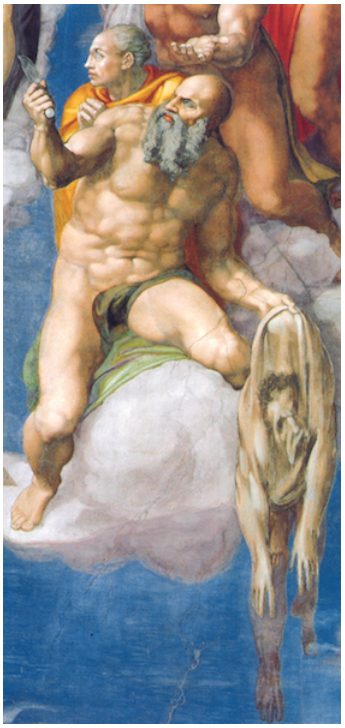

Figure 5.3.6.9.111*: St. Bartholomew (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

Even more poignant is Michelangelo's insertion of himself into the fresco. His is the face on the flayed skin held by St. Bartholomew, an empty shell that hangs precariously between heaven and hell. To his learned audience, the flayed skin would bring to mind not only the circumstances of the saint's martyrdom but also the flaying of Marsyas by Apollo. In his foolish arrogance, Marsyas challenged Apollo to a musical contest, believing his skill could surpass that of the god of music himself. His punishment for such hubris was to be flayed alive. That Michelangelo should identify with Marsyas is not surprising. His contemporaries had dubbed him the "divine" Michelangelo for his ability to rival God himself in giving form to the ideal body. Often he lamented his youthful pride, which had led him to focus on the beauty of art rather than the salvation of his soul. So, here, in a work done in his mid sixties, he acknowledges his sin and expresses his hope that Christ, unlike Apollo, will have mercy upon him and welcome him into the company of the elect.

An epic painting

Like Dante in his great epic poem, The Divine Comedy, Michelangelo sought to create an epic painting, worthy of the grandeur of the moment. He used metaphor and allusion to ornament his subject. His educated audience would delight in his visual and literary references.

Originally intended for a restricted audience, reproductive engravings of the fresco quickly spread it far and wide, placing it at the center of lively debates on the merits and abuses of religious art. While some hailed it as the pinnacle of artistic accomplishment, others deemed it the epitome of all that could go wrong with religious art and called for

its destruction. In the end, a compromise was reached. Shortly after the artist's death in 1564, Daniele Da Volterra was hired to cover bare buttocks and groins with bits of drapery and repaint Saint Catherine of Alexandria, originally portrayed unclothed, and St. Blaise, who hovered menacingly over her with his steel combs.

Figure **5.3.6.9.112***: Clockwise: Saint Blaise, Saint Catherine and Saint Sebastian (detail), Michelangelo, Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel, fresco, 1534-1541 (Vatican City, Rome)*

In contrast to its limited audience in the sixteenth century, now the Last Judgment is see by thousands of tourists daily. However, during papal conclaves it becomes once again a powerful reminder to the College of Cardinals of their place in the story of salvation, ***as they gather to elect Christ's earthly vicar (the next Pope)****—the person who will be responsible for shepherding the faithful into the community of the elect.*

Additional resources:

The Last Judgment from the Vatican Museums

Michelangelo's Last Judgment—uncensored

Video series on the Reformation and Counter-Reformation

Bernardine Barnes, Michelangelo's Last Judgment: The Renaissance Response (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

Marcia Hall, ed., Michelangelo's Last Judgment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Loren Partridge, Michelangelo The Last Judgment: A Glorious Restoration (New York: Abrams, 1997).

Michelangelo, Medici Chapel (New Sacristy)

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.9.19*: Michelangelo, Medici Chapel (New Sacristy), 1519-34, San Lorenzo, Florence*

Michelangelo, Laurentian Library

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.3.6.9.20*: Michelangelo, Laurentian Library (vestibule and reading room), begun 1524, opened 1571, San Lorenzo, Florence*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

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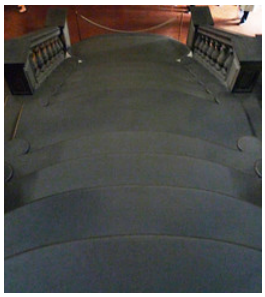

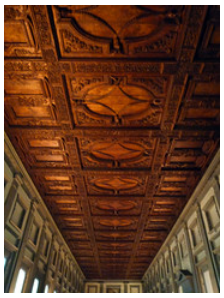

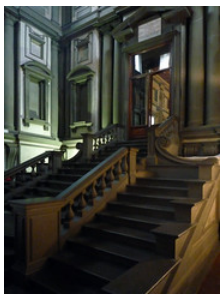

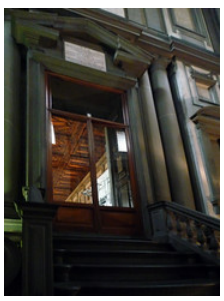

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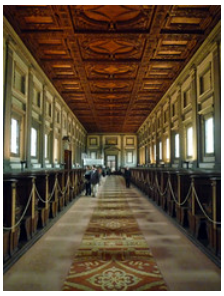

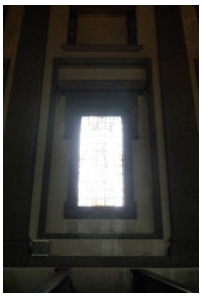

Figure **5.3.6.9.113***: More Smarthistory images…*

Raphael

Raphael, an introduction

by DR. HEATHER GRAHAM

Figure **5.3.6.9.114***: Raphael, Self Portrait, 1504–05, oil on panel, 47.3 x 34.8 cm (Uffizi)*

Raffaello Sanzio, better known simply as Raphael, enjoyed a meteoric career. An impeccable professional artist and a consummate courtier, Raphael was famed both for his artistic skill and his charismatic personality. From his beginnings as a local painter in his native Marche and later Florence, Raphael skyrocketed to fame in Rome, ultimately becoming the city's most sought-after artist. Raphael's untimely death at the age of 37 (in 1520) while at the height of his visual powers only solidified the legend of his extraordinary talent.

His visual accomplishments range from paintings of all sizes and drawings in chalk and ink—some intended to be translated to print—to elaborate fresco cycles, tapestry designs, and architecture. He was shrewd and meticulous, and his work is notable for its elegance and poise, for the ease with which he translated nature into idealized artifice. How does one paint divine grace or the very concept of philosophy? Raphael did such things with apparent ease. He embodied the ideal of sprezzatura (the appearance of nonchalant effortlessness in his creative process), a notion popularized by Raphael's good friend, Baldassare Castiglione, in his Book of the Courtier (1528).

Figure **5.3.6.9.115***: Portrait of Raphael, from Giorgio Vasari, Le Vite De' Piu Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori, E Architettori, 1791 [1568]*

How do we know about him?

> ***"For in truth we have from him art, colouring, and invention harmonized and brought to such a pitch of perfection as could scarcely be hoped for; nor may any intellect ever think to surpass him. And in addition to this benefit that he conferred on art, like a true friend to her, as long as he lived he never ceased to show how one could deal with great men, with those of middle station, and with the lowest."***
>
> ***Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects [1]***

Information about Raphael's life comes from relatively few surviving contemporary documents that refer to him, and two biographies written in the sixteenth century. Paolo Giovio, who knew Raphael personally, wrote an essay on the artist's life shortly after his death in 1520. In 1550, Giorgio Vasari wrote an extended biography of Raphael for his Lives of the Artists, published in 1550 (expanded in 1568). Despite Raphael's very public career, we have scant evidence of his personal life, private correspondence, and other writings to reveal the man behind the public persona.

Early career

Figure 5.3.6.9.116*: Map showing the location of Urbino*

Raphael was born in Urbino into the circle of one of the most sophisticated and intellectually oriented courts in Italy. Following the tradition of family craft, Raphael was initially trained by his father, Giovanni Sanzio, who was court painter to the ruling Montefeltro family and ran a thriving workshop. Vasari tells us that Raphael was sent by his father to continue his training under ***Pietro Perugino****, presumably because the precocious youth had learned all he could at home. Perugino was a leading artist in both Florence and his native Perugia and his influence on Raphael's early paintings is unmistakable. Recent scholarship however, suggests that Raphael's associations with Perugino came a bit later, his early training continuing in the family workshop even after his father's death in 1494.*

Figure 5.3.6.9.117*: Left: Perugino, Marriage of the Virgin, 1500–1504, oil on wood, 234 x*

185 cm (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen); right: Raphael, Marriage of the Virgin, 1504, oil on panel, 174 × 121 cm / 69 × 48" (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan)

*An altarpiece depicting the **Marriage of the Virgin** (1504) shows Raphael's indebtedness to Perugino's approach as well as his departure from the master's style. A comparison with a contemporaneous work on the same subject by Perugino is telling. The compositions are similar, with ready parallels evident between the placement of figures and the use of architecture. Yet Raphael's space is more pronounced, his architecture more monumental, and his figures are imbued with a greater vitality. The younger man created a work that simultaneously met and surpassed the expectations of a market shaped by the older master. This ability to synthesize from and innovate upon the visual sources that he encountered—from his contemporaries or from the ancient world—was a definitive aspect of Raphael's career.*

Figure 5.3.6.9.118*: Raphael, Madonna of the Meadow, 1505–06, oil on panel, 885 x 1130 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)*

*In 1504, at the age of twenty-one, Raphael arrived in Florence. There, the young artist found a flourishing art market. He was able to gaze upon the powerfully expressive works of the **early Florentine renaissance**, and also encountered first-hand the work of local artists, including that of **Leonardo da Vinci**, whose influence is evident in several of Raphael's Florentine paintings. The two portraits below recall Leonardo's **Mona Lisa**.*

Figure 5.3.6.9.119*: Raphael, Portraits of Agnolo and Maddalena Doni, c. 1504–07, oil on panel, 63.5 x 45 cm (Uffizi)*

In Florence, Raphael's commissions were primarily for smaller, private paintings, such as the Madonna of the Meadow (1505) or his dual portraits of Agnolo and Maddalena Doni (1506). Local commissions for large-scale altarpieces—more desirable projects both for the higher prices they commanded and the public exposure they brought—eluded Raphael during these years. He did, however, continue to fulfil more prestigious projects for ***patrons*** *outside of Florence, including in Siena, Urbino, and Perugia.*

Figure **5.3.6.9.120***: Raphael, Entombment, created for Atalanta Baglioni's chapel, S. Francesco al Prato, Perugia, 1507, oil on panel, 184 x 176 cm (Galleria Borghese)*

Raphael's 1507 altarpiece for the Perugian widow, Atalanta Baglioni, is among the most groundbreaking works of his early career. The central panel depicting the Entombment of Christ is characterized by a forceful dynamism: figures' bodies move and strain with tension created by strongly opposing diagonal lines. Raphael rejected the mood of quiet contemplation that usually characterizes altarpiece imagery in favor of energetic fervor. This daring departure from the altarpiece tradition anticipates the artist's innovative work soon to come in Rome.

Figure 5.3.6.9.121*: Raphael, Portrait of Pope Julius II, 1511, oil on poplar, 108.7 x 81 cm (National Gallery, London)*

Raphael in Rome

*Having never completed a large-scale project in Florence, Raphael left for Rome in 1508. He was drawn to the Eternal City by the powerful Warrior Pope, **Julius II**, who was in the process of re-vitalizing Rome. Julius was an astute patron. He recognized the potential of art and architecture to give material form to his vision for Rome as a new center of the Christian empire—one that would rival antiquity.*

Figure 5.3.6.9.122*: Raphael, School of Athens (left) and Disputà (right), fresco, 1509–1511 (Stanza della Segnatura, Papal Palace, Vatican)*

*Raphael was initially one of a number of artists hired by Julius to decorate his personal suite of rooms in the **Vatican** palace, a semi-public space where the pope's interests were to be materialized in art. The first room he painted, the Stanza della Segnatura (Stanza means "room" in Italian), so perfectly aligned with Julius's vision that the entire suite*

was given over to him. The two frescos known as the ***School of Athens*** *and Disputà (1509–1510) on the opposing largest walls of the Stanza represent Philosophy and Theology respectively. Raphael infused non-narrative scenes with dramatic force. His figures engage in active dialogue and interact emotionally—no artist before him had presented immaterial concepts with such ingenuity.*

Figure **5.3.6.9.123***: Raphael,* ***Galatea****, c. 1513, fresco, Villa Farnesina, Rome, 9 feet 8 inches x 7 feet 5 inches*

Raphael's success in the papal suites lead to a flourishing Roman career informed by all he saw there. He studied with equal attentiveness the art and architecture of antiquity and the Roman work of his contemporaries, including ***Michelangelo****, who was working on the Sistine Chapel ceiling while Raphael was undertaking the frescoes in the papal suites. Raphael worked for merchants and bankers, for popes and mighty statesmen.*

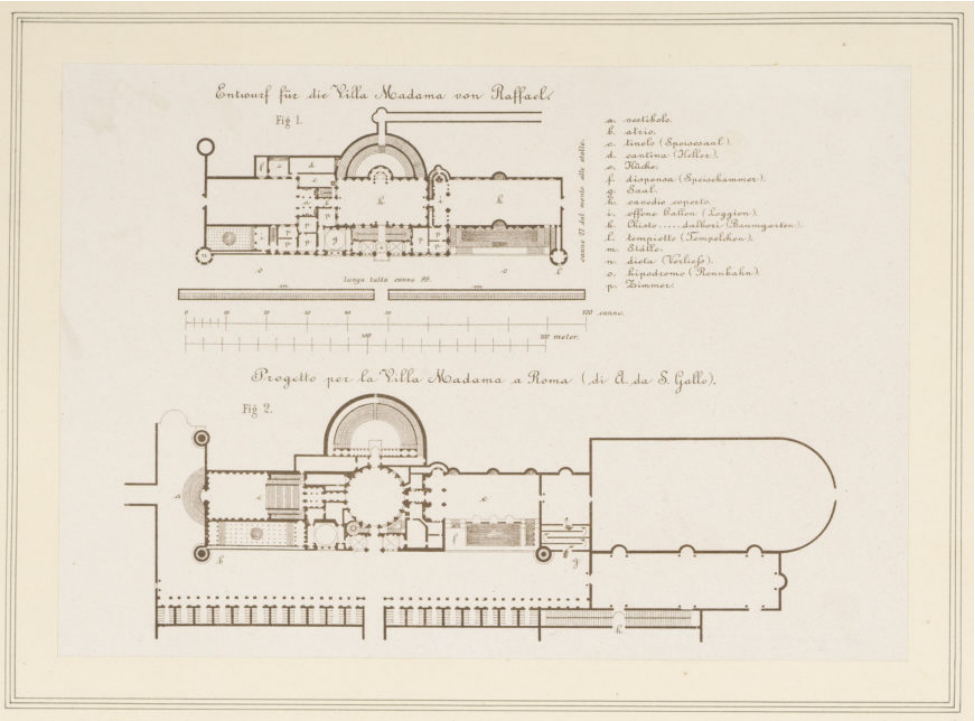

Figure 5.3.6.9.124*: Plans of Villa Madama, after the original plan drawing in the Uffizi Galleries, Florence. Rudolph Redtenbacher, lithograph, published 1876, 18.7 x 26.9 cm (**Prince Albert Royal Collections**)*

His enormous output included the spectacular mythological fresco cycle for the Roman pleasure villa of Agostino Chigi (the Villa Farnesina) and an elaborate series of tapestry designs on the life of St. Peter for the Sistine Chapel. He designed numerous buildings, such as the sumptuous Villa Madama (1518) just north of the Vatican, and was named lead architect of the new St. Peter's in 1516. Partnering with the Bolognese engraver, Marcantonio Raimondi, Raphael provided drawings to be circulated as prints enabling his visual inventions to reach the widest possible audience. Religious or secular, private or public, Raphael's work seamlessly reflected his synthesis of visual ***naturalism*** *and classical idealism.*

Figure **5.3.6.9.125***: Raphael, tapestry cartoon for The Miraculous Draught of Fishes, 320 x 390 cm (**Victoria and Albert Museum**)*

Working method

Raphael worked well with others. He ran a large and complex workshop comprised of skilled collaborators who enabled him to realize numerous projects simultaneously. A shrewd manager and skilled teacher, Raphael provided highly detailed preliminary drawings for projects that could then be realized by his extensive and trusted workshop all under his meticulous eye. Raphael knew how to delegate to his team, capitalizing upon the strengths of those who worked for him.

Figure 5.3.6.9.126*: Raphael, Transfiguration, 1518–1520, tempera on wood, 405 x 278 cm (Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City)*

Gone too soon

On April 6, 1520—Good Friday that year—Raphael died. While Vasari attributes his early demise to an excess of amorous pursuits, the artist likely succumbed to sudden illness. The shock of his death reverberated throughout Rome. His corpse lay in state in his studio under his final finished work, the Transfiguration, before being interred in no less an exalted site than the ***Pantheon****. His workshop and many projects underway passed into the capable hands of his assistants, Gianfrancesco Penni and Giulio Romano, who continued his legacy and fostered further the cult of Raphaelism. His death was universally understood as marking the end of an era. As lamented by his friend, Castiglione:*

> ***you rouse the envy of the gods above and death is outraged***
> ***that you can return the breath of life to things long dead, and***
> ***that what the long day had gradually effaced, this you were***
> ***preparing anew, spurning mortal law. Thus you fall, alas! [1]***

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Notes:

1. *Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects, Translated by Gaston du C. de Vere. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1912, p. 746.*
2. *Baldassare Castiglione, poem on the death of Raphael, c. 1520. Translated by Shearman, 2003, p. 52. Raphael in the Early Modern Sources, ed. John Shearman, 2003.*

Additional resources:

Read more about The Book of the Courtier at the British Library

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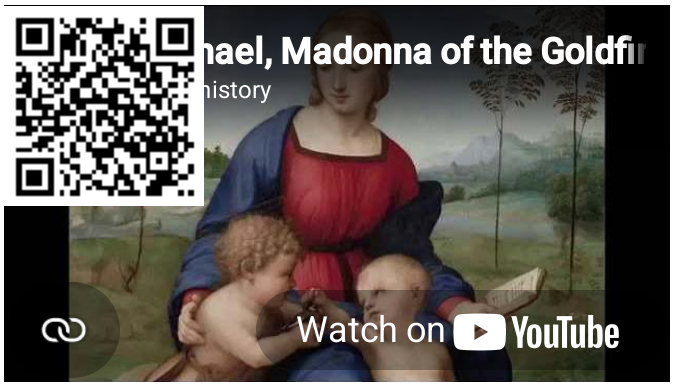
Raphael, *Marriage of the Virgin*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.9.21*: Raphael, Marriage of the Virgin, 1504, oil on panel, 174 × 121 cm / 69 × 48" (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan)*

Raphael, *Madonna of the Goldfinch*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS



Video 5.3.6.9.22*: Raphael, Madonna of the Goldfinch, 1505-6, oil on panel, 42" x 30" (107 x 77 cm) (Uffizi, Florence)*

Raphael, *La belle jardinière (Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist)*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.3.6.9.23*: Raphael, La belle jardinière (Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist), 1507, oil on panel, 48 × 31½" / 122 × 80 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)*

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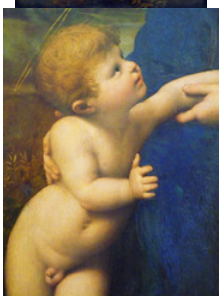
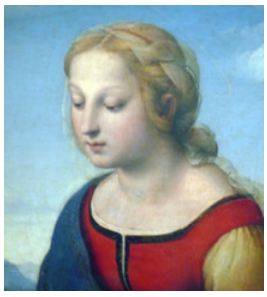

Figure 5.3.6.9.127*: More Smarthistory images…*

Raphael, *School of Athens*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

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hael, School of Athens
history
ether (air)
fire
earth
Watch on YouTube

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.9.128*: More Smarthistory images…*

Raphael, *The Alba Madonna*

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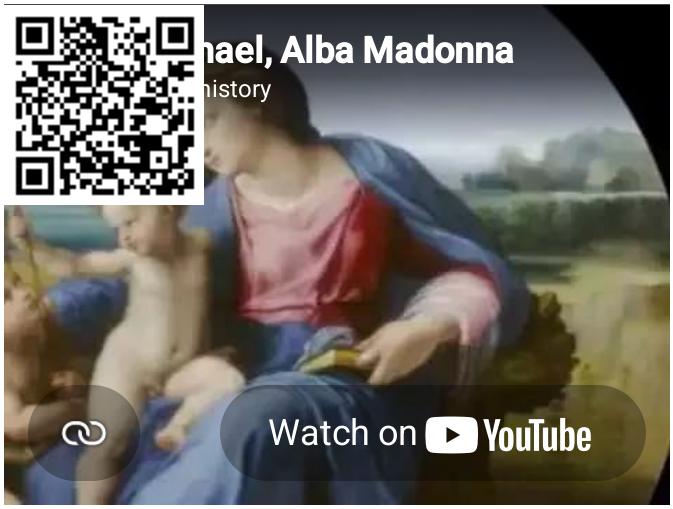

Video **5.3.6.9.25***: Raphael, The Alba Madonna, c. 1510, oil on panel transferred to canvas (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.)*

Raphael, Portrait of Pope Julius II

by BETH HARRIS and STEVEN ZUCKER

Video **5.3.6.9.26***: Raphael, Portrait of Pope Julius II, 1511, oil on poplar, 108.7 x 81 cm (National Gallery, London)*
Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Raphael, *Galatea*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.3.6.9.27*: Raphael, Galatea, c. 1513, fresco, Villa Farnesina, Rome, 9 feet 8 inches x 7 feet 5 inches*

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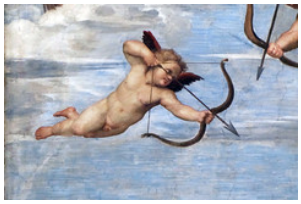

Figure **5.3.6.9.129***: More Smarthistory images…*

Raphael, *Pope Leo X*

by CHRISTINE ZAPPELLA

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Figure **5.3.6.9.130***: Raphael, Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de'Medici and Luigi de'Rossi, c. 1518, oil on panel, 119.5 x 155.5 cm (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)*

No hint of chaos

Pope Leo X, son of Lorenzo de' Medici, is best known for his wasteful habits, lecherous activities, and hedonistic quote, "Since God has given us the papacy, let us enjoy it." But, judging from his portrayal in Raphael's 1518 Portrait of Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi, one would never guess that Leo's policies were ripping Christendom apart and would directly lead to the Protestant Reformation. Rather, Leo and his two illegitimate relatives—on the left, his nephew Giulio de' Medici (later Pope Clement VII, who was responsible for the disastrous 1527 Sack of Rome) and on the right, his cousin Cardinal Luigi de' Rossi—are presented as dignified, stalwart men, giving no hint of the chaos into which they were throwing Italy and the entire Christian world.

Figure **5.3.6.9.131***: Detail, Raphael, Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de'Medici and Luigi de'Rossi, c. 1518 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)*

Leo, Giulio and Luigi

The painting is dominated by Leo, whose corpulent body and sumptuous dress are the only indications of the pope's penchant for excess. He looks off into the distance, beyond the edge of the painting, and holds a magnifying glass while turning the page of his Bible. This gives the impression that he is reacting to someone who has just entered the room. The poses of both other men indicate their relationships with Leo. Giulio stands on the left of the painting, looking out to the other direction; his posture and gaze mirror Leo's. Giulio was considered a man of great authority, and was called by a Vatican chronicler, "Leo's other self." Luigi de' Rossi, the pope's cousin and best friend, is the only person who looks at the viewer, and his hands are touching the pope's chair. The two had been raised together, and Leo was said to have been devastated after Luigi's 1519 death of gout (an affliction that habitually plagued the Medici). The painting is dominated by red paint, the color of the papacy.

Figure 5.3.6.9.132*: Sebastiano del Piombo, Cardinal Bandinello Sauli, His Secretary, and Two Geographers, 1516, oil on panel, 121.8 x 150.4 cm / 47 15/16 x 59 3/16" (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)*

Figure **5.3.6.9.133***: Raphael, Portrait of Pope Julius II, 1511, oil on panel, 108.7 x 81 cm (The National Gallery, London)*

Although the composition of Raphael's painting has been considered revolutionary, it actually has several precedents, such as Sebastiano del Piombo's 1516 Cardinal Bandinello Sauli, His Secretary, and Two Geographers. But because this painting is so different from other portraits by Raphael, such as his Portrait of Julius II, and because infrared x-rays of the work show that Raphael originally conceived the composition to show only Leo, like Julius, in front of a green background, many people have wondered what to make of this very odd portrait.

Significantly, the painting was sent to Florence from Rome. This has led many people to believe that the portrait was made for the wedding of his nephew, which Leo knew he could not attend. That way, the three Medici relatives could still be "present" at the event. However, the men are shown in their winter clothes, indicating that Raphael painted it a long time before the wedding; it is unlikely that Leo knew he would not be able to attend that far in advance. More importantly, Luigi de' Rossi was at the wedding, further evidence that although the painting was set up at the event, it was probably originally intended for other purposes.

Some art historians have interpreted it as a dynastic portrait. Leo was the first Medici to attain the papacy, one of the most important offices in the entire world, and he quickly elevated his family members to high ranks within the Vatican. The Bible shown with Leo has been identified as a copy of the Hamilton Bible owned by Leo's father, Lorenzo the Magnificent, indicating his Medici lineage. The bell on the table is a symbol of power, as it was used to summon servants, and is covered with Medici insignia, such as feathers, diamonds, and the Medici palle, or "balls," which were the most recognizable symbols of the family. Some have suggested that the globe on Leo's chair is also meant to recall the palle.

Figure **5.3.6.9.134***: Detail, Raphael, Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de'Medici and Luigi de'Rossi, c. 1518 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)*

Most convincing is the suggestion that the portrait was made for religious purposes. In 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses condemning the abuses of the church, among which were the selling of indulgences, which Leo had used to fund the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica. Although Luther would not split from the church for many years, the threat to the church was palpable. Art historians have noted that Leo is turning the page of his Bible from the last passage of the Book of Luke to the first of the Book of John. In Luke, Jesus is exhorting the Apostles to pray often in the Temple. This has been interpreted as a direct rebuke to Luther's opposition to the building of Saint Peter's Basilica. The Book of John begins, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him." Since Leo's birth name was Giovanni (the Italian version of "John"), this scriptural passage can be understood to assert that it is only through the obedience to the pope, Giovanni de' Medici, and official Vatican doctrines that one can achieve salvation. This is in direct contrast to Luther's belief that salvation could be achieved through faith in God alone.

Figure **5.3.6.9.135***: Detail, Raphael, Portrait of Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de'Medici and Luigi de'Rossi, c. 1518 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)*

Overall, Raphael's portrait has been lauded as a masterful piece of realism. The unflattering likeness of Leo, along with intricate details, such as the reflection of the interior of the room on the metal surface of the ball on the chair, show a complete mastery of the art of painting and a conception of naturalism entirely in keeping with the goals of the High Renaissance. It is ironic that modern viewers can look at Raphael's painting, meant to glorify the Medici and the authority of the pope, as a portrait of two of the worst popes in history: Leo X saw the Christian church cleaved in half, and Clement VII hid in safety as the city of Rome was destroyed around him.

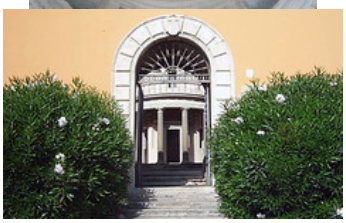
Donato Bramante

Donato Bramante, Tempietto, Rome

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.3.6.9.28*: Donato Bramante, Tempietto, c. 1502, San Pietro in Montorio, Rome*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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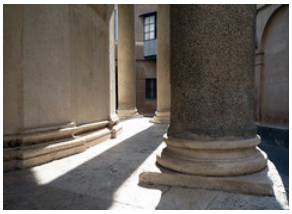

Figure 5.3.6.9.136*:* *More Smarthistory images…*

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Video **5.3.6.9.29***: Saint Peter's Basilica (Basilica Sancti Petri), begun 1506, completed 1626, Vatican City*

Architects and designers included: Donato Bramante (whose design won Julius II's competition); Antonio da Sangallo, a student of Bramante (the Pauline Chapel); Fra Giocondo (strengthening of the foundation); Raphael and Fra Giocondo (whose redesigned building plan was not executed); Michelangelo (design of the dome, crossing, and exterior excluding the nave and facade); Giacomo della Porta (design of the cupola); Carlo Maderno (extension of Michelangelo's plan, adding a nave and grand facade); Gian Lorenzo Bernini (addition of the piazza, the Cathedra Petri, and the Baldacchino).

Figure **5.3.6.9.137***: H.W. Brewer, Drawing of Old St. Peter's Basilica as it appeared between 1475 and 1483, 1891*

Pope Julius II commissioned Bramante to build a new basilica—this involved demolishing the Old St Peter's Basilica that had been erected by Constantine in the fourth century. This ancient church was in disrepair. But tearing it down was a bold maneuver that gives us a sense of the enormous ambition of Pope Julius II, both for the papacy as well as for himself.

Figure **5.3.6.9.138***: Numerous architects (see below), Saint Peter's Basilica, begun 1506 completed 1626 (Vatican City) (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)*

Burial site of St. Peter

The site is a very holy one—it is (according to the Church) the site of the burial of St. Peter. Bramante did the first plan for the new church. He proposed an enormous centrally planned church in the shape of a Greek cross enclosed within a square with an enormous dome over the center, and smaller domes and half-domes radiating out. When Bramante died, Raphael took over as chief architect for St. Peter's, and when Raphael died, Michelangelo took over. Both Michelangelo and Raphael made substantial changes to Bramante's original plan. Nevertheless, the experience of being inside St. Peter's is awe-inspiring.

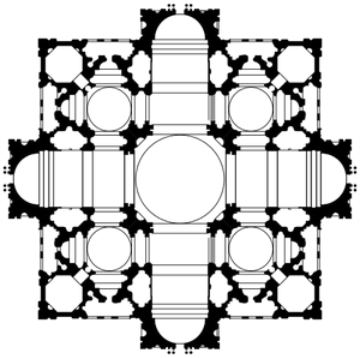


Figure **5.3.6.9.139***: Bramante, plan for St. Peter's Basilica, 1506*

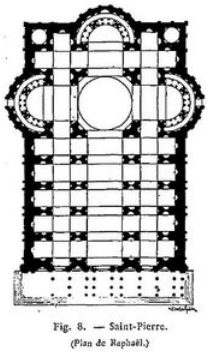


Figure 5.3.6.9.140*: Raphael, plan for St. Peter's Basilica, 1513*

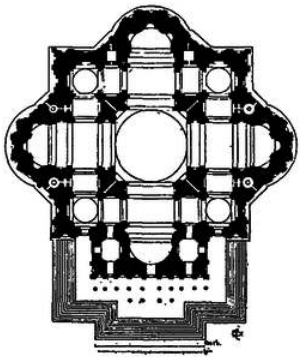


Figure 5.3.6.9.141*: Michelangelo, plan for St. Peter's Basilica, 1547*

Basilica and central plan

The two basic types of Church are the basilica and the central plan. The basilica, with its long axis that focuses attention on the altar, has been the most popular type of church plan because of its practicality.

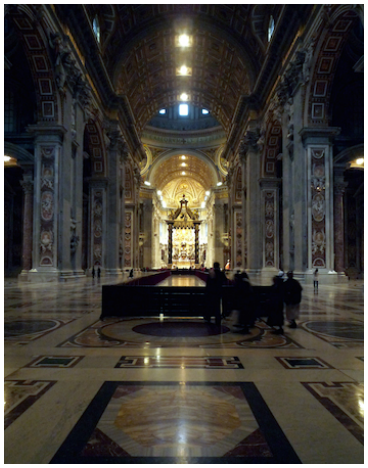


Figure 5.3.6.9.142*: Numerous architects (see below), Nave, Saint Peter's Basilica, begun 1506 completed 1626 (Vatican City)*

The other popular type of church plan is a central plan that is usually based either on the shape of a circle, or on a Greek cross (a cross with equal arms). These are called central plans because the measurements are all equidistant from a center. This type of Church, influenced by Classical architecture (think of the Pantheon), was very popular among

High Renaissance architects. Besides the influence of ancient Roman architecture, the circle had spiritual associations. The circle, which has no beginning and no end, symbolized the perfection and eternal nature of God. For some thinkers in antiquity and the Renaissance the universe itself was constructed in the form of concentric circles with the sun, moon and stars moving in circular orbits around the earth.

Bramante's original design was for a central plan, however—as built—the church combines elements of a central plan with the longer nave of a basilica.

Architectural contributors to St. Peter's Basilica include:

> ***Donato Bramante, whose design won Julius II's competition***
> ***Antonio da Sangallo, a student of Bramante, who designed the Pauline Chapel***
> ***Fra Giocondo, who strengthened the foundation***
> ***Raphael worked with Fra Giocondo, whose redesigned building plan was not executed***
> ***Michelangelo designed the dome, crossing, and exterior excluding the nave and facade***
> ***Giacomo della Porta designed the cupola***
> ***Carlo Maderno, extended Michelangelo's plan adding a nave and grand facade***
> ***Gian Lorenzo Bernini added the piazza, the Cathedra Petri, and the Baldacchino***

Additional resources:

Designing St. Peter's from Columbia University

Vatican tour of the necropolis believed to contain the tomb of Saint Peter – *Please note: to reach the interactive tour of the necropolis, proceed beyond the introduction and the brief lecture offered by Cardinal Comastri*

St. Peter's Basilica at Sacred Destinations

Google Satellite image

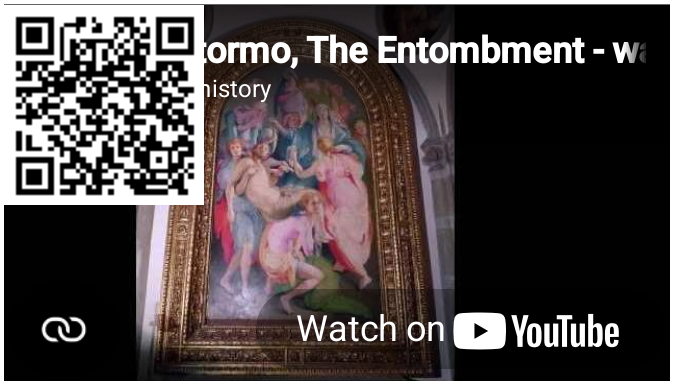
Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure **5.3.6.9.143***: More Smarthistory images…*

Mannerism

Jacopo Pontormo, *Entombment* (or *Deposition from the Cross*)

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS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Watch on YouTube

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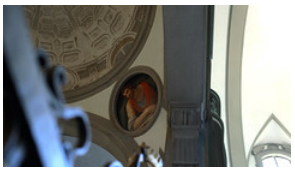
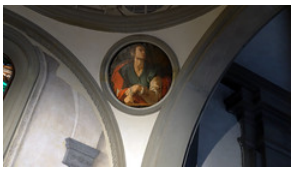
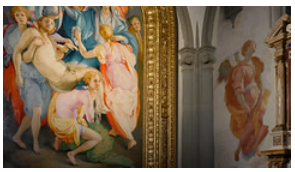






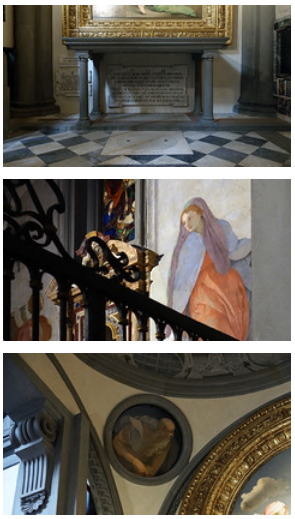


Figure 5.3.6.9.144*: More Smarthistory images…*

Parmigianino

Parmigianino, *Madonna of the Long Neck*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.3.6.9.31*: Parmigianino, Madonna of the Long Neck, 1530-33, 28 3/4 x 23 1/2" (73 x 60) (Uffizi, Florence)*

Parmigianino, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

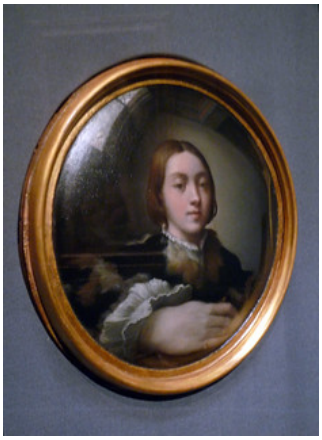


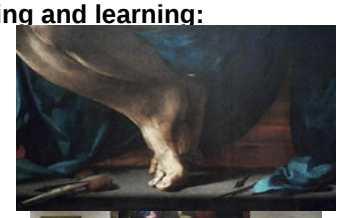
Figure **5.3.6.9.145***: More Smarthistory images…*

Rosso Fiorentino, *The Dead Christ with Angels*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video **5.3.6.9.33***: Rosso Fiorentino, The Dead Christ with Angels, c. 1524-7, oil on panel, 133.4 x 104.1 cm (52-1/2 x 41 inches) (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



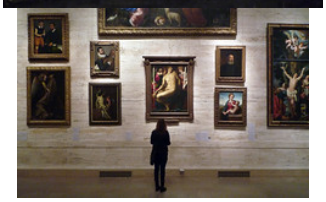
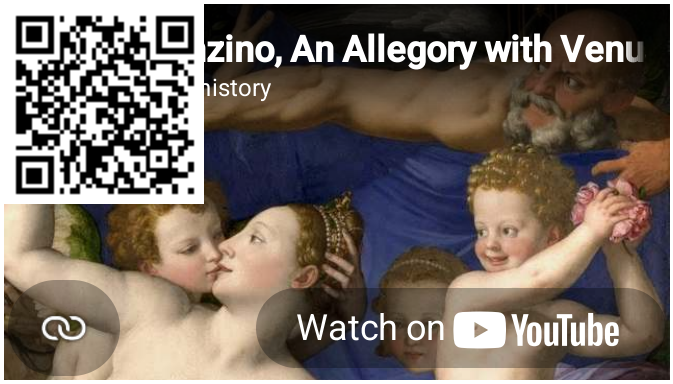


Figure 5.3.6.9.146*: More Smarthistory images…*

Bronzino

Bronzino, *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video 5.3.6.9.34*: Agnolo di Cosimo Bronzino, An Allegory with Venus and Cupid, c. 1545, oil on panel, 146.1 x 116.2cm (National Gallery, London)*

This passage by Vasari is most likely related to this canvas:

> ***And he painted a picture of singular beauty that was sent to King Francis in France, wherein was a nude Venus, with a Cupid who was kissing her, and Pleasure***

> ***on one side with Play and other Loves, and on the other side Fraud and Jealousy and other passions of love.***

Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the most Eminent Painters Sculptors and Architects, volume 10, trans: Gaston du C. De Vere (London: Medici Society, 1912-15)

Bronzino, *Portrait of Eleonora di Toledo with her son Giovanni*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video 5.3.6.9.35*: Bronzino, Portrait of Eleonora di Toledo with her son Giovanni, 1544-1545, oil on panel, 115 x 96 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)*

Bronzino and the Mannerist Portrait

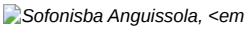
by DR. DAVID DROGIN and DR. BETH HARRIS

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Video 5.3.6.9.147*: More Smarthistory images…*

Sofonisba Anguissola

by DR. LAUREN KILROY-EWBANK



Self-Portrait, c. 1556, varnished watercolor on parchment, 8.3 x 6.4 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). The medallion is inscribed in Latin: “The maiden Sofonisba Anguissola, depicted by her own hand, from a mirror, at Cremona.”" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-13092" height="667" sizes="(max-width: 503px) 100vw, 503px" src="

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Figure 5.3.6.9.148*: Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, c. 1556, varnished watercolor on parchment, 8.3 x 6.4 cm (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). The medallion is inscribed in Latin: “The maiden Sofonisba Anguissola, depicted by her own hand, from a mirror, at Cremona.”*

The 16th-century painter and author of Lives of the Artists, Giorgio Vasari, praised the work of Sofonisba Anguissola. Vasari wrote that Sofonisba,

> ***has laboured at the difficulties of design with greater study and better grace than any other woman of our time, and she has not only succeeded in drawing, colouring, and copying from nature, and in making excellent copies of works by other hands, but has also executed by herself alone some very choice and beautiful works of painting.”[1]***

Sofonisba Anguissola was an artist who came from a noble family in Cremona (northern Italy). She is well known for the paintings she made of herself and her family (she was the oldest of seven children). In 1559, she became a lady-in-waiting to the Queen of Spain, Elisabeth de Valois, and continued to produce works while at the court of King Philip II until 1573. Interestingly, Sofonisba painted at least twelve self-portraits at a time when this was not a particularly common subject for artists (in the next century, Rembrandt would be the first artist to make the self-portrait a major part of his oeuvre).

Figure **5.3.6.9.149***: Sir Anthony Van Dyck, Sofonisba Anguissola, 1624, oil on panel, 41.6 x 33.7 cm (Knole, Kent)*

Women in Renaissance Italy were generally barred from becoming apprentices to master artists (the standard way in which artists were trained during the Renaissance). Female artists tended to come from families where a father (or sometimes a brother) was an artist. In this way they could receive training and bypass the apprenticeship system. Sofonisba is atypical in this respect—her father was not an artist. Instead, she studied with other artists—with Bernardino Campi as well as Bernardino Gatti (Il Sojaro)—who exposed Anguissola to the fundamentals of painting, such as the importance of disegno (drawing or design).

We have a letter from the artist's father dated 7 May 1557 thanking the great Italian Renaissance painter, sculptor, and architect, Michelangelo, for the "honourable and thoughtful affection that you have shown to Sofonisba, my daughter, to whom you introduced to practice the most honourable art of painting."[2] While it is clear from this note that Sofonisba met the famous Renaissance artist, it has also been suggested that she may have even studied with Michelangelo. Certainly the renown she gained in Italy helped to secure her position as lady-in-waiting at the Spanish court.

Sofonisba's international renown grew throughout her lifetime. Later in her life, the great Baroque painter Anthony van Dyck visited her in Sicily and painted her portrait (above). Centuries later, with the feminist movement of the 1970s, Sofonisba's fame and significance have been once again "rediscovered" and she is now counted among ranks of other important painters of the early modern period, a revival of interest similar to that accorded to artists such as Artemisia Genitleschi.

Self-Portrait, 1556

Figure 5.3.6.9.150*: Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait at the Easel, 1556, oil on canvas, 66 x 57 cm (Łańcut Castle)*

In the 1556 self-portrait (above), Sofonisba shows herself in the act of painting, applying mixed pigments to a canvas that depicts the Virgin and Christ Child tenderly kissing. She gazes outward—as if we have just interrupted her in mid-stroke. Her expression is calm and reserved. A maulstick (a common device used to support the artist's hand) held in her left hand supports her right hand as she touches the brush to the canvas.

Figure **5.3.6.9.151***: Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, 1554, oil on poplar wood, 19.5 x 12.5 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)*

The artist wears a simple black dress—possibly to connote modesty and virtue. Her simple fashion embodies the woman of court, as outlined by Baldassare Castiglione in his Book of the Courtier (1528):

> ***I wish this [Court] Lady to have knowledge of letters, music, painting, and to know how to dance and make merry; accompanying the other precepts that have been taught the Courtier with discreet modesty and with the giving of a good impression of herself. And thus, in her talk, her laughter, her play, her jesting, in short, in everything, she will be very graceful, and will entertain appropriately, and with witticisms and pleasantries befitting her, everyone who shall come before her. [3]***

Some of Sofonisba's other self-portraits, such as one where she holds a small book (left), even include inscriptions like "Sophonisba Angusola virgo seipsam fecit 1554" (The virgin Sofonisba Anguissola made this herself in 1554) to identify herself as a chaste, virtuous woman.

The inclusion of a painting of the Virgin Mary and Christ child in the 1556 self-portrait further reflects on Sofonisba's virginity. While Mary feeding, kissing, or embracing Christ as a child were common subjects of this era, it is likely that Sofonisba incorporated this intimate scene between mother and son here to fashion herself as a virtuous woman—one who identifies with the ultimate virtuous woman, the Virgin Mary.

Figure 5.3.6.9.152*: Catharina van Hemessen, Self-Portrait at the Easel, 1548, oil on panel, 32.2 x 25.2 cm (Kumstmuseum, Basel)*

Displaying herself in the act of painting associated her with an established tradition of artists depicting themselves—not all of them men. While contemporaneous artists like Titian and Albrecht Dürer painted self-portraits, those that included a painter's tools of the trade—a canvas, palette, and maulstick—were less common. Examples do exist, however, from the sixteenth century, and artists showing themselves with their tools became increasingly popular over time. Like Sofonisba, Caterina van Hemessen fashions herself at a canvas, holding a maulstick while she paints. A ***self-portrait by the Dutch artist Joachim Wtewael*** *also shows the artist holding his painter's tools, most likely applying paint to a canvas outside the picture plane.*

Other Portraits

Beyond painting self-portraits, Sofonisba also produced miniatures and group portraits. Many of those completed before her departure for Spain, such as The Chess Game, exhibit members of her family. Sofonisba would not have had access to male models, and drew inspiration from those people she encountered in her daily life like her family.

Figure 5.3.6.9.153*: Sofonisba Anguissola, The Chess Game (Portrait of the artist's sisters playing chess), 1555, oil on canvas, 72 x 97 cm (National Museum in Poznań)*

This painting shows the artist's three sisters (Lucia, Europa, and Minerva) playing chess —an intellectual pursuit—with their governess looking over them. Sofonisba shows an intimate setting with her sisters. The sister to the left, thought to be Lucia, looks out at the viewer after winning the game. Sofonisba displays her virtuosity as a painter here by positioning her figures in a variety of poses. Their gazes also lead our eye around the canvas and eventually back to the artist herself, who occupies the position outside of the canvas. Sofonisba also demonstrates her skill by painting a variety of textures in her sisters' clothes and the imported carpet under the chessboard.

Figure 5.3.6.9.154*: Sofonisba Anguissola, Self-Portrait, c. 1610 (Gottfried Keller Collection, Bern)*

Sofonisba continued painting portraits throughout her life, including self-portraits of her in advanced age. One, dated to 1610 (left, when the artist was 78) shows the artist seated on a chair, holding a book and a piece of paper. Her dress is not altogether different from the outfit in her 1556 painting: black, modest, and reserved. Upon her death at age 93 (in 1625), her second husband, Orazio Lomellino, had her tomb inscribed, "To Sofonisba, my wife, who is recorded among the illustrious women of the world, outstanding in portraying the images of man."

Notes

[1] Giorgio Vasari, The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1912–4), pp. 127–8.

[2] Buonarroti Archives, Florence. From Ilya Sandrea Perlingieri, Sofonisba Anguissola, The First Great Woman Artist of the Renaissance (New York: NY, Rizzoli, 1992), p. 67.

[3] "Third Book of the Courtier," from Baldassare Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 180.

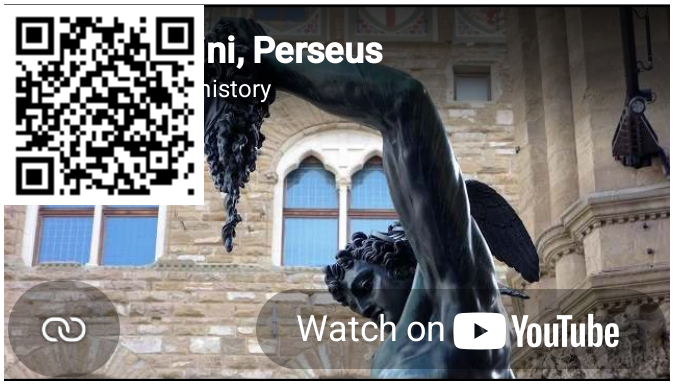
Additional resources:

Sofonisba Anguissola by Alan Farber

Woman's Capacity to Create: The Unusual Case of Sofonisba Anguissola

Benvenuto Cellini, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. DAVID DROGIN



Video 5.3.6.9.37*: Benvenuto Cellini, Perseus with the Head of Medusa, c. 1554, bronze (Loggia dei Lanzi, Piazza della Signoria, Florence)*

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

Figure 5.3.6.9.155*: More Smarthistory images…*

Giambologna, *Abduction of a Sabine Woman*

by DR. SHANNON PRITCHARD

Figure **5.3.6.9.156***: Giambologna, Abduction of a Sabine Woman, 1581-83, marble, 410 cm high (Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence)*

One of the most recognized works by one of the least well-known artists

Giambologna's Abduction of a Sabine Woman is one of the most recognized works of sixteenth-century Italian art by one of the least well-known artists of the period. And while Giambologna may not be a household name like Michelangelo, his influence on late sixteenth- and early seventeenth- century European art was extensive and long lasting. The Abduction of a Sabine Woman is located in a spot few tourists miss—the Loggia dei Lanzi, just outside of the Palazzo Vecchio, in Florence.

Figure 5.3.6.9.157*: Giambologna, Mercury, c. 1586, bronze, 72cm high (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden)*

The story of how Giambologna came to create the Sabine sculpture is almost as interesting as the historical tale it represents. Giambologna (born Jean du Boulogne in Douai in Flanders), arrived in Florence sometime around 1552, and within a few short years was court sculptor to the Medici and running his own large and productive workshop. Giambologna was highly regarded for his small to mid-size works in marble and bronze which were collected by connoisseurs and sent as Medicean diplomatic gifts all across Europe.

Giambologna and Mannerism

Giambologna's works exemplified the characteristics of the Mannerist period, a time in which artists exploited the idea of beauty for beauty's sake in works that showcased their artistic talent with figures composed of sinuous lines, graceful curves, exaggerated poses, and a hyper-elegance and preciousness that delighted viewers. His figure of Mercury (above) is an example of what made his work so popular.

While Giambologna's fame and workshop flourished, there was one area in which he was not active, and that was in monumental sculpture. And in Florence, just taking the short walk from the Cathedral to the Palazzo Vecchio becomes a demonstration of the long history of life-size or larger public sculpture that dominated the cityscape. There were marble sculptures by such famous fifteenth-century sculptors as ***Donatello****,* ***Nanni di Banco****, and* ***Lorenzo Ghiberti*** *on the façade of the cathedral, in the niches on the campanile (the belltower), and encircling the exterior of* ***Orsanmichele****, and in the Piazza della Signoria—the center of Florentine life and politics—were the truly monumental*

*sculptures, including Michelangelo's **David** (1504), Baccio Bandinelli's **Hercules and Cacus** (1525-32), and Bartolommeo Ammanati's **Neptune Fountain** (1565).*

Figure 5.3.6.9.158*: Giambologna, Abduction of a Sabine Woman, 1581-83, marble, 410 cm high (Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence)*

A sculptor of monumental works too

Thus, Giambologna also wanted to prove himself as a sculptor of monumental works. And as the story is told, Giambologna undertook the Sabine project without any specific subject in mind with the only goal being to produce a complex multi-figural group.[1] When the work was nearly complete and placed in the Loggia dei Lanzi in August of 1582, it was referred to simply as "group of three statues," as no one knew what the subject was.[2] However, just a short time later, the work was interpreted as representing an ancient Roman event, and Giambologna produced a bronze narrative relief to be inserted into the base of the sculpture to help clarify the content of the three figures above.[3]

Figure **5.3.6.9.159***: Giambologna, Abduction of a Sabine Woman, 1581-83, marble, 410 cm high (Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence)*

The subject

The subject is a dramatic one from ancient Roman history. According to the accounts of both Livy and Plutarch, after the city of Rome was founded in 750 B.C.E., the male population of the city was in need of women to ensure both the success of the city and the propagation of Roman lineage. After failed negotiations with the neighboring town of Sabine for their women, the Roman men devised a scheme to abduct the Sabine women (which they did during a summer festival).

What we see in Giambologna's sculpture is the moment when a Roman successfully captures a Sabine woman as he marches over a Sabine male who crouches down in defeat. (As a note, the sculpture is also referred to as the Rape of a Sabine Woman, which can lead to confusion over the subject. In Latin, the word rapito means "abduction" (and in Italian, the verb rapire means "to abduct," thus the title Abduction of a Sabine Woman is technically more correct than the Rape of a Sabine Woman, which has explicit connotations of sexual violence. And indeed, in Livy's account of the episode, he claims there was not sexual violence, rather a variety of enticements by the Roman for how the women would be treated as their wives.)[4])

A triumph

The Sabine was indeed a triumph for Giambologna. According to one account, when the work was officially unveiled to the Florentine public, not one person could find fault with

it.[5] And if we compare the Sabine with another multi-figure group, such as Bandinelli's two-figure ***Hercules and Cacus****, it is immediately apparent how Giambologna dramatically altered the conception of a sculpture involving more than two figures. Bandinelli's Hercules stands over a defeated Cacus, both men trapped in stony stillness. Neither figure expresses emotion or seems to possess the potential for movement.*

Figure **5.3.6.9.160***: Giambologna, Abduction of a Sabine Woman, 1581-83, marble, 410 cm high (Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence)*

In contrast, Giambologna built his figures up from the bottom, beginning with the cowering Sabine male (above), whose body twists and contorts in reaction to what is happening above him. The man's straining muscles are evident as he raising his left hand up in despair as the triumphant Roman literally straddles his body, as he strides forward, carrying the Sabine woman away. If you look closely where he grabs her left hip, his fingers actually press into her flesh (below), thus amplifying the effect of these figures being more than marble statues. The woman herself, arms outstretched, twists back and over the Roman's shoulder as she is hoisted into the air. These figures convey movement, aggression, fear, and struggle, as they move upward in a flame-like or twisting pattern known as figura serpentinata (serpentine figure), popular with Mannerist artists of the period. And to enhance the sense of frenetic energy, Giambologna did not provide a single or primary viewpoint for the work so the viewer must engage with the sculpture in 360 degrees in order to see the entirety of the drama unfold.

Figure 5.3.6.9.161*: Giambologna, Abduction of a Sabine Woman, 1581-83, marble, 410 cm high (Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence)*

The Abduction of the Sabine Woman proved to be Giambologna's entrée into the Florentine world of monumental sculpture. From this point forward he went on to create numerous other works that occupy principal sites in Florence, including the Cosimo I de'Medici Equestrian Monument in the Piazza della Signoria, St. Luke for a niche at Orsanmichele, and a brilliant Hercules Battling the Centaur, which is situated just a few feet from his Sabine group in the Loggia dei Lanzi.

Figure 5.3.6.9.162*: Giambologna, Abduction of a Sabine Woman, 1581-83, marble, 410 cm high (Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence)*

Influence

The influence of what Giambologna accomplished with the Sabine group was seen through the next several decades. For example, in Gianlorenzo Bernini's ***Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius*** *we can most certainly begin to see the influence of Giambologna on the man who would become the face of Baroque sculpture in Italy. In Bernini's Pluto and Proserpina, the forward stride of Pluto, the elevation of Proserpina above his head, his fingers pressing into the flesh of her thigh, and her outstretch arms and anguished face all point directly to the influence of Giambologna's Sabine group. And it wasn't only*

other sculptors who were responsive to Giambologna's sculpture. Painters such as Nicolas Poussin and Pietro da Cortona both executed paintings of the same subject and clearly borrowed from both Giambologna's Sabine figural group, but also his bronze narrative relief as well.

[1] Charles Avery, Giambologna. The Complete Sculpture (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1993), 111.

[2] Ibid, 112.

[3] Ibid.

*[4] **Titus Livius, The History of Rome (Ab Urbe Condia Libri, c. 27-25 B.C.E.), Book 1, chapters 9-10.***

[5] Avery, pp. 112-114.

Additional resources:

Bronze sculpture in the Renaissance on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Mannerism: Bronzino and his Contemporaries on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Giambologna at the Google Cultural Institute

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Figure 5.3.6.9.163*: More Smarthistory images…*

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5.3.6.10: Slab Man

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5.3.6.11: Father

by DR. MADELINE ESCHENBURG

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Figure **5.3.6.11.1**: Luo Zhongli, *Father*, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China)

When Luo Zhongli's oil painting, *Father*, was first exhibited at the Second National Youth Exhibition in 1981 in China's capital, Beijing, visitors were astonished by what they saw. It was not necessarily the subject matter, composition, or colors that drew them in. Rather, it was the raw truthfulness with which Luo depicted his subject. Originally titled "My Father," this painting is based on sketches he made of a man whose job was to guard a local manure pit in the remote Daba Mountains. This artwork elicited strong reactions among the Chinese public and remains one of the most revered paintings from this period in China's history.

A rural inhabitant

The subject matter of a rural inhabitant would not have been new or shocking to a Chinese audience at the time. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the "peasant" was upheld as one of the three "heroes" of Communist leader Mao Zedong's socialist revolution, alongside soldiers and workers. In fact, it was only through the support of China's vast peasantry that the communists were able to consolidate power in 1949 after many years of civil war.

Lasting from 1966–1976, China's Cultural Revolution was Communist leader Mao's last push to maintain his power over the nation. Marked by anti-intellectualism, cultural and economic isolation, and totalitarianism, it was one of the most oppressive and violent periods in China's modern history. In 1968, in an attempt to diffuse the violent uprisings of the student militants known as the Red Guard, Mao declared that the youth of China's cities should move to the countryside to be re-educated by the rural peasantry. Luo Zhongli, after graduating from the Sichuan Academy preparatory middle school in Chongqing in 1968, was one of millions impacted by this policy. He lived for ten years in the rural Daba mountain region on the border between Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces, where he encountered the man who would later become the subject of his most celebrated painting.

Figure **5.3.6.11.2**: Examples of propaganda posters of the 20th century featuring idealized peasants: left: Zhang Yuqing, "The Future of the Rural Village," October 1958, 53.5 x 76.5 cm (private collection); right: Revolutionary Group of the Second Liaison office of the Fifth Battalion of the Shanghai Cultural System, "Prepare for Struggle, Prepare for Famine, For the People," 1970, 53 x 77 cm (IISH collection)

Depicted as happy, strong, and healthy, the idealized image of the peasant came to represent the success of the Communist Party in the propaganda paintings, posters, and murals of the time. Most of the prints and posters that were widely disseminated were originally based on oil paintings. In Zhang Yuqing's poster "The Future of the Rural Village," for example, the well-dressed and hearty peasants work happily together in a village containing state of the art agricultural machinery, a streetlight, and a telephone, all symbols of a wealthy, technologically advanced country. Unfortunately, the artworks did not reflect the harsh reality that many rural inhabitants endured as a result of poverty, famine, and poor infrastructural planning under Mao's leadership. The Cultural Revolution came to an end after Mao's death in 1976. After the implementation of new policies which opened China's economy to the rest of the world in 1978, Chinese people began to reflect upon the reality and legacy of Mao's revolution. Luo's large-scale oil painting *Father* (made in 1980) is representative of this larger trend of historical reassessment.

Still, as Luo once said "The image of this old peasant actually is the summary of the images of so many peasants in my mind." In fact, he never knew the man's name that he painted. There is an interesting tension in the specificity of the photorealist style and the fact that this figure still stands as a symbol for "peasants" in general. It demonstrates how at this time in Chinese history, the "peasant" still held a strong symbolic meaning that was directly related to China's process of modernization. The jury of the exhibition actually changed the name from "My Father" to "Father," which pushes the symbolic function of the painting even further.

Figure **5.3.6.11.3**: Luo Zhongli, Father, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China)

Figure **5.3.6.11.4**: Chuck Close, *Mark*, 1978–79, acrylic on gessoed canvas, 274.3 x 213.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

After 1978, as part of China's opening its doors to the rest of the world, Chinese publishing houses released translations of foreign literature and philosophy, and art journals began to print reproductions of foreign artworks, initiating a period often referred to as "Cultural Fever." Although Luo had never seen an actual reproduction of any of Chuck Close's work, he was inspired to take a similar approach when painting *Father* as the American artist after reading a vivid description of his photorealistic style by a Japanese author. [1]

For a Chinese viewer in 1980 accustomed to the propaganda of the Mao period, the lack of triumphant heroism in *Father* — that had previously been required in representing a peasant — would have been shocking. Instead, he focuses in the most direct way on the painful labor this man, and those he represents, has endured. The composition is almost entirely filled by the man's face, which is friendly, but at the same time confronts the viewer directly, returning our gaze, implicating us. Both face and hands are covered in fine and deep wrinkles, a single tooth pokes jaggedly out of the right side of his mouth, his fingernails are filthy, sweat drips from his forehead, brow, and nose, one finger is wrapped with a thin bandage, and the bowl of tea he holds is cracked. He stares straight out at the viewer, squinting in the harsh sunlight that is reflected on his forehead, nose, and lower lip.

Unlike the Revolutionary Realism of Maoist propaganda, a style which Luo mastered during the Cultural Revolution, this painting highlights the harmful effects of years of working in the hot sun, revealing a truth that had been unspoken during the previous decades. This, combined with the man's guileless gaze, inspires compassion and reverence for the millions like him that gave so much of their lives and health attempting to fulfill Mao's utopian dreams.

Figure **5.3.6.11.5**: Wang Guodong, *Portrait of Mao* above Tiananmen Gate, 1964, 20 x 15 feet (6.1 x 4.6 m)(photo: Nicor, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Monumental in size

Figure 5.3.6.11.6: Viewers in front of Luo Zhongli, *Father*, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China)

One reason this painting was so moving to viewers was its monumental size, measuring about 215 x 150 cm. Such a large scale had previously been reserved for portraits of powerful politicians, and before that, emperors, ancestors, and literati officials. In fact, *Father*'s large scale and composition is reminiscent of the most famous Chinese portrait at the time: the portrait of Mao Zedong by artist Wang Guodong, a version of which continues to hang above Tiananmen Gate watching over Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Some were so moved by the painting that they even suggested that *Father* should replace Mao's portrait.

Although the audience was urban-based, many had had experiences similar to Luo's in which they were sent to the countryside to learn from the rural peasantry. Others still traveled from the countryside and smaller towns and villages to see the exhibition. This connection with the rural countryside held by so many undoubtedly enhanced the feeling of identification with the portrait. Luo has said:

> ***Our country is a country of peasants. But those who speak for them are few and those who speak the truth are even fewer. They are our father and mother who provide us with clothing and food, they are the veritable masters of our country. [2]***

Figure 5.3.6.11.7: Left: location of the pen in Luo Zhongli, *Father*, oil on canvas, 1980, 215 x 150 cm (National Art Museum, Beijing, China); right: a draft by Luo Zhongli for *Father* in which the pen is not there

What's with that pen?

One detail that strikes many viewers as out of place within the composition is the ball point pen resting behind the man's left ear. It is important to note that the exhibition where this work was first displayed was officially sponsored by the central government and therefore had a political agenda to promote the positive elements of Chinese society. It was within this context that the chairman of the Sichuan Artists Association, Li Shaoyan, insisted that Luo add the ballpoint pen to the composition for fear it would not be accepted into the exhibition without it. The pen was pivotal in expressing that this peasant was modern and educated, representative of China's hopeful future, rather than being seen as a direct attack on the policies of the Chinese Communist Party, who continued to hold power after Mao's death and remain in power today.

Ongoing relevance

Throughout the 1990s, Chinese economic and political policies began to favor urban development over rural stability. In the last 30 years, millions of rural inhabitants, unable to make a living in their hometowns and villages, have been forced to work as migrant laborers in Chinese cities along the East coast, often lacking economic and legal stability. While in recent years the government has attempted to improve China's rural economy, the rural inhabitant remains one of the most marginalized within the current system of global capitalism. It is perhaps for this reason that Luo Zhongli's painting continues to resonate both in China and around the world, decades after it was first painted.

Notes:

[1] 2011 interview with Luo by Eugene Wang as cited in Wang's article "Film and Contemporary Chinese Art: Mediums and Remediation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*, ed. Carlos Rojas and Eileen Chow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 571.

[2] As quoted in Xia Hang, "Sichuan qingnian huajia tan chuangzuo," *Meishu* (1981.1): 44. Translation from Martina Köppel-Yang, *Semiotic Warfare: A Semiotic Analysis, The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979–1989* (Hong Kong: timezone 8), p. 96.

Additional resources

Luo Zhongli's *Father* is currently held in the collection of the **National Art Museum of China**

Martina Köppel Yang, "Luo Zhongli: Father" in *Semiotic Warfare: A Semiotic Analysis, the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2003), pp. 92–103.

Minglu Gao, "Academicism and the Amateur Avant-Garde in the Post-Cultural Revolution Period (1979–1984)," in *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 65–97.

Michael Sullivan, "The 1980s: New Directions," in *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 225–239.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.4: Analyzing Art

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

5.4.1: Formal and Historical Analysis

- 5.4.1.1: Madonna of the Meadow
- 5.4.1.2: Third of May, 1808
- 5.4.1.3: Plowing of the Nivernais
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5.4.2: Iconography and Iconographic Analysis

- 5.4.2.1: Look Mickey
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5.4.3: Questions_to_Consider

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.4.1: Formal and Historical Analysis

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

5.4.1.1: Madonna of the Meadow

5.4.1.2: Third of May, 1808

5.4.1.3: Plowing of the Nivernais

5.4.1.4: Wivenhoe Park

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5.4.1.1: Madonna of the Meadow

How to do Visual (formal) Analysis in Art History

Madonna of the Meadow

Italy: 16th century

One of the most tumultuous periods in Western culture—primarily due to the Protestant Reformation.

1500 - 1600 (The High Renaissance and Mannerism)

A beginner's guide

Toward the High Renaissance, an introduction

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video **5.4.1.1.1:** Andrea del Verrocchio (with Leonardo), *Baptism of Christ*, 1470-75, oil and tempera on panel, 70 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches or 180 x 152 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence); Andrea del Verrocchio (with Leonardo), *Baptism of Christ*, 1470-75, oil and tempera on panel, 70 3/4 x 59 3/4 inches or 180 x 152 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

Figure **5.4.1.1.6**: Raphael, *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1505–06, oil on panel, 885 x 1130 cm (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)

Parmigianino takes us to an otherworldly realm in which the laws of proportion, naturalism, and mathematics do not apply. It is a far cry from the rational classicism of earlier works like **Raphael's** *Madonna of the Meadow* (from what is traditionally called the "**high renaissance**"). Here, the Virgin and Christ child, accompanied by the infant John the Baptist, are rendered in classical proportions and occupy an idealized though believable space. The Virgin's body is demurely clothed and the children's plump forms suggest playful vitality. Nowhere do we find the sensuous ambiguity or the irrational geometry of Parmigianino's creation. Something new is happening in the mannerist image.

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- **7.6: Italy in the 16th century- High Renaissance and Mannerism (I)** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.4.1.2: Third of May, 1808

Figure 5.4.1.2.1. Francisco Goya, *The Third of May 1808 in Madrid: the executions on Principe Pio hill, 1808*, 1814–15, oil on canvas, 8′ 9″ × 13′ 4″ (Museo del Prado, Madrid)

Napoleon Puts His Brother on the Throne of Spain

In 1807, Napoleon, bent on conquering the world, brought Spain's king, Charles IV, into alliance with him in order to conquer Portugal. Napoleon's troops poured into Spain, supposedly just passing through. But Napoleon's real intentions soon became clear: the alliance was a trick. The French were taking over. Joseph Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother, was the new king of Spain.

Figure 5.4.1.2.2. Francisco Goya, *The Second of May, 1808*, 1814, oil on canvas, 104.7 × 135.8 in. (Museo del Prado)

The 2nd and 3rd of May, 1808

On May 2, 1808, hundreds of Spaniards rebelled. On May 3, these Spanish freedom fighters were rounded up and massacred by the French. Their blood literally ran through the streets of Madrid. Even though Goya had shown French sympathies in the past, the slaughter of his countrymen and the horrors of war made a profound impression on the artist. He commemorated both days of this gruesome uprising in paintings. Although Goya's *Second of May* (figure 2) is a tour de force of twisting bodies and charging horses reminiscent of Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, his *Third of May* is acclaimed as one of the great paintings of all time, and has even been called the world's first modern painting.

Figure **5.4.1.2.3**. Francisco Goya, *Third of May, 1808*, 1814–15 (detail)

Death Awaits

We see row of hooded French soldiers aiming their guns at a Spanish man, who stretches out his arms in submission both to the men and to his fate. A country hill behind him takes the place of an executioner's wall. A pile of dead bodies lies at his feet, streaming blood. To his other side, a line of Spanish rebels stretches endlessly in to the landscape. They cover their eyes to avoid watching the death that they know awaits them. The city and civilization is far behind them. Even a monk, bowed in prayer, will soon be among the dead.

Figure **5.4.1.2.4**. Figure **5.4.1.2.3**. Francisco Goya, *Third of May, 1808*, 1814–15 (detail)

Transforming Christian Iconography

Goya's painting has been lauded for its brilliant transformation of Christian iconography and its poignant portrayal of man's inhumanity to man. The central figure of the painting, who is clearly a poor laborer, takes the place of the Crucified Christ; he is sacrificing himself for the good of his nation. The lantern that sits between him and the firing squad is the only source of light in the painting, and dazzlingly illuminates his body, bathing him in what can be perceived as spiritual light. His expressive face, which shows an emotion of anguish that is more sad than terrified, echoes Christ's prayer on the cross, "Forgive them Father, they know not what they do." Close inspection of the victim's right hand also shows stigmata, referencing the marks made on Christ's body during the Crucifixion.

Figure 5.4.1.2.5. Francisco Goya, *Third of May, 1808*, 1814–15 (detail)

The man's pose not only equates him with Christ, but also acts as an assertion of his humanity. The French soldiers, by contrast, become mechanical or insect-like. They merge into one faceless, many-legged creature incapable of feeling human emotion. Nothing is going to stop them from murdering this man. The deep recession into space seems to imply that this type of brutality will never end, that it is a part of human nature itself.

Not Heroism in Battle

This depiction of warfare was a drastic departure from convention. In the eighteenth century art, battle and death was a bloodless affair with little emotional impact. Even the great French Romanticists were more concerned with producing a beautiful canvas in the tradition of history paintings, showing the hero in the heroic act, than with creating emotional impact. Goya's painting, by contrast, presents us with an anti-hero, imbued with true pathos that had not been seen since, perhaps, the ancient Roman sculpture of *The Dying Gaul*. Goya's central figure is not perishing heroically in battle, but rather being killed on the side of the road like an animal. Both the landscape and the dress of the men are nondescript, making the painting timeless. This is certainly why the work remains emotionally charged today.

Legacy

Future artists also admired *The Third of May, 1808*, and both Manet and Picasso used it for inspiration in their own portrayals of political murders (Manet's Execution of Emperor Maximillian and Picasso's Massacre in Korea). Along with Picasso's *Guernica*, Goya's *Third of May* remains one of the most chilling images ever created of the atrocities of war, and it is difficult to imagine how much more powerful it must have been in the pre-photographic era, before people were bombarded with images of warfare in the media. A powerful anti-war statement, Goya is not only criticizing the nations that wage war on one another, but is also admonishing us, the viewers, for being complicit in acts of violence, which occur not between abstract entities like "countries," but between one human being standing a few feet away from another.

Contributors

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5.4.1.3: Plowing of the Nivernais

Detailed viewing of Plowing in the Nivernais can be found at Google Arts and Culture.

Rosa Bonheur, *Plowing in the Nivernais* (or *The First Dressing*)

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Bonheur, Plowing in the Nivernais

Rosa Bonheur, *Plowing in the Nivernais* (or *The First Dressing*), 1849, oil on canvas (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) via SmartHistory

Video transcript

[0:00] [music]

Dr. Beth Harris: [0:05] We're in the Musée d'Orsay, and we're looking at Rosa Bonheur's light-filled painting called "Plowing Nivernais."

Dr. Steven Zucker: [0:15] That refers to both the region and the kind of oxen that are the stars of this canvas.

Dr. Harris: [0:21] They are. The human figure that pushes them along is hardly important.

Dr. Zucker: [0:26] So, Rosa Bonheur did some extraordinary things. She was an incredibly precocious girl. I think it was at age 14 she was actually sketching in the Louvre and actually creating oil paintings. This was possible because her father was an artist and had really encouraged her. I think they were very liberal.

Dr. Harris: [0:41] Otherwise, she likely would not have had her enormous artistic talent encouraged. She might not have ended up a painter at all.

Dr. Zucker: [0:49] This was made in 1849, which is just one year after the revolution, and it's so interesting that an artist now is moving out into the countryside, away from all of the chaos of the city.

Dr. Harris: [1:00] Where the revolution happened.

Dr. Zucker: [1:01] We have this incredible image of these oxen turning the soil in the fall, to prepare it for the following year's season. Look at the soil itself, you almost get a sense that here is the strength of France.

Dr. Harris: [1:14] The earth looks incredibly rich and fertile, so there is a sense of a kind of nationalistic idea of the French countryside, and that France will survive, and indeed thrive.

Dr. Zucker: [1:27] Those oxen are so powerful and so beautiful, and in a sense, so eternal. This is a ritual that has gone on long before the politics of the modern world…

Dr. Harris: [1:36] And will continue long after. They come forward in a receding diagonal that moves into our space. We have this sense of depth and atmospheric perspective and sense of weather, and the warmth of the sunlight. It's really so particularly and carefully observed.

[1:54] It reminds me of so much that we see in the 1840s and then into the 1850s of this interest in rural life, of laborers, of the virtues of the countryside.

Dr. Zucker: [2:06] When I look at this, the oxen, those backs are so beautifully aligned, they almost create their own horizon, like the hills beside them. In a sense, they are the earth itself. There is the sense of permanence. Throughout the 1840s, especially with the kind of industrialization and the growth of the cities that's taking place, there is this real desire to return to this much more basic truth.

Dr. Harris: [2:31] Which resides in nature and the countryside…

Dr. Zucker: [2:34] And in labor itself, but a kind of simple, very direct kind of labor.

Dr. Harris: [2:39] So do you think Rosa Bonheur is giving us a conservative vision at this moment, just after a very radical revolution of 1848 that brings the working class into power in a significant way?

Dr. Zucker: [2:51] I think that there are conservative aspects here, but it's more complicated than that. She's breaking too many boundaries. She is emphasizing the importance of landscape, of animal painting itself, on a scale that is often reserved for history painting.

[3:06] She is a woman, not painting interiors, not painting as an amateur, but is painting at the level of the highest professional. These are radical ideas, and I don't think we can see this as conservative painting.

Dr. Harris: [3:16] And really remarkable accomplishments.

[3:18] [music]

Artwork details

Artwork details

Title	Plowing in the Nivernais (The First Dressing)
Artist(s)	Rosa Bonheur
Dates	1849
Places	Europe / Western Europe / France
Period, Culture, Style	Realism
Artwork Type	Painting
Material	Oil paint, Canvas
Technique	

Bibliography

10 Reasons to Love Rosa Bonheur on ArtUK

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5.4.1.4: Wivenhoe Park

Romanticism

In Romanticism, humanity confronted its fears and proclivity for violence.

c. 1800 - 1848

A beginner's guide

A beginner’s guide to Romanticism

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

19th century stylistic developments

Figure 5.4.1.4.1: Caspar David Friedrich, *The Abbey in the Oakwood*, 1809-10, oil on canvas, 110 x 171 cm (Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

As is fairly common with stylistic rubrics, the word “Romanticism” was not developed to describe the visual arts but was first used in relation to new literary and musical schools in the beginning of the 19th century. Art came under this heading only later. Think of the Romantic literature and musical compositions of the early 19th century: the poetry of Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and William Wordsworth and the scores of Beethoven, Richard Strauss, and Chopin—these Romantic poets and musicians associated with visual artists. A good example of this is the friendship between composer and pianist Frederic Chopin and painter Eugene Delacroix. Romantic artists were concerned with the spectrum and intensity of human emotion.

John Constable

Constable and the English landscape

Figure 5.4.1.4.139: John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1821, oil on canvas, 51-1/4 x 73″ (National Gallery of Art, London)

Reviving landscape painting

Studying the English painter John Constable is helpful in understanding the changing meaning of nature during the industrial revolution. He is, in fact, largely responsible for reviving the importance of landscape painting in the 19th century. A key event, when it is remembered that landscape would become the primary subject of the Impressionists later in the century.

Landscape had had a brief moment of glory amongst the Dutch masters of the 17th century. Ruisdael and others had devoted large canvases to the depiction of the low countries. But in the 18th century hierarchy of subject matter, landscape was nearly the lowest type of painting. Only the still-life was considered less important. This would change in the first decades of the 19th century when Constable began to depict his father's farm on oversized six-foot long canvases. These "six-footers" as they are called, challenged the status quo. Here landscape was presented on the scale of history painting.

Why would Constable take such a bold step, and perhaps more to the point, why were his canvases celebrated (and they were, by no less important a figure than Eugène Delacroix, when Constable's *The Hay Wain* was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1824)?

Painted in the studio, from sketches done out-of-doors

Figure 5.4.1.4.140: John Constable, *Sketch for "The Hay Wain,"* c. 1820, oil on canvas laid to paper, 4 7/8 × 7″ (Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection)

The Hay Wain does include an element of genre (the depiction of a common scene), that is the farm hand taking his horse and wagon (or wain) across the stream. But this action is minor and seems to offer the viewer the barest of pretenses for what is virtually a pure landscape. Unlike the later Impressionists, Constable's large polished canvases were painted in his studio.

He did, however, sketch outside, directly before his subject. This was necessary for Constable as he sought a high degree of accuracy in many specifics. For instance, the wagon and tack (harness, etc.) are all clearly and specifically depicted, The trees are

identifiable by species, and Constable was the first artist we know of who studied meteorology so that the clouds and the atmospheric conditions that he rendered were scientifically precise.

Constable was clearly the product of the Age of Enlightenment and its increasing confidence in science. But Constable was also deeply influenced by the social and economic impact of the industrial revolution.

From farming to factories, from country to city

Figure 5.4.1.4.141: Manchester, England, pictured in 1840 showing the mass of factory chimneys, engraving by Edward Goodall, original title *Manchester, from Kersal Moor after a painting of W. Wylde*

Prior to the 19th century, even the largest European cities counted their populations only in the hundreds of thousands. These were mere towns by today's standards. But this would change rapidly. The world's economies had always been based largely on agriculture. Farming was a labor intensive enterprise and the result was that the vast majority of the population lived in rural communities. The industrial revolution would reverse this ancient pattern of population distribution. Industrial efficiencies meant widespread unemployment in the country and the great migration to the cities began. The cities of London, Manchester, Paris, and New York doubled and doubled again in the 19th century. Imagine the stresses on a modern day New York if we had even a modest increase in population and the stresses of the 19th century become clear.

Industrialization remade virtually every aspect of society. Based on the political, technological and scientific advances of the Age of Enlightenment, blessed with a bountiful supply of the inexpensive albeit filthy fuel, coal, and advances in metallurgy and steam power, the northwestern nations of Europe invented the world that we now know in the West. Urban culture, expectations of leisure, and middle class affluence in general all resulted from these changes. But the transition was brutal for the poor. Housing was miserable, unventilated and often dangerously hot in the summer. Unclean water spread disease rapidly and there was minimal health care. Corruption was high, pay was low and hours inhumane.

Child labor, long hours & calls for revolution

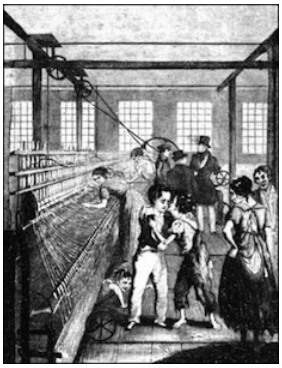


Figure 5.4.1.4.142: A cotton mill scene, from Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong: Factory Boy* (1840)

As is still true in too much of the world today, families would depend on the labor of even very young children. Working long days with only Sunday off was normal. The contemporaneous author Charles Dickens famously chronicled the depravity of laissez-faire

or pure market capitalism that characterized this era. There were no laws to soften this harsh new world. No unemployment insurance, no health insurance, no unions, no benefits, no vacations, no retirement, few safety regulations, no child labor nor bankruptcy protections. If you couldn't pay a debt because you had been sick and lost your job, you, and sometimes your family, were sent to prison. The wealth created by the rich (the return on risked capital) was largely theirs to keep as a permanent national income tax would not become law until 1874 (U.K.) and 1913 (U.S.).

Such terrible abuses were answered by both calls for reform and revolution. Radicals and bourgeois reformers slowly forced change. In 1848, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels co-authored a pamphlet that would become enormously influential, The Communist Manifesto while revolts raged in England, France and to a lesser extent in Germany. It is no surprise that France and England were particularly hard hit as they were amongst the most industrialized of nations.

Rural landscape as a lost Eden

What effect did these changes have on the ways in which the countryside was understood? Can these changes be linked to Constable's attention to the countryside? Some art historians have suggested that Constable was indeed responding to such shifts. As the cities and their problems grew, the urban elite, those that had grown rich from an industrial economy, began to look to the countryside not as a place so wretched with poverty that thousands were fleeing for an uncertain future in the city, but rather as an idealized vision.

The rural landscape became a lost Eden, a place of one's childhood, where the good air and water, the open spaces and hard and honest work of farm labor created a moral open space that contrasted sharply with the perceived evils of modern urban life. Constable's art then functions as an expression of the increasing importance of rural life, at least from the perspective of the wealthy urban elite for whom these canvases were intended. *The Hay Wain* is a celebration of a simpler time, a precious and moral place lost to the city dweller.

Additional resources:

John Constable on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Romanticism on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

(opens in new window)

(opens in new window)

Figure 5.4.1.4.143: More Smarthistory images…(opens in new window)

by DR. ABRAM FOX

When we think about a portrait, we think about a person. A man or woman, boy or girl. Maybe on occasion a favored pet, but always a living being. The portrait serves as a record of his or her appearance, characteristics, and interests.

Does a portrait have to be of a person, though? People often ascribe human characteristics to inanimate objects. A car that is having trouble starting might be "stubborn," or a powerful storm might be "angry." What if the attributes shown in a landscape were supposed to be ascribed to the person who owned that land?

Figure **5.4.1.4.144**: John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, oil on canvas, 56.1 x 101.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

With *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, landscape painter John Constable depicted an English country estate in order to make a broader statement about its owner and his relationship with nature in the early nineteenth century.

Wivenhoe Park

Major-General Francis Slater Reboe owned Wivenhoe Park, a quiet countryside estate located approximately seventy miles northeast of London. Rebow was friends with corn merchant Golding Constable, whose son John insisted on pursuing the career of an artist rather than take up his father's business. The wealthy officer was one of John Constable's first patrons.

The 200-acre estate at Wivenhoe was the pride of Major-General Rebow's father-in-law, Colonel Isaac Martin Rebow (interestingly, the Major-General took his wife's last name after marriage), who purchased the land in the 1730s and commissioned the construction of Wivenhoe House in 1759, and then massive alterations in the 1770s to the surrounding parkland, designed by the landscape architect Richard Woods.

Figure 5.4.1.4.145: Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with Saint John on Patmos*, 1640, oil on canvas, 100.3 x 136.4 cm (The Art Institute of Chicago)

Wivenhoe Park's grounds were redesigned along the lines of the picturesque, an aesthetic concept which combined elements of the philosophy of the awe-inspiring Sublime and the serene Beautiful—categories of landscape painting in the eighteenth century. An example of the picturesque is Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with St. John* (above), which combines rocky hills and architectural ruins with lush greenery and a peaceful summer's day.

Figure 5.4.1.4.146: Arch and bridge (detail), John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, oil on canvas, 56.1 x 101.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

In order to evoke a sense of the picturesque the architect Woods introduced an arch and bridge specifically designed to look old, multiple curving roads lined with trees, and two new lakes for fishing and boating. Rebow's estate was a prime example of the picturesque in England, and a source of pride for the entire family.

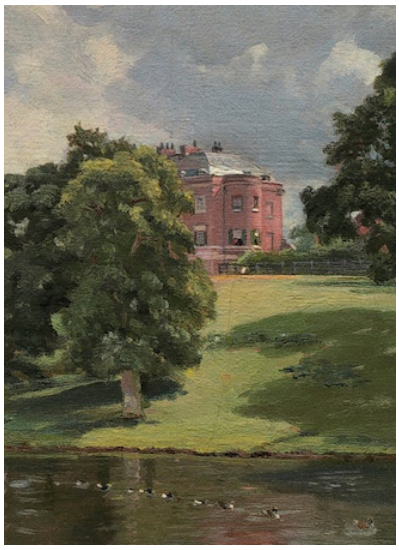


Figure 5.4.1.4.147: Country home (detail), John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, oil on canvas, 56.1 x 101.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

The gorgeous estate of Wivenhoe Park is evident in Constable's painting. Filled with rolling hills populated by people and livestock, lit by soft sunlight streaming through low-hanging clouds, and highlighted by a large lake in the foreground and a country home peeking from behind a stand of trees in the background, the landscape of Wivenhoe Park entices viewers with a vision of rural beauty, simplicity, and harmony.

Constable's connection to nature

Today John Constable is regarded as one of the two great British landscape artists of the nineteenth century, alongside his contemporary J.M.W. Turner. During his lifetime, however, Constable was afforded little respect. He almost exclusively painted landscapes—avoiding the far more popular genres of history painting and portraiture. Most of his artistic output is comprised of images of the rural countryside of England's Suffolk and Essex counties, where Wivenhoe Park was located. Whereas most artists would sketch scenes in nature before returning to the studio to paint, beginning in 1814 Constable began to bring his canvases outside and paint directly from nature, adding a sense of veracity and immediacy to his paintings and inspiring future artists like those that would form the Barbizon School (French artists who painted landscapes in a forest near Paris, beginning in the 1830s) as well as the later Impressionists (beginning in the 1860s).

Figure 5.4.1.4.148: John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, oil on canvas, 56.1 x 101.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

Constable was deeply invested in the physical experience of nature. His paintings possess a strong sense of the particular, and demonstrate a keen artist's eye turned to the environment. The artist famously studied weather reports and spent countless hours sketching clouds, which he rendered with precise meteorological detail in *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*. Similarly, the play of light and shadow across the right foreground, and the glimmers of light reflected off the pond in the middle of the composition, enhance the sense of a real, observed landscape. Constable believed that an artist could encourage positive and negative emotions in the viewer through the depiction of nature—particularly through the play of light and dark on the landscape and skyscape.

Figure 5.4.1.4.149: Light and shadow on the water, John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, oil on canvas, 56.1 x 101.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

The present past

The emotions Constable intended to stir up in his viewers were, much like in his later *View on the Stour near Dedham* (below), those of a nostalgia for the past, and a desire to recapture the English connection to nature that was disappearing during the early decades of the Industrial Revolution (among other things, the shift from producing many objects by hand to mass-produced, factory-made objects using machinery and steam power).

Figure 5.4.1.4.150: John Constable, *View on the Stour near Dedham*, 1822, oil on canvas, 51 x 74 inches (The Huntington Library)

Wivenhoe Park, Essex depicts an idyllic England that still physically existed in some locations, but was barely holding on, ideologically speaking. Much like Turner's ***The Fighting Temeraire*(opens in new window)**, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex* celebrates its subject while mourning the end of the era in which it was created. In this sense, the painting functions as a portrait: of eighteenth-century England; of the English countryside; and of the estate's owner, Major-General Rebow, and the values he attempted to uphold. Considering the fact that much of the picturesque estate of Wivenhoe Park was designed by an architect, the foregrounded presence of the manmade lake also speaks to Rebow's dominion over the lands he owned.

Figure **5.4.1.4.151**: Mary Rebow (detail), John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, oil on canvas, 56.1 x 101.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

There is one member of the Rebow family included in the composition: Mary Rebow, the 11-year-old daughter of Major-General Rebow, who can be seen on the left side of the canvas driving the donkey cart. Her red scarf, one of the girl's favorite accessories, is a brief flash of color in a composition otherwise dominated by greens, blues, and browns. Constable, then in his 40th year, seems to have doted on the little girl, perhaps hoping to have a child like her one day with the woman he was then courting, longtime friend Maria Bicknell. Constable's biographer wrote that Constable's "fondness for children exceeded, indeed, that of any man I ever knew."[1] In a letter to Maria dated August 21, 1816, Constable describes his visit to Wivenhoe Park and notes that Major-General Rebow had in fact commissioned two paintings, one of the estate and one of a small building on the estate grounds, both of which were to include references to Mary Rebow: "…the heroine of all these scenes."[2] The commissions were essentially early marriage gifts to Constable, as the Rebows were well aware that he was saving money to pay for his wedding to Maria, whose grandfather had threatened to disinherit her if she insisted on marrying the financially unstable artist. The two were married on October 2, 1816, less than a month after Constable completed Wivenhoe Park, Essex.

With impending fatherhood on his mind, Constable was aware of the stakes for Major-General Rebow and his daughter. Rebow wanted to secure his legacy and ensure future security for his daughter, yet in this transitional period of history he had no idea what young Mary Rebow's future would look like, only that her life could not resemble his. Asking Constable to include her in his painting was one way for the Major-General to ensure that Mary was always present in the bucolic landscape she grew up in, regardless of what might come of that landscape in the future. Furthermore, with the inclusion of such small details like the young girl's scarf, the canvas rewards those viewers who actually knew the family and the estate, and could recognize those references, creating a deeper meaning for the Rebow family and their intimates.

Figure 5.4.1.4.152: Seam where the artist added additional canvas, visible in white shirt (detail), John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, oil on canvas, 56.1 x 101.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

Wivenhoe Park, Essex is a record of a particular location at a particular moment in time, but also a nostalgic image of the English past, a past that never quite existed. Humans tend to remember the past as far more positive or negative than it may have actually been and *Wivenhoe Park, Essex* is no exception. The artist rearranged the landscape to create a more harmonious image. For example, the lake and house would not have been visible in the same view in real life. Additionally, at some point during his painting process Constable extended the canvas on both sides to include additional details, such as a hunting lodge on the far right. The seams created where the new pieces of canvas were stitched onto the existing fabric are visible running through the figure of the young boy wearing a white shirt in the boat on the right side of the painting, and on the left through the neck of the black cow in the left foreground.

Prelude to six-footers

Less than two years after completing *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, Constable embarked on the process of painting a series of monumental landscape paintings of the Stour River Valley, known as his "six-footers," a name which referred to the width of the canvases. At 40 years of age when he married Maria Bicknell in 1816, Constable was still seeking the honor of election to the Royal Academy—the surest indicator of professional success for an artist working in England. *Wivenhoe Park, Essex* serves as a precursor to those massive canvases, allowing the artist to practice organizing a series of complex landscape details, vignettes of daily life, and a visceral depiction of elements, like sun and wind, into one coherent composition.

The "six-footers" vaulted Constable to greater popular acclaim, and eventually he was elected to the Royal Academy in 1829. *Wivenhoe Park, Essex* remained in possesion of the Rebow family until 1906, and Wivenhoe Park itself until 1902. Perhaps ironicly, considering Major-General Rebow's apprehension of the forthcoming industrial age and the nostalgia radiating from Constable's canvas, Wivenhoe Park is now owned by the University of Essex, and the stately Wivenhoe House featured in the center of the painting is now a four-star luxury hotel, used to train university students studying for a career in hospitality.

1. Charles Robert Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, esq., RA* (Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845), p. 77.

2. Charles Robert Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, esq., RA* (Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845), p. 73.

Additional resources:

Constable's *Wivenhoe Park, Essex* at the National Gallery of Art(opens in new window)

View this work up close on the Google Art Project

Video from The National Gallery of Art about Constable's *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*(opens in new window)

John Constable on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

John Constable, *The Hay Wain*

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Video **5.4.1.4.12**: John Constable, *The Hay Wain (Landscape: Noon)*, 1821, oil on canvas, 130.2 x 185.4 cm (The National Gallery, London). Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

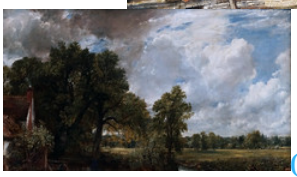
Additional resources:

This painting at The National Gallery(opens in new window)

John Constable at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History(opens in new window)

Graham Reynolds, *Constable's England* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning: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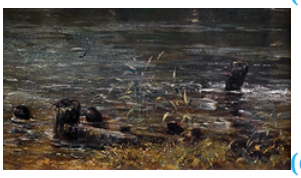
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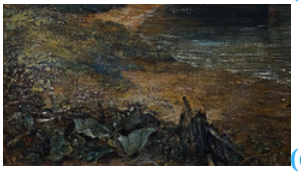
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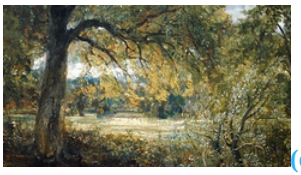
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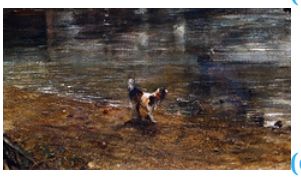
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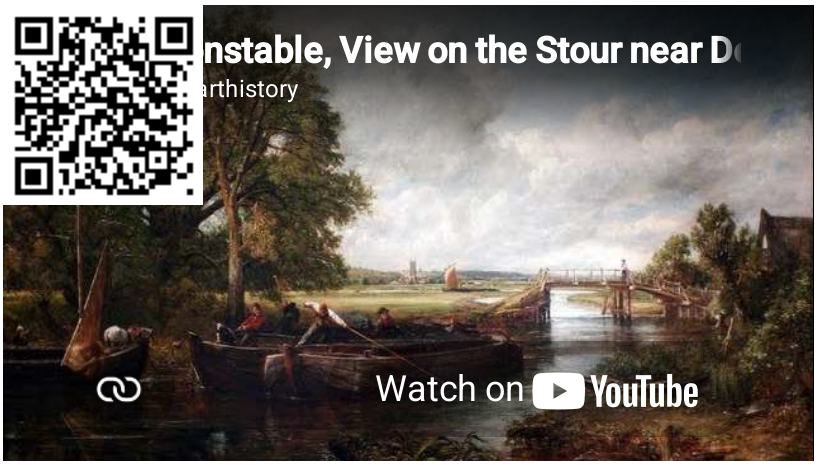
Figure 5.4.1.4.153: More Smarthistory images…(opens in new window)

John Constable, *View on the Stour near Dedham*

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video 5.4.1.4.13: John Constable, *View on the Stour near Dedham*, 1822, oil on canvas, 51 x 74″ (The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:

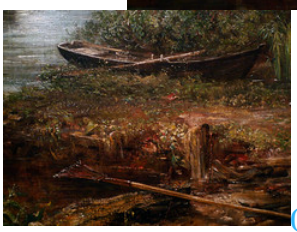


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Figure 5.4.1.4.154: More Smarthistory images…(opens in new window)

John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*

by BEN POLLITT

A Romantic scientist

For Constable “Truth (in all things)” was what mattered. Not for him Turner’s clash of elemental forces – land, sea, sun and sky – creating those highly dramatic, almost abstract fields of color. Constable instead pursued an art that was, in his own words, “legitimate, scientific, mechanical.”

That the same artist could declare, without fear of contradiction, that “painting is but another word for feeling” should not surprise us. For what we might see as a conflict between the scientific and the emotional was for the Romantics nothing of the kind. For them reason and emotion informed and enhanced each other, so that truth gained through the filter of personal experience was considered of a higher order than that got by slavish reference to universal laws.

Figure 5.4.1.4.155: John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, 1831, oil on canvas, 151.8 x 189.9 cm (National Gallery, London, on loan from a private collection)

The sky

In this sense, Constable was a great empiricist, scrupulous in his recordings of natural phenomena but artistically aware enough to appreciate that these recordings were deeply informed by his own emotional being. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his treatment of the sky. “The sky is the source of light in Nature,” he wrote, “and it governs everything.” Certainly it is one of the most intriguing features in *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*. Before getting on to that, though, the first question to ask is why Salisbury?

Constable and Salisbury

“I should paint my own places best,” Constable once said, referring to the Suffolk landscape he grew up in and which he painted with an almost religious devotion. Yet in the course of his life, Salisbury too became one his “own places”.

Figure **5.4.1.4.156**: John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop’s Garden*, 1826, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 112.4 cm (Frick Collection, New York)

He first visited this small city in the west of England in 1811 on the invitation of the Bishop, one of his first and most important patrons, for whom he painted *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop’s Gardens*, a version of which can be found in New York’s Frick Collection. Over the years he made many more trips producing over 300 paintings and watercolors of the area.

It was in Salisbury, too, that the painter formed his closest friendship with the Bishop’s nephew John Fisher: “we loved each other,” Constable wrote towards the end of his life, “and confided in each other entirely.”

“Church under a cloud”

It was to Fisher that he turned after the great shock of losing his wife in the autumn of 1828, making the trip west in the spring of 1829. It was Fisher, too, who suggested the title for his next painting: “Church under a cloud,” a title which, though in the end was rejected, is still helpful in understanding Constable’s motivations.

Figure 5.4.1.4.157: William Heath, *Protestant Descendency – a Pull at the Church*, 1829, hand-colored etching on paper, 26.1 x 36.9 cm (The British Museum, London)

A caricature by William Heath from 1829 hints at what Fisher was getting at. In it we find the Prime Minister, Lord Wellington, and others pulling down the steeple of a church (here representing the Anglican Church, or the Church of England), while a Catholic monk holds a lighted candle in one hand and trails gunpowder from his other, with the intent of blowing the rest of it up.

The image refers to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, which allowed Catholics to sit in Parliament; a just and reasonable decision one might think, yet as the caricature shows not everyone agreed, including Fisher and Constable, who saw it as an assault on the fabric of the British establishment, the latter describing it as the 'greatest mischief' of Wellington's government. Perhaps this is why Constable painted the sky as he did, bearing ominously down on that masterpiece of English religious architecture., the very embodiment of the Church of England.

So what are we to make of it? – that Constable was a religiously intolerant, political reactionary, doggedly opposed to reform and the granting of rights to what had for centuries been an oppressed minority? Most probably that is true. But then having abandoned Fisher's suggested title in favour of the less politically charged *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, it seems equally likely that Constable was keen to avoid such a narrow reading of his work.

Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows

Turning back to the painting itself, the scene depicts Salisbury Cathedral across the River Avon. The vantage point was well-considered. For many months Constable produced pencil and oil sketches from different viewpoints in preparation for the final design. In the end, we are presented with a sort of a composite construction based on these, with topographical features artfully maneuvered into position, such as Leadenhall where the rainbow ends and the church of St Thomas to the left, neither of which are visible from this viewpoint.

Yet for all its contrivances, the painting still retains an extraordinary sense of vitality, more so than the Frick painting, for example, with its meticulously observed topography and those picturesque recessional markers such as the framing foliage or the three neatly placed cows. In *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadow* the viewer is instead guided sinuously backwards and forwards in the picture space through a stimulating interplay of line and curve.

Up close Constable's painterly method is even more impressive. Using palette knife and brush, the effects are truly breathtaking. Indeed, few artists have shown such an extraordinary facility for capturing the textures of the natural world.

"I mean more than the rainbow itself"

It is the rainbow though that captivates, the first in any of Constable's paintings. It came as an afterthought, as x-rays of the painting show. But what an afterthought! In one masterstroke Constable negotiates a multitude of difficulties. Compositionally it unites the various elements of the painting, softening the horizon and creating rich echoes with the curve of the river and the undulating line of the large tree to the right that is carried through the cart and horses.

Figure 5.4.1.4.158: John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, 1831, oil on canvas, 151.8 x 189.9 cm (National Gallery, London, on loan from a private collection)

But that is not all. In 1834 he gave a series of lectures on the history of landscape painting. Alluding to rainbows painted by the Baroque artist Peter Paul Rubens, he stated: “I mean more than the rainbow itself, I mean dewy light and freshness, the departing shower, with the exhilaration of the returning sun.” The rainbow then generates feelings of “freshness” and “exhilaration”, as well as capturing that ceaseless mutability of the forces of nature, that like the tide, depart and return.

That the base of the rainbow is situated at Leadenhall where John Fisher lived and Constable had stayed, reveals also something of its personal significance, made all the more poignant in that a year after the painting was exhibited Fisher died at the age of forty-four.

Lastly, one senses that with the rainbow bounding the cathedral as boldly as it does, Constable invites us to consider traditional Christian iconography. The storm has passed and whatever it may stand for: the Papist (Catholic) threat to the Church of England, the artist’s own religious uncertainty or, as many have argued, his deep sense of desolation at the loss of his wife, the rainbow that marks its passing carries with it more benign associations: God’s pardon and reconciliation with man (as in after the Flood) or the promise of peace after the storm of life (as in the Resurrection).

Conclusion

If for Turner the sun was god, for Constable it was the sky; a sort of sustained autobiography written in the clouds. They are also beautifully observed. As for the rainbow, containing the colors of the spectrum in a single stroke, what better summation of Constable’s powers as an artist, the ultimate painterly gesture, conveying the fullest expression of the compass of his art?

Additional resources:

A Preliminary Sketch of *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* in the Tate Britain, London(opens in new window)

Short biography of the artist from The National Gallery, London (opens in new window)

Frick Collection video: *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop’s Garden*(opens in new window)

John Constable on The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History (opens in new window)

New York Times Topics on John Constable(opens in new window)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.4.2: Iconography and Iconographic Analysis

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

5.4.2.1: Look Mickey

5.4.2.2: Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash)

5.4.2.3: Crucifixion

5.4.2.4: Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of Saint Climacus

5.4.2.5: Buddha from Gandhara

5.4.2.6: Shah Jahan Holding an Emerald

5.4.2.7: Caligula

5.4.2.8: Nitza Tufino

5.4.2.9: Page from the Codex Zouche-Nuttall

5.4.2.10: The Dinner Party

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5.4.2.1: Look Mickey

More information on Look Mickey can be found at the National Gallery of Art.

Roy Lichtenstein, *Look Mickey*

by Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Lichtenstein asks: can a painting of Mickey and Donald Duck be fine art?

Pop Art

Roy Lichtenstein, Look Mickey

Roy Lichtenstein, *Look Mickey*, 1961, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 175.3 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein; Disney characters © Disney Productions. Speakers: Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

Video transcript

0:00:06.5 Dr. Steven Zucker: We're in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., looking at a very famous canvas. This is Roy Lichtenstein's Look Mickey from 1961. Go back 65 years, when this painting was first made, and the kind of boundary-breaking that the artist is engaged in here was not only radical, it was an affront to everything that art had meant. He's bringing humor, he's bringing the tawdry, and challenging us. Is this serious? Can this be fine art?

0:00:35.6 Dr. Beth Harris: It's just this very funny moment, and you look at the speech bubble coming from Donald Duck. These are all characters we recognize. Mickey has his hand over his mouth because he's just dying to laugh because he's noticed that Donald Duck has actually hooked his own jacket instead of a fish, and the whole thing is just ridiculous. And yet here we are within this very serious space of an art museum.

0:01:02.3 Dr. Steven Zucker: I think one of the key issues here is that popular culture, the stuff from newspapers, from advertising, the images that we confront every day, was not considered fine art. It was not considered a world that fine art could even consider. And what the artist has done here is he's put it front and center. The artist has transformed this image from the original. Ironically, the original is more naturalistic. This is more simplified. The colors are bolder. The colors are reduced. We have white, we have blue, we have red, we have yellow. These are the primary colors, and all of that screams a kind of popular culture, but here blown up large on a canvas, signaling that it's meant to be taken seriously, that there is some serious message here.

0:01:48.0 Dr. Beth Harris: There are those serious marks of an artist. I can see brush strokes. I can see where the paint thins out in some areas. Even the lettering looks like it was painted, and I'm noticing where the words "look" and "big" are emphasized. There's even pencil outlines for some of the forms. So there's this idea that he sketched this, that it was based on a drawing, that this is carefully planned.

0:02:14.2 Dr. Steven Zucker: So on the one hand, it is ridiculous. On the other, I think the artist is asking some very serious questions about what constitutes art and where do we locate its value. And I think that it's clear that we're not going to find value in the artist's brushwork, in the artist's technique. So where is the subject? Where are we supposed to find meaning? I think that the artist is asking us to think about the way that contemporary culture, popular culture, the visual stuff of our everyday lives had not been allowed into fine art.

0:02:45.8 Dr. Beth Harris: And yet we could think about moments when artists have drawn upon the everyday world. We can think about Picasso using newspaper print. Go back a little bit more to the art of Manet and the Impressionists, and they're embracing the boulevards of Paris, the cafes, modern life. It's not mythology or history. It's the stuff of everyday life in their paintings.

0:03:12.3 Dr. Steven Zucker: And the modern city was not considered beautiful in that moment, just like Mickey is not considered fine art and a thing of beauty in an aesthetic sense, in the way that we generally define beauty.

0:03:23.3 Dr. Beth Harris: Here we are in 1961. If we step back and think about the post-war period, we are actually looking at art that was removed from everyday life. So what's happened here?

0:03:35.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: So in the immediate post-war period, what we would consider the most advanced art, Abstract Expressionism, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, were grappling with profound issues of whether or not humanity could survive its own destructive impulses. The Second World War had just ended. We understood the full gravity of the Holocaust. We had unleashed nuclear weaponry. The world was seen as a very dangerous place, and artists sought a kind of profundity in their work, in their abstraction, that was meant to meet that moment. But by the time we get to 1961, Abstract Expressionism is the dominant style of art, and it was stale. Some artists, like Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, had begun to use irony in the mid-1950s, in some ways as a direct attack against Abstract Expressionism and its dominance and its sense of the profound, bringing in popular culture. But Lichtenstein is going even further. He's making irony central to his art. He's challenging us. Is this serious? Can this be fine art?

0:04:41.0 Dr. Beth Harris: It is true of Abstract Expressionism that there is a kind of idea of the artist taking their vision, their individuality, and putting that on the canvas. And so the art is very self-referential, and we have something very different here.

0:04:57.5 Dr. Steven Zucker: Look Mickey, is not referencing some deep interior psychoanalytic notions of the self, of what drives humanity on the individual level. This is slapstick humor. This is silly. If you look closely at the eyes of Donald Duck or at the face of Mickey, you'll see that these are not solidly painted. What the artist did was actually take a dog brush with little balls at the end and dip that in paint and then place that against the surface to begin to mimic what are known as Ben Day dots, that is, the sort of coarse printing that one would find in a comic book that you're not supposed to notice but create through a halftone, a sense of volume or color. And so the artist is creating a set of visual cues that is meant to replicate the mechanical processes that have taken over commercial art.

0:05:46.1 Dr. Beth Harris: So is Lichtenstein saying, this is who we are in 1961? We are superficial? We exist in a consumer culture of advertising and mass media and TV. And this is a truer reflection of Americans in 1961.

0:06:04.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: Yes, but that was also a slap in the face. The work was really provocative in 1961 because it's asking us to relocate our definition of art, to expand our definition of art, to widen the possible array of subject matter to include the stuff that we come into contact with every day that we had always dismissed as not worthy of art, but that is actually the day-to-day stuff of our visual culture.

0:06:29.1 Dr. Beth Harris: So one could say this is a continuation of a project started by Marcel Duchamp in the early decades of the 20th century, where something like a snow shovel mounted in a museum can be art challenging those categories of what is art and what is not and why a certain context allows us to see something as art. And it makes me think about the incredible persistence of that idea of high art and how important it is that even after Duchamp in the early decades of the 20th century, 50 years later, we're still challenging it.

0:07:04.5 Dr. Steven Zucker: Duchamp was known only by a very small audience in the 19-teens and 20s, and it was only in the mid-1950s and in the early 1960s that he becomes a much more broadly known figure and is in a sense resurrected. And his ideas are absolutely central to the kind of irreverence that we're seeing here, but also to the inclusion of non-fine art content within the realm of fine art. But it's one thing for Duchamp to bring a snow shovel, a ready-made object into a gallery. Lichtenstein is doing something that is in some ways even more of an affront because he's dealing here with the pictorial. Disney was creating images

that were immediately recognizable, that dealt with linear perspective, that dealt with chiaroscuro, simplified, yes, so that the image was clear and concise. And Lichtenstein is taking that abbreviated imagery and pushing it even further, making it more simple, reducing the colors, making everything as schematic as possible, and then putting that up as fine art. In a sense, a confrontation with Manet, with Velázquez, with Rembrandt, with the great masters of representation. We can think about a work by Rembrandt, and it is glorious. It can be absolutely breathtakingly beautiful, and it can bring us a sense of the depths of the human experience.

0:08:26.1 Dr. Steven Zucker: But in order to see that Rembrandt, we have to go to the museum, and most people don't. What most people do is they see a representation in a magazine or on a computer screen, and that is mediated through a different technology. And in Lichtenstein's era, that would have been the Ben Day dot, the printing technology of the newspaper. That's how people actually experience things mostly. That's the truth of our visual experience. And what Lichtenstein is doing is making that truth the subject of his art.

Artwork details

Artwork Details

Title	Look Mickey
Artist(s)	Roy Lichtenstein(opens in new window)
Dates	1961
Places	North America/ United States
Period, Culture, Style	Modernism / Pop Art
Artwork Type	Painting
Material	Oil paint, Canvas
Technique	

Bibliography

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Important fundamentals

Pop art, an introduction(opens in new window)

1945–80 in the United States, an introduction(opens in new window)

Read a *Reframing Art History* textbook chapter, Popular, transient, expendable: print culture and propaganda in the 20th century(opens in new window)

Cite this page

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5.4.2.2: Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash)

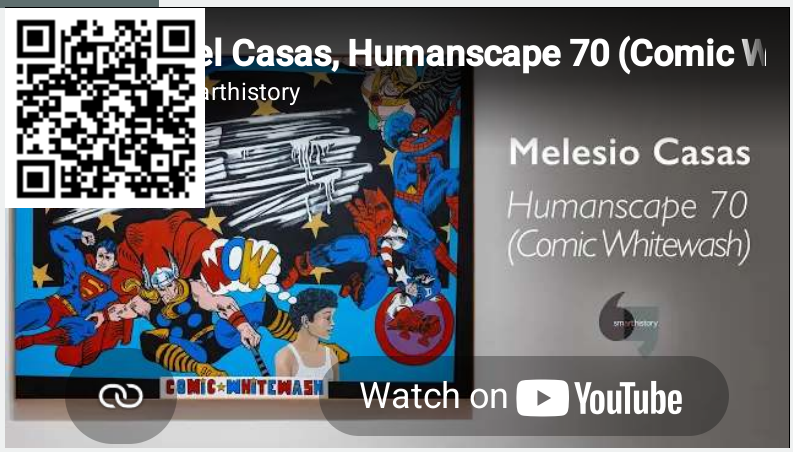
Find more information on Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash) at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.(opens in new window)

Mel Casas, *Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash)*

by Victor Gomez, Curatorial Associate, Contemporary Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

Through heroes like Captain America and Superman, Casas explores the relationship between media and identity.

Melesio Casas, Humanscape 70



Melesio Casas, *Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash)*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 72-3/4 x 97 x 2-1/4 inches (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville) © Mel Casas Family Trust. Speakers: Victor Gomez, Curatorial Assistant, Contemporary Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Steven Zucker

Video transcript

0:00:05.3 Dr. Steven Zucker: We're in the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art looking at a large canvas. This is by Mel Casas. It's called Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash). The first thing we recognize are figures from the Marvel and D.C. Comic superhero universes. The comic book figures are oriented every which way.

0:00:25.6 Victor Gomez: Hawkman flying through, Spider-Man clinging onto the right side of the canvas, and you have this tilted movie screen which makes the composition even more dynamic.

0:00:37.9 Dr. Zucker: Batman is coming at us foot first, Superman seems to be flying through space, Thor seems to almost be falling out of the canvas, but the boy seems stable.

0:00:49.1 Gomez: He is also not making eye contact with the viewer but rather looking off into the distance.

0:00:55.6 Dr. Zucker: The boy, however, is not completely disassociated from the world of the comic because we see a thought bubble coming from him with the word "wow".

0:01:06.6 Gomez: And this "wow" can be interpreted as amazement or this moment of awe.

0:01:11.3 Dr. Zucker: The boy seems to be in his own thoughts, perhaps his understanding, his appreciation, his sudden realization that the world of the comic book hero that exists above his head is not the world that he lives in.

0:01:25.7 Gomez: And I think when you look at these letters that are painted towards the bottom of the canvas, you realize that he has made a conscious decision to incorporate these white, male superheroes, putting them within the same picture plane of this boy who is not white, this boy who is not in any way depicted as heroic.

0:01:48.3 Dr. Zucker: And that distinction is made so clear by the fact that Captain America is most directly adjacent and seems to be looking directly at him, although he does not return Captain America's gaze.

0:02:00.3 Gomez: And it's almost as if Captain America is reaching for the boy, for his attention.

0:02:05.3 Dr. Zucker: In fact, with his right hand fingers spread, he almost seems desperate in the futility of his efforts. The term whitewash means to cover up, but the artist is incredibly clever and knows his art history, and is not only drawing on imagery of popular culture of comic book heroes but is also drawing on the visual culture of contemporary art. In the middle of the canvas is this enormous, stylized brush stroke, this whitewashing of the black field with the gold stars. And it's a direct art historical quote of the work of Roy Lichtenstein, the famous American pop artist. And so the criticism here exists on a number of levels. There is the criticism of comic book culture and the way it doesn't quite fit with a multi-racial American youth, but it also has to do with the way the artist, perhaps, himself feels a certain tension with mainstream American visual culture, that is, the kind of art that is seen in major museums.

0:03:06.8 Gomez: I think what Casas is driving at is the fact that media as a whole, whether that be through television, art, advertising, has the power to affect the way we think and the way we see ourselves. Here, Casas is really thinking about media, the impact of the things we consume.

0:03:28.9 Dr. Zucker: What I find so compelling about this painting is, on the one hand, its subject has serious social critique, but on the other hand, it's a pleasure to look at. The artist has engaged our eye in so many ways, drawing not only on the incredible dynamism of the art of the comic book but also the way that fields of color can enliven and disrupt our sense of stability.

0:03:52.5 Gomez: Another thing worth noting is the color palette. You see the way he is incorporating a lot of these blues and reds and whites and how familiar and patriotic a lot of these colors can feel. We even talked about the gold stars and the way it might allude to this flag-like imagery. We might read this white brushstroke as being very painterly but also flowing and dripping into the larger expanse of the canvas. Looking at the boy, directly above him the drips almost seem to be pouring down as if they were gonna land on him. And I think it's interesting to think about this idea of whitewash and how prevalent or how much it can pour into other aspects of life outside of media or what we tend to know or consume in art.

Artwork details

Artwork Details

Title	Humanscape 70 (Comic Whitewash)
Artist(s)	Mel Casas
Dates	1973
Places	North America / United States
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms / Civil Rights era / Chicano Art Movement
Artwork Type	Painting
Material	Acrylic paint, Canvas
Technique	

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Important fundamentals

Contemporary Art, an introduction(opens in new window)

Identity Politics: From the Margins to the Mainstream(opens in new window)

Pop Art(opens in new window)

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5.4.2.3: Crucifixion

Crucifixion

Figure 5.4.2.3.1: Crucifixion. Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel, 1305–06, Padua, Italy (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Arena Chapel (and Giotto’s frescos) in virtual reality

by Matthew Brennan

Take a tour of the Arena Chapel in virtual reality—it’s almost as good as being there in person!

The Arena Chapel

The Arena Chapel (and Giotto's frescos) in virtual reality,

Set the resolution to 8k! (use the gear icon) and take a guided virtual tour of the Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, in Padova, Italy — thanks to Matthew Brennan. 360-degree video allows you to look around the interior freely, and provides a new perspective on this masterpiece of Italian Renaissance art.

Set the resolution to 8k! (use the gear icon) and take a guided virtual tour of the Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, in Padova, Italy — thanks to Matthew Brennan. 360-degree video allows you to look around the interior freely, and provides a new perspective on this masterpiece of Italian Renaissance art.

See the frescoes up-close and at eye-level, as if you were floating right in front of them, thanks to a new approach developed by Mirror Stage Studio.

Narration by SmartHistory: www.smarthistory.org

Video production by Mirror Stage: www.mirrorstage.io

This video makes use of imagery available in the public domain, as well as provided by SmartHistory.

Video transcript

0] [music]

Dr. Steven Zucker: [0:05] We're in the Arena Chapel, a small private chapel that was connected to a palace that was owned by the Scrovegni family.

Dr. Beth Harris: [0:13] It was the Scrovegni family who commissioned Giotto to decorate this chapel with frescoes.

Dr. Zucker: [0:20] It's called the Arena Chapel because it's next to an ancient Roman arena.

Dr. Harris: [0:23] When you're inside it, as we are now, I have to say that it's taller than I expected, and that feeling of being enclosed by images that happens when you're in a space entirely covered with fresco.

Dr. Zucker: [0:38] There are lots of narrative scenes, but even in between those scenes are trompe l'oeil faux marble panels. We get the sense that there is inlaid stone, but in fact, this is all painting.

Dr. Harris: [0:52] That extends even onto the ceiling, where we have a star-studded blue sky with images of Christ and Mary and other saints and figures.

Dr. Zucker: [1:03] The Arena Chapel is organized in a very strict way. Three registers begin at the top and move downward. I think of it as a kind of spiral, that is, it tells a continuous story. It begins with Christ's grandparents. It goes into the birth of Mary, her marriage, and then when we get down to the second register, we get to Christ's life or ministry. Then the bottom register is the Passion; these are the events at the end of Christ's life and immediately after his death.

[1:34] The impetus for the entire cycle can be seen at the apex of the triumphal arch on the opposite wall, with God, who calls Gabriel to his side, telling him to go to the Virgin Mary and announce to her that she will bear humanity's savior, that she will bear Christ.

Dr. Harris: [1:53] Interestingly, when Giotto painted God, he inserted a panel painting, so that is not fresco. It's interesting that he chose to paint it in a style that was more conservative, less earthly than the style that we see in the frescoes.

[2:09] Just to go back to that Annunciation and this wall, we begin to see the illusionism that we see throughout the cycles. If we look to Mary and the angel, Giotto has created an architectural space for each of them. These are not panel paintings with gold backgrounds that suggest a divine space. These are earthly settings for Mary and the angel.

Dr. Zucker: [2:33] There's another great example of the way that architecture and the sense of space is constructed, even in this era before linear perspective.

[2:41] Two scenes below the Annunciation are these wonderful, empty architectural spaces, these rooms that have oil lanterns that hang from their ceilings, and there is such a delicate sense of space, of light and shadow. It is this bravura example of naturalism and it shows Giotto's interest in the world, the present, the physical space that humanity occupies.

[3:07] The narrative cycle begins on the right altar side in the top register. It introduces Joachim and Anna, the grandparents of Christ.

Dr. Harris: [3:17] Mary's parents.

Dr. Zucker: [3:18] Joachim begins by being thrown out of the temple.

Dr. Harris: [3:21] For his childlessness.

Dr. Zucker: [3:23] That's right, he's grown old without children. Don't take this too literally, it's not in the Bible. These are the extra stories that were added to the biblical narrative because people wanted to know what happened in between the events that really are mentioned in the Bible.

Dr. Harris: [3:38] Much of this is from a book called "The Golden Legend" that filled in narrative.

Dr. Zucker: [3:43] Let's focus on the last scene on the right side of the upper register, which is the Meeting at the Golden Gate. To get here, what's happened is that Joachim has prayed to God, wanting a child. Anna, his wife, has done the same, and they've both been visited and been told that there is hope.

[4:02] They're shown coming together for the first time in front of Jerusalem, in front of the Golden Gate.

Dr. Harris: [4:09] Each now with the awareness that their desire for a child, this wish, has been fulfilled.

Dr. Zucker: [4:16] We have this wonderful example of the humanism of Giotto. We see their faces together. It is a kiss, it is incredibly intimate, so personal. Their faces come together, they touch and almost become a single face.

Dr. Harris: [4:32] We sense the warmth of their embrace, the warmth of the figures around them who watch, and something that we see throughout the cycle, figures who have mass and volume to their bodies, who exist three-dimensionally in space.

[4:48] Gone are the elongated, swaying, ethereal bodies of the Gothic period. Giotto gives us figures that are bulky and monumental, where drapery pulls around their bodies, and taken together with the emotion in their faces, it's almost like we have real human beings in art for the first time in more than a thousand years.

Dr. Zucker: [5:12] Giotto — we think — was Cimabue's student, and learned from that great master, who had begun to experiment with the chiaroscuro that you're speaking of. This light and shadow, this ability to model volume, and form, and mass, but nothing like what Giotto has achieved here.

[5:30] You're right, it is the coming together of both the chiaroscuro as well as the emotion, as well as the human interaction that creates the sense of the importance of our existence here on Earth.

Dr. Harris: [5:44] I would also add the clarity of the gestures and the narrative.

Dr. Zucker: [5:48] Look at the way in which the city is not rendered in an accurate way. We have a schematic view, and yet it's everything we need. We have the gate of Jerusalem. Now, of course, Giotto had no idea what the architecture of Jerusalem looked like, yet from legend, he has created this golden arch and this medieval-looking fortified city.

Dr. Harris: [6:08] But the forms are simplified.

Dr. Zucker: [6:09] It's a stage set, and he wants those figures to be front and center. They are what's most important. If we move across to the other wall, the upper register continues the narrative. Mary is born, she's presented in the temple, she's married.

[6:25] And then, we get back to the altar side of the chapel, and there we reach the triumphal arch. We're back to God the Father now, but below that we have the Annunciation.

Dr. Harris: [6:36] In the register below, now, we see scenes from Christ's childhood including…

Dr. Zucker: [6:42] The Circumcision, the Flight into Egypt.

Dr. Harris: [6:45] …the Massacre of the Innocents. And then moving to the next wall, we begin the story of the ministry of Christ and his miracles.

Dr. Zucker: [6:54] As the story unfolds from scene to scene, Christ is often shown in profile, which is derived from the Roman tradition of coinage, which is the most noble way of representing a figure. He's shown moving from left to right, which is the way that we're meant to read the scenes.

Dr. Harris: [7:12] So Giotto is helping us to move through the narrative from one scene to the next. Here, we see Christ on a donkey, with the apostles behind him.

Dr. Zucker: [7:21] You'll notice that Giotto does not really care to depict every single one of the 12 apostles. He's really giving us only three or four faces, and the rest are just an accumulation of halos.

Dr. Harris: [7:33] There's that legacy of symbolic representation that we think of as more medieval.

Dr. Zucker: [7:39] Look at the way in which the figures in the lower right, there are three of them, begin to pull off their outer garment. One man is pulling his arm out of his sleeve. The next is taking the garment off his head, and the final one is placing that garment at the feet of the donkey in an act of respect.

[7:57] But it is almost cinemagraphic. There is this idea that is, I think, part of the chapel as a whole, that it is about the movement of time. This is one of the most innovative aspects of the entire chapel, I think.

[8:10] One technical issue, if you look at Christ, there is a blue garment that's wrapped around his waist, but the blue is almost entirely missing, and that's because the Arena Chapel is painted in buon fresco, true fresco. That is, pigment is applied to wet plaster.

Dr. Harris: [8:26] When that happens, the pigment binds to the plaster, and the paint becomes literally part of the wall.

Dr. Zucker: [8:33] That's right, the wall is stained. The problem is that blue was really expensive. Ultramarine blue came from lapis lazuli, which was a very expensive, semi-precious stone.

[8:44] Enrico Scrovegni, when he drew up the contract with Giotto, did not want the blue's brilliance to be diminished by being mixed with the plaster. So he asked that it be applied as secco fresco.

Dr. Harris: [8:55] Dry fresco.

Dr. Zucker: [8:56] That's right, on top of the wall, and the result is it didn't last.

Dr. Harris: [9:00] Right. It didn't adhere to the wall as well as the paint that was applied to the wet plaster. Sadly, that's been flaked off, and we really have to use our imagination to fill in a brilliant blue on that drapery.

Dr. Zucker: [9:11] Let's move on to the bottom register, to the end of Christ's life. On the lowest register, the register that's devoted to the scenes of the Passion, is the Arrest of Christ, also known as the Kiss of Judas.

Dr. Harris: [9:25] This is the moment when Judas leads the Romans to Christ, and they arrest him and take him away, and torture him, and ultimately crucify him. Remember, Judas is one of the 12 apostles, one of those considered closest to Christ. He betrays him for 30 pieces of silver.

Dr. Zucker: [9:45] And so it is all the more horrific — it's all the more a terrible betrayal — because this is one of the people that Christ trusted most. Judas has betrayed Christ, not by pointing at him from afar, but with a kiss.

Dr. Harris: [9:58] There's chaos here.

Dr. Zucker: [10:00] Well, that's right. That idea of the embrace is really important, I think, because look at the way that Giotto has the figure of Judas' arm and cloak wrapping around him, embracing him, enveloping him and — importantly — stopping him. Remember that in almost every scene we have noticed Christ moving from left to right in profile.

[10:22] But here, Judas is an impediment. His progress is stopped. This is literally arresting his movement forward.

Dr. Harris: [10:30] If we compare this, for example, to Duccio's "Betrayal of Christ," there, Christ is frontal. Here he's in profile. You're right, but it makes it so that Judas and Christ look at one another, look at each other in the eye. Judas is a little bit shorter. He looks up at Christ.

[10:46] There's a sense of, to me, determination, but also at the same time maybe a hint of beginning to be sorry for what he's done.

Dr. Zucker: [10:54] But still, corruption in that face versus the nobility of Christ's.

Dr. Harris: [10:59] And the sense that Christ knew that this would happen, right, at the Last Supper. He said, "One of you will betray me," and an acceptance of his destiny that we often see in images of Christ.

Dr. Zucker: [11:09] Let's go back to that idea of chaos that you raised before. Giotto has created this sense of violence, and one of the ways that he's done that is by reserving half the painting, the sky, just for those lances, for those torches, for those clubs, and the way in which they're not held in an orderly way, but they are helter-skelter, crossing at angles.

[11:31] They create this almost violent visual rhythm that draws our eye down to Christ, down to Judas, but also feel[s] dangerous.

Dr. Harris: [11:40] There's a sense of Judas and Christ anchoring the composition down as that chaos takes place around him. The most remarkable figure to me, though, is the figure who leans his left side of his body and his elbow out of the composition, almost right into our space.

Dr. Zucker: [11:58] It's amazing actually, and it almost prefigures the way that Caravaggio, who centuries later will master this idea of breaking the picture plane.

Dr. Harris: [12:06] Then we also see another device that Giotto employs often in the Arena Chapel, and that is a figure with his back to us. That figure seems to be pulling something that's out of the space of the panel, but look at his feet, perfectly foreshortened, grounded; there's that sense of Giottoesque weight and monumentality to the figures, all of that modeling as we can follow the forms of the body underneath.

Dr. Zucker: [12:32] Giotto is giving us this full sensory experience. We have this crowd of figures, the sense of violence; the crowd is multiplied because we can see numerous helmets, which by the way would've originally been silver, but have oxidized.

Dr. Harris: [12:46] There's a sense of a crowd pressing in, of all these faces watching what's going to happen.

Dr. Zucker: [12:51] There's one man on a horn who's blowing creating this sense of energy; this audio that goes with this painting, that finishes the whole scene in its chaos and its drama.

Dr. Harris: [13:02] Giotto is a master of the dramatic.

Dr. Zucker: [13:05] One of the most powerful scenes in the chapel is the Lamentation. Christ has been crucified. He's been taken down off the cross, and he's now being mourned by his mother, by his followers.

Dr. Harris: [13:18] That word that we use for this scene, Lamentation, comes from the word to lament, to grieve.

Dr. Zucker: [13:24] This is one of the saddest images I've ever seen. We have Mary holding her dead son, and it reminds us of a scene that's across the wall of the Nativity, where there is this tenderness and this relationship between Mary and her infant son, and now we see Mary again holding her adult, now dead son.

Dr. Harris: [13:45] On her lap, the way she does as a mother when he's a child.

Dr. Zucker: [13:49] The idea of representing Christ as dead is a modern idea, putting emphasis on Christ as physical, as human.

Dr. Harris: [13:57] I think we're struck by the simplicity of the composition. Giotto's placing all of this emphasis on the figures. He's simplified the background, but where we might expect to see the most important figure, Christ, in the center, Giotto's moved him off to the left.

[14:13] The landscape is in service of drawing our eye down toward Christ, that rocky hill that forms a landscape that moves our eye down to Mary and Christ.

Dr. Zucker: [14:25] And at the top, there's a tree, and the tree might look dead, but of course, it might also be winter. That tree might grow leaves again in the spring, and it is an analogy to Christ and his eventual resurrection.

Dr. Harris: [14:39] It's not just that the dead Christ is on his mother's lap. Look at how she's raised her right knee to prop him up. Look at how she bends forward.

Dr. Zucker: [14:49] And twists her body.

Dr. Harris: [14:50] And puts her arms around him. One hand on his shoulder, another on his chest. She leans forward as if to plead with him to wake up, as if in disbelief that this could have happened.

Dr. Zucker: [15:02] At Christ's feet, we see Mary Magdalene, with her typical red hair, who is attending to his feet, and of course, that's appropriate given the biblical tradition as well because she had anointed Christ's feet. There's a real sense of tenderness there.

[15:16] Giotto is so interested in naturalism that he's willing to show two figures where we only see the backs. There's no representation of their faces at all. We would never have seen this in the medieval period.

Dr. Harris: [15:28] That's because those figures provide no information to the narrative. All that they do is frame Christ and Mary. They draw our eye to those most important figures.

Dr. Zucker: [15:39] We look at Christ and Mary as they're looking at Christ and Mary.

Dr. Harris: [15:42] Exactly. We become like them, surrounding the body of Christ. But they also help to create an illusion of space. It's amazing to me how close they are to us. Their bottoms almost move out into our space. Giotto makes it clear that these figures are looking in, and therefore there is an "in" to look into. There's space here for the human figures to occupy.

Dr. Zucker: [16:10] There are other-than-human figures here as well. There are angels, but these angels are not detached figures. They mourn as we mourn. They rend their clothing, they tear at themselves, they pull their hair. They are in agony.

Dr. Harris: [16:24] And they're foreshortened. Like the figures with their backs to us, they assist in Giotto's creating an illusion of space. Like the angels above them, the human figures display their grief in different ways. Some are sad and resigned and keep to themselves, other figures throw their arms out.

[16:44] There's a real interest in individuality, in the different ways that people experience emotion. I always like to look at the feet, and the feet of the figure on the far right, that sense of gravity and weight of a figure, really standing on the ground, just like the figures who are sitting, not the medieval floating figures that we've come to expect.

Dr. Zucker: [17:05] Well, that ground is used for several purposes; to root those figures, but also to draw our eye down to Christ, or in another sense, to allow us to move out of the picture, because as we move from the Lamentation, we move to the next image, which is the scene where Christ says "Do not touch me" when Mary Magdalene recognizes him as he has been resurrected.

[17:28] You'll notice that Giotto has continued that mountain. Our eye then moves down and so there is this visual relationship that is drawn between Christ's death, Christ's mourning, and Christ's resurrection by the landscape that frames them.

[17:42] In the trompe-l'oeil depictions of inset stone, there is another painted scene in a little quatrefoil.

Dr. Harris: [17:49] Here we see Jonah being swallowed by the whale and we see water.

Dr. Zucker: [17:54] Or at least a giant fish.

Dr. Harris: [17:56] Throughout the chapel, we see this, an Old Testament scene being paired with the New Testament. Specifically, Old Testament scenes that, in some way, prefigured the life of Christ.

Dr. Zucker: [18:08] So Jonah is swallowed by this giant fish, by this whale, prays for forgiveness having betrayed God, and is delivered from this fish. It is a perfect Old Testament analogy to the New Testament story of Christ's crucifixion and ultimate resurrection.

[18:24] It's a tour de force of emotion. It's such an expression of this late medieval period that is moving towards what we will eventually call the Renaissance. Below the Passion scene is even more painting. There are these marvelous representations of virtues and vices, that is, expressions of good and evil.

Dr. Harris: [18:43] We're looking at the figure of Envy.

Dr. Zucker: [18:45] It's one of my favorite figures.

Dr. Harris: [18:46] Here's a figure in profile, engulfed in flames, clutching a bag.

Dr. Zucker: [18:52] But reaching with her other hand for something she does not have, something that she wants.

Dr. Harris: [18:56] Not content with what she has, she wants more.

Dr. Zucker: [19:00] She's got huge ears. It's as if every sense is attuned to what she does not have.

Dr. Harris: [19:06] We see emerging from her mouth a snake, who moves toward her eyes.

Dr. Zucker: [19:10] That's right, it doubles back on itself because it is what she sees that bites her, in a sense.

Dr. Harris: [19:15] We have virtues and vices here because these are the good and evil that we confront, all of us, in our lives. And these are the things that decide at the day of judgment [whether] we go to heaven or hell.

Dr. Zucker: [19:26] They are in a sense abstractions of the ideas that are told in the stories above. The final virtue, as we move towards the exit of the chapel is Hope, and she is reaching upward, floating, a classicized figure.

Dr. Harris: [19:43] And she's winged like an angel and is lifted up toward a figure on the upper right, who's handing her a crown.

Dr. Zucker: [19:51] And so Hope, because she's in the corner, is looking up towards the Last Judgment, and is of the same scale, and her body is in the same diagonal position as the elect in the bottom left corner.

Dr. Harris: [20:05] We see the elect, many of them with their hands in positions of prayer, looking up toward the enormous figure of Christ, the largest figure in this chapel.

Dr. Zucker: [20:15] We should say that the elect are the blessed, that is, these are people that are going to heaven, and you'll see that they're actually accompanied by angels that look so caring and gentle. They're shepherding these people into heaven. If you look carefully, you can see that their feet are not on the ground. They're actually levitating slightly. They're rising up.

Dr. Harris: [20:35] These benevolent, generous expressions on the face of those angels as they look at all of these individuals who've made the choices in their lives that have led them to this moment of being blessed.

Dr. Zucker: [20:48] The choices that are laid out for us in the virtues and vices in the bottom panels. Just below the elect, you can see that there are what seem to be children, naked, coming out of coffins, out of tombs. Those nude figures are meant to represent the souls that are to be judged by Christ, who, as you said, sits in the middle.

[21:11] He sits here as judge, to judge those souls that are being wakened from the dead, to determine whether or not they are blessed and get to go to heaven or if they're going to end up on the right side of this painting, in hell.

Dr. Harris: [21:24] This follows very standard iconography or standard composition of the Last Judgment, with the blessed, those who are going to heaven, on Christ's right, and the damned below, on Christ's left. Now, just either side of Christ, though, that division of left and right doesn't happen.

Dr. Zucker: [21:43] That's because this is heaven.

Dr. Harris: [21:45] There we see a court of saints, and around that mandorla, that full body halo around Christ, we see angels blowing trumpets.

Dr. Zucker: [21:55] These are images that come right out of the Apocalypse, the Gospel according to John.

Dr. Harris: [22:01] The Book of Revelation.

Dr. Zucker: [22:02] We have the angels announcing the end of time. We have angels above them rolling up the sky as if it were a scroll. These are images that we generally see in Last Judgments because they are in the text of the Bible.

[22:15] The scene of hell on the lower right with a large blue figure that is meant to represent Satan, surrounding him are souls being tortured in hell.

Dr. Zucker: [22:25] A lot of this imagery is inspired, I think, indirectly by the work of Dante, who had not so long ago written "The Divine Comedy," which was extremely popular, and he describes the landscape of hell.

Dr. Harris: [22:38] And he equates the punishments of hell with the different kinds of sins that people committed. In the Last Judgment that we're looking at, and because the patron here was concerned with the sin of usury, we see usurers featured. They're being hung with the bags of money on the ropes that they're hanging from.

Dr. Zucker: [23:00] Right. Usury is requiring interest for when you lend money. It's basically just the act of banking. That was a mortal sin. In fact, Dante speaks at great length about the usurers who have their money bags hanging from their necks and are in one of the lowest of the circles of hell.

[23:17] Below the usurers, you can actually make out a specific individual, also hanged. This is Judas, the disciple that betrays Christ.

Dr. Harris: [23:26] So anyone leaving the chapel from this exit would look up at this scene of the Last Judgement, up at the cross carried by two angels. Perhaps they would notice that figure that I just noticed, a figure behind the cross, grasping it for dear life, and would also have looked up and have seen Enrico Scrovegni himself, the patron, offering this chapel to the Three Marys.

Dr. Zucker: [23:53] As the public would have walked outside after a sermon, after Mass perhaps, they would be reminded right before they walk back into the world — the world of desire, the world of sin — that the sacrifice that Christ had made, that story that had unfolded in this chapel, comes down to decisions that they need to make in their own life.

[24:14] This is, in a sense, a kind of last reminder before you walk out to take these stories seriously.

Dr. Harris: [24:20] Giotto makes it very easy for us to do that by painting these figures in their humanity, by making the narrative so easy and clear to read, and by making something so beautiful, recognized for its beauty even when it was first painted.

Dr. Zucker: [24:37] That's right. Even in its own day.

[24:39] [music]

Artwork details

Artwork Details

Title	Frescoes from the Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel
Artist(s)	Giotto
Dates	c. 1305
Places	Europe / Southern Europe / Italy
Period, Culture, Style	Medieval / Gothic / Late Gothic
Artwork Type	Painting / Mural
Material	
Technique	Fres(opens in new window)co(opens in new window), Chiaroscuro

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5.4.2.4: Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of Saint Climacus

Figure 5.4.2.4.114: Iconoclasts destroying an icon of Christ, Khludov Psalter, 9th century (State Historical Museum, Moscow)

During the **Iconoclastic period** of the eighth to ninth centuries, the Byzantine Empire, and particularly its capital city of Constantinople (modern Istanbul), was convulsed with the question of whether religious images with human figures (called "icons") were appropriate, or whether such images were in effect idols, akin to the statues of gods in ancient Greece and Rome. In other words, did worshippers pray *through* icons to the holy figure represented, or did they pray *to* the physical image itself? The Iconoclasts (those who opposed images) attempted to ban icons and reportedly even destroyed some.

But by the time of the Iconoclastic controversy, the Sinai Peninsula, where Saint Catherine's Monastery is located, was under **Islamic** rather than Byzantine control, enabling the monastery's icons to escape Iconoclasm. Other factors, including the monastery's isolated location, fortifications, continuous occupation by monks, as well as the dry climate of the region, all likely contributed to the preservation of icons at Sinai.

Figure 5.4.2.4.117: Christ Blessing, first half of the 6th century, encaustic on panel, 84 x 45.5 x 1.2 cm (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt)

Figure 5.4.2.4.118: Bronze statuette of Jupiter Capitolinus, 1st–2nd century C.E., bronze, 11.9 x 6 . 5.1 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The sixth-century icon of Christ Blessing—or Christ "Pantokrator" (all-ruler), as this image would later become known—was painted using encaustic that enabled the artist to create a vivid sense of **naturalism**. This icon was painted by a highly skilled artist, and therefore might have been made in the capital city of Constantinople.

Christ raises his right hand to give a blessing. His other hand holds an elaborate manuscript, which probably takes the form of a contemporary Gospel book, emphasizing Christ's identity as the embodied "Word" of God. This bearded, mature version of Christ —just one of several ways Christ appears in art before Iconoclasm—draws on pre-Christian traditions of rendering other male divinities such as Jupiter.

The Monastery of Saint Catherine preserves a number of rare Early Byzantine icons such as this.

Read about another Early Byzantine icon at Saint Catherine's.

Figure 5.4.2.4.119: Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of Saint John Climacus, late 12th century, tempera and gold on panel, 41.3 x 29.9 x 2.1 cm (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt)

After Iconoclasm, perhaps to avoid accusations of idolatry, Byzantine icons became less naturalistic. **Compare** this Middle Byzantine icon of the Heavenly Ladder with the Early Byzantine icon of Christ. Notice, for example, the ethereal, flat gold background in the icon of the Ladder that replaces the landscape hinted at behind the halo in the sixth-century Christ "Pantokrator."

This icon of the Heavenly Ladder was made at the monastery of Saint Catherine in the late 12th century, and illustrates the process of spiritual ascent undertaken by monastics. The icon is based on a spiritual text of the same name, written by a monk called Saint John of the Ladder, who lived c. 579–649 and was a member of Saint Catherine's Monastery. In his writing, John warns his fellow

monks about temptations of the monastic life; in the icon of the Ladder, the artist depicts these temptations as elegantly silhouetted demons who attempt to tug the monks off the ladder as they climb toward Christ in the upper righthand corner.

Figure 5.4.2.4.120: Saint Theodosia, early 13th century, Constantinople, tempera and gold on panel (34 x 25.6 x 2.2 cm) (The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt)

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5.4.2.5: Buddha from Gandhara

Buddhist Art

Buddhist Stupas

A stupa is a traditional Buddhist monument that houses holy relics associated with the Buddha.

Learning Objectives

Describe the common features, as well as stylistic variations, found in Buddhist stupas

Figure 5.4.2.5.1: Buddha from Gandhara, c. 2nd–3rd century C.E., Gandhara, schist (Tokyo National Museum)

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Stupas evolved over time from simple funerary monuments to elaborately decorated objects of veneration.
- Emperor Ashoka, who ruled from 274–236 BCE during the Maurya Dynasty , is said to have redistributed the relics housed in the original stupas of the Buddha into thousands of stupas throughout India.
- All stupas contain a treasury , a Tree of Life, and small offerings known as Tsa-Tsas. It is believed that the more objects placed into the treasury, the stronger the stupa's energy.
- There are five types of stupas: Relic stupas, Object stupas, Commemorative stupas, Symbolic stupas and Votive stupas. A stupa is thought to bring enlightenment to the one who builds and owns it; it is also considered a placed of worship for many Buddhists.

Key Terms

- **relic**: A part of the body of a saint, or an ancient religious object, kept for veneration.
- **mantra**: A phrase repeated to assist concentration during meditation.

History of Stupas

A stupa, literally meaning heap, is a mound-like structure designed to encase Buddhist relics and other holy objects. Stupas exist all over the world and are the oldest Buddhist religious monuments.

Originally a simple mound of clay or mud, stupas evolved from simple funerary monuments to become elaborately decorated objects of veneration. Legend has it that following the cremation of Buddha, his ashes were divided into eight parts and distributed among various rulers to be enshrined at special burial mounds.

Emperor Ashoka, who ruled from 274–236 BCE during the Maurya Empire, is said to have redistributed the relics housed in the original stupas into thousands of stupas throughout India. Ashoka is also credited with the construction of numerous stupas that remain to this day, including those at Sanchi and Sarnath.

Stupa at Sanchi, India: Emperor Ashoka is credited with construction of numerous stupas that remain to this day, including the stupa at Sanchi.

Structure and Style

While they can vary visually, all stupas have a few features in common. Every stupa contains a treasury filled with various objects —small offerings, or Tsa-Tsas, fill the majority of the treasury, while jewelry and other precious objects are also placed within. It is believed that the more objects placed into the treasury, the stronger the stupa's energy.

The Tree of Life, a wooden pole covered with gems and mantras , is an important element of every stupa and is placed in the stupa's central channel during an initiation ceremony , where participants' most powerful wishes are stored.

There are five types of stupas:

1. Relic stupas, in which the relics of Buddha and other religious persons are buried.
2. Object stupas, in which the objects belonging to Buddha or his disciples are buried.
3. Commemorative stupas, built to commemorate events in the life of Buddha and his disciples.

4. Symbolic stupas, built to symbolize various aspects of Buddhist theology.
5. Votive stupas, constructed to commemorate visits or gain spiritual benefits.

In the Buddhist religion, it is believed that a stupa brings enlightenment to the one who builds and owns it. In addition, the stupa is considered a place of worship, and many Buddhists complete pilgrimages to significant stupas.

Buddhist Architecture and Sculpture

Sri Lankan art and architecture were deeply influenced by Buddhism, which was introduced to the island in the third century BCE.

Learning Objectives

Discuss the evolution of Buddhist art in Sri Lanka, from early cave temples to the art and architecture of the kingdom of Anuradhapura

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Three types of structures are typically associated with the religious architecture of early Buddhism : monasteries (viharas), places to venerate relics (stupas), and shrines or prayer halls (chaityas or chaitya grihas). The earliest examples of Buddhist architecture found in Sri Lanka are cave temples. The most famous of these, the Dambulla temple complex, dates to the 1st century BCE.
- The kingdom of Anuradhapura (377 BCE–1017 CE), named for its capital city, produced some the finest ancient Sri Lankan art and architecture.
- Sri Lankan stupas were among the largest brick structures known to the premodern world. Intended to enshrine relics of the Buddha, they were built in various shapes and often accompanied by a vahalkada, or decorative frontispiece.
- Another architectural creation associated with stupas and unique to ancient Sri Lankan architecture was the vatadage , a circular Buddhist structure built around small stupas.
- The rock fortress and palace complex of Sigiriya is particularly renowned for its ancient frescoes of female figures bearing flowers; it dates from the fifth century and is painted in a very distinctive style .
- Sculpture was also a notable art form , and many fine statues of the Buddha were produced during the Anuradhapura period. The fourth-century Samadhi statue in Anuradhapura is considered one of the finest examples of ancient Sri Lankan sculpture.

Key Terms

- **vatadage**: A decorative circular frontispiece near the entrance of a Sri Lankan stupa.
- **stupa**: A dome-shaped Buddhist monument, used to house Buddhist relics.

Overview: Buddhist Architecture

Buddhist religious architecture developed in the Indian Subcontinent in the third century BCE. Three types of structures are typically associated with the religious architecture of early Buddhism:

1. Monasteries (viharas).
2. Places to venerate relics (stupas).
3. Shrines or prayer halls (chaityas or chaitya grihas), which later came to be called temples in some places.

Viharas were initially only temporary shelters used by wandering monks during the rainy season, but they later developed to accommodate the growing trend towards Buddhist monasticism. A distinctive type of fortress architecture found in the former and present Buddhist kingdoms of the Himalayas is known as dzongs.

The initial function of the stupa was the veneration and safe-guarding of the relics of the Buddha. The earliest surviving example of a stupa is in Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh).

In accordance with changes in religious practice, stupas were gradually incorporated into chaitya-grihas. These reached their high point in the 1st century BCE, exemplified by the cave complexes of Ajanta and Ellora (Maharashtra). The Mahabodhi Temple at

Bodh Gaya in Bihar is another well-known example.

Buddhist Architecture in Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan art and architecture was deeply influenced by Buddhism, which was introduced to the island in the third century BCE by the son of Ashoka, Mahinda. Ashoka, the great Buddhist emperor of the Maurya Dynasty , dedicated himself to the propagation of the religion across Asia. Sri Lanka has the longest continuous history of Buddhism of any Buddhist nation, and its culture reflects its religious tradition.

Cave Temples

The earliest examples of Buddhist architecture found in Sri Lanka are cave temples. The most famous of these, the Dambulla temple complex, dates back to the first century BCE. This complex consists of five caves and is decorated inside with statues and frescoes of the Buddha and various gods and goddesses from the Buddhist pantheon .

Sri Lankan Stupas

The kingdom of Anuradhapura (377 BCE to 1017 CE), named for its capital city, produced some of the finest ancient Sri Lankan art and architecture. Some of the most distinctive and famous Sri Lankan monuments were built during this period, including a large number of dagobas or stupas, for which the island is renowned.

Sri Lankan stupas were among the largest brick structures known to the premodern world. Intended to enshrine relics of the Buddha, they were built in various shapes, including the bubble, the pot, and the bell. The Sri Lankan stupa is characterized by its vahalkada, or frontispiece. It is a structure, often ornately carved, that joins the stupa and often uses cardinal directions as a decorative flourish.

One of the most famous stupas in Sri Lanka is the Jetavanaramaya stupa, which was built during the 3rd and 4th centuries CE in the sacred city of Anuradhapura; it is believed to house a part of a sash of the Buddha. Built from baked bricks bound with limestone , sand, and clay and coated with lime plaster, this stupa stands at 400 feet and was the tallest stupa in the ancient world.

The Vatadage

Another architectural creation associated with stupas and unique to ancient Sri Lankan architecture was the Vatadage, a circular Buddhist structure built around small stupas. These were usually made of stone and brick and elaborately carved. They may have also had wooden roofs that were supported by stone columns arranged in concentric rows.

Polonnaruwa Vatadage: A vatadage in the ancient city of Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka, from the 12th century CE.

Sigiriya

Another famous monument erected under the patronage of Anuradhapura was the rock fortress and palace complex of Sigiriya. Sigirya is particularly renowned for its ancient frescoes, which date from the 5th century and were painted in a very distinctive style.

The lines are painted in a manner that enhances the sense of volume of the figures, and the paint is applied in sweeping strokes, using more pressure on one side than the other and giving the effect of a deeper tone toward the edges. The frescoes all depict beautiful female figures who are carrying flowers and are hypothesized to be apsaras (celestial nymphs), ladies of the king's court, or women taking part in religious rituals .

Sigiriya fresco: Depicting women with flowers, the Sigiriya frescoes are examples of a distinctive Sri Lankan school of painting from the 5th century CE.

Buddhist Sculpture

Sculpture was also a notable art form, and many fine statues of the Buddha were produced during the Anuradhapura period in Sri Lanka. The Samadhi statue in Anuradhapura is considered one of the finest examples of ancient Sri Lankan sculpture. Sculpted from dolomite marble, it dates to the 4th century CE and shows the Buddha seated in a position of deep meditation.

Samadhi Statue: Located in Anuradhapura, this statue dates to the fourth century CE and is a fine example of ancient Sri Lankan Buddhist sculpture.

Buddhist Rock-Cut Architecture

Rock-cut architecture is the practice of creating a structure by carving it out of solid natural rock.

Learning Objectives

Distinguish the features of the Ajanta, Barabar, and Ellora caves of India

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Buddhist rock-cut temples and structures were often located near trade routes and became stopovers and lodging houses for traders. Their interiors became more and more elaborate as their endowments grew.
- A notable trait of rock-cut architecture is the crafting of rock to imitate timbered and carved wood.
- Cave temples have been well-preserved due to their hidden locations and the fact that they are constructed from stone, a far more durable material than wood, clay, or metal.
- The Barabar caves in Bihar, built in the third century BCE and credited to Emperor Ashoka, are the oldest example of Buddhist rock-cut architecture.
- The Ajanta caves contain some very well-preserved tempera wall paintings that illustrate the Jataka and date from the second century BCE.
- The Ellora caves are made up of twelve Buddhist, seventeen Hindu, and five Jain rock-cut temples, excavated out of the Charanandri hills. Similar to the Barabar and Ajanta caves, they contain many frescoes , reliefs , and shrines.

Key Terms

- **cornice**: The topmost architectural element of a building that projects forward from the main walls and was originally used to direct rainwater away from the building's walls.
- **tempera**: A medium used to bind pigments in painting, as well as the associated artistic techniques.
- **pilaster**: A rectangular column that projects partially from the wall to which it is attached, giving the appearance of a support but used only for decoration.

Overview: Rock-Cut Architecture

Rock-cut architecture is the practice of creating a structure by carving it out of solid natural rock. In India, the term cave is often applied in reference to rock-cut architecture; however, it must be distinguished from a naturally occurring cave, as rock-cut architecture is a highly engineered and elaborately decorated structure.

There are more than 1,500 rock-cut temples in India, most of which are religious in nature, adorned with decorative paintings and exquisite stone carvings that reflect a very high level of craftsmanship.

Buddhist rock-cut temples and monasteries were often located near trade routes and these spaces became stopovers and lodging houses for traders. As their endowments grew, the interiors of rock-cut temples became more and more elaborate and decorated.

While many temples, monasteries, and stupas have been destroyed, cave temples are better preserved due to their hidden locations and the fact that they are constructed from stone, a far more durable material than wood, clay, or metal.

India's Rock-Cut Architecture

The Barabar Caves

In India, caves have long been regarded as sacred spaces and were enlarged or entirely man-made for use as temples and monasteries by Buddhist monks and ascetics. The Barabar caves in Bihar, built in the third century BCE during the Mauryan period, are the oldest examples of Buddhist rock-cut architecture.

Credited to Emperor Ashoka, these caves mostly consist of two rooms carved entirely out of granite. The first room, a large rectangular hall, was meant to be a space for worshipers to congregate, while the second room was a small, domed chamber for worship. This second chamber is thought to have contained small, stupa-like structures, though it is empty now.

The Ajanta Caves

The Ajanta caves in Maharashtra are a group of 30 rock-cut Buddhist temples that span six centuries, beginning in the first century BCE. They are carved into the vertical side of a gorge located in the hills of the Sahyadri mountains.

The Ajanta caves are considered masterpieces of Buddhist architecture and contain living and sleeping quarters, kitchens, monastic spaces, shrines, and stupas. Made of brick or excavated from stone, the residences of monks are called viharas, while the cave shrines used for worship are called chaitya grihas.

Similar to the Barabar caves, the Ajanta caves are situated close to main trade routes. A great deal of decorative sculpture—intricately carved columns and reliefs, including cornices and pilaster—are found here.

A notable trait of rock-cut architecture is the crafting of rock to imitate timbered and carved wood. The Ajanta caves are home to some very early and well-preserved wall paintings that decorate the walls and ceilings and date from the second century BCE.

Executed using tempera technique on smooth surfaces and prepared by the application of plaster, the themes of the paintings are Buddhist and gracefully illustrate the major events of Buddha's life, the Jataka tales , and the various divinities of the Buddhist pantheon .

Ajanta Cave: A great deal of decorative sculptures—intricately carved columns and reliefs, including cornices and pilaster—are found in the Ajanta caves.

The Ellora Caves

The Ellora caves were built between the fifth and tenth centuries. These caves are made up of twelve Buddhist, seventeen Hindu, and five Jain rock-cut temples, excavated out of the Charanandri hills.

The proximity of the temples that belong to different religions demonstrates the religious harmony of the time. Similar to the Barabar and Ajanta caves, the Ellora caves contain many frescoes, reliefs, and shrines, including carvings of the Buddha, bodhisattvas , and saints. In many cases the stone is intricately carved to look like wood.

Ellora Cave: Similar to the Barabar and Ajanta caves, the Ellora caves contain many frescoes, reliefs, and shrines, including carvings of the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and saints.

Buddhist Wall Paintings

Buddhist wall paintings can be traced back to the Gupta period and are one of the dominant art forms of the early medieval period in India.

Learning Objectives

Describe the cave murals, rock-cut monasteries, and miniature paintings created during India's early Medieval period

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- The period of Gupta rule is known as the Golden Age of India, as it was a time marked by peace, prosperity, and the flourishing of the arts, as seen in the cave paintings at Ajanta.
- Medieval India was a time marked by the appearance of a multitude of states and dynasties that were often in conflict with one another. The Islamic invasions began as early as the 8th century, and by the early 12th century, almost all of northern India was conquered.
- The dynasties of Medieval India were predominantly Hindu, though some were Jaina and only a very few were Buddhist.
- Murals continued to flourish during the early medieval period, mainly in caves or rock-cut temples and monasteries, such as the caves of Ellora, Bagh, and Sittanavasal.
- Miniature painting began in the early medieval period as illustrations on palm-leaf manuscripts, painted on the leaves (about 2.25 by 3 inches) and wooden covers of Hindu, Jaina, and Buddhist texts.

Key Terms

- **fresco**: In painting, the technique of applying water-based pigment to wet or fresh lime mortar or plaster.
- **album leaves**: Types of paintings that were popular among the gentry and scholar-officials of the Southern Song Dynasty.

The Gupta Empire

The Gupta Empire was an ancient Indian empire that covered much of the Indian subcontinent and was run by the Gupta Dynasty from approximately 320 to 550 CE. After the fall of the Mauryan Empire in the 2nd century BCE, India remained divided in a number of disparate kingdoms.

During the late 3rd century CE, the Gupta family gained control of the kingship of Magadha (modern-day eastern India and Bengal). The period of Gupta rule is known as the Golden Age of India, as it was a time marked by unprecedented prosperity and the flourishing of the arts and sciences in India.

Art in the Gupta Empire

The rulers of the Gupta Empire were staunch supporters of the arts, science, literature, and architecture. In addition to patronizing the art of the Hindu religion, which the majority of the rulers subscribed to, the Guptas were known also for their support of Buddhist and Jain art and culture . In particular, Gupta period Buddhist art was quite influential in most of East and Southeast Asia.

The Ajanta caves are a Buddhist rock-cut structure dating from the 2nd century BCE to 600 CE that contain wall paintings created during the Gupta period. The paintings depict the Jataka tales and are considered to be masterpieces of Buddhist religious art . In addition, the Gupta Empire supported the Buddhist Universities of Nalanda and Vikramasila.

Ajanta cave painting: A wall painting from the Ajanta caves, painted during the Gupta dynasty, circa 6th century CE.

Medieval India

The Gupta Empire quickly declined under the successors of Chandragupta II. In the year 480 CE, the Huns—nomadic-pastoralist warriors from the Eurasian steppe—launched an invasion of India, and by the year 500 CE, they overran the Gupta Empire. Though the Huns were eventually driven out of India, the Gupta Empire would never recover.

The disintegration of the Gupta Empire towards the end of the 5th and 6th centuries triggered what is known as the medieval period in India (c. 8th–13th centuries CE). This period was marked by the appearance of a multitude of states and dynasties that were often in conflict with one another.

The dynasties of Medieval India were predominantly Hindu, though some were Jain, and a very few were Buddhist. The Islamic invasions of India began as early as the 8th century, and by the early 12th century almost all of northern India was conquered.

The Hindu kingdoms of medieval India fell easily to the Islamic invaders, and soon the majority of India was under varying degrees of Islamic control. The impact of Islam on Indian art was initially quite destructive, but it eventually resulted in a synthesis of styles and the development of new and important works of art.

Cave Murals

The Ellora caves consist of 34 rock-cut temples and monasteries belonging to the Buddhist, Hindu, and Jaina faiths, built between the 5th and 10th centuries. The majority of the earlier caves were Buddhist, while caves constructed in the 9th and 10th centuries were Hindu and Jain.

The caves contain many different elaborately carved rooms as well as figures of gods, stupas , and decorative work that are all carved in stone. Frescoes on the walls and ceilings of both the Ajanta and Ellora caves are believed to date from the early medieval period, between the 8th and 10th centuries, and illustrate various Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain themes.

Ajanta cave painting: An example of a painting from one of the Ajanta caves.

Sittanavasal

Sittanavasal dates from the 2nd century and is the most famous of the Jain rock-cut monasteries. It contains remnants of beautiful frescoes believed to be from the 7th to 9th centuries. Again, the themes of the frescoes are religious and generally employ a palette consisting of black, green, yellow, orange, blue, and white.

In addition to wall murals, there are paintings on the ceiling of Sittanavasal from the 9th century that depict elephants, buffalo, fish, geese, dancing girls, and lotus flowers. These frescoes, along with those of the Ajanta caves and Bagh, are considered to be the high point of Medieval Indian art.

A painting from Sittanavasal: Sittanavasal contains remnants of beautiful frescoes believed to be from the 7th to 9th centuries.

Miniature Painting

Miniature painting is believed to have started in the eastern part of medieval India, as exemplified by illustrations on palm-leaf religious manuscripts that are painted on the leaves and wooden covers of the manuscripts. Some of the most common Buddhist illustrated manuscripts include the Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita, the Pancharaksa, the Karandavyuha, and the Kalachakrayanatantra.

Detail of an illuminated manuscript: The detail on this piece of artwork was created circa 700–1100 CE.

Miniature painting is thought to have developed slightly later in western India, somewhere between the 10th and 12th centuries, and it generally exists with Hindu and Jain texts.

Human figures are seen predominantly from a profile view, with large eyes, pointy noses, and slim waists. The color palette often employs black, red, white, brown, blue, and yellow.

While it is believed that miniature painting came into existence during the medieval period, it was to flourish extensively from the 16th to 19th centuries during the Mughal empire .

Greco-Buddhist Art

The art styles of Gandhāra and Mathura are noted for their distinctive style of Buddhist art influenced by Greek culture.

Learning Objectives

Give examples of the Greek influence on the Buddhist Gadhara style of art

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Gandhāra is the name of an ancient kingdom located in parts of modern-day northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan that lasted from the early first millennium BCE to the 11th century CE.
- The Gandhāran art style flourished and achieved its peak during the Kushan period, from the 1st to the 5th century. It declined and suffered destruction after the invasion of the White Huns in the 5th century.
- Gandhāra is noted for its distinctive style of Buddhist art, which developed out of a merger of Greek, Syrian, Persian, and Indian artistic influences. Gandhāran Buddhist sculpture displays a Greek artistic influence that contributes to depictions of wavy hair, drapery covering both shoulders, shoes, and sandals.
- Stucco was widely used by sculptors in Gandhāra for the decoration of monastic and cult buildings; it provided the artist with a medium of great plasticity and enabled a high degree of expressiveness to be given to the sculpture.
- Although based on a strong Indian tradition, the art of Mathura also incorporated elements of the Hellenistic tradition, such as a general idealistic realism , and key design elements, such as curly hair and folded garments.
- The Mathura and Gandhāra art styles strongly influenced each other, and it is still a matter of debate whether the anthropomorphic representations of Buddha were essentially a result of a local evolution of Buddhist art at Mathura or a consequence of Greek cultural influence in Gandhāra.

Key Terms

- **stucco**: A plaster that is used to coat interior or exterior walls or used for moldings.

Overview: Gandhāra and Mathura

In ancient art, anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha started to emerge from the 1st century CE in Northern India. The two main centers of creation have been identified as Gandhāra in today's North West Frontier Province in Pakistan, and the region of Mathura in central northern India.

Gandhāran Art

Introduction

Gandhāra is the name of an ancient kingdom located in parts of modern-day northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, mainly in the Peshawar Valley, the Pothohar Plateau, and the Kabul River Valley. The Kingdom of Gandhāra lasted from the early first millennium BCE to the 11th century CE.

The art style of the Kingdom flourished and achieved its peak during the Kushan period, from the 1st to the 5th centuries; it then declined and suffered destruction after the invasion of the White Huns in the 5th century.

Style

Gandhāra is noted for its distinctive style of Buddhist art, which developed out of a merger of Greek, Syrian, Persian, and Indian artistic influences. This development began during the Parthian Period (50 BCE–CE 75).

The art of Gandhāra benefited from centuries of interaction with Greek culture after the conquests of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE and the subsequent establishment of the Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek Kingdoms, which led to the development of Greco-Buddhist art.

In Gandhāran art, the Buddha is often shown under the protection of the Greek god Herakles, standing with his club (and later a diamond rod) resting over his arm. This unusual representation of Herakles is the same as the one seen only on the back of of Demetrius's coins, and it is exclusively associated to him (and his son Euthydemus II).

Gandhāran Buddhist sculpture displays Greek artistic influence, and it has been suggested that the concept of the man-god was essentially inspired by Greek mythological culture. Artistically, the Gandhāran School of sculpture is said to have contributed wavy hair, drapery covering both shoulders, shoes, sandals, and acanthus leaf decorations.

Buddha Herakles: The Buddha and Vajrapani under the guise of Herakles.

Stone was widely used by sculptors in Gandhāra for the decoration of monastic and cult buildings, and stucco provided the artist with a medium of great plasticity, enabling a high degree of expressiveness to be given to the sculpture. Sculpting in stucco was popular wherever Buddhism spread from Gandhāra: India, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and China.

Mathura Style

Introduction

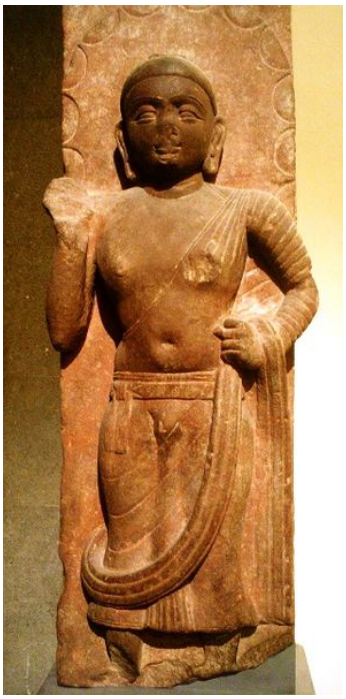
Mathura is a city in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The art of Mathura tends to be based on a strong Indian tradition, exemplified by the anthropomorphic representation of divinities such as the Yaksas, although in a style rather archaic compared to the later representations of the Buddha.

The Mathuran school contributed to many new styles in art such as clothes of thin muslin that only cover the left shoulder, the wheel on the palm, and the lotus seat.

Art of Mathura

The representations of the Buddha in Mathura are generally dated slightly later than those of Gandhāra (although not without debate) and are also much less numerous. Mathura sculptures incorporate many Hellenistic elements, such as a general idealistic realism, and key design elements, such as curly hair and folded garments.

Specific Mathuran adaptations tend to reflect warmer climatic conditions, as they consist in a higher fluidity of the clothing, which progressively tends to cover only one shoulder instead of both. The art of Mathura also features frequent sexual imagery: female images with bare breasts or nude below the waist, displaying labia and female genitalia, are common, making these images more sexually explicit than those of earlier or later periods.



Mathura Buddha: The representations of the Buddha in Mathura are generally dated slightly later than those of Gandhāra (although not without debate) and are also much less numerous.

Relationship to Gandhāra Style

The Mathura and Gandhāra styles strongly influenced each other. During their artistic florescence, the two regions were united politically under the Kushans, both being capitals of the empire. It is still a matter of debate whether the anthropomorphic representations of Buddha were essentially a result of a local evolution of Buddhist art at Mathura, or a consequence of Greek cultural influence in Gandhāra through the Greco-Buddhist syncretism .

This iconic art was characterized from the start by a realistic idealism that combined realistic human features, proportions, attitudes, and attributes, together with a sense of perfection and serenity reaching to the divine. This expression of the Buddha as both man and God became the iconographic canon for subsequent Buddhist art.

Influences and Legacy

Hindu art began to develop from the 1st to the 2nd century CE and found its first inspiration in the Buddhist art of Mathura. It progressively incorporated a profusion of original Hindu stylistic and symbolic elements, in contrast with the general balance and simplicity of Buddhist art.

The art of Mathura acquired progressively more Indian elements and reached a very high sophistication during the Gupta Empire between the 4th and the 6th century CE. The art of the Gupta Period is considered the pinnacle of Indian Buddhist art.

Gupta Buddha: A statue of Buddha from the Gupta Period, Musée Guimet, Paris.

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5.4.2.6: Shah Jahan Holding an Emerald

Shah Jahan's portrait, emeralds, and the exotic at the Mughal court

by Dr. Marika Sardar

Muhammad Abed, *Shah Jahan holding an emerald*, 1628 (dated regnal year 1), India, 21.4 x 9.5 cm (Victoria & Albert Museum(opens in new window))

The Mughal emperor Shah Jahan stands against a plain, mint-green background dressed in a gossamer-thin tunic, his head encircled by a golden halo. A bejeweled dagger is tucked into the sash tied around his waist, and he wears a treasury of gems set in his ears and on his turban, wrapped around his upper arms, circling his wrists, and suspended in the long strands of his necklaces. Amidst all of this finery, however, there is one item that stands out: the sizeable emerald Shah Jahan grasps in his left hand, secured in a gold setting and encircled by pearls. This, we might speculate, is the very emerald that he captured during an important military campaign that he led as a prince, one of the many treasures he plundered from the sultan of Bijapur in central India. On his return to the Mughal court, Shah Jahan presented the emerald to his father, the emperor Jahangir, as a show of his fealty.

Muhammad Abed, *Shah Jahan holding an emerald* (detail), 1628 (dated regnal year 1), India, 21.4 x 9.5 cm (Victoria & Albert Museum(opens in new window))

Possession of the magnificent gem would have reverted to Shah Jahan once he took the throne, however, and it was apparently meaningful enough to him for it to be included in his accession portrait, made at the time he took the throne in 1628. This painting would have been made not only to mark the historic occasion but would have been one of many intended to capture different aspects of his Shah Jahan's authority. The particular imagery of this portrait, for instance, would have been selected as to remind viewers of his already distinguished career on the battlefield.

Interestingly, of all the treasures Shah Jahan captured from Bijapur, including particularly large diamonds and rubies, it is notable that the emerald is featured in this portrait. Here, the emerald not only represents wealth, and Shah Jahan's defeat of a rival, but also the Mughals' desire for precious objects from around the world, and their ability to obtain such foreign luxuries on the global trade markets that were then expanding in many novel directions.

Map with global trade routes, c. 1600

Global trade

For over three centuries between 1526 and 1858, the emperors of the Mughal dynasty ruled over a vast empire covering parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. These lands had long been linked to the world surrounding them and there had been travel and trade routes that connected eastward to China, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and westward to Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, and eastern Africa.

Over the course of the 1600s, however, European powers, or trading companies operating in their names, came to dominate the global trade system, taking over already well-worn routes and forging new ones. Spain and Portugal brought the Americas into the nexus of global trade, part of a larger enterprise which saw the establishment of European colonies throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas, through which European rule was imposed. As a result of these developments, imported goods such as porcelains from China, lacquered furniture from Japan, and printed and painted textiles from India could be found in many of the major urban centers being established across the Americas.

Mansur, *Turkey cock*, c. 1612, opaque watercolour and gold on paper (Victoria & Albert Museum, London(opens in new window))

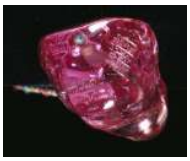
Moving in the opposite direction, various American rarities arrived with great fanfare at the courts of South Asia. A turkey (native to North America), for instance, was presented to Jahangir, having been transported to India by Portuguese traders. The emperor described the unusual bird in his memoirs, and asked that one of his court painters record its image. On a broader scale across the subcontinent, pineapples and chilies, tomatoes and potatoes were introduced into South Asian cuisine, tobacco became immediately popular, and gems such as emeralds soon found their way into the hands of wealthy collectors.

A magnificent gem

Emerald from the Muzo Mine, Vasquez-Yacopí mining district, Boyacá District, Colombia (photo: Géry Parent, CCO 1.0)

Prior to the 1500s and the advent of the global trade involving the Americas, emeralds were only available in limited numbers from sources in Egypt, Austria, and Pakistan. However, sources in South America, particularly Colombia, provided gems of higher quality and in greater quantity, although prior to the European invasions, they only circulated within the immediate area of the

mines. But as the Spanish colonists in Colombia started their own mining operations, emeralds were extracted in greater numbers and began to travel further afield, reaching Europe and Asia through a variety of sea and land networks.



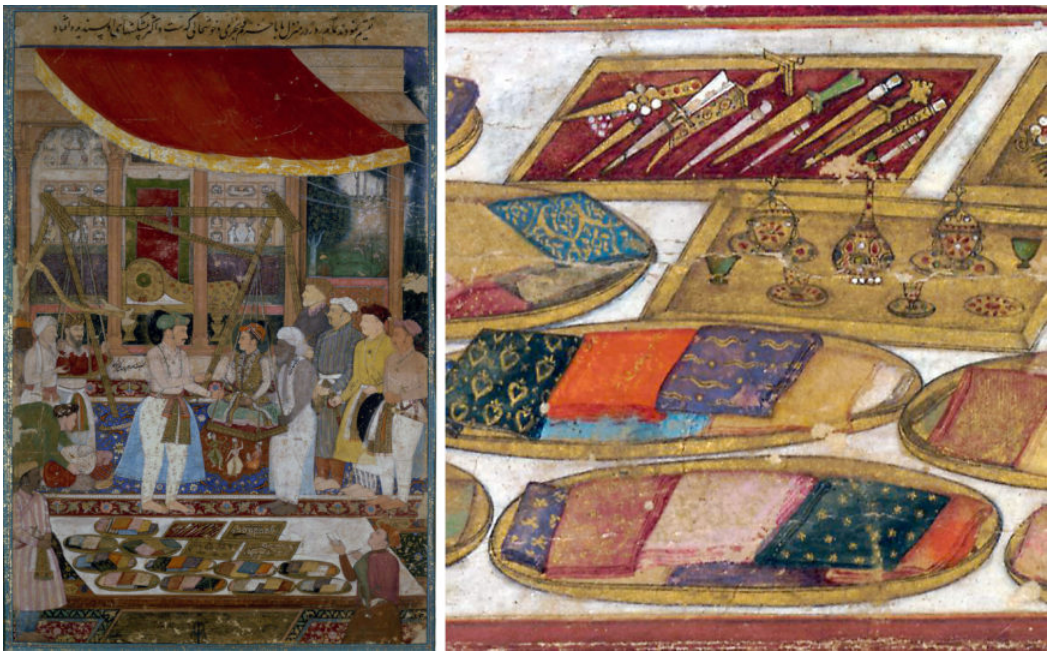
Carew Spinel engraved with the titles of Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and ‘Alamgir (Aurangzeb), 17th century, Mughal Empire, India. 4 cm high, 2.3 cm wide (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

The impact of this trade at the Mughal court is apparent in the expanded prominence of emeralds in writings, in paintings, and in surviving objects from the late sixteenth century on. A chronicler of the reign of Emperor Akbar, for instance, recorded emeralds as one of the major holdings in the Mughal treasury, along with the kind of gems that long been collected there, such as spinels, pearls, diamonds, sapphires, and rubies.

Emerald cup, later 16th–17th century, Mughal, India, 4.1 cm high, 252 carats (Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait)

In the records of the reigns of Akbar’s son Jahangir and grandson Shah Jahan, there are frequent mentions of the presentation of emeralds or emerald jewelry, commissioned by the emperors as gifts to their sons and subordinates at key moments such as their birthdays, military deployments, or new governorships. In addition, European visitors to court mention that the emperors wore emerald jewelry and displayed emerald-encrusted objects during public ceremonies. In 1611, the Englishman John Jourdain describes a procession of elephants with trappings inlaid with emeralds, while in 1616, English ambassador Thomas Roe speaks of a cup, cover, and dish used by Jahangir, set with turquoises, rubies, and emeralds. In imperial portraits emerald jewelry became more noticeable as well, as demonstrated by the likeness of Shah Jahan discussed above, in which he wears emeralds mounted in necklaces and turban ornaments.

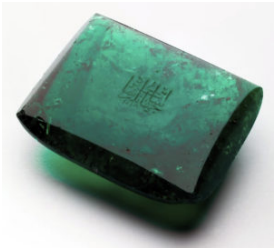
Surviving emerald objects are also plentiful. While many stones were never cut and were stored loose, there are dozens of carved beads and pendants that would have been strung with pearls and rubies to create the necklaces that appear in so many Mughal paintings. There are also a number of flat plaques decorated with floral motifs that would have been set in armbands and bracelets. Finally, there is a set of small cups whose bowls are made from solid emeralds, along with a box made of emerald plaques set into a gold lid and base.



Left: Jahangir weighing Prince Khurram against gold and silver, Commemorating an event of 31 July 1607 for Khurram's 15th birthday, c. 1615, India, Mughal, image: 30 x 19.6 cm; right: detail of the trays with emerald cups (© Trustees of the British Museum)

These might correspond to descriptions by European observers at Jahangir's court of drinking cups made from single pieces of spinel, jade, and emerald, or to representations of such vessels in Jahangir-era paintings, such as the small green cup depicted on the tray of precious objects distributed at the time of a royal birthday.

Mughal court inscriptions



Emerald inscribed "Jahangir Shah-i Akbar Shah 1018 [1609–10 C.E.]," India, Mughal, 3.4 x 2.8 cm, 98.74 carats (Museum of Islamic Art, Doha)

But most intriguing are three emeralds that were inscribed by Jahangir with his name and titles, for this indicates that the emerald itself was of special significance in the Mughal iconography of state. These three emeralds are impressive in size, with the largest, now in the Museum of the Islamic Art, Doha weighing in at 98.74 carats. All three include the phrase *Jahangir shah-i Akbar shah* (King Jahangir, son of King Akbar), and two include a date of 1018 in the Islamic calendar (converting to 1609–10 C.E.). The third also included a date but it is no longer legible.

This practice can be contextualized by looking to other types of objects that the Mughals emperors inscribed, for they added their names to a range of precious items and historical objects that they collected for their personal treasuries. This includes rare and valuable porcelains acquired from China, and imperial manuscripts sourced from Iran. Most relevant to the example of the emeralds, though, would be other gemstones, specifically spinels (such as the Carew spinel above) and jades. On the one hand these stones were considered aesthetically striking and could be made into jewelry or precious objects to be used and displayed at court. These stones also had great monetary value and unblemished and high-quality specimens were hard to come by; like monarchs the world over, the Mughals sought them as an expression of their wealth. But in addition, these particular stones were desirable because they had special significance for the Mughal family line. Spinels come from a region in Afghanistan once ruled

by the conqueror Timur, one of the great forebears of the Mughal line, and Timur and his descendants had also collected and inscribed them.

If this helps us to understand the Mughal practice of inscribing objects with names and titles, there is one aspect of the emeralds that diverges from the earlier examples: the fact that the emeralds did not have the same ancestral connection, having come from Colombia. Therefore, we imagine that the emeralds' appeal was quite different in nature, and one avenue for understanding the value of emeralds to the Mughals is the extensive Persian-language literature on gems. One treatise, in circulation at the Mughal court, entitled *Javahirnama* ("Treatise on Precious Stones") lists the numerous benefits of emeralds: it was considered an antidote for poisoning, it was believed to strengthen the heart, and it was thought to be useful against ailments of the stomach and liver as well as epilepsy. Therefore, the text states, the children of a ruler often wear emeralds. This may be why emeralds were gifted at significant court events, especially when princes were given new assignments.

Precious stones from distant lands

However, a major part of the emeralds' appeal was probably the fact that they came from an exotic and newly discovered locale, South America. That the Mughals were aware of this change in sources is attested by Jahangir's comment in regard to the emerald depicted in the portrait of Shah Jahan, in which he notes:

> **It is from a new mine, [and] it is of extremely good color and valuable. Until now nothing like it has been seen.**

This origin might have been emphasized by sellers to the court such as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a French dealer who made trading trips to India several times between the 1620s and 1640s. He was very well informed about the sources of his gems, even including in his memoirs a section titled "Concerning Coloured Stones and the Places where they Are Obtained" in which he includes a discussion of the American emerald mines. But the Mughals would equally have been aware of the European invasions of the continent, and the exploitation of its natural resources, from a variety of other sources.

Depiction of a South American silver mine from *Tarikh-i Hind Gharbi (A History of the India of the West)*, early 17th century, India (Chester Beatty Library)

Primary among these is *Tarikh-i Hind Gharbi (History of the India of the West)*, a text compiled in Turkish in 1583 at the Ottoman court in Istanbul based on second-hand Italian reports. Focusing on select aspects of the Italian sources, the text lays out the key events in the Spanish conquests of the continents, and discusses the history of each area they captured, including descriptions of the customs of its people, its natural resources, and its topographical features. It specifically mentions, for instance, Spanish finds of impressively large emeralds and the discovery of the Muzo mine in Colombia. A Persian-language version of chapter three of this text, called *Tarjuma-yi Tarikh-i Yenigi Dunya (Translation of the History of the New World)* and tentatively attributed to South Asia in the early 1600s, could be evidence for the circulation of this kind of information during the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

This manuscript copy includes paintings of unusual animals from the new continent, as well as images of its peoples, that would have provided a contextual setting for the source of the emeralds. While some information is factual, there are also many misguided discussions of life in South America, particularly the beliefs and customs of the people of different regions. Some of these discussions were filtered through the lens of what was familiar to the translator and illustrator of the text, for instance in a painting of a silver mine that shows the workers in the style of clothing prevalent in the Mughal lands.

Shah Jahan is shown wearing jewelry with emeralds and other gemstones, such as spinels and pearls. Chitarman, "Shah Jahan on a Terrace" (detail), folio from the *Shah Jahan Album*, 1627–28, Mughal, ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, attributed to India, 38.9 x 25.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art(opens in new window))

However South America, its people and its products were for the most part characterized as unimaginably foreign, if appealing in their foreign-ness. In this context, the emeralds that arrived from such conceptually and physically distant lands would have been exciting acquisitions, linked with the Mughals' desire to possess objects from around the world. Emeralds symbolized the exotic and the rare, and their relatively limited availability made them all the more precious, the perfect emblem to encapsulate the wealth and aspirations of Shah Jahan as he embarked on his rule as emperor.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Artwork details

Art Details

Title	Shah Jahan holding an emerald
Artist(s)	Muhammad Abed(opens in new window)
Dates	1628
Places	Asia(opens in new window) / South Asia / India
Period, Culture, Style	Mughal(opens in new window) / Islamic(opens in new window)
Artwork Type	Painting(opens in new window) / Portrait painting(opens in new window)
Material	Watercolor paint(opens in new window), Gold(opens in new window), Paper(opens in new window)
Technique	Gilding(opens in new window)

Cite this page

Cite this page as: Dr. Marika Sardar, "Shah Jahan's portrait, emeralds, and the exotic at the Mughal court," in *Smarthistory*, October 7, 2022, accessed February 4, 2026, Shah Jahan Portrait [smarthistory.org].

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5.4.2.7: Caligula

Caligula

Learn more at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.(opens in new window)

Figure 5.4.2.7.1: Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus ("Caligula") (Primary Title) ca. 38 AD, Unknown (Artist), Image released via Creative Commons CC-BY-NC

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5.4.2.8: Nitza Tufino

Nitza Tufiño, *Pareja Taína (Taíno Couple)*

by Dr. Susanna V. Temkin, Curator, El Museo del Barrio and Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño

Taíno iconography is cleverly incorporated throughout Tufiño's painting of a couple.

Nitza Tufino

Nitza Tufino, Pareja Taina

Nitza Tufiño, *Pareja Taína (Taíno Couple)*, 1972, acrylic, charcoal, and polyurethane on Masonite, 123.8 x 122.5 cm (El Museo del Barrio, New York) © Nitza Tufiño. Speakers: Dr. Susanna V. Temkin, Senior Curator, El Museo del Barrio and Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño, University of Puerto Rico

Video transcript

0:00:05.4 Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño: We are here at El Museo del Barrio in New York, looking at Nitza Tufiño's Pareja Taína, or Taíno Couple, a square painting where we find two bodies that are very colorful. These are figures that almost have a carnivalesque quality in the way their facial features are represented, almost as mask or harking back to the petroglyphs of the Taíno culture that we find in places like Puerto Rico.

0:00:34.3 Dr. Susanna V. Temkin: I like to think about this in the tradition of couples portraiture, images of kings and queens, or even going all the way back to Egyptian stele with the pharaohs and their consorts, elevating these Taíno figures to that symbolically divine status.

0:00:56.5 Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño: Tufiño is related to the founding of Taller Boricua, which is a artist's workshop that had a very political inclination, where they were very interested in reclaiming Taíno culture in the context of the diaspora. They were very interested in exploring Taíno iconography. We have these very colorful bodies dressed completely in Taíno imagery. The male figure has a symbol in green on his torso, and the figure itself hearkens to Taíno petroglyphs in Puerto Rico, where the coquí frog is represented that way. The way the heads or the mask are designed are also hearkening back to petroglyphs in places like Puerto Rico, which you find in monoliths in caves.

0:01:43.6 Dr. Susanna V. Temkin: I think it's very interesting how the male, he's not just wearing a coquí, but the coquí petroglyph defines his anatomy. It defines his chest, his torso. And then his face hearkens back to petroglyphs of the sun god.

0:02:00.0 Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño: The nipples are also green in the petroglyph design. Those are the coquí's eyes. So very much the torso is completely defined by this petroglyph.

0:02:08.6 Dr. Susanna V. Temkin: These are important early moments for Taller Boricua, a printmaking center that was looking to Taíno imagery, Taíno iconography to include in their artwork. These were also early moments here at El Museo del Barrio, where Nitza was involved as an educator. There are early images of El Museo where we see this image hung on a wall. I also think it's interesting that Nitza was referencing this very hyper local cultural context of being Puerto Rican, being Nuyorican. She was also thinking about the Vietnam War. So she talks about the female figure, how her face, her mask also recalls the images of gas masks that would have been prominent throughout the news from soldiers coming back and forth between Vietnam and the United States.

0:03:05.4 Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño: Taller Boricua's mission was also very much related to political education, cultural education. So a lot of the production is involved with the community in the interest of teaching the community about their heritage, about the political situation in Puerto Rico, about the cultural heritage that comes from being Puerto Rican.

0:03:25.8 Dr. Susanna V. Temkin: Nitza often uses the phrase Neo-Boriken, this idea of a new Boriken, which is the Arawak word for Puerto Rico. And in fact, she extends that title to a piece that she made for the New York City subway mosaics that adopt the same palette that we see here in Pareja Taína, with these almost electric pinks and yellows and oranges and greens.

0:03:53.4 Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño: And even the way the paint sets on the skins of the figures on the background, it very much feels like an almost liminal space between the ethereal and the urban of New York.

0:04:04.8 Dr. Susanna V. Temkin: I also love how present these two figures are. They're pushed against the picture plane, confronting us like we're in their presence.

Artwork details

Art Details

Title	Pareja Taína (Taíno Couple)
Artist(s)	Nitza Tufiño(opens in new window)
Dates	1972
Places	North America(opens in new window) / United States / The Caribbean / Puerto Rico
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms(opens in new window) / Civil Rights era(opens in new window)
Artwork Type	Painting(opens in new window)
Material	Acrylic paint(opens in new window), Charcoal(opens in new window), Panel(opens in new window)
Technique	

Bibliography

The artist's website(opens in new window)

See *Pareja Taína* in the exhibition "Taller Boricua: A Political Print Shop in New York" from El Museo del Barrio(opens in new window)

Watch "Art for All," a documentary about Taller Boricua directed by Marcos Dimas(opens in new window)

Taína Caragol, "The Construction of Nuyorican Identity in the Art of Taller Boricua," *Nuyorican and Diasporican Visual Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Arlene Dávila and Yasmin Ramirez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2025), pp. 70–89.

Aimé Iglesias Lukin, *This Must Be the Place: An Oral History of Latin American Artists in New York, 1965–1975* (New York: Americas Society/Institute for Studies on Latin American Art, 2022).

Important fundamentals

Contemporary art, an introduction(opens in new window)

1945–80 in the United States, an introduction(opens in new window)

Cite this page

Cite this page as: Dr. Susanna V. Temkin, Curator, El Museo del Barrio and Dr. Tamara Díaz Calcaño, "Nitza Tufiño, *Pareja Taína (Taíno Couple)*," in *Smarthistory*, February 12, 2025, accessed February 4, 2026, Nitza Tufino [smarthistory.org].

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5.4.2.9: Page from the Codex Zouche-Nuttall

by THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Figure **5.4.2.9.1**: Folio one and two, *Codex Zouche-Nuttall*, 1200-1521, C.E., Mixtec, Late Postclassic period, deer skin, 47 leaves, each 19 x 23.5 cm, Mexico © Trustees of the British Museum

This is one of a small number of known Mexican codices (screenfold manuscript books) dating to pre-Hispanic times. It is made of deer skin and comprises 47 leaves.

Figure **5.4.2.9.2**: Folio fifty enthroned Mixtec ruler, Eight Deer Jaguar-Claw (detail), *Codex Zouche-Nuttall*, 1200-1521, C.E., Mixtec, Late Postclassic period, deer skin, 47 leaves, each 19 x 23.5 cm, Mexico © Trustees of the British Museum

The powerful ruler Eight Deer Jaguar-Claw can be seen here (above), sitting on a throne with his name next to him (8 circles and a deer's head).

The *Zouche-Nuttall Codex* contains two narratives: one side of the document relates the history of important centres in the Mixtec region, while the other, starting at the opposite end, records the genealogy, marriages and political and military feats of the Mixtec ruler, Eight Deer Jaguar-Claw. This ruler is depicted at top center, next to his calendric name (8 circles and a deer's head). It was made by the Mixtec people, some of whom joined the Aztec empire. It uses a kind of picture-writing showing important Mixtec events, with special signs for names and dates.

Figure **5.4.2.9.3**: Folio fifty, *Codex Zouche-Nuttall*, 1200-1521, C.E., Mixtec, Late Postclassic period, deer skin, 47 leaves, each 19 x 23.5 cm, Mexico © Trustees of the British Museum

Very few Mesoamerican pictorial documents have survived destruction and it is not clear how the *Codex Zouche-Nuttall* reached Europe. In 1859 it turned up in a Dominican monastery in Florence. Years later, Sir Robert Curzon, 14th Baron Zouche (1810-73), loaned it to The British Museum. His books and manuscripts were inherited by his sister, who donated the Codex to the Museum in 1917. The Codex was first published by Zelia Nuttall in 1902.

Suggested readings:

E.H. Boone, *Stories in red and black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2000).

Z. Nuttall, *Facsimile of an Ancient Mexican Codex Belonging to Lord Zouche of Harynworth, England* (Cambridge, Mass., Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1902).

G. Brotherstone, *Painted books of Mexico* (London, The British Museum Press, 1995).

C. McEwan, *Ancient Mexico in the British* (London, The British Museum Press, 1994).

F. Anders, M. Jansen and G. A. Pérez Jiménez, *Códice Zouche-Nuttall, facsimile with commentary and line drawing* (Madrid, Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario; Graz, Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt; Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992).

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- **11.2: North America before c. 1500** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.4.2.10: The Dinner Party

- *by DR. JENNIE KLEIN*

Page ID

385060

Figure **5.4.2.10.1**: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, ceramic, porcelain, and textile, 1463 x 1463 cm (**Brooklyn Museum**)

A Place at the Table

<em

The Dinner Party research team, Santa Monica, CA (Through the Flower Archive and Judy Chicago)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-35053" loading="lazy" sizes="(max-width: 200px) 100vw, 200px" srcset="

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Figure **5.4.2.10.2**: The Dinner Party research team, Santa Monica, CA (**Through the Flower Archive and Judy Chicago**)

The Dinner Party is a monument to women's history and accomplishments. It is a massive triangular table—measuring 48 feet on each side—with thirty-nine place settings dedicated to prominent women throughout history and an additional 999 names are inscribed on the table's glazed porcelain brick base. This tribute to women, which includes individual place settings for such luminary figures as the Primordial Goddess, **Ishtar**, **Hatshepsut**, **Theodora**, **Artemesia Gentileschi**, Sacajawea, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Emily Dickinson, Margaret Sanger, and **Georgia O'Keeffe**, is beautifully crafted. Each place setting has an exquisitely embroidered table runner that includes the name of the woman, utensils, a goblet, and a plate.

The Dinner Party was intended to be exhibited in a large, darkened, sanctuary-like room, with each place setting individually lit, making it look as though it is composed of thirty-nine altars. The 999 names, written in gold, gleam softly, suggesting a hallowed or liminal space. Five years in the making (1974-1979) and the product of the volunteer labor of more than 400 people, *The Dinner Party* is a testament to the power of feminist vision and artistic collaboration. It was also a testament to Chicago's ability to create a work of art that spoke to people who had not previously been a part of the art world. When the exhibition opened at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco in March of 1979, it was mobbed. Judy Chicago's accompanying lecture was completely sold out.

Figure **5.4.2.10.3**: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, ceramic, porcelain, and textile, 1463 x 1463 cm (Brooklyn Museum, photo: **Eric Wilcox**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Although critics praised the table runners, they ignored or disparaged the plates. These ceramic objects, which become increasingly three-dimensional during the procession from prehistory to the present in order to represent women rising, look somewhat like flowers and butterflies. They also resemble female genitalia, which many people found disturbing. Writing for the feminist journal *Frontiers* in 1981, Lolette Kuby was so taken aback by the plates' forms that she suggested that Playboy and Penthouse had done more to promote the beauty of female anatomy than The Dinner Party ever could.

Figure **5.4.2.10.4**: Judy Chicago, Emily Dickinson place setting from *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79 (Brooklyn Museum, photo: **Philipp Messner**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Kuby's distaste for pudenda was echoed more forcefully a decade later, when Chicago attempted to donate the artwork to the University of the District of Columbia. Chicago was forced to withdraw her donation after the U.S. Senate threatened to withhold funding from UDC if they accepted what Rep. Robert Dornan characterized as "3-D ceramic pornography" and Rep. Dana Rohrabacher dismissed as a "spectacle of weird art, weird feminist art at that." It was not until 2007 that The Dinner Party, an icon of feminist art, would find a permanent home in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Feminist Education

What drove Chicago to embark on such a large and controversial feminist project? She was inspired, in part, by her pioneering work in feminist education. She started the Feminist Art Program at California State University, Fresno in 1970. The following year she founded the Feminist Art Program (FAP) at the newly established California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) with the abstract painter Miriam Schapiro. The galleries were still under construction when Chicago arrived at CalArts, so the FAP had their exhibition in an abandoned mansion that was slated to be demolished shortly after. The resulting installation, *Womanhouse*, was a testament to Chicago's method of teaching, which begin with consciousness raising and then progressed to realizing a message through whatever medium was most suitable, whether it was performance, sculpture, or painting.

Figure **5.4.2.10.5**: Judy Chicago, Eleanor of Aquitaine place setting from *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79 (Brooklyn Museum, photo: **Mark B. Schlemmer**, CC BY 2.0)

While at CalArts, Chicago and Schapiro developed the idea of "central core imagery," arguing in a 1973 article published in *Womanspace Journal* that many women artists making abstract art unconsciously gravitated towards imagery that was anti-phallic. By the time she began working on *The Dinner Party*, Chicago had come to believe that central core imagery, which celebrated feminine eroticism and fertility, could be used to challenge patriarchal constructions of women. For Chicago, there existed an irreducible difference between men and women, and that difference began with the genitals. Chicago would eventually put vaginal imagery front and center in *The Dinner Party*.

Right Out of History

After several years of work establishing various feminist art programs in Southern California, Chicago was eager to get back to making her own artwork and resigned from teaching in 1974. Her experience with *Womanhouse* inspired her to embrace materials that had traditionally been associated with women's crafts, such as embroidery, weaving, and china painting. She was determined to make a monument to women's history using china-painted plates alluding to thirteen specific figures, which she originally planned

to hang on the gallery wall. However, she soon realized that there were many more women that she wished to include, and the initial conception of the piece expanded to a large-scale installation with thirty-nine place settings.

Figure **5.4.2.10.6**: Judy Chicago, Sojourner Truth place setting from *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79 (Brooklyn Museum, photo: **Neil R**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

An important component of the piece was the educational material that represented the years of research that had been conducted by Chicago's volunteer staff, led by art historian Diane Gelon. *The Dinner Party* was accompanied by a book of the same title (published by Anchor Books in 1979 and designed by Sheila Levrant de Bretteville) that included the stories behind all 1,038 names. Filmmaker Johanna Demetrakas documented the monumental effort that it took to make this installation in her film *Right Out of History: The Making of the Dinner Party*.

Not Exactly Playboy or Penthouse

Figure **5.4.2.10.7**: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Two Calla Lilies on Pink*, 1928, oil on canvas, 101.6 × 76.2 cm (**Philadelphia Museum of Art**)

In order to understand *The Dinner Party*, we must keep in mind that the sculptural painted plates were intended to be metaphors rather than realistic representations. Take, for instance, **the final place setting on the table—the one for Georgia O'Keeffe**. This

plate is the most sculptural piece in the installation. Pink and greenish gray swirls and folds radiate out from a central core framed by fleshy looking folds that seem to have been deliberately spread apart in order to reveal what should be a hidden entrance. The plate can be read as suggestive of female genitalia, but its forms also recall the shape of a butterfly and the reproductive organs of flowers. O'Keeffe was famous for her abstracted paintings of flowers, and and the plate is an homage to some her best-known works, such as *Grey Lines With Black, Blue, and Yellow* (1923) and *Black Iris III* (1926), both of which have a central opening framed by folds, or *Two Calla Lilies On Pink* (1928), which has a similar color palette to the O'Keeffe plate.

Chicago's decision to use vaginal imagery has proven to be powerful. *The Dinner Party*, having survived rejection, critical dismissal, and political grandstanding, is now considered a key work of contemporary art, and is permanently installed in a dedicated space at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

Additional Resources:

The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago at the Brooklyn Museum

Through the Flower

Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History (*Arnold L. Lehman, foreword. Brooklyn Museum of Art/The Monacelli Press, 2014).

Jane Gerhard, T*he Dinner Party: Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism, 1970-2007* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2013).

Gail Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago* (*N*ew York: Harmony Books. 2007).

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5.4.3: Questions_to_Consider

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.5: Considering History

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Further explore the artwork from What is Cultural Heritage? Each highlighted artwork is listed below with a supplemental image for comparison.

Topic hierarchy

5.5.1: What is Cultural Heritage?

- 5.5.1.1: Mona Lisa
- 5.5.1.2: Nampeyo, polychrome Jar
- 5.5.1.3: Hileq and Bileq
- 5.5.1.4: Medallion Carpet, The Ardabil Carpet
- 5.5.1.5: Abdoulaye Ndoye, Ahmed Baba
- 5.5.1.6: Djingareyber Mosque
- 5.5.1.7: Amrita Sher-Gil Self-Portrait as a Tahitian
- 5.5.1.8: Faith Ringgold, Dancing at the Louvre
- 5.5.1.9: Lysippos of Sikyon, Apoxyomenos (Scraper)
- 5.5.1.10: Plate with Hunting Rams

5.5.2: Asia Cultures and Brief History

- 5.5.2.1: Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya
- 5.5.2.2: Handheld Prayer Wheel
- 5.5.2.3: Mosaic, Great Mosque of Damascus
- 5.5.2.4: Torah case
- 5.5.2.5: Six Gentlemen 六君子图
- 5.5.2.6: Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design
- 5.5.2.7: Wang Meng, Ge Zhichuan Moving to the Mountains 葛稚川移居圖
- 5.5.2.8: Heavenly Horse from the West
- 5.5.2.9: Angkor Wat
- 5.5.2.10: Mahabodhi Temple
- 5.5.2.11: Scenes In and Around the Capital
- 5.5.2.12: Kathakali Dance
- 5.5.2.13: Participation of Women in Work
- 5.5.2.14: Timur’s entry into Samarkand
- 5.5.2.15: Abanindranath Tagore
- 5.5.2.16: Khem Karan, View of the Siege of Baghdad in 1258
- 5.5.2.17: Han Jar Overpainted with Coca-Cola Logo
- 5.5.2.18: Knotted Carpet with Human Figures and Brahmi/Khotanese Inscriptions

5.5.3: Africa Cultures and Brief History

5.5.3.1: Running Horned Woman
5.5.3.2: Linguist Staff Okyeamepoma
5.5.3.3: Memorial Head (Ntiri)
5.5.3.4: Gold weight- Geometric
5.5.3.5: Great Mosque of Djenné
5.5.3.6: Lidded Saltcellar
5.5.3.7: Shrine Head
5.5.3.8: Shell Vessel with Leopard from Igbo-Ukwu
5.5.3.9: Queen Mother Pendant Mask
5.5.3.10: Head of an Oba
5.5.3.11: Bet Giyorgis Church
5.5.3.12: Painted wooden lion’s head, Early Coptic period
5.5.3.13: Coptic ostrakon, Early Islamic period
5.5.3.14: Jar, late 3rd–4th century
5.5.3.15: Conical Tower, Great Zimbabwe
5.5.3.16: Power Figure (Nkisi Nkondi)
5.5.3.17: Zlan of Belewale, Ceremonial Ladle
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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.5.1: What is Cultural Heritage?

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Topic hierarchy

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5.5.1.2: Nampeyo, polychrome Jar

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Beth Harris and Sal Khan provide a description, historical perspective, and analysis of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*.

The link to this video is provided at the bottom of this page.

Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503–05, oil on panel 30-1/4 × 21 inches (Musée du Louvre)

Portraits Were Once Rare

We live in a culture that is so saturated with images, it may be difficult to imagine a time when only the wealthiest people had their likeness captured. The weathy merchents of Renaissance Florence could commission a portrait, but even they would likely only have a single portrait painted during their lifetime. A portrait was about more than likeness, it spoke to status and position. In addition, portraits generally took a long time to paint, and the subject would commonly have to sit for hours or days, while the artist captured their likeness.

The Most Recognized Painting in the World

Figure **5.5.1.1.1**. Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*

The Mona Lisa was originally this type of portrait, but over time its meaning has shifted and it has become an icon of the Renaissance, the most recognized painting in the world. The *Mona Lisa* is a likely a portrait of the wife of a Florentine merchant, and so her gaze would have been meant for her husband. For some reason however, the portrait was never delivered to its patron, and Leonardo kept it with him when he went to work for Francis I, the King of France.

The *Mona Lisa*'s mysterious smile has inspired many writers, singers, and painters. Here's a passage about the *Mona Lisa*, written by the Victorian-era writer Walter Pater:

We all know the face and hands of the figure, set in its marble chair, in that circle of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea. Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least. The presence that thus rose so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed!

Figure **5.5.1.1.2**. Piero della Francesca, *Portrait of Battista Sforza* (c. 1465–66)

Early Renaissance artist, Piero della Francesca's *Portrait of Battista Sforza* (figure 2) is typical of portraits during the Early Renaissance (before Leonardo); figures were often painted in strict profile, and cut off at the bust. Often the figure was posed in front of a birds-eye view of a landscape.

A New Formula

With Leonardo's portrait, the face is nearly frontal, the shoulders are turned three-quarters toward the viewer, and the hands are included in the image. Leonardo uses his characteristic sfumato—a smokey haziness, to soften outlines and create an atmospheric effect around the figure.

Figure **5.5.1.1.3**. Hans Memling *Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer* (c. 1485–94)

When a figure is in profile, we have no real sense of who she is, and there is no sense of engagement. With the face turned toward us, however, we get a sense of the personality of the sitter.

Northern Renaissance artists such as Hans Memling (see figure 3) had already created portraits of figures in positions similar to the *Mona Lisa*. Memling had even located them in believable spaces. Leonardo combined these Northern innovations with Italian painting's understanding of the three dimensionality of the body and the perspectival treatment of the surrounding space.

A Recent Discovery

An important copy of the *Mona Lisa* was recently discovered in the collection of the Prado in Madrid. The background had been painted over, but when the painting was cleaned, scientific analysis revealed that the copy was likely painted by another artist who sat beside Leonardo and copied his work, brush-stroke by brush-stroke. The copy gives us an idea of what the *Mona Lisa* might look like if layers of yellowed varnish were removed.

Figure **5.5.1.1.4**. Comparing the copy to the original *Mona Lisa*.

Contributors

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5.5.1.2: Nampeyo, polychrome Jar

Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

Page ID

386631

by **DR. DAVID W. PENNEY, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

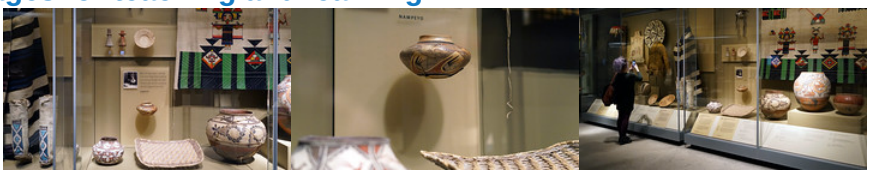
Video 5.5.1.2.1: Nampeyo (Hopi-Tewa), polychrome jar, c. 1930s, clay and pigment, 13 x 21 cm (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution), a Seeing America video

Speakers: Dr. David Penney, Associate Director for Museum Scholarship, Exhibitions, and Public Engagement, National Museum of the American Indian and Dr. Steven Zucker

Additional resources

This jar at the National Museum of the American Indian

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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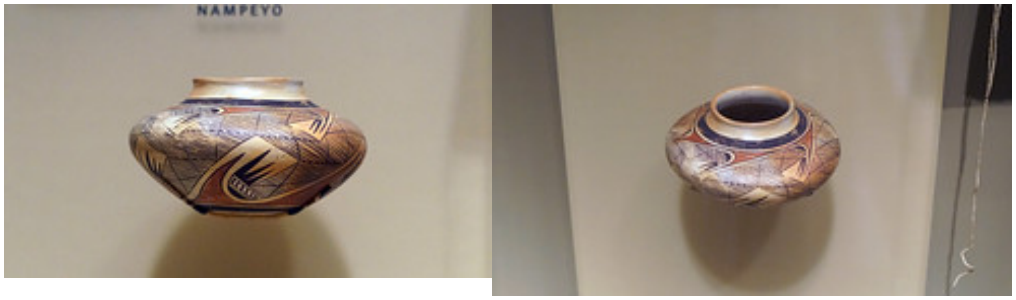

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2021, accessed January 6, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/nampeyo-hopi-tewa-polychrome-jar-2/..

- **2.3: Ancient Egypt** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The “Hileq and Bileq” Haggadah

by Adam S. Cohen

Figure 5.5.1.3.1: Jewish family celebrating the Passover seder, Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 20v, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/386632

Setting the table: Passover and the haggadah

Figure **5.5.1.3.1**: Jewish family celebrating the Passover seder (detail), Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 20v, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

At the bottom of this page in a fifteenth-century manuscript, we see a family—a father, mother, and two children—seated together at a table. Even without knowing anything about what is depicted, we can draw some basic conclusions. It was obviously important that they be shown as a family, and they are all holding up cups; the jug on the table further emphasizes that drinking is important in this scene. Also on the table, in front of the father, is an open book, and he may be pointing to a particular text (the words themselves are not actually written in legible letters, and the picture as a whole has suffered damage from moisture). Finally, to the right, we see a large golden lamp, which suggests that the action is taking place at night—why else would they need light? Who are these people, and what is the point of depicting them on this page, which contains Hebrew text and an opening word that is richly ornamented and set against a patterned gold background? The short answer is that they represent a Jewish family celebrating the Passover seder, although there is more going on here than first meets the eye.

The seder was the home ritual celebrated each year on the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Nissan (usually in April) to commemorate the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt and miraculous delivery from slavery, which is recounted in the biblical book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible. On the first night of the Passover festival, Jews were commanded to tell the story of God's redemption of the children of Israel and to eat various ritual foods, including matzah (unleavened bread), four cups of wine, and maror (a bitter herb).

In the ancient world and the early Middle Ages, the Passover seder was conducted entirely through spoken word and performance. Beginning around 1300, Jews in Europe began to create or acquire decorated versions of the haggadah, a small book containing the texts used at the seder. The impetus for the creation of the written haggadah was part of a larger European trend in which literacy was increasing, and more people were using books for both religious and secular purposes. For European Jews, it was useful to collect the seder texts in a book, and those books could be decorated to enhance the entire seder experience. One example is this book, known as the Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, which was made in the second half of the fifteenth century somewhere in southern Germany. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to be more precise about the date and location of this particular work, but in many ways it is typical of decorated haggadahs in central Europe in the Middle Ages.

Figure 5.5.1.3.1: Right: plague of the firstborn; left: women cleaning and preparing the seder meal, Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fols. 16v-17r, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

Past and present in the haggadah

Medieval haggadahs, whether made in central Europe (Ashkenaz) or Iberia, regularly included two kinds of illustration: pictures that tell the biblical story of the exodus and depictions of the seder activities themselves. These two facing pages of the Hileq and Bileq Haggadah contain both kinds of illustration.

Hebrew is read from right to left, so the page on the right comes first. The image in the bottom margin shows us, according to the rhyming Hebrew captions, “Image of pharaoh, getting out of his bed in a hurry, because God smote [killed] all the firstborn of Egypt” and “Image of Moses our teacher standing opposite him, and pharaoh about to plead for his life.”

Figure 5.5.1.3.1: Plague of the firstborn, Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 16v, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

The page thus brings to a conclusion a series of images that represent the dramatic ten plagues that God sent to punish the Egyptians for enslaving the Jews and to motivate them to release the Children of Israel from their bondage. Admittedly, the haggadah pictures themselves—a big bed, the crowned king of Egypt in his nightshirt, and Moses confronting him—are not particularly dramatic; compositional sophistication was not a value for this artist (although other examples, like the luxurious fifteenth-century Darmstadt Haggadah, demonstrate that some haggadah artists were quite sophisticated).

Figure **5.5.1.3.1**: Women cleaning and preparing the seder meal, Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 17r, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

On the facing page is something altogether different: two women engaged in domestic activities. According to the captions, one is an "Image of the girl wiping the dishes because this is what girls do"; the other caption reads, "Says the picture: I will prepare the food for our meal, because they have already started to say '*dayenu*.'"

Pictures of setting the table and cooking dinner are not illustrations of the *dayenu* text found on the page itself, which is a list of the great things God did for the Jewish people over the course of the exodus. Nor do they represent a commanded ritual, like eating the matzah, which is depicted elsewhere in the haggadah. They are, instead, candid reflections of the practical aspects of the seder, snapshots of contemporary fifteenth-century life. Expressing this in the mother's voice makes the lived experience even more vivid: something like "Oh, we've reached the point of the *dayenu* prayer, which means it's getting close to the meal, so I'd better get dinner ready." (This is a moment that many contemporary participants in a seder will find familiar!) The picture shows how household labor was divided along gender lines, but what would have stood out to the fifteenth-century readers and viewers is the seamless transition from biblical history on one page to contemporary life on the next. This demonstrated that participating in the seder was an unbroken tradition that reached back to the Bible itself.

Figure 5.5.1.3.1: “In every generation, a person is required to see [consider] himself as if he went out of Egypt,” Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 20r, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

One of the traditional texts in the haggadah makes this explicit: “In every generation, a person is required to see [consider] himself as if he went out of Egypt.” Accompanying that passage are a picture and caption that make a literal play on the key words: “Says the picture: I can’t ‘see myself’ if I don’t look into one of the mirrors.” This is yet another demonstration of how the maker of this haggadah used clever words and engaging images to draw the book’s audience into the seder experience.

Figure 5.5.1.3.1: Jewish family celebrating Passover seder, Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 20v, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

Who was responsible for the 67 marginal text illustrations with their rhymed, often witty, captions? An inscription at the end of the haggadah claims: “The scribe Abraham, the son of Moses Lando, wrote the humble poems, half asleep.” Abraham takes credit for the captions in a way that is superficially modest even as it reveals him to be a rather playful person. Although Abraham does not claim to be the artist, the close coordination between texts and images, and the artist’s apparent lack of professional training, make

this likely. The pictures certainly display the kind of playful wit also seen in the captions, as we can see when we return to the picture of the family sitting at the seder.

At this point in the book, the main part of telling the story of the exodus has been completed. The page marks an important moment in the haggadah, because it is one of just six pages that have an enlarged decorated word highlighted with gold, a standard practice in medieval Hebrew manuscripts .

“THEREFORE, we are obligated to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, lavish, bless, raise high, and acclaim He who made all these miracles for our ancestors and for us: He brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to [celebration of] a festival, from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption. And let us say a new song before Him, Hallelujah!”

This relatively long and repetitive text hammers home the need to sing thanks to God, which the picture and its caption communicate succinctly: “Image of those who make pleasant music, lifting their [wine] cups when they get to ‘Therefore.’” We have to imagine the original users of the book coming to this point in the haggadah, seeing the beautifully decorated opening word that cues them to begin their expressions of praise, and at the same time seeing an idealized picture of themselves—the family united in performing the required seder activity, led by the father who has, as was the norm, the only haggadah in the household.

Figure **5.5.1.3.1**: Monkey in upper margin of the page, Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 20v, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

But what is that at the top of the page? It seems to be a monkey playing a trumpet or trombone-like brass instrument. In thousands of late medieval manuscripts, the margins were a place to expand upon the otherwise serious matters on the page, and animals playing instruments were part of the standard repertoire of medieval marginalia. In this instance, the monkey blowing his horn at the top of the page “announces” the text but also becomes, humorously, a member of the group “who make pleasant music … when they get to ‘Therefore.’” The monkey may also be a visual reward for any member of the family paying close enough attention to spot this unexpected and delightful detail.

Figure **5.5.1.3.1**: “Next year in Jerusalem,” Hileq and Bileq Haggadah, fol. 38r, Abraham ben Moshe Landau, 15th century, southern Germany (Bibliotheque nationale de France) via SmartHistory

We do not know the names of the original owners. One clue might be in the book’s final illustration, near the very end of the haggadah under the customary closing proclamation: “Next Year in Jerusalem.”

Four men are seen in acrobatic poses, each holding a cup—an echo of the four cup-holding family members at the seder. According to the caption, this is “The image of Hileq and Bileq each drinking his share.” Were Hileq and Bileq real people—perhaps the original owners of the book? Are they being praised for drinking the required four cups of wine at the seder? Or are they, as their poses suggest, fanciful characters poking a little fun at what happens by the end of the night when so much wine is consumed? Whatever the answer, which perhaps further research will reveal, the drinking acrobats are a final decoration that must have delighted the fifteenth-century users of this Passover haggadah, much as it continues to do today.

Artwork details

Art Details

Title	The "Hileq and Bileq" Haggadah
Artist(s)	Abraham ben Moshe Landau
Dates	15th century
Places	Europe / Central Europe / Germany
Period, Culture, Style	Medieval / Late Medieval / Gothic
Artwork Type	Manuscript
Material	Ink, Tempera paint, Gold, Silver, Parchment
Technique	Illumination

Bibliography

Text of the Haggadah

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Cite this page

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5.5.1.4: Medallion Carpet, The Ardabil Carpet

by DR. ELIZABETH MACAULAY-LEWIS

Figure **5.5.1.4.1**: Medallion Carpet, The Ardabil Carpet, Unknown artist (Maqsud Kashani is named on the carpet's inscription), Persian: Safavid Dynasty, silk warps and wefts with wool pile (25 million knots, 340 per sq. inch), 1539-40 C.E., Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan or Kirman, Iran (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Old, beautiful and important

The Ardabil Carpet is exceptional; it is one of the world's oldest Islamic carpets, as well as one of the largest, most beautiful and historically important. It is not only stunning in its own right, but it is bound up with the history of one of the great political dynasties of Iran.

Figure **5.5.1.4.2**: The Ardabil Carpet at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

About carpets

Carpets are among the most fundamental of Islamic arts. Portable, typically made of silk and wools, carpets were traded and sold across the Islamic lands and beyond its boundaries to Europe and China. Those from Iran were highly prized. Carpets decorated the floors of mosques, shrines and homes, but they could also be hung on walls of houses to preserve warmth in the winter.

Figure 5.5.1.4.3: Medallion Carpet, The Ardabil Carpet, Unknown artist (Maqsud Kashani is named on the carpet's inscription), Persian: Safavid Dynasty, silk warps and wefts with wool pile (25 million knots, 340 per sq. inch), 1539-40 C.E., Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan or Kirman, Iran (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Ardabil and a 14th century saint

The carpet takes its name from the town of Ardabil in north-west Iran. Ardabil was the home to the shrine of the Sufi saint, Safi al-Din Ardabili, who died in 1334 (Sufism is Islamic mysticism). He was a Sufi leader who trained his followers in Islamic mystic practices. After his death, his following grew and his descendants became increasingly powerful. In 1501 one of his descendants, Shah Isma'il, seized power, united Iran, and established Shi'a Islam as the official religion. The dynasty he founded is known as the Safavids. Their rule, which lasted until 1722, was one of the most important periods for Islamic art, especially for textiles and for manuscripts.

Made for a shrine

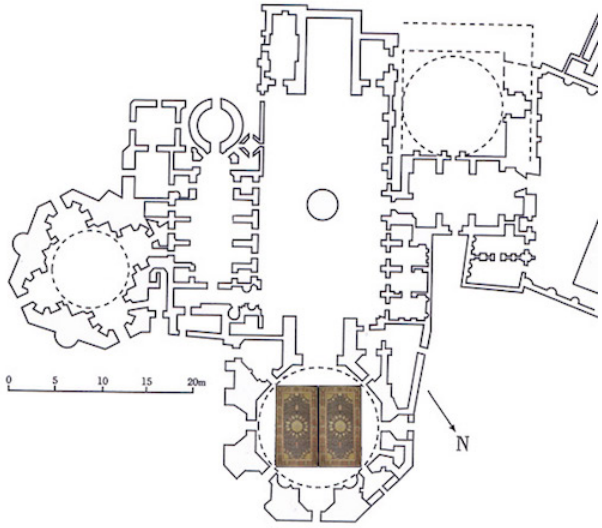

Figure 5.5.1.4.4: Plan of the shrine at Ardabil, showing where the carpets were situated (permission, Victoria and Albert Museum)

This carpet was one of a matching pair that was made for the shrine of Safi al-Din Ardabili when it was enlarged in the late 1530s. Today the Ardabil carpet dominates the main Islamic Art Gallery in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, while its twin is in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The carpets were located side by side in the shrine.

The pile of the carpet is made from wool, rather than silk because it holds dye better. The knot-count of a carpet still directly impacts the value of carpets today; the more knots per square centimeter, the more detailed and elaborate the patterns can be. The dyes used to color the carpet are natural and include pomegranate rind and indigo. Up to ten weavers could have worked on the carpet at any given time. The Ardabil carpet has 340 knots per square inch (5300 knots per ten centimeters square). Today, a commercial rug averages 80-160 knots per square inch, meaning that the Ardabil carpet was highly detailed. Its high knot count allowed for the inclusion of an intricate design and pattern. It is not known whether the carpet was produced in a royal workshop, but there is evidence for court workshop in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Figure **5.5.1.4.5**: Detail, Ardabil Carpet

Design and pattern

The rich geometric patterns, vegetative scrolls, floral flourishes, so typical of Islamic art, reach a fever pitch in this remarkable carpet, encouraging the viewer to walk around and around, trying to absorb every detail of design.

That the design of the carpet was not arbitrary or piecemeal, but was well-organized and thoughtful can be seen throughout. Considering the immense size of the carpet—10.51m x 5.34m (34′ 6″ x 17′ 6″)—this is impressive. A central golden medallion dominates the carpet; it is surrounded by a ring of multi-colored, detailed ovals. Lamps appear to hang at either end.

Figure **5.5.1.4.6**: Detail, Ardabil Carpet

The carpet's border is made up of a frame with a series of cartouches (rectangular-shaped spaces for calligraphy), filled with decoration. The central medallion design is also echoed by the four corner-pieces.

Figure **5.5.1.4.7**: Detail of lamp, Ardabil Carpet

Art historians have debated the meaning of the two lamps that appear to hang from the medallion. They are of different sizes and some scholars have proposed that this was done to create a perspective effect, meaning that both lamps appear to be the same size when one sat next to the smaller lamp. Yet, there is no evidence for the use of this type of perspective in Iran in the 1530s, nor does this explain why the lamps were included. Perhaps they were included to mimic lamps found in mosques and shrines, helping the

viewer to look deeply into the carpet below them and then above them, to the ceiling where similar lamps would have hung, creating visual unity within the shrine.

An inscription

The Ardabil Carpet includes a four-line inscription placed at one end. This short poem is vital for understanding who commissioned the carpet and the date of the carpet.

The first three lines of poetry reads:

> ***Except for thy threshold, there is no refuge for me in all the world.***
> ***Except for this door there is no resting-place for my head.***
> ***The work of the slave of the portal, Maqsud Kashani.***

Maqsud was probably the court official charged with producing the carpets. By referring to himself as a slave, he may be presenting himself as a humble servant. The Persian word for a door can be used to denote a shrine or royal court, so this inscription may imply that the royal court patronized the shrine. The carpets would have probably taken four years to make.

The fourth line of the inscription is also important. It provides the date of the carpet, AH 946. The Muslim calendar begins in the year 620 CE when Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina; this year is known as the year of the Hijra or flight (in Latin anno hegirae). AH 946 is equivalent to 1539/40 CE (the lunar Muslim calendar does not exactly match the Gregorian Calendar, used in the west).

The design of the Ardabil carpet and its skillful execution is a testament to the great skill of the artisans at work in north-west Iran in the 1530s.

Figure **5.5.1.4.8**: Detail, Ardabil Carpet

How the carpet came to the V&A

Many great treasures from around the world have legally made their way into the collections of western museums. Many objects were legally purchased by collectors and museums in the 19th and 20th centuries; however, many works of art are still illegally exported and sold. British visitors to the shrine in 1843, noted that at least one carpet was still in situ. Approximately thirty years or so later, an earthquake damaged the shrine, and the carpets were sold off.

Ziegler & Co., a Manchester firm involved in the carpet trade purchased the damaged carpets in Iran and “restored” them in fashion typical of the late nineteenth century. Selections of one carpet were used to repair the other, resulting in a “complete” carpet and one lacking a border. Vincent Robinson and Co, a dealer based in London, put the larger carpet up for sale in 1892 and persuaded the V&A to purchase it for £2000 in March 1893.

The second carpet was secretly sold to an American collector, J.P. Getty, who donated it to the LA County Museum of Art in 1953. Unlike the carpet in the V&A, the carpet in LACMA is incomplete. Throughout the twentieth century, other pieces of the carpets have appeared on the art market for sale.

Additional resources:

This carpet at the V&A

On the conservation of the carpet

The Ardabil Carpet at LACMA

Carpets of the Islamic World at The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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Jon Thompson, *Milestones in the History of Carpets* (Milan: Moshe Tabibnia, 2006).

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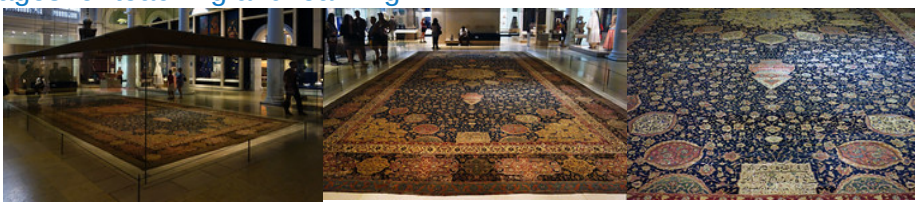

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Abdoulaye Ndoye, *Ahmed Baba*

by Dr. Christa Clarke

Figure **5.5.1.5.1**: Abdoulaye Ndoye, *Ahmed Baba*, 2013, ink and henna on paper, 16 1/8 x 11 x 1 ¾ (dimensions when folded closed), lives and works in Dakar, Senegal (The Newark Museum of Art, © Abdoulaye Ndoye) via SmartHistory

The book unfolds like an accordion, stretching across the length of a table. At first glance, it appears to be an ancient map or perhaps a long-lost manuscript, its pages yellowed like parchment. Thick, dark lines undulate and radiate across the surface, tracing the irregular contours of an uncertain topography. In the spaces between, what appears to be finely detailed script flows across in horizontal waves, row upon row, but ultimately proves illegible.

Figure 5.5.1.5.1: Abdoulaye Ndoye, *Ahmed Baba* (detail), 2013, ink and henna on paper, 16 1/8 x 11 x 1 ¾ (dimensions when folded closed), lives and works in Dakar, Senegal (The Newark Museum of Art, © Abdoulaye Ndoye) via SmartHistory

Dakar-based artist Abdoulaye Ndoye describes this work, part of a larger series of artist's books, as *poesie graphique*, or visual poetry. He combines writing, drawing, and painting to create layered compositions, saturated with washes of henna pigment and meticulously filled with invented script inked onto the surface. The resulting works are not meant to be "read" but instead invite the viewer on a visual journey, exploring the beauty of the inscriptions and designs and the subtle interplay of form and texture. They are informed by the artist's own travels, representing an accumulation of ideas, materials, and techniques.

Celebrating Ahmed Baba

Ahmed Baba is based in part on Ndoye's research on manuscripts and cultural heritage, an area of interest first begun in 2009. It was created as an outgrowth of Ndoye's participation in a 2013 workshop about archives and manuscript preservation hosted by the Ahmed Baba Institute of Higher Learning and Islamic Research in Timbuktu (Mali), founded in 1973. The name of the Institute—as well as the title of Ndoye's work—honors Ahmed Baba al-Massufi al-Timbukti, a celebrated medieval Islamic scholar and writer.

Ahmed Baba was born in 1556 near Timbuktu, which was an important center of regional trade, cultural exchange and Islamic learning during the Songhai empire. Hailing from a long line of jurists, he is credited with writing over 50 books, including theological and legal treatises, an influential biographical dictionary, and a grammar of Arabic still used in northern Nigeria. He also amassed an extensive library of thousands of books. In 1594, after the conquest of Timbuktu by the Sultan of Morocco, Baba was accused of political resistance and exiled to Marrakesh until 1608.

The Ahmed Baba Institute, the only public library in Timbuktu, is a research center and repository for a historically significants collection of over 20,000 manuscripts. They primarily date from the 14th to 16th centuries and cover much of Malian history. The books are mostly written in Arabic, though some are also in local languages such as Songhai, Tamashek, and Bamanankan on subjects including astronomy, medicine, poetry, literature, and Islamic law. In 2012, in the wake of the Malian coup and subsequent political instability,Timbuktu was occupied by Islamist rebels who targeted cultural and religious sites perceived as idolatrous according to their strict interpretation of religious beliefs. Many of the Institute's manuscripts, and thousands more from private

libraries in Timbuktu, were pre-emptively moved to secure locations. They were thus preserved when the rebels set fire to the library of the Ahmed Baba Institute and destroyed or severely damaged many of the city's historic buildings in January 2013 (under the supervision of UNESCO, these manuscripts are **now being digitized**).

Materials and motifs

Ahmed Baba relates both formally and conceptually to Ndoye's experiences in Timbuktu and his participation in the 2013 workshop organized in the aftermath of—and in response to—this destruction of cultural heritage. Ndoye became interested in the artistic implications of manuscripts, exploring writing not just as a mode of communication but in relation to the recording and safekeeping of cultural heritage.

The work was made using a blank book given to him by a fellow artist from China. The pages have been treated on either side with washes of henna pigment, which Ndoye employs both for its cultural significance as well as for artistic effect. The natural dye has a long history of use in West and North Africa, where it is associated with good fortune and painted on women's hands and feet for celebratory occasions such as weddings. On the pages of the book, Ndoye has applied the pigment with a broad brush in successive layers not only as a reference to tradition but also to achieve a color and texture much like an age-worn document. This is overlaid with a palimpsest of invented script and organic patterns in ink.

Figure **5.5.1.5.1**: Guancho Diarra, woman's wrapper (bògòlanfini), 1985, cotton, vegetal dye, 61 5/8 x 35 ½ inches (Newark Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

The patterns and motifs of the book are inspired by regional artistic traditions, including the hand-dyed fabric known as *thioup* and painted *bògòlanfini* (mudcloth) aswell as henna designs. Art historian Joanna Grabski, who has written extensively about Ndoye's artistic practices, describes how these aesthetic appropriations inform the conceptual concerns underlying this work. She observes that "not only are many of these forms and motifs typically associated with ethnic identities, they are also subsumed as national and global heritage in post-independence era cultural politics…. His work underlines that both manuscripts and formal motifs associated with heritage in the Sahel are subject to interpretation as well as reinvention. They are adaptable and translatable to new mediums and expressive forms." [1]

The artist's book

The format that Ndoye adopts here—the artist's book—was introduced an artistic genre at the turn of the 20th century in the Western world. During the first half of the century, artists' books were associated with avant-garde movements, adopted to more widely disseminate art and ideas, subvert traditional market systems and to experiment with form. In the 1950s and 60s, artists such as Dieter Roth and Ed Ruscha began to experiment with the form conceptually. The genre gained popularity with artists in the U.S. and Europe from the 1970s onward. In Africa, however, artists have only recently begun to engage the genre.

Artwork details

Artwork Details

Title	Ahmed Baba
Artist(s)	Abdoulaye Ndoye(opens in new window)
Dates	2013
Places	Africa(opens in new window) / West Africa / Mali
Period, Culture, Style	Contemporary(opens in new window)
Artwork Type	Manuscript(opens in new window) / Calligraphy(opens in new window)
Material	Ink(opens in new window), Paper(opens in new window)
Technique	

Footnotes

[1] Joanna Grabski, *Art World City: The Creative Economy of Artists and Urban Life in Dakar* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), p. 125.

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Janet Stanley, “Artists’ Books and Africa: Unique Visions.”

Read more about cultural heritage at risk in Mali.

Joanna Grabski, *Art World City: The Creative Economy of Artists and Urban Life in Dakar*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017

Christine Mullen Kreamer, et al. *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art*. (5 Continents Editions, Smithsonian, National Museum of African Art; 5 Continents, 2007).

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Timbuktu

by UNESCO

Timbuktu

Home of the prestigious Koranic Sankore University and other madrasas, Timbuktu was an intellectual and spiritual capital and a center for the propagation of Islam throughout Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries. Its three great mosques, Djingareyber, Sankore, and Sidi Yahia, recall Timbuktu's golden age. Although continuously restored, these monuments are today under threat from desertification.

Artwork details

Artwork Details

Title	Timbuktu
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	11th–16th century
Places	Africa / West Africa / Mali
Period, Culture, Style	Mali Empire
Artwork Type	Architecture / Historic City
Material	Adobe
Technique	

Cite this page

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Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*

by Dr. Orin Zahra

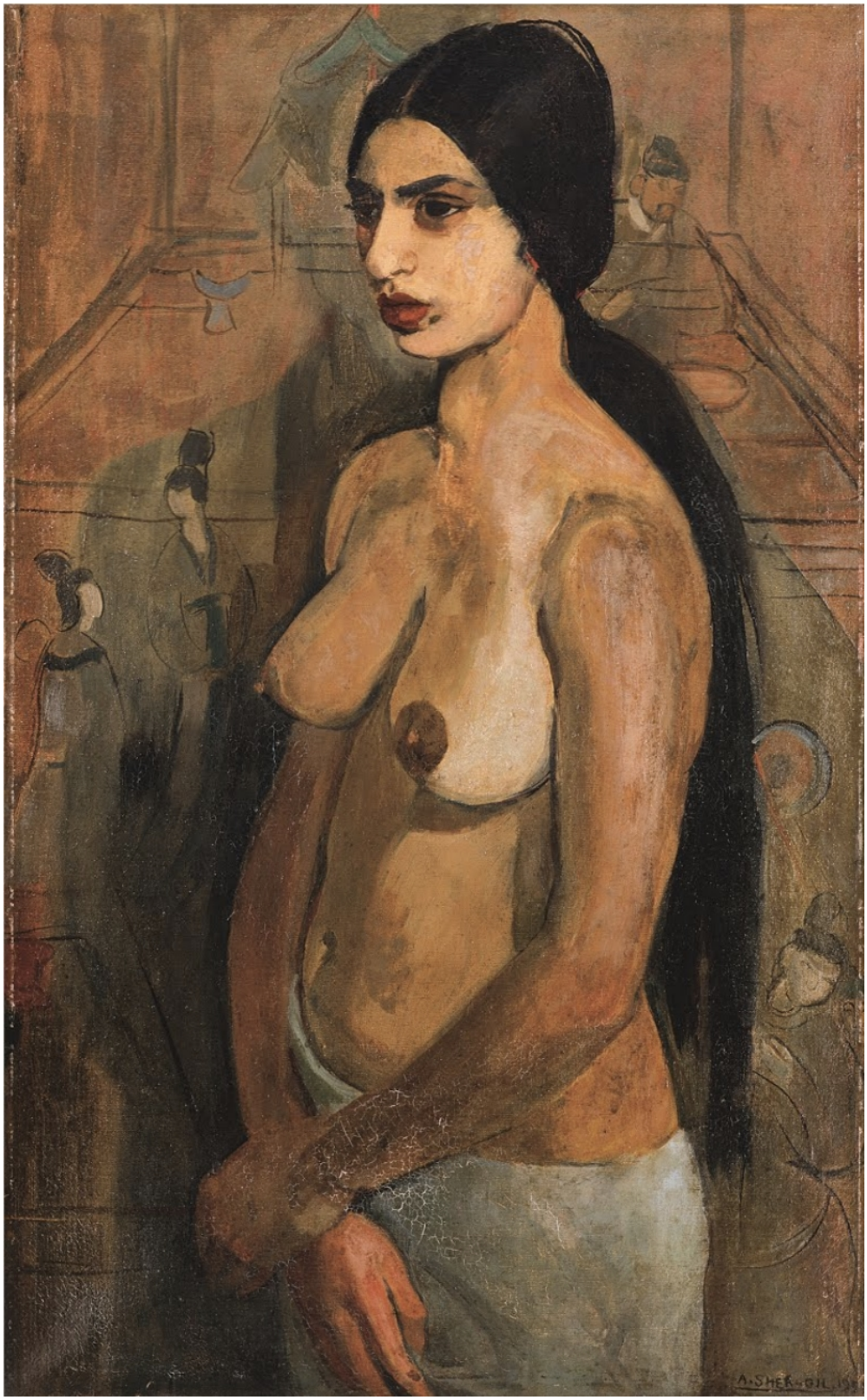

Figure **5.5.1.7.1**: Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934, 90 x 56 cm (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi) via SmartHistory

In a large self-portrait, the modernist painter Amrita Sher-Gil stands half nude with a plain white wrap around her waist. Her loosely tied jet-black hair, parted down the middle, flows down her back. Her brown skin is dappled in varied shades of ochre, nutmeg, and cinnamon, created with multiple layers of paint.

Her upright posture and her hands crossed in front of her convey a measured and firm stance. She turns to the side and gazes off into the distance, a pensive expression on her face, though she leaves us with no clear indication of what the subject of her ruminations might be.

In the background, we see a seated man and slender kimono-clad women occupying the interior or exterior of a pagoda-like structure. [1] Although the oblique angles of the walls give the impression of some spatial depth in this scene, the dramatic difference in scale between Sher-Gil and the other figures, as well as the presence of a large grey shadow cast in a frontal pose behind her, suggest that she does not inhabit the same space as the Japanese figures, but rather stands in front of a flat screen or wallpaper that is decorated with an Asiatic tableau.

In this challenging painting, Sher-Gil engages with the artists Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh and their entanglements with representations of non-European cultures in their individual quests to find their place within and actively shape the discourse of modernist art. It also speaks to her own multi-faceted identity and training as an artist.

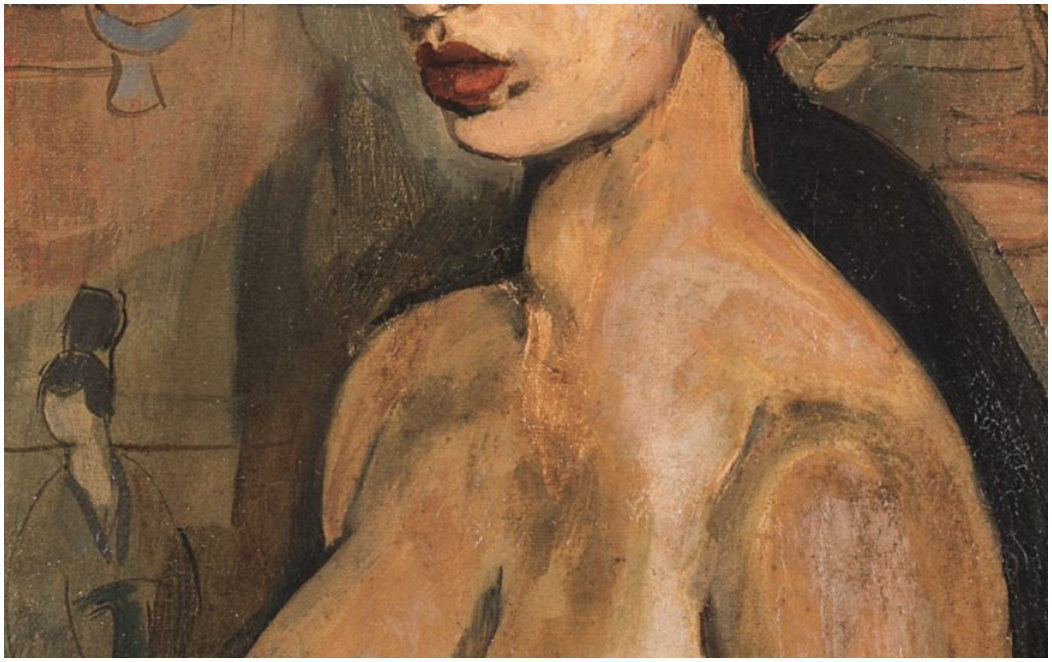

Figure **5.5.1.7.1**: Detail, Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934, 90 x 56 cm (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi) via SmartHistory

Gauguin and cross-cultural entanglements

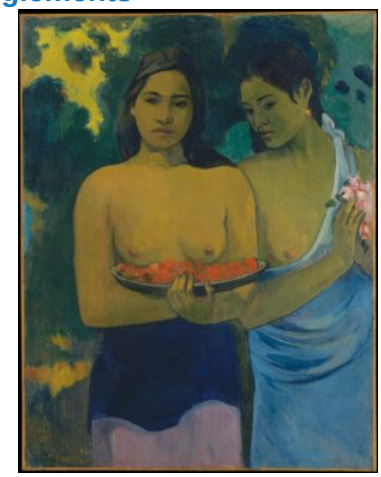

Figure **5.5.1.7.1**: Paul Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899, oil on canvas, 94 x 72.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) via SmartHistory

Sher-Gil's painting, entitled *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, is a direct reference to the art of Gauguin who, like many other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists adopted subject matter outside the European tradition (primarily the arts of the Pacific Islands and modern peasant culture in France). Embracing subjects he saw as "primitive" was, for Gauguin, a critique of traditional European painting and at the same time, a return to a perceived, more natural way of life in response to increasing industrialization. Artists like Gauguin were looking for a way to reinvigorate the language of modern art.

After Gauguin lost his job as a stockbroker in the French financial crash of 1882, he turned his focus to the arts. In search of new, exotic subject matter, he travelled to Panama, Martinique, Brittany, Arles, and finally the Pacific Islands. Inspired by the pictorial possibilities of these locations, he worked increasingly in a style of bold colors and simplified flat forms. Through his paintings, drawings, sculptures, and crucially his writings, he crafted a myth and a persona of a self-exiled Western observer and admirer of so-called "primitive" cultures. Gauguin famously and frequently sourced his imagery from reproductions, books, and postcards of scenic vistas, art, architecture, and artifacts from South America, India, China, Japan, Java, and Egypt.

Although Gauguin was disappointed to see the marks of French colonization during his travels to the South Seas in the 1890s, his paintings of the Polynesian Islands nonetheless perpetuated a long-standing Western myth of a utopia untouched by European influence. In his famed *Two Tahitian Women*, the figures entice the presumed male viewer with exposed breasts, pink blossoms, and a platter of mangoes, offering fantasies of a primeval Tahiti inhabited by exotic, sexually available Indigenous women.

Sher-Gil engages with Gauguin's iconic Tahitian women. Like Gauguin, she also employs color for its affective and emotive qualities. In her painting, a Tahitian identity takes the form of an Indian body, with brown skin substituting for brown skin. Her monochromatic palette of terracotta shades helps to flatten the space, which is a pictorial strategy that was characteristic of modernist art. But the brown background also works to focus the eye on the artist's body. If green and yellow tones were necessary for Gauguin to convey the "otherness" of the Tahitian women, then brown in all of its dynamic layers uncompromisingly confronts the viewer throughout Sher-Gil's composition. As the color of the colonized body with its connotations of inferiority in Western culture, brown here is not alien, but prevalent.

Figure **5.5.1.7.1**: *Amrita Sher-Gil with 3 paintings*, 1930s, photograph via SmartHistory

Foreigner in Paris

Sher-Gil's own biracial identity perhaps enabled her to masquerade as a Tahitian woman. She was born in 1913 in Budapest to a Hungarian-Jewish mother and a Sikh father, and moved with her family to Paris in 1929, where she studied art at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and later at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts.

Figure **5.5.1.7.1**: Amrita Sher-Gil, *Young Girls*, 1932, oil on canvas, 134 x 164 cm (National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi, India) via SmartHistory

She was an active participant in the city's bohemian lifestyle, ingrained in its cultural and artistic social circles, and she found success in the art world. At the École des Beaux Arts, she won the first prize for the annual still-life and portrait competition every year for the first three years of her study. In 1932, she exhibited at the Grand Salon to many favorable reviews by art critics who remarked on the force and vigor of her work. The next year, she won a Gold Medal for her large-scale painting *Young Girls*, which was "the picture of the year," and subsequently she was elected as an Associate of the Grand Salon, making her the youngest and the only Asian individual to have received this recognition.

However, as a foreigner, she never quite escaped her exotic status. The artist was described by a friend and art critic, Denise Proutaux, as "an exquisite and mysterious little Hindu princess" who "speaks French like a Parisian" and whose "blue silk sari brings out the amber and ochre skin that conjures up the mysterious shores of the Ganges." [2]

Sher-Gil's biographer Yashodhara Dalmia notes that the artist's self-portraits from her Paris period (1929–1934) reflected her academic training, but also denoted a way to grapple with her Euro-Indian identity. The shadow behind Sher-Gil in the self-portrait —possibly a male onlooker with cropped hair and broad shoulders—might symbolize the looming influence of male modernists in the art world, like Gauguin and van Gogh. It might also suggest the hybrid roles which she has had to negotiate; she was both objectified as an exotic outsider figure while holding agency as a painter with the ability to portray herself as she desired.

Was Sher-Gil identifying with the position of women from the many regions that Europe had colonized, or was she making a more specific association between her body and the Tahitian nude constructed by Gauguin? Or was it more about the language of modernism itself as practiced by her forebearers than the actual nude that was of significance here? These layered possibilities combined with her evocative and not-easily-accessible disposition in the painting break with established tropes of representing colonized women as lacking intellectual depth and solely existing for the consumption of the male, Western viewer. Instead, her self-portrait is an expression of sophisticated ideas and individualism, evoking a desire for self-discovery that she saw in the work of Vincent van Gogh.

Figure 5.5.1.7.1: Vincent van Gogh, Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear, 1889, oil on canvas, 60 x 49 cm (Courtauld Galleries, London), via SmartHistory

In her discussion of the nuances of *Self Portrait as a Tahitian*, art historian Saloni Mathur notes how unusual or improbable the Japanese background was for a Tahitian subject. It was an intentional bringing together of the formal elements of varied "exoticisms" that preoccupied artists of her time. Sher-Gil's artistic training in Paris would surely have fostered an understanding of the Western fascination with the art of Japan in the later part of the nineteenth century (referred to as Japonisme). With an influx of Japanese art and design into Europe and America at this time, progressive artists adopted compositional devices, such as large areas of flat color, abrupt cropping, and oblique vantage points, as well as explored new subject matter, and reflected a deep admiration for the decorative arts found in the visual language of Japanese aesthetics.

Japonisme had an indelible impact on Western modernist art. Artists like van Gogh even became avid collectors of Japanese prints and readers of Japonisme literature of the day. In his *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, a Japanese woodblock print of women in traditional attire in a landscape with Mount Fuji can be seen behind the artist, which he had adapted from his own personal collection of prints that he pinned to the walls of his studio. Van Gogh believed Japanese people to be untainted by the corruptions of Western society.

Figure 5.5.1.7.1: Detail with Japanese figure on the right, Amrita Sher-Gil, *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, 1934, 90 x 56 cm (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi) via SmartHistory

Van Gogh's infusion of his individual temperament and psychological state through markers of exoticism into his paintings may have partly inspired Sher-Gil's own self-portrait. It should be noted that Sher-Gil's Japanese figures are thinly painted and more sketchily rendered than the careful handling of paint that the artist dedicates to the representation of her own body. The architectural perspective lines of the walls are even visible through the body of the seated man suggesting that Sher-Gil was not as concerned with the individual details of the Japanese imagery, but rather wanted to convey her overall awareness of Japonisme's crucial role in modernist practice, and more importantly draw an artistic lineage to van Gogh.

Sher-Gil never met Gauguin and van Gogh, who were decades removed from the young emerging artist. As Mathur argues, Sher-Gil related to van Gogh's desire to foster an image of himself as an artist, while negotiating a relationship to a space outside of Europe via personal experiences and feelings of social displacement. Over the years, she grew to increasingly identify with van Gogh over Gauguin, even explicitly writing in a letter from 1937,

> ***In spite of the fact that till now my special favorite has been Gauguin, I sometimes feel that van Gogh was the greatest of the two.[3]***

But in *Self-Portrait as a Tahitian*, Sher-Gil's engagement with the work and lives of both modernist precursors is palpable. Using their innovations to work through her own complex explorations of identity and cultural difference, she subverted the power of the Western male gaze on the colonized nude female body.

The Turn to India

By the end of 1934, Sher-Gil returned to India (she had temporarily moved to India with her family in the 1920s due to financial difficulties and political unrest in Hungary), expressing that her prolonged encounter with Europe's modernist art scene incited in her a need to develop her own style and point of view. She felt that the colors, light, and natural environment in India would help to improve her painting.

When she painted the self-portrait in 1934, Sher-Gil was herself a colonial subject since India was still a British possession despite intense and ongoing efforts for self-rule. Sher-Gil, who died at age twenty-eight, would not live to see India's independence from the British Empire in 1947. While she disrupted the structures of power normally held by the imperial West in reformulating Gauguin's colonialist views for her own purpose, her affluent, aristocratic background and international mobility complicated her identity and distinguished her from a subject of the colonial crown in India who had little to no agency. Her relatives even owned a major sugar plantation where her family briefly stayed, and where her husband, Victor Egon, had worked as a medical officer of the dispensary attached to the factory. That the sugar industry, encouraged by the colonial state, benefited Indian capitalists like the artist's family while placing millions of common workers in indentured servitude further distances her from the subjects whom she portrayed.

Figure **5.5.1.7.1**: Amrita Sher-Gil, *Bride's Toilet*, 1937, oil on canvas, 146 x 88.8 cm (National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi, India) via SmartHistory

Perhaps aware of her global and Eurocentric identity, she replaced her Western fashions with traditional sarees, painted Indian peasantry, and brightened her color palette to reflect her cultural surroundings. As Gauguin had done in Tahiti, Sher-Gil too carefully cultivated a persona to make her mark in the art world. In Sher-Gil's case, it was imperative that she be accepted as an *Indian* modernist, as seen through her bold claim that while European modernism fell within the purview of Matisse, Picasso, and other avant-gardists, "India belongs to me." [4]

Indeed, the murals of Ajanta, sculptures and frescoes of temples and palaces, and Mughal and Rajput miniature painting inspired new creative avenues. As Sher-Gil progressed in her painting, she went even further than Gauguin and Western modernists in the simplification of forms, reduction and stylization of shadows, and elimination of extraneous details, focusing only on the monumentality of the Indian figures, the central interest of her compositions. Her work evolved to merge Western and Eastern stylistic and formal vocabularies and subject matter and led to the artist's legacy as a pioneer of modern Indian art.

Artwork details

Title	Self-Portrait as a Tahitian
Artist(s)	Amrita Sher-Gil
Dates	1934
Places	Asia / South Asia / India
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms / Colonial South Asia / British Raj
Artwork Type	Painting / Portrait painting
Material	Oil paint, Canvas
Technique	

Footnotes

[1] The Japanese identification is based on Saloni Mathur's "A Retake of Sher-Gil's Self-Portrait as Tahitian," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): pp. 515–44.

[2] Denise Proutaux quoted in N. Iqbal Singh, *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Biography* (New Delhi, India: Vikas, 1984), p. 25.

[3] Sher-Gil, letter to Karl J. Khandalavala, 16 May 1937, in *Amrita Sher-Gil* (Bombay, India: New Book Company, 1944), 1: p. 375.

[4] Amrita Sher-Gil quoted in Deepak Ananth et al, *Amrita Sher-Gil: An Indian Artist Family of the Twentieth Century* (Prestel Pub, 2007), p. 13.

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5.5.1.8: Faith Ringgold, Dancing at the Louvre

Page ID
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by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

> ***Marcia and her three little girls took me dancing at the Louvre. I thought I was taking them to see the Mona Lisa. You've never seen anything like this. Well, the French hadn't either. Never mind Leonardo da Vinci and Mona Lisa, Marcia and her three girls were the show.***
>
> ***— Willa Marie Simone, Dancing at the Louvre***

Breaking rules

Faith Ringgold's *Dancing at the Louvre* is all about breaking the rules, and having lots of fun while doing it. Combining representational painting and African-American quilting techniques with the written word, *Dancing at the Louvre* is the first in Ringgold's series of twelve "story quilts" called *The French Collection*.

Figure **5.5.1.8.1**: Faith Ringgold, *Dancing at the Louvre*, 1991, acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border, 73.5 x 80″, from the series, The French Collection, part 1; #1 (**Gund Gallery, Kenyon College**)

The series tells the fictional story of Willa Marie Simone, a young black woman who moves to Paris in the early 20th century. Told through text written around the margin of each quilt, Willa Marie's adventures lead her to meet celebrities such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks on the road to becoming an artist and businesswoman.

Drawing on her own struggle for recognition in an art world dominated by European traditions and male artists, Ringgold uses this narrative format to literally rewrite the past by weaving together histories of modern art, African-American culture, and personal biography. This practice reflects the shift toward postmodernism in art of the 1980s and 1990s. In deliberate contrast to Modernism's emphasis on autonomy and universal meaning, artists like Ringgold highlighted the implicit biases in accepted forms of art, especially in their treatment of race and gender. Characteristic is her use of appropriation, narrative, biographical references, and non-Western traditions. Through these devices, Ringgold offers an alternative to the European and masculine perspectives that are prevalent in art history.

Story-quilts

Ringgold's story-quilting technique is important to meaning in her work. She creates the central image using acrylic paint on canvas, reflecting her knowledge of western art history in both style and subject matter, and surrounds it with a patchwork cloth border that includes her hand-written text. She then uses traditional quilting methods to sandwich a layer of batting by stitching the decorative front to the plain cotton backing.

Figure **5.5.1.8.2**: Faith Ringgold, *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?* (1983), acrylic on canvas, dyed, painted and pieced fabric, 90 x 80″ (private collection)

She first developed this format in *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima* (1983), a large quilt that transformed the marketing stereotype into Jemima Blakey, a successful black businesswoman. Comprised of squares of fabric, painted portraits, and text, Ringgold's quilt draws on Afro-Caribbean storytelling practices to create the Blakey's family folklore. Made soon after the death of Ringgold's mother Willi Posey (a seamstress and fashion designer in Harlem), the quilt also serves as personal tribute to the inspiration and creative skills she passed on to her artist-daughter.

Ringgold's technique positions her work more in the world of folk art and craft than European traditions of fine art. Associated with women's domestic work, quilt making has historically been important to maintaining female relationships. Quilting is often done collectively, allowing women time to gather and have conversations away from men or others outside their community. Young girls watch and participate in the activity in order to learn family stories, cultural background, shared knowledge, and technical skills associated with their maternal and domestic roles. Although quilts are common in a number of cultures, Ringgold's African-American heritage recalls their historical role, especially within the Underground Railroad, to communicate codes and hidden messages that remain unrecognized by outsiders to the community. (The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses in the 19th century that allowed slaves of African descent to move northward to freedom.)

Rewriting the past

Typical of much postmodern art, Ringgold's work appropriates recognizable imagery and alternative artistic practices to offer critical cultural commentary. She challenges us to consider expectations of gender and race, as well as traditional expectations and values of what art might be. Through image and text, Ringgold rewrites history to make a place for women like herself in its historical development.

The transformative power of Ringgold's message led her to translate her work into picture books for children. Her first *Tar Beach* (1991), based on a 1988 story quilt in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, received the 1992 Caldecott Honor Award. She has since published several others including *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* (1992) and *If A Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* (1999) inspired by African-American history and her own life story.

Additional Resources:

The website of Faith Ringgold

Faith Ringgold at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

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5.5.1.9: Lysippos of Sikyon, Apoxyomenos (Scraper)

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Ancient Greek athletes cleaned themselves with oil. This sculpture shows one athlete's bathing ritual.

Video **5.5.1.9.1**: Lysippos, *Apoxyomenos (Scraper)*, Roman copy after a bronze statue from c. 330 B.C.E., 6′ 9″ high (Vatican Museums)

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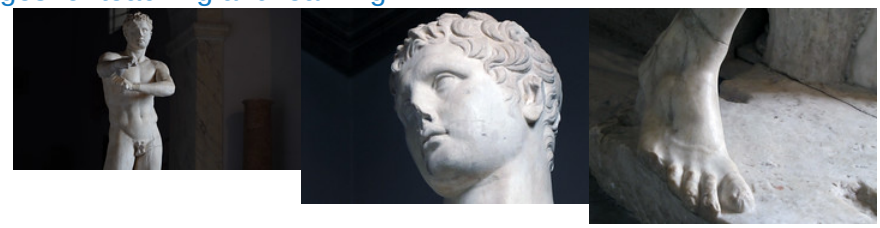

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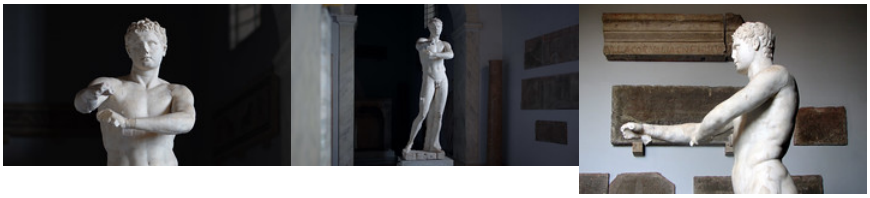

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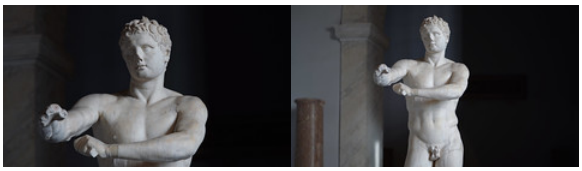

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5.5.1.10: Plate with Hunting Rams

More information at The Met Museum

Figure **5.5.1.10.1**: Sasanian, Plate with King Hunting Rams, ca. mid-5th - 6th century CE, The Met Museum, Public Domain

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

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5.5.2.1: Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya

More information at The Met Museum

Figure **5.5.2.1.1**: Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya (Buddha of the Future), Pakistan (ancient region of Gandhara), ca. 3rd century, The Met Museum, Public Domain

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Handheld Prayer Wheel

by Dr. Elena Pakhoutova, Dr. Steven Zucker and The Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art

Filled with scrolls of Buddhist mantras, this prayer wheel boosts the merit of its user.

Handheld Prayer Wheel

Handheld Prayer Wheel, early 20th century (central Tibet), silver, wood, semi-precious stones, 19.6 x 5 x 4.5 inches (Rubin Museum of Art, New York). Speakers: Dr. Elena Pakhoutova, Senior Curator Himalayan Art at the Rubin Museum of Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

Rubin Museum senior curator Dr. Elena Pakhoutova and Smarthistory's Dr. Steven Zucker take a look at an ornate handheld prayer wheel, which are ritual objects that are ubiquitous in Tibetan Buddhist culture. The action of turning a prayer wheel with conscious intent is believed to "recite" or "read" the mantras, activating and releasing them into the world for the benefit of all.

The Rubin Museum of Art has teamed up with Smarthistory to bring you an "up-close" look at select objects from the Rubin's preeminent collection of Himalayan art. Featuring conversations with senior curators and close-looking at art, this video series is an accessible introduction to the art and material culture of the Tibetan, Himalayan, and Inner Asian regions. Learn about the living traditions and art-making practices of the Himalayas from the past to today.

Video transcript

[music]

0:00:06.6 Dr. Steven Zucker: We're in the McMullen Museum of Art, at a special exhibition with objects from the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art. And it contains this beautiful, fairly large handheld prayer wheel.

0:00:21.7 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: This specific example is quite impressive because it's rather large for a handheld device. What you see in this prayer wheel is the standard elements, which are the cylinder handle, and this little counterweight, which helps the cylinder to spin around the axis. The cylinder is also called [a] reliquary, and the reason being is that inside are tightly bound paper rolls filled with mantras.

0:00:52.3 Dr. Steven Zucker: Text that has been written out by a scribe, very likely in a monastery.

0:00:57.8 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: And the texts are the mantras repeated multiple times over and over again for the maximum accumulation of religious merit.

0:01:07.4 Dr. Steven Zucker: And merit is crucial for Buddhist practice.

0:01:10.5 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: I call merit an investment in the future life. Because during this life, we have the opportunity to accumulate as much merit as possible so you can reap benefits in this life, but most importantly in the next life.

0:01:24.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: And in that way, move closer to the ultimate goal, which would be enlightenment.

0:01:29.7 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: Yes, enlightenment or awakening.

0:01:31.7 Dr. Steven Zucker: That is, breaking the cycle of death and rebirth, what is known in Buddhism as samsara.

0:01:37.8 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: And these two registers of mantras written in two different scripts are of the same mantra, "Om mani padme hum," which directly relates to Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of compassion and a very popular deity in Tibetan Buddhist culture. On the top register we see the mantras written in the Lantsa or Ranjana script, and on the bottom they're written in Tibetan script. And each syllable is in this little arch or mandorla, if you will, which reflects the respect for the syllables themselves.

0:02:15.4 Dr. Steven Zucker: And surrounding the mandorla and the text are these beautiful, intricate floral decorations. A lot of care was taken in the production of this object.

0:02:25.8 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: And you can also see that there are semi-precious stones in this band that holds the cylinder together. The top of the prayer wheel has a finial, which is shaped as a lotus bud. And it also directly references Avalokiteshvara because Avalokiteshvara is usually shown holding a lotus, and he's also part of the Lotus Family of the Buddha Amitabha. The top of this cylinder is also decorated with the wheel.

0:02:55.6 Dr. Steven Zucker: And the wheel is a very common iconographic form in Buddhist art.

0:03:00.8 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: This specific wheel represents the Dharmachakra, or the wheel of the Buddha's teachings, the dharma, and directly relates to the content of the cylinder, which contains the mantras, which are the dharma.

0:03:13.9 Dr. Steven Zucker: But there's even more. If we look at the bottom of this cylinder, there's another circular form.

0:03:19.2 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: And this form is a crossed vajra. Vajra, sometimes translated as a thunderbolt scepter, refers to the quality of being indestructible. The counterweight is actually a very interesting invention. When you hold it, it really helps the wheel to turn.

0:03:37.0 Dr. Steven Zucker: So the wheel that we're seeing here in this case in the museum is divorced from its use. And to really understand this object is to understand it within the hand of a practitioner.

0:03:47.1 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: What usually happens in Tibetan culture is that people would go around sacred sites or stupas, having in one hand a prayer wheel and another hand a string of prayer beads. And they would recite mantras, counting them on their beads, at the same time turning the wheel, and at the same time walking around the sacred object and sacred site in a practice called circumambulation. And all of these three actions — of the speech through reciting mantras, of the body through turning the wheel and walking around, and the right intention — are creating positive karma in body, speech, and mind. Tibetan prayer wheels come in many shapes and sizes. In this case, the action is powered by the hand. But prayer wheels can also be activated by the elements: By wind, water, sometimes fire.

0:04:42.2 Dr. Steven Zucker: So really, any technology can be used to turn these objects.

0:04:46.2 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: These days you can get a prayer wheel with a solar panel and you can put it on a dashboard and it'll be working, accumulating merit on your behalf. But you have to have a good intention, of course. And there are also gigantic prayer wheels that are filled with millions of mantras. And the way to turn it is only through working together with other people.

0:05:10.9 Dr. Steven Zucker: The origins of prayer wheels are not fully understood.

0:05:14.0 Dr. Elena Pakhoutova: We don't really know definitively where the idea of prayer wheels comes from. Consensus seems to be that having something revolving around the axis that contains Buddhist text comes from the so-called revolving scripture depositories in Chinese monasteries. So when the person is walking around a stupa or a temple, turning the prayer wheel and reciting mantras, and also counting these mantras that they recite on their prayer beads, they are committing these actions of body, speech, and mind to accumulate good karma, increase their merit. Very often it's actually also a social event, where some Tibetan women or families would do the same practice together. They would go for a walk around a gompa or a temple, and it's a social

occasion, and it's also accumulation of merit at the same time. Especially for people who have to work and provide for their families and earn their livelihood, this is one of the best religious devices to increase the amount of merit they can generate, I think.

[music]

Artwork details

art details

Title	Handheld Prayer Wheel
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	early 20th century
Places	Asia / East Asia / China / Tibet
Period, Culture, Style	Tibetan
Artwork Type	Sculpture / Metalwork
Material	Silver, Wood, Gems
Technique	

Bibliography

This work at the Rubin Museum of Art(opens in new window)

View the Himalayan Art Up Close series(opens in new window)

Subscribe to the Rubin Museum YouTube channel(opens in new window)

Learn more about prayer wheels on Project Himalayan Art, a resource from the Rubin for learning about Himalayan, Tibetan, and Inner Asian art and cultures:

Accumulating Merit Every Day: Prayer Wheel(opens in new window)

Living Practices: Merit(opens in new window)

This work in the Gateway to Himalayan Art exhibition(opens in new window)

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by DR. ELIZABETH MACAULAY-LEWIS

Figure **5.5.2.3.1**: Distant view of the Great Mosque of Damascus, photo: **Bernard Gagnon**, CC BY-SA 3.0

To understand the importance of the Great Mosque of Damascus, built by the Umayyad caliph, al-Walid II between 708 and 715 C.E., we need to look into the recesses of time. Damascus is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world, with archaeological remains dating from as early as 9000 B.C.E., and sacred spaces have been central to the Old City of Damascus ever since. As early as the 9th century B.C.E., a temple was built to Hadad-Ramman, the Semitic god of storm and rain. Though the exact form and shape of this temple is unknown, a bas-relief with a sphinx, believed to come from this temple, was reused in the northern wall of the city's Great Mosque.

From Zeus to Saul

Alexander the Great marched through Syria on his way to Persia and India and while he likely passed through Damascus, it was his successors—the Ptolemies and the Selecuids—who would shape Syria. Until 63 B.C.E., Damascus would remain under the political control and cultural influence of these Greek dynasties. While almost nothing survives archaeologically from this period, Greek became the dominant language and the culture became Hellenized (influenced by Greek culture). At this time, the temple of Hadad was converted into a Temple of Zeus-Hadad. Zeus was a natural choice for assimilation; he ruled the Greek pantheon and was associated with weather and, of course, thunder bolts. Many Greek (and later Roman) gods were combined with local gods across the lands controlled by the Greeks and then the Romans. This allowed the conquering culture to integrate their new subjects into their religion, while also accepting local traditions—thus helping to make new foreign masters more agreeable to subjugated locals. The Zeus-Hadad temple dominated the Greek city and was connected by a main thoroughfare to the new agora, or market area, located to the east. At the center of a *temenos*, an enclosed and sacred precinct, stood the temple to Zeus-Hadad, which had a cella (the room in which a statue of the god stood).

Figure 5.5.2.3.2: Map © Google

After the Greeks came the invading Roman armies (led by Pompey in 63 B.C.E.). Under Herod the Great (the local pro-Roman ruler), the city of Damascus was transformed. Herod built a theater whose remains can still be seen in the basement and ground floor of a house called Bayt al- ‘Aqqad (now the Danish Institute). The temple was modified at this time when two concentric walls were added to enclose the precinct (or *peribolos*) of the temple and two monumental gates, or propylaea, were added on the western and eastern ends of the precinct which now measured 117,000 square feet. At its center was the temple with a cella for the worship of Jupiter-Hadad. It was now a truly monumental temple. The western gate was refurbished and embellished under the Roman Severan dynasty (193–235 C.E.), additions that remain visible today.

Although the great temple to Jupiter marked the spiritual heart of the city for several centuries, just as it was completed, a new cult to a single God was developing: Christianity. Saul, or Paul as he is known after his conversion, is said to have converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9.1–2; 9.5–6). Blinded by a light, he was led to the home of a Jew named Judas on Straight Street, the *decumanus* or main east-west street in Damascus. Ananias had a vision that told him to go and care for Paul and when he touched Paul at Judas’ house, the scales fell from Paul’s eyes and he could see.

Figure 5.5.2.3.3: View of the exterior of the Great Mosque of Damascus in 2008, photo: Ghaylam, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Unsurprisingly, once Christianity was widely adopted in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, the temple to Jupiter was once again converted, this time into a cathedral dedicated to John the Baptist. This church is attributed to the Emperor Theodosius in 391 C.E. The exact location of the church is unknown, but it is thought to have been located in the western part of the *temenos*. It was probably one of the largest churches in the Christian world and served as a major center of Christianity until 636 C.E. when the city was once again conquered, this time by Muslim Arabs. Damascus was a key city, as it provided access to the sea and to the desert. When it was clear that the city was going to fall, the defeated Christians and conquering Muslims negotiated the city's surrender. The Muslims agreed to respect the lives, property and churches of the Christians. Christians retained control of their cathedral, although Muslim worshippers reportedly used the southern wall of the compound when they prayed towards Mecca.

Figure **5.5.2.3.4**: View of the the prayer hall from the courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus (treasury at right), photo: **Erik Shin**, CC BY-NC 2.0

al-Walid's mosque

When Damascus became the capital of the **Umayyad dynasty**, the early 8th century caliph al-Walid envisioned a beautiful mosque at the heart of his new capital city, one that would rival any of the great religious buildings of the Christian world. The growing population of Muslims also required a large congregational mosque (a congregational mosque is a mosque where the community of believers, originally only men, would come to worship and hear a sermon on Fridays — it was typically the most important mosque in a city or in a neighborhood of a large city). The Great Mosque of Damascus was commissioned in 708 C.E. and was completed in 714/15 C.E. It was paid for with the state tax revenue raised over the course of seven years, a prodigious sum of money. The result of this investment was an architectural tour de force where mosaics and marbles created a truly awe-inspiring space. The Great Mosque of Damascus is one of the earliest surviving congregational mosques in the world. The mosque's location and organization were directly influenced by the temples and the church that preceded it. It was built into the Roman temple wall and it reuses older building materials (called spolia by archaeologists) in its walls, including a beam with a Greek inscription that was originally part of the church.

Figure **5.5.2.3.5**: Courtyard fountain and the dome of the clock in the distance, Great Mosque of Damascus, photo: **Thom May**, CC BY-NC 2.0

The complex is composed of a prayer hall and a large open courtyard with a fountain for ablutions (washing) before prayer. Before the civil war that began in 2011, the courtyard of the mosque functioned as a social space for Damascenes, where families and friends could meet and talk while children chased each other through the colonnade, and where tourists once snapped photographs. It was a wonderful place of peace in a busy city. The courtyard contains an elevated treasury and a structure know as the "Dome of the Clock," whose purpose is not fully understood. There are tower-like minarets at the corners of the mosque and courtyard; the southern minarets are built on the Roman-Byzantine corner towers and are probably the earliest minarets in Syria. Again, the earlier structures directly influenced the present form.

Figure **5.5.2.3.6**: Prayer hall, Great Mosque of Damascus with the shrine of Saint John the Baptist in the center, photo: **Seier+Seier**, CC BY 2.0

From the courtyard, one would enter the prayer hall. The prayer hall takes its form from Christian basilicas (which are in turn derived from ancient Roman law courts). However, there is no apse towards which one would pray. Rather the faithful pray facing the qibla wall. The qibla wall has a niche (mihrab), which focuses the faithful in their prayers. In line with the mihrab of the Great Mosque is a massive dome and a transept to accommodate a large number of worshippers. The façade of the transept facing the courtyard is decorated on the exterior with rich mosaics.

Figure **5.5.2.3.7**: Mosaic, Great Mosque of Damascus, 8th century (photo: **american rugbier**, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Although a fire in the 1890s badly damaged the courtyard and interior, much of the rich mosaic program, which dates primarily to the early 8th century, has survived. The mosaics are aniconic (non-figurative). Islamic religious art lacks figures, and so this is an early example of this tradition. The mosaics are a beautiful mix of trees, landscapes, and uninhabited architecture, rendered in stunning gold, greens, and blues. Later sources note that there were inscriptions and mosaics in the prayer hall, like the Umayyad mosque in Medina, but these have not survived.

Mediterranean influences

The architecture and the plants depicted in the mosaics have clear origins in the artistic traditions of the Mediterranean. Acanthus-like scrolls of greenery can be seen. Not only are they similar to those found in the **Dome of the Rock** in Jerusalem, but similar motifs can be seen in the sculpture of the ancient Roman **Ara Pacis**.

Figure 5.5.2.3.8: Arches with acanthus motif in mosaic, Great Mosque of Damascus, photo: **Judith McKenzie/Manar al-Athar**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

There are other strong connections to the visual traditions of the Mediterranean world — to Ptolemaic architecture in Egypt, to the architecture of the **Treasury at Petra,** and the **wall paintings of Pompeii**. By using these well-established architectural and artistic forms, the Umayyads were coopting and transforming the artistic traditions of earlier, once dominant religions and empires. The use of such media and imagery allowed the new faith to assert its supremacy. The mosaics and architecture of the Great Mosque signaled this new prominence to an audience that was still predominantly Christian, that Islam was as powerful a religion as Christianity. The subject of the mosaics remains debated to this day, with scholars arguing that the mosaics either represent heaven, based on an interpretation of Quranic verse, or the local landscape (including the Barada River).

Scholars traditionally attributed the creation of these mosaics to artisans from Constantinople because a twelfth-century text claimed that the Byzantine emperor had sent mosaicists to Damascus. However, recent scholarship has challenged this as the text that made this claim was written from a Christian perspective and is much later than the mosaics. Scholars now think that the mosaics were either created by local artisans, or possibly by Egyptian artisans (since Egypt also has a long tradition of decorating domes with mosaics).

The influence of the mosque and its artistry can be seen as far as a way as Cordoba, Spain, where the 8th century Umayyad ruler, Abd al-Rahman (the only survivor of a massive family assassination that sparked the Abbasid Revolution), had fled. The mihrab and the dome above in the **Great Mosque of Cordoba** was decorated in blue, green and gold mosaics, evoking his lost Syrian homeland.

The Umayyad mosque of Damascus is truly one of the great mosques of the early Islamic world and it is remains one of the world's most important monuments. Unlike many of Syria's historic buildings and archaeological sites, the mosque has survived the Syrian Civil War relatively unscathed and hopefully, will one day again welcome Syrians and tourists alike.

Additional resources:

"The Art of the Umayyads," The Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Manar-al-athar photography archive at the University of Oxford

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Alain George and Andrew Marsham, editors, *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam Perspectives on Umayyad Elites*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Video **5.5.2.3.1**

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Chinese export silver, a 19th-century Torah case

by Dr. Ariel Fein

Figure **5.5.2.4.1**: Torah case, 1886, Guangzhou, China, oxidized silver, silver, and silver-gilt, 92.6 x 30 cm (Center for Jewish Art(opens in new window))

What do China and India have to do with the form and decoration of a 19th-century silver case made for a Jewish community from Iraq? The decoration of this remarkable object speaks to the relationship of artistic production and global trade in the modern world.

This elaborate case (called a *tik*), adorned with scrolling vines and flowers, contains within it a Torah scroll, the holiest object in Judaism. The case, consisting of a cylindrical body and domed crown, is constructed of a wooden core with decorated silver plates adorning its exterior surface. The crown culminates in an undulating form with bells hanging on chains and two projecting finials (*rimonim*) surmounting the Torah's staves. The hard case protects the scroll within while also enhancing its preciousness. When portions from the Torah are read during weekly services, the *tik* is positioned upright on a reader's table and opened to reveal the scroll inside.

This particular Torah case was produced in Guangzhou, China in the late 19th century for a Jewish community originally from Iraq and by then living and working in both China and India. This Torah case is a rare Jewish example of Chinese export silver—silverwork made in China from the late 17th through mid-20th centuries that catered to foreign tastes.

Figure 5.5.2.4.1: Chinese export silver. Left: standing cup with repoussé figures in landscape design and stand of pine tree and crane form, 19th century, Cumshing, Canton, silver 24 x 16.5 x 11.5 cm (Hong Kong Maritime Museum(opens in new window)); center: set of bamboo-shaped tea service, 1900–10, silver (Hong Kong Maritime Museum(opens in new window)); right: rosewater sprinkler with floral pattern, late 18th century, filigree silver, 16 x 9 cm (Hong Kong Maritime Museum(opens in new window))

Chinese export silver

Since the 16th century, spices, ivory, tea, silks, porcelain, and myriad other goods from China were shipped across the globe—to the Americas, Europe, and the Ottoman and Safavid Empires—through maritime and land trade networks. Along with the exchange of manufactured goods, silver also played a significant role in global trade. Beginning in 1565, Spanish trading ships known as Manila Galleons biannually traveled from the cities of Manila in the Philippines and Acapulco in Mexico bringing Asian luxury goods to Europe and the Americas in exchange for silver coins minted in Spain and Mexico. Silver coins quickly spread all over the world establishing a system of internationally accepted currency. But in China, and elsewhere, it was also used for making everyday and precious objects due to its bright color and its ease of working. Chinese silverware, including food containers, wine vessels, and objects for daily use, were decorated with subjects commonly found in Chinese painting and the decorative arts, such as bird-and-flower motifs and renderings of famous historical gatherings.

Figure **5.5.2.4.1**: Teapot, 1680, China, silver, 13.97 x 21.59 x 11.43 cm (Peabody Essex Museum(opens in new window))

In the late 17th century, Chinese silver, including tea and coffee sets, tableware, card cases, snuff boxes, jugs, and Christian religious vessels, began to be produced specifically for export to Europe to cater to Western tastes. For example, this hexagonal teapot imported to London in 1682–83 includes scenes of a man set in a lush Chinese landscape of bamboo, pine, willow, and blossoming plum. This teapot, the earliest known datable Chinese export silver object, speaks to the early period of Chinese export silver, when imported objects bore traditional Chinese forms and decoration, such as bamboo stems and leaves, flying birds, and lotus flowers. By the 19th century, Chinese craftsmen adapted and combined Western-inspired forms and traditional Chinese design motifs, materials, and techniques to create new transcultural objects.

Figure 5.5.2.4.1: View of the foreign settlement in Guangzhou, 1855–60, Sunqua, oil on canvas, 80.8 x 184.5 cm (Peabody Essex Museum(opens in new window))

Figure 5.5.2.4.1: Map of Guangzhou (underlying map © Google)

The Torah case that is the subject of this essay was produced in Guangzhou—a city on the south-east coast of China with a long history of maritime trade. It was one of the most important Chinese ports along the historic maritime Silk Roads. From the 4th century on, Guangzhou offered a viable route for traders to the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf region. Although already a centuries-long hub for global trading, Guangzhou became the exclusive port for foreign trade in 1757, when the Qianlong Emperor closed all other ports. The production and export of silver and all other goods for foreign trade was thus limited to the port city of Guangzhou. Foreign merchants—including Dutch, Portuguese, Parsi, Sindhis, and British, among others—established settlements in Guanghzou to use as their commercial base. As a result, the city emerged as a hub of cross-cultural interaction and artistic production.

However, almost a hundred years later, new trade horizons developed following the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing (1840–42), which permitted the opening of several new Chinese ports to foreign trade (Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai—as well as the

cession of Hong Kong island to the British). Export silver workshops and foreign merchants relocated to cities surrounding these new ports to meet the new demands of a robust Chinese-European trade network. Although the centers of silversmithing largely shifted away from Guangzhou at this time, it continued to have some active export silver workshops, including the firm associated with the Guangzhou Torah case.

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Figure 5.5.2.4.1: Left: Torah case, Guangzhou, China, 1886, oxidized silver, silver, and silver-gilt, 92.6 x 30 cm (Center for Jewish Art(opens in new window)); right: Torah case, Iraq, 1897, silver and glass beads, 103.9 x 28.6 cm (Spertus Institute Collection(opens in new window))

An Iraqi Torah case made in Guangzhou

While the majority of Chinese export silver was made for European export and consumption, some works were produced for others engaged in Indian Ocean trade, including Jewish merchants originally from Iraq and now living in India and China. Far away from their Jewish spiritual center in Iraq, many Jewish merchants in India and China imported Jewish liturgical and ceremonial objects —such as Torahs and Torah cases—from Iraq, and commissioned Torah cases from artisans in China based on the model of Iraqi Torah cases. The Guangzhou Torah case is an example of a Torah case commissioned from a Chinese export silver craftsman.

Figure 5.5.2.4.1: Torah case with flying bird motifs, China, 1891, silver, copper, gilt (Herbert & Eileen Bernard Museum of Judaica, Temple Emanu-E(opens in new window)l)

Like most Chinese export silver, the Guangzhou Torah case features a combination of techniques and forms—here, both Iraqi and Chinese. Like most Iraqi Torah cases, the Torah case is cylindrical in shape and made of wood covered with silver plates adorned with patterns in a technique called repoussé, which involves hammering from behind. However, the surface design differs significantly. Where Iraqi Torah cases typically featured motifs, such as vases with flowers enclosed within ornamental borders that created a net-like pattern across the case, the Guangzhou Torah case abandons the rhythmic rigidity of this design, and instead features rose-like flowers and buds whose vines scroll in all directions across the surface of the *tik*. This pattern is inspired by floral motifs commonly found in Chinese decorative arts, including porcelain, silver, and textiles. In fact, some of the Chinese export silver Torah cases featured other traditional Chinese patterns, such as bamboo stems and leaves, flying birds, and lotus flowers.

There are other differences between Torah cases produced in Iraq and those produced in China as well. Iraqi Torah cases often included inscription bands around the top, as well as crenellations ornamented with colored beads. Finally, the various elements of the design are treated differently. Where the Iraqi Torah cases primarily employed only silver and silver gilt, the Guangzhou Torah case, and other Chinese export silver Torah cases, also incorporated oxidized silver (silver purposely darkened using a chemical process). The contrast between the background of the case in blackened silver, and the floral motifs in both silver and silver gilt, created a more dramatic effect.

Figure 5.5.2.4.1: Left: Dome and finials; right: dedication inscription, Torah case, Guangzhou, China, 1886, oxidized silver, silver, and silver-gilt, 92.6 x 30 cm (Center for Jewish Art(opens in new window))

As in Iraqi Torah cases, the Guangzhou's Torah crown and finials are integral to the case. When the case is opened, the inside of both halves of the crown display dedicatory plaques inscribed with biblical verses and details about the donors. But while Iraqi

Torah crowns are typically onion-shaped, the Guangzhou crown is domed. Moreover, while Iraqi finials are set on a diagonal, are pear-shaped, and feature little-to-no decoration, the Guangzhou finials are vertical, undulating in form, and far more ornate with ornament matching the decoration of the case. These alterations offered more surfaces for the display of the silversmith's skills. In addition to the decoration of the finials, the altered form of the crown created more space on the interior faces of the Guangzhou crown, where we find the sharp execution of large Hebrew letters raised in relief against a delicate background, all framed by an enameled frame of floral motifs. Throughout the decoration of the Torah *tik*, the Chinese silversmith moved beyond the model of Iraqi Torah cases, creating new patterns and designs that celebrated their craft.

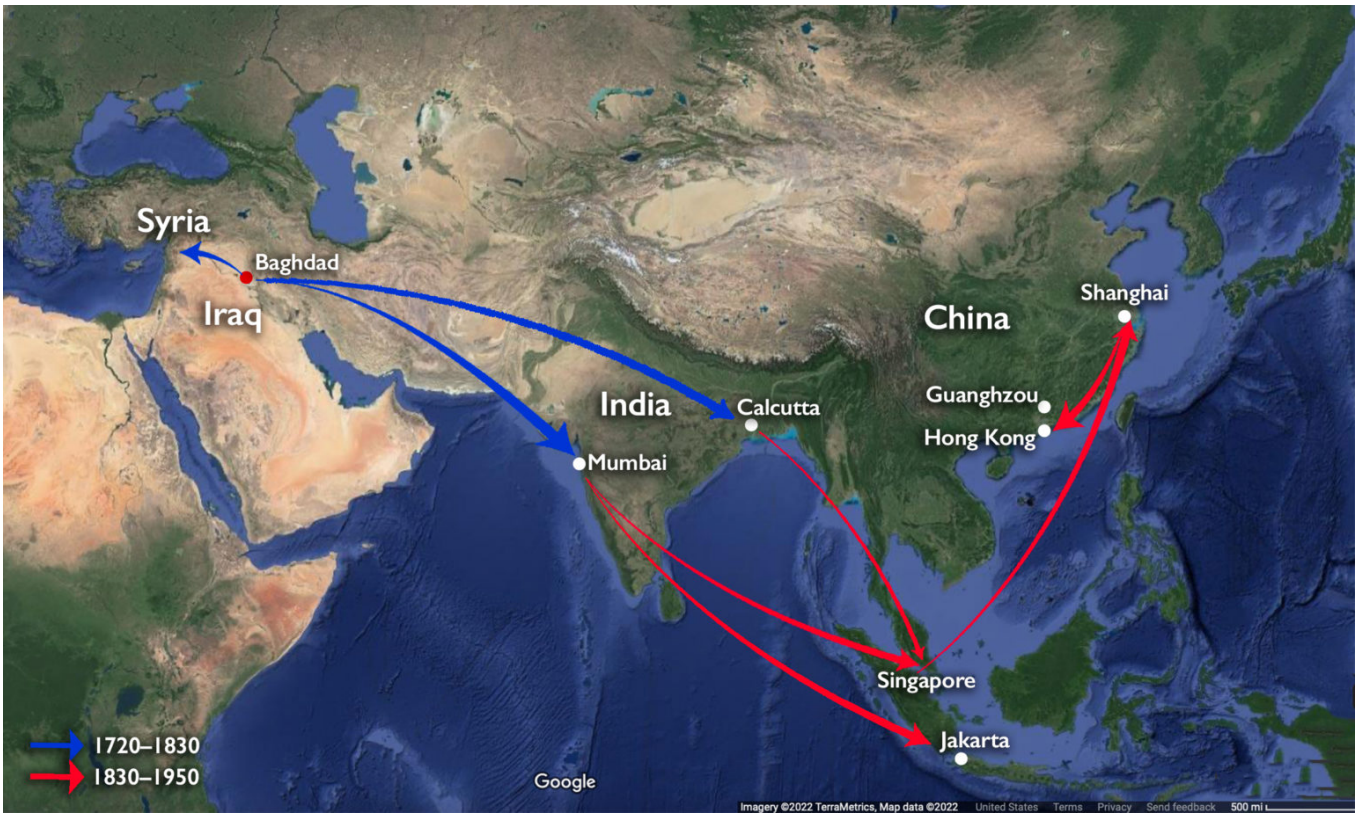

Figure **5.5.2.4.1**: Baghdadi Jewish trade routes 1720–1950 (after Goldstein-Sabbah, underlying map © Google)

Baghdadi Jews and Indian Ocean trade

According to the dedicatory inscriptions on the interior of the *tik*, the Guangzhou Torah case was commissioned by Nissim Hai, a Baghdadi Jewish merchant who lived and operated in Hong Kong and Singapore. He dedicated the Torah case in memory of his deceased wife Mazal Tov, from Calcutta (today Kolkata), India. Nissim Hai's family, like many other Jewish merchants working in the Indian Ocean trade, traced their heritage to Baghdad, Iraq.

Beginning in the early 19th century, some Jewish merchants and their families living in the Ottoman Empire (and other regions throughout West and Central Asia) moved to British-controlled India and later to China. Many of the Jewish immigrants to India and China during this period came from Baghdad, and so the communities are commonly described as Baghdadi Jews. In East Asia, they established a Baghdadi diaspora, or communities of Baghdadi Jews separated from Iraq. From their bases in India and in China, they fashioned trade networks stretching from Shanghai to London through which they could distribute luxury goods. The intricate trade networks that they established were supported by a shared common identity and continuity across the many Baghdadi diaspora communities in India and China. Although they were surrounded by local Chinese, Indian, and Muslim populations, and others present in the region, for the most part, the Baghdadi Jews maintained a separate lifestyle. They kept strong ties with their Jewish cultural heritage and the spiritual and religious center of their community—Baghdad. They built synagogues and needed liturgical and ceremonial objects—especially Torahs and Torah cases—to fulfill the rituals of Jewish life.

In the early years of the Baghdadi Jewish presence in India and China, Jews commissioned Torah scrolls and cases from scribes and artisans still in Iraq, but by the late 19th century, just the Torah scrolls were imported from Baghdad, and the cases were

produced in China in Chinese export silver workshops, based on the model of Iraqi Torah cases. The Guangzhou Torah case is an example of Chinese export silver Judaica.

Figure **5.5.2.4.1**: Stamps, Torah case, Guangzhou, China, 1886, oxidized silver, silver, and silver-gilt, 92.6 x 30 cm (Center for Jewish Art(opens in new window))

While we don't know the specific artist that created this Torah case, the firm that produced the case can be associated with the production of several other works of Jewish art. Three marks in Chinese characters and Latin letters can be seen stamped along the Torah case's front bars. Beginning in the 1840s, Chinese silversmiths began to stamp their works with marks that indicate information about the object—one of the case's three marks includes the letter "K." This letter has been connected to a retail Chinese export silversmith active in Guangzhou between 1840 and 1875, who created other works of Chinese export silver Judaica, including two Torah cases and a case for a scroll of the Book of Esther (*Megillat Esther)*. Clearly, there was substantial demand for Chinese export silver Judaica among the Baghdadi communities of India and China.

We also do not know the synagogue in which this Torah case was originally used. It's possible that it was donated to a synagogue in Hong Kong or Singapore, where Nissim Hai (its patron) lived and worked. It is also possible that it was donated to a synagogue in Calcutta, where the family of Mazal Tov, Nissim Hai's wife, was based. In fact, the Torah is known to have arrived in Israel in the 20th century from Calcutta. In the second half of the 20th century, many of the Baghdadi Jews left India and China for England, North America, and Israel. When they moved, they took their ceremonial objects with them, including their Torah scrolls.

Made in China, and used in China or India (or possibly both), this Torah case is a unique product of the transnational artistic and cultural networks forged by the Baghdadi Jewish community in the 19th century.

Artwork details

art details

Title	Torah case
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	1886
Places	Asia / East Asia / China
Period, Culture, Style	Qing dynasty
Artwork Type	Metalwork
Material	Silver
Technique	Repoussé and chasing

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5.5.2.5: Six Gentlemen 六君子图

by **DR. HANNAH SIGUR**

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Figure **5.5.2.5.1**: Song Su-Nam, *Summer Trees*, 1979, ink on paper, 2 feet 1-5/8 inches high (© Trustees of the British Museum) © Song Su-Nam

Modern, but deeply rooted in tradition

In Song Su-nam's *Summer Trees*, broad, vertical parallel brush strokes of ink blend and bleed from one to the other in a stark palette of velvety blacks and diluted grays. The feathery edges of some reveal them to be pale washes applied to very wet paper, while the darkest appear as streaks that show both ink and paper were nearly dry. The forms overlap and stop just short of the bottom edge of the paper, suggesting a sense of shallow space—though one that would be difficult to enter. Only a practiced hand could control ink with such simplicity and impact. The painting exudes psychological power, despite its relatively modest proportions (it is only a little more than 2 feet high).

Song's exploration of tone (the shades of black and gray) and the effects produced by the marks of the brush, the wet paper, and dripping ink, has led some to think that these abstract, formal qualities are the real subject of this very modern-looking work. But it is important that the title refers to the natural world. Song created *Summer Trees* in 1979, but he made at least two similar paintings. One, in 1985, he called *Tree*. Not until the second, painted in 2000, did he fully embrace abstraction. His title—and even his decision to create a work in ink—shows us that though clearly addressing issues of contemporary art—Song's work is deeply rooted in tradition.

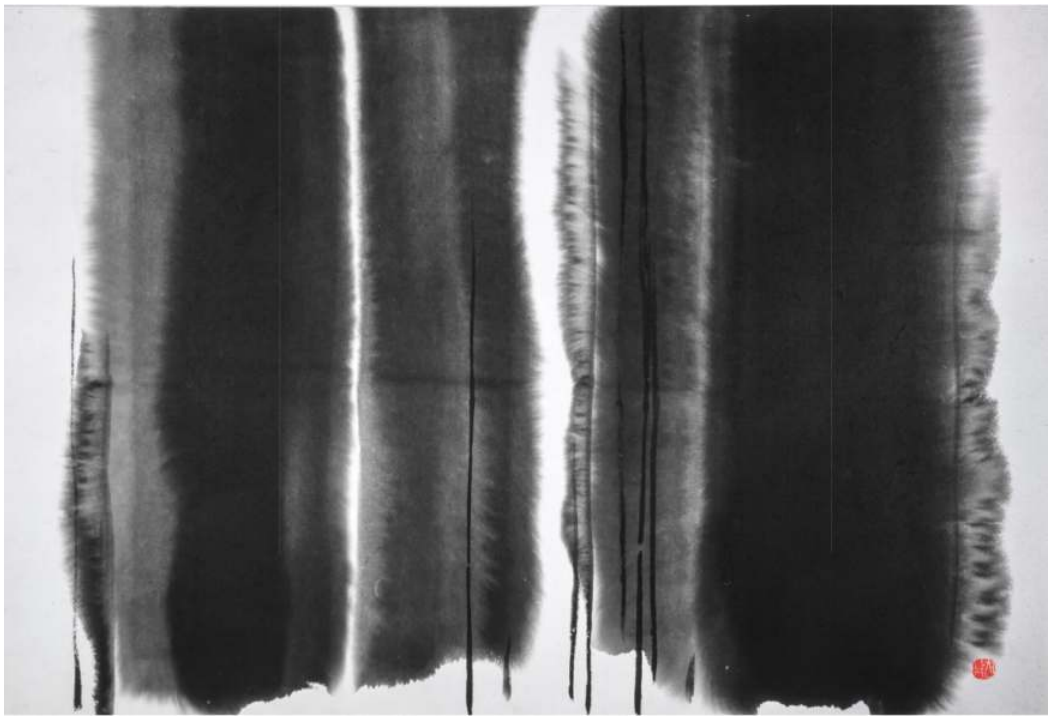

Figure 5.5.2.5.2: Song Su-Nam, *Tree*, 1985, ink on paper, 94 x 138 cm (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea) © Song Su-Nam

Figure 5.5.2.5.3: Ni Zan, *Six Gentlemen*, 1345, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 61.9 x 33.3 cm (Shanghai Museum; photo: Difference engine)

To choose the medium of ink on paper was important for the artist, a leader of Korea's *Sumukhwa* or Oriental Ink Movement of the 1980s. *Sumukwha* is the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese word for "ink wash painting," also called "literati painting." The "literatus" can be defined as a "scholar-poet" or "scholar-artist," a type of ideal man that emerged in China in the 11th century or before. Chinese poetry was considered the noblest art, and "ink wash painting" was its twin, because writing a poem and making a painting used the same tools and techniques—one resulting in words, the other a picture. In their simplicity and reductiveness, the style of ink wash paintings created centuries ago often seem to match Western notions of abstraction.

In Chinese poetry, mountainous landscapes and the plants that grow in them serve as metaphors for the ideal qualities of the literatus himself—qualities such as loyalty, intelligence, spirituality, and strength in adversity. The world the literatus wants to live

in is one of beauty, deep in nature, away from the centers of power and money. These themes provided painters with a library of motifs. From the 1970s–90s, Song created many such landscapes, executed unconventionally, with and without titles. *Summer Trees* may also reference a traditional theme: a group of pine trees can symbolize a gathering of friends of upright character. Whatever his intention with this title, Song was clearly alluding to the special world of the literati. Highly educated and a respected professor, he stood among the modern literati of Korea.

Song's interest in abstraction and the formal properties of ink has led some art historians to attribute the inspiration for his work to that of American artists like Morris Louis, who used the medium of acrylic resin on canvas in his "Stripe" paintings of the 1960s, which resemble Song's works of later decades such as *Summer Trees*. But in Korea during the 1980s, there was a tension between the influence of Western art that used oil paint (whether traditional or contemporary in style), and traditional Korean art that used an East Asian style, the vocabulary of traditional motifs, and the medium of ink for calligraphy and painting. Song felt very strongly that the materials and styles of Western art did not express his identity as a Korean.

Figure 5.5.2.5.4: Morris Louis, *Pungent Distances*, 1961, Magna on canvas, 231.8 x 150.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)
© 1961 Morris Louis

Sumukwha provided Song and his circle with a way to express Korean identity. Since antiquity, the country had taken great pride in a political and cultural distinctiveness that was recognized throughout Asia. Yet the twentieth century had brought trauma: the end of Korea's ancient monarchy, colonization by the Japanese who had attempted to obliterate the Korean language, mass destruction during the Korean War (1950–53), and the partitioning of the nation. In South Korea, where Song lived, the country was healing but endured authoritarian government and student unrest. People lived in constant fear of hostility from North Korea. For protection, they accepted a conspicuous American military presence, but this cast modernization in a decidedly Westernized light.

Sumukwha's ideal—the literatus—presented a compelling antidote to the psychological displacement felt by Song's circle of artists and intellectuals: a model individual of character and moral compass no matter what challenges life presents; and a way of expressing those ideals through his iconic tools of ink and brush. *Summer Trees*, with its allusions to friendship and a balmy season, could be Song's statement of optimism in the rediscovery of traditional values recast for modern times.

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Buncheong Jar with cloud and dragon design

by The National Museum of Korea

Essay by Lee Jung-in

Figure **5.5.2.6.1**: Exemplifying the unique aesthetics of buncheong ware, this jar is decorated with a dynamic design of two dragons, embellished with auxiliary designs of stamped chrysanthemums and a large ruyi motif, and coated with light green translucent glaze. Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design, 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea)

The two representative types of Joseon ceramics are white porcelain and buncheong ware. White porcelain was produced throughout the entire duration of the Joseon period (1392–1910), symbolizing the order and principles of the Neo-Confucian society. Buncheong ware, on the other hand, emerged from the tradition of inlaid celadon of the late Goryeo period (918–1392). It was produced until the late sixteenth century, becoming a crucial chapter in the magnificent legacy of Joseon ceramics.

Figure 5.5.2.6.1: The *ruyi* symbols are surrounded by stamped designs. Here, the *ruyi* curl outward, as shown on the right. to connect to one another. Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design (detail), 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea)

Dragon design, icon of buncheong ware of the early 15th Century

Figure 5.5.2.6.1: Celadon Jar with Inlaid Monkey and Tree Design in Overglaze Gold, Korea, Goryeo Dynasty, 918–1392, Stoneware uinlaid decoration and overglaze gold pigment on celadon glaze, H. 25.5 cm (National Museum of Korea)

Buncheong ware vessels were decorated with various techniques, including inlay, stamping, incision, *sgraffito*, iron-brown underglaze, brushed white slip, and dipped white slip. Among these, the primary methods were inlay and stamping. For the inlay technique, decorative patterns or images are carved into the surface of a vessel and then filled with different materials. During the Goryeo period, the inlay technique was used to decorate various types of vessels (such as bronze vessels with silver inlay and lacquerware inlaid with mother-of-pearl), but it was most famously applied to celadon. For inlaid celadon, patterns or images were carved into the grayish base clay, and then filled with white or ocher clay (which darkened to black during firing). After glaze was applied and the vessel was fired, the resulting design would feature a superb contrast between white and black.

As opposed to inlay, wherein each design was individually carved by hand, stamped designs were made by pressing a stamp into the surface of the vessel, and then filling the imprinted lines with white or ocher clay. This process was much more efficient, because the stamp could be re-used many times. Hence, the majority of late Goryeo celadon wares were decorated with either inlaid or stamped designs. These techniques were then carried over to Joseon buncheong ware, becoming part of the representative aesthetics of the early Joseon period.

Figure 5.5.2.6.1: Detail of the black and white inlaid design of a dragon chasing a *cintamani* (auspicious jewel). Dragons were prominent symbols of the king, indicating that this jar was likely used by the royal court. Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design (detail), 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea)

In particular, this buncheong jar with cloud and dragon design (National Treasure 259), which features a harmonious use of both inlay and stamping, is one of the quintessential examples of buncheong ware of the early fifteenth century. The jar is elaborately adorned with a dynamic design of two dragons in the center, embellished with auxiliary designs of stamped chrysanthemums and a large *ruyi* motif (visible in a detail earlier), and coated with light green translucent glaze.

Figure 5.5.2.6.1:Detail of second dragon. Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design (detail), 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea)

Jars with this shape had been produced since the Goryeo period. For the design, the exterior surface of the jar was divided into four sections, separated by horizontal bands with black outlines and white scrolls. The primary section on the main body is filled with a black and white inlaid design of two dragons. Facing to the viewers' left, both dragons are chasing an auspicious jewel known as a "*cintamani*." Although somewhat lacking in refinement and precision, the dragon design is rendered in minute detail, with very fine lines used to depict the scales and mane. Furthermore, the design conveys a powerful energy, as the dragons surge through the clouds.

Interestingly, one dragon is actually treading upon the lower border of the design. The discrepancy of placing one dragon a bit lower than the other one adds an element of humor and surprise to the design. Notably, dragons were prominent symbols of the king, and jars with dragon designs were very special vessels that were reserved exclusively for royal ceremonies or banquets. Thus, this buncheong jar is believed to have been used by the royal court.

Figure **5.5.2.6.1**: Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design (detail), 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea)

Unique jar with an open bottom

The mouth of this jar has been partially restored. A pattern of small chrysanthemums is densely stamped around the neck of the jar and even in the upper interior of the mouth, such that the base clay has been almost entirely replaced by white clay. This dense application of the stamping technique, leaving almost no blank space, is characteristic of the Joseon period. The same technique, which creates a beautiful snowflake-like pattern, was also used to fill in the *ruyi* design on the shoulder.

Figure 5.5.2.6.1: Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design (detail), 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea)

Rendered with both black and white outlines, the *ruyi* design is surrounded by a pattern of small waves, formed by concentric semi-circles. Within the wave motifs is a small lotus flower and another form that seems to resemble a waterfowl. This stamped wave pattern helps to distinguish the upper decorative section with the *ruyi* design from the dragon design on the midsection.

Figure 5.5.2.6.1: Stylized lotus leaves. Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design (detail), 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea)

Below the dragon design, the lower decorative section features a black and white pattern of stylized lotus leaves. An elaborate design is inlaid within each individual lotus leaf, making the pattern stand out and enhancing the visual stability of the jar.

Figure 5.5.2.6.1: Buncheong Jar with Cloud and Dragon Design, 15th century, Joseon, 48.5 cm high, National Treasure 259 (National Museum of Korea)

Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of this jar is that it is completely open on the bottom. Many theories have been put forth to explain this unusual quirk, but there is as yet little evidence to support any of the hypotheses. But given the finished condition of the rest of the jar, it seems that the bottom was left open intentionally, rather than being a mistake or incompletion.

Influence of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain and modification of buncheong

Figure 5.5.2.6.1: Jar with Dragon, early 15th century, Ming dynasty, porcelain painted with cobalt blue under transparent glaze (Jingdezhen ware), 48.3 cm high, 48.3 cm in diameter (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The dense composition of the designs reflects the influence of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. After first rising to popularity during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), blue-and-white porcelain reshaped the entire ceramics culture of China, reaching its pinnacle during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), when diverse new forms appeared.

Through the course of its development, Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was introduced to Korea via multiple channels, providing an early stimulus for the white porcelain culture of Joseon. Notably, the decorative composition of this jar—with a dragon design in the center, a *ruyi* design on the top, and a lotus leaf design on the bottom—has also been seen on Yuan blue-and-white porcelain jars and *maebyeong* vases. Moreover, the posture of the dragons resembles dragons on Ming blue-and-white porcelain. Thus, this jar demonstrates how buncheong ware—the primary type of Joseon ceramics at the time—adopted certain elements of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain in developing its own unique style.

Symbol of the new culture of the Joseon Dynasty

The early fifteenth century was a crucial turning point in Korean history, when the Joseon Dynasty was firmly established. This was also a significant time for Korean ceramics, which saw many important changes and developments. Combining the domestic tradition of Goryeo celadon and the international influence of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, buncheong ware represented the shift to the new ceramic culture of Joseon, which eventually led to the creation of Joseon white porcelain within the social context of Neo-Confucianism.

This formative period is encapsulated by this buncheong jar with cloud and dragon design, which integrates the Goryeo tradition with elements acquired through cultural exchange. While this jar showcases the vibrant designs and simple beauty that characterize buncheong ware, it has special significance for exemplifying the spirit of the new era, when Joseon culture was beginning to blossom, and for expressing the authority of the Joseon royal court.

국립중앙박물관
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF KOREA

Artwork details

Artwork details

Title	Buncheong Jar with cloud and dragon design
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	15th century
Places	Asia / East Asia / Korea
Period, Culture, Style	Joseon dynasty(opens in new window)
Artwork Type	Ceramics(opens in new window)
Material	Clay(opens in new window), Ceramic glaze(opens in new window)
Technique	Wheel throwing(opens in new window)

Bibliography

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5.5.2.7: Wang Meng, Ge Zhichuan Moving to the Mountains 葛稚川移居圖

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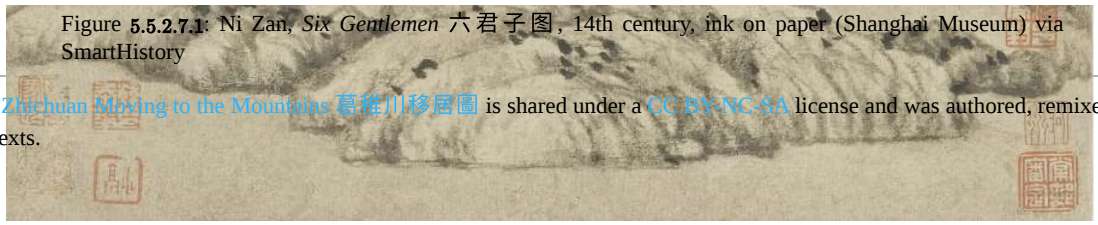

Figure 5.5.2.7.1: Ni Zan, *Six Gentlemen* 六君子图, 14th century, ink on paper (Shanghai Museum) via SmartHistory

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Dunhuang Historical Art, Cave 323

by The Dunhuang Foundation

Artwork Details↓

Essay by Mei Mei Chan

Cave 323 and the history of Buddhism in China

Official historical records indicate that Buddhism first arrived in China during Eastern Han Emperor Ming's rule (57–75 C.E.). Emperor Ming saw a golden figure in his dreams, and the next morning, he asked his ministers who it was. They surmised that the figure must have been the reputed Buddha from the west.

Figure 5.5.2.8.1: Location of the Longmen caves in China

Thus in 68 C.E., the emperor sent Official Cai Yin from the capital, Luoyang, to the west. Three years later Cai Yin returned to Luoyang after journeying to India, bringing back with him Buddhist art and scriptures along with two Buddhist monks to preach in China.

Soon after Cai Yin's return, a Buddhist community began to grow in Luoyang. About three hundred years later, rulers ordered the carving out and decoration of the caves today known as the Longmen Grottoes.

Figure 5.5.2.8.1: Buddha at the Longmen Grottoes, Northern Wei Dynasty, Luoyang, China, 493–534 C.E.

Today, the Longmen Grottoes of Luoyang are one of the three most important Buddhist grottoes in China, along with the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang and the Yungang Grottoes of Datong. They tell a series of narratives arranged in chronological order.

Though many historians mark Cai Yin's return from India as the official entrance of Buddhism into China, Chinese Buddhists prefer to emphasize that Buddhism appeared in China even earlier.

Histories of Chinese Buddhism

Mogao Cave 323 at Dunhuang tells one such version of the origins of Chinese Buddhism. Cut in the Tang dynasty in the 7th century, Cave 323 is a product of a great increase in powerful Buddhist patronage by rulers such as Empress Wu Zetian and Emperor Wuzong. During this expansion in Chinese Buddhism, Buddhist historical paintings began to appear in places such as the Mogao Grottoes.

Figure **5.5.2.8.1**: Foreground: Emperor Wu on a horse sending off Zhang Qian who is kneeling. Right middle ground and background: Emperor Wudi kneels before an enclosure that contains the two buddha statues. North wall fresco in Mogao Cave 323, early Tang dynasty (image courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy)

The north wall of Mogao Cave 323 depicts the story of diplomat Zhang Qian being dispatched to the Western Regions by Han Dynasty Emperor Wu (140–87 B.C.E). Historically, Emperor Wu sent Zhang Qian to the Western Regions as an imperial envoy in an attempt to form a political alliance to fight the Xiongnu.

The mural on the north wall in Cave 323 specifically references a legend that describes Emperor Wu worshipping two metal statues after winning a war against the Xiongnu. Delighted with his spoils of war and wanting to know more about the deities that the statues represented, Emperor Wu sent Zhang Qian to the Western Regions. Thus Zhang Qian journeyed to the west and returned to China with information that the statues were of the Buddha. This legend helps to explain the early origins of Buddhism in China.

Besides the legend of the metal statues, there exists another story about Emperor Wu's westward expansion. Following one of his military victories, Emperor Wu came into possession of a special breed of horse from Central Asia. We don't see these horses in the wall paintings though. These special horses were from Ferghana, and truly magnificent (likely related to the Akhal-Teke horses of today). According to the legends, they sweat blood—in Chinese, they're still referred to as "汗血马 (hanxuema)," or "sweat-blood horses."

Figure 5.5.2.8.1: Heavenly Horse from the West, 25–220 C.E., China (Gansu Provincial Museum; photo: G41rn8, CC BY-SA 4.0)

This bronze sculpture, known as “the Heavenly Horse from the West,” takes its name from the first line in Emperor Wu’s ode:

> ***The heavenly horses have arrived from the Western frontier***
> ***Having traveled 10,000 li, they arrive with great virtue***
> ***With loyal spirit, they defeat foreign nations***
> ***And crossing the deserts all barbarians succumb in their wake!The Shiji, Ch. 24, “The Treatise on Music” from the Digital Silk Road Project***

On your way to Dunhuang from Lanzhou, considering stopping by the Gansu Provincial Museum to take a peek at the Heavenly Horse from the West, otherwise known as the Flying Horse.

Figure 5.5.2.8.1: Detail of Emperor Wu on a horse sending off Zhang Qian who is kneeling, north wall fresco in Mogao Cave 323, Early Tang dynasty (image courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy)

Whether or not Zhang Qian ever really journeyed to learn about Buddhism for Emperor Wu, he did go on at least one dangerous mission to the west that lasted twenty years. Although he never succeeded in forming a political alliance to combat the Xiongnu, his journey trail-blazed a route for political, economic, and cultural exchange between China and the Western Regions.

These routes that would completely reshape the history of world civilization became known as the Silk Road.

Other stories in Cave 323

Besides the Zhang Qian legend on the origins of Chinese Buddhism, the wall paintings in Cave 323 depict other stories. Though not directly related to the two metal Buddha statues in Emperor Wu's possession, the fresco on the south wall of Cave 323 relates another early tale of Chinese Buddhism involving two statues.

Two stone Buddhas

Figure 5.5.2.8.1: Two Stone Buddhas Floating on the River on the south wall of Mogao Cave 323, Tang Dynasty (image courtesy of the Dunhuang

In 323 C.E., two stone statues were found floating in a river in southern China. When Daoists tried to welcome the statues, they were stopped by a storm. As depicted in the painting, when the Buddhists arrived, the weather became favorable and the statues approached the shore to be carried to town to be worshipped.

A bronze Buddha

In 326 C.E., a bronze statue of the Buddha seated on a lotus was discovered in southeast China, in present-day Yangzhou. When townspeople placed the statue in an ox-cart to head towards town, the ox stopped in front of a monastery. According to the Sanskrit inscription on the back of the lotus, the statue was made by the fourth daughter of the great Indian king who converted to Buddhism, Asoka. This story is depicted across multiple scenes on the south wall of the cave.

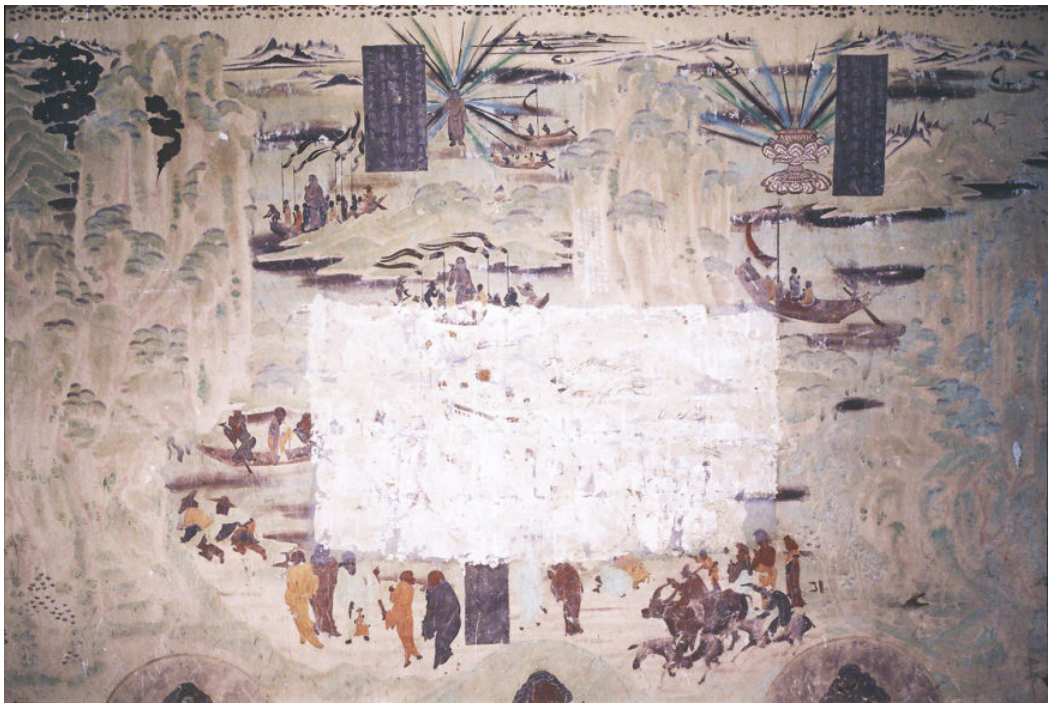

Figure 5.5.2.8.1:Discovery of a Bronze Image of the Buddha on the south wall of Mogao Cave 323, Tang Dynasty (image courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy)

Figure 5.5.2.8.1: Eight Men Ferrying a Statue of the Buddha from Mogao Cave 323, Tang Dynasty, Dunhuang (Harvard Art Museums)

The center of the mural at Dunhuang depicting this scene was removed by American explorer and archaeologist Langdon Warner in 1924. It is now in the Sackler Collection at the Harvard Art Museums. The removed scene shows eight men ferrying the bronze statue of the Buddha to shore, to be placed in the ox cart.

Figure 5.5.2.8.1: Reconstruction of the Bronze Image of the Buddha Mural on the south wall of Mogao Cave 323, Dunhuang, including the Harvard segment

Here is a reconstruction of how the section might have appeared in the original mural.

Emperor Wen and Master Tan Yan

The Sui dynasty's first emperor, Emperor Wen (who ruled from 581–604 C.E.), grew up in a Buddhist monastery and ruled as one of Buddhism's greatest public advocates.

Figure 5.5.2.8.1: Sui Dynasty Emperor Wen and Master Tan Yan on the south wall of Mogao Cave 323, early Tang Dynasty, Dunhuang (image courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy)

In this mural, Emperor Wen sits as a disciple in the center left with his palms pressed together, listening to the Master Tan Yan deliver a *dharma* talk, or a public discourse on Buddhism. He sits on a purple rug, with his courtiers on the rug behind him. The details of his headdress and long sleeves —along with the fact that he is alone—indicate his imperial status.

Emperor Wen's presence is a powerful indication of the support and patronage that Buddhism enjoyed during his reign, a period likely within living memory when Cave 323 was constructed in the early Tang dynasty.

Dunhuang FOUNDATION

Originally published on The Dunhuang Foundation blog

Artwork details

Artwork details

Title	Cave 323
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	7th century
Places	Asia / East Asia / China
Period, Culture, Style	Tang dynasty
Artwork Type	Architecture / Temple / Painting / Mural
Material	Rock
Technique	Carving, Fresco

Bibliography

Asia Society on the Belief Systems Along the Silk Road

Buddhism

Digital Silk Road Project: Emperor Wu's Horse

The Dunhuang Academy on Cave 323

Silk-Road.com

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Cite this page

Cite this page as: The Dunhuang Foundation, "Dunhuang Historical Art, Cave 323," in *Smarthistory*, May 11, 2021, accessed March 26, 2026, https://smarthistory.org/dunhuang-hi...-art-cave-323/.

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5.5.2.9: Angkor Wat

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is home to some of the largest and most complex religious architecture in the world.

1st millennium B.C.E. - c. 1200

The art of Cambodia

The great Hindu monuments of Cambodia have long been targets of looting and trafficking.

10th-12th century

Angkor Wat

by DR. MELODY ROD-ARI

Figure 5.5.2.9.1: Aerial view, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: **shankar s.**, CC BY 2.0)

A temple with a lost name

Angkor Wat in Siem Reap, Cambodia is the largest religious monument in the world. Angkor Wat, translated from Khmer (the official language of Cambodia), literally means “City Temple.” As far as names go this is as generic as it gets. Angkor Wat was not the original name given to the temple when it was built in the twelfth century. We have little knowledge of how this temple was referred to during the time of its use, as there are no extant texts or inscriptions that mention the temple by name—this is quite incredible if we consider the fact that Angkor Wat is the greatest religious construction project in Southeast Asia.

A possible reason why the temple’s original name may have never been documented is that it was such an important and famous monument that there was no need to refer to it by its name. We have several references to the king who built the temple, King Suryavarman II (1113-1145/50 C.E.), and events that took place at the temple, but no mention of its name.

Historical Context

Angkor Wat is dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu who is one of the three principal gods in the Hindu pantheon (Shiva and Brahma are the others). Among them he is known as the “Protector.” The major patron of Angkor Wat was King Suryavarman II, whose name translates as the “protector of the sun.” Many scholars believe that Angkor Wat was not only a temple dedicated to Vishnu but that it was also intended to serve as the king’s mausoleum in death.

Figure 5.5.2.9.2: Angkor Wat. Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: Benjamin Jakabek, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The construction of Angkor Wat likely began in the year 1116 C.E.—three years after King Suryavarman II came to the throne—with construction ending in 1150, shortly after the king's death. Evidence for these dates comes in part from inscriptions, which are vague, but also from the architectural design and artistic style of the temple and its associated sculptures.

The building of temples by Khmer kings was a means of legitimizing their claim to political office and also to lay claim to the protection and powers of the gods. Hindu temples are not a place for religious congregation; instead; they are homes of the god. In order for a king to lay claim to his political office he had to prove that the gods did not support his predecessors or his enemies. To this end, the king had to build the grandest temple/palace for the gods, one that proved to be more lavish than any previous temples. In doing so, the king could make visible his ability to harness the energy and resources to construct the temple, and assert that his temple was the only place that a god would consider residing in on earth.

The building of Angkor Wat is likely to have necessitated some 300,000 workers, which included architects, construction workers, masons, sculptors and the servants to feed these workers. Construction of the site took over 30 years and was never completely finished. The site is built entirely out of stone, which is incredible as close examination of the temple demonstrates that almost every surface is treated and carved with narrative or decorative details.

Carved Bas Reliefs of Hindu Narratives

There are 1,200 square meters of carved bas reliefs at Angkor Wat, representing eight different Hindu stories. Perhaps the most important narrative represented at Angkor Wat is the *Churning of the Ocean of Milk* (below), which depicts a story about the beginning of time and the creation of the universe. It is also a story about the victory of good over evil. In the story, *devas* (gods) are fighting the *asuras* (demons) in order reclaim order and power for the gods who have lost it. In order to reclaim peace and order, the elixir of life (*amrita*) needs to be released from the earth; however, the only way for the elixir to be released is for the gods and demons to first work together. To this end, both sides are aware that once the amrita is released there will be a battle to attain it.

Figure 5.5.2.9.3: Churning of the Ocean of Milk (detail), Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: John Brennan, CC BY-ND 2.0)

The relief depicts the moment when the two sides are churning the ocean of milk. In the detail above you can see that the gods and demons are playing a sort of tug-of-war with the Naga or serpent king as their divine rope. The Naga is being spun on Mt. Mandara represented by Vishnu (in the center). Several things happen while the churning of milk takes place. One event is that the foam from the churning produces *apsaras* or celestial maidens who are carved in relief throughout Angkor Wat (we see them here on either side of Vishnu, above the gods and demons). Once the elixir is released, Indra (the Vedic god who is considered the king of all the gods) is seen descending from heaven to catch it and save the world from the destruction of the demons.

Angkor Wat as Temple Mountain

Figure 5.5.2.9.4: Aerial view, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: Peter Garnhum, CC BY-NC 2.0)

An aerial view of Angkor Wat demonstrates that the temple is made up of an expansive enclosure wall, which separates the sacred temple grounds from the protective moat that surrounds the entire complex (the moat is visible in the photograph at the top of the page). The temple proper is comprised of three galleries (a passageway running along the length of the temple) with a central sanctuary, marked by five stone towers.

Figure 5.5.2.9.5: Gallery, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 1116-1150 (photo: fmpgoh, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

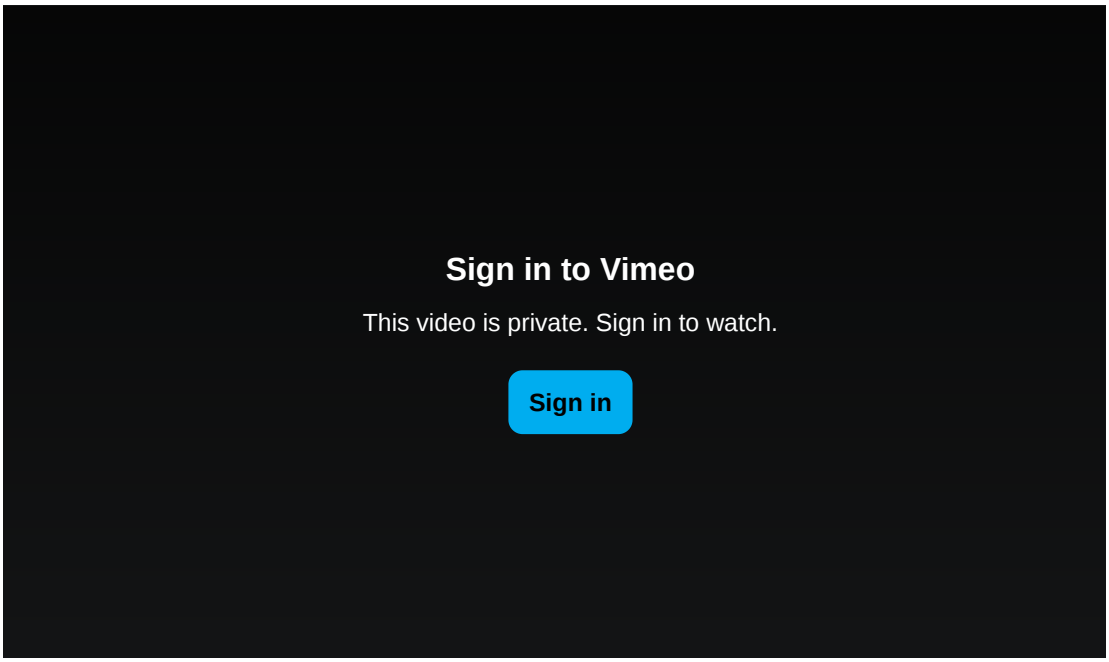
The five stone towers are intended to mimic the five mountain ranges of Mt. Meru—the mythical home of the gods, for both Hindus and Buddhists. The temple mountain as an architectural design was invented in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian architects quite literally envisioned temples dedicated to Hindu gods on earth as a representation of Mt. Meru. The galleries and the empty spaces that they created between one another and the moat are envisioned as the mountain ranges and oceans that surround Mt. Meru. Mt. Meru is not only home to the gods, it is also considered an axis-mundi. An axis-mundi is a cosmic or world axis that connects heaven and earth. In designing Angkor Wat in this way, King Suryavarman II and his architects intended for the temple to serve as the supreme abode for Vishnu. Similarly, the symbolism of Angkor Wat serving as an axis mundi was intended to demonstrate the Angkor Kingdom's and the king's central place in the universe. In addition to envisioning Angkor Wat as Mt. Meru on earth, the temple's architects, of whom we know nothing, also ingeniously designed the temple so that embedded in the temple's construction is a map of the cosmos (mandala) as well as a historical record of the temple's patron.

Angkor Wat as a Mandala

According to ancient Sanskrit and Khmer texts, religious monuments and specifically temples must be organized in such a way that they are in harmony with the universe, meaning that the temple should be planned according to the rising sun and moon, in addition to symbolizing the recurrent time sequences of the days, months and years. The central axis of these temples should also be aligned with the planets, thus connecting the structure to the cosmos so that temples become spiritual, political, cosmological, astronomical and geo-physical centers. They are, in other words, intended to represent microcosms of the universe and are organized as mandalas—diagrams of the universe.

Angkor Wat Today

Angkor Wat continues to play an important role in Cambodia even though most of the population is now Buddhist. Since the fifteenth century, Buddhists have used the temple and visitors today will see, among the thousands of visitors, Buddhist monks and nuns who worship at the site. Angkor Wat has also become an important symbol for the Cambodian nation. Today, the Cambodian flag has emblazoned on it the silhouette of Angkor Wat.



Video 5.5.2.9.1: **World Monuments Fund at Angkor Wat: The Churning of the Sea of Milk Gallery**

At the magnificent temple of Angkor Wat, World Monuments Fund is restoring the *Churning of the Sea of Milk* Gallery. Rainwater and harmful salts have leaked through the roof of the gallery, which forms the south half of Angkor Wat's prominent east façade, damaging the fragile surface of the frieze. Without treatment, the deterioration will increase at an alarming rate, risking the eventual loss of what most historians regard as the most ambitious and finely produced stone sculptures in Khmer art.

Additional resources:

Angkor Wat from Unesco

Temples of Angkor, google street-view interactive

"In Cambodia, Along the Path to Something Profound," NY TImes (May 13, 2015)

The Looting of Cambodian Antiquities

by TESS DAVIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Video 5.5.2.9.2: The looting of ancient Cambodian antiquities from Prasat Chen, the 10th century the Khmer capital at Koh Ker ARCHES: At Risk Cultural Heritage Education Series

Additional resources:

"Sotheby's Accused of Deceit in Sale of Khmer Statue" (*The New York Times*, November 13, 2012)

Rebuilding Koh Ker: A 3D Reconstruction Restores Context to a Looted Khmer Temple (from Chasing Aphrodite)

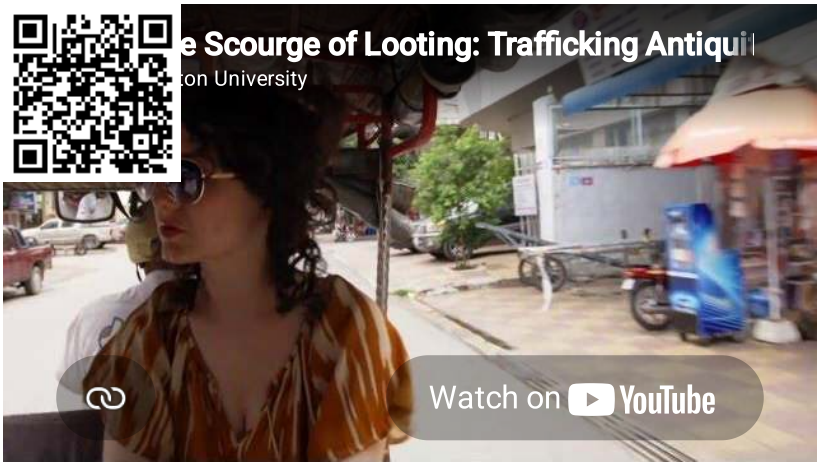
Cambodia Vs. Sotheby's In A Battle Over Antiquities (from NPR)

Return of six of the nine statues looted from Cambodia (UNESCO)

Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk (ICOM)

The Scourge of Looting: Trafficking Antiquities, from Temple to Museum

by TESS DAVIS



Video 5.5.2.9.3: Archaeologist and legal expert Tess Davis talks about the illicit antiquities trade, and how the looting of archaeological sites in conflict zones goes to fund paramilitary groups and terrorist organizations.

Sotheby's Returns Looted 10th Century Statue to Cambodia

by TESS DAVIS

Video 5.5.2.9.4: Archaeologist and legal expert Tess Davis talks about Sotheby's attempt to auction an ancient Cambodian statue that had been looted by the Khmer Rouge in 1972; and the statue's eventual return home.

Indonesia

Borobudur

by ROBERT E. GORDON

Figure **5.5.2.9.6**: Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: **Claire André**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Borobudur and the concept of path in Buddhism

Paths have been pervasive in human civilization. We are all familiar with the streets, trails, and lanes along which we routinely travel. Ancient Roman roads are utilized in some places even today. In contemporary computer culture we follow "paths" on webpages as we find our way to the information or experience we are searching for or find unexpectedly. There are simulated paths in complex first-person virtual reality video environments, where role-playing games formulate their content around the path to be conquered. The idea of path is an important concept in Buddhism, and is essential in understanding the meaning and purpose of one of the most remarkable and impressive monuments in the world: Borobudur.

Figure **5.5.2.9.7**: Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: **Claire André**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Located on the island of Java in Indonesia, the rulers of the Śailendra Dynasty built the Temple of Borobudur around 800 C.E. as a monument to the Buddha (exact dates vary among scholars). The temple (or candi in Javanese, pronounced "chandi") fell into disuse roughly one hundred years after its completion when, for still unknown reasons, the rulers of Java relocated the governing center to another part of the island. The British Lieutenant Governor on Java, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, only rediscovered the site in 1814 upon hearing reports from islanders of an incredible sanctuary deep within the island's interior. [1]

Figure **5.5.2.9.8**: Bodobudur, photo: **Wilson Loo Kok Wee** (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Candi Borobudur's design was conceived of by the poet, thinker, and architect Gunadharma, considered by many today to be a man of great vision and devotion. The temple has been described in a number of ways. Its basic structure resembles that of a pyramid, yet it has been also referred to as a caitya (shrine), a stupa (reliquary), and a sacred mountain. In fact, the name Śailendra literally means "Lord of the Mountain." While the temple exhibits characteristics of all these architectural configurations, its overall plan is that of a three-dimensional mandala—a diagram of the cosmos used for meditation—and it is in that sense where the richest understanding of the monument occurs.

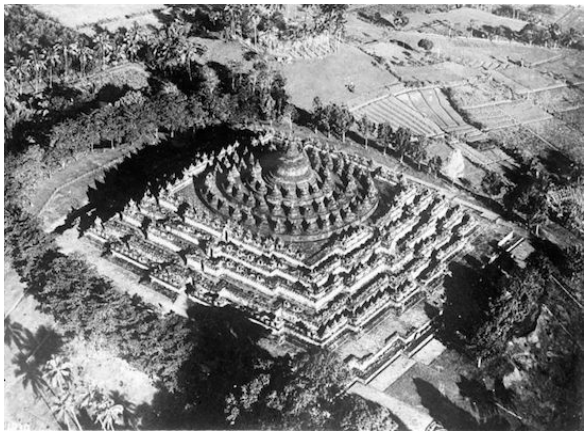


Figure 5.5.2.9.9: Aerial photo of Borobudur (Tropenmuseum Collection)

The journey

Set high upon a hill vertically enhanced by its builders to achieve a greater elevation, Borobudur consists of a series of open-air passageways that radiate around a central axis mundi (cosmic axis). Devotees circumambulate clockwise along walkways that gradually ascend to its uppermost level. At Borobudur, geometry, geomancy, and theology all instruct adherents toward the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Meticulously carved relief sculptures mediate a physical and spiritual journey that guides pilgrims progressively toward higher states of consciousness.

Figure 5.5.2.9.10: Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Wilson Loo Kok Wee, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The entire site contains 504 statues of the Buddha. 1460 stone reliefs on the walls and opposite balustrades decorate the first four galleries, with an additional 1212 decorative reliefs augmenting the path. The relief sculptures narrate the Buddha's teachings (the Dharma), depict various events related to his past lives (Jatakas), and illustrate didactic stories taken from important Buddhist scriptures (sutras). Interestingly, another 160 relief sculptures adorn the base of the monument, but are concealed behind stone buttresses that were added shortly after the building's construction in order to further support the structure's weight. The hidden narrative reliefs were photographed when they were discovered in the late 19th century before the stones were put back to help ensure the temple's stability.

Figure 5.5.2.9.11: Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Gildardo Sánchez, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Figure 5.5.2.9.12: Borobudur, Indonesia, central stupa at the temple's apex in the distance (photo: pierre c. 38, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Moving past the base and through the four galleries, the devotee emerges onto the three upper terraces, encountering 72 stupas each containing a three-dimensional sculpture of a seated Buddha within a stone latticework. At the temple's apex sits the large central stupa, a symbol of the enlightened mind.

The experience of meaning

While the sheer size and scope of a mandala structure such as this makes the site worthy of admiration, it is important to understand how the experience of Borobudur relates to the philosophic and spiritual underpinnings of the Buddhist religion it reifies and commemorates. Since its inception, roughly 2500 years ago, Buddhism has directly engaged what it sees as the paradoxical nature of human existence. The most essential tenet the religion promulgates is the impermanent, transient nature of existence. Transcendental wisdom via the Dharma (the Noble Eight-Fold Path) hinges on recognizing that attachment to the idea of a fixed, immutable "self" is a delusion.

Enlightenment entails embracing the concept of "no-self" (*anattā*), understood to be at the heart of eliminating the suffering and dissatisfaction (*dukkha*) of sentient beings. This is the ultimate message expressed in the sacred scriptures that are solidified in artistic magnificence along the stone walls and railings of Borobudur. The physical movement of circumambulating the structure symbolizes the non-physical—or spiritual—path of enlightenment. In a real sense, then, the concept of path within Borobudur monumentalizes the impermanent. Like a river that is never the same from moment to moment, to physically move along the path while meditating on the spiritual message of the sutras is meant to help one fully embrace the Buddha's paradoxical message of impermanence.

Figure 5.5.2.9.13: From the Gandavyuha Sutra, Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Photo Dharma, CC BY 2.0)

The texts illustrated on the walls refer to pathways as well. For instance, the Gandavyuha Sutra forms a major segment of the temple's upper galleries. The last chapter of a larger text called the Flower Garland Sutra, it relates the story of Suddhana, a youth who commences a journey to meet fifty-three teachers while seeking the path to enlightenment. The concept of "path" is a central theme in the text. He eventually meets an enlightened being (bodhisattva) named Samantabadhra. Excerpts from the larger sutra illustrate the concepts under discussion:

> ***"I will lead those who have lost their way to the right road. I will be a bright light for those in the dark night, and cause the poor and destitute to uncover hidden treasures. The Bodhisattva impartially benefits all living beings in this manner.***

> ***I vow to shut the door to evil destinies and open the right paths of humans, gods and that of Nirvana.***
>
> ***Once any sentient beings see the Buddha, it will cause them to clear away habitual obstructions. And forever abandon devilish actions: This is the path traveled by Illumination.***
>
> ***Sentient Beings are blinded by ignorance, always confused; the light of Buddha illuminates the path of safety. To rescue them and cause suffering to be removed.***
>
> ***All sentient beings are on false paths—Buddha shows them the right path, inconceivable, causing all worlds to be vessels of truth…"***

The full text is available here.

From darkness into light

The idea of moving from the darkness into the light is the final element of the experience of Borobudur. The temple's pathway takes one from the earthly realm of desire (*kamadhatu*), represented and documented on the hidden narratives of the structure's earthbound base, through the world of forms (*rupadhatu*) as expounded on the narratives carved along the four galleries set at right angles, until one finally emerges into the realm of formlessness (*arupadhatu*) as symbolized and manifested in the open circular terraces crowned with 72 stupas.

Figure 5.5.2.9.14: Crowning stupa, Borobudur, Indonesia (photo: Paul Atkinson, CC BY-SA 2.0)

However, the symbolization of enlightenment these stupas represent is not intended to be merely aesthetic. Buddhist stupas and mandalas are understood as "spiritual technologies" that harness spiritual "energies" in the creation of sacred space. The repetition of form and the circumabulatory progress of the pilgrim mimic, and thereby access, the cosmological as a microcosm. The clockwise movement around the cosmic

center reproduces the macrocosmic path of the sun. Thus, when one emerges from the dark galleries representing the realms of desire and form into the light of the "formless" circular open air upper walkways, the material effect of light on one's physical form merges concomitantly with the spiritual enlightenment generated by the metaphysical journey of the sacred path.

Light, in all its paradoxes, is the ultimate goal. The crowning stupa of this sacred mountain is dedicated to the "Great Sun Buddha" Vairocana. The temple sits in cosmic proximity to the nearby volcano Mt. Merapi. During certain times of the year the path of the rising sun in the East seems to emerge out of the mountain to strike the temple's peak in radiant synergy. Light illuminates the stone in a way that is intended to be more than beautiful. The brilliance of the site can be found in how the Borobudur mandala blends the metaphysical and physical, the symbolic and the material, the cosmological and the earthly within the structure of its physical setting and the framework of spiritual paradox.

Notes:

[1] Borobudur and many other archaeological sites in South and Southeast Asia often have orientalized narratives attached to them wherein colonizers "discover" or "bring to light" ancient monuments. These distortions discount the real and living history of the site.

Thailand

Ban Chiang Clay Jar

by THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Patterned pottery from the earliest agricultural communities of Thailand

Neolithic cultures based on agriculture and the use of stone tools appeared throughout mainland South-east Asia between 4000 B.C.E. and 1000 B.C.E.

Bronze technology became widespread in the northern part during the second millennium B.C.E. and iron after 500 B.C.E. The expansion of settlements, the spread of agriculture and the use of metal technology were closely connected with the Neolithic cultures of southern China.

Ban Chiang

Figure **5.5.2.9.15**: Ban Chiang Clay Jar, Ban Chiang, north-eastern Thailand, 1st millennium B.C.E. © Trustees of the British Museum

The site of Ban Chiang was excavated from the late 1960s. Until then the period prior to the spread of an Indianized culture in the first millennium C.E. was relatively unknown. The finds at Ban Chiang and other sites clearly demonstrated that the prehistory of Thailand and South-east Asia was far more complex than had previously been thought.

The site at Ban Chiang was occupied from around 3000 B.C.E. to the early centuries C.E. The earliest levels are agricultural but date before the use of bronze, which began to be used from around 2000 B.C.E. Burials with grave goods were excavated in addition to large quantities of decorated pottery in a variety of styles, for which the site is famous. Elaborately decorated pots such as this one were produced in the first millennium B.C.E. A great variety of decorative motifs feature on this pottery including the red spiral patterns that densely cover the surface of this pot. These are similar to those found on contemporary pottery in southern China.

Additional resources:

C. Higham, T*he archaeology of mainland Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 1989)

N. Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

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Bodh Gaya: the site of the Buddha's enlightenment

by Louis Copplestone

Artwork Details↓

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Bodhi tree with shrine, eastern gateway, Sanchi Stupa no. 1, 2nd–1st century B.C.E. (photo: Biswarup Ganguly, CC BY 3.0)

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Map showing the location of Bodh Gaya

For centuries, religion, politics, myth, and history have converged around a small town on the banks of the Phalgu River just south of the state capital Patna in India. This extraordinary place—Bodh Gaya—is understood to be the site of the enlightenment, or "great awakening" (Sanskrit, *mahabodhi*), of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. It was here that Siddhartha Gautama sat in meditation under the Bodhi tree, having renounced his princely life to wander and practice asceticism. Here, he defeated temptation in the form of the demon Mara, and set a great world religion—Buddhism—into motion.

The events of the Buddha's life are understood to have taken place sometime in the 5th century B.C.E. More than 2,500 years later, Bodh Gaya is a sprawling pilgrimage town dense with ancient, medieval, and modern shrines, monasteries, temples, and hotels. The historical and archaeological record at this sacred Buddhist center stretches back to at least the 3rd century B.C.E.

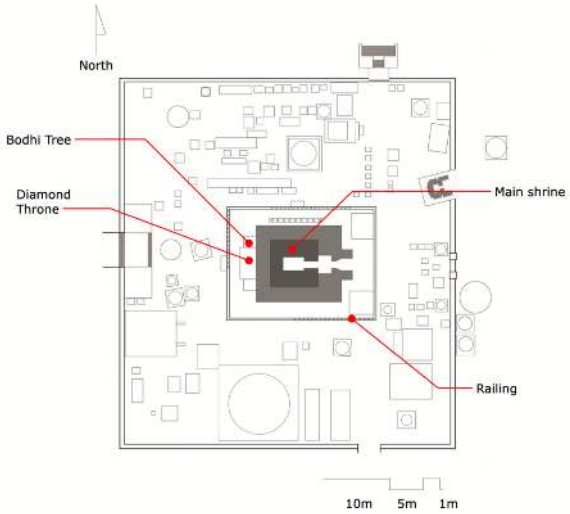

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Plan of Mahabodhi Temple Complex, drawn from Cunningham, *Mahabodhi*, 1892, plate XVII (drawn by the author)

At the heart of ancient Bodh Gaya is the Mahabodhi Temple Complex, which is busy with shrines, monuments, and sculpted images established over more than 2,000 years. Three of the most important monuments will be discussed in this essay:

- The Bodhi tree
- The Vajrasana, or “Diamond Throne”
- The Mahabodhi Temple

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Buddhist convention in front of the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, 2013 (photo: Triratna_Photos, CC BY-NC 2.0)

The Buddha’s Great Awakening

Siddhartha Gautama arrived at Bodh Gaya in middle age, having renounced his life as a prince on seeing the “four sights” of aging, sickness, death, and asceticism. It was the fourth sight that encouraged him to begin practicing extreme asceticism and meditation. Having done this for some time he became disillusioned with this extreme path and departed his ascetic companions wandering in north India until he arrived at the Bodhi tree (pipal tree or *ficus religiosa*) on the banks of the Phalgu River. [1] Taking a seat under this tree to begin a long meditation, the Buddha-to-be was seen by the servant of a local noblewoman who, thinking he was a tree spirit, presented him with a bowl of rice and milk.

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: *Buddha calling on the earth to witness*, 9th century, Bihar, India (Cleveland Museum of Art)

With this nourishment he continued to meditate under this tree and saw off the attacks of the demon Mara; who had sent both his demonic armies and daughters to distract the meditating Siddhartha Gautama. Finally, on that very night, the Buddha attained enlightenment. At that moment the Buddha was asked to provide a witness to this miraculous feat; and so the Buddha touched the earth with the fingers of his right hand, calling the Earth Goddess to witness. Buddhist traditions diverge on some of this account but this moment and the place at which it occurred, under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, is significant to all Buddhist traditions.

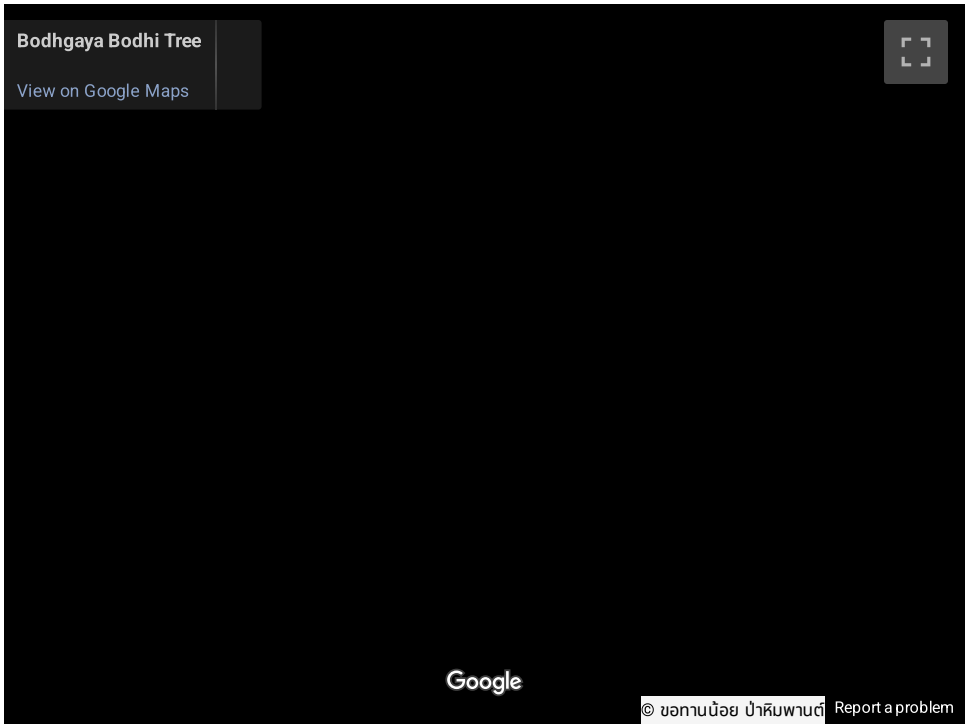

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: The Bodhi Tree today at Bodh Gaya

The Bodhi Tree

As the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment, Bodh Gaya appears to have become a significant place for Buddhists soon after the death of the Buddha and the formation of the Buddhist community of monks and nuns (Sanskrit, *sangha*) and lay people. Very little is known, however, about the earliest structures at Bodh

Gaya, and centuries of addition and alteration make it difficult to imagine how this site appeared at any particular moment in the past.

Figure 5.5.2.10.1: Timeline of key events at Bodh Gaya (drawn by the author)

From depictions of Bodh Gaya in art dating from the 2nd century B.C.E and early narrative accounts it can be surmised that devotion at this site initially focused on the Bodhi tree itself. It is likely that this tree was surrounded by a wooden enclosure-shrine (Sanskrit, *bodhi-ghara*) by the 3rd century B.C.E., if not before.

Figure 5.5.2.10.1: Bodhi tree inside stone railing (photo manbartlett, CC BY 2.0)

According to one early narrative, the enclosure around the Bodhi tree provided a platform from which the famous early Indian King Ashoka Maurya anointed the sacred Bodhi tree with milk. [2] The stone railings enclosing a descendent of this tree at Bodh Gaya today likely date to the 1st century B.C.E., and these reveal that this wooden shrine was later replaced by a stone structure.

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Diamond throne at excavation (Alexander Cunningham, Mahabodhi, 1892, Pl. XIII)

The Diamond Throne

A few centuries after the Buddha, a stone platform or throne was established under the Bodhi tree to mark the spot where the Buddha sat in meditation and acts as a second focus of devotion there. In some Buddhist traditions Bodh Gaya itself is referred to simply as the "Diamond Throne" (Sanskrit, *vajrasana*), indicating the significance of this throne to the identity of this sacred site. Some of this throne remains in-situ, though it has been moved around the site at various times in the past.

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**:Goose and palmette motif. Diamond throne at excavation (Alexander Cunningham, Mahabodhi, 1892, Pl. XIII)

The distinctive goose and palmette motif appearing in relief on the upper register of this polished sandstone slab allows art historians to date it to the time of the Mauryan dynasty (4th to 2nd century B.C.E.), and possibly even to the time of Ashoka Maurya.

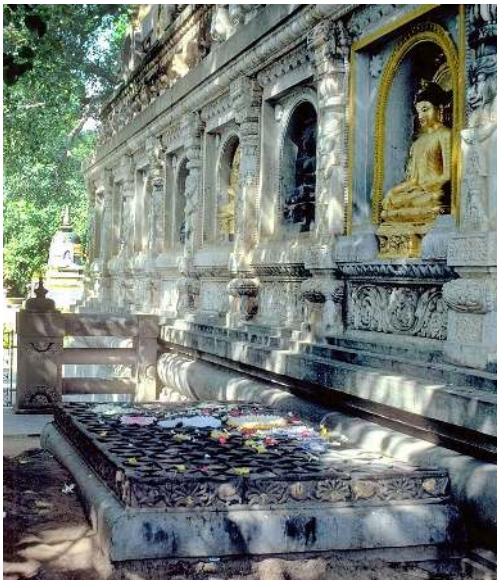

Figure 5.5.2.10.1: Diamond Throne of Ashoka at Bodh Gaya (photo: Christopher J. Fynn, CC BY-SA 3.0)

This throne has been moved around, restored, and altered many times in the past and is located today at the rear of the Mahabodhi Temple. The squat, atlas-like figures depicted in relief below the uppermost Mauryan throne likely date to the time of the Gupta dynasty (4th–6th century C.E.), if not a century or so earlier.

Figure 5.5.2.10.1: Bharhut relief with Diamond throne and Mahabodhi Temple around the Boddhi Tree (from Sir Alexander Cunningham, *Mahâbodhi, or the great Buddhist temple under the Bodhi tree at Buddha-Gaya*, 1892)

The combined image of this throne and the Bodhi tree was a popular image in early Buddhist art, which appears to have eschewed the depiction of the Buddha himself. The empty throne under the tree often acted as a sign for both the absent presence of the Buddha and for Bodh Gaya as a sacred site. The throne and the tree has remained an important sign for the Buddha and the moment of enlightenment throughout the history of Buddhist art, as can be seen in the early relief of the Bodhi tree with a shrine (at the top of this page) and in the common image of the Buddha calling on the earth to witness.

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Mahabodhi Temple today, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India (photo: manbartlett, CC BY 2.0)

The Mahabodhi Temple

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Mahābodhi plaque, 3rd century C.E. (Bihār Museum, Paṭnā Museum no. 4419).

The accounts of Chinese pilgrims who visited Bodh Gaya from at least the 5th century C.E. onwards give historians an idea of the next phase of construction at Bodh Gaya. Their accounts reveal that at some point in the early centuries of the Common Era the Bodhi tree and the Diamond Throne were partly superseded—or added to—by a towering temple housing a sculpted image of the Buddha.

Some art historians argue that a terracotta plaque from the 3rd century C.E. found near Patna represents the earliest Mahabodhi Temple. Whether or not this is the case, it is likely that the first iteration of the Mahabodhi Temple looked something like the one depicted: a tall straight-sided structure comprised of multiple layers of small arched "cow's eye" windows (*gavaksha*) tapering slightly at the pinnacle and surmounted by parasols and banners marking the presence of the Buddha and surrounded by a railing on all sides. The temple depicted in this plaque also houses an image of the Buddha.

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: *Buddha calling on the earth to witness*, 9th century, Bihar, India (Cleveland Museum of Art)

This broadly agrees with the description of Mahabodhi Temple given by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang who visited Bodh Gaya centuries later, at the end of the 7th century C.E. He describes a temple that is "160 or 170 feet high . . . [with] niches in the different storeys [holding] golden figures. The four sides of the building are

covered with wonderful ornamental work." [4]

According to Xuanzang and other pilgrims accounts, the Mahabodhi Temple housed a sculpted image of the Buddha in a seated position with his right hand touching the earth, recalling the moment of enlightenment when the Buddha "called the Earth to witness." This image became an increasingly popular theme in Buddhist art around the 7th century C.E., as we see in the *Buddha calling the earth to witness.*

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Model of the Mahabodhi Temple (front and side), 11th–12th century, Bihar, India (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

In subsequent centuries this "earth touching" Buddha image was combined with representations of the Mahabodhi Temple itself. These "pilgrim plaques" and miniature "models" of the Mahabodhi Temple give historians an idea of what this temple looked like at this time. Depictions of the Mahabodhi Temple also suggest the increasing importance of the temple housing the Buddha image in its own right as a sign for Bodh Gaya and the events there, although the Diamond Throne and the Bodhi tree continue to be depicted alongside them.

It is around this time too that inscriptions begin to refer to the Mahabodhi Temple as the "*vajrasana-gandhakuti*," literally the "perfume chamber (i.e. temple) with the Diamond Throne." These inscriptions, the depictions of the Mahabodhi Temple in art, and other evidence for royal and foreign-sponsored programs of restoration suggest an important shift from tree shrine to the building of temples, shrines, and monasteries at Bodh Gaya over the course of the 1st millennium C.E. [3]

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India (photo: Santosh Kumar, CC BY-SA 2.0)

The Mahabodhi Temple today

The Mahabodhi Temple as it appears today is mostly the product of restorations undertaken in the late 19th century: first by a Burmese mission and then overseen by the recently established Archaeological Survey of India (see the timeline above). The towering brick, stucco and concrete temple seen at Bodh Gaya today comprises a large primary straight-sided spire (Sanskrit, *shikhara*), rising out of a central image chamber (Sanskrit, *garbha-griha*). Four smaller spires sit on the corner of the main chamber and each of these is, like the primary spire, surmounted by the form of a Buddhist relic mound (Sanskrit, *stupa*). The surface of the temple is studded with receding levels of Buddha images set into niches alternating with circular "cow's eye windows," not unlike the accounts of Chinese pilgrims and early depictions of this building in art.

The late 19th-century restoration of the Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya made significant alterations to the site, however. Although these were based on architectural remains and models such as that shown in the model of the temple, pre-restoration paintings and photographs reveal how much was invented, such as the gateway pavilion on the second storey, the four corner spires, and much of the surface ornament. This period of restoration and partial excavation of the complex also brought to light the many small "votive" (pertaining to a wish) shrines and images which had steadily built up around the temple over centuries.

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Mahabodhi Phaya, Pagan, Myanmar (photo: David-Stanley, CC BY 2.0)

Many Mahabodhis: replication of Bodh Gaya

An important feature of Bodh Gaya and the Mahabodhi Temple Complex is its replication across Asia. What might be called "replica" Mahabodhi temples were built across Asia from the 13th century onwards: the Mahabodhi Phaya in Myanmar, Wat Chet Yot in Thailand, Wuta Si in China, and the Mahabuddha Temple in Nepal are important examples.

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**: Model of the Mahabodhi Temple, 11th–12th century, Bihar, India (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Each of these structures imitate the form of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, though they vary in style, building technology, and materials. Each temple works with similar assumptions of the Mahabodhi Temple form, being mostly organized around four towers surrounding a central larger tower. It is likely that some of these replicas were built from the recollections of pilgrims, if not on even small portable artworks and "models" carried away from Bodh Gaya such as that shown in model of the temple at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. These other Mahabodhi Temples may have been constructed because access to north Indian Buddhist sites was not easy for Buddhist pilgrims, especially at a time when monastic Buddhism had declined in the region. How and why these many Mahabodhi Temple were built, however, remains unclear; likely each of these buildings was built for a specific purpose in each context but all of them can be understood to, in a sense, transfer the Buddhist "holy land" abroad.

This replication of Bodh Gaya in the medieval and early modern period in Asia finds an earlier precedent in the account given in the Sri Lankan chronicle (*mahavamsa*) which records how a branch of the Bodhi tree was brought to Sri Lanka and planted in the city of Anuradhapura in the time of King Ashoka, where its descendant grows to this day. [5]

Bodh Gaya Today

International interest in Bodh Gaya increased from the 1880s onwards, particularly after the Archaeological Survey of India restored and landscaped much of the Mahabodhi Temple Complex. This ushered in a new phase of patronage, construction, and contention at the site. Over the course of the 20th century, international Buddhist communities and associations began to establish temples, monasteries, and guest houses in the town. Today at least forty different Buddhist organizations are represented in Bodh Gaya—a town with a mostly Hindu and Muslim population.

Many of the sculptures found at Bodh Gaya—including those used in worship today—date to the time of the Pala dynasty (8th–12th century C.E.) and depict both Buddhist and non-Buddhist deities. And it is likely that Bodh Gaya held significance within a network of sacred and pilgrimage sites in the region, both for Buddhists and other religious communities. It is also important to note that Bodh Gaya neighbors the major Hindu pilgrimage town of Gaya: an ancient sacred center associated with ancestor rites (Sanskrit, *shraddha*).

Indeed a major Shaiva (pertaining to the Hindu god Shiva) monastery was established just north of the Mahabodhi Temple Complex in the 18th century C.E., and this community of renunciates (people who renounces earthly pleasures and lives as ascetics) assumed administrative control of the complex around this time. Until recently the Shaiva Mahant (head of monastery) took up residence in a small building just opposite the Mahabodhi Temple and worshipped images of Buddhist deities installed there as forms of Hindu gods.

Relationships at Bodh Gaya became strained in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the ownership and authority of the Mahabodhi Temple in particular became contested. It was initially in order to "reclaim Bodh Gaya for Buddhists" that the Sri Lankan-born Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala established the Maha Bodhi Society in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1891. The Maha Bodhi Society campaigned to overturn Shaiva Hindu authority at the Mahabodhi Complex by appealing to first British colonial authorities and then to the independent Republic of India after 1947. After a lengthy legal battle, the question of ownership of the Mahabodhi Temple Complex was partially resolved in 1949 after the Indian Government assumed control of the site for the State of Bihar and established the Bodh Gaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC), which was composed of both Hindu and Buddhist members.

With the Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2002, responsibility for this place shifted once again. While its new status as "World Heritage" brought international attention and renown to Bodh Gaya, it has also caused some concern that the spiritual and devotional character of Bodh Gaya will be altered and even that Bodh Gaya will be "museumized"—its built remains being preserved at the expense of the range of sacred, devotional, and architectural practices that have characterized the place for more than 2,000 years.

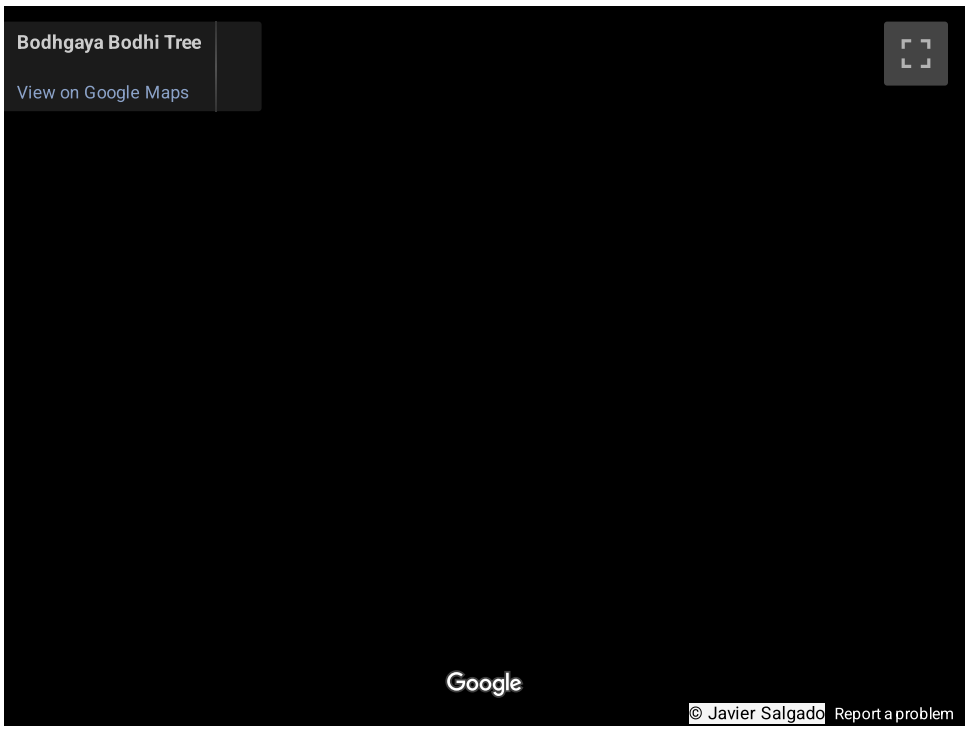

Figure **5.5.2.10.1**:

The Timeless Seat of the Buddha

Bodh Gaya has a long and complex history. Over millennia it has been reconstructed and reimagined; it is steeped in significance and stories. The variety of perceptions of this place across the Buddhist world and more locally are reflected in the site's physical history: the densely packed amalgam of structures, shrines,

and sculptures that span the breadth of two millennia. Each addition, whether physical or conceptual, has built upon an earlier layer, changing Bodh Gaya without entirely erasing that which came before. The Bodhi tree, the railing, and the Diamond Throne remain at Bodh Gaya alongside the towering temple, the Buddha image, the Shaiva Mahant's residence and — a hotel and a museum.

Artwork details

Artwork details

Title	Bodh Gaya
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	First enclosure: c. 250 B.C.E.; Mahabohdi Temple: c. 300 C.E.; Mahabodhi Temple restorations: c. 1050, c. 1295, 1875, 1890
Places	Asia / South Asia / India
Period, Culture, Style	Mauryan / Gupta dynasty
Artwork Type	Architecture / Temple
Material	Stone, Brick, Plaster, Concrete
Technique	

Footnotes

[1] For the life of the Buddha see, Patrick Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha*, Clay Sanskrit Library; 33 (New York University Press, 2008); and *The Play in Full*, translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2013.

[2] See John S. Strong, The Legend of King Asoka. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 250-266.

[3] See Geri H. Malandra "The Mahabodhi Temple" in Janice Leoshko, Bodhgaya, the Site of Enlightenment. (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1988), pp. 9–28.

[4] See Samuel Beal trans. Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World (London, 1884; reprinted Delhi, 1981), 118–119.

[5] See Vidya Dehejia, "Bodh Gaya and Sri Lanka" in Janice Leoshko, Bodhgaya, the Site of Enlightenment. (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1988), pp. 89–100.

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5.5.2.11: Scenes In and Around the Capital

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Kathakali dance and masks

by The MAP Academy

Artwork Details↓

Figure 5.5.2.12.1: A Kathakali interpretation of the *Paṭṭābhiṣēkaṃ* of Śrī Rāma, 2020 (photo: AdvaithNair, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Consisting of makeup, face painting, and stylized masks, kathakali masks are used in the kathakali dance drama that use masks, colorful makeup, and costumes worn by performers. The word "kathakali" is derived from the Sanskrit words *katha* (story) and *kali* (to play or perform). The subject matter of kathakali originally included stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas. The central theme of kathakali performances is the triumph of good over evil, expressed with martial dances or action-heavy climactic sequences.

The form is thought to have originated in Kerala around the seventeenth century, evolving from existing forms of devotional dance drama such as *Krishnattam* and *Ramanattam*. It is also believed to incorporate elements from martial arts such as Kalaripayattu; Koodiyattam, a temple-based drama; and ritualistic performances such as Theyyam and Mudiyettu.

The performance

Early Kathakali performances were held in the compounds of family homes or outside temple walls, on a rectangular ground cordoned off with poles and cloth. The stage was generally bare, with the exception of a handheld curtain. More recently, performances are held in stage performance venues. The performers undergo a rigorous makeup and costuming process before the performance, taking up to three hours. Props such as weapons, generally made from lightweight wood, are often used. Other objects, such as chariots, are represented through mimetic actions. Performances originally lasted all night, beginning at dusk and ending at dawn. Contemporary kathakali performances reduce or remove the introductory segments entirely, making them two to three hours long.

The performance begins with the lighting of an oil lamp, accompanied by the singing of ceremonial verses. The performance then starts with introductory dances. As the story is enacted, four kinds of dances may be performed. The basic stance of a kathakali performer consists of feet placed parallel to each other at shoulder width, with the knees bent outward. The lower back of the

performer is curved inwards towards the belly, allowing the arms to stretch wide. This accounts for the heavy mask and costume worn by the performers, keeping their centre of gravity low. Their footwork follows rectangular, straight, diagonal or circular patterns. Eye movements, along with facial and hand gestures, are employed to express the *bhava*, or inner state of the character. The performers are primarily men, though women began to join kathakali performances from the mid- to late twentieth century. Kathakali performers were traditionally from and patronized by the upper castes; its popularity today has prompted the participation of performers from more diverse social backgrounds.

Figure 5.5.2.12.1: Kathakali dance, 2014 (photo: Dumphasizer, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Makeup and masks

It originally used simple makeup for characters being represented: Rama and Lakshmana (Rama's brother) had faces painted blue, while demons and monkeys wore face masks. The headgear was made of palm sheath painted with designs, and the torso was left bare. The influence of patrons like the feudal chiefs of the kingdom of Tanur led to changes in makeup and masking traditions. The blue makeup of divine characters was changed to the emerald green that is today one of the most recognizable aspects of the form. Masks for demons and monkeys were replaced with facial paint and gilded crowns began to be used as headgear.

Kathakali today uses a number of makeup types. The first, called *paccu*, uses green facial paint and is most frequently used for divine or noble characters. The green coloration is circumscribed by a white painted border, the *cutti*. The mark of Vishnu is often applied on the forehead with red and black marks upon a yellow base composed of rice paste. The eyes are framed by underlining the eyebrows and lower eyelids with a soft black pigment, extending to the sides of the face.

The "ripe" (*payuppu*) makeup type uses a similar design but replaces the green with a strong orange-red. It is used for characters such as Balarama (Krishna's brother), Brahma, Shiva, and Surya.

Figure 5.5.2.12.1: Hanuman in Kathakali dance (photo: Gokul Krishna Raja, CC BY-SA 4.0)

The white beard (*vella tati*) type is used to signify another class of wise divine beings like Hanuman. It involves red, white and black patterns painted on the face, accompanied by a white beard either painted or worn on the cheeks. A small patch of green paint on his nose suggests his pious nature.

Figure 5.5.2.12.1: Kathakali dancer with “knife” makeup type, Kerala, India (photo: Pratheep P S, CC BY-SA 3.0)

A number of makeup types are used to signify different types of antagonistic characters. The “knife” (*katti*) type, for example, is used for high-born characters who embody villainy or arrogance. Although the basic frame of the design is the same as in *paccu*, an upturned red mustache framed by white rice paste is added. The pattern is repeated above the eyes and eyebrows, and two white, bulbous extensions provided on the nose and forehead. This type is used for characters like Ravana.

Figure 5.5.2.12.1: Kathakali dancer with “knife” makeup type, Kerala, India (photo: Pratheep P S, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Red beard (*cuvanna tati*) makeup signifies characters who are also evil or vicious, such as Dussassana, who led the disrobing of Draupadi. The eyes are framed by black bands, and a white mustache extending to the ears is added. Lips are painted black to set off a ferocious mouth, and the bulbous noses and foreheads are made deliberately larger than that of the “knife” characters. A big crown is worn, with red paint around its borders.

Black beard (*karutta tati*) makeup is used for evil characters associated with the forest, characterized by a black beard but otherwise similar to those of the red beard type. The lower part of the face is black and the face is framed by the design of a black beard; otherwise it resembles the design of the red bearded characters.

Figure 5.5.2.12.1: Left: Kathali dancer as a demoness (photo: Charles Haynes, CC BY-SA 2.); right: Kathakali dancer in *minukku* makeup type at Thiruvananthapuram (photo: Shagil Kannur, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Demonesses are given jet black (*kari*) faces, relieved by patches of red, outlined in white rice-paste. They are usually contrasted with the "radiant" (*minukku*) variety, which includes "virtuous" or noble women like Sita in the *Ramayana* and similarly "pure" males, including Brahmins, holy men, and sages (who may wear a wooden crown). The *minukku* makeup type uses a warm yellow-orange paint, creating an effulgent glow.

A host of make-up styles and patterns are used for the other varieties and shades of characters and beings like Garuda and Jatayu, who are depicted with makeup resembling a bird; Bhadrakali may be given a red tongue and white rice paste spots on the face, suggesting a pockmarked appearance.

Masks are usually adopted to signal a transformation, such as from human to animal. Bali's son Angada wears a monkey mask when he appears on stage, while Daksha, Brahma's son who is decapitated by Virabhadra and Bhadrakali, wears a goat mask after coming back to life.

Kathakali is one of Kerala's most popular and recognizable dance forms today.

Artwork details

Artwork details

Title	Kathakali dance and masks
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	17th century–today
Places	Asia / South Asia / India
Period, Culture, Style	Malayali / Contemporary
Artwork Type	Dance / Mask / Clothing
Material	Pigment
Technique	

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5.5.2.13: Participation of Women in Work

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Figure 5.5.2.13.1: Unknown artist, “Participation of women in work (…)”, Turkic text (Arabic script), book factory of the Central Publishing House of USSR Nations , 920s, print run: 2000 copies, 108.4×70 cm. (image: “Уголок Ленина,” Russian Perspectives on Islam) via SmartHistory

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Timur’s entry into Samarkand, page from the *Zafarnama*

by Dr. Yuka Kadoi

Artwork Details↓

Figure 5.5.2.14.1: Timur’s entry into Samarkand, page from a copy of the Zafarnama by Yazdi, c. 1436, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 25.9 x 13.2 cm, Iran (Shiraz) (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

A powerful gray horse strides forth against a background of inlaid tiles, alerting residents to the arrival of a special visitor. The horse carries a male rider adorned in a bright overcoat, colorful trousers, an elaborate hat, and a curved sword hanging at his side. This figure is followed by a courtier on a smaller brown horse holding a parasol above the central figure’s head. Textiles dyed in crimson reds, saffron yellows, vibrant greens, and deep blues hang from parapets and windows above as curious on-lookers steal peeks of the majestic procession below. Who is this figure that rides through a colorful city to fanfare and draws attention from its citizens? What did his arrival mean to those who witnessed his entrance, and why was this scene, real or imagined, made into a work of art?

Figure **5.5.2.14.1**: Detail showing Timur on horseback. *Timur's entry into Samarkand*, page from a copy of the *Zafarnama* by Yazdi, c. 1436, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 25.9 x 13.2 cm, Iran (Shiraz) (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

Who was Timur?

Figure **5.5.2.14.1**: Timurid Dynasty at its greatest extent (underlying map © Google)

The central figure in the image depicts the ruler, Timur, also known as Tamerlane. Born in Kesh (later renamed Shakhrisabz in modern day Uzbekistan), an important ancient urban center of Sogdiana, Timur rose from local tribal chieftain to become one of the most powerful conquerors in global history. He gained prominence as a military leader in his mid-twenties and proclaimed rulership around 1370 over one of the four territories that Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol empire, had divided among his sons. Timur aspired to restore the supremacy of nomadic people from the Eurasian steppe that had been achieved by the Mongols in the previous century but had since declined (their empire having fragmented into smaller ruling entities). Timur eventually led his forces successfully across a vast territory between the eastern Mediterranean and the Indian subcontinent, including major parts of the Iranian plateau, then known as Persia.

Before dying at the age of nearly seventy years old en route to attack China in 1405, Timur established one of the largest nomadic empires, now called the Timurids, which lasted from 1370 to 1507. The Timurids, like the Mongols before them, were the latest in a long line of nomadic cultures from the Asian steppe who conquered and politically connected broad regions of Eurasia. The period of the Timurid empire was also marked by the flourishing of art and science in Central Asia. This included adopting elements of Persian and Mongol culture as a means to integrate the Timurids into a prior history of Central Asian kingship.

Figure 5.5.2.14.1: *Timur's entry into Samarkand* (detail), page from a copy of the *Zafarnama* by Yazdi, c. 1436, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on
paper, 25.9 x 13.2 cm, Iran (Shiraz) (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

The splendor of Samarkand

In the painting of Timur, his procession evokes his majesty as a ruler and his victorious entry into Samarkand (today in Uzbekistan), the city that he chose as the capital of his new empire due to its economic and strategic importance on the Silk Roads. A column of Persian text to the right narrates this processional episode. The image displays the splendor of this ancient city that he further enriched by capturing talented artisans from across his conquered lands and bringing them to Samarkand. For example, under the Timurids, Samarkand became famous for its beautiful ceramic tilework, such as we see here in this image. This was described by the Arab chronicler Ibn 'Arabshah, who stayed in Samarkand during the reign of Timur:

> ***Timur took from Damascus learned men and craftsmen and all who excelled in any art, the most skilled weavers, tailors, gem-cutters, carpenters, makers of head-coverings, farriers, painters, bow-makers, falconers, in short, craftsmen of every kind (…) and he divided these companies among the heads of the army and ordered them to lead them to Samarkand.from the Arabic Life of Ahmed ibn 'Arabshah [1]***

Figure 5.5.2.14.1: Page of text in Persian describing Samarkand receiving Timur and his troops, page from a copy of the *Zafarnama* by Yazdi, c. 1436, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 25.9 x 13.2 cm, Iran (Shiraz) (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

This image of Timur on horseback was originally part of a 15th-century manuscript of the *Zafarnama* (“Book of Victories”), a biography of Timur written in Persian by the scholar Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi and the first written text to depict images of Timur’s life and conquests. Having established his dynasty across Eurasia, one of the ways Timur attempted to unify the disparate regions and cultures within his empire was to adopt Persian as the language of administration and literature. Persian had a written history dating back 2,000 years and was already a language of high culture across wide swathes of Asia when Timur rose to power. Persian had also historically been used to document the reigns of kings in West and Central Asia (including by the Mongols).

Commissioned by Timur’s grandson, Ibrahim Sultan, and completed some 30 years after Timur’s death, the *Zafarnama* was intended to be viewed and read by political and cultural elites of the Timurid empire rather than by the general public. When Timur died in 1405 there was no clear heir and various male descendants of Timur fought amongst themselves for the right to rule. Ultimately, Ibrahim Sultan’s father, Shahrukh, prevailed. Producing the *Zafarnama* was one way that Ibrahim Sultan helped to legitimize his rule for contemporaries and future generations, connecting himself to his grandfather and father.

Visual echoes of the *Shahanama*

Like illustrated texts patronized by earlier Mongol rulers of Persia, the *Zafarnama* asserted Timur’s descendants’ right to rule over a vast and multi-ethnic territory that had been conquered through force. The earlier Persian manuscripts discussing the history of kings often included images of those rulers engaged in activities expected of them as kings—such as hunting, waging war, or processing victoriously through cities.

While little is known about the painter who created *Timur’s entry into Samarkand* or the other illustrations in this volume, it is clear that the artist was familiar with the essential visual tropes of Persian kingship that had developed over the course of the previous century, especially for the *Shahnama* (“Book of Kings”). An epic poem written in Persian by Ferdawsi around 1000 C.E., the *Shahnama* recounts the history of Persia and its rulers and heroes prior to the arrival of Islam in the seventh century. The *Shahnama* was copied many times in the coming centuries and began to be illustrated in the early 14th century while Persia was under Mongol rule.

Figure 5.5.2.14.1: Detail of Khusraw Parviz before Shirin from a *Shahnama (Book of Kings)*, early 14th century, ink, opaque watercolor, gold and silver on paper (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

Figure 5.5.2.14.1: *Timur's entry into Samarkand*, page from a copy of the *Zafarnama* by Yazdi, c. 1436, opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 25.9 x 13.2 cm, Iran (Shiraz) (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

In a copy of the *Shahnama* produced in 14th-century West Asia under Mongol patronage, an illustration depicts Khusraw Parviz, a Sasanian king from the late 6th and early 7th centuries, riding an athletic black horse while an attendant holds a parasol (*chatr*) above his head. The parasol had been used for centuries in Persian culture as a symbol of kingship. Khusraw's lover, Shirin, looks out at him from a window above. Drawing on this type of pictorial convention (though perhaps not from this particular copy), the unnamed painter of Timur in the *Zafarnama* created a similar equestrian image of the ruler from the Asian steppe, echoing that of an earlier Persian king.

Constructing Timur's equestrian image

Taken together, the text and image portray Timur not as a savage foreign conqueror from the Eurasian steppe, but as the embodiment of Persian kingship—one who could fight and win but could also rule over beautiful cities. It is possible that Timur's descendant, Ibrahim Sultan, who commissioned this copy of the *Zafarnama* required a carefully crafted image of Timur that conformed to existing conventions of kingship in Persian art and literature as a response to criticism. For example, Ibn 'Arabshah (quoted earlier) described the conqueror in a critical manner, arguing that "he [Timur] destroyed right custom and went forth wicked with insolent swords that moved hither and thither." [2] Inserting Timur into established visual conventions of kingship developed first in Persia and later adopted by its Mongol rulers in the 14th century transformed the image of Timur on horseback into political propaganda.

While Timur is depicted in the *Zafarnama* in a variety of ways, including sitting cross-legged on the floor, his equestrian image would have been the most recognizable embodiment of his royal legacy to cultured audiences familiar with such conventions. In Persian culture, the horse was a key symbol of kingship, providing the king with the means to be a fierce warrior but also a stately and majestic monarch. Additionally, for the Mongols and the Timurids—as traditionally nomadic peoples—horseback riding was a way of life, and both cultures were known as master horsemen.

Figure **5.5.2.14.1**: Equestrian statue of Timur Lang [Amir Temur], by Ikhom Jabbarov, 1994, Tashkent, Uzbekistan (photo: Matthew Goulding, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0). See another angle of the statue.

Measuring the impact of Timur's equestrian image

Though his empire fractured into several autonomous states ruled by his successors and went into sharp decline in the second half of the 15th century, copies of the *Zafarnama* and depictions of Timur on horseback did persist for a short while. [3] Still, after the 16th century, Timur's legacy quickly vanished within Central Asia, and he was largely forgotten in the wider world until the 1990s. The convention of showing Timur as a majestic ruler on horseback resurfaced in 1991 when the Republic of Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union and took much of the historical territories of the Timurid empire (excepting Iran but including the former capital Samarkand). In 1993, an imposing bronze equestrian statue of Timur was placed in the main square of Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, to emphasize a historical link between the glory of the Timurid empire and the recently established nation of Uzbekistan. For Uzbekistan—as a new nation in post-Soviet Central Asia—the 20th-century equestrian statue of Timur offers a

visual echo of *Timur's entry into Samarkand* from the 15th century, reviving an image asserting political legitimacy into the modern world.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Artwork details

Artwork details

Title	Timur's entry into Samarkand from the Zavarnama
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	c. 1436
Places	Asia / West Asia / Iran
Period, Culture, Style	Timurid / Islamic
Artwork Type	Manuscript / Painting
Material	Watercolor paint, Ink, Paper
Technique	Illumination

Footnotes

[1] Ibn 'Arabshah, *Tamerlane or Timur the Great Amir, from the Arabic Life of Ahmed ibn Arabshah*, trans. by John H. Sanders (London: 1936), p. 161.

[2] Ibn 'Arabshah, *Tamerlane or Timur the Great Amir, from the Arabic Life of Ahmed ibn Arabshah*, trans. by John H. Sanders (London: 1936), p. 234.

[3] Of the images of Timur made in the later 15th century, there is a second illustrated manuscript detailing the life and achievements of Timur, the *Timurnama (Book of Timur)* written by the Persian poet, Hatifi, also included images of Timur as a warrior and general on horseback, including in copies made into the mid-16th century. Subsequently, manuscript images depicting Timur were made outside of Central Asia but continued to be used for political purposes. For example, a version of the *Zafarnama* was commissioned by the third Mughal emperor Akbar, a direct descendant of Timur, around 1590 in South Asia in order to historicize Akbar's reign as part of Timurid dynastic lineage

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Abanindranath Tagore's *Bharat Mata*: Bengal School painting and the idea of India

by Dr. Aparna Kumar

Artwork Details↓

Figure 5.5.2.15.1: Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*, 1905, gouache, 26.6 x 15.2 cm (Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata)

In 1905, the celebrated Indian artist Abanindranath Tagore debuted his painting of *Bharat Mata*. Made from gouache, Tagore's painting is one of the earliest renderings of the idea of "Bharat Mata," or "Mother India," as a political icon. The work centers on a lone female figure draped in saffron-colored robes, who stands amid a glowing landscape where earth and sun entwine in a flash of blended pigment behind her. It is clear that this lone figure is no ordinary woman, but Bharat Mata. Her divine stature is signaled by the double halo that enshrines her head, the aura of light that extends down her legs, her multiple arms, and the line of lotus flowers on the ground beside her feet. She is also identifiable from the blessings that she holds in each of her four hands. Food (shown as grain), clothing (shown as cloth), knowledge (shown as a manuscript), faith (shown as prayer beads)—these are the building blocks and promise of a healthy national future. [1]

Figure 5.5.2.15.1: Figure holding four blessings (detail), Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*, 1905, gouache, 26.6 x 15.2 cm (Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata)

Tagore crafted *Bharat Mata* amid the fervor of the anti-colonial Swadeshi movement in Bengal, with an awareness that the image would be used to galvanize early support for anti-colonial resistance (direct British rule was imposed on India from 1858–1947, when it became independent). He initially conceived the work as "Banga Mata" or Mother Bengal, modeling the painting on the everyday Bengali woman, perhaps even his own daughter. [2] The painting, however, quickly acquired recognition as Mother India, a wider embodiment of the emerging Indian nation. *Bharat Mata* was copied by other artists, used on posters in Swadeshi fundraising campaigns, and republished in vernacular media. [3] In 1906, a local magazine reprinted the painting with the label, "The Spirit of the Motherland," foretelling the prominent place the symbol would come to occupy in the Indian national movement a few years later. [4]

Making past present

Tagore's *Bharat Mata* is important both for giving early visual form to this salient political icon and for the ideas the work proffered, on the whole, for the direction of modern art in South Asia. Rising anti-colonial sentiments in the late 19th century had produced a series of debates around the nature and origins of Indian aesthetics. These debates pushed modern artists, like Tagore, in search of new modes of artistic practice that could be harnessed by a burgeoning national polity in South Asia. [5]

In forging this new artistic language, Tagore regularly drew inspiration from the subcontinent's early artistic heritage. In *Bharat Mata*, for instance, he compiles the figure's iconography from visual forms common to South Asian art prior to the 20th century and which hold special significance for several South Asian religions, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. More than simply a gesture of cultural renewal amid a period of colonial rule, Tagore's collected iconography for *Bharat Mata* asserts the longevity of the subcontinent's past and heritage through the body of an emerging national icon. It also steeps *Bharat Mata* in new ideas of Pan-Indian cohesion, befitting an anti-colonial national project in early stages of mobilization.

Figure 5.5.2.15.1: Buddha from Gandhara, c. 2nd–3rd century C.E., schist (Tokyo National Museum, photo: public domain)

A recurring form in early South Asian art, the halo was used by Indian artists across the region to imbue figures with divine power and authority. Tagore extends this practice to the figure of Bharat Mata, whose halo is a prominent feature of the composition, formed from a pair of concentric circles that radiate outwards from her body into a golden hue. Bharat Mata's halo, perhaps foremost, recalls the early iconography of the Buddha in South Asia. As seen in early Buddhist sculpture from Gandhara, the Buddha's enlightened status is often conveyed through circular rays of light which encircle the Buddha's head like a crown.

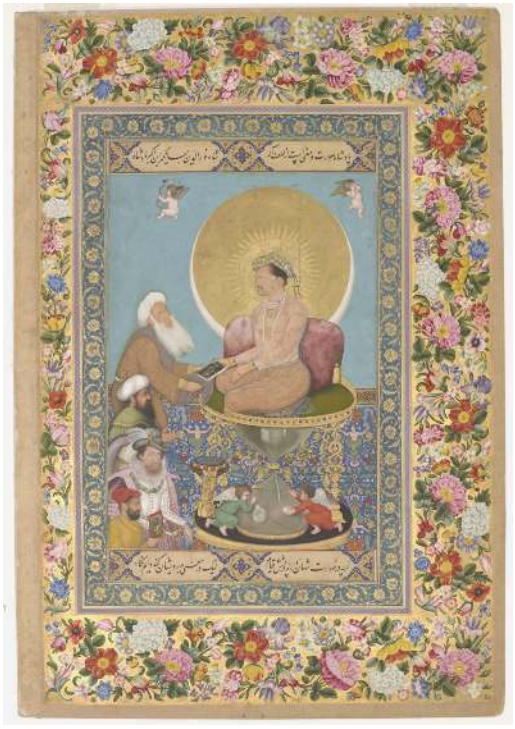

Figure 5.5.2.15.1: Bichitr, margins by Muhammad Sadiq, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings* from the "St. Petersburg Album," 1615–18, opaque watercolor, gold and ink on paper, 46.9 x 30.7 cm (National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C.)

Bharat Mata's halo also, however, recalls the conventions of 17th-century Mughal manuscript painting, where the halo was used to visualize new conceptions of divine kingship in South Asia. Tagore's image, in this regard, is reminiscent of allegorical portraits such as Bichitr's *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings* and Abu'l Hasan's *Jahangir Embracing Shah Abbas*. In such paintings, the halo blurs the Mughal emperor Jahangir's body with key natural elements, such as the sun and moon, to suggest the sovereign's kinship with nature and, by extension, his authority over his earthly political rivals.

Figure **5.5.2.15.1**: Lotus flowers (detail), Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*, 1905, gouache, 26.6 x 15.2 cm (Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata)

The lotus flowers that surround Bharat Mata like a throne place Tagore's painting in dialogue with other early Buddhist monuments in South Asia, including the Great Stupa at Sanchi. The lotus flower is an important metaphor for the Buddha's life and teachings, associated with ideas of spiritual purity, enlightenment, and devotion. Such flora is carved in abundance at Sanchi, where it imbues the site's reliquary architecture and monastic complex with a sacred status becoming of the Buddha and his devotees. In Tagore's painting, the presence of lotus flowers beneath Bharat Mata's feet, like her halo, helps to underscore the figure's ethereal difference and in turn elevate the idea of Indian collectivity. [6]

Figure 5.5.2.15.1: Durga slays the Buffalo Demon Mahishasura, from the north side of Mahishasuramardini Mandapa, Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu, India, c. 7th century, granite, approximately 2.4 x 4.6 m (photo: © Arathi Menon, all rights reserved)

Bharat Mata's many arms also potently invoke early depictions of the Hindu goddess Durga. In the Hindu pantheon, Durga is an important consort of Lord Shiva. She is worshipped for her strength and power, as both warrior and primordial mother. [7] In early Hindu reliefs such as Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon at Mamallapuram, Durga is depicted as the embodiment of the feminine and divine force of *shakti*. She sits astride her lion, confidently engaged in battle against the forces of evil, with weapons bestowed from the heavens in each of her eight arms. *Bharat Mata*'s close kinship with such images of Durga lends Tagore's composition a sense of strength and transcendence, important for a nation in the process of becoming. These iconographic ties also, however, point to the potential limits of Tagore's Pan-Indian vision, anticipating the role Bharat Mata would later play as a national icon in figuring the Indian nation as predominantly Hindu, to the exclusion of other religious minorities.

Painting a national icon

Setting aside the painting's iconography, Tagore's *Bharat Mata* is also noteworthy for inaugurating the Bengal School of Art, which by the 1940s was celebrated by art critics and leaders within the Indian national movement as a true "national" art form. Pioneered by Tagore in the early 20th century, this new mode of painting was envisioned as an "Indian" counter to the predominance of British academic art in South Asia.

Academic art refers to a style of naturalistic painting and sculpture nurtured by European academies of art in the 19th century and later British art schools in South Asia. It is an artistic approach that prioritizes materials such as oil and canvas, and techniques such as linear perspective, foreshortening, and chiaroscuro to achieve strong illusionistic effects and narrative legibility.

A celebrated example of academic art in South Asia is Raja Ravi Varma's *The Galaxy of Musicians*. Commissioned by the Maharaja of Mysore in 1889, the painting brings to life a diverse group of Indian women engaged in a musical performance. The painting is notable for its rich, naturalistic detail and for its allegorical use of the Indian woman to personify the geographic and cultural diversity of the Indian subcontinent.

Figure 5.5.2.15.1: Raja Ravi Varma, *A Galaxy of Musicians*, 1889, oil on canvas, 49 x 43 inches (Sri Jayachama Rajendra Art Gallery, Jaganmohan Palace, Mysore, Karnatak)

Tagore's Bengal School of Art, in contrast with the British academic style, is interested more in harnessing the coloristic and emotive possibilities of regional materials such as tempera and watercolor, which were long central to local forms of South Asian art, including Mughal, Rajput, and Pahari painting. As seen in *Bharat Mata*, it is a style of painting that forsakes the bold lines, stringent linear perspective, and verisimilitude of academic art in favor of flatter picture surfaces and large swathes of blended color.

This shift in material and technique encouraged Indian artists to use painting to explore the complexities of human interiority and intimacy, with palpable ramifications for an image like *Bharat Mata*. The Bengal School style, in this regard, not only lends *Bharat Mata* a new sense of authenticity at a time when the idea of "Indian" art and culture was in flux, but also helps to ground *Bharat Mata* and, by extension, the idea of the Indian nation, in the realm of the personal and the everyday. In spite of her divine stature, *Bharat Mata* and her promise of self-sufficiency is made available and accessible to viewers.

Figure **5.5.2.15.1**: Abanindranath Tagore, *The Journey's End*, c. 1913, tempera on paper (National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi)

Tagore's signature "wash technique" is another defining characteristic of the Bengal School approach. This form of loose brushwork, which centers color and mood, grew from Tagore's interest in Pan-Asianism and his wider experimentation with Mughal manuscripts and Japanese ink painting. [8] In *Bharat Mata*, this kind of brushwork combines with the figure's Pan-Indian iconography to produce a mythic composition of woman and nation, emblematic of a new idealism within Indian national discourse by the early 20th century.

Artwork details

Artwork details

Title	Bharat Mata
Artist(s)	Abanindranath Tagore
Dates	1905
Places	Asia / South Asia / India
Period, Culture, Style	Modernisms / Colonial South Asia / British Raj
Artwork Type	Painting
Material	Gouache, Paper
Technique	

Footnotes

[1] Sister Nivedita, "Art Appreciations," *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, volume III (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1955), pp. 58–59.

[2] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), p. 255.

[3] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University, 2010), p. 15–16; Guha-Thakurta (1992), p. 259.

[4] Ramaswamy (2010), p. 15.

[5] Guha-Thakurta (1992), pp. 78–116; Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), p. 48–60.

[6] Naela Aamir and Aqsa Malik, "From Divinity to Decoration: The Journey of Lotus Symbol in the Art of Subcontinent," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, volume 1, number 2 (Dec 2017), p. 206.

[7] Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (New York: Columbia University, 1998), p. 28, 106.

[8] Guha-Thakurta (1992), p. 255.

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Arts of the Abbasid Caliphate

by Dr. Beatrice Leal

The Abbasid period started with a revolution. Caliphs of the earlier Umayyad dynasty had ruled for almost a hundred years after they assumed power in 661 (after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 C.E.), and over this time discontent gradually built up against them, both from rival elites and from large sections of the general population. After three years of open fighting the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, was assassinated in 750. This is when the Abbasid caliphate began.

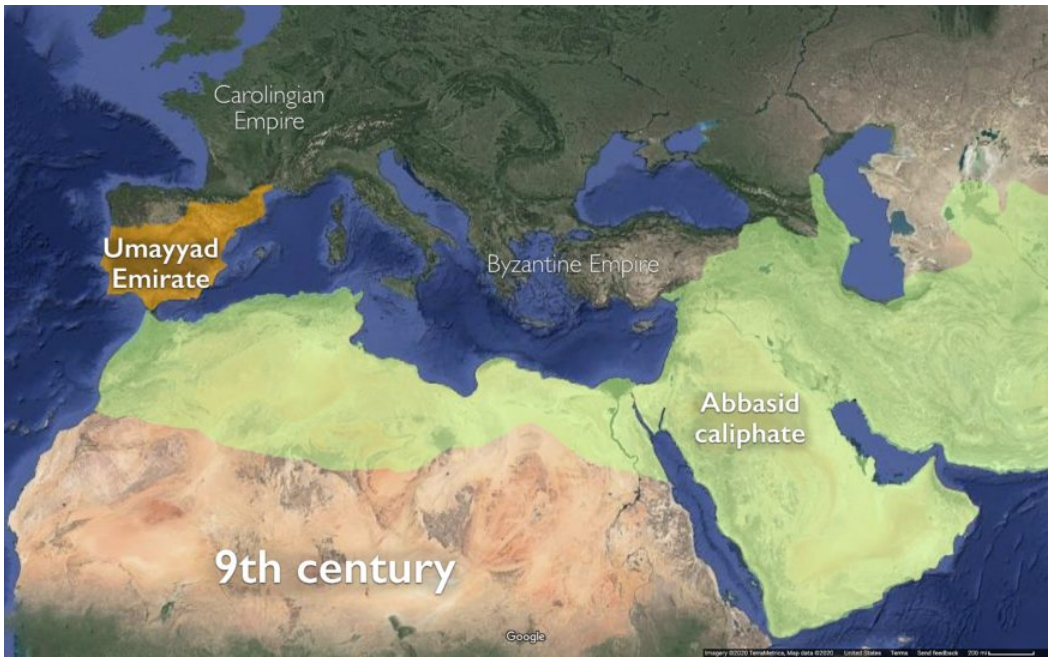

Figure **5.5.2.16.1**: Map of the Mediterranean and west Asia in the 9th century

The end of the Abbasid era is harder to define. Though territory and power were lost to various competing dynasties from the late 10th century, there were still rulers calling themselves Abbasid caliphs in the 1200s. This essay will focus on the high point of their power—the late 8th to 10th centuries—and will look at three aspects: cities, technologies, and books.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: A map of the Abbasid Caliphate around 850 C.E., with cities circled in red that are discussed in this essay (map: Cattette, CC BY 4.0)

Cities

After the revolt in 750, the Abbasids moved the capital from Damascus in Syria, where the Umayyads had been based, to Kufa in Iraq. Then, in 762 the caliph al-Mansur founded a new imperial city on the banks of the Tigris—*Madinat al-Salam* or the City of Peace, also known as Baghdad.

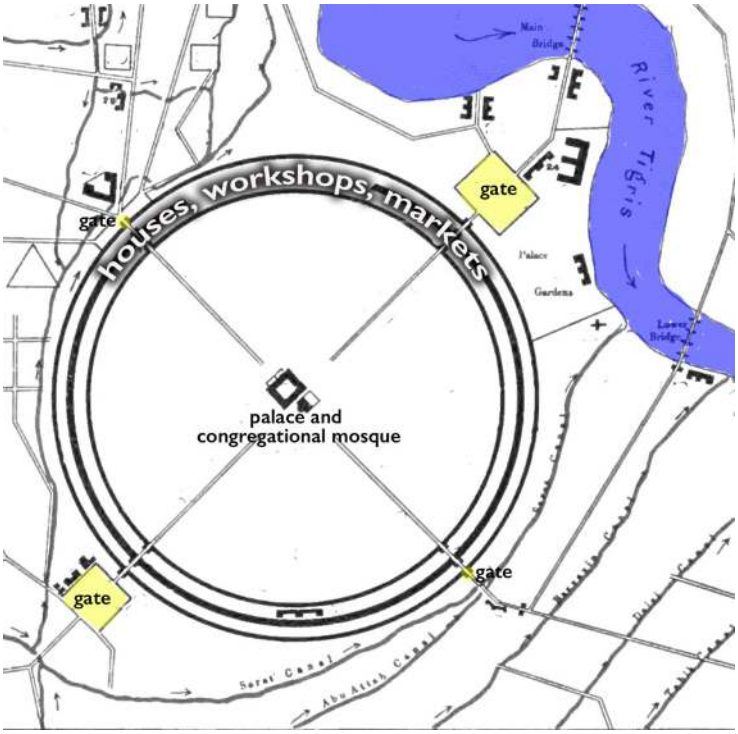

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Round City of Baghdad in the time of Mansur, Abbasid caliphate, adapted from Guy Le Strange, Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate from Contemporary Arabic and Persian Sources. Oxford: Clarendon Press, Map II (1900; public domain)

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Aerial view of Gur (underlying map © Google)

The city was carefully planned to express perfection and order, as a display of the qualities of the new regime; it was circular in plan, with four main gates, one at each compass point, similar to the 3rd-century Sasanian city of Gur, whose outlines can still be seen in the fields around Firuzabad in Iran. The center of Baghdad was left largely open around the palace and congregational mosque, while the houses, workshops, and markets were arranged in a ring inside the walls.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Khem Karan, view of the Siege of Baghdad in 1258, folio from an illuminated manuscript of the History of Genghis Khan, 1596, ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, Lahore, Punjab province, Pakistan, Asia, 34.9 x 22.5 cm (Saint Louis Art Museum)

No remains of the round city have survived, partly due to the siege and assault on the city by the Ilkhanid Mongol army in 1258, and partly due to the construction of the modern city on top of the older structures, but we know something of its appearance from medieval descriptions. Some were written by authors born in Baghdad, such as al-Ya'qubi and al-Katib al-Baghdadi, and some by those who had moved there, attracted by the facilities for scholars, such as al-Jahiz, who reported that:

> ***I have seen the great cities . . . in the districts of Syria, in Bilad al-Rum and in other provinces, but I have never seen a city of greater height, more perfect circularity, more endowed with superior merits or possessing more spacious gates or more perfect defenses than the [Baghdad] . . . of Abu Jafar al-Mansur.Description by al-Jahiz, reported in the Ta'rikh Baghdad (History of Baghdad) by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi [1]***

Among the treasures in the palace was an automata in the shape of a tree made of gold and silver, whose branches would move as if swaying in the wind, while the model birds sitting on them would sing. [2] One of the aims of such luxury was to advertise the wealth and strength of the Abbasid caliphate to rival powers, such as the Byzantine Empire based in Constantinople—and in this the patrons were successful. After hearing an ambassador's report of the palace and its furnishings, the mid-9th-century, Byzantine emperor Theophilus was so impressed that he commissioned one intended to imitate it, although the site is not known with certainty today.

Figure **5.5.2.16.1**: Baghdad Gate, Raqqa, Syria (photo: CC BY-SA 3.0)

Another early Abbasid project was the twin city of Raqqa-Rafiqa in Syria. Raqqa had existed for centuries, and in 770 al-Mansur ordered the construction of a new and more defensible settlement, Rafiqa, less than half a mile away, as part of a larger project of creating fortified sites near the border with Byzantium. The new part of the town, Rafiqa (Raqqa and Rafiqa eventually merged as one urban center) was given a substantial wall of brick, nearly three miles long, with monumental entrance gates.

In the 780s caliph Harun al-Rashid chose Raqqa-Rafiqa as his capital, and the architecture of the twinned towns took on a more elegant aspect, with enhanced decorative as well as defensive features. Archaeologists have discovered more than twenty palaces, mostly outside the walled enclosure, dating to the reigns of Harun and his son al-Mu'tasim.

Figure **5.5.2.16.1**: Capital with Leaves, late 8th century, alabaster, gypsum; carved in relief, made in Syria, probably Raqqa, 28.6 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The capital shown here comes from one of these palaces. It has a stylized version of an acanthus-leaf design that had been popular throughout late antiquity; in this reimagined form, the leaves also form abstract patterns. Other pieces of carved stone and molded stucco were found with similar designs, showing that the decor of the late 8th-century palaces was carefully coordinated by skilled artisans.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Great Mosque of Samarra, 9th century, Iraq (photo: Taisir Mahdi, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Samarra, founded by the caliph al-Mu'tasim in 836, was different from either of the earlier sites. Although it was the size of a city, covering more than twenty square miles, it was devoted to the Abbasid court, with palaces, pavilions, mosques, monumental avenues, barracks, gardens, pools, and three horse-racing tracks. There were also areas of more modest housing, but the heart of Samarra was ceremonial. Despite the huge outlay of resources, the site was fully occupied for less than sixty years. The 860s saw significant political instability at Samarra caused by competing military factions in the caliphal guard, and at the death of caliph al-Mu'tamid in 892, the court moved back to Baghdad.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Wall painting, detail of two heads, 9th century, Abbasid caliphate, plaster and pigment, Dar al-Khilafa, Samarra, Iraq (© Trustees of the British Museum)

The fragments of painting shown above come from the Dar al-Khilafa, the largest of the palaces. Its walls were covered with a mixture of figural frescos, stucco reliefs, ceramic tiles, and marble panels, and some of the floors were tiled with glass. These buildings were showcases of all the precious materials that the patrons possessed (some local, others acquired from afar), and all the arts of the skilled workers they could command.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Tile fragments, 9th century, Abbasid caliphate, Millefiori glass, excavated in Samarra, Iraq (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Technologies

The grandeur of Samarra drew on the expertise of craftspeople from across the Islamic world, who had been invited or conscripted to the caliphal workshops. Raqqa-Rafiqa also had industrial areas, especially for the production of glass and ceramics. Artisans around the Abbasid courts developed new methods of production, for instance inventing recipes for glass which used plant-ash instead of natron salt, so that production was no longer restricted to areas with natural deposits of the salt.

Figure **5.5.2.16.1**: Bowl, 9th–10th century, Abbasid caliphate, tin-glazed earthenware with designs painted in cobalt blue, Iraq, 21.5 cm diameter (© Trustees of the British Museum)

Potters experimented with glazes, some of them trying to imitate the precious porcelain vessels from China, which were imported to the caliphate in increasing quantities from the early 9th century, along sea trade routes via Indonesia and India. The Abbasid potters did not have the materials needed to produce porcelain, but succeeded in inventing a white tin-based glaze, as on the bowl shown here. They also developed iridescent luster glazes, a technique that would go on to change ceramic production not only in the Middle East but also in medieval Europe. Although they would have been valued, lusterware plates and bowls were probably not restricted to the very rich, and were made in large quantities for sale in urban markets.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Panel in the “Beveled Style,” 9th–10th centuries, stucco, Samarra, Iraq (Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin; photo: Miguel Hermoso Cuesta, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Artisans working in various materials in this period developed a new aesthetic of swirling patterns, known today as the beveled style. It was first used in the palaces of Samarra, particularly for stucco wall coverings, and it was also often used for carved wood and stone.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Bowl Decorated in the ‘Beveled Style’, 10th century, earthenware; white slip with polychrome slip decoration under transparent glaze, made in present-day Uzbekistan, Samarqand, 26.7 cm diameter (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The bowl shown above is painted with a two-dimensional variant. It was made in the 10th century in Samarkand, modern Uzbekistan, which was part of the Abbasid caliphate at that time. Samarkand was also the site of the first Islamic mill for paper-making, another technology which (like porcelain) originated in China, and which changed the face of book production as paper replaced parchment and papyrus over the following centuries.

Books

Before the Islamic conquests, large parts of the caliphate belonged to the Byzantine Empire, where Greek was the dominant language, and although the language of government was changed to Arabic in the early 8th century, Greek continued to be widely spoken and written. Many Muslim patrons took an interest in classical literature—continuing a long history of interaction between Arabic and Greco-Roman cultures—and if not bilingual themselves, they commissioned translations. The trend started in the Umayyad period, for example caliph Hisham is said to have enjoyed Arabic translations of tales of Alexander the Great. Under the Abbasids there was an even greater interest in the classics, and works of philosophy, mythology, astronomy, medicine, and others were translated.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: Yahya ibn Mahmoud al-Wasiti, "Scholars in library of the House of Wisdom," Al-Makamat lil-Hariri, 1237 (Bibliothequè nationale de France, Paris, Codex Parisinus Arabus 5847, folio 5 verso)

The library known as the House of Wisdom in Baghdad (*bayt al-hikmah*, destroyed during the Mongol siege in 1258) was a major center for this project, and there scholars from a range of cultural and religious backgrounds produced Arabic editions of Syriac, Aramiac, Hebrew, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit texts. The image above shows an idealized version of the library, with scholars engaged in debate below—their hand gestures show that it is a lively discussion—and the collected works of the institution piled up above them.

Figure 5.5.2.16.1: The illustration shows a doctor making a medicine from honey, with a patient drinking the result at top-left. “Preparing Medicine from Honey”, from a Dispersed Manuscript of an Arabic Translation of *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, dated A.H. 621/1224 C.E., ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, 31.4 x 22.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The image here comes from one of the many works translated in medieval Baghdad. It is an Arabic version of a 1st-century C.E. Greek medical work by Dioscorides, now generally known by its Latin name, *De Materia Medica*. The translation was first made in the 9th century by two Christian scholars, Stephanos ibn Basilos and Hunayn ibn Ishaq, and this specific manuscript was made in the 13th century, also in Baghdad. The illustration above shows a doctor making a medicine from honey, with a patient drinking the resulting medicine at top-left.

Abbasid scholarship was not limited to copying earlier works; for instance astronomers working for caliph al-Ma’mun in the 830s calculated the circumference of the earth, improving on ancient measurements, and established accurate figures for the phenomenon known as the precession of the equinoxes.

Figure **5.5.2.16.1**: Amajur Qur'an, before 9th century C.E. (264 AH), pigment and ink on parchment, 12.3 x 18.9 cm (MS Add.1116, Cambridge University Library)

There were also developments in the format of Qur'anic manuscripts. Great emphasis was placed on the beautiful proportions of calligraphy, and a new form of script became popular; it is sometimes called Kufic, after the city of Kufa, but it was widely used across the Abbasid caliphate. Symbols for marking verses or groups of verses became more common during the 9th and 10th centuries, usually circular designs ornamented with loops, swirls or petals, and in more expensive manuscripts they were illuminated in gold, as above.

The Qur'an shown above was made for Amajur, Abbasid governor of Damascus in the 870s, and he donated it to a mosque in the city of Tyre in Lebanon. The script does not include all the diacritical marks used in written Arabic today, and along with the elegantly stylized letter shapes and the gilded verse marker, the effect is to make this a work of visual art just as much as a piece of text.

Artistic legacies

The artistic legacies of the Abbasid caliphate are varied. Some of the monuments described in this essay were short lived; impressive as they were, the palaces of Samarra barely lasted for two generations. But many visual and technological innovations of the period, from lusterware ceramics to "Kufic" script to the engagement with classical scientific literature, continued to be significant components of Islamic culture—and influences on surrounding cultures—for centuries to come.

Footnotes

[1] Description by the author al-Jahiz (776–869) reported in the *Ta'rikh Baghdad* (*History of Baghdad*) by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (1002–71); quoted in Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of 'Abbasid Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 167.

[2] Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Ta'rikh Baghdad* (*History of Baghdad*); quoted in Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 159).

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5.5.2.17: Han Jar Overpainted with Coca-Cola Logo

More information at Han Jar Overpainted with Coca-Cola Logo(opens in new window) [www.metmuseum.org]

Figure **5.5.2.17.1**: Ai Weiwei (Chinese, b. 1957). **Han Jar Overpainted with Coca-Cola Logo**, 1995. Earthenware, paint; H. 9 7/8 in. (25 cm); Diam. 11 in. (28 cm). Lent by M+ Sigg Collection, Hong Kong. © Ai Weiwei

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5.5.2.18: Knotted Carpet with Human Figures and Brahmi/Khotanese Inscriptions

Cultural exchange and integration, a Khotanese carpet on the Silk Road

by Dr. He Zhang

Artwork Details↓

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, 5th–6th century C.E., Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: Qi Xiaoshan)

Imagine a carpet being as valuable as gold. At Khotan, one location in western China on the ancient global trading network known as the Silk Roads, high-quality carpets made of wool became luxurious trade items. One brightly colored 5th–6th century knotted carpet was made from wool to cover a bed or floor. The carpet depicts human figures, trees, and includes an inscription woven in between (images below). The border offers decorative motifs, stylized animal forms, and wave motifs. Due to the dry climate in this region, the amazingly bright colors and much of the wool are naturally preserved despite the passage of 1,500 years.

Carpets like this one reveal how multiple cultural ideas, art traditions, and aesthetic tastes—from India, Bactria, the Hellenistic world, the early Roman Empire, and Persia (Achaemenid and Sasanian)—informed objects made and traded on the ancient Silk Road.

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Map showing Khotan (near center) in the network of trade routes that made up the Silk Roads (adapted from a map by Dr. Evan Freeman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Silk Road

The Silk Road is a romantic term given by some Europeans of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to describe an ancient global trading network that extended from East Asia to Europe (for example, from China to Rome), from about 1000 B.C.E. (or earlier) to early modern times. Despite its name, it was not a single road, and the merchandise traded included far more than silk. Trade along these roads included spices, precious stones, jewelry, glass, textiles, exotic plants and animals, and much more. This large network was connected via caravan posts in numerous small oases that made it possible to traverse vast deserts, mountains, and other types of harsh terrain, and via ships over the rivers and seas.

A single trader would not likely travel the entire route (except for some diplomats or individuals like the Venetian explorer and merchant Marco Polo). Most traders would exchange their merchandise at certain posts on the borders with other countries or territories. An object—such as a bolt of silk—would go through several or many hands like a relay race before it arrived at the end-users.

China kept silk-making a secret for many centuries, so the silk trade is almost all from China to other places. However, besides the trade of luxurious Chinese silk, other textile materials were traded extensively and in multiple directions across trading networks. Woolen textiles from Hellenistic and Roman-ruled Syria from places like Palmyra and Dura-Europos), and cotton cloth from India have been discovered in many oasis towns in the Taklamakan Desert in Xinjiang, a western region of China, where the knotted carpets in question are found.

Ideas about politics, philosophy, religion, technology, art making, and aesthetics became integrated as a result of trade and military campaigns between empires (such as Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire and the Chinese Han Dynasty's expansion to the western region and Central Asia). Cultural exchange and integration took place on a near global scale, and has proven to be the most significant impact of the Silk Road.

Knotted carpets in Central Asia

Carpets could be made in different ways. A knotted carpet, like the one above, was made by weaving the wool yarn with extra yarn threads piled up on warps to produce a thicker and fluffier surface.

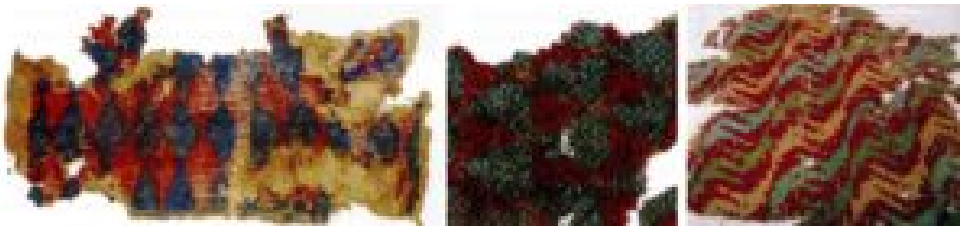
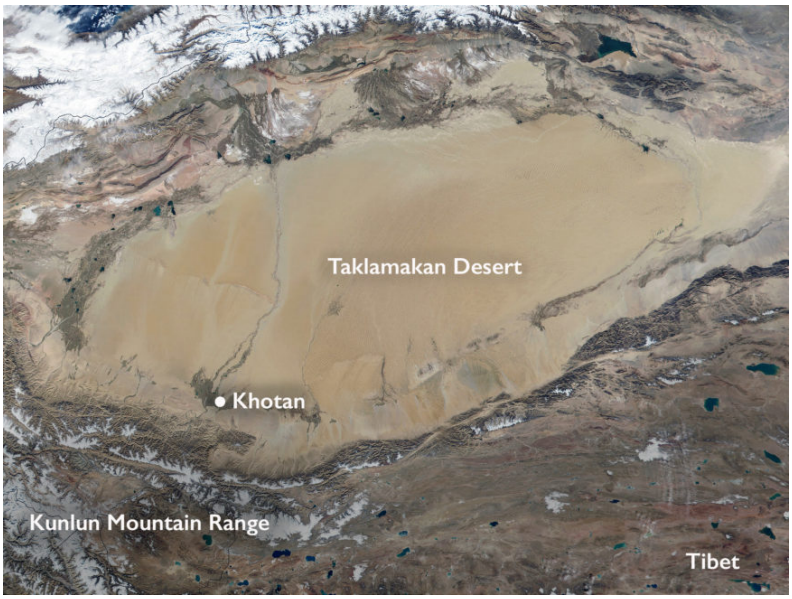


Figure **5.5.2.18.1**: Carpet fragments from Yanghai, Xinjiang, China, 1000–700 B.C.E.

The earliest wool knotted carpets known are from the western region of China, dated to 1000–700 B.C.E. and the Altai region of Russia, dated to 500–400 B.C.E. [3] More carpets, dated from 200 B.C.E. to 600 C.E., have been discovered in many sites in Xinjiang (including Khotan) and some sites in northern Afghanistan. They include plain ones and colorful ones with geometric patterns and natural representations. Among these peoples and places, Khotan in west China developed into a renowned carpet-making center.



Khotan and Khotani carpet

Khotan is an oasis town on the southern edge of the world's second largest desert, the Taklamakan Desert. Two seasonal rivers Yurumkash (White Jade) and Karakash (Black Jade) from the Kunlun Mountains nourished this large oasis for millions of years, making it suitable for people to live. It was also an important station for caravan traders and other travelers from either the east or west to rest during their long distance journey. The diverse population included Sakas, Gandhari Prakrit Indians, Khotanese-Sakas, Chinese, Tibetan, and Turkic groups.

At the crossroads of the Silk Road, Khotan developed into a significant center of culture and commerce. Multiple religions were practiced in Khotan, including Shamanism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Brahmanism (Hinduism), Manicheanism, Christianity, and

possibly Judaism. [4] Several well-known historic people visited Khotan—such as Chinese General Ban Chao, monks Fa Xian, Song Yun , Xuan Zang, and Marco Polo and his father and uncle, who traveled from Venice, Italy, to Beijing, China.

Even though silk had to be imported from central China at first, in the 5th century C.E. it appears that the Khotanese learned the secret of silk making. Supposedly, the king married a Chinese princess (described by Xuan Zang in his 7th-century diary), who had smuggled silkworm eggs into Khotan in her hair. Long before the arrival of silk, however, Khotan had already made its fame with carpets, known as “Khotani Carpets.” In surviving documents, Khotan carpets appear as either gifts or commercial payment that could even replace gold. The immense value of these carpets is even noted in one document from c. 235–325 C.E.:

> ***On another occasion, the queen came here. She asked for one golden stater (coin). There is no gold. Instead of it we gave tavastaga (knotted carpet), thirteen hands long. Seraka took it. Many people here know this matter as witnesses. . . .[5]***

Figure **5.5.2.18.1**: King and Queen of Khotan standing on carpets, reconstructed painting of Dunhuang Cave 98, east wall, Five Dynasties, 907–60 C.E.

Khotan’s renown as a carpet-making center is indicated in depictions of the Khotanese. For instance, in paintings from Dunhuang —a famous Buddhist site east of Khotan in Gansu province, where there are about five hundred rock-cut caves full of mural paintings—the king and queen of the Khotan were painted standing on carpets. Most of Khotani carpets were originally used to cover beds, floors, and seats.

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Dancers and musicians on a carpet, detail of a palace scene. Dunhuang Cave 156, north wall, late Tang, 827–59 C.E.

We also see dancers and musicians dancing and sitting on carpets (such as in Dunhuang Cave 156) in numerous scenes. The designs of these painted carpets match actual carpets found in Khotan and the rest of Xinjiang.

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Three of the five carpets looted from Shanpula Township. Left: carpet with putti figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, Shanpula, 5th–6th century; center: knotted wool carpet, 5th or 6th century, Shanpula; right: carpet with putti figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, Shanpula, 5th–6th century (photos: Qi Xiaoshan)

A group of carpets

In 2008, a group of seven carpets, all dated 5th–6th century C.E., was looted from Shanpula Township (Luopu County, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China). Five of them were caught from the looters, including the one that is the focus of this essay.

The carpets are the first known examples of human figures set within natural features and in a narrative in the history of Khotan carpets. The complexity of the design and bright colors make them very rare cases in the world history of knotted carpets of this early time.

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Another carpet that survived looters' hands. Carpet with putti figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, Shanpula, 5th-6th century C.E. (photo: Qi Xiaoshan)

As a group, the five knotted carpets tell us a great deal about the shared cultural ideas and traditions in Khotan. They all have striking, bright colors with a unique figurative and naturalistic style (versus the earlier geometric style in Xinjiang carpets), each with rich border designs composed of flowers and leaves, waves, animals, and some unidentified motifs. Four of the five carpets have Khotan-Saka inscriptions woven into them—such as the carpet that opens this essay. The inscription is puzzling: while it is based on Indian Brahmin scripts, it represents Khotanese language, an ancient eastern Iranian language.

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Left: Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, 5th-6th century CE; Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: Qi Xiaoshan); right: line drawing of the Knotted Carpet

Let's focus on this carpet in more detail. It is in relatively complete condition, with relatively minimal damage given its age, which helps us to identify images and their narrative relationships. In the center portion of the carpet, we see human figures arranged in seven horizontal rows. Nearly all are shown in a three-quarter view and characterized by prominent eyes and noses and naturalistic bodily proportions.

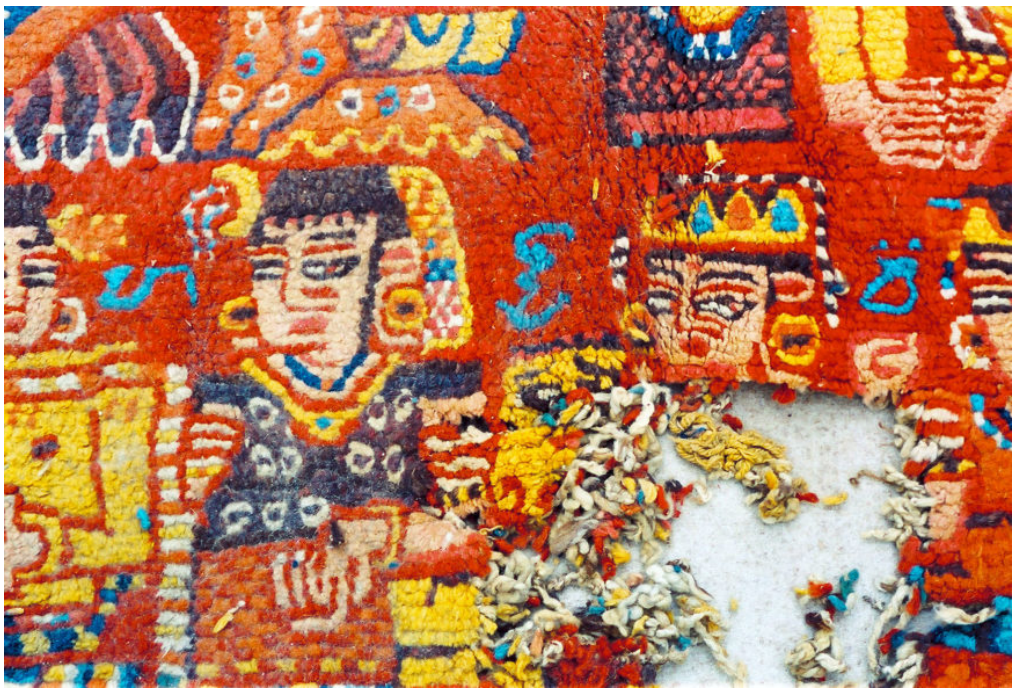


Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Detail of several figures, with the Brahmi script between them in bright blue. Knotted Carpet, detail of two human figures, 5th–6th century C.E., Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: Qi Xiaoshan)

If a particular body part does not contrast sufficiently from the red background, it is carefully set off by a thin contour line of contrasting color—black, blue, or yellow; otherwise, red is generally used. In many areas, especially faces, arms, and legs, a light red or pink line is added within the outer contour line as if to suggest some form of modeling or shading. The skin tone of most figures is pinkish. Hands and feet appear unusually large; the individual fingers are carefully shown and all feet are bare.

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Blue Krishna in Lila Dance, detail of Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, 5th–6th century C.E., Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: He Zhang)

Who are the figures?

Although the carpet was found in China, its subject matter and motifs share more in common with art from South Asia and Central Asia. For example, there is a small figure in dark blue, who appears twice in the composition and is reminiscent of an Indian deity, Krishna, who often appears in blue color in Hindu art. Krishna, whose name means “dark” or “dark blue” in Sanskrit, and appears in Hindu epics such as *Mahabharata*, *Harivamsa*, and *Bhagavata Purana*.

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Detail with two figures, possibly showing Yashoda sitting in Indian royal posture *lalitāsana*, and the little blue Krishna holding a butter ball motif in the right hand. Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, 5th–6th century C.E., Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: He Zhang)

In the carpet, the small blue figure appears twice among people of all ages and genders—male and female, old and young.

Figures also appear to wear Indian dress in the trees, water, hills, which provide landscape settings for Krishna’s youthful life as herdsman in the countryside. In one scene, we see a figure sitting in Indian royal posture (*lalitāsana*) and the little blue figure holding a ball-shaped motif in the right hand. This is likely supposed to relay the story of how, as he grew up, Krishna was mischievous, stealing butter from his mother Yashoda, a *gopi* (cowherd woman), and the other *gopis* to feed monkeys. In another scene, the blue figure is between two *gopi* girls, one is playing flute and the other is reaching out her hand to another young man as if dancing, which suggests a typical Lila dance in the Krishna stories.

The appearance of the Krishna story makes the carpet significant in two ways. First, it provides evidence of Hindu imagery early on in Khotan. Also, it is the earliest example of Krishna in blue color—almost one thousand years before the next existing image of a blue Krishna appears in Indian art. Incorporating Hindu imagery reveals the transmission of ideas and art along the Silk Road—so too does the carpet’s style.

The carpet’s style

The design of the carpet shows several artistic styles and motifs from different cultures on the vast trading network. We see a number of visual elements that borrow from Indian stories and art, as noted above. Besides Krishna, we see figures in Indian dress (such as *dhoti*), sitting in specific royal postures, and conducting Hindu rituals (such as the *aarti* fire ritual).

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Detail of a man in baggy trousers, holding a lamp and conducting an aarti. Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, 5th–6th century C.E., Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: Qi Xiaoshan)

Visual motifs from Central Asia are also apparent. For example, some male figures wear long tunics with a waist belt or baggy trousers, which are typical of Central Asian dresses seen with the Kushans—a nomadic people who ruled Central Asia and northern India in the first few centuries C.E.

Figure 5.5.2.18.1: Left: Seated figure, detail of a second carpet from the same hoard with the similar design as the main carpet in this essay; the same figure in the main carpet is damaged. Pay attention to the sitting posture and border design of running waves in the carpet and the Greek vase. Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, 5th–6th century C.E., Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: Qi Xiaoshan); right: Bell-krater (mixing bowl) with seated male figure and running wave motif, c. 350–325 B.C.E., attributed to Python, terracotta, Greek, South Italian, Paestan, 30.7 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

There are also a number of Greco-Roman and Bactrian influences. For instance, the natural and free manner of representing human figures and landscapes with natural body movements and postures is similar to figures on many Greek vases and Greco-Roman mosaics. The carpet figures' faces also are often shown in a three-quarter profile, which is also a Mediterranean tradition. Likewise, the wave motifs in the carpet's narrow borders also borrow from Greco-Roman art.

A carpet at the crossroads

Figure **5.5.2.18.1**: Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions, 5th–6th century C.E., Shanpula Township, Khotan District, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (photo: Qi Xiaoshan)

This carpet indicates that the knowledge, art making technique, and aesthetic taste traveled with the materials to many places of the world and were willingly accepted and blended by local peoples of different places, like those of Khotan. The carpet showcases the cultural interaction and integration happening at the crossroads of East and Central Asia, South Asia, and China in the 5th–6th century on the ancient Silk Road.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Artwork details

Artwork details

Title	Knotted Carpet with human figures and Brahmi/Khotanese inscriptions
Artist(s)	Unrecorded artist
Dates	5th–6th century C.E.
Places	Asia / East Asia / China
Period, Culture, Style	Period of Division
Artwork Type	Textile
Material	Wool
Technique	Weaving

Footnotes

[1] There are several ways to tie or knot the yarn piles on the surface of a carpet: symmetrical, asymmetrical, and single-warp or U-shape.

[2] Knotted carpets appear as early as 1500 B.C.E. in Egypt, but with linen fiber, including examples discovered in the tombs of individuals related to Hatshepsut, Queen and Pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty of the New Kingdom.

[3] The earliest samples are the ones excavated in Yanghai (1000–700 B.C.E.), Xinjiang, China, and then Pazyryk (500–400 B.C.E.), Russia.

[4] There is a Persian Jew's letter of the 8th century C.E. discovered in a nearby site (Dandan-Uiliq). Many Confucian texts in Chinese were found as well.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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Introduction to Fine Arts - Visual

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by NATHALIE HAGER

In an ancient North African “rock city,” modern explorers wetted a wall with water—revealing this graceful image.

Figure 5.5.3.1.1: *Running Horned Woman*, 6,000-4,000 B.C.E., pigment on rock, Tassili n’Ajjer, Algeria

“Discovery”

Between 1933 and 1940, camel corps officer Lieutenant Brenans of the French Foreign Legion completed a series of small sketches and hand written notes detailing his discovery of dozens of rock art sites deep within the canyons of the Tassili n’Ajjer. Tassili n’Ajjer is a difficult to access plateau in the Algerian section of the Sahara Desert near the borders of Libya and Niger in northern Africa (see map below). Brenans donated hundreds of his sketches to the Bardo Museum in Algiers, alerting the scientific community to one of the richest rock art concentrations on Earth and prompting site visits that included fellow Frenchman and archaeologist Henri Lhote.

Lhote recognized the importance of the region and returned again and again, most notably in 1956 with a team of copyists for a 16-month expedition to map and study the rock art of the Tassili. Two years later Lhote published *A la découverte des fresques du Tassili*. The book became an instant best-seller, and today is one of the most popular texts on archaeological discovery.

Figure 5.5.3.1.2: Sand and rocks, Tassili n’Ajjer, Algeria (photo: **Akli Salah**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Lhote made African rock art famous by bringing some of the estimated 15,000 human figure and animal paintings and engravings found on the rock walls of the Tassili’s many gorges and shelters to the wider public. Yet contrary to the impression left by the title

of his book, neither Lhote nor his team could lay claim to having discovered Central Saharan rock art: long before Lhote, and even before Brenans, in the late nineteenth century a number of travelers from Germany, Switzerland, and France had noted the existence of “strange” and “important” rock sculptures in Ghat, Tadrart Acacus, and Upper Tassili. But it was the Tuareg—the indigenous peoples of the region, many of whom served as guides to these early European explorers—who long knew of the paintings and engravings covering the rock faces of the Tassili.

Figure 5.5.3.1.3: Tassili n’Ajjer is a Tamahaq name meaning “plateau” of the Ajjer people (the Kel Ajjer is group of tribes whose traditional territory was here). Much of the 1,500-2,100 meter high plateau is protected by an 80,000 square kilometer National Park.

The “Honed Goddess”

Lhote published not only reproductions of the paintings and engravings he found on the rock walls of the Tassili, but also his observations. In one excerpt he reported that with a can of water and a sponge in hand he set out to investigate a “curious figure” spotted by a member of his team in an isolated rock shelter located within a compact group of mountains known as the Aouanrhet massif, the highest of all the “rock cities” on the Tassili. Lhote swabbed the wall with water to reveal a figure he called the “Horned Goddess”:

> ***On the damp rock surface stood out the gracious silhouette of a woman running. One of her legs, slightly flexed, just touched the ground, while the other was raised in the air as high as it would normally go. From the knees, the belt and the widely outstretched arms fell fine fringes. From either side of the head and above two horns that spread out horizontally was an extensive dotted area resembling a cloud of grain falling from a wheat field. Although the whole assemblage was skillfully and carefully composed there was something free and easy about it…***

Figure 5.5.3.1.4 : Visible in this reproduction of the original rock painting are two groupings in red ochre of small human figures superimposed onto the horned goddess

The *Running Horned Woman*, the title by which the painting is commonly known today, was found in a massif so secluded and so difficult to access that Lhote's team concluded that the collection of shelters was likely a sanctuary and the female figure—"the most beautiful, the most finished and the most original"—a goddess:

> ***Perhaps we have here the figure of a priestess of some agricultural religion or the picture of a goddess of such a cult who foreshadow—or is derived from—the goddess Isis, to whom, in Egypt, was attributed the discovery of agriculture.***

Lhote's suggestion that the painting's source was Egyptian was influenced by a recently published hypothesis by his mentor, the French anthropologist Henri Breuil, the then undisputed authority on prehistoric rock art who was renowned for his work on Paleolithic cave art in Europe. In an essay titled, "The White Lady of Brandberg, South-West Africa, Her Companions and Her Guards," Breuil famously claimed that a painting discovered in a small rock shelter in Namibia showed influences of Classical antiquity and was not African in origin, but possibly the work of Phoenician travellers from the Mediterranean. Lhote, equally convinced of outside influence, linked the Tassili painting's provenance with Breuil's ideas and revised the title to the 'White Lady' of Aouanrhet:

> ***In other paintings found a few days later in the same massif we were able to discern, from some characteristic features, an indication of Egyptian influence. Some features are, no doubt, not very marked in our 'White Lady'; still, all the same, some details as the curve of the breasts, led us to think that the picture may have been executed at a time when Egyptian traditions were beginning to be felt in the Tassili.***

Foreign influence?

Time and scholarship would reveal that the assignment of Egyptian influence on the *Running Horned Woman* was erroneous, and Lhote the victim of a hoax: French members of his team made "copies" of Egyptionized figures, passing them off as faithful reproductions of authentic Tassili rock wall paintings. These fakes were accepted by Lhote (if indeed he knew nothing of the forgeries), and falsely sustained his belief in the possibility of foreign influence on Central Saharan rock art. Breuil's theories were likewise discredited: the myth of the "White Lady" was rejected by every archaeologist of repute, and his promotion of foreign influence viewed as racist.

Figure 5.5.3.1.5 : Tassili National Park (photo: **magharebia**, CC BY 2.0)

Yet Breuil and Lhote were not alone in finding it hard to believe that ancient Africans discovered how to make art on their own, or to have developed artistic sensibilities. Until quite recently many Europeans maintained that art "spread" or was "taken" into Africa, and, aiming to prove this thesis, anointed many works with Classical sounding names and sought out similarities with early rock art in Europe. Although such vestiges of colonial thinking are today facing a reckoning, cases such as the "White Lady" (both of Namibia and of Tassili) remind us of the perils of imposing cultural values from the outside.

Chronology

While we have yet to learn how, and in what places, the practice of rock art began, no firm evidence has been found to show that African rock art—some ten million images across the continent—was anything other than a spontaneous initiative by early Africans. Scholars have estimated the earliest art to date to 12,000 or more years ago, yet despite the use of both direct and indirect dating techniques very few firm dates exist ("direct dating" uses measurable physical and chemical analysis, such as radiocarbon dating, while "indirect dating" primarily uses associations from the archaeological context). In the north, where rock art tends to be quite diverse, research has focused on providing detailed descriptions of the art and placing works in chronological sequence based on style and content. This ordering approach results in useful classification and dating systems, dividing the Tassili paintings and engravings into periods of concurrent and overlapping traditions (the *Running Horned Woman* is estimated to date to approximately 6,000 to 4,000 B.C.E.—placing it within the "Round Head Period"), but offers little in the way of interpretation of the painting itself.

Figure 5.5.3.1.6 : Running Horned Woman (detail) (photo: FJ Expeditions)

Advancing an interpretation of the *Running Horned Woman*

Who was the *Running Horned Woman*? Was she indeed a goddess, and her rock shelter some sort of sanctuary? What does the image mean? And why did the artist make it? For so long the search for meaning in rock art was considered inappropriate and unachievable—only recently have scholars endeavored to move beyond the mere description of images and styles, and, using a variety of interdisciplinary methods, make serious attempts to interpret the rock art of the Central Sahara.

Lhote recounted that the *Running Horned Woman* was found on an isolated rock whose base was hollowed out into a number of small shelters that could not have been used as dwellings. This remote location, coupled with an image of marked pictorial quality —depicting a female with two horns on her head, dots on her body probably representing scarification, and wearing such attributes of the dance as armlets and garters—suggested to him that the site, and the subject of the painting, fell outside of the everyday. More recent scholarship has supported Lhote's belief in the painting's symbolic, rather than literal, representation. As Jitka Soukopova has noted, "Hunter- gatherers were unlikely to wear horns (or other accessories on the head) and to make paintings on their whole bodies in their ordinary life."[1] Rather, this female horned figure, her body adorned and decorated, found in one of the highest massifs in the Tassili—a region is believed to hold special status due to its elevation and unique topology—suggests ritual, rite, or ceremony. Rather, this female horned figure, her body adorned and decorated, found in one of the highest massifs in the Tassili—a region is believed to hold special status due to its elevation and unique topology—suggests ritual, rite, or ceremony.

Figure 5.5.3.1.7: Archers, Tassili n'Ajjer (photo: Patrick Gruban, CC BY-SA 2.0)

But there is further work to be done to advance an interpretation of the *Running Horned Woman*. Increasingly scholars have studied rock shelter sites as a whole, rather than isolating individual depictions, and the shelter's location relative to the overall landscape and nearby water courses, in order to learn the significance of various "rock cities" in both image making and image viewing.

Archaeological data from decorated pottery, which is a dated artistic tradition, is key in suggesting that the concept of art was firmly established in the Central Sahara at the time of Tassili rock art production. Comparative studies with other rock art complexes, specifically the search for similarities in fundamental concepts in African religious beliefs, might yield the most fruitful approaches to interpretation. In other words, just as southern African rock studies have **benefitted from tracing the beliefs and practices of the San people**, so too may a study of Tuareg ethnography shed light on the ancient rock art sites of the Tassili.

Afterword: the threatened rock art of the Central Sahara

Tassili's rock walls were commonly sponged with water in order to enhance the reproduction of its images, either in trace, sketch, or photograph. This washing of the rock face has had a devastating effect on the art, upsetting the physical, chemical, and biological balance of the images and their rock supports. Many of the region's subsequent visitors—tourists, collectors, photographers, and the next generation of researchers—all captivated by Lhote's "discovery"—have continued the practice of moistening the paintings in order to reveal them. Today scholars report paintings that are severely faded while some have simply disappeared. In addition, others have suffered from irreversible damage caused by outright vandalism: art looted or stolen as souvenirs. In order to protect this valuable center of African rock art heritage, Tassili N'Ajjer was declared a National Park in 1972. It was classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982 and a Biosphere Reserve in 1986.

[1] Jitka Soukopova, "The Earliest Rock Paintings of the Central Sahara: Approaching Interpretation," *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2011), p. 199.

Additional resources

African Rock Art: TassilinAjjer – Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Tassili n'Ajjer – African World Heritage Sites

Tassili n'Ajjer, UNESCO

TARA – Trust for African Rock Art: Algeria and TARA Interactive Rock Art Map

David Coulson and Alec Campbell, *African Rock Art: Paintings and Engravings on Stone* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001).

David Coulson and Alec Campbell, "Rock Art of the Tassili n Ajjer, Algeria." *Adoranten*, no. 1 (2010), p. 115.

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Henri Lhote, *The Search for the Tassili Frescoes*, translated by Alan H. Brodrick (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1959).

Jitka Soukopova, "The Earliest Rock Paintings of the Central Sahara: Approaching Interpretation," *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2011), pp. 193-216.

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5.5.3.2: Linguist Staff Okyeamepoma

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5.5.3.3: Memorial Head (Ntiri)

by DR. CHRISTA CLARKE

Figure **5.5.3.3.15**: Memorial Head (Ntiri), 17th century (?), Ghana, Adanse traditional area, Fomena, Akan peoples, 31.3 x 19 x 14.5 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Since the late sixteenth century, Akan women potters have created ceramic heads and sometimes complete figures to commemorate deceased royals and individuals of high status. During the funeral, family members placed the terracotta portraits of the deceased in a sacred grove near the cemetery, sometimes with representations of other family members. These sculptures served as the focal point for funerary rites in which libations and food were offered to the ancestors.

This example has a rounded face with protruding elliptical eyes that tilt downward and a delicately shaped nose. These circular shapes are repeated by the eyebrows, ears, and open, oval-shaped mouth which projects from the smooth surface of the face. An incised line curves around the forehead, indicating the hairline. The surface of the sculpture has been covered with a clay slip tinted black, a color linked to the ancestral world and spiritual power in Akan thought.

Like other examples of African portraiture, these commemorative sculptures are idealized representations that convey individuality through specifics of scarification and hairstyle. The artist would typically be summoned to the deathbed of the deceased in order to observe his or her distinguishing characteristics, which she would depict later, working from memory to capture the individual's essence. The figural terracotta sculptures vary enormously in style, ranging from fairly naturalistic and sculpturally rounded forms to examples that are solid, flat, and more dramatically stylized.

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Additional resources:

This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Ghana on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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- **4.3: West Africa** by Smarthistory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

5.5.3.4: Gold weight- Geometric

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5.5.3.5: Great Mosque of Djenné

by DR. ELISA DAINESE

Figure **5.5.3.5.1**: Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, 1907 (photo: **Mark Abel**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

As one of the wonders of Africa, and one of the most unique religious buildings in the world, the Great Mosque of Djenné, in present-day Mali, is also the greatest achievement of Sudano-Sahelian architecture (Sudano-Sahelian refers to the Sudanian and Sahel grassland of West Africa). It is also the largest mud-built structure in the world. We experience its monumentality from afar as it dwarfs the city of Djenné. Imagine arriving at the towering mosque from the neighborhoods of low-rise adobe houses that comprise the city.

Djenné was founded between 800 and 1250 C.E., and it flourished as a great center of commerce, learning, and Islam, which had been practiced from the beginning of the 13th century. Soon thereafter, the Great Mosque became one of the most important buildings in town primarily because it became a political symbol for local residents and for colonial powers like the French who took control of Mali in 1892. Over the centuries, the Great Mosque has become the epicenter of the religious and cultural life of Mali, and the community of Djenné. It is also the site of a unique annual festival called the *Crepissage de la Grand Mosquée* (Plastering of the Great Mosque).

Figure **5.5.3.5.2**: Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, 1907 (photo: **herr_hartmann**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

The Great Mosque that we see today is its third reconstruction, completed in 1907. According to legend, the original Great Mosque was probably erected in the 13th century, when King Koi Konboro—Djenné's twenty-sixth ruler and its first Muslim sultan (king)—decided to use local materials and traditional design techniques to build a place of Muslim worship in town. King Konboro's successors and the town's rulers added two towers to the mosque and surrounded the main building with a wall. The mosque

compound continued to expand over the centuries, and by the 16th century, popular accounts claimed half of Djenné's population could fit in the mosque's galleries.

The first Great Mosque and its reconstructions

Some of the earliest European writings on the first Great Mosque came from the French explorer René Caillié who wrote in detail about the structure in his travelogue *Journal d'un voyage a Temboctou et à Jenné* (*Journal of a Voyage to Timbuktu and Djenné*). Caillié traveled to Djenné in 1827, and he was the only European to see the monument before it fell into ruin. In his travelogue, he wrote that the building was already in bad repair from the lack of upkeep. In the Sahel—the transitional zone between the Sahara and the humid savannas to the south—adobe and mud buildings such as the Great Mosque require periodic and often annual re-plastering. If re-plastering does not occur, the exteriors of the structures melt in the rainy season. Based on Caillié's description, his visit likely coincided with a period when the mosque had not been re-plastered for several years, and multiple rainy seasons had probably washed away all the plaster and worn the mud-brick.

Figure 5.5.3.5.3: "The Old Mosque Restored," from Félix Dubois, Timbuctoo the Mysterious (London: William Heinemann, 1897), pp. 157.

A second mosque built between 1834 and 1836 replaced the original and damaged building described by Caillié. We can see evidence of this construction in drawings by the French journalist Felix Dubois. In 1896, three years after the French conquest of the city, Dubois published a plan of the mosque based on his survey of the ruins. The structure drawn by Dubois (above) was more compact than the one that is seen today. Based on the drawings, the second construction of the Great Mosque was more massive than the first and defined by its weightiness. It also featured a series of low minaret towers and equidistant pillar supports.

The present and third iteration of the Great Mosque was completed in 1907, and some scholars argue that the French constructed it during their period of occupation of the city starting in 1892. However, no colonial documents support this theory. New scholarship supports the idea that the mason's guild of Djenné built the current mosque with the help of forced laborers from villages of adjacent regions, brought in by French colonial authorities. To accompany and motivate workers, musicians were provided who played drums and flutes. Workers included masons who mixed tons of mud, sand, rice-husks, and water and formed the bricks that shape the current structure.

The Great Mosque today

Figure 5.5.3.5.4: Roof (detail), Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, 1907 (photo: un_photo, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Figure 5.5.3.5.5: Ostrich eggs circled in red (detail), Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, 1907 (photo: un_photo, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The Great Mosque that we see today is rectilinear in plan and is partly enclosed by an exterior wall. An earthen roof covers the building, which is supported by monumental pillars.

The roof has several holes covered by terra-cotta lids (above), which provide its interior spaces with fresh air even during the hottest days. The façade of the Great Mosque includes three minarets and a series of engaged columns that together create a rhythmic effect (below).

At the top of the pillars are conical extensions with ostrich eggs placed at the very top—symbol of fertility and purity in the Malian region. Timber beams throughout the exterior are both decorative and structural. These elements also function as scaffolding for the re-plastering of the mosque during the annual festival of the *Crepissage*. Compared to images and descriptions of the previous buildings, the present Great Mosque includes several innovations such as a special court reserved for women and a principal entrance with earthen pillars, that signal the graves of two local religious leaders.

Figure 5.5.3.5.6: Façade (detail), Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, 1907 (photo: lhhais, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Re-plastering the Mosque

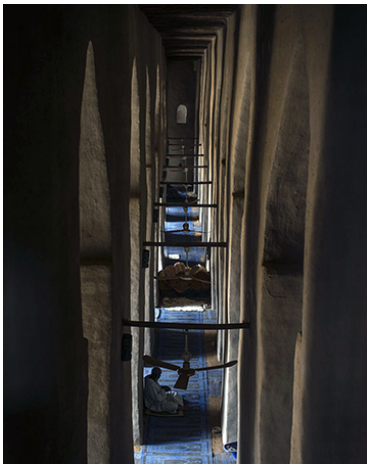

Figure 5.5.3.5.7: Interior view, Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, 1907 (photo: UN Mission in Mali, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

During the annual festival of the *Crepissage de la Grand Mosquée*, the entire city contributes to the re-plastering of the mosque's exterior by kneading into it a mud plaster made from a mixture of butter and fine clay from the alluvial soil of the nearby Niger and

Bani Rivers. The men of the community usually take up the task of mixing the construction material. As in the past, musicians entertain them during their labors, while women provide water for the mixture. Elders also contribute through their presence on site, by sitting on terrace walls and giving advice. Mixing work and play, young boys sing, run, and dash everywhere.

Over the years Djenné's inhabitants have withstood repeated attempts to change the character of their exceptional mosque and the nature of the annual festival. For instance, some have tried to suppress the playing of music during the *Crepissage*, and foreign Muslim investors have also offered to rebuild the mosque in concrete and tile its current sand floor. Djenné's community has unrelentingly striven to maintain its cultural heritage and the unique character of the Great Mosque. In 1988, the tenacious effort led to the designation of the site and the entire town of Djenné as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Backstory

The Great Mosque of Djenné is only one of many important monuments in the area known as the Djenné Circle, which also includes the archaeological sites of Djenné-Djeno, Hambarketolo, Tonomba and Kaniana. The region is known especially for its characteristic earthen architecture, which, as noted above, requires continuous upkeep by the local community.

Djenné's unique form of architecture also makes it particularly susceptible to environmental threats, especially flooding. The town is situated along a river, and in 2016, torrential rains led to massive floods that caused one historic 16th-century palace to collapse, and left the Great Mosque with significant cracks its pillars. Construction of new buildings on the archaeological sites and inadequate waste disposal infrastructure also present continual problems.

UNESCO and other agencies have supported the restoration of the riverbanks in Djenné to help prevent flooding, and the four archaeological sites have now gained official status as properties of the state, which shields them from urban development. However, the conservation situation in Djenné remains fragile. Since the civil war in Northern Mali in 2012, the government has had limited bandwidth to deal with all of the various measures necessary to successfully protect, maintain, and monitor these sites. UNESCO has also noted a lack of funding from outside partners, who, **according to the agency**, have shown greater interest in Timbuktu, where terrorists **vandalized** several historic mausoleums and a mosque in 2012.

The current state of Djenné highlights the complex network of factors that affect world heritage: armed conflict and civil unrest, environmental threats, urban development, and lack of cooperation between agencies can all undermine the fate of monuments like the Great Mosque. Such circumstances remind us of the importance and the difficulty of conservation efforts not just in Djenné, but around the globe.

Backstory by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee

Additional Resources:

The website of the Great Mosque of Djenné

Katarina Höije, "The mud mosque of Mali" from Roads and Kingdoms (May 2018)

Old Towns of Djenné (from UNESCO)

UNESCO State of Conservation report for the Old Towns of Djenné

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5.5.3.6: Lidded Saltcellar

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5.5.3.7: Shrine Head

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5.5.3.8: Shell Vessel with Leopard from Igbo-Ukwu

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5.5.3.9: Queen Mother Pendant Mask

by DR. CHRISTA CLARKE

Figure **5.5.3.9.1**: Queen Mother Pendant Mask (Iyoba), 16th century, Edo peoples, Court of Benin, Nigeria, ivory, iron, copper, 23.8 x 12.7 x 8.3 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

This pendant mask was created in the early sixteenth century for an Oba named Esigie, in honor of his mother Idia. The face has softly modeled, naturalistic features, with graceful curves that echo the oval shape of the head. Four carved scarification marks, a number associated with females, indicate her gender.

Figure **5.5.3.9.2**: Detail, *Queen Mother Pendant Mask (Iyoba)*, 16th century, Edo peoples, Court of Benin, Nigeria, ivory, iron, copper, 23.8 x 12.7 x 8.3 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Iron inlays for the pupils and rims of the eyes intensify the Queen Mother's authoritative gaze and suggest her inner strength. The two vertical depressions on her forehead were also inlaid with iron. She is depicted wearing a choker of coral beads and her hair is arranged in an elegant configuration that resembles a tiara. The intricately carved openwork designs are stylized mudfish alternating with the faces of Portuguese traders. Both motifs are associated with the Oba and his counterpart, the sea god Olokun. The mudfish is a creature that lives both on land and in water, and a symbol of the king's dual nature as both human and divine. Similarly, the Portuguese, as voyagers from across the sea, may have been seen as denizens of Olokun's realm. Like the sea god, they brought great wealth and power to the Oba.

Figure **5.5.3.9.3**: Queen Mother Pendant Mask (Iyoba), 16th century, Edo peoples, Court of Benin, Nigeria, ivory, iron, copper, 23.8 x 12.7 x 8.3 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

In Benin culture, ivory holds both material and symbolic value. As a luxury good, ivory was Benin's principal commercial commodity and helped to attract Portuguese traders who, in turn, brought wealth to the kingdom in the form of copper and coral. In addition, ivory is white, a color that symbolizes ritual purity and is also associated with Olokun, who is considered to be a source of extraordinary wealth and fertility.

Queen Idia is honored as a powerful and politically astute woman who provided critical assistance to her son during the kingdom's battles to expand. Upon the successful conclusion of the war, Esigie paid tribute to Idia by bestowing upon her the title of Queen Mother, a custom that has continued with subsequent rulers until the present time. The title of Queen Mother, or *Iyoba*, is given to the woman who bears the Oba's first son, the future ruler of the kingdom. Historically, the Queen Mother would have no other children and, instead, devote her life to raising her son. Oba Esigie is said to have worn the mask as a pectoral during rites commemorating his mother. The hollow back, holes around the perimeter, and stopper composed of several tendrils of hair at the summit suggest that the mask functioned as an amulet, filled with special and powerful materials that protected the wearer. Today, such pendants are worn at annual ceremonies of spiritual renewal and purification.

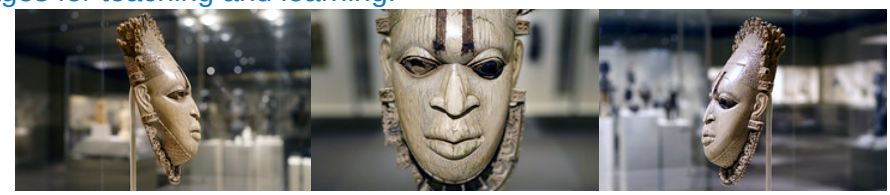
© 2006 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (by permission)

Additional resources:

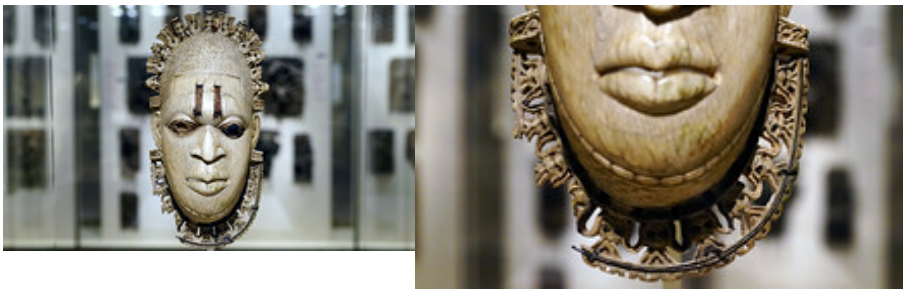
This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

African Ivories (Metropolitan Museum of Art publication)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)



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5.5.3.10: Head of an Oba

Introduction

In today's southern Nigeria, the Kingdom of Benin reached its artistic splendor from 1400 through 1600. The kingdom began in the 900s when the Edo people started building settlements. After continued warfare with others in the 1100s, they asked a neighboring king for help, and the king sent his son, who took command of the territory. By the 1400s, the new Oba (king) increased his army and began annexing additional lands, helping build a vast and wealthy kingdom. Benin traded along the western African coastline while ruling over the neighboring tribes. A series of earthen walls have been recently excavated and believed to stretch over 8,000 kilometers, perhaps to delineate territory. Because the houses were constructed of the local mud, the humid, wet weather has caused the walls to disintegrate and become part of the soil, making it impossible to discern the style and size.

The king's court was an immense area composed of palaces, homes for family and courtiers, and large gathering spaces. The kingdom had a strict social structure with the king and the highest priest, a semi-divine figure. The king ruled with input from a council usually composed of the many princely descendants with multiple wives. "According to Drapper, his harem consisted of nine hundred wives guarded by eunuchs."[1] All the land belonged to the king, and no other person could inherit property without the king's consent.

Artists were arranged into guilds for different types of materials or art under the direction of a master guild leader. The guilds were responsible for taking direction from the Oba for whatever requirements he needed. The 1400s became the Oba's Golden Age, the extended Benin City the center of a widespread kingdom. When the Portuguese came in the late 1400s, they found metropolitan areas, sizeable palaces, and homes all decorated with artworks made of ivory, bronze, brass, wood, and natural elements from animals and plants. When the British invaded in 1897, they destroyed the palaces and took most of the brass, ivory, and wooden artworks.

Initially, Benin crafted bronze by hammering and incising, then learned to cast bronze with the lost-wax method producing elaborate artwork. They used other materials also; however, because of the long-lasting quality of bronze, most of the surviving artifacts were made of bronze. During this period, the communities were surrounded by walls and ditches, and an Oba ruled each clan. The Oba or a designate could only commission the works of bronze, and the bronze artwork was kept in the palace. Each Oba maintained their own guild of artisans who were masters of their trade. The objects were created to exalt the king, his household, armies, and others of elite status and used in ceremonial events. When an Oba took his position, he had to create an altar to honor his father and his mother if she was a queen, these pieces of art were made for use on the altar. Other artwork was created for agricultural festivals, spiritual activities, or ceremonial events.

Although artifacts were made of bronze, many were created from brass, similar materials using the same procedure for construction. Bronze is mainly made from copper with the addition of tin and small amounts of other minerals. Bronze was the original material used by artists since 3500 BCE. Brass was also made with copper and mixed with zinc instead of tin with other trace elements as required. The melting point for brass is lower than bronze and is somewhat more malleable. It is unknown when Benin started casting brass; however, it was a highly respected talent, and the kings supported a guild for brass casting. Using the lost-wax method, they made exceptionally detailed models, then covered the model with clay. When heated, the wax melted out of a channel, and the liquid metal was poured in to set. The clay was broken away after the metal hardened.

The first obligation of the new king was to create a shrine, dedicated to his predecessor and serving as the site at which the living monarch communicated with his ancestor or father. Ensuring dynastic continuity, the shrine held various carved and cast artifacts, including freestanding brass heads... The head acted as a vessel through which the late king transferred his power to the new king, the latter accepting the responsibility for successfully directing and defining his life. The Edo people considered the head to be the locus of a man's character, knowledge, authority, success, and family leadership. These sculptural heads were a consistent visual point of reference from ruler to ruler, reinforcing the idea of familial succession across a single dynasty. The Oba is often called by his praise name "Great Head," emphasizing the head of the living leader as the center of responsibility for the kingdom.[2]

Heads

The bronze or brass heads sat on ancestral altars and were not based on the exact facial characteristics of the departed but rather on a stylistic, natural look. Some metalheads had an opening in the top to hold an elephant tusk engraved with decorative images. "The

metal pieces were made using lost-wax casting and are considered among the best sculptures made using this technique.[3]

The cast bronze head (1.4.1) portrayed an idealized likeness, generally made to look like the Oba when he was young. The woven cap on his head is patterned after coral beads with a single bead hanging down on his forehead, a tribute to the artist who created the perfect symmetry and detailed cap. Coral was imported, a valuable commodity for the Oba. His face reflects the perfect youth in a natural, undistorted image. The head would be placed on the altar made to honor the king.

Figure **5.5.3.10.1**: Head of an Oba (16th century, brass, 23.5 x 21.9 x 22.9 cm) Public Domain

The *Head of Oba* (1.4.2) has more elaborate ornamentation. The cap is made to look like coral beads strung together with larger beads on the cap and three small beads over each eye, and one in the middle. The face is perfectly rendered, and his neck is encased with eighteen layers of beads encircling his neck—long strands of coral hang from the cap around both of his ears.

Figure **5.5.3.10.2**: Head of an Oba (1550-1680, 27.3 x 21.3 x 21.9 cm) Public Domain

Historians believe earlier altar heads were made from terracotta, and later brass became more prestigious. The terracotta head (1.4.3) appears less refined, with fuller features in the wider nose, bigger eyes, and an uneven beaded cap. Some historians believe the terracotta heads may have been used to store the coral or original designs used as models.

Figure **5.5.3.10.3**: Head (16th-17thcentury, terracotta, sacrificial materials, 16.5 x 11.1 x 12.4 cm) Public Domain

Plaques

During the sixteenth century, the artisans of the Benin art guilds made a series of brass plaques to line the front of the palace. A later European visitor wrote about the extensive palace complex with multiple courtyards, huge rooms, and even galleries with pillars covered by the plaques. Historians believe the plaques were arranged in a specific order with some relationship or narrative occurring. There was an established convention of the most significant person appearing as the most prominent figure. The plaque with the Oba and his warriors (1.4.4) depicts the Oba as the most significant and dimensional figure ensuring his status while his small attendants are behind him. The king wears a studded helmet and carries an elaborate sword.

Figure **5.5.3.10.4**: Warrior and Attendants, (16^{th}-17^{th} century, 47.6 x 38.1 x 10.8 cm) Public Domain

The*Iyase* (1.4.5) was the chief and chosen by the Oba for his qualities. The Iyase acted as second in command to the Oba and was in charge of the army. He wears an elaborate headdress and carries the sword of authority while attended by the lesser person, a very low-level person based on the size of the figure.

Figure **5.5.3.10.5**: Iyase with Sword and Attendant (1550-1680, brass, 40.6 x 18.4 x 6.4 cm) Public Domain

Mounted on a horse, the Oba (1.4.6) and his attendants ride under the salute of swords by his warriors. The warriors are almost the size of the king, a portrayal of their essential status, while the attendants are small, with very unimportant positions. The junior court official (1.4.6) does not have any attendants, wears simple clothing and a helmet, and carries a small sword, demonstrating his position as a lower-level warrior. The artists making the plaques frequently added other decorations on the plaque to fill in empty spaces or perhaps leave their mark. They also added holes on the plaques for the nails to hold them on the pillars.) and his attendants ride under the salute of swords by his warriors. The warriors are almost the size of the king, a portrayal of their essential status, while the attendants are small, with very unimportant positions.

Figure **5.5.3.10.6**: Equestrian Oba and Attendants (1550-1680, Brass, 49.5 x 41.9 x 11.4 cm) Public Domain

The junior court official (1.4.6) does not have any attendants, wears simple clothing and a helmet, and carries a small sword, demonstrating his position as a lower-level warrior. The artists making the plaques frequently added other decorations on the plaque to fill in empty spaces or perhaps leave their mark. They also added holes on the plaques for the nails to hold them on the pillars.

Figure 5.5.3.10.7: Junior Court Official with Sword, (1550-1680, brass) Public Domain

Masks

Multiple rituals and ceremonies were essential to Benin's life, a way to cleanse the kingdom of past problems and for the king to ensure his power. During the ceremonies, royalty, and those of elite status, wore elaborate works of art made of brass or ivory, ornamental textiles, or layers of coral beads. The mask in the shape of the leopard's head (1.4.8) was part of the display and was worn around the waist. The leopard was an important animal, a symbol of strength, and tamed leopards were often found in the palaces, showing the power of the king to control a wild animal. In a procession, the Oba might be preceded by leopards on long chains indicating his strength. Images of women were rare and generally represented a female who was a queen or the mother of a king.

Figure 5.5.3.10.8: Hip Ornament: Leopard Head, (16^{th}-19^{th} century, 18.6 x 12.1 x 5.7 cm) Public Domain

The ivory mask (1.4.9) would be reserved for special ceremonies and usually worn by the king to honor his mother; the ivory represents purity. The facial features on the mask are distinct, with bands of metal inlaid on the forehead, and carvings of mudfish are part of the collar below her chin and the tiara. Mudfish lived in water but could survive on land, thus representing the king as both divine and human.

Figure 5.5.3.10.9: Queen Mother Pendant Mask: Iyoba (16th century, ivory, iron, copper, 23.8 x 12.7 x 8.3 cm) Public Domain

The brass mask of a face (1.4.10) was made in the king's image and hung from the necks of his high-level chiefs and elites to demonstrate loyalty for the king. As in the style of many masks, the chin is framed with loops to hang rattles. The eyes are intense, an image of his power as a ruler while his nose and mouth appear sensitive, the look of a thoughtful king.

Figure 5.5.3.10.10: *Pectoral: Face* (15th-17th century, brass, iron, 19.1 x 11.8 x 4.5 cm) Public Domain

Sculptures

Only the Oba could commission works of art in bronze. The sculptures were small and used for ceremonies, each one made with detailed precision. The horn player (1.4.11) represented a court musician and was made for one of the king's shrines. The figure is wearing an elaborately detailed leopard hide with coral beads around his neck. The horn was blown from the side and the artist making the statue demonstrates Benin's expertise in lost-wax casting.

Figure **5.5.3.10.11**: Horn Player (1550-1680, brass, 62.9 x 29.2 x 17.2 cm) Public Domain

The bird of prophecy (1.4.12) has extended wings and an oversized beak and was a percussion idiophone carried by the chiefs and struck on the beak with a rod. The birds, along with plaques, decorated the palace. Large metal birds were often installed on the roof of the palaces demonstrating the Oba is the overseer of the people.

Figure **5.5.3.10.12**: Idiophone: Bird of Prophecy (16^{th} century, bronze, 36.2 x 14.3 x 15.2 cm) Public Domain

The ivory gong (1.4.13) was finely carved with an additional small cup in the front. Officials carried the gongs during rituals, tapping them to create sounds to dispel evil spirits.

Figure 5.5.3.10.13: Double Bell (Egogo) (16th century, ivory, 35.9 x 9.5 x 5.7 cm) CC BY 3.0

The arts of Benin had a long tradition of creative and innovative art promoted by the rulers who used art to define their history. Benin art started in the late 13th century and developed a longstanding portfolio of artwork. The altars and artwork in the palace complexes remained in place and were used over the centuries by Oba rulers. Unfortunately, in the 19th century, the British invaded Benin to conquer the people and destroy their culture. Before they burned the town, they confiscated the artwork, taking most of it and selling it worldwide. The British did not document the Benin artwork, losing an entire history of the civilization.

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[1] Carré, L. (1936). Benin -- The City of Bronzes. *Parnassus*, *8*(1), 13-15. doi:10.2307/771199

[2] Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/312290?searchField=All&sortBy=relevance&ft=kingdom+of+benin&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=12.

[3] Nevadomsky, J., African Arts, *Art and Science in Benin Bronzes*, Spring 2004, 37(1), p.95-96.

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- **1.4: Kingdom of Benin (1180 CE – 1897 CE)** by Deborah Gustlin & Zoe Gustlin is licensed CC BY 4.0.

5.5.3.11: Bet Giyorgis Church

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5.5.3.12: Painted wooden lion’s head, Early Coptic period

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5.5.3.13: Coptic ostrakon, Early Islamic period

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5.5.3.14: Jar, late 3rd–4th century

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5.5.3.15: Conical Tower, Great Zimbabwe

Southern Africa

Southern Africa is home to William Kentridge, Great Zimbabwe, and the Apollo 11 Stones.

28,000 B.C.E. - present

About Southern Africa

by SMARTHISTORY

Southern Africa includes Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Create your own visited countries map or check out the JavaScript Charts.

The art of Namibia

In the mountains of Southern Namibia, researchers uncovered stunning rock art from nearly 30,000 years ago.

28,000 - 26,000 B.C.E.

Origins of rock art in Africa

by THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Figure **5.5.3.15.1**: Quartzite slabs depicting animals, Apollo 11 Cave, Namibia, c. 25,500–25,300 B.C.E. Image courtesy of State Museum of Namibia.

Rock art and the origins of art in Africa

The oldest scientifically-dated figurative rock art in Africa dates from around 26,000-28,000 years ago and is found in Namibia.

Between 1969 and 1972, German archaeologist, W.E. Wendt, researching in an area known locally as “Goachanas,” unearthed several painted slabs in a cave he named Apollo 11, after NASA’s successful moon landing mission.

Seven painted stone slabs of brown-grey quartzite, depicting a variety of animals painted in charcoal, ochre and white, were located in a Middle Stone Age deposit (100,000–60,000 years ago). These images are not easily identifiable to species level, but have been interpreted variously as felines and/or bovids; one in particular has been observed to be either a zebra, giraffe or ostrich, demonstrating the ambiguous nature of the depictions.

Art and our modern mind

While the Apollo 11 plaques may be the oldest discovered representational art in Africa, this is not the beginning of the story of art. It is now well-established, through genetic and fossil evidence, that anatomically modern humans (Homo sapiens sapiens) developed in Africa more than 100,000 years ago; of these, a small group left the Continent around 60,000-80,000 years ago and spread throughout the rest of the world.

Recently discovered examples of patterned stone, ochre and ostrich eggshell, as well as evidence of personal ornamentation emerging from Middle Stone Age Africa, have demonstrated that “art” is not only a much older phenomenon than previously thought, but that it has its roots in the African continent. Africa is where we share a common humanity.

The first examples of what we might term “art” in Africa, dating from between 100,000–60,000 years ago, emerge in two very distinct forms: personal adornment in the form of perforated seashells suspended on twine, and incised and engraved stone, ochre and ostrich eggshell. Despite some sites being 8,000km and 40,000 years apart, an intriguing feature of the earliest art is that these first forays appear remarkably similar. It is worth noting here that the term “art” in this context is highly problematic, in that we cannot assume that humans living 100,000 years ago, or even 10,000 years ago, had a concept of art in the same way that we do, particularly in the modern Western sense. However, it remains a useful umbrella term for our purposes here.

Pattern and design

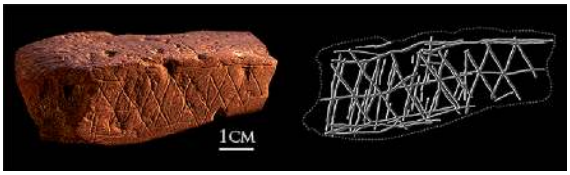

Figure **5.5.3.15.2**: Incised ochre from Blombos Cave, South Africa. Photo by Chris. S. Henshilwood © Chris. S. Henshilwood

The practice of engraving or incising, which emerges around 12,000 years ago in Saharan rock art, has its antecedents much earlier, up to 100,000 years ago. Incised and engraved stone, bone, ochre and ostrich eggshell have been found at sites in southern Africa. These marked objects share features in the expression of design, exhibiting patterns that have been classified as cross-hatching.

One of the most iconic and well-publicised sites that have yielded cross-hatch incised patterning on ochre is Blombos Cave, on the southern Cape shore of South Africa. Of the more than 8,500 fragments of ochre deriving from the MSA (Middle Stone Age) levels, 15 fragments show evidence of engraving. Two of these, dated to 77,000 years ago, have received the most attention for the design of cross-hatch pattern.

For many archaeologists, the incised pieces of ochre at Blombos are the most complex and best-formed evidence for early abstract representations, and are unequivocal evidence for symbolic thought and language. The debate about when we became a symbolic species and acquired fully syntactical language – what archaeologists term ‘modern human behaviour’ – is both complex and contested. It has been proposed that these cross-hatch patterns are clear evidence of thinking symbolically, because the motifs are not representational and as such are culturally constructed and arbitrary. Moreover, in order for the meaning of this motif to be conveyed to others, language is a prerequisite.

The Blombos engravings are not isolated occurrences, since the presence of such designs occur at more than half a dozen other sites in South Africa, suggesting that this pattern is indeed important in some way, and not the result of idiosyncratic behaviour. It is worth noting, however, that for some scholars, the premise that the pattern is symbolic is not so certain. The patterns may indeed have a meaning, but it is how that meaning is associated, either by resemblance (iconic) or correlation (indexical), that is important for our understanding of human cognition.

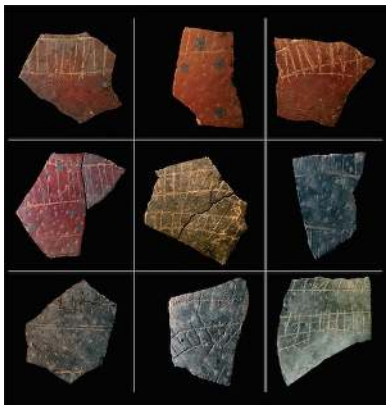

Figure **5.5.3.15.3**: Fragments of engraved ostrich eggshells from the Howiesons Poort of Diepkloof Rock Shelter, Western Cape, South Africa, dated to 60,000 BP. Courtesy of Jean-Pierre Texier, Diepkloof project. © Jean-Pierre Texier

Personal ornamentation and engraved designs are the earliest evidence of art in Africa, and are inextricably tied up with the development of human cognition. For tens of thousands of years, there has been not only a capacity for, but a motivation to adorn and to inscribe, to make visual that which is important. The interesting and pertinent issue in the context of this project is that the rock art we are cataloguing, describing and researching comes from a tradition that goes far back into African prehistory. The techniques and subject matter resonate over the millennia.

Additional resources:

British Museum African Rock Art Image Project

Apollo 11 (ca. 25,500–23,500 B.C.) and Wonderwerk (ca. 8000 B.C.) Cave Stones on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Trust for African Rock Art

© Trustees of the British Museum

Apollo 11 Cave Stones

by NATHALIE HAGER

Figure **5.5.3.15.4**: Apollo 11 Cave Stones, Namibia, quartzite, c. 25,500–25,300 B.C.E. Image courtesy of State Museum of Namibia.

A significant discovery

Approximately 25,000 years ago, in a rock shelter in the Huns Mountains of Namibia on the southwest coast of Africa (today part of the Ai-Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park), an animal was drawn in charcoal on a hand-sized slab of stone. The stone was left behind, over time becoming buried on the floor of the cave by layers of sediment and debris until 1969 when a team led by German archaeologist W.E. Wendt excavated the rock shelter and found the first fragment (above, left). Wendt named the cave "Apollo 11" upon hearing on his shortwave radio of NASA's successful space mission to the moon. It was more than three years later however, after a subsequent excavation, when Wendt discovered the matching fragment (above, right), that archaeologists and art historians began to understand the significance of the find.

Figure **5.5.3.15.5**: Location of the Huns Mountains of Namibia, © Map Data Google

Indirect dating techniques

In total seven stone fragments of brown-grey quartzite, some of them depicting traces of animal figures drawn in charcoal, ocher, and white, were found buried in a concentrated area of the cave floor less than two meters square. While it is not possible to learn the actual date of the fragments, it is possible to estimate when the rocks were buried by radiocarbon dating the archaeological layer in which they were found. Archaeologists estimate that the cave stones were buried between 25,500 and 25,300 years ago during the Middle Stone Age period in southern Africa making them, at the time of their discovery, the oldest dated art known on the African continent and among the earliest evidence of human artistic expression worldwide. What was the Middle Stone Age?

While more recent discoveries of much older human artistic endeavors have corrected our understanding (consider the 2008 discovery of a 100,000-year-old paint workshop in the Blombos Cave on the southern coast of Africa), the stones remain the oldest examples of figurative art from the African continent. Their discovery contributes to our conception of early humanity's creative attempts, before the invention of formal writing, to express their thoughts about the world around them.

The origins of art?

Genetic and fossil evidence tells us that Homo sapiens (anatomically modern humans who evolved from an earlier species of hominids) developed on the continent of Africa more than 100,000 years ago and spread throughout the world. But what we do not know—what we have only been able to assume—is that art too began in Africa. Is Africa, where humanity originated, home to the world's oldest art? If so, can we say that art began in Africa?

100,000 years of human occupation

Figure **5.5.3.15.6**: View across Fish River Canyon toward the Huns Mountains, /Ai-/Ais – Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, southern Namibia (photo: **Thomas Schooch**, CC-BY-SA-3.00)

The Apollo 11 rock shelter overlooks a dry gorge, sitting twenty meters above what was once a river that ran along the valley floor. The cave entrance is wide, about twenty-eight meters across, and the cave itself is deep: eleven meters from front to back. While today a person can stand upright only in the front section of the cave, during the Middle Stone Age, as well as in the periods before and after, the rock shelter was an active site of ongoing human settlement.

Inside the cave, above and below the layer where the Apollo 11 cave stones were found, archaeologists unearthed a sequence of cultural layers representing over 100,000 years of human occupation. In these layers stone artifacts, typical of the Middle Stone Age period—such as blades, pointed flakes, and scraper—were found in raw materials not native to the region, signaling stone tool technology transported over long distances. Among the remnants of hearths, ostrich eggshell fragments bearing traces of red color were also found—either remnants of ornamental painting or evidence that the eggshells were used as containers for pigment.

Figure **5.5.3.15.7**: Excavation site of the Apollo 11 stones (photo: **Jutta Vogel Stiftung)**

On the cave walls, belonging to the Later Stone Age period, rock paintings were discovered depicting white and red zigzags, two handprints, three geometric images, and traces of color. And on the banks of the riverbed just upstream from the cave, engravings of a variety of animals, some with zigzag lines leading upwards, were found and dated to less than 2000 years ago.

The Apollo 11 Cave Stones

But the most well-known of the rock shelter's finds, and the most enigmatic, remain the Apollo 11 cave stones (image above). On the cleavage face of what was once a complete slab, an unidentified animal form was drawn resembling a feline in appearance but with human hind legs that were probably added later. Barely visible on the head of the animal are two slightly-curved horns likely belonging to an Oryx, a large grazing antelope; on the animal's underbelly, possibly the sexual organ of a bovid. What is a bovid?

Perhaps we have some kind of supernatural creature—a therianthrope, part human and part animal? If so, this may suggest a complex system of shamanistic belief. Taken together with the later rock paintings and the engravings, Apollo 11 becomes more than just a cave offering shelter from the elements. It becomes a site of ritual significance used by many over thousands of years.

The global origins of art

In the Middle Stone Age period in southern Africa prehistoric man was a hunter-gatherer, moving from place to place in search of food and shelter. But this modern human also drew an animal form with charcoal—a form as much imagined as it was observed. This is what makes the Apollo 11 cave stones find so interesting: the stones offer evidence that Homo sapiens in the Middle Stone Age—us, some 25,000 years ago—were not only anatomically modern, but behaviorally modern as well. That is to say, these early humans possessed the new and unique capacity for modern symbolic thought, "the human capacity," long before what was previously understood.

The cave stones are what archaeologists term *art mobilier* —small-scale prehistoric art that is moveable. But mobile art, and rock art generally, is not unique to Africa. Rock art is a global phenomenon that can be found across the World—in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North and South America. While we cannot know for certain what these early humans intended by the things that they made, by focusing on art as the product of humanity's creativity and imagination we can begin to explore where, and hypothesize why, art began.

Additional resources:

Introduction to Prehistoric Art on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Apollo 11 and Wonderwerk Cave Stones on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

African Rock Art on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

"Africa: Continent of Origins," lecture was delivered by Dr. Ian Tattersall at The Metropolitan Museum of Art on the occasion of the symposium "Genesis: Exploration of Origins" on March 7, 2003.

"Homo Sapiens," from Becoming Human

British Museum – Rock Art and the Origins of Art in Africa

Namibia from the TARA, the Trust for African Rock Art

Bradshaw Foundation – Africa Rock Art Archive

John Masson, "Apollo 11 Cave in Southwest Namibia: Some Observations on the Site and its Rock Art," *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 61, no. 183 (2006), pp. 76-89.

Ralf Vogelsang, "The Rock-Shelter "Apollo 11" – Evidence of Early Modern Humans in South-Western Namibia," in *Heritage and Cultures in Modern Namibia – In-depth Views of the Country*, edited by Cornelia Limpricht and Megan Biesele (Göttingen, Windhoek-Namibia: Klaus Hess Publishers, 2008), pp. 183-196.

W. E. Wendt, "'Art Mobilier' from the Apollo 11 Cave, South West Africa: Africa's Oldest Dated Works of Art," *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* vol. 31, no. 121/122 (1976), pp. 5-11.

The art of South Africa

Over the last two centuries, artists in South Africa have responded to European colonialism in different ways.

19th - 20th century

Married Woman's Apron (Ndebele peoples)

by DR. CHRISTA CLARKE

Figure 5.5.3.15.8: Married Woman's Apron (Ijogolo), 19th-20th century, South Africa, Ndebele peoples, leather, beads and thread, 75.6 x 67.3cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

This five-paneled garment is known as an *ijogolo*, a bridal apron worn by Ndebele women. Upon marriage, the groom's family traditionally gave the bride a plain leather or canvas apron with five flaps. The newly married Ndebele woman embroidered that apron, creating bold geometric designs with imported glass beads. She would wear this apron on important ceremonial occasions to signify her married status. The multiple panels, referred to as "calves," symbolize the future children the woman will bear.

Throughout southern Africa, peoples wear beaded garments that comment upon their stage in life and convey aspects of their individual identity. Different types of beaded artifacts may communicate social and marital status, number of children, and a person's home region or ethnicity.

Although the historical origins of southern African beadwork are uncertain, it is known that glass beads from Europe were available in the area as early as the sixteenth century through trade with the Portuguese. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the region became the world's largest consumer of glass beads. Dating beaded works is difficult, although the color and size of the beads, the patterns and motifs, and the material used can all provide some indication of age. Older works typically have leather backings and use mostly small, white beads with minimal color designs, as in this example.

© 2006 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (by permission)

Additional resources:

This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

William Kentridge, drawing from *Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair)*

by JOSH R. ROSE

Figure 5.5.3.15.9: William Kentridge, Drawing from *Tide Table (Soho in Deck Chair)*, 2003, charcoal on paper, 81.28 x 121.92 cm (courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, NYC, © William Kentridge)

On the beach, but in a suit

It is a humorously discordant image: a man in a pinstriped suit sits on a deck chair at the beach, ignoring the overcast vista by reading a newspaper. The figure's balding head and newspaper are the brightest highlights against the smooth, rippling surf. South African artist William Kentridge has said the inspiration for this scene was a photograph of his grandfather similarly dressed at a beach near Capetown. The contrast of formal dress and beach setting—while whimsical—also suggests class distinctions and the disconnect between experiencing one's environment and codification as control: rather than watch the tide, the figure (as we come to find out) reads the newspaper's tide table (a chart that shows water heights over time for a particular location). The gulf separating understanding and experience in this drawing resonates in much of Kentridge's imagery and process.

"Successful Failures"

Kentridge was raised by two progressive lawyers in Johannesburg who actively helped disenfranchised South Africans navigate the legal system during the systemic inequalities of apartheid. The harsh racial and socioeconomic conditions in South Africa marked the earliest work Kentridge produced after studying visual art at the Johannesburg Art Foundation and theater at the L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris.

Kentridge's earliest passions were theater and opera (and he has continued working in these areas throughout his career), yet after realizing he was not cut out as an actor, he was "reduced to being an artist." As he has described it, "Every clear decision I have made was wrong. And the only thing that saved me was what I hadn't decided." This deceptively self-deprecating remark adequately describes the intentional openness and mutability of meaning Kentridge has built into his approach.

Process as Performance

The drawing above is the result of a film, *Tide Table*, the ninth film in the series "Drawings For Projection" begun in 1989. These films utilize a unique stop-motion technique: using a 16mm camera, Kentridge photographs each stage of a drawing on one sheet of paper as he continually modifies it through additions and erasures, often leaving ghostly remnants of previous marks on the page. He even periodically appears within the frame, such as by placing a new sheet in front of the camera when the previous drawing/scene is finished.

Figure 5.5.3.15.10: William Kentridge, Drawing from *Tide Table*, 2003 © William Kentridge

The resulting work of art is generally comprised of two elements: an animated film and a series of drawings. Unlike traditional animation, which is painstakingly planned and comprised of thousands of single images each denoting a fraction of a second, Kentridge's films develop organically without any preparatory planning like storyboards, relying more on a stream-of-consciousness approach that strives for something between random chance and conscious premeditation. Kentridge associates this with the concept of "fortuna," in which his imagery and narrative are influenced by objects in his environment or ideas and motions that seem intrinsically related to—but independent of—the themes and narrative being tackled at the time. The relationship might be comparable to that of authors noting how their characters do something unexpected in the course of writing a novel. There is a performative quality to Kentridge's process, predicated by the spontaneity he fosters, his own appearances in the frame, and the film itself as a time-based record of his drawing process.

The Traces Always Remain

Kentridge's drawings for his films are often regarded as palimpsests. A palimpset is the word for a manuscript where the original text has been erased and overwritten (a practice common before paper was available and when parchment was expensive). In Kentridge's work, the sheet of paper becomes the locus for layer upon layer of images that evolve and shift, where the earlier states of the drawing exist only through traces intentionally left on the paper. In the film, these traces help intensify the movement of his figures, but also visually remark upon the process as a physical interaction of charcoal and eraser on paper.

The palimpsest quality to Kentridge's approach is one that many critics and historians have associated with his reaction to growing up during a turbulent and shifting period in South African history. Apartheid, legalized racial discrimination, dominated South African governance and society from 1948 until 1994. One way Kentridge has made overt reference to the atrocities of apartheid in his "Drawings for Projection" series is through the one pre-determined facet of these narratives: an established "cast" featuring the wealthy white real-estate developer and industrialist Soho Eckstein. Eckstein represents the authoritative oppressors ruling over black South Africans.

Figure 5.5.3.15.11: William Kentridge, Drawing for the film *Monument*, 1990 © William Kentridge

In the 1990 film *Monument*, for example, Eckstein unveils a heroic monument showing a black worker struggling to carry a load of pristine marble objects. An ostensibly commemorative sculpture to the efforts of South Africans is revealed later to be an actual living person, not a sculpture. Racial discrimination is starkly reduced to the contrast between the "sculpted" worker's body and the white classically-styled load he bears.

In the 1991 film, *Mine*, a similar contrast is presented between Eckstein's white bed coverings and tray as he enjoys coffee, and the grueling, dank conditions of the mines that Eckstein owns. The two are linked visually by the downward action of the French-press coffee maker that becomes the elevator within the mines. Such contrasts seem intentionally provocative, both formally and thematically. Yet Kentridge admits that the decision to have the coffee plunger become the elevator shaft was another example of fortuna, inspired simply from the fact he had that type of coffee maker in his studio that day.

Figure **5.5.3.15.12**: William Kentridge, Drawing for the film *Mine*, 1991 © William Kentridge

A critical event linked to the legal dissolution of apartheid in the 1990s was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Commission was a five year investigation into the crimes and human rights abuses committed under apartheid from 1960 until May 10, 1994. The results of the investigation, broadcast on South African television, were intended to bring to light crimes committed and the breadth of the structure of racism and disenfranchisement.

Although Kentridge's process was established several years before the Commission, scholars like Jessica Dubow and Ruth Rosengarten have linked the palimpsest quality of Kentridge's "Drawings for Projection" with the contradictory nature of the Commission: although the broadcasts intended to reveal atrocities, they also established that the harrowing acts revealed were firmly "in the past" and therefore not reflective of the dawn of a post-apartheid South Africa. Dubow and Rosengarten suggest that Kentridge's palimpsest technique is reminiscent of the Commission's attempts to show —but also remove—traces of apartheid and that Kentridge's "finished" drawings similarly do not fully reveal everything that went into making them. The documentation of every stage of the drawing is only seen in the animated film, hence the reason the drawings and the films are intrinsically related and should not be separated.

Tide Table

The disconnect between documentation and direct experience seen in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is also central to the drawing of Soho Eckstein sitting at the beach in a business suit. In the films he created after 1994, Kentridge presents Soho as a man whose life has fallen apart: between inexplicable health issues, violent nightmares, and the loss of his fortune, Kentridge portrays Eckstein's struggles in post-apartheid South Africa. Throughout Tide Table the artist provides a subtext that reflects upon youth, as a choir on the beach sings and a young boy dances and leaps in the surf. Often this occurs around Eckstein, as he sits in the deck chair, seeming to prefer the analytical table of tide flows in the newspaper and, in a later scene, pointedly placing the newspaper over his head to sleep (see above).

These images reinforce Eckstein's character as one who is more comfortable at a remove from human connection and the natural world, a portrayal that is common to many of the films in the series.

Eckstein's actions in *Tide Table* evoke a sense of loss for the comforts and advantages the character had during apartheid. Still, there is a glimmer of hope. Ultimately Eckstein observes those around him; he gets up, and playfully throws a rock into the water.

Additional Resources:

The artist discussing his 2003 film, *Tide Table* (SFMOMA)

The artist discusses his process (SFMOMA)

This film at SFMOMA

Interview with the artist

Kentridge Wikipedia entry

Zimbabwe

Great Zimbabwe

by DR. NANCY DEMERDASH

Figure **5.5.3.15.13**: Aerial view of Great Zimbabwe's Great Enclosure and adjacent ruins, looking southeast (photo: **Janice Bell**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Great Zimbabwe has been described as "one of the most dramatic architectural landscapes in sub-Saharan Africa."[1] It is the largest stone complex in Africa built before the modern era, aside from the monumental architecture of ancient Egypt. The ruins that survive are a four-hour drive south of Zimbabwe's present-day capital of Harare. It was constructed between the 11th and 15th centuries and was continuously inhabited by the Shona peoples until about 1450 (the Shona are the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe). But Great Zimbabwe was by no means a singular complex—at the site's cultural zenith, it is estimated that seven comparable states existed in this region.

Figure **5.5.3.15.14**

The word *zimbabwe* translates from the Bantu language of the Shona to either "judicial center" or "ruler's court or house." A few individual *zimbabwes* (houses) have survived exposure to the elements over the centuries. Within these clay structures, excavations have revealed interior furnishings such as pot-stands, elevated surfaces for sleeping and sitting, as well as hearths. Taken together, the settlement encompasses a cluster of approximately 250 royal houses built of clay, which in addition to other multi-story clay and thatch homes would have supported as many as 20,000 inhabitants —a exceptional scale for a sub-Saharan settlement at this time.

The stone constructions of Great Zimbabwe can be categorized into roughly three areas: the Hill Ruin (on a rocky hilltop), the Great Enclosure, and the Valley Ruins (map below). The Hill Ruin dates to approximately 1250, and incorporates a cave that remains a sacred site for the Shona peoples today. The cave once accommodated the residence of the ruler and his immediate family. The Hill Ruin also held a structure surrounded by 30-foot high walls and flanked by cylindrical towers and monoliths carved with elaborate geometric patterns.

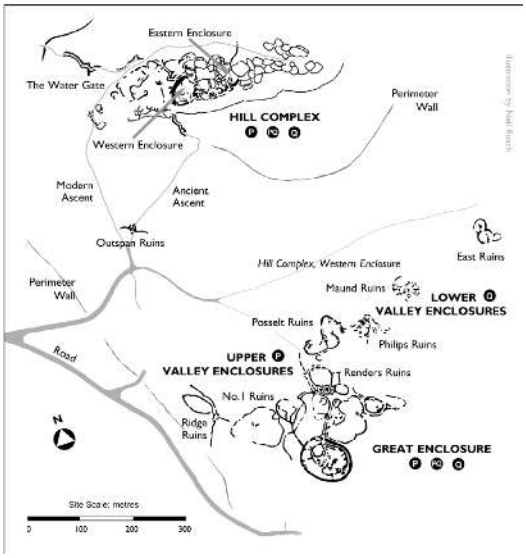

Figure **5.5.3.15.15**

Site plan of Great Zimbabwe (modified from an original plan by National Museums and Monuments ofZimbabwe) from Shadreck Chirikure and Innocent Pikirayi, "Inside and outside the dry stone walls: Revisiting the material culture of Great Zimbabwe," *Antiquity* 82 (December 2015), pp. 976-993. The letters refer to the types of stone construction (see **figure 4**).

Figure **5.5.3.15.16**: Between two walls, Great Enclosure, Great Zimbabwe (photo: Mandy, CC BY 2.0)

The Great Enclosure was completed in approximately 1450, and it too is a walled structure punctuated with turrets and monoliths, emulating the form of the earlier Hill Ruin. The massive outer wall is 32 feet high in some places. Inside the Great Enclosure, a smaller wall parallels the exterior wall creating a tight passageway leading to large towers. Because the Great Enclosure shares many structural similarities with the Hill Ruin, one interpretation suggests that the Great Enclosure was built to accommodate a surplus population and its religious and administrative activities. Another theory posits that the Great Enclosure may have functioned as a site for religious rituals.

The third section of Great Zimbabwe, the Valley Ruins, include a number of structures that offer evidence that the site served as a hub for commercial exchange and long distance trade. Archaeologists have found porcelain fragments originating from China, beads crafted in southeast Asia, and copper ingots from trading centers along the Zambezi River and from Central African kingdoms.[2]

A monolithic **soapstone sculpture** of a seated bird resting on atop a register of zigzags was unearthed here. The pronounced muscularity of the bird's breast and its defined talons suggest that this represents a bird of prey, and scholars have conjectured it could have been emblematic of the power of Shona kings as benefactors to their people and intercessors with their ancestors.

Figure 5.5.3.15.17: Conical Tower, Great Zimbabwe (photo: Mandy, CC BY 2.0)

Conical tower

All of the walls at Great Zimbabwe were constructed from granite hewn locally. While some theories suggest that the granite enclosures were built for defense, these walls likely had no military function. Many segments within the walls have gaps, interrupted arcs or elements that seem to run counter to needs of protection. The fact that the structures were built without the use of mortar to bind the stones together supports speculation that the site was not, in fact, intended for defense. Nevertheless, these enclosures symbolize the power and prestige of the rulers of Great Zimbabwe.

The conical tower (above) of Great Zimbabwe is thought to have functioned as a granary. According to tradition, a Shona ruler shows his largess towards his subjects through his granary, often distributing grain as a symbol of his protection. Indeed, advancements in agricultural cultivation among Bantu-speaking peoples in sub-Saharan Africa transformed the pattern of life for many, including the Shona communities of present-day Zimbabwe.

Figure 5.5.3.15.18: Great Enclosure entrance (restored), Great Zimbabwe (photo: Mandy, CC BY 2.0)

Wealth and trade

Archaeological debris indicate that the economy of Great Zimbabwe relied on the management of livestock. In fact, cattle may have allowed the Shona peoples to move from subsistence agriculture to mining and trade. Iron tools have been found on site, along with copper, and gold wire jewelry and ornaments. Great Zimbabwe is thought to have prospered, perhaps indirectly, from gold that was mined 25 miles from the city and that was transported to the Indian Ocean port at Sofala (below) where it made its way by dhow (sailing vessels), up the coast, and by way of **Kilwa Kisiwani**, to the markets of Cairo.

By about 1500, however, Great Zimbabwe's political and economic influence waned. Speculations as to why this occurred point to the frequency of droughts and environmental fragility, though other theories stress that Great Zimbabwe might have experienced political skirmishes over political succession that interrupted trade, still other theories hypothesize disease that may have afflicted livestock.[3]

Figure 5.5.3.15.19

Great Zimbabwe stands as one of the most extensively developed centers in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa and stands as a testament to the organization, autonomy, and economic power of the Shona peoples. The site remains a potent symbol not only to the Shona, but for Zimbabweans more broadly. After gaining independence from the British, the nation formerly named after the British industrialist and imperialist, Cecil Rhodes, was renamed Zimbabwe.

Figure 5.5.3.15.20: Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) banknote featuring the conical tower at Great Zimbabwe, 1955 (The British Museum)

1. **Webber Ndoro, *The Preservation of Great Zimbabwe: Your Monument, Our Shrine* (ICCROM, 2005), p. 16.**

2. Peter Garlake, *Early Art and Architecture of Africa* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 153.

3. Garlake, 157.

Video 5.5.3.15.1

Additional resources:

Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site (UNESCO)

Great Zimbabwe student worksheet (The British Museum)

Great Zimbabwe on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Webber Ndoro, *The Preservation of Great Zimbabwe: Your Monument, Our Shrine* (ICCROM, 2005)

Thomas N. Huffman, "Debating Great Zimbabwe," South African Archaeological Bulletin, 66 (2011), pp. 27-40.

——. The Soapstone Birds from Great Zimbabwe, African Arts, 18 (May 1985), pp. 68-73.

P. Hubbard, "The Zimbabwe Birds: Interpretation and Symbolism," *Honeyguide: Journal of Birdlife Zimbabwe* 55 (2009), pp. 109-116.

Great Zimbabwe from *Scientific American*

"Lost cities #9: racism and ruins – the plundering of Great Zimbabwe," *The Guardian* (August 18, 2016)

Peter S. Garlake, *Great Zimbabwe* (Stein & Day Pub, 1973).

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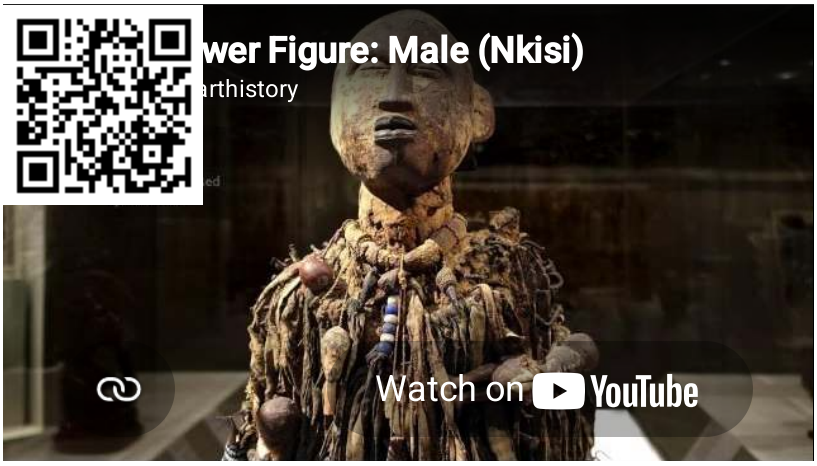
5.5.3.16: Power Figure (Nkisi Nkondi)

by DR. SHAWNYA L. HARRIS and DR. PERI KLEMM



Video **5.5.3.16.1**:

Power Figure: Male (Nkisi), 19th-mid 20th century, Kongo peoples, wood, pigment, nails, cloth, beads, shells, arrows, leather, nuts and twine, 58.8 x 26 x 25.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Speakers: Dr. Peri Klemm and Dr. Beth Harris

Figure **5.5.3.16.1**: Power figure (Nkisi nkondi), Kongo peoples (Democratic Republic of the Congo). c. late 19th century, wood and metal, 36 x 18 1/2 x 14 1/4″ / 16/8 x 47 x 36.2 cm (Detroit Institute of Arts)

Divine protection

Sacred medicines and divine protection are central to the belief of the Kongo peoples (Democratic Republic of Congo). The Kongo believe that the great god, Ne Kongo, brought the first sacred medicine (or *nkisi*) down from heaven in an earthenware vessel set upon three stones or termite mounds.

A *nkisi* (plural: *minkisi*) is loosely translated as a “spirit” yet it is represented as a container of sacred substances which are activated by supernatural forces that can be summoned into the physical world. Visually, these *minkisi* can be as simple as pottery or vessels containing medicinal herbs and other elements determined to be beneficial in curing physical illness or alleviating social ills. In other instances *minkisi* can be represented as small bundles, shells, and carved wooden figures. *Minkisi* represent the ability to both ‘contain’ and ‘release’ spiritual forces which can have both positive and negative consequences on the community.

Nkisi nkondi

A fascinating example of a *nkisi* can be found in a power figure called *nkisi nkondi* (a power figure is a magical charm seemingly carved in the likeness of human being, meant to highlight its function in human affairs.). A *nkisi nkondi* can act as an oath taking image which is used to resolve verbal disputes or lawsuits *(mambu)* as well as an avenger (the term *nkondi* means 'hunter') or guardian if sorcery or any form of evil has been committed. These *minkisi* are wooden figures representing a human or animal such as a dog (*nkisi kozo*) carved under the divine authority and in consultation with an *nganga* or spiritual specialist who activates these figures through chants, prayers and the preparation of sacred substances which are aimed at 'curing' physical, social or spiritual ailments.

Insertions

Figure **5.5.3.16.2**: (Nkisi N'Kondi: Mangaaka), mid to late nineteenth century, wood, paint, metal, resin, ceramic, 46 7/16″ / 118 cm high, Democratic Republic of Congo (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Nkisi nkondi figures are highly recognizable through an accumulation of pegs, blades, nails or other sharp objects inserted into its surface. Medicinal combinations called *bilongo* are sometimes stored in the head of the figure but frequently in the belly of the figure which is shielded by a piece of glass, mirror or other reflective surface. The glass represents the 'other world' inhabited by the spirits of the dead who can peer through and see potential enemies. Elements with a variety of purposes are contained within the *bilongo*. Seeds may be inserted to tell a spirit to replicate itself; *mpemba* or white soil deposits found near cemeteries represent and enlist support from the spiritual realm. Claws may incite the spirits to grasp something while stones may activate the spirits to pelt enemies or protect one from being pelted.

The insertions are driven into the figure by the *nganga* and represent the *mambu* and the type or degree of severity of an issue can be suggested through the material itself. A peg may refer to a matter being 'settled' whereas a nail, deeply inserted may represent a more serious offense such as murder. Prior to insertion, opposing parties or clients often lick the blades or nails, to seal the function or purpose of the *nkisi* through their saliva. If an oath is broken by one of the parties or evil befalls one of them, the *nkisi nkondi* will become activated to carry out its mission of destruction or divine protection.

Migrations

Europeans may have encountered these objects during expeditions to the Congo as early as the 15th century. However, several of these "fetish" objects, as they were often termed, were confiscated by missionaries in the late 19th century and were destroyed as evidence of sorcery or heathenism. Nevertheless, several were collected as objects of fascination and even as an object of study of Kongo culture. Kongo traditions such as those of the *nkisi nkondi* have survived over the centuries and migrated to the Americas and the Caribbean via Afro-Atlantic religious practices such as vodun, Palo Monte, and macumba. In Hollywood these figures have morphed into objects of superstition such as New Orleans voodoo dolls covered with stick pins. Nonetheless, *minkisi* have left an indelible imprint as visually provocative figures of spiritual importance and protection.

Figure **5.5.3.16.3**: (Nkisi N'Kondi: Mangaaka), mid to late nineteenth century, wood, paint, metal, resin, ceramic, 46 7/16″ / 118 cm high, Democratic Republic of Congo (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Essay by Dr. Shawnya Harris

Additional resources:

This figure at the Detroit Institute of Arts

The sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Nkisi Nkondi on Art Through Time

Nkisi Nkondi on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

David C. Driskell, Michael D. Harris, Wyatt Macgaffey, and Sylvia H. Williams, *Astonishment and power* (Washington: Published for the National Museum of African Art by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983).

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5.5.3.17: Zlan of Belewale, Ceremonial Ladle

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5.5.3.18: Crucifix, 16th–17th century

by DR. CHRISTA CLARKE

Figure **5.5.3.18.1**: Crucifix, 16th-17th century, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kongo peoples, solid cast brass, 27.3 cm high (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

When Portuguese explorers first arrived at the mouth of the Zaire River in 1483, the Kongo kingdom was thriving and prosperous, with extensive commercial networks between the coast, interior, and equatorial forests to the north. Portugal and Kongo soon established a strong trading partnership. In addition to material goods, the Portuguese also brought Christianity, which was rapidly adopted by Kongo rulers and established as the state religion in the early sixteenth century by King Afonso Mvemba a Nzinga. The adoption of Christianity allowed Kongo kings to foster international alliances not only with Portuguese leaders but also with the Vatican. In response to their new faith, Kongo craftsmen began to introduce Christian iconography into their artistic repertoire.

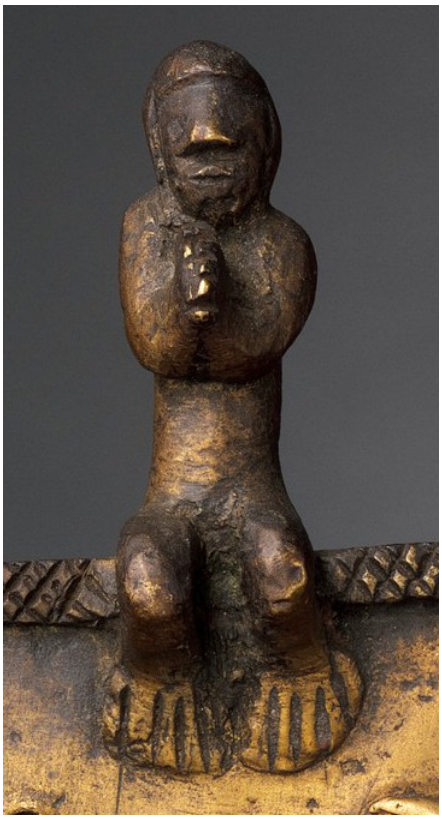

Figure 5.5.3.18.2: Detail, Crucifix, 16th-17th century, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Angola; Republic of the Congo, solid cast brass, 27.3 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

This crucifix demonstrates how Kongo artists adapted and transformed Western Christian prototypes.

Although the general depiction of the central Christ figure with arms extended follows Western conventions, the features of the face are African. The presence of four smaller figures with clasped hands—two seated on the top edges of the cross, one at the apex, and one at the base—is a departure from standard iconography (left). These figures are more abstract and remote, in contrast to the expressionistic treatment of Christ.

Western forms like the crucifix resonated profoundly with preexisting Kongo religious practices. In Kongo belief, the cross was already regarded as a powerful emblem of spirituality and a metaphor for the cosmos. An icon of a cross within a circle, referred to as the Four Moments of the Sun, represents the four parts of the day (dawn, noon, dusk, and night) that symbolize more broadly the cyclical journey of life.

Kongo kings, having adopted Christianity as the state religion, commissioned locally made crucifixes for use as emblems of leadership and power. These crucifixes were cast with copper alloys. The use of copper, a valued import from Europe, reinforced the association with wealth and power. Although Christianity was eventually rejected by the Kongo in the seventeenth century, such works continued to be made as symbols of indigenous cosmological concepts.

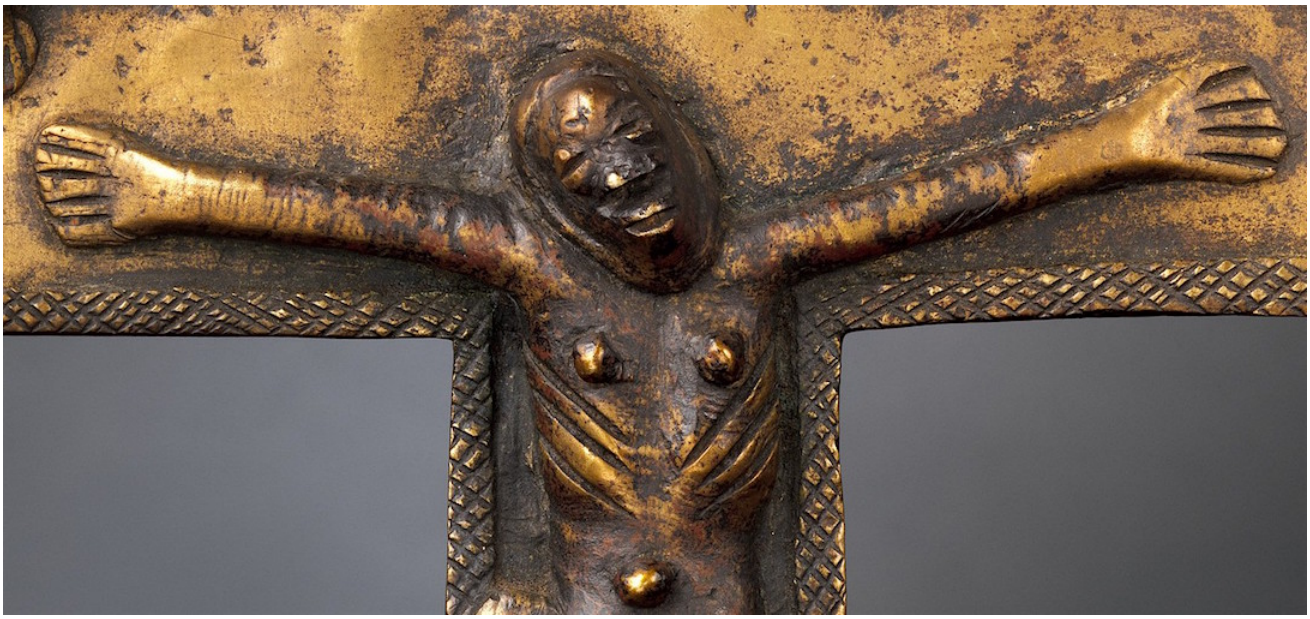

Figure **5.5.3.18.3**: Detail, Crucifix, 16th-17th century, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Angola; Republic of the Congo, solid cast brass, 27.3 cm high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

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Additional resources:

This sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Central Africa, c. 1600-1800 on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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5.5.3.24: Plaque- Equestrian Oba and Attendants

by GREG STUART

Page ID
387133

Royal history rendered in brass

Figure **5.5.3.24.1**: Plaque: *Equestrian Oba and Attendants*, Edo peoples (Benin Kingdom), 1550–1680, brass, 19 7/16 x 16 1/2 x 4 1/2″ / 49.5 x 41.9 x 11.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

This remarkable brass plaque, dated between 1550-1680, depicts an Oba (or king) and his attendants from the Benin Empire—a powerful kingdom located in present-day Nigeria. We know that the central figure is an Oba because of his distinctive coral beaded regalia. Also, attendants hold shields above his head, either to protect him from attack or possibly from the hot, tropical sun. This was a privilege only afforded to an Oba.

The figures around him range in size, not because of their actual height or distance from the Oba, but rather due to their level of importance within the court. This convention of sizing human figures based on status is known as “hierarchic scale” and is found in artwork from cultures around the world and across time. The Oba would have travelled with a large cohort of attendants, warriors, servants, diplomats, chieftains, and priests.

The plaque originally hung alongside many others on posts throughout the palace of the Oba. The order of their placement on these posts would have told the history of the royal lineage of Benin’s Obas, who traced their dynasty all the way back to Oranmiyan, whose son was the first Oba of Benin. However, the sequence of plaques is lost to us since they were long held in storage when found by westerners in the 19th century. You may notice that the Oba rides sidesaddle on horseback, which would seem to indicate a connection to Oba Esigie (who ruled c. 1504-1550), the first Oba to travel by horse. However, without knowing the original order of the plaques, we will never know for certain whether this was Esigie, or a later Oba who emulated his brash new mode of travel.

Artists working in brass were organized under Esigie. Today, artists working in brass in Benin are part of a brass workers guild, and it was likely that previous generations would have also worked collectively. These artists created plaques and other sculptures using what is known as the “lost wax casting technique,” in which, first, a more malleable wax version of the final brass work is made. It is then covered in clay and fired to harden the clay, removing the wax, which melts away in the process (hence the term, “lost wax”). Hot, molten liquid brass is then poured into the clay mold. As the brass cools, it hardens, and the clay is removed, revealing the finished plaque.

Figure 5.5.3.24.3: Plaque (detail): *Equestrian Oba and Attendants*, Edo peoples (Benin Kingdom), 1550–1680, brass, 19 7/16 x 16 1/2 x 4 1/2″ / 49.5 x 41.9 x 11.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Almost every detail in this work speaks to the Benin Kingdom's mutually beneficial trade with Portugal, which first made contact with Benin in the late 15th century. The Portuguese received items like peppers, cloth, and stone beads from Benin, while Benin received—among other items—the coral that makes up the beads worn by the Oba, and even the brass that makes up this plaque in the form of manillas, or armbands, worn by the Portuguese, which would have been melted down as the raw material for this plaque.

Figure 5.5.3.24.4: Manilla, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 17th century (?). Brass, 24 x 26 x 8 cm (Museum für Völkerkunde Wein, coll. A. Maschmann)

Figure 5.5.3.24.5: Rosette shape and figure (detail), plaque: *Equestrian Oba and Attendants*, Edo peoples (Benin Kingdom), 1550–1680, brass, 19 7/16 x 16 1/2 x 4 1/2″ / 49.5 x 41.9 x 11.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The rosette shapes that adorn the background of the plaque were possibly derived from Christian crosses brought by these European traders. Even the horse that the Oba rides was originally introduced to West Africa from across the sea. There is nothing quite like these plaques in all of Africa or Europe from this period, and some scholars speculate that they were created as a way of reconciling traditional African brass sculptural forms with the illustrated books and prints that may have been in the possession of European travelers.

Troubled Legacy

Trade began to decline with Portugal as the Portuguese empire waned in the 18th century. By the 19th century, Britain was seeking to make inroads with Benin as a new trading partner. However, this partnership was much less mutually beneficial and was marked with frequent tension. After increased aggression from both nations, the British launched the Punitive Expedition of 1897, seizing the Oba's palace, burning down the city around it, killing many, and looting the royal court's vast stores of art and treasure.

Figure 5.5.3.24.6: British soldiers sit surrounded by Benin works of art during the British Punitive Expedition of 1897 (documentary photograph by Sir Harry Holdsworth Rawson)

We know that this plaque was one of the artworks looted in the siege because Norman Burrows, a known trafficker in stolen Benin objects, owned it briefly during this time. This act of looting perpetrated by the British was later condemned as a criminal and violent act of British imperialism and colonialism. As such, there are many who believe that objects such as this plaque should be returned to the people of Benin, who remain deeply connected to their history and cultural traditions. However, there are others who feel that these remarkable objects are part of the world's heritage, and thus should remain in museum collections around the world as testament to this artistically rich culture.

Backstory

A consortium of European museums called the “Benin Dialogue Group,” formed in 2007, has been meeting with representatives from Nigeria to discuss issues around repatriation. Their hope is to establish a system of rotating loans of artworks to Benin City, though the security and guaranteed return of the objects is a point of ongoing discussion, set to continue at a conference in 2018. The consortium includes representatIves from the British Museum and Berlin’s Humboldtforum, two of the institutions that hold the largest collections of objects from Benin. Other members of the group include museums in Cambridge, Vienna, Stockholm, Leiden, Leipzig and Dresden, Oxford, and Hamburg, and London. Museums in the United States and France, which also hold significant numbers of Benin artworks, have yet to become formally involved, though some, such as the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris, have been approached directly with restitution claims from Nigeria.

The ongoing dialogue between museums and nations from which important objects, like those from Benin, were forcibly removed, highlights the complexities of the current, post-colonial world. Should formerly colonized areas be repaid for the damage inflicted on them by colonial powers? Who is responsible for doing so, and how? Who has the ethical right to the ownership, display, and preservation of these important pieces of cultural heritage? The formation of consortia like the Benin Dialogue Group is a significant first step towards resolving some of these thorny and pressing questions.

Backstory by Dr. Naraelle Hohensee

Additional resources:

Alice Apley, “African Lost-Wax Casting” on the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

The Art of Africa: A Resource for Educators (publication by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, available online)

“Origins and Empire: The Benin, Owo, and Ijebu Kingdoms” on the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Benin chronology on The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Benin from the Dallas Museum of Art

Kate Ezra, *Royal Arts of Benin: The Perls Collection* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).

Barbara Plankensteiner, (ed.). *Benin Kings and Rituals: Court Arts from Nigeria* (Ghent, Belgium: Snoeck Publishers, 2007).

“Looted Benin bronzes to be lent back to Nigeria,” *The Art Newspaper,* October 16, 2017

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5.5.3.25: Asante kente cloth

by DR. COURTNAY MICOTS

Figure **5.5.3.25.1**: Asante kente cloth, 20th century, silk and cotton (Vatican Museums)

Inspired by a spider's web

Among the Asante (or Ashanti) people of Ghana, West Africa, a popular legend relates how two young men—Ota Karaban and his friend Kwaku Ameyaw—learned the art of weaving by observing a spider weaving its web. One night, the two went out into the forest to check their traps, and they were amazed by a beautiful spider's web whose many unique designs sparkled in the moonlight. The spider, named Ananse, offered to show the men how to weave such designs in exchange for a few favors. After completing the favors and learning how to weave the designs with a single thread, the men returned home to Bonwire, and their discovery was soon reported to Asantehene Osei Tutu, first ruler of the Asante kingdom. The *asantehene* adopted their creation, named *kente*, as a royal cloth reserved for special occasions, and Bonwire became the leading kente weaving center for the asantehene and his court.

Figure **5.5.3.25.2**: Asantehene Osei Tutu II wearing kente cloth, 2005 (photo: **Retlaw Snellac**, CC BY 2.0)

A royal cloth

Originally, the use of kente was reserved for Asante royalty and limited to special social and sacred functions. Even as production has increased and kente has become more accessible to those outside the royal court, it continues to be associated with wealth, high

social status, and cultural sophistication. Kente is also found in Asante shrines to the deities, or *abosom*, as a mark of their spiritual power.

Figure **5.5.3.25.3**: Ewe kente cloth (detail), 1920-40, Ghana, cotton, 339 x 198 cm (The British Museum)

Historians maintain that kente cloth grew out of various weaving traditions that existed in West Africa prior to the formation of the Asante Kingdom. These techniques were appropriated through vast trade networks, as were materials such as French and Italian silk, which became increasingly desired in the 18th century and were combined with cotton and wool to make kente.

Kente cloth is also worn by the Ewe people, who were under the rule of the Asante kingdom in the late 18th century. It is believed that the Ewe, who had a previous tradition of horizontal loom weaving, adopted the style of kente cloth production from the Asante —with some important differences. Since the Ewe were not centralized, kente was not limited to use by royalty, though the cloth was still associated with prestige and special occasions. A greater variety in the patterns and functions exist in Ewe kente, and the symbolism of the patterns often has more to do with daily life than with social standing or wealth.

Weaving kente

Kente is woven on a horizontal strip loom, which produces a narrow band of cloth about four inches wide. Several of these strips are carefully arranged and hand-sewn together to create a cloth of the desired size. Most kente weavers are men.

Weaving involves the crossing of a row of parallel threads called the warp (threads running vertically) with another row called the weft (threads running horizontally). A horizontal loom, constructed with wood, consists of a set of two, four or six heddles (loops for holding thread), which are used for separating and guiding the warp threads. These are attached to treadles (foot pedals) with pulleys that have spools of thread inserted in them. The pulleys can be used to move the warp threads apart. As the weaver divides the warp threads, he uses a shuttle (a small wooden device carrying a bobbin, or small spool of thread) to insert the weft threads between them. These various parts of the loom, like the motifs in the cloth, all have symbolic significance and are accorded a great deal of respect.

Figure **5.5.3.25.4**: Kente weaver in Adanwomase village, Ashanti Region, Ghana (photo: **Shawn Zamechek**, CC BY 2.0)

By alternating colors in the warp and weft, a weaver can create complex patterns, which in kente cloth are valued for both their visual effect and their symbolism. Patterns can exist vertically (in the warp), or horizontally (in the weft), or both.

A cloth with a name

Patterns each have a name, as does each cloth in its entirety. Names are sometimes given by weavers who obtain them through dreams or during contemplative moments when they are said to be in communion with the spiritual world. Alternatively, chiefs and elders may ascribe names to cloths that they specially commission. Names can be inspired by historical events, proverbs, philosophical concepts, oral literature, moral values, human and animal behavior, individual achievements, or even individuals in pop culture. In the past, when purchasing a cloth, the aesthetic and social appeal of the cloth's was as important as—or sometimes even more important than—its visual pattern or color.

The King has Boarded the Ship, c. 1985, rayon (collection of Dr. Courtnay Micots)" aria-describedby="caption-attachment-20496" height="302" sizes="(max-width: 650px) 100vw, 650px"

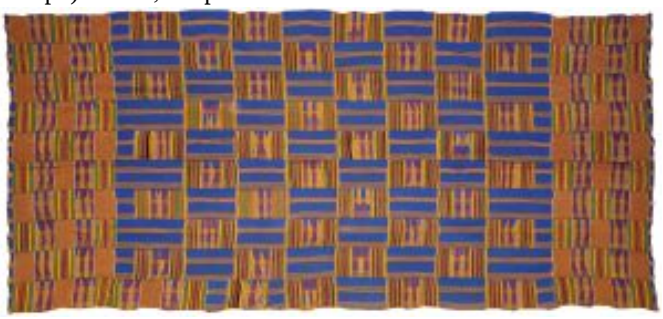

Figure **5.5.3.25.11**: The King has Boarded the Ship (Asante kente cloth), c. 1985, rayon (collection of Dr. Courtnay Micots)

This cloth is named *The King Has Boarded the Ship*, and it includes both warp and weft patterns. The warp pattern, consisting of two multicolor stripes on blue, relates to the proverb "*Fie buo yE buna*," meaning the head of the family has a difficult task. The weft patterns vary throughout the cloth; these examples are "*NkyEmfrE*," a broken pot, and "*Kwadum Asa*," an empty gunpowder keg.

Figure **5.5.3.25.12**: The King has Boarded the Ship (details), left: "Broken Pot" pattern; right: "Empty Powder Keg" pattern, c. 1985, rayon (collection of Dr. Courtnay Micots)

Wearing kente

There are differences in how the cloth is worn by men and women. On average, a men's size cloth measures 24 strips wide, making it about 8 feet wide and 12 feet long. Men usually wear one piece wrapped around the body, leaving the right shoulder and hand uncovered, in a toga-like style. Women may wear either one large piece or a combination of two or three pieces of varying sizes ranging from 5-12 strips, averaging of 6 feet long. Age, marital status, and social standing may determine the size and design of the cloth an individual would wear.

Figure 5.5.3.25.7: Men (left) and women (right) wearing kente at the Kente Cloth Festival in Kpetoe, September 2005 (photos: John Nash, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Social changes and modern living have brought about significant changes in how kente is used. It is no longer only the privilege of royalty; anyone who can afford it can buy kente. The old tradition of not cutting the cloth has also long been set aside, and it may be sewn into other forms such as dresses, shirts, or shoes. Printed versions of kente are mass produced and marketed, and both woven and printed versions are used by fashion designers in Ghana and abroad.

Figure 5.5.3.25.8: Kente print bag, 1990s (photo: Huzzah Vintage, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Kente is more than just a cloth. It is an iconic visual representation of the history, philosophy, ethics, oral literature, religious belief, social values, and political thought of West Africa. Kente is exported as one of the key symbols of African heritage and pride in African ancestry throughout the diaspora. In spite of the proliferation of both the hand-woven and machine-printed kente, the design is still regarded as a symbol of social prestige, nobility, and cultural sophistication.

Additional resources:

Videos of kente weaving: Kente Weavers of Asante, Bonwire Kente, Bonwire Kente weavers

"Wrapped in Pride" from the National Museum of African Art

"Asante Textile Arts" from The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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