

Section I

Art Fundamentals

INTRODUCTION TO ART HISTORY

Art history is an academic discipline dedicated to the reconstruction of the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which an artwork was created. The basic goal of this work is to arrive at an understanding of art and its meaning in its historical moment, taking into consideration the formal qualities of a work of art, the function of a work of art in its original context, the goals and intentions of the artist and the patron of the work of art, the social position and perspectives of the audience in the work's original time and place, and many other related questions. Art history is closely related to other disciplines such as anthropology, history, and sociology. In addition, art history sometimes overlaps with the fields of **aesthetics**, or the philosophical inquiry into the nature and expression of beauty; and **art criticism**, or the explanation of current art events to the general public via the press.

This brief introduction to the discipline of art history will help you understand the kinds of questions that one may ask in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of a work of art. We will put these ideas into practice as we proceed through case studies related to the specific topic of the resource guide.

Methods and Inquiries of Art History

Art historians today generally define “art” very broadly and include in their inquiries almost any kind of visual material that is created by people and invested with special meaning and/or valued for its aesthetic appeal. In the past, art historians often limited their focus to what was called “fine art,” which generally included paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture, and architecture, usually produced specifically for appreciation by an audience who also understood these objects as works of art. Today we define art much more broadly, also taking into

consideration objects that in the past were dismissed as “craft”: textiles, pottery, and body art such as tattoos, for example. Art historians also consider objects that might not be considered art by their intended audience, including mass-produced posters and advertisements and even the design of ordinary household items like telephones, forks, and the living room sofa.

Art historians acknowledge that the meaning of a work of art can shift over time, and that an artwork may be perceived differently by viewers who approach it from different perspectives. To give one hypothetical example, Michelangelo's paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel would have certainly been significant in different ways in the eyes of 1) the Pope, who commissioned the work and who had sophisticated theological knowledge and nearly exclusive access to this private space within the Vatican and 2) a worker who was charged with cleaning the floors of the chapel and whose level of literacy was probably quite low. Differences such as social status, education, physical access to a work of art, religious background, race, and gender have an impact on the construction of the meaning of a work of art. Similarly, the paintings' meaning to a twenty-first-century Protestant, Muslim, or atheist is certainly different from the meaning they had for a practicing Catholic in the sixteenth century, even though the works may be equally admired for their aesthetic value by all of these viewers. In other words, the meaning of a work of art is not fixed; it is sometimes open to multiple interpretations taking into consideration factors such as historical context.

The Nature of Art Historical Inquiry

Art historians generally analyze works of art in two ways that are distinct from one another, but also interrelated. These two modes of analysis are called **formal analysis** and **contextual analysis**. Formal analysis focuses on the visual qualities of the work of art itself. A basic assumption of formal analysis is that

the artist makes decisions related to the visual aspects of the artwork that can reveal to us something about its meaning. From this point of view, aspects of meaning are intrinsic to the work of art. Terms associated with the formal qualities of works of art, or the “elements of art,” are discussed in detail a bit later in this section of the guide. Formal analysis requires excellent skills in observation and description. Beginning our study of an artwork with formal analysis keeps the focus on the object itself, which to the art historian is always primary.

Contextual analysis involves looking outside of the work of art in order to determine its meaning. This involves examining not only the context in which the work was created, but also later contexts in which the work was and continues to be consumed. Contextual analysis focuses on the cultural, social, religious, and economic context in which the work was produced. Art historians may examine issues of patronage, viewer access to the work, the physical location of the work in its original context, the cost of the work of art, the subject matter in relation to other artworks of the time period, and so on.

Art history often emphasizes a chronological development with the assumption that within one cultural setting the work of one generation of artists will have an impact on following generations. Art historians often use comparative study. For example, by contrasting a Gothic with a Renaissance artwork, we can understand more clearly the unique features of each and the series of stylistic changes that led from one to the other. Then, we can seek to relate these changes to historical context. Art history provides information and insights that add background to the meaning and significance of the works of art we study. As we place these works of art in their cultural and historical context, they are connected to the long history of events that has led up to our present culture.

Sources, Documents, and the Work of Art Historians

Art historians often begin their analysis with a close examination of a work of art. Direct examination of the work of art is ideal because much is lost when we look at a reproduction rather than an original object. In the case of sculpture, it is often difficult to get a proper sense of the scale and the three-dimensional qualities of a piece from a photograph. We lose the texture and

some of the rich colors when we experience paintings in reproduction. Even photographs can appear flatter, lacking their subtle transitions from light to dark when seen reproduced in books. It is quite common, though, for art historians to settle for studying from reproductions due to practical constraints. In some cases, works of art might be damaged or even lost over time, and so art historians rely on earlier descriptions to aid in their formal and contextual analysis. In addition to examining the work of art in question, art historians will also seek to understand any associated studies (sketches, preparatory models, etc.) and other works by the artist and his or her contemporaries.

Art historians also use many written sources in the quest for contextual information about a work of art. Often these texts are stored in archives or libraries. Archival sources may include items such as letters between the artist and patron, or other documents pertaining to the commission, and art criticism produced at the time the work of art was made. An art historian might also search for written documentation about the materials used to produce the work of art, such as their cost and source, and about the function of the artwork—how a particular sculpture was used in ritual practice, for example. Art historians also seek to situate the work in the context of the literature, music, theater, and history of the time period.

Art historians may also rely on interviews with artists and consumers of works of art. This is especially the case in cultures that rely more on oral history than on written documents. Guided by the field of anthropology, some art historians also use methods such as participant observation to understand the context of a work of art. An art historian studying masquerade traditions in West Africa, for example, may participate in a performance while carefully documenting the event in order to better understand art traditions.

The Development of Art History

As an academic discipline, art history arose in the mid-eighteenth century. However, we can look at the work of much earlier writers to see how commentary on art has developed over time. The ancient Roman historian **Pliny the Elder** (23–79 CE) sought to analyze historical and contemporary art in his text *Natural History*. During the Renaissance, the author and artist **Giorgio Vasari** (1511–74) gathered the biographies of great Italian artists, past and present, in *The Lives*



Giorgio Vasari, self-portrait c. 1567.

of the Artists. Vasari's text provides us with insights into the changing roles of artists in society during this period and the developing concept of artistic genius.

Modern art history was strongly influenced by eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy. **Johann Joachim Winckelmann** (1717–68) was a German scholar who shifted away from Vasari's biographical emphasis to a rigorous study of stylistic development as related to historical context. Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, art historians continued to develop approaches that placed increasing emphasis on an understanding of the interrelationship between the formal qualities of a work of art and its context.

When considering contemporary views of art history as well as perspectives on art history from the past, it is important to keep in mind that all histories are individual stories and thus will inevitably reflect certain biases. More recently, art history has been revised, particularly by feminist historians, who have noted that the traditional version of art history has largely focused on white men, whether as artists or as patrons. As a result of such revisions, art history has

expanded its scope in recent years and has become a field that is broader, more international, more multicultural, and more inclusive than in the past, often involving Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic methods and viewpoints. Moreover, the concern with great artistic geniuses and masterpieces has lessened as the full range of "visual culture," ranging from advertisement posters to film to photography and television imagery, has come to view.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ART OF THE WESTERN WORLD

This brief overview of Western art is intended to provide you with a basic understanding of important art historical periods as they developed chronologically. This abbreviated discussion also covers some key artistic innovations that occurred over time, providing you with examples of artists and works in their historical contexts. This basic information will set the stage for our more in-depth discussion of our case study focusing on the interconnections between water and art. Of course, a brief guide such as this only begins to touch upon the richness and power of the stories that comprise the history of art. You may also enjoy looking at other works from each of the periods discussed, beginning your own exploration of these works in their historical contexts.

Much of what we know of the earliest life on earth has been revealed through a study of the objects or artifacts that remain from early cultures. In many cases, the objects that remain are those made of enduring materials such as stone, metal, or fired clay, as opposed to those made of perishable materials like wood or fibers. Environmental conditions also have a major impact on preservation. The hot dry climate of the desert in Egypt, for example, enabled the preservation of even delicate materials like papyrus, and the sealed atmosphere of Egyptian caves and tombs likewise helped to preserve the objects contained within them for our wonder and enjoyment centuries later. In contrast, the humid climate of West Africa means that objects made of perishable materials have had little chance of survival over the course of decades, not to mention centuries.

This is one reason that the history of art as a discipline has placed greater emphasis on Western cultures, often neglecting to focus on developments in Nonwestern cultures. It is important to recognize that the

civilizations that are most often studied in art history courses are not necessarily those where the most or the best art was made. Rather, they are the civilizations whose art has been preserved and whose art has been discovered. There are, for example, many sites of important civilizations in Central and South America that though known, remain yet unexplored. Too often the story at these sites has been one of exploitation and destruction, as people carelessly take artifacts to sell them on the international market in antiquities.

Ancient Civilizations

Art of the Old Stone Age

The oldest works of art that we will consider are the cave paintings found in Chauvet Cave in southeastern France. These paintings, discovered in 1994, date from c. 30,000 BCE and thus are placed in the Old Stone Age (Upper Paleolithic Period). It should be noted that art historians use the best available information to date works of art from the distant past. Estimated dates are frequently contested and sometimes revised as new information becomes available. Except for a minimal use of yellow, the paintings and engravings in Chauvet Cave were created using red ochre and black charcoal and depict animals such as horses, rhinoceros, lions, buffalos, and mammoths. Additional cave paintings have been discovered in other parts of France and in Spain, with those in Lascaux and Altamira being the most famous. The art in these caves takes the form of large colored drawings of animals such as horses, bears, lions, bison, and mammoths, and the paintings include several outlines of human hands. The earliest scholarship on these drawings considered them to be the spontaneous scribbling of primitive cavemen. However, with further study, it became apparent that the various groups of drawings had been created by skilled artists working within an established tradition. The artists used pigments of red and yellow ochre to add color to the elegant black outlines they had created using charcoal. Though we cannot be sure of their original function, it is possible that these works were created as a part of hunting ceremonies or other ritual behaviors.

Another well-known group of artworks from the Old Stone Age are small stone female figures that have exaggerated bellies, breasts, and pubic areas. The best known of these figures is the *Venus (or Woman) of Willendorf* (c. 28,000–25,000 BCE), which is about four and one-eighth inches high. In contrast



Painting found in Chauvet Cave.

to the exaggerated female features of the body, the facial features of the statue are undefined, the arms are barely visible, and the feet are missing. Scholars contend that these statues were fertility figures although it is not known precisely how they were used.

Art of the Middle Stone Age

During the Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic Period) the climate warmed, and a culture developed that produced art similar in some ways to the cave paintings of the Paleolithic Period. With the warming of temperatures during this era, cave dwellers moved out of their caves and began using rock shelters, as evidenced by the various paintings that have been discovered at such locations in eastern Spain. There has been much scholarly debate regarding the dating of these paintings, but it is generally estimated that they were created from around 7000 BCE until 4000 BCE. The rock shelter paintings, like the cave paintings that preceded them, demonstrate the skill of their creators in the depiction of animal figures. What sets the rock shelter paintings apart from the cave paintings is their depiction of the human figure. Except for one human figure found in the paintings at Lascaux, cave paintings did not include any human beings. The rock shelter paintings, however, portray human beings, both alone and in groups, and there seems to be an emphasis on scenes in which human beings dominate animals.



Photograph of Stonehenge.

Photo by Frédéric Vincent

Art of the New Stone Age

The art forms most often linked with the New Stone Age (Neolithic Period) are rings or rows of rough-hewn stones located in Western Europe. These formations have been dated as early as 4000 BCE. The stones used were often exceedingly large—as much as seventeen feet in height and fifty tons in weight. Indeed, the sheer size of these works led historians to call the stones megaliths, meaning “great stones,” and the culture that created these works is often termed “megalithic.” The most well known of these rock arrangements is the one found at Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, England. Stonehenge is believed to have been built in many phases around 2100 BCE. **Stonehenge** features concentric rings made with sarsen (a form of sandstone) stones and smaller “bluestones”—rocks indigenous to the region. The outermost ring is comprised of huge sarsen stones in post and lintel construction—two upright pieces topped with a crosspiece, or lintel. The next ring is composed of bluestones, which encircle a horseshoe-shaped row of five lintel-topped sarsen stones—these are the largest ones used at Stonehenge, with some weighing as much as fifty tons. Outside the formation, to the northeast, is the vertically placed “heel-stone.” If one stands in the center of the rings and looks outward, this “heel-stone” marks the point at which the sun rises on the midsummer solstice.

The works of art and the ideas we have considered thus

far have been isolated examples that have survived a very long time. The works and civilizations that we will consider next point to further conditions that allow for the creation of artworks and enable their survival. Usually, art thrives in highly organized cultures with stable population centers—usually great cities—that house ruling classes who in turn support the work of artists.

Also, if a civilization has a tradition of protecting its art in locations that are largely inaccessible, it is more likely that the works from that culture will survive to a point where they are included in a study of art history. Many extant artifacts have come from burial chambers, caves, and tombs, where they have been protected by being naturally concealed.

Ancient Mesopotamian Art

The civilizations that arose in Mesopotamia in the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers developed writing and arts in parallel with Egypt (discussed later). Unfortunately, the Mesopotamian civilizations formed in a valley that lacked the natural barriers of deserts and mountains that protected Egypt. This left them vulnerable to invasion, and hence, the history of this ancient region is one of successive conquest and destruction. Moreover, the use of more perishable materials by Mesopotamian civilizations has left us with fewer examples of their arts.



The 4100-year-old Great Ziggurat of Ur, near Nasiriyah, Iraq.

From around 4000 BCE, the Sumerians in Mesopotamia created impressive sculptures and buildings. Religion was a central aspect of Sumerian life, and the Sumerians built massive temples at the centers of their cities. Less complex platform structures evolved over time into the stepped pyramids called **ziggurats**. Around 2334 BCE, the cities of Sumer came under the rule of Sargon of Akkad. Although the Akkadians spoke a different language from the Sumerians, they assimilated Sumerian culture. With the Akkadian dynasty, loyalty to the city-state was supplanted by loyalty to the king, and consequently the art of this period tends to reflect an emphasis on the monarchy, with Akkadian rulers depicted in freestanding and relief sculptures. Around 2150 BCE, Akkadian rule came to an end as the Guti, barbarous mountaineers, invaded and took control. About fifty years later, however, the cities of Sumer were able to reassert control, and a Neo-Sumerian ruler was established as the King of Ur. Perhaps the greatest known works of this era were the ziggurats that were built at the city centers. The ziggurats functioned primarily as temples but also served as administrative and economic centers.

The next important civilization in Mesopotamia was that of the Babylonians. For centuries Mesopotamia had witnessed the coexistence of several independent citystates, but around 1792 BCE, Hammurabi, king of the city-state of Babylonia, was able to centralize

power. Hammurabi left an enduring legacy in that he codified Babylonian law—the Code of Hammurabi is the oldest legal code known in its entirety. The best-known artwork from this period, preserved in the Louvre Museum, is related to this code of law; it is a [stone stele](#) onto which Hammurabi’s code is carved with a sculpture in high relief at the top that depicts Hammurabi receiving inspiration for his code of law from the sun-god, Shamash.

While the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian cultures grew in southern Mesopotamia, the Assyrians dominated in the north. From about 900 BCE to around 600 BCE, the Assyrians were the most powerful civilization in the Near East. Among the most notable of Assyrian artworks are relief carvings, which often depict battles, sieges, hunts, and other important events. Throughout the seventh century BCE, the Assyrian hold on power weakened, and from c. 612–538 BCE, Babylonia once again became the dominant force in the region. It was during this Neo-Babylonian period that the famous hanging gardens of Babylon were constructed. Another important construction at this time was the gateway to the great ziggurat of the temple of Bel, called the Ishtar Gate, which is considered one of the greatest works of architecture in which figures—in this case animal figures—are superimposed on a walled surface.

Persian Art

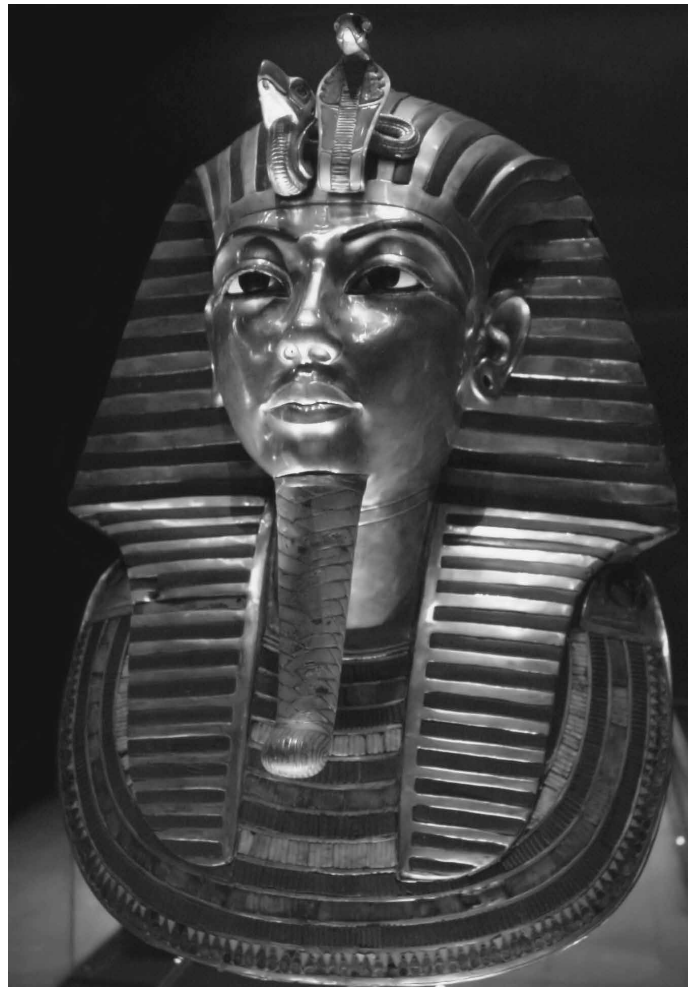
The Persian Empire (c. 538 BCE–330 BCE) flourished in what is present-day Iran. The Persians were notable for their impressive architectural achievements, the most important of which was the palace at Persepolis, which was constructed of stone, brick, and wood and reflects the influence of Egyptian architecture.

Ancient Egyptian Art

Ancient Egyptian civilization is generally dated from c. 3000 BCE, following the predynastic period, through 332 BCE, when Egypt was conquered by Alexander the Great. Recognizable works include the great monuments of ancient Egypt: the Sphinx, the great pyramids at Giza, the larger-than-life-sized statues of the pharaohs, and the portrait head of Queen Nefertiti.

Much Egyptian art emphasizes a style called **hierarchical scale**, which uses the status of figures or objects to determine their relative sizes within an artwork. Hierarchical scale is exemplified in the [Palette of King Narmer](#), a relic from the Old Kingdom. This slab of stone, which may have been used as a ceremonial palette for mixing cosmetics, presents King Narmer centrally, and he is depicted as being considerably larger than the other figures. In the main image on the palette, Narmer is seen holding the hair of a fallen enemy, with his arm raised in preparation for delivering a deathblow. In the lowest section of the palette, below the king and his enemy, are two smaller figures of defeated enemies. The organization of the figures, their relative sizes, and their poses recurred in most of the ancient Egyptian art that followed. Figures are presented so that each part of the body is shown as clearly as possible, in a technique known as “**fractional representation**.” The head is in profile with the eye in frontal view, the torso is in full frontal view, and the lower body, legs, and feet are in profile. This formula became a standard style that endured for centuries as the typical way of representing people in Egyptian art.

We know a great deal about the art of Egypt because excellent conditions for preservation were present in much of Egypt. In addition, the burial customs of the Egyptians, which decreed mummification and entombment with lavish furnishings, symbolic servants, and jewelry, resulted in rich stores of objects and images. The most famous of the Egyptian tombs is that of the boy king, Tutankhamun. By the twentieth century, most of the ancient Egyptian tombs of the



Burial mask of King Tutankhamun.

Pharaohs had been broken into and robbed of the materials inside. However, Tutankhamun’s tomb, because it was cleverly hidden, remained almost completely intact until 1922. When it was opened, the excavators found a treasure-trove of objects, all superbly made of rich materials. Among the most famous of the objects is Tutankhamun’s burial mask. This mask, found in the innermost layer of the king’s sarcophagus, rested on the mummy’s face and shoulders. It is made of gold and is decorated with blue glass and semiprecious stones. The mask presents an idealized portrait of the young king.

Nubian Art

The kingdom of Nubia lay to the south of Egypt and covered a large area of Africa. As contemporary historians become increasingly interested in revising and expanding art history, more knowledge about this great African civilization is being uncovered. Indeed, it is now known that there was a period in the history of Egypt when Nubia ruled the area, and the

Pharaohs of that era were Nubian. While there are few collections that feature Nubian works, this may well soon change as revisions to the story of art continue.

Greek and Roman Art

Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean Art

The Aegean island cultures were very important as precursors of the Greeks in terms of art production. Three major cultures flourished on the islands in the Aegean Sea, on Crete, and along the Aegean coast. The earliest of these cultures, the Cycladic culture, flourished from about 3200 to 2000 BCE in the Cyclades, a group of islands in the Aegean. Archaeologists still have many unanswered questions about Cycladic culture, but the simplified, geometric nude female figures from this area are highly appealing to modern sensibilities. In addition to these sculptures, the Cycladic culture produced decorated pieces of pottery as well as marble bowls and jars. Eventually, the Cycladic culture was supplanted by the Minoan culture, which developed on the island of Crete and reached its pinnacle in the second millennium BCE.

The Minoan culture centered around the city of Knossos on Crete, where the legend of the Minotaur—the creature believed to be half man and half bull who devoured those who entered his maze—is supposed to have taken place. The maze was actually the royal palace, a sprawling complex that has since been excavated. The art of these island people depicts sea life and includes statues of a female snake goddess. The Minoans created artworks that were characterized by a naturalistic pictorial style. Their paintings took two major forms: frescoes painted on palace walls and pottery designs. The architectural achievements of the Minoans were also impressive, as they built four major palaces, all completely unfortified and designed in a light, flexible, and organic style.

The collapse of the Minoan civilization coincided with the pinnacle of Mycenaean culture, and as a result, many historians believe the Minoans were destroyed by the Mycenaeans. The Mycenaean culture was centered around the city of Mycenae on the Greek mainland. The Mycenaeans built elaborate tombs, and their burial practices allowed for a large number of objects to be preserved. The objects that are best known are made of gold and show astonishing levels of mastery in goldsmithing. Additionally, the Mycenaeans demonstrated much skill in their use of relief sculpture.

Ancient Greek Art

From around 660 to 475 BCE, during the Archaic Period, the Greeks, influenced by the stone sculptures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, created sculptures carved in marble and limestone. These freestanding figures borrowed the frontal pose used in Egyptian art, but were more dynamic and placed greater emphasis on depicting realistic human features. Temples were also built during this time period using columns in the early **Doric** and **Ionic** decorative styles. Vase painting was another notable art form and was done in many different styles. Some vases portrayed black silhouetted figures, while those in the **Corinthian** style set figures against a floral, ornamented background. Athenian-style vases used black figures, but were more linear and larger in scale. Red-figure vases, with red figures standing out against a black background, were also common.

The best-known ancient Greek art is that from the city-state of Athens from the Classical Period. During the Early Classical Period, temples were typically built with sturdy, Doric columns. Unfortunately, much of the sculpture from this period has not survived, but luckily Roman copies have provided us with a good deal of information on these ancient works. The sculpture of the Early Classical Period was characterized by its solemnity, strength, and simplicity of form and most often focused on a figure or scene either in the moment before or the moment after an important action. Significant advances were made in sculptural techniques, as the stiff frontal postures of the Archaic Period were largely abandoned in favor of more complex and life-like figures and positions.

Greek statuary evolved from a stiff, frontal presentation like that of the Egyptians to an increasingly natural-looking figure. A pose called “**contrapposto**,” or counter positioning, was invented to show the body to its best advantage. In contrapposto, the standing figure is posed with its weight shifted onto one leg, for a more relaxed, naturalistic appearance. Greek sculpture set the model for thousands of years in Western art, and the Renaissance, Baroque, and Neoclassical artists of the fifteenth through early nineteenth centuries aspired to equal the perfection displayed by the surviving Greek statues.

The Middle Classical Period witnessed important advances in architecture as is evident in the temples of this time period. The temple called the [Parthenon](#),

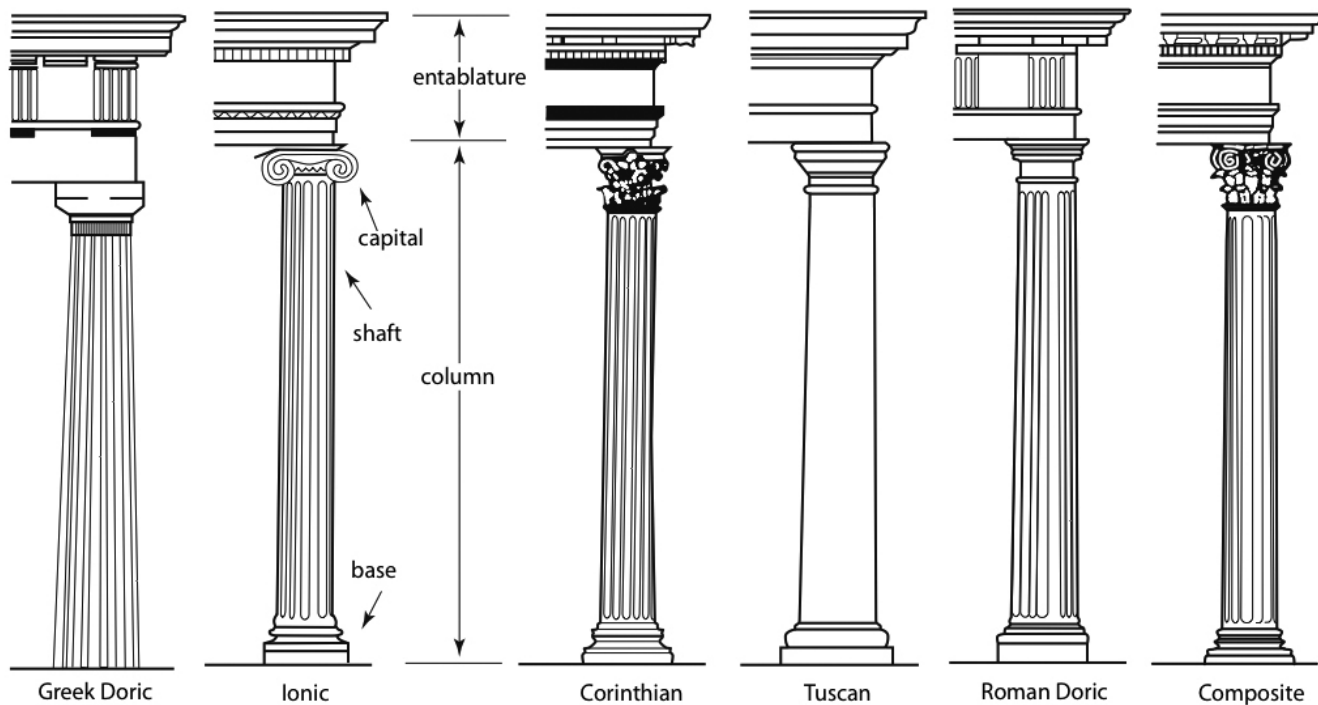


Diagram of Greek and Roman Orders. Classical Greek and Roman columns consist of a base, shaft, capital, and an entablature. Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders are differentiated by their degree of ornamentation.

restored in 447 BCE after being destroyed by the Persians in 480 BCE, is one of the most admired works of all ages, and the use of columns as exemplified in the Parthenon has been a principal feature of Western architecture for more than two thousand years.

Architecture declined during the Late Classical Period as Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War. Temples in this era were still built using simple Doric columns, but the use of highly decorative Corinthian columns became more and more popular. The Hellenistic Period saw an increasing influence from Eastern civilizations as Greek styles blended with those of Asia Minor. Notable works of this time period include freestanding sculptures such as the [Venus de Milo](#) and the [Laocoön Group](#), which are masterworks designed to present ideals of beauty.

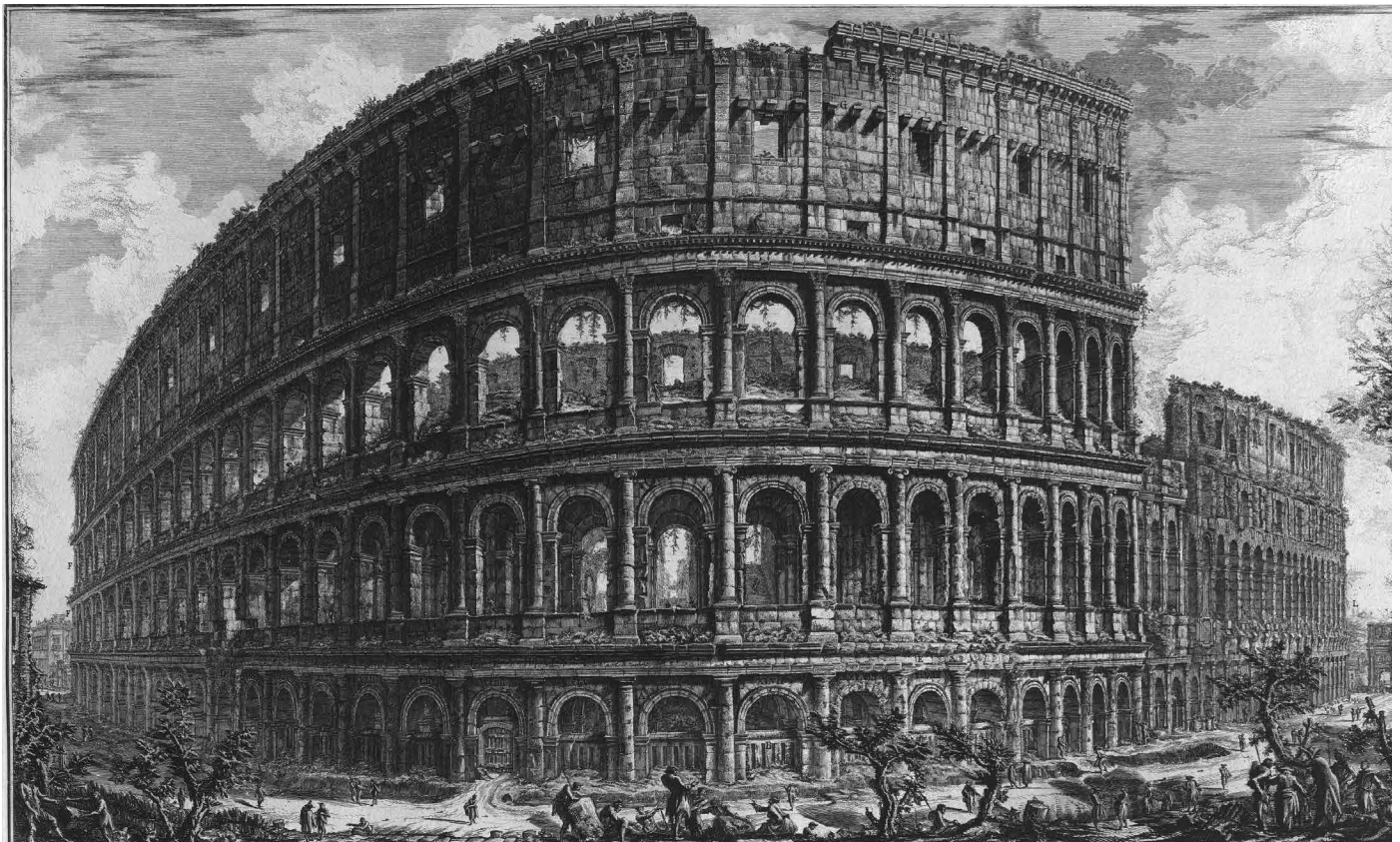
Etruscan Art

The art of the Etruscan civilization is seen as a transition from the ideals of Greece to the pragmatic concerns of the Romans. Etruscan civilization arose in what is now Italy in the first millennium BCE. Like other cultures we have examined, this one is known largely from the arts of tomb decoration. Nothing remains of Etruscan buildings as these were

constructed of brick and wood. However, ceramic models depict temples with tiled, gabled roofs supported by columns in the fashion of the Greeks. Extant Etruscan artifacts also include sarcophagus lids and other art forms made of baked clay, as well as objects that display the Etruscans' talent in bronze work. The only paintings that remain from the Etruscan culture are those found on the walls and ceilings of tombs. These were done in bright, flat colors, and they show figures playing music and dancing as part of funeral celebrations.

Roman Art

The story of Rome is one of conquest and empire building. Early Roman art reflected the influence of Etruscan art. However, by the second century BCE many Roman sculptures and other Roman artworks were variations of Greek works, and the standards for idealized presentations of Roman rulers were based on those of the Greeks. The Romans, however, made pioneering advancements in architecture and engineering. The Roman discovery of the equivalent of modern **concrete** was a major contribution to architecture, as it enabled Roman builders to fill the spaces between their stone walls with rocks and rubble bound together by the concrete mixture. With this



The Colosseum as depicted in a 1757 engraving by Giovanni Battista Piranesi.

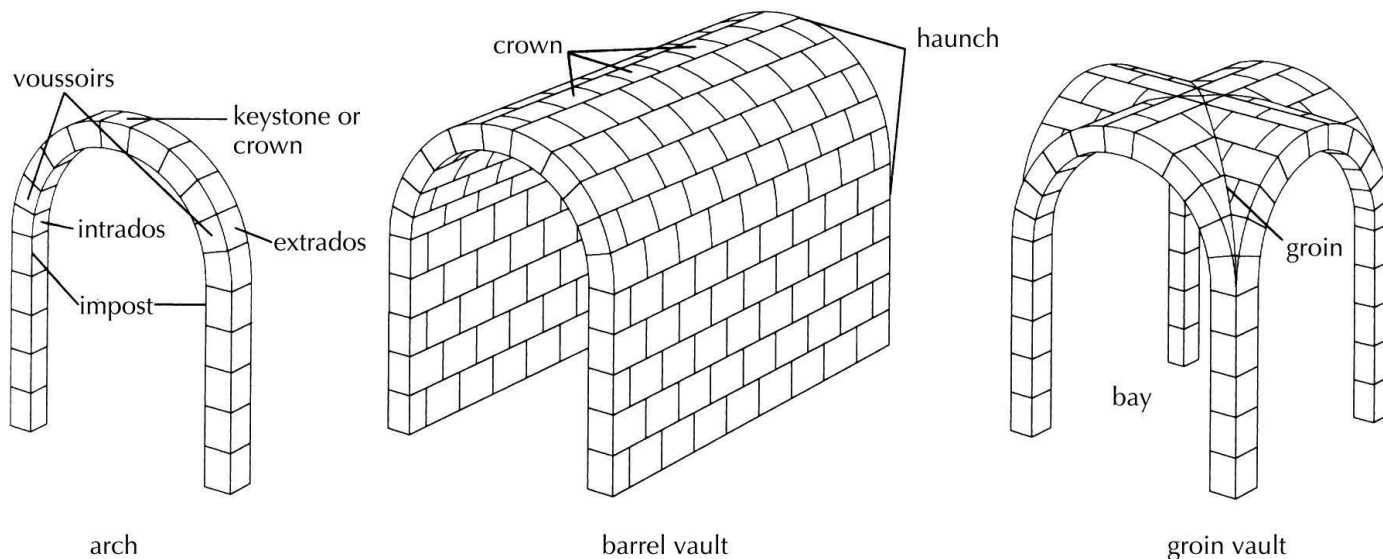
strong material, the Romans were able to construct huge domed buildings. They also pioneered the use of the curved **arch**, using this form to build bridges and aqueducts. These structures were part of a paved road system, making communication and control very effective in the Empire. Two buildings that can still be seen in Rome, the [Colosseum](#) (72–80 CE) and the [Pantheon](#) (c. 126 CE), remain as monuments to the engineering genius of the Romans.

The Romans created numerous sculptures. Often, colossal triumphal arches would be topped with relief sculptures portraying Roman emperors or Roman military victories. The Romans also created relief sculptures for funerary purposes. Tombs and sarcophagi were decorated with reliefs. Some of these reliefs were simply decorative, but many others had narrative subject matter. The Romans also sculpted portraits, which ranged in size from tiny busts to huge statues. During the Roman Republic it became common for members of a funeral procession to carry small carved images of the deceased family member. Later, statues in memory of great statesmen or other noble figures were erected in public areas. Both the funerary sculptures and the public statues did not

present naturalistic depictions of their subjects. Rather, the Romans favored an idealistic style that highlighted Roman ideals. The art of the Romans not only had a tremendous influence on the art of the Middle Ages, but also had a notable impact on the art of the Renaissance and much of the art that followed.

Byzantine and Medieval Art

With the fall of the Roman Empire, the connections between its parts disintegrated, and what was once a vast empire evolved into separate and often warring kingdoms. But even as the Empire collapsed in Western Europe, it continued in Byzantium. The art that is best known from this Eastern culture is **mosaic** work in which small ceramic tiles, pieces of stone, or glass were set into a ground material to create large murals. It is an art that is largely Christian in content and can best be studied in the glimmering, shining mosaic walls of the great churches of Ravenna. Although Ravenna is in present-day Italy, it was then under Byzantine control. In terms of Byzantine architecture, the [Hagia Sophia](#) (532–537 CE), built in Constantinople, is still considered one of the greatest architectural achievements in history.



Components of an arch, a barrel vault, and a groin vault. The Romans pioneered the use of the curved arch.

The medieval period witnessed a great deal of civil strife, and consequently the art of this era was preserved largely by the Church. During these times, the majority of the population was illiterate; formal education was largely limited to the noble class and the clergy. The international language was Latin, and books were hand copied on vellum or parchment. The preservation and production of books was largely confined to monasteries, where the monks spent time copying and illustrating the books in their collections, which were so valuable that they were chained to the tables where they were read. These illuminated manuscripts were remarkable works of art and helped facilitate the exchange of artistic ideas between northern and southern Europe. Among the many notable examples are the [Book of Kells](#) (late eighth or early ninth century) and the [Coronation Gospels](#) (c. 800–810).

Notable from the early medieval period (c. 375–1025) is the art of nomadic Germanic peoples, particularly their metalwork. The metal arts of this time period were abstract, decorative, and geometric and often took the form of small-scale, portable jewelry or ornaments made of bronze, silver, or gold and covered with patterns of jewels. Artifacts from this era also exist from the seafaring culture of the Vikings in Scandinavia. While metalwork was popular with the Germanic peoples, wood was the most important medium to the Vikings, who carved artistic designs and sculptures on their wooden ships. As a result of Viking invasions, the artistic styles of the Vikings eventually merged with those found in Anglo-Saxon

England and Celtic Ireland. The resultant style is often termed Hiberno-Saxon.

In later medieval art, the architecture of churches became a dominant art form. Every city, town, and village had a church at its center, and the largest of these are masterpieces of art that often took more than a century to complete. The earliest churches of this period used a Roman arch as the basis of their design, and so the style used is called Romanesque. One famous example is [Saint-Sernin](#) in Toulouse, France (c. 1070–1120). Romanesque churches were stone vaulted buildings that often replaced earlier churches that had highly flammable wooden roofs. Romanesque churches are usually formed of a tunnel of arches called a **barrel vault**. A **vault** is an arch-shaped structure that is used as a ceiling or as a support to a roof. Massive walls had to be built to support the heavy stone arches of the Romanesque style. Consequently, window and door openings were usually kept quite small and were often decorated with carvings and relief sculpture.

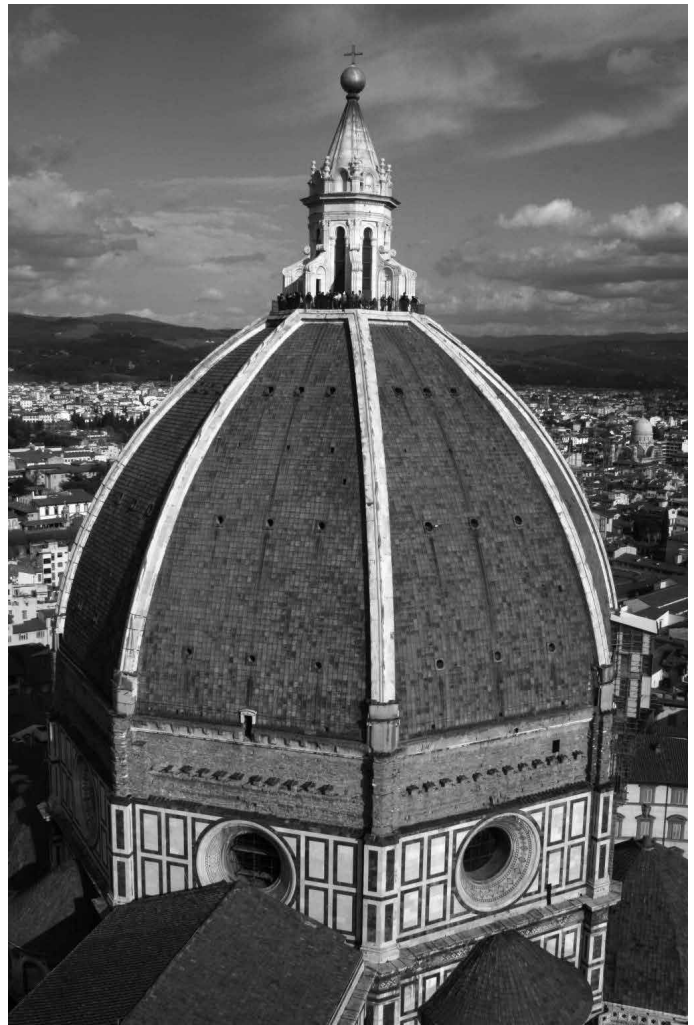
The Gothic style developed in the first half of the twelfth century and remained popular into the sixteenth century. Though this style was used for some secular buildings, it was largely applied to the construction of churches. One characteristic of the Gothic style was the use of pointed arches, which gave an upward, soaring sense to Gothic interiors. Another important element of the Gothic style was the addition of **ribbed vaults**, a framework of thin stone ribs or arches built under the intersection of the

vaulted sections of the ceiling. A key innovation came in the early Gothic period when architects learned that the downward and outward pressure created by the arches of the barrel vault could be counteracted by the use of **flying buttresses**—additional bracing material and arches placed on the exterior of the building. This advance allowed for larger windows, many of which were filled with beautiful stained glass, and higher ceilings. A classic example of a Gothic cathedral is [Chartres Cathedral](#) in France (begun c. 1145; rebuilt after 1194). Here the effect of the tall arches and the brightly colored light from the stained-glass windows directs attention heavenward.

The Renaissance in Southern Europe

Although we often tend to divide historical periods into a series of discrete and separate styles and events, in actuality, history is much more complicated and subtle. The transition from the later medieval period to the Renaissance provides a good example of this, as the styles from this period cannot be neatly identified as either Gothic or Renaissance, but rather involve a mix of the two. The artist most often mentioned in connection with this transitional time period is a Florentine named Giotto di Bondone (1267–1336/37), who is best known for his frescoes. A key advance visible in Giotto’s works is his use of a simple perspective, achieved in large part by overlapping and modeling his figures in the round. This technique created the illusion of a stage for his figures, giving the viewer a sense of looking into the event. Giotto’s works were different from many Gothic works as he gave his figures powerful gestures and emotional expressions. To our eyes, his paintings may not look entirely naturalistic, but his artistic innovations must have had quite an impact on viewers at the time, who were accustomed to the flat, unexpressive, and stylized figures of the Gothic style.

Like the art of ancient Greece, the art of the Renaissance continues to have an impact on art today. It is interesting to note that a change in the economy played a key part in triggering the Renaissance. It was in this time period that paper money was first developed, and its use led, in part, to the vast fortunes accumulated by notables such as the Medici family. These wealthy families were the major patrons of the arts during the Renaissance era. Another important factor was the fact that examples of Greek and Roman art were readily available in Italy, and these classical works of art had a tremendous impact on



View of the dome of Florence Cathedral.

the art of the Renaissance.

As we discuss the art of this period and later, you will observe that the lives and works of individual artists are often highlighted, while this has not been the case in our discussion of earlier periods. In part, this can be attributed to a new emphasis on the individual and the concept of individual genius that emerged during the Renaissance. Until the time of the Renaissance, painters and sculptors were, in accordance with Greek traditions of art, considered artisans. That is, they were people who were viewed as being of lesser status because they worked with their hands. During the Renaissance, the role of artists in society changed, as great artists came to be recognized as intellectual figures. Consequently, artists were accorded a special place in society.

An important event in the beginning of the Renaissance was a competition held in the city of Florence in 1401 for the design of the doors for the city’s new baptistery.



Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa.

The winner of that competition was Lorenzo Ghiberti (1381?–1455), who designed a door panel that had figures harkening back to those of classical Greece. Ghiberti's panel design depicts the sacrifice of Isaac, in which Isaac appears as a classical Greek figure. Soon after the doors were installed, Ghiberti was asked to make a second set for another entrance to the cathedral. This second set took more than twenty-five years to complete. The doors were so magnificent that Michelangelo called them the "[Gates of Paradise](#)," and they have been referred to by that name ever since.

The second-place winner in the competition was Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446). After losing the competition, he concentrated on architecture and won a competition to complete the dome of the cathedral in Florence, which had remained unfinished for many years because architects had not been able to construct the huge vault that was required to span the open space. Brunelleschi achieved this major engineering

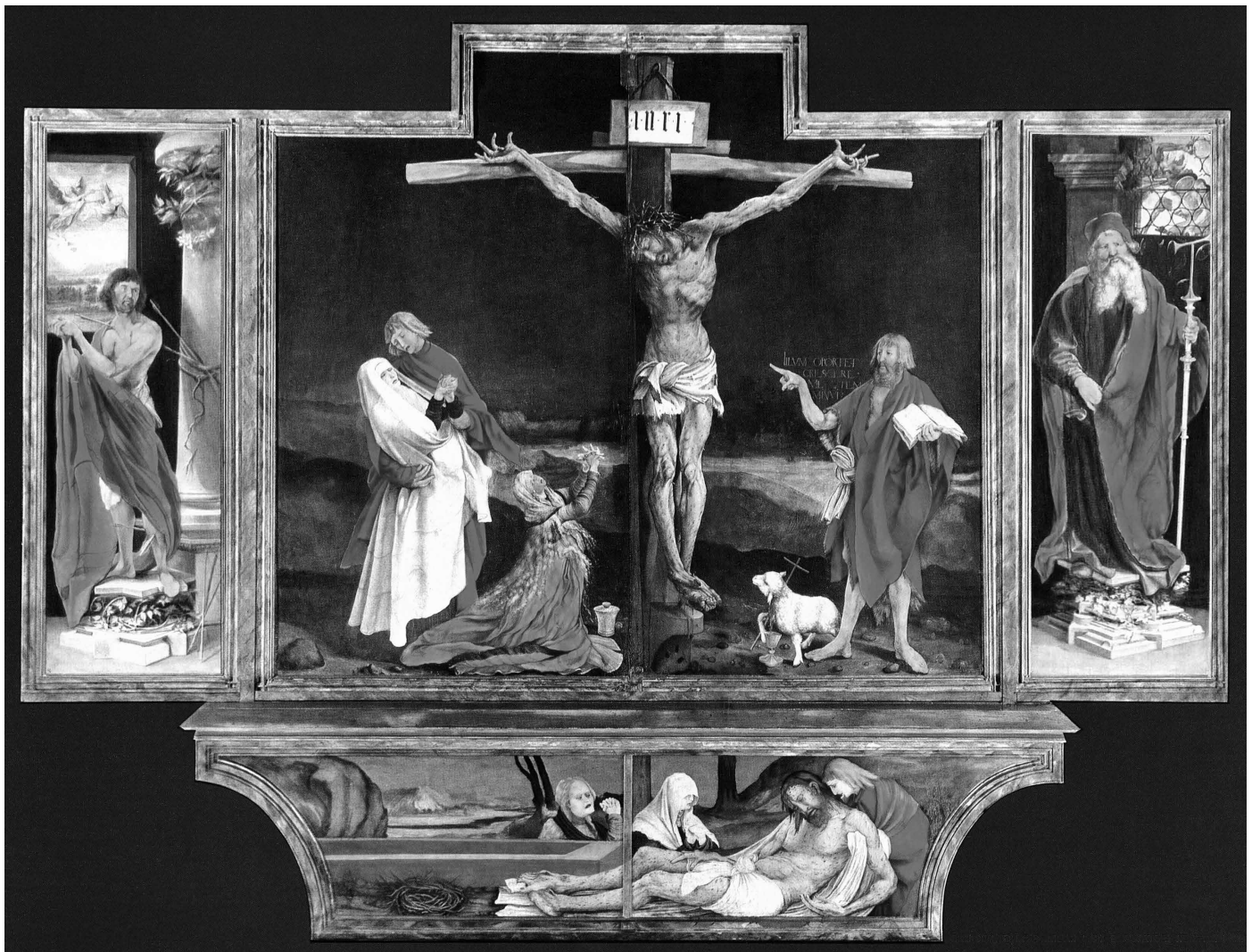
feat with the help of a double-shelled dome design that has been imitated by many later architects. Brunelleschi is also credited with developing **linear (single vanishing point) perspective**. Masaccio (1401–28), a Renaissance painter, is given credit for putting Brunelleschi's theory into practice, as he used both linear and **aerial perspective** in his frescoes. The development of linear perspective had a tremendous and lasting influence on the world of art.

Among the most remarkable of Renaissance artists was Donatello (1389?–1466), who is widely considered the founder of modern sculpture. The influence of classical antiquity on his sculpture was strong, as evidenced by his best-known work, a bronze statue of [David](#) (c. 1420s–60s). This work was the first known freestanding nude statue to have been cast since antiquity. Toward the end of his life, Donatello's sculptures reflected a greater emphasis on naturalism and the expression of character and dramatic action.

A generation later, the work of Botticelli (1444?–1510), particularly his best-known painting, [The Birth of Venus](#) (c. 1482), established an image of female beauty that has lasted through the centuries. His long-necked Venus with her languid pose and flowing hair was one of the first paintings of a full-length nude female since antiquity.

The generation of artists that followed are often referred to as High Renaissance artists. Two well-known artists of this time period, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Michelangelo (1475–1564), are the models for the term "Renaissance Man." Leonardo da Vinci is well known as an inventor, but also is recognized as an architect, engineer, painter, sculptor, scientist, and musician. His design for the locks that control movements along canals from one level to another is still used today, and his drawings of submarines and helicopters have been found to be viable models. Two of his paintings, [The Last Supper](#) (c. 1495–98) and the [Mona Lisa](#) (c.1503–05), have become so well known that they are now icons of popular culture. Leonardo's key innovation in painting, which is readily apparent in the *Mona Lisa*, is the use of **sfumato**. Sfumato, from the Italian word *fumo*, meaning smoke, is the use of mellowed colors and a blurred outline. Sfumato allows forms to blend subtly into one another without perceptible transitions.

At the same time that Leonardo was working in



A partial view of Matthias Grünewald's Insenheim Altarpiece.

Florence, another artist, Michelangelo di Buonarroti, was at work on the piece that would establish his reputation as a sculptor. The city held a competition to have a statue created from a massive piece of marble that it had acquired, only to discover that the marble was flawed. Taking this difficult piece, which had a large crack in the middle, Michelangelo turned it into his vision of [David](#) (1504). The statue is larger than life-sized, as it was originally meant to be placed high on the façade of the cathedral in Florence and would have been viewed from far below. The beautiful carving, the smooth texture of the finished marble, and the striking pose were seen as the very embodiment of the spirit of Florence as a republic.

Throughout his stormy career, Michelangelo created a large number of other important sculptures, but it is a painting that often comes to mind when people hear his name. In 1505, Pope Julius II commissioned

Michelangelo to design his tomb. Michelangelo began sculpting great statues such as [Moses](#) (c. 1513–15), [The Dying Slave](#) (1513–16), and [The Bound Slave](#) (1513–16) to be included in the Pope's colossal tomb. However, in the midst of this commission, the Pope canceled the project for uncertain reasons. The cancellation of his work on the Pope's tomb was one of the greatest disappointments of Michelangelo's career, and he was bitter and hesitant when Pope Julius II gave him another commission. This time, the artist was asked to decorate the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It took Michelangelo four years, from 1508 to 1512, to cover the seven hundred square yards of the ceiling, but the result was an astonishing tour de force. The great masterpiece of the Sistine Ceiling has received renewed attention in recent decades, as restorers set about cleaning the great frescoes. The cleaning removed the collection of oil, wax, and grime that had accumulated over the centuries,

and the colors have returned to their original brightness. Not everyone was happy with the results of the cleaning, however, and a controversy about this restoration, as well as the restoration of artworks in general, continues within the art world.

One of the most influential painters of the High Renaissance was Raphael Sanzio (1483–1520). When he was a young painter, Raphael was brought to Rome, where Julius II gave him several commissions. During this period, Raphael learned much from Michelangelo, his older rival. Unlike Michelangelo, Raphael was not a loner, but employed numerous assistants to help him cover the Pope's official chambers with large, sumptuous frescoes, notably the *School of Athens* (c. 1508–11), an homage to the great Greek philosophers and scientists. Raphael is considered the most influential painter of the Madonna. His masterworks, such as the *Sistine Madonna* (c. 1513–14), created an image of the Virgin Mary that has endured in religious paintings throughout the centuries.

Rome and Florence were not the only locations to witness an incredible flowering in the arts. Venice, too, became a center of artistic creativity. Giorgione (1477/78–1510) is credited with making innovations in the subject matter of landscapes, as he painted scenes not taken from the Bible or from classical or allegorical stories. Prior to Giorgione's painting *The Tempest* (c. 1508), artists had generally begun with the figures that were to be the subject matter of the painting and then added the background. However, in *The Tempest* the landscape became the subject of the painting—the figures depicted are of lesser importance than the storm that threatens them.

Titian Vecelli (c. 1488–1576) was one of the most prolific of the Venetian painters. Titian is well known for his portraits of his patrons, and he is also recognized as having been the greatest colorist of the Renaissance artists. Titian was an innovative portraitist. He used various elements of setting, such as a column or a curtain, as the backdrop for his portraits instead of an atmospheric neutral background, as had been the custom. The influence of Titian's use and arrangement of background elements can be seen in portraiture up through the twenty-first century.

Tintoretto (1518–94), another great Venetian painter, is often linked with an artistic style called **Mannerism** that grew in popularity in the late sixteenth century.

Mannerist works are characterized by the distortion of certain elements such as perspective or scale and are also recognizable by their use of acidic colors and the twisted positioning of their subjects. Although Tintoretto used some Mannerist pictorial techniques, his color schemes differed from those of the Mannerists. Tintoretto presented his figures from dramatic angles—it is said that he used small figures as models and arranged them and rearranged them until he had the most dramatic effect. He also used dramatic contrasts of light and dark, called **chiaroscuro**, to heighten the emotional impact of his subjects. Tintoretto's later works are marked by their spiritual subject matter, and his use of sharp perspectives and chiaroscuro anticipate the Baroque era.

One of the most important events impacting the history of sixteenth-century art was the **Reformation**. Protestants criticized the opulence and corruption of the Catholic Church and called for its purification. For art, this meant a move away from the richly decorated churches and religious imagery of the Renaissance. The Church reacted to the Protestant Reformation by launching a **Counter-Reformation**, which emphasized, even more than before, lavish church decoration and art of a highly dramatic and emotional nature. One of the artists most closely associated with the Counter-Reformation is Dominikos Theotokopoulos, known as El Greco. El Greco was strongly influenced by Tintoretto's paintings, and he worked for a period of time in Titian's workshop in Venice. In 1576, El Greco left Italy for Toledo, Spain. El Greco is one of the most well known of the Mannerist painters, and his dramatic use of elongated figures captured the religious fervor of the Counter-Reformation. The works of both El Greco and Tintoretto can be seen as transitional works bridging the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Baroque period.

The Renaissance in Northern Europe

During the fifteenth century, the artworks being produced in northern Europe were smaller in scale than those of contemporaneous artists to the south. However, the work of northern artists displayed a degree of realistic detail beyond what can be seen in works of the south, primarily due to their use of new **oil paints**. While the Renaissance was occurring in Italy, much of European art north of the Alps was still Gothic in style. The influence of classical antiquity was also much less of a factor in the north, as the

northerners did not share Italy's cultural connection with ancient Rome, nor did they have the advantage of being in close proximity to ancient Roman works as did their Italian counterparts.

The art of northern Europe in the sixteenth century demonstrates a far greater awareness of the Italian Renaissance than that of the fifteenth century. Many artists traveled to Italy to study the great works of the Renaissance, and some Italian artists brought these ideas with them when they traveled to the north. Engravers copied some of the more notable Italian works, and these engravings became available throughout Europe, thus spreading the ideas and styles of the Renaissance. Trade connections between upper-class German merchants and merchants in Venice, a center of trade and art, provided another avenue of influence.

Though the influence of the Italian masters was notable, not all northern artists embraced the ideals and innovative techniques of the Renaissance, as many maintained a more traditional approach. Moreover, though linear perspective and the colors used farther south did travel northward, the manner in which they were used in the northern countries was quite different.

During the fifteenth century and into the early decades of the sixteenth century, areas of southern Germany witnessed a flowering of artistic production. Matthias Grünewald (1475?–1528) and Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) are often considered the greatest artists of the Renaissance in northern Europe. Although only ten of Grünewald's works have survived, his influence has nonetheless been notable. Grünewald is known for his religious scenes and his depiction of Christ's crucifixion. The [*Isenheim Altarpiece*](#) (c. 1510–15), a work consisting of nine panels mounted on two sets of folding wings, is considered to be his greatest masterpiece.

Albrecht Dürer is perhaps the most famous artist of Reformation Germany. Dürer's early training was largely influenced by late Gothic works, but as the ideas of the Italian Renaissance spread northward in the sixteenth century, Dürer's work began to reflect some of these new influences. Dürer aimed to achieve a style that combined the naturalistic detail favored by artists of the north with the theoretical ideas developed by Italian artists. He traveled to Italy, studied the work of his Italian contemporaries, and brought his new knowledge back to Germany. Dürer wrote about theories of art and published many series of woodcuts

and copper engravings, such as [*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*](#) (c. 1498).

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543) is another important artist of this era, and he is considered one of the greatest Renaissance portraitists. Though born in Germany, Holbein is best known for his work in England. He became court painter to King Henry VIII of England, and his portrait of Henry VIII shows not only his talent for presenting details, but also his ability to capture the psychological character of his subjects. Holbein's works became the model and standard for English painting up through the nineteenth century.

Baroque Art

The term “**Baroque**” is generally used to refer to artworks produced from the late sixteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century. Baroque styles differed from those of the Renaissance in that Baroque artworks tended to be less static than Renaissance examples; the Baroque is characterized by a greater sense of movement and energy. The political structure of Europe during the Baroque era also differed from that of the Renaissance. Whereas the Renaissance witnessed wars between cities, the Baroque era saw conflicts between empires. During this time, the Church was determined to preserve its dominance in Spain and Italy, and orders like the Jesuits were founded to convert the peoples of other areas. Baroque art appealed largely to the emotions, and thus, these artists, influenced by the Counter-Reformation, aimed at dramatic and moving appeals to faith.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe were a time when society was governed by a ruling class that viewed its power as a divine right. Some of the most powerful sovereigns ever to rule are from this period. Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great of Russia, and King Louis XIV of France dominated the lives of the people of their countries. It was a time that saw the ongoing concentration of power and wealth into the hands of a few, until the results eventually became intolerable for the majority of the people. While a small minority of the population lived in great luxury, the lives of ordinary people were generally quite difficult, and eventually this disparity gave rise to protests like those found in the writings of Enlightenment authors, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in particular. Ironically, however, it was the patronage of the wealthy ruling class that gave



Rembrandt's *The Company of Frans Banning Cocq and Willem van Ruytenburch, known as The Night Watch*.

rise to the great works of art of the period.

As we might expect, the art of the Baroque period moved away from the classic simplicity and calm that was so characteristic of Renaissance works. The word “baroque” has come to represent the richness of color and ornamentation that heightened the energy and emotion that were characteristic of the great works of art of this period. The emphasis was on dynamic works that presented imagery in the most dramatic way possible.

Baroque painters made use of *chiaroscuro*, using exaggerated contrasts between light and dark to create a theatrical kind of lighting that made the subject appear to be in a spotlight. Caravaggio (1571–1610), an Italian Baroque painter, was renowned for his dramatic

use of light and dark, and his technique influenced many artists who followed. Caravaggio’s work is so important that artworks using extremes of dark and light are often termed “caravaggesque.” Caravaggio’s work is also notable for its provocative degree of naturalism. For example, Caravaggio portrayed the Virgin Mary and the apostles not as noble figures in classical garb as they had traditionally been represented, but instead depicted them as poor and simple folks in threadbare garments. His use of actual lower-class individuals as models for his work helped him achieve this effect. It is no wonder that several patrons of Caravaggio’s canvases rejected them for this reason.

With recent revisions of art history, a woman named

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593?–1652?) has also joined the ranks of important Baroque artists. Gentileschi, the daughter of a painter, had the unusual opportunity to study in her father’s studio. She is particularly known for her remarkable adaptation of Carravaggio’s techniques. Her works include self-portraits and paintings of Old Testament women.

The most important Baroque artist, Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), the son of a sculptor, was a child prodigy who received recognition from the Pope at age seventeen. Bernini did his most significant work in sculpture, but he was also a talented architect, painter, and draftsman. He worked as a designer in the theater, and many of his works reflect the influence of his theatrical background. His most important masterpiece, the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52), is set into the altar of the Cornaro Chapel. The space includes a concealed stained-glass window that bathes the figure of the saint in dramatic gold lighting, as if she were on a stage. Bernini treated his medium in a new way as well. He did not adhere to the classical calm and natural flow of drapery around the figure that had been used in the past. Instead, Bernini pushed the use of marble to new limits and tried to make stone look like real fabric and even clouds.

The importance of the Baroque style extended beyond Italy. In Flanders, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) established a huge workshop and produced works of great energy and color that became models for many artists. In the mid-seventeenth century, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), a Dutch artist, created some of the best-known works from the Baroque period. Rembrandt is recognized not only as a painter and printmaker, but also as one of the greatest draftsmen ever. Perhaps his best-known work is *The Night Watch* (1642), more properly known as *Sortie of Captain Banning Cocq’s Company of the Civic Guard*. Like many other group portraits of the time, each member of the company depicted paid a certain sum to be included in the painting. Rembrandt chose to break with tradition and grouped the members of the company in a way that gave more attention to some members than to others. This break with tradition, as well as other problems in his life, ultimately caused the decline of his career. Though Rembrandt died in poverty, the self-portraits of his later years are considered to be some of the greatest studies of the inner life of the sitter ever to be painted.

It might be argued that the Baroque period reached its peak in France. There, Louis XIV had come to power, and his long reign was marked by a blossoming of French culture. Louis XIV united all of France and built a lavish [palace](#) at Versailles beginning in 1669. The palace and its grounds covered about two thousand acres and included various grand chateaux and gardens. There was a stable, capable of housing hundreds of horses, and a grand *orangerie*, or greenhouse, for the king’s orange trees. Eventually there was also a zoo and a system of fountains and waterfalls that included a grand canal large enough for the staging of mock sea battles. The opulence and power of this “sun king,” around whom the world of the court revolved, became a model that contemporaneous monarchs tried to emulate.

An important feature of Louis XIV’s court that was to influence art well into the nineteenth century was the system of choosing and supporting artists called the *Salon*. This annual exhibition established a set of rules for judging art that is still influential in the art world today. It was also under the rule of Louis XIV that the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, often referred to simply as the “**Academy**,” was established, and it soon came to be a means for imposing aesthetic standards and principles of taste.

To the south, the Spanish court of King Philip IV of Spain tried to emulate the court of France, and his court painter, Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), was a contemporary of Bernini. Velázquez’s method of building his figures from patches of color, rather than starting from a drawing, became a model for many later artists. In fact, Velázquez’s work had an influence on the movement we call Impressionism.

Rococo, Neoclassicism, and Romanticism

While the **Rococo** style might be seen as an extension of the Baroque period, it is quite different in form and content. Whereas the Baroque aimed to arouse grand emotions, Rococo works were celebrations of gaiety, romance, and the frivolity of the grand life at court, particularly the court at Versailles. The emphasis was on light-hearted decoration with the use of gold and pastel colors.

Three artists who excelled at capturing the elegance and wit so valued by their aristocratic patrons are



Jacques Louis David's Oath of the Horatii (1784).

considered the greatest masters of the Rococo style. Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) was the leader of a new generation and the innovator of a new genre of painting called the *fête galante*. Paintings of this genre generally depicted members of the nobility in elegant contemporary dress enjoying leisure time in the countryside. François Boucher (1703–70) was influenced by Watteau's delicate style. He became the favorite painter of Madame Pompadour, mistress to Louis XV, and his works often transformed the characters of classical myth into scenes of courtly gallantry, with an emphasis on nubile nudes. Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) was also promoted by Madame Pompadour. Fragonard studied with Boucher, and his works strongly reflect Boucher's influence.

The Revolution of 1789 in France ushered in an era of great change throughout Europe, and the idea of a

democratic republic ruled by and for the people was reflected in the artwork of the time. In an attempt to hearken back to the democratic ideals of the ancient world, art of this period demonstrated a revival of interest in the art of classical Greece and Rome. This style, called **Neoclassicism**, emerged in the decades leading up to the Revolution and was also influenced by Enlightenment philosophy. The Neoclassical style, a direct challenge to the Rococo and its associations with the aristocracy, is epitomized in the work of Jacques Louis David (1748–1825), whose paintings, such as the *Oath of the Horatii* (1784), illustrated republican virtues. Following the Revolution, David joined members of the new government as the master of ceremonies for the grand revolutionary mass rallies. Later he became a dedicated painter to Napoleon Bonaparte, and in this capacity he painted large propagandistic canvases that would seem to undermine



Gustave Courbet's The Stonebreakers.

his earlier revolutionary ideals. A closer investigation of his work and his career reveals the complicated world of an artist and his patrons. The work of David's pupil, Jean Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), shows the sharp outlines, unemotional figures, careful geometric composition, and rational order that are hallmarks of the Neoclassical style.

Ingres's rival, Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), was a proponent of **Romanticism**. This style hearkened back to the emotional emphasis of the Baroque and had similar characteristics, though the subject matter was different. Whereas Neoclassical works emphasized line, order, and a cool detachment, Romantic painting tended to be highly imaginative and was characterized by an emotional and dreamlike quality—the Romantics favored feeling over reason. Romantic works are also characterized by their incorporation of exotic or melodramatic elements and often took awe-inspiring natural wonders as their subject matter. Delacroix's works are characteristic of the Romantic movement in that they centered on exotic themes and included foreign settings, violence involving animals, and historical subject matter. Théodore Géricault (1791–1824) and William Blake (1757–1827) were also

important Romantic artists.

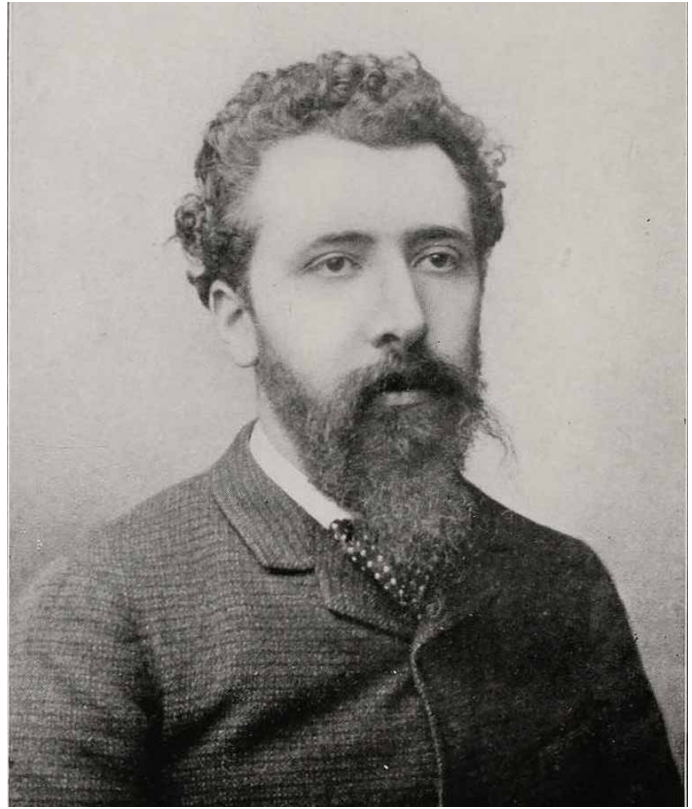
Realism and Impressionism

In many ways, **Realism** was a reaction to Neoclassicism and Romanticism. The Realist style was inspired by the idea that painting must illustrate all the features of its subjects, including the negative ones. It was also obligated to show the lives of ordinary people as subjects that were as important as the historical and religious themes that dominated the art exhibitions of the day. The artist who represented this movement most forcefully was Gustave Courbet (1819–77), a flamboyant and outgoing personality who outraged conventional audiences by showing a painting of ordinary workmen repairing a road at the official government-sponsored Salon. This work, called [*The Stonebreakers*](#) (1849–50), also had political implications in the context of a wave of revolutions that spread across Europe beginning in 1848. Realism can also be seen in the works of Honoré Daumier (1808–79) and Jean François Millet (1814–75).

Impressionism largely grew out of dissatisfaction with the rigid rules that had come to dominate the *Salons* held to recognize selected artists each year.

Édouard Manet (1832–83) is sometimes referred to as the first Impressionist. Although he refused to consider himself as one of the Impressionists, Manet’s work, which showed light by juxtaposing bright, contrasting colors, nonetheless greatly inspired and influenced the generation of artists following him. Manet’s painting [*Le Déjeuner sur L’herbe*](#) (*Luncheon on the Grass*) (1863)—included in the *Salon des Refusés* in 1863, an exhibit of works rejected by the “official” *Salon*—was singled out for ridicule. The scandal surrounding this work resulted from its violation of the unwritten rule that the only appropriate nudes in contemporary art were classical figures or women in suitably exotic settings. In *Luncheon on the Grass*, Manet based his work on an engraving with a classical subject matter, but he showed contemporary clothed men with a nude woman as part of the group. This caused an uproar.

While Manet continued to submit his work to the *Salon*, other artists who disagreed with the rigid artistic standards espoused by the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris and favored by the Salon set about establishing Impressionism as a new style. A work by Claude Monet (1840–1926) was the source of the movement’s name. Monet showed a work that he called [*Impression, Sunrise*](#) (1872), and the critics seized on this mere “impression” as a means by which to ridicule the movement. It was Monet who urged his fellow artists to work outdoors, and these endeavors were aided by technical advances in paint and brush production that made the medium more portable. Impressionist artists put their colors directly on the canvas with rapid strokes to capture the rapidly changing light. Scientific studies of vision and color led to the discovery that shadows were not merely gray but that they reflected the complementary color of the object casting them. Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) and Alfred Sisley (1839–99) were two other Impressionists of note.



Georges Seurat, photographed in 1888.