

Assignments #6 – 25
Semester Two
**Major Time Periods
Of
Western Art**

This packet contains a **very** brief summary of the major time periods used by art historians to classify and analyze art works in Western Art. That is the art created by the civilizations and cultures surrounding the Mediterranean Sea – Europe, the Near East, and North Africa from ancient to modern times. Beginning in the 17th century it includes the areas settled by the European powers in North America, especial the area that became the United States. This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

There are many other artists, art movements, and regional art that could not be covered in this short review. You are encouraged to explore widely and learn more about the beautiful, thought provoking, and exciting artworks created in the ancient and modern Western World. If you are unsure if an artist or artwork is Western or Non-Western, please consult me.

This is just a beginning reference guide for your assignments #6 to 25. You are expected to do more research on the web as you study individual art works and artists, in books and magazines provided in the classroom, and in books, magazines and videos available at the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library. Information from your Modern History course may also be used for the periods after the Renaissance.

Words that are underlined in the packet appear in the glossary provided to all students in this course. These summaries should be kept with your assignments #6 to #25 in your notebook. The glossary should be kept in your notebook in your reference section.

PACE High School
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Prehistoric Art: 35,000 BC – 2,000 BC (Assignments #6-7)

Archeology is helping us see that early humans created personal and tribal art from very early times. About 35,000 years ago, our ancestors decorated animal bones and eggshells, beads, stone amulets, terra cotta and ivory figurines, wall paintings and rock paintings. Fertility figures from 25,000 – 15,000 BC are found across Europe, from Spain to Russia and to the banks of the Tigris River in Mesopotamia. Experts believe that they were part of a cult of the Mother Goddess. They are made of stone, bone, ivory and clay with simple clothes and incised hair in curls or braids.

Cave art has been discovered around the world. The oldest found to date are at Panaramitee in South Australia, from 43,000 BC and include mazes, spirals, circles and other marks. Caves at Lascaux, France were painted from 15,000 – 10,000 BC with naturalistic images of bulls, horses, mammoths, and lions but very few people. Archeologists have found prehistoric art in caves in Namibia in Africa (c. 24,000 BC), in shelters at Bhimbetka in central India (c. 11,000 BC), on rocks in the Sahara (c. 8,000 BC), in mud-brick houses in Turkey (c. 6,000 BC) and in the Amazon region of South America (c. 5,000 BC). Pictographs have also been found in Ireland, Peru, Hawaii, and the American Southwest. Jewelry has been found in burial tombs in China, England and Egypt.

Prehistory humans tracked the movements of the sun, moon and the stars. Many cultures built monuments that align with the major yearly cycles. The most famous is probably Stonehenge (2100 BC) in England that consists of large circles of standing stones, some with cross pieces, which mark the solar equinoxes and solstices. There are thousands of other henges (stone circles) across the British Isles. On Peru's southern coast in South America the Nazca culture (1,000 BC) carved huge outline drawings of birds, monkeys, spiders and geometric shapes into the earth. They are best viewed from an airplane and may have astronomical meanings.

This information is taken from *Instant Art History* by Walter Robinson, 1995.

Ancient Egypt: 3,000 BC – 395 AD (Assignments #8-9)

The Egyptian Empires grew out of the civilizations that developed along the Nile River Valley in the northeast corner of the continent of Africa. The Nile River rises deep in the interior of Africa and flows through desert and mountains to empty into the Mediterranean Sea. The history of Egypt is divided into five major periods: the Old Kingdom, 2650 – 2150 BC the age of the Pyramids, the Middle Kingdom, 2040 – 1640 BC, the New Kingdom, 1500 – 1070 BC, the Later Period, 712 – 332 BC and the Ptolemaic and Roman Period, 332 BC – 395 AD.

During these periods, Egypt was prosperous and the kings had great power and wealth to build monumental pyramids and temples. They sent out expeditions to conquer new lands and expand trade routes. In between these times, the land was politically fragmented.

Egyptian art was originally created for religious and magical purposes. Its symbols and functions show the Egyptians' beliefs about their world and the promise of an afterlife. Statues placed in tombs and temples served as physical repositories for the spirit and were to receive offerings and prayers. There are many images of kings making offerings to the gods and defeating Egypt's enemies. The Egyptians believed that these images helped make these triumphs come true.

The Egyptians believed the universe and all events that occurred within it were governed by the will of the gods. The gods represented all natural forces – fire, water, wind – as well as justice, kingship, protection and truth. Their actions dominated all aspects of life. To ensure prosperity and survival, Egyptians performed elaborate rituals and made rich offerings to gain the favors of the gods. Egyptians combined animal and human forms to show the many powers of their gods.

The king was the mediator between the gods and humankind. He had divine power so that he could maintain order and justice against evil and chaos. Art played a vital role in asserting the divine powers of the king and showing in visual terms the king's awesome responsibilities.

Egyptian art ranges from delicate jewelry and grave goods to monumental sculpture of the pharaohs. The human form is often shown in rigid frontal poses. The artists used overlapping **perspective** and richly colored **patterns**. Even over thousands of years, basic forms and symbols remained constant.

This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Ancient Greek And Roman Art: 1,000 BC – 400 AD (Assignments #10-11)

About 1,000 BC the Greek civilizations established their fundamental institutions – city-states, major sanctuaries (sacred places), the Pan-Hellenic games, and the Greek alphabet. Greek culture spread around the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, including the area from present-day Spain and Italy to Egypt, and Turkey. Each city-state had its own distinct political and cultural identity, but shared common language, mythology and religion.

Early Greek art (1,000 – 480 BC) was noted for pottery (ceramics) that was richly decorated with geometric forms and characterized by order and structure. The poet Homer wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* about 800 BC and scenes from these stories were common themes in the pottery, along with athletic events and everyday scenes. Classic Greek art was created between 480 – 332 BC. Athens, the first democratic state, was the dominant city, politically, economically and artistically. The Parthenon was built and its many temples were adorned with sculpture and reliefs. Sophocles and Aristophanes wrote the ancient Greek tragedies. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle taught and organized the study of philosophy, science and mathematics. The Greek artists perfected their mastery of materials and techniques, of proportion and of decoration in relation to a work's form and function. The order and balance characteristic of this age are considered classic, beyond the changes of fashion.

The Hellenistic Period was from 323 – 31 BC. Great cosmopolitan cities developed because of widespread trade and peace. Kings spread their political messages through statues, sculptured monuments and grand public buildings. Hellenistic art was sophisticated and experimental. At this time it became more naturalistic and a major subject was mythology. Greek mythology is a body of stories about the origins of the gods, their interrelationships, significant individuals and events of the past and natural phenomena. Like the Greek language, myths provided a fundamental cultural bond among Greeks. The Olympian gods, such heroes as Hercules and Achilles, and epics such as the Trojan War were central to maintaining Greek identity.

A number of cultures had been developing on the Italian peninsula about the same time as the Greeks. The Roman Republic began in 510 BC with the expulsion of the Etruscan kings. Most Roman sculptures from this time are copies of Hellenistic originals or eclectic creations strongly influenced by Greek art. The republic ended in 27 BC when the Roman Senate appointed Octavian the “Augustus” and gave him extensive powers. The Republic was a time of vast territorial expansion and consolidation of internal religions, political and social institutions. About the second century BC a distinctly Roman identity developed, especially in architecture, portraiture and wall painting.

The Roman Empire began with the reign of Octavian and continued until 337 AD. Roman art and particularly architecture, sculpture and coinage – together with Roman law, roads, religion, monumental public buildings and other institutions bound together a vast dominion that at its height extended from Britain to Central Asia.

This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Ancient and Near Eastern Art: 3,000 BC – 629 AD (Assignments #12-13)

The Ancient Near East spans a vast geographical area that today includes the modern countries of Turkey, Israel, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Complex civilizations began developing in the Mesopotamian valley around 4,000 BC and continued until the Moslem conquest of 629 AD.

Mesopotamia, the area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (now Iraq), is the heart of the near east. The rivers transformed the arid plains into fertile soil for grazing animals and growing crops. This led to the development of urban civilization with political organizations – kings, priesthoods and laws. The area was poor in natural resources such as hard wood, metal and stone. So the peoples of Mesopotamia developed a complex trade system with neighboring areas using the rivers and overland caravan routes. This brought them the raw materials that they needed to build their cities and create luxury goods and art.

The area around Mesopotamia had many different ethnic groups and languages and developed many cultures which succeeded each other over thousands of years. Archeology has uncovered complex bronze artworks, beautifully decorated pottery, and exquisite gold and silver objects. There were fabulous temple complexes with multi-layered courtyards and outer buildings. Massive stone works and carved reliefs decorated the monuments.

Some of the kingdoms that rose and fell in the area are: Assyria (northern Iraq), Babylonia (southern Iraq), Sumeria (S. Iran) and Anatolia (Turkey). The Anatolians developed beautiful techniques for working metal. The Sumerians developed the first known writing system that scholars call cuneiform. Written mainly on clay tablets, it was used to record economic and commercial matters, literature, astronomical observations and calculations, mathematics, religious rituals, hymns and laws.

There were a broad variety of peoples and cultures in the ancient near east. They worshipped many different gods and deities of one region were worshipped in another. Gods usually had human forms but had supernatural powers. Complex rituals, including sacrifices and prayers, were performed to please the gods or to prevent troubles, as well as to divine the future.

This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Islamic Art: 630 – 1400 AD (Assignments #14-15)

Islam is the religion founded by the prophet Muhammed in the early 7th century. It spread through wars and invasions over the next 100 years across North Africa to Spain in the West and into Central Asia as far as India in the East. Islamic art is very diverse, reflecting the many cultures conquered by the Muslims. Artists combined the rules of Islamic art with their own artistic traditions. Islamic art was created in the services of the Muslim faith and was also secular art produced for Muslim patrons or created by individual artists.

Many artists dedicated their art to God by producing beautifully written and illustrated copies of the Qur'an, the sacred book of Islam. It contains Muhammed's prophetic messages, as well as his laws and moralizing stories. All books, whether the Qur'an or any other book, are important objects of Islamic art. Calligraphy (expert writing) is a very important design element in Islamic art. "Purity of writing is purity of spirit" is an old Arabic saying. Copies of the Qur'an had to be accurate, but they also had to be worthy of the sacred texts. Artists aimed for balance, elegance and harmony in their work. They used repetition, mirror images, animal shapes, interlacing and overlapping scripts on arabesques. In Islamic hands, master calligraphers achieved higher status than painters. Artists also painted lavishly decorated pages or illustrations of royal court scenes for many books.

Islamic textiles, ceramics, glass, metalwork, mosaics and woodwork from different regions are characterized by frequent use of calligraphy, all-over patterns of geometrical designs or arabesques. There are two basic design elements: geometric patterns and highly stylized plant forms. Both grew out of the art of countries conquered by the Muslims. The Greeks and Romans had used these designs. When further developed by Islamic artists, they became abstract. The arabesque is a common design motif in which one leaf grows" out of another leaf, in a continuous pattern with no beginning and no end. Islamic artists took the geometric patterns of the Greeks and Romans and created more intense, dense and imaginative patterns than any other culture.

This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Medieval Europe: 312 – 1500 AD (Assignments #16-17)

The Middle Ages or the Medieval Period is the time between ancient and modern times in Western Civilization. It starts in 312 AD with the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine The Great to Christianity and the invasion of the Roman Empire by the barbarian tribes of Northern Europe and the Asian Steppes. It ends with the Renaissance and the Reformation in the 14th to the 16th century.

Western Civilization was split in two. In the Latin West the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire with the royal courts of France, England and Spain, were the principal social institutions. In the East was the Byzantine Empire dominated by the Orthodox Church (Christian) and the Imperial Court.

Religion is a major theme of medieval art. Christianity is based on the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God whose life on earth, death on the cross and ascension into heaven redeems man's sins. Descended from Judaism, Christianity spread slowly throughout the Near East, Mediterranean region and the Roman Empire beginning in the 1st century AD. Churches, art to decorate those churches and objects for Christian rituals were the main expressions of medieval artists. This included manuscript illustrations (bibles, prayer books) painting, sculpture, tapestries, stained glass and architecture.

Spanning over 1,000 years, Medieval Europe developed many diverse styles of art. Late Antique art developed as Christianity influenced the Classical Roman traditions. This occurred from the 4th through the 8th centuries (300 – 800 AD). Christian themes developed their own pictorial language to communicate the teachings of the Church to people who were predominately illiterate.

At the same time in Northern Europe, the Germanic tribes were moving into the Roman territory. Their art was based on animal imagery of the Eurasian Steppes, a region stretching from Mongolia to Hungary. The tribes were warrior herdsman who wore splendid jewelry, used lavishly decorated swords and rode horses with elaborate trappings. Their artists adopted some of the Greco-Roman and Celtic traditions and created the Migration Style.

In the 11th and 12th centuries (1000 – 1100 AD) artists drew their inspiration from the art of the Classical past. Roman monuments were all over Europe. This bold Romanesque style or art is distinctive for its expression of power through abstract line and form. Romanesque architecture adopted the semicircular barrel vaulting of ancient Roman art. Churches grew larger and more open.

Gothic art was created in Western Europe between 1140 and 1500. It is characterized by elegance of line and ornate forms. The Greeks knew linear perspective, but medieval artists did not use it in their paintings. They stressed spiritual content, showing that the day-to-day world was less important. Architects developed rib vaulting that allowed more spacious, light filled church and palace interiors.

This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Renaissance Europe: 1300 – 1500 AD (Assignments #18-19)

This era was an age when new frontiers, both intellectual and geographical, were explored. With the help of the Byzantine and Islamic scholars, European Humanists recovered the language and knowledge of classical Greek and Rome. Renaissance art reflected the humanist interest in the study of history, belief in a universe that could be understood and mathematically ordered and the observation of the natural world and human emotions.

Artists placed a new emphasis on anatomy and the depiction of the nude, portraiture, and secular art with themes from classical mythology or history. Linear perspective and art theory are products of the Renaissance, especially Italy. In Northern Europe, art was characterized by astonishing realism and complex symbolism. Renaissance ideas about art and science were spread through the exploitation of a new technology – the printing press. The population became more literate and educated.

Renaissance artists and intellectuals aspired to make art an intellectual discipline. They used Greek and Roman literature to develop a theory of art: how expression is communicated, how art works represent the world and an idea of beauty, and the character of artistic genius. This contrasts with the medieval world where the emphasis was on the artwork, not the artist. Also, Medieval art was principally for the glory of God and to teach the people about the Christian way to live. In the Renaissance the idea grew that painting was silent poetry, it should move the viewer and that the highest task of the artist was narrative or historical painting.

The area we now know as Italy was a center for the Renaissance. At this time it was divided into city-states and small kingdoms. A number of cities became powerful political entities and fought with each other for territory, trade and power. Powerful families who believed in the arts as an expression of their wealth and power ruled Florence, Venice, Urbino and Rome.

In the North, the Renaissance was led by Flanders (present day Belgium) that was ruled by the Dukes of Burgundy. The nobles and merchants were very prosperous and the local artists benefited from their patronage and that of Italian merchants and bankers living in the north. The Flemish and Italian artists were influenced by each other because they studied the works from other regions collected by their patrons.

Renaissance artists believed their task was to choose an instructive action or event and through the use of gesture and facial expression define its expressive and moral content. The setting for an event, laid out according to perspective, was viewed as a stage. With the revival of Classicism, artists experimented with perspective based on math and optical laws. The subjects of the paintings were both religious – illustrating the life of Christ – and secular – allegorical, mythological or literary themes. Landscape was often an important aspect of setting “the stage.”

This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Europe and America: 17th and 18th Centuries (Assignments #20-21)

Many people consider the artists of this period as “The Old Masters” – Caravaggio, Rembrandt, David, Tiepolo, and Velazquez. The classical style of the Renaissance merged with the newer Baroque to create great works of art during the 17th century (1600 – 1699). As the 18th century began, the European center of artistic creativity shifted to France where the Rococo and Neoclassic styles reflected the new social and political reality. Neoclassicism was strong in English architecture and interior design. Rome remained the source for classical inspiration and artistic theory and art education.

Baroque was a style prevalent in Western European that included many styles. Artists responded to the Catholic Church’s desire to use art to inspire people and they created works of great monumentality, dynamism and emotional appeal. They blended architecture, sculpture and painting to create magnificent art for the cathedrals and public buildings. Baroque artists showed vast spaces and naturalistic depictions with dramatic lighting effects, rich textures and diagonal compositions to make their work more powerfully expressive. Secular art featured portraits with startling psychological impact.

Rococo appeared about 1710 in France and is associated with the fanciful interior decoration of King Louis XV. The term, from the French *rocaille* (literally “pebble”), refers to the shell motifs often used in Rococo designs.

Neoclassicism describes a style of art and architecture that began in Europe and moved to America. It began in the 1770s and lasted until about 1850. Artists rejected the ornate forms of the Baroque and Rococo styles. They adopted simple, geometric ornamentation from Greek and Roman architecture, subdued colors and preferred a flat rather than an elaborated sculptural approach. The artists admired the reason and nobility they saw in the ancient artworks. Painters wanted to express the Roman virtue of civic life and their work often showed buildings with archeological accuracy and heroic images.

The Age of Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, was an intellectual movement in 18th century Europe. It was based on a rational and scientific approach to nature, humanity and society. Proponents of the Enlightenment held that a secular (non-religious) view of the world and believed in progress and the supremacy of the individual. This was in contrast to the rigid and authoritarian roles played by the church and state. In France and later England, official Salons dictated what were appropriate subjects and styles. For artists to sell their work to the aristocrats and the wealthy, they had to follow the rules of the Salon.

In America the period from 1620 until the revolution is known as the Colonial Era. Painters and craftsmen drew inspiration first from England and later from other European countries. Baroque and Rococo influenced portraiture and designs for furniture and silvermaking. In rural America, artists expressed themselves in quiltmaking and woodworking.

This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

19th Century Europe and America: 1800 – 1899 AD (Assignments #22-23)

After the fall of Napoleon in 1815, there was a reaction in Europe against Neoclassicism. The Romantic Movement, led by the artist Delacroix, enabled artists to rebel against the rigid academic art establishment and approval of the official salons. Technical and scientific advances led to the Industrial Revolution. There were dramatic social changes and political unrest as the population of poor urban people exploded. The artist Courbet led the Realists, a movement of artists who painted a brutally realistic view of society and a direct observation of nature. This was followed by the Impressionists who dramatically broke with tradition and revolutionized the art for succeeding generations.

After the revolution, Americans grew increasingly wealthy. The middle class looked to France and England for ideas for decorative arts and architecture. This Federal period was predominately Neoclassical. There were ambitious public buildings and lavish high-style decorations. Wealthy Americans took up art collecting and patrons commissioned landscape and genre paintings. There was a new demand for heroic portraiture and statues. Landscape painters captured the dramatic mountains and plains as settlers pushed the frontier west. Genre paintings celebrated and spoofed common Americans engaged in routine activities, from the blacksmith shop to the barnyard.

In Europe, Realist artists and writers (1840 – 1880) reacted against the imaginative subjectivity of the Romantics and showed views of ordinary daily life rather than mythology, religious or literary scenes. They analyzed and described what they saw in their everyday existence. In a sense they became the pictorial journalists of their time (long before illustrated newspapers and later TV). Realist paintings showed how the Industrial Revolution impacted the working class and urban poor. This was in dramatic opposition to the heroic paintings of the court and the fashionable Salon paintings of academic artists.

Impressionism was a major movement in painting that began in France and spread through Europe and America beginning about 1850. Impressionist artists wanted to capture visual impressions, rather than factual representation. They opposed the academics and exhibited their paintings independently. At first they were rejected and ridiculed. But by 1880 their work was more highly accepted and the shift toward artistic expression independent of natural appearances was firmly established.

In the United States, the period between 1876 and 1917 is known as the American Renaissance period. Many American artists, collectors, industrialists and politicians identified with the Renaissance, believing its spirit had been reborn in the U. S. This was a time of collaboration among artists of various media on specific projects, including architectural schemes that included stained glass, sculpture and murals.

This information is taken from teacher materials prepared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

20th Century Europe and America: 1900 – 1999 (Assignments #24-25)

Art historians are still sorting out the many artists and art movements of the 20th century. New technologies, new media, improved communications and the ability to faithfully reproduce artworks and now films and computer images, created a world where more artists could react to and be influenced by other artists' work. Artists continued to be affected by historical events, scientific discoveries, the new world of psychoanalyses and the horrors and pleasures of societies in which they lived. Artists worked more independently and depended less on patrons. There is now a belief that each person viewing a work of art should arrive at his or her own conclusions about the meaning of the work. The interpretation is the result of each viewer's unique and reasoned perspective.

The following is a brief review of just a few of the major art movements of the 20th century. Cubism shook the art world with bold experimentation. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque were influenced by African sculpture, Impressionism and Pointillism. They emphasized the shallow space of the picture plane by rejecting three-dimensional perspective; they reduced colors to somber shades; forms were distorted and broken into geometric fragments. Later they combined painting with newspaper and cloth to form collage.

Expressionism developed in Germany and Austria in the 1920s and influenced artists through the 1930s. In their works, Expressionists displayed an inner suffering and anxiety related to the disruptions of war and to the more personal questions of sexuality and psyche. Many artists projected their anguish through the use of intense colors, caricature, grotesque forms, non-Western and children's art. They often used flat, distorted perspective.

Surrealism (1920 – 1940) was a movement in both Europe and America. Artists explored the visual motifs of biomorphism, automatism (art produced without the conscious control of the artist), and the subconscious dream world of psychoanalysis. They juxtaposed unrelated objects and perceived realities.

Abstract Expressionism (1945 – 1950) developed in America after World War II around a group of artists in New York City. There were two formal styles. Action painting emphasized the physical action involved in applying paint to large canvases. Color Field painting emphasized the importance of physical shapes and colors to emotions and sensibilities. For both styles, abstract expressionism enabled artists to transfer physical and emotional feelings more directly, free of traditional forms, perspective and references.

There have been many other "isms" in the 20th century painting, sculpture, printmaking and architecture: Futurism (1908 – 1918), Realism (1920 – 1940), Pop Art (1950s – 1960s), Op Art (1960s), and Photorealism (1960 – 1975). Minimal Art and Conceptual Art began in the 1970s and continue to the present. Some movements were short-lived and others were very regional. Photography became firmly established as an art form and has its own wide variety of styles and movements.

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