

Art History General Characteristics

Compiled by Liz Ketner, May, 2003

African

- Jijora- combination of realism and abstraction
- Symmetry around vertical axis
- Curving cylindrical forms
- Frontality and static poses; rigid, upright
- Calm facial expressions
- Use of negative space
- Odo- prime of life
- Parts of body that are considered most important are emphasized

Example: Dogon Primordial Couple



Indian

- Sensuality, eroticism
- Smooth, simplified body volumes with little muscle definition
- Idealized figures based on forms in nature
- Overall decorative quality with profusion of images and ornament (horror vaqui)
- Use of symbols
- Mudras- hand positions
- Attributes to identify deities
- Narrative
- Architectural settings

Example: Shiva Nataraja

Egyptian

Example: Palette of Narmer

- Extreme conservatism: very little change in art for 3000 years (exception: Akhenaton & Amarna Pd)
- Hieratic scale
- Combination of text and images
- Use of registers
- Things may be seen from the front, the side, or above
- Rules for depicting pharaoh and family; very stylized and idealized
 - Shown in prime of life
 - Broad shoulders, narrow hips, some muscle definition
 - Calm face
 - Limited poses include composite view and Egyptian sculptural stance
- Naturalism for depiction of non-royalty, landscape, and animals in natural surroundings
- Men are dark, women are light
- Continuous narrative
- Sculpture serves as a home for the spirit/ka
- Symbols
- Architecture
 - OK: mastabas; pyramids serve as burial sites and monuments
 - MK: cliff side tombs and temples with reserve columns



- NK: funerary temples; corridor axis approach
- Amarna Period: Exception to all the Egyptian art rules; shows naturalism

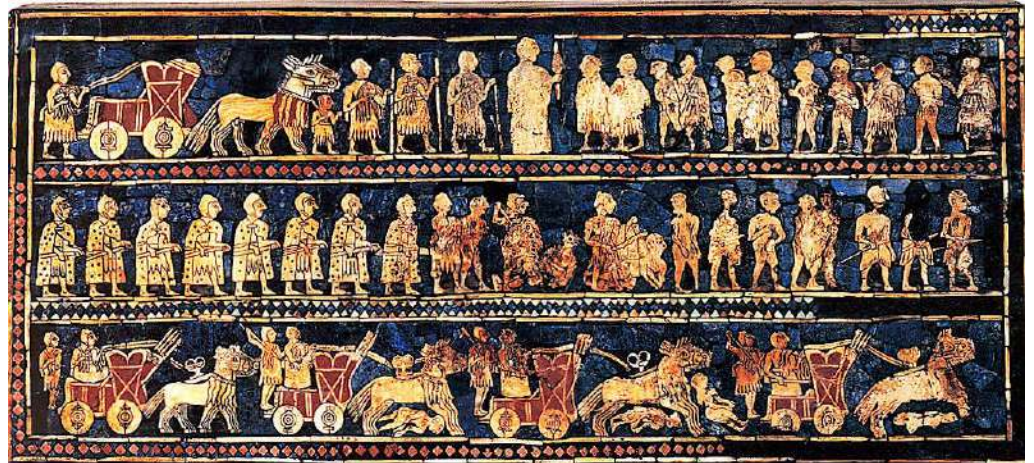
Mesopotamian

- SANTA ANNA NEVER BAKED A NUTTY PANKAKE (Sumerians, Akkadians, Neo-Sumerians, Babylonians, Neo-Babylonians, Persians)

- **Sumerians**

Example: Standard of Ur

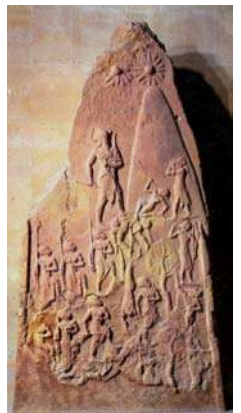
- Votive figures
- Stylized figures with large eyes (reflecting sense of fear), curly hair and beards
- Gestures of humility
- Cylindrical, curving figures
- Heraldic arrangement
- Use of Egyptian characteristics- registers, repeated figures, composite view, slight hieratic scale, linear and flat
- Ziggurats; bent axis approach



- **Akkadians**

Example: Victory Stele of Naram-Sin

- More confident, arrogant attitude; claims kings are divine
- Use huge hieratic scale



- **Neo Sumerians-** bring back Sumerian characteristics
- Example: Seated Gudea**

- **Babylonians**

- Symbolism
- Heraldic arrangement
- Composite human animal form

Example: Stele of Hammurabi



- **Assyrians**

- Use general Mesopotamian characteristics in addition to a mix of naturalism and abstraction
- Common theme of the royal lion hunt

Proto-Greek

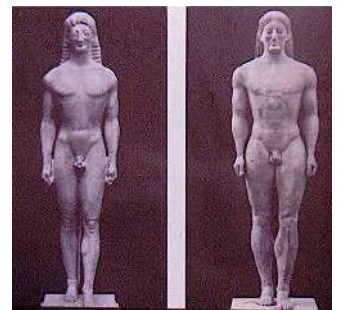
- **Cycladic** plank idols- continuation of the ancient fertility figure; abstract, simple, geometric, tubular
- **Minoans**
 - Images of animals, recreation, marine life, flora and fauna
 - Playful, curving lines; "Minoan swirlies"
 - Bright, rich colors
 - Happy mood
 - Stylized, idealized human form; tall, slender, broad shoulders
 - Celebration of youth
 - Men are darker, women lighter
 - Continuous narrative
- **Myceneans**
 - Weapons, death masks, walled cities and palaces (war-like)
 - Adopt Minoan writing and art forms
 - Use repoussé
 - Corbelled vaults, beehive tomb



Greek



- **Geometric**
 - Vases- huge pots that function as grave markers
 - Stylized, triangular human form
 - Very little detail
 - No text b/c writing disappeared
- **Archaic**
 - Egyptian influence
 - Kouros/Korae figures: stylized and idealized; goofy smile/Archaic smile; curly ravioli hair; nudes in the prime of life; Egyptian sculptural stance



- **Classical**
 - Severe Style: calm faces; contrapposto stance (Kritios Boy); realistic but idealized male nudes; focus on mastering body mechanics and showing motion
 - High Classical: use of earlier characteristics + focus on perfect proportions
 - Late Classical: Praxiteles does 1st female nude; subtle changes that lead to Hellenistic

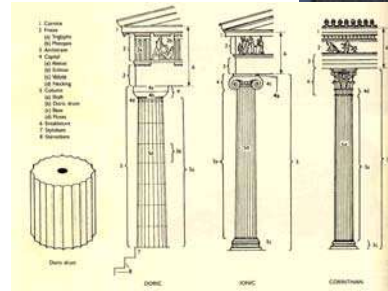
• Hellenistic

- Loss of Greek independence leads to different mood
- Wider range of subject matter
- Art expresses emotion, especially negative ones
- Intentionally erotic art
- Realistic and naturalistic



• Greek Architecture:

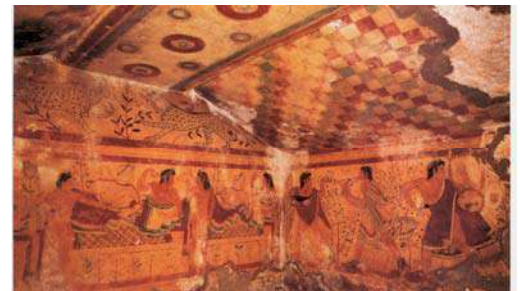
- Doric, Ionic, columns (Corinthian on inside)
- Peristyle temples with entry from all sides
- Decorated pediment
- Triglyphs and metopes (Doric temples); frieze (Ionic temples)
- Vertical and horizontal lines; balance and proportion
- Post and lintel system
- Religious structures
- Focus on exterior decoration
- Significance of location of buildings



Etruscans

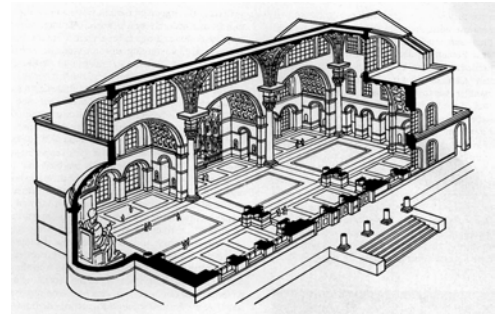
- Tuscan columns- bases but no flutes
- Round arch
- Tombs arranged in cities called necropolises
- "Happy" wall paintings w/ curving lines, sense of vitality
- Temples: made of wood; solid walls

with columns only in front; plain pediments



Romans

- Use arch (round), vault (barrel, groin), dome, concrete in monumental ways
- Mosaics: earth colors; tesserae (flat tiles)
- Cities laid out according to ideal grid plan
- Basilicas: rectangular; apse; entrances on sides; roof higher than side aisles; barrel and groin vaults; coffered ceiling; clerestory windows; Corinthian columns
- Exterior and interior decoration
- Triumphal arches
- Wall painting
 - 1st style: emulates marble
 - 2nd style: illusion of 3D space- atmospheric and linear perspective, diminution, foreshortening, overlapping (all not perfected)
 - 3rd style: reasserts primacy of the wall; framed pictures
 - 4th style: combines earlier 3



• Sculpture

- Roman Republic: super-realism/verism
- Early Empire: idealized
- 3rd Century: expressionistic



Early Christian

- Art in catacombs
- Jesus shown as good shepherd and later as Pantocrator
- Use of lunettes
- Denaturing- moving back to conceptual art

- Architecture: basilica plan; clerestory windows; post and lintel (wooden ceiling); triumphal arch over apse; round arch/arcade; very light
- Continuous narrative



Byzantine

- Architecture: central and quincunx plan churches
- Mysterious, irrational, very decorative
- Columns with basket capitals
- Mosaics with lots of gold
- "Too many peopleism"
- Stylized forms: large eyes, long thin fingers and noses
- Central, frontal, symmetrical
- Figures lack mass and have down-pointing feet
- Hieratic scale
- Flat, linear; no shadows, no landscape background, little modeling
- Isocephalic- heads at same level



Islamic

- Hypostyle halls with lots of open space for communal prayer
- Wall of a mosque that is closest to Mecca is called the *qibla*; it is marked by a domed niche called a *mihrab*
- Tower called *minaret* marks the entrance
- Courtyard that serves as preparatory experience
- Horseshoe and lobed arches
- Gold color; bands of geometric figures; Arabic calligraphy; stylized intertwining plan forms



Barbarian

- Interlace patterns
- Imaginary animals
- Appears on small portable objects, usually with a practical purpose



Carolingian (ca 750-900, period around rule of Charlemagne)

- Evidence of Classical Illusionism: modeling, landscape background, attempts at perspective
- Expressionism: energetic lines, emphasis on expression of inner emotional state

Ottonian

- Stylized figures with big eyes
- Completely linear and flat
- "Too many peopleism"
- Hieratic scale
- Composition: central, frontal, symmetrical
- Isocephalic



Romanesque

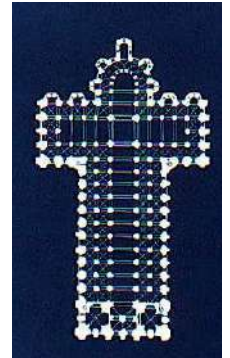


Sculpture:

- Attached to churches, completely dependent on the architecture
- Stylized, elongated

Architecture:

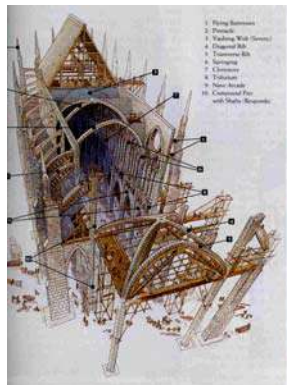
- Use of Roman round arch and barrel vault
- Larger churches built to accommodate pilgrimages: second aisle, ambulatory, radiating chapels
- Stone barrel vaults replace flammable wooden roofs, cause walls to be thicker, w/ smaller windows so darker



Gothic

Sculpture:

- Increasingly less stylized and more naturalistic
- Increasingly Classicistic: Gothic sway is close to contrapposto stance, Classical proportions, idealization
- Becoming more independent from the architecture, moving out from the walls behind it.



Architecture:

- POINTED arch + Ribbed groin vault makes ceilings much higher
- Flying buttresses take weight out, can make big stained glass windows



Proto-Renaissance

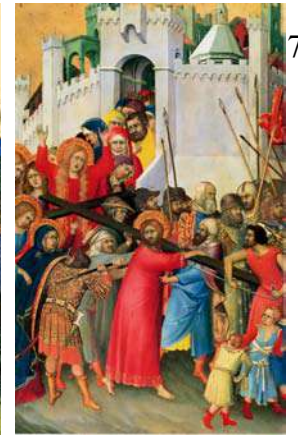
Giotto re-introduces *naturalism* to painting:

- shading
- shadows
- individualization
- landscape settings
- no hieratic scale



International Gothic Style

- Commingling of Northern European and Italian style
- Tons of gold and bright rich colors
- Processions of wealthy looking people who are richly dressed
- Very crowded canvases- horror vacui
- Intentionally ornamental and decorative style, meaning a loss of realism
- Thin, two dimensional, flatter figures; less modeling and shading



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Early Renaissance

- 1st half of 15th century
 - Humanism
 - Illusion of depth- linear and atmospheric perspective; unified light source
 - Contrapposto stance
 - Heavy modeling
 - Realistic arrangement of figures in space
 - Individualized, realistic figures



- 2nd half of 15th century
 - All earlier features
 - Motion and emotion
 - Foreshortening, middle ground



Northern Renaissance

- Disguised symbolism
- Miniature detail
- Surface realism
- Patterns, textures
- Bright oil colors
- Combination of everyday and supernatural
- Frail, pale, elongated figures
- Realism of everyday details, actual unidealized human faces, and landscapes (when depicted)
- Puddles of drapery with angular folds
- Humanism: artists' signatures, secular subject matter, depiction of donors in paintings, frontal portraits, personality in portraits



High Renaissance

- Many Classical characteristics
- Balance, harmony, proportion
- Calm dignity and rationality
- Central, symmetrical
- Realistic but idealized human figures; proportionate
- Figural pyramid
- Realistic deep space



Venetian Style

- Rich oil colors- red, gold, green
- "Miller Time"- soft late afternoon light
- Pastoral Arcadian landscape
- Painterly style
- Plump figures with golden skin; often in motion
- Dynamic composition
- Asymmetrical with asymmetrical balance
- Diagonal lines
- Mood of lightheartedness, sensuality, worldliness



Mannerism

- Anti-naturalism; trying to make viewers uncomfortable
- Intentionally distorted, disproportionate figure- elongated with small heads
- *Figura serpentinata*- twisting figures
- Chaotic sense of space- too many peopleism
- Centrifugal composition; no focal point; figures pushed out around edges and to front
- Clashing colors
- Overly dramatic; theatrical hand gestures
- Phase I: intense emotionalism
- Phase II: hyper-elegance; CHEESUS!



Baroque

- Matter in motion through time, space, and light
- Action, drama, motion, tension
- Chiaroscuro, tenebroso
- Snapshot in time
- Emotional involvement and intensity- lots of diagonals, emotional faces, figures in motion
- Space is outward and expansive; comes out towards us
- Profusion of ornament; "more is more"
- First style: Baroque naturalism- images of a realistic, un-cleaned up natural world; Caravaggio, Artemesia Gentileschi, Velasquez, Rembrandt, Hals
- Second style: Baroque classicism- idealized natural world; more resembles Renaissance art; Carracci, Bernini, Poussin, Claude Lorrain
- Third style: Proto-Romantic- hyper dynamic natural world; spiraling composition; Rubens



Rococo

- Rich people doing rich people things
- Light-hearted, sensual, indulgent, playful
- Pastel colors
- Painterly style
- Nature is wild but nice
- Curvy lines
- Frivolous



Romanticism

- Dramatic historical scenes and contemporary scenes
- Images of heroism, suffering, the exotic
- Nature as vast, powerful, awe-inspiring
- Images of fear, cruelty, insanity
- Neo-Baroque techniques: intense color, intense drama, dramatic light, dynamic motion



Realism

- Reaction against Romanticism
- Artists painted only what they could see
- Much of their art has a political agenda
- Everyday scenes, often of the lower class



Impressionism

- Influenced by Realists and French Barbizon School
- Paint only what they can see
- Wanted to capture fleeting impressions of light and color
- Loose brushstrokes
- Paint everyday scenes, usually of the middle class
- Avoided blacks and grays

Post Impressionists

- SOUTH CAROLINA VEGETABLES GROW TALL (Seurat, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Toulouse Lautrec)
- Feel Impressionism is too limiting
- Retain the bright color palette but explore aspects of structure/form (Seurat and Cézanne) or expression (Van Gogh, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec)

Symbolists

- Think realism is trivial
- Fascinated by the inner workings of the mind
- Believe their task is seeing through things to their deeper meaning and reality



20th Century (4 trends)

- **Expressionism:** artists use art to express their own emotional responses to the world; influenced by Van Gogh, Gauguin, non-Western art
- **Abstraction:** artists explore the internal structure of forms in the visible world; influenced by Cézanne and non-Western art
- **Fantasy:** artists explore the interior of the human psyche, focusing on the non-rational, such as dreams, fantasy, imagination, fears; influenced by Symbolists and Freud
- **Realism:** artists reveal their life in the 20th century, focusing frequently on mechanization, urbanization, war, and isolation; influenced by Courbet and Daumier