



Geometry, perfect solids, the golden mean

We now look at the nature and purpose visual objects created by the early Greek civilization and how it inherited many aspects of Egyptian art, then departed from these origins between 700 BCE and 400 BCE. Introducing elements of foreshortening and study of human anatomy, visual objects representing humans and deities became more lifelike, evolving a remarkable degree of perfection unrivaled for more than a millennium. We examine the identification of Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns on architecture. We consider the influence of Greek art on the visual objects of the Roman republic, the “perfect solids” identified by the ancients, and the evolution of large structure creation techniques including pyramids, Greek temples and the development of the arch. We examine the nature of monumental objects of the Roman era, Middle Eastern portraiture funerary practices, the influence of Rome on Buddhist artistic practice, and the radical changes in art brought about by the Christian conquest of Rome.

Time period and civilizations

700 BCE to 400 CE

Early Greece, the Hellenic Greek empire, Roman empire, Buddhist India

Associated readings

E. H. Gombrich *The Story of Art*, 16th edition:
Chapters 3, 4, and 5

Francois Delamare *Colors: The Story of Pigments and Dyes:*
Chapter 1, *Painting and Dyeing*

Study questions

After accomplishing this chapter's reading from the workbook and the associated textbook readings you should be able to form accurate answers to the following questions. Use these questions to help guide your study activities in preparation for quizzes and exams.

1. Describe the departure of Greek portrayal of the human body from the way the body was portrayed in ancient Egypt, and discuss a concrete example.
2. Describe the significant features of a Greek Doric temple of the 4th century BCE.
3. Describe the characteristics and purpose of sculptures of Greek deities such as that of Athena created by Pheidias about 450 BCE.
4. Discuss why very few painted visual objects or sculptures made of bronze have come down to us through the ages from ancient Greece, as opposed to marble copies of these three-dimensional visual objects.
5. Discuss what accounts for the remarkable achievements of the Greeks in portraying the human body, which occurred by about 400 BCE.
6. Concisely distinguish between Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian column forms.
7. Identify and discuss the most significant content and characteristics of the ***Laocoon Group*** sculpture of Hagesandros (175 BCE).
8. Discuss the limitations evident in Roman landscapes of approximately 100 BCE in terms of their depiction of distance and depth.
9. Identify the “perfect solids” and the “golden mean” and what is special about each of them.
10. Describe the substances that ancient Greeks thought made up the universe.
11. Identify and describe the serious limitation of stone in constructing large structures and how the arch magnificently overcomes this limitation.
12. Describe the unique aspects of the construction of the ***Pantheon*** in Rome (130 CE), discussing in particular how the large opening in the roof is made possible.
13. Discuss the purpose(s) of statuary in the daily life of the Roman empire (100 CE).
14. The carvings on the upper reaches of ***Trajan's Column*** (114 CE) in Rome are unreadable from the ground. Discuss the intent of such “unviewable” inscriptions.
15. Identify and discuss some of the pigments used in ancient Pompeii to create wall art that is still visible today as a result of the “smothering” effect of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 CE.
16. Discuss the influence of Roman artistic forms on early Indian Buddhist art.
17. Discuss how the purpose and practice of artistic activities changed with the official adoption of Christianity by the Roman empire in the 4th century CE.
18. Compare and contrast Jewish and Christian artistic practices of the 3rd and 4th centuries CE in terms of content, composition, and intent.