**Year 1 Art History: An Overview**

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These works illustrate the earliest examples of human art, the early art of Mesopotamia and Egypt, followed by the rapid and astonishing development of Greek art from the Archaic style (solid and unemotional) to the accurate representation of the anatomy and weight of the human body in Classical Greek art, through the more dramatic, emotional of Hellenistic art.

Sculptures were made in both marble and bronze, though very few bronze sculptures have survived; the vast majority have been melted down over the millennia so that the metal could be reused. Romans greatly admired Greek art and imitated its style (often recreating original Greek bronzes in marble, with the frequent addition of struts to support limbs and "props" such as tree trunks to support the weight of the stone). In the late Roman period, 800 years after the Greeks had developed what we know as Classical art, styles moved away from this emphasis on the accurate and lifelike representation of the human body, an interest and technique which would be rediscovered during the Renaissance. Compare the Apollo Belvedere to Michelangelo's David; it is hard to believe that they come from cultures separated by 1300 years of history.

Greek vases are important as source material for details of everyday life in Ancient Greece, and because they are almost the only examples of Greek painting that have survived. Several of the works included are primarily important as artefacts as much as being works of art in their own right; they are significant historical sources for the ancient world (Hammurabi's Law, Rosetta Stone, Book of the Dead).

# Glossary

**Apotropaic** - Art or objects believed to protect against evil spirits or bad luck, like scary faces carved on buildings.

**Bas relief** - Sculpture that is carved so it sticks out slightly from a flat background, like pictures carved into stone walls.

**Chryselephantine** - Sculptures made with gold and ivory, often used for the most important statues of gods.

**Continuous frieze** - A long band of carved or painted decoration that runs around a building without breaks.

**Exedra** - Curved or rectangular seating area, often with benches, built into the walls of Classical buildings for conversation.

**Gorgoneion** - The face or head of Medusa (a monster with snakes for hair) used as decoration to ward off evil.

**Grand Tour** - Educational trips that wealthy young Europeans took to see ancient art and ruins in Italy and Greece.

**Hierarchy of scale** - Making the most important people or gods in artwork much larger than less important figures to show their power or status.

**Horizon line** - An imaginary line where the sky meets the ground that artists use to show depth and distance in their paintings.

**Kore/korai** - Statues of young women made by ancient Greeks, often wearing long robes and sometimes holding offerings.

**Kouros/kouroi** - Statues of young men made by ancient Greeks, usually standing straight with one foot forward and arms at their sides.

**Kylix** - A shallow, two-handled drinking cup used by ancient Greeks for wine.

**Metope** - Square spaces between triglyphs on Greek temples that were often filled with carved scenes or decorations.

**Pediment** - The triangular space above the columns at the front and back of a Greek temple, often filled with sculptures.

**Sacraria** - Small shrines or sacred spaces in Roman homes where families worshipped their household gods.

**Slip** - A liquid clay coating applied to pottery before firing to create a smooth surface or add color.

**Sprues** - Small channels or tubes used when casting bronze sculptures to let the melted metal flow into the mold.

**Stylobate** - The top step or platform that Greek temple columns stand on.

**Triclinium** - The dining room in a Roman house where people ate while lying on couches arranged around three sides.

**Triglyph** - Rectangular stone blocks with three vertical grooves that decorated the tops of Greek temple columns.

**Twisted/composite perspective** - An art technique where different parts of the same object or person are shown from different angles, like showing a face from the side but shoulders from the front.

**Exedrae** - Curved or rectangular seating areas, often with benches, built into the walls of Roman buildings for conversation.

**Unit 1: Lascaux cave paintings, France, 15,000 BC**

The Lascaux cave paintings were discovered in 1940, by two boys walking in the Dordogne countryside. Their dog found a hole created by a fallen tree, which led the boys to clamber down and discover a vast painted cave complex. The boys brought Abbe Henri Bresson, the local Catholic priest, to see their find, and he sketched many of the paintings, creating a record of the designs in the condition in which they were found. There are over 650 paintings throughout these caves. They are believed to have been painted by many different artists over a period of about 2000 years.

Most of the paintings depict animals. Over 36 different species have been identified, including cows, bulls, horses, deer, stags, aurochs, and bison. Different ages of animal life are shown, including pregnancy. Most of the species are prey, rather than predators, leading art historians to suggest that the caves have religious meaning related to ensuring successful hunting.

This image comes from the largest space, a cave known as the Great Hall of the Bulls, which is big enough for 50 people to gather. It is not thought that people lived in these caves, but that they came there for rituals and celebrations related to the paintings.

Paints were made from natural materials: charcoal, ore, plants, berries, mixed with animal fat to bind. It was either sprayed on through blowpipes of bone or swabbed on with fur or lichen brushes. There are holes made in the ceiling which suggest that wooden scaffolding was used to reach the top of the cave. As well as animal paintings, there are some abstract designs and some handprint patterns.

There is no ground or **horizon line** in the paintings; the animals float in space (contrast this with later paintings that we will see). The animals are usually shown in profile, but also with **twisted or composite perspective** – bodies in profile, but horns shown as though we see them from the front), a pose that makes them easily identifiable. Later, we will see this as a typical feature of Egyptian art – front-facing body, head in profile.

The caves were opened to the public in 1948, but the paintings began to deteriorate immediately due to carbon dioxide, heat, humidity and other contaminants brought into the caves, and they were closed again in 1963. In 2016, an 8000 meter square reproduction of the caves was opened to visitors.

**Unit 2: Bronze Head of Sargon, 2300-2200 BC**

Sargon the Great was the first ruler of the Akkadian Empire, which included most of Mesopotamia as well as parts of the Levant. Sargon became the first person in recorded history to rule over an empire when he defeated the Sumerian states in the 24th or 23rd century BC.

Sargon's name appears in various versions of the Sumerian king lists, as well as later legend-like accounts of his life. A "hero's origin" story is recorded about his birth – he was found in a basket in a river and brought up as the son of a gardener. He became cup-bearer to Ur-Zababa of Kish, and then later forcefully took the throne from Lugal-zage-si of Uruk and made his own city of Akkad the capital of his empire.

This bronze portrait head, approximately 12" tall, is one of the first known depictions of a ruler. Earlier art tended to depict deities, so this represents the beginning of the use of art for not just spiritual, but also political purposes.

The portrait was probably originally part of a full-length statue. It depicts the elaborately curled beard, braided hair and (not seen) royal man-bun of Akkadian rulers. The portrait has been damaged – the left eye socket gouged out, the nose flattened at the tip, the ears cut off, and the ends of the beard trimmed. It is possible that the eye socket was damaged in an attempt to gouge out an inlay of precious material, but there is no evidence that there was any such inlay. The presence of the other damage suggests that this was deliberate political iconoclasm. It is interesting that the portrait was not completely destroyed, to obliterate Sargon's memory, but rather defaced, to create a lasting humiliation of the emperor.

The mask is currently in the Baghdad Museum, Iraq.

**Unit 3: Akhenaten & Nefertiti Reliefs, 1340 BC, Egyptian**

This is a relatively small (1' square) block of stone that was probably used as an altar in a private home. It shows an informal domestic scene of the Pharaoh Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti, and three of their daughters. The children are nude and have shaved heads, as was customary for Egyptian children. Nefertiti's throne is decorated with the lotus symbol of a unified Egypt. Above the figures, the deity Aten (shown as a sun disk with a cobra on it) sends out rays that end in tiny ankhs, the Egyptian symbol of life.

King Amenhotep IV abandoned the polytheistic worship of the pantheon of Egyptian gods. He instituted monotheism and the worship of Aten, the universal and only sun god. He removed names and statues of gods from temples and dissolved the orders of priests. He changed his own name to Akhenaten (Aten is pleased) and declared himself to be Aten's son, his only representative on earth, and the only human who would be able to live on in the afterlife. Unsurprisingly, this declaration that his subjects would have no access to the afterlife was very unpopular.

A new style of art, known as the Armana Period, was introduced at this time. In contrast to the typical Egyptian depictions of pharaohs as godlike, remote, perfected and eternal, Armana art showed the pharaoh and his family in relaxed and even casual settings and positions. This style also featured stylized, curving body contours instead of naturalistic and muscular depictions of the human forms, including exaggerated and elongated heads, slender limbs and swollen bellies. Like Akhenaten's religious innovations, the stylistic change was not popular; after his death, Egyptian art quickly reverted to its previous styles.

**Unit 4: Tutankhamun mask, 1332-1323 BC, Egyptian**

King Tutankhamen was the son of Akhenaten. His reign was short, and he died young, but in those few years he returned Egypt to its traditional gods and artistic styles. King Tutankhamen is best known for his tomb and the elaborate burial goods inside, discovered in 1922 by an expedition led by Sir Howard Carter in the Valley of the Kings. The expedition made their breakthrough when a young Arab boy, employed to carry water, noticed a step buried in the sand. The step led to the threshold of the tomb, unopened since ancient times. After weeks of careful excavation, Carter famously peered through a hole in the inner door and saw "wonderful things" illuminated by candlelight. The tomb contained over 5,000 artifacts crammed into four small chambers, including the antechamber, annex, burial chamber, and treasury.

The burial chamber contained the mummified body of the pharaoh. It was enclosed within four layers of gilded wooden outer shrines, a red granite sarcophagus, and three inner sarcophagi in human form. The innermost coffin was made of 243 lbs. of solid gold and was adorned with this mask made of gold, enamel, and semi-precious stones. The king is depicted in the idealized form of Osiris, god of the underworld. He holds the crook and flail, the symbols of the power of the pharaoh. He wears the traditional headdress decorated with the cobra and falcon, and the ornamental beard, all made of gold, lapis lazuli, carnelian, and obsidian. Intricate hieroglyphic inscriptions on both the coffins and mask invoke protective spells from the Book of the Dead.

The tomb had been broken into twice in antiquity, but both attempts were discovered and stopped before the treasures could be removed. Repairs are visible from the first attempted break in; after the second attempt, a corridor within the tomb was entirely filled with stone chips to prevent entry. The Valley of the Kings was prone to flooding, and over time the outside of the tomb was blocked by deposits of alluvial materials. Debris from the excavation of later tombs in the Valley further blocked the entrance, preserving the tomb and its contents untouched for centuries.

**Unit 5: Codex of Hammurabi, Babylonian 1750 BC**

This 7'6" stele of black basalt is the earliest recorded law code. There would have been multiple copies of the code placed around the kingdom. This particular stele was originally displayed at the city of Sippar in the Babylonian kingdom. After the Elamites defeated the Babylonians, it was brought back to Susa as war plunder and exhibited on the Susian acropolis.

At the top is a low relief carving showing Shamash, the sun god, seated on a ziggurat-shaped throne, with his feet resting on mountains, and with rays of light coming out of his shoulders. Hammurabi stands in front of him in a posture of respectful greeting. Shamash hands to Hammurabi the symbols of kingship: a rope, a rod, and a ring. Both figures are in **twisted or compositive perspective** (shoulders frontal, faces in profile). The composition uses **hierarchy of scale**, which means that more important figures are depicted as taller than less important figures (if Shamash stood up, he would tower over Hammurabi).

The text on the stele is written in cuneiform characters, top to bottom, right to left. It is in three parts: a justification of the authority of Hammurabi, the listing of over 300 specific laws and their relative punishments (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth), and a poem praising Hammurabi's virtues.

Literacy was relatively rare, but the presence of such an image indicated the importance of the codex of laws. Even those who could not read would be able to understand from the image that the laws were given to the king by the deity, and that the king had divine authority to enforce them.

**Unit 6: Lamassu guardian figure, Nimrud, 885-889 BC, Assyrian**

This lamassu is one of more than 100 known gateway statues from Neo-Assyrian cities and citadels showing human-animal hybrid guardian figures. This example is at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

From the ninth to the seventh century BC, Assyria ruled a large empire in Mesopotamia. King Ashurnisipal II (r. 883-859 BC) built a huge palace complex in the town of Nimrud. The palace sprawled over nine hundred acres and was surrounded by a mudbrick wall 120 feet thick, 42 feet high, and five miles in circumference. The gates of this complex were guarded by stone sculptures of hybrid creatures – eagle-winged, human-headed, and with the bodies of lions or bulls. The figures wear horned crowns indicating their divinity (like the one worn by Shamash on the Codex of Hammurabi) and have carefully curled beards, similar to that shown on the portrait bust of Sargon.

These figures are all carved with five legs: two are visible as they are viewed from the front, which would appear to stand motionless, but then an additional three legs give the impression of motion as the visitor enters past them.

These figures were believed to be **apotropaic**, meaning intended to be able to turn away evil (Gk/Latin roots: *apo* – away; *tropos*, to turn). Mudbrick and timber were still the common building materials, with limestone, alabaster or gypsum only used for carved reliefs such as these. Unlike stone, mudbrick and timber are not long-lasting building materials, so "little besides remains" of the palace.

The reliefs from Ashurnasirpal's palace were inscribed with a formula known as the "Standard Inscription", which refers to these statues as it declares repeatedly, "I built thereon [a palace with] halls of cedar, cypress, juniper, boxwood, teak, terebinth and tamarisk as my royal dwelling and for the enduring leisure life of my lordship … Beasts of the mountains and the seas, which I had fashioned out of white limestone and alabaster, I had set up in its gates. I made it fittingly imposing".

**Unit 7: Kouros of Merenda, 540-530 BC, Greek**

A **kouros** was a type of ancient Greek grave marker. It was not a portrait of the deceased, but a **type**, always a young man, standing, with one foot forward, frontal facing, showing either no emotion or a slight smile (known as "the Archaic smile", believed to be an expression indicating not happiness but spirituality or eternity).

In the 7th century BC, Greek trade with Egypt reopened and Greek contact with Egyptian artistic traditions was re-established. The earliest **kouroi** closely followed the Egyptian geometric norm: the figures were cubic, starkly frontal, broad-shouldered, and narrow-waisted. The arms were held close to the sides, fists usually clenched, and both feet were firmly planted on the ground, knees rigid, with the left foot slightly advanced. By the time of the Merenda Kouros, Greek sculptors had begun to move away from these rigid Egyptian conventions toward more naturalistic representations, though still maintaining the formal, frontal pose characteristic of the type.

The Kouros of Merenda was created approximately 540-530 B.C. It is 6 ft 2 inches tall and made of marble. It would originally have been brightly painted, in common with all ancient stone sculpture. The paint was encaustic, meaning it was mixed with melted wax before being applied. This sealed the marble, providing a protective barrier against erosion from the elements.

There were also female versions of these statues, known as **kore** (maiden). These were also votive or commemorative statues, often with an inscription on the base indicating who had made the offering. Unlike the male **kouros**, which were always nude, the female **kore** were always clothed.

The statue was discovered alongside the famous Phrasikleia Kore in the ancient city of Myrrhinous. Both works had been deliberately buried, possibly to protect them from Persian invasions in the early 5th century BC.

The Merenda Kouros marks an important step in Greek art's evolution from rigid, Egyptian-style figures to more natural-looking sculptures. This statue represents the bridge between early, stiff kouros figures and the lifelike masterpieces that would define Classical Greek art in the next century.

**Unit 8: Dionysius cup, Exekias, 540 BC, Greek**

Greek black-figure pottery emerged around 700 B.C. and remained the most popular Greek pottery style until about 530 B.C., when the red-figure technique was developed. The production process involved a complex three-stage firing technique using iron-rich Attic clay that could transform from red to black depending on oxygen conditions in the kiln. In black-figure vase painting, figural and ornamental motifs were applied with a **slip** (a solution of clay particles in water) that turned black during firing, while the background was left the color of the clay.

Vase painters created detail in their compositions by incising (scratching into) the slip or by adding white and purple painted details. The first significant use of the black-figure technique was developed in Corinth, but it reached its artistic peak in Athens, where master painters developed increasingly sophisticated narrative scenes drawn from mythology, daily life, and religious ceremonies. The technique required exceptional skill as artists had to paint their compositions in color-reverse, knowing that the glossy slip would turn black during the firing process, creating dramatic silhouettes against the orange-red clay background.

The Dionysus Cup is one of the best-known works of ancient Greek vase painting. It is a **kylix** (drinking cup – the root word that chalice comes from) dating to 540–530 BC. It stands less than 6 inches high, and about 12 inches wide. Exekias was a painter and potter who was active in Athens between roughly 545 BC and 530 BC. Only 14 surviving vessels are signed by him, including this one, although many others have been attributed to him based on style.

The outside was decorated with two pairs of large eyes (and 2 small noses), a style created by Exekias, possibly with this cup, and much imitated. It also depicts six warriors standing over a corpse, probably that of Patroclus, friend of Achilles, who was killed by Hector when he went into battle in Achilles' armor because Achilles refused to fight.

The interior of the cup shows Dionysus sailing within the wine-dark interior of the cup, creating an ingenious composition that transforms the circular interior into a seascape when tipped to drink. It was more common for kylix to be decorated on the inside with a **gorgoneion**, a small gorgon's head that would be revealed (jump scare!) when the vessel was tipped up to be drained.

Dionysus was the god of wine, vegetation, festivity, inspiration, and madness; the painting depicts his journey to Athens by ship. Pirates seized the ship and were planning to capture Dionysus and sell him into slavery. Instead, the god caused vines to grow from the mast, frightening the pirates so much that they jumped overboard and were changed into dolphins, here seen swimming around the ship.

**Unit 9: The Sirens Stamnos, 480-470 BC, Greek**

The Sirens stamnos, attributed to the Siren Painter, dates to c. 480-470 B.C. It shows the famous episode from Homer's Odyssey where Odysseus encounters the deadly Sirens, birds with women's heads, who sing a beautiful and compelling song to lure sailors towards their island, where they will waste away to death listening to the enthralling song.

Odysseus instructed his men to fill their ears with beeswax so that they could not hear the song, but he, curious to hear their enchanting music, had himself lashed to the mast and gave instructions that he should not be released no matter what he ordered or begged when he heard the sirens.

The ship moves to the left, propelled by oars, of which six are seen on the port side; the heads and shoulders of five bearded rowers are visible above the gunwale. Two bird-bodied maidens perch on rocky crags on each side of the composition. A third appears to be plunging into the ocean, probably a reference to the legend that the sirens will die, possibly of despair, if any sailor escapes their clutches.

A stamnos was a large wide-mouthed jar for the storage and serving of liquids. This one is 13 inches high and 15 inches wide, including the two large handles for carrying. It is decorated in the red-figure style, a technique that replaced the black figure style from about 530 BC. The red figure style was achieved by painting most of the red clay vase with a slip that would turn shiny black in the kiln to create a background, while leaving only the silhouettes of the figures and objects unpainted. Details would be added with a very fine brush, which enabled painters to create subtle facial expressions, intricate drapery folds, and complex anatomical details that were impossible to achieve with the rigid incision method of black-figure work, leading to more naturalistic and emotionally expressive scenes.

**Unit 10: Bronze statue of Zeus (or Poseidon), 470 BC, Greek**

The production of bronze statues in Classical Greece through lost-wax casting represented one of the most sophisticated metalworking techniques of the ancient world, enabling artists to create large-scale sculptures with unprecedented detail and naturalism.

How to make a bronze statue:

1. Make a clay version of the statue
2. Cover the clay model in wax and incise fine details into the wax.
3. Cover the wax with another layer of clay.
4. Use metal pins to hold the inner and outer layers of clay together, so that they cannot shift when the wax is drained away. Add channels (little drainage pipes), called sprues, to allow the wax to run out when it was heated.
5. Fire the mold in a kiln to melt out the wax, leaving a hollow cavity between the two clay layers.
6. Pour molten bronze in through the sprues to create a bronze layer between the two clay layers.
7. Break away the clay layers and snap off the pins and the **sprues** (which will also have filled with bronze). Polish and finish the statue and add additional details by hand.

In the indirect method of lost-wax casting, the original master model is not lost in the casting process. Therefore, it is possible to recast sections, to make multiple copies of the same statue, and to piece-cast large-scale statuary. The process, both in making a clay model of a statue as the first step, and in allowing the possibility of recasting the metal if the result was dissatisfactory, gave more artistic freedom than sculpting in stone, where one error could irreparably ruin a valuable block of marble. This technical achievement in bronze casting allowed the Greeks freedom to experiment with the representation of the human body, while also enabling them to create hollow statues that were lighter and used less precious bronze material than solid casting would require.

The Artemision Zeus (or Poseidon) dates to around 460 B.C.E and stands nearly seven feet high. It was found off Cape Artemision in Greece in 1928 and had presumably gone down in a shipwreck in ancient times. Very few full-scale bronzes have survived from antiquity, although sources record that they were once very common. The vast majority were melted down so that the metal could be re-used for cannons or later artwork. This powerful figure represents either Zeus preparing to hurl a thunderbolt or Poseidon about to cast his trident. The weapon (which may have been may of wood and so rotted away) has not been found, so it is impossible to firmly identify the god. Zeus (or Poseidon) is in full “heroic nudity” with his left arm and foot thrust dynamically forward, capturing a moment of both divine power and perfect athletic balance. The eyes would have originally been inlaid in silver and the lips in copper, adding another dimension of intimidating realism.

## Unit 11: Parthenon Pedimental Sculptures, 438-432 BC, Greek

The Parthenon is an ancient Greek temple located on the Acropolis of Athens, built between 447-438 BC during the height of the Athenian Empire. It was dedicated to Athena Parthenos (Athena the Virgin), the patron goddess of Athens.

The construction of the Parthenon was part of Pericles' ambitious building program following Athens' victory over the Persians and the establishment of the Delian League. In 447 B.C., some 33 years after the Persian invasion, Pericles began building the Parthenon to replace the earlier temple that had been destroyed by the Persians in 480 BC. Its design is credited to two architects, Ictinus and Callicrates and it took nearly 15 years to build. The project was paid for with funds from the Delian League treasury, transforming what was supposed to be a defensive alliance into a statement of Athenian pride and superiority. The building demonstrated not only religious devotion to Athena but was also a bold political statement of Athenian cultural supremacy in the Greek world.

The temple is considered the finest example of classical Greek architecture. It was constructed primarily of white Pentelic marble and originally housed a massive **chryselephantine** (gold and ivory) statue of Athena created by the sculptor Phidias. The building is supported by 46 massive outer columns and was decorated with elaborate sculptural friezes depicting mythological scenes, including the birth of Athena and the Panathenaic procession.

The Parthenon is an unusual example fo Greek architecture because it combines both Doric and Ionic elements; the column capitals, **triglyphs** and **metopes** are typical Doric elements while the **continuous frieze** is usually only found on Ionic buildings.

The architects incorporated subtle variations throughout the building to balance out optical distortions when viewed. If all the lines were straight and the proportions regular, the massive building would look distorted to the human eye. Instead, the Greeks included actual irregularities so that the eye would perceive the proportions as perfect. For example:

• The **stylobate** (base) curves slightly downwards towards the ends so that it looks flat and not sagging to the human eye. It is about 6cm higher in the middle.

• The columns are not straight, but lean slightly inwards (if you imagine them continuing upwards, they would meet at a height of about a mile above the Parthenon).

• The columns taper visibly towards the top, but they also swell towards the middle to avoid the impression of narrowing at the center.

• The columns are not evenly spaced; the two at the ends are slightly closer together so that they look evenly spaced

• The columns are not all the same width; those at the corners are a little wider, so that they appear to match those in the middle.

The sculptural decoration of the Parthenon is composed of:

(1) The **frieze**, which runs around the interior row of columns and is believed to show the Panathenaic procession, an annual religious festival in which a new peplos tunic was ceremoniously brought to the cult statue of Athena in the temple. The procession included cavalry, chariots, sacrificial animals, and citizens. This was a significant break with tradition as it showed the people of Athens and not only mythological figures and deities, as was traditional on temples.

(2) The sculptures in the two triangular **pediments** at each end of the building. The sculptures in the east pediment represent the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus and the sculptures in the west pediment represent the struggle between Athena and Poseidon for the land of Attica.

(3) A series of **metopes** (square sculpted relief panels) depicting the Centauromachy (battle between the Centaurs and the Lapiths, the Gigantomachy (battle between the Giants and the Olympian gods), Amazonomachy (Greeks vs. Amazons), and the Fall of Troy; together these represent the triumph of civilization (Greeks) over barbarism (everyone else). Many of these metopes were destroyed by Christians when the building was used as a church in the 6$^{th}$ or 7$^{th}$ century.

In 1687, during the Great Turkish War, Venetian forces attacking Athens scored a direct hit on the Parthenon with a mortar shell, igniting the Ottoman ammunition stored inside. This destroyed much of the interior and damaged many of the sculptures. Some fell to the ground and smashed, and others were left precariously balanced. The commander, Francesco Morsini, was instructed by the Venetian Senate to bring back to Venice the best sculptures he could retrieve. He attempted to remove the figures from the western pediment, but in the process, the sculptures fell to the ground and were destroyed.

The building's roof had been ruined in the 1687 explosion, leaving all the internal artwork exposed to weather and pollution. In the 18$^{th}$ century, tourists on the **Grand Tour** (a tradition of finishing one's classical education with a tour of Europe to visit the sites studied) took small pieces of the Parthenon home as souvenirs of their visit. Locals burned fallen pieces of marble masonry and statuary to create mortar for building. Finally, between 1801 and 1805, Lord Elgin, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, claiming to be concerned for the condition of the art, and with the permission of the Ottoman authorities, removed about half of the remaining sculptures from the ruins of the Parthenon, shipped them to England, and sold them to the government for display in the British Museum.

In 1832, the Greeks won independence from the Ottomans and began to demand that the sculptures should be returned to Athens. This ongoing diplomatic disagreement is the most well-known art repatriation debate.

**Unit 12: Nike of Samothrace, 2nd C. BC, Greek**

The Classical period of Greek art began around 479 BC, with the defeat of the Persians. From the late 4th century BC, there was a growing interest in a newer style known as the Hellenistic style, which abandoned the rules of Classical art and sought new themes and genres, with compositions that showed increased action, emotion, pathos and drama. The Hellenistic style assimilated Eastern influences as Alexander the Great's conquests pushed Greek influences further into Asia.

Classical sculpture had focused on ideal beauty, perfect proportions, and serene expressions. Hellenistic artists explored extreme emotions, individualized portraiture, and dynamic compositions that captured figures in violent motion or psychological turmoil.

The Nike of Samothrace is one of the supreme masterpieces of Hellenistic sculpture, embodying the period's fascination with movement, drama, and technical virtuosity in its depiction of the winged goddess of victory. The statue, nine feet tall, is made of Parian marble and shows the goddess of Victory about to alight on a ship whose sailors have just won a sea battle. It probably dates to 190 BC and was commissioned to celebrate that victory. The sculptor's extraordinary skill is evident in the way the marble drapery appears to billow and cling to the goddess's body as if caught in a sea breeze, creating an illusion of movement that exemplifies Hellenistic artists' ability to transform static stone into dynamic narrative. It is thought that the statue once stood on a fountain looking out to sea, so the elements of water spray and sea breezes would have added to the illusion of the marble draperies.

**Unit 13: The Rosetta Stone, 196 BC**

The Rosetta Stone, made of black granite and measuring 45” by 25”, was discovered on 15 July 1799 by French officer Pierre-François Bouchard while digging the foundations of a fort near the town of Rashid (Rosetta) in the Nile Delta during the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt.

The inscription on the stone itself is not remarkable. It dates to the Ptolemaic period and records the deification of the new ruler, Ptolemy V, in 196 BC, and his gift of silver and grain to the temples of Memphis. It also records that there was particularly high flooding of the Nile in the eighth year of his reign, and that Ptolemy V had the excess waters dammed for the benefit of the farmers. In return the priesthood pledged that the king's birthday and coronation days would be celebrated annually and that all the priests of Egypt would serve him alongside the other gods.

What makes the Rosetta Stone so important is the fact that its inscription contained the same text written in three different scripts: hieroglyphic, demotic, and ancient Greek. Ancient Greek was well known and understood by scholars in the 18$^{th}$ century, but both hieroglyphic and demotic Egyptian had been unknown and unused since the 4$^{th}$ and 5$^{th}$ centuries respectively. Multiple attempts to decode Egyptian inscriptions and texts throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, but without success. Scholars guessed that the stone’s inscription was the same text in three different languages; they also hypothesized that the symbols enclosed within cartouches were proper names.

On September 27, 1822, the French philologist Jean-François Champollion, announced that he had decoded the key that would unlock Egypt's ancient past, by working out the phonetic values of a dozen hieroglyphs. This achievement was monumentally significant because it ended over 1,400 years of silence from ancient Egyptian civilization, opening vast libraries of texts, temple inscriptions, and royal records that revealed the religious beliefs, historical events, and daily life of one of humanity's greatest civilizations, fundamentally transforming our understanding of ancient Egypt and establishing the field of Egyptology.

The stone was brought to London and put on display in the British Museum after the British defeat of Napoleon in Egypt in 1801.

**Unit 14: Garden Fresco, House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii, 1st C BC**

Pompeii, a prosperous Roman city in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius, was catastrophically destroyed on August 24, 79, when the volcano erupted after centuries of dormancy. The city was buried under 13 to 20 ft of volcanic ash and pumice in the eruption. Largely preserved under the ash, Pompeii offers a unique snapshot of Roman life, frozen at the moment it was destroyed.

In the immediate aftermath of the disasters, Roman looters dug into Pompeii to steal whatever valuables they could, but over the course of the centuries, the knowledge of where Pompeii once lay was lost. Systematic excavations began in 1738, and the rediscovery of Pompeii sparked international fascination with Roman civilization and established the foundations of modern archaeology.

The wall paintings of Pompeii represent the most comprehensive surviving collection of Roman domestic art. Paintings from antiquity rarely survive—paint, after all, is a much less durable medium than stone or bronze sculpture. These wall frescoes followed the four main styles of Roman wall painting, which are defined as:

- First Style: painted imitations of marble panels
- Second Style: elaborate architectural illusions
- Third Style: mythological scenes
- Fourth Style: fantastical and eclectic combinations of the three previous styles.

The House of the Golden Bracelet, was named after the skeleton of a woman wearing a golden bracelet was found in one of its rooms. Next to the *triclinium* (dining room) was a room decorated with murals of birds and plants, as well as symbols of the Greek god Dionysus, suggesting that the room could have been a *sacraria* or cult room to the god. These frescoes created the illusion of an eternal garden paradise, with lush vegetation, exotic birds, and architectural elements that transformed interior spaces into outdoor sanctuaries. Roman townhouses were built for security with high perimeter walls and few windows – and those usually high, small and barred. A garden at the center of the building, and openings in the ceilings of the atrium provided interior light. Frescos added beauty and luxury to what might otherwise have been rather dreary interiors.

**Unit 15: Augustus of Prima Porta, Rome, 1st C. BC, Roman**

The Augustus of Prima Porta is one of the most famous ancient Roman statues. It was created around 20 BC to honor Rome's first emperor, Augustus Caesar. This marble statue, standing about 7 feet tall, was discovered in 1863 at a villa in Prima Porta, near Rome, that once belonged to Augustus's wife, Livia. The statue shows Augustus as a powerful military commander, wearing ornate armor decorated with scenes celebrating his diplomatic victory over the Parthian Empire, where he successfully negotiated the return of Roman military standards without fighting a war. His pose, with one arm raised as if giving a speech, was designed to show his authority and leadership to the Roman people.

The carvings on Augustus's breastplate celebrate his achievements and divine connections. The central scene shows a Parthian king returning captured Roman battle standards to a Roman soldier, referring to Augustus's diplomatic triumph. Above this scene, the sky god Caelus spreads his cloak across the heavens, while below, the earth goddess Tellus holds a cornucopia representing the prosperity Augustus brought to Rome. On the sides, weeping female figures represent conquered territories like Gaul and Spain, while the gods Apollo and Diana flank the central scene, emphasizing Augustus's divine favor. The dolphin at his feet serves as a symbol connecting Augustus to the goddess Venus, who was considered the divine ancestor of the Julian family line. In Roman mythology, Venus was born from sea foam and was often associated with dolphins as creatures of the sea, so the dolphin reminds viewers that Augustus claimed to be descended from this powerful goddess, giving him divine authority to rule.

Today, the statue is housed in the Vatican Museums and remains one of our best examples of how Roman emperors used art as a sophisticated tool to communicate their power, divine connections, and political accomplishments to their subjects throughout the empire.

**Unit 16: Laocoon, Rome, 1st C. BC, Roman**

This Hellenistic marble statue depicts an incident from Virgil's *Aeneid*. After the Greeks appear to sail away from Troy, leaving behind only the giant wooden horse, Laocoön, a priest of Poseidon, warns the Trojans not to bring the horse inside the city, crying,

> "*Equō nē crēdite, Teucrī! Quidquid id est, timeō Danaōs et dōna ferentēs.* ("Do not trust the horse, Trojans! Whatever it is, I fear the Danaans (Greeks), even when bringing gifts."- from which we get the English saying, "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts")

Immediately afterwards, the gods sent two giant serpents which attacked and strangled Laocoon and both his sons.

The sculpture is attributed to three Greek sculptors - Agesander, Athenodoros, and Polydorus of Rhodes - as it is believed to be the statue that Pliny the Elder described in his *Natural History*,

> "*This is the case with the Laocoön in the palace of the emperor Titus. It is a work to be set above all that the arts of painting and sculpture have produced. Out of a single block of marble, the consummate craftsmen of Rhodes – Agesander, Polydoros, and Athenodorus - created Laocoön, his children, and the wonderful coils of the serpents, working from a joint plan*".

The discovery of the Laocoön in January 1506 was one of the most momentous archaeological finds of the Renaissance. A wealthy Roman named Felice De Fredis was developing his vineyard on the Esquiline Hill, in between the Colosseum and the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, when workers uncovered the marble group that had been buried for over a millennium. The Pope, Julius II, who had a particular interest in ancient Greek and Roman art, went straight to the site of the excavation, and immediately acquired the sculpture. It was put on public display in the Vatican Museums, where it remains today. The statue was studied by Renaissance artists, including Michelangelo, and influenced the development of High Renaissance sculpture

The triangular composition captures three figures in an agonizing struggle, with the muscular father at the center desperately trying to free himself and protect his children while massive serpents coil around their bodies. The sculpture is an example of the way in which Hellenistic art shrugged off Classical restraint, displaying raw emotion through contorted faces, straining muscles, and dynamic movement that conveys both physical pain and psychological horror.

Romans held Greek art in such high regard that they established an entire industry devoted to copying and adapting Greek masterpieces, preserving countless Greek works for posterity, although usually working in marble rather than bronze. This copying practice satisfied the Roman elite's desire to associate themselves with Greek cultural prestige, decorated their villas and public spaces with recognized masterpieces, and preserved many Greek works that would otherwise have been lost when the bronze originals were melted down to reuse the metal.

**Unit 17: Trajan's Column, Rome, 2nd C. AD, Roman**

Trajan's Column stands as one of the most remarkable examples of Roman narrative sculpture, rising nearly 100 feet high and featuring an unprecedented spiral frieze that chronicles the emperor's Dacian campaigns in careful detail. Completed in AD 113, the freestanding column is decorated with a **bas relief** which depicts the wars between the Romans and Dacians as it spirals 23 times around the column. Carved into the structure are 2,662 figures in 155 different scenes. The Emperor Trajan appears in 58 of the scenes, creating a visual biography of the emperor's greatest military achievement.

The Dacian campaign is presented in two parts and in chronological order – from bottom to top. The lower half of the frieze illustrates the First Dacian War (101-102 AD), and the upper half covers the Second War (105-106 AD). About 20 per cent of the scenes are battles; the majority show the engineering and organization required for a military campaign, including the army marching, constructing garrisons, building bridges, and loading ships. The column served as a propaganda tool, reinforcing Trajan's image as a great emperor, while also functioning as the emperor's tomb, with his ashes originally placed in a golden urn within the column's base. A statue of Trajan originally stood atop the column, but this disappeared in the Middle Ages. On December 4, 1587, the top was crowned with a bronze figure of Saint Peter the Apostle by Pope Sixtus V, which remains to this day.

The Column was placed within Trajan's Forum, which was built with the spoils of war from the conquest of Dacia. The complex was designed by the famed architect Apollodorus of Damascus. Built of marble and gilded bronze, the forum contained a vast basilica, two libraries (one for Greek works and one for Latin), semicircular *exedrae* (roofed seating areas) with elaborate colonnades, and the Markets of Trajan, a six-story-high complex with shops, offices and warehouses, which feels remarkably like an ancient Roman version of the Westchester Mall on the inside!

**Unit 18: Head of Constantine, Rome, 4th C. AD, Roman**

This colossal head of Constantine is over eight feet tall and was originally part of a forty-foot-tall statue. It depicted the Emperor Constantine seated on an imperial throne, with his right arm raised and pointing towards the sky. The remains were discovered during the papacy of Innocent VIII (1484-1492). The great head, arms and legs of the Colossus were carved from white marble, while the rest of the body was constructed of a brick core and wooden framework, possibly covered with gilded bronze. Constantine's face, which is clean shaven, has a placid expression with large, deeply carved eyes directed towards heaven. The statue exemplifies the Late Antique move away from carefully observed Classical naturalism: the enormous scale, simplified features, and upward-gazing eyes create an image of superhuman authority that, rather than an individual personality, projects Constantine's role as God's chosen ruler.

The simplification of Roman art in the later empire reflected broader transformations in politics, religion, and cultural values, as the classical tradition gave way to new aesthetic priorities that emphasized spiritual over naturalistic concerns. The individuals were less naturalistic and idealized. Figures were more frontal and deeply carved. The characteristics of Late Antique art include frontality, stiffness of pose and drapery, deeply drilled lines, less naturalism, squat proportions, and lack of individualism. Important figures are often slightly larger or are placed above the rest of the crowd to denote importance. Late Antique art sought to convey divine authority, spiritual transcendence, and imperial power through symbolic rather than naturalistic means, preparing the ground for the development of Byzantine and medieval Christian art.