The Classical and Medieval West
Learning Objectives

1. Explain the artistic and architectural innovations of ancient Greece and Rome.
2. Relate the characteristics of classical art to Greek and Roman cultural values.
3. Identify architectural elements that characterize classical and medieval structures.
Learning Objectives

4. Discuss the influence of Christianity on art and society in medieval Europe.

5. Distinguish visual characteristics of Early Christian, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic art.

6. Compare different ways artists communicate sacred or religious ideas through art.
Introduction

• Influence of Greece over concept of "beauty" as ideal, perfect
• Classical Greek and Roman cultures dominated Western civilization from fifth century BCE until the decline of Rome.
• Later influence of Christian Byzantines
  ▪ Orthodox Church headquartered in Constantinople
Greece

- Culture regarding humankind as the closest thing to perfection in physical form
  - Power to reason
  - Gods had human weaknesses
  - Importance of the individual
Greece

• Three stages
  ▪ Archaic
    • Painters better known than sculptors
    • Euphronios **Krater**
      • Refers to shape of handled vessel
    • Individual achievement statues
      • **Kouros**, male, and **kore**, female, youths
      • Individuals not rulers but posed similar to Egyptian rulers
Euphronios Krater. c.515 BCE.
Terra cotta. Height 18", diameter 21-3/4".
Photograph Scala, Florence. Courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali. [Fig. 16-1]
*Kouros*. c.580 BCE.
Marble. Height 76".
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Fletcher Fund, 1932 (32.11.1). © 2013 Image The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 16-2]
Greece

- Three stages
  - Classical
    - Art emphasizes rational simplicity, order, and restrained emotion
    - Increasingly naturalistic sculpture
      - Spear Bearer of Polykleitos
      - Blemish-free, prime-of-life athlete
      - Contrapposto (counterpoised) pose of rest
Polykleitos of Argos. *Spear Bearer (Doryphoros).* 5th century BCE. Roman copy of Greek original, c.440 BCE. Marble. Height 6' 6".

Museo Acheologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy. akg-images/Nimatallah. [Fig. 16-3]
Greece

- Three stages
  - Classical
    - Parthenon, Ictinus and Callicrates
      - Built as a gift to Athena Parthenos
      - Post-and-lintel construction
      - Refined clarity, harmony, and vigor
      - Careful ratio of 4:9 throughout
      - None of the major lines is straight
        - Slight bulge called entasis above center
      - Metopes featuring Lapiths and Centaurs
Ictinus and Callicrates. Parthenon, view from the northwest. 448–432 BCE. Acropolis, Athens. Photograph: Duane Preble. [Fig. 16-4a]
Ictinus and Callicrates. Parthenon. 448–432 BCE. Acropolis, Athens. Photograph: Duane Preble. [Fig. 16-4]
The Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs. Metope from the Parthenon. c.440 BCE. Marble. Height 67-3/4". The British Museum © The Trustees. [Fig. 16-4c]
Greece

• Three stages
  ▪ Classical
    • Later period led away from noble and serious, favoring the sensual
      • *Venus de' Medici*, Praxiteles
        - Refined and modest pose
    • Three architectural orders identified by *capitals* at the top
      • Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian
Venus de' Medici (Medici Venus). 3rd century BCE.
Marble. Height 5'.
Photo Scala, Florence - courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali. [Fig. 16-5]
Architectural Orders.  
[Fig. 16-6]
Greece

• Three stages
  ▪ Hellenistic
    • Approx. 323 BCE to 30 BCE
    • Decline of Athens as city-state
    • The Laocoön Group
      • Mythology interpreting gods' disapproval of Laocoön's prophecy
      • Hierarchic proportion
The Laocoön Group. 1st century CE Roman copy of a 1st-or 2nd-century BCE Greek original. Marble. Height 95-1/4". Musei Vaticani, Rome. Photo Scala, Florence. [Fig. 16-7]
Rome

- Practical, less idealistic from the Greeks
- *Portrait Head of an Old Man*
  - High degree of individuality
  - Recorded imperfections give character
- Greatest achievements in civil engineering, town planning, and architecture
  - Semicircular arch featured
*Portrait Head of an Old Man*. Italy. 25 BCE–10 CE. Marble. 13-3/4" × 61-5/16" × 9-3/4". The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California. [Fig. 16-8]
Rome

• Public works projects
  □ Colosseum
    • Flavian Amphitheater
    • Three-story round-arch colonnade with different architectural orders
    • Meant for amusements such as gladiatorial matches and game hunts
The Colosseum. 70–80 CE.
Rome. © John McKenna/Alamy. [Fig. 16-9]
Rome

• Public works projects
  ▪ Pantheon
    • Major temple to all gods capped by dome
    • Single entrance framed by a columned porch (*portico*)
    • Recessed squares called *coffers*
    • Oculus at the top
Pantheon, view of the entrance. 118–125 CE. Rome. © Vincenzo Pirozzi, Rome. [Fig. 16-10a]
Pantheon plan and section. Rome. 118–125 CE.  
[Fig. 16-10b–c]
Oil on canvas. 50-1/2" × 39".
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1939.1.24
[Fig. 16-11]
Rome

- Paintings
  - Show love of luxury
  - Survived from Pompeii, Herculaneum
  - One from a villa near Naples
    - Complex urban scene
    - Perspective from Hellenistic murals
  - After collapse of Roman Empire, representation of third dimension ceased to be of interest.
Europe from 117 to 1400.
[Fig. 16-12]
Roman painting. Bedroom from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, Pompei. 1st century BCE.
Fresco on lime plaster. Height (average) 8'.
Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rogers Fund, 1903. N. inv.: 03.14.13a-g © 2013 Image copyright The MoMA/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 16-13]
Early Christian and Byzantine Art

• Followers of Christianity
  ▪ Initially forced to hide
  ▪ Burial chambers called **catacombs**
  ▪ Simplified figure painting
    • As in *Christ and the Apostles*

• Constantine's role
  ▪ Acknowledged and adopted Christianity
    • Spiritual values stronger than failing stability of material world
Christ and the Apostles. Mid-4th century 1st century CE. Early Christian fresco. Catacomb of St. Domitilla, Rome, Italy. Photograph Scala, Florence. [Fig. 16-14]
Early Christian and Byzantine Art

• Constantine's role
  ▪ **Head of Constantine**
    • New type of imperial portrait
    • Large eyes and stiff features suggesting spiritual life
  ▪ Moved capital of Roman Empire to Constantinople (Byzantium)
  ▪ Roman Empire divided and Western half collapsed in 476
Head of Constantine. c.312 CE.
Marble. Height 8'.
Museo Dei Conservatori, Rome. Photograph: Duane Preble. [Fig. 16-15]
Early Christian and Byzantine Art

- Survival of Byzantine Empire
  - Extensive building programs
  - Roman *basilica* adapted for public worship
    - *Apse* at each end
    - Long central aisle called *nave*
    - Old Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome
  - Perfection of mosaic utilizing *tesserae*
Old St. Peter's Basilica, reconstruction drawing. c.320–335.
Restoration study.
Kenneth J. Conant, Old St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. Courtesy of the Frances Loeb library, Harvard Graduate School of Design. [Fig. 16-16a]
S. Martino ai Monti, Rome, Italy. Photograph: Scala, Florence/Fondo Edifici di Culto - Min. Dell'interno. [Fig. 16-16b]
Old St. Peter's Basilica, plan. c.320–335.
Rome. [Fig. 16-16c]
Early Christian and Byzantine Art

• Transition of styles seen in Ravenna
  ▪ Church of San Vitale
    • Glittering mosaics covering most interior surfaces
    • Figures of Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora
      • Blend of religious and political authority

• Byzantine art
  ▪ Flat, decorative richness
San Vitale, exterior. 526–547.
Ravenna, Italy. Photograph: Scala, Florence. [Fig. 16-17a]
San Vitale, plan. 526–547.
Ravenna, Italy. [Fig. 16-17b]
Mosaic.
San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy. © Cameraphoto Arte, Venice. [Fig. 16-17c]
Apse mosaic. 526–547.
San Vitale. Ravenna, Italy. akg-images/Cameraphoto. [Fig. 16-17d]
Early Christian and Byzantine Art

- Influenced by controversy over biblical prohibition against the making of images and those who wanted pictures to tell sacred stories
  - Argument that stylized imagery could not be confused with a real person
- Apse mosaic of San Vitale
  - Beardless Christ in royal purple
  - Invokes heavenly majesty
Closer Look: Technique: Mosaic

*Christ as Pantocrator with Mary and Saints*. Late 12th century.
Apse mosaic.
Cathedral of Monreale, Sicily. Photograph: Scala, Florence.
[Fig. 16-18]
Early Christian and Byzantine Art

• Iconoclastic Controversy
  ▪ Image-breakers, or *iconoclasts*
  ▪ Punishment of those who owned images of Christ, Mary, saints, and angels
  ▪ Icons made with precious materials

• New image of Christ as *Pantocreator*, or ruler of the universe
  ▪ San Vitale apse mosaic's typical hierarchic scale
Early Christian and Byzantine Art

• Eastern Orthodox style
  ▪ Closely supervised
  ▪ Portraying symbolic, mystical aspects
  ▪ Andrei Rublev, *Old Testament Trinity*
    • Tenderness of expression and elongation of bodies
    • Bright colors' intensity
  ▪ *Madonna and Child on a Curved Throne*
    • Based on circular shapes, linear patterns
Tempera on panel. 55-1/2" × 44-1/2".
Photo Scala, Florence. [Fig. 16-19]
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.1. [Fig. 16-20]
The Middle Ages in Europe

• Early Medieval Art
  ▪ Absorbed influence of nomadic invaders
    • Based on horse culture, but no written language
  ▪ Round tray on conical stand
    • Suggests mysterious narrative
  ▪ Exceptional technical metalwork skill
    • Sutton Hoo purse cover
      • Gold and enamel with motifs
Round tray on conical stand. 5th to 3rd century BCE. Bronze. Height 10-7/8".
Central State Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty. Inv. KP8591. [Fig. 16-21]
Gold and enamel. Length 7-1/2".
The British Museum © The Trustees. [Fig. 16-22]
The Middle Ages in Europe

• Early Medieval Art
  ▪ Meeting of decorative nomadic styles with Christianity
    • Chi-Rho monogram in the *Book of Kells*
      • Illustrated manuscript from Ireland
      • Richly embellished
      • Spirals and interlacings among Greek letters $X$ and $P$
Chi-Rho monogram (XP), Page from the *Book of Kells*. Late 8th century. Inks and pigments on vellum. 12-3/4" × 9-1/2".
The Board of Trinity College, Dublin Ms. 58, fol. 34r. [Fig. 16-23]
The Middle Ages in Europe

• **Romanesque**
  - Distinguished European Christian architecture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries
  - Developed in times of feudalism and monasticism
  - Religious pilgrimages
    - Groups of Christians
    - Need for larger churches
The Middle Ages in Europe

- Romanesque
  - Architecture's feel of solid stability
    - Massive fortress-like walls, round arches, and vaults
  - Features stone carvings
  - Christ of the Pentecost
    - Deviation from standard human proportions give symbolic meaning
    - Monumental quality
*Christ of the Pentecost*, Church of Saint Madeleine. 1125–1150. Stone. Height of the tympanum 35-1/2'. Vézelay, France. Hervé Champollion/akg-images. [Fig. 16-24]
The Middle Ages in Europe

• **Gothic**
  - Round arch superseded by pointed arch
  - Cathedrals filled with light and upward-reaching
    • Symbolize joyous spiritual elation
  - Notre-Dame de Chartres
    • Center of community life
    • Built and changed for more than 300 years
Notre-Dame de Chartres, view from the southeast.  
1145–1513.
Cathedral length 427'; south tower height 344'; north tower height 377'.
Chartres, France. © John Elk, III. [Fig. 16-25a]
Notre-Dame de Chartres, west façade. 1145–1513.
Cathedral length 427'; south tower height 344'; north tower height 377'.
Chartres, France. Photograph: Duane Preble. [Fig. 16-25b]
The Middle Ages in Europe

• **Gothic**
  - Notre-Dame de Chartres
    - Flamboyant late Gothic style curves on north tower
    - Stained glass windows in transcendent function
      - "Rose de France" window
    - Progressive walkways
    - Impressive statues of Old Testament at west entrance
"Rose de France" window. c.1233.
Notre-Dame de Chartres. Chartres, France. Photograph: Duane Preble. [Fig. 16-25c]
Notre-Dame de Chartres, plan based on Latin cross. Cathedral length 427'; south tower height 344'; north tower height 377'. Chartres, France. [Fig. 16-25d]
Old Testament prophet, kings, and queen. c.1145–1170. Doorjamb statues from west (or royal) portal. Notre-Dame de Chartres. Chartres, France. Photograph: Duane Preble. [Fig. 16-25e]
• Approaching the Sacred
  ▪ Sheikh Lutfallah Mosque in Iran
    • Built early 17th century
    • Dark interior lighted with a circle of grille windows
    • Ceramic tiles with tasteful color choices and dazzling patterns
    • Clear compositional elements
    • Underlying order and rhythm lead to awareness of God (Allah)
Sheikh Lutfallah Mosque, interior. 1603–1619.
Isfahan, Iran. Photograph: Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair. [Fig. 16-26]
Art Forms Us: Worship and Ritual

• Approaching the Sacred
  ▪ *Ocean Without a Shore*, Bill Viola
    • Installation of a small church in Venice, Italy in 2007
  • Large marble altars
    • Plasma screen above each
    • Figures pass through a sheet of water and recede
    • Symbolic passage between two realms
      - Physical and spiritual
Video/sound installation. Color high-definition video triptych.
Installed at Church of San Gallo, Venice. Photograph: Thierry Bal. [Fig. 16-27]
Approaching the Sacred

- **Marassa**, ceremonial vodou flag
  - Invocation of Sacred Twins
    - Represented by dark vertical lines
  - Crossroads refers to boundary between living and spiritual world
  - Unfurling symbolizes invitation to worshippers to join the ritual
  - December 6 Roman Catholic feast of St. Nicholas
Marassa. Ceremonial vodou flag.
Sequins on fabric. 30" × 30-1/2".
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