

# ART HISTORY

## Overview of the Western Art Movements

<b>Prehistoric Art</b> , c. 40,000 BCE – 2,000 BCE.....	2
<b>Ancient Art</b> , c. 3,000 BCE – 400 CE.....	2
<b>Medieval Art</b> , c. 400 – 1400 CE .....	3
<b>Renaissance Art</b> , c. 1400 – 1600 .....	3
<b>Mannerism</b> , c. 1520 – 1600 .....	5
<b>Baroque Art</b> , c. 1600 – 1750 .....	5
<b>Rococo Art</b> , c. 1720 – 1780.....	6
<b>Neoclassicism</b> , c. 1760 – 1830 .....	6
<b>Realism</b> , c. 1840 – 1880 .....	8
<b>Art Nouveau</b> , c. 1890 – 1910.....	9
<b>Impressionism</b> , c. 1860 – 1890.....	10
<b>Post-Impressionism</b> , c. 1885 – 1910 .....	10
<b>Fauvism</b> , c. 1905 – 1910 .....	11
<b>Expressionism</b> , c. 1905 – 1930 .....	12
<b>Cubism</b> , c. 1907 – 1925 .....	12
<b>Surrealism</b> , c. 1924 – 1945 .....	13
<b>Abstract Expressionism</b> , c. 1943 – 1965 .....	14
<b>Optical Art (Op Art)</b> , c. 1955 – 1970.....	15
<b>Pop Art</b> , c. 1955 – 1970s.....	16
<b>Minimalism</b> , c. 1960 – 1975 .....	16
<b>Conceptual Art</b> , c. 1960s – 1980s .....	17
<b>Post-Modernist &amp; Deconstructivist Art</b> , c. 1970s – 2000s .....	18
<b>New Media Art</b> , c. 1990s – present .....	19
<b>Post-Internet Art</b> , c. 2008 – present.....	20

# Prehistoric Art, c. 40,000 BCE – 2,000 BCE

Prehistoric Art marks humanity’s earliest known artistic expression, created long before the invention of writing. Found in caves, carved into rock surfaces, and fashioned as small figurines or decorated tools, these works often served ritualistic, communicative, or practical purposes. Art tended to be embedded into survival, ritual, and community identity.

Depicting animals, human figures, and symbolic forms, Prehistoric Art reveals early humans’ relationship with their environment and belief systems. These early artists would use natural pigments from minerals, plants, and charcoal to bring their visions to life.

<i><b>Parietal Art</b></i>	Images painted, engraved, or carved directly onto cave walls and rock shelters, such as those at Lascaux, France and Altamira, Spain.
<i><b>Portable Art</b></i>	Small sculptural works, ornaments, or decorated tools that could be carried, such as the Venus of Willendorf (c. 28,000 BC).
<i><b>Megalithic Structures</b></i>	Monumental stone constructions in the later Neolithic, such as Stonehenge in England, serving ritual or astronomical purposes.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Cave paintings, rock carvings, and small figurines. Focus on animals, people, and nature. Stylized shapes and natural colors. Often connected to rituals or beliefs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Lascaux Cave Paintings</b> (France), ancient animal depicts in vivid natural pigments</li><li>▪ <b>Venus of Willendorf</b> (Austria), a fertility figurine with exaggerated female features</li><li>▪ <b>Altamira Cave Paintings</b> (Spain), polychrome bison paintings in deep cave chambers</li></ul>

# Ancient Art, c. 3,000 BCE – 400 CE

Encompasses the visual culture of the world’s earliest civilizations, where artistic production was deeply intertwined with religion, politics, and mythology.

From the monumental tombs and afterlife imagery of Egypt, to the idealized human forms of Classical Greece, to the narrative reliefs of Mesopotamia and Rome, art served to express divine authority, legitimize rulers, preserve cultural myths, and record historic events.

Pottery, sculpture, monumental architecture, fresco painting, metalwork, and early forms of print-making reflected both technical innovation and symbolic meaning.

Sacred geometry and precise proportional systems guided design, while advances in materials and craftsmanship allowed for increasingly ambitious works.

Across Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, and beyond, Ancient Art established many of the foundational forms, motifs, and aesthetic principles that would influence artistic traditions for millennia.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Religious and mythological themes. Idealized human forms. Decorative patterns and symbolic imagery. Monumental buildings and sculptures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The <b>Bust of Nefertiti</b> (Egypt), an iconic royal portrait with graceful, symmetrical features</li> <li>▪ <b>Parthenon</b> and <b>Phidias's sculptures</b> (Greece), classical temple with idealized gods and heroes</li> <li>▪ <b>Pantheon</b> (Rome), grand domed temple showcasing Roman engineering mastery</li> </ul>

## Medieval Art, c. 400 – 1400 CE

Developed in the centuries between the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the emergence of the Renaissance, deeply embedded in the religious, political, and social fabric of the Middle Ages.

Predominantly commissioned by the Church, monarchs, and nobility, it served liturgical, devotional, and educational purposes, aiming to instruct the faithful and glorify the divine.

Architecture, manuscript illumination, stained glass, frescoes, mosaics, sculpture, and metalwork reflected a worldview rooted in divine order and hierarchical structure.

While personal artistic identity was secondary to craftsmanship and spiritual intent, styles evolved across Romanesque and Gothic periods, incorporating symbolic imagery, elaborate ornamentation, and biblical narratives.

Cultural exchange, particularly with the Islamic world via Spain, Sicily, and the Crusader states, enriched Medieval Art with new motifs, techniques, and decorative sensibilities.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Flat, stylized figures and religious symbols. Illuminated manuscripts, mosaics, frescoes. Darker colors and gold backgrounds. Detailed craftsmanship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The <b>Book of Kells</b>, intricate illuminated manuscript with vibrant Celtic designs</li> <li>▪ <b>Byzantine Mosaics in Hagia Sophia</b>, gold-tiled religious images in grand church interiors</li> <li>▪ <b>Giotto di Bondone</b>, early Renaissance painter emphasizing naturalistic human emotion</li> </ul>

## Renaissance Art, c. 1400 – 1600

Renaissance Art marked the rebirth of classical antiquity, reviving Greco-Roman ideals of harmony, proportion, and beauty while embracing the humanist belief in the nobility and potential of humankind.

Artists pursued realism and naturalism with unprecedented skill, mastering linear perspective through mathematical precision and achieving anatomical accuracy that reflected both scientific study and idealized beauty.

Painting, sculpture, and architecture demonstrated a deep attention to detail, convincing depth, and lifelike forms, blending the observation of nature with classical principles.

The era popularized naturalism in the Early and High Renaissance, where visual representation sought to replicate the true proportions and appearance of the human body and the world.

Patronage from wealthy merchants, city-states, and the Church fostered artistic innovation, leading to some of history's most celebrated masterpieces and establishing enduring standards for Western art.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Realistic human figures. Mastery of perspective and proportion. Influence of ancient Greek and Roman styles. Focus on individualism and nature. Vitruvian Triad: strength, function, and beauty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Leonardo da Vinci</b>, painter of the <i>Mona Lisa</i> and inventor</li> <li>▪ <b>Michelangelo</b>, sculptor of <i>David</i>, painted the Sistine Chapel</li> <li>▪ <b>Raphael</b>, master of balanced, harmonious Renaissance art</li> </ul>

<b><i>Realism</i></b> Subject Matter, Content is Real	<b><i>Naturalism</i></b> Style, Technique is Realistic	<b><i>Idealism</i></b> Philosophy, Aesthetic
<u>Definition:</u> Depicts everyday life and social realities without idealization	<u>Definition:</u> The life-like representation of subjects with accurate proportion, anatomy, texture, perspective, and color.	<u>Definition:</u> Representation is perfected according to aesthetic, moral, or philosophical ideals, often smoothing out or altering reality to achieve a harmonious, beautiful, or symbolic form.
<u>Objective:</u> Truth to the world as it is, socially, culturally, and materially, focusing on what is represented.	<u>Objective:</u> Convincing illusion of physical reality; even if the subject is fictional or mythological, it is rendered with visual fidelity.	<u>Objective:</u> Show the “perfect” or “universal” rather than the flawed, mundane specifics. Can still be naturalistic in anatomy, but proportions or features are adjusted for beauty or symbolic effect.
<u>Depicts:</u> Real-world subjects	<u>Depicts:</u> Any subject	<u>Depicts:</u> Myth, allegory, religious
<u>Example:</u> Leonardo da Vinci's “Portrait of a Musician”	<u>Example:</u> Rubens' “Venus and Adonis”	<u>Example:</u> Botticelli's “Birth of Venus”

## Mannerism, c. 1520 – 1600

Emerged in Italy after the High Renaissance, during a time of political instability, religious upheaval sparked by the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation, and shifting intellectual paradigms.

Centered in cultural hubs like Florence and Rome, it marked a deliberate departure from the harmonious balance, proportion, and clarity that defined Renaissance ideals. Instead, Mannerist artists embraced elegance, artifice, and complexity, often prioritizing style over strict adherence to nature.

Figures were elongated and exaggerated, poses were contrived and serpentine, compositions crowded and spatially ambiguous, and colors sometimes unnaturally vivid or jarring. This cultivated sophistication appealed to elite, courtly audiences, who valued its refinement, wit, and subtle symbolic content.

Serving as the bridge between the Renaissance and the Baroque, Mannerism reflects the intellectual tension and cultural uncertainty of its era while paving the way for the drama and dynamism that would define the art of the 17th century.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Elongated bodies and unusual poses. Complex, sometimes chaotic compositions. Bright, unnatural colors. Decorative details over natural realism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Pontormo</b>, known for his bright colors and unusual poses</li><li>▪ <b>Parmigianino</b>, famous for his elegant, elongated figures</li><li>▪ <b>El Greco</b>, recognized for his dramatic style and bold colors</li></ul>

## Baroque Art, c. 1600 – 1750

Emerged in Rome during the Catholic Counter-Reformation, when art became a powerful tool for inspiring faith, asserting religious authority, and glorifying absolute monarchs. Fueled by the Church’s desire to communicate spiritual drama and emotional intensity, Baroque artists created works that were theatrical, immersive, and designed to engage viewers on a visceral level.

Mastery of chiaroscuro (i.e., contrasting light and shadow) heightened the sense of depth and drama, while dynamic compositions, rich color palettes, and movement-filled scenes amplified the emotional impact.

Often depicting Biblical narratives, grand historical events, or triumphs of state, Baroque art aimed to overwhelm the senses, uniting painting, sculpture, and architecture into a total, awe-inspiring experience.

This period’s grandeur and emotional power reflected both the religious fervor and the political ambitions of the 17th and early 18th centuries.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Dramatic lighting and shadows. Rich colors and detailed textures. Strong sense of movement and energy. Large, grand compositions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Caravaggio</b>, famous for dramatic lighting and realistic scenes</li> <li>▪ <b>Rembrandt</b>, known for deep shadows and emotional portraits</li> <li>▪ <b>Peter Paul Rubens</b>, recognized for energetic compositions and rich colors</li> </ul>

## Rococo Art, c. 1720 – 1780

Arose in early 18th-century France as a graceful and playful reaction to the grandiosity and seriousness of the Baroque. Flourishing during a period of relative peace and prosperity, it became the favored style of the French aristocracy, reflecting their desire for lightness, elegance, and refined pleasure.

Characterized by intricate, highly detailed ornamentation, delicate pastel colors, and flowing natural forms like shells, flowers, and curves, Rococo art celebrated fantasy, sensuality, and escapism.

Often found in intimate interiors, decorative arts, painting, and sculpture, it embodied cultivated sophistication and carefree enjoyment.

Emerging alongside the early Enlightenment, Rococo's focus on charm and delight contrasted with the era's growing intellectual currents, and its association with aristocratic decadence sometimes drew criticism as emblematic of moral decline before the social upheavals to come.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Light, pastel colors. Elegant, playful scenes. Themes of love and leisure. Decorative details and curves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Jean-Honoré Fragonard</b>, famous for playful and romantic scenes</li> <li>▪ <b>François Boucher</b>, known for soft colors and a decorative style</li> <li>▪ <b>Antoine Watteau</b>, recognized for elegant festival scenes and graceful figures</li> </ul>

## Neoclassicism, c. 1760 – 1830

Neoclassicism represents a decisive return to the ideals of classical antiquity, fueled by Enlightenment values of reason, order, and moral clarity, as well as groundbreaking archaeological discoveries such as the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

This movement sought to revive the aesthetic principles of ancient Greece and Rome, emphasizing harmony, balance, clarity of form, and rigorous study of proportion. Neoclassical art was closely tied to the European

Academies of Art, embodying the doctrine of academicism: creating highly polished, true-to-life works that conveyed elevated, didactic messages rooted in virtue, patriotism, and civic responsibility.

Artists strove to express the Enlightenment ideal of genius, or the capacity for original creation that transcends imitation, through compositions with strongly defined focal points and clear narratives.

Neoclassicism was as much a cultural and intellectual movement as an artistic style, reflecting the period's emphasis on reason, moral rigor, and a belief in art's capacity to inspire ethical behavior and societal progress.

Still life paintings during this era often explored the theme of *vanitas*, a genre of art popular during this time, reminding the viewer of the transience of life, the futility of pleasure, and the certainty of death. The term *vanitas*, meaning emptiness or futility, comes from "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:3). Skulls and bones represented mortality, or *memento mori*; wilting flowers or rotting fruit symbolized the inevitability of decay; hourglasses, clocks, and extinguished candles indicated the passing of time; books, instruments, jewelry, and fine clothing indicated worldly knowledge and pleasures that fade.

Its influence extended beyond painting and sculpture into architecture, decorative arts, and political iconography, becoming the visual language of revolutions and new republics across Europe and the Americas.

<b><i>Academies of Art</i></b>	Formal institutions in Europe designed to professionalize, regulate, and elevate the training of artists, rooted in classical antiquity and Renaissance ideals.
<b><i>Academic Art</i></b>	Refers to the style and standards promoted by these academies, characterized by a polished technique, precise draftsmanship, and compositions that adhere to established canons of harmony, proportion, and perspective. Often center on history painting, mythological and religious themes, and allegory.
<b><i>Characteristics of Academic Art</i></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Rationalism</u> – Intellectual style of art, treating the Fine Arts as an intellectual discipline. Art requires careful planning.</li> <li>2. Great importance placed on the message of art. Art should be appropriately uplifting and have a high moral content. Academic art is often allegorical.</li> <li>3. Often features idealized forms that are aspirational and beautiful.</li> <li>4. Adherence to complex rules of drafting, such as linear perspective, foreshortening, techniques in mark-making, etc.</li> <li>5. Color should be naturalistic, i.e., smooth brush strokes.</li> </ol>

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Clean lines and balanced compositions. Idealized figures and serious themes. Moral or heroic subject matter. Restraint in emotion and color.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Jacques-Louis David</b>, famous for heroic and patriotic themes</li> <li>▪ <b>Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres</b>, known for precise lines and smooth finish</li> <li>▪ <b>Antonio Canova</b>, recognized for graceful and idealized marble sculptures</li> </ul>

### Hierarchies of Genres in Academic Art:

Genre	Description	Neoclassical Example
<b><i>History Painting</i></b>	Considered the highest form of academic art, history paintings depict subjects from classical history, mythology, the Bible, or important contemporary events, often intended to convey moral lessons or heroic ideals.	Jacques-Louis David's " <b>Oath of the Horatii</b> " (1784), dramatizing Roman virtue and patriotism
<b><i>Portrait Art</i></b>	Representations of individuals or groups, often idealized to convey status, character, and moral worth, while adhering to classical compositional balance.	Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' " <b>Portrait of Napoleon on His Imperial Throne</b> " (1806)
<b><i>Genre Paintings</i></b>	Depictions of scenes from everyday life, illustrating common people engaged in ordinary activities, often with moral or sentimental undertones.	Louis-Léopold Boilly's " <b>The Arrival of a Stagecoach in the Courtyard of the Messageries</b> " (1803), portraying urban social interaction
<b><i>Landscapes</i></b>	Representations of natural scenery, either idealized in the classical tradition or rendered with attention to topographical accuracy, often infused with allegorical meaning.	Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes' " <b>View of the Palace of Nemi</b> " (1780s), merging natural observation with classical compositional ideals.
<b><i>Still Life</i></b>	Arrangements of inanimate objects, such as flowers, fruit, or symbolic artifacts, used to explore composition, texture, and moral allegory (e.g., vanitas themes).	Anne Vallayer-Coster's " <b>Attributes of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture</b> " (1769), a display of artistic tools symbolizing intellectual and creative achievement.

## Realism, c. 1840 – 1880

Emerged during the mid-19th century as a decisive reaction against the emotional intensity and idealized exoticism of Romanticism, championing instead a truthful, unembellished representation of everyday life and ordinary people. The term "Realism" became codified as a specific art movement with socially grounded content, to be distinguished from how the term "Realism" was used during the Renaissance to describe the content or subject matter of art.

Rooted in the social and political upheavals following the French Revolution and the profound transformations of the Industrial Revolution, Realist artists sought to depict the world with honesty, objectivity, and social awareness.

Rejecting drama and theatricality, they focused on the mundane realities of labor, domestic life, and the experiences of common people, subjects previously deemed unworthy of fine art.



Characterized by meticulous attention to detail, honest textures, and a muted, earthy palette, Realism emphasized direct observation and empirical study of the observable world. This commitment to portraying life “as it is” not only challenged artistic conventions but also reflected broader cultural shifts toward modernity, industrialization, and social critique.

The movement laid important groundwork for later developments such as Impressionism and Social Realism, influencing how artists approached both subject matter and technique in the evolving landscape of modern art.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Depictions of everyday life and common people. Honest textures and natural colors. Scenes from rural life, work, and the streets. Focus on accuracy over beauty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Gustave Courbet</b>, for realistic scenes of everyday life</li> <li>▪ <b>Jean-François Millet</b>, showcased rural workers with dignity</li> <li>▪ <b>Édouard Manet</b>, bold brushwork and modern subjects</li> </ul>

## Art Nouveau, c. 1890 – 1910

A decorative art movement that sought to dissolve the boundaries between fine art and applied design, creating a unified aesthetic across architecture, graphic arts, furniture, and everyday objects.

Rejecting the imitative historicism of previous eras, Art Nouveau embraced expressive, flowing lines inspired by natural forms, often featuring undulating, rhythmic curves and stylized floral motifs.

Influenced in part by the influx of Japanese art and design into Western culture, its emphasis on organic shapes and asymmetry represented a fresh visual language.

Emerging as a cultural response to the alienation of industrial mass production and academic rigidity, Art Nouveau aligned with progressive art movements and reformers advocating for design innovation and craftsmanship. It flourished in vibrant urban centers such as Paris, Vienna, Brussels, and Prague, embodying the spirit of modernity and artistic experimentation before its decline with the onset of World War I.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Long, curving lines. Floral and plant motifs. Ornamental, decorative details. Influence from Japanese ukiyo-e prints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Alphonse Mucha</b>, decorative posters with flowing lines</li> <li>▪ <b>Gustav Klimt</b>, known for gold details and symbolic patterns</li> <li>▪ <b>Hector Guimard</b>, for designing organic, curved architecture</li> </ul>

# Impressionism, c. 1860 – 1890

Impressionism originated in France as a revolutionary movement that sought to capture the fleeting effects of light, atmosphere, and movement with immediacy and spontaneity.

Rejecting the rigid rules and polished finish of academic painting, Impressionist artists embraced individual freedom and the unique vision of the artist, often working *en plein air* (meaning to paint outdoors directly from nature to observe changing natural light and transient moments firsthand).

Rather than focusing on precise forms or idealized compositions, Impressionism prioritized sensory experience, using loose, visible brushstrokes and vibrant, often unmixed colors to evoke the impression of a scene rather than its exact detail.

Subjects typically included everyday life, landscapes, urban scenes, and leisure activities, portrayed with a fresh, dynamic energy.

This break from tradition challenged established norms such as the golden ratio and symmetry, opening the door to modern art’s emphasis on perception, emotion, and personal expression. Impressionism laid the groundwork for subsequent avant-garde movements, fundamentally transforming how artists approached color, light, and composition.

***En plein air***  
 (“*in the open air*”)

The practice of painting outdoors directly from the natural environment, rather than working in a studio. This was not just a technique, but a radical shift in artistic philosophy. It prioritized direct sensory experience and spontaneity, requiring the artist to depict dynamic, ever-changing qualities about nature and life, in stark contrast to the idealized studio compositions favored in academic art.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Painted outdoors for natural light effects. Short, visible brushstrokes and line work Bright colors placed side by side. Clear separation of colors Focus on everyday life and modern scenes. Sketch-like finishes; modern subject matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Claude Monet</b>, capturing light with loose brushstrokes</li><li>▪ <b>Pierre-Auguste Renoir</b>, warm colors and joyful scenes</li><li>▪ <b>Edgar Degas</b>, dynamic poses of dancers and everyday life</li></ul>

# Post-Impressionism, c. 1885 – 1910

Post-Impressionism developed in France as a critical evolution of Impressionism, building upon its innovations while moving beyond its emphasis on fleeting natural light and spontaneous outdoor painting. Whereas Impressionists sought to capture immediate sensory impressions *en plein air*, Post-Impressionists favored a more deliberate, studio-based approach that emphasized structure, order, and emotional depth.

This movement is marked by a diverse range of styles unified by their shared focus on subjective vision, symbolism, and abstraction.

Artists employed geometric forms, vivid colors, and expressive brushwork to convey deeper meanings and personal interpretations rather than merely replicating the visible world.

Key figures like Paul Cézanne explored underlying shapes and spatial relationships, laying the groundwork for Cubism, while others like Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin infused their work with emotional intensity and symbolic content.

Post-Impressionism thus represents a crucial bridge from the naturalism of Impressionism toward the varied explorations of modern art, emphasizing the artist's inner experience and the intellectual structuring of form.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Strong use of color and form. Personal symbols and emotional expression. More structured than Impressionism. Varied techniques, including Pointillism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Paul Cézanne</b>, known for building shapes with color patches</li> <li>▪ <b>Georges Seurat</b>, recognized for using tiny dots of color (pointillism)</li> <li>▪ <b>Paul Gauguin</b>, famous for vivid colors and exotic scenes</li> </ul>

## Fauvism, c. 1905 – 1910

“The wild beasts of the early 20th century.” Fauvism, often dubbed “the wild beasts” for its bold, untamed approach, was one of the earliest modern art movements to break decisively from academic tradition.

Originating in France, Fauvist artists embraced wild, vibrant colors applied with painterly freedom, using color not to replicate reality but to convey raw emotion and subjective experience.

This radical departure challenged conventional color theory and realistic representation, favoring intense hues and simplified forms to evoke mood and energy.

Fauvism's emphasis on expressive color and liberation from naturalistic constraints marked a crucial step toward modern abstraction, paving the way for later movements that explored emotional intensity and formal innovation in new and revolutionary ways.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Bright, non-natural colors. Loose, expressive brushwork. Simplified shapes and forms. Focus on emotion over realism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Henri Matisse</b>, famous for bright colors and simple shapes</li> <li>▪ <b>André Derain</b>, known for bold colors and wild brushwork</li> </ul>

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Raoul Dufy</b>, recognized for lively scenes with vibrant colors</li> </ul>

## Expressionism, c. 1905 – 1930

Expressionism emerged primarily in Germany and Austria as a powerful artistic response to the anxieties of rapid urbanization, social upheaval, and existential uncertainty.

Rejecting the intellectual restraint and idealized forms of earlier academic traditions, Expressionist artists used raw, emotive colors, distorted shapes, and dynamic lines to convey intense inner psychological states rather than objective reality.

Drawing on influences from Germanic and Nordic medieval art, as well as primitivism and fantasy, the movement embraced vivid, often jarring compositions that evoke emotional turmoil and existential dread.

Expressionism prioritized subjective experience over physical accuracy, deliberately deforming figures and space to amplify emotional impact.

This focus on the psyche and emotional authenticity laid important groundwork for subsequent developments in psychological and abstract art, marking a profound shift toward exploring the depths of human consciousness through visual language.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Distorted shapes and exaggerated lines. Bold, intense colors. Inner feelings expressed through the image. Sometimes dark or unsettling themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Edvard Munch</b>, famous for expressing deep emotions in art</li> <li>▪ <b>Egon Schiele</b>, known for raw, twisted figures and intense feelings</li> <li>▪ <b>Oskar Kokoschka</b>, recognized for energetic brushstrokes and psychological portraits</li> <li>▪ <b>Wassily Kandinsky</b>, pioneered abstract art with shapes and colors</li> <li>▪ <b>James Ensor</b>, known for strange masks and satirical scenes</li> </ul>

## Cubism, c. 1907 – 1925

Cubism revolutionized the visual arts by breaking down objects into fundamental geometric shapes and depicting multiple viewpoints simultaneously within a single composition.

Originating in Paris with pioneers Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, Cubism rejected the traditional techniques of perspective, foreshortening, and chiaroscuro that had dominated Western art for centuries.

Instead, it embraced a flat, two-dimensional picture plane where forms were abstracted and fragmented into overlapping planes and facets.

By reducing natural subjects to simplified, often Platonic geometric forms, Cubism challenged the illusion of depth and singular viewpoint, offering instead a complex, multifaceted understanding of space and form. This intense geometric mark-making and compositional innovation laid the foundation for much of modern abstract art, fundamentally transforming how artists represent reality.

Cubism was the era when collage art may have been first formally introduced into Fine Arts, through *papier collé* (pasted paper) as a way to break pictorial illusion and bring real-world materials (such as newspapers and wallpaper) into the picture plane.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Fragmentation, abstraction, muted palette (Analytic Geometric forms and flat shapes. Multiple viewpoints in one image. Limited color palettes in early works. Later use of collage techniques.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Pablo Picasso</b>, famous for inventing Cubism and changing art forever</li><li>▪ <b>Georges Braque</b>, known for developing Cubism alongside Picasso</li><li>▪ <b>Juan Gris</b>, recognized for clear shapes and colors in Cubism</li></ul>

## Surrealism, c. 1924 – 1945

Emerged as a groundbreaking movement dedicated to exploring dreams, the unconscious mind, and deeper metaphysical truths, profoundly influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

Rejecting traditional ideals of beauty and rationality, Surrealist artists sought to disrupt logic through unexpected juxtapositions, bizarre combinations of ordinary objects, and illogical, dreamlike imagery.

Rooted in a broader avant-garde reaction that included Dadaism, Surrealism was explicitly anti-Bourgeois, challenging societal norms and conventions. Collage art also became a popular vehicle in Dadaism for absurdity, political critique, and anti-art statements, and in the Surrealist art movement in general, used to create dreamlike juxtapositions by combining unrelated elements. Photomontage was also popular during this time.

Art became a form of personal memoir, filled with symbolic motifs drawn from the artist’s inner world, subconscious desires, and fears.

By unlocking the irrational and embracing mystery, Surrealism expanded the possibilities of artistic expression and reshaped the understanding of creativity as a gateway to the hidden recesses of the mind.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Dreamlike or bizarre imagery. Strange, unexpected object pairings. Personal symbols with hidden meanings. Influences from psychoanalysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Salvador Dalí</b>, famous for dreamlike and bizarre surreal images</li> <li>▪ <b>René Magritte</b>, known for clever and mysterious visual puzzles</li> <li>▪ <b>Max Ernst</b>, recognized for strange textures and imaginative scenes</li> </ul>

## Abstract Expressionism, c. 1943 – 1965

Abstract Expressionism stands as the first American art movement to achieve international prominence, marking a seismic shift in the center of the art world from Europe to New York City in the post-World War II era.

Characterized by monumental scale, spontaneous and improvisational techniques, and highly individualistic approaches, Abstract Expressionism embodied a rebellious, anarchic spirit that sought to capture the emotional and psychological essence of its subject rather than its physical form.

The movement's diversity included both the gestural, action painting of artists like Jackson Pollock, emphasizing dynamic brushwork and physical engagement with the canvas, and the color field painters such as Mark Rothko, who focused on expansive areas of pure color to evoke profound emotional responses. Collage and mixed-media practices also flourished, reflecting the era's absorption of consumer culture and experimentation with materials.

While New York was the movement's epicenter, the San Francisco Bay Area fostered its own significant developments, contributing to the movement's rich regional diversity.

Abstract Expressionism's emphasis on improvisation, raw emotion, and the subconscious laid the groundwork for many subsequent modern and contemporary art movements, fundamentally redefining the possibilities of abstraction and artistic expression in the 20th century.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Very large canvases. Abstract shapes with no clear subject. Expressive brushwork or big color areas. Spontaneous, emotional creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Jackson Pollock</b>, famous for energetic drip painting techniques</li> <li>▪ <b>Mark Rothko</b>, known for large, glowing color fields</li> <li>▪ <b>Willem de Kooning</b>, recognized for bold brushwork and abstract figures</li> </ul>

## Optical Art (Op Art) , c. 1955 – 1970

Op Art, or Optical Art, emerged in the 1960s amid a broader cultural fascination with psychology, science, and emerging technologies, reflecting the era’s curiosity about human perception and the mechanics of vision.

Grounded in advances in color theory and visual science, Op Art artists created works designed to actively engage viewers by producing dynamic, disorienting optical effects that challenge traditional notions of art as static and passive.

Through precise arrangements of geometric patterns, lines, and contrasting colors, these artworks generate illusions of movement, flickering, vibration, or warping, transforming the act of viewing into a sensory, participatory experience.

Central to Op Art is the exploration of how the eye and brain interact with visual stimuli, particularly through the three major contrast principles iconic of the Op Art style.

As an abstract art style, Op Art distinguished itself from previous movements by emphasizing perception itself as subject matter, blurring the boundaries between art, science, and psychology.

Op Art’s legacy lies in its radical rethinking of the viewer’s role, from passive observer to active participant, and its enduring impact on how artists and audiences consider the experience of seeing.

Study of Three Major Contrasts:

<i>Simultaneous Contrast</i>	Colors appear differently depending on adjacent hues
<i>Successive Contrast</i>	Afterimages affect perception following exposure to a color
<i>Reverse Contrast (Assimilation)</i>	Surrounding colors influence the perception of a color’s intensity or tone.

In Op Art styles, these three major contrast principles create compelling visual illusions that manipulate depth, motion, and spatial ambiguity.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Precise, geometric patterns. Strong color contrasts. Illusion of motion or depth. Abstract, non-representational.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Victor Vasarely</b>, known as the father of the Op Art movement</li><li>▪ <b>Bridget Riley</b>, famous for creating optical illusions with patterns</li><li>▪ <b>Julio Le Parc</b>, recognized for kinetic art with moving light effects</li><li>▪ <b>M.C. Escher</b>, famous for mind-bending impossible shapes and patterns</li></ul>

## Pop Art, c. 1955 – 1970s

Pop Art emerged as a vibrant and provocative movement that drew directly from popular culture, mass media, and consumer goods to both celebrate and critique the realities of modern life.

Originating primarily in Britain and the United States in the post-World War II era, Pop Art artists used everyday mundane objects, such as advertisements, comic strips, packaging, and celebrity images, as subject matter, reflecting the pervasive influence of consumerism and advertising on society.

By incorporating familiar imagery and employing techniques like repetition and bold colors, the movement questioned how mass media shapes personal identity, desires, and cultural values.

Pop Art blurred the traditional boundaries between high art and low culture, challenging elitist notions of artistic value by elevating commonplace items and commercial aesthetics to the status of fine art.

The movement's playful yet critical stance had a profound impact on contemporary art, influencing subsequent generations and expanding the scope of what art could be and represent in a media-saturated world.

Artists like Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Richard Hamilton embraced irony, parody, and appropriation to expose the contradictions of consumer society, while also acknowledging its seductive power.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
Bright, flat colors. Recognizable images from media or products. Irony and humor. Simple, bold designs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Andy Warhol</b>, famous for colorful images of celebrities and products</li> <li>▪ <b>Roy Lichtenstein</b>, known for his comic book style with bold dots</li> <li>▪ <b>Richard Hamilton</b>, recognized as a pioneer of Pop Art collage</li> </ul>

## Minimalism, c. 1960 – 1975

Minimalism arose in the New York City art scene as a rigorous reaction against the emotional intensity and subjective expressiveness of Abstract Expressionism. Emphasizing clarity, precision, and simplicity, Minimalist artists sought to strip art down to its essential elements: form, color, and material. The style eschews metaphor, narrative, and personal emotion.

Often described as Literalist Art, Minimalism focused strictly on what the artwork physically is, demanding that viewers engage with the object itself rather than any external associations or symbolic meanings.

Characterized by geometric shapes, clean lines, and monochromatic palettes, Minimalism presented an austere, cerebral approach aligned with the intellectual rigor of conceptualism and broader postmodern critiques of authorship, originality, and representation.



By foregrounding the material presence and spatial relationships of the work, Minimalist artists challenged traditional ideas of artistic expression, inviting contemplation of art as pure form and experience.

This movement fundamentally reshaped contemporary art, influencing architecture, design, and installation art, and redefining the boundaries between art and objecthood.

<i>Avant-garde</i> ("advance guard")	Forward-thinking, pioneering spirit challenging traditional aesthetic, cultural, or social values. Experimental, innovative, and pushing the boundaries of accepted norms and conventions. A deliberate break from the emotional intensity and figurative expressiveness of the preceding art movements.
<i>Literalist Art</i>	Artwork that presents itself exactly as it is, without illusion, metaphor, or symbolic meaning. Emphasized the physical reality of the art object. Focus is on what the artwork literally is, rather than what it represents or suggests. Strips away emotional content, narrative story, or extraneous details. Wants the viewer to engage directly with the pure visual and tactile experience of the piece. Literalist art is <i>not</i> about storytelling or expression, but rather, it is about clarity, objectivity, and the immediacy of perception.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Geometric shapes. Limited colors. Repetition of forms. Smooth, impersonal surfaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Donald Judd</b>, famous for simple, geometric sculptures in space</li><li>▪ <b>Carl Andre</b>, known for floor-based arrangements of industrial materials</li><li>▪ <b>Dan Flavin</b>, art made with fluorescent light tubes</li><li>▪ <b>Agnes Martin</b>, delicate grids and subtle lines</li><li>▪ <b>Frank Stella</b>, known for bold shapes and vibrant colors</li></ul>

## Conceptual Art, c. 1960s – 1980s

Marked a radical departure from traditional artistic practice by prioritizing ideas and concepts over aesthetic form or craftsmanship. This movement fundamentally challenged conventional definitions of art, asserting that the intellectual engagement and underlying message are the essence of the artwork, often *making the concept itself the work of art*.

Rather than focusing on visual beauty or technical skill, Conceptual artists emphasized purpose, meaning, and critical inquiry, encouraging viewers to become active participants in interpreting and questioning the nature of art. Characterized by the use of mixed media, performance, text, documentation, and ready-made objects, Conceptual Art often took ephemeral or non-traditional forms that de-emphasized permanence or materiality. By doing so, it broke away from the art object as a commodity and shifted attention to language, philosophy, and critical theory, reflecting broader cultural movements that interrogated systems of meaning, authorship, and representation.

This era redefined artistic creation as an intellectual process and opened new possibilities for what art could be, influencing contemporary practices and expanding the boundaries of artistic expression. The movement invites artists and viewers to rethink what “art” even is, how it functions, and what role it plays in society.

Conceptual Art champions art’s value and meaning as coming from its intellectual concept, rather than its physical form or aesthetic qualities.

<u>Style Characteristic of this Era:</u>	<u>Key Examples for Study:</u>
<p>Focus on the concept, not appearance. Use of text, found objects, or performance. Can be temporary or not physically made. Challenges the idea of what art is.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Marcel Duchamp</b>, challenging art with ready-made objects; progenitor of Conceptual Art, questioning the very nature and definition of art</li> <li>▪ <b>Sol LeWitt</b>, conceptual art using written instructions for others to follow and carry out the work, emphasizing process; often considered a foundational figure in this art movement. Concept: artistic authorship can be collective and delegated.</li> <li>▪ <b>Joseph Kosuth</b>, exploring the meaning of art itself, and the concepts of language and philosophy. To Kosuth, “art is a linguistic act.”</li> <li>▪ <b>Yoko Ono</b>, performance art and audience participation pieces; emphasized art as an experience and a social process</li> <li>▪ <b>Ai Weiwei</b>, for his political and social activism in art, blending traditional Chinese materials with modern social commentary</li> </ul>

## Post-Modernist & Deconstructivist Art, c. 1970s – 2000s

Emerged as critical reactions against the ideals of modernism, which emphasized purity, coherence, and universal truths. Rejecting these notions, Postmodernist art embraces irony, fragmentation, and multiplicity, dismantling the idea of a single, authoritative center or meaning. Instead, this art style celebrates diversity, ambiguity, and the coexistence of multiple perspectives and “truths.”

This era is marked by an eclectic reworking of past styles, often combining and reinterpreting historical, popular, and multicultural influences in playful or provocative ways. Collage became a key method for appropriation art, remixing existing media to challenge originality, authorship, and cultural narratives.

Postmodern art is inherently self-referential and challenges traditional hierarchies by blurring the boundaries between high and low culture, frequently using pastiche, parody, and appropriation to question concepts of originality, authorship, and authenticity. This movement is deeply aligned with broader cultural critiques found in postmodern philosophy, including skepticism toward grand narratives and universalizing ideologies.

Within this broad context, Postmodernism gave rise to diverse strands such as feminism, which interrogated gender and power dynamics; neo-expressionism, with its raw emotional intensity; street art, which brought art into public and urban spaces; and appropriated art, which recontextualized existing images and objects to

challenge cultural meaning. It also marked the beginnings of digital art, reflecting the integration of new technologies and media into artistic practice.

Postmodernism and Deconstructivism is about questioning established narratives, embracing complexity and contradiction, and reflecting a pluralistic, more globalized and media-saturated society. Postmodern artists opened the door for a more inclusive, diverse, and critical art landscape that continues to evolve today.

<b>Deconstructivism</b>	Often associated with architecture but influential in visual art as well, shares these concerns by fragmenting forms and destabilizing conventional structures to reveal contradictions and complexities within cultural and aesthetic norms. Both movements emphasize process over final product, favoring works that are open-ended and invite active interpretation.
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Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Mix of styles and references. Playful or ironic tone. Cultural critique. No single “right” way to make art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Barbara Kruger</b>, famous for bold text over striking photos; critiqued consumerism, power structures, and identity politics; work is often deeply ironic, blending high art and pop culture</li><li>▪ <b>Cindy Sherman</b>, known for photographing herself in many roles; questions the notion of identity and authorship; interest in expressing fragmentation; critiqued cultural stereotypes</li><li>▪ <b>Frank Gehry</b>, recognized for innovative, sculptural building designs; architects featured non-linear forms that disrupt traditional architectural harmony</li><li>▪ <b>Yayoi Kusuma</b>, Japanese artist iconic for polka dot motives and immersive installations; focused on themes of obsession, psychological depth, and eclecticism</li></ul>

New Media Art, c. 1990s – present

New Media Art is a contemporary art movement that encompasses a wide range of creative practices utilizing emerging and evolving technologies as fundamental components of both the process and the concept. This movement includes interactive installations, virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), internet-based art, bio-art, and other technologically driven forms that challenge traditional boundaries of art-making.

Artists working in New Media Art harness digital tools such as graphics tablets, styluses, and software like Photoshop, Procreate, and 3D modeling programs to create works that often blend traditional artistic techniques, such as watercolor, oils, and impasto, with digital execution. Artists such as John Stezaker and Eugenia Loli extended collage into the digital realm, remixing photography and memes.

Beyond simply replicating traditional media in digital form, New Media Art emphasizes interactivity, immersion, and the fluidity between creator, artwork, and audience. It frequently explores themes related to technology’s impact on society, identity, perception, and the nature of reality itself.

Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Use of computers, software, and digital devices. Interactive or immersive experiences. Blends old and new art methods. Constantly evolving with technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Rafael Lozano-Hemmer</b>, famous for interactive public light installations</li> <li>▪ <b>Jenny Holzer</b>, known for powerful text-based digital art</li> <li>▪ <b>Refik Anadol</b>, recognized for immersive data-driven audiovisual experiences</li> <li>▪ <b>Nam June Paik</b>, Korean artist who pioneered video art and electronic media installations</li> </ul>

## Post-Internet Art, c. 2008 – present

Emerged not merely from the use of digital tools, but from a deep engagement with the cultural, psychological, and aesthetic realities shaped by the omnipresence of the internet and social media. This movement reflects how online life permeates everyday existence, influencing identity, communication, and visual culture, often marked by irony, self-awareness, and playful juxtapositions of virtual vs. physical reality.

Rather than focusing solely on technology as a medium, Post-Internet Art explores the blurred boundaries between digital and physical worlds, capturing the ways in which internet aesthetics, such as memes, viral imagery, social media filters, and the language of online platforms, inform contemporary experience.

Post-Internet artists critically reflect on issues like digital surveillance, virtual identity, consumerism, and the rapid circulation of images and information in the networked age. This art movement reveals the evolving relationship between technology, society, and artistic expression in an increasingly interconnected world.

Closely related is <b>Metamodernism</b> (2000s - present)	A philosophical and cultural response to Postmodernism and an evolution beyond it. Metamodernism oscillates between sincerity and irony, structure and play, embracing complexity and paradox rather than rejecting grand narratives outright. It resonates with Post-Internet Art's tendency to navigate and negotiate the contradictions of contemporary digital life, blending earnestness with critique.
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Style Characteristic of this Era:	Key Examples for Study:
Mixing old and new styles, integrating digital art and physical mediums of art. References to online culture and aesthetics. Ironic, self-aware tone. Often blends sincerity and playfulness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Amalia Ulman</b>, famous for exploring identity through social media</li> <li>▪ <b>Petra Cortright</b>, known for digital paintings and webcam videos</li> <li>▪ <b>John Rafman</b>, recognized for surreal internet-based video and art projects</li> <li>▪ <b>Cao Fei</b>, Chinese artist who explores digital culture, urban life, and virtual realities</li> </ul>