

AP Art History Review: Unit 1

From Simple Studies, <https://simplestudies.edublogs.org> & @simplestudiesinc on Instagram

Global Prehistory (30,000-500 B.C.E)

~ 4% of exam (11 works)

****Disclaimer: the material provided has been compiled from two main sources, including the College Board AP Art History Course Description and Khan Academy's AP Art History course resources. The material provided is not claimed by Simple Studies as original content. All images have been provided courtesy of The College Board.*

Background: What Is Global Prehistory?

- Humans were able to express themselves through art before the existence of written records.
- “**Prehistory**” refers to the period of global history that predates written records
- Archaeological evidence suggests humanity began in Africa around 3 million years ago and that homo sapiens (modern humans) migrated outwards from the continent
- Global prehistory is divided into **three periods**: the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Mesolithic eras.
 - **Paleolithic** (“Old Stone Age” — 35,000-10,000 B.C.E): The period of the Stone Age associated with the evolution of humans. It predates the Neolithic period.
 - **Mesolithic** (“Middle Stone Age”— 7,000-4,000 B.C.E in Europe): The period of the stone age associated with the final period of hunter-gatherer societies. Characterized by small, chipped stone tools (burins, etc.).
 - **Neolithic** (“New Stone Age”— 4,500-1,500 B.C.E in Europe; 6,000-3,500 B.C.E in Ancient Near East): The period of the Stone Age associated with the ancient Agricultural Revolution. It follows the Paleolithic period.

Characteristics of Prehistoric Art

- The first “art” forms were not created until around 70,000 years ago in the form of rock paintings made with natural materials such as **ocher** and with tools such as **brushes** made from animal hair and small, sharpened **stones**.
- Prehistoric works usually depicted **animal forms**; human forms were not drawn frequently.
- Asia: ritual objects, funerary stelae, ceramics → memorializing arts
- Europe: megaliths, cave paintings, stone figurines → human/animal fertility, attempting to understand the cosmos
- Pacific: pottery w/ incised geometric designs
- America (both continents): animal bone/clay structures
- Africa: rock paintings/rock sculpture

The Neolithic Revolution

- Marks the transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyles to *sedentary societies* built around the production of agriculture and animal domestication
- Neolithic art demonstrates a shift away from monumental structures on rock art to more portable objects with more utilitarian functions, such as preserving or containing food.
- Beginnings of architecture to maintain sedentary lifestyle
- Not many Neolithic cultures had yet produced a writing system

Key Vocabulary:

- **Abstract:** non-representational, simplified or distorted in depiction
- **Acropolis:** an elevated city or mound
- **Bas relief:** sculptural technique in which images or symbols are carved into and raised from the surrounding material
- **Burin:** small steel object used for incising
- **Bushel:** a cylindrical earthenware vessel
- **Hierarchy of scale:** technique in which the artist manipulates proportion or scale to communicate the relative importance of figures in an artwork

- **Incising:** technique in which a deep cut or carving is made into a soft surface such as clay for the purpose of decoration.
- **Megalith:** a large stone used to construct a monument
- **Narrative art:** visual representation of a story or event in art
- **Neolithic Revolution:** period of transition of humans from nomadic, hunter-gatherer societies to more sedentary, agrarian ones. Also known as the **Agricultural Revolution.**
- **Ocher:** natural reddish-brown pigment that contains nitrous oxide
- **Post and lintel construction:** an architectural system of construction with two or more vertical elements (posts) supporting a horizontal element (lintel)
- **Register:** horizontal band of ornamental or decorative imagery on an object
- **Sculpture in the round:** sculpture meant to be viewed from all sides
- **Shamanism:** An animistic religion of northern Asia, having the belief that shamans affect the mediation between the visible and the spirit worlds
- **Stele:** a vertical slab serving as a marker or monument
- **Subtractive sculpture:** technique in which a sculpture made from the removal of certain materials to create a finished product
- **Superimpose:** to layer an object or image on top of another
- **Trithilions:** a pair of monoliths roofed by a lintel
- **Zoomorphic:** having the features of or bearing resemblance to an animal

1. Apollo 11 Stones. Namibia. c. 25,500–25,300 B.C.E. Charcoal on stone.



Content

- Unidentified animal form, appears to have hind legs and a feline head

Context

- Found in a rock shelter off of the southern coast of Africa in the Huns Mountains.
- Rock shelter was an ongoing site of human settlement at the time
- “Apollo 11” refers to the name of the cave investigated by Wendt, where the rocks were found on the same day as the return of the Apollo 11 spacecraft from the moon.
- Various stone tools and materials that came from different areas in the continent were found on the site.

Form

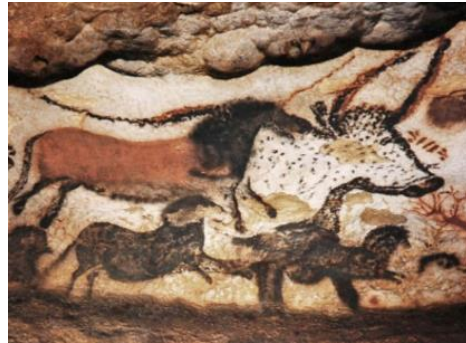
- Two-dimensional
- Drawn in strict profile
- Silhouette colored in using charcoal
- Portable

Function

- Presence of other rock paintings and materials found on the site suggest the object is of ritual use
- Artist’s purpose was to capture the form of the animal itself through a simple visual representation
 - Suggested that artist could have believed that capturing the essence of the animal would make hunting easier and thus increase chances of survival

2. Great Hall of the Bulls. Lascaux, France. Paleolithic Europe. 15,000–13,000

B.C.E. Rock painting



© The Bridgeman Art Library

Content

- The caves contain many wall paintings depicting wildlife such as bison, bulls, horses, deer, etc., which were present in the region at the time, in motion.
 - [Rhinoceros, wounded man and disemboweled bison: Lascaux, France, c. 15,000-13,000 BC](#)
 - Image depicts a ritualistic interaction between a bird-headed figure, bison, and rhino; the bird-headed figure is interpreted to be a shaman

Context

- The Lascaux Caves are located near the south of France
- One of the most extensive examples of Paleolithic narrative art
- Other documented caves in southern France feature various hand paintings, some of which give a glimpse into the supernatural or shamanistic beliefs
- Animals depicted were not part of the hunter-gatherers' diets

Form

- Large-scale paintings, narrative art
- Bodies of animals drawn in twisted perspective/composite view
- Ochre, a natural material, was used to make these paintings
- Dark contour lines present, some animals drawn as silhouettes
- Groundlines present

Function

- Scholastic theories suggest the paintings had a connection to beliefs in “sympathetic

magic,” in which they would create a visual representation of an object to create a supernatural connection to the actual object in the mundane world to ensure success during hunting

- Themes: survival, supernatural beliefs, shamanism

3. Camelid sacrum in the shape of a canine. Tequixquiac, central Mexico.

14,000– 7000 B.C.E. Bone.



© Jorge Pérez de Lara

Content

- Resembles the head of a canine -- a domesticated dog, coyote, or wolf
 - Artificial holes represent nose cavity and eye sockets
- The action of taking an object from an animal and creating something else from it shows reverence for the animal world
- Remains of red ocher found on object, was once painted

Context

- Discovered in Tequixquiac, Mexico in 1870 (current day Mexico City)
- Made from the sacrum (large triangular bone at base of spine) of a camelid - an animal related to alpacas, camels, and llamas.
- Camelids originated in Asia and Africa; they migrated to the Americas via the Bering Strait land bridge
- Bone sculpting was a tradition in Ancient Mesoamerica
 - Sacrum bone hypothesized to be sacred across various global cultures
- Canines played an integral part in traditional stories and art
 - Perhaps a reference to the Mayan creation myth, the Popol Vuh

Form

- Subtractive sculpture
- Contains carvings and incisions made by a sharp instrument

Function

- May be a visual representation of a mythological creature
- May also be an object that functioned as a medium for communicating with the underworld via a shaman

4. Running horned woman. Tassili n'Ajjer, Algeria. 6000–4000 B.C.E.

Pigment on rock.



© The Granger Collection, New York

Content

- Faceless, horned, running female deity towering over figures in the background
- Grain cloud above deity's head
- Figure adorned in raffia skirt, body paint, armlets, and garters
- Scarification marks and body suggest tribal traditions; deity is most likely performing a ritual
- Various figures in background appear to be humans

Context

- Surrounding region has been inhabited since the Neolithic era
- Large concentrations of rock in Algeria
- Found on a high isolated plateau that had not been a dwelling place, which suggests that site may have been a sacred space of some sort

Form

- Figure in twisted perspective or composite view, illusion of movement
- Female deity superimposed on figures in the background
- Hierarchy of scale → deity larger than any other figure in the work

Function

- Female deity worshiped for survival
- Representation of relationship between humans and the supernatural

5. Beaker with the ibex motifs. Susa, Iran. 4200-3500 B.C.E. Painted terra cotta.



Content

- The figures of the beaker are visual representations of the wildlife and agriculture that defined the civilization at the time
- Beaker is divided into a series of sections called registers
- On the frieze of the beaker are a series of parallel, long-necked birds that are on top of a body of water
- Below the frieze is a section of running dogs with narrow bodies
- The central section contains an ibex (mountain goat) framed by meander patterns that could have symbolized a visual representation of agricultural fields
 - The ibex's horns frame what appears to be a clan symbol or identifying mark of a group

Context

- Found at an acropolis in Susa, which was the leading agricultural settlement inhabited c.

5,000-4,000 B.C.E.

- Susa was located in Ancient Mesopotamia, which is also known as the cradle of civilization.
- Located near fertile river valley
- Animal domestication took place in this society (similar to other Neolithic cultures)
- Monumental buildings and graves found in the surrounding area, hypothesized religious nature
- Remains of the dead gathered at the foot of the acropolis after being defleshed at a previous [unknown] location
- Various ceramics and burial items found at base of acropolis along with beaker

Form

- Simple geometric forms/stylized representations of natural subjects
- Abstraction (clan-symbol/motif)
- Exaggerated necks of birds, narrowed body of hound-like animals
- Repetition of animal forms may suggest movement
- Use of twisted perspective (composite view)
- Beaker has thin, fragile walls

Function

- Fragility of object indicates that it may have a ritual function as opposed to a utilitarian one
- Found in gravesite, a funerary object

6. Anthropomorphic stele. Arabian Peninsula. Fourth millennium B.C.E.

Sandstone.



Content

- Upright human figure, three feet high
- Simplistic face
- Awl, dagger hanging from belt, and two horizontal cords frame the torso → perhaps a warrior

Context

- Found in Ha'il, a village in Saudi Arabia, along with other similar stele
- Dry climate caused people to adopt sedentary lifestyle and travel among caravan routes across Arabian Peninsula
- The stele's imitation of a human figure reveals that figural representation existed in pre-Islamic Arabia
- Caravan networks that spanned across Arabia were responsible for the linking of ancient cultures through trade
- Some tribal communities in Arabia still wear knife blades as a part of tradition stemming from prehistory.

Form

- Abstract facial features: oval-shaped eyes, triangular nose
- Features carved out of sandstone using bas relief

Function

- Excavated from a burial site

- Most likely to be a stele or grave marker for an individual
- Similar objects were found across sites in Yemen and Jordan

7. Jade cong. Liangzhu, China. 3300–2200 B.C.E. Carved jade.



Content

- Artifact with a tubular interior and a squarish exterior → bi disks and cong
 - Bi disks symbolizes the heavens, cong represent the earth → connection between both worlds
- Masked images/faces incised on outer corners of the cong, may depict spirits or deities
 - Round eyes, curved nose/mouth
 - Resemble taotie masks of the later Shang dynasty

Context

- During the Neolithic period of Ancient China, regional communities created their own tools and utilitarian items using stone
 - Jade was a precious material reserved for the elite, upper-class
- Liangzhu situated along the Yangtze River delta, allowed for settlement and development of agriculture
 - More technologically and socially developed than surrounding Neolithic cultures
- Bi disks were laid with the bodies of the dead in China since the preceding Hongshan culture
- Evidence of social stratification--elite buried with precious items like jade that were hard to work

Form

- Artifact carved from jade, a fine stone that is green and transparent--now faded in color
- Cong cut and incised through abrasion

- Abstract mask decorations incised carefully through small lines

Function

- Found in burial tombs
- Suggests elite status of the individual(s) buried
- Safety passage to and wealth in the afterlife

8. Stonehenge. Wiltshire, UK. Neolithic Europe. c. 2500–1600 B.C.E.

Sandstone.



Content

- Outermost ring consists of erected stones that are equidistant from each other, topped with lintels (trilithons)
 - Within this ring are smaller stones standing upright without lintels
- On the interior are upright sandstones arranged in a semi-circle
 - Sandstones frame an even smaller half circle
- Sun shines exactly in between a pair of stones during the summer solstice

Context

- Stonehenge was not constructed through organized labor
 - Connection to solstice suggests the importance of planning before construction
- Three periods of construction

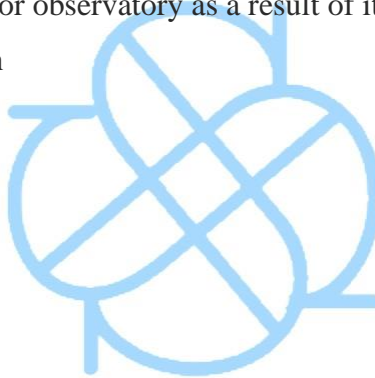
- Period 1 (3100 B.C.E): henge (circular ditch and bank), Aubrey holes (pits)
- Period 2 (3000-2900 B.C.E): Aubrey holes used as burial sites, wooden posts at center
- Period 3 (2500-1600 B.C.E): stones erected within henge in a circular manner
- Remains of humans from second construction were analyzed; young adult males buried at site
- Monument has connection to astronomy--solar & lunar calendar

Form

- Trilithons constructed using post-lintel technique
- Stones arranged in concentric rings
- Megaliths were bluestones (sandstone and limestone)

Function

- Could be a solar calendar or observatory as a result of its precise connection to astronomical phenomenon
- Burial site for the elite



9. The Ambum Stone. Ambum Valley, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea. c.

1500 B.C.E. Greywacke



Content

- Zoomorphic figure with an elongated nose, circular eyes, long arms, and a round lower torso
 - Resembles an echidna, a mammal with an elongated snout
- Figure is curved into a fetal-like position

Context

- Found with other ancient pestles stylized in the form of animals in New Guinea
- One of the earliest examples of sculpture in Oceania
- When discovered by the native Enga people in the early 20th century, it was believed to be a relic containing ancestral powers

Form

- Carved from greywacke (a hard, dark sedimentary stone)
- Facial features carved using high relief
- Smooth, lustrous exterior
- 8 inches tall

Function

- Most likely a pestle, as suggested by the curvature of the creature's neck
- Ritual object; went through process during which it was granted ancestral powers

10. Tlatilco female figurine. Central Mexico, site of Tlatilco. 1200–900 B.C.E.

Ceramic.



Content

- Female nude figurines
 - Double-headed (bicephalic), may symbolize concept of duality--important component of Mesoamerican shamanism and tradition
 - Wide hips, pinched waist
 - Elaborate hairstyles, is important to the region itself
- Pose resembles that of dancers

Context

- Valley of Mexico inhabited by the Tlatilco people before the rise of the Aztec Empire
- Plant domestication in area c. 5000 B.C.E
 - Settlement around 2000 B.C.E
- Many early cultures created nude female figurines to promote survival in societies with high infant mortality rates
- Motifs of animals from surrounding environment found on other Tlatilco figures

Form

- Completely handcrafted, clay shaped by hand
- Exaggerated proportions--wide hips and pinched waist in comparison to small feet
 - No detail on hands or feet
- Details on face added through incising
- Chips of paint present

Function

- Found in a grave in Mexico city by miners
- Promote fertility and survival

- Suggest fascination with the supernatural--physical deformity interpreted as supernatural by natives

11. Terra cotta fragment. Lapita. Solomon Islands, Reef Islands. 1000 B.C.E.

Terra cotta (incised).



Content

- Fragments of pottery with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures
 - Stylized human faces
- Forms bare semblance to traditional tattoo designs and cloth from Polynesia

Context

- The Lapita culture is known for its ceramics that feature geometric motifs and anthropomorphic designs
 - These ceramics were found in islands of SE Asia and Pacific. Originated in SE Asia and then spread to Pacific
- Lapita people were seafarers who lived in Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia
- Polynesia populated 4,000-3,500 years ago

Form

- Reddish color--terracotta clay
- Simple and complex patterns incised and stamped into wet clay before low-fired
 - Sharp and natural tools used for fine designs
- Fragile and thin walls

Function

- Poor technical composition and lack of carbon residue suggest that these objects were used to store or serve food
- Other theories suggest that men practiced tattooing on these vessels