Over the last few weeks, I have been spending some time exploring the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, which is an online art history resource hosted within the museum's website. It is designed to offer students, educators, and the general public a useful digital tool to experience art history through organizing and contextualizing (a portion of) the Met's collections. With this tool, all one needs is access to the internet to explore art with a historical perspective through a catalog of thousands of essays, works of art, and additional historical overviews written and maintained by the Met's experts. Accessing the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History is relatively simple; one must navigate to the Met's main website, move to the main menu at the top of the screen, hover over the "Learn with Us" tab, and finally select the "Art History Timeline" option. From there, the main landing page offer's 3 sections for users to begin their exploration into art history: "essays", "works of art", and "chronology".

The "essays" section offers a catalog of over 1,000 essays written by scholars on various topics in art history, such as art movements or materials. Each essay threads together a topic or theme from art history with specific works of art in the Met's collection, illustrating the author's findings through examples we can further engage with online. The initial page opens to a list of essays in reverse chronological order, and users are able to further filter by time period, theme, and geography, with predefined options to choose from. In "Gladiators: Types and Training" by Marlee Miller, the author describes how images of gladiators on various objects can provide insight into the armaments, training, fighting structure, and amphitheaters of ancient Rome. As is standardized for these essays, the author effectively contextualizes a number of art works from a specific theme and period in a digestible format. In addition to this, the essay hosts direct links to the object pages within the collection catalog for the reader to further explore the artwork she references, like this Terracotta Oil Lamp from Cyprus.

The "works of art" section allows users to experience the objects directly, leading with visuals of the artwork as opposed to written content. For this reason, the "works of art" section feels closer to a traditional museum experience, where one visually encounters a work of art before reviewing the accompanying description. At the home page, over 8,000 art pieces from the Met's collections are arranged at random, endlessly filling the screen as you scroll down. Although the images of these works are beautifully rendered, one cannot help but feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of works to view. Fortunately, like the essay section, users are able to filter the works by either period and geography or by theme. Even with the filtering capabilities, the tight arrangement of images paired with the size of the catalog led me to develop feelings of trepidation over how to proceed. This reminded me of the famous jam experiment where psychologists had discovered people are more likely to purchase jam when they are offered only 6 options as opposed to 24. When selecting an object, for example, this Terracotta Plate attributed to Paseas, we are transferred to the object's page within the broader collection catalog, like in the "essay" section. From here, users are given a description of the artwork, its location in the museum, details about its history and specifications, links to essays or publications the artwork is featured in, and other suggested works.

The "chronology" section is the most interactive feature of the timeline, providing users with an encyclopedia of sorts that can be filtered through an interactive timeline and map. Directly below the timeline and map tool all 291 chronology pages are listed in alphabetical and chronological

order. The tool is really simple to use, and effective at offering an intuitive filtering experience when engaging with the information. There are limits to the tool, as there are fewer filtering options, with no ability to filter by theme. As an example, the "Greek and Roman" categorization that is available in other sections is not an option when filtering, and users are only able to filter for "Greek" art of a certain era, with no "Roman" section available. On each of the chronology pages, such as the [Ancient Greece (1-500 A.D.)](#) page, there are a handful of works that represent the given period and place, a timeline indicating the ruling entity at a given period, a map noting the relevant locations, a brief historical overview, an extensive list of key events, and links to similar and supplemental pages.

Overall, I think this tool is really successful in a few areas. The "essays" and "chronology" sections provide expertly written and researched information that is effectively organized to educate the users on the featured artworks and their histories. The information in each section is transparent and trustworthy, with each page highlighting sources for their work and providing citations for those looking to reference these pages themselves. The images are stunning and offer users clear visual representations of the work in question. The filtering capabilities are largely effective at narrowing any search quickly, and the 3 distinct sections offer a unique view into art history. There are also a few items I would address to improve the user experience of this tool. I feel that the "works of art" section could offer an option for users to view the artwork more spread apart on their screen to avoid overwhelming users with too much visual information. Also, when interacting with the tool it becomes apparent that there is a different web theme for different sections, which leads to a disjointed user experience. For example, when visiting the "essays" section or the timeline homepage, the user interface looks to be part of the Met's main website, but if the user is on the "chronology" or "works of art" sections, users are taken to an entirely different user interface. As you jump from link to link, the constant change in user interface makes it unclear what tool you are using. This could be solved by unifying the website themes, and creating a consistent [Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#) notation near the top-right corner of a webpage (when on relevant pages), so users know where they are on the website. Regardless of my suggestions, the Heilbrunn Timeline is an excellent resource for anyone interested in learning more about art history.