Art History Learning Journal: Week 2 Reflection

Before beginning this course, my impressions of ancient Greece and Rome were largely shaped by popular media and general knowledge. I viewed these civilizations as foundational to Western culture, known for their contributions to philosophy, democracy, and engineering. However, studying their art and architecture has significantly deepened and nuanced my understanding of these ancient cultures.

The video "Ancient Greek and Roman art" from Khan Academy provided an excellent overview that challenged my preconceptions. It highlighted how Greek and Roman art were not just aesthetic pursuits but integral to their societies, reflecting cultural values and serving practical functions (Khan Academy, n.d.-a). This perspective made me appreciate the multifaceted role of art in these ancient cultures.

My impression of Greek art and architecture has been particularly transformed. The article "The Art of Classical Greece" by Hemingway and Hemingway (n.d.) revealed the sophisticated techniques and ideals behind Greek sculptures and buildings. I was struck by how Greek artists strived for an idealized representation of the human form, as exemplified in the Doryphoros by Polykleitos. This sculpture, discussed in detail in a Khan Academy video, demonstrates the Greeks' pursuit of perfect proportions and harmony (Khan Academy, n.d.-b). It made me realize that Greek art was not just about beauty, but also about expressing philosophical and mathematical concepts.

The article "Architecture in Ancient Greece" by Hemingway (n.d.) further expanded my understanding of Greek architectural achievements. Learning about the development of the different classical orders - Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian - showed me how Greek architecture evolved over time, reflecting changing cultural values and technological advancements (Khan Academy, n.d.-c). The Parthenon, in particular, has taken on new significance for me. Haynes' (n.d.) article about the original colors of the Parthenon was eye-opening, challenging my perception of ancient Greek aesthetics and reminding me how much our view of the past can be distorted by time.

Regarding Roman art and architecture, Ambler's (n.d.-a) introduction to Ancient Roman Art helped me appreciate the complexity of Roman artistic culture. I was fascinated to learn how Roman art both borrowed from and innovated upon Greek traditions. The video "Rome's history in four faces at The Met" provided a tangible example of how Roman art evolved over time, reflecting political and cultural changes (Khan Academy, n.d.-d).

Roman architecture, in particular, has gained new significance in my understanding. Ambler's (n.d.-b) article on Roman Architecture highlighted the practical genius of Roman builders. Learning about innovations like the arch, vault, and dome, and how they were used in structures like the Pantheon, gave me a new appreciation for Roman engineering prowess. The video on the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine further illustrated how Roman architecture could be both functional and awe-inspiring (Smarthistory, n.d.).

In conclusion, studying the art and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome has transformed my impressions of these cultures from somewhat idealized and distant civilizations to complex, innovative societies whose cultural products were deeply intertwined with their values, beliefs, and daily lives. The Parthenon, the Doryphoros, Roman portrait busts, and structures like the Pantheon and the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine have been particularly influential in reshaping my understanding. This deeper appreciation of ancient art and architecture has not only enriched my knowledge of these cultures but also made me more aware of their enduring influence on our modern world.

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