



Art History and Other Disciplines

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Art history studies how the visual arts relate to human history and cultural development. It often crosses over into other areas of study associated with human history and cultural development. This lesson is about these relationships between art history and other areas of study. In this lesson, you will learn about:

- [1. Art History and Other Areas of Study](#)
- [2. How Art Historians Evaluate Visual Evidence](#)

1. Art History and Other Areas of Study

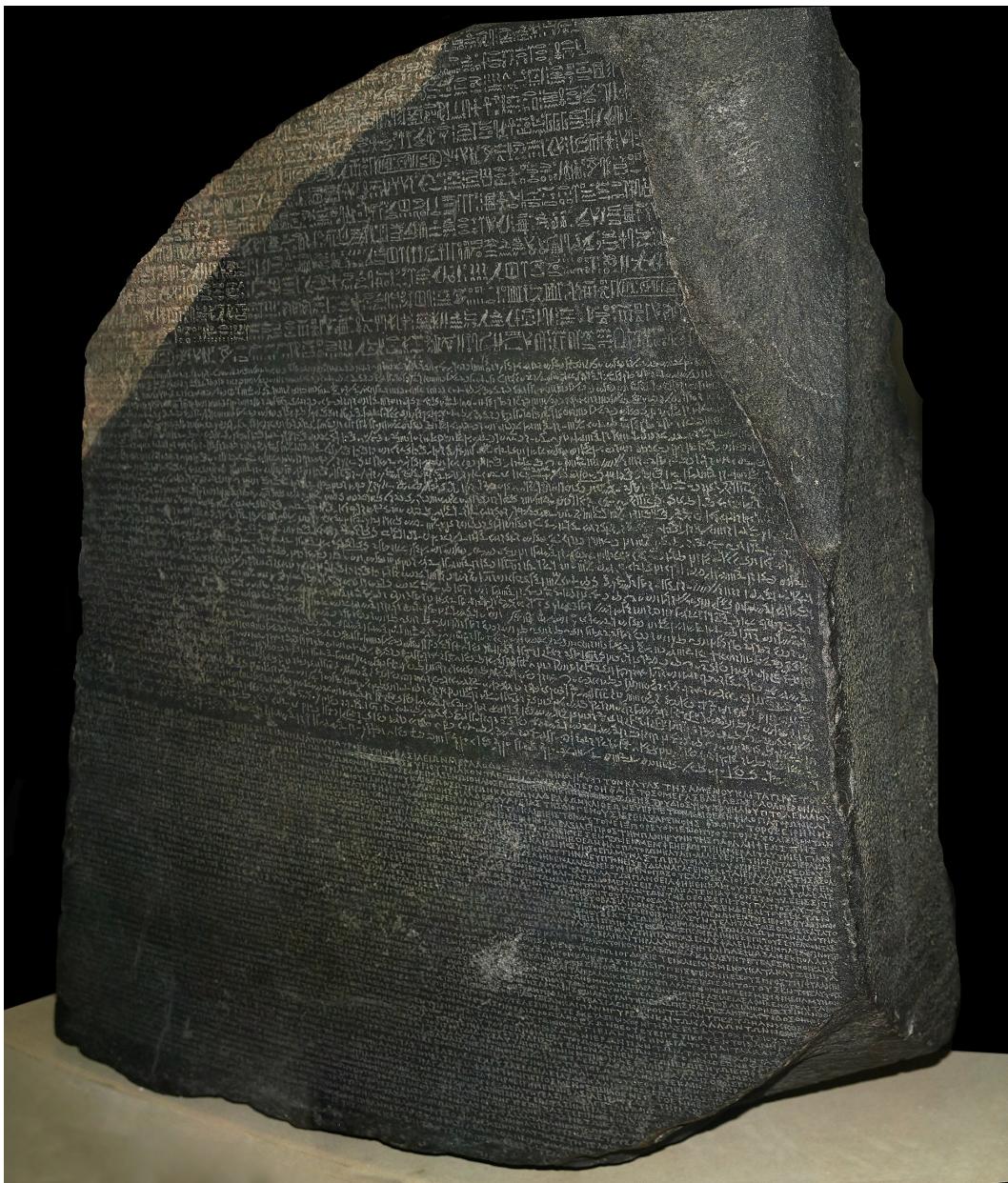
Art history is an area of study that focuses on how the visual arts relate to human **history** and cultural development. It often crosses over into other areas of study, such as:

- Archaeology
- Anthropology
- Sociology

It is important to remember that art history does not stand alone. Often there is crossover into other areas that are concerned with human history and development. For the most part, art history is interdisciplinary. This area of study borrows from and contributes to other areas of study.

Archaeology is the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and analysis of artifacts. Archaeologists study human history and analyze physical artifacts, or things made by humans, as well as sites, or places, where humans lived in order to learn more about a culture and its history. Fieldwork such as data collection is a part of archaeology. You might think about how the Rosetta Stone influenced the study of ancient Egyptian art. This stone features the same text carved on its surface in three different languages, including ancient Greek and Egyptian hieroglyphs.

- How could scholars of ancient Egypt have used this source to learn more about Egyptian culture?



Artist unknown
Rosetta stone
Rosetta, Nile Delta, Egypt
196 BC
Granodiorite

The study of humans and their ancestors is **anthropology**. Anthropology considers time and location as well as how humans adapted to their environment over time. Evolution, problem solving, and significant breakthroughs, such as the benefits of agriculture in the establishment and growth of societies, are studied. Anthropologists ask questions such as:

- What was the culture like?
- What role did religion play, or what were the morality and ethics of that society?

- What were relationships among people within the culture and between cultures?

They also study other social values. Anthropologists compare modern-day society to ancient society in many contexts.

☞ EXAMPLE The image below is of a mask from New Guinea. Our impulse upon acquiring such a mask might be to put it on display in a museum. It is actually in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



Artist unknown

Mask (Lor ?)

Papua New Guinea, New Britain

late 19th–early 20th century

Wood, paint, fiber

However, in order to truly understand the importance of this object for the people who produced it, we would need anthropologists who would have done fieldwork, learning as much as they could about this society by visiting New Guinea and conducting interviews, or perhaps even living among them. That would involve learning the language of these people and understanding concepts that might not translate well into English.

*"The scientific study of social behavior is known as **sociology**. Sociology focuses on the study of societies and groups of people. In relation to art history, it might involve understanding artistic movements in relation to social class and not just in terms of who was in power at a certain time. For instance, a sociological analysis of the work of Mary Cassatt might consider the role of women in 19th-century French society. This would allow us to better understand Cassatt's work, how she related to male artists of the time, and why her work tends to consist of images of women and children."*

Karl Marx



Mary Cassatt (1844 - 1926)

The Boating Party

Washington, D.C., USA

Oil on canvas

An emerging area of academics that looks at aspects of cultural production, with an emphasis on popular culture in everyday life, is **cultural studies**.

↗ EXAMPLE Looking at the different ways in which Elvis Presley has been depicted through time and how this relates to cultural changes in preferences.

Cultural studies might intersect with art through studying the significance of celebrities like Elvis and their depiction in pop art. A sociological approach might consider how society changed as a result of the growing

influence of television, rock and roll, and popular movies on American society. Because it's an emerging field, some art historians may not view cultural studies as a legitimate area of academic focus. This can cause controversy in the field.



Andy Warhol

Triple Elvis

San Francisco, California, USA

1963

Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas



TERMS TO KNOW

History

The study of the past, particularly through the analysis of written documents.

Archaeology

The study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and analysis of artifacts.

Anthropology

The study of humans and their ancestors in different time periods and locations, with emphasis on adaptation to physical environment, culture, and interpersonal relationships.

Sociology

The study of the development, structure, and functioning of human society.

Cultural Studies

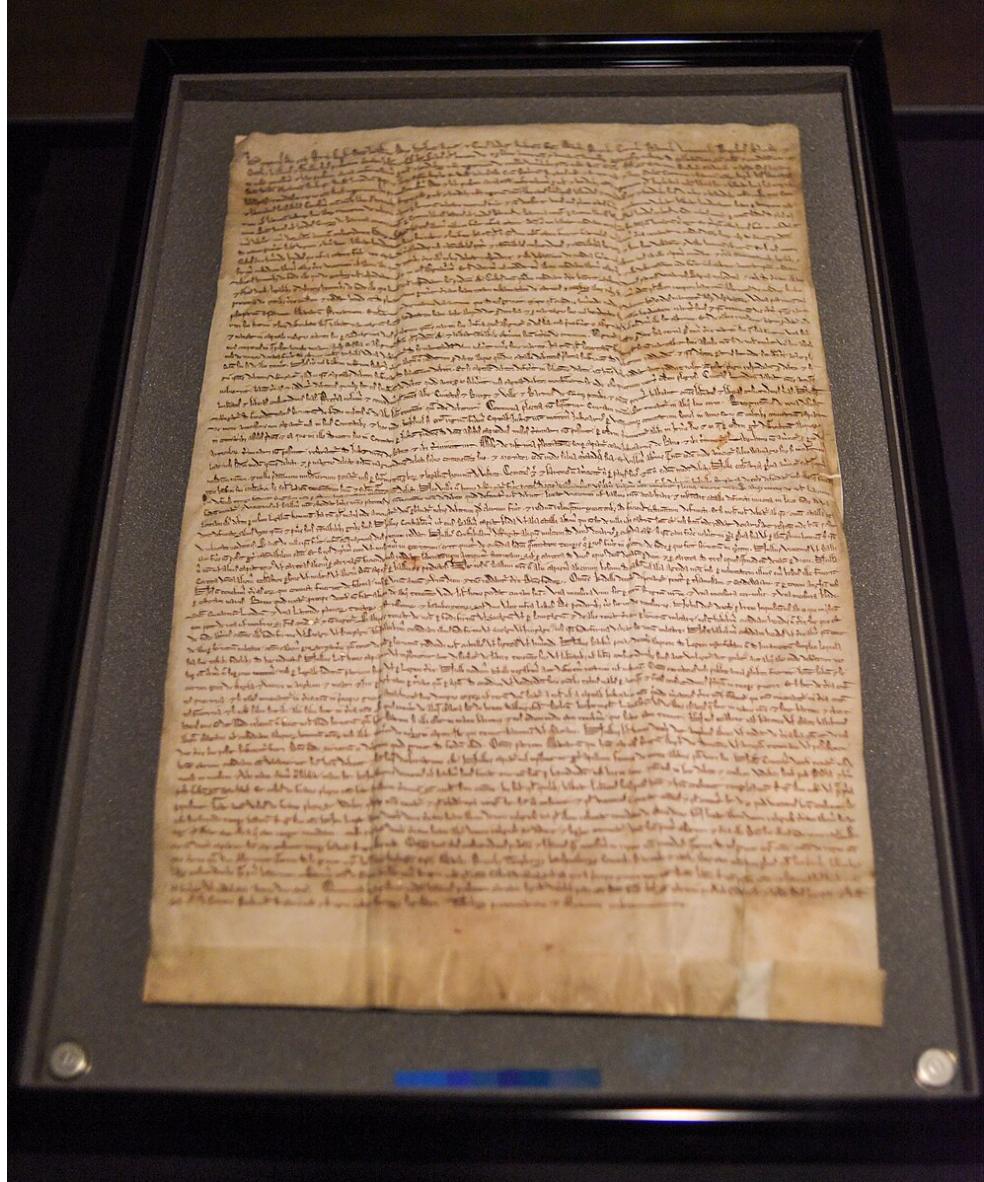
The study of all aspects of cultural production, in particular popular culture or everyday life.

2. How Art Historians Evaluate Visual Evidence

The main difference between art history and other areas of study is that other fields of study consider images as less important than documents and other forms of primary source material.

- Historians consider art as a product of its time, as the result of specific events, religious and philosophical beliefs, and documents, almost like an illustration.
- Art historians view works of art and other aesthetic objects as active participants in the creation of ideas and attitudes.

You might think back to the lesson that discussed advertising and propaganda and how these images influence the ideas and attitudes that people adopt when they view them.



John, King of England, his barons, and Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury

Magna Carta Libertatum

Runnymede, England

1215

Peace treaty

Magna Carta is an extremely important historical document that asserts rule of law, in other words that the law carries more authority than the king. It says that the king is not above the law and that a king's subjects cannot be imprisoned for no reason.

- But how can we determine the importance of Magna Carta within British and other societies?



Brook Temple

Magna Carta U.S. Postage Stamps

USA

June 15, 1965

This U.S. postage stamp, which might be considered as an example of visual culture, presents an image of Magna Carta as influencing our own ideals related to democracy and the rule of law.

- Historians might be interested in researching the events that led to the production of this postage stamp.
- Art historians would argue that this postage stamp played a crucial role in connecting democracy and rule of law to the United States.



Agustí Querol Subirats, Cipriano Folgueras, and Antonio Moliné

Monument to the Magna Carta and Four Regions of Argentina

Palermo, Buenos Aires, Argentina

1910-1927

Marble and brass

The name of the sculpture shown above is the *Monument to Magna Carta and the Four Regions of Argentina*. It was donated by people of Spanish descent.

- Why do you think these people considered it important to have a monument to Magna Carta in the middle of Buenos Aires, a city located in South America?
- What message does this work of art communicate?

As you learn more about the stylistic aspects of various artistic movements, you might also think about how this monument stylistically references Greek and Roman sculpture and architecture, as well as the neoclassical movement in Europe.



SUMMARY

Art history is an area of study that focuses on how the visual arts relate to human history and cultural development. It often crosses over into other areas of study associated with human history and cultural development.

You learned about the relationship between **art history and other areas of study**, such as anthropology, archaeology, and sociology. Art historians have an advantage when it comes to looking at visual evidence.

Finally, you learned **how art historians evaluate visual evidence**. Other areas of study have a tendency to look at visual imagery as only a reflection of the culture where they were produced rather than actually producing culture itself.

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