

ART HISTORY

Egyptian Art

Art is an essential aspect of any civilization. Once the basic human needs have been taken care of, such as food, shelter, some form of community law, and a religious belief, cultures begin producing artwork, and often all of these developments occur more or less simultaneously. This process began in the Pre-dynastic Period in Egypt (c. 6000 - c. 3150 BCE) through images of animals, human beings, and supernatural figures inscribed on rock walls. These early images were crude in comparison to later developments but still express an important value of Egyptian cultural consciousness: balance. Egyptian society was based on the concept of harmony known as *ma'at* which had come into being at the dawn of creation and sustained the universe. All Egyptian art is based on perfect balance because it reflects the ideal world of the gods. The same way these gods provided all good gifts for humanity, so the artwork was imagined and created to provide a use. Egyptian art was always first and foremost functional. No matter how beautifully a statue may have been crafted, its purpose was to serve as a home for a spirit or a god. An amulet would have been designed to be attractive but aesthetic beauty was not the driving force in its creation, protection was. Tomb paintings, temple tableaux, home and palace gardens all were created so that their form suited an important function and, in many cases, this function was a reminder of the eternal nature of life and the value of personal and communal stability.

Roman Art

For several centuries Ancient Rome was the most powerful nation on earth, excelling all others at military organization and warfare, engineering, and architecture. Its unique cultural achievements include the invention of the dome and the groin vault, the development of concrete and a European-wide network of roads and bridges. Despite this, Roman sculptors and painters produced only a limited amount of outstanding original fine art, preferring instead to recycle designs from Greek art, which they revered as far superior to their own. Indeed, many types of art practised by the Romans - including, sculpture (bronze and marble statuary, sarcophagi), fine art painting (murals, portraiture, vase-painting), and decorative art (including metalwork, mosaics, jewellery, ivory carving) had already been fully mastered by Ancient Greek artists. Not surprisingly, therefore, while numerous Greek sculptors (like Phidias, Kresilas, Myron, Polykleitos, Callimachus, Skopas, Lysippos, Praxiteles, and Leochares, Phyromachos) and painters (like Apollodorus, Zeuxis of Heraclea, Agatharchos, Parrhasius, Apelles of Kos, Antiphillus, Euphranor of Corinth) were accorded great respect throughout the Hellenistic world, most Roman artists were regarded as no more than skilled tradesmen and have remained anonymous.