

HANDBOOK OF ART

REVISED EDITION

A history of painting, sculpture and architecture
from the earliest times to the present day

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Foreward: This book recounts many important achievements in the world of art and includes representative examples carefully selected from the holdings of museums, galleries and private collections.

The aim has been to supply as much information as possible in a limited space to provide a concise, informative, easy-to-read, world overview of the development of art practices and styles.

The *Handbook of Art* is the culmination of years of research, worldwide travel and painstaking compilation of data. It is hoped you will find it useful and enlightening, and that it will be an incentive for you to become more interested in the various branches of art.

The Meaning of Art. Art is human emotion expressed in terms of a medium. It is the revelation of a mysterious *something* which lies within us. Through mediums such as architecture, sculpture, painting, music, drama and literature, a person may be capable of giving expression to that *something* in tangible form. When these human creations attain a certain high level, we refer to them as works of art.

From the dawn of history art has been an essential ingredient in the life of mankind. Art reflects the spirit of a person and the age in which they live, and it is one channel through which a person can reveal their ideas, longings and imaginings in a tangible way. The artist is always seeking new and suitable ways to express feelings; sometimes in an experimental manner.

A work of art is man-made. It must be creative, and it must have unity. Regardless of the extent of their beauty, objects in nature or natural phenomena are not works of art; neither are impassive exact copies of nature in painting or sculpture. Into a work, the artist must inject something of their own personality, intelligence, talent and imagination. Art satisfies the intellect and the emotional desires, and it manifests the artist's world of appearance and experience. Art originates in the mind. The production of artistic work is one of personal creative achievements.

From works of art an audience may derive aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction. A work of art is a communication from the artist to an audience. In viewing a work of art one must remember that it reflects the cultural outlook of the age in which it was produced. It expresses the artist's personal feelings and thoughts, but it was also influenced by the existing social, religious, political and economic conditions.

It is not always easy to assess with certainty the artistic value of a piece of work, for art cannot be judged by sets of rules, and, as artistic opinions differ and tastes change, all-embracing evaluation is difficult. Sometimes we find that further study and investigation of strange, or even objectionable works of art, may lead to understanding, respect and eventually approval. As well, there is no prescribed way to produce a work of art, the artist selects and arranges forms to create a satisfying, complete and harmonious unit or composition.

Elements and Principles of Art and Design. The artist is concerned with these elements – line, colour, tone, mass, form, shape, texture and space as well as principles such as composition, balance, unity, repetition, harmony, contrast and rhythm.

A summary of the main elements of art and design:

Line. Line in art may mean a single thin stroke as produced with a sharp-pointed pencil, or a broad stroke as made with a large brush; it may signify the meeting edge of two areas; or it may refer to the contours as in sculpture and architecture. Line displays a strong suggestion of movement – the vertical line carries the eye upwards and it conveys a feeling of alertness and life; the horizontal line produces a sense of repose and tranquillity; the diagonal line suggests motion; and the free-flowing curved line indicates gentleness and grace. Line in a drawing can be delicate, bold or expressive.

Colour. Colour may cause emotional reactions. Red gives the impression of heat, excitement and gaiety; blue gives the sensation of coldness and restfulness. Warm colours appear to come forward boldly, while cool colours seem to recede. Cool colours, such as blue and bluish-purple, suggest distant objects.

Hue. All colour comes from light; if there is no light there is no colour. The name of a colour is called the hue (red, blue, yellow and their mixtures). There are three primary colours – red, blue and yellow. The resultant mixture of any two primary colours is termed a secondary colour (red plus yellow produces orange, blue plus red gives purple, and yellow plus blue makes green). A tertiary colour is a mixture of the three primaries, which produces grey, brown or fawn.

Value. The amount of light reflected back from a colour is called value. When dealing with pigments, it means the quantity of white or black in a colour, that is, the lightness or darkness of a colour – pale blue or dark blue.

Intensity. The brilliance or brightness of a colour is referred to as intensity – dull yellow or bright yellow. When different values of only one hue are used in a colour scheme, it is called a monochromatic colour scheme; when closely related hues are used together the colour scheme is said to be harmonious; and when very different hues, such as red and green are placed side by side, the colour scheme is termed complementary. A harmonious colour scheme produces a feeling of tranquillity and a sense of peace, while a complementary colour scheme at full intensity gives a feeling of energy and an effect of brilliance and discord. Very often discords are desirable in a colour scheme.

Tone. The common meaning of tone in art is the amount of lightness or darkness, that is, the light and shade on an object. The tone can be flat or gradated. In another artistic sense, it applies to the value, the intensity and the hue, for example, a dark dull green is a dark or deep toned colour.

Introduction

Mass. A large form or assemblage of forms in sculpture and architecture; or a large area of colour, highlight or shade in painting. Mass is the broad general effect.

Form. The essential structure, or the organisation of all parts in a work of art. The sculptor is usually concerned with the form of the exterior; the architect is interested in the form of the exterior and the interior; while the painter-artist is concerned with the control of shapes, tones and colours on a plane surface to produce the impression or the illusion of form.

Shape. A two-dimensional area or surface, or the contour of a three-dimensional form.

Texture. Pertains, in art, to the character or the nature of the surface. The texture may be smooth, rough, corrugated, grained and so on, and the texture can be tactile (as felt with the fingers) or visual (the illusion of texture as in an oil or watercolour painting, or in a drawing, when such things as coarse fabric or the bark of a tree are depicted).

Space. The vacant part within or without an object, such as inner space in architecture; penetrating space in the voids of sculpture; or the illusion of space or distance in a painting or a drawing. In painting, space can be suggested by tone, colour, linear perspective or overlapping planes.

The principles of art and design that an artist should consider:

Composition. The arrangement of the art elements – colour, line, tone, mass, form, shape, texture and space – is referred to as the composition of the artwork. All artworks consist of several or all of the elements.

Balance. The most important part of the composition is balance. There are two types of balance. Symmetrical balance has equal weight or the same or very similar art elements on either side of the central axis. Asymmetrical balance is a less formal arrangement of the art elements which have different visual weight. For example, large shapes are heavier than small shapes, bright colours are heavier than dull colours and dark thick lines are heavier than light thin lines.

Unity. When art elements work together unity is achieved. If the art elements in the artwork are not united, discord will interrupt the appreciation of the artwork. Unity can be created by repetition and harmony.

Repetition. Repeating and duplicating art elements will unite a composition.

Harmony. Art elements that share visually common characteristics are harmonious. For example, a colour base of red is common to both orange and red; shapes may share types of lines such as curved or straight to be considered harmonious.

Contrast. Contrast is created when art elements have nothing in common, for example colours red and green, dark and light tones, angular and curved lines. Strongly contrasting elements create visual interest and can add energy and movement to the composition.

Rhythm. Visual rhythm is created by the repetition of the art elements in a composition. Repetition creates a pattern and by following the pattern the eye moves around the composition. Visual rhythm is an important way of creating movement in a composition.

Style. The particular way in which an artist expresses his ideas is called style. Styles in art are forever changing with modifications in ways of living and thinking. We classify the products of art under various styles, such as expressionistic or realistic. Sometimes art is classified under period styles, for instance, the Gothic, the Renaissance, the Chinese Ming, or the English Georgian; or it may be linked with that of location or race as in Egyptian, Venetian, Indian or Japanese styles. In painting, we find such terms as painterly style, linear style, pointillist and plastic styles. The reference to style is a convenient way to classify and describe some forms of art.

Medium. In a broad sense, it is the means (such as painting or sculpture) or the material (such as oil paint or marble) used by an artist to produce a work of art. As well, it indicates the liquid or binder, such as oil, water, gum or egg, used for mixing pigments.

Palaeolithic Art (Old Stone Age): c.30 000-c.8000 BCE. ('c.' stands for circa = about). The early exploits of primitive people dating back to perhaps 500 000 BCE, have been obscured with the passage of time, but mystifying and fascinating remains of their late work reveal much of their intelligence and artistic ability. As the name implies, the Old Stone Age was the time when people shaped stone implements and weapons for special purposes.

A reason for the increasing superiority of humans over the animal world is that their intelligence is cumulative and creative. They have not the agility and the strength of some animals, but through intelligence they have survived and developed against tremendous odds.

Art was born when the intellect of humans permitted them to express visually their deepest feelings, desires and imaginings. The mind of Palaeolithic human beings was always filled with thoughts of survival – survival against the ferocious wild beasts they hunted and killed for food and clothing, but with such crude weapons as sticks and roughly chipped stones, this task was most difficult, exciting and highly dangerous.

The first signs of art are carved figures and the engravings on stones, ivory and bone. It is thought that they were produced about 30 000 BCE when primitive humans used art for magical purposes to bring good fortune in life and hunting.

The earliest known paintings, which Palaeolithic humans made about 17 000 years ago on the walls and ceilings of more than 50 secluded caves in Spain and France, were intended perhaps to cast a magic spell over the animals they feared. Some of the caves may have been ceremonial centres. The fact that men could vividly and realistically represent these wild elusive beasts in an impressive, astonishing way, gave them a feeling of confidence and supremacy for their future battles. To primitive humans these were magical pictures to bring success in hunting.



Fig. 1.1 European Prehistoric: Palaeolithic. *Bulls, Horses and Reindeer*. Lascaux Cave, France. c.15 000 BCE. Wall painting. Bulls three times life-size.



Fig. 1.2 European Prehistoric: Palaeolithic. *Galloping Boar*. Altamira Cave, Northern Spain. c.15 000 BCE. Ceiling painting. 1.7 metres long. Courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History.



Fig. 1.3 European Prehistoric: Late Palaeolithic. *Boar Hunt*. Remigia Cave, Eastern Spain. c.10 000 BCE. Wall painting. Boar c.15.2 cm long. (Drawing after Obermaier and Breuit.)

To us, these cave paintings of bison, bulls, horses, rhinoceroses, boars, reindeer and wolves (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2), and occasionally human beings (Fig. 1.3), all in a variety of poses and full of action, indicate keen observation, intense feeling and imagination on the part of the painters. As well, these paintings display amazing skill in lifelike and expressionistic representation. Sometimes the outlines were incised before being painted with red, yellow, orange, brown or black pigments which were mixed with animal fat. Each subject was considered singly and not as part of a pictorial composition. Nor were the paintings intended to be decorative wall treatments, otherwise they would have been executed in more conspicuous, accessible places, and not in dark, mysterious recesses. Frequently, a new painting was done over old work, which suggests that the magic spell did not exist forever.

Prehistoric Art

Palaeolithic humans showed remarkable ability in creating sculptured and modelled figures and animals (Figs. 1.4 and 1.5) which also may have been linked with magic and mysterious rituals. These oldest remains of sculpture (from c.30 000 BCE) and painting (from c.15 000 BCE) represent humankind's entry into the realm of art.

Neolithic Art (New Stone Age): c.8000-c.1000 BCE.

The change from the Palaeolithic to the Neolithic way of living was very gradual. During the Neolithic Period, the hunter and fisherman became the farmer and builder. People learned how to sow grain seeds and to harvest crops, occupations that kept them in the one location, so they built houses for comfortable, safe accommodation, and erected buildings in which to store grain and food. For further security, Neolithic humans gathered in small farming communities – the first form of organised tribal life, and the commencement of civilisation. Neolithic people domesticated animals, they made well-designed polished stone and flint implements and tools, and they produced useful items such as woven materials and pottery (Fig. 1.6).



Fig. 1.4 European Prehistoric: Palaeolithic. *Bison Licking its Flank*. La Magdeleine Cave, France. c.14 000 BCE. Carving on reindeer horn. 6.4 cm x 10 cm. St-Germain-en-Laye Museum, France.



Fig. 1.5 European Prehistoric: Late Palaeolithic. *Two Bison*. Tuc d'Audoubert Cave, Southern France. c.10 000 BCE. Modelled in clay on a mould of rock. Each beast c.61 cm long.



Fig. 1.6 European Prehistoric: Neolithic. Pottery vessels. Northern Europe. c.5000 BCE. Fired clay. c.15 cm high. State Museum for Prehistory, Halle, East Germany.

To Neolithic humans, the mighty forces of nature, the sun and the rain, were awe-inspiring mysteries, and they were of utmost importance in their new way of living. These elements became subjects for nature worship in place of the strange mystical magic of Palaeolithic humans, and the realistic but magical cave paintings and drawings of Palaeolithic people changed to abstract designs on coiled and moulded pottery and weapons (Fig. 1.7). Maybe these designs had symbolic meanings that were linked with worship. Art was used at first to cast a spell over the animals Palaeolithic humans required for their physical existence, but with Neolithic humans, art was used to satisfy spiritual yearnings which indicated the emergence of a civilised culture.

The people of northern Europe remained in a primitive state long after the populations of Egypt, Babylonia, Western India and China had learned to congregate and work together within their own countries as highly civilised and cultured communities. In some places, there was no need or desire to change the mode of living, and Stone Age customs continued with a few isolated and scattered races of people for many more thousands of years – the last remnants being the Bushmen of South Africa and the Australian Aborigines.

In widely separated places in Europe, single pillars (monoliths), table-like structures (dolmens or cromlechs, Fig. 1.8), and circles of huge stones were set up with utmost difficulty and obvious care, presumably for the ritual of sun or nature worship – a primitive indication of the human desire for the monumental, that is, an imposing sculpture. One such example is at Stonehenge (c.1800-c.1400 BCE. Figs. 1.9 and 1.10) in southern England. This curious circle of enormous upright stones, capped and jointed with massive horizontal slabs, has mystified civilised people and stirred their imagination. Some of the larger stones, which stand 6.7 metres high and weigh as much as 50 tonnes, were hauled 35 kilometres to the site, and would require 200 men to erect them in the carefully planned cluster. Other stones were transported over 400 kilometres by land and sea from Wales. All this indicates the great importance placed on these ceremonial structures for the mental and spiritual gratification of Neolithic humans. The urge to make effective use of impressive materialistic things to assist in spiritual worship has continued down through the ages. In more recent times, this was expressed in majestic cathedrals, dignified temples, imposing statuary and sublime religious paintings.



Fig. 1.7 Asian Prehistoric: Neolithic. Funerary Vase from Susa, Persia. c.3200 BCE. Black animals, birds and geometric forms on fired yellow clay. c.25 cm high. The Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 1.11 Asian Prehistoric: Bronze Age. Medallion pendant from the Caucasus. c.1500 BCE. Cast in bronze. 13.4 cm diameter. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund.

Prehistoric Art

Bronze Age Art: c.2000-c.1200 BCE. The production of bronze dates back to about 3500 BCE, but its universal use in Europe occurred about 2000 BCE. Since the remote dawn of time, humans have used and fashioned natural materials to make utilitarian, devotional and ornamental articles. Prehistoric people found that gold, silver and copper could be melted, beaten and shaped to make things, and these examples reveal their remarkable ingenuity, intellect and inventiveness. They discovered that a molten mixture of copper and tin would make an easily worked material called bronze. Now they could cast hard, durable and attractive metal weapons (arrowheads, spearheads and daggers), utensils (pots, bowls and cups), tools (blades, knives and axes) and decorative objects (statuettes, pins, buckles and pendants) for their personal use (Fig. 1.11). Moreover, these gave them valuable items for the widespread trade which was developing between the European and Asian communities. Trading necessitated travel, and this in turn resulted in the accelerated exchange of cultural, artistic and technical ideas.

Bronze is easy to cast in shaped stone or clay moulds (known as the 'open-hearth process'), and intricate surface decoration is possible. In the Bronze Age, animals were favourite subjects in designs. Outstanding examples of bronze casting were produced in the Scandinavian countries, where utilitarian, ornamental and religious items show a high degree of imagination, remarkable artistic talent and great technical skill.



Fig. 1.8 European Prehistoric: Neolithic. Table of Marchands. Dolmen or cromlech. Locmariaquer, France. c.2000 BCE. 9 metres long.



Fig. 1.9 European Prehistoric: Neolithic. Stonehenge (likely appearance), near Salisbury, England. 30.48 metres diameter. Painting by A Sorrell.

Iron Age Art: c.1200 BCE. While iron does not hold the same artistic importance as bronze, as a craft it flourished in such places as Austria, Switzerland, Celtic Britain and Scandinavia.



Fig. 1.10 European Prehistoric: Neolithic. Stonehenge (as it appears today). c.1800-c.1400 BCE. Large stones 6.7 metres high, 50 tonnes.