Ancient Greek Art
Ancient Greek Art

Can be classified into the following categories:

Geometric Period    ca. 900-700 B.C.E.
Orientalizing Period   ca. 725-600 B.C.E.
Archaic Period         ca. 625-480 B.C.E.

Early Classical Period   ca. 480-450 B.C.E.
High Classical Period    ca. 450-400 B.C.E.
Late Classical Period    ca. 400-330 B.C.E.
Hellenistic Period       ca. 330-31 B.C.E.
Mesopotamian = Worship

Egyptian = Afterlife

Greek = Humanism
Patronage and Artistic Life

- Artists signed their work as a symbol of accomplishment and a form of advertisement.
- Many artists were theoreticians (wrote books on theories of art and architecture) as well.
Innovations of Greek Sculpture

- Unafraid of nudity- Males especially, some reluctance with females
- Large marble statues were cut away from the stone behind them. Bronze sculptures treasured; lighter weight made compositional experiments more ambitious
- Contrapposto stance
The Geometric Period

• The beginning of Greek art is found in painted pottery and small scale sculpture.

• Artists established different categories of shapes of ceramic vessels—most important was the amphora—two-handled vase used to carry wine and oil.

• Around 800 BCE, pottery began to move away from purely non-objective designs—ornamental figures.

• Dipylon Vase was a grave monument—bottom has holes through which liquid offerings filtered down to the dead below-done in remembrance rather than to appease the soul of the dead.
The Geometric Period

- The vase functions as a grave marker depicting the funeral procession of an obviously well respected individual.

- The magnitude of his funeral procession speaks to the wealth and position of the deceased family in the community.

- Contains no reference to an afterlife

- The nature of the ornamentation of these early works has led art historians to designate these as GEOMETRIC. (all empty spaces are filled with circles and M-shaped ornament. No open spaces.)
The Geometric Period

• The image of the man is thought to be Herakles battling the Centaur.

• This image demonstrates the Geometric artist not being limited to depicting scenes from daily life.

• The centaur is a purely Greek invention that has obviously created a problem for this artist, as no such creature has ever been seen.

Even at the beginning of Greek figural art, we can see the instinct for the natural beauty of the human figure. This concept is reflected in the fact that Greek athletes exercised without their clothes and even competed nude in the Olympic Games from very early times.
Orientalizing Art:
Contact with the East through trade and colonization in the seventh century exposed Greek artists to new ideas and motifs in sculpture and painting.

Greek artists also exhibited an interest in showing the anatomy of figures in greater detail.

*Mantiklos Apollo*, statuette of a youth dedicated by Mantiklos to Apollo, from Thebes, ca. 700-680 B.C.E. BRONZE, APPROX. 8” HIGH.
The Orientalizing Period

- This is considered one of the master works of the early 7th century.

- It is unsure whether statue is of Apollo, or of the creator of the statue. If the broken hand had carried a bow, we would certainly know the depiction to be of Apollo.

- This figure represents the increasing interest in depicting human anatomy. Notable is the abdomen area, where the muscles are beginning to find definition.

Mantiklos Apollo
Thebes, Greece ca. 700 - 680 BCE
The Orientalizing Period

- This demonstrates the Greek awareness of Eastern artworks and the influence of that newly discovered work on the art of the Greeks.

- This is a two handled storage jar called an amphora. The amphora was the most important vessel used in ancient Greece.

- Eastern monsters such as the sphinx and the siren (part bird, part woman) are displayed on the amphora’s neck.

- This demonstrates **black-figure painting**, created by the Corinthians, in which the artist first puts down the black silhouettes on the clay surface, as in the Geometric times, but then used a sharp, pointed instrument to incise linear details within the forms, usually adding highlights in purplish red or white over the black figures before firing the vessel.

- The Athenians later copied this technique.
The Orientalizing Period

- This is an example of a kore figure. (plural korai)

- It is still uncertain whether this figure was meant to represent a mortal or a deity.

- The hand across the chest is thought to be an indication of prayer, referencing that this is a probably a kore.

- The image has a monumental quality, but it is only about 2 feet tall (still larger that the bronze statuettes of the era)

The Lady of Auxerre, statue of a goddess or kore
Greece ca. 650 - 625 BCE

The style of this work is referred to as Daedalic, after the legendary artist Daedalus, whose name means “the skillful one”. Greeks have attributed to him almost all of the great achievements in early sculpture and architecture before the names of those artist were recorded.
Characteristics of Greek Archaic Sculpture

- Marble was the stone of choice although works were done in bronze, limestone, terra cotta, wood, gold, even iron
- Kouros and Kore
  - Figures stand frontally, upright and with squarish shoulders
  - Hair is knotted and ears are curlicue
  - Figures cut free from stone as much as possible, although arms are sometimes attached to thighs
  - As in Egyptian works, kouros figures have one foot placed in front of the other, as if they were in mid-stride
  - To give a sense of life most figures have smiles
- Sculpture was often painted
- Bronze sculpture was hollow-eyes inlaid with stone or glass
Kores and Kouros

- Produced in large numbers during the Archaic Period
- Were originally painted
- Used first as votive and funerary statues
- Not many varieties—most looked similar despite the artist
- Neither gods or mortals, but the ideal of physical perfection in both
- Similar dynamic to vase painting
- Kroisos shows innovations over the first Kouros much like the innovations in vase painting

Kore- Maiden
- Always clothed

Kouros- Youth
- Always nude
The Archaic Period

- Male figures called **kouros** meaning “youth” were always depicted nude.
- Rigidly frontal
- Emulates stance of Egyptian sculpture but is nude and arms and legs cut away from stone
- Freestanding and able to move, in contrast to Egyptian works that are reliefs or are attached to stones

- This particular kouros figure was said to have a funerary purpose, as it once stood over a grave in the countryside near Athens.

- Statues such as this replaced the Geometric vases as the preferred form of grave marking replacing huge vases.

Despite the similarity with the Egyptian prototype for figurative sculpture, these kouros figures differ in many significant ways…
The Archaic Period

How are Mentuemhet and the Kouros different?
The Archaic Period

Differences between Egyptian and Greek statuary

The Greek statues are liberated from the original stone block, where the Egyptian statues were not. This demonstrates the Greek idea of including motion rather than stability.

The kouros are nude and absent of any attributes

The proportions of the body are slightly less idealized than those from Egypt.
The Archaic smile was used by Greek Archaic sculptors, especially in the second quarter of the 6th century BCE, possibly to suggest that their subject was alive. The smile is flat and quite unnatural looking, although it could be seen as a movement towards naturalism, if such a move is sought. One of the most famous examples of the Archaic Smile is the Kroisos Kouros.
The Archaic Period

- This work was found in the acropolis in fragments.
- Rhonbos bringing an offering to Athena in thanks for his prosperity.
- The sculpture contains an inscription in the base that dedicates the creation of the statue to a man named Rhonbos, of whom many think the calf bearer is a portrait.
- Significant is the beard and cloak, which clearly removes this figure from the idea of male youth that the kouros figures contained.
- Two figures are united; tightly woven composition.
- From this time on, Archaic sculptures seem to smile— even in inappropriate contexts.

- The calf’s legs join with the hands of the figure to form an “X” that unites the two both physically and formally.
- “Archaic smile” indicates life.
- Knotted hair.
The Archaic Period

• Around 530 BCE a man named Kroisos died a hero’s death in battle. His grave was marked by this figure.

• The inscription at the base of this statue read: “stay and mourn at the tomb of dead Kroisos, whom raging Ares destroyed one day as he fought in the foremost ranks”

• The “archaic smile” is present, as is the Egyptian stance, but the naturalism of the body far exceeds any figurative sculpture that preceded it.

• Head is no longer too large for the body, the cheeks are full and rounded, the abdomen is well developed and natural, the hair is less stiff, and rounded hips have replace the V-shaped ridges of the New York kouros.

Some of the original paint has survived, giving the sculpture an even more naturalistic appearance.

The flesh was left the natural color of the stone, but the hair, lips, and eyes were painted in encaustic (pigment mixed with hot wax)
Developing to more realism middle and late 6th Century
The Archaic Period

- Titled Peplos Kore because of the peplos that the figure is wearing. (a simple, long, woolen belted garment that gives the female figure a columnar appearance.
- Broken hand used to carry offering to Athena
- Hand emerges into our own space, breaks out of the mold of static Archaic statues
- Tightened waist, breasts revealed beneath drapery
- Rounded and naturalistic face
- Much of the paint still remains; animating the hair and face

- This sculpture was damaged during the sack of the Acropolis in 480 BCE by the Persians.
- This sculpture once stood as a votive offering in Athena’s sanctuary.
The Archaic Period

• The peplos is now replaced by the Ionian chiton, worn in conjunction with the heavier himation - the garment of choice for fashionable women.

• The folds of the clothing give the sculpture a much more lifelike appearance than that of the peplos kore.

• The left arm of the figure, unfortunately broken off, had once grasped part of the chiton to lift it off the ground before taking a step. This further adds to the naturalism and notion of movement.
Innovations and Characteristics of Greek Pottery

• Earliest pots during the Geometric period were largely composed of horizontal lines with minimal figures
• In Orientalizing, an influence from Egyptian and Mesopotamia art so more floral motifs and animals
• Archaic Period- black figure painting- large figures drawn in black on the red surface- at end of Archaic period used red figure also- backgrounds painted black and natural red of the clay detailed forms
• In Classical and Hellenistic periods, contrapposto was used
The Archaic Period

• Attic black-figure volute krater Created by Kleitas and Ergotimos. Signed by them twice.
• More than 200 figures represented in six superimposed rows and two rows on each handle.
• Nearly every feature is labeled, even horses, dogs, and water jars.
• Mythological subjects, among which are a boar hunt, a dance of maidens, Ajax carrying Achilles.
• Much of the depictions on the vase are of Achilles, the great hero from Homer’s *Iliad*.
• Separate themes on each band of the vase echo one another; parallels draw meaning from various mythological episodes.
• Also present is the centauromacy, or battle of the centaurs and the Lapiths (a northern Greek tribe).
• Figures are depicted in profile with frontal eyes and frontal torsos.
• Said to have every Greek god on the vase.
The Archaic Period

**Exekias**, Achilles and Ajax playing a dice game. Vulci, Italy ca. 540 -530 BCE

- Detail from an Athenian black-figure amphora created by Exekias (painter and potter)
- Exekias was considered by the Greeks to have been a Master of black figure painting.
- Concentration of two competing figures on a Greek amphora
- No series of horizontal bands- instead a simple large band that contains the didactic image and Geometric designs.
- Legs mirror the reflective pose
- Achilles wins by saying “four”; Right: Ajax says “three”; it is ironic that Ajax will live and bury his dead friend Achilles, who will eventually lose in a battle

The earliest of these types of vase paintings were called bilingual due to their depiction of the same subject on both sides of the vase. One in red-figure, and the other in black-figure.

Subdued emotions portrayed- The “calm before the storm”, a concept that is repeated throughout the history of art.

The intricacy of the decoration in the cloaks of these two heroes is unmatched by any other black-figure painter.

The composition of the figures is emulative of the shape of the amphora.
Andokides Painter, Achilles and Ajax Playing Dice, CA. 525-520 BCE.

Bilingual Painting
• Detail from an Attic red-figure amphora by Euthimides.

• Euthimides was a contemporary and rival of Eurphonious.

• This subject matter is appropriate for the vessel that it is decorating. This wine storage jar contains imagery of drunkenness.

• The artist has rejected the conventional frontal and profile composite views.

• Uses foreshortened three quarter views of his subjects.

• His signature reads: “Euthymides painted me as never Euphronious could do”. A bold statement.
The Archaic Period

• A detail from a *kylix* (a drinking cup).

• Demonstrates an interest in foreshortening, as the girl's torso and breasts are displayed in a three quarter view.

• Also notable is the genre scene depicted. This does not depict any Gods or heroes, but rather a everyday woman doing an everyday activity.

• Images such as this would only be displayed privately and would never be the subject of public art.
Characteristics of Greek Architecture

- Except for tholos shrines; Greek temples were rectangular and organized on a rigid set of geometric principles.
- Temples built with post and lintel system
- Pediments, which projected over the tops of columns, contained sculptures representing the heroic deeds of the gods or goddesses housed inside.
- A cornice separated the upper and lower parts of a Greek temple
- Doors set back from facade, so that little light could enter. This increased the sense of mystery about the interior
Chapter 5: Doric and Ionic Temples

- Columns in antis
- Stylobate
- Celly (Naos)
- Pronaos
- Anta
- Opisthodomus
- Peristyle
aka a "peripteral temple"
Chapter 5: Doric and Ionic Temples

Doric Order

- Entablature
  - Frieze
  - Architrave or Epistyle
  - Capital
    - Abacus
    - Echinus
    - Necking
  - Shaft
  - Stylobate

Ionic Order

- Entablature
  - Frieze
  - Architrave or Epistyle
  - Capital
    - Abacus
    - Volute
  - Shaft
  - Base
  - Stylobate

Pediment
The Archaic Period

- The Greek temple was the house of the God or Goddess, not of his or her followers. These temples were not places of worship, but rather places for the worshipped.

- Most of the temples would contain figural sculpture that would embellish the God’s shrine as well as to tell something about the deity symbolized within.

- This temple is a prime example of early Greek efforts at Doric temple design
  - The entire area of the temple is 80 ft by 170 feet.
  - Most of the frieze, pediment, and all of the roof, have vanished.

- The columns contained pronounced **entasis** or swelling of the column at the middle.

- This bulky and less elegant architecture is result from the lacking architectural knowledge of the Archaic Greeks
The Archaic Period

West pediment from the Temple of Artemis
Corfu, Greece ca. 600 - 580 BCE

- Corfu is an island off the western coast of Greece and was an important stop on the trade route between the mainland and the Greek Settlements in Italy.
- This temple was lavishly embellished with sculpture including metopes that were decorated with relief sculptures and both pediments were filled with huge sculptures (nine feet high).
- The west pediment (seen here) is the more preserved of the two.
- The gorgon, demon woman with bird wings, Medusa fills the center of the pediment. In mythology, anyone gazing at Medusa would be turned into stone.
The Archaic Period

West pediment from the Temple of Artemis
Corfu, Greece ca. 600 - 580 BCE

- Medusa assumes the Archaic bent-leg, bent-arm, pin wheel position pose that indicates running or, in this case, flying.

- The two giant felines that flank Medusa serve as guardians of the temple. Similar to the part feline Sphinx that guarded Khafre’s tomb in Egypt.

- To the right is Zeus slaying a kneeling giant with his thunderbolt. The gigantomachy (battle of the gods and giants) was a popular theme in Greek art from the Archaic through the Hellenistic periods. It signifies the triumph of order over chaos.
Greek Archaic, Siphnian Treasury at Delphi reconstruction, 530 BCE
Ionic, caryatids
Battle of the Gods and Giants, North Frieze 530 BCE, Marble, Delphi, Greece

- Greater organization of space - shows depth by overlapping and more shallow carving
- Figures rest on a stage
- Arms and legs are carved in the round
- This is a purely narrative work - high drama
- Mythic Battle between the Greek Gods and the giants, called a gigantomachy
- Shows contemporary military tactics and weapons
- Undercutting of forms creates shadows around legs
- Varying relief depth, attempt at placing figures one behind another; however they are on the same ground line
The Archaic Period

Gigantomachy, detail from the north frieze of the Siphnian Treasury
Delphi, Greece ca. 530 BCE

- Much more detailed version of this story than the one on the pediment at Corfu.
- Depicts Artemis and Apollo chasing a giant while the lion pulling a goddess’s chariot attacks another giant.
- This was originally embellished with color that has worn away over time.
Temple of Aphaia
Aegina, Greece
c.a. 500-490 B.C.E.
Temple of Aphaia
Dying Warrior from the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina, c. 500-490 BCE., marble

- Warrior dying, fits neatly into the corner of the pediment
- Hair in rows of tight curls
- Rigid musculature
- Pose of the crossed legs is awkward and unnatural, especially given the life and death struggle the warrior is going through
- Archaic smile
Greek Classical, Dying Warrior from Temple of Aphaia, ~490 BCE
West pediment of the Temple of Aphaia

Aegina, Greece

ca. 500-490 B.C.E.

marble

approximately 5 ft. 8 in. high at center
The Tholos temple, Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia, Delphi, Greece