Prehistory

Paleolithic c. 6 million-10,000 BCE

Paleolithic people were nomadic. As hunters/gatherers, they needed to move around to find new sources of food. Anything they wanted to bring with them as they traveled needed to be small enough to carry. Most Paleolithic art objects were small and easily transportable. The largest sculpture in-the-round was only about a foot and half tall.

It would be very difficult to keep up with a herd of animals while carrying or dragging a gigantic stone statue!

Woman of Willendorf Austria 28,000 - 23,000 BCE

- This is a well-known paleolithic figure, formerly known as *Venus of Willendorf*.
- She is under 5 inches tall (4 3/8").
- She would be easy to keep with you if you as you were on the move.
- The most widely accepted interpretation is that she represents fertility. What visual evidence supports this interpretation? Obviously, it is not intended to be a portrait of a specific person with individualized facial features! She is also clearly not the heavy lifter of her community. Did you even see her arms at first?

Neolithic c., 9,000-3,000 BCE

The Neolithic period began around 10,000-9,000 BCE when the climate became warmer. Neolithic people were able to live a different lifestyle due to the warmer climate.

They developed agricultural practices, invented the wheel and plow, and learned how to irrigate crops. There were consistent sources of vegetation for them and their newly domesticated livestock.

All of these advancements gave them the resources they needed to live in permanently established dwellings.

Neolithic clay storage jar with four Ibexes, Pakistan (probably Quetta Valley) c. 2800-2500 BC

- Earthenware clay vessels began to pop up all over the world during in the Neolithic era.
- Now that people were planting crops and living in permanent locations, they started making pottery to store their food and seeds.
- Vessels from this time are all earthenware because people had not developed kilns that could fire ceramics to high enough temperatures to create stoneware vessels.
- *Earthenware* is not water-tight and does not have shiny, glasslike glaze. *Stoneware*, since it is heated to higher temperatures, is water tight and can have glasslike glazes on the surface.

Ancient Egyptian (c. 3,000-500 BCE)
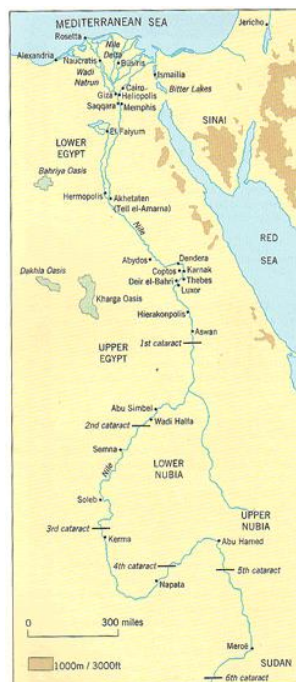
The Ancient Egyptians spent a lot of time thinking about and preparing for the afterlife. Most artwork was funerary in nature and was not created for use in this life.

They never could have imagined that we would be looking at their works in museums, in books and certainly not on computer screens. Most of the work we associate with the ancient Egyptians comes from inside their tombs and was never intended to be seen by the living at all!

Here you can see the evolution of Old Kingdom tombs from the early mastabas to the recognizable forms of the Great Pyramids of Giza.
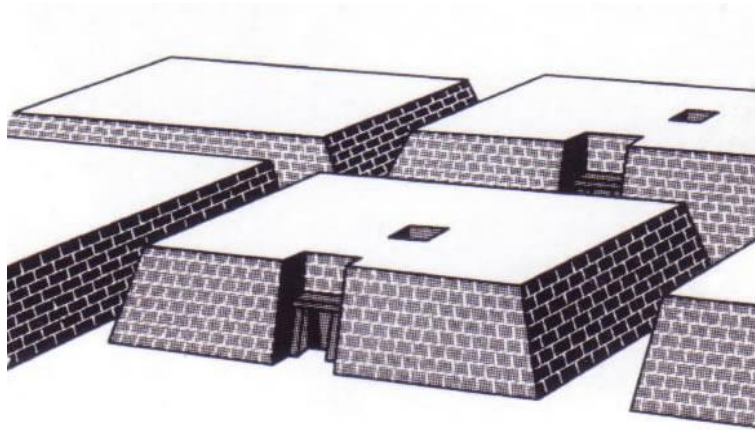
Drawing of a typical early Egyptian mastaba tomb

- "Mastaba" is aerobic for "bench."

- These are relatively simple structures.

- These low platform tombs continued to be used for members of the elite upper class.


Step pyramid of Djoser/ Funerary Complex of Djoser/Zoser, Saqqara, Egypt, 2778-2648 BCE

- This step pyramid is the next step (pun intended) in the evolution of Egyptian tombs!

- It is twice enlarged and basically looks like mastabas stacked on top of one another.

Great Pyramids at Giza [Menkure, Khafre, and Khufu] Giza, (Egypt 4th Dynasty) c. 2601-2515 BCE

These are the iconic Great Pyramids of Egypt. They are the structures most people associate with ancient Egypt. Try to picture how amazing they would have looked right after they were built. Originally, they were not the color of the surrounding landscape. They had a 30 foot thick polished white limestone facing. Imagine how the bright Egyptian sun shining off the smooth white surface!
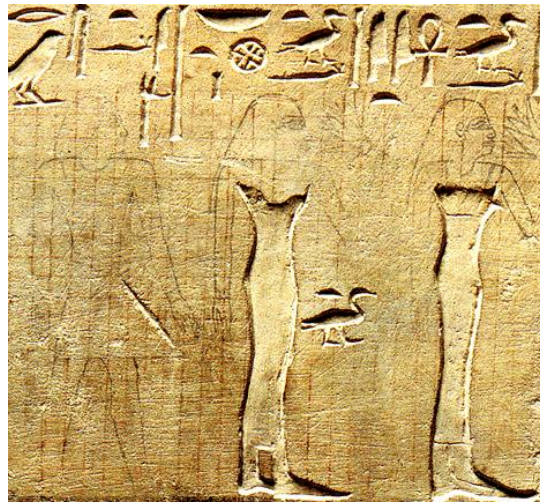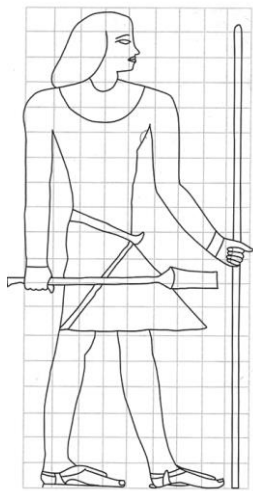
These images show the Egyptian canon of proportions for the ideal image of the human form.

The grid is based on the size of a fist, one unit (square) wide. The height of a man was 18 units with the knees aligning with the fifth line up, the elbows at the twelfth and the shoulder joining the neck at the sixteenth.

Remember that even if all of the figures had the same proportions, their bodies may be different sizes because of the use of hierarchical scale.

This formula was used throughout most of Ancient Egyptian history (it was especially crucial to apply this formula when representing an important person).

Menkaure 2490 BCE   &   Mentuemhet 650 BCE

Since artists followed the same formula over the years, these figures look very similar even though one was made 1,800 years after the other. They could be body doubles! This culture was all about stability and permanence. The similarities between these figural works reflect that cultural value.

Classical Antiquity: Ancient Greece – Roman Empire (550 BCE – 400 CE)

Classical Greek

- The high point of ancient Greece is called the Classical period. Everything was going well for the Greeks during this time and they reveled in their victories against the Persians. When you look at Classical Greek art, you will notice that almost everyone is young, beautiful, and strong.

Doryphorus 450 BCE

This is a good example of an *idealized* human body from the Classical period.

Maybe this guy worked out for hours every day. I still think it's impossible that his facial features are perfectly symmetrical and he does not have even one blemish anywhere on his body (remember they did not have all of the cosmetic procedures we do today)!

Late Classical and Hellenistic Greek

By the fourth century BCE things aren't going so quite as well for the Greeks. When their culture was young and thriving, the Greeks praised their gods and goddesses. They credited their deities for military successes and built huge temples with extensive artwork to honor their favorite gods and goddess.

When they started losing in battle and experiencing the problems that come along with urbanization, the Greeks began to attribute more vulnerable, human qualities to their gods and depicting them as less perfect and invincible than they were in the early classical era.

In Late Classical and Hellenistic artwork, the gods and goddesses are more humanized. Figural art showed the gods and goddesses as vulnerable, with the same kinds of limitations, frailties and failings that humans experience.

Archaic-Early Classical   Late Classical

Look at the differences between the Classical statue of Athena (c. 500-490 BCE) and the Hellenistic statue of Aphrodite (Roman copy after the original by Praxiteles c. 350-340 BCE).

Goddesses were never naked when things were going well. Poor Aphrodite seems embarrassed.

Human subjects in the Late Classical and Hellenistic styles, are not as perfect as they were in the Classical period because the Greeks had more important issues to think about than athletics and achieving the ideal body type.

During the Classical period Greek culture was obsessed with athletes and the physical perfection. They were so obsessed that after sporting events, athletes would scrape down their (nude) bodies to collect their sweat to sell to their fans! Buying your favorite athletes sweat tells us about their level of obsession and also how well they were doing financially. I think you must be pretty well off when you've got sweat buying money!

The perfect athletes, heroes, and warriors of the Classical era start to become scared, old, tired, out of shape and defeated in the Late Classical period.

It is common in the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods, to see monumental sculptures of old people, poor people, and naked women. (The Greeks were always cool with naked men!!)

Compare this Classical god (*Zeus* or *Poseidon*, c. 460-450 BCE) to a Hellenistic god (*Weary Herakles*, Roman copy after bronze original by Lysippos c. 320).

The Classical god has a lean, trim body. Every hair is in place. He strikes a strong pose and his calm expression says "I could hold this pose all day, no sweat."

The Hellenistic Herakles seems exhausted and ready to give up. His hair is messy, his brow is furrowed, and he is propping himself up as if he is already falling asleep.
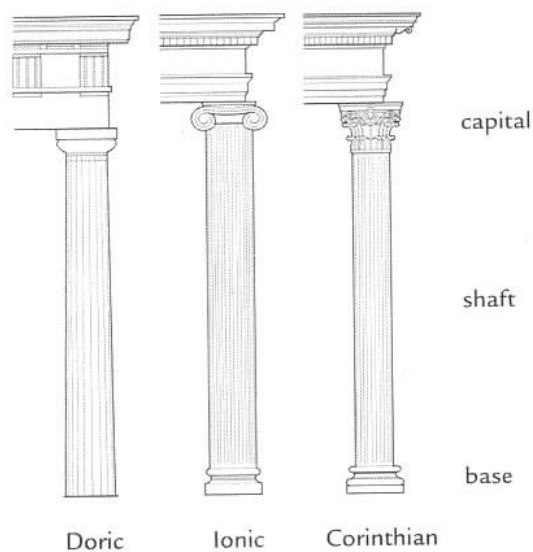
Architectural styles of classical Antiquity change throughout the years. The earliest Greek columns were very simple in design and the styles become increasingly more elaborate by the Roman Republic.

The three main styles are: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

ROMAN (c. 100 BCE-300 CE)

You are not alone if you find it difficult to distinguish Greek art from Roman art. Early Roman art looks Greek.

When the Romans conquered the Greeks, they embraced the art and other parts of the Greek culture. The Romans employed Greek artists to make copies of their favorite Greek sculptures.

Roman figural work and portraits start out very life-like an become increasingly less naturalistic as the empire goes downhill!

Roman Republic
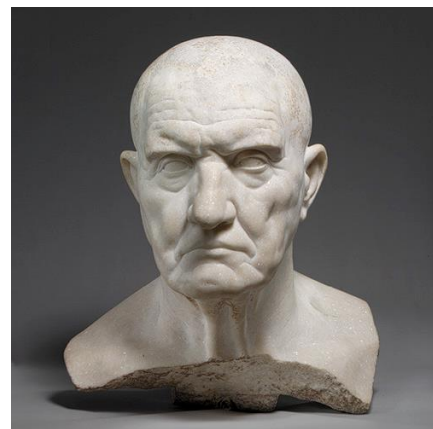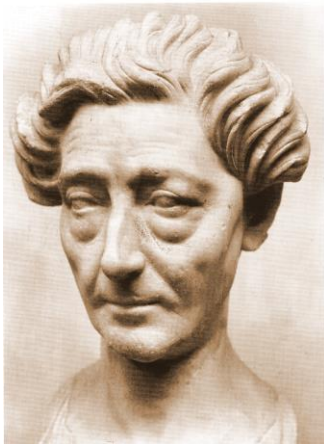
Portraits c. 54-117 CE and 1st century BCE

Verism is extreme or strict naturalism in art or literature. A veristic portrait is a super accurate recording of a person's features. These portraits emphasized individuality.

Veristic portraits were popular in the early years of the Roman Republic.

These portraits of both women and men are true to life, not idealized. They wanted to be remembered exactly as they were.

Late Antiquity

Portraits of the Four Tetrarchs c. 305 CE

Classical proportions and techniques for creating spatial depth are left behind as the Roman Empire declines.

Around the year 300 CE, the Roman Empire was large and the leadership was unstable. A number of recent Emperors had fallen victim to military coups and there were disagreements about who should be in charge.

The statue above was created at a time when the empire was divided between East and West ruled by 4 co-rulers known as the Tetrarchs.

Looking at this sculpture of the four rulers does not inspire much confidence! Notice their unidealized, even unnatural, proportions.

Their faces look like masks with no individuality . . . a far cry from the earlier, veristic portraits of the Roman Republic.