

Art History Timeline

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The history of art is immense, the earliest cave paintings pre-date writing by almost 27,000 years! If you're interested in art history, the first thing you should do is take a look at this table which briefly outlines the artists, traits, works, and events that make up major art periods and how art evolved to present day:

Art Periods/ Movements	Characteristics	Chief Artists and Major Works	Historical Events
Stone Age (30,000 b.c.– 2500 b.c.)	Cave painting, fertility goddesses, megalithic structures	Lascaux Cave Painting, Woman of Willendorf, Stonehenge	Ice Age ends (10,000 b.c.–8,000 b.c.); New Stone Age and first permanent settlements (8000 b.c.–2500 b.c.)
Mesopotamian (3500 b.c.–539 b.c.)	Warrior art and narration in stone relief	Standard of Ur, Gate of Ishtar, Stele of Hammurabi's Code	Sumerians invent writing (3400 b.c.); Hammurabi writes his law code (1780 b.c.); Abraham founds monotheism
Egyptian (3100 b.c.–30 b.c.)	Art with an afterlife focus: pyramids and tomb painting	Imhotep, Step Pyramid, Great Pyramids, Bust of Nefertiti	Narmer unites Upper/Lower Egypt (3100 b.c.); Rameses II battles the Hittites (1274 b.c.); Cleopatra dies (30 b.c.)
Greek and Hellenistic (850 b.c.–31 b.c.)	Greek idealism: balance, perfect proportions; architectural orders(Doric, Ionic, Corinthian)	Parthenon, Myron, Phidias, Polykleitos, Praxiteles	Athens defeats Persia at Marathon (490 b.c.); Peloponnesian Wars (431 b.c.– 404 b.c.); Alexander the Great's conquests (336 b.c.–323 b.c.)
Roman (500 b.c.– a.d. 476)	Roman realism: practical and down to earth; the arch	Augustus of Primaporta, Colosseum, Trajan's Column, Pantheon	Julius Caesar assassinated (44 b.c.); Augustus proclaimed Emperor (27 b.c.); Diocletian splits Empire (a.d. 292); Rome falls (a.d. 476)

Indian, Chinese, and Japanese(653 b.c.–a.d. 1900)	Serene, meditative art, and Arts of the Floating World	Gu Kaizhi, Li Cheng, Guo Xi, Hokusai, Hiroshige	Birth of Buddha (563 b.c.); Silk Road opens (1st century b.c.); Buddhism spreads to China (1st–2nd centuries a.d.) and Japan (5th century a.d.)
Byzantine and Islamic (a.d. 476–a.d.1453)	Heavenly Byzantine mosaics; Islamic architecture and amazing maze-like design	Hagia Sophia, Andrei Rublev, Mosque of Córdoba, the Alhambra	Justinian partly restores Western Roman Empire (a.d. 533–a.d. 562); Iconoclasm Controversy (a.d. 726–a.d. 843); Birth of Islam (a.d. 610) and Muslim Conquests (a.d. 632–a.d. 732)
Middle Ages (500–1400)	Celtic art, Carolingian Renaissance, Romanesque, Gothic	St. Sernin, Durham Cathedral, Notre Dame, Chartres, Cimabue, Duccio, Giotto	Viking Raids (793–1066); Battle of Hastings (1066); Crusades I–IV (1095–1204); Black Death (1347–1351); Hundred Years' War (1337–1453)
Early and High Renaissance (1400–1550)	Rebirth of classical culture	Ghiberti's Doors, Brunelleschi, Donatello, Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael	Gutenberg invents movable type (1447); Turks conquer Constantinople (1453); Columbus lands in New World (1492); Martin Luther starts Reformation (1517)
Venetian and Northern Renaissance (1430–1550)	The Renaissance spreads northward to France, the Low Countries, Poland, Germany, and England	Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, Dürer, Bruegel, Bosch, Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden	Council of Trent and Counter-Reformation (1545–1563); Copernicus proves the Earth revolves around the Sun (1543)
Mannerism (1527–1580)	Art that breaks the rules; artifice over nature	Tintoretto, El Greco, Pontormo, Bronzino, Cellini	Magellan circumnavigates the globe (1520–1522)
Baroque (1600–1750)	Splendor and flourish for God; art as weapon in religious wars	Reubens, Rembrandt, Caravaggio, Versailles	Thirty Years' War between Catholics and Protestants (1618–1648)

Neoclassical (1750–1850)	Art that recaptures Greco-Roman grace and grandeur	David, Ingres, Greuze, Canova	Enlightenment (18th century); Industrial Revolution (1760–1850)
Romanticism (1780–1850)	The triumph of imagination and individuality	Caspar Friedrich, Gericault, Delacroix, Turner, Benjamin West	American Revolution (1775–1783); French Revolution (1789–1799); Napoleon crowned emperor of France (1803)
Realism (1848–1900)	Celebrating working class and peasants; <i>en plein air</i> rustic painting	Corot, Courbet, Daumier, Millet	European democratic revolutions of 1848
Impressionism (1865–1885)	Capturing fleeting effects of natural light	Monet, Manet, Renoir, Pissarro, Cassatt, Morisot, Degas	Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871); Unification of Germany (1871)
Post-Impressionism (1885–1910)	A soft revolt against Impressionism	Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, Seurat	Belle Époque (late-19th-century Golden Age); Japan defeats Russia (1905)
Fauvism and Expressionism (1900–1935)	Harsh colors and flat surfaces (Fauvism); emotion distorting form	Matisse, Kirchner, Kandinsky, Marc	Boxer Rebellion in China (1900); World War (1914–1918)
Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism, De Stijl (1905–1920)	Pre- and Post-World War 1 art experiments: new forms to express modern life	Picasso, Braque, Leger, Boccioni, Severini, Malevich	Russian Revolution (1917); American women franchised (1920)
<i>Dada and Surrealism</i> (1917–1950)	<i>Ridiculous art; painting dreams and exploring the unconscious</i>	<i>Duchamp, Dalí, Ernst, Magritte, de Chirico, Kahlo</i>	<i>Disillusionment after World War I; The Great Depression</i> (1929–1938); World War II (1939–1945) and Nazi horrors; atomic bombs dropped on Japan (1945)
Abstract	Post-World War	Gorky,	Cold War and Vietnam War (U.S.)

Expressionism (1940s–1950s) and Pop Art (1960s)	II: pure abstraction and expression without form; popular art absorbs consumerism	Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko, Warhol, Lichtenstein	enters 1965); U.S.S.R. suppresses Hungarian revolt (1956) Czechoslovakian revolt (1968)
Postmodernism and Deconstructivism (1970–)	Art without a center and reworking and mixing past styles	Gerhard Richter, Cindy Sherman, Anselm Kiefer, Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid	Nuclear freeze movement; Cold War fizzles; Communism collapses in Eastern Europe and U.S.S.R. (1989–1991)