

SMITHSONIAN ASSOCIATES: THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN ART

QUESTIONS FOR ART HISTORIANS

1. **HOW OLD IS IT?** Or, what is the dating of the item? One can use a number of different types of evidence to understand chronology (i.e., physical, documentary, stylistic).
2. **WHAT IS THE “STYLE”?** Defining artistic styles is a key part of art historical inquiry, and there exist a number of different “styles” (e.g., period style, regional style, personal style).
3. **WHAT IS THE SUBJECT (ICONOGRAPHY)?** Subject matter can vary greatly and can include categories like religion, history, myth, daily life (genre), portraiture, landscape, or still-life.
4. **WHO MADE IT?** Though signing a work today can be common, many ancient artifacts were created by unknown artisans. When examining such pieces, art historians use style and specific details to try to attribute works to “hands.”
5. **WHO PAID FOR IT?** Depending upon the time period and place, artists may have had little to say about the form of a work. Rather, they would take their direction from a patron who dictated the content and shape of the item.

TERMS FOR ART HISTORIANS

1. **FORM:** the object’s shape and structure
2. **COMPOSITION:** how forms are arranged or “composed”
3. **MATERIAL:** pigment, clay, marble, gold, etc.; also known as “medium”
4. **TECHNIQUE:** the process artists employ to shape materials AND/OR the distinctive personal ways artists handle materials
5. **SPACE:** area that can be literal and three-dimensional (e.g., a statue within a room) or illusionistic
6. **MASS:** the bulk, density, and weight of matter in space; it does not need to be solid (e.g., a hollow metal sculpture)
7. **VOLUME:** the space that mass organizes, divides or encloses or the amount of space occupied by three-dimensional objects
8. **PERSPECTIVE:** pictorial device for organizing forms in space in order to create an illusion of depth (linear, aerial, or atmospheric)
9. **FORESHORTENING:** forms closer to the viewer appear larger while forms further appear smaller in order to create depth
10. **PROPORTION:** relationships (in terms of size) of the parts of persons, buildings or objects to the whole
11. **CARVING AND CASTING:** carving is a subtractive technique in sculpture; casting is additive
12. **RELIEF SCULPTURE [HIGH VS LOW]:** figures project from supporting background or plane
13. **FREESTANDING SCULPTURE:** sculpture finished on all sides; also known as sculpture-in-the-round

