Ancient Egyptian Art Notes

Introducing how we analyze art: The Three S’s

1. Subject matter/iconography
2. Style/Formal Analysis
3. Significance/why?

Ex: This sculpture to the left
- Subject Matter: Egyptian Pharaoh who would rule for 25 years
- Style: symmetrical, shadowed
- Significance: shows his power, used as emergency vessels if the mummy tomb was destroyed and then this statue would serve as a backup home for their “ka” or “soul”

*If everyone drew a picture of Professor Tom, the subject matter would remain the same but the style might different from individual to individual

Egypt will serve as our baseline for the rest of the art we look at
9 pieces of Egyptian Art

![Works of Egyptian art on Image List #1](image-url)
Egyptian Art cast over a very long period of time (about 3,000 years) and hardly even changed
- Pre-Dynastic: before 3200 BC - ruled by tribes
- Early-Dynastic: up to 2600 BC - all of the area of Egypt was ruled under one by King Narmer
- Old Kingdom: up to 2150 BC - flourishing really robust commerce and art
- Middle Period: up to 1540 BC - invasions, turmoil, a period of difficulty
- New Kingdom: up to 1075 BC flourishing again
- Late Period: up to 330 BC - comes to an end when “tolomies” (Greek successors of Alexander the Great) took over and Egypt became part of the “Hellenist” world (aka Egypt was Greekified)

Geographical concept

- Egyptians lived in the Nile Area
- The whole civilization lives along the river bc the river is a source of food and water
- Extremely fertile mud that is deposited when the river floods (like yearly)
- The Valley of the Fertile Crescent and the Nile Valley were the beginnings of huge successful civilizations thanks to the rivers
- This mud made it possible to produce lots of food, attracted other people, those people put to work to make building out of stone and such
- They loved the river as if it was given by the gods to them
- There’s an altitude change that created 2 separate Egypts that still share the same culture (like the Greek and Roman gods and how they are the same but different)
Three Aspects of Egyptian Art to Keep in Mind:

1. Political Structure
   a. Strong centralized gov headed by an absolute monarch
   b. Absolute monarchy means that absolute power was given to one family
      i. Egyptian history is divided into different dynasties (families of power)
      ii. Pharaoh might have hundreds of kids and 20 wives
   c. Pharaohs were divine beings, gods, not just humans
   d. Look for art that:
      i. Serves to construct and maintain monarch’s claims to authority and myths surrounding his status
      ii. Convince that they truly are “all powerful”
      iii. Very anagogical
      iv. The art needs to be made to last, immortal art for an immortal god (really solid or preserved well)
      v. Frequently used for funerals and preserved into tombs
      vi. Has a lot to do with the after life

2. Religion
   a. Complex system of strong beliefs in the afterlife
   b. Look for art that:
      i. Is anagogical
      ii. Serves to construct and maintain a sense of involvement with a realm of reality beyond an earthly one

3. Environment
   a. Nile river provides large labor and wealth surplus for large-scale art and architecture projects
   b. Look for art that:
      i. Connects with the Nile as a source of life
   c. Ex. Art to the right: The Pharaoh is sitting on a poor portrayal of the Nile river that supplies water for life and civilization, that’s a papyrus plant stemming from it which was a symbol of the Nile

9/11 relief sculpture that we will refer back to and relate to our next piece of art
   – This is a relief sculpture because it’s carved but not completely a sculpture
   – **Around Sculpture** = could walk all the way around it

**Palette of King Narmer (front and back), Egypt, Early Dynastic Period, c. 3135 B.C.**

– Medium: sandstone
– Funny shaped called palette because it was originally used to grind “kohl” makeup like a mortar and pestle
– This one is much more ceremonial, still functional but not used in its original way
– Divided into “registers” or different compartments
  Represents the conquest of Lower Egypt
– This object is the first “work of art depicting a namable historical figure”
– Narmer was one of the first to be identified in art history
Perspective = The illusion of 3D space on a 2D surface
Narrative Art = contains and depicts a story

Hieroglyph = Greek for “Holy writing”
- The front and the back both have a title at the top
- This one translates from “N’r Mr” to “Catfish Chisel”
- The name is in bw a Palace kinda like how the “White House” stands for “The President”
- This remarkable work of art is the first image of a human figure (in the whole world) that can be identified by name (bc it’s signed up there)
- The two nobs depict “Hathway” (woman deity neither human nor animal)

Front
- Narmer with a mace, beating his enemy to death
- The lower figure represents the ruler of Lower Egypt
- Bowling Pin shaped hat is worn by Upper Egypt throughout history (like if something had a swastika and we would know what it represents)
- Little guy is holding a pair of sandals and holding a jar, he is a priest overseeing the killing and performing a ceremonial ritual, Narmer has god on his side
- Bare feet is an attribute of holiness
- Shoes = dirty and smelly
- Bare feet = sacred
- Upper Right is the same guy face with a body of papyrus growing out of him (found in Lower Egypt)
- God Horace (falcon) relative of Narmer and subduing this cord attached to the other guy’s nose
- Theme: upper vs. lower

Back
- Another doubling of Narmer in the bull and he’s stepping on this guy
- In the background there’s the walls of the enemy palace and the blocks have been knocked down
- Top: Narmer is now wearing the lower Egypt hat, still being followed by the priest
- Upper right: boat/craft
- Center: two beasts with intertwining necks, interpreted as a metaphor for the union of upper and lower Egypt
- Headless corpses of his enemies
Comparing the Palette and the 9/11 Relief Sculpture

Unifying Subject Matter: destruction

Second “5” – Style

- The fallen enemies and even identified by their symbols
- The difference: fallen enemies as opposed to fallen heroes
- Art can take a piece of narrative art and show it from a certain point of view that affects the way you view it, can lead you into picking up one idea or the other

The Abstraction/Naturalism Spectrum

Naturalism = making objects in art appear the way those same objects would appear if we viewed them in nature
- Involves a comparison bw what you’re used to seeing when looking at the object and when you’re looking at the work of art
- Nature sets the standard
- Measured by the body pose, the depth, the proportions and the scale
- Four qualities determine the position of an image on the abstract/naturalism spectrum
  1. View Point
  2. Scale
  3. Perspective
  4. Composition
Egyptian Art - View Point:
- Head is seen in profile but the eye is seen frontally
- Torso is frontally
- Legs seen by profile
- That's abstract, they are mixing the view points

Fore Shortening = object on a flat surface that appears to be projecting out of the plane of the picture
- Ex. Uncle Sam “I Want You” and the 9/11 memorial
- Egyptian artists try to avoid that, that ram (top right) is one example when they do foreshorten and its goofy

Egyptian Art - Scale
- Narmer is just really big bc he’s important
- Most important – biggest
- Next important – a little smaller
- Others – small

Egyptian Art - Perspective

Perspective = creating illusion of 3D (depth) on a 2D surface
- We know that the fallen lord is behind Narmer bc of a small amount of “Overlapping”
- Could have overlapped or graduated diminution (drawing steps to show the priest is further away) but instead they did neither and that is why Egyptian art looks funny/awkward
Egyptian Art - Composition

**Irregular Composition** = no mathematical basis or division, everything is scattered (probably unplanned)
**Regular Composition** = something that appears ordered, symmetrical, shaped, etc. (probably planned)

- Here is a real pre-dynastic work of art on the right
- A kind of randomness “just put the men with sticks here”
- Political order reflects order of art

- Triangle shape here and two blocks here, you don’t get that in real life but artists can provide that
- Also comparing the Palette of King Narmer with pre-dynastic period painting, the palette is much more symmetrical then the asymmetrical painting

The Pyramids of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure (left to right), Giza, Egypt, Old Kingdom, 2600-2500 B.C.

- 400 years after Narmer’s rule
- Made for the Pharaoh’s
- One of the largest projects of its time
- Function: tombs for Pharaoh’s after they die and their permanent resting place for the after life
- Style/form: immense size
- Khufu 481 feet tall (the largest of them)
- 23 million blocks of stone
- Big stones
- Big enough to build a wall all the way around France
- Imagine the power necessary
- Function: peace of mind, he’s going to be safe for the afterlife, also the demonstrate power of their current life

- Middle Ages Lincoln something finally built taller
- Often works of architecture aren’t made to depict something, the subject matter of a pyramid doesn’t say much so we use the 2 Fs
- Ex. The shape of our classroom in its curvature and elevation to allow everyone to see
- Pie in the Sky = pie is good stuff, sky is the afterlife, a reward in the afterlife, it’s good to be there
Pyramids are basically giant safes for the mummified cadaver
Phenomenal embalming techniques to preserve the body
Tombs to secure the body
The body would be home to the soul safely and peacefully

Question: What can you make of a work of architecture?

Answer: Explore the two F’s:
1. **Form**: describe the structure = shape, size, location, material
2. **Function**: describe the experience the structure provides = physical, emotional, social, spiritual

**Anagogic** = relating to another, higher realm of reality

- The shape of it, it’s like a ramp to go reach the gods and heaven
- Perfect geometric regularity of it, probably like the celestial heaven is
- The layout of the three pyramids were supposedly built by three successive pharaohs
- Supposedly correspond to the three stars of Orion’s belt, Osiris
- Beams power, outside is very splendid
- The pyramid outsides were covered with polished limestone, reflecting the sky (like the Luxor Hotel in Vegas)
- Successive generations pillaged those wonderful materials for their own
- Not much going on on the inside
- Pharaoh in big chamber, Pharaoh’s Queen probably with him too, but thieves came in and defenses were penetrated
- “space” is solid stone
- A false chamber to fool thieves
- Air shafts had something to do with religious reasons, they were shoots for them to the stars (one is pointed to Polaris)

**Two M’s of Religion**

1) **Mysticism** – the notion of the anagogical, there is another life, you will leave your body, you will transform, you will be with the company of all-powerful individuals, you will achieve all knowledge
2) **Morality** – notion of right and wrong, approve of certain behaviors and actions because we had a sense of right and wrong, religion has an idea of divide justice, but the Egyptian’s didn’t seem to have the belief that the way you live will affect your after life (in the Old Kingdom, that moral aspect will come up in the New Kingdom)

Who built the pyramids?

- Egyptians have the reputation of being a “Slave Society”
- Records in hieroglyphs have been interpreted as wages of people hired to build
- Slaves typically wouldn’t be paid... they must have built part of it and others might have been paid and others might have volunteered
Menkaure’s pyramid (almost 200 feet tall) is small
Pharaonic portrait had a mystical function as a backup container for the soul of the individual, so if their mummy got destroyed then the soul could be safe in one of these statues
“One who keeps alive” – a common name for sculptures in Egypt cuz they kept their subjects “alive”

**Menkaure and Queen, Giza, Egypt, Old Kingdom, c. 2500 B.C.**

High school had the jocks the stoners the skaters the surfers the preps
There are categories based off of appearance
What does his portrait do for him?
- Shown here with his wife, probably his number 1 queen
- They are around the same height
- He’s dressed in Pharaonic attributes: Nemes and False Beard
- He looks very formal, in a stiff position (like walking down the red carpet)
- He seems a little bit in front of her, clenched fists, he’s stronger and more aggressive
  - Patriarchal society vs. Matriarchal society
- he’s playing the dominant role, and she’s playing the supporting role (especially with her hands around him)
- Coverage/clothing both very form fitting and so sensual, but also covered so very formal
- Men can go topless but women less so
- Combining stability and firmness with a sense of little bit of looseness to move and to act

What kind of character, what kind of face do you want your ruler to have?
- This face expresses calm, tranquility,
- He doesn’t portray any of the emotions from Inside Out, he shows none, impassive, placid, but essentially unfeeling face
- Doesn’t have human feelings, no human ups and downs, he’s a GOD!

Obama broke the smiling, has a bit of a smile there and also a concern in the eyes
Most of the presidents show no emotion until Ford shows a smile
Ti Watching a Hippopotamus Hunt, Old Kingdom, c. 2460 BC

- Ti was an overseer of building projects, high up in social order
- He had a tomb like many other high up people
- Art was something people wanted in their tomb bc what it depicted is what you could do in the afterlife
- Hunting by the Nile river
- Ti was involved in hunting as well, had servants help him
- Papyrus are the things on top of the scene, papyrus means Nile bc that is what grows there
- Could be more than just a hunting scene
- Literal sense = hunting
- Allegorical sense = representation of the conflict between the forces of order, goodness and the forces of evil, chaos
- The hippo was an evil creature

**Allegory** = Greek meaning “another sense” (cf. literal)

**Cf** = compared to, contrasted to ^ opposite literal in this case

- Ti is much more abstract than the servants bc the servants are doing an action and are portrayed in a way that makes sense
- The servant’s shoulders are foreshortening
- The servants are more naturalistic
- People of higher status in Egypt tend to have a more abstract form, hence why Ti is like that
- These high class people are not attached to the ordinary world, they aren’t apart of the natural world
- Marxists were the first people to start looking at art and perceiving rich and poor, high and low class
- A generation after Marx, a friend of Stalin, Trotsky, wrote a book
- In his book *Literature and Revolution (1924)*, Trotsky argued that since ancient times art has primarily served as a means for expressing and enforcing the interests and privileges of the wealthy, ruling class
  - Trotsky’s view might be right cuz the wealthy are the people who had the money to make it
  - Trotsky’s view is about social class
  - When we say what is Trotsky’s view we are talking about what social class is depicted

**Pattern** = repetition of same appearances

- Composition of Ti compared to the painting earlier, Ti has more rhythm and pattern from the line sin the back
- The lines might be the stems of the papyrus
- It has straight lines not zig-zag lines more like the painting does
- People are attracted to symmetrical and straight ordered things
- Middle kingdom is an analogy to the middle ages of Europe
- Middle kingdom was full of bad times and collapse of centralized power
  - No unity between upper and lower Egypt
  - Political instability due to invasions
  - Much less building and art produced
- The motif on back of the palette of Narmer with the two monster heads intertwined has dissolved in this period

**Portrait of Sesostris III (fragment), Middle Kingdom, c. 1850 B.C.**

- Expression of Sesostris III versus Menkuare looks a lot sadder and more worried
- Eyes looking down
- Frowning
- The glabellar lines are showing
- The contours of the mouth are very smooth
- The lines of the glabellar lines do not have the curving form that the other parts do
- Just a gouge in the face
- The artist was use to copying other pharaonic portraits so when they did the glabellar lines, they did not know what to do with them
- That is why it stands out so much

**Temple of Amun at Karnak, Egypt, New Kingdom, c. 1579-1075 B.C.**

- Economic prosperity and political stability is back for the New Kingdom
- Lots of temples along the Nile valley
- Function of these temples was to act as a home for a god
- In this case Amun, the son of a god
- There was a legion of priests who stayed on the temple’s grounds
- Areas outside were storage places and resident areas for the priests
- The gates were a characteristic feature of Egyptian temple architecture
- All have the same shape of a tampered wall with a door in the middle and the top of the wall coming down to the door
- Successive pylons were built over centuries
- It would be covered with paintings, sculptures, the pharaoh who built that one, etc.

**Pylon** = Egyptian gates
Basic structure for the temple is built along a line
In architecture some are arranged along a line and some are arranged around a point
Only building on campus that is built with a central plan is in the business faculty area
Street part of the campus has an axial plan to it
The area in the middle has more of a central plan
It was built this way to avoid too steep of a road so they cut in to it instead of up it

Once you get to go in, the realm is completely surrounded by an artificial attitude
The rides at Disneyland relate to the temple by how in both you experience an artificial art derived environment
A sense of leaving behind the world of everyday life
Could feel the effect when you entered
Artificial creations are all around
They are carrying a giant boat (barks) that contain a statue that they would bring down the Nile so it could visit other temples

After the courtyard you enter into here
Then it went into the inner sanctum which there is no photo of...
Churches look special because it needs to be different then the mundane
The Weighing of the Heart and Judgement of Osiris, from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer, New Kingdom, c. 1285 B.C.

- This is a painting on a papyrus scroll from the Book of the Dead
- It is rolled up and placed into the folds of the clothes that mummies were rolled up in
- It is supposed to show the mummy the way to the afterlife
- How to get into the afterlife
- The god is at the end on the right
- In the New Kingdom period, there are 2 religious changes
  
  1) Now more people could get into the afterlife
     - Some lesser down people had some small tombs and book of the dead
  2) The way you act in the real world affects your afterlife or chances of getting into the afterlife

- Hunefer = book belonged to him, he appears 3 times
- Anubis leads Hunefer into the afterlife
- With the balance, on right is feather, on left holds the deceased person's heart
- If they weighed the same they could go on to the afterlife
- If not then Ammut would devour you, had a combo of the animals of the nile that could kill you
- Thoth was the god of scribes who kept record of it all
- Hunefer made it through and is introduced to Horus and the god Osiris (god of fertility who makes the plants grow along the Nile)
- Hunefer appears at the top where he is with Egyptian gods
- Ankh, rook and flail are extinct symbols
- Scales are used in lots of things that show impartiality, fairness, justice
- Do not see rook and flail or ankh symbols very much anymore
- Book and the flail are shown in pharaonic and god portraits
  - Used by shepherds dealing with a flock of sheep
  - Shows authority
- **Ankh** symbolizes eternal life, breath of life
  - Horus holds it in the book of dead
  - Analogical symbol
- Very structured and linear verse and that appears in the art work too
- Rhythmic sequence to the narrative of the art
- The prayer is formalized cuz you don't go up to the gods and talk normally
- The lines follow a pattern, the 1, 2, and 3 on the sides (1213, 1213)
- The top of the artwork with the gods goes 1213, 1 = white, 2 = brown, 3 = black
  - Ignore the first black one
- Does not have very much innovation, lots of repetitiveness, very patterned
Queen Nefertiti, New Kingdom, c. 1350 B.C.

- **Nefertiti** = the beautiful one has arrived
- This is the most naturalistic portrait of her
- **Buff** = statue of shoulders up
- Left eye has not been painted in yet
- It could have just been one to work off of
- This represents the standard of beauty
- Looks surprisingly similar to the people who consider beautiful today
- Standard of beauty varies from century and culture as well
- Nefertiti is very composed, no passion or vulnerability, female version of that detached expression from earlier
- Essence of an Egyptian queen

Funerary Mask of Tutankhamun, New Kingdom, c. 1330 B.C.

- Queen Nefertiti’s son was Tutankhamun
- People found the tomb of Tutankhamun
  - Was the first tomb to have never been opened yet
  - Clay seal on entrance still remained with the pharaonic seal
- Was a very modest tomb cuz he was only 19 when he died
- **Antechamber** is related to the funerary rituals
- **Treasury** is full of statues of the jackal and gods
- The several layered coffin was surrounded by concrete boxes
- Impenetrable casing
- Full body coffin made of over 500lbs of gold

- Covered in vast quantities of great material
- Gold = flesh of the gods
- Has much more gold and divine qualities than the Nefertiti buff
- Is abstract enough to look divine but also naturalistic enough to be a good looking human
- The difference between the actual body and this represents what people want form art
- **Nemes** = pharaonic headdress
- Was found inside his tomb
11 pieces of Greek Art
- Divided into male figures and female figures
- Now looking at region just north of Egypt
- Distance from SD to San Francisco
- Island people
- Terrible soil
- Specialized in trading
- Cosmopolitan outlook – constantly in contact with Non-Greeks, that influenced their character and made them more than their own
- Three aspects of the 5th-c. BC “cultural revolution” in Greece:
  1. philosophy (speculation, skepticism); do the gods truly exist?
  2. politics (government by consensus); Greeks had a republic aka democracy
  3. art/architecture
- Key chronology for ancient Greece:
  - c. 500 – 330 BC: “Classical” period
  - c. 330 – 30 BC: “Hellenistic” period
    - Hellenistic Era = spread of Greek culture to other regions
- We are going to talk about this from 500 BC to 30 BC
- 330 BC: Hellenized warrior from Macedonia named Alexander the Great conquered a vast area and brought it under his dominion, Greek successors
- Hellenized world transformed centralized Greek culture on just the islands and spreads
  - Affects Romans a lot, Romans really adopt Greek art and architecture