



▲ **FIGURE 13.1** This painting is a *genre* (*zhan-ruh*) scene. It focuses on an activity that was part of everyday life. Notice how the artist has focused as much on the surroundings as on the human subjects. How would you describe the mood of this scene?

Jan Vermeer. *The Concert*. c. 1658–60. Oil on canvas. 72.4 × 64.8 cm (28½ × 25½"). Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Massachusetts.

Western Traditions in Art

The term *Western art* refers to art of the western hemisphere, specifically western Europe and North America. Western art includes the rich traditions of Ancient Greek and Roman architecture up through the groundbreaking movements and styles of Modern art.

In this chapter, you will:

- Identify historical and cultural events that have shaped Western art.
- Describe general characteristics in artworks from a variety of Western cultures.
- Compare and contrast historical and contemporary styles of Western art, identifying trends and themes.

Focus on Art History

Figure 13.1 is a painting by the Dutch artist Jan Vermeer (1632–1675). Vermeer was born in Delft, Holland. During his life he traveled little, and his paintings were largely unknown. Vermeer is now considered one of the greatest Dutch painters. In seventeenth century Holland, painters mainly created their artworks for the working class. Vermeer and his contemporaries chose everyday subjects as they were recognizable and appreciated by this class. As in Figure 13.1, the style of these works is very precise and realistic, and the mood is hushed and serious.

Compare and Contrast. Compare and contrast Vermeer's use of color and value to create an area of emphasis. Where is the focal point in this artwork?

The Beginnings of Western Art Traditions

Vocabulary

Byzantine art
Romanesque
Gothic

Greece was the birthplace of Western civilization. The influence of ancient Greek culture can still be seen today. Almost every city in our country has at least one building with features that resemble the architecture of the classic Greek temple.

The Art of Greece and Rome

The Greeks built temples in honor of their gods. The most outstanding example is the Parthenon in Athens (**Figure 13.2**). The columns slant slightly inward to prevent a top-heavy look. Inside was a huge statue of the goddess Athena created of ivory and gold. The relief sculpture that covered the area under the roof is missing. Many of the missing pieces are in foreign museums. The Greeks worked to create a logical, harmonious world. They sought perfect proportions in buildings, sculpture, and music by following the guidelines of mathematical proportion. Their artists produced statues that represented the Greek ideal of the perfect body. According to one story, athletes used these statues, like the one shown in **Figure 13.3**, as inspiration for developing their own muscle strength and tone.



▲ **FIGURE 13.2** Although partially destroyed, you can see that the Parthenon was designed to look harmonious. Architects used mathematical formulas to make the temple look balanced and beautiful.

Parthenon. Temple of Athena. Fifth century B.C. Acropolis, Athens, Greece.

When they were new, Greek temples and statues were not the pure white we see today. The Greeks loved color, and they painted their buildings and sculptures various hues. Time has since worn the paint away.

Even though the Romans conquered Greece in 146 B.C., they did not conquer Greek culture. Instead, the Romans adopted Greek culture, modifying it to suit their own needs. Greek sculptors, painters, architects, philosophers, and teachers exerted a great influence on the culture of the Roman Empire.

Earlier, the Romans had absorbed the culture of the Etruscans in Italy. Two outstanding Etruscan developments that the Romans adopted included a system of drainage and an improved use of the arch in the construction of buildings. What we call Roman art is a blend of the ideal Greek and the practical Etruscan arts.

The Romans added much to what they adopted. They used the arch and concrete to build large-scale structures, including huge vaulted and domed inner spaces. Engineers constructed a network of roads to connect all parts of the Roman Empire. The Romans also developed beautiful interior decoration and created realistic rather than idealized portrait sculpture (**Figure 13.4**).



◀ **FIGURE 13.3** Look at the proportions and detail of this athlete. Notice the idealized muscles and facial features. What does such a sculpture reveal about Greek culture? What features of the human body were admired by them and important to them?

Myron. *Discobolus (Discus Thrower)*. c. 450 B.C. Roman copy of a bronze original. Life-size. Italy. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, Italy.



◀ **FIGURE 13.4** Unlike the Greeks, the Romans did not seek to depict idealized human forms. The expression on the boy's face seems haughty or proud, but notice how his features have been shown realistically. For example, his ears stick out from his head.

Roman. *Portrait Statue of Boy*. Late first century B.C.–early first century A.D. Julio-Claudian. Bronze. Height: 123.2 cm (48 $\frac{1}{2}$ ""). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Rogers fund, 1914 (14.130.1).

Activity

Analyzing Architecture

Illustrating Ideas for Artworks Using Direct Observation. Find a building in your community in the Greek or Roman style. Write the location, the culture from which the style was adopted, the purpose of the building, and anything else you can find out about it. Using direct observation, make a sketch of the building in your sketchbook. Name the ancient culture and describe the features that match the style of the ancient culture.

► **FIGURE 13.5** Byzantine art expressed a solemn, devotional mood. Notice how the infant Christ in this ivory sculpture is presented as a miniature man. He holds a scroll in one hand and blesses the viewer with the other.

Byzantine, Constantinople. *Virgin and Child*. Mid-tenth to eleventh century. Ivory. 23.4 × 7 × 1.3 cm (9³/₁₆ × 2³/₄ × 1/2"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917. (17.190.103).



The Art of the Middle Ages

The Middle Ages began with the conquest of Rome in A.D. 476 by invaders from the north and lasted about 1,000 years. This period of time was also called the *Age of Faith* because the Christian religion exerted such an important influence. Monasteries, or buildings that housed people who had made religious vows, grew in number. The monks who lived in them created finely decorated religious manuscripts. Churches grew in size, number, and political importance, reflecting the status of the Christian religion during this period.

Byzantine Art

In the eastern part of the former Roman Empire, a new style of art developed during the Middle Ages. This style thrived around the city of Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) and spread to towns such as Ravenna in Italy. Constantinople, built on the site of the ancient city of Byzantium, served as the capital of the Byzantine Empire. **Byzantine art** featured very rich colors and heavily outlined figures that appeared flat and stiff. Constantinople was close to Asia as well as to Greece, and because of this proximity, Greek, Roman, and Asian art and culture all influenced Byzantine artists (**Figure 13.5**).

Romanesque Style

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, many new churches were built in western Europe in a style of architecture similar to ancient Roman buildings. It was called **Romanesque** and featured buildings of massive size; solid, heavy walls; wide use of the rounded Roman arch; and many sculptural decorations.

Churches, castles, and monasteries were all built in the Romanesque style (**Figure 13.6**). Architects building Romanesque structures could not

► **FIGURE 13.6** This church was built in the Romanesque style. Identify the rounded arches.

Church of San Clemente. Tahull, Spain. Twelfth century.



include many windows because they weakened the structure of the walls and could cause the heavy stone roofs to collapse. As a result, Romanesque buildings were dark and somber inside.

Gothic Style

In Europe in the twelfth century, increasing numbers of people moved from the countryside into towns. Workers such as stone carvers and carpenters organized into craft guilds (or unions), and apprentices learned their crafts from the masters in these guilds. A wealthy new merchant class, pride in the growing cities, and religious faith led to the building of huge cathedrals. Two developments in architecture—the pointed arch and the flying buttress—brought about changes in how buildings were built, and how they looked. The flying buttress removed the weight of the roof from the walls, allowing for higher walls and many more windows than had been possible in Romanesque structures. This new style, called **Gothic**, featured churches that seemed to soar upward, used pointed arches, and included stained-glass windows, like the cathedral shown in **Figure 13.7**.

By using stained-glass windows, Gothic builders changed the light that entered the churches into rich, glowing color. Gothic sculptors and painters sought more realistic ways to depict subject matter. Religious scenes were painted on church altarpieces with egg tempera paint and gold leaf.



▲ **FIGURE 13.7** This cathedral was built in the Gothic style. Notice the pointed arches and stained-glass windows. Compare this to Figure 13.6. Describe the similarities and differences between the two churches.

Chartres Cathedral, Chartres, France. Twelfth to sixteenth century.

Check Your Understanding

1. How did the Greeks represent the human form?
2. Describe general characteristics of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine art.
3. Identify two features of Romanesque buildings.
4. What two developments of the Gothic period allowed builders to place many openings in walls and to build churches taller?

Activity

The Gothic Style

Applying Your Skills. Research cathedrals built in the Gothic style. List the names of and sketch three of the cathedrals in your sketchbook. Write down where and when they were built.