



## Art History

Classical Greek Art and Architecture

Name:

Section:

Score: \_\_\_\_/5

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Directions: Read the following text explaining characteristics of Greek art and architecture and answer the thought questions at the end of the article.

### INTRODUCTION

In around 450 B.C., the Athenian general Pericles tried to consolidate his power by using public money, the dues paid to Athens by its allies in the Delian League coalition, to support the city-state's artists and thinkers. Most of all, Pericles paid artisans to build temples and other public buildings in the city of Athens. He reasoned that this way he could win the support of the Athenian people by doling out plenty of construction jobs; at the same time, by building public monuments so grand that people would come from far and wide to see them, he could increase Athens' prestige as well as his own.

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF CLASSICAL GREECE

The most noteworthy result of Pericles' public-works campaign was the magnificent Parthenon, a temple in honor of the city's patron goddess Athena. The architects Iktinos and Kallikrates and the sculptor Pheidias began work on the temple in the middle of the 5th century B.C. The Parthenon was built atop the Acropolis, a natural pedestal made of rock that was the site of the earliest settlements in Athens, and Pericles invited other people to build there as well: In 437 B.C., for example, the architect Mnesikles started to build a grand gateway known as the Propylaea at its western end, and at the end of the century, artisans added a smaller temple for Athena—this one in honor of her role as the goddess of victory, Athena Nike—along with one for Athena and Erechtheus, an Athenian king. Still, the Parthenon remained the site's main attraction.

### TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

With its rectangular stone platform, front and back porches (the pronaos and the opisthodomos) and rows of columns, the Parthenon was a commanding example of Greek temple architecture. Typically, the people of ancient Greece did not worship inside their temples as we do today. Instead, the interior room (the naos or the cella) was relatively small, housing just a statue of the deity the temple was built to honor. Worshippers gathered outside, entering only to bring offerings to the statue.

The temples of classical Greece all shared the same general form: Rows of columns supporting a horizontal entablature (a kind of decorative molding) and a triangular roof. At each end of the roof, above the entablature, was a triangular space known as the pediment, into which sculptors squeezed elaborate scenes. On the Parthenon, for example, the pediment sculptures show the birth of Athena on one end and a battle between Athena and Poseidon on the other.

So that people standing on the ground could see them, these pediment sculptures were usually painted bright colors and were arrayed on a solid blue or red background. This paint has faded with age; as a result, the pieces of classical temples that survive today appear to be made of white marble alone.

### PROPORTION AND PERSPECTIVE

The architects of classical Greece came up with many sophisticated techniques to make their buildings look perfectly even. They crafted horizontal planes with a very slight upward U-shape and columns that were fatter in the middle than at the ends. Without these innovations, the buildings would appear to sag; with them, they looked flawless and majestic.

### SCULPTURE

Not many classical statues or sculptures survive today. (Stone statues broke easily, and metal ones were often melted for re-use.) However, we know that sculptors such as Pheidias and Polykleitos in the 5th century and Praxiteles, Skopas and Lysippos in the 4th century had figured out how to apply the rules of anatomy and perspective to the human form just as their counterparts applied them to buildings. Earlier statues of people

had looked awkward and fake, but by the classical period they looked natural, almost at ease. They even had realistic-looking facial expressions.

## **POTTERY**

Classical Greek pottery was perhaps the most utilitarian of the era's art forms. People offered small terra cotta figurines as gifts to gods and goddesses, buried them with the dead and gave them to their children as toys. They also used clay pots, jars and vases for almost everything. These were painted with religious or mythological scenes that, like the era's statues, grew more sophisticated and realistic over time.

Much of our knowledge of classical Greek art comes from objects made of stone and clay that have survived for thousands of years. However, we can infer that the themes we see in these works—an emphasis on pattern and order, perspective and proportion, and man himself—appeared as well in less-durable creations such as drawings and paintings.

"Ancient Greek Art." History.com. A&E Television Networks, 2010. Web. 28 Sept. 2014.

### Thought Questions:

1. Architecturally what was the primary function of most of the buildings built in Classical Greece (specifically during the time of Pericles)? What additional functions did they serve for the city of Athens?
2. What were the major signifying characteristics of Greek Temples (at least 3)
3. How did the Greeks use illusions to make buildings look even and symmetrical?
4. How were sculptures of the Greek era different than the era before them?
5. What were the prime uses of pottery in classical Greece?
6. What design features are prevalent in Greek pottery? (list and explain at least 2)