The Human Figure throughout The Ages
Paleolithic:
Venus of Willendorf;
Willendorf, Austria
(c. 28,000 – 25,000 BC)
(~4 ½” high, limestone)
[fertility statue]
MESOPOTAMIA
Sumerian: Female Head from Uruk, (goddess Inanna?)
(c. 3,200 – 3,000 BC)
[Marble, Sculpture]
(stolen from Baghdad Museum – found in someone’s back yard)
Akkadian: Head of an Akkadian Ruler, from Nineveh, (c. 2,250 – 2,200 BC) [Bronze, Sculpture]
Babylonian: Stele of Hammurabi, (c. 1,780 BC), Present day Iran [Babylonian Civic Code Marker] (basalt)

**Hammurabi:** (1,792 – 1,750 BC)
Babylon’s strongest king: centralized power in Mesopotamia
Sumerian: Statuettes of Abu, from the Temple at Tell Asmar (c. 2,700 BC)
Detail: Worshippers, (gypsum inlay with shell and black limestone) [Iraq Museum]
Symbolism: The Four Evangelists

**Matthew**
attribute: winged human
symbolizes: humanity, reason

**John**
attribute: eagle
symbolizes: sky, heavens, spirit

**Mark**
attribute: winged lion
symbolizes: royalty, courage, resurrection

**Luke**
attribute: winged ox
symbolizes: sacrifice, strength
Assyrian: *Lamassu*, (winged, human-headed bull - citadel of Sargon II) (c. 720 - 705 BC), Present day Iraq (limestone)
Assyrian: Ashurbanipal Hunting Lions, (c. 645 - 640 BC), Present day Iraq  [Relief sculpture from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal] (gypsum)
Ancient Egyptian (Early Dynasty): *Palette of King Narmer*, (c. 3,000 - 2920 BC), (~2’ 1” high) [Egyptian eye makeup palette] (slate)
Explanation of *Palette of King Narmer*

The earliest example of the Egyptian style, which is called "Frontalism", can be seen in the *Palette of Narmer* which is considered to be an early blueprint of the formula of figure representation that was to rule Egyptian art for 3,000 years. The *Palette of Narmer* was originally used as a tablet to prepare eye makeup for protecting the eyes against sun glare and irritation.

This object is important as a historical document that records the *unification of Upper and Lower Egypt* and the beginning of the *dynastic period*. On the palette's back, the king - wearing the crown of Upper Egypt, is about to kill his enemy. Below the king are two trampled enemies, and behind him stands a slave holding his sandals. The other side of the palette shows Narmer wearing the crown of Lower Egypt and reviewing a pile of beheaded enemies. On both sides, the king towers over his own men and enemies and performs his task alone. The king is presented as a god-like figure who alone is responsible for the victory. This is the main theme that appears throughout Egyptian art --"the kingship is divine and its prestige is one with the prestige of the gods." The king is seen in a perspective that combines the profile views of head, legs and arms with the front views of eyes and torso. The surface is subdivided into a number of bands separated by horizontal lines that serve as the ground for the figures.
Ancient Egyptian society was obsessed with **immortality**, and much of what is known about ancient Egypt comes from tombs that have survived to the present day. Egyptians believed that the pharaoh's spirit was immortal, and they filled his tomb with every earthly delight for it to enjoy throughout eternity. Wealthy members of the nobility, although not immortal like the pharaoh, sometimes took their earthly possessions to their tombs with them. Paintings, sculptures, and other objects found in these tombs represent almost everything we know about Egyptian art.

One of the most important things that tomb paintings and sculptures tell us is that Egyptian art remained virtually unchanged for nearly 3,000 years. Except for a brief period in the mid 1300's B.C., all Egyptian art between 3000 B.C. and 30 B.C. looks almost exactly the same. This is because there were **strict rules** governing the way art had to look.

**“Frontalism:”** Sculpture and paintings followed a rigid formula for representing the human figure which is always depicted with a **front view** of the eye and shoulders and **profile view** of head, arms, and legs. In wall paintings, the surface is divided into horizontal bands separated by lines. The leg is turned to the same side as the head, with one foot placed in front of the other. The head is at right angles to the body. Statues, since they must last forever, are made of hard substances like granite and slate. The pose is always frontal and bisymmetrical, with arms close to the torso. Every figure --whether in paintings or sculptures-- stands or sits with a **formal rigid posture**.

**“Hierarchical Depiction:”** The **size of a figure indicates rank**, with pharaohs presented as giants towering over tiny servants. There were different rules for drawing **animals**, and they are generally depicted more **naturalistically**. Items of the landscape such as water and plants (usually papyrus and lotus flowers) are **stylized**, following a "convention" that makes them always look the same and, therefore, always quickly recognizable.
In this image is a portion of the text of the *Book of the Dead*. In the representation, the deceased’s heart is being weighed under the observation of the deities Isis, Osiris, and Nephthys. Also present are Maat, Thoth, Hor, and Anubis. The creature kneeling before the shrine is a monster who will eat the heart if it fails to pass inspection. This example is from the Ptolemaic period.
Menkaure and Khamerernebty, from Gizeh (Dynasty IV): Menkaure (c. 2490 –2472 BC), (slate) [~4’ 6 ½ ”]

*Menkaure and Khamerernebty* shows the rules of “Frontalism” figure representation applied to sculpture. Both figures have their left foot forward, but there is no hint of forward movement. While the bodies of the pharaoh and his queen are stiff (a symbol of authority), their faces are serene and natural. Although they are cut from stone, they do not stand freely and seem to be part of the rock.
The formula for painting images on a flat surface can be seen in wall paintings in the tomb of Amenemheb at Thebes. The *Fowling Scene* shows the deceased nobleman (Nebamun) standing in his boat and driving birds from a papyrus swamp with this throw-stick. In his right hand, he holds the birds he has caught. His hunting cat, on a papyrus stem in front of him, catches two birds in her claws while holding the wings of a third bird in her teeth. His two companions (probably his wife and daughter) are scaled down in proportion to their rank. Although the water, plants and figures are represented by the usual conventions, the cat, fish, and birds show a naturalism based on visual observation.
Dynasty XVIII: Akhenaton,
(c. 1,353 - 1,335 BC)
(sandstone, ~ 13’ high)
[feminine features]
Hieroglyph: Presenting Gifts to Sun God, (c. 1,350) (sandstone relief)
What makes the **Amarna Style** different from all other Egyptian art is the way the pharaoh and his family are portrayed in relaxed, natural poses as actual human beings rather than in the stiff impersonal poses of Frontalism that ruled Egyptian art up to this time, and after. Akhenaten ordered his artists to allow his physical traits to show through in the artwork, whereas before, everyone looked pretty much alike without showing personal features. In the image above, Akhenaton is shown with a protruding chin, oblong head, thick lips, and a belly that hangs out over his garments. No other pharaoh would allow his physical flaws to be portrayed in stone. It is thought that perhaps Akhenaton wanted to personalize his image so that he would stand out as the pharaoh who revolutionized Egyptian religion and society. Neither the artistic revolution of the Amarna period nor the worship of Aton survived Akhenaton. His successor, the boy-king Tutankhamen, attempted to return to more traditional artistic and religious ideas, but the Armana influence is still evident in the art found in his tomb --possibly because much of the art had been created for Akhenaton himself. After Tutankhamen's brief reign, the old gods were completely reestablished, Akhenaton's monuments were wiped out, his temples were destroyed, and his city was abandoned. Akhenaton's name was deleted from official king lists, and he was thereafter referred to in Egypt as "that criminal of Akhenaton." By 1300 B.C., the rigid, flattened shapes and formality of traditional Frontalism were firmly restored, and it was as if the Amarna Style in Egyptian art had never existed.

After 1000 B.C., Egypt slipped into a long period of decline dominated by priests, and the country was invaded by the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. During the Roman period of rule, around 30 B.C., Egyptian civilization finally came to an end. But Egyptian art exerted a powerful influence on the cultures of the invaders. Early Greek artists acknowledged a debt to Egyptian art in the development of their own styles. The Romans loved Egyptian art so much that they carried countless examples off to Rome and had imitations of Egyptian sculpture carved by Roman artists. The influence of Egyptian art and an interest in Egyptian antiquity have lasted to the present day, and the treasures of the Amarna period that were discovered in the tomb of Tutankhamen are among the most familiar and popular works of art in the world.
Dynasty XVIII: Bust of Nefertiti, (c. 1353 - 1335 BC), (painted limestone) (~1' 8" high)
Death Mask of Tutankhamen, (“King Tut”)  
(Dynasty XVIII):  
(c. 1323 BC)  
[Gold w/ inlay of semiprecious stones]  
(~1’ 9” high)
Sarcophagus of Tutankhamen, (outermost coffin-mummified body of King Tut), (gold inlayed with semi-precious stones)
Ramses II as a Child, 1290-1224 B.C. (Ancient Egyptian)
Mentuemhet, (from Karnak, Egypt), (Dynasty XXVI): (c. 650 BC) [granite] (~4’ 5” high) [return to classical Egyptian depiction]
GREECE
PREHISTORIC (GREEK) AEGEAN ART

Mycenaean (Mainland Greece) (c. 3,000 BC – 1,200 BC)
Minoan (Island of Crete)
Cycladic (Islands of Cyclades)

http://www.ou.edu/finearts/art/ahi4913/aegeanhtml/aegean2.html
Mycenaean:  
Warrior Vase,  
From Mycenae, Greece  
(c. 1,200 BC)  
(~1’ 4” high)
Greek Pottery: Illustration Techniques

Detail: Red Figure Technique

Detail: Black Figure Technique
Exekias:
*Detail: Achilles and Ajax Playing Dice*, black figure Amphora (c. 540 BC) (~2’ high)
**Proto-Geometric** (1000-900 B.C.) Strongly influenced by Aegean pottery. This period coincided with the end of Aegean dark ages.

**Geometric/Orientalizing** (900-600 B.C.) Greek vase painting became very geometric in design and showed influences of Mesopotamian and Egyptian art. The first human form appeared in Greek art.

**Archaic** (600-500 B.C.) Greeks began to experiment with the human form. Vase painting was at its height, sculpture and architecture were being developed.

**Classical** (480-323 B.C.) This was the golden age of Greece. Athens was the cultural center. This period began with the Athenian defeat of the Persians and ended with conquest by the Macedonians and the rule of Alexander the Great. Sculpture and architecture were at their height of achievement.

**Hellenistic** (323-31 B.C.) Alexander the Great died shortly after conquering Greece and his empire was divided among his generals. This was a very diverse period. The idealism of the classical age was lost, but realism gained.

**Roman** (31 B.C.) Augustus conquered Greece for the Roman empire.
The Greeks emerged from the Aegean "dark ages" to become the foundation of western culture. Man began to play a new and important role in art. The Greek philosopher Protagoras said that man is "the measure of all things". The Greeks felt that man's intelligence is what set him apart. This was a time of great intellectual development including the great philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, great teachers like Socrates, and great tragic dramatists, such as Aeschylus, Sophacles, and Euripides.

The Greeks extended their ideas about man into their religion. The Greek gods were created in the image of man, having man's character and weaknesses, with the only difference being that they were immortal. The Greeks felt that man should strive for perfection of both mind and body. The philosophy that characterized these ideas about man was called Humanism. Humanism is a philosophy characterized by concern for human values and interests, distinct from (but not opposed to) otherworldly values of religion (i.e. the Egyptians). So not surprisingly, the human body was the key subject in art.

One characteristic of Greek culture and art that is different from other cultures to this point is that, once established, the culture did not remain strictly the same, but gradually developed and changed. Greek ideas and art were strongly influenced by the Mesopotamians and Egyptians, but the Greeks took those ideas, filtered them, experimented with them and improved on them.
Cycladic: 
*Figurine of a Woman*, 
From Syros, Greece 
(c. 2,500 BC) (marble) 
(~1’ 6” high)
[funerary statue or fertility statue? Debate]
Cycladic: Male Lyre Player, From Keros, Greece (c. 2,700 BC) (~9” high) (marble)
Mycenaean: Funerary Mask, From Mycenae, Greece (c. 1,600 BC) (~1’ high) (beaten gold)
Kouros,  
(the “New York kouros”),  
Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
NYC  
(c. 600 BC)  
(~6’ ½” high) (marble)  
[kouros]
Which one of these images is meant to display the ‘Ideal Male Virtues?’ The choice is obvious...

Your grade depends on it!!!
The first truly monumental stone statues of the Greeks follow very closely the (frontalist) Egyptian format. A life size marble *kouros* ("youth") in New York emulates the stance of Egyptian statues, for example the portrait of Mentuemhet carved only a half century before the Greek statue. In both cases the figure is rigidly frontal with the left foot advanced slightly. The arms are held beside the body, and the fists are clenched with the thumbs forward. This *kouros* even served a funerary purpose. It is said to have stood over a grave in the countryside somewhere near Athens. The *kouros* type, because of its generic quality, could be employed in several different contexts.

Important differences:
1. They were liberated from their original stone block. The Egyptian obsession with permanence was alien to the Greeks, who were preoccupied with finding ways to represent motion rather than stability in their sculptured figures - Addition of *negative space*.
2. The *kouroi* are nude
3. *Kouroi* were painted
“Kroisos,”
kouros statue from Anavysos, Greece (c. 530 BC) (marble) (~6’ 4” high)
Compare/Contrast: Two Kouros

Kroisos

NY Kouros
Compare/Contrast: Two Kouroi

A Statue for a Hero’s Grave

~ 530 BC a young man named Kroisos died a hero’s death in battle, and his grave at Anavysos, not far from Athens, was marked by a kouros statue. The inscribed base invites visitors to “stay and mourn at the tomb of dead Kroisos, whom raging Ares destroyed one day as he fought in the foremost ranks.” The statue, with its distinctive Archaic smile, is no more a portrait of a specific youth than is the New York Kouros.

But two generations later, the Greek sculptor greatly refined the type and, without rejecting the Egyptian stance, rendered the human body in a far more naturalistic manner. The head is no longer too large for the body, and the face is more rounded, with swelling cheeks replacing the flat planes of the earlier work. The long hair does not form a stiff backdrop to the head but falls naturally over the back. Rounded hips replace the V-shaped ridges of the NY Kouros.

The original paint survives in part on the Kroisos statue, enhancing the sense of life. All Greek stone statues were painted. The modern notion that classical statuary was pure white is mistaken. The Greeks did not, however, color their statues garishly. The flesh was left in the natural color of the stone, which was waxed and polished, while eyes, lips, hair, and drapery were painted in encaustic. In this technique the pigment was mixed with wax and applied to the surface while hot.
Getty Kouros,

Name the approximate time period.
Getty Kouros,

Name the approximate time period.
Getty Kouros,

Name the approximate time period
The Federal Communications Commission has asked for a tape of NBC's broadcast of the opening ceremony of the 2004 Summer Olympics after it received at least one indecency complaint. The Aug. 13 tape-delayed broadcast, featuring the history of Athens and Greece, also included male performers representing ancient Greek Kouroi, life-size stone figures of naked young men dating to the sixth century B.C. It wasn't clear whether the images were broadcast. (Wolfgang Rattay/Reuters)
Lady of Auxerre,
(statue of a goddess or kore)
Louvre, Paris
(c. 650 - 625 BC)
(~2’ 1½” high) (limestone)
Peplos Kore,
From the Acropolis, Athens, Greece
(c. 530 BC)
(~4’ high) (marble)
Temple of Aphaia, Aegina, Greece
(c. 500 - 490 BC)
West Pediment of the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina, Greece (c. 500 - 490 BC) (~5’ 8” at center) (marble) Glyptothek, Munich, Germany

(Old assembly: now discredited)
Transition: Archaic/Classical
Dying Warriors, From the Pediments of the Temple of Aphaia, Aegina, Greece (~5’ 2 ½” / ~6’ 1” long) (marble)

Archaic:
West Pediment Figure (Original)
~500 - 490 BC

Classical:
East Pediment Figure (Damaged and Replaced)
~490 – 480 BC
Temple of Aphaia:
Both pediments were filled with life-size statuary and the same subject and similar compositions were employed. The theme was the battle of Greeks and Trojans, with Athena at the center of the bloody combat. She is larger than all the other figures because she is superhuman, but the mortal heroes are all carved at the same scale, regardless of their position in the pediment...

Archaism yields to Classicism:
The sculptures of the Aegina pediments were set in place when the temple was completed ~490 BC. But the pedimental statues at the Eastern end were damaged and replaced with a new group a decade or two later. It is very instructive to compare the earlier and later figures. The West pediment's dying warrior was still conceived in the Archaic mode. His torso is rigidly frontal, and he looks out directly at the spectator. In fact, he smiles at us, in spite of the bronze arrow (now missing) that punctures his chest. He is like a mannequin in a store window whose arms and legs have been arranged by someone else for effective display. The viewer has no sense whatsoever of a thinking and feeling human being.

The later East pediment's comparable figure is radically different. Not only is his posture more natural and more complex, with the torso placed at an angle to the viewer – he is on a par with the painted figures of Euphronios and Euthymides – but he also reacts to his wound as a flesh-and-blood human being would. He knows that death is inevitable, but he still struggles to rise once again, using his shield for support. And he does not look out at the spectator. He is concerned with his pain, not with the spectator. Only a decade, perhaps two, separates the two statues, but they belong to different eras. The later warrior is not the creation of the Archaic world, when sculptors imposed anatomical patterns (and smiles) on statues from without. This statue belongs to the Classical world, where statues move as humans move and possess the self-consciousness of real men and women. This was a radical change in the conception of what a statue was meant to be. In sculpture, as in painting, the Classical revolution had occurred.
Figures from East pediment
Classical Greek:  
*Kritios Boy*,  
From the Acropolis, Athens, Greece  
(c. 480 BC)  
(~2’ 10” high) (marble)  
[contrapposto]
Classical Greek: "Riace Warrior,"
From the sea off Riace, Italy
(c. 450 BC)
(~6’ 6” high) (bronze)
Classical Greek: *Diskobolos*, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original (c. 450 BC) (~5’ 1” high)
Zeus,
From the sea off Cape Artemision, Greece (c. 450 BC) (~6’ 10” high) (bronze)
Classical Greek:
Polykleitos: *Doryphoros*, Roman marble copy after a Greek bronze original (c. 450 BC) (~6’ 11” high)
The Quest for Ideal Form

One of the most frequently copied Greek statues was the *Doryphoros* (*Spear Bearer*) by Polykleitos, a work that epitomizes the intellectual rigor of Classical statuary design. The original is lost (we illustrate a marble copy…from Pompei…where it served as a model for Roman athletes). The *Doryphoros* is the embodiment of Polykleitos’s vision of the ideal statue of a nude male athlete or warrior. In fact, it was made as a demonstration piece to accompany a treatise on the subject…it was originally titled *Canon* [the body of rules, principles, or standards accepted as axiomatic and universally binding in a field of study or art: i.e. the *neoclassical canon*].

The Doryphoros is the culmination of the evolution in Greek statuary from the Archaic *kouros* to the *Kritios Boy* to the *Riace Warrior*. 
Brief Critique:

The *contrapposto* is more pronounced than ever before in a standing statue, but Polykleitos was not content with simply rendering a figure that stands naturally. His aim was to impose order on human movement, to make it “beautiful,” to “perfect” it.

He achieved this through a system of “chiastic,” or cross, balance. What appears to be a casually natural pose is, in fact, the result of an extremely complex and subtle organization of the figure’s various parts…

…although the Doryphoros seems to take a step forward he does not move. This dynamic asymmetrical balance, this motion while at rest, and the resulting harmony of opposites are the essence of the Polykleitan style.
South Porch of the Erechtheion
Classical Greek:
Caryatid from the South Porch of the Erechtheion,
From Athens, Greece
(c. 421 - 405 BC)
(~7’ 7” high) (marble)
[caryatid]
Late Classical:
Praxiteles:
*Hermes and the Infant Dionysus*,
From the Temple of Hera, Olympia, Greece
(c. 340 BC)
(~7’ 1” high) (marble copy)
Hellenistic: Nike of Samothrace, From Samothrace, Greece (c. 190 BC) (~8’ 1” high) (marble) (Louvre, Paris)
Hellenistic:
Alexandros of Antioch-on-the-Meander:
Aphrodite of Melos
— “Venus de Milo,”
From Mycenae, Greece
(c. 150 BC)
(~6’ 7” high) (marble)
Roman: Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes:

Laocoon and his Sons,
From Titus’s palace, Rome, Italy
(1st Century AD)
(~7’ 10” high) (marble)
Laocoon was an intriguing character in Greek mythology. He played a small but significant role in the notorious Trojan war. According to ancient authors, Laocoon was a Trojan priest of Poseidon (some sources claim that he was instead one of Apollo's priests). In mythology, Laocoon was the brother of the hero Anchises and son of Capys. One of our best sources for the story of Laocoon is found in Virgil's Aeneid. In this epic tale, the Roman poet Virgil describes the dramatic scene in which the Trojans discover an enormous Wooden Horse standing outside the city of Troy. The prescient priest Laocoon warns against bringing the gigantic Horse into Troy in a famous speech:

"O my poor people,
Men of Troy, what madness has come over you?
Can you believe the enemy truly gone?
A gift from the Danaans, and no ruse?
Is that Ulysses' way, as you have known him?
Achaeans must be hiding in this timber,
Or it was built to butt against our walls,
Peer over them into our houses, pelt
The city from the sky. Some crookedness
Is in this thing. Have no faith in the horse!
Whatever it is, even when Greeks bring gifts
I fear them, gifts and all."
(Virgil, The Aeneid, Book II, 59-70)

Immediately after saying these words, Virgil has Laocoon hurl his spear into the flank of the Wooden Horse. However, this gesture was to come back to haunt Laocoon. For soon after this incident, while the priest is sacrificing to his god Poseidon, a pair of giant sea serpents emerge from the sea and envelope both Laocoon and his two sons (this tragic scene is immortalized in the famous Hellenistic statue). The Trojans interpret this grotesque punishment as a sign that Laocoon offended the gods - either Athena or Poseidon in particular - for attacking the Wooden Horse. In the end, the Horse in brought into Troy, which is a fatal mistake and seals the city's doom.