





13 Art Materials Children Should Know

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Contents



4 • First artworks:
bone, ivory and wood



8 • When art
celebrates power



12 • Shaping artworks
with clay



14 • Casting beauty



16 • Illuminated art:
from parchment to paper



20 • Glass paintings



26 • Forms and ideas
hidden in stone



24 • Signs of expression

What materials do artists use to make works of art?

Lots of materials! If you explore the pages of this book you will discover that there are no limits to the kinds of materials found in art.

Since ancient times people have learned to transform the materials around them into beautiful things. Wood, stone and animal bones were among the first materials that people fashioned to make objects with a magical or religious meaning. These were the first works of art.

Over time artists have learned to use other materials, while at the same time evolving and perfecting new techniques for working with them. Some techniques were handed down from generation to generation, while others were the fruit of continuous innovation and experiment.

In this book you will find very old works of art side by side with modern art. By seeing the old and the new together, you'll discover how the same basic materials can be worked in many different ways, with many different techniques, and with an eye to what the artist was trying to communicate.

It doesn't matter whether an artwork is made with gold or with garbage. What's important is that it's the creation of an artist, a person who has chosen art as a medium to express himself and the world around him.

Difficult words are explained here.

45 • Glossary



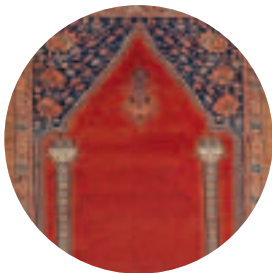
42 • When garbage becomes art



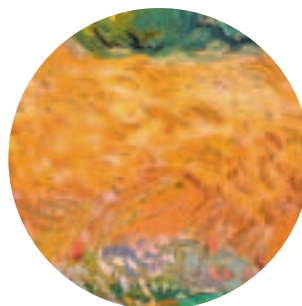
40 • New materials, new ways to express art



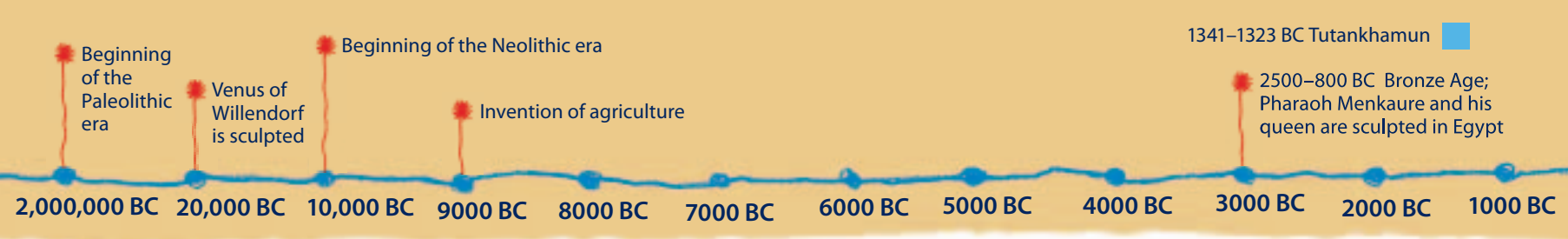
36 • Materials combined



30 • Wool, cotton, silk: the texture of art



32 • Looking for colors




Material:
Bone, ivory, wood

Tools:
Chisel, carving knife,
and other cutting
and modelling tools

Used since:
Palaeolithic Era
(ca. 40,000 years ago)

First artworks: bone, ivory and wood

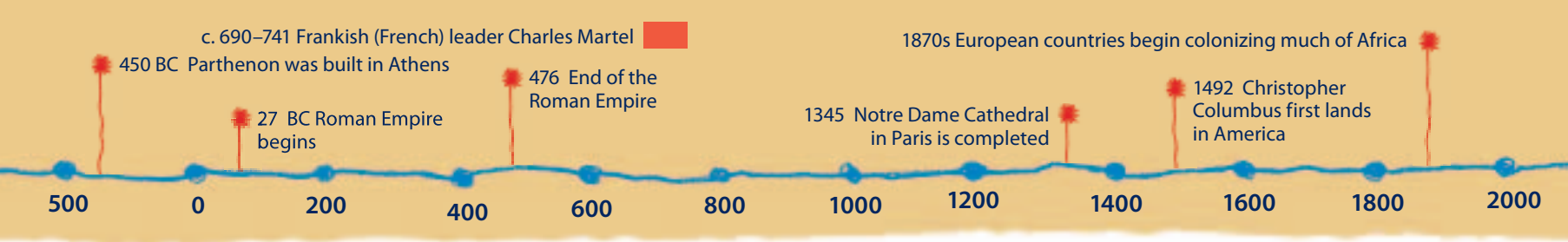
In the safety of dark caves, thousands of years ago, prehistoric people learned how to create the first sculptures from simple materials such as stone, wood and bones.

For thousands of years in the heart of the French Pyrenees mountains, the cave of Mas-d’Azil has preserved the bones of prehistoric* animals—wooly mammoths, wooly rhinos and cave bears. Among these bones archaeologists* also found a remarkable treasure: a reindeer horn only 32 cm (12.6 in) long and carved by an unknown prehistoric artist almost 20,000 years ago!

At one end of the horn this skillful artist depicted a chamois goat in the act of turning its head towards its own tail, where two little birds are sitting! The sculpture is incredibly lifelike, which you can see in the chamois’ lively and attentive look, its legs ready to spring for a big jump, and its accurately carved hooves. It was this careful attention to detail that allowed modern-day experts to determine exactly what animal the artist was depicting.

Perhaps at this point you are wondering: “But what was this object used for?” Archaeologists now believe that it was a tool used by prehistoric people to throw spears farther and faster. The three holes at the base of the stick probably served to fix the tool to the shaft of the spear.

Inside the cave archaeologists also found other things, such as scrapers, needles, wooden spears and decorated pebbles. But none of these



Spear thrower,
ca. 20,000–13,000 BC,
reindeer horn,
Les Mas d'Azil Prehistoric
Museum, Les Mas d'Azil,
France

This carving of a chamois goat, part of an ancient spear-throwing tool, shows how accurately cave-dwelling people could reproduce the animals they hunted.

objects could compare with the beauty of the carved hunting tool. It is truly a masterpiece!

The Mas d'Azil spear thrower is just one example of many tools from the Paleolithic* period with remarkably realistic details. But why did prehistoric* artists reproduce the forms of animals in objects that were made for practical uses?

Did you know?
This spear-throwing tool was found during the last century, during some construction work for a road that now runs partially through the cave of Mas-d'Azil.

Mask, Luba people,
late 19th – early 20th
century, wood and plant
fibers, Ethnological
Museum, Berlin, Germany

Traditional African masks,
which sometimes look
like animal heads, were
often worn to help peo-
ple enter into contact
with the natural world.



The simple answer: they may have wanted
to make something beautiful!

A beautiful object can make you happy, especially
when you show it to others. In fact, archaeologists*
now think that thousands of years ago, something so
beautiful and special as the spear thrower would have brought
prestige — and even magical powers — to its owner.

Perhaps by reproducing the shape of an animal on the spear thrower,
the prehistoric artist wanted to empower this object to make its owner
more successful at hunting: like a good luck charm!

We see something similar in the masks of many African tribal cultures.
These peoples believed that by wearing the masks, they could enter in
direct contact with the forces of nature and the divine. The forms of the
masks vary widely from tribe to tribe. What all of them have in common
are the materials with which they are made: wood, straw and natural
fibres.

Wood was also used as a support structure upon which to attach marvel-
ous ivory sculptures. These objects became popular in Europe during

the Byzantine* period. Ivory, a bone-like material, is rare because it comes from the tusks of elephants. By carefully carving and polishing ivory, artists can make amazingly intricate works of art, such as the tablet shown below. At the center of the tablet is a Roman emperor triumphant on his horse, blessed by a Winged Victory (to his right) and by Jesus Christ (above). Notice how the emperor and horse seem to jump right out of the background!

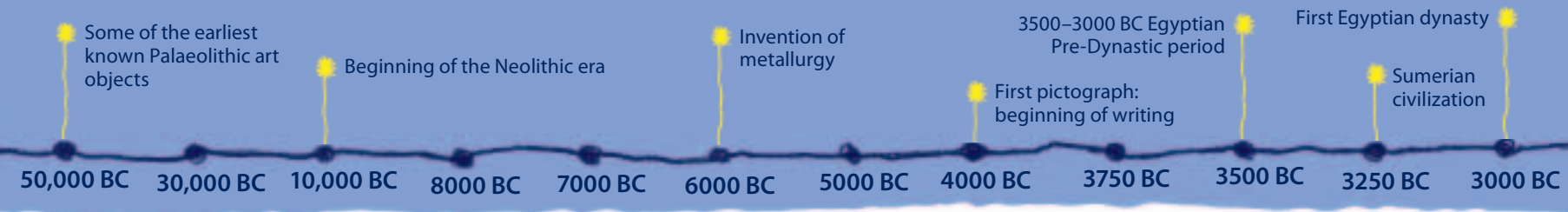


'The Barberini Ivory',
6th century, ivory, Louvre,
Paris, France

This gleaming ivory tablet originally had five intricately carved panels. As you can see, one of the panels (on the right) is missing. Still, we're lucky to have so much of an artwork that is now 1,500 years old!

Quiz

This is not the only artwork in the book that depicts an emperor. On what page can you find another one?



When art celebrates power

Gold was one of the first metals discovered by prehistoric* people. Since ancient times, because of its brightness and malleability, gold has always been a desirable metal for making jewelry.

On the next page you can see a marvelous example of Mycenaean* art: an ancient mask made of gold. It was found in Greece in the 19th century by German archaeologist* Heinrich Schliemann. This object is the most famous and beautiful of all the masks discovered in tombs from the ancient town of Mycenae. When Schliemann later spoke about the mask, he declared "I have gazed on the face of Agamemnon" because he thought the object belonged to Agamemnon, the commanding chief of the Greek army in Homer's *Odyssey**. Even though we now know that the mask didn't belong to Agamemnon, the discovery brought vast fame to Schliemann and helped promote the study of archaeology. The mask shows the austere face of a bearded man, who was certainly a Mycenaean chief.



Material:

Gold, semiprecious stones

Tools:

Smelting (metal melting) equipment, beading tools, hand drill, polishing materials, measuring tools, hammer, fine-toothed saw

Used since:

Late Neolithic Era (ca. 7000 years ago)



Gold processing has a very long tradition in Greece. The ancient goldsmiths used some very sophisticated techniques, and this mask proves it. It was made of one single gold sheet, which was hammered and chiseled with a high-precision tool to bring out the details.

Mycenaean are known to have been a warrior people, and this aspect of their character is often represented in their art and architecture. As you can imagine, precious and beautiful artifacts like the gold mask were made to celebrate the power of their owners.

1811–1750 BC Babylonian King Hammurabi

c. 570–c. 495 BC Greek mathematician Pythagoras

34 BC

2575–2465 BC: The Great Pyramids of Giza are built

ca. 1600–1100 BC Mycenaean Culture in Mycenae

Beginning of the New Kingdom in Egypt

1336–1327 BC reign of Tutankhamun; 1340 BC bust of Nefertiti

460–450 BC 'The Discobolus', or 'Discus Thrower', by the Greek sculptor Myron

conquered by the Roman Empire

2750 BC 2500 BC 2250 BC 2000 BC 1750 BC 1500 BC 1250 BC 1200 BC 1000 BC 750 BC 500 BC 250 BC



Death mask, known as the Mask of Agamemnon, 16th century BC, gold, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece

This glistening mask from the ancient Greek city of Mycenae was almost certainly made for a king. Modern historians, in fact, believe that Mycenaean kings had their tombs filled with golden treasures!

Quiz

Today, women rather than men tend to wear precious jewelry. Can you find an artwork in the next pages that shows a famous bejeweled lady?

