Chapter Guide #1: Art Before History

**CONTEXT:**

* The role of written language as a source for understanding the past
* The importance of understanding the relationship of *context* and *function* when studying art
* Alberti’s theory of *Image by Chance – a Renaissance theory as to the origins of art making*
* *"I believe that the arts of those who attempt to create images and likenesses . . . originated in the following way. They probably observed in a tree-trunk or clod of earth and other similar inanimate objects certain outlines in which, with slight alterations, something very similar to . . . nature was represented. They began . . . [to] take away or otherwise supply whatever seemed lacking to effect and complete the* true likeness.*"*

Alberti in *On Sculpture*

* 75,000 BCE: Stick of ochre (a pigment of the earth, brown/yellow) are engraved in Blombos Cave, South Africa, 61,000 years before the Lascaux caves!
* Earliest works are cave paintings and portable sculptures
* Conjectures are made about the meaning of prehistoric works
* Monuments like Stonehenge show that people were able to build structures made of the post and lintel system.
* The need to create is one of the strongest human impulses.

**CONCEPTS:**

1*:*  origins of art making

* *"image by chance" (*Alberti)
* simplest form of image making: schematic representation = icon / iconic

2: Image-making concepts / ideas (relating to drawing / painting):

* twisted perspective (images of animals in the cave paintings at Lascaux)
* silhouette and contour
* aerial view *versus* side view of a figure/animal (*Why was aerial perspective used ?)*
* “optical” vs “descriptive” views of objects (in two dimensional representational art)

3: animation / animism (as it relates to undulating surface of the caves at Lascaux and ritual)

4: the importance of knowing the *context (*including original site / circumstances of art work)

5: what is *abstraction* and why is it used?

**ART WORK CARDS: 3D (Yellow), 2D (Red), Architecture (Green)**

* Feline headed human, Statuette (3D)
* Statuette ("*Venus of Willendorf*") (3D)
* Cave paintings at Lascaux, France (2D)
* Cave paintings at Altamira, Spain (2D)
* Clay bison at Le Tuc d’Audoubert, France (3D)
* Stonehenge (architecture)

**VOCABULARY:**

shamanism

post & lintel

megalith

contour line

aerial view

twisted perspective

additive sculpture

subtractive sculpture

statuette

relief

**KEY PERIODS:**

**Paleolithic Art**:        40,000-8,000 BCE in the Near East  
    "Old Stone Age"     40,000-4,000 BCE in Europe  
 Hunter-Gatherers, Nomadic

**Neolithic Art**:           8,000- 3,000 BCE in the Near East  
    "New Stone Age"   4,000- 2,000 BCE in Europe  
 Cultivated, raised livestock, organized settlements

**STYLISTIC ANAYLSIS:**

Characteristics of Paintings

* Animal figures dominate- usually with a dark outline
* Humans represented as stick figures
* Lascaux Caves, 15,000- 13,000 BCE, France
* Altimira Caves, Spain

Characteristics of Sculpture

* All in-the-round sculpture is portable
* Some human representations have emphasis on certain body parts
* Carvings on cave walls utilize natural formations in the rock

Characteristics of Architecture

* Shelters out of large animal bones
* Post and lintel systems (most basic type of architecture)
* Stonehenge

**CONTEXT CARDS: Blue**

* Paleolithic
* Neolithic