

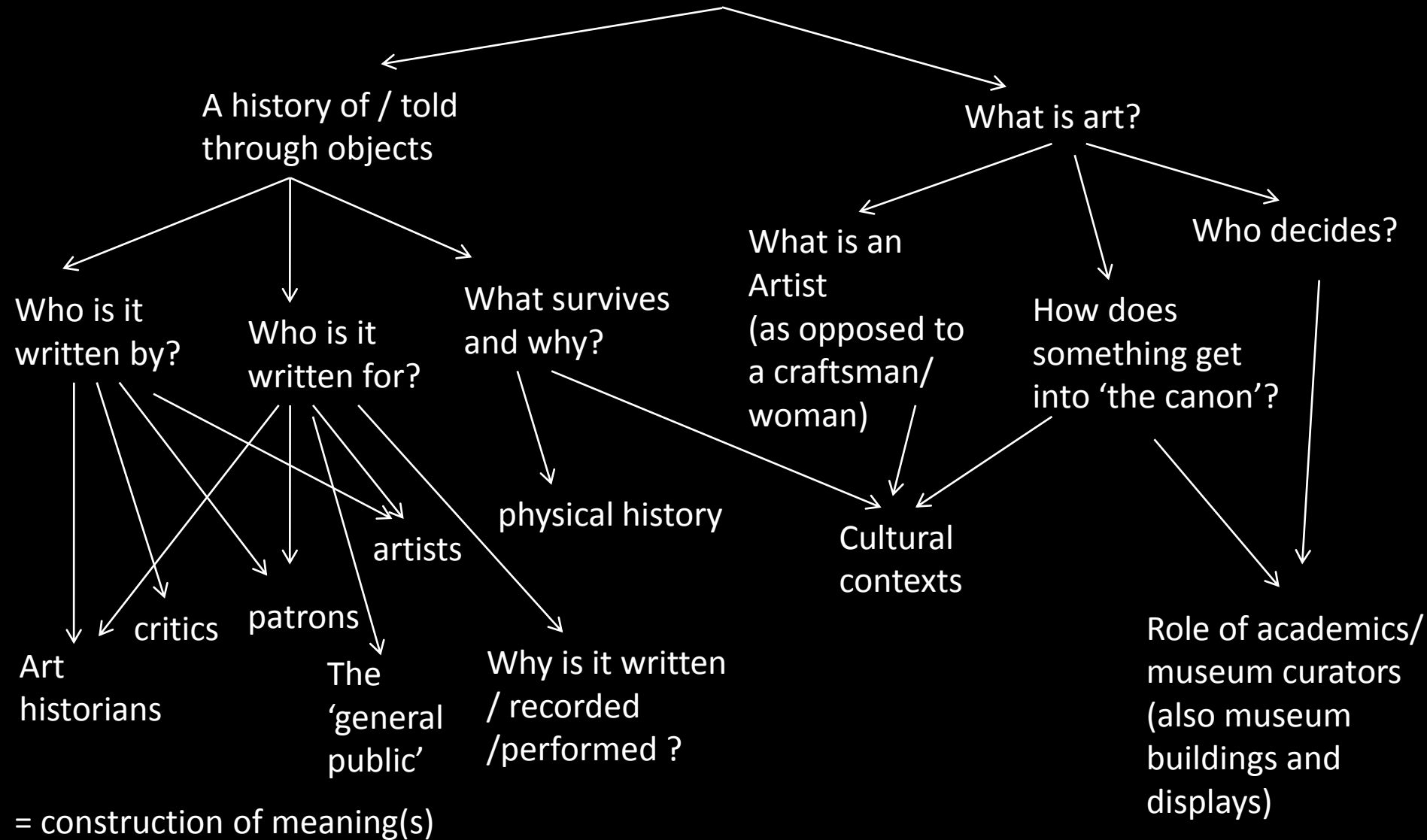
Art History and Historiography

Historiography = 'the writing of history' or the study of how history is written

Methodology = the study of methods applied within a discipline

What is the history of art?

What is the history of art?



The issue of chronology:

Has man/womankind always been essentially the same, or have the ways in which we think fundamentally changed?

Can we apply an approach to a work of any period?

Writing in antiquity:

I Vitruvius, c.90-c.20BC

On Architecture Book 2 Ch 1 'The Origin of Buildings'

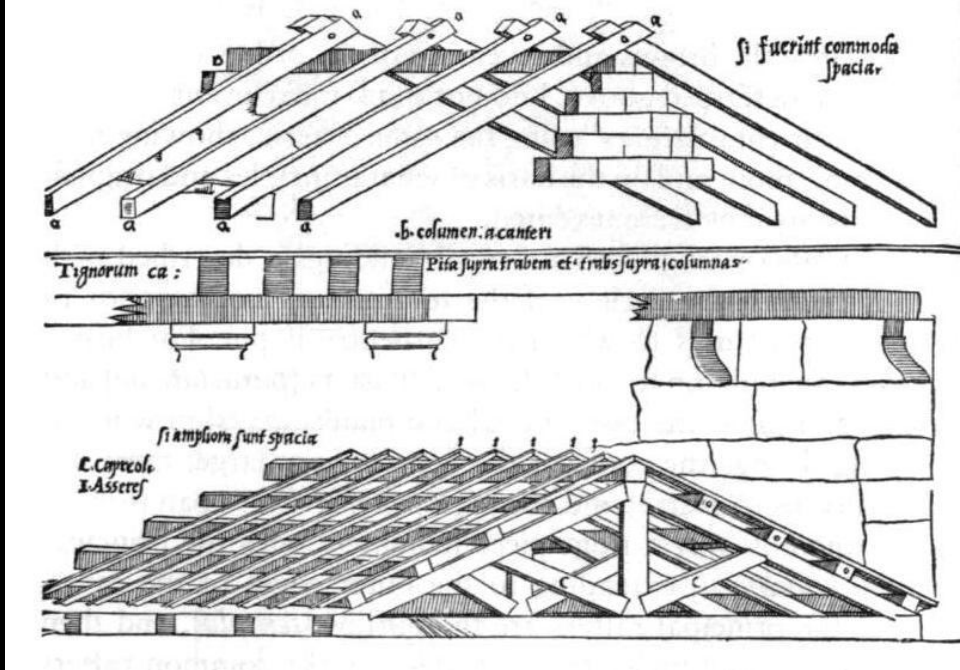
Having discovered fire and developed speech primitive man 'began to make shelters of foliage, others to dig caves at the foot of the mountains and yet others to build refuges of mud and branches in which to shelter in imitation of the nest of swallows and their way of building. Next, by observing each other's shelters and incorporating the innovations of others in their own thinking about them, they built better kinds of huts day by day.

Since men were naturally imitative and quick to learn, they would show each other the results of their building, proud of their inventions, and so, sharpening their wits in competition, became more competent technically every day. At first, after putting up stakes with forked ends any laying branches across them, they covered the walls with mud. Others built walls by drying out lumps of mud, binding them together with wood and covering them with reeds and foliage to avoid the showers and heat. When the roofs proved incapable of resisting showers during winter storms, they made gables, and, having covered the inclined roofs with mud, led the rain down them. [...]

when they had daily become more manually adept at building and had, by cleverly exercising their ingenuity, arrived at a mastery of these arts, then the habit of hard work instilled in their minds also enabled those pursuing these practices most assiduously to proclaim themselves craftsmen. So when these arts had been developed like this at the beginning, and nature had not only enriched human beings with senses like other living being, but had also reinforced their intellectual capacities with powers of reasoning and common sense and had subjected other animals to their power, then men, progressing gradually from the construction of buildings to other arts and disciplines, moved themselves on from their wild, rustic lives to gentle civilization'.

Book IV chapter 2

'carpenters working on other buildings extended the projecting principal rafters so that they were perpendicular to the triglyphs, and then cut off their projections. The result of this was that just as triglyphs were developed from the arrangement of joists, so too the concept of mutules under cornices was evolved from the projection of the principal rafters'.



Treasury of the Athenians, Delphi c.490-480 BC

II Pliny The Elder (23-79AD)

The Natural History

Book 35 'An Account of Painting and Colours'

Chapter v:

'We have no certain knowledge as to the commencement of the art of painting, nor does this enquiry fall under our consideration. The Egyptians assert that it was invented among themselves, six thousand years before it passed into Greece; a vain boast, it is very evident. As to the Greeks, some say that it was invented at Sicyon, others at Corinth; but they all agree that it originated in tracing lines round the human shadow. The first stage of the art, they say, was this, the second stage being the employment of single colours; a process known as "monochromaton", after it had become more complicated, and which is still in use at the present day. The invention of line-drawing has been assigned to Philocles, the Egyptian, or to Cleanthes of Corinth. The first who practised this line-drawing were Aridices, the Corinthian, and Telephanes, the Sicyonian, artists who, without making use of any colours, shaded the interior of the outline by drawing lines; hence, it was the custom with them to add to the picture the name of the person represented. Ecphantus, the Corinthian, was the first to employ colours upon these pictures, made, it is said, of broken earthenware, reduced to powder. We shall show on a future occasion, that it was a different artist of the same name, who, according to Cornelius Nepos, came to Italy with Demaratus, the father of the Roman king, Tarquinius Priscus, on his flight from Corinth to escape the violence of the tyrant Cypselus.'

Chapter 1:

'I shall begin then with what still remains to be said with reference to painting, an art which was formerly illustrious, when it was held in esteem both by kings and peoples, and ennobling those whom it deigned to transmit to posterity. But at the present day, it is completely banished in favour of marble, and even gold. For not only are whole walls now covered with marble, but the marble itself is carved out or else marqueted so as to represent objects and animals of various kinds. No longer now are we satisfied with formal partitions of marble, or with slabs extended like so many mountains in our chambers, but we must begin to paint the very stone itself!'

Writing in the Middle Ages

I Bernard of Clairvaux

Apologia written c.1125

‘instead of candlesticks we see what might be called trees, devised with a great amount of bronze in an extraordinary achievement of craftsmanship, which gleam no more through their lights than through their gems. What do you think is being sought in all this? The compunction of penitents, or the astonishment of those who gaze at it? O vanity of vanities, but no more vain than insane! The Church is radiant in its walls and destitute in its poor. It dresses its stones in gold and it abandons its children naked. It serves the eyes of the rich at the expense of the poor.’

‘apart from this, in the cloisters, before the eyes of the brothers while they read – what is that ridiculous monstrosity doing, an amazing kind of deformed beauty and yet a beautiful deformity? [...] You may see many bodies under one head, and conversely many heads on one body. [...] In short, everywhere so plentiful and astonishing a variety of contradictory forms is seen that one would rather read in the marble than in books, and spend the whole day wondering at every single one of them, rather than meditating on the law of God. Good God! If one is not ashamed of the absurdity, why is one not at least troubled at the expense?’

II Hugh of Saint Victor

Didascalicon, composed 1120s

Book 6

Divine Scripture is like a building, in which, after the foundation has been laid, the structure itself is raised up; it is altogether like a building, for it too has a structure. [...] Take a look at what the mason does. When the foundation has been laid, he stretches out his string in a straight line, he drops his perpendicular, and then, one by one, he lays the diligently polished stones in a row. [...]

The foundation which is under the earth we have said stands for history, and the superstructure which is built upon it we have said suggests allegory. [...] The superstructure rises in many courses of stones, and each course has its basis. Even so, many mysteries are contained in the Divine Page and they have their bases from which they spring'.



And God created the heavens and the earth, sun, moon and all the elements.

God creating the world from a Moralised Bible, early thirteenth century.

The birth of Art History?

Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574)

The Lives of the Artists

Preface:

'I know it is an opinion commonly accepted among almost all writers that sculpture, as well as painting, was first discovered in nature by the peoples of Egypt; and that some others attribute to the Chaldeans the first rough carvings in marble and the first figures in relief; just as still others assign to the Greeks the invention of the brush and the use of colour. But I would say that design, the basis of both arts, or rather the very soul which conceives and nourishes within itself all the aspects of the intellect, existed in absolute perfection at the origin of all other things when God on High, having created the great body of the world and having decorated the heavens with its brightest lights, descended with His intellect further down into the clarity of the atmosphere and the solidity of the earth, and, shaping man, discovered in the pleasing invention of things the first form of sculpture and painting'.

Rome as cultural highpoint –

‘But because after carrying men to the top of her wheel , either for amusement or out of regret Fortune usually returns them to the bottom, it came to pass that almost all of the barbarian nations in various parts of the world rose up against the Romans , and, as a result, not only did they bring down so great an empire in a brief time but they ruined everything, especially in Rome itself. With Rome’s fall the most excellent craftsmen, sculptors, painters and architects were likewise destroyed, leaving their crafts and their very persons buried and submerged under the miserable ruins and the disasters which befell that most illustrious city. Painting and sculpture were the first to go to ruin, since they are the arts that serve more to delight us than anything else; and the other one, that is architecture, since it was necessary and useful to the welfare of the body, continued, but no longer in its former perfection and goodness’.