

United States Art and Architecture

Task1: Read and answer the questions

The first American artists were native people who had lived in America for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans.

However, most permanent settlements in North America were English, and England became the main influence on early American painting, sculpture, and building styles.

Colonial Period

No art schools existed in America for about 200 years after the first settlements. Much colonial art was created by people who had no formal artistic training. These folk artists produced many decorative objects, including painted shop signs, wooden toys and figures, metal weathervanes, and carved tombstones. They also painted portraits that were unsophisticated but honest.

Most early buildings in the colonies were made of wood--first logs and later wooden frames with clapboard siding. Houses had massive chimneys and steeply pitched roofs. By the end of the colonial period, however, many buildings were made of brick or stone.

Federal Period

The early years of independence, from 1783 to about 1825, are known as the Federal period. The artists often modeled their works on classical Roman art and architecture. One of the leading Federal architects was Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who became the third president of the United States. His design for the state capitol in Richmond, Virginia, completed in 1796, is based on a famous Roman temple. Later, Jefferson designed the University of Virginia library after the Roman Pantheon.

1. Who were the first American artists?

a) European settlers b) Native people c) African slaves

2. What influenced early American painting, sculpture, and building styles?

a) Spanish b) English c) French

3. What types of objects did colonial folk artists produce?

a) Stained glass windows b) Metal sculptures c) Carved tombstones

4. Which material were most early colonial buildings constructed from?

a) Stone b) Brick c) Wood

5. Who was one of the leading Federal architects known for modeling works on classical Roman art and architecture?

a) George Washington b) Thomas Jefferson c) Benjamin Franklin

6. What was Thomas Jefferson's design inspiration for the state capitol in Richmond, Virginia?

a) Gothic architecture b) Egyptian architecture c) Roman temple

7. In which period did the early years of independence occur?

a) Colonial Period b) Federal Period c) Victorian Period d) Renaissance Period

8. Which structure did Thomas Jefferson design after the Roman Pantheon?

a) State Capitol in Richmond, Virginia b) White House c) University of Virginia library

Task 2. Read and fill in the articles where necessary.

Mid-1800's

Beginning in 1)_____ 1820's, landscape painters glorified the country's natural beauty, painting romantic views of the wilderness. One influential group of landscape artists was known as 2)_____ Hudson River School because they painted scenes in and around 3)_____ Hudson Valley in New York.

In architecture, interest continued in styles of the past and the architects turned to 4)_____ ancient Greece and to the architecture of 5)_____ Middle Ages for 6)_____ inspiration. There were two main styles: 7)_____ Greek Revival and 8)_____ Gothic Revival. Many other styles appeared--so many that architecture of 9)_____ period is often described as 10)_____ "battle of the styles." American sculptors of 11)_____ late 1800's often imitated 12)_____ European sculpture, especially works from the Renaissance.

Task 3. Read and answer the questions.

Early 1900's

Many artistic trends of the late 1800's continued as America entered the 20th century. Gradually, however, signs of a new movement, called modernism, appeared.

In the early 1900's, skyscrapers continued to be built across America. The 56-story Woolworth Building (1913) in New York City was designed by the noted architect Cass Gilbert (1859-1934). It was the world's tallest building for 17 years until it was surpassed by the Chrysler Building (1930) and the Empire State Building (1931). Both these skyscrapers are in New York City.

Perhaps the most distinguished architect of the 1900's was Frank Lloyd Wright (1869-1959).

Painting and Sculpture

Post-war painters expressed their feelings in a style called abstract expressionism. Abstract expressionist paintings typically have no recognizable subject and no familiar sense of space. They are flat and appear disorderly, yet they are often very beautiful. Their meaning may be completely understood only by the artist.

One important abstract expressionist was Jackson Pollock (1912-56). Pollock developed an unusual way of painting. He would splash and drip paints onto a large canvas until it was covered with pigment. The finished work had a feeling of energy and movement.

Architecture

Tall steel and glass buildings came to dominate the skylines of cities across the country. But certain architects moved away from the international style toward a less impersonal building style. Some used cast concrete to create expressive shapes. Other architects broke completely with the simplicity of the international style, which they considered boring and repetitive. As the 20th century neared an end, postmodernists were among the many painters, sculptors, and architects who contributed to the continuing vitality of the arts in the United States.

1. What new movement in American Art appeared at the beginning of the 20th century?
2. What famous skyscrapers were built in the 1930s?
3. What is a particular feature of abstract expressionism?
4. What contribution did the men of Art do by the end of the 20th century?