

Chapter 3: Significance of Materials Used in Art

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3.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the differences among valuation of art materials, especially with regard to intrinsic qualities of raw material versus produced objects
- Discuss the differences between monetary and cultural values for works of art
- Discuss the idea of “borrowed” significance that comes with the re-use of components from previous artworks
- Describe the significance of value added to objects by complex artistic processes or by changing tastes in different eras

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Among the aspects of an artwork that evoke response, aid understanding, and contribute meaning will be the material(s) used in its creation. These materials might make it more or less important, more or less valuable, or might bring a variety of associations that are not inherent in the essential form. For example, you might recognize a vase not merely as a vase, but as a Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933, USA) Favrile glass vase. (Figure 3.1) Knowing the creator, material, and special processes involved in the artwork's creation would add to and might change your perception and appreciation in several important respects. For example, you could link it to an important artist, an innovative artistic technique, a significant period in American décor and manufacturing and marketing, a valuation based on its collectability, and numerous other interesting details about its creation and use.



Figure 3.1 | Bowl

Artist: Louis Comfort Tiffany

Source: Met Museum

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The most apparent choices in this regard are for three-dimensional forms such as sculpture and architecture, where it is more likely that costly and precious materials such as gold, silver, gems, marble, or bronze are used in its creation. The distinction among material choices for drawing and paintings will also have certain effects for their meanings. For example, if a painter applied **gold leaf**, 22K gold pounded into extremely thin sheets, to a painting's surface, the monetary and cultural value of the work increases. (Figure 3.2) The **monetary value** refers to the amount a buyer is willing to pay, which in this case includes the cost of the materials the artist factors into the price of the artwork. The **cultural value** is the perceived quality or merit of the work: what it is worth according to that culture's standards of artistic importance or excellence. If a work of art has high monetary or cultural value, the owner's reputation and status are, in turn, elevated.

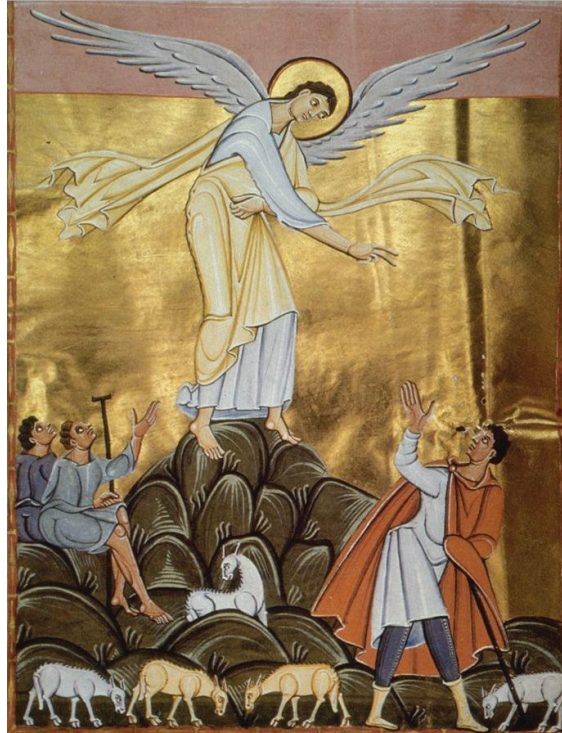


Figure 3.2 | *Annunciation to the Shepherds*, illumination from the *Book of Pericopes* (Lectionary) of Henry II, fol. 8v, 1002-1012 CE.

Source: Artstor.org
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Without considering each and every possibility in this regard, we should look at a few pointed examples that will help us know what to consider when we examine artworks with a view to the choices of materials that the artist (or patron) must have made. The techniques for many of these is discussed in greater detail in other parts of the text, so our primary focus here will be on the intrinsic materials, although the ways they are worked, used, and combined are inextricably significant in some of these cases.

3.3 UTILITY AND VALUE OF MATERIALS

The earliest drawings, paintings, vessels, and sculptures were made with whatever the artists could find and turn to their use for creating images and objects; such readily-available material includes mud, clay, twigs, straw, minerals, and plants that they could use directly or with slight alteration, such as grinding and mixing minerals with water to apply to cave walls. (Figure 3.3) Experimentation was surely part of the process and, just as surely, much of it is lost to us now, although we have some examples of works, materials, and tools to give us insight into the artistic processes and material choices.



Figure 3.3 | Reproduction of a bison of the cave of Altamira

Author: User "Rameessos"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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For example, in works such as this **earthenware**, or baked clay, vessel, the artist had explored sufficiently to discover that mixing a certain type of earth in certain proportions with water would yield a flexible substance. The resulting clay could be **handbuilt**, generally by wrapping and smoothing coils, into a vessel shaped with a conical bottom that would sit nicely in a coal fire for heating its contents. (Figure 3.4) A twig or string might be used to incise marks in the surface, not only to decorate it, but also to make it easier to hold onto than if it were completely smooth. Dating to c. 3,500 BCE, pots such as this from the late Neolithic era in Korea are known as Jeulmun pottery, meaning “comb-patterned.” The clay could be found in different colors, textures, density, potential for adherence, etc. It could be manipulated by hand to make containers to store, transport, cook, or serve all sorts of goods.



Figure 3.4 | Korean neolithic pot, found in Busan

Author: User "Good friend100"

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The invention of the potter's wheel allowed artists to "throw" the clay on a rotating platform the artist operated by hand or powered with a kicking motion. When and where the potter's wheel first appeared is much debated, but it was widely used in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Southeast Asia before 3,000 BCE. Using a potter's wheel allowed the artist to turn vessels with thinner walls, a greater variety of and more uniform shapes and sizes, and a larger array of painted and incised decorative elements for additional aesthetic appeal. They could, as well, make molds for serial production of commonly used types of pots.

By the time of the Ming Dynasty in China (1368-1644), vases such as this from the Xuande period (1426-1435) painted in imperial (cobalt) blue and white display both the technical innovations and the remarkable degree of refinement achieved. (Figure 3.5) The development of such mineral resources as kaolin and petuntse allowed ceramicists to create porcelain, one of the most refined and hardest types of pottery, which became known as "china" because of the origins of the materials and processes; chinaware was soon emulated the world over for its beauty and utility as tableware and décor. Traders from Portugal returned from China with chinaware (porcelain vessels) in the sixteenth century. The semi-translucent material, elegant shapes, and glass-like, intricately decorated surfaces of the pots were unlike anything produced in Europe at that time. The demand for such wares quickly spread throughout Europe, and ceramicists on that continent spent the next two centuries trying to unlock the secret of how to create such smooth, white, and hard pottery. Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus and Johann Friedrich Böttger, both

employed for that purpose by Augustus II the Strong, Elector of Saxony (today Germany) and King of Poland (r. 1694-1733), are credited with producing the first European porcelain in 1708. It would become known as Meissen ware because it was produced at the factory set up in the town by Augustus II for that purpose to safeguard the formula and maintain his exclusive control over the creation and sale of European porcelain. (Figure 3.6)



Figure 3.5 | A Ming dynasty Xuande mark and period (1426-1435) imperial blue and white vase

Author: User "Meliere"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Figure 3.6 | Teapot

Artist: Königliche Porzellan Manufaktur
Author: Walters Art Museum
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The monopoly held by Augustus II was short-lived, however, as the secret was sold and a competing factory opened in Vienna, Austria, by 1717. From there, variations of the formula and the production of porcelain spread throughout Europe as demand increased from the privilege of royalty, to the rich and titled, and eventually to all who could afford the status-giving ware. For example, this nineteenth-century commemorative pitcher made by the American Porcelain Manufacturing Company would have been presented to specially mark an occasion. (Figure 3.7) Although it is a distant relative of Chinese imperial porcelain ware and the royal courts of Europe, the techniques and materials used in its creation were still associated with tradition, wealth, and high social standing, elevating the cultural value of this mass-produced vessel to the level of a keepsake or even a family heirloom. Objects such as this are valued beyond their monetary worth or utilitarian purposes, both due to the tactile and aesthetic qualities that come from the physical substance and techniques used and to historical and social associations they hold.



Figure 3.7 | Pitcher

Artist: American Porcelain Manufacturing Company
Source: Met Museum
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Similarly, drawing and painting, apparently first confined to the rock walls of nature, were areas of exploration for artists who later applied color to the built walls of architecture, and then to portable objects of various types. Ceramic ware was decorated with images from nature, pictorial

and narrative motifs, and messages of myth, power, and even everyday life. The same is true of tomb walls of Egypt (Figure 3.8), palace walls in ancient Iraq, ([Ashurnasirpal II with Attendants and Soldier](#)) and Greek vessels used for practical or ritual purposes (Figure 3.9).



Figure 3.8 | Egyptian tomb wall painting

Author: British Library

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Figure 3.9 | Terracotta krater

Source: Met Museum

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Eventually such vessels, as well as books and other objects, bore written information and pictorial explications of textual content: illustrations. Early textual works were often inscribed on

stone tablets to ensure their durability or on relatively fragile materials like papyrus that required laborious preparation to make it suitable for conveying information. In either case, the materials used added to the work's significance. By the time of the development of the **codex** (probably in the Roman era), or manuscript with bound pages, the most common form of modern physical books, the choice material was animal skin, as seen in manuscripts throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, roughly the beginning of the fourth to the fifteenth centuries, in the Western and the Middle Eastern regions of the world. (Figures 3.10 and 3.11) Sheepskin, or parchment, the most commonly used support for written works, was obtained by laborious preparation of the pelts, through scraping and buffing the surface to make it suitable for use by scribes and illustrators who added the words and pictures. The most refined book arts were often presented on **vellum**, or calfskin, prized for its smoother and finer surface. When used for especially important works or those made for royal purposes, it was often dyed purple or dark blue, with script applied in gold or silver ink and illustrations that included areas of gold or silver. (see Figure 3.2) These lustrous images were known as **illuminations**, that is, given light. The viewer would at once recognize the special and distinctive treatment implied by the use of such precious materials and know that the patron had paid well for an elegant and important book.



Figure 3.10 | Historiated Letter L, with illustration of the Tree of Jesse, Capuchin's Bible, f. 7v, c. 1180.

BNF

Author: User "Soefrm"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Figure 3.11 | Kitab al-Bulhan: Middle Eastern House and Lifting Machine, Arab scientific manuscript

leaf. 1. 14th century

Author: User "Peacay"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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3.4 PRECIOUS MATERIALS, SPOLIA, AND BORROWED GLORY

Objects made for sacred or royal use were often wrought of such lavish and treasured components as vellum, silk, linen, wool, ivory, gold, silver, gems, and rare stones and minerals. Frequently crafted for further refinement, such works show their precious properties to advantage. In ancient Rome/Byzantium, there were quarries for **porphyry**, a rich purple marble stone (the basis for the association of the color purple with royalty). Because it was restricted to royal purposes, its very appearance carried connotations of the imperial significance of any work made from it. It was often used for columns and other architectural components that thereby accentuated important structures or parts of them. Once the imperially controlled mines were abandoned in the fifth century CE, new items could not be made of porphyry, so older monuments were sometimes pillaged and re-used, with the royal significance transferred to the plunderers, implying not only the replacement of the old order by the new, but also the superiority of the conquerors.

Porphyry burial containers were especially prized in antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Constantina was the eldest daughter of Emperor Constantine the Great (r. 306-337 CE), the Roman ruler who in 313 CE decreed early Christians could practice their faith without persecution and confiscated land should be returned to the Church. Although Constantine considered himself a Christian, he did not abandon the Roman gods and religious rituals. For example, in 321 CE he stated that Christians and pagans alike should observe the day of the sun (later named Sunday); the cult of the sun god had been popularly observed in Roman culture for centuries, and associations of the sun as the source of light, warmth, and life had been adopted by those of the Christian faith. Constantine, according to legend, was baptized a Christian on his deathbed in 337 CE.

When his daughter Constantina died in 354 CE, she was entombed in a porphyry **sarcophagus**, or stone coffin, that was richly carved with motifs from both the pagan Roman and Christian faiths. (Figure 3.12) There are small, winged cupids gathering grapes among garlands of grape vines with peacocks and a ram below on the front and back of the coffin, and cupids treading on grapes on both ends. In Roman mythology, such scenes were associated with Bacchus (known to the Greeks as Dionysus), the god of the wine harvest and wine making who as a baby was reborn after having been slaughtered by the Titans. Interpreted as Christian motifs, the cupids, who became known as **putti** or small, winged angels, are seen as preparing the grapes for the **Eucharist**, the sacrament commemorating the Last Supper by consecration of the bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Such re-imaging and re-purposing of motifs and their meanings were frequently seen at this time of transition from paganism to Christianity; further, having been adopted by Constantine and his family, they were associated with imperial power and carried connotations of the Christian conquest of paganism.



Figure 3.12 | Sarcophagus of Constantina

Author: User "Jean-Pol GRANDMONT"

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Later, in the eighth and ninth centuries CE, Charlemagne (r. 768-814 CE) used pillaged porphyry columns inside arches on the upper level of his imperial chapel, a building intended for his own entombment. (Figure 3.13) The Palatine Chapel (c. 796-798 CE, consecrated 805 CE) was part of the palace complex Charlemagne had built at Aachen, in what is now Germany. The interior of the chapel is an octagon topped by a dome supported by heavy piers with arches on the second level, where the imperial throne is located, with a view to the high **altar** (the table or other surface where religious rituals are carried out) located across the church on the first floor below. (Figure 3.14) The design of the building is modeled on **mausolea**, or buildings containing tombs, and churches from the late Roman, early Christian, and early Byzantine periods (fourth-seventh centuries), such as San Vitale (526-647 CE) in Ravenna, Italy. (Figure 3.15) Charlemagne, who was not only King of the Franks and King of the Lombards but was also crowned as the first Holy Roman Emperor in 800 CE, used that design and the plundered columns to signify the revival and replacement of the old Roman Empire with his own reign as a Christian world ruler.



Figure 3.13 | Aachen, Palace Chapel of Charlemagne. c. 800

Author: User "Velvet"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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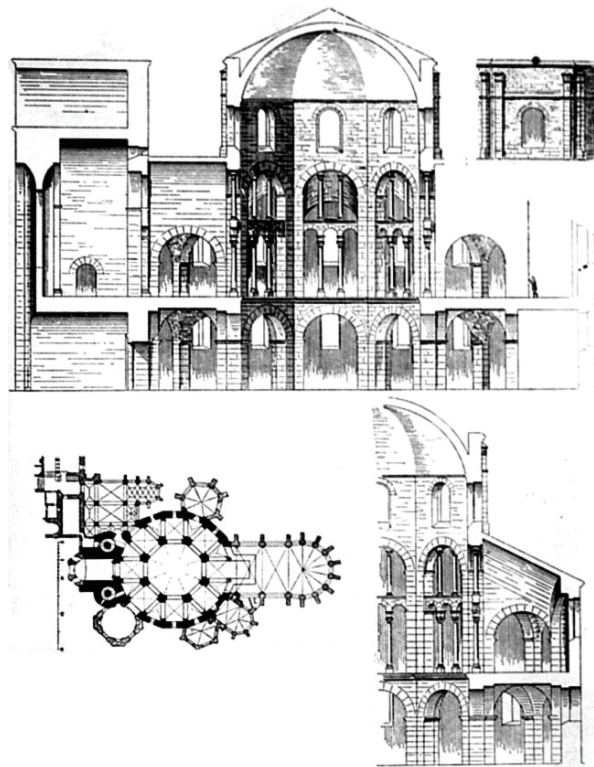


Figure 3.14 | Cross-sections of the Palace Chapel of Aachen

Author: User "Sir Gawain"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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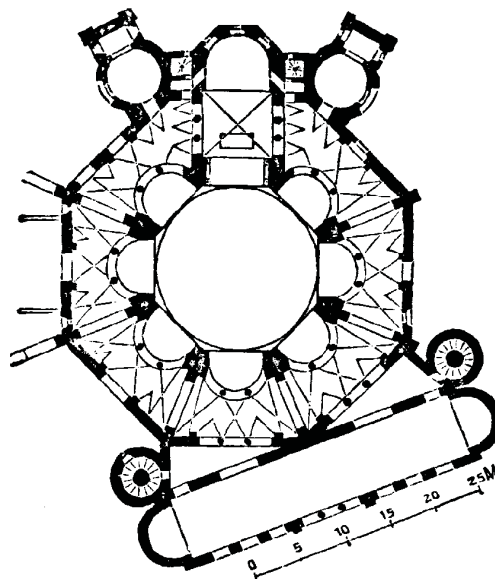


Figure 3.15 | San Vitale, Ravenna

Author: User "Väsk"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Among others, Holy Roman Emperor Henry (or Heinrich) II (r. 973-1024) similarly borrowed and supplanted Charlemagne's glory by adopting his palace complex at Aachen and adding to its structure and furnishings with his own statements of imperial power. Henry II commissioned a lavish pulpit for the chapel that was completed in 1014. (Figure 3.16) The semi-circular pulpit has a smaller semi-circle to either side, a shape known as a **trefoil**. The center is made up of nine rectangular panels covered with **chased** gilt copper that has been formed by hammering into low relief images of the Four Evangelists. The panels are adorned with gemstones and embellished with **enamel**, powdered glass fused to the surface by heat, and **filigree**, beads or threads of gold or silver arranged in designs on a metal surface. The three ivory panels on each of the smaller semi-circles depict pagan mythological figures; the panels were made in Egypt in the sixth century CE. Re-used parts such as the porphyry columns, gemstones, and ivory panels are known as **spolia**, remnants that had been taken from older art and architecture and incorporated into new art objects and places with the implications of conquest, superiority, and heritage for the new patrons.



Figure 3.16 | Ambon (11th century) of Henry II, Holy Roman Emperor. Aachen Cathedral, Germany.

Author: User "HOWI"

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Another, later Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick I (r. 1155-1190), and his wife, Beatrice, commissioned a chandelier to hang below the octagonal dome in the chapel. (Figure 3.17) This was called the Barbarossa chandelier, reflecting the emperor's nickname after his red beard; it was

installed between 1165 and 1170 in honor of the Virgin Mary and as a tribute to Charlemagne. The chandelier's forty-eight candles cast a tremendous spread of light in an age when artificial illumination was costly, emphasizing its association with earthly wealth and heavenly light.



Figure 3.17 | The Barbarossa chandelier

Author: User "Lokilech"

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As a continuation of the work undertaken by his grandfather Frederick I, which also included exhuming Charlemagne's bones, Frederick II (r. 1220-1250), following the plans Barbarossa had made, completed the creation of a lavish, new jeweled and gilded shrine for the remains of Charlemagne, seeking to elevate him to the rank of sainthood. These statements in rich material forms, imply the surpassing glory of their imperial predecessor, shared by those who followed in his lineage. Moreover, the associations of royalty and honor for earthly rulers was often intertwined in very pointed ways to artwork associated with the Christian God and saints. Notable in this regard is the shrine for Charlemagne—clearly a statement of imperial power—made of rich materials that reflect popular Christian notions of the Heavenly Jerusalem, where these saintly rulers were thought to act as intercessors for the believer. (Figures 3.18 and 3.19) Often such imperial works actually featured objects or significant decorative details from imperial Roman works, such as the antique cameo of the Roman Emperor Augustus that was applied to the *Cross of the Emperor Lothair II*. (Figures 3.20 and 3.21) The gilded cross, dated to c. 1000, is covered with 102 gemstones and thirty-two pearls and has a rock crystal seal near its base bearing a portrait of Lothair II (r. 835-869). Including the portraits of earlier emperors further emphasized the wealth and power of the ruler who had it made, believed to be Otto III (r. 983-1002). In addition, gemstones on such devotional works were selected for their qualities associated with

healing, good fortune, the ability to ward off evil, and their mystical translucence, that fostered spiritual illumination.



Figure 3.18 | Shrine of Charlemagne, Interior of palatine chapel in Aachen Cathedral, Germany.

Author: User "ACBahn"

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Figure 3.19 | Shrine of Charlemagne

Author: User "HOWI"

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Figure 3.20 | Cross of Lothair

Author: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas

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Figure 3.21 | Augustus cameo

Author: User "Absalypson2"

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3.5 LIQUIDATION OF TREASURES

Works such as these often implied the storing of riches as heavenly treasure and also represented a means of storing material wealth that could be used for mundane purposes in time

of need. We have records of a number of extravagant shrines and **liturgical** (relating to worship) furnishings that have not survived because they were taken apart and sold to feed a famine-stricken community or to provide for a new building project or an updated expression of devotion. Such works as the sumptuous Screen of Charlemagne (Figure 3.22) and the enormous Stavelot Altarpiece (Figure 3.23) are known to us only from drawings and small fragments that remain from the original objects. The disappearances of such works indicate that their rich material components, while once intrinsic to their great spiritual implications, at some point came to be seen as an important source of wealth that could be put to other use.

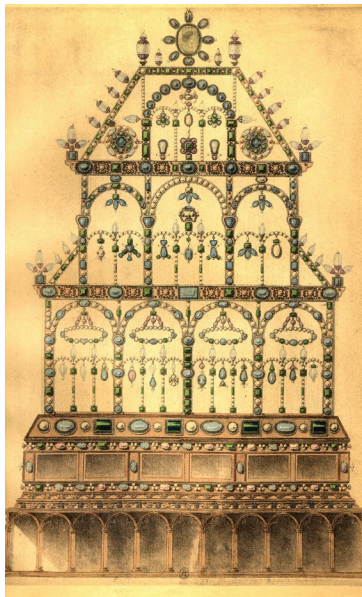


Figure 3.22 | Screen of Charlemagne

Artist: Piersac

Source: www.medart.pitt.edu

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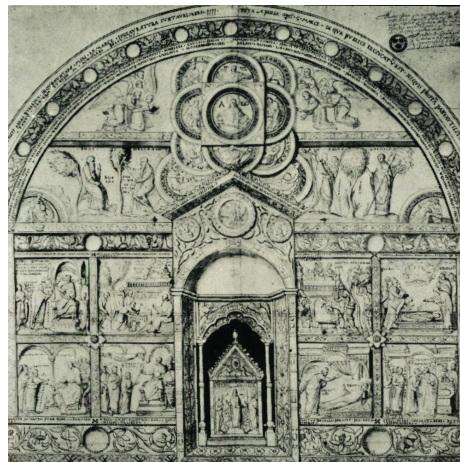


Figure 3.23 | The mid-12th-century silver altar piece surrounding the shrine of Saint Remaclus

Author: User "Kleon3"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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3.6 WOOD, INLAY, AND LACQUER

Sculptures, objects, and architectural components of wood were also fashioned with a view to their monetary and cultural value. Some varieties of wood are more rare, others have qualities that make them easier to work in certain types of process, and there have been waves of “fashion” in wood choices at many eras. For example, lindenwood and limewood are associated with the Middle Ages, mahogany with eighteenth-century England and Scotland, oak with the Arts and Crafts work of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, and delicately lacquered wooden goods with Yuan Dynasty China.

Wooden sculpture was a far more predominant art form than painting in northern Europe during the Romanesque (c. 1000-1200) and Gothic periods (c. 1200-1500) in that region. The material favored was lindenwood or limewood due to the fineness of the wood’s grain, which allowed the sculptor to carve intricate detail. Generally, the sculpture was then **polychromed**, or painted, to increase the lifelike quality of the figure. Suggesting that spark of life was important in works such as *The Throne of Wisdom* because Mary, the compassionate and merciful Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, was believed to have the power to intercede with her Son, the infant Christ, on behalf of the faithful. (Figure 3.24)



Figure 3.24 | Throne of Wisdom

Author: User "Okapi07"

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Mahogany was discovered as a marketable wood by European explorers and traders in the Caribbean islands, Central America, and South America by the seventeenth century. The naturally reddish-brown wood was prized for its beauty and strength and, throughout the 1700s, was frequently used in England and Scotland to create fine furniture for the market there and in the American colonies. A table such as this was a status symbol indicating the owner's wealth and taste, which was further enhanced by its use: this was not a utilitarian piece but a display table for chinaware. (Figure 3.25)



Figure 3.25 | China table

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

The Arts and Crafts movement began in England in the middle of the nineteenth century, but quickly spread throughout Europe and to the United States. In a time of growing industrialization, with an ever greater number of people moving to urban areas, working in factories, and consuming machine-made goods, some felt the need to reclaim the handmade. With romantic associations of simpler times, greater authenticity, and individual labor, furniture and decorative objects made as part of the Arts and Crafts movement were prized for their workmanship, design based on forms from nature, and respect for the natural materials used. For example, this cabinet is thought to have been made by Daniel Pabst (1826-1910, Germany, lived

United States), one of the leading furniture makers of his day. It features elaborately carved surfaces and **inlay**, where one material is cut and fit into another in complex patterns. (Figures 3.26 and 3.27) Although the types of wood used—walnut, maple, and white pine—are not exotic or rare, the mastery with which they have been painstakingly cut and applied conveys a sense of preciousness. Inlay techniques were often used to provide visual contrast and to emphasize both the distinctive and diverse qualities among the materials brought together and the refined craftsmanship involved. A piece of furniture made with such skill was prized for its singularity and for the intricacy of the craft involved in its creation.

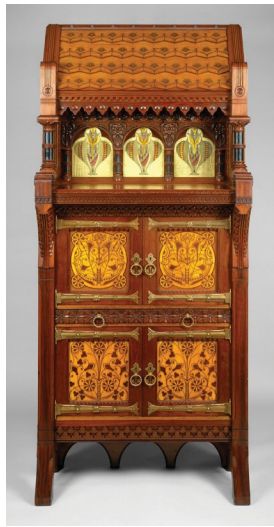


Figure 3.26 | Cabinet

Artist: Daniel Pabst

Source: Met Museum

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Figure 3.27 | Detail of Cabinet

Artist: Daniel Pabst

Source: Met Museum

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Lacquer has been used in art throughout Asia since Neolithic times, but carved lacquer is created in China only. **Lacquer** is resin from trees found in continental Asia that hardens to a natural plastic when exposed to the air; it is resistant to water and durable. The base of a lacquered object is wood, to which the liquid resin is applied in up to 200 layers. This tray was made in the fourteenth century, during the Yuan Dynasty, when lacquer was most often tinted red by adding cinnabar, powdered mercury sulfide. (Figure 3.28) Once hardened, the lacquer was carved away to create detailed scenes of court life, such as we see here, floral motifs, nature scenes, dragons or abstracted patterns. While the resin itself is of little monetary value, the laborious process and high level of skill required for such delicate carving meant the completed objects had, and still have, significant cultural value.



Figure 3.28 | Tray with women and boys on a garden terrace

Source: Met Museum

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3.7 INTRINSIC VALUES AND ENHANCED WORTH OF METALS

Some of the materials prized by artists and patrons become more valuable because of these artistic uses; others are valuable for their intrinsic worth as raw substance. From the earliest times, metals such as gold, silver, iron, and copper were used and traded in their natural states, as they came from the earth. They were mixed with other materials to create alloys, used for minting coins and forming sculptural objects. Among the most prominent metal materials first

used for art were iron and bronze; forging and casting them were among the earliest complex artistic processes devised. Brass (copper alloyed with tin, lead, and/or other metals) and the harder, more durable bronze have been widely used for grand public monuments that have fine detail, weather well, and can be hollow cast to reduce the amount of metal used. (Figures 3.29 and 3.30). Because forging and casting are complex and highly skilled processes, a viewer should know that an object made of this material was a significant statement for the artist or patron to make, one involving considerable planning and staging to accomplish the work.



Figure 3.29 | Bronze statue of Buddha

Author: User "Dirk Beyer"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Figure 3.30 | The Minute Man

Artist: Daniel Chester French

Author: User "Flying Jazz"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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3.8 RARE MATERIALS AND PROHIBITED USES

The economic and ecological factors involved in some materials have sometimes moved consideration of their use far beyond the discussion of artistic production. An example is work in ivory, especially that obtained from elephants, although it was also taken to use for sculpture from their kin, the extinct mammoth, as well as from walruses and other mammals. Its rarity and workability led to its valuation for finely carved works, often for aristocratic patrons and very special purposes, such as the devotional objects ([*The Virgin and Child, Unknown*](#)) and personal toilet articles ([*Attack on the Castle of Love, Unknown*](#)) that were popular among the court ladies of the late Middle Ages. Its exploitation has led to scarcity and, ultimately, now threatens the very existence of elephants, since they have been savagely hunted and their herds decimated in the interest of profit. Consequently, both the sale and purchase of ivory objects, even those considered antiques and historical treasures, are now widely boycotted in the interest of preservation of the species.

3.9 MATERIAL CONNOTATIONS OF CLASS OR STATION

Other more mundane materials and appropriated components might also have strong political connotations that intensify the meaning of the artwork. Korean artist Do Ho Su chose

and assembled military dog tags to create a larger-than-life figural impression of an imperialistic robe with a hollow core. It carries connotations of the political strength of his native land being built upon such things as the dehumanizing mandatory military service he had performed, and the relationships between individuals and the collectives they form. ([Some/One, Do Ho Suh](#); [Some/One detail, Do Ho Suh](#))

3.10 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Key Concepts

One of the basic artistic choices for any creation is the material from which it will be made and so should be an area for careful attention in our analysis of any artwork. Deliberate choices can also involve the pointed spurning of rich resources in favor of humbler stuff, as in the robe created by Do Ho Su, and less refined surfaces, such as cardboard or burlap for paintings; things that are only more recently available than those traditionally used, like plastics for sculpture, titanium for architecture; and the technologically evolved media that move into the realms of the physically immaterial. Choices and implications have expanded exponentially, and our examination of them should be broad, deep, and careful.

Test Yourself

1. Discuss the differences between materials that are intrinsically precious, and those that are made more valuable by the processes or creative ideas in works of art, by considering specific examples.
2. Consider the use of *spolia* in at least three specific examples and discuss how they changed the significance of the art work to which they were applied.
3. Review and describe a specific process for creating artwork that involved procedures for combining diverse materials into the product.
4. Considering such common materials as clay or wood, discuss the ways in which an artist might use it for making an object of much greater value than the inherent worth, and what factors, other than the creation process, might lead people to value it highly.

3.11 KEY TERMS

Codex: the book form in which pages (or leaves) of material such as parchment, vellum, or paper, are gathered into bundles and bound together—initially by sewing, now usually by glueing— and then provided with a cover to protect the sheets. Its ancestor was the scroll, in which the sheets were joined into a long continuous roll that was opened out from one side, rolled up at the other, for viewing the contents.

Cultural value: the perceived quality or merit of the work: what it is worth according to that culture's standards of artistic importance or excellence.

Earthenware, or objects made from clay: such as vessels that are formed for specific uses and hardened either by drying in the air or by baking in high heat. Often, earthenware goods are distinguished from more refined clay-based objects that are creating with additional processing of the material or different/more complex firing methods. See **porcelain**

Gold leaf: 22K gold pounded into extremely thin sheets, to be applied selectively to areas of 2-d or 3-d objects.

Handbuilt: clay objects that are shaped by hand, often by wrapping and smoothing coils of clay into the desired form. These are distinguished from **wheel-thrown** or mold-made goods.

Illumination: literally, given light, specifically through the use of gold or silver for letting of illustrative touches in a manuscript. The term is also sometime used to describe manuscripts that have images added to them, as opposed to simply including lettered text

Manuscript: literally, hand-written presentation of script and/or images. The form was supplanted by books produced with a printing press, although the term is still used for a singular copy of a written work.

Mausolea, plural of **mausoleum:** a building designed to house one or more tombs, usually for an important person. These were most often centrally-planned, with a design that pivoted around the burial site. In Christian usage, these were sometimes attached to a larger, congregational structure, but sometimes stood alone. They might house more than one tomb.

Monetary value: the worth of materials or objects, in terms of “market value.” This might be determined by the value of the materials use or of the finished art object, considered differently from the cost of the materials.

Parchment: sheepskin, prepared for use in manuscripts—less refined than **vellum**, used for finer and more expensive works.

Polychrome: painted in several colors.

Porcelain: highly refined ceramic ware, initially produced in China, with select materials like petuntse and kaolin, to create semi-translucent material, with elegant shapes, and glass-like, intricately decorated surfaces, and high-temp fired for hardened finishes.

Potter's wheel, wheel-thrown: pottery made with the use of a potter's wheel, a device for turning the clay body on a rotating platform for a more uniform shape. These were first turned by hand, knee, or pedal motion, later electrified.

Putti plural of *putto*: a small winged baby angel, a cherub.

Spolia: bounty taken from and original context, as in the “spoils of war.” Often, items of spolia were re-used in later works to imply the conquest (and superiority) of the new owner over the original.

Vellum: calfskin, prepared for use in luxury manuscripts, more highly prized than the rougher, less expensive **parchment**.