

Pictures from the Stone Age to the Digital Age

Have picture creators always been of a like mind?

Composition

Leading Lines: Use natural lines to guide the viewer's eye

Depth: The illusion of depth by perspective, 3D shading, colour etc.

Rule of Thirds: Dividing the image into a 3x3 grid **Golden Ratio:** 60/40

Balance: This refers to the visual weight of elements

- Symmetrical balance mirroring elements on either side of a central axis
- Asymmetrical balance uneven distribution but balanced by their visual weight

Framing: Use elements within the scene to create a "frame" main subject

Emphasis/Focal Point: Pictures should have a clear subject or focal point

Symmetry and Patterns: Repeating shapes or textures

Prehistoric - Over 40,000 years ago

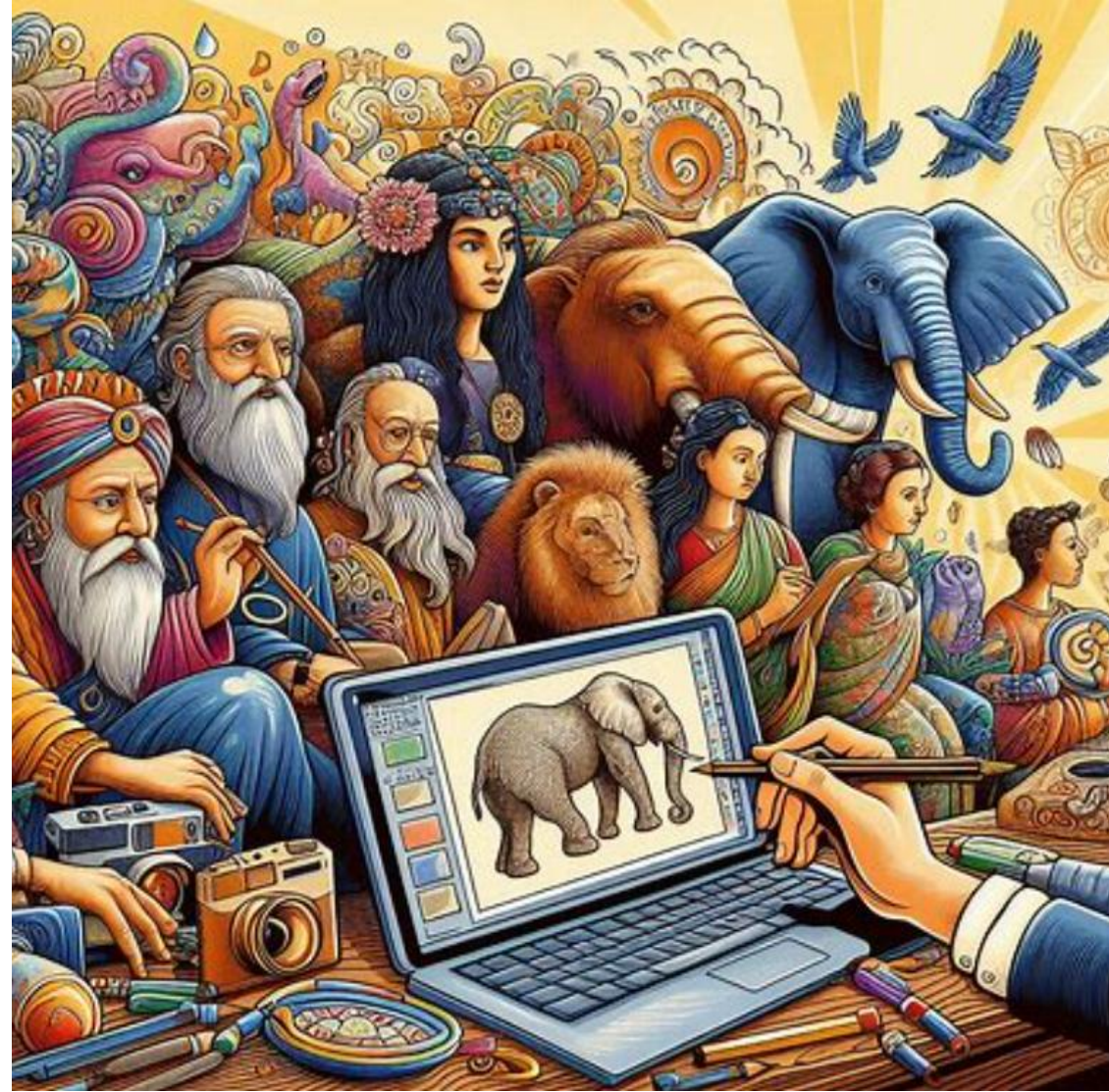


- **Neanderthal** (stupid?) and **Homo Sapiens** (adaptable?).
- **Interests** - Survival, rituals, spirituality, hunting.
- **Art** - Cave paintings and carvings.



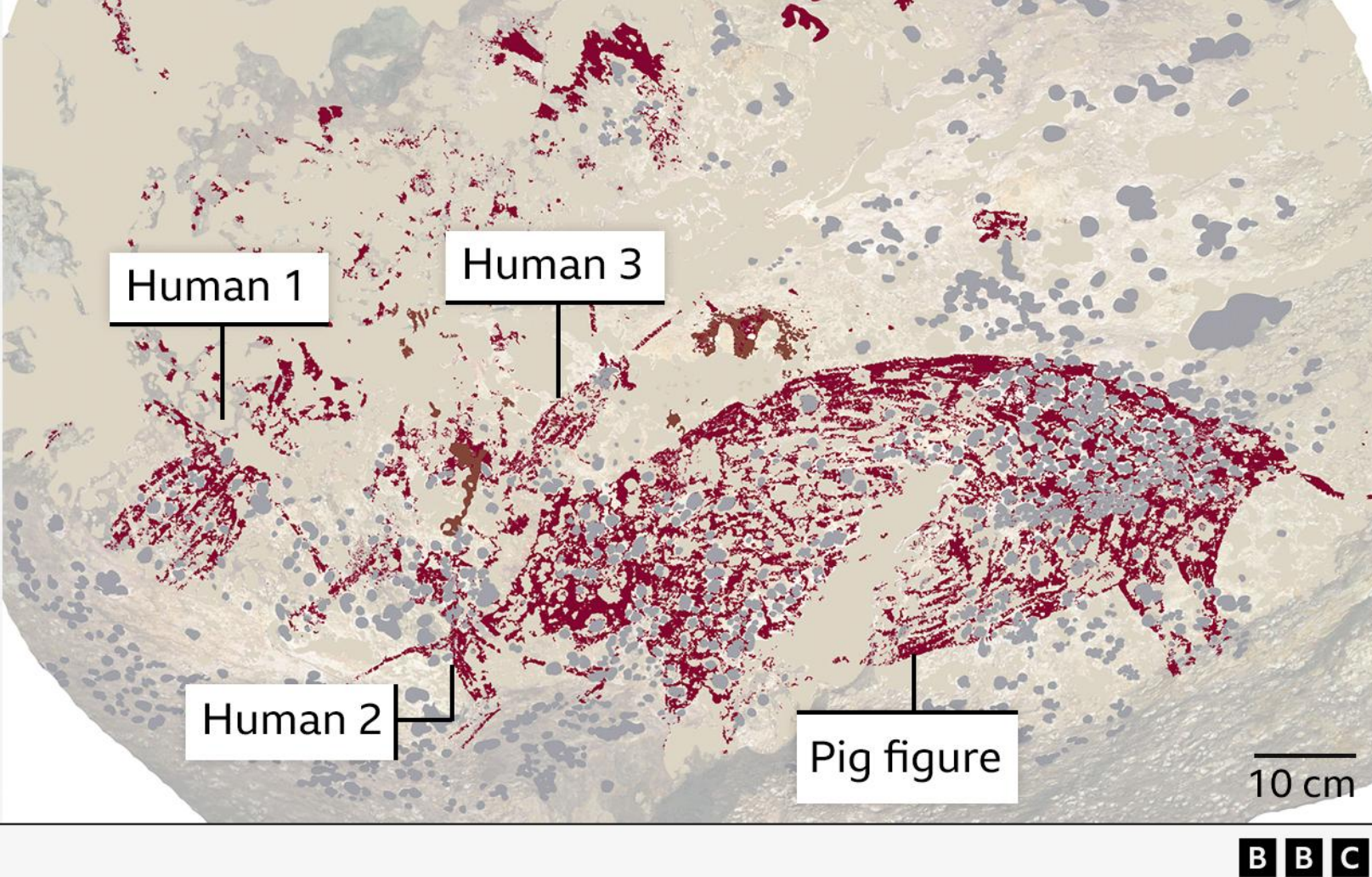
64,000 year-old Neanderthal cave painting

“AI” composition illustrating the title of this talk



What were early Humans trying to do?

- **Communication:** The images may have been a form of visual communication, documenting animal types or hunting scenes, where the most important information was made dominant.
- **Ritual/Spiritual Beliefs:** The prominent and detailed depiction of certain animals suggests their importance in spiritual beliefs. The "hierarchy of animals" in the iconography likely reflected their cultural significance.
- **Storytelling:** These compositions served as early forms of visual storytelling, where the arrangement of elements helped convey a narrative, such as a hunting accident.



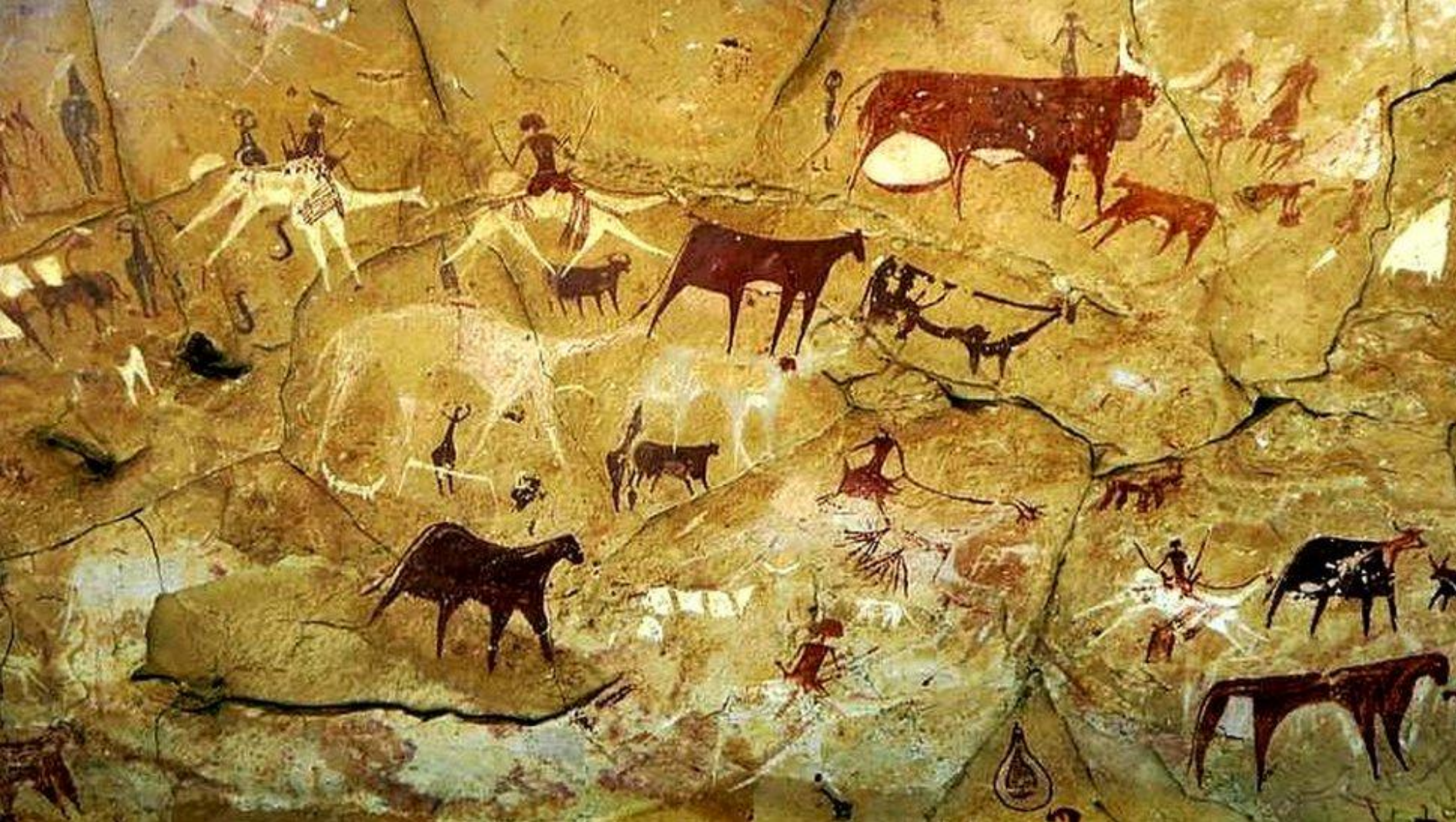
- **50.000 years ago**
- **Animals** rendered with great detail and naturalism, often occupying prominent spaces.
- **Humans**, in contrast, were rare and typically depicted in a highly schematic or stick-figure style, suggesting that animals held greater symbolic or spiritual importance in the context of art than individual human identity.
- Perspective not important

“The painting tells a complex story. It is the oldest evidence we have for storytelling. It shows that humans at the time had the capacity to think in abstract terms,”



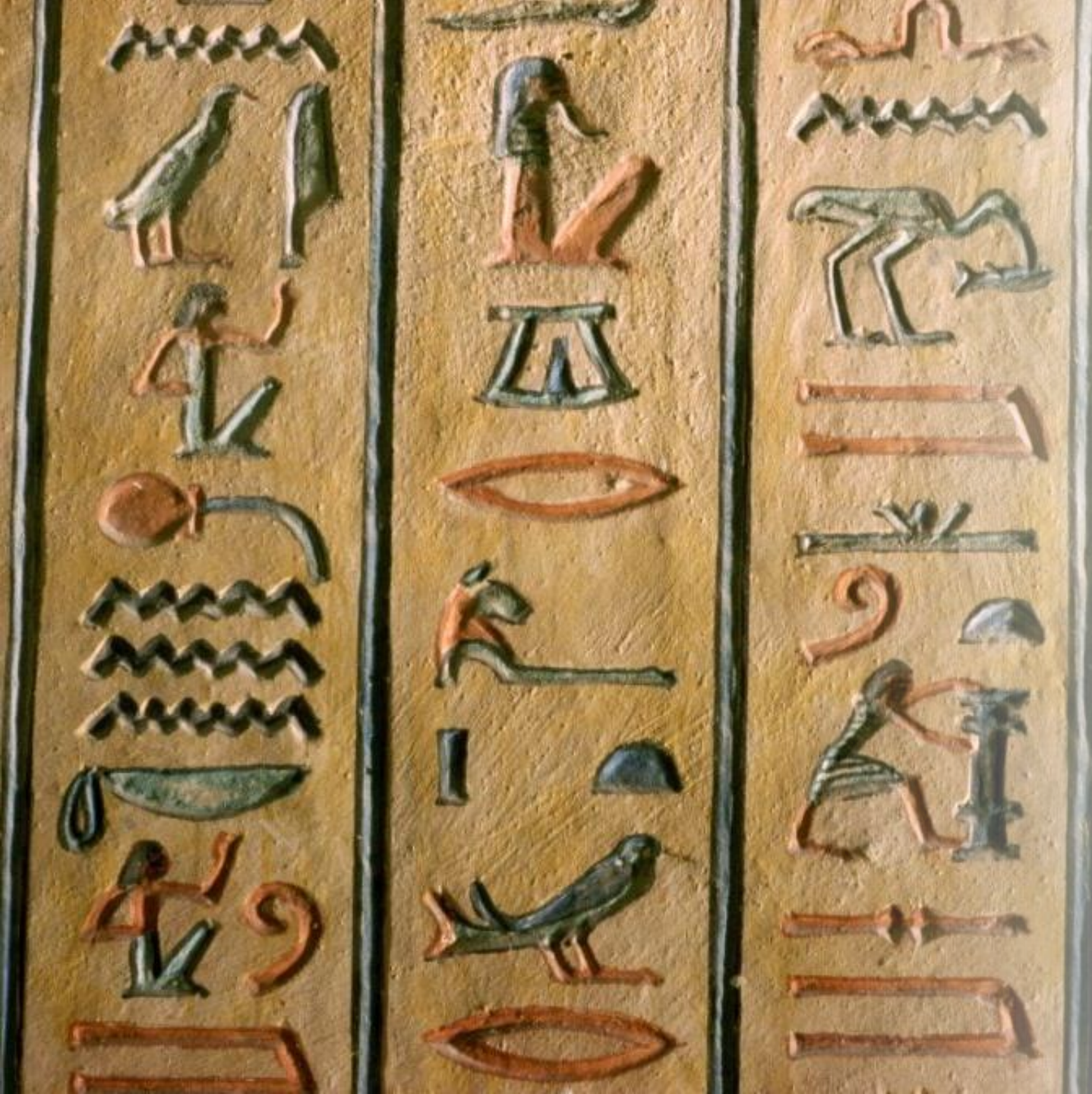
Artists used the natural bulges and contours of the cave walls to enhance the three-dimensional appearance of the animals, making them seem more real and present in the space.

44,000 years ago. Realistic movement, feet grounded under a threatening sky?
This picture is composed for a realistic and dramatic effect



- Symbolic placement of animals and hunters
- Scale and repetition for emphasis
Early visual hierarchy
- Grasping for perspective
- Imaginative birds
eye view

10,000 years ago – Story, teaching aid - map?



2. Ancient Civilizations (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome)

- Religion, Pharaohs/Rulers, afterlife, idealized human form.
- Hieroglyphics, gods, myths (originally colourful).
- Portraiture

3500 years ago

The Greeks

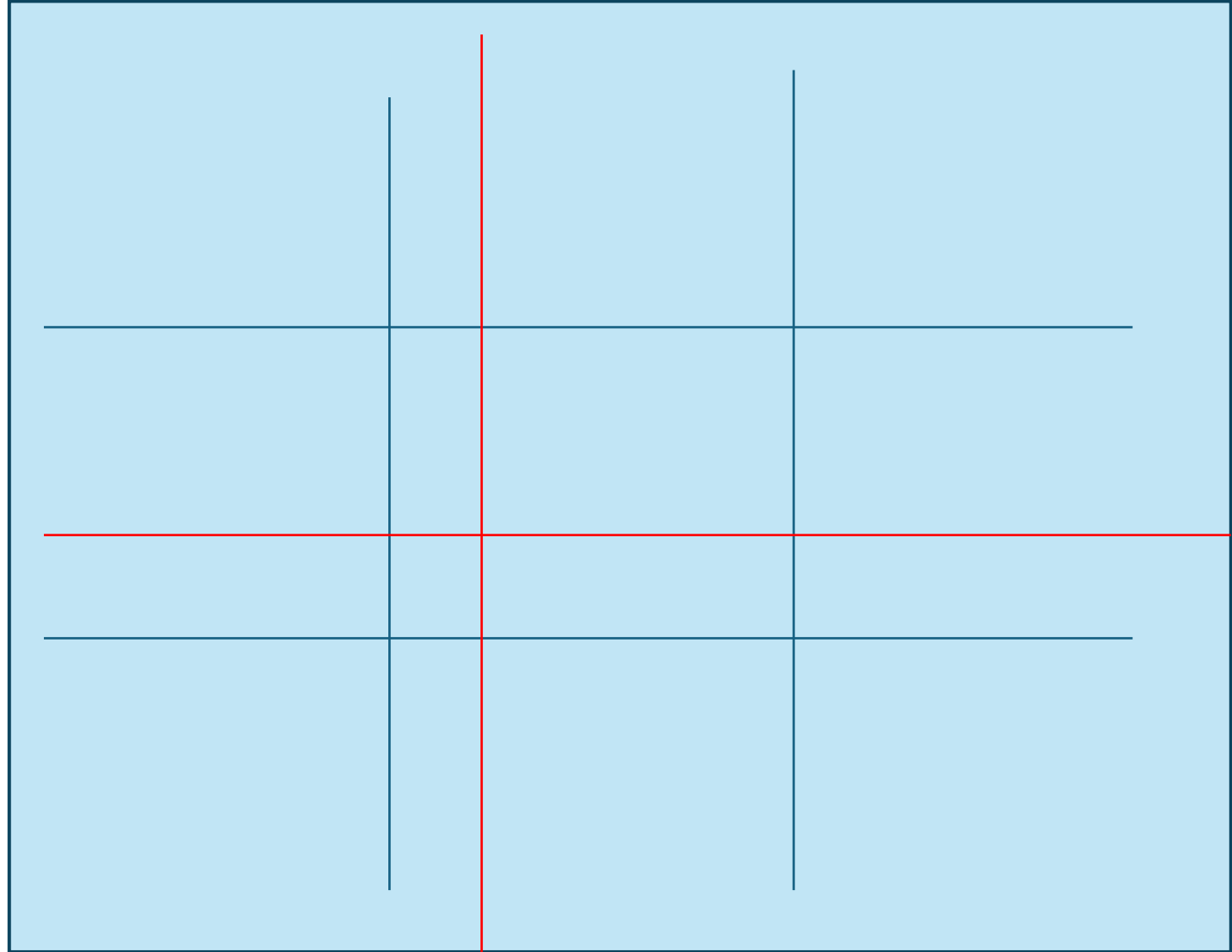
- The Ancient Greeks developed many new styles and techniques to achieve perfection of balance and proportion
- Aristotle realised that harmonious design had mathematical roots and documented the rule of thirds (33% and 66%)
- Ancient Greek mathematicians also first studied the golden ratio, the ratio of a larger to a smaller quantity when this is the same as the ratio of their sum to the larger of the two quantities (i.e. 1 to about 1.618) because of its frequent appearance in geometry
- Summed up, the Greeks realised that a subject looks better offset against the background than stuck in the middle. Layout became critical in art and then photography.



Mathematical Harmony

The rule of thirds divides the space into 9 identical rectangles. The points where the lines meet are the points to place a subject or compelling parts of the main subject.

Alternatively, the Golden Section (approximately 60/40%) is a pleasing place to put a subject against a larger background



Ancient Greek landscape with musicians in foreground



Story telling about offerings of cattle



Framing the Picture

The idea of using borders for images also dates back to ancient Egyptian and Greek art, where artists used painted or carved lines to divide scenes on walls and pottery.

The earliest known examples of a physical, separate wooden frame enclosing a portrait date to around AD 50–70 in Roman Egypt.

The earliest physical frames were simple wooden frames found on mummy portraits in Egyptian tombs. It is thought some of these were displayed in homes before being used for burial.



Mummy portrait about 100 A.D.

It protects the artwork from dust, dirt, moisture, and physical damage

It enhances the visual appeal of the artwork by complementing its details

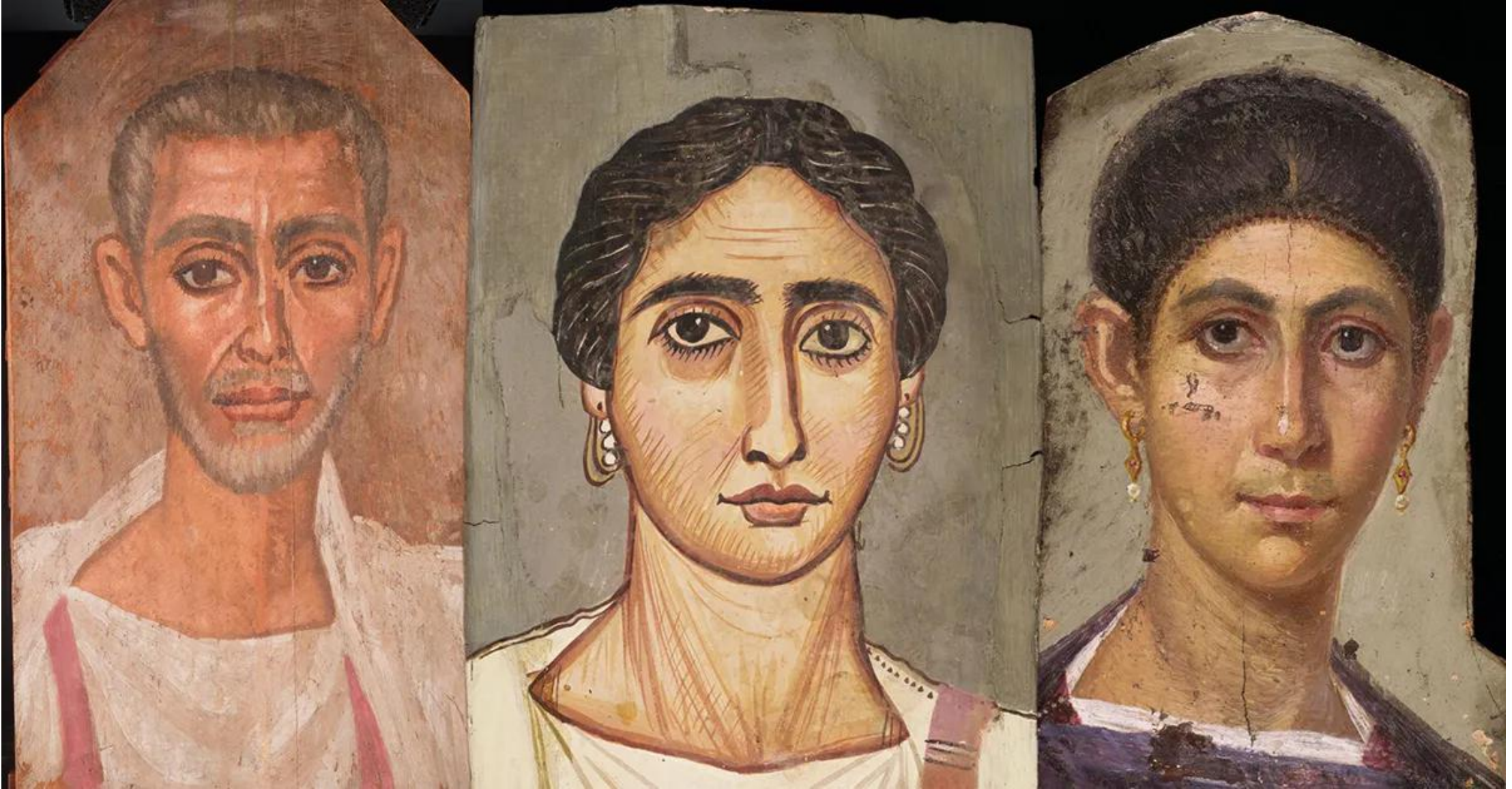
It creates a focal point in a room, making the artwork stand out and contributing to the overall decor.

It provides a safe and easy way to display and protect the artwork

Frames themselves play a significant role in the cultural and artistic heritage of society.

Face to face - Ancient Egyptian framed portraits

Photographic realism achieved



- Middle Ages (c. 500–1400 AD) Emotion arrives in art
- **Focus:** Christianity, teaching religious stories (Bible).
- **Broader ideals:** Beauty and order
- **Key Figure:** Giotto reintroduced depth & emotion, characters are no longer deadpan
- Paves way for Renaissance.



A combination of spiritual depth, technical sophistication, and growing naturalism, late medieval paintings represent one of the great flowering periods of European art.



- 4. Renaissance (c. 1400–1600)
- **Symmetry and balance:** Fundamental principles reflecting a revival of classical antiquity's aesthetic ideals of harmony, order, and proportional perfection.
- **Focus:** This was heavily influenced by the humanist philosophy and the belief in mathematical precision in design.
- **Art:** Oil paints (depth, blending), perspective, anatomy.
- **Figures:** Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael.

Artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo incorporated these principles into their works, emphasizing the importance of proportion and harmony in achieving aesthetic perfection.



15th Century
Perugino, *Christ Giving
the Keys of the Kingdom
to St. Peter*,



The Renaissance was a revival of the classical ideals of ancient Greece and Rome, and artists and architects enthusiastically adopted and built upon Greek principles of symmetry, balance, proportion, and harmony.

- **5. Baroque & Rococo (c. 1600–1780)**
- **Baroque (1600s):** Drama, emotion, rich colour, light/shadow, dark backgrounds, evil forces (Caravaggio, Rembrandt).
- **Rococo (1700s):** Playful, ornate, decorative, light-hearted (response to Baroque).



Vermeer The Hague



Caravaggio



Rococo

- **6. Neoclassicism (c. 1750–1830)**
- **Focus:** Order, logic, Roman/Greek ideals, civic virtue.
- **Clear forms:** sober colours, and classical themes from Greek/Roman mythology or history, emphasizing virtue, duty, and reason, epitomized by artists like Jacques-Louis David reacting against Rococo excess with serious, moralizing narratives.



Photographic
detail from the
past

COURTESY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

Marie-Denise Villers, *Young Woman Drawing*, 1801.

The Cupid
Seller
1763



Neoclassicism



Burne Jones
The Mirror
of Venus



- **7. 19th Century (Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism)**
- **Photography:** Reality in detail leads to a need to differentiate painting.
- **Impressionism (Monet):** Capturing light, fleeting moments, outdoor scenes.
- **Post-Impressionism (Van Gogh, Cézanne):** Experimentation with colour, form, emotion over reality. The study of light and its components (Seurat)

Photography - Art World hit for Six!

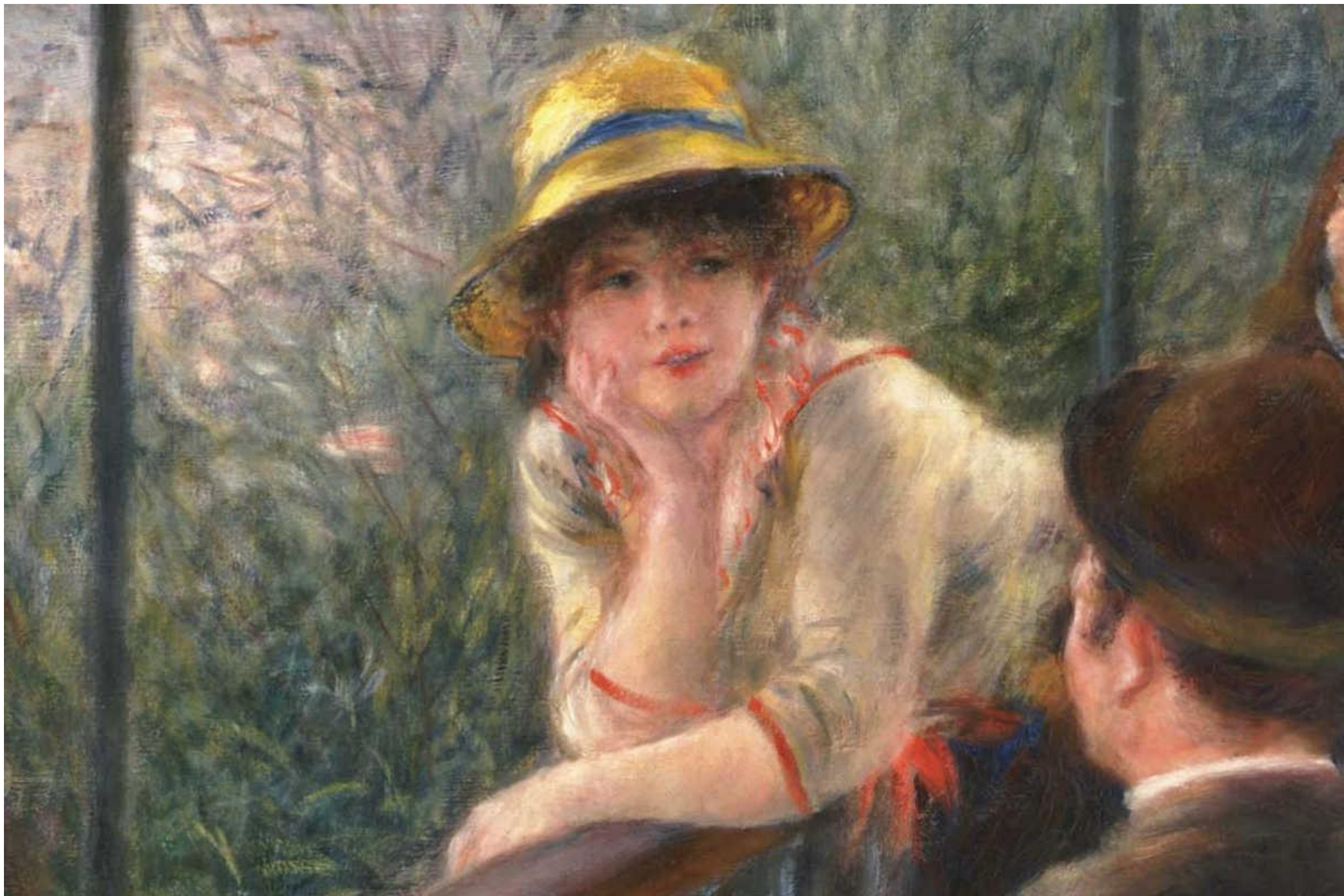
REACTION...

Impressionism originated with a group of Paris-based artists whose independent exhibitions brought them to prominence during the 1870s and 1880s



Featured image: Louis Daguerre – Boulevard du Temple, 1838. Captions, via Creative Commons

A half-remembered scene with brush strokes well on show



Not what you
see directly,
what you
remember
seeing?

Perfect
composition
and
perspective

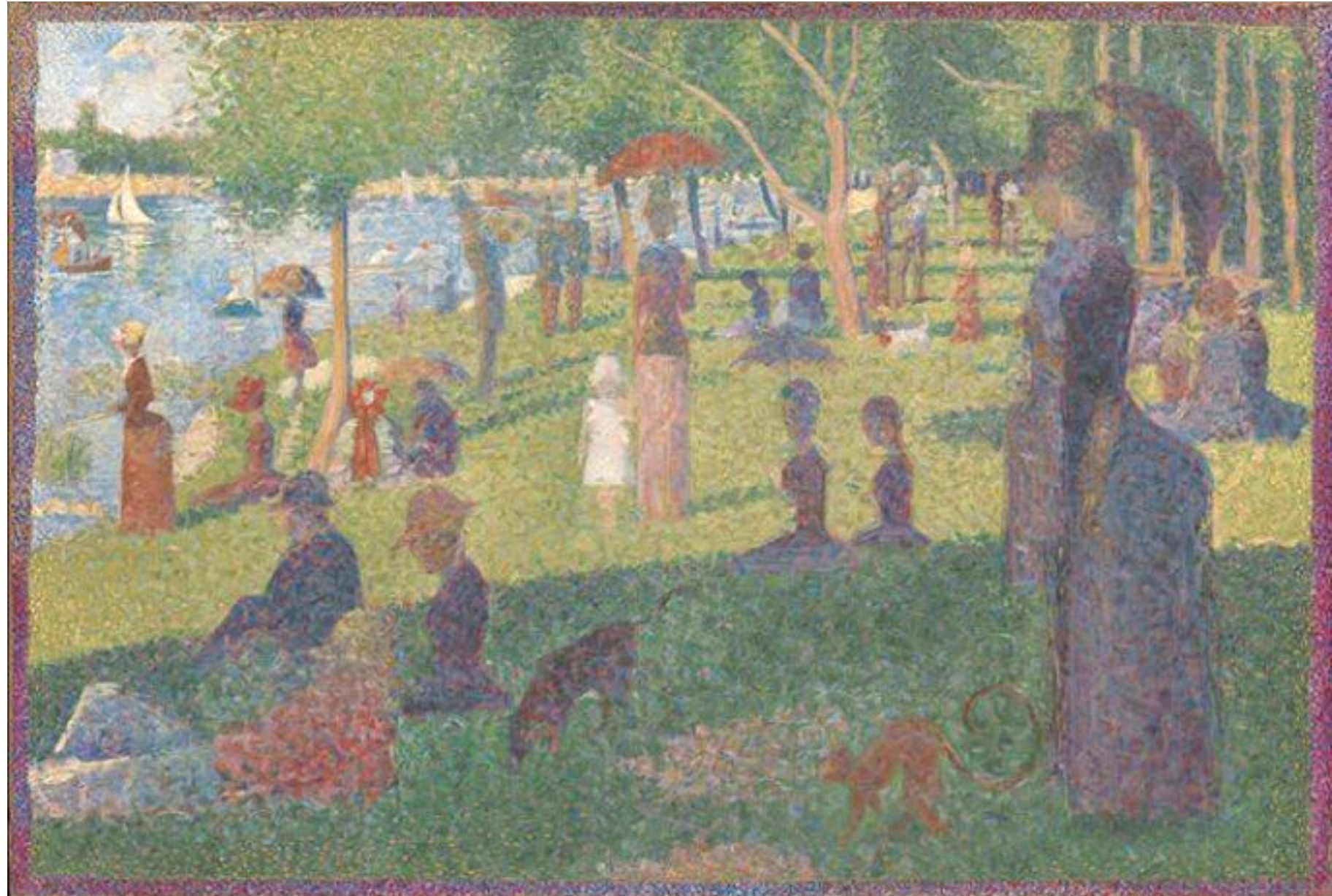


Not a photo -
Colours are
distorted or
accentuated



Post Impressionism Seurat

Understanding the
components of
colour to mix
within the brush
strokes



Van Gogh landscapes

- Brush strokes in bold
- Portrait for a landscape
- Shadows are purple
- Leading line, strong subject but bang in the middle



Van Gogh

- Dreamlike image distortion
- Use of colour loss to achieve depth
- Three leading lines



- **8. 20th Century & Modernism**

- Photography: Life as it is
- Cubism: Fractured forms (Picasso).
- Expressionism (Munch): Subjective, emotional distortion.
- Abstract (Mondrian): Geometric, primary colours, stripping reality.
- Surrealism, Dada, etc.: Exploring the subconscious, absurdity, new realities.

**FRANK MEADOW
SUTCLIFFE (1853-
1941)**

Realistic
images as
never
before

Rule of
thirds
strictly
observed



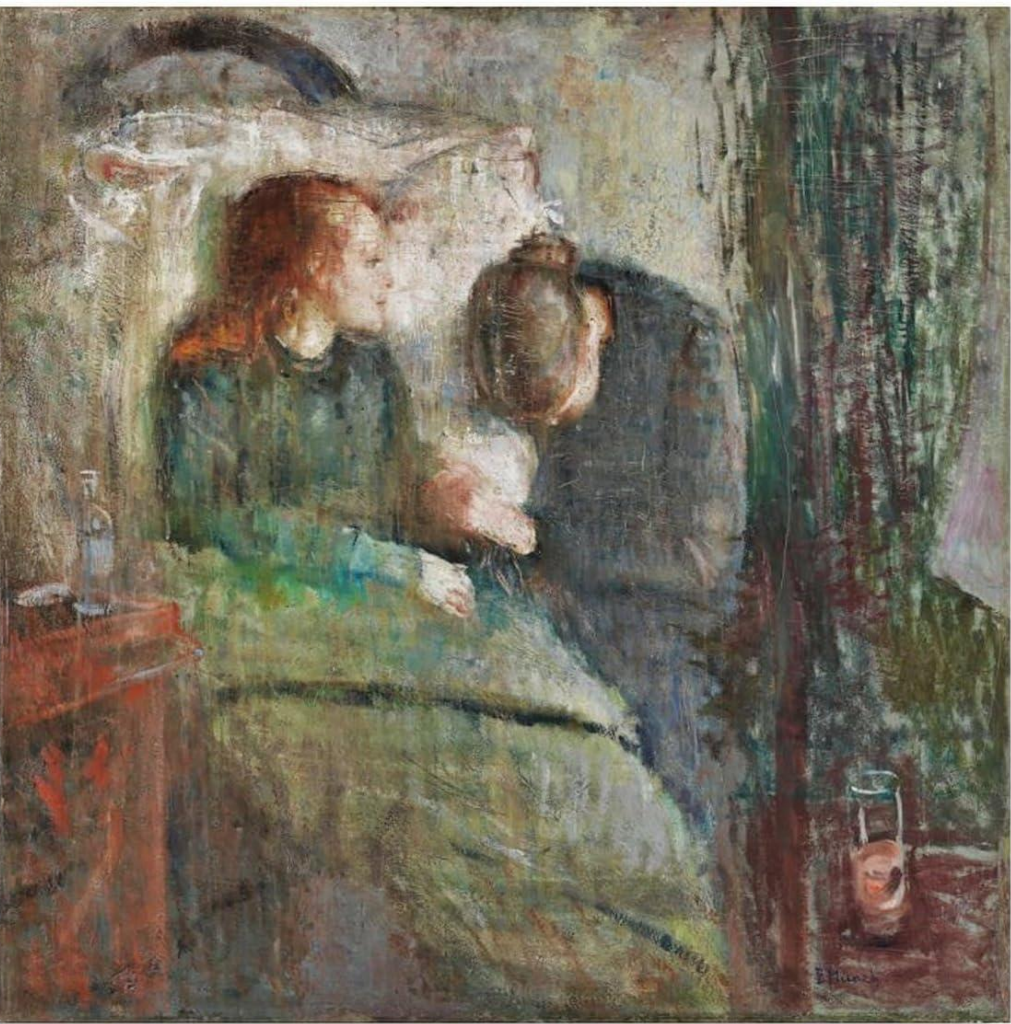




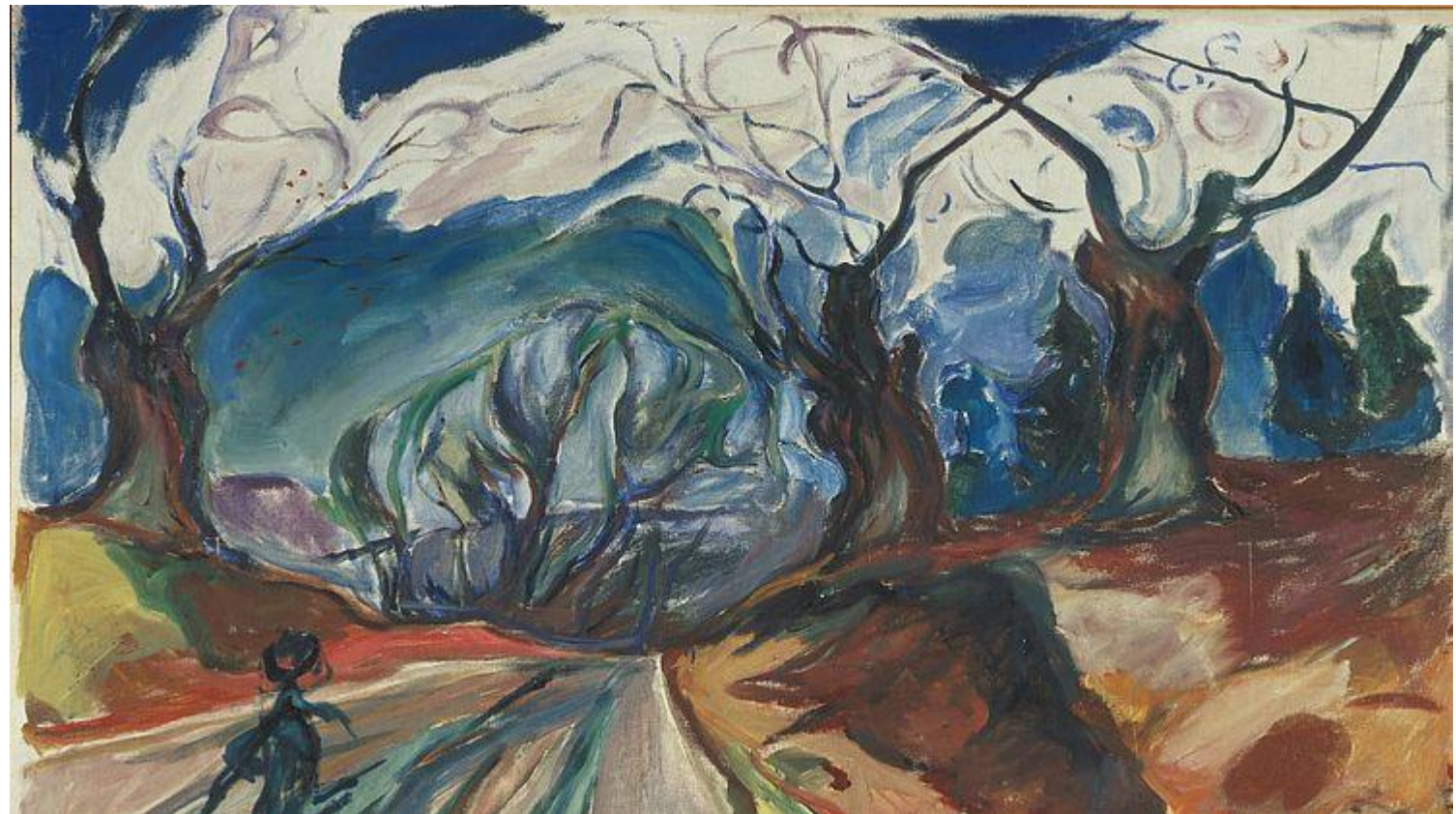


Cubism and Fracture – Picasso

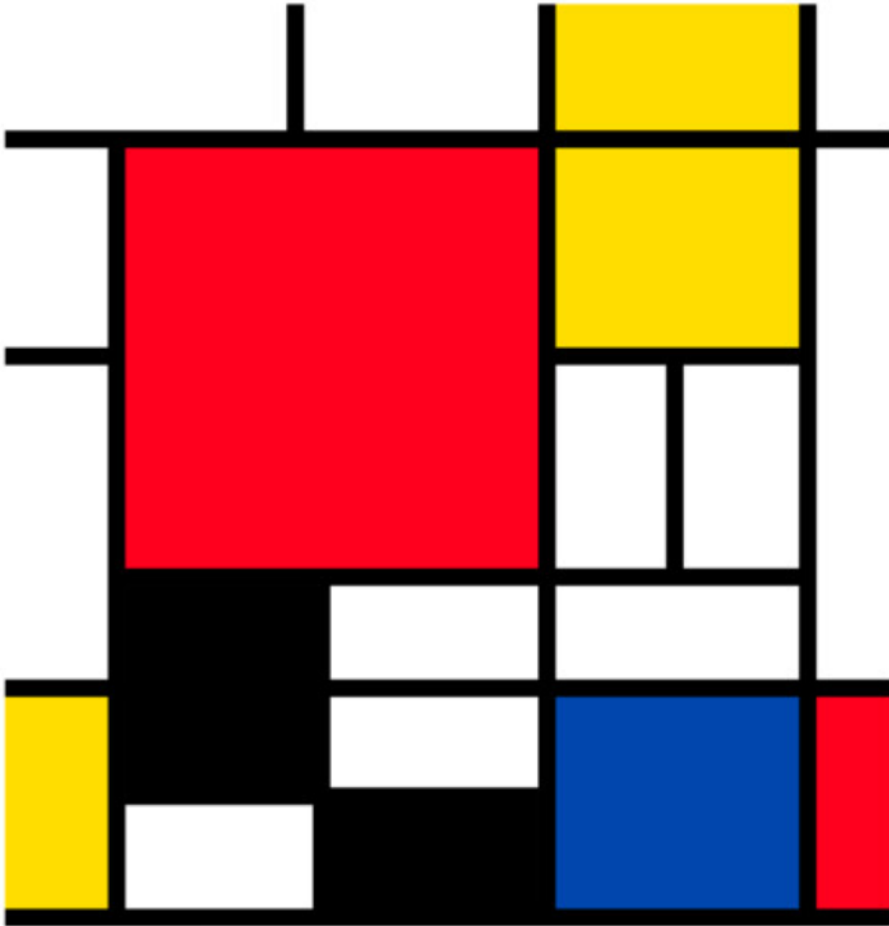
1. No depth
2. Plenty of depth



Expressionism (Munch): Subjective, emotional distortion.



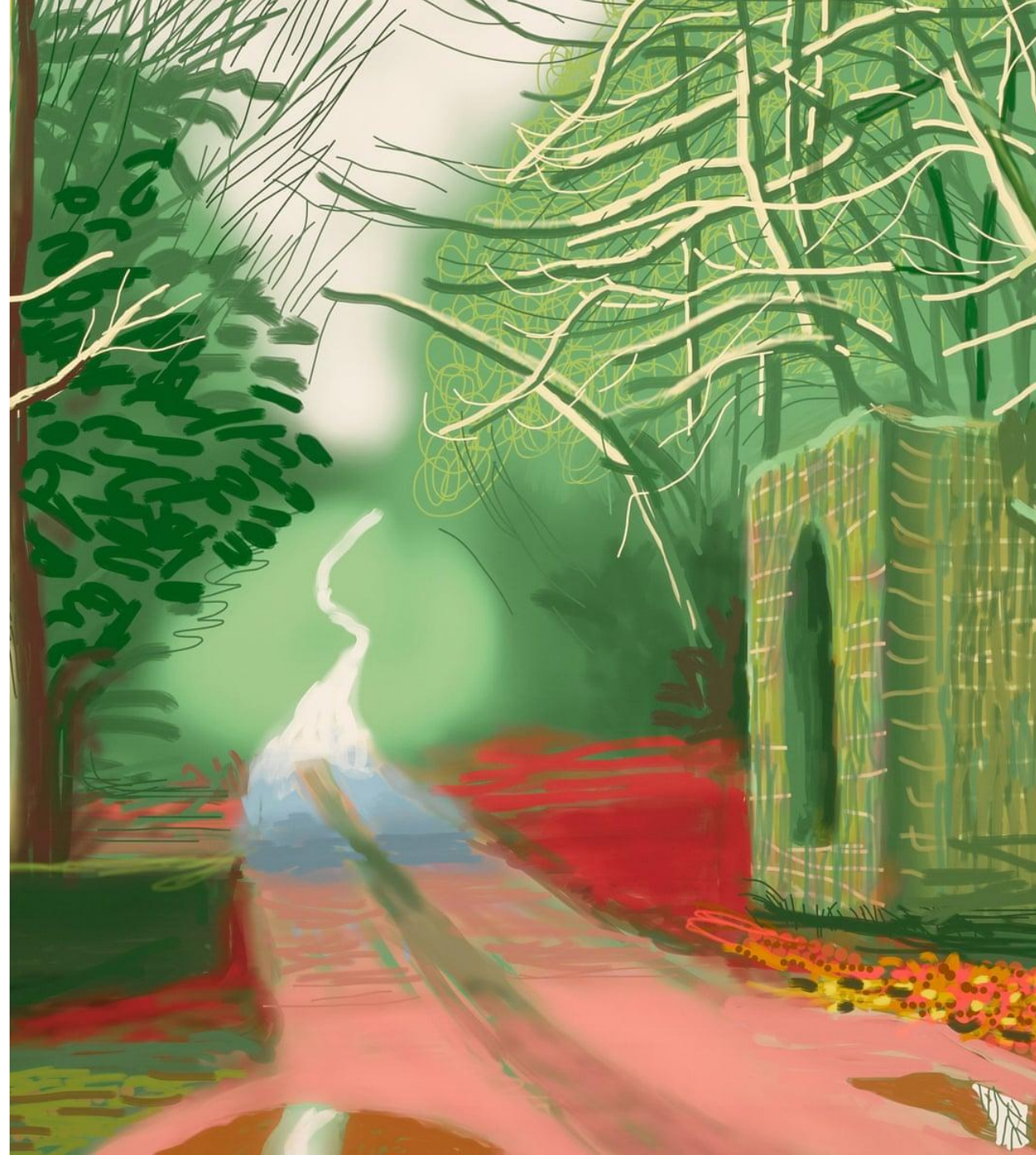
Abstract (Mondrian): Geometric, primary colours, stripping reality down to the barely recognisable.



- **9. Contemporary (Late 20th Century – Present)**
- **Focus:** Conceptual art, mixed media, digital, global perspectives, identity, social commentary.
- Art becomes diverse, challenging definitions of art itself.

David Hockney embraced the iPad

- But the layout is entirely traditional although coloration is obviously of a new genre.



Banksy – Self Destroying Art!

It's not what it depicts, it's what it is or isn't

The Exploding Shed

More entertaining than a pile of bricks?

The Emperors new Clothes?

