The Ultimate AP® Art History Unit 1 Cheat Sheet

Unit 1 Big Picture: Art Before Writing

Stone Age Periods (dates vary by region)

Period	Way of life	Art / works
Paleolithic	Hunt-gather, Ice Age	Caves, portable
Mesolithic	Ice melts, shifts	Rock art, bridge
Neolithic	Farms, villages	Pots, megaliths

Neolithic Revolution: agriculture + herding → settled villages → surplus, status, pottery, polished stone, monuments.
Prehistory = before written records: no texts explain the art, so function is inferred from finds & context.

3 Big Ideas of the Unit (CED)

Global, not just Europe: early art on every inhabited continent. Shared focus: animals, nature, humans' place in it.
Africa first: humans + earliest art begin there, spread w/ migration. Asia → ceramic tech; Pacific → Lapita pottery.
Science partners: archaeology + dating give the facts (where, when); art historians interpret meaning.

How Scholars Know

Radiocarbon (C-14): dates organic matter (charcoal, bone) to ~50,000 yrs. **Stratigraphy**: deeper layer = older.
Thermoluminescence: dates fired clay by its last heating (#5, #10, #11); C-14 can't date clay itself.
Ethnographic analogy: compare w/ living cultures (e.g., San rock art → shamanism theory). Useful but speculative.
Parietal art = on cave/rock walls (#2, #4). **Portable (mobiliary) art** = small, movable objects (#1, #3, #9).

Core Vocab

Zoomorphic = animal form. **Anthropomorphic** = human form.
Therianthrope = part human, part animal.
Naturalism: lifelike (#2). **Stylization/abstraction**: nature simplified to shapes, patterns (#5, #10, #11).

⚠ "Neolithic" is a stage, not a date: China, Iran and Britain reached it at very different times (millennia apart).

✓ Medium is a clue: charcoal/rock → Paleolithic; pottery, jade, megaliths, polished stone → Neolithic.

#1 Apollo 11 Stones · #3 Camelid Sacrum

#1 Apollo 11 Stones (Namibia, c. 25,500 BCE)

Medium: charcoal on stone slabs. Portable, not cave walls. Oldest work in the AP image set (#1 of 250).
Find: Apollo 11 Cave, Huns Mtns, SW Namibia; dug 1969, named for the moon mission then in the news.
Content: animals in profile; one has a feline body + human-like hind legs → possible **therianthrope** (part human, part animal), a shamanic idea in later San art.
Dating: C-14 on charcoal in the same layer. Proves figurative art in Africa as early as Europe's cave paintings.
Form: simple black outlines; no ground line or scene; each figure isolated on a flat, palm-sized slab of stone.
Theory: hybrid figure may link to later San shamanic rock art (trance, transformation). Still unproven.

✓ Use #1 to argue art began in Africa, not Europe: the CED's key point vs. a Eurocentric story.

#3 Camelid Sacrum (Mexico, 14,000–7000 BCE)

Medium: bone. Sacrum (hip bone) of an extinct llama relative, cut + shaped to look like a dog/coyote head.
Process: artist saw an animal in the bone's natural shape, then carved/drilled nostrils to finish it. Found 1870, Tequixquiac, ~12 m deep in a quarry dig.
Meaning: *os sacrum* = "sacred bone" (later Latin term). Theories: fertility, rebirth, ritual use in burials.
Context: people reached the Americas from Asia (Beringia). Bone carving came before clay art here.

	#1 Apollo 11	#3 Sacrum
Medium	Charcoal, stone	Bone
Method	Drawn on slab	Natural form carved
Theme	Human-animal mix	Animal → animal

Transformation: one creature becomes another (both).

⚠ Don't call #3 "painted" or "stone": it's bone, and the animal is the bone itself, reshaped by hand.

#2 Great Hall of the Bulls, Lascaux

Identify It (France, 15,000–13,000 BCE)

Medium: rock painting (parietal art), Paleolithic Europe, Dordogne cave. Found 1940 by 4 teens.
Content: aurochs (giant wild bulls, some 17 ft), horses, deer, enigmatic "unicorn." Almost no humans.
Setting: main chamber at the entrance; ~36 animals.

Form & Technique

Feature	What to say
Twisted perspective	Body profile, horns frontal
Pigments	Ochre (red/yellow), black
Application	Blown, pads, brush, finger
Rock surface	Bulges used for volume
Overlap	Painted over time, no ground

Black = charcoal/manganese. **Light**: animal-fat stone lamps.
No setting: no horizon, landscape or ground line; animals float + overlap at many scales & angles on the wall.
Naturalism: close observation; contours, horns, coats lifelike; the animals look like they're in motion, mid-run.

Theories of Function

Hunting magic: paint the animal → control the hunt. Weak b/c bones show reindeer was the main food, yet reindeer are rare on the walls; most painted animals weren't eaten.
Shamanism / ritual: deep, dark space for initiation or trance.
Structuralism (Leroi-Gourhan): species placed in patterns, e.g., horse vs bison as paired symbols.
Preservation: closed 1963 (visitors' breath → mold, algae). Replicas: Lascaux II (1983), IV (2016).

✓ Visual analysis: tie the rock bulges + blown pigment to the illusion of 3D mass and movement.

⚠ State theories as theories: "scholars suggest…" Never claim a single proven purpose for the cave.

#4 Running Horned Woman · #5 Beaker w/ Ibex

#4 Running Horned Woman (Algeria, 6000–4000 BCE)

Medium: pigment on rock, rock shelter at Tassili n'Ajjer, Sahara. Thousands of paintings at the site.
Content: female figure mid-stride; horned headdress; dots (body paint or scarification); fringe on arms, waist.
Style: profile + frontal mix; small figures behind her.
Composition: legs spread wide, torso leans forward → speed; the figure fills the frame diagonally.
Context: Sahara was green then (grass, lakes). Later scenes add cattle, then horses, then camels → the art records **climate change** over millennia, as it dried out.
Theories: goddess, fertility figure, ritual dancer. Horns tie human + animal power (agriculture, herding).

✓ #4 = proof Africa's rock art tradition continued for millennia after #1, across the continent.

#5 Beaker w/ Ibex Motifs (Susa, Iran, 4200–3500 BCE)

Medium: painted terra cotta, very thin walls; skill of early ceramics. Found in a cemetery w/ ~2,000 pots.
Process: buff clay, dark brown-black paint; possibly shaped on a slow wheel (turntable), w/ very even walls.
Registers (bands, bottom → top): **ibex** w/ huge arcing horns circling a disk; elongated running **dogs**; long-necked **wading birds** as vertical strokes at the rim of the cup.
Dogs: likely hunting hounds, stretched into a band → speed; their repetition circles the whole pot w/o end.
Stylization: animals reduced to triangles, arcs, lines; nature turned geometric to fit the pot's shape.
Function: funerary; may mark status. Ibex horns possibly = seasons, cycles, abundance (only a theory).
Compare: #5 stylized ibex vs #2 naturalistic bulls: same subject type, opposite approaches to nature.

⚠ Ibex = mountain goat, not deer. Read the registers bottom → top, from the ibex up to the wading birds.

#6 Anthropomorphic Stele · #7 Jade Cong

#6 Anthropomorphic Stele (Arabian Peninsula, 4th mill. BCE)

Medium: sandstone, carved in low relief. **Stele** = upright stone slab, often a grave or site marker.
Anthropomorphic = human-shaped. Simple head + face; the body stays a flat, rectangular slab of stone.
Style: frontal, symmetrical, flat; little modeling → a type or role, not a portrait of one real person's face.
Details: double cord belt, double-bladed dagger at waist, cloak/robe over shoulders → status, a specific person?
Function: likely funerary marker or memorial for an ancestor/leader. Found Saudi Arabia (Ha'il region).

✓ #6 = early monumental human figure in Arabia: pair w/ #8 for stone used as a permanent memory.

#7 Jade Cong (Liangzhu, China, 3300–2200 BCE)

Medium: carved jade (nephrite). **Form**: tube, round inside, square outside; stacked tiers of mask faces.
Decoration: stylized faces at corners (eyes, mouth band), human-animal mask; precursor to later bronze motifs.
Liangzhu: Neolithic culture, lower Yangzi (Lake Tai); a walled city, rice farming, water-control works.

Fact	Why it matters
Jade too hard to cut	Ground w/ sand + water
Months of labor	Shows wealth, status
Elite burials	Placed around body

Cosmology: later Zhou texts: square cong = earth, round **bi** disk = heaven. Read back onto Liangzhu; unproven.
Jade's value: durable, luminous, cool → permanence; later Chinese culture links jade to immortality.
Compare: #6 vs #7: public memorial stone vs private elite burial good; both signal a person's high status.

⚠ Jade is not "carved" like wood: it's abraded w/ sand. Say abrasion for a process answer on the FRQ.

#8 Stonehenge (Wiltshire, UK)

Identify It (Neolithic, c. 2500–1600 BCE)

Medium: sandstone (sarsen) + bluestones. Salisbury Plain. Built in phases over ~1,500 yrs; earliest ditch ~3000 BCE.
Megalith = huge stone. **Henge** = circular bank + ditch.
Cromlech = a circle of standing megaliths.
Phases: earthwork ~3000 BCE → stones raised ~2500 BCE → rearranged until ~1600 BCE, over ~1,500 yrs.

Construction

Element	Detail
Sarsens	~20 mi away; up to ~25 tons
Bluestones	From Wales, ~150 mi
Trilithon	2 posts + 1 lintel
Joints	Mortise-tenon, tongue-groove
Plan	Circle + inner horseshoe

Post-and-lintel: lintels slightly curved to follow the ring.
Wood joinery copied in stone → builders knew carpentry.
Moving stones: sledges, rollers, levers, ramps; huge organized labor → strong social structure.
Dressing: sarsens pounded smooth w/ stone hammers; uprights taper, and lintels lock in place on top.

Function Theories

Astronomical: axis aligns w/ summer solstice sunrise + winter solstice sunset; Heel Stone marks it.
Ritual / burial: cremation burials found. **Living vs dead**: wood circle at nearby Durrington Walls (living), stone (ancestors).
Healing site (bluestones' power) is a 3rd theory.
Ritual landscape: burial mounds (barrows) + the Avenue to the River Avon surround the monument for miles.

✓ FRQ: use labor + solar alignment as evidence for a ritual, calendar-tracking farming society w/ leaders.

⚠ Druids did NOT build it: they came ~2,000 yrs later. A classic MCQ trap answer, so cross it out.

#9 Ambum Stone · #10 Tlatilco · #11 Lapita

#9 Ambum Stone (Papua New Guinea, c. 1500 BCE)

Medium: greywacke (hard dark stone), ground + polished. Ambum Valley, Enga Province. Small (~20 cm).
Content: **zoomorphic**; long snout, folded limbs: likely echidna (spiny anteater), maybe its embryo.
Process: pecked + ground w/ harder stone, sand; long labor. Now in the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
Function: unknown; pestle? ritual object? Later Enga used it in rituals for ancestors and for fertility.

#10 Tlatilco Female Figurine (Mexico, 1200–900 BCE)

Medium: ceramic, hand-modeled. Found in graves at Tlatilco, near Mexico City; most figurines are female.
Name: Tlatilco = "place where things are hidden" (Nahuatl); found by brickmakers digging for clay, 1930s.
Form: two faces sharing three eyes; wide hips + thighs, tiny waist, stub arms. Abstraction + emphasis.
Theories: duality, shamanic transformation, fertility; or a real birth condition (two-faced). Olmec contacts at site.

⚠ Don't confuse #9 (stone animal, PNG) w/ #10 (clay woman, Mexico): both small, both ritual.

#11 Lapita Terra Cotta Fragment (Solomon Is., 1000 BCE)

Medium: terra cotta, **incised** + **dentate-stamped** (toothed tool pressed in wet clay); white lime fills lines.
Design: dense geometric bands; some read as faces. Echoed later in Pacific tattoo & tapa cloth designs.
Name: "Lapita" from a site in New Caledonia where this pottery was first identified by archaeologists.
Context: Lapita = seafaring people; pottery spread east to Fiji, Tonga, Samoa → ancestors of the Polynesians. The pots trace **migration** across open ocean in canoes.

✓ Pacific migration Q? Cite #11: the same dentate-stamped designs across thousands of miles of ocean.

Unit 1 on the Exam (~4% of MC)

FRQ Types: How Unit 1 Fits

Q	Type	Unit 1 move
1	Comparison	Pair 2 works by theme
2	Visual/context	No image: know IDs
3	Visual	Unknown work, compare
4	Contextual	Setting → choices
5	Attribution	Cave? ceramic? dates
6	Continuity	e.g., megaliths, rock art

Strong Comparison Pairs

#2 vs #4: both rock painting; animals vs a human figure, Ice Age Europe vs the green Sahara of Africa.
#7 vs #8: huge labor → status + cosmology; small/portable object vs monumental architecture in a landscape.
#5 vs #11: both ceramics w/ geometric decoration; funerary use vs evidence of ocean migration routes.
#9 vs #10: small ritual figures; ground stone animal vs modeled clay human; the Pacific vs the Americas.
Continuity (Q6): rock art #1 → #2 → #4 over 20,000 yrs; megaliths → later monuments & tombs.

Write It Right

Identifiers: name, culture/place, date, medium. Q2 gives no image, so memorize all 11 works cold.
Evidence words: "suggests," "scholars propose," "likely." Tie each claim to a visible detail or find-site fact.
Form, function, content, context: hit all 4; function = the weakest-known, so argue from context.

✓ Q1: pick a pair w/ one clear shared theme (ritual, status, nature) + one sharp, specific difference.

⚠ Biggest point loss: treating European caves as "the" start of art, or stating a theory as a proven fact.

✓ Unit 1 = only ~4% of the exam, but its 11 works can anchor Q1 & Q6 comparisons w/ later units.