

Q: What does it mean if a building is described as Palladian?

A: The adjective Palladian means in the style of the famed sixteenth-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio. Palladio wrote architectural treatises, inspired by the ancient Roman architect Vitruvius, and sought to refine the Renaissance understanding of classical architecture. Palladio's architecture most famously inspired the architecture of Baroque England (most notably in the architecture of Inigo Jones) and early America, especially in the buildings designed by Thomas Jefferson.

Tags: [Andrea Palladio](#), [Architecture](#), [artistic styles](#), [English Baroque](#), [inigo jones](#), [Palladian](#), [terminology](#), [Thomas Jefferson](#), [Vitruvius](#)

Q: How did the discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii in the eighteenth century affect artistic tastes?

A: The discovery of these ancient Roman cities helped further the taste for Classical art in Europe. Not only were these discoveries quite current and important for that reason, but they also provided a great deal of inspiration to artists as newly discovered works of art from the Classical world were being unearthed.

Tags: [Archaeology](#), [artistic influence](#), [Classicism](#), [enlightenment](#), [Neoclassicism](#)

Q: Jacques-Louis David was working during one of the most turbulent periods in French history. What were his political leanings?

A: David was a member of the Jacobin party, which means that he was opposed to the monarchy and supported their removal. He was very politically engaged and addressed political issues directly in his paintings. In *The Death of Marat*, one of his most famous paintings, he depicted the political assassination of his friend (a fellow Jacobin) with the same reverence once reserved for religious images.

Tags: [art and politics](#), [Jacques-Louis David](#), [Neoclassicism](#)

Q: What is the Reign of Terror?

A: The Reign of Terror began with the start of the French Revolution in 1789 and lasted through 1794. During this time, anyone seen as a threat to the revolution was executed, including such prominent figures as Marie Antoinette and King Louis XVI. The guillotine was invented during this period to make beheadings easier and more humane; this turned out to be very necessary as tens of thousands of people were killed during the Reign of Terror. For some artists, the Reign of Terror was personally difficult. Consider, for example, Vigee-Lebrun, who was patronized by Marie Antoinette before the French Revolution. Although she was very admired by her peers before the revolution, her former relationship with the murdered queen led her to a life of exile for many years after the revolution.

Tags: [art and politics](#), [French Revolution](#), [guillotine](#), [Neoclassicism](#), [Reign of Terror](#)

Q: I understand the philosophical ideals behind Neoclassical art, but what were the characteristic styles of Neoclassical art—painting in particular?

A: Neoclassical painting valued straight lines, smooth paint surface, bright light, minimal use of color, and clearly defined forms. The softness and sumptuousness that was so characteristic of Rococo painting can be considered the opposite of Neoclassical stylistic taste. The quintessential artist working in this style was Jacques-Louis David.

Tags: [artistic styles](#), [Neoclassicism](#)

Q: What are the stylistic characteristics and principles of Georgian architecture?

A: Georgian architecture was a form of Neoclassical architecture that was popular in England and America from the second quarter of the eighteenth century through the middle of the nineteenth century. It combined the English architectural style that grew out of an interest in Palladianism with the Renaissance interest in harmony and proportion.

Tags: [Architecture](#), [artistic styles](#), [Georgian architecture](#), [Neoclassicism](#), [terminology](#)

Q: Why did so many American artists work in London in the eighteenth century? Wouldn't this have been seen as treasonous?

A: While it may seem strange that so many American artists worked in London, given the political tensions between the two countries, it actually makes a lot of sense on an artistic level. England and America were culturally and artistically linked in many ways. Moreover, the Royal Academy was one of the most prominent places for artistic training; in the early American colonies, there was no equivalent training ground for artists. Many American artists studied and worked in England and returned to America to fight in the revolutionary war. Others, like Benjamin West, made England their new home, but nonetheless influenced later generations of American artists.

Tags: [American Art](#), [artistic influence](#), [artistic training](#), [Neoclassicism](#), [Royal Academy in London](#), [travel](#)

Q: I hear of a lot of American artists studying and working in England. Did American artists study and work in any other European countries?

A: Yes. Most notably an early school of Neoclassical sculptors from America went to Italy. Italy was a great place for the study of Classical sculpture, because there were so many antique sculptures there to study first-hand. Italy was also a logical place for these sculptors to visit, because many of Europe's leading sculptors of the day were at work in Italy.

Tags: [American Art](#), [artistic influence](#), [artistic training](#), [Italy](#), [Neoclassicism](#), [Sculpture](#), [travel](#)

Q: What is Federalist architecture? What are its main characteristics?

A: Federalist architecture, a sub-category of Neoclassical architecture, was heavily influenced by English architecture as well as ancient Roman architecture. The main stylistic hallmark is an emphasis on planar (flat) surfaces with very little three-dimensional embellishment. This style marks a departure from the more ornamental Georgian style, which immediately preceded it. It was a leading architectural style in America from the last quarter of the eighteenth century through the first third of the nineteenth century.

Tags: [Architecture](#), [Artistic Movements](#), [Federalist Style](#), [Georgian Style](#), [Neoclassicism](#)

Q: Why would American patrons have commissioned a French sculptor, Houdon, to sculpt George Washington? Wouldn't it have been more in line with early American patriotism to use an American artist?

A: America had a special relationship with France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many ways, these countries viewed each other as sister nations, since both had fought bloody revolutions to free themselves from tyranny and sought to bring about liberty and democracy. Given Houdon's exalted reputation, it is not surprising that he would have been an ideal choice to sculpt George Washington; France's special relationship with America would have solidified this choice.

Tags: [American Art](#), [George Washington](#), [Houdon](#), [politics and art](#), [Sculpture](#), [travel](#)

Q: What is a life mask?

A: A life mask, much like a death mask, is a plaster cast mask made of a person's face to faithfully capture his or her features. As you might have gathered, the main difference between a life mask and a death mask is the status of the person whose likeness is being taken: dead versus alive. It was common practice to take death masks to get a final record of a person's likeness. Life masks became increasingly popular for the sake of scientific accuracy and some artists, like Houdon, used them to inform their sculptures.

Tags: [Houdon](#), [life mask](#), [Sculpture](#), [terminology](#)

Q: Early Americans admired Classical antiquity and were fully immersed in the Neoclassical style. Was there a preference for Greek or Roman style or were both cultures admired?

A: Early Americans admired both Greek and Roman cultures, but there seems to have been a preference for the Roman style and culture before the Greek Revival style began in the early nineteenth century. The father of American Neoclassicism, Thomas Jefferson, strongly favored Roman art and culture. The favoring of Roman art was probably not just aesthetic but linked to the ideals of Roman democracy and republicanism.

Tags: [American Art](#), [artistic styles](#), [Classicism](#), [Neoclassicism](#), [Thomas Jefferson](#)

Q: What are the stylistic characteristics of Greek Revival architecture, and when did it flourish?

A: Greek Revival is often called the first truly distinct style of American architecture, and it flourished throughout the country beginning in roughly the second quarter of the nineteenth century. As the name suggests, it involved a revival of Greek architectural traditions, relying heavily on post and lintel construction (that is columns supporting horizontal elements). Many European countries also had a Greek Revival, but these revivals looked different in their different contexts. Different countries combined local tradition with Greek Revival to declare a national style that seemed somehow rooted in the classical world.

Tags: [American Art](#), [Architecture](#), [artistic styles](#), [Greek Revival](#), [Neoclassicism](#)

Q: What was Thomas Jefferson's academical village?

A: Academical village was Jefferson's rather idealistic description of the University of Virginia. This description encapsulates his vision of the university as not an institution but as a utopian village wherein students would learn from each other and a spirit of intellectual curiosity would prevail.

Tags: [Academical Village](#), [Neoclassicism](#), [Thomas Jefferson](#), [University of Virginia](#)