WAR and VIOLENCE:
CLASSICAL, LATE CLASSICAL, AND HELLENISTIC GREEK ART
(Greek Images of War and Violence)
CLASSICAL and LATE CLASSICAL GREEK ART

Online Links:

Niobid Painter – Smarthistory
Niobid Krater – Louvre
Theater of Ancient Greece - Wikipedia
Alexander the Great – Wikipedia
History of Macedonia: Alexander the Great Biography
Alexander Mosaic – Smarthistory
In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great (Part 1 of 4)
Niobid Painter, Artemis and Apollo slaying the children of Niobe (Athenian red-figure calyx-krater), from Orvieto, Italy, c. 450 BCE
The Niobid Painter, probably inspired by the large frescoes produced in Athens and Delphi (by Polygnotos of Thasos?), decorated this exceptional krater with two scenes in which the many figures rise in tiers on lines of ground that evoke an undulating landscape. On one side, Apollo and Artemis are shown decimating the children of Niobe with their arrows; on the other side is Heracles surrounded by Athena and heroes in arms, in a composition whose serenity is already classical, and whose meaning is still uncertain.

Niobe, who had at least a dozen children, had boasted that she was superior to the goddess Leto, who had only two offspring, Apollo and Artemis. To punish her hubris (arrogance) and teach the lesson that no mortal could be superior to a god or goddess, Leto sent her two children to slay all of Niobe’s many sons and daughters.
On the Niobid Painter’s krater, the horrible slaughter occurs in a schematic landscape setting of rocks and trees. The painter disposed the figures on several levels, and they actively interact with their setting. One slain son, for example, not only has fallen upon a rocky outcropping but is partially hidden by it. The Niobid Painter also drew the son’s face in a three-quarter view, something that earlier vase painters of the Archaic period had not attempted.
A final, more recent, hypothesis looks at the obvious emphasis given to Heracles – crowned with laurels, wrinkled and standing on a stepped base almost invisible to the naked eye. It is thought to be a statue of the deified hero, after he had completed his exploits. We know from ancient sources that Heracles was thought to have helped Marathon to victory and was subsequently the object of a cult in Athens. We may therefore be seeing, in this image, the warriors of Marathon, come to place themselves under the protection of the hero before battle.
In ancient Greece, the theater was more than mere entertainment; it was a vehicle for the communal expression of religious belief through music, poetry, and dance. During the fifth century BCE, the plays primarily were tragedies in verse based on popular myths and were performed at a festival dedicated to Dionysos.
A semicircle of tiered seats built into the hillside overlooked the circular performance area, called the orchestra, at the center of which was an altar to Dionysos. Rising behind the orchestra was a two-tiered stage structure made up of the vertical skene (scene)- an architectural backdrop for performances and a screen for the backstage area- and the proskenion (proscenium), a raised platform in front of the skene that was increasingly used over time as an extension of the orchestra. Ramps connecting the proskenion with lateral passageways (parodoi; singular parodos) provided access to the stage for performers.
This design provided uninterrupted sight lines and good acoustics and allowed for efficient crowd control of the 12,000 spectators. Performances took place in daylight, starting early in the morning. There was of course no stage lighting.
Greek tragedies have some striking peculiarities- for example, all violent events, such as the killings of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, take place off-stage, and are described for the audience; the drama thus lives in language at least as much as it does in action. In addition, the plays generally deal with events whose outcome is already known to the audience; everything that happens is preordained.
Tragedy originated in the dithyramb, a kind of choral performance in which the members of the chorus were dressed as satyrs. These performances were probably always competitive. Originally the prize was a goat, afterwards sacrificed to the god- hence the word ‘tragedy,’ which means goat-song in Greek. The origin of comedy was the comus, a ribald comic chorus with performers wearing extravagant disguises. This went round from house to house. The obscenity and scurrility associated with the comus contained a ritual element- they were thought to ward off evil.
Philoxenes of Eretria. *Battle of Issus*, c. 310 BCE, Roman copy (*Alexander mosaic*) from the House of the Faun, Pompeii, Italy, late second or early first century BCE, mosaic
Greek painting has so far been discussed only in terms of pottery decoration because little remains of paintings in other mediums. Later, Roman patrons greatly admired Greek murals and commissioned copies, as either wall paintings or mosaics (created from tesserae, small cubes of colored stone or marble), to decorate their homes. These copies provide another source of evidence about fourth-century BCE Greek painting. A second-century BCE mosaic, *Alexander the Great Confronts Darius III at the Battle of Issos*, was based on an original wall painting of about 310 BCE. Pliny the Elder attributed the original to Philoxenos of Eretria; a recent theory claimed it was by a well-known woman painter, Helen of Egypt.
This scene is one of violent action, gestures, and radical foreshortening, all devised to elicit the viewer’s response to a dramatic situation. Astride a horse at the left, his hair blowing free and his neck bare, Alexander challenges the helmeted and armored Persian leader, who stretches out his arm in a gesture of defeat and apprehension as his charioteer whisks him back toward safety in the Persian ranks. Presumably in close imitation of the original painting, the mosaicist create the illusion of solid figures through modeling, mimicking the play of light on three-dimensional surfaces by touching protrusions with highlights and shading (called skiagraphia by the Greeks) undercut areas and areas in shadow.
Alexander fights on recklessly without his helmet: he is wide-eyed and, although in the act of spearing a member of the Persian cavalry, obviously intent on attacking the Persian king himself. Darius, however, has wheeled his chariot round. The tall lances of his numerous troops are shouldered for retreat. He turns, horror-struck, to glimpse the hero-warrior sowing panic among his bodyguards. He is a study in the loss of nerve. The costumes look authentic, but when examined closely, those of the Persians are suspiciously ornate and effeminate (the horseman being speared by Alexander wears earrings and sequined trousers, for example).
The Persian to the right of the rearing horse has fallen to the ground and raises, backward, a dropped Macedonian shield to protect himself from being trampled. Philoxenos recorded the reflection of the man’s terrified face on the polished surface of the shield.

Everywhere in the scene, men, animals, and weapons cast shadows on the ground. Philoxenos here truly opened a window into a world filled not only with figures, trees, and sky but also with light.
After the battle of Issus, Darius fled, leaving his purse and his family behind him, to be treated the one with gratitude, the other with chivalry. After peaceably taking Damascus and Sidon Alexander laid siege to Tyre, which was harboring a large Phoenician squadron in the pay of Persia.

Marching back into Asia, hardly stopping to rest at Susa, he marched over mountains in the depth of winter to seize Persepolis; and so rapidly did he move that he was in Darius’ palace before the Persians could conceal the royal treasury. Here again his good judgment left him, and he burned the magnificent city to the ground. His soldiers looted the houses, ravaged the women, and killed the men.
HELLENISTIC GREEK ART

Online Links:
HELLENISTIC GREEK ART

Online Links:

The Boxer: An Ancient Masterpiece Comes to the Met

Prized Fighter - Wall Street Journal

Winged Victory of Samothrace – Wikipedia

A Closer Look at the Victory of Samothrace – Louvre

Nike of Samothrace – Smarthistory

The Louvre's Winged Victory of Samothrace is Back - Wall Street Journal
Pergamon rose to prominence during the years of the Greek empire’s division following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. His short-lived empire was partitioned among his generals, with General Lysimachus inheriting the then-settlement of Pergamon and its wealth. Due largely to its strategic position along land and sea trading routes and in part to the wealth of the Attalid kings who ruled the kingdom, the city enjoyed centuries of prosperity that continued when it passed peacefully to Rome’s control in 133 B.C. From that point on, Pergamon’s fate was inextricably linked to that of Rome, and it rose and fell in tandem with the great Roman Empire.
Altar of Zeus (Pergamon, Turkey), c. 175 BCE

This high relief depicts a mythical battle between pre-Greek Titans and Greek Olympians. The subject was popular in Hellenistic art partly as a result of renewed political threats to Greek supremacy. But unlike the Classical version on the Parthenon metopes, that at Pergamon is full of melodrama, frenzy, and pathos. King Attalus I defeated the powerful Gauls, who invaded Pergamon in 238 BC. This victory made Pergamon a major political force. Later, under the rule of Eumenes II (197-c. 160 BC) the monumental altar dedicated to Zeus was built to proclaim the victory of Greek civilization over the barbarians.
Above: Sketched Reconstruction of the City of Pergamon

Under Attalus I (241–197 BC), the Attalids allied with Rome against Philip V of Macedon, during the first and second Macedonian Wars, and again under Eumenes II (197–158 BC), against Perseus of Macedon, during the Third Macedonian War. For support against the Seleucids, the Attalids were rewarded with all the former Seleucid domains in Asia Minor.
Polyeuktos. Demosthenes, Roman copy after a bronze original of c. 280 BCE, marble

This statue was one of several Athenian heroes opposed to the Macedonian rule of Athens that was set up in the agora, or marketplace, of the city. Demosthenes was forced by the Macedonians to flee Athens. When he reached the island of Poros, he drank poison rather than submit to the enemy. An inscription on the base of the sculpture reads: “If your strength had equaled your resolution, Demosthenes, the Macedonian Ares [i.e. Alexander the Great] would have never ruled the Greeks.”
Demosthenes’ life was beset by difficulties, including his financial hardship and a speech impediment. He was a serious stutterer as a young man, but he trained himself to become the greatest public speaker in Athens. His political enemies succeeded in having him exiled from Athens on a trumped-up charge of corruption. In Polyeuktos’ rendition, Demosthenes is an elderly, haggard man, with long, thin arms. His dejection shows on his face and an inner tension is conveyed by the agitation of his hands.
In the Great Altar of Zeus erected at Pergamon, the Hellenistic taste for emotion, energetic movement, and exaggerated musculature is translated into relief sculpture. The two friezes on the altar celebrated the city and its superiority over the Gauls, who were a constant threat to the Pergamenes. Inside the structure, a small frieze depicted the legendary founding of Pergamon.

In the third century BCE, King Attalos I (r. 241-197 BCE) had successfully turned back an invasion of the Gauls in Asia Minor. The gigantomachy of the Altar of Zeus alluded to that Attalid victory over the barbarians. The Pergamene designers also used the gigantomachy frieze to establish a connection with Athens, whose earlier defeat of the Persians was by then legendary, and with the Parthenon, which the Hellenistic Greeks already recognized as a Classical monument- in both senses of the word.
Attalos II, the son of Attalos I of Pergamon, studied in Athens in his youth. As a gift to the city of Athens, he ordered a stoa (a building that housed shops and civic offices) built in the Athenian agora, a central meeting place in the city. This stoa was meticulously recreated by the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. Originally, stoas framed each side of the agora, providing a sense of order to an ancient city known for its haphazard, unplanned development. The Stoic school of Greek philosophy took its name from that building.
Hellenistic art, especially in its late phase, reflects uncertainty and turmoil of the period. (By the end of the first century BCE, the Romans were in complete control of the Mediterranean world.) A writing movement pervades the entire design, down to the last lock of hair, linking the figures in a single continuous rhythm. This sense of unity restrains the violence of the struggle and keeps it just barely form exploding its architectural frame. Indeed, the action spills out onto the stairs, where several figures are locked in combat.
The sculptural frieze, over 7 feet in height, probably executed during the reign of Eumenes II (197-159 BCE), depicts a mythical struggle that the Greeks saw as a metaphor for their conflicts with all outsiders. The victory of the gods is meant to symbolize Eumenes’ own victories. Such translations of history into mythology had been common in Greek art for a long time. But to place Eumenes in analogy with the gods themselves implies an exaltation of the ruler that is Oriental rather than Greek.
The snake helps the viewer to identify that the giant Alkyoneos (seen here) is battling with the Olympian goddess Athena. The snake aids Athena in her victory, similar to how serpents aid the Olympian gods (specifically Athena, according to some accounts) in the killing of Laocoön, the Trojan priest.

Athena was often identified with snakes. Not only was the snake associated with wisdom (which was one of Athena's attributes), but snakes also served as the symbol for Erectheus, the mythical king of Athens. As the patron goddess of Athens, it makes sense that Athena would also be associated Erectheus (and Athens) through the snake symbol. Athena was depicted with a snake in the monumental "Athena Parthenos" statue by Phidias.
What the viewer receives from the frieze is an impression of tumult, but a tumult in which the faces of the Olympians are uniformly calm, and those of the giants contorted. This depicts a battle in which the superiority of one side over another is absolute. The giants are anchored to the earth by their snake-tailed bodies, defining them as reptilian; frequently we see them being pulled by the hair, raging but essentially impotent.
Hecate fights against Klytios on the left; Artemis against Otos on the right

On the eastern side of the altar area, on the left, the presentation begins with the three-faceted goddess **Hecate**. She fights in her three incarnations with a torch, a sword and a lance against the giant Klytios. Next to her is **Artemis**, the goddess of the hunt; in keeping with her function she fights with a bow and arrow against a Giant who is perhaps Otos. Her hunting dog kills another Giant with a bite to the neck.
On the south frieze, the goddess Rhea/Cybele, the great mother goddess of Asia Minor, rides into battle on a lion with bow and arrow. On the left can be seen the eagle of Zeus holding a bundle of lightning bolts in his claws. Next to Rhea, three of the immortals fight with a mighty, bull-necked Giant.
On the inside wall (stairway) are to be found (shown left to right above) the couple Nereus and Doris, a giant, and Oceanus, and a fragment supposed to be Tethys, all of whom are engaged in fighting Giants. The figures in themselves reveal their distinctive character rather than this being the result of the artists’ personal styles.
As the Attalids were supreme patrons and had actually employed mercenary troops to effect their victories, there was no place here for any depiction of the citizen body of Pergamum itself.
The shape of the altar was almost a square. In this respect it followed Ionic models, which specified a wall enclosing the actual sacrificial altar on three sides. On the open side the altar could be accessed via a stairway. For cultic reasons such altars were usually oriented toward the east so that those bringing sacrifices entered the altar from the west.
Some criticized the use of the Pergamon Altar as a backdrop for the application submitted by the city of Berlin to host the Olympic summer games in 2000. The Senate of Berlin had invited the members of the IOC executive committee to a banquet taking place in front of the altar. That called to mind Berlin's application to host the games in 1936. Also at that time the Nazi Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick had invited the members of the IOC to a banquet laid out in front of the altar.
The new Pergamene style is illustrated by a group of sculpture from a monument commemorating the victory in 230 BCE of Attalos I (ruled 241-197 BCE) over the Gauls. These figures, originally in bronze but known today only from Roman copies in marble, were mounted on a large pedestal.
Epigonos (?). Dying Gaul, Roman copy of a bronze original from Pergamon, c. 230-220 BCE, marble

The wiry, unkempt hair and the trumpeter’s twisted neck ring, or **torque** (the only item of dress the Celtic Gauls wore in battle), identify them as “barbarians.”
Writing a century or two later, Diodorus Siculus tells us how the Gauls washed their hair in limewater, making it dense and tousled, and consequently looked like satyrs, or even Pan. From Pan comes panic - a good thing if you create it on the battlefield (as has been claimed for one of the Macedonian kings, Antigonus Gonatas), but dangerous to be on the receiving end.

The group created for Attalos I retains respect for the enemy: these are images of not only physically formidable opponents, but also of a people with pride - the same refusal to surrender, the same dignity in defeat that Tacitus and other Roman writers would guardedly admire in the Celts. Of course, the achievement of Attalos in defeating such spirited enemies is thereby heightened.
Epigonos (?). Gallic chieftain killing himself and his wife, Roman copy after a bronze original from Pergamon, c. 230-220 BCE, marble

The artist has sought to arouse the viewer’s admiration and pity for his subjects. This pathos can be seen in the chieftain, for example, still supporting his dead wife as he plunges the sword into his own breast.
Nike alighting on a warship (Nike of Samothrace), c. 190 BCE, marble

In its original setting – in a hillside niche high above the theater in the Sanctuary of the Great Gods at Samothrace, perhaps drenched with spray from a fountain – this huge goddess must have reminded visitors of the god in Greek plays who descends from Heaven to determine the outcome of the drama. The forward momentum of the Nike’s heavy body is balanced by the powerful backward thrust of her enormous wings.

The wind-whipped costume and raised wings of this Nike indicate that she has just alighted on the prow of the stone ship that formed the original base of the statue. The work probably commemorated an important naval victory, perhaps the Rhodian triumph over the Seleucid king Antiochus III in 190 BCE.
Originally, the Nike stood in an architectural niche above the theater and to the south of the stoa. Rising a towering 5.57 meters into the air, the great ensemble of ship and Victory were visible from many vantages within the Sanctuary.

However, it is possible that the precinct walls, which are constructed of ashlar masonry, originally supported a roofed enclosure for the statue, which would have protected the statue but considerably reduced her visibility.

The boulder retaining wall now visible at the site was later placed around the precinct to protect the monument. At one time it was thought that the monument formed a fountain, but that reconstruction now seems unlikely.
The Nike must commemorate a great victory; the prominence of the ship suggests that the victory was connected with a naval engagement or with the achievement of naval supremacy.

However, just when the Nike was commissioned and what she commemorates remains deeply contested. For many years, the style, material, and subject suggested to scholars that the Nike was dedicated by the Rhodians, whose navy was particularly accomplished and powerful at the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 2nd centuries B.C. The dark stone of the base has been associated with the quarries at Lartos on the island of Rhodes, and the ship has been identified as a trihemiolia. While the trihemiolia was common in many Hellenistic navies, it was especially prized by the Rhodians.

Recently, however, the Rhodian naval connection has come under sharp scrutiny, and a range of dates, both earlier and later, have been proposed.
Athanadoros, Hagesandros, and Polydoros of Rhodes. Laocoon and his sons (Rome) early 1st century CE, marble

The Hellenistic interest in melodramatic pathos is again evident in the sculptural group of Laocoön and his Sons, a Roman adaptation of a Hellenistic work. It depicts an incident from the end of the Trojan War, in which Laocoön and his sons are devoured by a pair of serpents. Laocoön was the priest who was punished by the gods for telling the Trojans not to admit the Greeks’ wooden horse into the city.
The Laocoön was placed at the Vatican Museums by Pope Julius II not long after it was discovered on Jan. 14, 1506, on the Esquiline Hill. Upon hearing the news, the pope immediately dispatched the architect Giuliano da Sangallo to view it; Sangallo brought along his colleague Michelangelo Buonarroti. The men identified the statue as that described by the first-century Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder in his Natural History, who called it "a work superior to any painting and any bronze," one "carved from a single block in accordance with an agreed plan by those eminent craftsmen Hagesander, Polydorus and Athenodorus, all of Rhodes."
Estimates of the date of this work vary widely - from the 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE - and there is a debate over whether it is a later copy of an earlier original or a later original in an earlier style. The Laocoön was long thought to be a Greek original and was identified with a group by Agesander, Athenodoros, and Polydoros of Rhodes that the Roman writer Pliny mentions as being in the palace of the emperor Titus.
In style, including the relief-like spread of the three figures, it clearly descends from the Pergamon frieze.
Seated boxer, from Rome, Italy, c. 100-50 BCE, bronze

The "Boxer at Rest," which remains in superb condition, was discovered in 1885 on the Quirinal in Rome, a site once occupied by the Baths of Constantine. Like the other great thermal complexes of the Roman Empire, these baths were far more than a place to bathe: They were a cultural center that included libraries, conference rooms and museums containing some of the finest sculptures of the ancient world. By the time the Baths of Constantine were completed about 315 CE, the "Boxer at Rest" was between four and six centuries old and so would have been admired by Constantine's contemporaries much as we admire the works of Lorenzo Ghiberti and Donatello today.
Perhaps at one time part of a group, the boxer is not a victorious young athlete with a perfect face and body but a heavily battered, defeated veteran whose upward gaze may have been directed at the man who had just beaten him. His nose is broken, as are his teeth. He has smashed “cauliflower” ears. Inlaid copper blood drips from the cuts on his forehead, nose and cheeks.
Seated on a stone outcropping, the wiry boxer, naked except for his boxing gloves and athletic suspender, rests his elbows on his outstretched legs and glances up and behind him, as though he had turned around suddenly, perhaps in response to the roar of the crowd. His musculature and posture, as well as the minutely observed *caesti*, or boxing gloves, that he wears, have been conceived with a vivid naturalism that is initially obscured by the stylized rendering of his facial hair. But the more one examines that face, the more striking its realism becomes. Surely it is distorted, but its distortions are those of pugilism rather than of art: the flattened nose that appears to have been broken more than once; the half-shut eyes and battered ears; the swollen, parted lips through which the boxer strains to draw breath. Cast in the lost wax technique, the bronze surface has been inlaid at points with traces of copper alloy to describe scar tissue and traces of blood.
Our boxer, however, is a loser, whatever the outcome of his latest bout. In Ancient Greece boxing was a sport in which even noblemen might engage, as opposed to the later gladiatorial contests in Rome, whose participants were slaves or members of the lower classes. Still, it is difficult to imagine that anyone would submit to the punishment that this boxer has clearly sustained unless he were driven to it by the most unenviable necessity.

As a result, the effect of this sculpture is one that is very rare in Western art, or in any art. Raised on the Judeo-Christian culture that dominates the Western canon, most of us have seen countless depictions of slaughter and gore far more graphic and shocking than any of the scars and mutilations that mark the surface of the "Boxer at Rest." But even the most abject depictions of Christ at his Crucifixion, even the most sanguinary martyrdoms of the saints hold out an implicit promise of the ultimate victory of their cause.
WAR and VIOLENCE:
CLASSICAL, LATE CLASSICAL, AND HELLENISTIC GREEK ART
(Greek Images of War and Violence) ACTIVITIES and REVIEW
STUDENT REVIEW #1:

Based on these two images, how do these two depictions of war address the subject of war and violence differently and why?
Think of ways in which both of these works reflect characteristics of the Hellenistic period. Why perhaps did the sculptor depict, in both works, not a heroic victor but a defeated tragic figure?
Compare and contrast these two depictions of battles.

How do the two images reflect changes in Greek art and culture from the Classical period to the Hellenistic age?
To what degree does the fragmented state of much of Greek sculpture contribute to our appreciation of the work?

Would these works possess the same degree of appeal if they were not fragmented?
Based on these two trailers, how do these two movies address the subject of war and violence differently and why?

Saving Private Ryan Trailer – YouTube

The Hurt Locker Trailer – YouTube
Discuss ways in which the imagery devised for a video game demonstrates an awareness of its targeted audience.