



Image from: [Central west portal, Chartres... in Blackwell Companions to Art History: A Companion to Medieval Art](#)

#### Summary Article: **Gothic art**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Style that succeeded Romanesque as the most popular force in European art and prevailed in most countries, particularly in northern Europe, from the middle of the 12th century to the 16th century, when it gave way to Renaissance influence. The term 'Gothic' was first used with reference to architecture, and it is only in Gothic architecture that it has a clear meaning, with pointed arches being the most obvious characteristic. The term is used as a convenient label for other visual arts of the period, but its meaning in these contexts is rarely precise.

The term Gothic, which was first used in the Renaissance, originally expressed disapproval of the medieval style, and referred to the barbarian **Goths** who invaded the Roman Empire between the 3rd and 5th centuries.

Several types of sculpture are considered to be typical of the Gothic period, most notably the spectacular groups of figures around the portals of great cathedrals, particularly in France, where the Gothic style originated. These figures usually echo the long and graceful forms of the architecture. This was also a great age of woodcarving, with elaborate sets of choir stalls, their spiky pierced forms intended to reflect the tracery and pinnacles of the larger Gothic structures. The Gothic emphasis on dynamic line reveals the spirit of religious mysticism that dominated, with spires intended to reflect the human reach heavenwards.

In smaller-scale sculpture, the spirit of the Gothic period is seen particularly in statuettes of the Virgin and Child. These were often in ivory and typically have a graceful swaying pose following the natural shape of the elephant tusks from which they were carved.

This swaying elegance is considered characteristic of Gothic art and is also found in the manuscript illumination of the time. Illumination and stained glass were the two principal forms of painting in the Gothic period, while individual easel paintings were still something of a rarity. Easel paintings first became common in Italy, where the Gothic style took root much less firmly than in other parts of Europe. Because of its Roman heritage, Italy was more influenced by classical art than was the rest of Europe, and this restrained the more flamboyant features of Gothic art. Climatic factors came into play too – because Italy is a sunny country, the windows of medieval churches there tended to be smaller than those in northern Europe. Decoration took the form of frescoes, painted on the large areas of flat wall space, rather than stained glass in the windows.

#### **weblinks**

[Gothic Painting \(1280–1515\)](#)

[Web Gallery of Art](#)

**APA**

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Gothic art. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/art\\_gothic](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/art_gothic)

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## APA

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## Chicago

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## Harvard

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## MLA

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