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| **New Kingdom Art and Architecture**   |  | | --- | | [[Karnak](javascript:launchImage())](javascript:launchImage()) | | Karnak featuring obelisks |   **The New Kingdom of ancient Egypt was a golden age of architecture and art. A variety of factors combined to make the New Kingdom one of the most creative cultures of the ancient world.**  The empire that the Pharaohs expanded through diplomacy, trade and war brought Egypt centuries of political stability and prosperity. Money poured into Egypt from its foreign lands, particularly Nubia, home to the richest gold mines in the ancient world.   **Giving thanks, looking good**  Much of this money was used by the pharaohs to give thanks to the gods who had helped them in their success. Commissioning magnificent buildings and statues, obelisks and temples gave pharaohs the opportunity to show off their wealth and generosity to their own people, as well as to visitors from other lands.   The pharaohs also controlled the news through carvings on the temple walls - an early form of propaganda. Pharaohs - particularly [Hatshepsut](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/hatshepsut.html) and [Ramesses II](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/ramesses.html) - used this power of information to its full capacity , to legitimize their own reign and to rewrite failures into glorious successes.   **Temples - the next big thing**  The god to benefit most from all the building work was Amen-Re, the chief of the gods. His temple at Karnak was expanded repeatedly. This was done most notably by Ramesses II, who added 134 massive columns shaped like papyrus trees, weighing more than 100 tons each.  Temples were one of the main architectural innovations of the New Kingdom. They were the most important buildings in ancient Egypt - cities like Amarna were built around a central temple, with roads radiating outwards.   **Royal extravagance**  Hatshepsut began the trend by building a magnificent temple at Deir el-Bahri. Others soon followed. [Amenhotep III](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/amenhotep.html) commissioned huge numbers of enormous buildings and was the first to build the gigantic statue, or colossus. The Colossi of Memnon dominated the plains around Thebes, while the temples for the pharaoh and his wife, [Queen Tiy](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/tiy.html), set new standards in royal opulence.   But even these were overshadowed by the building program of Ramesses II. Almost every temple in Egypt was rebuilt, redecorated or expanded . In Thebes, the great temple to Amen-Re gained a new entrance with four colossi of the pharaoh, to remind people who was in charge.   **Tombs, not pyramids**  The other major change was the move away from pyramids to tombs carved out of the rock face, a trend started by Amenhotep I in around 1500 BC. Other pharaohs followed suit, building their tombs in what became known as the Valley of the Kings, with other valleys used for queens and princes.   |  | | --- | | [[Nefertari's tomb](javascript:launchNefertari3())](javascript:launchNefertari3()) | | Click on the image for a gallery view |   The tombs were exquisitely decorated with fine paintings or carved reliefs of religious texts that would help the dead successfully navigate their way to the afterlife. Other tombs contained idealized images of everyday life that represented a person's hopes for paradise in the afterlife.   **A means to an end**  The ancient Egyptians had no word for art and no concept of art for art's sake. For them, the images had a more important purpose - representing the life of the tomb's occupant and forming the basis of their life after death.  **Art evolves**  Yet Egyptian art did evolve over the years. During the reign of Hatshepsut, portraits of both men and women became more feminine, with heart-shaped faces, arched eyebrows and kindly smiles. Art changed again in the reign of Akenhaten. New portraits of the royal family replaced graceful images with shocking new pictures. Kings and queens had skinny chests and shoulders, and massive hips, thighs and buttocks. A short shock Akenhaten's willingness to ditch tradition altogether was a forerunner of things to come. But like his decision to abandon Thebes and Amen-Re for Amarna and Aten, the changes died with him.   The backlash against his actions and ideas was brutal: ancient Egypt was a conservative country and soon traditional paintings were back, as the tombs of [Tutankhamen](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/tutankhamen.html) and Ramesses II would demonstrate all too clearly. |

[**http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/architecture.html**](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/architecture.html)