



Classical Art and Archaeology: Teaching Latin and the Humanities with the Monuments of Rome with Karen Moore

Lecture 4: Idealism in Greek Sculpture

Outline:

Introduction

In this video, Karen Moore looks at Greek art and its influence on Roman sculpture and writing.

- Focus on sculptures of divine or mortal figures.
- Greek art history can be divided into three periods:
 - Archaic (625-500 BC)
 - Classical (500-323 BC)
 - Hellenistic (323-30 BC)
- This lecture focuses primarily on the Classical period, leading to its influence on Roman sculpture.

Greek Archaic Period

- Kouroi (male figures) and Kore (female figures)
 - These figures seem to be influenced by Egyptian sculptures of men and women.
 - In both cases the forms seem stiff, solid, abstract.
 - Characteristics of Egyptian sculpture:
 - Stiff, solid, and abstract forms.
 - Formal, lifeless posture.
 - Seated or standing positions with close-set arms and legs.
 - Hair or headdress providing neck and head stability.
 - These characteristics are also seen in the Greek kore and kouroi figures:
 - Slightly more lifelike but still rigid.
 - Meant to be the representation of the *idea* of male and female, rather than actual humans.



- During the transition to the Classical Period of Greek art, the dominant characteristics shift towards:
 - Naturalism and movement.
 - Attention to human body details.
 - Idealized forms with balance, symmetry, and harmony.

Notable Classical Sculptors and Their Works

We will now look at 3 sculptors and their figures from the Classical Period preserved for posterity by Pliny the Elder in his *Historia Naturalis* (A.D. 77).

- **Myron (480-440 B.C.):**
 - Athenian
 - Notable work: Discobolus (discus thrower)
 - Mentioned by Pliny the Elder in [Book 34, Ch. 19 of *Historia Naturalis*](#):
 - *Myronem Eleutheris natum, Hageladae et ipsum discipulum, bucula maxime nobilitavit celebritatis versibus laudata,...fecit et canem et discobolon et Perseum etc.*
 - Myron born at Eleutheraea, and himself a student of Hagelades, was known especially for his heifer praised in well-known verses...he made a dog and Discobolos (discus thrower) and Perseus etc.
 - Discobolos:
 - Idealized athlete showcasing anatomy and musculature.
 - Presents ideal proportions and symmetry through repeated use of triangles.
 - Student activity: “How many triangles can you find?”
 - Located at the National Museum of Rome.
- **Polykleitos (480-420 B.C.):**
 - Contemporary of Myron.
 - Highly celebrated in antiquity, ranked top 3 by Xenocrates.
 - The other 2 were Myron and Phidias (who constructed the Parthenon).
 - Included in Book 34 of Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis* as well:
 - *Polyclitus Sicyonius, Hageladae discipulus, diadumenum fecit molliter iuvenem, centum talentis nobilitatum, item et dorophorum viriliter puerum. Fecit et quem canona artifices vocant liniamenta artis ex eo petentes, veluti a lege quadam, solusque hominum artem ipsam fecisse artis*



*opere iudicatur...hic consummasse hanc scientiam
iudicatur et toreuticen sic erudisse, ut Phidias aperuisse.*

- Translation: Polycleitus of Sicyon, a student of Hagelades, made the youth softly binding his hair (Diadumenos), renown cost of one hundred talents, likewise also the manly boy carrying a spear (Doryphorus). And he made what the artisans call a Canon aiming their lines of art from that just as from a certain rule, and he alone of men is judged to have made out of his work of art, the artform itself...This man (Polycleitus) is judged to have perfected this science [of sculpture] and to have thus brought to perfection the art of carving sculpture, just as Phidias is judged to have revealed it.
- Known particularly for the "Canon of Polykleitos" (mathematical body proportions for the idealized male shape).
- Notable works:
 - Diadumenos (youth tying his hair)
 - 6'4" tall
 - Originally cast in bronze around 420 B.C.
 - Contrapposto stance (weight shift towards axis creating dynamic posture).
 - Contrast of weight-bearing vs. non-weight bearing, tension vs. relaxation.
 - Doryphoros (spear bearer)
 - 6'11" tall
 - Originally cast in bronze around 440 B.C.
 - Balancing spear on left shoulder.
 - More mature musculature and confidence than the Diadumenos.
 - A Roman copy of the original is found in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples.
 - Meant to illustrate Polycleitus' canonical work, i.e. perfect symmetry and proportions.
 - Commended by Galen in *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*.
 - Inspired Michelangelo's statue "David".
- Praxiteles (395-330 B.C.):
 - Known for his marble sculptures.



- Mentioned by Pliny the Elder in [Book 36, Ch. 4 of *Historia Naturalis*](#):
 - *Praxitelis aetatem inter statuarios diximus, qui marmoris gloria superavit etiam semet. Opera eius sunt Athenis in Ceramico, sed ante omnia est non solum Praxitelis, verum in toto orbe terrarum Venus, quam et viderent, multi navigaverunt Cnidum...illo enim signo Praxiteles nobilitavit Cnidum.*
 - Translation: We have said the age of Praxiteles is among the [bronze] statue makers, who overcame even his own work in the glory of marble. His works are at Athens in the Cerameicus, but before every work, not only of Praxiteles, but truly in the whole world is the Venus, which many have sailed to Cnidus to see...indeed by that sign/statue Praxiteles rendered Cnidus famous.
- Famous work: Venus of Cnidos (first female nude statue).
 - Also called Venus Pudica (Chaste Venus)
 - Represents modesty and eroticism.
 - King Nicomedes unsuccessfully attempted to buy her.
 - Widely copied and established a canon for female nude proportions.
 - Best-known copy in the Vatican Museum.
- The works mentioned above represent the idealized human form, as lauded by Vergil in *The Aeneid* Book 6:
 - *Excudent alii spirantia mollius aera, credo equidem, vivos ducent de marmore vultus*
 - Others hammer out rather softly breathing bronze, they lead forth living faces from marble
- Word Study: *signum*
 - Common term for Roman art including statues
 - Works of arts are like signs in that they convey specific messages and stories:
 - Discobolus/Doryphoros: ideal form
 - Venus of Cnidos: eroticism and sexuality
- The upcoming lesson will explore Roman portraiture and its intended messages.