Sculpture

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On page 79 of Unflattening, Dr. Nick Sousanis uses an image of Auguste Rodin's Le Penseur [The Thinker]. We are aware of this sculpture, but what is the history of sculptures?

Art can be expressed in so many different ways. Every art form that has ever been used has a history and a place where it all began. Sculpture is an art form that dates all the way back to the Stone Age. The earliest prehistoric sculptures were stone carvings of animals. These carvings were found in the caves of Vogelherd, Hohle Fels, and Hohlenstein-Stadel, in the Swabian Jura, Germany. During the Stone Age, they also made sculptures of obese women. No one knows the exact reasoning as to why they made these types of sculptures. These figurines were made from a variety of materials such as, mammoth bones, various types of stone, ceramic clay, and bone ash.

Many of the most famous ancient sculptures are known to have come from the Greeks. The Greeks generally made their sculptures out of stone. They hand carved the stone using metal tools. They also made sculptures out of bronze, but the bronze art was considered to be of a higher stature than the stone sculptures. Even though the bronze pieces were classified as better, most of them were recycled and used as something else.

There are many different sculpting techniques that can be used for making this intricate kind of art. The different kinds of techniques used depend on what material is used for the sculpting. While using wood or stone, artists use a hammer and chisel to chip away pieces and create their masterpiece. If artists are using clay, they are able to mold the clay with their hands to create whatever they desire. If artists want their sculptures to be stronger, they can cast the clay models in bronze to make them more permanent.

In the era of Classical art, artists started making great strides to make their art pieces more realistic. These Greek artists began to not only observe their models more carefully but also they began to understand the anatomy of what they were looking at and creating. The sculptures they created looked much more lifelike and even started to depict people’s age and emotions. With this new form of art, artists were not able to create their sculptures the same way as they did previously. A new style of art called for a new style of artistry. Instead of carving straight into the stone block as they did before, they had to form their models of out clay and then create their stone carvings.

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Byzantine art started with the fall of Rome. At this time Christianity was the official religion and the Roman Empire was divided into Eastern and Western. The Eastern half was ruled by Rome and Byzantine ruled the Western half. Greek artists started creating Christian images and icons known as Byzantine art. Almost all of the Byzantine art created was religion based. During this time many churches and were painted with beautiful mosaics.

Medieval art also happened during the fall of the Roman Empire. Medieval art had three different phases; Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic. All of these art styles were shaped at the same time but they all wished to convey different things. Byzantine art, as mentioned earlier, was focused on the Christian religion. On the other hand, in Romanesque art, the Catholic Church played a key role in creating this art style. Romanesque art was involved with not only sculptures but also great, inventive architecture. Gothic art revolutionized architecture and was very similar to Romanesque architecture. Gothic art had the most lifelike painting and sculptures when being compared to Romanesque and Byzantine art.

Gothic art was grew from Romanesque art and has lasted from the 12th century to as late as the 16th century in most areas. Gothic art really has nothing to do with the Goths but yet the name remains a standard in art history. Architecture was the most important art form during Gothic art. A problem that arose in during the Gothic art period was that masons could not figure out how to their heavy ceiling vaults. These masons were able to fix this problem with numerous innovative techniques.

Renaissance art is most famous for holding the amazing masters Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Raphael. These three were known to dominate in a period called High Renaissance art. Leonardo Da Vinci most famous works of art are the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. Da Vinci was not only famous for his amazing art work but also for his studies with such a wide variety of topics such as, anatomy, geology, botany, hydraulics, and flight. He was known as the "Renaissance man." This time was full of many inventions and new technology.

Just like any other art form, there were artists that dominated the field of sculpture. Donatello was the most recognized artist of Italian Renaissance Sculpture. His most celebrated art piece is his bronzed sculpture, *David*. It was made in the 1440's and is one of the most famous sculptures of all time. The sculpture depicts the young, biblical shepherd's boy with a smile on his face while his foot is rested upon the head of the giant Goliath after he has defeated him.

The Middle Ages and Medieval periods gave way to European artists creating a lot of religious sculptures. Churches and Cathedrals started to show off these religious pieces of art. Some of them even provided special platforms for the elaborate art pieces to be displayed. One of the most famous religious sculptures ever created was the *Pieta*. This sculpture was created by Michelangelo, in 1498, after he was asked to make a life-sized sculpture of the Virgin Mary holding her only son, Jesus Christ. Michelangelo was only in his early twenties when he created this stunning art piece within two years by using only a single slab of marble. The *Pieta* is one of the most beautiful sculptures ever created.

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Sculpture, along with all art forms, is forever changing. Artists will always come up with new styles and methods for creating artwork. Sculptures in Modern Art are able to use a variety of new materials which does not follow traditional sculpting. Most modern sculptures follow a new art form called, "pop art" one of the most influential characteristics of pop art is the concept that art can use sources from any type of culture or time period.

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