

The Development of the Human Form in Greek Art

Greek art is highly influenced by the human form. The most vivid illustration of this influence is the evolution of Greek sculpture. The appreciation for the nude form is evident in sculpture, painting (most notably on ceramics) and even in Greek philosophy. The standing male nude and the draped female form are some of the most iconic of styles emerging from the Greek obsession with the human form. The nude male form appears more prevalently in Greek art than the draped female form. It is apparent from the frequency of the occurrence and the level of development that the human form was the most important aesthetic inspiration for ancient Greek art. The gender roles of ancient Greece are obvious in the presentation of the two different forms. The draped figures of the females are all very modest, and conservatively draped, whereas the male figures are completely exposed and sculpted to show the strength and masculinity of the male form.

The earliest known Greek art involving the human form was *Mantiklos Apollo*, dated at around 700 BCE. This initial crude attempt at a nude youthful form is among the earliest Greek art depict the nude male form. *Mantiklos Apollo* is not accurately proportioned, but instead has an elongated neck and torso, with legs descending from wide (almost feminine) hips. The overall figure is rounded and lacks detail or dimension. The *Matiklos Apollo* is a motionless figure, but still displaying the typical statuary smile that is commonly seen in Greek kouros. Between 650 and 625 BCE the draped female form appeared as the statue *Lady of Auxerre*. This shaping of this draped female is similar to that of the *Mantiklos Apollo* in its shaping below the torso, however, this particular kore is much more accurate to the proportions of the human

form than the previously mentioned *Apollo*. Both of these Orientalizing period statues are physically smaller than most of the statuary that followed and feature triangular faces shows a distinctive link to Geometric period techniques.

During the Archaic period most of the statuary was constructed very much as a three-dimensional portrait utilizing the human form. Many of the pieces were completed at near life size. The kouri from the Archaic period display rigid forms, with bodies full of tension. The earliest pieces, specifically the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Kouros* and the National Archaeological Museum's *Kroisos* have hair sculpted in a very similar fashion to that of *Lady of Auxerre*, using a matrix of lines to give the appearance of texture and the illusion of individual pieces of hair. One piece that sticks out as unique during the Archaic period is the *Calf Bearer* from 560 BCE that is obviously an older individual than either of the kouri. *Calf Bearer* is also engaged in an activity, whereas the other two examples are not. The kore also developed during the Archaic period. The works were given a more shapely appearance, with less area of the sculpture left without detail. The Archaic kouri have relatively featureless faces, but the korai have much more facial detail and distinctiveness. In *Peplos Kore* the feminine features are carefully draped, showing only subtle hints of detail in the breasts. For this particular piece the torso and lower body are assembled very awkwardly with a heavy line dividing them, compared to the seamless flowing appearance of the kouri. The *Peplos Kore* does show some of the advances of the Archaic period, primarily in the more rounded and proportional head and face.

In the century following the initial kouros and korai statues, advances in expression of the human form were being made. The human form moved beyond simply being present in sculpture to be included in vase painting as well. Ceramic vases of various styles (krater, amphora, hydria, kylix and lekythos), each having their own purpose, were carefully painted. The paintings in the black figure and red figure designs were more expressive than the statues, and in some ways captured more human essence than the more detailed and technically accurate sculptures of similar time periods. Ceramic vases are among the most telling of artistic

devices when it comes to Greek culture. The vessels themselves have their function, but their paintings have images of activities that were key to Greek life, such as various games and competitions.

In the Classical period the standing nude form was released from its rigid pose adopted from Egyptian techniques, taking much more natural postures. Using a subtle bend at the right hip and a relaxed posture of his right leg, *Krisios Boy* from 480 BCE is one of the earliest surviving pieces to show this contrapposto. A further advancement of this technique is seen in the *Warrior* that was retrieved from the sea near Riace. This 6' 6" tall sculpture not only displays contrapposto, but also dramatic rotation of the head from center, detailed hair and beard, and arms that are engaged in motion and activity, as if the motions of a live warrior had been frozen in time. *Diskobolos* by Myron integrates some of the athletic concepts of the black figure works with the freeing techniques of sculpture that defined Classical art. The medium of the sculptures affected how freely the sculptures could be executed though, as with *Diskobolos*, while the bronze original was free-standing, even in such an extreme position, the marble copies had to have a tree trunk included to support the form. Polykleitos' *Doryphoros* is a key achievement of the Classical period. *Doryphoros* is designed to present contrapposto as well as have a trait of "beauty". The entire right side of the piece is in motion, while the left side is stable, creating a very natural feel to the sculpture. There are traits of *Doryphoros* that resemble Michelangelo's *David* nearly two-thousand years later.

In the later Classical period, we see a reappearance of gods in Greek sculpture. Between 350 and 340 BCE Praxiteles took the bold step of displaying a nude female form, with *Aphrodite of Knidos*. The piece integrates the techniques common to earlier Classical work. Unfortunately, the piece also has a lot of the masculine traits of earlier work as well, and does not present a very feminine pose. A key artist in the late Classical period was Lysippos, who began to break with frontal-designed statuary. Lysippos intended for these sculptures to be viewed from multiple angles. This is seen initially in *Apoxyomenos* with his bodily positioning, but more dramatically in

Weary Herakles, where a key component of the sculpture can not be seen unless the viewer moves around the sculpture. *Weary Herakles* is also unique in that it displays an emotion and physical state, whereas the more youthful works only capture the essence of youth and physical motion.

The movement toward the portrayal of emotional states started by Lysippos continued into the Hellenistic period. *Gallic chieftain killing himself and his wife* and *Dying Gaul* are key examples of this development. By this point in Greek art the physical technique and the capturing of natural contrapposto are seen in all of the works, but at this point the artists are moving beyond simply capturing the perfect human form, focusing on emotion and drama as key elements of sculpture. The Hellenistic works also keep the perspective distinct qualities of Lysippos. Both of the sculptures of Gaul capture emotions and situations of a defeated people. Fantasy and myth were also elements brought into sculpture during this period. *Nike of Samothrace* and *Aphrodite, Eros and Pan* are good examples of this type of inclusion in Greek art. During the Hellenistic period that was a move toward eroticism in the display of the female form. Picking up from the end of the Classical period and stretching the boundaries of femininity in sculpture. In *Venus de Milo* the drapery is present, but the entire torso is exposed, presenting a more modest, but yet more sensually curved Aphrodite than its *Aphrodite of Knidos* counterpart. The Hellenistic period opened up the options for sculptural representations of the human form. Approaching 100 BCE works such as *Old Market Woman* and *Demosthenes* removed the requirement of a sculpture depicting a youthful male, athlete or god.

The use of the human form in Greek art moved from a very rigid, barely human form in the Orientalizing period to an expressive, free and almost living form at the end of the Hellenistic period. The sculptures began very much frontal, with no development that would demand the viewer move. Perhaps inspired by black figure paintings, the sculptures were given life, dimension and a characteristic that could not be experienced merely by looking at the sculpture as if it were a portrait.