

BEAUTY IN ANCIENT GREEK ART: AN INTRODUCTION

Translate each term/expression about body, sculpture, ancient greek clothing.

forearm / upper arm:

palm:

hairstyle:

braid:

fingers:

wrist:

bosom:

bosom / chest:

neck:

lips:

cheekbones:

eyelids:

eyelashes:

chin:

back:

shoulders:

womb / abdomen:

navel:

leg:

foot:

ankle:

navel:

knee:

sandals:

peplos / peplum:

cloak / himation:

tunic / chiton:

patch:

linen:

wool:

to be wrapped in:

to be fully clothed:

(large scale / life-size) sculpture:

sculpture carved in the round:

statue (equestrian / votive):

half-length / full-length portrait/figure:

relief (bas-relief / high-relief):

stele):

marble:

bronze:

gold:

silver:

wood:

plaster:

clay:

stone (dressed stone):

terracotta:

wax:

to sculpt / carve:

to woodcarve:

to rough-hew:

to polish/to smooth:

sculptor:

carver:



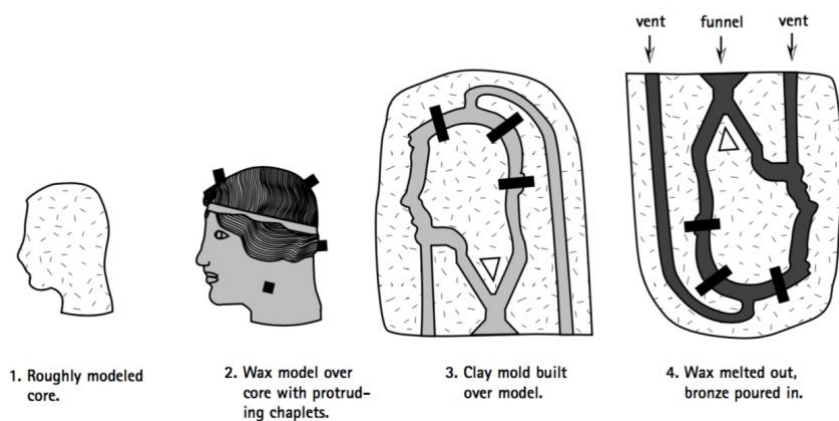
Read the following texts about bronze and marble sculpting and then answer the questions.

Bronze sculpting: the hollow lost-wax casting technique

In the Classical period, sculptors made freestanding bronze statues by hollow-casting their parts, then joining these components together by mechanical and metallurgical means. Cold chiseling then brought out details, especially in the hair, while blemishes and holes in the metal were patched. Although artists used different alloys of bronze for different effects, the metal was always left its original colour in statues—a golden brown that resembled suntanned skin. With inset eyes of stone and other materials, silver teeth, copper lips, and coloured borders on the drapery, these figures must have seemed astonishingly lifelike as they stood in the bright Mediterranean light.

Hollow Lost-Wax Casting: The Direct Method

Drawing © Seán Hemingway



QUESTION

Can you explain in a short text (5-6 lines) the main steps of the hollow lost-wax casting technique?

Marble sculpting

From the seventh century onward, the Greeks began to use marble extensively in their architecture and sculpture. Ancient marble sources included the Cycladic islands of Naxos and Paros; Thasos in the northern Aegean; Doliana in the Peloponnesos; and the mountains of Pentelikon and Hymettos near Athens. [...] Today, scientists are able to determine the provenance of most marble sculptures through isotopic analysis of their chemical compounds.

The Greeks first took measurements of the stone in the quarry. They removed the marble by chopping out a trench around the block with an iron pick, then they either levered it out or inserted wooden pegs around the edge of the block, doused them with water, and waited for the swollen pegs to split the marble away from the quarry surface. The sculptor roughed out the figure or relief using single-pointed picks, hammers, and chisels. From the sixth century onward, various types of drills, mostly powered by bows or straps, were used by sculptors for deep undercutting. In the fifth century, a method of "pointing off" evolved that permitted the transfer of measurements from a model to the stone being carved, a system refined in later Greek and Roman times. This technique allowed a work to be replicated with considerable accuracy and in some quantity.

The surfaces of the marble were usually polished smooth with pumice or emery, and then painted with a mixture of natural pigments and wax, a technique known as encaustic. Even marble architectural details were treated with an organic wash that toned down the excessive whiteness of the raw stone.

QUESTIONS

According to you why do the marble statues need a prop (=puntello) while the hollow bronze statues don't?

Translate the following terms that you can find in the text: wooden pegs, hammers, undercutting, emery

BEAUTY IN ANCIENT GREEK ART: THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Read the following reworked extracts from "Defining beauty: the body in ancient greek art" (catalogue for the homonymous exhibition that took place in London, British Museum, in 2015).

The (naked) body at the centre

To represent the body is a basic human instinct, and among the people of the ancient world, the Greeks were by no means alone in their preoccupation with it. Never, however, was the self-conscious cultivation of the body in ancient art and life greater than it was among the Greeks, and nowhere it is more evident than in their taste for nudity.

So prevalent is male nudity in Greek art of all periods, that we may be forgiven for thinking that the standard dress for youths and men was in fact a state of undress. In representations of battle, nudity becomes a standard device for distinguishing Greek warriors from their enemies, notably Persians, for whom nudity was shameful. Of course public nudity for men was not the norm, either in war or in much day-to-day life. But male nudity was acceptable in gymnasium and in the symposium.

Instead, cult and the sex industry apart, female nudity was never a social norm. In fact, according to the Greeks, while men were rational, women were passionate. They posed a threat to the stability of male society, and consequently the female body had to be covered, contained and controlled. When female nudity occurs in Greek art, it is almost always sexually charged. Erotic scenes in Athenian vase painting include female bathing or dressing, where the male spectator is drawn into the role of the voyeur, exercising a forbidden gaze. The restricted repertory of acceptable occasions for female nudity inspired sculptors to ever-greater inventiveness in the treatment of drapery on the female form, which was often more erotic than nudity itself. Aphrodite, goddess of love, emerged naked just in the fourth century BC, and only between the third and the second century BC ancient Greek art gets used to represent both female and male nudity focusing on their power of attraction, thus abandoning the idea of a relationship between beauty and morality and instead combining the idea of beauty and sexuality.

Beauty and Honour

For the ruling class of men and youths in ancient Greece, the achievement of *arete* or excellence was closely linked with honour. Before the age of democracy and, indeed, to a large extent during it, the pursuit of both qualities was open to those "of good family". Excellence and honour also, however, had to be won by cultivating a certain look, conducting the right sort of love affairs, excelling at athletics and in public speaking, fighting in defence of one's city and, if necessary, dying the "beautiful death" (*kalos thanatos*) on the battlefield. So the idea of beauty and the idea of rightness are strictly connected one the other.

The same occurs for women between the archaic and the classical periods: even for them contract the right kind of marriage and be a model wife and mother was necessary to conquer *arete*. And only the honourable woman was considered beautiful.

The connection between beauty and honour is testified in archaic and classical Greek art by the research of ideal types (the perfect athlete, the perfect female model...). For understanding this concept, it could be useful to remember a story told by Plato. In 431 BC Sokrates - citizen, soldier and philosopher - was introduced to Charmides at the wrestling school. Pursued by admirers, Plato records, "everyone looked at him as if he were a statue". "Do you find him handsome?", Sokrates is asked. "Yes", came the reply. "But", his companion continued, "If he took his clothes off, you would think him faceless, so perfect is his beauty". The story is an illusion to statues of the time that were given the same features in order to reduce human personality to an ideal type. Such beauty is both physical and moral. Charmides does not provoke attention and is possessed of modesty and temperance. He is *kalos kai agathos*, "beautiful and good". That is also the reason why in all classical statues (and then in all academic sculptures) the body's sexual parts are understated: so that the erotic charge is reduced and the moral imperative heightened.

Balance of opposites

In the crepidoma of the temple of Apollo, in Delphi, you could have read the following quotes: "the fairest is the beautiful", "respect the limit", "reject the hybris", "reject the exceeding".

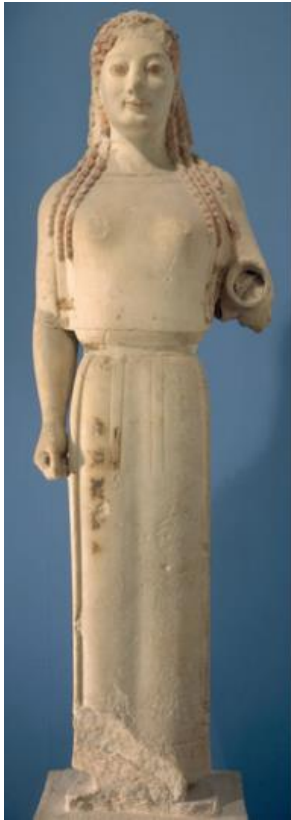
Now consider the fact that Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher of the V cent, used to say: "They do not understand how that which differs with itself in is agreement: harmony consists of opposing tension, like that of the bow and the lyre".

It follows that an enduring principle of Greek natural philosophy is the idea that order in the world, or in other words beauty, is determined by the balance of contrary and complementary forces.

Balance, rhythm, proportion, harmony and symmetry are the language of ancient Greek medicine, but also of representational art.

BEAUTY IN ANCIENT GREEK ART: COMPARING BEAUTIES

The female beauty - between the archaic and the classical period



Attic art, *Grave stele of a girl with doves*, around 530 BC

Attic art, *Peplos Kore*, around 530 BC

She [Athena] drifted a sound slumber over Icarus' daughter, back she sank and slept, her limbs fell limp and still, reclining there on her couch, all the while Athena, luminous goddess, lavished immortal gifts on her to make her suitors lose themselves in wonder...

The divine unguent first. She cleansed her cheeks, Her brow and fine eyes with ambrosia smooth as the oil the goddess Love applies, donning her crown of flowers whenever she joins the Graces' captivating dances.

She made her taller, fuller in form to all men's eyes, her skin whiter than ivory freshly carved, and now, Athena's mission accomplished, off the bright one went as bare-armed maids came in from their own quarters, chattering all the way, and sleep released the queen.

—Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 18, lines 188-225
(description of Penelope)

The female beauty - the classical and late-classical period



Phidias, *Iris?*, 447-432 BC

Kallimachos, *Marble relief with a dancing maenad*, 425-400 BC



...when the holy flute like honey plays the sacred song of those who go to the mountain! To the mountain! Then, in ecstasy, like a colt by its grazing mother, The Bacchante runs with flying feet, she leaps!

—Euripides, *Bacchai*, lines 160-167

On the other hand, if I must say anything on the subject of female excellence to those of you who will now be in widowhood, it will be all comprised in this brief exhortation. Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among the men whether for good or for bad.

—Thoukydides, *History of the Peloponnesian war*, lines 160-167 (last part of the speech delivered by Perikles commemorating those who had fallen in the Athenian armed forces during the first year of the Peloponnesian War)

Describe briefly the couple of statues that you can find above and in the next page concerning the female figure. Then answer to the following questions:

1) What kind of female beauty is expressed by each couple? Can you find any difference between the idea of beauty expressed in the first one and in the second one?

2) Can you relate the texts given to one of the statues or both of them?

The female beauty - the hellenistic period



Bombýca fair, to other folk you may a Gipsy be;
 Sunburnt and lean they call you; you're honey-brown to me.
 Of flowers the violet's dark, and dark the lettered flag-flower tall,
 [...] and I – O! I am wild for you,
 Would all old Croesus had were mine! O then we'd figured be
 In good red gold for offerings rare before the Love-Ladye,
 You with your pipes, a rose in hand or apple, I bedight
 Above with mantle fine, below, new buskins left and right.
 Bombýca fair, your pretty feet are knucklebones, and oh,
 Your voice is poppy, but your ways – they pass my power to show.
 —Theocritus, *Idyll X. The reapers*, lines 26-37

The male beauty - from the archaic to the hellenistic period



Polykleytus, *Diadoumenos*, around 430 BC



Greek art, *Barberini Faun*, around 220 BC

Attic art, *Naxos Kouros*, 590-580 BC

...It is shocking when an old man lies on the front line before a youth: an old warrior whose head is white and beard gray, exhaling his strong soul into the dust, clutching his bloody genitals in his hands: an abominable vision, foul to see: his flesh naked. But in a young man all is beautiful when he still possesses the shining flower of lovely youth. Alive he is adored by men, desired by women, and finest to look upon when he falls dead in the forward clash....
 —Tyrtaios of Sparta, seventh-century BC lyric poet

Describe briefly the evolution in the anatomy of male body that you can see in the three statues above. Then, also using the text, try to consider what idea of "manhood" is expressed in the three different works.