

The Immortal Depiction of Ever-Changing Beauty

Golden light blazed in the dusky room illuminating the statue's ivory skin. The wet draping of fabric across fleshy stomach and hip was formidable and intimate in its shape. Standing over me with her wings held high in glory, basking in the sun in all of her magnificence, was Nike, the ancient Greek goddess of victory. Visitors perused the halls of the Louvre as I stared in awe at this behemoth of a masterpiece standing before me. I wanted to reach out and feel her cold skin, to trace my fingers along the thin, stone cloth that was carved out of raw stone. She looked as if her feet could lift off her mighty pedestal and take flight through the air at any moment. The splendor of the sculpture filled me with a great sense of power, as if I was the winged goddess herself, standing in triumph over the feeble passersby who were only there to relish in my feminine beauty.

My affinity for sculpture has only deepened since encountering Nike, dragging along anyone I can to Nelson-Atkins Art Museum to marvel at the rounded faces and carefully molded tendons of its statues. Greek men stand with their hips jutting to one side, their torsos curving with soft flesh, while women bend and twist, their voluptuous stomachs and arms unapologetically on display. These depictions of Greek beauty are nowhere near the malnourished bodies that dominate the Vogue runways or the hypercurated hourglass figures that plague social media feeds. I feel nothing like a Greek goddess when I'm sitting in class, aware of my stomach folding over itself after eating a hefty lunch, or when I catch an unflattering glimpse of my arms in the TJ Maxx dressing room mirror.

The more I became engrossed in sculpting I began to realize that the reason I was so amazed was due to the irregular beauty standards exhibited in the statues on display. According to the State University of New York art archives, beauty standards in Greek sculpture were

rooted in proportion and *kallos*, a concept that extended beyond physical appearance to include the internal goodness of one's soul. In this way, these sculptures were never just about aesthetics; they were also about capturing a version of humanity that was elevated way beyond its composition. Polykleitos, a famous sculptor best known for his work *Doryphoros*, developed what he called the *Canon*, a set of mathematical proportions intended to define the perfect composition of the human body. "This pursuit of symmetry, proportion, and motion gave rise to statues that appeared both structured and alive, embodying the Ancient Greek ideal of beauty and harmony in the art of sculpture" (The Greek Reporter). Most classical era sculptures also embodied the sculpting technique, *contrapposto*, developed by Polykleitos that highlighted the shifting axes of the body, allowing the body to curve naturally and appear alive. This dynamic balance was most likely echoes of the work of Pythagoreans, who believed that the mathematical relationship between notes was what created harmonies in music and in nature.

Sculptures are beautiful, because they depict us. Our human shape and form are laid bare—exposed for all to see. While we might not possess the perfectly proportioned muscles of David or the harmony of Aphrodite's figure, the emphasis of back dimples and saggy butts reveals a different kind of excellence. Even down to the position of which the subject is placed highlights our very own bodily characteristics we wish to hide about ourselves is even yet, considered art. Seeing an untuned stomach on the body of a Greek goddess has made the overused phrase "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" a reality for me. It is not something to be whittled down into a one size fits all, it is *kallos* and it is *contraposto*. It is the lines on my grandpa's forehead that show the years of smiles. It is my mom's rosacea that makes her appear as if she is blushing from within. It is my friend's chubby cheeks as we giggle over a shared

memory. It is something that transcends everyday life into an art piece and speaks to the eternal ache we have within to accept ourselves just as we are.

Works Cited

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