

Yennhi Nguyen

September 27, 2010

AP Art History 2B

Essay 3

Greek Art

Greek art created the foundation of the western canon of art by creating an argument based on a search for truth. The Hellenistic Dying Gaul (200 BCE) at Pergamon searched for truth through the utilization of emotion to make their art more natural and realistic, while the Classical Greek Parthenon (420 BCE) made by Iktinos and Kallikrates sought truth via perfection.

The Hellenistic Dying Gaul shows extremely distinct emotion. One can clearly see the anguish on his face. His eyebrows are furrowed in agony as he lies on the floor dying. In comparison to the Dying Warrior from the Temple of Aphaia (500 BCE) of the Archaic Greek time period, the Dying Gaul is indeed more realistic. Instead of having the plastered Archaic smile as he dies, the Dying Gaul clearly shows his anguish openly giving one the sense that the sculpture is more realistic than fake. The emotion on the Dying Gaul's face actually makes it seem like he is dying, while the Archaic smile the Dying Warrior has makes it seem like he's reclining rather than dying.

Taking a closer look at the Dying Gaul, there are actually great details that are incorporated into this sculpture. The artist actually sculpted in the blood for the wound on this statue, and a close up of his face shows that he also has a mustache. This is not as noticeable when looking at him directly due to the fact that his head is tilted down in order to further

increase his emotion of defeat. These features may seem miniscule, but it actually serves the purpose of enhancing the realism of this sculpture.

Instead of being in a stiff posture, the Dying Gaul shows distinct movement as his body is twisted and moving even in the position that he is in on the floor. By incorporating this feature into the statue, it makes the Dying Gaul seem more natural. Comparing this to the Dying Warrior yet again, one will notice how stiff and unnatural the Dying Warrior's posture is. He looks far from wounded with the way he is positioned. The Dying Gaul is positioned with a twisted body as if he had just been wounded by his enemy and had fallen onto the floor where he shows quite distinctly his lucid and almost shameful defeat.

On the other hand, the Parthenon of the Classical Greek period is perfection itself. It is perfectly proportioned using an algebraic equation of $x=2y+1$. No matter where this formula was used, it would be constant and would in turn be perfect. By using this equation, the artists Iktinos and Kallikrates were able to make the Parthenon equal and perfect in proportion. The Parthenon architects believed that beautiful proportions resulted from strict adherence to harmonious numerical ratios.

There is also the use of an axial design towards the Parthenon to further make it perfect. The axial design is based on lines rather than circles. These lines are used as a grid system to make even spaces in between the lines. This grid also used math to make it seem like a graph. By utilizing the axial design, there are equally evened out spaces that make the Parthenon perfect. This building used a combination of math and the grid to achieve truth in perfection.

There is a curvature to the entire building, giving off an optical illusion that it's built on a flat land. It appears to look perfectly vertical and horizontal, but it actually isn't. The stylobate curves upward at the center on both the sides form a sort of shallow dome. Since it was not built

on flat ground, the stones used to make the Parthenon were customized to be cut in a specific way because it is sloped upward. Instead of cutting up random pieces of stone and stacking them on top of each other, every individual stone was carved to fit the structure of the Parthenon perfectly. They are customized in a way to make the Parthenon look perfect and straight when in actuality it isn't.

Greek art was based on a search for truth. The Hellenistic time period searched for truth with the dramatic emotion that is shown on the Dying Gaul's face with his realistic posture. However, for Classical Greek with the Parthenon, their search for truth was through perfection. The Parthenon itself symbolized perfection through the utilization of math to make everything in this piece of architecture perfect.