


SCULPTURE AND ART: THE MULTIPLE FACES OF REALISM

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ABSTRACT

This essay proposes as an object of study to reflect on realism applied to sculptures of human figures in the periods of Greek Antiquity, Italian and Brazilian Baroque and Hyperrealism in the 1990s. The intended objective is to establish a narrative woven to the strategies related to the choices of materials and the plastic capacity of the artists to transform them into skins, hair, hair, eyes, muscles, clothes and human expressions. The motivating question of this work is: how is realism interpreted by artists so that the human appearance is visible in the sculptures?

Keywords: Art. Sculpture. Realism.



PRESENTATION

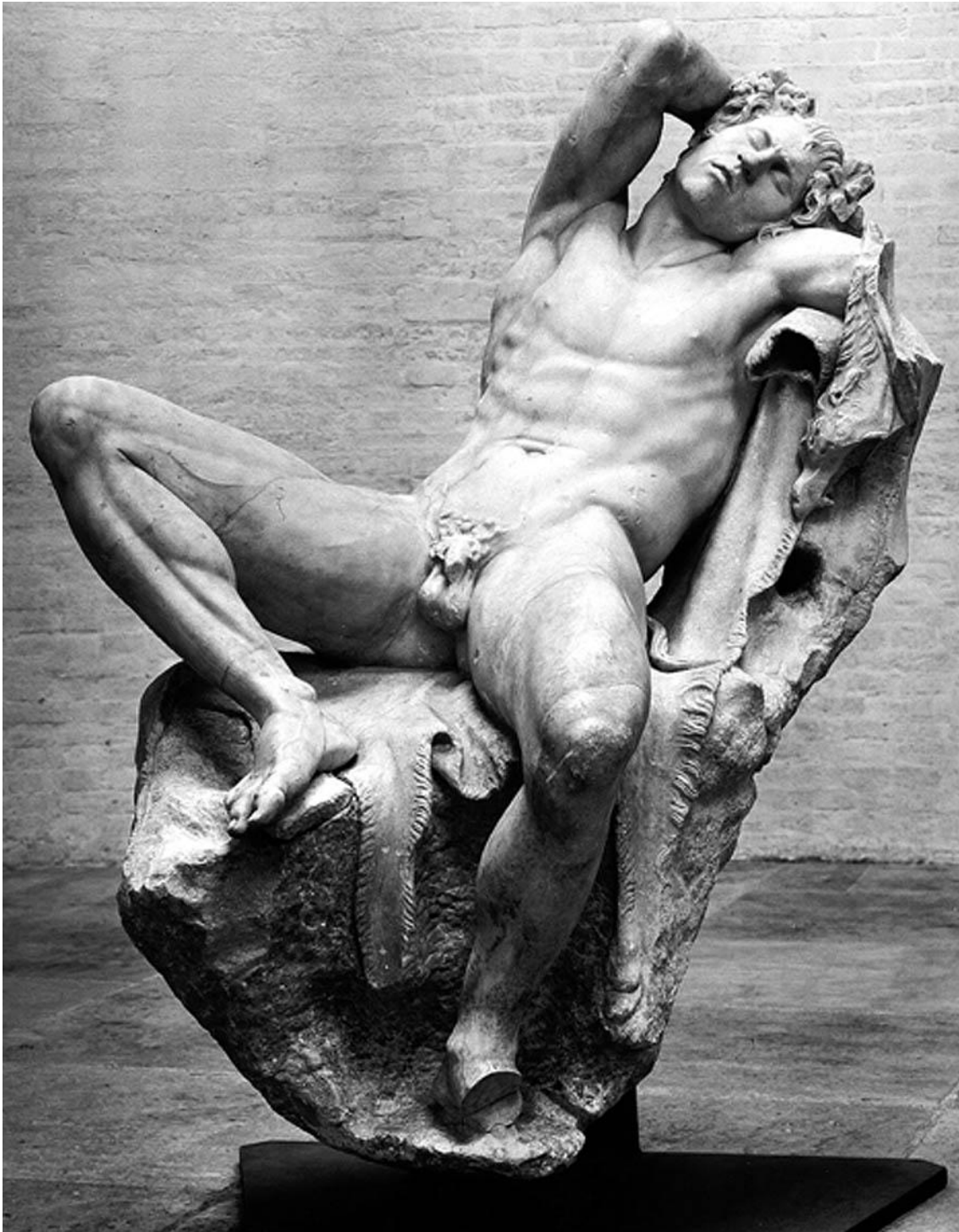
From a historical point of view, sculpture is an ancient art in which the artist represents an image in three dimensions, its surfaces and reliefs, through the use of specific techniques to give new forms to the materials worked. In Greece, the term *téchné* means *art* and is associated with *tékton*, that is, the art of working wood. Thus, transforming a tree into another three-dimensional thing is an example that demonstrates the artist's ability to model a new form and resort to some artifices to achieve his goal; and perhaps wood was one of the materials where the term of carving, of removing matter, emerged, with the carpenter being the first sculptor of this genre.

Although the artist has the freedom to choose any theme for his sculptures, the human body has always been, and still is, the subject of many themes in the history of art. This is what we want to present here, some realistic sculptures of human figures, their techniques and materials, in four distinct moments.

MARBLE AND WOOD SCULPTURES

The first moment refers to the *Faun Barberini* sculpted in marble around the second century B.C., in Hellenistic Greece and found in the early seventeenth century, in Rome, in the mausoleum of Hadrian.

Fauno Barberini



In Greek mythology, the Faun is a half-human, half-goat deity; he remains close to another Greek deity, Dionysus, or his Roman counterpart Bacchus, the god of wine. The story goes that the Faun is naked, drunk, in a deep sleep, about to awaken from an erotic dream. In life-size, this sculpture provides fine finishes and textures of the techniques of sculpting marble that simulate the realism of the musculature, tendon, vein, skin, nail, hair, fur and leather fabric (where the Faun is sitting). The sculptor, by leaving the rest of the marble block in its natural state, without sculpting, demonstrates to the observer his

astuteness in transforming the stone into people, comparing the natural material and the transformed material. The naturalness in which the male nude was sculpted carries the ideal of beauty of Greek culture, of athletic and young men, unlike the ancient fauns who were sculpted with the appearance of old and ugly men.

Ecstasy of Saint Teresa





In the seventeenth century, the Italian Gian Lorenzo Bernini restores the *Barberini Faun*, removing the goat's feet, but leaving the horns in the middle of the curly hair, demonstrating that this sculpture, throughout history, would be transformed to fit the standards of beauty and culture of the Italian Baroque.

Bernini, in addition to being a restorer, was also an excellent sculptor. He sculpts in marble *Saint Teresa of Avila*, a sculpture widely recognized for *the Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, installed in the Cornaro Chapel, Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, in Rome. The installation of the sculpture is as important as it is, as Bernini took advantage of the natural zenith light, threw the marble block into a reinforced base by raising it from the ground, creating an atmosphere of splendor in gilded stucco, so as to obtain the theatrical effect that surrounds this religious passage and Baroque realism. In this sculpture, marble was transformed into a cloud (where Saint Teresa is sitting), into a fluttering fabric that surrounds the body, fingers, nails and flesh; and the expressive gestures that moved Teresa when she received the divine flame, causing her spiritual pain or religious ecstasy, is shown by Bernini in the realism of her features – with her mouth slightly open, the artist deeply sculpts her interior to show her teeth, and places Saint Teresa in front of the angel who smiles and targets her with a golden spear that represents divine love.

Just like the Faun, Teresa seems to be alive and these two sculptures became a point of contact between matter and spirit, between the sensuality of the flesh and the desire for the divine, or as it is expressed in the popular saying, these two figures, one mythological and the other holy, were sculpted and incarnated. Sculpted and embodied are terms often used to represent two phases of the process of realistic sculpture, modeling a form and bringing it to life.

Similar to this conception of sculptures appearing alive, in the Brazilian Baroque, realism is also present in religious sculptures. In this third moment, for historical, geographical, economic and cultural reasons, the base material of the sculptors is not marble, but wood, as has already been pointed out in the first Greek sculptors. In Brazil, the artist sculpts human figures, the vast majority of whom are saints, and dedicates himself more to the work of the heads, hands and feet, carefully carving them and then covering them with paint, to make the tones of the skin, the hair, the colors of the beards, the color of the eyes and the marks of the wounds and blood seem more alive. Many of these polychrome sculptures are dressed in clothes made of natural fabrics, receive natural hair and the genius of Brazilian culture is then shown by specialists of the international Baroque: in Brazil, there is no need to sculpt fabrics, because the fabric itself is used; There is no need to sculpt hair as natural hair wigs are used. The incorporation of other materials in

Baroque sculptures is a way for some Brazilian artists to represent their sculptures as more realistic, more alive and, so to speak, closer to us humans and alive. Even though they were disqualified as legitimate baroque sculptures by European scholars, these sculptures brought significant advances in what is apprehended by realism in sculptures.

Christ scourged



Sculpted in life-size, the sculpture of the flagellated Christ, from the Mother Church of Sabará, in Minas Gerais, reveals the sculptor's talent in transforming wood into lips, teeth and eyes and the mastery of sculpting, in depth, the holes, just as Bernini did in Santa



Teresa. What is impressive is the use of natural hair as a way to highlight realism, the use of garments to cover the body of Christ and the pictorial treatment of the colored ones.

Passion of Christ





In the sculpture with the theme of the Passion of Christ, a sculpture that is in the Museum of Sacred Art of Pernambuco, in Olinda, the effect of realism is also similar. But, unlike the flagellated Christ, where the entire body was carved, this rock sculpture is an image of devotion in which the sculptor structures the body of Christ in pieces of wood similar to the structure of the human skeleton (torso, arms and legs), sculpts the head and limbs in detail and dresses the sculpture with clothes, making the unsculpted body disappear. Afterwards, this unsculpted body is dressed in an embroidered blue velvet tunic, with a girdle or long cord that symbolizes the arrest of Christ, a wig of natural hair, and a crown of Christ that is also natural. This type of realistic sculpture allows the arms to be articulated, giving other gestures; this Christ is used in processions as a way of reenacting Christian events and sufferings.

CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE

The fourth moment deals with contemporary sculptures from the 1990s. Distancing themselves from mythological and sacred themes, all the sculptures presented below deal with the human being and the intimate relationship that artists have with their works of art.

The sculpture *Self* (1991), by the British Marc Quinn, is an artifact that does not use traditional techniques or sculptural removal processes, as was demonstrated by the marble sculptures, but uses modeling processes, making the mold and filling it with blood. Marc Quinn models his own head, uses ten liters of his own blood and silicone for molding; The blood is frozen, and allows the preservation of his blood head in a freezer specially designed to keep his sculpture alive.

Self



In this sculpture, the realistic character is extrapolated, flowing into an ultra-realistic representation of the human figure; perhaps to show people a sculpture that is more realistic than the others, because what embodies the sculpture is the artist's blood.

In this way, the materiality of sculpture has a real and symbolic function, as in the materiality of Brazilian Baroque sculptures; But in the case of this British artist, his artifact needs electricity to maintain the sculptural object.

Another example of sculpture that excels in realism is by the British Abigail Lane. The sculpture *Mistif* (misfit) was produced especially to be part of a group exhibition called *Some went mad, some ran away*, at the Serpentine Galleries in London, in 1994, curated by the artist Damien Hirst.

The artist uses wax, oil paint, human hair, natural fabric clothing, glass eyes, and the actual size of the sculpture reinforces realism. The misfit is another English artist – Angus Fairhurst.

Misfit



He is depicted half-naked, wearing only the top of a blue button-down shirt. Lying on his stomach, lifting his torso with his left elbow and right hand, looking at the floor and exposing his bare buttock to those who see him from above, the artist places the male figure in an unconventional position, as if he were an unruly, unbalanced guy or had the appearance of a madman, as is the theme of the group exhibition. But, unlike the Baroque sculptures, which insert hair and natural fabrics into the works, Abigail achieves a more realistic effect than the Brazilian Baroque, she achieves a hyper-realistic level of sculptural representation.

Between 1996 and 1997, Australian sculptor Ron Mueck made a sculpture, also hyper-realistic, called *Dead Dad* .

Dead Dad



Molded in silicone, polyurethane, styrene and synthetic hair, the sculpture is a reduction of the artist's father, since the piece is 102 cm long. What interests the artist is not the resemblance to human dimensions, as Abigail did, but the resemblance to some essential human characteristics in the modeling process, including, for example, wrinkles and digital marks. The strands of hair are implanted one by one on the head, the hair is implanted on the legs and arms, genitalia and eyebrows. Using pigments similar to those used in the makeup of major cinematographic productions, the sculptor polychromes his object with hyper-realistic techniques, which makes him, in addition to being an excellent sculptor, an excellent painter. The realism of this work invites the viewer to discover the minutiae of certain human characteristics, and a certain fanciful air when we see the sculpture belie the drastically reduced stature. The themes he addresses in his sculptures are timeless, as is the case of death.

What runs through all realistic sculptures, without a doubt, is the relationship between art, matter and technique – sculpture has proven to be the best means of creating an image similar to human nature. But also, the ability of artists to model human characteristics in different materials, to connect with the state of the art at each moment, to research technical artifices about materials and to resort to countless tricks to represent the realism of their works, makes them inventors capable of sculpting, assembling and modeling increasingly embodied forms, or rather, apparently, increasingly similar to us.



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