

WHAT A RELIEF!

Teachers' Notes

Sculpture Workshop for Key Stage 3-5 at the Wallace Collection

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'Sculpture is the Art of the hole and the lump'.

Auguste Rodin

This is a four hour session, at the end of which students will have an understanding of the difference between sculpture in relief and in the round, as well as of the different levels of relief (high, mid and low.) They will also have discussed different sculpting techniques (building and carving in particular) and understand the basics of mould-making and casting. They will take away a small piece of relief sculpture which they have modelled, made a mould of in alginate, and cast in plaster.

This workshop involves messy materials. Aprons are provided but we recommend pupils and members of staff wear old clothes.

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Introduction

Relief sculpture comes in all sizes, from the whole side of a building to the coin in your pocket. Halfway between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representation, it uses techniques from both. The forms are partially modelled, giving real three dimensional form, and the illusion may be intensified using perspective and other tools of the painter.

The technique goes back thousands of years, and was used by ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, Asians and Meso-Americans. The first coin was probably made in China in the 11th century BC. Ancient Greeks, famously, decorated the Parthenon with a multi figure representation of a religious festival (The Elgin Marbles) in relief, in the fifth Century BC, and made some of the earliest coins, with reliefs celebrating gods and heroes. The Romans adopted the technique, and the reliefs on display in the Wallace Collection are their direct descendants.

The workshop

The session begins and ends in the Wallace Collection education studio. We will begin with an introduction to the Wallace Collection and the five generations who built it.

This is followed by an outline of the day: the length of the session, what the students will be doing (looking, talking, drawing, sculpting, casting) and when the break is (a half hour for lunch.)

The workshop will start with talk about the difference between relief and fully three-dimensional sculpture. Students will be shown, and encouraged to hold, objects from the Handling Collection, which will help to clarify the differences.

Materials and methods will be discussed, leading to a conversation about modelling and casting.

Students will then be led into the Galleries, to have a close look at the following objects and discuss the materials and methods involved in making them.

(Probably) Henri Perlan, *The Borghese Dancers*, France, 1642, Bronze

This relief, modelled (probably) by the French sculptor Henri Perlan, is an excellent example of high, mid and low relief, which can frequently be found in a single work. *The Borghese Dancers* (Louvre, Paris) is a celebrated Roman marble relief, the name of which derives from the Villa Borghese in Rome, where it was displayed from the early seventeenth century. It features five female figures in clinging draperies dancing to a gentle but measured step. A plaster cast was made of this marble and other antique sculpture for Louis XIII of France in 1640. This bronze version, probably intended for the grande galerie of the Louvre, is a reworking by François Anguier of the plaster cast which is said to have arrived in Paris as a 'rather formless sketch'. The casting of this and a pendant in the Louvre, Maidens adorning a Candelabrum, was contracted to Henri Perlan (1597-1656).



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Moderno, *Hercules and the Nemean Lion*, Italy, 15th century, Bronze

Students had the opportunity of looking at cast copies of this piece back in the studio, and now they can observe the original. In a way, casting is the original method of 3D printing.

Plaquettes were an invention of the Italian Renaissance – small reliefs which were generally cast in several copies. They were developed in Italian humanist circles in Italy in the mid-fifteenth century, reflecting the classical learning of the period, and they were used by artists as a medium to replicate antique relief compositions or to work more independently in an antique style.

On this plaquette, Hercules has gripped the Nemean lion, a dangerous and seemingly invulnerable beast which he has to kill as the first of his twelve labours. This piece is a good example of Mid-Relief.



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Pisanello, *Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, 1444, Mantua, Italy, Bronze*

Pisanello was not only famous as a painter but also because “he virtually invented the art of the portrait medal.” Cast in lead or bronze; these fine objects commemorating individuals or events, suitable as gifts or mementoes and inspired by the ancient Roman medallion, clearly had a strong appeal for patrons already under the influence of humanist learning and values.

This particular medal commemorates Gianfrancesco’s role as a military captain, principally in Venetian service, as well as his political status as Marquis of Mantua, conferred by the Emperor Sigismund in 1433.



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Guillaume Dupré, *Henry IV of France and Marie de Médicis with the Dauphin, 1603, France, Gold and Bronze*

Guillaume Dupré was also a sculptor, but his reputation rests mainly on his work as a medallist. He made many portrait medals of Henri IV (1553-1610), the first Bourbon King of France, and his wife Marie de Médicis (1573-1642).

On the reverse of the medal the king and queen are shown as Mars and Minerva, standing with hands joined and the infant dauphin (the future Louis XIII) as Cupid between them, an eagle descending from the skies with a crown in its beak. It was Henri IV who finally brought peace to France after decades of bitter civil war. Countless images celebrating his qualities and achievements were produced in many media. This piece is a good example of Mid and Low-Relief.



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1- Drawing

In the galleries, the students will be provided with paper, clipboards and pencils, and their task will be to select a detail from a painting of their choice, and make a sketch of it. Later, they will translate the detail into a small relief sculpture.



Detail of Philippe de Champaigne's *Annunciation*, 1648

They will be guided in both choice of detail and approach to drawing. As the focus is on turning 2D into 3D, paintings in which there is clear light and shadow, defining form, are preferable. Students will be encouraged to focus on shading in their drawing, rather than relying on line. They will need this illusion of form to guide them when creating actual form.

2- Sculpting

Back in the studio, the students will be provided with plasticine and modelling tools, and shown how to approach the problem of turning their drawing into a relief, of approximately 9 cms x 1.5cms.

Teachers and accompanying adults will then help students build a clay wall around their plasticine relief.



3- Casting

Students will then be shown how to mix alginate and make a mold of their "master".



Finally, we will help students with mixing and casting plaster.

