

Out of Reach

IP Senior Thesis

Lorenzo Lorenzetti

INTRODUCTION

The great virtue of stone is that unlike other hard materials it seems to have a luminous life, light or soul.

—Adrian Stokes, *Stones of Rimini*

There is a certain truth embedded in the art of stone carving. Innumerable artists and artisans of the past shared the same inkling, the same sensitivity for the potential to vitalize and create a connection with nature through carving the literal bones of the earth. Having grown up in America, I've been over saturated by mass production in a consumerist society, surrounded by moneymaking gimmicks and temporary technologies. The flood of replicated plastic commodities and materials results in a constantly changing visual landscape; one where mechanically made objects are glanced over and do not hold any sense of power.

The Venetian culture I am a part of has an endless love for stone and water, limestone and the sea. Their appreciation for the human spirit and its connectivity to the sea is apparent in their environment: narrow limestone bridges connect the city like arteries to a heart, hand polished stone pillars support stone figures on every corner. The handcraft is obvious in Venice— stones seem to glow in the aura of the touch of hand.

The slow passing of time is paralleled in the waves that repeatedly crash against handcrafted walls of stone. Their history and culture with stone and time contradicts the fast-paced environments and experiences that define my American lifestyle. I ask myself which forms of art will not be washed away by the waters of time? Can rigorous process and an authentic relationship with a natural material give life to something greater than the artist's conception? I wonder if a material like marble can be considered 'old' or archaic. To me, within each block of compressed marine life holds something magnificently new.

I aim to prove that the image within my block of marble will stand fresh, not reflecting an object of the past, but our present time. Its necessary to see art images created in natural materials, so to ask questions not only about the human condition, but also the condition of the natural world. The fountain I've carved of a female figure bearing the weight of a waterfall questions the durability and longevity of the marble material, as well as the water system's effect on it, in an effort to parallel our human existence with the changing waters of today.

CONTEXTUAL DISCUSSION

As I carve, I think of erosion in the modern age; I think of great waves from the Adriatic Sea smashing against the man-placed limestone walls of Venice. I think of Venice as a sculpture in its own right, being carved every day under the hands and feet of its citizens and the relentless and infinite chaotic sea. I think of acid rain, sulfuric acids forming in the skies above industrial America due to anthropogenic emissions. I think of

poisoned land, oil spills, and seas of plastic that have become the physical remnants of humanity.

As I carve I think of erosion. I remember the sculpture studios underneath the massive-marble mountains of Carrara, where the plaster models lay in courtyard frozen in a state of paralysis for decades. Many storms had come and gone during the wet Mediterranean winters, and each plaster had eroded and gained a natural patina. Faces and forms were distorted or erased entirely, melted by the polluted rain.

I think of the first time marble was damaged by acid rain and documented in the 17th century. Acid rain inspired my sculpture, and as it steadily increases with population and industrial growth, it will wash away more limestone buildings and marble statues. What once was a finely chiseled, hand-polished sculpture that represented the vitality of human conception now erodes to ambiguity while returning to Nature's possession. The beautifully-flowing-marble drapery that once swayed like the unruly waves of the sea now resembles crumbling valleys, flooded rivers, and the weathering of the earth's crust as if carved like a marble sculpture by Nature with her most powerful chisel; the water cycle. The history of humanity is written in stone, yet the waters of today are carving the land like never before. As these waters wash over civilization, humanity will watch its rich human history captured in stone fade away. Limestone monuments of the past will fall to ruin, returning back to the sea as they're forcefully reclaimed by nature.

When I think of the hard and soft sculptures of the past 100 years, I think of Rodin and Giacometti. They labored to fulfill their vision, to muster up a representation that gave the same feeling, weight and grace as the real thing. Expressive marks left behind exposed the material potential and mastery. Brancusi, once an apprentice of

Rodin, opened the door to seeing the power of the figure in new, purer forms that could allow for a rebirth of the magical object. Moore and Hepworth sought that same energy from their materials, they saw the stone as maternal, giving birth to new forms that represent the cyclic forces of life. Through simple form they yearned to draw out the vitalize energy trapped in the stone; to show the maternal role stone has to our earth. During times of scientific questioning and spiritual decay, they sought to discover a truth greater than that one could find in a textbook.

METHODOLOGIES

Direct carving is when one works directly with the stone without use of a model. I use the stone as if it were clay, modeling and articulating the given space in the moment. While carving, I create new forms directly into the stone, staying flexible while working with the natural material. Endless variations of the sculpture are possible but only one lay embedded in the marble, one that is already embedded deep in my unconscious mind and in the potential energy of my physical abilities.

The process of direct carving is always a challenge. It's often a surprise to see how quickly form can be removed during a carving and how quickly forms can be altered ever so slightly to change the appearance of the entire piece. My goal is not to achieve a fully naturalistic figure, but instead to bring the stone to life through the medium of a figure. This is made possible by the vitality of the stone, the color hidden within, the deep veins and fossilized materials that glow when polished. Adrian Stokes was a British writer and painter, known principally as an influential art critic and a romantic about stone carving. His words on carving ring true today, and would ring true to past masters

like Michelangelo: “A figure carved in stone is fine carving when one feels that not the figure, but the stone through the medium of the figure, has come to life.” (*Stones of Rimini*, Adrian Stokes)

My method for carving this block of stone was loosely planned. I began carving with the right idea: mapping out how I could get the main plains that were closest to the surface in the correct direction. I achieved this with half of the face, but instead of immediately carving around to rough out the other side, I continued to finesse the first half of the face, thinking that if I could carve this half well, I could ensure the location of all the features. In the end, it worked out, but the left side of the face was left wide and asymmetrical. It might have been corrected if I had more time, but I settled for the final form once I decided the piece needed to enter the polishing stages. Hair was done mechanically with expression and spontaneity, using the angle grinder and pneumatic sander. I learned that all planes should be blocked out, removing all excess sediment before finalizing certain features.

In the end, I articulated the face of a woman I had known all along. I followed Adrian Stokes’ ideologies about carving when creating this sculpture, like leaving the figure in the block. As he stated, “...the carved form should never, in any profound imaginative sense, be entirely freed from its matrix,” because “...carving is an articulation of something that already exists in the block.” (*Stones of Rimini*, Adrian Stokes)

CREATIVE WORK

The final work was a success. I was able to complete the polish and move the stone without harm to the exhibition. The sculpture is a successful carving in stone; the medium of the figure brings the stone to life and the gesture of the figure gives the stone strength, weight, and tension.

The asymmetry in the face could have been worked out if I had more time, but as the water falls down the face and distorts the image, it becomes almost unnoticeable. The water flows steadily over the figure; the base and stand are created to be waterproof and stand at 4 ½ feet tall, raising the 300lb stone to a monumental height of 7 feet. The marble chips fill the bottom of the base where the water is caught, as well as around the base of the block. This emphasizes the process, making apparent the battle between the material and me.

CONCLUSION

This exploration of material furthered my knowledge and capabilities in stone carving. I don't expect to continue to carve directly into expensive blocks of marble, but this exploration of space and the process of carving will surely influence future sculptures. Stone and water, as well as their relationship to space and time, will be something I will continue to explore for the rest of my life.

With more acid rain and greater pollution of the landscape, limestone is being washed away by the waters of our time. Because of this, stone carving's relationship with water has changed. My image in stone today represents the unbalanced that has occurred between humans and their environment.

Bibliography

Stokes, Adrian. *The Image in Form: Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes*, ed. Richard Wollheim. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Stones of Rimini in *The Image in Form: Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes*, edited by Richard Wollheim (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 150-4.