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History of Western Art
Part Two – The Classical and Medieval Worlds

Assignment Two – Exercise 2

Annotation of two sculptures – sculpture one – Greek

The Marathon Youth or Ephebe of Marathon.
C340-330bc.
1.3m high.
National Archaeological Museum in Athens, Greece

Sources

tuttartpitturascultuarpoesiamusica. 2017. *Tutt' Art@*. [ONLINE] Available at:
<http://www.tuttartpitturascultuarpoesiamusica.com/2016/12/Ephebe-of-Marathon.html>.
[Accessed 10 July 2017].

National Archaeological Museum. 2017. *National Archaeological Museum*. [ONLINE]
Available at: <http://www.namuseum.gr/collections/sculpture/classical/classic19-en.html>.
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Encyclopaedia of Art and Classical Antiquities: Visual arts Cork. 2017. *Late classical Greek sculpture*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/antiquity/greek-sculpture-late-classical-period.htm#poses>. [Accessed 9 July 2017].

Balance of pose suggests statue was leaning against a tree/pedestal/column?

Cast bronze, ivory and bone (?) in situ for eyes. Casting is fine and high quality.

Not a real person. Perhaps commissioned by a man to give to his lover or by an admirer. No apparent religious or real-life representation.

Sculpture is properly 3-dimensional, extending beyond the flat, frontal plane. However, viewing is designed to be from the front. Knee extends forwards, arms to front and right. Rear of figure equally carefully sculpted.

Expression is a pensive gaze, slightly distant. Head tilts downwards, eyes looking down at outstretched hand which presumably held an item, now lost.

Figure is at once lifelike yet somehow ethereal and other-worldly.

Weight is distributed between left leg and right arm. Right leg is raised, hip tilted and left arm outstretched.

Hair is stylised with soft, thick, textured curls. The boy wears a band around the head, possibly a victory crown?

Body is finely crafted, musculature refined but soft rather than angular; curved, firm buttocks. Attention to detail extends from delicately pinched together fingertips and palm lines to well-observed feet, toes and even toenails.



One of a small number of surviving original Greek bronzes (bronzes in particular were liable to being melted down so few survive). Dredged from the Marathon bay on the Attic coast in 1925. Dated to late classical period, c340-33bc, believed to be in the style of /of the school of, Praxiteles. Praxiteles was one of three late classical masters, alongside Skopas and Lysippus. (Encyl. Of Art). However, very few statues can be definitively ascribed to a particular artist. Much attribution is derived from writers' descriptions and cross-referencing to later copies. (WHA, p141)

Pose exhibits strong 'contrapposto', an Italian term describing 'an asymmetrical arrangement of the human figure in which the line of the arms and shoulders contrasts with, while balancing, those of the hips and leg'. (Tutt' Art@). The weight rests on one leg (the engaged leg), freeing the other leg (left in this case) which bends at the knee.

Slightly smaller than life-size, the sculpture is believed to represent a victor in athletics, indicated by band around head with leaf at centre. Not known what was held in either hand though left hand was later replaced by a new palm worked in the form of a lamp (National Arch. Mus).

Late Classical period is a time where balance between idealisation and naturalism of the human form leans towards idealisation and this is the case here. (WHA, p141). The boy is very 'pure' looking; no blemishes, wrinkles or particular defining features. Everything is quite perfect from the smooth skin, delicate lips, fine nose and refined limbs.

Sculptures were frequently painted, and bronzes were also decorated with bone, ivory, glass, gems, copper and silver.

Males were routinely nude. Praxiteles is credited with sculpting the first female nude, the Aphrodite of Cnidus. Unfortunately only Roman copies of this apparently stunning sculpture survive. (WHA p142)