

Contrapposto

Smart History



Anatomy and spirituality in the Middle Ages

The medieval jamb sculptures are almost completely symmetrical—that is one side of their body is nearly identical to the other side. They look stiff, rigid, and incapable of movement. They don't seem to belong to our world—and they're not supposed to. They're supposed to look otherworldly and spiritual and were made for the doorway of a church. They are also expressionless, and lacking in individuality. Their bodies match the shape of the columns that they are attached to, and because they are attached, they are NOT free-standing. Their drapery does not reveal the forms of their bodies very much. In addition, the figures are elongated. This sculpture reveals the intense spirituality of the Middle Ages: the figures sense the unimportance of the material world, and the importance of things we can't see or touch—the soul, heaven and God.

Source URL: <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/contrapposto.html>
Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/arth206/> (Art History 206)

Attributed to: SmartHistory





Contrapposto and Classical Greece

Our Ancient Greek sculpture, on the other hand, IS free-standing—he was not made to fit on architecture. The artist was obviously much more concerned with the anatomy of the body. The figure is idealized (nude, athletic, young, beautiful proportions). The ancient Greeks invented the position that this sculpture is standing in. The position is called contrapposto. Contrapposto means weight shift, and we can see that the figure has his weight shifted onto his right leg, while his left leg is bent. The figure is asymmetrical -- different on the different sides of his body. As a result of contrapposto, this figure looks as though it can move, and it looks so much more alive! This sculpture tells us about Greek Humanism -- their sense of the enormous potential of the human mind and the beauty of the human body.

Source URL: <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/contrapposto.html>
Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/arth206/> (Art History 206)

Attributed to: SmartHistory

