

History of art paper assignment



The paper “ Statuette of Standing Woman, Seated Hatshepsut, and Snake Goddess in the Metropolitan Museum of Art” is a dramatic example of an essay on visual arts & film studies. A great deal of information about a given society can be preserved in the sculptures and other artworks they leave behind. By studying the various elements of a given piece, including the elements that are added specifically or given particular importance, and then comparing these elements to similar creations in other cultures can help us to understand the greater significance of the work. As an example, a specific statuette will be examined in this context.

The “ Statuette of a Standing Woman” currently in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is made of terracotta and dates back to sometime in the late fourth or early third century BC. It is of Greek origin and probably Boeotian. Terracotta is a specific type of clay that is fairly common and produces a red to a pale yellow shade of pottery depending on the iron content in the clay. In this case, the pale yellow tint of the clay gives the statuette an almost life-like quality. The artist remains unknown, but the region the statuette is believed to have come from is a specific region of Greece that later became widely associated with uneducated or stupid individuals. This statuette, however, displays no indication that the artist was incapable of understanding the technical attributes of weight, gravity, form and direct modeling to produce a figure that is very realistically posed as compared to other statues created during this period.

The statuette portrays a single young woman as she stands, one foot slightly

forward for balance but with the majority of her weight thrown onto her back foot and one hand resting authoritatively upon her jutting back hip. The other hand hangs at her side holding what appears to be the strap of a water jug. She is dressed in a traditional chiton, with the folds of fabric falling rigidly to the ground in tight folds consistent with the amount of material included in this outfit. This is covered by another traditional piece of clothing called a himation, which covers the woman's shoulders, portions of her arms, her torso and falls down at an angle to her upper thighs. Again, the folds of the fabric appear natural as they stretch in a soft diagonal across her hips and upward across her chest. Her face is rendered in great detail, providing her with round eyes, full cheeks, and a delicate chin. Her hair is also highly detailed, parted in the center and pulled back into a bun. There is evidence that the statuette was once painted as red tints can still be found in the hair.

While such a simple piece might not immediately seem to convey much information about her society, there is a certain strength and attitude in her stance that speaks of a greater strength among women than is commonly considered. She shows no sign of weakness and instead seems to be asserting a certain form of authority as she stands evidently awaiting some form of obedience to a recent directive. The detail of the piece belies its early composition and suggests that these people had a highly refined sense of art and aesthetics. The portrayal reflects a realistic approach to life and strong attention to detail evident in the folds of the cloth and the pull of the fabric. The careful balance of the piece represents a very sophisticated approach to poses while the details of the face indicate the importance of individuality within the culture.

These individual elements of the figure stand out to greater effect when compared with some of the other female statuary of the ancient world. For example, the " Seated Hatshepsut", circa 1470 BC, depicts a very rigid posture. Her feet are flat on the floor, legs positioned straight out in front of her and hands extended to rest flat on her knees. The goddess's back is almost unnaturally straight while the details of her costuming or naked body are almost non-existent. Her headpiece is highly detailed, conveniently covering her breasts and her face takes on some of the detail seen in the later Greek work. An even older piece, the " Snake Goddess", circa 1600 BC, portrays another unnatural pose as the goddess stands in a full-length skirt, bosom completely and proudly exposed, as her arms extend to the sides, hands up grasping snakes. Her face is only slightly detailed, providing a hint of her expression, but her dress is intricately decorated complete with a tight girdle around her middle and a many-tiered skirt, allowing the detail of the tiles to emerge as decoration. Unlike the Greek piece discussed above, the skirt of the Snake Goddess remains stiff and unbending while the shape of the woman is unnatural, with disproportionate curves in various places. By contrast, the Akropolis Kore, circa 682, shows much more of the detail of the above-discussed piece in the folds of the fabric as well as in the modeling of the figure. This is noticeably evident in the suggested lines of the woman's legs as they become evident under the cloth of her garment.

While there seems to be a long-standing tradition of modeling women as goddess figures throughout the ancient world, the way in which this was accomplished is seen to take on ever-more realistic qualities as time moved

forward. While the Acropolis Kore approximates the realistic portrayal evident in the statuette, it doesn't portray the same sense of individuality and female control found in the smaller statue while older statues don't manage to convey the same sophistication of carving and textural details. Thus, the statuette gives the impression of a sophisticated, advanced and strong society in which individualism and female strength were valued.