

The sculpture bodhisattva

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The sculpture Bodhisattva had the strongest impact upon me for various reasons. This piece, found in the Silk Road Chicago collection at the Art Institute of Chicago, is a cross-cultural work with obvious Eastern and Western influences. This sculpture is a beautiful 2nd to 3rd century A. D. piece that depicts a man standing in obvious deep meditation. This model was created in the region of Gandhara, which is modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. This early representation of a Buddha-like figure is a unique and powerful image. The title, Bodhisattva, can be directly translated from Sanskrit as meaning a “ spiritual essence or being.”

This figure is an interpretation of a sacred being that has delayed its own nirvana in order to help others reach the spiritual plane. The adornments that this figure wears are representative of its delay to the spiritual realm. Wearing material and worldly items means that it has not transcended yet. This type of commitment is impressive and the figure is blessed with the incredible ability to be in a state between both worlds. The figure in the sculpture has an awe-like power over the viewer. It makes you feel as if you are looking at an object that attains holy attributes.

Although, the sculpture has divine qualities, it also makes the viewer feel able to relate to it. It is humanized in a way that differs from other Buddha representations. This makes the impact of the work even stronger. An inner strength is portrayed that varies from the traditional at rest Buddha that is found in most artwork. This figure has power, but it is not menacing. It is serene and this serenity is transferred to the viewer of the piece. It is easy to see how these types of figures transcended into what is now modern-day

Buddhism. The bodhisattvas were ancient spiritual beings that were worshipped.

The collective group of these became the Buddha figure that is widely known today. The detail of this sculpture is incredible. Despite its age, the particulars of the piece have remained blissfully intact. The hands are missing, but it is possible to guess at how they were placed in the sculpture. The right hand was most likely raised and assuming a gesture of reassurance. An object found in the left hand would determine the type of bodhisattva. There is realism in the depiction that makes the viewer feel that they are gazing upon an actual interpretation. Unlike other bodhisattva pieces, this work feels more based on a real person.

Despite the Eastern subject matter, there is little doubt that there is Western influence apparent in this piece. " The art of this region experienced a type of merger with Greek influences after Alexander the Great conquered the region in the 4th century B. C. " (Rowland, 1960, 8). An example of this found in the Bodhisattva is clear in the figure's intricate robes. These types of folds are traditionally found in Greek and Roman artistic depictions. The drapery reminds the viewer of the togas worn by the figures in the sculptures of Roman imperials. The chest of the figure is also reminiscent of the merger of these two cultures.

It is a more realistic portrayal with the muscular indentations found upon the figure's chest. Eastern portrayals had less defined bodies in their works. The Indian traditions of the sculpture are displayed in the figure's mustache and the dhori that he wears. The dual influences of this work made the most significant impact upon me. It is rare to see a piece that has such obvious

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Eastern and Western elements found in the manifestation. This cross-cultural work is a harmonious interpretation of a strong spiritual figure. Additionally, it has a strong religious impact.

It is a documentation of how Buddhism made its way from India into China. When looking at the sculpture, it is unavoidable that you are not moved at how this is exposing a historical occurrence. The stone material of the piece lends power to the idea that this is a strong figure that is tied to the material world, but has the ability to guide people to their own nirvana. The lasting material makes the viewer feel as though they are looking at a spiritual piece that has transcended through the ages. Buddha is an important figure in artwork and it is essential to know how this form came into being.