



# Greek Sculpture

## Intro Guide

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### Introduction

“The Greeks shape statues of bronze so real, that they seem to be breathing; and they carve cold marble, until it almost comes to life” (Vergil, *Aeneid*, 6.847-848). Thus, Vergil describes the beauty of Greek sculpture, undoubtedly the most emblematic aspect of Greek art. The primary focus of Greek sculptors was the human body, portrayed in an idealized, as well as aesthetic manner. Their realistic depictions of the human form with increasing attention to anatomy, proportion, and poise greatly influenced and inspired later Western art. The study of Greek sculpture is not only essential for anyone interested in the art of ancient Greece, but also delightful in that it opens up a door to a world of unique artistic beauty.

### Types of sculptures

Sculpture ‘in the round’: free-standing statues of any size, whether made of marble/stone or bronze/metal.

- Deities (cult or votive statues, free-standing pedimental sculpture)
- Mythical figures (heroes and heroines)
- Human figures (including portrait sculpture)
- Animals

- Mythical beings (f.e. Sphinxes, Sirens, Chimaera, etc.)

Relief sculpture: the sculptures are not free-standing but projecting from a background / plane surface.

- Architectural relief sculpture (esp. pedimental sculpture, friezes, metopes)<sup>1</sup>
- Votive reliefs (dedicated to sanctuaries)
- Funerary reliefs (tombstones)
- Document reliefs (reliefs carved above public records inscribed on *stelai* / marble slabs)

## Greek Sculpture Timeline

- Archaic (700-480 BCE):
  - *Kouroi* and *Korai* (c. 630-480 BCE): marble statues of young male figures (*Kouroi*) and young female figures (*Korai*). *Kouroi* are always naked, *Korai* are always dressed. Their function was either votive (dedicated to deities in sanctuaries) or funerary (marking the tombs of young people who died prematurely).
  - Animal statues (votive and funerary) – horses and lions are particularly popular.
  - Architectural sculpture
  - Votive reliefs
  - Funerary sculpture
    - Attic grave *stelai*: narrow shaft with sculpted or painted figural decoration on a rectangular base crowned by a finial.
    - The earlier *stelai* were crowned by a capital surmounted by a Sphinx in the round.
    - The standard iconography consisted of a single male figure, usually a naked youth or a man in his prime, standing in profile view to the right, frequently represented as a nude athlete or warrior.

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<sup>1</sup> Pedimental sculpture could be either free-standing / ‘in the round’ or in relief.

- Classical (480-323 BCE):
  - Statues of gods, heroes, humans in idealized form
  - Statues of animals, hybrid creatures, and monsters
  - Architectural Sculpture (f.e. Parthenon, Temple of Zeus at Olympia)
  - Votive reliefs
  - Document reliefs
  - Funerary sculpture
    - Attic grave *stelai*: shorter and broader than the Archaic ones with finials in palmette form, rounded with relief decoration or shaped like pediments. The deceased can be depicted alone, accompanied by a servant or by one or more family members.
    - Naiskos *stèle* type: architectural setting with *antae* (posts or pillars) flanking the shaft and a pediment. Very popular during the fourth century BCE.
  
- Hellenistic (330-100 BCE):
  - Statues of gods, heroes, humans. Realism in the depiction of anatomy and choice of subjects (fe. portraying old age or suffering), expressing emotions.
  - Portraiture
  - Statues of animals
  - Architectural Sculpture
  - Votive reliefs
  - Document reliefs
  - Funerary sculpture

## Famous Greek Sculptors

### Early Classical Period (ca. 480-450 BCE)

- Myron of Eleutherai:
  - Harmony of compositions, naturalistic statues of animals
  - Famous works:
    - Diskobolos (disc-thrower)

## Athena and Marsyas

### High Classical Period (450-400 BCE)

- Pheidias of Athens:
  - One of the greatest ancient Greek sculptors
  - Famous works:
    - Athena Parthenos gold and ivory statue (Parthenon)
    - Olympian Zeus gold and ivory statue (Olympia)<sup>2</sup>
    - Athena Promachos
    - Athena Lemnia
    - Amazon
- Kresilas of Kydonia:
  - Famous works:
    - Portrait of Perikles
    - Vulneratus (statue of wounded man dying)
    - Amazon
- Alkamenes of Athens:
  - Praised by many ancient authors, deities seem to be his favorite subjects
  - Famous works:
    - Hermes Propylaios (herm)
    - Seated Dionysos
    - Aphrodite of the Gardens
    - Triple Hekate
    - Prokne and Itys
- Agorakritos of Paros:
  - Pupil of Pheidias
  - Famous works:
    - Nemesis of Rhamnous
    - Athena Itonia and Zeus
    - Mother of the Gods
- Kallimachos:
  - Said to have invented the Corinthian capital and to have been the first to employ the drill, very meticulous sculptor

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<sup>2</sup> One of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

- Famous works:
  - Golden lamp for the Athena Polias (Erechtheion)
  - Seated Hera of Plataia
  - Dancing maidens of Sparta
  - Pan and the Graces (relief)
- Paionios of Mende:
  - Famous works:
    - Nike (Olympia)
- Polykleitos of Argos:
  - One of the most important sculptors, famous for his Canon (a treatise on body proportion)
  - Famous works:
    - Doryphoros
    - Diadoumenos
    - Hera (Argive Heraion)
    - Amazon
    - Kyniskos

#### **Fourth century BCE**

- Kephisodotos of Athens:
  - Famous works:
    - Eirene (Peace) holding the infant Plutus (Wealth)
    - Athena of Piraeus
    - Altar of Zeus
    - Muses
    - Hermes with the infant Dionysos
- Praxiteles of Athens:
  - One of the best Greek sculptors, S-shaped curve of body
  - Famous works:
    - Hermes holding the infant Dionysos (Olympia)
    - Aphrodite of Knidos
    - Apollo Sauroktonos
    - Eros of Thespiai
    - Artemis of Antikyra
    - Leto and Chloris
    - Mantineia base

Artemis Brauronia

Satyr

- Skopas of Paros:
  - One of the best fourth-century sculptors
  - Famous works:
    - Sculptures of the Temple of Athena Alea (Tegea)
    - Sculptures of the Mausoleum (Halikarnassos)
- Timotheos:
  - Famous works:
    - Sculptures of Asklepios Temple (Epidauros)
    - Sculptures of the Mausoleum (Halikarnassos)
- Bryaxis of Athens:
  - Famous works:
    - Sculptures of the Mausoleum (Halikarnassos)
    - Sculptured base depicting horsemen approaching tripods
    - Apollo
- Leochares:
  - Famous works:
    - Chryselephantine statues of Philip II of Macedon and his family (Olympia)
    - Sculptures of the Mausoleum (Halikarnassos)
    - Portrait of Isokrates (bronze)
    - Ganymedes and the eagle
    - Zeus the Thunderer
- Euphranor:
  - Painter and sculptor, wrote treatises on symmetry and color.
  - Famous works:
    - Apollo Patroos (Agora)
- Lysippos of Sikyon:
  - One of the great sculptors of his time, the most prolific Greek sculptor, originality, new concept of proportions, realism, large compositions
  - Famous works:
    - Apoxyomenos
    - Portraits of Alexander the Great

Agias  
Herakles  
Herakles Epitrapezios  
Poulydamas  
Bronze Zeus of Sikyon  
Seleukos portrait

## Bibliography

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- Boardman, J. 1992. *Greek Sculpture: The Classical Period*. London, Thames and Hudson.
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- Smith, R. 1991. *Hellenistic Sculpture: A Handbook*. New York, Thames and Hudson.
- Palagia, O. (ed.). 2019. *Handbook of Greek Sculpture*. Berlin, De Gruyter.

Parthenon sculptures:

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/parthenon-gallery/sculptural-decoration>

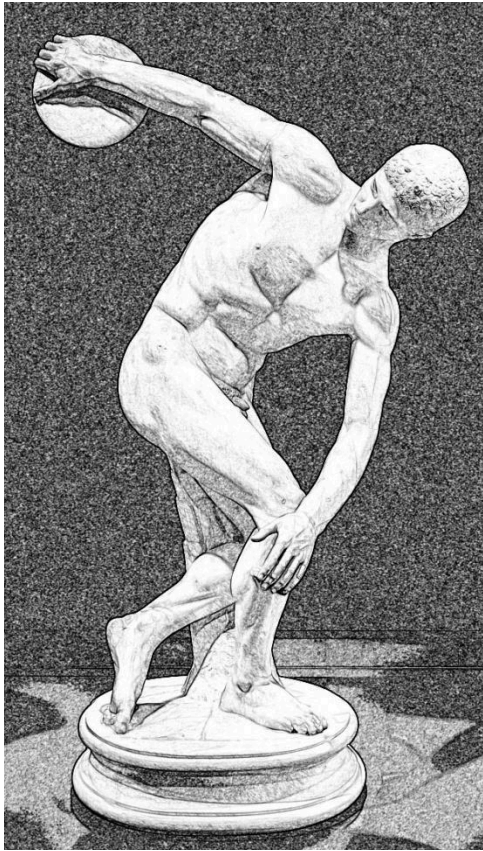
The Peplos Kore:

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/statue-kore-peplos-kore>

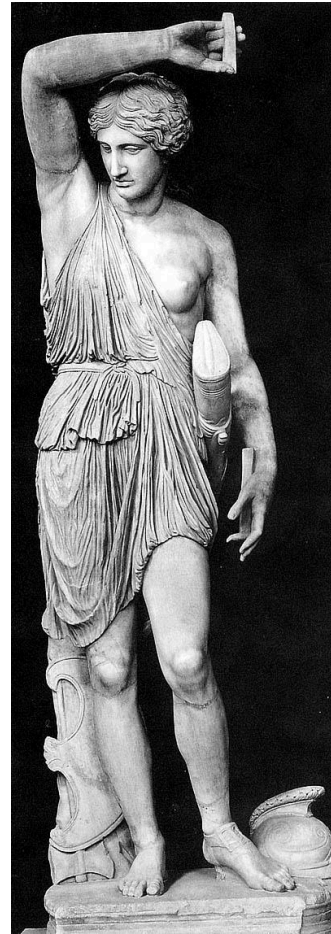
Statue of a Kore: <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/statue-kore-10>

Kouros statue: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/253370>

# Appendix



Diskobolos by Myron  
(Roman copy)



Amazon by Pheidias  
(Roman copy)  
Vatican Museum  
Photo: Public domain

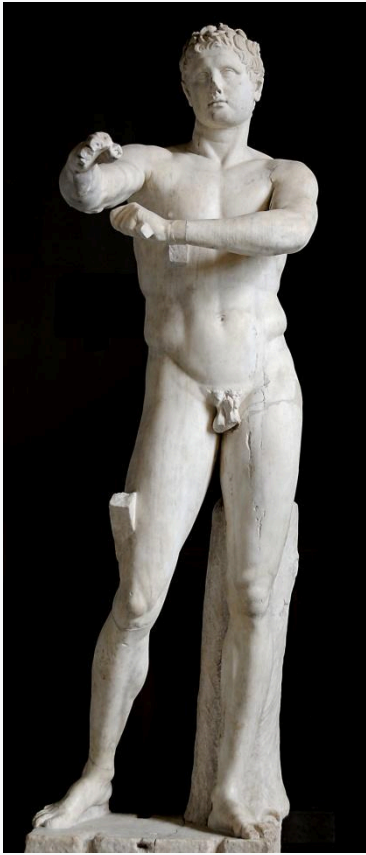




Doryphoros by Polykleitos  
(Roman copy)  
Naples Arch. Museum  
Photo: *Following Hadrian*



Hermes by Praxiteles  
Olympia, Archaeological Museum  
Photo: Gardner P., *Six Greek Sculptors* (1910)



Apoxyomenos by Lysippos  
(Roman copy)  
Pio Clementino Museo  
Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen