Sculpture

What do stone, wood, and sand share in common? All may be used as media in sculpture. Even water can be sculpted so long as it is frozen.

The art of creating three-dimensional works or sculpture dates back to prehistoric times. In this lesson, you will learn about the materials used to make sculpture. You will also learn about the processes used by artists working in this area.

The Media of Sculpture

An artist who works in sculpture is called a sculptor. Sculptors work with a great many materials and tools. One sculpting medium that you have probably used is clay. Some others are shown in Figure 4–14. How many of these can you name? How many have you used?

Types of Sculpture

As an art form, sculpture exists in one of two states:

- Freestanding. Also known as “in the round,” the word freestanding means surrounded on all sides by space. Statues of people are examples of freestanding sculptures. Every side of a freestanding sculpture is sculpted and finished. In order to see the work as the sculptor meant it to be seen, you have to move...
around it. The sculpture of a Mayan ruler in Figure 4–15 is an example of a freestanding sculpture.

- **Relief.** This is a type of sculpture in which forms and figures project only from the front. It is flat on the back. You can see large reliefs on buildings and small reliefs on items such as jewelry. The artwork in Figure 4–16 is an example of a relief sculpture.

Analyze and compare the sculptures in Figure 4–15 and Figure 4–16. Form conclusions about historical and cultural contexts. For example, what clues does each piece provide about its culture?

**Figure 4–15** This Mayan ruler is dressed to imitate a mythical person. What kind of dance movements do you think he would make wearing this costume? What kind of a beat would the dance have?


**Figure 4–16** Lord Ganesha is a very popular god in India. He is believed to be a remover of obstacles. Another sculpture of this god appears in Figure 12–15 on page 226.

**SCULPTING METHODS AND PROCESSES**

There are four basic methods for making sculpture. These are:

- **Carving.** In carving, the sculptor starts with a block of material and cuts or chips a shape from it. Often a hard material like stone is used. Look again at the sculpture in Figure 4–16. This work was carved from sandstone.

- **Casting.** In casting, the sculptor starts by making a mold. He or she then pours in a melted-down metal or some other liquid. Eventually, the liquid hardens. The mold is broken to reveal the newly created work within. One of the most commonly used media in casting is bronze. An example of a copper casting can be found in Figure 4–17.

- **Modeling.** In modeling, the sculptor builds up and shapes a soft material. Clay and fresh plaster are two such materials. The ancient Mayan sculpture you viewed in Figure 4–15 was the result of modeling. Notice the materials used in this ancient artwork.

◆ **Figure 4–17** This Buddha is seated in a pose of meditation. Notice the position of the hands forming a gesture of meditation.

Assembling. In assembling, also known as constructing, the sculptor glues or in some other way joins together pieces of material. The sculpture in Figure 4–18 was made by assembling pieces of wood.

Modeling and assembling are known as additive methods of sculpting. Works created by these methods are built up or added to. Carving is a subtractive method. In works created in this fashion, the artist takes away or removes materials.

Check Your Understanding

1. What is another term that has the same meaning as freestanding?
2. Name two media used by sculptors.
3. Describe the four basic sculpting methods.
4. What is meant by the term additive as it is used in sculpture? Which two basic methods of making sculpture are additive?
5. What is meant by the term subtractive as it is used in sculpture? Which basic method of making sculpture is subtractive?

Environmental Sculpting

Illustrate Ideas from Imagination.

Collect a variety of natural objects such as rocks, sticks, leaves, and grasses, which are not much larger than your hand. Illustrate ideas from your imagination by arranging these to create a three-dimensional environmental sculpture. Your work can be nonobjective or a recognizable object, such as a building or animal. Use the elements of line, shape, color, and texture to help you in arranging your natural objects in experimental ways. Share your environmental sculpture with your classmates. You may choose to do this activity as a group or individually.

◆ Figure 4–18 This sculpture was part of a large installation called Dawn’s Wedding Feast. It was a complex arrangement of 85 separate reliefs, boxes, and columns.

Louise Nevelson. Case with Five Balusters. 1959. Wood paint. 70.2 × 161.6 × 24.1 cm (27 3⁄4 × 63 1⁄4 × 9 1⁄2"). Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Peter M. Butler, 1983. © 2003 Estate of Louise Nevelson/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.