

BIG IDEAS

EROS BENDATO SCREPOLATO
Igor Mitoraj (Poland & Italy)

WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE? The artist Igor Mitoraj made this work. He was born in Oederan, Germany in 1944 to Polish parents. He studied art at the Cracow School of Art and later at the Academy of Fine Arts. He has been exhibiting his work since the late 1960's when he left Poland to live in Paris where he studied at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Mitoraj has spent time in Greece, Central America and Italy absorbing the sculptural forms of antiquity—forms that have greatly influenced both the style and the techniques used in his work. After spending a year in Mexico painting and studying Pre-Columbian art, statuary and monuments Igor Mitoraj began to use sculpture as his primary three-dimensional medium. Until the 1970's Mitoraj had worked only in terracotta or bronze, but, in 1979, on a visit to Carrara in Italy he discovered marble is a medium for his work. In 1983 he set up a studio in Tuscany, Italy in the famous town of Pietrasanta, near the famous quarries of Carrara marble. The use of Carrara marble can be traced back to Roman times. Michelangelo used to go to Carrara himself to choose the slabs of marble from which he sculpted his masterpieces.



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HOW WAS THIS SCULPTURE MADE? Generally when making a large sculpture, the artist begins by making a smaller model. This model is often made from plaster, clay or another material. Sometimes a full-size model is made, from which a mould can be constructed. These head forms were cast from one mould made from a life size model. It was cast in bronze. Moulds can be used to make one, or more of the same piece. After the form is cast, a patina or surface treatment is applied that gives it an aged look. This process of casting in bronze has a very long history. European, Middle Eastern and Chinese artists from ancient times knew and used this technique for casting bronze items which still exist today in museums. Mitoraj describes his process: “I first have a mental picture of the sculpture. I never draw or make any sketch on paper or anything. The idea matures in my head, and I already see it completed in a specific material.”



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WHAT IDEAS ARE BEING EXPLORED IN THIS WORK?

Ideas related to the mythical, epic, Classical, and monumental as reflecting the universal human condition are all reflected in Mitoraj's work. Though greatly influenced by Classical Art – ancient Greek and Roman forms, myths, culture and history his work is also modern. His work lures us back nostalgically to an ancient past but also brings universal human themes into the present – “bodies and faces depicted with typically Hellenic well-proportioned features are the starting point for a reflection on timeless issues such as love, sexual desire, femininity but also loneliness and suffering.” Mitoraj claims that the use of bandages and blindfolds are an expression of his past in Poland. He says, “I believe that it is an aesthetic, plastic expression of suffering.” Mitoraj has many versions of heroes, gods and goddesses in his art – mythical characters such as Icarus, Eros, some with his winged torso, also Centaurs or the cracked head of Tyndareus. All expressed in classical notions of beauty and proportions that are ideals, rather than ordinary people in diverse sizes and shapes. The perfect idealized forms with an emphasis on the torso make the figures epic and dramatic. His work exhibits a contemporary sensitivity, but references back to a lost classical beauty. Mitoraj draws on these



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ancient forms not to imitate the past but to recover it. “What I am looking for in ancient culture is to understand how and why this type of aesthetic arose, one that is completely mystical and at the same time religious, sensual yet human, too. It is not a naturalistic approach for example, it is completely different. There is such emotion in it that I try to find out why and how.” Igor Mitoraj.

The scale of Mitoraj’s work is both monumental and dramatic. Monumental refers to the massive or imposing quality of his sculptures, larger than life, or heroic figures gigantic in size. Mitoraj says it is important for him to work on a grand scale “...because it is a test of yourself to see the possibilities that you can achieve using large dimensions. You have to see if it works as well as on a smaller scale, or if the larger work is stronger. Personally, I have to say that I feel better working on a large scale. .. It is really hard work, but I like it a lot because it complicates things. It is a challenge against yourself.”



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WHAT IS THIS SCULPTURE ABOUT? This sculpture is titled *Eros Bendato Screpolato* or *Eros blindfolded and cracked*. It has been made to look like a fragment of an ancient monument to Eros, the god of love. Known as *Amor* in Latin and *Cupid* in Roman mythology. Eros is the youngest, most mischievous, and beautiful of the immortal gods. In ancient Greek mythology Eros was the primordial god of romantic and love and sexual desire. In some references he was also seen as a fertility deity. The Roman counterpart was *Cupid*, the god of desire, also known as *Amor* or “love”. In Greek mythology Eros is described as being the son of *Aphrodite* and *Ares*. It is from the name of Eros, that the term *erotic* comes from. Often portrayed with his arrows, Eros is blindfolded, suggesting that love is blind, and also illustrating that Eros’ victims were randomly selected. *Cupid’s* did not see where his arrows were going. The head with its surface patina, cracked plates and pieces of shattered fragments suggest the destruction of objects and monuments brought on by time. Some suggest that this mutilated head represents a loss of history, myths and of a connection with higher powers; to others it is a criticism of contemporary civilization and a warning against its destructive power. Mitoraj often makes sculptures that are only fragments of the human form, such as only the head of Eros. These fragments with marred surfaces suggest ancient ruins that have been discarded, vandalized or plundered

over time with only fragments remaining. This approach adds a patina of time to his work. Many of his classical faces are blindfolded and have tightly-shut mouths. Mitoraj claims that this is an expression of modern suffering. “Modern men are completely isolated, they spend entire days in front of the computer causing themselves misery. Through myth, one can establish a dialogue with the past, abandon isolation and get to know oneself, by getting acquainted with the Gods’ multiform nature that is contained in our DNA. I feel that a piece of arm or a leg speak far more strongly than a whole body. It leaves a lot to the imagination, too.”

TO LEARN MORE:

More on the artist:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igor_Mitoraj

More about Michelangelo:

www.artchive.com/artchive/M/michelangelo.html

Glossary

CARRARA MARBLE—A fine white or blue-gray marble from the quarry at Carrara, a city in the province of Massa-Carrara (Tuscany, Italy). It is exported all over the world. This marble has been used for sculpture and in architecture since ancient times. The famous Pantheon in Rome is constructed with marble from this quarry. Used during the Renaissance, Michelangelo’s statue of David was carved from Carrara marble.

CLASSICAL—Pertaining to the literature, and languages of ancient Greece and Rome. Works that conform to ancient Greek and Roman model of beauty and ideals as portrayed in literature and art.

HELLENIC—Relating to or about characteristics of the ancient Greeks including their language, culture, or thought especially during the period 1635-1645 before the time of Alexander the Great. Hellenic can also be used as the term for the pure Modern Greek language.

MICHELANGELO—The Italian sculptor, painter, architect, poet and scientist that lived from 1475 to 1564. He is famous for his art, such as his painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the Pieta and the statue of David. His work is central to the period known as the Italian Renaissance.

MYTHICAL OR MYTHOLOGY—Stories and legends about gods, heroes and other mythical beings, often drawn from ancient Greek legends.

PATINA—A surface calcification of implements, usually indicating great age. A film or incrustation, produced on the surface of old bronze and often esteemed as being of ornamental value and aesthetic value.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL—Having or appearing to have depth. Existing in three-dimensions of depth, width and height.

WHO PUT THIS SCULPTURE ON DISPLAY IN RICHMOND? This sculpture is part of Vancouver Biennale 2009-2011 Exhibition. The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that celebrates art in public space. Each exhibition transforms the urban landscape into an Open Air Museum, creating globally inspired cultural experiences where people live, work, play and transit. The Biennale features internationally renowned and emerging Contemporary artists that represent a diversity of cultural perspectives and artistic disciplines including sculpture, new media, performance works and film. The objective is to use great art as a catalyst to transformative learning and social action.

The Vancouver Biennale also creates supporting public programs, events and publications including the award-winning BIG IDEAS Education program, the International Artist Residency Program inspired by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream", the CineFest LIVE documentary film festival and the Tour de Biennale and BIKennale arts & culture cycling events.

TO LEARN MORE you can search the terms **BIENNALE**, **PUBLIC ART** or **OUTDOOR SCULPTURE PARKS** on-line. Also Visit the Vancouver Biennale website at www.vancouverbiennale.com

IMAGE CREDITS:

- 1 Artist portrait; artist
- 2 *Ero Bendato Scrippolato*; Dan Fairchild
- 3 *Light of the Moon*; Peter Musterd
- 4 *Archangel*; ibiscus27
- 5 *Tyndareus*, Paris, 1997; Sebastia Giralt
- 6 *Untitled*; Artist Facebook, Karina Pest
- 7 *Giardini di Boboli*, France; Artist Facebook, Federica Segalini

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