Toya Shigeo "A History of Sculpture Without Rodin: Part 2"
Construction, Composition, and Subversion

Two Currents in Contemporary Sculpture

When I was young, I was fond of *Head of Apollo* by Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929). Later, as I began to think more and more about sculpture, I realized this was not the kind of thing I wanted to make, but the hollows under the cheekbones and the tension extending from the nose to the lips are still wonderful to see. Even in this head-only portrayal, the construction of bones and muscles is remarkable. No doubt we should expect no less from a man who was Rodin's assistant.

Aristide Maillol (1861-1944) was the same age as Bourdelle, but did not become a sculptor until later, in his 40s. Both are prominent "post-Rodin" (as we might call this analogue to post-Impressionism in painting) sculptors, but in contrast to Bourdelle's "construction," Maillol's sculpture is characterized by "composition."

Like Rodin, Bourdelle constructed based on the strength of the body with subjects such as Apollo and Hercules, whereas Maillol's oeuvre consisted almost entirely of female nudes, even if they were given titles such as *The Mediterranean* and *Ile-de-France*. At first glance they may appear a bit on the sweet side, but the overall compositions, combining body parts such as neck and arms at exquisite angles within a single space, are well thought out and reminiscent of the compositions of abstract paintings. Compared to the physicality of Bourdelle, the shapes of individual elements are simplified, and the works recall Cezanne's capturing of nature by reducing it to cylinders, spheres, and cones. From a Japanese perspective, these works also recall the distant past, the Buddhist statues of the Asuka and Tenpyo eras.

Maillol also sculpted torsos. Since these works show only the torso isolated from the rest of the body, there is no composition of body parts as described above, but *sculpture* itself becomes the subject of the work. Sculptural volumes merge to form a composition of masses. The lineage of composition, as exemplified by Maillol, went on to become the main current of contemporary sculpture.

The Layered Columns of Brancusi

Last time I spoke of my discomfort with existing sculptural forms, but Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957) is a sculptor of whom I am uncharacteristically fond. He, too, inherited the Maillol legacy.

Brancusi left Romania for Paris to study sculpture at the École des Beaux-Arts and entered the workshop of Rodin, whom he admired, but left after three months. While he was exposed to the latest modernist trends in Paris, his works apply elements of the folk crafts and architecture from his homeland. These works revive a sense of rustic simplicity slumbering within the hearts of the Romanian people. This, too, is a valid way of producing contemporary sculpture. As a sculptor in Japan, a country on the far edge of the world, I was influenced by the possibility that regionalism can connect to universality, and decided to take a rustic approach myself.

Let me touch upon *Maiastra*, which I saw at MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art, New York). The title comes from a Romanian legend about a miraculous bird, and on top of a column divided into three parts is placed the simplified figure of a bird. However, what interested me most was the overall composition, including the column below. On top of an elongated rectangular column are two simple carved caryatids (female figures), and on top of the caryatids is a nearly cubic rectangular column. The structure of these columns is said to relate to decorations on Romanian farmhouse entrances, but the hybrid verticality of the columns also evoked a sense of a temporal axis, and reminded me of a five-storied pagoda. The work standing there seemed to smoothly unite the rustic and the modern, the local and the universal.

Picasso and the Great Fragmentation

In contrast to Brancusi, who pushed forms toward abstraction, most of the sculptures of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), like his paintings, remained figurative. However, as was the case with his Cubist paintings, Picasso's sculpture was more a subversive force in modern sculpture.

Take *Woman's Head*, from 1909. As a sculpture by a painter it has similarities to Maillol, but rather than smoothly caressing the form of the subject, the continuity of volumes is broken, as if painted with dynamic strokes of a broad brush. The head is split in many places and fragmented. In other words, there is no dedication to sculptural unity.

In a sense, what we see here is the painter's sense of privilege. Whereas a sculptor circles around the model to take in its form from all directions, a painter can just sit at his easel and order the model to turn to the right or to the left.

Be that as it may, the history of modern sculpture was rapidly on the path to disunity with the collapse of unity brought about by Picasso. This was the origin of the great fragmentation.

With Picasso's *Woman's Head* as a groundbreaking forerunner, modernist sculpture evolved through Russian Constructivism, Italian Futurism, David Smith (1906-65), Anthony Caro (1924-2013), and the Minimalism pioneered by sculptors such as Donald Judd (1928-94) in the 1960s. Modernist sculpture developed along a path of formalism and even conceptual art that does not necessitate the physical creation of works. The Tokyo Biennale of 1970, which I mentioned last time, was on the bleeding edge of modernism at that time.

When modernism had gone as far as it could go, people began shouting that painting and sculpture were finished, that art was dead, as if it had been beheaded by the devil himself. But in fact, it was still alive and well.

Giacometti: Constructing Not Only Volumes but Also Space

Let us consider sculpture from a different perspective than the formalistic one of modernism. One might say that sculpture is shaped by the gaze. By looking at a sculpture, we can grasp the nature of the artist's gaze. In the process of exploring the nature of the gaze in sculpture, I came across the structure of the woods. When I walk through the woods, I always feel that something is watching me. This differs from the unobstructed face-to-face showdown that occurs in the desert, where Judaism and Christianity emerged. In the woods it is as if indications of presences are coming in from every possible direction. As I return these multiple gazes, moving my eyes in every direction, from my feet to the gaps between the trees to the canopy overhead, I feel I must open my heart and mind to these various gazes rather than stare back at them eye-to-eye. This is not a gaze that can be represented as a binary, such as vertical-horizontal, but rather as a bundle of diagonal lines. My sculpture emerges from a place where such bundles of diagonals cluster together and fill a space.

Let us go back and review once more the vantage points of Western sculpture. As I mentioned last time, Egyptian combined views from two directions, front and side, but European sculpture expanded the range of viewpoints. It was Baudelaire in the 19th century who criticized sculpture for this multiplicity of viewpoints, but in the 20th century, as if in

response to his criticism, a sculptor emerged who took a single viewpoint to the extreme: Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966).

Having studied the constructive approach to sculpture under Bourdelle, Giacometti chose to face his models entirely from one direction (frontal). **[Fig.7]** His constructive nature was not limited to sculpture. He built transparent architectures *around* emaciated forms, volumes captured from the front of the face, from the apex of a mass centered on the nose. The space enfolding the physical object also has a constructive quality. This can be clearly seen in his drawings and oil paintings as well.

In the next installment, I will consider the surface as a boundary between the object and space. [Talk by Toya Shigeo]

Translated by Christopher Stephens
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