

Sculpture – A reading form

Step 1: How to proceed when you are in front of a sculpture.

- You identify the type: a statue, a high/low relief.
- Say how it was made: carved, modelled, cast, assembled, mobile, hologram.
- Give the name of the work, the date and the location.
- Give the name of the sculptor and of the client, if there is any.

Step 2: Now start observing the sculpture more closely.

- First, identify the subject and decide whether it is abstract or figurative, whether it is a portrait, a still life, it represents historical/religious figures or it is an allegory.
- Then, find out what material the work is made of: stone, ivory, metal (bronze, iron, steel, gold, silver), clay, ceramic, glass.
- It is now time to proceed to an iconographic analysis, in other words to identify the subject if possible.

Step 3: It is time to study the sculpture looking for the technical features that make it unique.

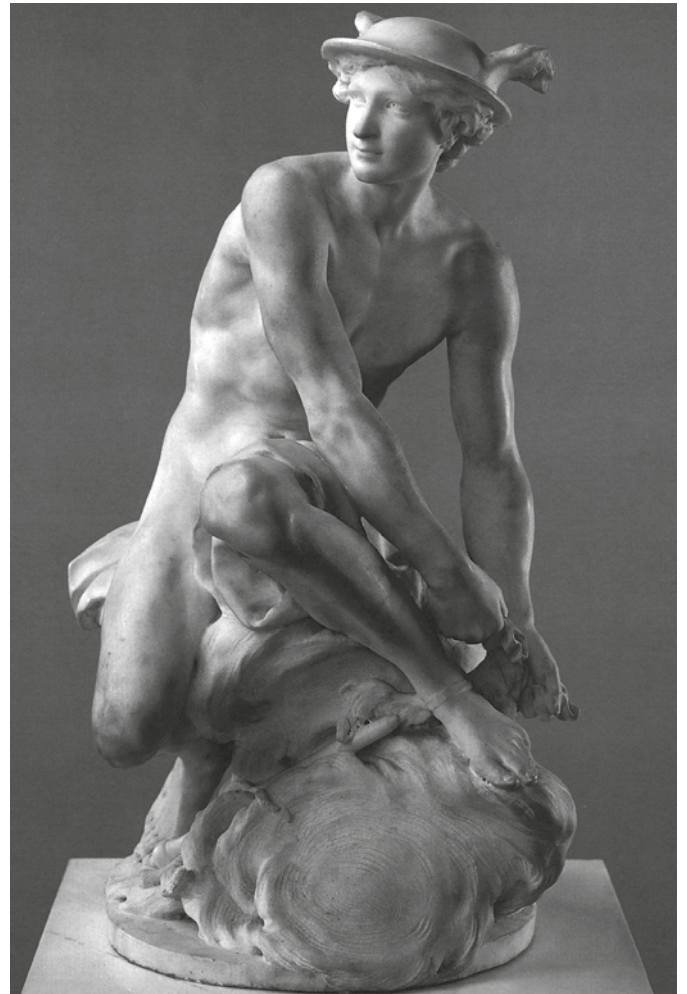
- Even if it is a single sculpture, it is important to study its contour and how the various elements (head, shoulders, arms and legs, body parts) are organized; whether the arrangement is continuous, soft, curved, broken, or overlapping; and whether the structure of the piece follows horizontal, vertical or oblique lines.
- The proportions of the piece, i.e. the distribution of its weight, are important. Sometimes weight is distributed uniformly, but often it is placed in the middle, at the top or at the bottom to emphasise some important details or as a necessary device to keep the harmony of the whole.
- The forms of the sculpture can be either naturalistic or abstract, stylized or fanciful, idealized or expressionistic.
- A sculpture is not only the piece, but also the space around it and the place where the piece is exhibited. So it matters a lot whether the statue is to be seen only frontally or all around, if it is placed outdoors or inside.
- Light (soft/strong, natural/artificial) and surface (uniform/varied, smooth/rough, in relief) interplay to give relevance either to the general shape or to spotlight the tiniest details.
- Colours, which were in the past applied to protect the sculpture, are now used to convey different messages or create different atmospheres according to whether they are realistic/fanciful, dark/bright, of the original material, etc.

Step 4: Now you are called to reveal your feelings in front of the sculpture.

- The long, detailed analysis of the piece has certainly given the viewer a better insight into the piece, its meaning and the author's purpose in making it that way: to commemorate a person or an event, or to send a special message.

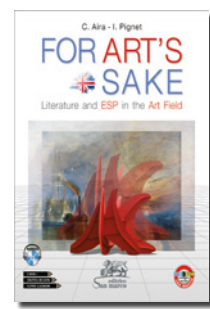
- Sometimes, especially in front of modern abstract sculpture, it is not so easy to understand the meaning of the work or the author's intentions, yet it is possible to say if the work captures one's attention, is intriguing and encourages reflection, is lively, attractive and relieves one's spirit.

Now look at the following sculpture and work with a partner to fill in the form.



Jean Baptiste Pigalle, Mercury tying his winged sandals, ca. 1739, marble, Metropolitan Museum, NY.





Identification	
Type	
Name, date and location	
Sculptor	
Client	
Size	
Observation	
Subject	
Material	
Iconographic analysis	
Stylistic analysis	
Arrangement and proportions	
Forms	
Space and light	
Surface	
Colour	
Your opinion	
Artist's purpose	
Evaluation	