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*Article*

# Significance of Sculptures in Shaping Social Multifarious Narratives

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**Abstract:** Art continues to be a veritable channel of expression of varying concepts and opinions. Therefore, this paper "Significance of Sculptures in Shaping Social Multifarious Narratives", explores the roles of sculpture as a dynamic medium for conveying societal, cultural, and political messages across historical epochs and modern contexts. The author examines how three-dimensional forms transcend aesthetic boundaries to function as agents of social commentary, historical memory and political satire. Beginning with foundational definitions, the work traces the progression of sculptures as the convenient tool for visual representation. It more so, reaffirms this position through inference from historical significance as agents of social commentary, drawing its perspective from sacred propaganda in ancient Egypt and democratic ideals in classical Greece, through medieval didactic tools and Renaissance humanism. The research addresses the argument in the work of Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" in the 20th-century avant-garde and how it critiques contemporary street installations. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the synergy between tactile sculptural installations and journalistic media, demonstrating how visual and informational narratives combine to foster public engagement as it reflects on the reviewed work of Michelangelo's "David" by the researcher, pondering critical inquiry, and systemic reform. The research thus demonstrates how iconic sculptures as three-dimensional art, have the universal capacity to address themes of liberty, conflict, non-violence and human rights among other narratives.

**Keywords:** dynamic medium, historical epochs, installations, modern contexts, information narratives

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## 1. Introduction

According to Johnson, sculpture is referred to as "the art of creating three-dimensional forms through carving, modeling, or assembling materials". Thus, this definition highlights the diverse techniques employed by sculptors to express their artistic visions.

Moreover, Brown argues that sculpture, not only serves as aesthetic objects but also as cultural artifacts that communicate societal values and beliefs. Again, this definition underscores Ancient sculptures, such as those from ancient Greece and Rome, which often depicted gods, heroes, and important historical events [1].

The term, sculpture is linked with craft skills/ technical capability to visually manipulate three dimensional forms into aesthetic appeal [2]. These sculptures not only showcases artistic skills but also serves religious and political functions within their respective societies. It therefore can be seen as those skills, expertise or distinguishing abilities demonstrated in sculpture production which may be acquired or learned from training and practice.

Synergizing sculptures for visual presentation

In contemporary society, visual representation of any phenomena plays pivotal role in shaping public opinion and understanding [3]. Hence, Jones et al., posit that issues in any system, demands effective communication strategies to elucidate its complexities and ramifications.

Garcia opined that visual representation transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, offering a universal platform for conveying complex ideas and emotions. In the context of complex ideas, this visual medium possesses the unique capacity to evoke empathy, provoke critical inquiry, and foster collective action [4].

Sculpture, as an enduring form of artistic expression, has historically served as a potent tool for social commentary. From ancient civilizations to modern movements, sculptors have utilized their craft to depict societal injustices, political corruption, and the struggle for democratic ideals. In specific contexts, sculptures strategically placed in public spaces can serve as poignant reminders of consequences of system deficiencies for appraisal thereby stimulating public discourse and civic engagement [5].

Williams, asserts that whereas sculpture presents tactile images, print media like journals, newspapers articles remain the cornerstone of journalism, disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and holding power to account. In the digital age, newspapers continue to adapt, utilizing multimedia elements to enhance storytelling and engage diverse audiences. Through investigative reporting, editorial commentary, and visual storytelling, newspapers possess the capacity to illuminate the intricacies and advocate for systemic reform [6], [7], [8].

Garcia and Lee, further attest that the convergence of sculptures and newspapers presents a dynamic opportunity for amplifying the visual narratives. By integrating sculptural installations with investigative journalism, editorial cartoons, and photojournalism, this synergy can offer a multi-dimensional portrayal of issues, resonating with diverse audiences and catalyzing collective action [9], [10].

By harnessing the emotive power of sculptures and the informational prowess of newspapers, stakeholders can foster a more nuanced understanding of issues, galvanize public opinion, and advocate for democratic reform [11], [12]. Through collaborative efforts between artists, journalists, civil society organizations, and policymakers, this synergy has the potential to catalyze positive change and uphold the integrity of the societal precepts.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Historical significance of sculptures as agents of social commentary

Sculpture has always played a significant role in society, serving as a powerful medium for conveying social and political commentary. Throughout history, artists have used their creative expressions to challenge the status quo, provoke thought, and inspire change.

Hopkins affirms that sculptures have played crucial roles throughout history as potent agents of social commentary, reflecting and shaping societal values, political climates, and cultural dynamics. In ancient civilizations, sculptures were not merely decorative objects but were imbued with profound cultural and political meanings. According to Smith, Egyptian sculptures often depicted pharaohs and deities, emphasizing the divine right and eternal authority of the rulers. Thus, sculptures were used to convey political power and social order, reinforcing the existing hierarchies.

Similarly, in ancient Greece, sculptures served as medium for political and philosophical expression. Boardman notes that the works of sculptors like Phidias and Praxiteles were not just aesthetic accomplishments; they also conveyed societal values such as democracy, heroism, and humanism. The depiction of gods and athletes in idealized forms was a commentary on the Greek pursuit of excellence and balance in both body and spirit. During the medieval period, sculptures were predominantly religious, aimed at educating the largely illiterate populace about biblical stories and moral lessons. According to Camille, the Gothic cathedrals of Europe are adorned with sculptures that

served as didactic tools, depicting scenes of salvation and damnation to reinforce Christian doctrine.

## 3. Results

The Renaissance marked a significant shift where sculptures began to explore more secular themes and humanistic values. Hall, points out that Michelangelo's "David" symbolizes the defense of civil liberties in the Republic of Florence [13]. The resurgence of classical themes and techniques during the Renaissance also allowed for subtler social commentaries, including critiques of political power and reflections on human nature [14].

In the modern era, sculptures have increasingly become explicit tools of social commentary, often challenging prevailing norms and highlighting social injustices. According to Elsen, Auguste Rodin's "The Burghers of Calais" commemorates the sacrifice of six citizens during the Hundred Years' War and subtly critiques the futility of war and the human cost of political decisions.

The 20th century saw an explosion of avant-garde movements where sculptures were used to challenge traditional aesthetics and comment on contemporary issues [15], [16]. Hopkins describes how the Dadaists, through works like Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain," used sculpture to critique the art establishment and question the nature of art itself.




Figure 1. Fountain by Marcel Duchamp, 1917.

Title: Fountain
Artist: Marcel Duchamp
Year: 1917

It thus revolutionized art by shifting attention from artistic craftsmanship to artistic ideas [17], [18]. Noting further that an artist's choice of an object could transform it into art not necessarily his creative involvement. Thus this challenged the traditional believe that art had to be handmade, aesthetically pleasing or technically skilled thereby emphasizing concept over craftsmanship. Similarly, Curtis notes that the works of Henry Moore, often reflecting the horrors of war and the resilience of the human spirit, provided profound social commentary during and after the World Wars [19], [20].

In recent decades, sculptures have continued to serve as powerful tools for social commentary. Broude and Garrard highlight the works of contemporary artists like Ai Weiwei and Kara Walker, who addressed themes such as political oppression, human rights, and racial history. Ai Weiwei's installations often critique the Chinese government's policies, while Kara Walker's sculptures address the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination in America [21].

Throughout history, sculptures have been central to cultural and political symbolism. Monuments and statues are often erected to commemorate significant historical figures and events, serving as enduring symbols of collective memory and identity. According to Savage, they can also become focal points for controversy and re-evaluation of history.

The recent debates over Confederate statues in the United States highlight how sculptures can be reinterpreted and contested as societal values evolve [22], [23].

Sculptures have historically been significant agents of social commentary, reflecting and shaping the values and dynamics of their times. From ancient political propaganda to contemporary critiques of social injustices, sculptures provide a tangible medium through which artists can engage with and influence public discourse [24]. Sculpture could therefore function through ideas and contexts as well as through conventional modelling and carving. Thus as society continues to evolve, the role of sculptures as tools of social commentary remains as relevant as ever, prompting reflection, dialogue, and sometimes, necessary controversy. The critical force of sculpture can therefore arise not only from what an artist constructs but also from how an artist contextualizes objects, places and systems [25].

Relevance of sculptures in conveying political messages

Sculpture has been used as a means of political commentary since ancient times. In ancient Egypt, for example, Pharaohs commissioned grand sculptures and murals to assert their power and promote their political agendas [26]. These artworks depicted the Pharaohs as divine rulers, reinforcing their authority and control over the people. Similarly, ancient Greek art often conveyed political messages, with sculptures and pottery depicting scenes from mythology that reflected societal values and political ideologies.

According to Hopkins, the renaissance period witnessed a resurgence of interest in humanism and individualism, leading to a shift in artistic expression [27]. Artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo used their works to challenge societal norms and comment on social issues. For instance, da Vinci's "The Last Supper" depicted the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, highlighting themes of loyalty and betrayal that resonated with the political climate of the time. Michelangelo's "David" symbolized the triumph of the Florentine Republic over tyranny, serving as a powerful political statement. Political Satire in Art has been a prevalent form of social and political commentary throughout history [28].



Figure 2. Review of Michelangelo’s David by Georgebest U.C.O., POP medium.

Title: Review of Micheangelo's David
Artist: Georgebest U.C.O
Medium: POP

Stewart, avers that artists have used humor and irony to critique political figures and institutions, often challenging the status quo. In the 18th century, the French artist Honoré Daumier created caricatures that satirized the corrupt French government and monarchy [29]. His works, such as "Gargantua" and "The Legislative Belly," exposed the greed and incompetence of those in power, sparking public debate and contributing to political change.

He further affirms that the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed the rise of social realism, an artistic movement that aimed to depict the harsh realities of society. Artists such as Gustave Courbet and Diego Rivera used their works to shed light on social injustices and advocate for political change. Courbet's "The Stone Breakers" depicted the plight of the working class, highlighting the exploitation and inequality prevalent in society [30], [31]. Rivera's murals, such as "Man at the Crossroads," conveyed political messages about class struggle and the need for social revolution. Modern and Contemporary Art as Political Commentary in the modern and contemporary art world, artists continue to use their works as a platform for social and political commentary. The Dada movement of the early 20th century, for example, sought to challenge traditional notions of art and society. Artists like Marcel Duchamp and Hannah Höch used found objects and collage techniques to critique the absurdity of war, consumerism, and societal norms.

Adams, asserts that in recent years, street art and graffiti have emerged as powerful forms of political commentary. Artists like Banksy have used their anonymous street art to challenge authority, question societal norms, and raise awareness about social issues [32]. Banksy's works, such as "Girl with a Balloon" and "Dismaland," have sparked global conversations about capitalism, war, and the refugee crisis. Sculpture has always played a crucial role in conveying social and political commentary throughout history. From ancient civilizations to the modern era, artists have used their creative expressions to challenge the status quo, provoke thought, and inspire change. Whether through ancient Egyptian sculptures, Renaissance masterpieces, political satire, or contemporary street art, art continues to serve as a powerful medium for conveying social and political messages [33]. By examining the role of art in history, we gain a deeper understanding of the societal and political issues that have shaped our world.

## 4. Discussion

Examples of Sculptures Depicting Societal Issues Globally

Sculptures have historically been used to depict societal issues and provoke reflection and dialogue. Here are several notable examples from around the world:

1. Statue of Liberty, USA: The Statue of Liberty, designed by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi and gifted by France to the United States in 1886, is a powerful symbol of freedom and democracy [34]. According to Berenson, the statue represents liberty and the welcoming of immigrants, reflecting societal values of openness and opportunity during a time of significant immigration to the United States.
2. Motherland Calls, Russia: The "Motherland Calls" statue in Volgograd, Russia, created by Yevgeny Vuchetich, commemorates the Battle of Stalingrad during World War II. As described by O'Neill, this colossal sculpture symbolizes the courage and sacrifice of the Soviet people in the fight against fascism, reflecting themes of patriotism and resistance [35], [36].
3. Berlin's Holocaust Memorial, Germany: Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, unveiled in 2005, consists of 2,711 concrete slabs arranged in a grid pattern. According to Young, the abstract and disorienting design invites reflection on the horrors of the Holocaust and serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of hatred and intolerance.
4. El Pensador, Argentina: "El Pensador" (The Thinker) by Auguste Rodin, located in front of the National Congress in Buenos Aires, symbolizes contemplation and

intellectual labor. According to Ward, it reflects on the role of thought and reason in societal development and governance, reminding viewers of the importance of critical thinking in political life.

b. v. Non-Violence (The Knotted Gun), Sweden: The sculpture "Non-Violence" by Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd, located outside the United Nations headquarters in New York and in several other locations worldwide, depicts a revolver with its barrel knotted. According to Williams, this sculpture is a powerful statement against violence and a call for global peace and disarmament [37].
c. vi. Gandhi Statue, India: The statue of Mahatma Gandhi in New Delhi, created by Ram V. Sutar, symbolizes the principles of non-violence and civil disobedience. According to Guha, it serves as a reminder of Gandhi's role in India's struggle for independence and his advocacy for social justice and equality.
d. vii. The Thinker, France: Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker" is a world-renowned sculpture that represents human contemplation and intellectual effort. As discussed by Elsen (2003), it symbolizes the importance of reason and thought in addressing societal issues and personal introspection [38].
e. viii. The Pietà, Italy: Michelangelo's "Pietà" in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, portrays the Virgin Mary holding the dead body of Jesus Christ. According to Wallace (1998), this sculpture addresses themes of suffering, compassion, and redemption, reflecting the Christian response to human suffering and loss.
f. ix. Nelson Mandela Statue, South Africa: The statue of Nelson Mandela at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, created by sculptors Andre Prinsloo and Ruhan Janse van Vuuren, commemorates Mandela's legacy in the fight against apartheid and his role in establishing democracy in South Africa. As noted by Lodge (2006), it symbolizes reconciliation, peace, and the triumph of justice over oppression.
g. x. Memorial to the Women of World War II, UK: The memorial in London, designed by John

## 5. Conclusion

W. Mills, honors the contributions of women during World War II. According to Noakes, it represents the diverse roles women played during the war, challenging traditional gender roles and highlighting their essential contributions to the war effort and society.

These sculptures, scattered across different parts of the world, are poignant reminders of various societal issues such as freedom, violence, intellectual thought, suffering, and gender roles. Through their powerful imagery and symbolism, they provoke reflection, inspire dialogue, and sometimes, drive social change.

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