

Eric Blanchard
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James Romaine
Intro to visual art

Rachel Whiteread's "Torso"

In the Seeing Art History video on Rachel Whiteread's sculpture "Torso" we are introduced to Whiteread's unique casting process. This process involves using a hot water bottle filled with plaster. After the mold hardens, she peels away the rubber skin leaving a solid plaster object that illuminates the invisible space created in the casting process. "Torso" was a formative work for Whiteread as the casting process she used in this sculpture was one that she returned to throughout her career. The video compares Whiteread's casting technique to three other sculpting methods: carving, lost wax casting, and constructed sculpture. These different methods of sculpture each individually create a unique vision for the viewer.

The Gaddi torso was created by chipping away at marble rendering a metamorphosis of material into an elegant display of the human form. When comparing the Gaddi torso to Whiteread's torso it is evident how the different methods of sculpting produce different effects on the viewing experience. Whiteread's casting method has a clean and smooth finish while the Gaddi torso is more raw and detailed. While the subject of these two sculptures are the same, the end result is a vastly different viewing experience and this is because of the different interpretation the artist had on the subject, and the different execution of methods used.

The Ife head was made by forming a mold around a wax model. The wax was then melted away and the mold was used to cast the bronze sculpture. The Ife head is an example of detailed realism. Because of its casting method, the Ife head encourages the viewer to look beyond the material surface of the sculpture and to view it as a real human head. In contrast to Whiteread's torso that doesn't give that same effect because its plaster form is only its material self. The material surface steals the show and evokes our imagination to fill in the gaps created by lack of detail.

In the constructed sculpture Coca Cola plan our interpretation of the objects and the viewers personal association with these objects inform how we see this sculpture. Constructed sculpture is the most literal form of sculpting. On the surface Whiteread's sculpture and Coca Cola plan seem very different. When we look deeper we see that both these sculptures encourage the viewer to go through the same process of going beyond the physical sculpture and becoming a witness of the interpretations that we bring to the sculpture. Unlike the detailed realism expressed in The Gaddi torso and The ife head, Coca Cola plan is more abstract and inspires a more subjective interpretation due to its varying subject and the literal nature in which it was constructed.