

# Formal Integration of Decorative Elements in the Creation of Figurative Sculpture

Wenzhong Yu\*

Freelance Artist, Zibo 255000, Shandong Province, China

\**Corresponding author:* Wenzhong Yu, piaoluodeguyey@126.com

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**Abstract:** Figurative sculpture and decorative elements belong to the same category of art; the development of sculpture art requires innovation and constant exploration of new development paths, while many characteristics of decorative elements can give the creation of sculpture works a variety of inspiration. This paper explores the significance of figurative sculpture and decorative elements, examining their intrinsic connections and historical practices. The study aims to uncover the potential of figurative sculpture in the creation of decorative elements, highlighting how the integration of these forms can contribute to the development of art and the creation of meaningful figurative sculptures.

**Keywords:** Figurative sculpture; Decorative elements; Sculpture creation form

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## 1. Introduction

As an important category of art, sculpture has a long history and carries a rich cultural connotation. Since ancient times, both Chinese and Westerners have expressed their emotions and manifested their beauty through sculpture. Sculpture has evolved from Western realistic traditions over a long development process, marked by the continuous growth of creative thinking. This evolution has led to ongoing changes in creative forms, materials, and decorative elements, all of which have become integral to artistic creation. As an important aspect of artistic creation, decorative elements are involved in architecture, product design, household goods, and other fields. As a unique art form, decorative elements also play a pivotal role in the creation of sculpture. With the development of society and culture, figurative sculpture presents diversified styles and forms of expression in different periods and regions. The incorporation of decorative elements can inject new vitality into the development of figurative sculpture and lead the development of sculpture art in a new direction<sup>[1]</sup>.

## **2. Introduction to figurative sculpture and decorative elements**

### **2.1. Definition and the development of figurative sculpture**

The figurative sculpture discussed in this article refers primarily to Western realistic sculpture. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, with the reform and opening up, Chinese students went abroad to learn Western realistic sculpture methods and brought them back to China, combining them with the characteristics of domestic social and cultural life to form figurative sculpture with Chinese cultural characteristics. Figurative sculpture is a form of sculpture art that mostly utilizes realistic techniques, taking the figures, animals, flowers, and other specific objects in life as the main subjects of expression, through the observation of the morphological characteristics of the physical objects, combined with the artist's subjective creation methods and approaches to artistic re-creation, which is an expression of the artist's perception of the world and aesthetics. In the course of historical development, figurative sculpture carries a rich cultural connotation and the artist's artistic emotions. The collision of emotions and emerging art leads to the development of sculpture art toward the peak of humanistic feelings <sup>[2]</sup>.

The development of Western sculpture has gone through three major periods of development: prehistoric sculpture, classical sculpture, and modern sculpture. Within these periods, four key peaks stand out: Ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, the European Renaissance, 19th-century French sculpture, and 20th-century Western sculpture. The development of Western sculpture gradually evolved from "quiet norms" to "warm freedom." In the Ancient Greek and Roman periods, sculpture adhered to established conventions, while the Renaissance ushered in the dawn of humanism. By the 19th century, French sculpture, particularly the work of Auguste Rodin, became known for its warmth and passion. Rodin, a revolutionary figure in late 19th-century sculpture, transcended traditional academic boundaries, making it difficult to classify his work within a specific school. His achievements in liberating modern sculpture stand at the pinnacle of artistic evolution. Following Rodin, artists like Emile Antoine Bourdelle and Aristide Maillol also broke away from academic idealization, infusing their work with realism and a profound passion for life. This paved the way for future generations of artists. In the 20th century, Western sculpture became characterized by a diversity of styles, including Cubism, Constructivism, Futurism, Surrealism, and Abstraction. Artists explored new materials and forms, breaking away from monotony to pursue novelty and uniqueness in the language of sculpture.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, China introduced Western realistic sculpture, with the proposal and development of Chinese figurative sculpture, Chinese society and culture were integrated into the art of sculpture, thus achieving the localization of Western sculpture. The development of sculpture gradually presented an open-ended creative state, and diverse modes of creation and expression were formed. It puts forward such sculpture creation ideas as the theory of realistic sculpture, which integrates Chinese realistic spirit and culture into sculpture art. The Chinese traditional culture is very much in line with these characteristics, which are in between realism and abstraction, and are neither as transparent as realism, nor as impenetrable as abstraction. Many artists have also attempted to use materials and expressive techniques with Chinese characteristics, gradually deepening the localization of Western sculpture and presenting a state of diverse and competitive sculpture creation <sup>[3]</sup>.

### **2.2. Content of decorative elements**

In artistic creation, we subjectively and purposefully arrange and combine various elements such as lines, patterns, decorations, textures, colors, forms, order, etc., to decorate or fill a certain part of a sculpture, so that the decorated object can be artistically beautified. We consider these elements as decorative elements,

mainly playing a role in embellishing and decorating artworks. The formal integration of decorative elements in sculpture creation discussed in this article mainly refers to the concise, generalized, and geometric processing of sculptures based on the characteristics of lines, patterns, decorations, textures, colors, forms, and order in decorative elements, so as to reflect the decorative features of sculpture works, including the direct decoration of decorative elements on the surface of concrete sculptures.

The creation of arts and crafts primarily aims to beautify, modify, and decorate, adding interest to daily life. Decorative elements, whether figurative or abstract, combine with the artwork to form an aesthetic unity. This harmony not only enhances the visual beauty of the form but also complements the artwork itself, satisfying people's deeper aesthetic desires related to life, culture, ideals, and history. It makes people feel the beauty of art coming to life. Decorative art itself is an art that is more ornamental than functional, and here we have to mention the Art Deco that arose in the 1920s. The Art Deco took the opposition to classicism, naturalism, and simple craftsmanship as its main ideas, emphasized the use of new materials as well as the texture and luster of the materials, and advocated the beauty of mechanization, and the shapes were mostly simple geometric shapes or decorated with folded lines. The colors are mostly bright, solid, contrasting, and metallic, which were initially embodied in luxury goods but later spread to the fields of architectural structure, interior design, furniture, ceramics, glass, graphic design, and product design <sup>[4]</sup>.

By this time, Art Deco was still mainly a product form movement, mainly reflected in the form of decoration, emphasizing decoration, striving to beautify products through decoration and make products high-end and luxurious. This product decoration involves the use of lines, patterns, ornamentation, texture, color, form, order, and other design elements, combined with product-specific materials, so that the product meets the requirements of the product designer.

### **3. Feasibility of bringing in decorative elements in the creation of figurative sculpture**

#### **3.1. Connection between figurative sculpture and decorative elements**

Figurative sculpture and decorative elements are all part of art, and the creation of art is to beautify life and express emotions. Sculpture, as an art discipline, is created by artists to express their perception of the world and artistic thinking. Certainly, there are times when figurative sculpture can also be used as a decorative element, such as some of the ancient large-scale buildings have figurative sculpture as a decoration, where figurative sculpture is transformed into a decorative element. Decorative elements are important elements that exist in order to beautify the decorated subject by the creator of art. Therefore, figurative sculpture and decorative elements can sometimes be transformed into each other. The use of decorative art in sculpture is not only limited to patterns and lines, more importantly, it is brought into the creation and integrated into the sculpture creation subject. For example, the outer contour of the sculpture work presents a specific geometric shape, or the figurative sculpture work takes the totem in the decorative element as the creative subject and makes the flat art three-dimensional. Therefore, decorative elements bring not only surface decorative patterns but also artistic sublimation in the creative form to figurative sculpture art.

Figurative sculpture and decorative elements are integral parts of artistic creation. Decorative elements are designed to enhance the subject they adorn through artistic beautification. Figurative sculpture can serve as the subject of decoration, just as decorative elements can be used to enhance it. In this process, not only can decorative elements like vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and fine lines be applied to the surface of figurative sculptures, but sculptors can also draw from the formal characteristics of decorative elements, such

as lines and simplified geometric shapes, to enrich their creations. Starting from the formal relationship of the decorative subject, firstly, it can belong to the artistic subject itself and decorate the surface of the figurative sculpture, making the decorated figurative sculpture more aesthetic and enhancing the artistic value of the figurative sculpture; secondly, decorative elements can also be integrated into the creative form of the decorated subject, summarizing the complex sculpture structure into simple lines and geometric shapes, making it become a part of the creation of the form of figurative sculpture to show their own design value so that the figurative sculpture becomes simple and generalized. Its aesthetic implications are integrated into the form of the subject's creation so that the decorative element can become a formal creative design factor. Arts created by using or absorbing decorative elements in sculpture works usually have a strong decorative style, self-contained main body, exaggerated deformation, or concise generalization, with a unique artistic connotation, so that the artistic appreciation is gradually enhanced <sup>[5]</sup>.

### **3.2. Historical practices**

In the creation of realistic sculptures, artists often reproduce and reflect the physical state through the combination of objective things and subjective creative methods. With the development of sculpture art, numerous schools and sculpture artists have emerged. They not only promote the development of sculpture techniques but also promote the development of sculpture thinking, sculpture forms, and sculpture materials. The emergence of new sculptural thinking, forms, and materials not only directly references the decorative elements, but also draws on the art forms of the decorative elements in their forms. By exaggerating, deforming, simplifying, and other creative techniques, the artist creates sculptures with unique aesthetic significance, so that the viewer can appreciate and feel the sculptures from a new perspective. The incorporation of decorative elements into figurative sculpture enhances its imaginative and aesthetic value, making it more engaging for viewers. This fusion stimulates the viewer's mood, guiding them to explore the deeper meanings and connotations behind the sculpture. It provides a greater space for reflection and thought, ultimately serving as a bridge between art and spiritual communication.

The sculpture of the Terracotta Warriors of the Qin Mausoleum in ancient China combines a lot of decorative elements. Although the Terracotta Warriors are realistic sculptures, they have strong decorative meanings, which are closely related to a large number of decorative elements and generalized form and structure, such as the neatly arranged armor pieces as well as protrusions on the armor pieces and the circular soles pattern. They are in the form of a very strong decorative style, such as concise and generalized body structure, overall concise lines, and geometric shapes. The combination of a large number of lines, surfaces, and bodies with local decorative elements makes the overall momentum of the Qin terracotta warriors grand and meticulous <sup>[6]</sup>.

Constantin Brancusi's works lack cumbersome structural details, making the sculpture concise and pure, reflecting the nature of strong decorative elements. His works such as "The Kiss," "Bird in Space," and "Mademoiselle Pogany II" are characterized by a purity of form that seeks only to express the essence of things, making the sculpture simple. "The Kiss" features two head shapes that are almost geometric, facing each other and forming almost a straight line in the middle. The two kiss together, and this concise geometric form, combined with simple detail depiction, gives the work a strong sense of decorative form. The work "Bird in Space" has broken through the inherent impression of the real bird, which is just a "simple" geometric form, showing the state of the bird, making the "bird" pure, with a strong sense of decorative form. In the work of "Mademoiselle Pogany II," the details of the face have almost disappeared, and then it is a pure

image of the character expressed by concise lines and a few large surfaces, capturing the facial features of the character through a simplified method, with concise and generalized details, and pursuing the intrinsic integration of the character.

In all of Giacometti Alberto's sculptures, both humans and animals are slender, either standing upright or walking in large strides. The characters in his sculptures are deformed to the point that they almost do not resemble human figures but only have part of the characteristics of the human figure. For instance, in his sculptures "Walking Man I," "Grande Femme II," and "Dog," the human and animal body structure is almost "non-existent," and is replaced by a long and slender line structure, either walking forward or standing upright. Alberto found that the more he continued to follow the shrinking of the size and the volume of the details, the more he was able to make it smaller and thinner. Pushed and stimulated by the side image, the human figure reflected in the sculpture is closer to what is seen when viewed from a distance, which Alberto called "trimming the fat out of space." It is because of this creative thinking that his extremely concise and generalized sculptural images are formed, and these sculptural image characteristics are also the characteristics of the form of the decorative elements.

In terms of art theory, the book *Complete Guide to Drawing from Life* written by George Brandt Bridgman has become an indispensable source for learning art<sup>[7]</sup>. The book uses seemingly simple lines to summarize and generalize the structure and relationships of characters, allowing art learners to understand the relationship between people, institutions, and character structures simply and clearly. The concise summary of the character structure and the relationship between the character structure in the book is exactly the formal requirements of decorative elements. Concise and geometric shapes are given up. The cumbersome character structure is replaced by concise, generalized, and geometric shapes. This display of artistic thinking made this book a best-selling art book for many years.

Looking at the development of sculpture art at all times domestically and internationally, the form of decorative elements has just begun to be integrated into sculpture creation. Many sculptors in history have made many attempts at sculpture creation, absorbing many decorative elements such as lines, order, geometric form, and other factors, showing a unique style of sculpture, which promotes the continuous development of sculpture as an art category<sup>[8]</sup>.

## **4. Aesthetic value of decorative arts brought in the creation of figurative sculpture**

### **4.1. Sculpture development path**

The development of sculpture involves several ways, such as deepening the development path of predecessors, innovating the development path of predecessors, breaking conventions, and diversifying development. Sculpture art also needs to develop with the development of the times, either to express the artist's understanding of the world or to increase aesthetic appreciation for society. These all require sculpture artists to innovate more creative methods and techniques, increase or enhance the expression methods of sculpture, and provide sculpture artists with more ways of presentation. From the standardization of sculpture in Ancient Greece and Roma to the emergence of humanism in sculpture during the European Renaissance, the breaking of the idealized formula of academia and the passion for life in French sculpture in the 19th century, and the development of multiple schools of Western sculpture in the 20th century, creative methods of sculpture are constantly innovative and the old creative methods are constantly broken, pushing forward the sculpture art. The development of art requires continuous exploration of different creative paths.

The integration of decorative elements in figurative sculpture creation is based on the simplification and generalization of realistic modeling, making figurative sculpture works more decorative. The creation of methods can be used in the concise lines, generalized geometric forms, and even changes in the surface mechanics of the work, special shaping methods can also be used to form decorative forms of sculpture. Figurative sculpture of decorative shapes can broaden the development path and provide new creative methods. The essence is still based on objective natural existence, which is transformed into a simplified and generalized sculpture with decorative characteristics. Figurative sculpture directly uses decorative elements as a decorative effect, which can get rid of the single surface effect processing of sculpture, and the subjective processing of decorative colors and patterns on the surface of figurative sculpture can make the surface effect of figurative sculpture richer, which is also a re-shaping of the sculpture image, and opens up a new way for the emotional expression of artistic thinking<sup>[9]</sup>.

## **4.2. Innovations in sculpture development**

Realistic sculpture is one form of sculpture, alongside abstract sculpture and figurative sculpture. Installation art, like these other forms, serves as a medium through which artists express their thoughts and feelings about the world. These creations are not merely sculptures but also reflections of the artist's personal emotions and perspectives.

The injection of decorative factors into figurative sculpture is a development of the creation form and expression method of sculpture, which helps to improve the artistic expression mode and improve the ornamental mood of the work and is a beneficial innovation approach. Decorative elements play a significant role in enhancing the mood of the work. Firstly, the simplicity and generalization of the decorative elements can increase the imagination of the viewer and deepen the meaning of the work, and the lines and order can give the viewer a sense of unity and make the work balanced and stable. By skillfully using elements such as decorative lines, orderly textures, and concise geometric forms in their compositions, artists can create a work that is concise, generalized, harmonious, and rhythmic. Secondly, the use of colors and patterns of decorative elements is also an important aspect in dealing with the surface effect of sculptural works. Choosing appropriate colors and patterns can make the works more vivid and eye-catching, highlight the theme and emphasize the emotions, and increase the visual experience of the viewers<sup>[10]</sup>.

## **5. Conclusion**

The creation of figurative sculpture and the formal integration of decorative elements are of great significance to the exploration of the development path of figurative sculpture and the enhancement of the aesthetic value of figurative sculpture. Breaking through the purely realistic way of creation, the introduction of decorative elements of concise lines, generalized geometrical compositions, decorative patterns, and textures can increase the method of representation of figurative sculpture. It improves the expressive ability of figurative sculpture and gives figurative sculpture a better expression of the artists' creative thoughts and thinking.

## **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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