



Italian masterpieces for blind and visually impaired people

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It has been very difficult to choose only three Italian masterpieces which have the hard task to represent Italy.

Policoro, despite its ancient origins, is a quite young town so we do not have many famous monuments.

However our students decided to describe the statue which is the symbol of our town and then two of the most original and important Italian statues from the Renaissance.

Omar Bello and Micol Manunta have worked on these descriptions and have recorded them.



The Penitent Magdalene



The **Penitent Magdalene** is a golden wooden sculpture of Mary Magdalene. It was created around 1453-1455 by the great Italian Renaissance sculptor Donatello, probably commissioned for the Baptistry of Florence.

It is currently housed in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence.

The statue is 1.88 metres, and represents only Mary Magdalene who is as tall as an adult man.

Donatello used the white poplar.

Donatello studied classical sculpture and used his studies to develop a complete new Renaissance style in sculpture, working with stone, bronze, wood, clay, stucco and wax.

The sculpture of the **Penitent Magdalene** was somehow revolutionary for its style: it was received with astonishment for its extraordinary realism.

Mary Magdalene was a popular figure: she had been a prostitute before meeting Jesus who changed her life forever. She spent thirty years repenting in the desert. Donatello's depiction represents her while she is leaving the desert. Donatello's gaunt, emaciated figure differs greatly from most depictions, which show a beautiful young woman in nearly perfect health.

Mary Magdalene is standing on her bare feet that seem to be attached to the ground Earth because the artist wants to underline our human, earthly nature.

Magdalene is also the symbol of all mankind who try to be uplifted to the spiritual level.

She is bare but her body is completely covered by her long shabby hair that is like a sleeveless dress, as long as to touch her knees.

When she was an earthly woman, her hair had been her greatest beauty, now it is neglected and careless.

Her arms come out from her strange dress they are thin but despite the fast, her muscles and her sinews are in tension.

She is about uniting her hands to pray but her fingers and palms are not in touch yet, so we can feel the dynamism of the figure, which is also expressed through her head that is slightly leaning to the left.

Her face is emaciated, her eyes are sunken, her look is fixed in front of her, her mouth is about to pronounce some words.

The Penitent Magdalene has consumed, sacrificed her physical beauty in order to gain the moral perfection, devoting herself to asceticism, plea, fast. Now she feels closer to the Divine: she has sanctified her soul and she is strong enough to leave the desert and to tell the world that her redemption is complete and that redemption is possible for everyone.

Donatello's Magdalene manages to convey the transformation of this prostitute, attached to material earthly things, into a pure spirit, a soul who is focused only on the spiritual world, thanks to the detailed and very realistic carvings on the statue which seem to transfigure Magdalene.



With this statue Donatello becomes the first artist to go beyond the classical ideal of beauty, according to which only what is beautiful can be also morally perfect. As a matter of fact, Donatello creates a new moral vision according to which the interior beauty is morally perfect and overcomes appearance: being becomes more ethically correct than seeming.

DAVID BY MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI



David is a masterpiece of Renaissance sculpture created between 1501 and 1504 by Michelangelo Buonarroti, the greatest artist of Italian Renaissance, also considered as one of the greatest artists of all time. Originally located in a public square outside Palazzo della Signoria in Florence, in 1873 David was replaced by a full-sized replica and the original statue was moved to Galleria dell'Accademia.

The subject chosen by the artist is the Biblical hero David, the one who killed the giant Goliath using a simple slingshot. It is possible that David was conceived as a political statue before Michelangelo began to work on it. Certainly David, the giant-killer, had long been seen as a political figure in Florence, as a matter of fact, in his original location his frowning eyes looked towards Rome, which at that time was an enemy of Florence.

David is a 5.17-metre white marble statue, just the height of 3 people together, smooth to touch, standing on a basement, of marble itself, in form of a rock.

If you could step over it, you would find that his feet are about as high as your head, as a consequence you feel it as towering over you.

David represented is a nude slender young man, with a very muscular body.

Touching it, you could feel how tense and defined his muscles and sinews are, since the moment represented is the one just before the battle, so he looks tense and ready for combat, a moment between conscious choice and action.

His hair is short and curly. His head turns to the left, his forehead is frowned, his brow is drawn, his eyes are frowning, his neck tense and the veins bulge out of his lowered right hand. You could even feel the veins as he clutches the stones with his right hand and the slingshot in the other which is leant on his left shoulder. The twist of his body effectively conveys the feeling that he is in motion, standing with most of its weight on his right foot so that its shoulders and arms twist off-axis from the hips and legs. David stands with his right leg holding its full weight and his left leg forward. This classic pose causes the figure's hips and shoulders to rest at opposing angles, giving a slight s-curve to the entire torso.

The proportions of the David are atypical of Michelangelo's work: his right hand is not proportionate to the figure: as a matter of fact, it is somehow too big, but that was not a mistake of the artist!



Indeed, Michelangelo intended to point out his vision about sculpture: the hand is the tool the artist uses to free the statue which is already inside the marble, so he wanted to underline the importance of the hand for the hero as well as for the artist, both have a challenge to face.

Michelangelo, indeed, could see the statue inside the marble before starting to carve.



Also the head of the young man is a little smaller than it should be because Michelangelo considered the point of view of the observer who is down respect the statue which is more than 5 metres, not counting the pedestal. Michelangelo's David has become one of the most recognized works of Renaissance sculpture, a symbol of strength and youthful beauty.

The colossal size of the statue impressed Michelangelo's contemporaries. Giorgio Vasari, a famous Art historian, described it as "certainly a miracle that of Michelangelo, to restore to life one who was dead."

THE STATUE OF HERCULES AND THE NEMEAN LION



The statue of Hercules who is fighting the Nemean Lion is the symbol of Policoro.

It is in bronze and it was forged by a local artist, Tonino Cortese, who is well known in Italy.

It is situated in the main square which is named after the Grecian mythological hero, Hercules, to whom the town was dedicated by its first Greek inhabitants in the IV century B.C.

Hercules was a Greek hero, son of the father of the gods, Zeus, and the mortal Alcmena.

Hercules is known for his many adventures, which took him to the far reaches of the Greek-Roman World.

His adventures became famous as "Twelve Labours".

The Nemean Lion was a vicious monster in Greek mythology that lived at Nemea. It could not be killed with mortals' weapons because its golden fur was impervious to attack.

Its claws were sharper than mortals' swords and could cut through any armor.

According to the legend, the Nemean lion took women as hostages to its lair in a cave.

The Statue is on a marble parallelepiped pedestal two meters high, just like as an adult.

The marble is hammered, not smooth but rough to touch.

The statue represents Hercules while he is strangling the Nemean lion.

The hero is about 1.80 m tall, young and naked, with long hair and long beard.

His body is strong and muscular, following the classical tradition.

The Lion is very well built, strong and represented dynamically in the fight.



Both the figures are dynamic in order to convey the tension of this struggle between two extraordinary creatures.

They form a triangle: the left side is Hercules' body who is leaning forward, his left leg is leaning towards the lion which is the right side of the triangle.

The Lion is pointing two of its paws against Hercules left leg while its tail is touching the ground.

Hercules is strangling the lion with his bare hands, it seems Hercules is hugging the Lion which has its left paw on Hercules' right arm.

Hercules, indeed, is grabbing it so strongly that the lion, despite its efforts, does not manage to free itself from this deadly embrace.

Both the figures are powerful and strong.

The Greek hero succeeds in winning this terrible fight but his face does not reveal any emotion or weariness because the artist Tonino Cortese follows the principles of the Classical Greek Art, according to which the faces of the statues had to be expressionless to exalt and intensify the interior greatness of the creature they represented.

