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Understanding Visual Culture (UVC)

My feelings: it feels calming. But also like a sense of silence before a storm. Unsettling. I am wondering what the sculpture wants to tell.

What attracts me? The sculpture feels at still and dynamic at the same time. The round form make is still and calming, the hollow with taut strings brings an element of tension, of excitement. I do like the shape of waves of the two spaces, a dynamic and calming tension.

A round wooden sculpture on a thin plinth. A geometric abstraction. It has a vast inner empty space that stands in a dialogue with the outer sphere. The outer sphere is curving inside and disappears in the void. Between the two spaces are tout strings that look like as if keeping the sculpture together - and under tension. The sculpture conveys a calming effect. Overall it is a minimalistic sculpture.

Hepworths' sculptures are to be seen in the context of the environment for her inspiration. Also they should be seen close up and walking around and touching - that was her intention. To place them into a white cube museum and far away from touch would mean to reduce the expression of her work to the sight only - and hoping that one can relate to the embodied sense of touch.

Hepworth sculpture is in its abstract geometric form and her bodily intimate engagement a sensual and humanistic work. The environment around her in Cornwall gives her inspiration and allows her to communicate her 'humanistic concern for the rhythm of social ineraction' (Wallensteiner, 2003, p.667)

As a modernistic geometric abstract work built on the idea of vitality and intuitive form there is no obvious narrative involved. This is up the viewer to make associations and to create his/her own story.

For Hepworth her style of direct and pure carving of abstract forms is a statement of 'universal experience'. To her the sculpture is an embodiment of an idea and through the vitality of an inner spiritiual life the form of the sculpture is found. Not the form exploration per se but rather an 'intuitive form perception like that of the child' (what reminds of me Ruskin 'innocent eye') as the 'plastic embodiment of a free idea' is what matters to her and what gives her abstract sculptures a spiritual and sensual appeal (Hepworth, 2013, p.396) She beliefs in the 'positive and integrative power of abstract art' and the 'form and idealistic social concerns' (Wallensteiner, 2003, p.667)

My associations: Calm, ocean, serenity, balance, storm. Also it reminds my of Yin-Yang, the opposites, one need the other. A sense of harmony .

Description

Differences when changed

Subject matter

Narrative?

Evaluation

Meaning?

Type, realistic, abstract

Classification

'Pelagos' is a modernistic geometric abstract sculpture.

An abstract geometric sculpture with connotation of Hepworth's personal experiences. The sense of pure form and material specifity alongside her innovative experiment does make this work a modernistic art.

Hepworth relates the sculpture with the taut strings to her personal experience though representing "the tension I felt between myself and the sea, the wind or the hills."
The purpose for Hepworth was to engage people bodily and let them move around and sense the look and touch of the sculpture.

Barbara Hepworth 'Pelagos', 1946 - Elms and strings on oak base

Warm color of elm wood alongside a contrasting cool blue inside. Both appear harmonious together. The cool inside alongside the void makes the space even larger.

Bold contrast between the light inside and the darker outside.

It is a convex geometric and symmetric round form. The shape reminds of a wave or the curve of a headland. A hollowed inside painted blue.

The convex geometric and symmetric round form is juxtaposed with strings, like a musical instrument, fretted through pierced small holes. The geometry of the form is interrupted by those strings.

Very simple and geometric, a pure abstraction in form. Consciously carved and placed on a rather thin plinth. The patterns on the outside are subtle deriving from the elm wood.

Tones

Shapes

Colours

Patterns

Composition

Lines

Textures

Influences are surely her close friends Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore and Naum Gabo. Other influences are coming from her inspiring environment and her ideas and intuitive working style.

Influences

Purpose?

Hepworth experimented with holes and strings already before with an emphasis on the interior of a sculptural shape. The art historian A.M. Hammacher argued that the characteristic 'hole' of Hepworth's earlier work has taken control and "mastered the interior and even broken it open." (Tate, 2015)
It seems re-assuring for me that Hepworth kept her interrogation of the brutal and turbulent time of WWII. 'Pelagos' seems the most convincing sculpture due to its reduction and minimalistic, It transmits a sense of natural beauty.

Her sculpture are somehow comparable for me to those of of her close friend Henry Moore and some earlier works by Constantin Brancusi. Brancusi for his round and minimalistic shapes with a subtle exploration of the surface. Moore for his quite close resemblance of his work with inside sculptural spaces and strings.

Henry Moore (1898 – 1986)

Henry Moore:
- Stringed Figure', 1938
- Moon Head', 1964

Comparision and contextualization

Interpretation

Happening?

Historical context

Artist life

Barbara Hepworth (1903 – 1975) was a British sculptor born in Yorkshire who moved in 1949 to the colony of St Ives in Cornwall and lived there until her death (by fire in her studio). She was one of few female artist with international recognition. Hepworth achieved a prominent status in Modernism sculptor. She was a close friend to Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, to whom she was married 1938-51, and Naum Gabo.
Hepworth emerged in the late 1920s as a leading member of a new generation of sculptors. Her work became increasingly abstract in the 1930s and, after moving to Cornwall, she began to make sculpture in terms of her experience of landscape. She continued to carve throughout her life, but from 1956 she also made works in bronze which allowed her to produce more and which were better suited to international travel.

Barbara Hepworth (1903 – 1975)

Constantin Brancusi (1876 – 1957)

Constantin Brancusi 'Newborn (I)', 1915

Examples for her work before and after the making of 'Pelagos':
- 'Sculpture with Color (Deep blue and Red)', 1940
- 'Wave', 1943-44
- 'Curved Form (Delphi)', 1950

Analysis

A smooth texture inside and outside, juxtaposed with the sharp straight lines of the taut strings. The natural structure of the wood gives a warm sensation. Juxtaposed with a rather sterile inner smoothly painted surface. All surfaces are do have quite a polished shine.

Hepworth combines with this sculpture elements for modernism (geometric abstaction) with an embodied sense of personal experience. This work is not only an expression of abstracted form (reductive shapes) and medium specifity (direct carving of elm wood and paint). It also is an expression of 'human emotion and physical sensual'. (Charlesworth, 2003) Against the odds of modernism and the paradox of observation versus representation, Hepworth conveys her bodily engagement and the correlating senses of seeing and touching (Tate, 2015b)

Process and technique

Hepworth got inspired for this sculpture by a coastal view at St Ives in Cornwall, where Hepworth lived from 1949 onwards. 'Pelagos' means in Greek 'sea'. Her inspiration from nature is clearly visible in the sculpture and one can sense the gestural notion of her 'dircet carving' in the rhythm of shapes in her neighborhood.

Artist gesture

Display, support

Type

A sculpture in elm wood. Carved with a chisel. Hepworth named her approach "direct carving". A minimalistic sculpture with elements of reduction to a pure abstract form.

Most of her sculptures were made in Cornwall in the Trewyn studios, now the Hepworth Museum. As she got inspiration from nature it seems quite logic that her sculptures are placed in that environment. Many are therefore installed int he Sculpture Garden in St.Ives. For Hepworth it was important that people can touch the sculpture and 'the real thing fo people is to move with their bodies' (Tate, 2011) .

Hepworth lived in turbulent times before and after WWII. Her residence in St. Ives was also a refure for many others artists during the war.

Part 2: 2.0 - The Modern in Painting and Sculpture