DONATELLO, MICHELANGELO, AND BERNINI: THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF ANTIQUITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE REPRESENTATION OF DAVID

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Introduction

> "And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.
>
> David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" The people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done for the man who kills him."
>
> When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's and he will give you into our hand."
>
> When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.
>
> So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand."[1]

The story of David and Goliath in the Old Testament of the Bible is one of the earliest, and perhaps ultimate, tale of a victorious underdog. David is but a shepherd boy, the youngest son of a humble family. Despite his age and size, he has something that no other warrior

[1] 1 Sam. 17:1-50

possesses, faith and the power of God on his side. With this strength and courage, the feeblest of individuals was transformed into an invincible hero who conquered all evils. The triumphant and inspirational morals of this account is something that resonates deeply with any audience. However, for the city of Florence, Italy in particular this story became their anthem during the Renaissance era. During this time, there was a high demand for representations of David in art and Italian Renaissance artists then used this opportunity to employ new tactics and innovate freely in their practice.

From the earliest period of Florentine communal government, Hercules served as the example of victory over tyranny.[2] Hercules was perceived as a hero and symbol of civil order as he overcame monsters and tyrants with his wisdom and strength and brought freedom to populations. Then in the early fifteenth century, biblical victors like David and Judith joined Hercules in the iconographic identity of Florence.[3] In the legendary narrative, Judith, like David, dominated her enemy Holofernes with her stealth and intellect. Judith's story parallels David's in the sense that both individuals vanquished their respective opponents despite physical weaknesses. Hercules, Judith, and David all left deep imprints on the city of Florence. These figures became powerful reminders to the small city of Florence of their virtuosity, prowess, and militaristic dominance.

As the epicenter of the Renaissance, Florentine artists played a crucial role in instigating the wider trend of artists turning their attention to antique models and implementing their classical forms into their works. However, the works of Italian Renaissance artists extended beyond mere imitation of classical styles. Instead, they restored the original form of these antique

[2] Patricia Lee Rubin, Alison Wright, and Nicholas Penny, *Renaissance Florence: The Art of the 1470s* (London: National Gallery Publications Limited, 1999), 90.

[3] Rubin, Wright, and Penny, *Renaissance Florence: The Art of the 1470s*, 90.

works and revived their monumentality, further adapting the ancient tradition to fit their contemporary environment. Nowhere can this better be observed than in the long and complex history of the artistic representation of David.

Although the Renaissance era is defined as the rebirth of classical antiquity, it should not be restricted to that time or technique. Artists of the time certainly alluded to the classical world with harmonious forms, balanced compositions, and accurate proportions. However, Renaissance artists were also innovators and took great strides to establish a completely unique style very distinct from their acclaimed classical predecessors. This is especially apparent in the various representations of the Biblical figure David by Italian Renaissance sculptors. Donatello's fifteenth century bronze *David* (fig. 1) was groundbreaking for its time, not only for its appearance but also because it was the first free-standing male nude bronze since antiquity.[4] Following Donatello was Michelangelo's early sixteenth century marble *David* (fig. 2), which stands in perfect contrapposto over five meters in height. The seventeenth century brings in a third variation of *David* (fig. 3) by the Baroque master Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The respective periods of these artists and their interpretations of antiquity greatly impacted the outcome and representation of each *David*, ultimately resulting in three completely diverse sculptures that exhibit the same protagonist. Although the concept of antiquity in Renaissance art is widely covered in existing publications, my contribution to this corpus is original in the sense that it focuses on the three most renowned artists for their time. The subject is concentrated further with the close examination of each artist's depiction of the same subject. Similar to a constant in a scientific experiment, analyzing the same subject provides a clear assessment of the artist's unique view on antiquity and its impact on their work, thus differentiating this argument from

[4] John Pope-Hennessy, *Donatello Sculptor* (New York, NY: Abbeville Press, 1993), 147.

previous scholarship. In this paper, I will compare Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini's sculptures of *David* while simultaneously evaluating the artist's relationship with the classical world in order to determine how the artists arrived at their final masterpiece and in what way their sculpture relates to the broader ideas of the era.

Chapter I: The Davids

In this chapter, I will briefly describe the evolution of the artistic representations of David, starting with the early Renaissance period and ending in the Baroque period. Specifically, I look at three renderings of David, done by the artists Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini to illuminate the stylistic developments that occurred from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. I will compare and contrast each of these artist's portrayal of the Biblical hero and analyze how the portrayal's salient features reflect the respective historical period.

Donatello's *David*

To fully grasp the innovations of Renaissance artists, it is crucial to trace the tradition which the artists emerged from and then broke out of. Before Donatello's first representation of *David*, a marble sculpture constructed between 1408-1409 (fig. 4), there had only been one other victorious, stand-alone David.[5] This was the 1330 *David* fresco painted by Taddeo Gaddi in the Baroncelli Chapel of the Santa Croce in Florence (fig. 5). Gaddi's *David* is portrayed in typical medieval fashion as an older man proudly standing upon the body of Goliath, carrying a sword in one hand and gripping the head of Goliath in the other. Nearly a hundred years later, Donatello broke new ground with his marble *David*. Originally commissioned by the Cathedral of Florence's *Operai*, Donatello's statue was meant to adorn the Duomo's buttresses alongside 12 other prophets, but the sculpture was never installed most likely due to its small size. In 1416, the Florentine *Signoria* purchased the sculpture and placed it in Palazzo Vecchio, setting the tone and cementing David's position as a civic hero for Florence.

[5] Anton Gill, *Il Gigante: Michelangelo, Florence and the David, 1492-1504* (London: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002), 241.

Donatello made a name for himself with this marble political emblem, but his sculpture exhibits close ties to the Gothic tradition. This is evident in the curving sway of *David*'s hips, elegant sweeping of his drapery, and his blankly modeled face, all characteristics that echo Ghiberti. Similarly, *David* was originally fashioned as an architectural sculpture that was meant to stand against a buttress and enhance a building's exterior rather than to dazzle on its own. The distant and glazed stare of the figure renders no psychological connection between the hero and the enemy that is dominated at his feet, therefore making it difficult for the viewer to empathize with this moment. However, even with these Gothic elements, Donatello's marble *David* exhibits the early strides to formulating a new artistic vocabulary in Renaissance sculpture. The royal prophet is represented in this marble sculpture for the first time as a very young man, rejecting past depictions of David as an older figure.[6] The upright posture and proud gesture also reveals an attempt to instill energy into the sculpture. With his marble *David*, Donatello invented an icon of a young man, relaxed in victory, the head of his giant enemy at his feet, thus paving the way for similar sculptures during the Renaissance period.[7]

Three years later in 1411, Donatello created *Saint Mark* (fig. 6) the first genuine statue in the sense that its standing goes beyond a suggestion to an actual articulation.[8] This work set an important precedent for later statues because Donatello portrayed the statue in a columnar pose borrowing directly from classical sculptures. This deviated from the Gothic sway, which portrayed figures with one leg barely breaking the heavy drapery of the clothing to imply a slight movement and twist in the body's axis. Donatello's marble *David* marks the initial transition

[6] Giorgio Castelfranco, *Donatello* (Milan: A. Martello, 1963), 15.

[7] Gill, *Il Gigante*, 241.

[8] *Italian Renaissance Sculpture in the Time of Donatello* (Detroit: Founders Society Detroit Institute of Arts, 1985), 34.

from Gothic tradition to early Renaissance, but it was not until *Saint Mark* that Donatello "would emerge out of the shadows to create his first 'true' work of Renaissance sculpture."[9]

Fully embracing the new artistic tradition of the early Renaissance, Donatello went on to create a bronze statue of *David*. Little is known about the conception of this sculpture. Its date is widely debated by scholars, ranging anywhere from 1420-1460, but stylistically the statue suggests a date in the early 1430s.[10] The first record of the sculpture was dated in 1469, in a report of the marriage of Lorenzo de' Medici to Clarice Orsini, but its original commission also remains unknown.[11] It seems most probable that the bronze *David* was privately commissioned by the Medici family for the palace, because it stood in the courtyard of the Palazzo Medici for years. In its position in the Medici courtyard, this *David* took on new meanings and became equated with the Medici family. However, the fact that this statue could be seen by the public from the Medici courtyard meant it retained a Florentine identity. With the expulsion of the Medici family in 1494, the statue was relocated to Signoria Palace where it remained until 1556.

Undeniably, the most notable element of Donatello's bronze statue is that it is the earliest surviving, free-standing, full-scale nude sculpture to be created since antiquity.[12] The bronze *David* shows a major artistic innovation in its complete break from architectural sculpture and its reference to classical antiquity. Rather than being designed for a niche, *David* is intentionally sculpted so that it could be viewed and appreciated from all angles. This was a major step forward in terms of sculptural practice. Although it was common in classical times, the idea of a

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[9] Marvin Trachtenberg, "An Antique Model for Donatello's Marble David," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 3 (September 1968): 268.

[10] H. W. Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 84.

[11] Joachim Poeschke, *Donatello and His World: Sculpture of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993), 397.

[12] Gill, *Il Gigante*, 244.

free-standing sculpture became lost in the medieval era. *David* being a free-standing sculpture altered the way sculptors thought about their work and simultaneously and heightened the perception of sculpture.

As the first nude *David*, Donatello marks yet another important transition in the representation of the Biblical hero. Erecting a blatantly nude male sculpture in that era was certainly unconventional, but the idea of David being nude wasn't off base by any means. The fully nude portrayal is derived from the first book of Samuel in the Bible, which describes how David refuses Saul's armor as he goes to face his enemy. The lack of physical protection highlights the divine aid David received in combat, paralleling the Florentine's belief that God was on their side in the battle against Milan. Donatello interpreted and applied this passage of the Bible literally to his sculpture, resulting in the figure's full nudity, but also adding a realism in the timing of the moment. In this sculpture, *David* is fresh from the battle, the event is so recent he hasn't even bothered to cloth himself. Instead, he gazes at Goliath's severed head and steps over it in a moment of total pride and intimacy. *David* reveling in this victorious instant above all other activities is a testament to his glory and the enormity of his feat. Donatello's message conveyed through the nude *David* was so convincing it quickly became the norm for later David representations.

The bronze *David* sculpture stands in a contrapposto pose, initially established and then popularized in the classical era. Contrapposto is applied to *David*'s bent left leg, leaving his right leg engaged to bear weight. The shift in weight causes a tilt in the hips, shoulders, and head around the body's axis. The overall effect of *David*'s pose is a gentle S-curve throughout the body and an inclination of a step, animating the sculpture and igniting its potential energy. This imbues an emotional essence in the sculpture which enhances its realism and present-ness. It is

as if Donatello took the movement of his marble *David* one step further in this bronze sculpture to generate a moment that is unfolding right there before the viewer. As stated by Kauffman, *David* is "the first Renaissance figure to embody a canon of proportions, it follows the canon laid down in Leone Battista Alberti's *De Statua* and matches proportional study of the Leonardo school."[13] *David's* mathematically precise anatomy in combination with his contrapposto pose contributes to the sculpture's overall fluidity and harmonious balance, both ideas that were highly valued and employed by Renaissance artists.

David's nudity also aligns with the Renaissance's celebration of the human body, an idea that was not expressed in previous medieval art. In Donatello's bronze *David*, this celebration of the human body is interpreted in its sensuality. The softness of the adolescent body in its musculature and pose adds a certain eroticism to the *David*. This is emphasized further with the feather of the helmet that reaches up and grazes the inside of the boy hero's thigh. *David* is fully nude, save for his boots and hat, which some scholars have theorized as an obscure reference to the classical god Mercury.[14] However, this David-Mercury theory only ends up raising more questions than answers, as it's typical for David to be portrayed as a weak young boy, but highly unlikely for a god to be shown in that manner. The most acceptable explanation for *David*'s appearance is Kauffman's idea that the hat is derived from a type popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for hunting and travel.[15] The soft nudity of the sculpture with the laurel wreathed hat and militaristic boots creates a cloud of ambiguity around the figure, which only increases its complexity. Even with these enigmatic features, there is no confusion regarding

[13] Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, 82.

[14] Cristelle L. Baskins, "Donatello's Bronze 'David': Grillanda, Goliath, Groom?" *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993): 144.

[15] Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, 84.

David's demeanor. *David* shows no shame, embarrassment, or attempt to conceal himself. His calm self-possession and assertiveness of his body and its sensuality demonstrates his complete control and accuracy, further promoting his identity as the confident and cunning hero.

The bronze *David* is the culmination of Donatello's career as an early Renaissance artist. Unlike the marble *David*, this later representation breaks away from its Gothic predecessor and architectural setting to stand on its own. Donatello readdresses classical ideals and commences the Renaissance era with the bronze *David*'s exquisite proportions and contrapposto pose. The fully nude boy-hero creates a palpable connection between the conqueror and conquered with his gaze, thus corresponding to the intimacy of the sculpture as a whole. Donatello depicts a moment just after the violence, yet *David*'s emotions are restrained. The weapons in *David*'s hands and the severed head of Goliath imply war, but these themes are counteracted by *David*'s serenity, youth, and sensuality. In this way, *David* reflects the peace and relief the small city-state of Florence experienced after defeating their "Goliath" Milan. With the bronze *David*, Donatello took his artistic liberties to create an original representation that would continue to inspire later Renaissance artists and set a certain standard for their depictions of the Biblical character.

Following Donatello's lead, Andrea del Verrocchio created a bronze *David* (fig. 7) between 1473-1475. Like Donatello's statue, Verrocchio's *David* was also made for the Medici but was later sold to the Florentine government and installed into the Palazzo Vecchio in 1476. The similarities between Donatello's and Verrocchio's *David*s don't end there. Verrocchio's *David* also shows the moment after the encounter with Goliath, the youthful figure standing in a contrapposto pose over the head of his enemy. These apparent similarities underscore Verrocchio's borrowing from Donatello's iconic representation of *David*. The key difference in Verrocchio's sculpture is that it embodies not a heroic character, like Donatello's, but rather a

richly adorned, aristocratic ideal type of the elegant victor.[16] This gladiator-David is stylishly clothed in a tight-fitting decorative breastplate and kilt. He carelessly grips a neat short sword, adding to his overall courtly elegance. This "stately hero" effect is only heightened by the figure's smug expression as he gazes outward, making no contact with the enemy. Through this sculpture, Verrocchio forms his interpretation of David, one that trades Donatello's dreamy contemplation and flirtation with the defeated opponent for self-righteousness and a sense of superiority.

Michelangelo's *David*

The turn of the sixteenth century marked a new political environment in Florence, as well as a new artistic landscape. The overthrow of the Medici in 1494 led to the rule of the moral dictator Girolamo Savonarola, whose call for Christian renewal brought an austere reign that denounced all activities and things associated with pleasure, relaxation, and luxury. Even though Savonarola's rule was brief (1494-1498), his strong disdain for art and culture caused a temporary lull in the production of Renaissance art in Florence. However, the end of Savonarola's rule ushered in a new era: the Florentine Republic. After overcoming the political turmoil of the expulsion of the Medicis and the execution of Savonarola, the Republic of Florence fully embraced its autonomy and was determined to defend it. In this way, David had never been a more appropriate symbol for Florence.

In August of 1501, the Renaissance artist Michelangelo received the commission from the Consuls of the Wool Guild and the *Operai* of the Duomo to complete a statue of David for the cathedral's north buttress. However, the history of this sculpture dates further back than its

[16] Martin Wackernagel, *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 99.

commission to Michelangelo. In 1464, Agostino di Duccio was contracted by the *Operai* to carve a giant prophet composed of Carrara marble for the cathedral's buttress. Agostino ignored the *Operai*'s specifications and boldly decided to carve the prophet from a single block of marble, instead of four. The *Opera*i's inability to envision a colossal statue from only one block of marble is a true indication of how extraordinary Michelangelo's achievement was. After the immense struggle of transporting the five and half meter block from Carrara to Florence, Agostino was released from his commissions for unknown reasons. The massive block then remained untouched in the *Operai* workshop until 1476, when the responsibility of carving it was passed down to Antonio Rossellino. Antonio made some progress on the sculpture, but his death in the late 1470s resulted in the termination of the project yet again. The first record of the next commission was not until July of 1501 when the *Operai* of the Duomo decided to "test a certain man of marble named David [that had been] badly blocked out and laid on its back in the courtyard of the Opera."[17] It's unclear what events transpired in the weeks between that July and August, when Michelangelo was awarded the commission, however, it can be assumed that he campaigned hard for the project. A letter written to Michelangelo in Rome in 1500 from his father confirmed that rumors of a monumental, abandoned, block of marble were swirling around. Then in March of 1501, four months before the *Operai*'s decision to resume the commission for the partially completed David, Michelangelo transferred his assets from a bank in Rome to Florence.[18] These events can serve as evidence for Michelangelo moving to Florence in order to win the honorable commission for *David*. Although Michelangelo's artistic reputation had been growing, it was his close relationships, most notably with Piero Soderini, the elected

[17] John T. Paoletti, *Michelangelo's David: Florentine History and Civic Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 20.

[18] Paoletti, *Michelangelo's David: Florentine History and Civic Identity*, 22.

Gonfaloniere of the Florentine government, that allowed him to secure the commission, beating out other esteemed artists like Andrea Sansovino and Leonardo da Vinci.[19]

On September 3rd, 1501, a brick and wood shed was constructed around the weathered and partially completed marble block as requested by Michelangelo to work privately. Six days later, Michelangelo struck a *nodum* (knot) off of the figure's chest with his hammer, commencing the carving of the block, referred to as *il gigante*.[20] With this decided action, Michelangelo freed the statue from its previous model and claimed it as his own. Michelangelo's sculpting process and approach is unique to him as an artist. With his uncanny ability to judge marble, he recognized the potential of *il gigante* and attacked the block directly to draw the figure out of it.[21] The idea was to free the life or spirit trapped within the marble, which translated into how Michelangelo sculpted.

The first public viewing of Michelangelo's *David* was on June 23rd, 1503, the eve of Florence's most important feast day that celebrated St. John the Baptist. Similar to Donatello's groundbreaking *David* sculpture, Michelangelo's *David* was revolutionary for being the first, free-standing colossal statue of a nude figure since antiquity.[22] Rising over five meters high, Michelangelo's sculpture still adheres to previous representations of *David* and stands in a balancing contrapposto pose. His right leg is engaged and bears the weight of his body, while his left leg bends and advances, the torso twisting ever so slightly. *David*'s upper body is asymmetrical to the lower body, with his right arm relaxed and extending forward while the left side withdrawals and his arm bends. The contrasting sides of the body and arrangement of limbs

[19] Howard Hibbard, *Michelangelo: Painter, Sculptor, Architect* (New York: The Vendome Press, 1978), 31.

[20] James H. Beck, *Three Worlds of Michelangelo* (New York: Norton & Company, 1999), 122.

[21] Charles De Tolnay, *The Art and Thought of Michelangelo* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 99.

[22] Gill, *Il Gigante*, 220.

provide a sense of gravity and the possibility of movement, resulting in an utterly natural pose. Despite the shallowness of the block, Michelangelo successfully conceives *David* in a perfect contrapposto, validating his immense knowledge and understanding of sculpture.

Unlike Donatello, Michelangelo rejected a canon, or fixed proportions, in his sculpture. *David* measures nine heads tall, breaking the standard of seven heads established by Polykleitos in the classical era.[23] The overall effect is a leaner, slenderer, and more heroic-athlete type. The hands and head of *David* are also enlarged, perhaps due to the sculpture's intended positioning in a high place. Another possible explanation for the oversized hands is to express the idea of *manu fortis*, a virtue commonly applied to David in the Middle Ages.[24] These physical imperfections were not mistakes on behalf of the artist. Instead, these slight but significant disproportions humanize *David*, making him a more realistic beauty.

David's fully exposed body and intense expression convey his determination and power as he prepares to face his enemy. Distinct from Donatello's sensual adolescent, Michelangelo depicts a strong young man, his veins bulging and muscles flexed with no sign of weakening. *David*'s face specifically reveals a flash of his emotions. His brow is tightly knit, nose pinched, and lips pressed in rage as he intensely gazes out at his imagined opponent. His stance seems calm and relaxed, but inwardly he is taut and highly alert. Like a loaded spring, *David* is completely wound up, physically tense, with muscles rippling as he gathers energy. However, this sheer power is completely suppressed and contained in the demeanor of his body language. In this way, *David* is self-possessed and exudes confidence.

[23] Tolnay, *The Art and Thought of Michelangelo*, 90.

[24] Ibid, 8.

Although Michelangelo looked to previous artists like Donatello and Verrocchio in his conception of *David*, he created a new representation by showing the moment before battle and excluding props. In this version, *David* carries no sword and his only weapons, the sling and stone, are hardly indicated. He lacks armor and any other type of physical protection and there is no severed head of Goliath. This "minimalist" *David* forces all the concentration and attention to be on his physical body and its language, heightening the anticipation of the work. Also contributing to the emotional build-up is the timing of this moment. This is not the triumphant and glorious *David* that had been previously erected. Michelangelo's *David* is frozen in the stage leading up to the fight. In this brief instant, he is simultaneously contracted and reflective, pointing to his, and therefore Florence's, strategic skills and mental willpower. Through only a single character, Michelangelo communicates an entire narrative and offers audiences a privileged imagined view of the battlefield where Goliath is rapidly approaching in the distance. In this highly dramatic moment, the outcome of the fight is unknown, but the inevitably of *David*'s victory is understood in his self-assuredness.

With *David*, Michelangelo created a powerful symbol of invincibility that accurately reflected the Florentine's attitude. The people of Florence had overcome their Goliaths and were resolute to keep it that way, which is embodied in *David*'s calmness and strength. Instead of Donatello's championed *David*, Michelangelo represents a complex inward moment that speaks to Michelangelo's great talents as a sculptor. The conscious thought of the *David* instills life into the sculpture, separating it from its classical inspirations and placing it in the high Renaissance.

Upon *David*'s completion, it became apparent the monument was too spectacular to be featured on a high and distant buttress, and a committee was formed to determine the rightful placement of the sculpture. January 25th, 1504 was the most remarkable meeting of Renaissance

artists ever recorded, comprising of two dozen painters, sculptors, artisans, and architects, all convened to discuss the location of *David*.[25] Francesco di Lorenzo Filarete, the first herald of the Signoria, suggested the placement for *David* at the Palazzo Signoria, the seat of the Florentine Republic. After much debate, Palazzo Signoria was the chosen location for the sculpture which solidified *David*'s identity as a patriot and civic hero for Florence. Deciding the sculpture's location only ended up being half the battle, as transporting the gigantic work took four days and over 30 men in total.[26] During the first night of its transfer from the Duomo to the Palazzo Signoria, *David* was attacked with stones by youths. Although the reasoning for this assault is unknown, there was no major damage inflicted on the masterpiece.

Michelangelo took on a seemingly hopeless and impossible project to create a fierce and graceful colossal figure that personified the courage of Florence. *David* not only confirmed Michelangelo's talents, but launched his career and established his reputation as one of the finest marble sculptors in Italy, if not the world. This *David,* although stemming from the artistic tradition set forth by artists like Donatello, is a major turning point in Renaissance art as it completely dismisses medieval influences and the cool detachment of classical art to welcome a Renaissance trend of a profound psychological and personal involvement between the artist and their work.

Bernini's *David*

The advancement of Renaissance artists emotionally investing in their work is no better represented than in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's 1623-1624 marble sculpture of *David*. Over a

[25] Beck, *Three Worlds of Michelangelo*, 123.

[26] James Hall, *Michelangelo and the Reinvention of the Human Body* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 50.

century after Michelangelo's *David*, Bernini takes the style of the high Renaissance and activates it, ushering in the new Baroque movement. Bernini's *David* is the epitome of Baroque sculpture in the sense that it naturally triggers a tangible, emotional relationship between the figure and the viewer. In Michelangelo's *David*, the viewer is invited to observe the scene, to join *David* in his thoughts and pensive state. On the other hand, in Bernini's work the viewer is actually in the scene by assuming the role of Goliath. This heightened level of personal engagement closes the distance that past artists, such as Donatello and Michelangelo, created between their sculpture and viewers. In the previous era, Michelangelo approached his sculptures with a desire to unleash the soul from the block. He would chip away at the marble to bring forth the form of the figure from its confinement in the block. Bernini differentiated his process and invented his sculptural theory by choosing to build up his forms as if molding clay. Without intending to, Bernini created figures who were increasingly more active and engaging, producing sculptures closer to nature than Michelangelo's.[27] While Michelangelo's *David* is undoubtedly awe-inspiring in its portrayal of the ideal and the way it uses universal intelligence to transcend human form, Bernini's *David* shows a real human model that fully discloses itself to the viewer.

Yet another innovation in Bernini's work is his interest in depicting an actual living face. Bernini's earlier 1621-1622 bust of *Monsignor Montoya* (fig. 8) showed Bernini was no stranger to physiognomic experimentation.[28] The extraordinary grasp of anatomy, accurate facial expression, and attention to minute details (like in the bristles of the mustache), enhances the bust's presence and gives it a sense of personality, despite being composed of stone. Similarly, Bernini took extreme measures to capture authentic human expressions. In his 1619 sculpture

[27] Robert T. Petersson, *Bernini and the Excesses of Art* (Florence: artout-maschietto&ditore, 2002), 79.

[28]Charles Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1997), 66.

Damned Soul (fig. 9), Bernini used his own face and the story goes he achieved this frightening realism in his expression by holding his left hand over a lighted candle, appropriate to the torture of hell-fire.[29] In the case of *David*, it was reported by Filippo Baldinucci that Bernini produced this grimace by studying his face in a mirror held by the Cardinal Barberini.[30] Through his expertise and incredible skill, Bernini is able to accurately gauge how the face muscles are altered for a specific expression and he then translated this onto his works. For example, *David*'s utmost concentration is exemplified in his "compressed lips, strained muscles around the mouth, inflated nostrils, knitted brow, and piercing eye."[31] Without careful observation and repeatedly conducting studies before a mirror, Bernini wouldn't be able to accomplish *David*'s individualized human face and lifelike expression.

Bernini's potent diagonal pose also contributes to the overall dynamism of his representation of *David*. In both Donatello and Michelangelo's depictions, *David*'s body is vertical, resembling a column. In Bernini's sculpture, however, the figure forms a steep angle, breaking away from the past high Renaissance and classical traditions. One of the chief inspirations for this physical stance is the frescoed ceiling of the Farnese Gallery in Rome by Annibale Carracci.[32] The scene of *Polyphemus and Acis* (fig. 10) parallels Bernini's *David* in the rendering of a split-second climatic moment before release. In Bernini's sculpture, *David*'s feet are wide apart, his left arm crosses over the body, and his hips rotate, thus insinuating a swiveling action to gain the maximum swing in the release of the stone. The realization of this pose is due to Bernini's treatment of the marble not as a block, but of a molding material. This

[29] Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque,* 66.

[30]Howard Hibbard, *Bernini* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books Inc., 1965), 54.

[31] Rudolf Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque* (London: Phaidon Press, 1955), 6.

[32] Hibbard, *Bernini*, 63.

shift in perception allowed the sculptor to create poses where the limbs extend beyond the torso. However, *David*'s extreme posture wouldn't be possible in marble without structural support. In Michelangelo's *David* and other classical sculptures, the figure is usually reinforced with the carving of a tree trunk in the marble, but in his *David,* Bernini used the shedding of his garments and armor. Not only is this feature functional in the upholding of the figure's pose, but the abandonment of outerwear draws attention to *David*'s nudity and serves as a better explanation for his total exposure. Although *David*'s position permits a 360 degree view, Bernini created the sculpture with the primary sight lying "exactly on the central axis of the figure and on eye level of an average person".[33] By standing in this precise location, one can experience the full vigor of *David'*s pose and take on a personal role in the drama. In doing so, the physical limits of the marble are surpassed and the detachment between audience and sculpture is eliminated.

Donatello showed a triumphant *David* post-battle, Michelangelo went on to depict *David* pre-battle, and this iconographic novelty continued with Bernini catching his *David* mid-battle. In Michelangelo's *David*, the sculpture is gathering energy in anticipation of the action. Whereas in Bernini's *David,* the figure shows no hesitation as he fully unleashes this potential energy in an explosive, high-drama action typical of the Baroque style. As a spectator in the role of Goliath, the overall effect is breathtaking. The viewer experiences real fear and can't help but to duck or protect themselves even though they are communicating with a marble statue. This goes to prove the success of Bernini's sculpture. The fulfillment of the imaginary Goliath is necessary to complement the figure of *David*, and in doing so, the viewer assigns purpose to *David*'s action and fully ignites the sculpture. As *David* becomes activated by the spectator, the spiritual focus

[33] Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque,* 5.

leaves the marble and moves into the viewer's space, abolishing the boundary between the sculpture and space which we reside in.

Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini each pioneered new artistic thought with their representations of *David*. In the early Renaissance, Donatello initiated the rejection of medieval techniques to reincorporate styles developed in the classical era. This is evident in his bronze *David*, which celebrates the nude male body, possesses a set of fixed proportions, stands in a harmonious contrapposto stance, and radiates sensuality and confidence. Following in Donatello's footsteps, Michelangelo erects a classicized *David*. His colossal figure is also completely nude and in contrapposto, but he stands in solitude, without any décor or objects to distract the viewer from his idyllic beauty and consciousness. In his *David*, Michelangelo masterfully balances the figure's wrath with collectiveness to emphasize the imminence of the action and personal complications of the sculpture. Finally, Bernini's Baroque sculpture of *David* branches away from the high Renaissance style to portray a climactic moment of high intensity and drama, expressing emotions that are more realistic and closer to nature. In Bernini's *David*, the artist smashes the proud isolation of art as an object or entity on its own and forces its participation with the atmosphere and its inhabitants.[34] The treatment of the same subject matter by Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini produced nuanced representations of the figure David. In the following chapter, I will address how these diverse portrayals of David reveal the artist's interpretation of antiquity and how this understanding was then employed in the crafting of a sculpture to embody the ideas of each artist's modern society.

[34] Hibbard, *Bernini*, 57.

Chapter II: Antiquity and David

The classical era can be briefly characterized by an intellectual surge, a quest for knowledge that encompassed all spheres, from mathematics and science to philosophy and literature. The subject of visual arts was not excluded from this expansion in thought, as classical artists began to reject the Archaic formula in favor of a more naturalistic style. The artistic tradition of the Archaic period is no better summarized than in *kouroi* figures (fig. 11). These rigid, mechanical, and frontal figures successfully transcend reality into a spiritual realm with their simplified forms; however, there is no interest in the replication of nature. With new academic developments, classical artists then abandoned *kouroi* figures to carefully observe the human form and apply their findings in sculpture. The artist Polykleitos is hailed as a master of this practice, establishing his canon of proportions, or *symmetria*, where all parts of the human body relate to one another in size. Polykleitos' sculpture the *Doryphoros* (fig. 12) reveals the precision of his canon and depth of his anatomical studies. This figure, although increasingly more life-like than the previous *kouros* type, was created based off of careful calculations, not off of life itself. The *Doryphoros* exposes the classical artist's articulation of the human body to an extreme. With the strong desire to replicate nature, these artists fashioned an ideal form that prioritized extreme beauty and perfect proportions over absolute realism.

It's a crucial point that throughout this paper I use the terms 'classical' and 'antiquity' to describe works of ancient Greece; however, most of these ancient Greek statues have been lost or melted down. The primary understanding of these classical works is known through Roman copies, which could be exact copies of the Greek originals or could have been adjusted according

to ancient Roman tastes.[35] This is problematic because oftentimes scholars have a clear idea as to what these Greek works looked like, but there is no way to be sure. For the sake of this argument, I have assumed that the Roman marble copies of these Greek works are relatively identical, so when using the terms classical and antiquity, I will be referring to the works of ancient Greece that are known through Roman copies.

In the following medieval era, the strive for utter naturalism in art was forfeited. Instead, these artists employed abstracted and broad iconographic types to convey messages and push religious ideas onto massive populations that were illiterate and relied on a visual vocabulary. The subsequent Renaissance era marks yet another sharp change with the resurgence of classical learnings. The art of this era, although impressive and spectacular in itself, would not exist without its foundation in antiquity. This is the undeniable truth, and evidence of classical techniques are scattered throughout Renaissance works as the artists recycled forms that had been forsaken in medieval times. However, the Renaissance artists were not complacent. They sought to achieve the highly acclaimed classical style and ultimately surpass it. The "good" Renaissance artists imitated classical works and claimed it as their own, while the "great" fully comprehended the classical world and reinterpreted its understandings to fit the contemporary Renaissance environment. The Renaissance artists who continuously followed this pursuit were Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini. Each of these artists, although emerging from slightly different eras, studied the antique and innovated on these learnings to create completely distinct and novel forms, separate from their classical foundations. In this chapter, I argue that the shifts and nuances in the treatment of David by Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini reveal the artist's

[35] Department of Greek and Roman Art. "Roman Copies of Greek Statues," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2002).

extension beyond classical antiquity as they individually reevaluate its ideals to create original works better adapted to their modern landscape.

The Same Source: The Artists' Background in Antiquity

Before grasping Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini's relationships with antiquity, it is important to note the underlying similarities that exist between the artists and their study. Each of these artists had exposure to classical art and its teachings, the key differences being the extent of these lessons and the means. Donatello being one of the major initiators of the artistic Renaissance commenced the era with his enthusiasm and acute interest in classical works. According to the historian Giorgio Vasari, Donatello himself owned antiquities and supposedly sparked Cosimo de' Medici's collection of antique works.[36] Also, Donatello briefly lived in Rome where he observed antique models and sought to emulate their style. Donatello's brilliant and aggressive laboring to achieve classical forms is apparent in the evolution of his work, from his early Gothic marble *David* to his later bronze *David*, the culmination of his career as a classical artist. Donatello's revival of classical style and competitive attitude to challenge the Greek masters ushered in the new Renaissance era, providing succeeding artists with the tools for further exploration and progress in terms of artistic representation.

Michelangelo Buonarotti, the following artistic entrepreneur, utilized the tools passed down by Donatello and combined them with his background in antiquity. Through his grandmother, the Buonarotti family was distantly related to the Medici, and Michelangelo's father Ludovico exploited this relationship to place his son in the Medici entourage.[37] Living as a

[36]Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Marc Bormand, *The Springtime of the Renaissance: Sculpture and the Arts in Florence 1400-1460* (Firenze: Mandragora, 2013), 42.

[37] Frederick Hartt, *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1968), 15.

member of the Medici family in their palace provided Michelangelo with a humanist education and exposed him to a sophisticated lifestyle, intellectual conversation, and a cosmopolitan view of the world. Like Donatello, Michelangelo also temporarily lived in Rome where he caught his initial glimpse into the classical past through extensive art collections. Michelangelo masterly combined classical knowledge with contemporary ideas to create his *David*, thus opening the cinquecento and high Renaissance, where all the achievements of Donatello's quattrocento came to fruition.

After Michelangelo was Bernini, who was a Baroque artist and worked in Rome, but adamantly identified as Florentine through his father's family.[38] Bernini, like his predecessors Donatello and Michelangelo, was in contact with antiquities. The artist's ability to access the Vatican collection allowed him to closely study famous masterpieces like the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Laocoön*.[39] Besides interacting with classical works, Bernini familiarized himself with the styles and techniques of previous Renaissance masters, like Donatello and Michelangelo. This collection of knowledge gave Bernini the means to build on the previous tradition and fully activate it, creating his version of the truth in his portrayal of *David*.

Yet another striking similarity that exists between Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini aside from their experience with classical works and ideas is that the artists didn't start from scratch or cleanly break from the past. Although these artists innovated freely and created inventive works, they were not unprecedented. The evolution of *David* by the three artists is layered and highly complex. Each artist, beginning with Donatello, built upon what they knew and what had been done previously, tweaked it ever so slightly and contributed their

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[38] Franco Mormando, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 7.

[39] Mormando, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome,* 30.

interpretation to arrive at each groundbreaking version of David. This is important to note because it goes along with my previous premise that the Renaissance era would not be what it is without the classical period. Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini, although undoubtedly artistic pioneers, have deep roots in previous traditions to which some credit must be owed. Of equal importance, is that originality as we understand it today was not a value shared among Renaissance artists. Instead, Renaissance artists wanted to be in line with the previous tradition and were commended for it, therefore explaining the strong presence of antique forms in their work. However, Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini earned their fame for not being "good," but great artists, as took what had been previously known and executed and injected their philosophies and beliefs to make each *David* sculpture truly their own and an appropriate embodiment of the time.

The Antique and Donatello's *David*

The classical example is ever-present in Donatello's *David*, specifically in its nudity, proportions, and contrapposto pose. *David*'s complete nakedness is evocative of the Greek athlete hero type. Here, we don't see a shepherd-boy or Biblical figure, rather a victorious Grecian adolescent. How *David* shamelessly stands nude before the viewer emphasizes the admiration for the human body, a concept that was lost during the medieval era. In his complete nudity, one can notice Donatello's interest in figure study which he then applied to this figure. The fluid modeling and soft musculature gives this bronze the impression of life; it strives to imitate nature in the same manner of classical works. Also reminiscent of antiquity is the statue's ability to be viewed and appreciated from all angles, rather than a frontal point of view. Typical of classical figures, *David* beckons the viewer to move around him. He belongs positioned in the

middle of a room or courtyard, rather than pushed against a wall or niche which would restrict certain views. *David*'s contrapposto reveals Donatello's in-depth study of classical art. The weight of the figure's body is placed entirely on the engaged right leg, while the left bends and the foot is gently placed on the beheaded enemy. This position forces a tilt in the axis of the hips, so *David*'s right hip shifts upward, directly opposing the downward tilt of the right shoulder. These contrasting angles compress the torso and imply movement. Rather than stiff *kouroi* and Gothic figures, *David* is memorialized in an utterly natural moment, a harmonizing and balancing posture borrowed from the classical masters. The fixed proportions of *David* expose his upbringing not from a living model, but from an imagined type. Like his classical predecessors, in his strict imitation of nature Donatello has created a beautiful, sensuous form that appears lifelike but isn't reflective of a real human. Despite *David*'s "easy, quiet pose, one notices a certain constraint in the contour, a certain lack in the form, a synthetic trait, which in itself gives us reason to assume that the artist did not work from a living model."[40] This rendition of the human form echoes the antique in its endeavor to construct the most beautiful and idyllic type through calculated proportions rather than physical observation.

Praxiteles and Donatello

Comparing Donatello's *David* to acclaimed types of the classical era, Praxiteles work, in particular, stands out for its clear similarities to the bronze Renaissance figure. Following Polykleitos in the classical period, Praxiteles adjusted his canon so the ratio shifted from 1:7 to 1:7.5. The result was a longer and leaner figure, constructed to appear lifelike rather than idyllic and mathematically correct. This slight variation in the human form reveals broader ideas of the

[40] Osvald Sirén, "The Importance of the Antique to Donatello," *American Journal of Archaeology* 18, no. 4 (1914): 453.

era as classical artists began to forgo the idea that beauty consists of exacting proportions. Praxiteles also applied the contrapposto pose made famous by Polykleitos' *Doryphoros* and exaggerated it, establishing the "Praxitelean S curve."[41] This S curve is prominent in the classical sculpture *Hermes and Dionysus* (fig. 13) by Praxiteles. In this sculpture, Praxiteles is showing the moment before Hermes, the herald of the Gods is to deliver Zeus's infant son Dionysus to the remote mountains, away from the wrath of his wife Hera. *Hermes* appears in a curving Praxitelean contrapposto stance, casually leaning against a tree stump. The musculature of his figure is defined, yet soft in appearance, instilling sensuality into the piece. The updated 1:7.5 canon is at work here, resulting in a slenderer form than the previous Polykleitan type. In this sculpture, *Hermes* teasingly dangles grapes in front of the infant who attempts to reach them, making for a rather playful and innocent scene that is very typical of Praxiteles. The curving sensuality and overall grace of this sculpture repeats itself later in Donatello's *David.*

Like *Hermes*, Donatello's *David* assumes a soft S-line throughout his body. He stands in a contrapposto that very closely aligns with Praxitelean figures. *David* and *Hermes* also both capture Polykleitan elements. The S-curve itself is derived directly from Polykleitos' contrapposto, and both *David* and *Hermes* are measured through anatomical proportions. However, these sculptures diverge from Polykleitos' ideal in the fact that they trade beautiful symmetrical posture for soft, languid muscles, curving pose, and more accurate proportions. The overall effect is a figure closer to our reality. Polykleitos, in all his intrinsic beauty, exceeds the natural standards of anatomy, both Praxiteles and Donatello recognized this and created their versions of truth and a closer imitation of nature in their works. Donatello's *David* also resembles *Hermes* in his stance and demeanor. Both figures are shown as downward-facing

[41] John Boardman, *Greek Sculpture: The Late Classical Period* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 53.

youths and there is a dreamy air surrounding both figures. To achieve this mood, surely Donatello would have looked to the antique master Praxiteles who had begun to steer sculpture away from the scientific and calculated beauty of Polykleitos to a more intimate and naturalized form. However, it has yet to be determined with any certainty which Praxiteles work was studied by Donatello, if any, or perhaps he studied copycat Praxiteles sculptures. What is known is "it is not so much a single specimen, as the entire group of these dreamy Praxitelean youths, which engages our interest, and we must confine ourselves to the confident assertion that Donatello probably took his model from this group."[42] This assertion supports the fact that Donatello didn't reproduce Praxiteles and classical works, rather he drew inspiration from them. Instead of taking an individual sculpture and replicating it in his work, Donatello studied the larger group and incorporated the aspects that he saw fit. In his *David*, Donatello employed classical techniques and styles as a baseline for which he could freely innovate on and make his own.

The Renaissance and Donatello's Innovation

In his sculpture, Donatello invents a completely new portrayal of David, where it is clear that he is the conqueror, but rather than a smug or celebratory mood, his figure exudes a distant contemplation. The pensive thought of *David,* combined with his seductiveness, is what distinguishes him from not only *Hermes* and other Praxitelean and classical works, but also previous David representations. Donatello's *David* is not aloof. His physical structure utilizes the same basic model as classical types in its pose and proportions, yet Donatello diversifies his sculpture in its pure vitality. The classical era, with all its glorious achievement, produced

[42] Sirén, "The Importance of the Antique to Donatello," 455.

wonderful and magnificent works; however, they lacked the emotion that Donatello was able to realize and imbue into his *David*. Rather than the blank and stoic faces of classical heroes, *David* radiates a range of possible sensations. The specific feeling of David is hard to pinpoint, spanning from tender intimacy to satisfaction. These morals clash with the narrative of David and the violent scene which had just occurred. All of these contradictions involving the statue of *David* are what elevates its overall complexity. The potential energy of the figure is Donatello's and his alone.[43] Unlike his predecessors, Donatello created a sculpture that so closely imitates nature it almost breathes with life. The viewer catches a glimpse of this intimate moment yet isn't fully let into the specifics of *David*'s feelings. Perhaps that was Donatello's intention with his sculpture, to entice the viewer with its classical beauty and then shock them with its emotional depth, its Renaissance modernity. With *David*, Donatello's grace, excellence, and masterly design matches that of classical works; however, he surpasses them "to imbue in his creation, for the first time in post-Medieval western art, a deeply personal preoccupation."[44] Donatello proves himself with *David* not the be a "good" artist or an imitator, but an inventor. It is clear Donatello extensively studied classical art and memorized its notable characteristics. He carried these aspects into his sculpture in its Praxitelean curve, slender proportions, and its stately elegance. However, Donatello didn't simply mimic classical artists, but reinterpreted their style to establish a new artistic era, the Renaissance. *David* marks the beginning of a new artistic tradition, where Renaissance artists worked independently and were able to experiment freely with their art.

[43] Luigi Grassi, *All the Sculpture of Donatello: Part I* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1964), 23.

[44] Gill, *Il Gigante*, 245.

With this fresh attitude, artists like Donatello developed relationships with their works and gave them personality, a certain energy that is nonexistent in the distant and remote, but magnificent, classical works. Donatello held antiquity in high regard—that much is true based on its presence in his works. However, Donatello appreciated antiquity for its face-value. He noted and exploited the tools passed down by classical artists, but they were not the means to a greater end. He did not view the success of the classical period as unattainable, but something he could access and ultimately refit to make art that was entirely new and different. That is precisely what occurred in his conception of *David*; Donatello adopted the classical template and readjusted it, reconciling it with contemporary ideas to integrate spirit and sculpture, thus inaugurating the artistic Renaissance in Italy.

From the Quattrocento to Cinquecento: Donatello to Michelangelo

Donatello's revolutionary ideas and works launched an entirely new way of thinking among artists. His approach and ideas inspired other artists, such as Michelangelo, to look to the ancient past and reinvigorate their models in their works. In landing the commission for the colossal marble *David*, Michelangelo took into account the previous representations and he positively knew of Donatello's bronze masterpiece which he used to provoke his artistic ambition and ingenuity.[45] Like Donatello's *David* and earlier classical works, Michelangelo's *David* stands in a contrapposto. This relaxed stance counteracts the high tension of the moment. The anticipation is present, yet the conflicting flexing and disengagement of the limbs implies a moment of hesitation, a brief pause. The contrapposto stance here is not the sensuous Praxitelean curve employed by Donatello, but a slight bow mirroring the upward strength and verticality of

[45] Gill, *Il Gigante*, 237.

Polykleitos' *Doryphoros*. Michelangelo's *David* seems to have matured and grown from Donatello's sweet and youthful *David* to become a powerful Greek deity.

The nudity of Michelangelo's figure is not intended for seduction or arousal, but pure admiration. The developed and defined musculature divulges Michelangelo's anatomical expertise which he acquired through dissection, like many classical artists.[46] With *David*'s complete nakedness and physical accuracy, Michelangelo endowed upon his figure a mortal nobility similar to the Greek and Roman's portrayal of gods and legendary heroes. Despite David's Herculean-ess and larger-than-life ego, he is derived from a human model.[47] The refusal to use exact physical proportions doesn't show Michelangelo's lack of classical education, but just the opposite. It demonstrates Michelangelo extending beyond the classical practice of imitating of nature to create something based off of life, through his experience with cadavers and live models.

Like Donatello, Michelangelo also breaks away from classicism in his injection of humanist thought into his sculpture. The bronze *David* of the quattrocento echoes antiquity in its physical economy and structure, but it breaks away from antiquity in its temperament. Michelangelo, like early Renaissance artists, sought to work directly from life, abandoning outdated and formulaic models to create rhythmic figures, thus following Donatello's desire to create a sculpture that's purpose is evocative rather than to be gawked at. Both artists were successful in this regard as their *David*s give off a peculiar vigor and reach a level of animation that classical sculptures failed to ever grasp. Donatello redirected artistic movement towards increased naturalism and classicism, but Michelangelo pushed this thought further to gift his

[46] Gill, *Il Gigante*, 112.

[47] Ibid, 273.

sculpture an essence. As a result, Michelangelo provides unequivocal insight into *David*'s determination and self-assurance. He digested all this material put out by Donatello's *David* and adjusted it in his version. For Michelangelo, "the discoveries and devices of the quattrocento had become a mere bag of tools, the means toward a greater end."[48] Michelangelo's *David* differentiates itself from quattrocento forms by penetrating the emotional fog of Donatello's *David* so that the viewer gains admittance into the figure's inner thoughts and strategy.

Michelangelo and the High Classical Era

Michelangelo's love affair with classical art lies in its ideality and extreme beauty. This affinity is best seen in comparing his *David* with the 5th century BCE sculpture the *Discobolus* (fig. 14) by Myron. The *Discobolus* is the quintessential classical sculpture, superbly and geometrically designed to emanate harmony. Although the athlete doesn't stand in contrapposto, the body is still counterbalanced as the arc of the arms and shoulders opposes that of the hips. Myron exercises an entirely new mode of artistic representation by depicting a moment of sheer power and strength in a way that appears graceful, smooth, and elegant. The *Discobolus* is wound up but frozen in this pregnant moment of tension, between a forward and backward swing of the discus. Yet, his body appears relaxed and stoic, his face tranquil and serene. The overall effect makes for a rather stunning and awe-inspiring scene, which Michelangelo recreates with his *David*. Like the *Discobolus*, *David* is stuck in a high-pressure moment, fully saturated with potential. Despite the stress and uncertainty of the situation, *David*'s stance is relaxed and his demeanor quiet. The detached body language of both figures reassigns the focus from the action

[48] Robert Coughlan, *The World of Michelangelo* (New York: Time Inc., 1966), 92.

to the body itself. By concentrating on the body's sublime form and the severe allure of the composition as a whole, Michelangelo is appropriating classical techniques.

There is a strong correlation in the exquisiteness of both the *Discobolus* and *David*, but Michelangelo advances the realism of his sculpture. The artificiality of the *Discobolus* can be observed in the impossible twist of the athlete's waist which corresponds to no known position in the art of discus throwing.[49] More inaccuracies exist in the slackness of the figure's muscles and blankness of his face, which are illogical considering the intensity of the movement. All of these incongruencies illuminate Myron's classical practice of experimenting with beauty in art rather than showing a real human form. This practice makes for a potent image, but it illustrates an unconvincing naturalism. Michelangelo's *David* is still impressive, but more believable. His muscles are contracted and flexed, his gaze focused, and his willpower is clearly expressed on his face. As a viewer, you can easily imagine *David*'s racing heart and the adrenaline surging through his veins as he is about to step into battle. Michelangelo's accuracy with *David* shows his understanding of the human body not as an ideal mechanism or form, but as a living organism active in our present day.

Another comparison can be made between Michelangelo's *David* and the classical *Doryphoros* by Polykleitos. Polykleitos' iconic nude was highly sought after and prolifically copied, so it is no stretch to assume Michelangelo had some familiarity with Polykleitos' design. The strong resemblances between the two sculptures can be noticed in their contrapposto stances and athletic nudity, which supplements the *Doryphoros* and *David*'s overall grandeur and nobility. The heroic identity associated with both of these figures is emphasized by the artists' meticulous rendition of the joints and muscles in such a natural way that the sculptures appear to

[49] Andrew Stewart, *Greek Sculpture*: *An Exploration*, vol. I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 148.

be real, living victors. However, *David* diverges from the *Doryphoros* in his facial expression which reveals his determination and fury while the *Doryphoros*' face is blank and quite impossible to read emotionally.

The greater naturalization of classical works is not to be understated, for it is truly a feat in itself, but with all the intensive figure studying of classical artists, they prioritized physical perfection over an authentic human soul. Classical works are entrancing in their supreme designs, but they are distant as the artists bestowed them with those ideal properties that ordinary humans can only recognize as their own best potentialities.[50] Michelangelo realized this distance in his relationship with antiquity. It is apparent in his *David*'s physical magnificence that Michelangelo, like many classical artists, showed great interest in the human form and wanted to accentuate its beauty. However, Michelangelo grew to develop his understanding of classical ideas and modified them to better reflect contemporary trends, seen in the consciousness of his sculpture.

Michelangelo's Contribution

Michelangelo and Donatello both carried over classical techniques in their representations of *David*. Donatello valued classical designs and the classical artist's urge to replicate nature in their work, which explains his *David*'s lifelike appearance. Donatello also absorbed themes of early Renaissance ideas and fused them with his view on antiquity, resulting in an innovative portrayal of *David* that takes the classical model and instills emotion. Michelangelo, following suit, found the potentiality and ideal beauty of classical works significant. He was also inspired by Donatello and other early Renaissance works to create a

[50] Coughlan, *The World of Michelangelo,* 92.

psychologically evocative sculpture. In the climate of the high Renaissance, Michelangelo furthered the past artistic tradition by investing the figure with human thought and consciousness. The sheer energy endowed in *David* transcends the more formal and detached works of prior generations.[51] *David* doesn't imitate nature; he *is* nature. The aloofness of classical style is greatly diminished initially in Donatello's *David*, his gentle emotions and intimacy brings him closer to life and as a result, our reality. In Michelangelo's *David*, the distance caused by idealized forms becomes nonexistent. Although *David* is breathtaking and glorious, he's real and contains an essence. Michelangelo is able to employ classical elements in his sculpture without making the figure intimidating and remote to the viewer. With *David*, we can appreciate his obvious beauty while simultaneously relating to his thoughts. Michelangelo's mastery, intelligence, and great understanding convinces us of *David*'s naturalism as we are allowed into his mind to discover his character. *David* is a man with conviction; he is selfless, sharp, brave, confident, and persistent. To make a sculpture with thoughts and personality demonstrates Michelangelo's inventiveness as an artist. With *David*, Michelangelo fixated and expanded on particular artistic elements, merged styles, and inserted his artistic flavor to create a masterpiece that perfectly embodies its time.

From Classical and Renaissance to Hellenistic and Baroque

For the succeeding artist Bernini, the only step he could take beyond sheer idealized realism was to elaborate it for dramatic effect, and to dwell on the particular rather than the general—in other words, through the expression of emotion and mood, and with more lifelike treatment of portraiture. Bernini's "own development compressed into the space of four years

[51] Gill, *Il Gigante*, 275.

something of the change that occurred between classical and Hellenistic times."[52] Art of the classical era captured grace and stillness, such as in the *Doryphoros* and *Discobolus*. These figure's precise proportions, fluid modeling, and calm stances created undeniably beautiful icons. Yet in the following Hellenistic era, the naturalism that was perfected by classical artists still applied, but this naturalism was remodeled in a way that some consider to be less beautiful because the idealization was significantly reduced and replaced by more realistic and truthful representations. With his Baroque art, Bernini reflected this artistic shift from classical to Hellenistic style.

Donatello's early Renaissance and Michelangelo's high Renaissance eras share plenty of the same overarching themes, namely the rediscovery of the classical world, with some variation. After decades of obsessing over the human form and classical type, Bernini changed this static dialogue of the art world. As stated by Howard Hibbard, "a return to 'nature' and to 'realism' are classic symptoms of artistic rebirth after years of stagnant formulae."[53] This is precisely Bernini's aim—to reach a form even closer to reality than what had been previously done. Bernini's concern with reality was not unique or revolutionary. Classical artists, early Renaissance artists, and even high Renaissance artists all held the same desire for naturalized forms in their work. However, each artist built upon the previous model, saw what was missing, and then pushed the boundaries further to create a new type, and Bernini is no exception to this cycle.

Bernini's deep understanding of the human figure, visible in *David*'s utter realism, is an idea brought forth and religiously practiced by Renaissance artists. In the rediscovery of the

[52] Hibbard, *Bernini*, 62.

[53] Hibbard, *Bernini*, 64.

classical world, artists like Donatello and Michelangelo both sought to replicate nature in their art by employing proportions and contrapposto poses. Bernini, like his Renaissance predecessors, also strived to attain realism in his sculpture, but used different means. His *David* doesn't adhere to certain proportions or postures, rather its realism lies in its expressiveness and action. Donatello and Michelangelo worked from the ideal, using ratios or an image of beauty, whereas Bernini worked from the human model. Donatello produced a classical yet intimate sculpture, Michelangelo's is majestic and mortal, while Bernini's is grossly natural. In his sculpture, Bernini sacrifices attraction and deliberately portrays the "ugly." *David*'s face is contorted into an expression of focused pain, as he summons all his inner strength in the release of the stone. Arguably, his *David* is less alluring than Donatello and Michelangelo's, but Bernini's sculpture is irrefutably the most authentic in its raw and unfiltered expression.

In Bernini's portrayal of *David*, the artist has gathered and collected previous artistic sources and fully awakened them. Donatello seized passive classical types and developed them to create a sensitive and profound sculpture. Michelangelo depicted an idyllic man and then amplified the sculpture's depth in the investment of an active mind. Bernini studied the potential of these figures, how they appeared lifelike or even went as far as to emit a certain energy. In his analysis, Bernini was able to create a sculpture that would make more sense if it was a breathing human rather than a marble block. Bernini's *David* doesn't discharge emotions, or allow viewers into his mind, but he uninvitedly enters our living world. Gone is the barrier between art and its audience, shattered by the astonishing vigor of *David*. Michelangelo's *David* is classically poised in its physical manner, yet under his skin one can notice the engagement of his muscles, preparedness of his joints, and determination in his head. Michelangelo's *David*'s external and internal self seems to be locked in a state of miscommunication, delaying any immediate action.

On the other hand, every aspect of Bernini's *David* is in synch and in full agreement, resolutely committed to the current response.

Bernini and the Hellenistic Era

Bernini's artistic creativity in his conception of *David*, although innovative, originates from Hellenistic tradition, specifically from the 1st century BCE sculpture the *Borghese Gladiator* (fig. 15).[54] The *Borghese Gladiator* depicts a Greek warrior actively defending himself against his opponent. His stance is wide as he gains the maximum amount of power to fully thrust his torso forward. This movement creates a strong diagonal line that runs throughout the figure's body, enhancing its energy and three-dimensionality. In the artist's distinct rendering of the figure's musculature he achieves a natural form and describes a shockingly real moment. This is further supported by the gladiator's facial expression, the concern in his eyes and brows along with his parted mouth directly correlates to his action and physical strain. The boldness of this composition resurfaces centuries later in Bernini's *David*. Like Myron's *Discobolus*, *David* is also caught in action; however, Bernini has taken this motion and actually brought it to life with Hellenistic expressiveness. *David*, like the *Borghese Gladiator*, rejects the classical vertical shape and linear direction. In the movement of both figures, it's as if they have expanded outside the limits of the marble blocks, creating new and angular compositions that spill into our space. Unlike the *Discobolus*, the *Borghese Gladiator* and *David*'s faces also indicate the intensity of the moment. *David* exhibits a dark scowl, pressed lips, and clenched jaw that correlate to his physical action. In the cohesive functioning of these elements, *David* and the *Borghese Gladiator* both genuinely and unapologetically participate in our living world.

[54] Hibbard, *Bernini*, 61.

Bernini's Artistic Advancement

The electrifying effect of Bernini's *David* resides in the artist's painstaking attention to detail and keen abilities as an artist. Unlike Donatello and Michelangelo, Bernini had no interest in projecting feelings onto the viewer or allowing them to ponder with, or at, the sculpture. Instead, Bernini aimed to craft a figure so brutally honest and close to the truth that it operated with us. To do this, he articulated every minute detail and neglected the larger idea. Donatello's and Michelangelo's *David* both exhibit detail, but the artists fixated on the overall effect of their compositions. Bernini created an actual individual by accurately and attentively carving each knuckle, joint, muscle, bone, and tendon. In this way, Bernini successfully sustained the practice of producing sculpture closer to nature than anything that had been created by a previous artist.

Bernini's relationship with antiquity was to challenge it, advancing its designs and lessons to make something new, closing the artistic Renaissance and commences the Baroque era. Like the Renaissance masters before him, Bernini studied the antique and implemented their scheme into his works, seen in the Hellenism of his *David*. Bernini didn't stop at matching the antique tradition, rather he broadened its ideas and refigured to encompass the emergence of a new set of values: a close union of the artist with nature.[55] The artistic ingenuity present in Bernini's *David*, particularly in his authenticity, ultimately reveals the prosperous marriage of styles, hybridity of features and call for changing trends and ideals.

[55] Petersson, *Bernini and the Excesses of Art*, 77.

Conclusion

Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini all addressed the same subject matter during their respective careers. Each artist was familiar with David's narrative and was, at one point, told the same story about his righteous victory over Goliath. However, the three artists arrived at completely different final products in their portrayal of David. How is it that these artists, given the same knowledge of David's story and background in classical art, could create such varying representations? The answer lies in the artist's implicit similarities and differences.

A major commonality between Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini is their high ambition as artists. These artists studied and absorbed all material that they had access to and practiced their art relentlessly. They recognized gaps in previous traditions and filled them with their imagination, taking risks to create new and innovative works. Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini all shared a competitive drive, constantly pushing to surpass themselves and their acclaimed predecessors.

Another shared interest between the artists is that they each possessed a relationship with antiquity and a yearning to generate figures that resemble nature as closely as possible. Although this passion is communal between the artists, it is personalized for each individual. Donatello, as one of the earliest artists of the Renaissance, created a natural figure and followed the classical idea that proportions result in beauty. He applied a canon to his *David* and rendered it in a curving contrapposto stance, dismissing any mechanical Gothic connotations and thus creating a fluid, lifelike form. Donatello adopted the classical style with its principal elements and total refinement; however, he recognized the lack of vitality in classical works and viewed it as outdated and even problematic. As a solution, Donatello permeated his David with sensuality, intimacy, and dreaminess. By supplementing classical forms with human emotion, Donatello not

only constructed an original work closer to nature, but also mirrored the intellectual rejuvenation of the early Renaissance with his *David*.

Like Donatello, Michelangelo also kept close ties with the classical world in his version of *David* in its relaxing demeanor and idyllic beauty. As Vasari said, "[Michelangelo] made me astonished that the ancients are surpassed by the beauty and grace of what his divine genius has been able to achieve."[56] This points to the glory of Michelangelo's *David* as it expresses an unattainable naturalism seen only in sculptures of Greek Gods, kings, and esteemed heroes. Michelangelo admires the ideal beauty of classical models, but he fashions his sculpture to be larger than an attractive shell of a figure. He ascribes a certain potential energy to *David* along with a consciousness, creating a novel form and bringing him one step closer to our reality than Donatello had in the quattrocento.

Art of the Hellenistic era resonated deeply with the artist Bernini, adjusting his perception of antiquity. The Hellenism of his *David* is synonymous with its Baroque-ness, in its exaggerated pose, expressive features, and memorialization in the climax of the story. Bernini's figure exceeds Michelangelo's in the sense that it is physically and mentally alive, not just internally awake, as Bernini's *David* infiltrates our world and becomes a truly real contributor.

The distinct interpretations each of these artists had of antiquity resulted in their dissimilar sculptures with varying degrees of realization. Along with their respective understandings of antiquity, each of these artists came from a different generation with its fresh ideas and beliefs which impacted the artist's expression in their representation of *David*. Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini all created innovative works, but they were not entirely original as they built off one another as well as the works from the classical past. Yet, Donatello

[56] William E. Wallace, *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture, Painting, Architecture* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2009), 29.

was the greatest sculptor of the fifteenth century, as was Michelangelo in the sixteenth and Bernini in the century after him; for these artists expanded beyond the replication of nature and revival of antiquity to integrate modern techniques and personal inventions in their highly praised representations of *David*.[57]

[57] Wallace, *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture, Painting, Architecture*, 13.

Figures

Figure 1: Donatello, *David*, 1430s, bronze, 158 cm., Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

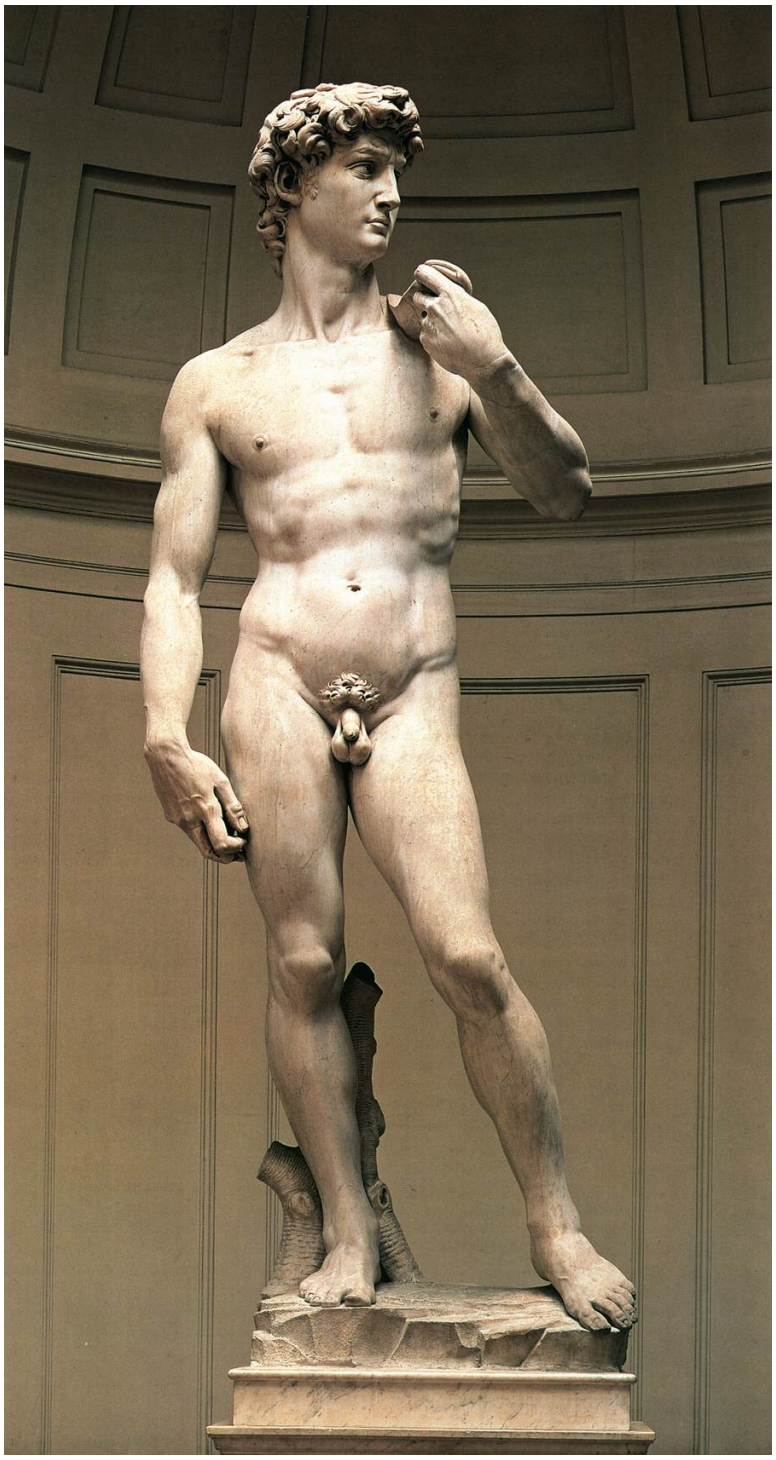

Figure 2: Michelangelo, *David*, 1504, marble, 434 cm., Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

Figure 3: Bernini, *David*, 1624, marble, 170 cm., Galleria Borghese, Rome.

Figure 4: Donatello, *David*, 1408-1409, marble, 191 cm., Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

Figure 5: Taddeo Gaddi, *David*, 1330, fresco, Cappella Baroncelli, Santa Croce, Florence.

Figure 6: Donatello, *Saint Mark*, 1411, marble, 236 cm., Orsanmichele, Florence.

Figure 7: Andrea del Verrocchio, *David*, 1473-1475, bronze, 125 cm., Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

Figure 8: Bernini, *Monsignor Montoya*, 1621-1622, marble, Santa Maria di Monserrato, Rome.

Figure 9: Bernini, *Damned Soul*, 1619, marble, Palazzo di Spagna, Rome.

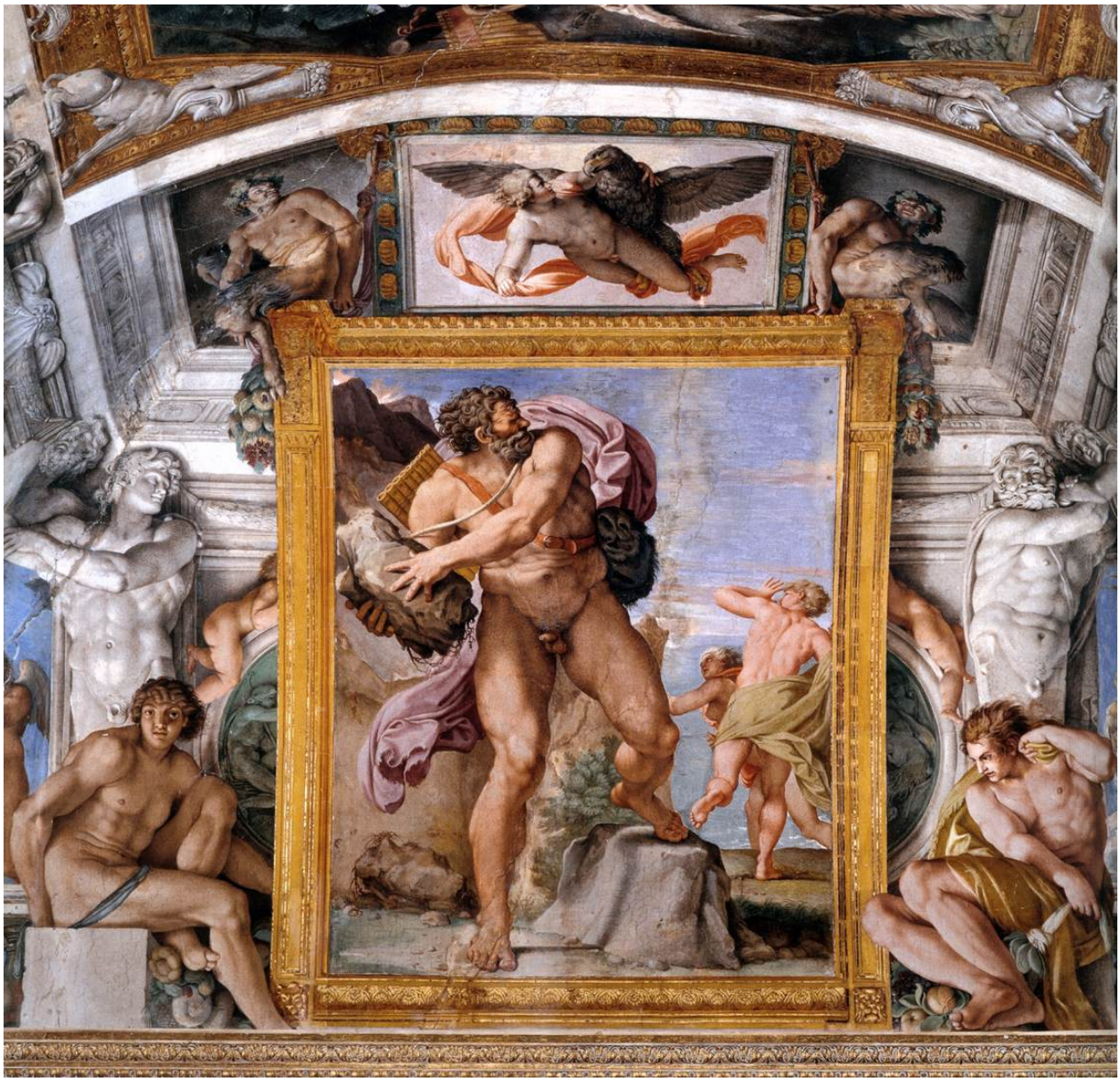

Figure 10: Annibale Carracci, *Polyphemus and Acis*, 1595-1605, fresco, Galleria Farnese, Palazzo Farnese, Rome.

Figure 11: *Anavysos Kouros*, 530 BCE, marble, 193 cm, National Archeological Museum, Athens.

Figure 12: Polykleitos, *Doryphoros*, 450-440 BCE, Roman marble copy of bronze original, 212 cm, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.

Figure 13: Praxiteles, *Hermes and Dionysus*, 350-330 BCE, marble, 370 cm, Archaeological Museum of Olympia, Olympia.

Figure 14: Myron, *Discobolus*, 460-450 BCE, Roman marble copy of bronze original, 173 cm, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome.

Figure 15: Agasias, *Borghese Gladiator*, 101 BCE, marble, 199 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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