

Exploration of Space Sculpture

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Received 8 July 2022; accepted 17 August 2022
Published online 26 October 2022

Abstract

Sculpture is an art in space. It is a creation where the creator uses physical substance as a medium to express personal thoughts and emotions in space. The concept of space has become increasingly rich, and artists are no longer satisfied with the pure expressions of 'shape' and 'between shapes'. They are pursuing elevation in the spiritual level. Sculpture appreciation requires multi-dimensional perspectives of the viewer. In addition to the shape of the sculpture, its spatial factor is also very important. If the artists can merge space and time organically and coordinate their interactions and relationship, then they can better display the art itself. The space sculpture can be roughly categorized into three kinds: positive, negative, and imaginary spaces. Positive space is the physical sculpture itself, negative space is the empty space within and around the sculpture, and the imaginary space is spiritual resonance between the viewer and the sculpture. Artists have inherited and innovated their understanding and usage of space and incorporated negative space rationally in sculpture creation.

Key words: Sculpture; Space sculpture; Positive space; Negative; Space; Imaginary space

Li, Y. (2022). Exploration of Space Sculpture. *Canadian Social Science*, 18(5), 38-42. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/12794>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12794>

1. SPACE SCULPTURE

1.1 Positive Space in Sculpture

The positive space of a sculpture is its physical form.

It is the depth, intersperse, and turning of the physical sculpture. It exists in real space and can be touched by viewers. It can be appreciated from multiple perspectives. Viewers can resonate with the emotion connotation of the artists, experience the implication of the sculpture, and comprehend its power. Positive space exists objectively. Sculpture is a space art, and the positive and negative space are interrelated and integrated with each other. Artists pursue a balance of the two spaces and transform the combination of the two spaces into one seamless and interdependent space. The coexistence of the positive and negative spaces is a common pattern in sculpture art modeling. The physical form of the sculpture is regular and natural, and the negative space around the sculpture is perfectly set off by its positive space. The two spaces complement each other and are harmonious and unified. For example, artist Michelangelo's work *Rebellious Slave* (Figure 1) depicts a strong slave tied to a stone pillar. This sculpture makes full use of the rich spatial expressive power of marble. The strong dynamic shape of the figure shows the unyielding spirit of resistance of the slave. The rest of the sculpture was roughly carved, and the coarse knife marks symbolize scars through the suffering of the slave. Audiences can feel the vitality and tension of art in the positive space of the sculpture and a unique artistic visual experience brought by the three-dimensional space. In the *Bronze Age* by Auguste Rodin (Figure 2), the figurative body posture and facial expressions are harmonious and natural. The structure of the body is even and reflects the artist's accurate understanding of anatomy. His sculpting technique is rigorous, compact, and reserved. The sculpture shows the liberation of human beings from nature since the Urgesellschaft to the Bronze Age and symbolizes the dawn or awakening of mankind. In Rodin's eyes, the beauty and ugliness of life and of art are completely different. He focuses on the light performance on the surface of the sculpture and integrates his ideology into his work, making the sculpture

a powerful language, which conveys his ideology to the audiences far beyond their visual perception.



Figure 1
Rebellious Slave by Michelangelo

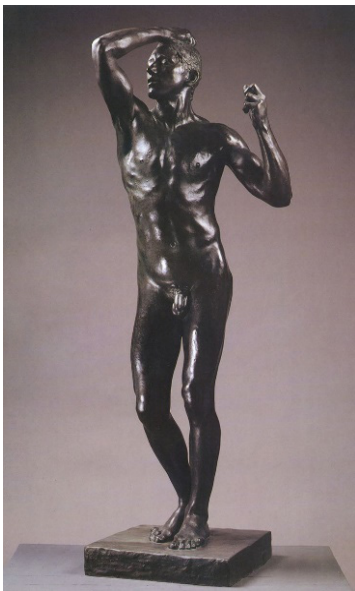


Figure 2
Bronze Age by Auguste Rodin

The positive space determines the direction of the entire space of the sculpture and its existence is objective. It has visible length, width, and height, or up and down, front and back, and left and right. In addition to show

the physical shape of the sculpture, the positive space beautifies the sculpture form, defines the spatial distances among parts of the sculpture, and guides the spatial circulation and continuity among shapes of the sculpture. It clearly defines the spatial range of the sculpture and forms invisible 'fields' that have mutual relations and express the connotation and cultural meaning of the sculpture.

Artists did not pay much attention to exploration of the positive space of sculpture and focused more on its practicality of serving reality before 19th century. People were unfamiliar with sculptures with little communication. Modern artists are more fascinated by the interaction and communication between the physical entities of sculptures and audiences in space, which is a change in the positive space of sculptures.

1.2 Negative Space of Sculptures

Negative space of sculptures refers to the space surrounding the physical form of sculptures. It is connected with the physical entities of sculptures. In general, negative space of sculptures exists in two ways: the empty space within the sculptures and the empty space surrounding the sculptures. Negative space of sculptures can be seen as transparent space. Its existence enables the physical form of sculptures to better integrate, coordinate, and agree with their surrounding natural environment perfectly. Meanwhile, sculpture is an art in three-dimensional space. Its form is inseparable from the surrounding environment. It occupies physical space and has a connection with the surrounding environment. It interacts and integrates with the environment. In addition to the position space of sculptures, artists explore negative space to display and coordinate the relationship among space, mankind, nature, and society. *Two Sides of the Glasses* by sculptor Xu Zhenglong (Figure 3) is a representative piece of the negative space. It is a pair of glasses placed on the campus of Tsinghua University. The sculpture is made of two materials: copper and stainless steel. Glasses are a symbol of culture and literature. The artist intentionally transforms the physical sculpture into space and time and emphasizes the exploration of negative space of the glasses. When audience wanders around the campus, they are wandering in sculptures that seem to be intricate in time and space, which provides a new visual experience. *Newspeak·Yang* by young artist Liang Jiachao (Figure 4) is an attempt of artistic deconstruction. The distortion of Dougong creates a spatial change of the sculpture and expresses the artist's view of change, the old and new, deconstruction and construction, and breaking and forming. It also shows Liang's understanding of inevitability and coincidence, silence and narration, and inheritance and innovation.



Figure 3
Two Sides of the Glasses by sculptor Xu Zhenglong
(Made in copper and stainless steel)



Figure 4
Newspaper-Yang by young artist Liang Jiachao
(Made in copper and stainless steel)

Negative space surrounds the positive space of sculptures and connects the surrounding environment and the sculpture to form one entity, which increases the spatial sense and enhances the charm of the sculpture. Negative space can exude unexpected expanding and adsorbing force. It can absorb the surrounding environment and incorporate them into the sculpture. This kind of accommodation of sculpture offers infinite possibilities, providing audience unlimited imagination. There are many pieces of art that use negative space in ancient China, such as the empty space in panes of ancient garden buildings. People can see different scenery through these panes when looking in different directions in various seasons. The beauty of negative space is creating vitality for changes. Negative space offers a unique sense of mystery. People are always curious about things that are

vague. The invisible and intangible of negative space gives audience an inexplicable sense of mystery. The blank space in Chinese painting serves a similar role as the negative space in sculptures. Its intangible form provides the audience a mysterious and illusory feeling.

1.3 Imaginary Space of Sculptures

Imaginary space is the space besides the positive and negative space of the sculptures. It is a space of thought. It represents the associations and perceptions of the audiences when looking at the sculptures. The consciousness of the artists, the sculptures, and the audience integrate with each other to form the imaginary space. This relationship transcends three-dimensional physical space and is a result of imagination. Imaginary space is created by audience's associations. It is the spatial feeling or soul resonance of the audience in exhibition

when viewing the sculptures. Good sculptures always leave plenty room for imagination. Brilliant creativity always avoids showing everything directly and pursues uniqueness and endless aftertastes. For example, my previous work *Dream as A Horse* (Figure 5) shows a girl sitting on top of a horse moving forward. However, the real meaning of the sculpture is the reflection and thoughts on growing up. The sculpture is surrounded by a faintly gloomy atmosphere. The dreamlike coloring gives



Figure 5
Dream as A Horse by Li Ying

Sculpture art is an art that triggers audiences' imagination. The same piece of art can initiate different imaginations when it appears in different places at different times. The traditional aesthetics of Chinese culture advocates artistic conception and imagery. The embodiment of beauty does not depend unilaterally on the physical world but exists in aesthetic activities. Imaginary space illuminates the real space, and this kind of aesthetic pursuit is important for Chinese artists. Imaginary space of sculptures is particularly important. The creation and generation of imaginary space is full of uncertainty. Only when the sculptor accurately expresses his thoughts and emotions can the work better resonate with the audiences. Sculpture is an intriguing form of art. Its form, materials, and placement can catch the attention of audiences. Sculptures with a log of imaginary space can make audiences happy, and thoughts can go beyond any languages and give sculptures 'life' and unlimited value.

a sense of surreality. Meanwhile, the 'pure water' under the horse's feet represent persistence of chasing dreams. *Dawn* by young artist Li Jinze (Figure 6) portrays figures of prayers. It represents personal understanding of belief. Art is a belief, and continuous creation of art is faith. The prayer is a 'thin' three-dimensional figure, showing a sense of ascetic practice of the prayer. The sculpture displays an atmosphere of sincere, solemn, peace, serene, and free.

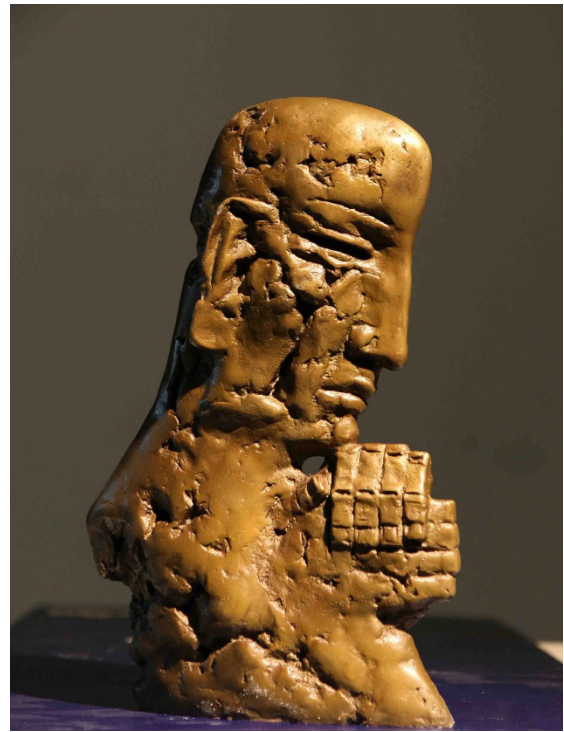


Figure 6
Dawn by Li Jinze

2. APPLICATION OF SPACE IN SCULPTURE CREATION

The constantly enriched and developed sculpture space is due to sculptors' continuous exploration and experimentation of shapes and spaces. Sculptors' constant experimentation and exploration in the expression and techniques of sculpture space has deepened the connotation and strengthened the sense of space of sculpture. The key to spatial art in applications in sculpture is to form an aesthetic sense of association and to emphasize the integrity and vividness of the subject. The connection of inner and outer space, that is, the inner part expands outward whereas the outer part shrinks inward, is a perfect combination. Space can be created by forming shapes. The overlapping, splitting, and surrounding of shapes can form void, which is connected with the surrounding space. This makes the space of sculpture more complete. The directionality of movement in sculptures also plays

a role in expanding the sculpture space. The sculptor can intentionally present the sculpture shape in different directions, showing directionality of movement, such as upward, downward, forward, or backward, to achieve spiritual resonance and extend the sculpture space.

With the advancement of science and technology, the art form of sculpture spaces is becoming more abundant, and the language of sculpture space is being improved. There are numerous possibilities in sculpture creation, and the varied expressiveness of sculpture space has gradually become an important feature in sculpture. The usage of space is one of the most difficult and important forms in sculpture art. It is indispensable in sculpture creation. Sculptors ensure the integrity of the sculpture space by focusing on and their conscious application of space. Through artistic experiments, sculptors understand changes in the space, feel its tension and charisma, and use the space rationally to express the wisdom of the art. The creation of positive space is sculpting the physical form of the work by the overlapping, surrounding, and separation of its physical form. The space of the sculpture is connected. The outline of the sculpture body is regarded as the shape of the positive space, and it increases the volume of the sculpture space. The coordination comprehends the language of positive space. The conscious use of transparent and reflective materials such as voids and mirrors to create the negative space of the sculpture, causing a dreamlike effect of the sculpture. The combination of sculpture and space has created a unique negative space. The integration of space has perfected the language of space. The sculpture space is integrated into an entity, forming a multi-dimensional imaginary space. Both negative and imaginary space shares the characteristic of transparency. Such shared characteristic

inspires me with the idea of combining the two with the positive space of the sculpture. The combination of the three spaces, positive, negative, and imaginary space, creates more possibilities, inspires audiences, and arouses resonance of mind and spirit.

Recognition, exploration, and usage of sculpture space lead artists and audiences to understand the varied charisma and to feel the unexpected and unique mystery of the space. In addition, the conscious use of negative space can further promote development of the concept of sculpture space. Audiences' understanding of sculpture space has also increased conforming to the trend of the times. Exploration of the understanding and application of negative space is one of the important directions for the future of sculpture art. At the same time, artists have enjoyed the manifestation and function of sculpture, enriched and improved the language of sculpture, perfecting the concept of sculpture space and making it more open and diverse.

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