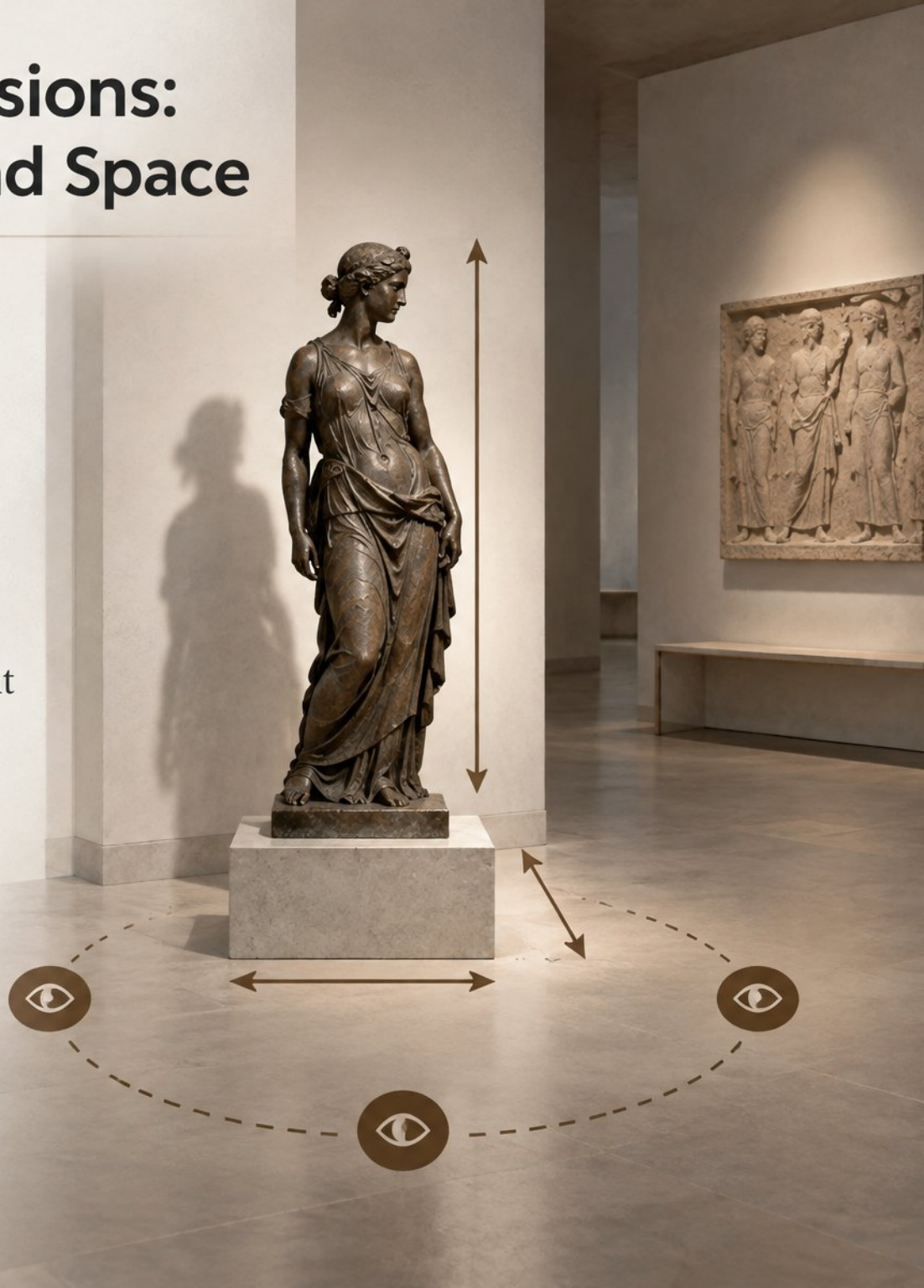
Understanding Sculpture:
Materials, Methods, and Viewing

- Course goal: build shared vocabulary linking materials, methods, and meaning
- Why sculpture differs from painting: presence, mass, surface, scale, changing light
- Walk around the work—sculpture occupies real space beside the viewer
- Audience pathways: visitors gain looking strategies; students learn process and context
- Roadmap: three dimensions, materials, making methods, museum context, close looking



Reading Three Dimensions: Form, Mass, Surface, and Space

- Sculpture has height, width, and depth; it casts shadows and shares space with you
- Form and mass reveal weight, volume, and negative space through light and shadow
- Surface and facture show making: tool marks, patina, polish, joins, and paint
- Walk around the work to see changing silhouettes and find intended sight lines
- Plinth, vitrine, lighting, and setting condition how you interpret the work
- Relief sculptures project from a background, so one frontal view may suit them



Materials and Meaning: Stone, Wood, Metal, Clay, and New Media



Stone

- Stone: hardness and veining evoke permanence and monumentality



Wood

- Wood: grain, joinery, and polychrome; each case needs tailored care



Metal

- Metal: casting, welding, and patina—bronze may be sealed or left to corrode



Clay and plaster

- Clay and plaster: modeling and molding blur original and reproduction

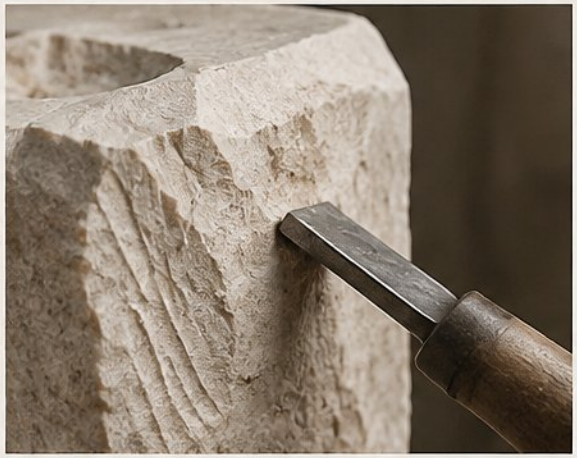


New media

- New media: plastics, found objects, light, and digital fabrication
- Unstable synthetics degrade irreversibly; preventive storage and display are crucial

Methods of Making: Carving, Modeling, Casting, and Construction

- Subtractive carving: stone and wood retain tool marks as evidence of removal
- Additive modeling: clay, wax, and plaster built up by hand
- Lost-wax casting: model → flexible mold → wax positive → investment mold → bronze
- Signatures, edition numbers, and foundry seals are added at the wax stage
- Construction: welding, joinery, assemblage; new tools raise authorship questions









From Workshop to Museum:
Contexts of Production and Display

- Commissions—religious, civic, royal, private—shaped function, scale, and setting
- Studios and foundries: assistants, editions, attribution questions
- Display shifts from temples and squares to galleries and public space
- Plaster cast collections boomed in the 19th–early 20th centuries
- Parthenon casts at the Acropolis Museum blend education and politics
- Casts today: mostly educational, conveying scale and physicality







Looking Closely:
A Step-by-Step Viewing Strategy

- First impression: note scale, silhouette, and emotional effect before reading any label.
- Inspect material and surface: tool marks, joins, patina, damage, paint or raw material.
- Walk around the work and watch how light and shadow define form.
- Check context: plinth, vitrine, label, installation, and surrounding objects.
- Separate observation, inference, and context—ask: what do you see that makes you say that?
- Common visitor error: assuming a single frontal view is the intended one.



Interpreting Sculpture: Style, Subject, and Historical Context

- **Subject and iconography:** gestures like mudras carry coded meaning
- **Style markers:** classical, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, modern, contemporary
- **Function and setting:** ritual, commemorative, decorative, political roles
- **Original viewing conditions:** eye level, angle, and architectural setting differed
- **Polychromy:** ancient marble was often painted, not pure white
- **Conservation and change** reshape **interpretation:** weathering, restoration, repainting



Why Surface and Color Change What We See

- Ancient marble was often painted; white surfaces are a later expectation
- Conservators choose: remove later paint, retain it, or visually reintegrate losses
- Outdoor painted sculpture is repainted periodically to sustain the artist's intent
- Repainting, patina renewal, and repairs leave traces viewers can learn to read
- Trebonianus Gallus bronze at the Met: about 75% is ancient; restoration now distinguishable



Trebonianus Gallus
AT THE MET

MATERIALS TELL STORIES

Museum Practice:

Questions, Activities, and Inclusive Access

Questioning toolkit: What is going on? What do you see? What more can we find?

Gallery activities: silent looking, sketching, viewpoint walks, material matching

Separate observation, evidence, and interpretation; let students build ideas

Inclusion: touch tours, audio description, tactile models, raised-line drawings

Touch tours: allow time, use whole hand, never ask 'guess what you're touching'

Audio description: plain language, relatable comparisons, layered optional detail



Questioning Protocols That Work in the Gallery

- VTS: three open questions build observation and evidence-based reasoning.
- Facilitator: listen, point, paraphrase conditionally, link ideas.
- Sequence: silent look, one observation, then visual analysis.
- Hold context until late, introducing it on demand.
- Peer observations can shift how the whole group sees.



Classroom and Gallery Connections for Students and Educators

- **Object-based research:** build a material, method, and viewing checklist for unfamiliar works
- **Comparative analysis:** discuss two works side by side, noting similarities and differences
- **Open questions** connect to prior knowledge and students' own experience
- **Ask students** to imagine entering the work and describe its space
- **Assessment prompts:** short written observations, sketch-and-annotate tasks
- **Repeatable sequence:** looking, evidence, context, interpretation





Synthesis: Analyzing an Unfamiliar Sculpture



Step 1: Look without labels; note scale, silhouette, surface, first impressions

Step 2: Inspect material and making evidence—tool marks, joins, patina, paint

Step 3: Walk around; note how viewpoint and light change your reading

Step 4: Check display context, then add label and historical information

Step 5: Build an evidence-based interpretation; state which observations support it

Comparative Looking: Two Works, Two Methods

- Pair works: carved stone beside cast bronze
- Carving removes material; casting reproduces a model through molds
- Surface evidence: tool marks, chasing, patina, polychromy
- Viewing conditions: plinth height, lighting, surrounding space
- Discuss: what is similar, different, and what evidence supports claims
- Debrief: how material and method shape meaning



STONE



BRONZE



LOOK CLOSELY
THINK DEEPLY

Takeaways for Visitors, Students, and Educators



Visitor habit:
look before labels, walk around, inspect surface

Student tool:
evidence template — material, method, context, viewpoint

Educator sequence:
open questions first, context arrives late

Universal prompts:
what is going on? what do you see? what more?

Closing:
sculpture is physical, made, and placed

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