

The Discobolus

The Discobolus, a sculpture created by the Athenian Sculptor Myron in around 450 BC, became a model of Greek artistry as well as a symbol of great taste. It was one of the first examples of a man in motion. The poised body in contrast to an almost emotionless face, highlights the athlete's confidence in his sport, almost mirroring Myron's skill in his own field.

By the 18th Century, most scholars had agreed the Ancient Greeks were the height of artistic achievement. As a result, artistic discoveries of other ancient civilisations from this point were studied in comparison; to show progression to sophistication (of the Greeks). This way of thinking became so engrained in society that only recently has the British Museum changed its model for study; researching other civilisation independently as models of development.

This statue was copied endlessly, and became widely popular in the homes of the Romans. What's fascinating is the contrast of such skill and artistry being mindlessly copied; it deadens the piece, giving it a new kitsch role in society. What was once a display of skill and innovation is now an over-examined, over-produced motif of the time.

Even Hitler became part of this fad; it was said The Discobolus was his favourite work of art. It is clear why he favoured this piece, as it demonstrates the perfect body as well as praised technical skill. Whilst a highly important artwork in the history of humanity, the fact that Hitler loved it so much highlights an outdated view of what perfection really is.

Thinking logistically about the satisfaction of the sculpture, the curve is what sets it apart from its historical counterparts. Other representations of bodies and movement prior and of the time were rigid and did not hold the same dynamism. The irony of this lies in the paradoxes when one looks to the historical theories surrounding the curve and the straight line.

The curve has been argued as less effective than the straight line. Even in language this comes through with terms such as 'on the straight and narrow' or 'as the crow flies', referring to on the right path, or the most effective way. However the curve is more beautiful, the long way round could be considered the most enjoyable. The popularity of the Discobolus with the Romans demonstrates the curved figure in art seemed to be a welcome divergence from the straight path of daily life. It was unexpected and therefore beautiful, almost Baroque.

Looking at other examples throughout history, straight can refer to sexuality, in this context it references not deviating from the 'norm'. Historically though; in the 15th and 16th C, the curve was seen as a metaphor for the faultless Creator, rather than a symbol of deviation. Theorists such as Plato and Aristotle formed arguments that circles were perfect, compared to a straight line, as straight lines are infinite, and therefore lack a beginning and an end. However, counter arguments have linked the curved nature of the human soul as a weakness and testament to sin. Straight lines generate true vision, compared to bent rays that distort light.

So taking from this, is the curve only welcome as an escape from daily ritual? A conclusive view being the curve is appealing when in the context of art and fantasy, but not as a logical reality. We can assess this by looking at societal examples throughout more recent history; descriptive or emotive language confusing public view in political speeches, or over the top, decorative architecture distracting from the function of a building or space.

The safety pin is the perfect example of straight and curved combined for the function of the object. It demonstrates a similar paradox by both piercing a surface as well as holding fabric together. The woman is almost as big as the pin, and her pose reflects that of an illogical discus thrower. She awkwardly holds onto the side of the pin with one hand, and with the other presents to us a diamond discus. One must objectify and move the body around to catch a glimpse of the sparkle through her legs – is she hiding the diamond, or is she alluring us in a siren-like move?

Whilst this piece could behave as a safety pin, it is also a decorative brooch, pinning the poised woman into place, and preventing any possible movement. Through this object, I wanted to query our historical view of perfection, calling into question the need to not just place emphasis on the most effective way forward, but to relish in the beauty of the irregular.