GERALD NOLAN ————————————————

4th YEAR SCULPTURE ——.————————

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BY

GERALD NOLAN

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Contents

Illustrations.   Page

Introduction

The practice of sculpture in the nineteenth century entailed
a number of fundamental differences to modern day practice.
The practical necessities of running a sculpture studio produced certain parameters, both ideological and stylistic, within
which works were produced.

The most observable products of the Victorian sculptor today
are the public statues and monuments which were erected by
commission.

I propose to discuss the means of production of public memorial
statuary at that time with reference to the contemporary academic
principles, and to the physical problems of execution. I also
propose to make reference to the effects, uses and subsequent
reaction to public monuments, in particular those erected in
Dublin during the period.

Chapter I - Sculptural Theory and Academic Constraint

In terms of modern art appreciation, it can be difficult to
look at nineteenth century sculpture objectively. Given that
Victorian sculpture was subject to a strong Neo-classical in-
fluence as late as the 1860s and 70s, (if in a somewhat dilute
form), it is easy to dismiss a great amount of it as excessively
conventional and academic compared to modenr art. The intellec-
tual developments of the twentieth century have to a large extent
overshadowed the aesthetic concerns of the nineteenth.

The influential nineteenth century writer, John Ruskin, did
not write a great deal about the sculpture of his time. This
could have been because he perceived stylistic weaknesses in
much of the work produced, as is evident in the statement:

> .... the state of sculpture in modern England, as
> compared with that of the great Ancients, is lite-
> rally one of corrupt and dishonourable death, as
> offered to bright and fameful life.[1]

Despite views such as this, (Ruskin was not typical of his
contemporaries), there is a large amount of critical work which
is contemporary with Victorian sculpture and it is important
to try to understand the nature of the sentiments involved in
the making of and the response to the sculpture.

This contemporary reaction to commemorative public statues is
interesting in terms of the more modern reaction. In a critique
of a new statue of a public figure, the Victorian writers admi-
red teachnique and the objective criterion for success was

realistic imitation.[2] That is, a realistic style used in a
theatrical sense to evoke feelings of sentimental pathos,
patriotism or admiration for the achievements of the person
commemorated. It is true to say that the use of a theatrical
realism is not exactly unknown in modern art, but it could
also be said that in Victorian art, the range of sentiments
being evoked was constrained by the values of quite a diffe-
rent society from that of today. Also, the conventions in use
in the physical form of art works were very much more rigid
in the nineteenth century.

The classification of nineteenth century sculpture, more than
of painting, is often a function of personal opinion. A number
of styles of public sculpture were recognized during the cen-
tury, Neo-classicism gradually being superceded by various
forms of a developing Romanticism towards the end of the
period. After 1850, especially, the situation as regards clas-
sification becomes very complex. Particular works or even
artists themselves could be categorised according to a number
of different theoretical views on the art of sculpture, and
a range of interpretations could be debated for individual
works.

This ambiguity persists throughout the century, it often has
to do with the sculptor's circumstances for, more than their
painter contemporaries, they were bound to the requirements
of their materials and therefore more inclined to caution as
regards stylistic expression.

At the risk of generalising, I think it is true to say that
the various styles of sculpture during the century showed the
influence, more or less pronounced, of an admiration for
classical art. It is in the interpretation of classical ideas
that polemics were created and different philosophies of art
evolved.

The sometimes severe Neo-classical style of the early nine-
teenth century could perhaps be seen as the result of efforts
to progress beyond the Baroque and Rococo styles during the
eighteenth century. This would seem to have led, academically
at any rate, to a certain electicism in classical form which
tended to restrict individual expression.

Among the professors of sculpture at the Royal Academy in
London who made any significant contribution to the sculptural
thinking of the time was Henry Weekes (professor 1869 - 77).

This problem of having a widely accepted and strictly followed
set of criteria as regards excellence in sculpture, (imitative
electicism regarding classical art), seems to have been recog-
nized by him. Speaking of the sculptors of the time he said:

> ... their portraits come so completely up to their
> standards of excellence that there appears to me
> to be no difference between them.[3]

Classical themes and motifs had been fundamental to the visual
arts from the Renaissance on. Neo-classicism, however, differed
in the concisely selected models from antiquity that were held

to embody the timeless virtues of reason and morality, and therefore were felt to be worthy of imitation and serious study. Artists of the period sought to establish aesthetic qualities of truth, purity and nobility which they thought were possessed by the ancient sculpture of Greece and Rome.

Incidentally, the new style was known at the time as the 'true' style or, the 'correct' style. The term 'Neo-classicism' was coined later in the nineteenth century as a pejorative label to describe the style which some critics saw as empty of meaning and devoid of contemporary significance.

This aim of artists towards the revival of antique forms had serious ethical aspirations, however, especially in its earlier developments. The sculptor was to interpret man's spiritual needs and his most refined feelings, in addition to his ideas of moral and intellectual beauty. The intention of the art, in the personification of these virtues, was to inspire the artists fellow man to higher nobility and enlightenment, to create an art which was genuinely concerned with the improvement of society.

In order to achieve this, both theorists and artists advocated a return to long accepted, and unquestioned standards of excellence. As far as sculptors were concerned such a return to first principles meant a return to antiquity.

In the attempt to express man's highest aspirations, elements of both sensualism (reality) and, spiritualism (idealism), were

Fig. 1.

combined. The appeal of the art was to both the senses and to the soul, or such was the intention. A harmonious balance between the spiritual and the sensual was not maintained in all works of art with these aims, note the comment of Ruskin above for example, but the more successful creations did achieve a fusion of the 'real' and the 'ideal', each reinforcing the other, neither drawing attention to itself.

There are two examples of the Neo-classical, or 'correct' style in the early nineteenth century which I will mention. First, 'St. Michael Slaying Satan' (c. 1819 - 26) by the English sculptor John Flaxman (1755 - 1826). (See Fig. 1). Despite the christian theme, the work is unmistakeably in the classical style, in the use of drapery and the idealised handling of physique. The sculptor borrows from religious tradition a theme of courage, heroism and righteous morality which was meant to inspire his contemporaries to develop such virtues in their moral and intellectual lives.

The human figure was considered to be the most worthy of sculptural forms, being the embodiment of the human soul. Contemporary aesthetics held that the most appropriate medium in which to express the figure was sculpture.[4] The marble nude statue was regarded as the sculptural expression of the human soul and antique sculpture, because of its calm and permanence, was considered a suitable model for expressing the spiritual and material values that the nineteenth century believed guided its society.

Fig. 1.

Flaxman here achieves a sense of calm and permanence by his treatment of the marble. The pose used is an active one, yet, the balance and perfection of physique together with the generalised modelling and finish produces a uniformity in the work. Uniformity in the sense of a balance of dynamic tnesions in the figures, giving the impression that the poses are used in order to demonstrate the idealisation of physique rather than to represent dramatic movement alone.

This suppression of irrational emotion in the group is also discernible in 'Hebe' (1916) by the Italian, Antonio Canova (1757 - 1822), (Fig. 2), another example of Neo-classical sculpture. This is a representation of a classical subject which shows the same teachnique of idealisation of physique to achieve a sculptural rationalisation of spiritual idealism. The carving of the left leg is done to represent the same amount of muscular tension as the right leg, even though, correctly speaking, the left should be supporting the body. Again, an active pose is used, as much for the purpose of displaying the symmetry of the body as to represent movement.

Both statues are examples also of the lack of particularising effects used in the representation of the body. All marks of individuality, such as lines in faces or emotive expressions are either absent or subdued. The aim was to create a figure that conforms to a harmony, balance and symmetry that is not found in nature. Neo-classicism subscribed to the ancient idea that sculptors had seen perfection in nature only in certain isolated elements. In the context of anatomy, this meant that

perfection in human form was not to be found in any individual human body. The sculptor could however, combine elements of nature, gathered by observation, to create the perfect human figure, or the 'ideal' since it conformed to an idea in the mind of the artist.

Marble, being organically pure, free from foreign elements and permanent, was seen as the most appropriate medium for the expression of the ideal. The colour and grain of wood was considered unacceptable for ideal statuary, and although bronze was used extensively in public commemorative statues and some other works, especially towards the middle and late nineteenth century, it was considered in purist terms to lack something of the neutrality and dignity of marble. The imperceptible grain and general blandness of marble were preferred so as not to divert the eye from the essential form of the statue.

It made little difference to the nineteenth century patrons and critics that the ancient Greeks coloured their sculpture and that, therefore, the uniformity of tone they admired was not archaeologically correct. In response to debates on the colouring of sculpture the majority of academic opinion seems to have been prepared to accept only a defined amount of representation. John Gibson, and Englishman, working in Rome (under Canova) produced a statue of Venus to which he applied colour to the marble by means of washes rubbed into the porous stone before polishing. He succeeded, he felt in coming closer to antique sculpture and closer to nature in approximating the tones of flesh, drapery and actual materials. Perhaps predictably,

the innovation was not very influential although much discussion
was generated.[5] The feeling of the majority of sculptors was
that all imitation would be relative because its main object,
flesh, can not be represented by marble absolutely illusionis-
tically. It was accepted that sculpture could imitate the
substance and form of objects but not their colour. Not because
it was impossible but because it was felt that this would
defeat the end of genuine illusion,

> the spectator might be fooled for an instant
>
> but would then realise that life and movement
>
> were lacking.[6]

The limitations of the sculpture medium would be more notice-
able and the purpose and intention of the sculpture would be
obscured. In fact, the opinions of the majority of sculptors
regarding the non-use of colour strengthened the claims for
the originality and invention of the artists working in the
'correct' style, who intended to create contemporary sculpture,
appropriate to its time and conditions. That is, they were in-
spired by ancient art, but were not merely making slavish
copies of ancient statues.

There was no precisely defined Neo-classical programme. But
attitudes to nature and antique art were clearly expressed in
the education of artists. It was in this period (late eight-
eenth / early nineteenth centuries) that the old methods of
artistic apprenticeship began to give way to systematic aca-
demic training. Art students were expected to acquaint them-
selves with classical literature, the development of intellect

being regarded as important as the technical training. Technical
training itself proceeded from drawing geometrical solids to
casts of antique statues and studies of the nude model in the
life-class. The routine might be varied according to the branch
of art which the student intended to adopt but the essential
process was the same for all. The student was constantly engaged
in comparing generally accepted examples of artistic excellence
with the visible world around him, as a means of learning how
nature could be purified and idealised.

While the academic system can be said to have codified some
aspects of Neo-classical theory, it also revealed certain
interior conflicts and contradictions which became more pro-
nounced as one generation of students followed another through-
out the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Emphasis on the
or modelled sketch increased as attention was more sharply
focused on the artists integrity and personality.

There were also significant problems regarding the reconcilia-
tion of realism and idealism in art works. Idealism was seen
as distracting from nature according to established principles
of taste. However, the creative process entailed the artist
making decisions based on his own sensibilities and feelings.
Real, or unidealised nature became the source for a more
intuitive and less rational approach to making art.

Changes in emphasis such as these took place gradually and
to widely differing degrees. The manifestation of such changes
in aesthetic philosophy gave rise to the phenomenon of the

growth of Romanticism in art. The term is difficult to define, perhaps because of a somewhat ambiguous relationship with Neo-classicism. It cannot be defined simply as a reaction against Neo-classicism because in many respects the two are based on similar intellectual motives. Both evolved from the need, as it was felt, to develop a greater integrity and honesty in artistic expression. Romanticism shared Neo-classicism's high sense of purpose. The two differ, however, in that Neo-classical art attempts to express universal and timeless values, while the ultimate criterion in Romantic art is the artist's own sensibility. Neo-classicism is identified with reason, Romanticism with passion and feeling.

Romantic sculpture was as committed as the Neo-classical to the human figure, aesthetic success, also was governed by an appropriate balance of the 'real' and the 'ideal'. The ideal being emotive rather than rational. Inspiration was also drawn from antiquity. However, subjects expressing violent emotion and a style characterized by intense and exaggerated movement, often executed in a sketch-like technique distinguish Romantic sculpture from Neo-classical.

I stated earlier that the classification of noneteenth century sculpture could be largely a function of personal opinion. This is especially true when dealing with the concept of Romanticism.

> It is simpler to seek out the presence of
> Romanticism in a particular work than to state
> outright that a particular sculptor was really
> a Romantic.[7]

Fig. 3.

Perhaps a good example of a Romantic sculpture of the period
is 'The Marseillaise' (1833 - 36) by the French sculptor
Francois Rude (1784 - 1855) 'Fig. 3). This is a large stone
relief mounted on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris commemorating
the revolutionary volunteers of 1782. Drawing on Greek and
Roman forms, modern sources, and a certain Baroque style of
composition, the sculptor creates a psychological and physical
intensity which he thought to be appropriate to the event.
Diagonal lines of dramatic movement are worked into the compo-
sition. Noticeably, from the left leg of the classical golden
figure to her outstretched sword, and from the sword to the
soldier at the lower right to the upheld helmet of the central
figure. The head and torso of this figure also echoe those of
the upper goddess figure while the posture of her right leg is
repeated in the figures below. A formal unity is achieved by
these devices while maintaining an energetic composition. The
animation of the figures and the density of the composition
achieved by the exaggeration of gesture and anatomical detail
contrast with the calm and the weightlessness of the statues
mentioned previously.

It is simplistic to suggest that the difference between Neo-
classicism and Romanticism can be illustrated clearly by des-
cription of the works. To refer to another piece of sculpture
to make this point, I would refer to 'The Greek Slave' (1843)
(Fig. 4) by Hiram Powers (1805 - 73), an American sculptor.
This work could be seen as a naturalistic development of the
'correct' style or categorised according to Romantic principles.
It draws for its form on the Venus de Medici of ancient art.

Fig. 4.

There is a certain Neo-classical restraint yet also a sensual
naturalness, a feeling that this is perhaps a portrait of a
real woman rather than an idealised female figure. Its inspi-
ration, incidentally, was the Greek War of Independence and
obliquely, the slavery issue in America.[8] It shares with the
Rude relief a visceral moral conviction about social events
relative to the cerebral social analysis of the Neo-classical
philosophy in its purest form.

In a discussion of the divergent trends of nineteenth century
art the difficulty lies in the varied frames of reference of
writers on the subject. The process of classification of art
and artists is itself suspect because our own sensibility
towards works of the past continues to change from one genera-
tion to the next. The writers and critics of the time were
attempting to express wholly new concepts, to approach their
subject matter in a different manner. The justification for
the classification of works by their contemporary writers was
relative, obviously, to the philosophy and sociology of the
time and there is a danger of applying modern attitudes to the
subject. This danger particularly applies to sculpture, if
only because of the circumstances of sculptors and the technical
reasons described in the next chapter. The mechanics of public
sculpture production had influences on the level of expression
which was possible. The mention of Neo-classicism and Romanti-
cism here is intended to give some idea of the aesthetic
reasons for the production of public monuments in the last
century and hence, to try to understand the responses to and
the effects of these works.

It is true that, later in the century, there were more complex developments in art theory. Notably there was the evolution of the freer, more expressive style in English sculpture known as the New Sculpture between 1880 and 1910, and the beginnings of Impressionism on the Continent. In the context of public monuments, however, because of their public nature and intention, the subtle classification of individual works is not so important as a general understanding of the aesthetic principles involved in their production.

On the question of the importance of aesthetic theory in the teaching of the Royal Academy (I have already mentioned Henry Weekes as professor), the attitude of the professors of sculpture to theorising seems to have been that it was secondary and subordinate to practical training of students.

> .... practical instruction can be carried on in
>
> the schools only, with the modelling tool in
>
> hand, and the clay to operate upon.[10]

Weekes' successor, Thomas Woolner (professor 1877 - 79), also held this view and after his retirement the post was not filled until the appointment of Alfred Gilbert in 1900. Considering that the makers of the large public monuments of the time received their training at the Academy or at similar institutions, and considering that the training took the form of an intensive regime of drawing and modelling studies, based on the idea of an ideal standard of execution, the homogeneity of form and design of public monuments can be better understood. An intimate understanding of the human form particularly and its potential for the expression of abstract emotions and attitudes

could conceivably lead to development and even some standar-
disation of techniques in the monumental genre.

Footnotes Chapter I

1. Benedict Read, <u>Victorian Sculpture</u>, p. 4, (Orig. Ruskin, Works vol. XX).

2. Ibid, p. 5.

3. Henry Weekes, <u>Lectures on Art</u>, p. 78.

4. Benedict Read, <u>Victorian Sculptures</u>, p. 15, (Quotation of Sir Charles Eastlake).

5. Ibid, pp. 25 - 26.

6. Ibid, p. 15, (Eastlake).

7. Maurice Rheims, <u>19th Century Sculpture</u>, p. 41.

8. Ibid, p. 48.

9. Stuart Macdonald, <u>The History and Philosophy of Art Education</u>,
   Royal Academy founded 1867, london,
   Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures 1835,
   Slade School founded 1871,
   Normal School of Design founded 1837 (later Central Art
   Training School and in 1901 Royal College of Art).

   It is necessary to mention the existance of other institutions besides the Royal Academy. Mention of the Academy in the text is relevant to the training of John Henry Foley (see chapter III).

10. Benedict Read, <u>Victorian Sculpture</u>, p. 16.

Chapter II - Working Methods and Practical Constraints

It is true to say that, in the nineteenth century, sculpture
as a discipline was slower to follow developments in art theory
generally then other branches of art, for example, painting.[1]
Sculptors, particularly as regards large works, often showed
a stylistic caution in their choices of forms even when they
professed to a particular style or philosophy. Apart from opi-
nions of individual artists there are important material reasons
for this circumstance.

The main source of income for professional sculptors at this
time was in the execution of commissions for public works. This
necessitated the use of large studios where the artist himself
worked, together with a number of assistants, often younger or
less well-known artists and a number of craftsmen and tradesmen.
All these would not necessarily be employed full-time but would
be hired when necessary at a particular stage of the work. The
cost of such an activity, together with the mere physical labour
of sculpture production, were held to be difficulties inherent
to the discipline. (Sculptors were subject to the same diffi-
culties as regards the sale of works as were painters while
being subject to greater financial commitments.)

The first stage in the execution of a work could be a drawing.
When working on portraits particularly it was recommended that
this be done with great accuracy. The English sculptor, John
Gibson, used compasses and callipers when drawing sitters.
Carefully measured profiles and other views were completed and

later used as working drawings for clay models. The practice
of measuring allowed increases in scale in the three dimensio-
nal stages.

The drawing stage was not absolutely essential however, and
many artists modelled portraits directly in clay from life.
This could depend, obviously, on the circumstances, whether
the likeness was recorded in the studio or not. Wax could also
be used as a material at this stage, it was considered superior
because of its cleanliness compared to clay or plaster but it
was too expensive to use in longer works.

The fragility of clay as a medium meant that if the work was
to survive, the clay model has at this stage to be rendered
in plaster. If the clay model had been a miniature version of
the finished piece the scaling up would be done at this stage.

The process involved the construction of a full scale model,
either in clay or plaster. A few artists worked in plaster
directly by carving and modelling, but it was difficult and
could be more expensive. The modelling of the full size figure
had to be done with the material of the full size figure in
mind. Surfaces which might suit realization in marble might
require different treatments and finishes to those which would
suit bronze.

A plaster model would then be produced from this full size
clay model by a 'waste-mould' process. The modelling and work
up to this stage would be done by the artist himself or perhaps

by senior students if the work was of monumental proportions.
At the plaster casting stage the work would generally be handed
over to tradesmen employed at the studio as this is purely a
mechanical stage. A plaster mould would be built around the
figure, the inner layers tinted, which was merely split in two
or into sections when dry. The original plaster model was cast
in this mould which was chipped off from the outside, hence the
term 'waste-mould'. The tinted layer served to show that the
model within the mould was being reached.

The term 'original plaster model' is used extensively in texts
about sculpture of this period.

The work was often exhibited at this stage, for instance at
the Royal Academy exhibitions or in competitions for the gran-
ting of commissions. The cost of marble or bronze being prohi-
bitive, a work could remain at this stage through lack of
patronage.

Although plaster is more durable than clay it is nevertheless
quite fragile in the long term. It is for this reason that a
large amount of the opus of the Victorian sculptors has been
lost. Works which were left at this stage through lack of pa-
tronage have tended to disintegrate or be destroyed or simply
lost after the decline of the practice of individual sculptors.

The plaster model functioned as a semi-permanent record of the
artist's work, and as a medium of translation to other media,
marble or bronze, should a patron become interested.

Apart from the expense simply of the material for the final version, a major contribution to the total cost of a work was the laborious procedure of execution. For instance, the casting of a work in bronze in a highly technical and elaborate process, required specialist expertise. This, in fact, was almost always doen by professional foundery firms.

The standard method of bronze casting throughout most of the last century was sand casting. This meant having an outer mould and an inner one, both made from a special sand which could be modelled like clay when moist and baked hard when ready to use in casting. The mould and the core respectively a 'negative' and 'positive', formally derived from the plaster model.

A layer would be taken off the inner core, as thick as the bronze was required to be and the core would then be placed in position inside the mould. Here it was supported by iron bars projecting through the mould into it at right angles to prevent it touching the mould or moving about. The basic principle was that molten bronze was introduced between the mould and the forced down inner core and allowed to harden. The mould and core were then removed and the bronze form was left. Furthermore, it was usual for technical reasons that a work would be cast in sections so that a considerable amount of skilled metalwork was still involved in rivetting and fine finishing of the bronze.

Another method of bronze casting, known as the 'lost wax' process was introduced from the Continent late in the last century but was not so widely used as the method described above. It

involved using an inner core of wax which was melted and re-
placed by the molten bronze.

The other principle medium, marble, was also expensive and
difficult to work with. It was almost always imported and it
was heavy and bulky which always added to costs. In addition
to plain logistical problems, it was possible for a flaw in a
block of marble to be undetected until work had started on it.

The design of a statue was transferred from the model to the
marble in three dimensions. This was done by the use of a
system of pointers and measurements. Measurements could be taken
from a fixed point to various salient features of the plaster
model and then marked into the marble.

At this stage either professional stone carvers or student
sculptors would cut away the marble until a rough version of
the finished piece was produced. Finally the fine carving would
be completed by the master sculptor.

With regard to the lives of sculptors at this time, the compara-
tive lifestyles of successful and less well known artists could
vary a great deal. This situation is of course true of any
period, but, in the Victorian situation, success meant becoming
part of the system of patronage through commissions and the
spreading of one's reputation within particular social circles.[2]
If a sculptor had no independent means or, if patronage was not
forthcoming, the practice of sculpture could be impossible
considering the nature of the work a sculptor was expected to
produce.

The studio system was occasionally questioned during the period, particularly in relation to the question of whether the extensive use of assistants in the work justified the claim of the work being the original product of one artist. Certainly, in view of the scale of operations in the studio, it could be reasonably assumed that only the fine finishing of marble carving, for instance would be done by the master artist. There were many cases, even so, of particular artists being accused of allowing the work of less prosperous sculptors to stand as their own creations. These may or may not be cases of mere professional jealousy, as also applies to cases of sculptors being accused of using social connections to influence the granting of commissions.[3]

The studio system was also felt, in some circles, to contribute to the degradation of the art to a factory situation in which replicas and small decorative pieces were produced for sale to private buyers. The reasonable durability of plaster models allowed such replicas and miniatures to be produced in bulk to satisfy fashionable demands, while the economic necessity of the studio demanded that some steady source of income be exploited.

In spite of any injustices or defects of the system in the opinions of the more idealistic critics it could be said that its value in terms of the education and general practical training of the assistants compensated for this. The general feeling among sculptors seems to have been that the Royal Academy was inadequate in this respect. It was felt that the Academy placed too much emphasis on its annual exhibition and not enough on

formal tuition. The more practical and business realities of
running a studio obviously could not be taught in the academic
training situation.

In a studio a student /assistant would begin to make the social
contacts necessary to do business professionally. It was a
fashionable practice at the time for would-be patrons and admi-
rers of art to visit studios of well-known artists with a view
to purchasing small works and portrait busts and occasionally
to discuss large commissions. As well as this aspect the studios
offered a living to younger artists in what was a precarious
profession to enter. Outstanding students within the studio
system also stood a good chance of inheriting commissions on
the death of a master, together with the possibility of gaining
a certain reputation by association.

When the artist John Henry Foley died, his assistants Thomas
Brock and G.F. Teniswood, inherited several commissions which
were in progress, including the O'Connell Monument, Dublin,
elements of the Albert Memorial, London and the statue of Vis-
count Gough for Phoenix Park, Dublin.

The preceding description of the working methods of sculptors
demonstrated that in order to overcome the practical limitations
of the art, it was necessary to have a patron. The means of
attracting patronage were various, I have already mentioned
studio visits and the fact that private lobbying was possible.

Probably the principle means of attracting attention to art work

was exhibiting. There were a number of individual prestige occasions throughout the century (Great Exhibition in London of 1851, and the London International Exhibition of 1862) which were good opportunities for advertisement and publicity. On the whole these events were intended as formal demonstrations of the art rather than opportunities for market transactions.

The annual Royal Academy exhibition was intended as a more practical event with the specific end of attracting business. However, there was a lot of criticism of the manner and sur- roundings in which the sculpture was exhibited there. Pieces were usually shown in separate rooms from paintings and this created crowding of the art which resulted in its being shown to a disadvantage. Even a well-known and successful artist like John Foley did not exhibit at the Academy after 1861 for precisely these reasons. Apart from large exhibitions like the Academy's and some other art societies and institutions, sculp- ture exhibitions were not frequent and one-man exhibitions were very rare. In fact, the practice of receiving visitors in the studio would seem to correspond to the situation of the one-man exhibition in Victorian times.

Competitive exhibitions also existed, the purpose being, to select designs to fulfil specific projects. Sculptors submitted designs and models for public monuments and memorials in this way. Disadvantages of this were that proposals could be examined by individuals or committees who were not necessarily qualified to make aesthetic judgements or who did not make adequate allo- wances, financial or otherwise, for the execution of the work.

Sculptors nevertheless persisted in this field. As a form of patronage, the public memorial monument could bring considerable prestige. On the question of patronage, there is a danger of applying modern attitudes to the concept as regards the claim that work produced by this means was considered to be Art or merely a commercial undertaking in order to earn money. The question could be raised as to whether academic art theory can in fact be applied to works which were made, as it were, to order. However, in view of the problems of realisation and execution of all types of sculpture in the last century, the distinction, as seen by modern eyes, between public commissions and the artist's own creative output was less significant, in terms of the application of aesthetic principles to the work, in the attitudes of Victorian sculptors.

In these descriptions of the technical processes of sculpture making and the nature of patronage I have attempted to show the extent to which the sculptors of the time were bound to the requirements of their materials. Here we see the physical parameters within which works were produced, which, when looked at in the context of nineteenth century art theory, can perhaps give some point of reference in examining the form taken by public sculpture of the period.

Footnotes Chapter II

1. Maurice Rheims, 19th Century Sculpture, Introduction.

2. B. Read, Victorian Sculpture, p. 50.

3. Ibid, p. 66.

Chapter III   -   <u>Uses and Effects of Monuments with reference</u>
                  <u>to the work of John Henry Foley</u>

The tradition of erecting public monuments had been established
in its modern form in the eighteenth century.[1] Works in Dublin
- such as King William III (1701) by Grimling Gibbons in
College Green, George I on Essex Bridge and George II in Steph-
ens Green by Van Nost - were erected in that period. (These
have subsequently been removed or destroyed for obvious politi-
cal reasons.) In England, national monuments were set up in
Westminster Abbey to military and political leaders. About 1790
there were proposals for monuments to general benefactors of
the nation in St. Pauls Cathedral. The Napoleonic Wars also
caused an increased demand for memorials to national heroes which
grew during Victorian times to the proportions of a minor indus-
try. The nineteenth century monuments became distinguished by
increasing size and elaboration and commemoration of collective
national achievements or the personification of national ideals
as symbolised by leader figures.

The journalistic response to memorial sculpture in the streets
in Victorian times, in the main, consisted of reports which
read as mere announcements. It would be stated that a particu-
lar statue had been completed by a certaim sculptor and a des-
cription of the statue was generally provided. Opinions as to
the quality of the work were limited to such aspects as realistic
likeness in portraiture, the decorative effectiveness of the
monument, and some discussion of whether the work was appropr
iate in its monumental impressiveness to the prescribed public

opinion of the person commemorated.

The question arises here whether the makers of certain nine-
teenth century public commemorative and memorial statues saw
themselves as being involved in propaganda, outside of the
aesthetic concerns of their art. Certainly, the status of 'art'
was emphatically claimed for public monuments. This despite
the fact that the form of such works was often constrained
stylistically in order to make ir appeal to a public audience
rather than to the senses of the art connoisseur. Nevertheless,
in the situation where a large sculpture depended for its reali-
sation on the approval of one or more prominent or influential
members of society it is to be expected that the opinions and
attitudes of these people would be reflected in their choice.

It is a matter of conjecture in any examination of a public
memorial as to what exactly were the attitudes of the artist
to the particular subject of the memorial, beyond assuming some
general approval of the idea.

All branches of theoretical artistic thinking in the period
acknowledged the usefulness of artistic development and refine-
ment of technique when applied to the task of the improvement of
society.[2] It was very well appreciated that aesthetic effect
was a powerful means of mass-communication. It is also manifest
from the amount of 'poetic' works produced by sculptors that
the most successful and highly regarded of them were indeed
adept in the principles of visual communication as they saw
them. In their choice of designs and forms in public sculpture

Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.

it must be assumed that the artists were fully aware of the
effects on the public mind of their works and that, for a
monument to have political implications, in the broad sense of
the word, was an acceptable aspect of its production.

One of the best known sculptors of the Victorian period, espe-
cially as a supplier of monuments and official statuary was
John Henry Foley (1818 - 74). His work is a good example of
the results of using the skills of a proficient sculptor to
achieve the power of effect necessary in a monumental public
work.

He was born in Dublin, the son of an English shopkeeper who
had settled in the city. He did not receive much education and
any learning he afterwards acquired was through his own effort.
At the age of thirteen he entered the art school of the Royal
Dublin Society to study sculpture. He was a successful student,
winning prizes for modelling and drawing, and in 1834, aged 16,
he left Dublin for London. The following year he became a stu-
dent at the Royal Academy. He was influenced by Canova and
Flaxman in his earlier work, for example 'Bacchus and Ino' (Fig.
5), exhibited in 1840 at the Academy and which was commissioned
to be executed in marble. His reputation grew as he exhibited
this and other ideal works throughout the 1840s and he began to
receive orders for portrait busts and statues. Ideal works such
as 'Youth at the Stream' (1844) and 'Innocence' (1847) Fig. 6 +
7) have a sense of charm and unsophisticated sentiment which be-
lie Foley's versability as a portrait sculptor and his flair

Fig. 8.

Fig. 9.

Fig. 10.

Fig. 11.a.

for monumental design. He was elected a member of the Royal Academy in 1858 and he established himself as one of the leading producers of public monuments in Britain and Ireland.

Some familiar examples of his work in Dublin include 'Grattan' (Fig. 8) in College Green, and the statues of 'Goldsmith (Fig. 9) and Burke (Fig. 10) (1864 and 1868) in front of Trinity College. These stand as examples of Foley's more mature work. The use of contemporary costumes and naturalistic portraiture in a modern feature while the formality of the classicism that runs through all of Foley's work gave his monuments the severity which impressed potential patrons.

He was known for a conscientiousness in his execution which made him slow in carrying out commissions, in the last years of his life he was obliged to decline many orders for this reason and because of failing health.

Among his major works are the O'Connell Monument (Fig. 11) in Dublin and the central figure in the Albert Memorial (Fig, 12) in London, also the group 'Asia' (Fig. 13) a part of the latter.

The London Albert Memorial (1876), for sheer size, scale, elaboration and complexity, is outstanding among commemorative monuments in Victorian Britain. The structure was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, an architect and was conceived as a tour-de-force of British monumental sculpture and architecture at the time, in recognition of the extensive patronage given by Prince Albert to the arts during his lifetime. The architectural

Fig. 12.a

Fig. 13.
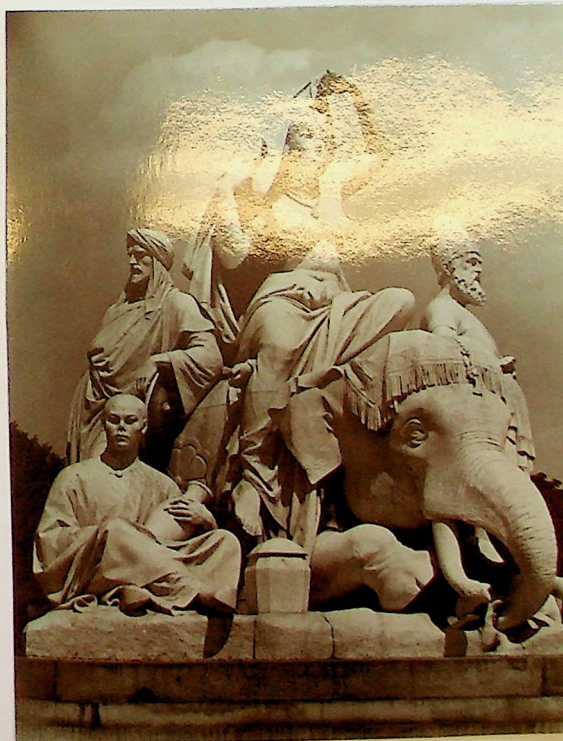
element is seen in the highly ornamented canopy over the central figure, done in the prevailing Gothic style of Victorian architecture.

The extremely ornamental design of the whole monument shows diverse historical influences, church gothic, classical and the modern naturalistic sculpture of the time.

The work's programme has been described as reflecting, symbolically but accurately, the Prince's belief in the edifying role of the arts, the promise of advances through science and the benefits of material progress, and the belief in the power of the British Empire to spread these benefits to the four corners of the earth.[3]

These four corners are represented on the monument by four groups at its outermost corners, portraying the continents of America, Africa, Asia and Europe. Each is by a different sculptor, and each has its separate signification. Foley's group, 'Asia' contains symbolic figures representing Asian nations and cultures. India is shown as a central female figure, mounted higher than the other figures, reflecting its importance in the British Empire. The figure is shown lifting a veil from her eyes, the reference to the enlightening influence of Britain is obvious.

The inner corners of the monument also have four groups representing Commerce, Engineering, Manufacturers and Agriculture. A frieze that runs around the base depicts the edifying arts,

Fig. 12.b.

through significant representatives of each, builders, archi-
tects, sculptors, musicians, writers and painters.

At the centre point of the monument is Foley's large seated
figure of Prince Albert. This portrait is in a larger scale to
the figures in the rest of the monument, distinguishing the por-
trait from the symbolic and allegorical parts of the work. The
use of symbolism is a common feature in Victorian monuments.
The device of including secondary groups or figures to support
and emphasise the elevation of the subject could be seen as an
attempt to include some poetic element into the communication
of prevailing establishment attitudes. By including an easily
deciphered symbolic element, combined perhaps with a certain
amount of sentimentality or visual novelty, the sympathy of a
majority among the public can be gained and a certain justifi-
cation of the concept of the monument is achieved.[4]

This is not to say that the majority of Victorian commemorative
monuments were inflicetd in some sense on an unwilling public,
merely that the relationship between art forms and the percep-
tion of meaning could be exploited for what was seen as the
greater benefit of society.

In 1866 Foley was given the commission to execute the O'Connell
Monument (Fig. 14) in Dublin. There was much discussion over
this and objections were raised against giving the work to an
artist who worked in London. Although the modelling of the
figures had been completed, Foley died before the monument was
finished in 1878 and his assistant Thomas Brock supervised the

Fig. 11.b.

Fig. 11.c.

casting and placing of the figure. His contributions to the Albert Memorial also were not finally installed until after his death by another assistant, G.F. Teniswood.

The style of the O'Connell Monument is somewhat more restrained than the Albert Memorial in London. There is less architectural decoration although there is a similar use of props, secondary figures surrounding the centrail portrait. The base has four large allegorical figures, winged Victories representing Patriotism (with sword and shield), Courage (grasping a snake and holding a bundle of reeds to symbolise strength through unity), Fidelity (with a dog and a mariner's compass) and Eloquence (holding a roll of documents and with outstretched oratorical hand). These figures were modelled largely by Brock after Foley's death but their concept and design had been Foley's. Above on the pedestal in a drum relief at the centre of which is a figure of Erin standing on her broken chains and pointing above to the large statue of O'Connell. To her right is a Catholic bishop leading a youth by the hand and pointing to the Act of Catholic Emancipation in Erin's hand. The bishop is surrounded by a number of priests, forming a group representing the Church. Following these to the right are the historian with a book, the painter and the musician (holding a scroll). Next come the craftsman (with tools), the soldier and sailor, the Peer and the Commoner, Doctors of Law and Medicine in academic robes, the scientist, the architect, the merchant, the representatives of the peasantry and working classes. The 13 foot statue of O'Connell is executed in a larger scale than the figures below, as is the case with Albert in the London work.

Fig. 15.

These descriptions of some major surviving examples of Victorian memorial monuments show the common design elements of such structures. The elaborate and decorative incorporation of secondary sculptural elements and the prominent siting of these monuments is contributary to their effect, and also to the perception of such monuments as political phenomena. The use of large and impressive pedestals and enlarged portraits stylises the concept of the glorification of a particular personality, whose ideals, policies and actions are well known to the public. This produces, in effect, a plainly declared political statement which is distinguishable and separable from the aesthetic elements of the work in the narrower sense.

The propagandistic nature of several Victorian monuments in Dublin has resulted in their being interfered with in various ways since their original placement.

A national memorial to Queen Victoria (Fig. 15) by the Irish sculptor John Hughes (1865 - 1941) was unveiled in 1908 in the lawn outside Leinster House. Again this took the form of a large portrait on an elaborate pedestal. The pedestal incorporated bronze statues, one depicting a wounded Irish soldier, with Erin presenting him with a laurel crown, also a bronze figure representing Peace and another figure of Fame. From the start, this monument was never considered a success, it has been called variously 'Ireland's Revenge' and 'The Hippopotamus' because of its aggressive and ugly representation of Victoria. Also, after independence, attempts were made to have it removed because of its position in front of the new Government buildings

Remains of 'Carlisle' and 'Gough' in
Works Depot, Dublin.

of the Republican state. It was in fact removed in 1948 and
is kept at present by the Board of Works in a depot in Daingean
Reformatory, Co. Offaly. Its removal was possibly prompted by
the more radical treatment given to some other memorial statues
in Dublin. Foley's statues of Lord Carlisle (1870), a nineteenth
century Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and the equestrian bronze
of Viscount Gough (1875) used to be in Phoenix Park. These were
blown up by the IRA and brought down without completely destroy-
ing them. The same thing happened to Van Nost's George II in
Stephens Green and to Gibbon's William III in College Green,
both large equestrian statues. The former, incidentally, was
demolished by bombing in May 1937 on the day of the coronation
of George VI, the latter was only brought down after several
attempts in 1929, after which the remains were removed by the
Board of Works because of a danger of collapse. The remains of
'Carlisle' and 'Gough' are also kept in the Board of Works' depot.
Apparently the other statues were more completely destroyed and
not preserved.

Footnotes Chapter III

1. W.B. Stanford, Ireland and the Classical Tradition, p. 121 - 2.
2. Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, From the Classicists to the Impressionists, Preface.
3. Charles Handley-Read,'The Albert Memorial Reassessed,' Country Life.
4. Maurice Rheims, 19th Century Sculpture, p 225 - 226.

Conclusion – On the nature of propaganda in Victorian memorials

> It happens only exceptionally... that the urge towards
> artistic creation asserts itself and leads to the
> genesis of works of art without the presence of social
> needs and demands.[1]

This quotation from an essay by Arnold Hauser on the 'Role of
the Artist in the Life of Society', subtitled Propaganda and
Ideology, defines the position of the Victorian sculptors with
respect to public monuments. The nature of the work they produced
inclines towards propaganda both because of the prevailing styles
of sculpture and the practical problems of its production. The
refinement of naturalistic representation caused the evolution
of unsophisticated visual motifs and produced a situation where
a readable system of symbolism and allegory could be used. Social
and financial concerns of sculptors, together with the demands
of their working methods allowed access to the production of
public sculpture to whatever sections of society possessed the
influence and the power to exploit the condition of the art.

Hauser draws a distinction between propaganda and ideology.

> (the artists)... works may bear the character
> of blatant propaganda or of a veiled, hidden,
> dislocated ideology.[2]

The point here is that the expression of interests, ideas and
judgements in art can be overt and obvious or that the impulse
which is exercised can be expressed in a more subtle, unconscious

manner. Ideology can be concealed and sublimated within the
substance of the art work and in fact, because of its subtlety,
the effect is stronger. The less obviously a particular social
or political tendency is expressed the stronger the statement
may be towards this end. Propaganda is characterised by direct,
unequivocal statement, the perogative of a powerful and stable
society which sees no need to justify itself. Only a society
which feels itself in danger has need of permissive, convincing
ideology. The development of the elaborate public memorial
in Victorian times, by this analysis, falls into the category
of propaganda. The stability and power of the British Empire,
including the various shades of political opinion within it,
provided the context for the erection of monuments, which, when
removed in time from the safety of their intended situation,
were subject to responses which they were not designed to
defend themselves against.

The unsuitability of the rhetoric of propaganda to changing
times has proved to be a greater factor in the reactions to
Dublin's monuments than considerations of their artistic merit.
The preservation of the O'Connell Monument is indicative of its
status as a symbol of Irish effort towards independence. Being
in the 'grand' manner of Victorian memorials, its propaganda is
explicit, and bearing in mind that its effect is justified and
so much accepted in the context of modern Irish society and
politics, it can be imagined that the effects of similar works,
attempting the justification of the British establishment, can
only have been correspondingly discordant and out of place.

Modern writing on the subject of nineteenth century sculpture
usually deals with the work of the established artists of the
time in terms of their being the practitioners of an outdated
and stifling academicism.[3] The refined classicism of Canova cast
a long shadow over the sculpture of the century and, notwith-
standing the influences of the romantic movements on the academic
theory of the day, Rodin and his contemporaries are seen as
the innovators of the most significant progress to be made in
sculpture of the era. It could be said, however, that the true
originality of the public monumental sculpture of the last
century lies in its public utility, for a public whose taste
was not sophisticated but still responded to noble actions and
fine sentiments. It is not perhaps the statues which are outdated,
but rather the sentiments they were intended to express. The
fact that the simple values of patriotism, solemnity and heroism
are perhaps too far removed from the modern mentality to be
taken absolutely seriously has given rise to the modern oppro-
bium of an art form, which, even if it has not disappeared
completely, has not outlived its time in its former prominence.

Footnotes Conclusion

1. Arnold Hauser, <u>The Sociology of Art</u>, p. 215.
2. Ibid, p. 216.
3. Germain Bazin, for example in, <u>The History of World Sculpture</u>, p. 84.

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Correspondence

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