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The Meaning of Art

Donatello's Gattamelata – Symbolism of Humanism

Equestrian statue of Gattamelata is one of the most famous sculpture by the Italian artist named Donatello. The sculpture was made in the years 1453, during the early Renaissance era and sheds light on the art forms of that specific era. The sculpture holds a significant position in the history as it depicts the figures of an Italian military leader, who were called condottiero during that time period, named Erasmo da Narni, commonly known as Gattamelata. He belonged to the military of Venice, which was the ruling force over Padua during that time of history. The military leader was acknowledged for his services after his death, due to which his sculpture was made and placed in front of the main church of the city. The sculpture still stands high in Piazza del Santo, which is in Padua, Italy. The sculpture is greatly important in history because of the fact that only the sculptures of the rulers were made and placed in the important places of society. Donatello's Gattamelata was first of its kind which acknowledged the services of a military leader and paid him such high regard that the sculpture is still standing intact even after centuries. Donatello's Gattamelata may highlight the changing preferences of the artist of the Renaissance era who incorporated the humanist ideology in their sculptures and other artworks.

Donatello's Gattamelata is one of the most famous sculptures of not only its own time period but also of the modern world. Erasmo da Narni was one of the most remarkable military leaders who protected Venice for his whole life while taking part in a number of battles. After his death, the Republic of Venice not only allowed but also paid for the creation of his sculpture, in order to acknowledge his services for the state and its people. This was a significant gesture of the states' authorities, who allowed the sculpture of a military leader, as initially only the sculptures of the rulers were allowed to be placed in the important places of the city and state. The sculpture of Gattamelata also set an example for the future artist and opened the door of sculpturing of the military heroes. The sculpturing of a military leader highlights the changes taking place in the Renaissance era, as the sculpture of Gattamelata was formed on the humanistic level, keeping in view the humanism ideology. It was sharply different from the sculptures of the rulers in the way that they were portrayed in a larger than life manner, while that of Gattamelata was quite realistic and represented the original figure of the military leader. There was no exaggeration or manipulation, which is the basic ideology behind the humanism form of sculptures and artworks. The sculpture of Gattamelata also represents the humanism ideology in the way that the features of the sculpture were quite close to that of his real personality. Before the humanism trends of the Renaissance era, the expressions of the sculptures were not given much importance, as they were exaggerated and presented in a larger than life appearance (Wheat, 7).

The sculpture of Gattamelata represented him in his armor, sitting high and alert on his horse. The sculpture also hints that he is looking at quite a distance, and it can be assumed that the focus of his gaze is the enemy force. The reason for the assumption is the expression on the face of the military leader, which is quite serious as well as depicts that he is in some deep thought. The sculptor, Donatello has represented Gattamelata as an alert leader, who has a sharp eye on his enemies and has the capability of assessing their strategies and ensuring their defeat. He is holding the reins of the horse in quite an attentive manner, and the horse is also sculptured in the way as if he is ready for the very next move and command of his master. The horse and his master are sculptured as the epitomes of power and strength which are also one of the main themes of the humanism and individualism ideology of the renaissance era. Another important thing which highlights the humanism theme of the renaissance era is the realistic depiction of the horse as well. He is depicted as self-contained, alert, as well as courageous, which are the supreme qualities of the horses. He seems quite loyal to his master and ready to follow each and every command of the rider, who is his master, which is the main reason that the rider is eyeing the enemy forces present at a distance, instead of focusing on controlling the horse. Moreover, the sculpture also depicts Gattamelata carrying a military sword, as well as a baton, which is the symbolism of his status and position. Bergstein claims that Donatello has presented the sculpture of Gattamelata which highlights the supreme years of his authority, power and wisdom. He has not depicted him during the last stage of his life, in order to not depict him as weak or failing at physical health. The sculpture highlights him as the epitome of power, valor and bravery (Bergstein, and Donatello, 845).

 Apart from the figure of Gattamelata and his horse, the sculpture also consists of a pedestal present under the horse. It contains two reliefs having two fake doors, below it. The critics are of the view that the doors symbolize the entry to the underworld. One relief has two putti inscribed on it, while the other consists of the figure of an angle in the battle armor. The sculpture of the pedestal, as well as its details, shed light on the circumstances of that time period. The whole sculpture is made of bronze utilizing the lost wax technique. Making the bronze sculpture was a common practice during that time period, however, this specific artwork by Donatello is different in the way that it has used the humanism ideology utilizing the lost wax technique. Less importance was paid to highlighting the features and emotions of the subject of the sculpture and the practice started from the sculpture of Gattamelata. The humanism ideology strengthens, as well as highlights the purpose of the sculpture of Gattamelata which was to acknowledge his bravery, power, wisdom and service for the Republic of Venice. It still stands high in Padua, Italy as the symbol of his remarkable military service, as well as the mastery of Donatello who had created the sculpture (Donatello).

Donatello's Gattamelata is the symbolism of humanism in the way that it is sculptured in a realistic manner. It highlights the changing themes of the Renaissance era, which paid less heed to the depiction of the emotions and facial expression of the subject. Moreover, the sculptures were presented in a larger than life manner, which was then defied through the humanism ideology which preferred more realistic and humanistic presentations, in order to make them close to reality. The sculpture is made of bronze, using the lost wax technique, which was also an important feature of the humanism ideology. The sculpture acknowledges the bravery, power and wisdom of Gattamelata, as well as pays tribute to him. It still, stands tall and high in modern-day Padua, Italy, after centuries of its creation.

Works Cited

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