



DONATELLO: SCULPTING THE RENAISSANCE

Teachers' Resource for Key Stages 4 & 5

V&A

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The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance. Its collection of 2.7 million objects spans over 5,000 years of human creativity. Each object in the museum has a different story to tell and can spark different questions about our connection to art and design.

The V&A Object Discussion Cards in this pack showcase objects from the V&A *Donatello: Sculpting the Renaissance* exhibition. Each Object Discussion Card encourages object-based learning and allows students to develop critical, creative and collaborative-thinking skills with the support of teachers and educators. Broad over-arching themes within this resource relating to Donatello's work include innovation, collaboration, inspiration and making.

Guidance for teachers and educators

These cards can be used while visiting the V&A or to support object-based learning in the classroom. You can use the cards as posters in your classroom after the activity. Before starting, please check the suitability of the content of the cards and questions for your students. Students can use the cards for individual work, but we recommend students refer to them in small groups to encourage peer-to-peer discussion. Or, in some cases, you may wish to facilitate the discussion. Each card includes an object image, a short object description and discussion questions. Encourage your students to take time to look at or draw the object before taking turns to read the description aloud and questions to their group. Some cards include more than one object to prompt students to make interesting connections between objects. We suggest giving students about 5-10 minutes to work through the questions on each card.

Managing student discussion

We recommend voicing the following discussion guidelines before students start:

- Allow everyone in the group to voice their opinion. Be kind, patient and respectful of other people's views and ideas.
- Don't worry if you don't know what your opinion is yet. Ask further questions to your group or do more research to help you decide.
- Remember that everyone's opinion is valid. If someone has a different opinion to you, listen to them and ask them to explain their reasoning – it might change your own viewpoint.

Supported by Rocco Forte Hotels

This exhibition is organised by the V&A Museum, London in collaboration with the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi and the Musei del Bargello in Florence, and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Cover image: Detail of *The Ascension with Christ giving the Keys to St Peter*, by Donatello (1386-1466), about 1428–1430, marble, Florence, Italy

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Further questions

As well as the discussion points on the cards, use the questions below to support students to analyse the artworks:

SUBJECT: What can you see in the image?

AESTHETIC: What does it look like?
How would you describe the features of the artwork?

COMPOSITION: How are the figures arranged in relation to one another and to the viewer? Why do you think this is?

MEANING: What do you think the artist is trying to make you feel when you look at this artwork?

MATERIAL: What do you think the artwork is made from?
How do you think it would have been made?

Interview with V&A Artist in Residence

At the end of this resource, you will find an interview with Rebecca Stevenson, V&A Artist in Residence. Rebecca's residency, *Shifting Perspectives*, coincides with the *Donatello: Sculpting the Renaissance* Exhibition. The interview has been conducted by a member of the V&A Youth Collective and will provide students with insights into artists' process and career pathways. It will also allow them to draw parallels, ask questions and reflect on the links between Donatello and other sculptors from the past with sculpture and sculptors today.

Find out more



Encourage your students to find out more about the objects by visiting bit.ly/donatello-exhibition

Find out more about the V&A's collections here vam.ac.uk/collections



DONATELLO: SCULPTING THE RENAISSANCE

About the exhibition

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DONATELLO: SCULPTING THE RENAISSANCE

About the exhibition

Donatello: Sculpting the Renaissance is the first major UK exhibition to explore the exceptional talents of Donatello (about 1386–1466), one of the most innovative and influential artists of the Renaissance. Working in the full range of sculptural materials and techniques, including marble, bronze, wood, terracotta and stucco, he contributed to major commissions of church and state, was an intimate of the powerful Medici family and their circle in Florence, and was highly sought after in other Italian centres.

The exhibition showcases works never seen before in the UK, including Donatello's early marble *David* and bronze *Attis-Amorino* from the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, as well as bronzes from the High Altar of the Basilica of St Anthony in Padua. Through these and other exceptional loans, the exhibition offers visitors a unique vision of Donatello's genius and central role at this critical time in European culture. Focusing primarily on Donatello's lifetime and his immediate followers, the exhibition combines a thematic approach with chronology, encompassing the inter-relationship between sculpture, paintings, drawings and goldsmiths' work. It looks at the artist's ability to combine ideas from both classical and medieval sculpture to create works that were novel, yet with an element of the traditional.

Key works by Donatello himself are complemented by carefully selected works by his contemporaries and followers that explore and expand on the sculptor's major place within the development of Renaissance art and his influence across the centuries.

Find out more



Encourage your students to find out more about the objects by visiting bit.ly/donatello-exhibition

Find out more about the V&A's collections here vam.ac.uk/collections

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This exhibition is organised by the V&A Museum, London in collaboration with the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi and the Musei del Bargello in Florence, and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin





View of Florence from the South-West, probably by Francesco Rosselli (1448–about 1513), about 1489–95, tempera and oil on panel, Florence, Italy

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London

View of Florence from the South-West,
probably by Francesco Rosselli (1448–about 1513),
about 1489–95, tempera and oil on panel, Florence, Italy

Although he also spent some years living and working in other cities, Donatello spent most of his career in Florence at a time when the city's artistic production was flourishing. This vibrant environment encouraged the exchange of ideas between artists of different disciplines: for example, sculptors were inspired by painting and painters in turn looked to sculpture for new ideas.

This painting captures a view of the city of Florence not long after the Donatello's death. The sculptor contributed works to many of the major civic and religious buildings featured in this image, such as Florence Cathedral, which can be seen in the centre.

He contributed to major commissions of church and state; was an intimate of the Medici family and their circle in Florence. Several of his sculptures were commissioned by the Medici, an Italian banking family and political dynasty that gained particular prominence in the Republic of Florence during the first half of the 15th century under Cosimo de' Medici.

Discuss

- Look closely at the painting. What types of buildings do you think had the most prominence in Florence in the 15th century?
- What can this tell us about the type of city Florence would have been at that time?
- Compare to a modern-day skyline of a big city. What types of buildings dominate skylines today? What might that tell us about the differences in society between the 15th century and today?

Explore further

- Find out more about 15th-century Florence. What influence do you think the city, its rulers and the environment would have had on the type of artwork that Donatello was creating?
- Find out more about the Medici family and their influence on art and architecture in Florence.

Find more info online at vam.ac.uk/collections

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The logo for the Victoria and Albert Museum, featuring the letters 'V&A' in a large, bold, red serif font.



David, by Donatello, about 1408–09, modified 1416, marble, Florence, Italy

Photo: Bruno Bruchi. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, courtesy of the Ministry of Culture

David, by Donatello, about 1408–1409, modified 1416, marble, Florence, Italy

Donatello quickly established himself as a marble carver early in his career, through employment at the workshops of Florence Cathedral, which was still under construction at the time. This sculptural programme provided artists with regular work. The close-knit workshop system, where a master worked with multiple assistants and collaborators to complete projects, encouraged both competition and collaboration between artists.

This sculpture depicts David, a figure from the Old Testament who, in his youth, defeated a giant called Goliath. He was seen as a religious hero and became a symbol of the city of Florence. One of Donatello's earliest important commissions, this work demonstrates his exceptional skill in marble carving. Originally intended for Florence Cathedral, the statue was repurposed in 1416 as a civic emblem for the Palazzo della Signoria (now Palazzo Vecchio), the city's town hall.

Discuss

- How would you describe the pose and characteristics of David? Why do you think Donatello has put David in this particular pose? What else can you see in the sculpture?
- Does the style of this sculpture remind you of another period in art history? Why might Donatello want to reference a previous period in history?
- David was one of the symbols of the city of Florence during the Renaissance. If you were to choose a significant person or group of people to represent where you are from, who would you choose and why? This could perhaps be someone who is underrepresented in public life, an unsung hero, or a fictional character.

Explore further

- 'David and Goliath' is a story from the Old Testament. David has come to represent good triumphing over evil. What other characteristics do you think David is meant to represent?
- Develop your idea further from the activity above to create a figure to represent where you are from. Research your local area, define the characteristics of your area and start sketching out some ideas. Think about where you might display your artwork.



Fragment of the *Massacre of the Innocents and tabernacle*, possibly by Donatello, about 1450, pen and ink over black chalk and metalpoint, probably Padua, Italy

© Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, Jean-Manuel Salingue.

Fragment of the Massacre of the Innocents and tabernacle,
possibly by Donatello, about 1450, pen and ink over black chalk
and metalpoint, probably Padua, Italy

Creating a sculpture involves a lot of preparatory work, including sketching out ideas. Donatello was said to be a prolific draughtsman and he would have made many sketches and models to use within his workshop or to show to the patrons who had commissioned (meaning ordered) a work from him.

This drawing was once in the collection of the 16th-century artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari who wrote of Donatello that he 'made his drawings with such virtuosity and vivacity that they had no equal'. Its authorship is debated, but the powerful, sketchy treatment of the dramatic biblical scene resonates with Donatello's emotive sculptures.

As well as making sketches, Donatello would have made models, sometimes in clay or wax, to test out his ideas before creating the final sculpture. A model could also be used to get approval from a patron before the final work was produced.

Discuss

- Look closely at the expressions on the figures' faces. What words would you use to describe them?
- In what way does the arrangement of the figures and the composition add to the emotion and meaning of the scene? How has the artist used line and composition (how the subject or subjects are arranged) to contribute to the mood or meaning?

Explore further

- Do a series of quick sketches to try out different compositions of the same scene. How can you use the composition of the scene to change the meaning? Try using different materials such as pen, graphite or charcoal.
- Get feedback from your peers and make changes.
- Now choose your favourite composition and try making a quick model of it in clay.



Dancing Spiritelli (panel from the pulpit of Prato Cathedral), by Donatello (about 1386-1466) and Michelozzo di Bartolomeo (1396-1472), 1434-38, marble with inlaid pottery mosaic, Florence, Italy

Prato, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo - Diocesi di Prato
Transferred from the Cathedral of Prato in 1976
© Fototeca Ufficio Beni Culturali Diocesi di Prato

Dancing Spiritelli (panel from the pulpit of Prato Cathedral), by Donatello (about 1386-1466) and Michelozzo di Bartolomeo (1396-1472), 1434-38, marble with inlaid pottery mosaic, Florence, Italy

Donatello collaborated with many different artists. For nearly a decade, he had an official partnership with sculptor and architect Michelozzo di Bartolomeo and they worked together on commissions for various Italian cities.

Michelozzo brought good administrative skills to the partnership and brought his experience of casting and a distinctive yet complementary style of carving. Documents and the works themselves reveal the collaborative process between the two artists and their assistants.

This relief was created by Donatello, Michelozzo and their assistants to decorate a pulpit (a raised platform usually used inside churches for preaching) they had been contracted to make for the exterior of the parish church of St Stephen in Prato, Italy, now known as Prato Cathedral, from which the Girdle of the Virgin Mary, a revered sacred object could be displayed to onlookers below.

Donatello largely carved these playful *spiritelli* (meaning 'little spirits' or 'sprites'), cleverly evoking a sense of movement. These winged children are inspired by examples the artist would have seen in ancient sculptures. The addition of pottery mosaic reflects Donatello's interest in colour and mixed media.

The 19th-century photograph below shows the pulpit still in situ on the outside of the Cathedral.



Photograph of the external pulpit of Prato Cathedral, by Donatello and Michelozzo

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Find more info online at vam.ac.uk/collections

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Discuss

- Michelozzo was skilled at casting and other making techniques. Why do you think Donatello would have wanted to collaborate with other people to create works of art?
- Look carefully at the figures in this relief. In what ways have the artists conveyed a sense of movement and playfulness?
- What does the mixed media nature of this piece bring to the artwork?

Watch



Watch a contemporary artist carving a partial reproduction of one of the reliefs from the pulpit.

bit.ly/donatello-a-master-at-work

Explore further

- Work together with some of your classmates to create a combined artwork. You could work in pairs or small groups. Think about the different skills that each person could bring to the process. Could you combine different media to create your piece?

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Ascension with Christ giving the Keys to St Peter, by Donatello, about 1428–30, marble, Florence, Italy

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Ascension with Christ giving the Keys to St Peter, by Donatello, about 1428–30, marble, Florence, Italy

Donatello is credited with inventing the challenging carving technique known as *rilievo schiacciato*, which literally means 'squashed relief' in Italian. Inspired by ancient carvings, Donatello used this technique to conjure a sense of space and depth within just a few millimetres of carving. The 16th-century artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari described this technical feat as demanding 'great skill in design and invention' and celebrated Donatello's unequalled virtuosity in this field. Only a few other sculptors, like Desiderio da Settignano, were able to master it. Although primarily a carving technique, Donatello also employed this treatment for reliefs designed to be cast, which were modelled in malleable wax or clay.

In this work, generally considered to be Donatello's most exquisitely carved *schiacciato* relief, he combines two unrelated biblical events, inspired by popular sacred plays that were performed in Florence at the time. This is alluded to through the dramatic gesture of the Apostles. Though the circumstances surrounding the production of this relief are unknown, it is documented as having been in the Medici palace in 1492.

Discuss

- Look carefully at the composition and detail of this relief. What features has Donatello included to create a sense of perspective and depth?
- Can you identify where the main focal point of this image is?
- If you wanted to create an artwork almost as thin as a painting but without any colour to work with, what different techniques and types of line could you use to create depth and perspective?

Find out more about the artwork



bit.ly/donatello-ascension

vam.ac.uk/articles/explore-donatellos-masterpiece-the-ascension

Find more info online at vam.ac.uk/collections

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London





The Virgin and Child with four angels (Chellini Madonna), by Donatello, about 1450, bronze, with gilded decoration, probably Padua, Italy

©Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Virgin and Child with four angels (Chellini Madonna), by Donatello, about 1450, bronze, with gilded decoration, probably Padua, Italy

Images of the Virgin and Child carried religious and protective meanings and were displayed in churches, homes and on street corners. Donatello's sensitive compositions generally depict a close bond between mother and child inspired by examples from the medieval period.

His two surviving documented examples take the form of a tondo (roundel). This format, adapted from antiquity, became popular in the Renaissance for both painted and sculpted images of the Virgin and Child.

Given by Donatello to his doctor Giovanni Chellini in return for treatment, this roundel depicts the Virgin as the ideal mother receiving a tray of sweetmeats, a common gift to new mothers in Renaissance Italy. The tender embrace of mother and child fits neatly within the round shape. Uniquely, this roundel also has a practical purpose: the reverse was designed as a mould to replicate the image in glass.

Discuss

- How would you describe the characteristics of the figures in this scene? Do they appear life-like? Why would the artist want to depict them in this way?
- What meaning or symbolism could you take from this artwork, even if you don't come from a Christian tradition?
- Consider the round shape of the artwork. How does this help frame the figures and enhance the mood of the piece?

Explore further

- Try creating a scene or group portrait set within different shaped frames – you could try round, oval or triangular. How does the shape of the frame affect the composition and meaning of your drawing?

Find out more about the artwork



bit.ly/donatello-roundel



Attis-Amorino, by Donatello, about 1435–40, bronze, partially gilded, Florence, Italy

Photo: Bruno Bruchi. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, courtesy of the Ministry of Culture.

Attis-Amorino, by Donatello, about 1435–40, bronze, partially gilded, Florence, Italy

This sculpture is made from bronze, which is a copper alloy made by combining copper with other metals, notably tin. Bronze was one of the most prized sculptural materials in the Renaissance. It was costly and challenging as it required a number of different processes. It therefore reflected both the wealth of the patron and the talent of the artist. It is also a very durable material. While Donatello was skilled at working in a range of different materials, bronze became the one that he worked with most frequently in his career. Donatello made use of a number of assistants in the workshop and collaborated with founders who cast his bronzes.

Donatello exploited the strength and qualities of bronze to create this joyous and animated child-like figure. Its name is inspired by its open breeches, which suggest he might represent the ancient Phrygian shepherd Attis, and the wings of a young cupid (*amorino*) on its back. But it also has the tail of a faun, winged feet of god Mercury and a snake associated with the hero Hercules, making its identity unclear. Its belt is decorated with poppy pods, a symbol of the Bartolini Salimbeni family.

Discuss

- In what way does this sculpture differ from other works that you have seen by Donatello? Do you find it surprising or unusual?
- Look closely. What different features can you see on the figure that might suggest it is an otherworldly character?

Watch

- This video shows one of the 'lost wax' processes for making a bronze sculptures.



bit.ly/lost-wax-bronze-casting



Madonna and Child, by Alceo Dossena (1878–1937), 1929, marble, Rome, Italy

© Detroit Institute of Arts / Bridgeman Images

Madonna and Child, by Alceo Dossena (1878–1937), 1929, marble, Rome, Italy

Since Donatello's death in 1466, artists and designers have looked back to his innovative practice, emulating his unique style and ground-breaking techniques. Recognised as one of the greatest living artists during his lifetime, he continued to shape the Renaissance long after his death.

Donatello's influence endured throughout the years, but in the 19th century his popularity flourished among a broader public thanks to a rekindled fascination with the Renaissance and the increasing accessibility to his work both in print and in museums. This prompted many artists to create works copied from and inspired by his sculptural masterpieces.

This 20th-century intimate relief of the Madonna was commissioned from Dossena in the Renaissance style. The sculptor has perfectly captured the feeling of Donatello in the tender devotion between mother and child, the use of the tondo (round shape) and his mastery of low relief. To enhance his remarkable carving, Dossena developed a secret chemical recipe to age his works.

Discuss

- This relief was created in the style of Donatello. It combines many different features that were prominent in Donatello's work. How many different features can you identify?
- Why do you think artists would want to copy the style of Donatello and other Renaissance artists?
- Donatello's work is reflective of the religion, society and power structure of 15th-century Italy. How could you develop ideas from the themes that you have seen in the work of Donatello to respond to and reflect on society today or to portray your everyday life?

Find out more

During the 19th century, artists also made casts of famous sculptures and architectural features from the Renaissance. You can view casts of some of Donatello's works in the V&A's Cast Courts.



bit.ly/cast-courts

Interview with Sculptor, Rebecca Stevenson

Donatello: Shifting Perspectives

By Hanyu Liu, a member of the V&A Youth Collective



There is a Spell in Every Sea-Shell, wax, resin and mixed media, 2021

Photo: Marianne Wie

V&A



Portrait by Nick Manser

Interview with V&A Artist in Residence, Rebecca Stevenson.

Conducted by Hanyu Liu, a member of the V&A Youth Collective.

Hanyu Liu: Your residency coincides with the *Donatello: Sculpting the Renaissance* exhibition. What do you think of Donatello's work? How will you respond to it?

Rebecca Stevenson: I must confess, I didn't know a lot about Donatello before I started this residency. As I'm learning more about him, I'm finding it more and more interesting and I'm finding working in response to his work is giving me ways in.

HL: Like finding a new way in and new perspective?

RS: Definitely. I think I was surprised by his work. How diverse it is! He uses a big range of styles. Sometimes, it's very fine and very elegant. Sometimes it's almost quite modern and quite kind of expressionist. I found his experimentation with materials interesting. It's not like he's always working in a very traditional way. He mixes up materials quite a lot and he tries strange things like putting wax on top of clay and this kind of thing. That seems quite modern. The second part of your question is about my response. During the Renaissance, it was really common for artists to copy each other and work from each other's work directly. In contemporary art you're not supposed to copy other people's work. You're supposed to be completely individual and original in your practice. But I decided that I would like to start by working from some of Donatello's pieces.

HL: It's not like copying his work. It's like getting inspired by great artists. Just like the Renaissance artists learnt from ancient Greece and Rome. Now we learn from the Renaissance.

RS: Yes! Absolutely! I couldn't copy Donatello even if I wanted to! What's interesting is all the things that change and all the things that come out differently in your version.

HL: But some things stay unchanged.

RS: Yeah, definitely.

HL: Do you think classical art is still important to modern society? In what way do you think classical art can inspire the artist now?

Rebecca: In some ways it's hard to see the relevance of it. It seems so far away and so long ago. However, in another way, it's kind of everywhere. It's so embedded in the Western visual culture we're kind of blind to it. So, I think it is really important but we don't always see it. It's like background, but many of our assumptions about what art is, what beauty is, and what is a nice composition, they're grounded in classical art even if we don't know they are, and that filter through into things like fashion, advertising, and film.

HL: Why do you adopt a variety of media, including wax, resin and bronze, rather than a single material? How do you think they help with your creation and conveying your thoughts?

RS: Materials have always been important to me. That's why I became a sculptor rather than working in 2D. It's like a language and a vocabulary. All the materials I use have different properties technically and physically. They can do different things. They have different meanings and associations. I like to combine materials that have high value with low value or low status materials. Bronze is a material that has history. It's a material that's full of meaning in its own right no matter what you make from it. But I also like materials that are almost disposable. Permanence and impermanence are a big theme in my work so I'm often looking to use materials that talk about permanence, like bronze, with materials, like wax, that talk about passing of time or something ephemeral.

HL: It's like it conflicts and contradicts.

RS: Yes.

HL: Who do you collaborate with, if anyone, to produce your work?

RS: I work on my own. I do sometimes work with an assistant, especially if I'm working on a large piece. At the moment I am collaborating with the ceramicist Amy Hughes because we're friends but also because I'm really interested in ceramics and I know that I don't have the skill to make the things I want to make. She is also quite interested in bronze but she doesn't have that skill. So, we've just started to explore how we could make some pieces together.

HL: I personally love your sculpture *There is a Spell in every Sea-shell #1*. Could you explain what are you trying to tell the audience through the sculpture and the creation process?

RS: Thank you! It's quite a complicated sculpture. Initially, that sculpture was inspired by objects I had seen in museum collections in early modern Wunderkammer collections. Those are objects that were made for small private collections. They often combine something from the natural world like a shell, typically, with some kind of man-made element like a stand or a mount made from silver in the shape of a swan or a bird or a figure. They're very fascinating, very beautiful, exquisite objects.

I combine elements that are cast from real life like fruit with elements that I've modelled and sculpted myself. So that was the starting point for that piece.

This shell element is kind of bodily and there are these red coral elements but they're also a little bodily. And then I used this upside-down swan, which I was working at a lot during the lockdown time. It seems like a strong image of everything being turned upside down. The swan is this image of grace, beauty and elegance. When it's turned upside down in this way when it's falling, it's like all of that is kind of falling or in freefall.

HL: So, you mentioned about body and bodily things. Can you explain to me what this means?

RS: Good question. I always come out with this quote from [sculptor] Louise Bourgeois. She said 'Sculpture is the body and the body is sculpture'. This quote is always in my mind because - this is just what it is. It doesn't matter what the sculpture is, it could be a sculpture of the human body or a stainless-steel cube. It's a physical object in the real world. When you look at that object, you're interacting on a bodily level. This aspect of sculpture has always been what drew me to the art form. When I started making work as a student, it was very directly about the body, I made bodies and body parts. I made things that looked very fleshy. I was very interested in anatomy, and I did a lot of anatomical drawing. I studied anatomy and not because I thought I would be a figurative sculptor but because I was interested in all those materials, textures, surfaces and forms inside the body. It's like this kind of unknown alien world but it's us! For me, the body is what underpins everything and every sculpture that I make.

HL: Definitely. Can you now tell us a bit about your career path? Your experience might be helpful to young people.

RS: Well, let's talk about my career path! I didn't go to college when I first finished my A-levels. I strongly wanted to be an artist or to be creative in some way but I wasn't entirely sure how I could find that path and what that path was going to be. It took me some time to find my way back. In the years in between I did lots of different things. I did lots of different jobs. I travelled. Then when I was about 23, I decided OK I think I want to go to art school. I went to a foundation course in Bristol where I was living at the time and then from there I did a BA in sculpture and then I did a Master's in sculpture. So, it wasn't like a straight route. It was a bit roundabout.

HL: So, you tried many things.

RS: Yeah, I tried many things. I was volunteering with community artists. I was always making stuff and doing short courses. I was exploring lots of different ways to be creative. I didn't think about being a sculptor. But when I went to my foundation course, I understood that this was the right thing. I knew I liked materials and working with my hands but I also knew I wanted to do something that had some kind of intellectual dimension. I didn't understand anything about sculpture, especially contemporary sculpture. So, when I went to my foundation course, I had great tutors who introduced me to contemporary sculptors whose work resonated with me. Then, there was a moment and I thought OK yeah this is it! After I graduated from my master's, I managed to sell some

works from my show. I had a little bit of money, so I was able to find a small studio space. And I was offered a couple of opportunities to exhibit in that first year. So, I had a start.

But the first few years were very difficult and there were lots of ups and downs. I think one thing that I would say to anyone who's thinking about a creative career is that you have to be very resilient. It is not like straight up. I thought OK, you start, you have a little bit of success, then you have some more, and then you're successful and famous. But it's more like you have highs and lows. You can go through phases where everybody wants your work. You can go through phases where no one is interested because what you're doing is not fashionable. You need to be very good at organising yourself and managing your time. No one will say to you when you need to start work and finish your emails, do these accounts, and then go to the studio. You must manage your time well. But it can be fantastic, and it can give you great experiences. You can meet amazing people, go to places, see things and do things you wouldn't imagine.

It sounds like the dream to just be by yourself in your studio, but by the end of the week when no one sees the work that you're making it can be difficult. And the other thing that can be quite difficult is that you're working all the time. Lots of freelancers have this in any kind of creative field. If you are an artist it's because you're doing what you love, which is a great privilege, but it also means that in a way you can never switch off, even when you're asleep. You can be dreaming about it!

HL: How do you think museums can help with young artists?

RS: Museums are a fantastic resource and we're so lucky in London that we can go to museums for free. All the way through my career from when I was a student, every time I was stuck, I would go to a museum. You always learn something from looking at artworks. Even if you don't like them, you always learn something. Even if you think you're not interested in it, go anyway - and go with an open mind and allow yourself to not be interested if that's what happens.

HL: Besides that, do you think there are any active things, like events, that museums can do?

RS: Of course. I think there's lots of things out there. Museums are really good at putting on events and finding different ways to help all different kinds of people, especially young people, to engage with their collections. I think sometimes it can be a bit intimidating, especially if you haven't been before or don't know what to expect or feel like the museum isn't really for you. I think there's lots of ways in. There's so much you can look at and learn.

With special thanks to Hanyu Liu and Rebecca Stevenson.

Rebecca Stevenson's residency, *Shifting Perspectives*, coincides with *Donatello: Sculpting the Renaissance* exhibition. For this residency, she has developed a series of new works in response to the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries, addressing themes of material and bodily presence, absence, and transformation.

Find out more about Rebecca's V&A residency and work.



bit.ly/rebecca-stevenson

www.rebeccastevenson.net

Find out more

V&A Residency Programme at www.vam.ac.uk/info/residencies

V&A Youth Collective and programmes for Young People at www.vam.ac.uk/info/young-people

V&A Schools Programme vam.ac.uk/schools