For information about this and other Yale University Press publications, please contact:
U.S. Office: sales.press@yale.edu yalebooks.com
Europe Office: sales@yaleup.co.uk yalebooks.co.uk

Set in Minion Pro by IDSUK (DataConnection) Ltd
Printed in. . .

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN 978-0-300-25366-5

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

CHAPTER 1

First Marks

It is 17,000 years ago. Two people climb through a narrow hole and pull themselves up into a long winding passageway deep within a cave system in southern France. A river churns beneath them, pushing its insistent way through the rock. It is charcoal-black in the passage and no sounds from the outside world reach them. The adult holds a flaming torch and its smoky flame throws out fingers of light. The teenager follows behind, glancing at the engravings of bison and reindeer carved into the walls. At times they have to crawl on all fours as the cave walls close in or pick their way around skeletons of long-extinct cave bears, their canine teeth wrenched out by previous visitors to become pendants and necklaces.

Together the pair head to the furthest point in the cave system, over half a kilometre from the entrance. There, balancing on their heels so their feet don't get stuck in the mud, they squat down and cut a heavy slab of clay from the damp cave floor using a sharp piece of rock they have brought along for this purpose. Their feet

musicians and acrobats are on hand for entertainment; replicas of Qin's courtiers and employees mill about, ready to offer service. Clay geese and swans 'swim' on an underground lake so the emperor will never run out of food.

*

Earlier rulers insisted on human sacrifice at their death so they could be staffed in the afterlife but Qin commissioned thousands of terracotta stand-ins who could serve him in perpetuity. To create them, clay was mixed with sand to strengthen it during firing and distributed to individual workshops to ensure the same quality across different production lines. The figures were made in identical pieces by over 1,000 workers but were configured differently, so that one soldier with studded armour may have a moustache while another may not, or one with a top knot may have a thicker scarf than his neighbour. These discrepancies make the figures seem more human. Traces of paint still on the clay show us they were originally painted in lifelike colours. Today we know these soldiers as the Terracotta Army and thousands of examples have been excavated since the site was rediscovered in 1974.

At the same time as Qin was building his empire, the Nok culture was flourishing in west Africa, north of the Niger river (now Nigeria), and many Nok sculptures, also made from terracotta, have survived. Nok artists were women and they coiled ropes of clay to make hollow figures in ceremonial dress, some originally standing over 1 metre tall. As the sculptures were drying, details were cut into the clay, such as textured necklaces, anklets and bracelets, weapons, hair braids and facial features. The faces of the sculptures were stylized and distinctive. Each head featured high arched brows, large triangular eyes with bulbous eyeballs and indented pupils. On the larger sculptures the mouth, ears, nostrils and eyes were drilled to make holes so the air could vent from inside the sculpture as it was fired in the kiln, to prevent the sculpture cracking.

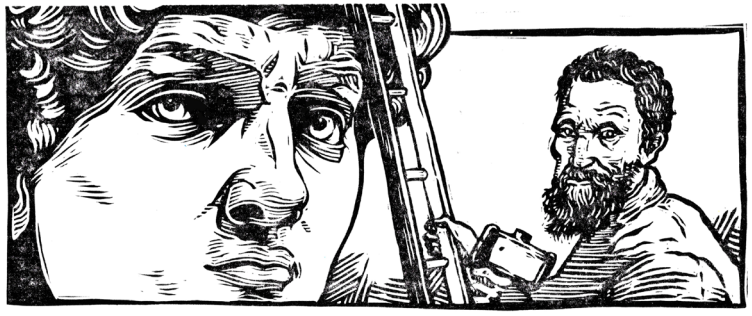
Nok sculptures now largely exist as fragments, mainly heads, and it is thought that they may have been broken and buried as part of a ritual such as a ceremony to honour ancestors or a funeral. Sadly no written records exist to tell us more of Nok culture.

A terracotta Nok sculpture from West Africa that is over two thousand years old.

Sculptural attributes such as a seashell head decoration and a pharaoh's crook positioned in an armlet suggest the Nok had a substantial trade network that resulted in cultural exchange stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to Egypt.

The Romans' answer to building a trade network was to invade neighbouring territories and expand their own empire. Rome grew from a small town to an imperial superpower that controlled vast swathes of the Mediterranean in the second century BCE. Appetite for sculpture in Rome was voracious. Over one million people lived in the city and there were sculptures everywhere: gods in the temples, Roman generals on street corners, portrait busts of Greek

CHAPTER 14



The Return of Rome

It is midnight on 14 May 1504 as a giant naked man begins to move through Florence's silent streets. The man is *David*, Michelangelo's most ambitious sculpture to date. It has taken him two years to carve and has taken the cathedral board almost as long to agree on where to locate it. Michelangelo signed a contract to make a colossal sculpture for the top of the cathedral's façade but ultimately the board decided to give it a more public home. It is now to be placed outside the Palazzo della Signoria, home to Florence's government.

The tall, narrow marble block that the church had given Michelangelo to use was far from ideal. Two other sculptors had already attempted to work on it, but abandoned it as unusable in the cathedral grounds. Michelangelo was paid a monthly rate of six gold florins (about £1,000 today), plus materials and assistants, to complete the new sculpture. Now the giant *David* stands naked like a Greek god, the slingshot over his shoulder the only indication of his role in the biblical story of David and Goliath.

Michelangelo wants *David* to compete with the ancient Greek and Roman sculptures he has seen in Rome, particularly the colossal naked figures of Castor and Pollux he encountered at the emperor Constantine's baths. His *David* has tousled curls and a classically beautiful face. His body is lean and muscly, his hands veined and strong as a sculptor's. *David* has been carved to be seen from far below and consequently his head and hands are larger than they might otherwise have been. Now they have ropes tied around them and the whole sculpture rests on a platform that is being rolled from Michelangelo's sculpture yard to the Palazzo della Signoria. Forty men crowd around it, taking the strain of the ropes, as *David* slowly begins his journey.

⋆

As a teenager Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) trained at Lorenzo de' Medici's new sculpture school in Florence. Lorenzo supported artists at all stages of their careers and, aged fifteen, the hot-headed Michelangelo became part of his family and lived in the Medici palace for two years. There he would have been able to study Donatello's bronze *David* in the courtyard. Donatello's sculpture is the height of a teenage boy; Michelangelo's *David* is more than three times the size. It is 5 metres tall, taller than a double-decker bus, and was the largest sculpture made in Italy since Roman times.

Michelangelo was an ambitious young artist who was able to paint as well as sculpt. As he finished carving *David* he was commissioned to paint one of two battle scenes for the Great Council Hall in the Palazzo della Signoria. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) had returned to Florence from Milan to paint the other scene, but in the end neither were completed. Michelangelo moved to Rome and Leonardo began to paint a wealthy silk merchant's wife, Lisa del Giocondo. We know this painting as the *Mona Lisa* today.

Leonardo's use of oil glazes and fine brushes allowed him to blend colours to the point where it was impossible to see where one stopped and another started. The technique was known as *sfumato*, meaning smoky or blurred. In the *Mona Lisa* the merchant's wife

in the Pantheon. Caravaggio bolted after killing Ranuccio Tomassoni in an illegal duel and died in Tuscany in 1610, aged thirty-eight. But in the work of the Caravaggisti and classical academy painters their styles lived on.

The painter Orazio Gentileschi had been one of Caravaggio's friends and was a Caravaggisti. Orazio's daughter Artemisia (1593–1653) grew up among artists and her early talent was nurtured by her father. While still a teenager she was painting large biblical scenes such as *Susannah and the Elders,* from 1610, based on a story where two men spy on the young Susannah while she takes her bath, hoping to take advantage of her. For Artemisia Gentileschi life imitated art when two men (one an artist working with her

Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith beheading Holofernes*, 1613–14

father) raped her when she was seventeen. Following a lengthy court case they were banished from Rome but they never left. Instead she relocated, marrying another painter in Florence and living there for seven years before returning to Rome.

Gentileschi's time in Florence secured her reputation as an exceptional painter. She responded to the work of Caravaggio and created paintings that were very physical and real. Taking a subject painted by Caravaggio in 1599, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, she reinterpreted it, giving far more credibility to the Jewish widow Judith as she slices through the neck of the drunk Assyrian general Holofernes, a man about to destroy her home town of Bethulia. In Gentileschi's first version (1612–13) Holofernes lies on a bed, his head towards the viewer, with Judith and her maid Abra the only other figures in the dark tent. Knowing that a woman such as Judith could not match the strength of a combat soldier Gentileschi has the maid pin him down as Judith draws the sword across his throat. Judith grasps a handful of his hair with her left hand and pulls and twists at the blade, one knee on the bed for counterbalance. In her painting Gentileschi transfers the energy Caravaggio gave to the dying Holofernes to the two women who murder him.

Within a year the 20-year-old Gentileschi had painted the scene again, this time for Cosimo II de' Medici. In it she gave even more force to Judith, who now twists her whole body behind the lengthened sword. Blood stains the sheets and spurts up from his neck, splattering her arms, dress and breasts. Gentileschi doesn't hold back from showing what an active woman's body looks like. Judith's brow is furrowed and her chin is doubled as she strains with the blade, her breasts crushed and rolled inside her bodice as she turns. You can't help feeling Gentileschi spent time in front of a mirror studying herself in this pose to make the scene as realistic as possible.

With this painting she asserted her place as one of the great Baroque painters. She became the first woman to be accepted into Florence's Academy of Art and she managed to establish a studio away from the family home, no easy feat for a woman at this time. Her portrayal of women as credible heroines of history, active and engaged, stands in sharp contrast to those by successful male

painted Aztec temples, pre-Columbian sculpture and Mexican workers rather than colonial buildings and European influences.

Kahlo remembers that, up on his makeshift scaffold in the school auditorium painting giant Mexican figures for his *Creation*, Rivera didn't see her creep in. The auditorium was out of bounds to students but she didn't care. She was fifteen, still at school, and intrigued by this giant of a man in his Stetson hat and workman's clothes. She thought he looked like a frog. On that day she stole some of his lunch. She returned to the auditorium often to watch him paint but she didn't start painting seriously herself until she was severely injured in a bus crash three years later. She met Rivera again, at a party in 1928, and despite the twenty-year age gap they fell in love and were married. Now she takes a final look at Rivera high up on the Detroit scaffold before taking her leave, keen to return to her own work.

*

While Diego Rivera (1886–1957) completed the *Detroit Industry Murals*, Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) painted *Self-portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States*. She stands in a floor-length pink dress between two contrasting scenes. On her right is the fertile earth of Mexico with its rich spiritual ancestry. On her left is industrial America, where the American flag is barely visible behind the smoky emissions from the Ford car plant. She holds the Mexican flag and the deep roots of the desert plants in Mexican soil stand for her own sense of belonging. She worked in America, alongside Rivera, but her heart, their hearts, remained in Mexico.

Following the bus crash at the age of eighteen, Kahlo was in pain every day of her life. Her back, pelvis, right leg and foot had all suffered multiple breaks and she was wrapped in plaster for months on end. When she was first injured her mother had a special easel built so she could paint lying down in bed. She largely painted intense self-portraits which connected directly to her emotions and often reflected her broken body. Sometimes she painted her heart with arteries snaking around her limbs, or she would paint her spine as a broken and crumbling column from a

Frida Kahlo, *Self-portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States*, 1933

Greek temple. In other paintings her eyes drip with tears or she is covered in blood or wounded by arrows. She didn't shy away from showing how she felt in her paintings but she never wanted people to pity her. Rivera was the bigger star during their lifetimes, but it is the emotional fire in Kahlo's work that speaks to us more loudly today.

A big retrospective looking back over Rivera's career was held at the newly opened Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1931. Americans loved his art: it was easy to understand, unlike the abstract paintings filtering into America from Europe, and Rivera and Kahlo were feted as celebrities. At the same time Dorothy Dunn (1903–1992) was setting up the Studio School as part of the Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico. Native Americans were invited to join her painting programme and many did so, including Pop Chalee (Merina Lujan, 1906–1993) and later José Vicente

Hopper captures her boredom and loneliness and amplifies it so it now feels like the loneliness of a whole city, a whole country.

Hopper enjoyed enormous success in the 1930s. The Great Depression fuelled a desire for an authentic, realistic art of America. Hopper's world, from Cape Cod lighthouses and country gas stations to cramped New York apartments and late-night cafes, had widespread appeal. Major museums bought his paintings and showered him with exhibitions. He captured the beauty of the everyday – the way light illuminated a wall or reflected in a darkened window – but ultimately he brought into the spotlight the growing alienation of modern American life.

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) recorded a different side of the Great Depression, one that had its roots in the First World War and continued to 1970. The Great Migration saw six million African-American people move from the rural south to northern industrial cities such as Detroit and New York in the hope or promise of factory work. The migration was fuelled by drought and disease that destroyed crops and therefore the livelihoods of poor tenant farmers. In 1940 Lawrence began painting sixty panels in response to the ongoing exodus. His accompanying captions documented

Jacob Lawrence, The Migration Series, panel 1, 1940–41

the reasons for the migration and the experiences of those who made the arduous journey, and included reports of lynchings and new levels of discrimination found in the north.

Lawrence was African-American and grew up in Harlem, New York during the Harlem Renaissance, an eruption of creative black talent across the arts that fused pride in black lives with a rising awareness of inequality and discrimination. In the 1930s Harlem was a neighbourhood that attracted many families from the south. Lawrence listened to their stories of 'coming up' and responded in paint. The sparse settings and empty bowls he depicts are reminders that families mostly left because they had to, not because they wanted to. Anonymous black figures are dressed in bright colours – red, yellow, turquoise, green. They are not recognisable as individuals and this allows the story to be about all migrants, the collective journey, rather than specific characters. White people rarely appear but when they do they are in positions of power or involved in racist abuse.

Despite its challenging content 'The Migration Series' was well received when it was exhibited at Edith Halpert's Gallery in New York in 1941. Sadly the series was subsequently broken up with the odd-numbered panels acquired by the Phillips Collection in Washington DC and the even-numbered panels entering the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. They are now regularly reunited for exhibitions.

Other artists preferred to turn their back on social issues and consider the vastness of the American landscape. Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) had studied in Chicago and New York and her early paintings were of city skyscrapers that were just starting to be built. But when she first travelled through New Mexico by train she said, 'From then on I was always on my way back.' She spent part of each year painting the state's flowers and landscapes, often on a huge scale. O'Keeffe was inspired by the cycles of nature, of new growth, reproduction and decay. Animal skulls float over mountain ranges like ancient talismans as in *Ram's Head – White Hollyhock – Little Hills, New Mexico* from 1935, while her studies of irises and poppies are full of sensuous folds. She lived at the Ghost Ranch near Taos, buying a small house (called an adobe) there in 1945.

Each film explores how gender is determined, with large doses of sex, violence, death and rebirth thrown in.

Many artists chose to work in photography during the 1990s. Digital printing processes meant that photographs could now be reproduced in colour on a cinematic scale. Jeff Wall (born 1946) was one of the first artists to work with photography in this way, creating vast staged photographs for museum walls such as *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)* from 1993. He recreated the famous Japanese print by Hokusai as if it was a still from a movie. Andreas Gursky (born 1955) similarly used this new large format to turn city views of apartment blocks into near-abstract images as in *Paris, Montparnasse* from 1993.

Other artists turned to photography because the camera could be discreet. Its compact size allowed them to take photographs of intimate moments. Nan Goldin (born 1953) captured her friends going to Pride parades, whizzing through New York on a bicycle in full drag, taking drugs and dying from AIDS. Sophie Calle (born 1953) used photography to record her 'private games', investigative journeys that saw her follow a man from a party in Paris to Venice for a fortnight and record the contents of strangers' hotel rooms while she worked as a chambermaid. She presents her findings as books and framed photographs, creating stories out of chance happenings and anonymous lives.

Other artists used photography to question its ability to record 'truth'. In her Qajar series from 1998 Shadi Ghadirian (born 1974) recreates the studio portraits of nineteenth-century Iranian photographers with painted backdrops, vintage costumes and props. Her props, however, are cassette players and vacuum cleaners and her women drink Pepsi from a can, ride bikes and wear sunglasses. They are not nineteenth-century women but contemporary Iranians. Ghadirian, who still lives in Iran, and Shirin Neshat (born 1957), an Iranian exile, use post-colonial and feminist theory to consider how Iranian women are viewed, both inside and outside Iran.

In 1979 the Iranian government was overthrown and a conservative religious government took over. Women were made to wear

Shadi Ghadirian, 'Qajar' series, 1998

the veil, among other restrictions. Neshat, who had been studying in America, remained there in exile. In her series Women of Allah, created between 1993 and 1997, she photographed women, including herself, wearing a hijab (a religious veil) and holding a gun. Martyrdom poems and feminist texts in Farsi are written over the women's faces. For many people viewing her work in the West, the radical poems remain unreadable, a calligraphic code written across cheekbones and chins. In the photograph *Rebellious Silence* from the series we are not sure if the woman holds a rifle to kill others or protect herself. Is she a martyr (as the poem that veils her

that looked like film sets. Sculptures were the size of buses; paintings looked like cinema screens. To coincide with the 2001 Venice Biennale British artist Mike Nelson (born 1967) transformed a disused brewery into a labyrinth of rooms, corridors and doors through which you had to navigate your way out. (A decade later he did the same to the Biennale's British pavilion.)

The 1990s was also the time of the celebrity architect and the super-curator. Curators had traditionally looked after museum collections but increasingly they organised ambitious exhibitions of work borrowed from international museums and galleries. Super-curators organised biennials so large that they could tackle giant themes such as 'Dreams and Conflicts' and 'All the World's Futures'. International artists responded to these new themes. In the Istanbul Biennial of 2003 the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo (born 1958) wedged 1,500 wooden chairs between two buildings. The empty chairs suggested homes that had been lost, lives that had been upturned, people who had gone away. They created a barrier where once had stood an apartment building, a community. Salcedo wanted to bring to mind the ongoing tensions between the city and its Greek and Jewish residents who had been forced to leave, creating these empty spaces.

Increasingly contemporary artists use their art for social change. They make political statements about life in their countries or engage with global crises such as climate change. These are the artists we are going to look at in the final chapter. But first, let's celebrate reaching the twenty-first century with some music . . .

CHAPTER 40

Art as Resistance

It is late May 2018 and the gallery is completely empty except for two people standing in front of a painting. It isn't just any painting: it is Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, one of the most famous paintings in the world. And they aren't just any people: they are Beyoncé and Jay-Z, wife and husband, two of the biggest musical artists on the planet.

Today they have the whole of the Louvre Museum in Paris to themselves. Well – apart from the dancers, the stylists, the film crew and the director, that is. They are shooting a video for their latest single *Apeshit*. There are endless costume changes and dance routines, hours of retakes to get it just right. They have stood in front of ancient Greek and Egyptian sculptures, the *Venus de Milo* and the Great Sphinx of Tanis. Beyoncé has danced in front of David's *Coronation of Empress Josephine* and Jay-Z has rapped in front of Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*. The camera crew have filmed Benoist's *Portrait of Madeleine* and the director has staged scenes that echo recent works by Faith Ringgold and Carrie Mae Weems.