

THE FIGURE

In the historical development of art, the human figure presents the deepest insight into the social-cultural concepts of art, from aboriginal tribal culture to the most advanced civilizations, past or present. If art can be seen as the refined endeavor of human aspirations, the figure in art is its most important expressive concentration. The inherent problem in its artistic invention, whatever its cultural sources, is the attempt by the artist to resolve his physical experience and aesthetic perception into a meaningful, significant visual form. But the limitation of his social-cultural viewpoint interposes a meaningful screen between the countless physical experiences and his capacity to absorb them. Thus, the artist's perceptions are refined into a condensed aesthetic form—the art-style of his social environment.

To speak of a style in the narrow sense of the individual artist is to discover personal mannerisms and techniques in the application of tools and media to surfaces and materials in an individualized, expressive way. Attributes of this kind are easily distinguished and are firmly imbedded in personal works of art as much as the autograph or signature of the artist is part of the art. To enlarge the field of definition, however, to embrace generations of artists in a sociological framework of culture that is a given era in art, is to speak of the general art-style of the time. If the analogy of the personal signature or handwriting holds for the individual artist, then the basic language construction, generalized expressions, idioms, colloquialisms could be said to belong to all the people of his period as well as to the artists.

Thus, to explain the art-style of an era, an overview is taken of the historical matrix of the period, major events and their impacts on living process and thought process, and their general influences on artists. These are broadly chiseled, in bas-relief as it were, to present the procession of the human figure in limited, significant visual conceptions of art.