



Waterbeach Community Primary School

Curriculum Capture for Year 6 Art: Mayan Sculptures

Key Knowledge

What role did art play in Maya?

Mayan art refers to the artworks done by the ancient Mayan civilization. It involves any painting, architecture, wood carvings, sculptures and figures made from wood, stone, stucco, and precious gems like jade, weaving and textile. Their art pieces are considered as precious artifacts and are mostly in the care of museums around the world. The Mayan people lived in North America to South America. To this day, several areas of Mayan art survived and practiced, particularly in weaving. Mayan sculptors were the first people to ever sign their artworks.

How is symbolism used in Mayan sculpture?

- The most common subjects in Maya art are mortal rulers and supernatural beings.
- After the collapse of the Classic Period kingdoms, Maya artists at northern cities like Chichen Itza drew influence from Central Mexico and southern Central America as they adorned their temples and created spectacular offerings to their rulers and deities.
- Mayan sculptors celebrated the human form in a naturalistic way, portraying royal individuals as they sit, stand, hold things, and interact with one another. Kings and queens of powerful cities, such as Tikal, commissioned artworks to cover their royal court buildings and their regal bodies.

What media did the Mayans use?

- Sculpture for the ancient Maya spans all media, from the miniature to the monumental, as artists gave shape to materials extracted from the landscape.
- This would include use of wood, stone (limestone), stucco and precious gems.
- In the first millennium B.C., Maya artists began to sculpt in stone, stucco, wood, bone, shell, and fired clay. Working limestone or volcanic tuff with stone tools, sculptors showed realistic portraits of divine lords, courtly ladies, captives, and deities.

Examples of Mayan Sculptures



Deity figure



Censer, Seated King



Seated Figure Censer

Depicted on the censer illustrated here is a seated figure, perhaps a ruler, surrounded by aspects of mythological creatures that are stacked around his head and symmetrically border his sides. The central figure is in higher relief, sitting cross-legged with arms carefully positioned in front of his chest. The position of the hands, held inward and touching, is known from sculpted stone monuments, where it carries connotations of rulership. A human head or masklike element is depicted in the figure's lap. The figure may represent a generalized concept of revered ancestor.

Vocabulary

Deities	A god or goddess. Something of divine status.
Stucco	A fine plaster used or modelling into architectural decorations.
Human form	Human body or has the characteristics of humans.
Censer	A container in which incense is burnt during a religious ceremony.
Slip	A mixture of clay and water to create a slurry which can be used to join two pieces of clay together.

Skills

Carving into clay to create detail
Investigating proportions and body shape
Develop confidence when working with clay
Developing joining techniques such as using slip