SCULPTURE is the one art whose value as a public decoration needs no argument for its support. It is the earliest of the decorative arts, for though architecture existed before sculpture, it was in carving that man seems first to have given evidence of the decorative gift. Its value as a record and as a memorial was so quickly learned and so generally recognized in the early centuries of civilization that much of the culture of past periods can be restored by means of the sculpture which they produced.

But the modern observer of art—and the observer is much more frequently met than the student—need not go back to early times to learn its value, either in itself, as an adjunct to a building, or as part of a scheme of public decoration. Such are the three aspects in which sculpture has been employed, and the examples of its use are almost without number. The modern question—the question which concerns us of to-day—is not so much what has been done, but what lessons can be drawn from past experiences for modern use.

To-day, the advocate of sculpture is likely to be dazzled by what is known of the past and what has survived until now. He will exclaim at the countless statues of imperial Rome, and bewilder his hearers by enumerating the multitude of statues, large and small, on the cathedral of Chartres. Nor will his claim rest on statistics alone, for astonishing as the record of number is, it will be surpassed by the quality of the art value.

There is small merit in the multiplicity of statues. Sculpture is the most difficult of the arts, and can be the highest expression of man's art culture. It can also reveal the utter incapability of the men who attempt to practise it. All sculpture is not good, but bad sculpture can not exist in a community in which the art sense has been so thoroughly developed as to form a critical public.

The problem for to-day, therefore, is not, how much sculpture can we have, but what good sculpture can we obtain, and display to our public? In the great sculpture periods: those of classic Greece, imperial Rome, the Middle Ages in northern Europe, the period of the Renascence in Italy, the later Renascence in France—there was no need to instruct the people in the art, nor to tell them why and how they should value it. In those days, people worked and thought in
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art more than they do in our own times; more than they are likely to do again. Centuries long, art was the medium for intellectual expression, and painting, sculpture, and architecture flourished marvelously. We can not hope that appreciation and cultivation of the arts will arise again in the same way. Modern art appreciation must be different from the classic, mediaeval, or Renascence appreciation. We can not and shall not think of art in the way in which it was regarded in those past ages; nor shall we practise it as it was practised then. But we shall have modern appreciation, modern methods, and modern results; and the great problem of the day is for all art lovers and art workers so to develop and forward the cause of art that it may regain once more the high levels of the past, albeit it speak in a new and modern tongue, distinctively our own.

We must not decry the art of our own time. Men can only do the best they can, and they can only take advantage of the opportunities which are offered them, or which they may carve out for themselves. A goodly step forward will be the recognition of essential differences in art—in methods and in work—in our day, from the art of previous days. Classic art, mediaeval art, Renascence art, were supremely great, because they were a natural product of their own period. If modern art is to be equally supreme, it must be equally spontaneous. But it can not be classic, or mediaeval, or Renascence, it must stand alone. It can only command respect, and win admiration, if it is modern.

A word of caution is needful. Modernity in sculpture, or in any form of art, is not synonymous with oddity, with unknown and uncouth combinations, or forms. It is not strained or forced art. It is neither forced, nor a clever transcript of a respectable academicism. The living sculptor must not only feel that he is alive in the twentieth century. He must further express modern life, thought, feeling and culture in his work. It is an indefinable quality, but not the less essential because it is difficult to describe it in words.

While it is an essential requirement that modern sculptors be modern, it is nevertheless true that the only real lessons in the sculptor's art are to be derived from a study of the past, by sculpture produced before the nineteenth century. For if the eighteenth century sculpture of France is not all inspiring, that period produced much fine work which no present-day sculptor can ignore. The museums of Europe are thronged with masterpieces from the past: many of them
PALACE OF THE OLD VINE; TOULOUSE, FRANCE; A FINE EXAMPLE OF FRENCH RENASCENCE ARCHITECTURE; THE WINDOWS BEING REMARKABLE FOR THEIR BEAUTIFUL STRUCTURAL DECORATION
of so supreme a quality that it would be folly to emulate them, and preposterous to seek to improve on them. Yet it is by contemplating just these works that the modern sculptor finds his noblest inspirations and is the more keenly inspired to greater effort himself.

But he must know how to use his study and how to profit by it. The truly great artist has no difficulty in this. Michelangelo loved, above all things, to study the remains of classic art, but save for a few minor pieces which were frankly modeled on Roman works, his own sculpture was so entirely of his own day and of such penetrating modernity that we to-day feel its living force and value. Here was rational study of the past, a proper appreciation of its works, a mastery of its secrets, and a final translation of its achievements into the master's own native tongue and that of his own time. No sculptor succeeded in so assimilating what he saw, studied and meditated, as Michelangelo, until Rodin struck a new note in sculpture with his astonishing art.

Supreme geniuses such as Michelangelo and Rodin—and I couple their names only as those of the most remarkable sculptors of their respective times—appear so rarely that epochs in art are named from them, and earlier and later sculpture is reckoned in its relationship to them. The bulk of sculpture is produced by the lesser men, for the very reason that the lesser men are more numerous. Many of these may, in themselves, be men of fine ability producing work of a very high order; but the larger amount of sculpture produced in any one century—for example—comes from chisels not handled by supreme artists. The more reason, therefore, for the study of great works by every one engaged in art workmanship! The artist, if he does not himself produce masterpieces, can at least familiarize himself with those wrought by greater hands than his, and improve himself as best he may.

The duty of the technician in art is, therefore, very clear. That of the connoisseur and art lover is not less evident. No art is possible without a public to support it. The responsibility for art rests upon the people, and of no form is this more true than sculpture, since sculpture is the most public of the arts. The patron of the painter may hang his treasures in his private gallery; the architect is so concerned with business details that he is often—and many times with utter justice—not ranked as an artist at all; more than for any other artist the public is the patron of the sculptor, since it is in public
work, in monuments and external decorations, that the latter has his most frequent rewards and wins his largest quotient of praise.

And the true artist lives on praise and appreciation: to him it is more than the nectar of life. It is life itself. A painter may gain reputation, although his work be known and loved by a few only. The sculptor must please and satisfy many thousands, and win praise, or merit dissatisfaction from very many people to whom he is not even a name. His art is not only difficult, technically and artistically, but the conditions under which it is shown are most complicated, often most disheartening.

There is need for change and progress. Modern sculpture does not suffer from lack of practitioners, nor even from lack of those who are competent. There are sculptors to-day producing work which, if not of the very highest rank, is yet so good as to promise durable reputation for them. It is not men who are needed, but rather wider appreciation of their works, broader knowledge of their achievements, livelier satisfaction in their capabilities. It is not the sculptors who need the spur, but the public, the great unwashed in art—if I may be permitted a barbarous expression—who know only what they like, and who like so little that it does not matter at all what their views may be on so important a subject.

The very first thing the public needs to know is how sculpture may be used and what it is for. Like the sculptor, it needs to study the art of the past, but for its own reasons. The public needs to study art to learn what it really is, to understand its earlier relations to the public of past times; to apprehend the conditions under which sculpture will best flourish, and to realize that art is not summed up and complete in the art of the present day and generation. It needs to learn, learn, learn. And the more difficult it is to learn, the more the records must be studied.

Art knowledge is difficult to impart. Many people think that they can get on without it, and many so exist. A very great deal of pleasure is lost thereby, but the ignorant ones never know what they have missed. Still, a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, and a few energetic workers can often accomplish wonders. There is no need for discouragement. Our sculptors do not have the opportunities enjoyed by other sculptors in more favorable times, but they are more and more winning their way. The question is not so much what they can do, but what opportunities the public will give them.