

Landmarks Guide for Adolescents



Koren Der Harootian

American, born in Armenia, 1909–1992

Prometheus and Vulture

1948

Marble

Subject: Depicting myths and stories

Activity: Create a drawing or painting that depicts a myth or story

Materials: A sheet of paper and graphite pencil for drawing materials. For painting materials: a brush; acrylic, oil, or tempera paints; and paper, canvas, cardboard, or fiberboard

Vocabulary: Abstract, direct carve, figurative, metaphor, mythology

i Introduction

Koren Der Harootian was born in Armenia during a time of persecution by the ruling Turks. His family fled to the United States and settled in Worcester, Massachusetts, a community where many Armenian immigrants were living. Later, he settled in New York and Philadelphia, after spending some years in Jamaica. He carved wood and bronze and was part of the “direct-carve” movement (carving done using only basic hand tools). *Prometheus and Vulture* was sculpted in marble using the “direct-carve” method.

Der Harootian often used classical and religious subjects as metaphors in his mostly figurative works. According to ancient Greek mythology, Prometheus disobeyed Zeus and secretly gave humans skills and knowledge relating to subjects as diverse as the alphabet, art, astronomy, and medicine. Maybe most importantly, he gave humans fire. In punishment for this last act, Zeus chained Prometheus to a mountaintop for eternity. Zeus’s vulture would tear open Prometheus’s flesh and eat his liver every day. At night, his flesh would heal again. After thirteen human generations, Hercules saved Prometheus.

? Questions

Why do you think Der Harootian chose this myth?

How do you think the story of Prometheus and Zeus relates to Der Harootian’s own life?

Why do you think he chose a direct-carving technique? How might this technique relate to the myth of Prometheus and Zeus?

Koren Der Harootian, continued



Activity

Research one of these stories: Sisyphus, Icarus, or Narcissus. Talk about what the stories mean. Then create a drawing or painting that depicts one of them. Think about your own interpretation of the story you chose and why you chose it.



Look Again

David Hare's sculpture *The Swan's Dream of Leda* is also based upon a classical Greek myth. The story tells of how the king of the gods, Zeus, desired a beautiful human woman, Leda. To disguise himself, Zeus appeared to Leda as a swan.

Compare and contrast *The Swan's Dream of Leda* and *Prometheus and Vulture*. Talk about the different materials the artists chose, the colors, and the abstract or realistic figurative qualities. Why might an artist choose to be more abstract? Why might he or she choose to be more figurative?



BTW

Der Harootian was a self-motivated learner. He taught himself how to watercolor first and then, when he went to Jamaica, how to carve in wood.



Vocabulary

Abstract - Expressing a quality apart from the way an object appears to the eye; the opposite of realistic

Direct carving - A twentieth-century term used to describe a less-planned approach to carving in which the sculptor carves the finished sculpture without using models, or maquettes

Figurative - Representing a figure

Metaphor - The use of one kind of object or idea in place of another, suggesting a likeness or analogy between them

Mythology - Stories dealing with the gods and legendary heroes of a particular people