

# Landmarks Guide For Adolescents

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## **Koren Der Harootian**

American, born in Armenia, 1909–1992

### ***Prometheus and Vulture***

1948

Marble

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**Subject:** Myths and stories in sculpture

**Activity:** Directly carve a mythical figure

**Materials:** Floral foam, carving tools (pencil, ends of pens, spoon, etc.), acrylic paint

**Vocabulary:** Armenian genocide, direct carving, figurative, metaphor, mythology, subtractive

## **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, after spending some years in Jamaica, he settled in New York and Philadelphia. 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. This sculpture was created in 1948, three years after the end of World War II.

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. As 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 to make art based on 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?

How do current events play a role in the significance of this sculpture?

## Koren Der Harootian, continued

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### Activity

- Do research on one of these stories: Sisyphus, Icarus, or Narcissus. Talk about what the stories mean. Think about your own interpretation of the story you chose and why you chose it.
- Using a block of floral foam, we will use a subtractive method to depict the story of your choice. Remove parts of the floral foam to make your figure using your carving tools. After carving, you can also add color to your sculpture using paint. Share the story of your sculpture to a partner.



### Look Again

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

Prometheus is known as the god of foresight. His brother Epimetheus, who famously let Pandora out of her box, was the god of hindsight. If Prometheus could see the future and know that he would eventually be released from his torment, then how did that help him endure his daily attacks? And why is this an important metaphor for Der Harootian?

Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, April 25th, is a day of reflection to honor those persecuted in 1915. The International Day of Remembrance was first recognized by the president of France in 2019 and the president of the United States in 2021.



### Vocabulary

**Armenian genocide** – The systematic destruction of the Armenian people and identity in the Ottoman Empire during World War I enacted by the ruling Committee of Union and Progress resulted in the destruction of more than two millennia of Armenian civilization

**Learn more:** <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-armenian-genocide-1915-16-overview>

**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** – (Of an artist or work of art) Representing forms that are recognizably derived from life

**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

**Subtractive** – (In sculpture) The artist starts with a larger piece of material and removes some of it until only the desired form remains

## Koren Der Harootian, continued

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### Artists with Related Works

Anita Weschler, *Victory Ball*, 1951

David Hare, *The Swan's Dream of Leda*, 1962

Hans Hokanson, *Source*, 1977