

40th Ohio Governor's Youth Art Exhibition
2009 First Place Art Criticism Winner
Nathaniel W. Reisinger, Urbana High School

Following the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian world entered a time period of turmoil and despair. Their previously assumed invincibility had been destroyed, and their lifestyle of ease epitomized in a funeral speech by Pericles, who said, "We live at ease and yet are equally ready to face the perils they [the Spartans] face," was in shambles. As a result, Greek sculpture broke away from the ideal of rational control so common in their Golden Age and entered a highly emotional and transient period of art. The Bronze Boxer captures the desperate search for meaning that was inherent in this desolate Hellenistic period of Greece and establishes a universal truth about the felling of loss.

One need look no further than a modern day high school football game to see evidence of this. Enter the locker room of the losing team and you will see many "Bronze Boxers" leaning forward and resting their elbows on their knees, overwhelmed by how tired they are. Some become aware of bumps and bruises and sit with their legs half extended, as stiffness pervades their joints. Shoulders give way to exhaustion, their entire bodies settling in to defeat. As the coach walks in, some turn their heads to see him, too sore and too crushed to move any other body part, as their eyes reflect the eternal question, "Why?"

Like the Bronze Boxer, there are no answers for them.

That is the basis for the extremity of this pain. It cannot be explained or justified, and it cannot be made to be reasonable in their minds. It feels wrong, as though they have been cheated out of their basic human right to happiness. Their goals have been shattered, twisting their hearts with uncontrollable anger and despair, swallowing them up. Nothing can ever make them feel right again in this moment.

As the coach talks, minds wander to the recent past. Thought of anger and sadness create an audible silence in the room as players begin to internalize their feelings. One can almost hear their pain.

"How could we have lost?"

"Why did this happen?"

"I can't believe those people told us everything was all right as we ran off the field. How can it be all right?"

"Why?"

"I didn't even hug my mom. I ran right past her and didn't even glance at her."

"Why?"

Their thoughts overlap in a sea of distress as each young man questions everything from the loss to his value as a human being. Oh, to have won! To have left everything right in the world, to have felt the joy of a win and be leaping and celebrating in the locker room instead of experiencing the exhausted defeat so strikingly similar to the Bronze Boxer.

Yet, there is one crucial difference between these players and their boxing counterpart. They are not bronze. They are not sculptural. They are not frozen in eternity, left questioning in pain and sorrow for the rest of their existence. They have vitality and youth, and will press on through life, certainly feeling more pain, but also achieving great joy. They will not be trapped in this loss forever.

Observe a Monday practice field. These players have moved on.



Bronze Boxer

Nathaniel W. Reisinger, Grade 12
Michael Simpson, Teacher

Note: *Nathaniel's* essay placed first among over 80 entries to the 2009 Art Criticism component of the Ohio Governor's Youth Art Exhibition. Juror was Dr. Terry Barrett, educator, author and artist. For program information, contact Nancy Pistone, nancy.pistone@ode.state.oh.us.