***Doryphoros (Canon)***

» After Polykleitos of Argos (Greek, ca. 480/475–415 BCE)

Created by master sculptor Polykleitos of Argos (ca. 480/475–415 BCE), the *Doryphoros*, or *Spear-Bearer*, has long been regarded as an exemplum of male beauty as conceived of by the ancient Greeks.

Polykleitos sought to capture the ideal proportions of the human figure in his statues and developed a set of aesthetic principles governing these proportions that was known as the *Canon* or “Rule.” In formulating this “Rule,” Polykleitos created a system based on a simple mathematical formula in which the human body was divided into measured parts that all related to one another.

Though we do not know the exact details of Polykleitos’s formula, the end result, as manifested in the *Doryphoros*, was the perfect expression of what the Greeks called *symmetria.* In art of the High Classical period (ca. 450–400 BCE), *symmetria*, or symmetry, not only encompassed a sense of proportion and balance, but was also an exercise in contrasts. The body of the *Doryphoros*, for example, stands in what is termed *contrapposto*, meaning that his weight rests on his right leg, freeing his left to bend. In the process, the right hip shifts up and the left down; the left shoulder raises and the right drops. His body is brought into a state of equilibrium through this counterbalancing act.

Although the *Doryphoros* represents a warrior poised for battle, he does not don a suit of armor or any other protective gear. In fact, were it not for the actual spear that that statue originally held, it would have been difficult to identify him as such. A hallmark of classical Greek sculpture, male nudity or nakedness was understood as a marker of civilization that separated the Greeks from their “barbarian” neighbors.

Many of the most influential Greeks of this period, including artists, writers, philosophers, and politicians, were obsessed with the notion that one should strive for perfection while recognizing that such perfection was unattainable. The face of the *Doryphoros* is devoid of individual features, which suggests that he is meant to represent an idealized version of the everyman, the perfect Greek male citizen (women were not citizens). Yet, his body—proportional, balanced, naked, strong, and exuding confidence—is one that the viewer might aspire to achieve, but never could.