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The beautifully imperfect sculptures of Massimiliano Pelletti



by Tobias van Schneider

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For hundreds of years, the art of sculpting has sought, in part, to immortalize humans in marble or stone. But visit any museum today and the truth is apparent: decay is inevitable. What were once godlike figures are now busts without heads and heads without noses.

At first glance, Massimiliano Pelletti's sculptures might seem like those from long ago. They are decidedly not.

Pelletti is a sculptor living and working in Pietrasanta, Italy, a hometown he shares with Michaelangelo. His figures, made from rough, porous or unusual stones, with cracked faces and crystalline spikes jutting from their heads, not only accept the imperfection of life but highlight it.

Here we talk with Pelletti about turning problems into resources, the importance of alone time and the idea of collaborating with your own work.



You just returned from a job in southern Italy. Can you tell us what it was and what you created?

I made a project for the "MARCA" museum, in a beautiful area of Southern Italy where, in the ancient times, there was a settlement of ancient Greece, and for that reason it is called Magna Grecia. There I presented my new project in which I created a mixture of Hellenic classical art and African art.



You originally studied philosophy. Who are some philosophers or ideas that inspire your work?

There are no particular philosophers who inspired my work, but all of the philosophers that I have studied have been important and necessary for my work. All of them helped me to open my mind, and this has been the real purpose of my studies.



I know you learned marble-working techniques from your grandfather and his work is a big influence for you. What is the most important thing he taught you?

My grandfather taught me to be humble, to fill the work with poetry and to face problems by transforming them into resources. Thanks to these teachings, in my work every defect has turned into merit.

"The beauty, the balance, the poetry are things that belong to everyone or almost everyone. If you can balance them in the right way, you can reach anyone."



That describes your work well – turning defects into merit. Does the material itself often inspire your work, or do you typically begin with an idea and just see what happens?

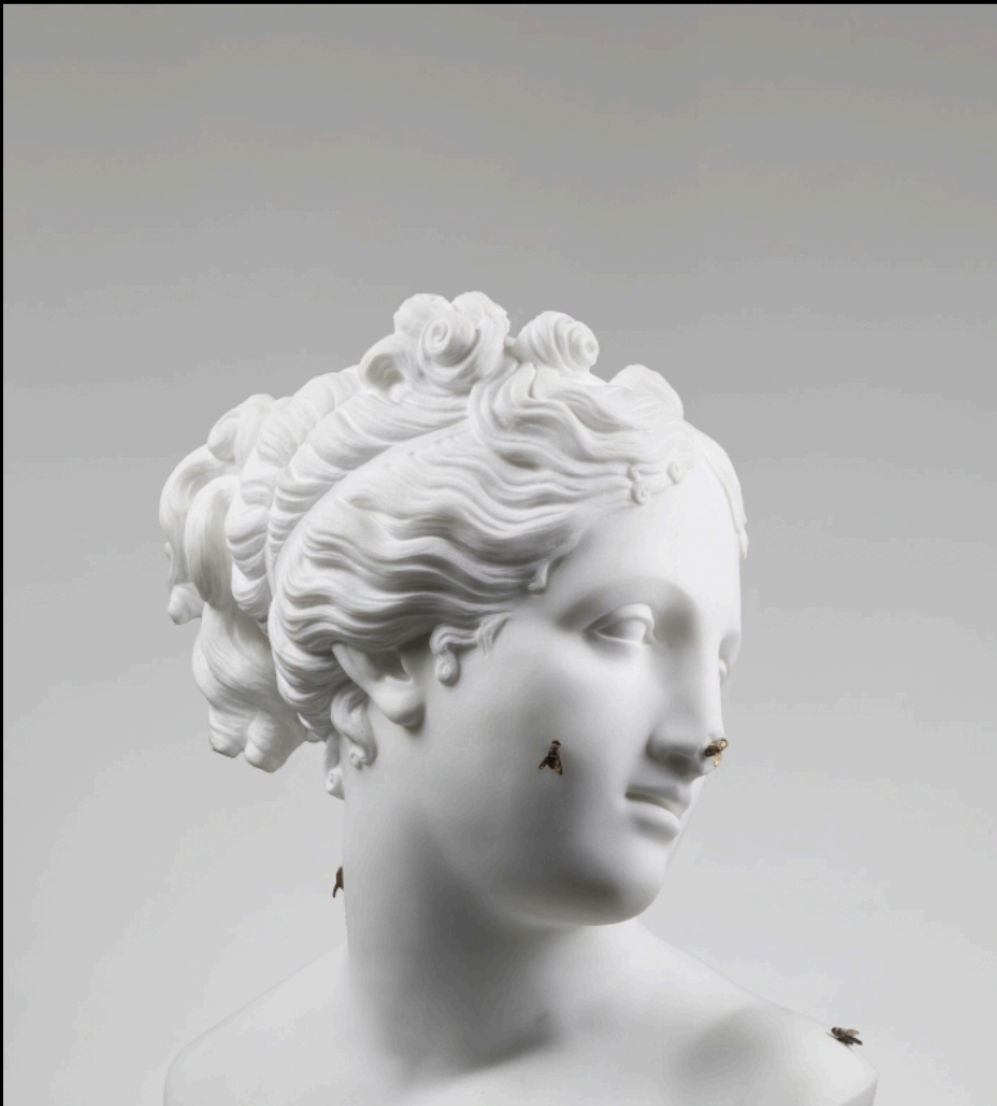
I start with an idea, then I listen to what the material suggests to me and the final work is the result of our collaboration, what I wanted to do and what the material decided that I would do.



Classical sculptures usually have this heroic, larger-than-life quality about them, portraying a person as more noble, more strong or more beautiful than they might have been. Yet your work twists this, adding unexpected elements of imperfection or even horror.

What story are you trying to tell with this type of work?

In antiquity, classicism represented the divine perfection and also man's ambition to rise to that perfection. In my work, I simply made this ambition more earthly, closer to us, to the contemporary man, with all its defects and its fragilities.



The current design trend is minimalism. At least in the West, we are removing all ornamentation in architecture, graphic design, furniture design and more, in favor of a more sterile, “simple” aesthetic.

What is your opinion about the current minimalist trend?

Each style has its history, its period and its trends. I believe that what really matters in painting, architecture, design is to create a balance. It is in the absence of noise that the brain truly appreciates what it is in front of it. I like a lot the minimalism when it is well balanced and in fact I also use it in my works. For example, the iron bases that I make for my sculptures are very "minimal" and create a sort of contrast with my works.



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The ancient Greek used the word “Arete” in association with excellence. Arete could be about pursuing knowledge, or about excellence of craft, about bravery or about living up to your full potential.

Today, at least in the West, we seem less concerned with Arete and more concerned about getting the job done efficiently and going home. What are your thoughts on this? Do you strive for Arete in your own work?

Yes, I strive for this because I am still convinced that beauty can help the world. Therefore I prepare my work competently, experimenting with new techniques, studying history and geology, trying to make what I do better and better.

Historically, sculptures like yours were created for and appreciated by the aristocracy – those who had the money, education or power to access it. How do we make this type of art more accessible to a wider audience?

I found that my work appeals to collectors of any age, from the oldest and to the youngest generations. The beauty, the balance, the poetry are things that belong to everyone or almost everyone. If you can balance them in the right way, you can reach anyone.

"Knowing how to stay alone is important for those who do creative work. It is a moment to look within yourself and find those depths to imprison within your works."

"No prophet is accepted in his home town." I rarely quote the Bible, but this line struck me recently. It can be hard to become our true selves in our hometown because everyone saw us grow up there. They have a specific image of who we are based on who we were.

What is it like working and living in the same town you grew up in?

Cultivating a credible identity in your own city is an important first step. I must say that I was lucky and good in that. The last year I made a public work for the municipality of Forte dei Marmi and it was for me the proof that I conquered my territory. I think that if you do good, you receive good.

I imagine with your type of work, you spend a lot of time alone. Do you like it this way or do your days ever get lonely?

I like being alone. I made a fireplace in my studio and when I light the fire, it is like someone was there with me.

Knowing how to stay alone is important for those who do creative work. It is a moment to look within yourself and find those depths to imprison within your works.



What sort of environment do you prefer to work in? Do you play music in your studio while you work, and if so, what music do you work best to?

I like silence, or rather I like the noise that matter makes while I work it, because from that type of noise I understand how it will behave. I have to listen to it.

I like music very much, but it is part of my free time, as many other things. To satisfy a curiosity, recently I am listening to Mayo Thompson, "Corky's Debt to His Father."

See more of Massimiliano Pelletti's work [on his website](#), and be sure to follow him [on Instagram](#).

Photography by Nicola Gnesi and the Barbara Paci Art Gallery





