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Object Essay:

Italy in the 1600s or 17th century was known for many things that still have an impact on the world today, such as art and religion. This time was known as the Baroque period, and it was widely known for its dark colors, theatrics, and the way that religious subjects were depicted in art. One piece that I want to focus on is known as "Corpus Christi" and was made by a well-known artist of the Baroque period, Alessandro Algardi, this piece embodies two of the previously mentioned aspects of this time period, art and religion. By taking a closer look at the time period, and the material used, we can see the historical and modern significance of this piece, and how might have the artistic meaning have changed based on the different artistic periods. We can also see how the significance of the material and the concept have changed over time.

Corpus Christi stands at a height of 73 cm from head to toe, made of cast bronze, it was made in 1614. He is posed as if he was on the cross, with his arms outstretched in either direction, head up turned and face holds an expression of agony and pain. He only has a loin cloth wrapped loosely around his waist, that looks like it is being blown by the wind. On both his feet, and both his hands he has stigmata. All his muscles are very strained, possibly to signify how tense he was, and in pain he was in. Widely known as the baroque period, this period was characterized by lots of dark colors, depictions of dramatic actions, emotions, and stories. It was a transition from bright colors into darker tones. People also wanted to show sharp contrast between shadow and light in their works. With this new drama artists were still depicting lots of biblical figures and stories. Alessandro Algardi was no different, the original provenance of this piece was that it was commissioned by Cardinal Pignatelli, future Pope Innocenzo XII and it was passed down in his family¹. The Cardinal owning this piece is significant for this time period

¹ "Alessandro Algardi," Artsy, accessed January 14, 2020. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/alessandro-algardi-corpus-christi>.

because, as a religious leader he was promoting the new art style that some may not have agreed with. As a future Pope, *Corpus Christi*, was most likely placed somewhere publicly or in view of a lot of people. Alessandro was a very well known sculpture in this time period. His two most well known pieces are of depictions of biblical stories. seeing as the piece was commissioned by a soon to be Pope, it shows Algardi's skill and ability. This piece could have gotten him many new connections in the art world. This piece shows how Algardi was able to take such a familiar figure, and portray such an emotion on his face. We are able to look at this piece and see that he was suffering on the cross because of how well Algardi was able to have him emote.

Even the medium of this piece reflects this drama. The Statue was cast from bronze, a very complex metal to sculpt with then, and now. It took a mastery of the skill in order to form the complex shapes and curves, let alone include details small enough to Capture a dramatic scene filled with pain and hope. During this time, bronze was more often used to make smaller works of art rather than large scale pieces. Making bigger pieces took a lot more time seeing as the metal is very hard to mold and manipulate. It takes a lot of heat and space to be able to make larger works. It is also a very heavy medium. Not only that, bronze was said to hold a sense of intimacy, due to the fact that it was a commonly used household material and played such a big part in people's everyday lives.² The fact that *Corpus Christi* is made out of bronze is a conscious decision that Algardi made, possibly because he wanted the work to be durable and not break down over the years. His choice of a durable material matches the durability of his subject matter, seeing as people still believe in Christ's message today. By depicting Christ Algardi wanted to pay some sort of tribute to him by making a piece that was durable and could withstand the strains of time. This material makes an impact on the art because it communicates a dark mood. This is especially dramatic or impressive because Algardi has mastered a difficult material to work with and was able to make a durable metal look fragile. A

² Jennifer Moutagu, *bronzes* (London: Octopus Books Ltd, 1972) 6.

large part of the theatrics in this piece, is the artist's mastery of the material. Algardi being able to make the statue emote, adds to the dramatic flair of the time period because he was able to show his mastery of the material in the small details of this piece. In today's society many people don't have much of a connection with bronze seeing as it is not used the same way anymore, before it was used in creating statues and works of art that people fell in love with, now people don't have the same fascination with these works. It is mostly used in tools and is mixed with other metals. We don't have such a personal connection to this type of metal because we have advanced our ways of building, and have found stronger metals³. Very similar to how many of us have lost our connection to Christ, and religion, we have also moved away from the use of Bronze. As for why we may have moved away from the Church and religion, people stopped putting their fate in a force that they can't see, and now have been consumed by a capitalistic form of greed and hunger. People chase after money and power and don't have a strong connection to religion.

Religion has always been a topic of conversation whether it be in art or in politics. It is something that can cause controversy, or be a cause for unification. The Baroque style of art brought a new sense of theatrics to the world of religion and art, due to artist having their characters portray emotions that we would usually see in real people. This piece was definitely based off a biblical story, but depicted in a completely new style that wasn't yet accepted. It was shown in a way that made you almost feel what Christ was feeling as he was being crucified. This piece might have been significant in this time period because it was done in a new style of art and it was endorsed by a Cardinal and soon to be Pope, meaning that the art style was being approved of in a sense by someone who held status in the world. The cardinal originally owning *Corpus Christi* amplified the impact it had on the art world because of his social, and political status. Today people have a completely different outlook on life, we are all so focused

³ "How Bronze is Used Today", Stanford Advanced Materials, accessed January 21, 2020
<https://www.samaterials.com/content/203-how-bronze-is-used-today>

on money and trying to make a name for ourselves and buying designer clothes. We don't have many things that as a society we can agree on. The reason for all the disagreements in this society is that people are consumed with greed and believe that there is a price to pay for everything. People's priority has shifted from religion to materialistic things. People are okay with stepping on people in order to get where they want to go, which can cause lots of conflict. Therefore the impact of this piece has changed over time due to the change in priorities of the world.

To close off my analysis of this artwork, I definitely think that the time has changed the way that the art is seen, and interpreted. There's a lack of connection with religion and spirituality and more of a focus on capitalism and money. People's lives today revolve around money and material things and not church as much, or they don't have a strong connection to God. Where the medium and the concept are still seen in the world today, they now have a vastly different impact on the people seeing it due to the change in society's values and priorities.