

Larger Than Life: The Tradition of Colossal Sculpture from Antiquity  
to the Twenty-First Century

The ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, was the first writer to discuss the *kolossoi*, describing the gigantic stone statues of pharaonic Egypt. Two colossal statues created by the Greeks themselves - the statue of Zeus in his temple at Olympia and the Colossus of Rhodes - made the top seven list of must-see wonders in the ancient world. A more inclusive list of all known examples of giant statues in antiquity is a much longer one, encompassing monuments from sites around the Mediterranean, created over a span of centuries. While other cultures also created large sculpture - notably the Olmec colossal heads and the buried monolithic figures of Easter Island - the ancient Greeks and Romans stand out as creators of large scale, idealized human forms displayed to the public in civic settings. Interestingly, this tradition has continued in the modern Western world, with colossal forms regularly set up across the United States. From the Statue of Liberty, to the pairing of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox in Minnesota, to Superman in Metropolis, Illinois, to Athena in the Nashville Parthenon to Birmingham's very own Vulcan atop Red Mountain in Birmingham, Alabama, contemporary tourists also can experience standing in the shadows of such massive, idealized forms.

This paper examines the long tradition of creating these colossal statues through a survey (when possible) of extant remains of the sculpture and the historic writings that describe them, a discussion of the technology required to create such wonders, and the significance of their symbolism and placement in public settings.