

MARBLE SCULPTURE

The Basics of Knocking Marble

In its simplest concept, sculpture is simply the art of breaking stone or other material into a specific shape. The marble is broken by striking it with tools. In practice however, adhering strictly to these simple instructions will rarely result in an aesthetically pleasing product. Even the geniuses among us need to know which tools to use and how to use them.

The Tools

- The Italian terms for the tools of sculpture are given here, and where possible the English terms have been included.
- *La Mazza* - The *mallet*. This is used to strike the chisels, sometimes your own hand, and, in moments of frustration, the stone itself.
- *Gli Scalpelli* - The *chisels*. These come in various types:
- *La Subbia* - a pointed chisel or punch
- *L'Unghietto* - Literally, "little fingernail"
- *La Gradina* - a chisel with multiple teeth
- *Lo Scalpello* - a flat chisel
- *Lo Scapezzatore* - a hefty chisel with a broad blunt edge, for splitting.
- *Il Martello Pneumatico* - *Air hammer*
- *Il Flessibile* - an angle grinder, fitted with an *electrolysis*-applied diamond studded blade
- *Hand Drill*

The Method

Good old-fashioned, hammer and point work is the most brutal technique used in working stone and the oldest: in use since Pygmalion. It consists of holding the pointed chisel against the stone and swinging the hammer at it as hard as possible. When the hammer connects with the striking end of the chisel, its energy is transferred down the length and concentrates on a single point on the surface of the block, breaking the stone all around. This is continued in a line following the desired contour. It may sound simple but many months are required to attain competence in this, with more than a few smashed fingers along the way. Most beginners instinctively hit the chisel with short quick blows, it produces a satisfactory-looking result and it is easier to hit the end of the chisel accurately. This novices' technique is inefficient, however, and will tire you out while only digging shallow lines. A good stone worker can maintain a rhythm of relatively longer blows (about one per second), swinging the hammer in a wider arc, lifting the chisel between blows to flick out any chips that remain in the way, and repositioning it for the next blow. This way, one can drive the point deeper into the stone and remove more material at a time. Some stoneworkers also spin the subbia in their fingers between hammer blows, thus applying with each blow a different part of the point to the stone. This helps prevent the point from breaking.