Shodhpith
International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
(International Open Access, Peer-reviewed & Refereed Journal)
(Multidisciplinary, Bimonthly, Multilanguage)
Volume: 2 Issue: 1 January-February 2026

A Study of Chandigarh Tricity Realistic Portrait Sculptures in Different Mediums and Techniques

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Article Info: *(Recieved- 02/01/2026, Accept- 05/01/2026, Published- 10/01/2026)*

DOI- 10.64127/Shodhpith.2026v2i10016

Abstract

This study investigates the materials, methodologies, and socio-cultural impacts of contemporary realistic portrait sculpture in the Chandigarh Tricity region. Drawing upon primary interviews, studio observations, and biographical data from seven prominent sculptors—Jagdeep S. Jolly, Gurpreet Singh Dhuri, Jaswinder Singh, Mandeep Singh, Pradeep Kumar, William Singh, and Janak Singh—this paper examines the shift from traditional mediums like clay and stone to modern composites such as silicone and fiberglass. The findings reveal that while anatomical precision and realistic observation remain the foundation of their practices, these artists have diversified their applications into public heritage, commercial monuments, cinematic special effects, and therapeutic replicas. The Government College of Art, Chandigarh, emerges as a vital institutional anchor that has preserved academic realism while fostering technical innovation.

Keywords: Realistic Portrait Sculpture, Chandigarh Tricity, Silicone Casting, Stone Carving, Cultural Heritage, Special Effects (SFX)

Introduction

Realistic portrait sculpture holds a venerable place in the global history of art, acting as a bridge between three-dimensional anatomical accuracy and the psychological essence of human character. In the Indian subcontinent, this tradition spans five millennia—from the Indus Valley Civilization's "Priest-King" to the elaborate temple carvings of later dynasties. In contemporary India, regional art ecosystems play a crucial role in adapting these historical legacies to modern environments. The Chandigarh Tricity—comprising Chandigarh, Mohali, and Panchkula—has emerged as a principal center for realistic sculpture in Northern India.

A major catalyst for this artistic hub is the Government College of Art, Chandigarh, which has systematically nurtured generations of sculptors under a rigorous curriculum based on life study, structural modeling, and material handling. This research paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary sculptural landscape in the Chandigarh Tricity. It investigates how seven pioneering sculptors utilize diverse mediums, handle technical challenges, and contribute to both public memory and commercial visual industries.



Research Scholar Mr. Amarbir Singh working on clay, and portrait sculptures at the Government College of Art, Chandigarh.

Research Objectives

This research paper aims to achieve the following specific goals:

1. Identify and document the primary mediums and technical workflows used in realistic portrait sculpture across the Chandigarh Tricity.
2. Evaluate the relationship between sculptural materials (e.g., stone, wood, clay, metal, silicone) and the techniques required to manipulate them.
3. Analyze the profiles and distinctive contributions of seven contemporary sculptors associated with this region.
4. Critically examine the socio-cultural, educational, and commercial value of realistic portrait sculpture in contemporary society.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following key inquiries:

- RQ1: How do contemporary sculptors in the Chandigarh Tricity balance traditional manual skills with industrial and synthetic materials?
- RQ2: What are the specific technical stages, material constraints, and safety challenges associated with mediums like stone, wood, metal, fiber, and silicone?
- RQ3: In what ways do the individual practices of the selected seven sculptors intersect with public monuments, education, cinema, and heritage conservation?
- RQ4: How does the medium of realistic sculpture function to preserve cultural identity and social values?

Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, empirical research design. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven selected sculptors practicing within or trained in the Chandigarh Tricity region. These personal accounts were supplemented by field observations of their working studio spaces, analytical examinations of their active portfolios, and a review of documented biographical details. Secondary data was compiled from regional exhibition records, historical references on Indian sculpture, and institutional archives of the Government College of Art, Chandigarh. Comparative analysis was subsequently applied to identify shared workflows, material-specific challenges, and distinct thematic trajectories.

Literature Review

The academic scholarship surrounding portrait sculpture consistently highlights the tension between objective realism and subjective expression. In The Materials of Sculpture, historical trends show that the physical parameters of a chosen medium dictate the formal limits of representation. While stone and wood carving rely on subtractive methods that require pre-planned precision, clay modeling is additive, offering fluid spatial exploration.

In the Indian context, the evolution of public portraiture has been closely tied to nationalism and the memorialization of historical figures. Recent scholarship on contemporary practice indicates that the traditional bounds of fine art are dissolving. Sculptors are increasingly applying their physical fabrication skills to modern commercial spheres, such as prosthetic design, cinematic special effects, and architectural heritage preservation. This study builds on existing literature by offering a highly localized, technically detailed examination of how these global trends are manifest in the Chandigarh Tricity.

Step-by-Step Analysis of Each Artist

1.



Portrait Sculptor Mr. Jagdeep S. Jolly

Born on December 28, 1973, in Muktsar, Punjab, Jagdeep S. Jolly developed an early fascination with art through modeling clay toys. This childhood hobby matured into formal academic training at the College of Art, New Delhi, where he completed his Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in Sculpture in 2001, earning the K. Kulkarni Award Scholarship and the Dhanraj Bhagat Award. Jolly spent five years teaching as an Assistant Professor of Sculpture at the Government College of Art, Chandigarh, before accepting a permanent role as a Fine Arts Teacher in the Education Department of the Chandigarh Administration, a position he has held for two decades.

[Clay Modeling] → [Anatomy & Proportions] → [Fiber Casting] → [Metallic Copper Finish]

Jolly's studio practice focuses on capturing the physical likeness and psychological presence of monumental Indian figures. His typical workflow starts by manually modeling a realistic portrait in clay, focusing first on structural bones and muscle groups before introducing fine skin details. He relies on his visual judgment and observational skills during the initial block-out phase, using calipers and measuring tools only at the end to verify the accuracy of his work. Once the clay model is finalized, he casts the sculpture in fiberglass (FRP) and applies a rich, metallic copper-colored coating. Notable examples of his realistic work include highly detailed busts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (depicting his classic spectacles, coat, and tie) and former President Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. Jolly operates out of his studio in Sector 20-B, Chandigarh, where he advocates for 3D portraiture as a powerful tool to preserve cultural history for future generations.

2.



Portrait Sculptor Mr. Gurpreet Singh Dhuri

Gurpreet Singh Dhuri is an innovative sculptor who blends traditional fine arts with state-of-the-art cinematic applications. Hailing from Ghanaur Khurd in Sangrur, Punjab, he completed his B.F.A.

and M.F.A. (specializing in Portrait Sculpture) at the Government College of Art, Chandigarh. He is the founder of Dhuriz Studio and has built a diverse practice utilizing bronze, silicone, plaster, and fiberglass.

Dhuri's creative methodology begins with comprehensive preparatory drawing, where he studies the subject's background, facial expressions, and overall personality. The physical sculpture is modeled first in clay, which is then cast. For his hyper-realistic silicone portraits, Dhuri uses a dual-mold technique: a mold is made first of the basic portrait structure, and a second mold is taken after high-fidelity skin textures are carved. He achieves realistic skin tones by blending pigments directly into liquid silicone and uses a needle to painstakingly insert hair strands one by one.

Dhuri's portfolio includes public monuments, such as the bronze statue of Maharaja Yadavindra Singh at Patiala, and commercial film projects. He has designed realistic prosthetics, special effects makeup, and anatomical replicas for major Bollywood productions like Tumbbad, Gangs of Wasseypur, Dil Dhadakne Do, and Badlapur. He won the Terror Molins Award for Best SFX and Makeup for the film Demons (2024).

3.



Portrait Sculptor Mr. Jaswinder Singh

Born on February 22, 1971, in Mehandipur, Ludhiana, Jaswinder Singh's path was shaped by his working-class family and a passion for drawing. He earned his B.F.A. in Sculpture in 1998, an M.A. in Fine Arts, and subsequently an M.F.A. in Sculpture from the Government College of Art, Chandigarh. He has balanced his studio work with over twenty years of art education, teaching at various regional institutions like Desh Bhagat University and the Government College of Art, Chandigarh.

Jaswinder's portraiture technique relies on working with live models. He seats the subject and sketches them from multiple angles before constructing a wire armature on a portrait stand positioned at eye level. He wraps the armature in jute or rope to provide a strong base for the clay. He uses various manual tools to create delicate surface textures, but warns that managing the mold-making process—particularly when opening plaster of Paris, molds —remains a highly delicate task. His works are featured in public spaces like Punjab Agricultural University and Jammu University. He is a recipient of the Sohan Qadri Fellowship (2017) from the Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi.

4.



Portrait Sculptor Mr. Mandeep Singh

Based in Kurali, Mohali, Mandeep Singh completed his academic studies at the Government College of Art, Chandigarh, and has focused on portraiture since 2008. Mandeep is a highly versatile material experimentalist, working with marble, wood, metal, terracotta, plaster, fiber, and organic elements like tree bark and peanut shells.

Material	Key Sub-Techniques	Material Properties & Challenges
Marble	Direct subtractive carving	Prefers fine-grained Makrana and Italia varieties; uses water to identify cracks.
Wood	Chisel and hammer; mechanical sanding	Primarily uses Sheesham; grinder blades ca catch in grain grooves.
Terracotta	Hollow hand-building; kiln firing	Handled without an internal armature t prevent cracks during firing.
Plaster	Direct block carving	Kept wet during carving; much faster tha

Mandeep's favorite medium is fine-grained white Makrana marble, in which he carved his first self-portrait. His expressive work is deeply influenced by classical masters like Michelangelo and Bernini, alongside the emotional styles of Impressionism and Expressionism.

5. Pradeep Kumar



Portrait Sculptor Mr. Mr. Pradeep Singh and Dr. Yatti Dutt, along with their students, creating a large-scale portrait sculpture of Shaheed Bhagat Singh at Desh Bhagat University

Born in 1986 in Kaithal, Haryana, Pradeep Kumar completed his B.F.A. and M.F.A. in Sculpture from the Government College of Art, Chandigarh. His technical mastery across mediums like clay, stone, wood, and metal has earned him comparison to classical masters.

Pradeep's career is marked by major public installations. He served as the Art Director and Chief Sculptor for the Bharat Mitra Stambh Museum in Khanda Kheri, Haryana, where he led the design of monumental stone carvings illustrating scenes from the Indus Valley Civilization to the Indian Independence Movement. He also contributed to the sacred architecture of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, creating realistic fiber-and-stone relief sculptures of key Ramayana scenes for the temple's lower plinth.

On the international stage, Pradeep won first prize at the World Ice Sculpture Championship in Sweden (2019/2020) with a detailed ice sculpture titled Kaliya Mardan, carved at sub-zero temperatures. He continues to work on international projects, including commissions for a Jain Temple in New Jersey, USA.

6.



Portrait Sculptor Mr. William Singh

William Singh, a professional prosthetics sculptor based in Mumbai, originally hails from Bhadaur, Punjab. He earned his B.A. from Punjabi University, Patiala, and went on to complete his M.F.A. in Sculpture from the Government College of Art, Chandigarh, in 2017.

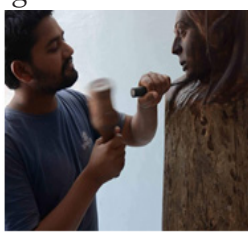
In his special effects (SFX) work for the film industry, William works primarily with sulfur-free clay. Standard sulfur-based clays can inhibit the curing process of liquid silicone. His workflow is highly systematic:

[Sulfur-Free Clay Model] → [Anatomy Block-Out] → [High-Fidelity Skin Texturing] → [Two-Part Silicone Casting] → [Individual Hair Punching]

To reinforce his silicone sculptures, William often integrates an inner fiberglass support structure.

Beyond commercial cinema, William highlights the profound emotional power of realistic sculpture. He recalls a project where his studio created a hyper-realistic silicone replica of a deceased infant for a grieving mother. This physical surrogate served as a therapeutic tool, helping her emotionally stabilize and gradually accept her loss alongside medical counseling.

7.



Portrait Sculptor Mr. Janak Singh

Janak Singh is an accomplished sculptor and social activist from Ramgarh, Barnala. He completed his B.F.A. (2010–2014) and M.F.A. (2014–2016) in Sculpture from the Government College of Art, Chandigarh. Janak's early art education began at home, watching his mother create traditional Punjabi folk art and clay ornaments.

Janak's work focuses on preservation and social activism. He established the Virasti Heritage Art Gallery in his native village of Ramgarh, where he displays handmade portraits of regional poets, Sufi saints, labor leaders, and social activists to inspire local youth.

His notable projects include fabricating a replica of Chandigarh's famous Rock Garden for the 15th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2016. He has also created life-size camel sculptures for the Bikaner Camel Festival, public works at the Bikaner Railway Station, and a portrait of Leo Tolstoy in plaster. Wood remains his favorite medium, and he uses its natural forms to shape his carvings.

Comparative Analysis

An examination of these seven sculptors reveals a shared academic foundation centered on Chandigarh, alongside diverse pathways in material application:

- The Academic Core: All seven artists received critical training at the Government College of Art, Chandigarh. This common foundation is clear in their shared approach: they all begin with rigorous clay modeling, emphasize underlying skeletal and muscle anatomy, and treat realistic likeness as a baseline before moving into abstraction or commercial finishes.
- Material Specialization: The cohort demonstrates a clear division between traditional and modern materials. While Mandeep Singh, Pradeep Kumar, and Janak Singh specialize in traditional materials like stone and wood, Gurpreet Singh Dhuri and William Singh have adapted their skills to synthetic, high-tech mediums like silicone and foam latex for the entertainment industry.
- Conceptual Motifs: These sculptors apply their skills to diverse cultural ends. Pradeep Kumar and Jagdeep Jolly focus primarily on national history, civic pride, and sacred temple iconography. In contrast, Janak Singh uses his work for rural activism and local memory, while Gurpreet Dhuri and William Singh focus on cinematic storytelling and hyper-realistic illusion.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that realistic portrait sculpture remains a vital and evolving medium. Despite the rise of digital tools like 3D scanning and printing, these sculptors emphasize that

manual modeling offers an irreplaceable artistic depth. A machine-made model may capture exact proportions, but it often lacks the subtle, expressive qualities of a hand-sculpted portrait.

Furthermore, the transition of fine art sculptors into commercial spaces—such as Bollywood prosthetics or national heritage museums—demonstrates the versatility of their academic training. These artists show that realistic sculpture is not just a gallery medium; it serves a vital role in public education, commercial cinema, and therapeutic healing.

Findings

1. Clay as the Universal Foundation: Every sculptor studied begins their workflow with clay, citing its unmatched flexibility for making quick anatomical and expressive corrections.
2. Material-Driven Techniques: The technical approach is dictated by the chosen material. While clay allows fluid, continuous changes, stone and wood require subtractive methods that demand pre-planned precision. Modern silicone requires highly specialized processes, such as using sulfur-free clay and manual hair punching.
3. Institutional Influence: The Government College of Art, Chandigarh, has been instrumental in preserving realistic academic training in Northern India, producing skilled artists who successfully transition into fine arts, public monuments, and commercial industries.
4. Socio-Cultural and Therapeutic Impact: Realistic sculpture serves as a powerful medium for public memory, local history, and social awareness. It also has surprising therapeutic value, as seen in the creation of hyper-realistic replicas to help individuals cope with grief.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the vibrant realistic portrait sculpture movement in the Chandigarh Tricity. By analyzing the work of seven prominent sculptors, the study shows how academic training, regional heritage, and modern materials intersect to keep this classical medium relevant. Whether carving marble, casting silicone, or creating local heritage galleries, these artists demonstrate that realistic sculpture remains a powerful tool for preserving history, expressing human emotion, and engaging communities.

Recommendations

Based on this study, the following recommendations are proposed to support and expand the field of realistic sculpture:

1. Establish a Dedicated Portrait Museum: As envisioned by local artists, a public museum dedicated to realistic portrait sculpture should be established to preserve and study the portraits of key regional and national figures.
2. Integrate Modern Materials in Academic Curricula: Fine arts institutions should formalize training in modern materials, such as silicone casting, resin fabrication, and cinematic prosthetics, alongside traditional stone and bronze techniques.
3. Expand Public Art Commissions: Municipal corporations and cultural ministries should actively commission local sculptors to design public memorials and interactive street installations, enriching civic spaces and making history visually accessible.

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Cite this Article-

"Amarbir Singh; Dr. Yatti Dutt", "A Study of Chandigarh Tricity Realistic Portrait Sculptures in Different Mediums and Techniques" Shodhpith International Multidisciplinary Research Journal, ISSN: 3049-3331 (Online), Volume: 2, Issue: 01, January-February 2026.

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