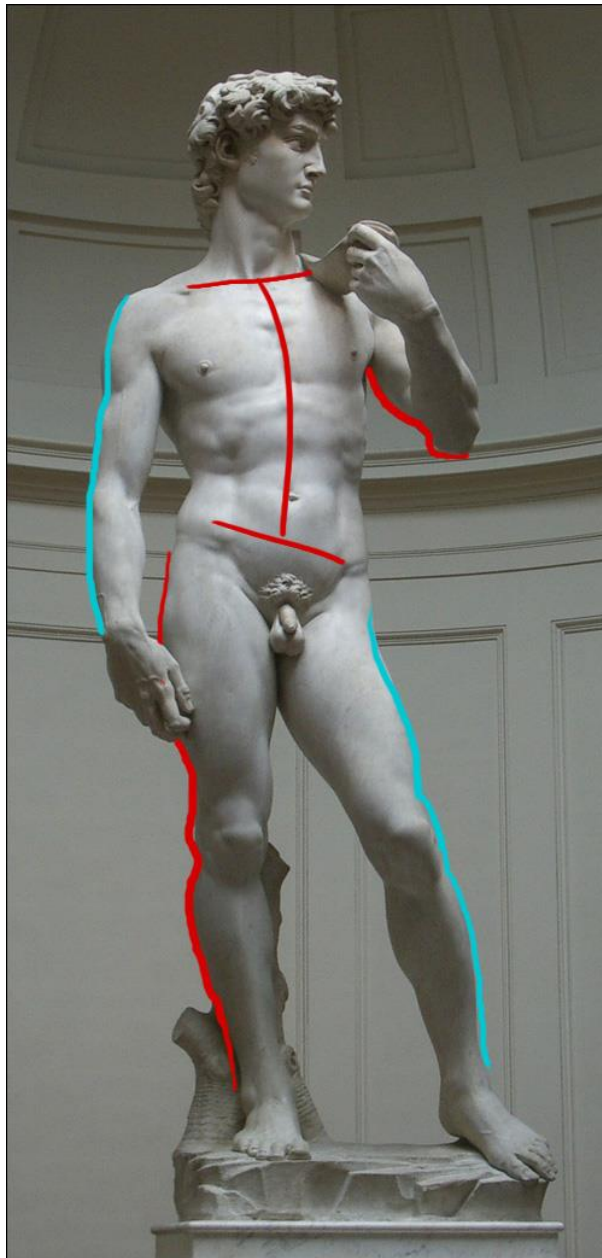


THE CONTRAPPOSTO POSE

What is contrapposto? If you've been in art circles where this term was discussed, you probably know that it relates to the way a figure is standing.

Specifically, *contrapposto* is when a figure stands with one leg holding its full weight and the other leg relaxed. This classic pose causes the figure's hips and shoulders to rest at opposite angles, giving a slight s-curve to the entire torso.



My apologies to **Michelangelo**, for using the David in this example—the red lines show where his muscles are tensed and the blue ones where his muscles are relaxed.

Michelangelo's David really IS the perfect example of contrapposto in Renaissance sculpture. You can easily see why contrapposto was considered the perfect pose for the human figure—it's a very natural, very "human" stance.

For instance, you or I might stand in exactly the same manner while waiting in line at the coffee shop simply because it's the most effective way to place your feet in that situation—you're at rest, but prepared to take another step at a moment's notice.

So where did contrapposto begin?

Well, despite the word itself being an Italian term (translated it means "counterpoise"), this particular method came about long before Michelangelo and the Italian Renaissance.

Contrapposto was actually created by the ancient Greeks in order to give their statues more "human" characteristics.

The earliest Greek statues like the one shown on the left were called Kouros and depicted young Greek men or Greek gods. They weren't very lifelike—every sculpture faced the front with its shoulders and hips squared up and (usually) one foot slightly in front of the other.

That stance is almost impossible to maintain in real life (try keeping your hips straight while stepping forward) and perhaps it bothered the Greeks in their search for perfection.

It wasn't long before they developed contrapposto as a natural way of depicting the human body, and it's been used ever since—not just by the Greeks but also by the Romans who came after them, the European artists during the Renaissance.



