

LESSON PLAN: People in Art

By Amy Wunsch, April 2011

Key Idea:

Artists have been interested in depicting the human figure since prehistoric times. Whether in drawings or sculpture, the human figure as a subject allows artists to explore culture and personality, anatomy and symbolism, states of mind and states of action. Contemporary artists may create life-like and even life-sized human figures, referencing themselves or live models. They may stylize or abstract the human figure for emotional and expressive purposes.



Objectives:

Students will become familiar with our fascination with the human figure through a brief discussion. Some questions to stimulate thought:

- Why do you think human beings have sculpted, painted and drawn the human figure since before pre-history?
- When you have drawn or sculpted a likeness of yourself, what kind of details did you include to express your “inside” self, or inner personality?
- Would it be easier to express a particular mood or emotion with an abstracted figure, or one that was created very realistically?
- How would you portray the human figure in movement or action?
- When you look at an artwork of a human figure, where do you look to see the personality of the person depicted?
- How might a particular pose tell you about the way the person might be feeling inside?

Students will go on an instructor-led tour, viewing a variety of full length human figures, both 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional, in a variety of media. Students will investigate and describe works that are abstracted or life-like, those that have many details and those that have very little details, etc.

Students will create a miniature person out of air-drying clay using the slab technique. The figure must convey some sort of action or movement in its pose. Several possibilities could be used to approach the figure:

- a self-portrait, using personal details in clay to express personality, hobbies, likes and dislikes, etc.
- an “alter-ego” (who would you like to be in your imagination?) or a vocation when you grow up (who would you like to be as an adult)?
- a portrait of a loved one with details that tell us about that person.
- an exaggerated human figure (exaggerated head or facial features, etc.).

Students will secure their figure onto a foam board base that could also have clay details added to enhance the expressive qualities of the figure (skateboard, a favorite pet, etc.).

Materials Needed:

Self-hardening, air dry clay = each student receives approx. ¼ to ½ lb. of clay

Large pieces of wax paper, one per student

6 x 8” piece of foam board for a base

Rolling pins

Clay sculpting tools, toothpicks, screening to push clay through for hair, etc.

Time permitting: fabric scraps, yarn, or tempera paints to add color and details

Vocabulary:

sculpture = the art or practice of shaping figures or designs in the round or in relief (chiseling marble, modeling clay, casting in metal).

abstract = a visual language of form, color and line (and their relationship to one another) to create a composition which may exist independently from visual references in the world.

representational = depicting an object, person, or place in a recognizable manner.

human proportions = canon of aesthetic measurements developed for the creation of a perfect human figure. The adult human figure can range between 6 and 7.5 heads tall, generally.

Assessment:

- What challenges does an artist face when creating a 3-D human figure as compared to a 2-D human figure?
- What separate, smaller **forms** is the human body made up of? (cylinders, spheres, etc.)
- What principles of design could artists use to create visual interest on the surface of a human figure? (contrast, pattern or variety of shapes, forms, textures, colors, lines, etc.)
- What is the effect of viewing a human figure that is much larger than life-size (Statue of Liberty) or one that is much smaller than life-size (an action figure)?

Each student will fill out a clue card with information about their finished sculpture:

Circle the words or phrases that best describe your human figure sculpture:

ABSTRACT

REPRESENTATIONAL

SELF-PORTRAIT

IMAGINARY PORTRAIT

PORTRAIT OF A PERSON I KNOW

PORTRAIT OF WHO I'D LIKE TO BE

This sculpture shows **movement** because _____.
(explain how your figure shows action and visual movement).

List 2 details about your figure that you are especially happy with:

_____ and _____.

The instructor will collect all the cards, mix them up in a basket, and let each student draw a card (not their own). By reading the clues, each student will match the card to the correct sculpture.

Tour Artwork Images:



Stephan Balkenhol (German, b. 1957)

Man Lying on Platform, 1998

Cedar wood and paint

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001.06

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



Louise Bourgeois (French American, b. 1911 - d. 2010)

Woman with Packages, 1949 (cast 1996)

Bronze, no. 6/6

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996.02

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Jules and Doris Stein Foundation



Allison Schulnik (American, b. 1978)

Skipping Skeletons, 2008

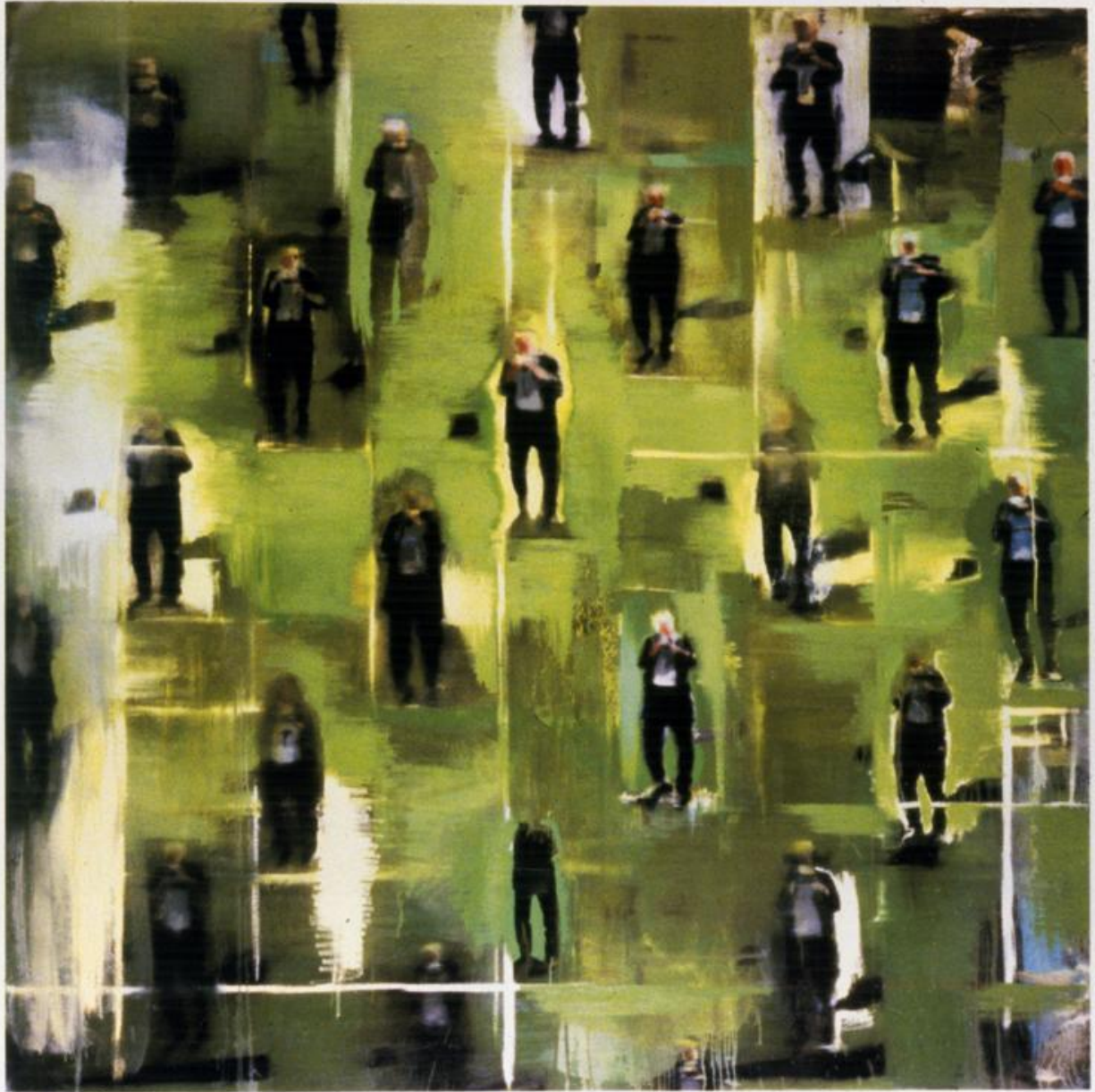
Oil on canvas

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008.20

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999.16



Christopher Brown (American, b. 1951)

The Bystander, 1994

Oil on linen

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994.01

Gift of JCCC Gallery Associates



Richard Chung (American, b. 1977)

Untitled, 2004

Ceramic and glaze

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004.28

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation



Jonathan Borofsky (American, b. 1942)

Walking Man, 1995

Fiberglass and steel

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995.14

Gift of Marti and Tony Oppenheimer and the Jules and Doris Stein Foundation



Antony Gormley (British, b. 1950)

Still Standing, 2000

Cast iron

Collection Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000.78