

Modern Figure Sculpture



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Minimalist yet complex, these expressive sculptures are inspired by the work of Alberto Giacometti.

The shadow-like figurative work of artist Alberto Giacometti is world-renowned, instantly recognizable, and beloved by so many. His sculpture “The Pointing Man” holds the record for the most expensive sculpture ever sold at auction. Yet the figures and busts that defined much of Giacometti's work still carry an air of mystery.

Born into a family of artists in Switzerland, Giacometti was trained in the traditional manner of western art schools. He found inspiration first in African and Egyptian art.

After the second World War, Giacometti became preoccupied with sculpting the human figure. As he repeated the form over and over, the figures became taller, rougher, and stretched to the point where, at times, they appeared to break. For the rest of his career, he continued exploring the same subject but always found new ways to present it. Some figures stood still, others strode forward with a sense of purpose. Some stood alone, others were grouped together. Some were presented as busts with recognizable features, while others were faceless and anonymous. His work remained both minimal and complex at the same time.

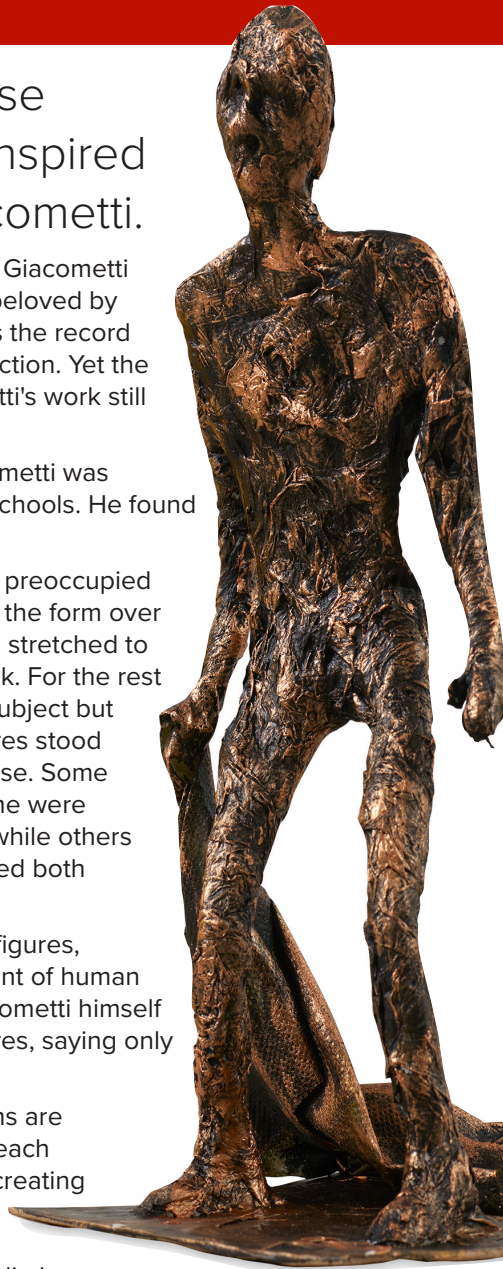
Audiences found stories and emotions in these figures, interpreting them as a reaction to war, a statement of human cruelty, frailty, loneliness, desire, and more. Giacometti himself did not explain or assign meaning to his sculptures, saying only that they represented his vision.

As you create a figure, consider what expressions are conveyed through the pose and the position of each component. Rather than focusing on realism or creating a likeness, approach this sculpture as if you were drawing a stick figure. Start with a simple structure formed from sticks. Position the limbs, shoulders, and tilt of the head to create expression and suggest movement. Cover it with a papier mâché “skin” and use metallic paint to give it the look of cast bronze.

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Dissolve methyl cellulose powder in water according to package directions. Divide into covered containers for distribution across classroom.



Required Materials

Bud Nosen Basswood Sticks - 1/8" x 1/8" x 24", 48-stick pkg (56560-1708); share one across class

Pacon Natural Kraft Paper, brown, assorted size rolls (11503-); plan on a 2-ft x 3-ft section per sculpture

Natural Earth Paint Methyl Cellulose Adhesive, makes 32 fl oz (00517-1075); share one across class

Blick General Purpose Masking Tape, natural, .5" x 60 yd (24149-1012); share 3 rolls across class

All-Purpose Chipboard, 22" x 28" x .10", 30-ply (13115-2232); share one sheet across class

Blickrylic Student Acrylics, Mars Black, Quart (00711-2047); share one across class

Blickrylic Student Acrylics, metallic colors, pint Bronze (00711-9076), Copper (00711-9516) or Soft Gold (00711-9086); share two across class

Blick Scholastic Golden Taklon Brush, One-Stroke, 1/2" (05567-4012); need one per student

Blick Essentials Value Foam Brush, 1" (06027-1001); need one per student

Optional Materials

Utrecht Heavy Duty Quart Bucket with Lid, for mixing adhesive (03332-1007)

Glass Jars and Caps, for storage of adhesive, 4 oz (04815-1004) or 8 oz (04815-1008)

Blick Sculpture Wire, 12-gauge, 350-ft coil (33401-1014); share one across class

Blick Premier Twist Lock Knife (57537-2980)

Smart-Fab Art and Decoration Fabric, 9" x 12", assorted colors, pkg of 270 sheets (62130-1023)

Blick Pure White Tissue Paper, 12" x 18", pkg of 50 sheets (11308-1497)

Frank Winne and Son Jute Twine, 5 ply, 254-ft (63304-5254)

Ready to order materials?

Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plan/modern-figure-sculpture to access a product bundle for your convenience.

Preparation, continued

2. Cut or tear kraft paper from rolls. Plan on a 24" x 36" section of paper or equivalent, per sculpture. Edges do not need to be tidy, and paper can be cut into smaller pieces.
3. Cut chipboard into 4" x 6" pieces using a heavy-duty paper trimmer or a utility knife.

Process for creating stick figure

1. **Cut sticks to size.** Basswood sticks are sturdy, yet sizes .125" x .125" and smaller can be easily cut with scissors. Start by measuring and marking sticks, then cutting.

To make a basic, 11"-high figure, cut these pieces from a 24" stick:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 - 6" pieces for legs | 1 - 4" piece for spine, neck |
| 2 - 3" pieces for arms | 2 - 1" pieces for hips and shoulders |

To make taller pieces, or disproportionate Giacometti-inspired pieces, use more than one stick per sculpture and adjust lengths to make longer legs, arms, and torso.

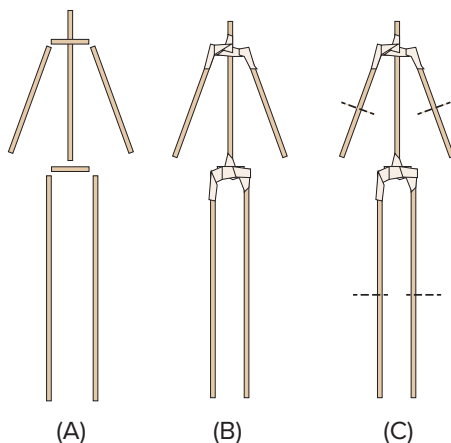
2. **Join sticks together with masking tape.** Tear at least 10 pieces from the roll, approximately 3" in length. Stick one end to edge of table so that the rest of the piece hangs freely and will be easily picked up.

Arrange stick pieces into a figure, as in (A).

Start by attaching the 1" hip piece to the spine, then the shoulders to the neck. Use one piece of tape at a time to wrap around the joint in multiple directions. Use multiple pieces, if necessary.

Continue, attaching arms and legs. Figure will look similar to (B).

As an option, cut sticks at elbows and knees and form joints there by wrapping back together with masking tape: see (C).



Step 1: Cut thin basswood strips to form basic stick figure and join with masking tape.



Step 2: Cover figure with scraps of paper, fabric, or tissue and secure with methylcellulose adhesive mixture.



Step 3: After drying, paint figure in a simple manner, using just one or two colors.

Process for covering stick figure

3. **Tear paper.** For best results, crumple kraft paper sheets first to make the paper more flexible. Tear into strips and smaller pieces. Cover table and work on a piece of waxed paper or palette paper so that the sculpture doesn't stick.
4. **Apply adhesive mixture.** Brush methyl cellulose adhesive lightly onto the front and back side of paper pieces, then wrap onto stick figure. Use more adhesive to seal edges. Cover joints first to strengthen them.

Note: methyl cellulose is a soft, plant-based, non-toxic material that washes easily from hands and brushes. Do not be afraid to use fingers to apply and shape papers.
5. **Continue to cover entire figure.** Allow kraft paper to wrinkle and form textures. For added interest, form a variety of textures using tissue paper, fabric scraps, cotton balls, and other materials.
6. **Create head.** Apply adhesive to paper, and roll into a ball about 1" in diameter. Position on top of stick representing the neck. Wrap more scraps around the neck and head to secure and fill out shape. Use fingers to press eye sockets and form a nose. As an option, use fabric scraps or pieces of twine to form hair.
7. Allow figure to dry before proceeding. Make sure to position the figure while it is wet—once dry, it cannot be adjusted.

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Process for finishing sculpture

8. **Place figure on cardboard base.** Use masking tape to create a temporary connection, then cover with multiple layers of paper strips and glue. Form the shape of feet and cover base with paper as well. Make sure that figure is secure and able to stand freely, then allow it to dry.
9. **Paint the figure and the base.** To make the figure appear as if it were cast in bronze and highlight the texture, first cover the entire sculpture with black paint and allow a few minutes for it to dry. Next, using a small, foam brush, apply metallic gold or copper paint, using the wide, flat side of the brush and a gentle motion. The metallic color should coat the raised areas of texture, leaving the black visible in the lower, recessed areas.

Options

- If preferred, a wire armature of the figure can be created rather than a wooden one. Secure the paper and glue tightly to the wire and do not oversaturate it.
- A natural stick figure could be created by lashing together found sticks. For best results, make sure sticks are fully dry.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.