

Frederick Hart: Bringing Sculpture to Life

Bringing Sculpture to Life is a program designed to establish a fun and interactive environment for students to explore the purposes of creating representational sculpture. Frederick Hart's work, *The Three Soldiers*, is the primary focus of this activity. The goal is for students, through the use of theatrical devices, to gain a greater understanding of sculpture. The process will develop students' aptitude for critical analysis abilities through the conjecture of the subjective quality of *The Three Soldiers*. The following is an outlined activity guide that instructors can use to work towards these goals.

Getting Started (5-10 minutes)

Warm-up!!!--Make sure that the participants warm up their muscles through a series of light stretches. The instructor can lead the participants in a group exercise or suggest that everyone stretches in their own way. It is important to focus attention to key areas of the body which may be harboring stress, i.e. the arms, shoulders, legs and neck. **(It is extremely important that when stretching the neck one should allow the weight of the head to do the stretching and not to force it or pull it with one's hand.)**

Once everyone is ready the participants should gather in a circle facing its center with their feet shoulder width apart. When everyone is settled, the leader will direct the participants to find their balance. Make sure the weight is distributed evenly between and throughout the feet, that the knees are not locked, and that the hips are aligned directly over the feet and knees, heads floating above the spine which is aligned by having the shoulders on the same plane as the hips.

From this neutral position, the participants will breathe normally by allowing air to fall into and out of the lungs. After a few moments the leader will ask the participants to begin to move about the space.

Mill and Seethe (10-15 minutes)

Mill: to move about aimlessly

Seethe: remain quite and soak-in the 'atmosphere' becoming in tuned with environment and others

As the participants move about the space they should make eye contact with each other as the pass. It is important to maintain a soft focus throughout the process so as to remain aware of ones surroundings. They can also find comfort in making nonverbal greetings to one another.

After a few moments of milling and seething, the leader will direct the participants to vary their pace from moving in slow motion to moving briskly, and to change directions when they feel the need so as to not to continue to move in circle, which can become a habit.

As the process develops, the participants can experiment with stopping or “freezing” in dynamic poses. As others pass they can freeze in a complimentary position (justify). Participants can freeze and justify at their whim. The participants should be encouraged to experiment with different levels, i.e. crouching, crawling, or sitting. The leader can guide the group by reminding them of their tasks. “Move about the space.” “Find an interesting position.” “Justify someone else’s position with an interesting spatial relationship.” “Play with varying tempos and levels.”

After a few minutes the group should be comfortable with the basic concepts of the game and can move onto more specific goals. The leader can ask the group to explore the dynamics of status and emotion. “How does someone walk or stand when they are powerful or weak?” “How does class affect ones posture and gait?” “How does one walk when they are angry or sad?” “How do other people affect the way we walk and how and when we stop?”

Introduce Hart’s Piece (5-10 minutes)

After 15 minutes or so of the milling and seething, once everyone seems comfortable with the process, the group should take a break. The leader should proceed in leading a discussion about the exercise. Good questions include, but are not limited to the following: “Did anyone see any interesting dynamics? How did it feel to relate to others spatially? What kinds of stories were being told without words?” etc. etc.

After a brief discussion the project can begin to incorporate *The Three Soldiers* statue. Here the process can go one of two ways, depending on the level of participation up to this point. The leader can separate the group into smaller groups of three, or ask for three volunteers to recreate the statue. If the group splits off into smaller groups, they should be given a couple minutes to experiment with the following exercise before presenting it to the rest of the class.

The first step will be to recreate the statue as well as possible. Participants need to pay particular attention to the figure’s posture, shape, and expression on the face. Try this position a couple of times so that it can be recorded into the body’s muscular memory.

Begin the milling and seething exercise again, but this time the focus will be to incorporate visual images. The leader can suggest that the participants imagine themselves in a jungle in Southwest Asia, hiding from enemy soldiers, seeking their mission objectives. This exercise can manifest itself in many ways. Are the soldiers exploring together or are they all lost and discover each other? Allow the participants to explore the possibilities of spatial relationship and nonverbal storytelling. With little direction guide the group to come together into the statue. Try not to force the tableau, instead suggest that they find themselves and discover the stillness.

Once the group establishes the basic tableau discuss the context of the statue in Washington, D.C. and Mia Linn’s Vietnam Memorial: “The Wall”. Ask the participants

to hold their position as you describe the scene in which they are set. “The soldiers appear to be emerging from a jungle. Have they just discovered each other or have they collectively found their way home. They enter into the light of day to stand before Maya Lin’s black wall of the names of fallen soldiers. What do you as an emerging soldier do? Do you go to the wall to find your name or the names of fallen comrades? How does the wall make you feel? Does it fill you with a sense of pride? Is the design too subtle to honor the sacrifice of 57,000 soldiers?”

After setting the scene in Washington, ask that the group begin to move when they are ready. Allow them to discover the possibilities of choice.

Discussion and Extended Activities

Once the exercise reaches its conclusion, it is time for everyone to discuss their experience. Ask that the group arrange themselves in a circle as this seating arrangement facilitates the best discussion. Go around the circle making sure that everyone who wants can describe their experience.

The leader of the discussion should call attention to the dramatic quality of sculpture. Does adding movement to a frozen sculpture give us a greater understanding of the piece? What stories developed when the group brought the sculpture to life? Why is the presence of this statue at the Vietnam Memorial important? Is it important to understand the Vietnam conflict in terms of the individual experience? How does this experiment with Hart’s statue give us a greater understanding of the personal sacrifice of individual soldiers?

If the leader wishes to continue to explore the narrative quality of sculpture, they can suggest the following activities. As a homework or in-class assignment participants of the exercise can engage in a writing the story of *The Three Soldiers*. Participants can either draw from what they experienced in class or from their own imagination. The goal here is to use one’s creativity to interpret other’s artwork, whether it is the statue itself or the project which the group had just witnessed.

It is possible to try this entire exercise with other works of Frederick Hart. Since Hart is a representational sculptor he has a full portfolio of pieces from which to work this exercise. Works that can be considered include, but are not limited to, *The Daughters of Odessa* and *Ex Nihilo*. *Ex Nihilo* would be an interesting experiment with a more advanced group of participants since it deals with bringing form out of nothingness.