Landmarks Guide for Adolescents

Magdalena Abakanowicz
Polish, born 1930

Figure on a Trunk
2000
Bronze

Subject: Voice and Identity

Activity: Create an autobiographical drawing

Materials: Pen or pencil and paper

Vocabulary: Identity, figure, symbolism

ⓘ Introduction

Magdalena Abakanowicz is from Poland. She was raised in that country during the violent and oppressive period of World War II. Many of her works deal with issues surrounding repression and individuality. This sculpture is a bronze casting of a headless figure. Abakanowicz makes many works like this one and displays them alone or in large groups. The figures in her works are often missing parts of their bodies. Sometimes they are headless, and sometimes their hands or feet are missing. Abakanowicz uses the removal of body parts to symbolize what the figures may be thinking or feeling. By removing certain body parts, she limits the figure's ability to do certain things, like think, speak, walk, or feel.

❓ Questions

Why do you think the artist chose to make this figure without a head?

What information about the figure do we lose as a result of the missing head?

What events might the artist, who lived under an oppressive regime in Poland, have experienced during World War II?

Being headless, the figure cannot talk or think. What are the implications of not having a voice?

Magdalena Abakanowicz, continued

✂ Activity

Using pen or pencil on paper, make a symbolic timeline of your life. Make a list of the most important things about you, such as life events and your interests. Think about what you would tell someone if you were being introduced to him or her for the first time. See if you can develop symbols for each of these items. How can you represent events and ideas visually, without words or numbers? Arrange the symbols so that they effectively tell a story about you without using words.

ⒶⒷⒸ Vocabulary

Identity - The distinct characteristics and personality of an individual

Figure - A human shape

Symbolism - Representing an idea or concept through images

LANDMARKS

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