ART SMART

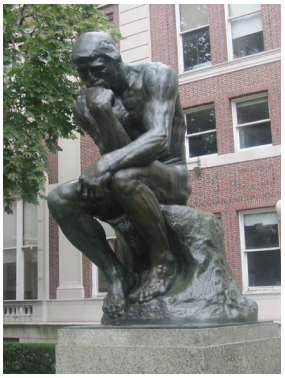
5th Grade / December

THEME:
Sculpture

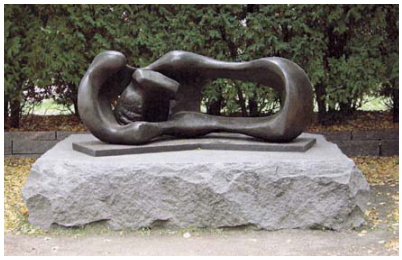
WORKS:

1. Michelangelo, *Pieta*
2. Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker*
3. Henry Moore, *Reclining Mother and Child*
4. Alexander Calder, *Lobster Trap and Fish Tail*
5. Claes Oldenburg & Coosje van Bruggen, *Spoonbridge and Cherry*

1.



2.



3.

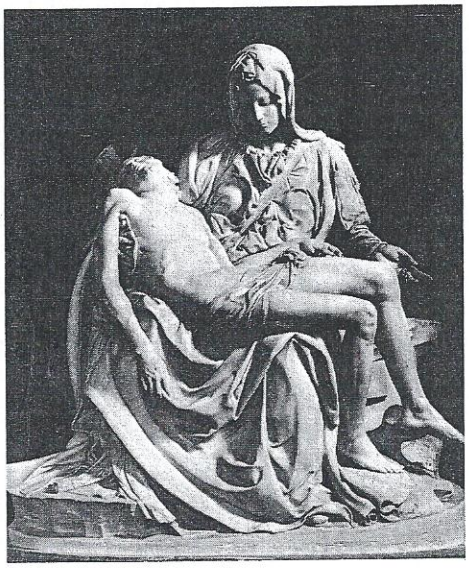
4.

5.

Sculpture

Michelangelo, *Pieta*, Vatican, St. Peter's

@1497



Michelangelo Buonarotti (mee-kel-*an*-jay-loh bwoh-nay-*roh*-tee), Italian, 1475–1564
Pieta, Vatican, St. Peter's, c. 1500, marble, 69 in.high
Scala\Art Resource, N.Y. K 46763

The Artist

Michelangelo was born into a large family in Caprese, Italy. His parents were poor and his early years at home were very hard. His mother died when he was only six, and because his father was a rough, abusive man, Michelangelo became a brooding, sullen boy. He was known for this manner his entire lifetime.

Michelangelo's education was brief, and he was always more interested in drawing than in his schoolwork. He showed extraordinary artistic talent at a young age, and although his father objected to his son becoming an artist, he could not afford to educate him for any other profession. At the age of 13, Michelangelo was apprenticed to a successful painter from whom he learned to draw and paint.

After a year, Michelangelo was transferred to the sculpture academy and gardens in nearby Florence, which at that time was ruled by Lorenzo the Magnificent of the powerful Medici family. Lorenzo invited him to live in the palace where he took over the young man's formal education. For four years, Michelangelo lived in the Medici Palace, surrounded by great art and artists and the most brilliant philosophers and scholars of the time. There, he developed his lasting love for sculpting. But Lorenzo died in 1492, and Michelangelo, then only 17, had to make his own way in the world. He moved to Rome, and by the age of 22, he had carved his famous *Pieta*, firmly establishing himself in Italy as a remarkable sculptor.

Michelangelo returned to Florence, where he carved his famous statue *David*. It was in Florence, too, that the city fathers asked Michelangelo to collaborate with another genius of the time to beautify the Great Council Hall. The other artist was Leonardo da Vinci. The two did not get along at all, and soon both quit, abandoning the project.

In 1503, Pope Julius II called Michelangelo to Rome to begin work on a monumental task, the Pope's own tomb. Although Michelangelo worked on and off for over 40 years, it was never completed. He wrote of it later, "In bondage to this tomb, I saw my whole youth wasted."

Among the projects that diverted Michelangelo's attention during the work on the tomb was the painting of the famous ceiling of the Sistene Chapel. He was furious when he received the commission which took the form of a command. He was a sculptor, not a painter! But for four years, he labored day and night on his back on scaffolding high above the stone floor in the worst lighting conditions, and today the entire world regards the ceiling as one of the greatest masterpieces of painting in history.

Many other projects occupied Michelangelo's later years. He carved tombs for the Medici family in Florence, designed a library for a church there, and became the chief architect of St. Peter's in Rome. He wrote over 100 sonnets and was the first artist to have his biography published during his lifetime.

The Art

At 22, during his first visit to Rome, Michelangelo executed his famous Pieta which now stands in St. Peter's Cathedral there. It is one of the most serenely beautiful works Michelangelo ever created. It reveals a tenderness that hardly appears in his later work. The body of Christ is limp and Mary grieves silently, her expression one of peaceful resignation. The draperies suggest real fabric, with a real form underneath, Yet as natural as they appear, the figures have a spiritual aura evoking great emotion in their viewers.

The sculpture is a series of contrasts: vertical and horizontal, clothed and naked, living and dead. This combines into one mound-like mass, with the broad drapery of Mary's clothing being a solid concealing base. The formal pose reflects the artist's great technical skill.

This *Pieta* is the only piece Michelangelo is known to have signed. Legend has it that he overheard admiring visitors to the statue attribute it to another popular sculptor of the time, so he sneaked into St. Peter's late one night and chiseled his name on Mary's sash.

This masterpiece has enjoyed such enduring popularity that the Vatican was persuaded to crate and ship it to the New York World's Fair in 1964 but has since refused to ever let it be moved again.

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

The Renaissance period in Europe was a time of transition between medieval and modern times and began in the 14th century in Italy. It was a time of vigorous artistic and intellectual activity and expression marked by a revival of classical influence. Modern science also had its beginning during this period.

By the 16th century, the Renaissance time of optimism changed to disillusionment as the Reformation swept across Northern Europe, leaving turmoil and upheaval. This movement against the practices of the Catholic Church ended the production of images of the deity in pictorial or sculptural form, and much of this type of art was destroyed.

But Michelangelo's homeland was not as affected by the Reformation as much of Europe, and artists continued to travel to Italy to study its art. The celebration of the individual that characterized the Renaissance now included Michelangelo, who was revered and adored as a genius.

It is interesting to note that Christopher Columbus made his historic voyage during Michelangelo's time, and the year of the artist's death was the year of Shakespeare's birth.

Subject:

Pieta is an Italian word that comes from the Latin "pietas," the root word for both "pity" and "piety." It is the name usually given the picture or sculpture depicting the dead Christ in the mourning Virgin's lap and is the tragic counterpart to the very familiar motif of the Madonna and Child.

Michelangelo carved a number of pietas in his old age. In one, now in Florence, there is a figure of an old man which is thought to be Michelangelo's self-portrait.

Expressive Properties and Interpretation:

Critics of this *Pieta* have often focused on the particular aspect of Mary's youthful countenance, arguing that she is simply too young to be Christ's mother. What do you think? Do think that Michelangelo might have realized that but made her look youthful for some other reason? What might that have been? *Some say that it is important to view the Pieta as an interpretation of religious mystery and not just a technical portrait.* Is this piece more a technical or expressive masterpiece for you? What one word would you use to express the effect this sculpture has on you?

Media and Techniques:

Michelangelo insisted always on using the finest marble for his sculptures, and he spent long hours at the quarry supervising the stonecutters as they removed huge blocks from the mountain. He saw in his mind's eye the figure within the stone block and felt that the act of carving was simply cutting away the unnecessary stone to let the figure emerge. This cutting-away is called *substractive sculpture*. Compare this process with the way Rodin modeled *The Thinker* and Calder constructed *Lobster Tail and Fish Trap*. After making preliminary drawings and models in wax, Michelangelo attacked the stone directly with hammer and chisel. He refused to consider as sculpture a work modeled in clay!

Michelangelo believed that a well-made piece of sculpture could be rolled downhill and not be damaged. His works favored compact, closed forms rather than open forms with many projections. Look at the *Pieta* and other sculptures by Michelangelo. Do their forms fit this philosophy? Many sculptors since Michelangelo's time have tried to imitate his style, but they did not capture his philosophy of monumental form, and historians state it is easy to determine the imitator and the master.

Judgment:

What reasons can you offer for the enduring love and respect people have always given to this work? Why has it been favored over other sculptures done of the same subject? Has its value increased since the Renaissance? Why? *So much of the art depicting Christ was destroyed during the Reformation.*

Activity: Using a block of wax, a foam block, or a soft carving brick, carve a seated figure holding an object. Try to include fabric with folds.

Sculpture

Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker*

Auguste Rodin (oh-*goost* row-da[n]), French, 1840–1917
The Thinker, 1880, bronze, 79 x 51¼ x 55¼-in.
Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Rodin Museum, Philadelphia: Gift of Jules E. Mastbaum.

The Artist

The fame of Auguste Rodin is almost as great as that of Michelangelo, whom he admired greatly. He has often been referred to as the most celebrated sculptor of the past hundred years, and by 1900, he was uncontested as the most famous artist in the world.

Auguste Rodin was born in France and at an early age dropped out of school. At thirteen, he was training to be a decorative stonemason. He tried for a place as a sculpture student at the best art school in France, but was rejected three times even though he was recognized for his artistic ability.

Rodin spent years on each major sculpture, making hundreds of sketches and dozens of plaster models. Many of his works gave rise to bitter controversy because of poses, costumes, treatment, or technique. However, by the time of his triumphant one-man exhibition in 1900, he was visited by royalty, in constant demand as a portraitist by the rich and famous of all nations, and elected president of the International Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers.

Rodin was an ardent patriot who believed strongly that art should add to the prestige of one's country. He accepted more commissions from the state than he could finish. Among his unfinished commissions is the masterpiece, *The Gates of Hell* from which *The Thinker* comes.

Because history knows him as a sculptor, many of his other talents have often been overlooked. He was a tireless draftsman. He was a watercolorist, but also worked in oils. He was one of the most skilled professional designers and decorators in France, and he became an architectural historian, an author, and an illustrator. He was a leading collector of classical art, a lecturer on aesthetics, and a serious student of literature. At the time of his death, he bequeathed to France all his property which included many photographs, over 7,000 drawings, and an enormous sculpture collection.

The Art

One of Rodin's most recognizable sculptures is *The Thinker*. He modeled it first in clay and then had it cast in bronze. *The Thinker* is the figure of a giant-man which focuses our attention on powerful muscles and an attitude of deep thought. There is great strain and tension in the body which draws out the idea of intense thinking. Rodin posed the figure to emphasize this strain: the man rests his right elbow on his left knee. This is not natural — it is, in fact, quite uncomfortable! But this twist gives the "thinker" an attitude of brooding contemplation. Find other evidence that this man is lost in serious thought. *Furrowed brow; toes that grip the base; tense, bulging neck muscles; forward-leaning, precariously perched body.*

How do

The original "thinker" is only about 27 inches high! He is only a small part of Rodin's *Gates of Hell* which is over 21 feet tall, 13 feet wide, and three feet deep. Eventually, Rodin enlarged *The Thinker* to a colossal 6-ft. 6-in. — twice life-size for a seated figure. The sculpture was exhibited in Paris in 1904. Since a mold can be used more than once, there are a number of bronze versions of this famous statue, both in small and large sizes. Several of them are located in the United States.

Because the original version of *The Thinker* sits at the top and in the center of *The Gates of Hell*, Rodin never intended him to be viewed at eye level. He took artistic license in his creation so that the huge head and thick shoulders are out of proportion when viewed straight on, but beautifully proportioned when seen from below. This is a form of forced perspective that can often be found in theater staging.

Guided Analysis

Subject:

Rodin dedicated his life in art to the portrayal of the human condition. His private vision of the trials and torments of human existence come to life in his renowned *Gates of Hell* which he based on

the poet Dante's *The Inferno*. The doors, unfinished at the time of Rodin's death and cast in bronze ten years later, took nearly 40 years to create. The figures on the work leap forward from niches and apertures, all in a riot of struggle, torment and confusion. All this chaotic activity takes place on a torn, lava-like landscape pitted with holes and caves. In the central place above the door is seated *The Thinker*, sadly surveying the turmoil below.

Expressive Properties:

Study *The Thinker* carefully and try to sit exactly like him. See if you can put the same expression on your face. Are your toes curled? How do you feel in this position? How long could you sit this way? What are you thinking about that requires this much energy, for as you've doubtlessly discovered, this is not a passive, restful pose! Just getting into this position requires a lot of hard *thinking*!"

Style:

Rodin's goal was to have his sculpture become a link to classical anatomy and at the same time express deep human emotion and character. He wanted to restore vitality to sculpture, even in the face of constant controversy over his style of doing this. "Lines and colors are only...the symbols of hidden realities," he said. "Our eyes plunge beneath the surface to the meaning of things, and when afterward we produce the form, we endow it with the spiritual meaning which it covers."

Media and Techniques:

Unlike Michelangelo, Rodin found working with stone dull and much preferred the challenge of clay. Molding the material, pounding it, Rodin believed that broken surfaces were important to sculpture. He applied the clay to his figures in lumps and ridges, or he scooped out holes and caves with his fingers. The bolder elements of a work, he believed, should stand out to catch the light; weaker elements should be hollowed to catch the shade. "To model shadow is to bring out thought," he said. Rodin used this method to push the art of sculpture close to that of painting by "coloring" his pieces through this play of light and shadow on his surfaces. Look carefully at the sculpture and you can see the lumps, ridges and caves Rodin deliberately made in the sculpture.

Rodin and his assistants made molds directly from the clay models and poured melted bronze into them. Every detail of the original appears in the metal and several casts were made from the same mold. Weather, the elements of nature, and age have stained the sculpture and also created a blue-green finish, or patina, on the bronze.

Judgment:

Sometimes Rodin did the work of molding his clay figures, enlarging them, and polishing the final pieces, all tasks he did not enjoy, but more often he left this work to his many assistants. Since he left important work on the sculptures in the hands of his assistants, how do you think Rodin made sure their work was worthy of the finished piece? What might he have looked for when he hired his workers? Are all the traits of a good assistant merely technical?

If Rodin is no longer considered the finest sculptor in the world, what has happened since 1900 to change that opinion?

Elements and Principles of Design:

The Thinker is seated, doing the most quiet of things: thinking. Yet this statue is enormously active. Where is the action and how is it accomplished? Assume another "quiet" pose, such as sleeping. Can you add power and energy to it without moving?

Does this sculpture seem balanced? *Yes and no. The man himself seems to tilt forward nearly leaving his perch. All of his personal balance is in his toes, which hold him back. We can also say the total piece is balanced as far as the entire composition because the heavy mass of the "thinker's" seat anchors him solidly, counterbalancing his pose.*

Comparison:

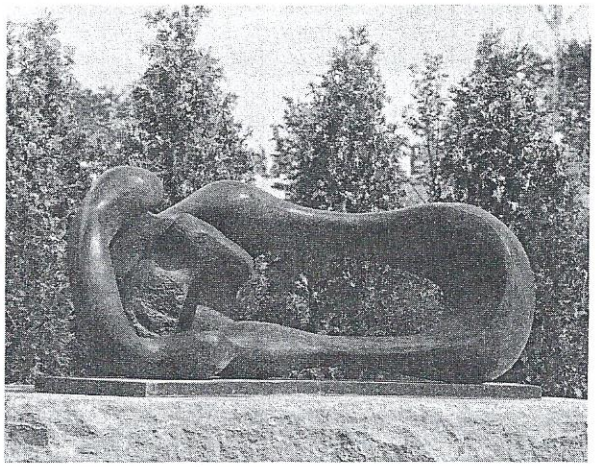
There are obvious similarities and differences between Michelangelo's *The Pieta* and Rodin's *The Thinker*. Carefully study the two pieces and discover as many as you can. Don't forget to look beyond the subjects to the materials, the shapes, textures, composition, the expressive qualities, and the intent of the artist (as you understand it).

Rodin's manner of working the surfaces of his pieces to reflect and hide light has been called "sculptural impressionism." Compare the broken, rough modeling of *The Thinker* to the other sculptures in this series. What can you say about the variety of surfaces?

Activity: Have a student assume a pose, then have the class model the figure in clay using Rodin's techniques of lumps, ridges, and hollows allowing light and shadow to "color" it.

Sculpture

Henry Moore, *Reclining Mother and Child*



Henry Moore, English, 1898–1986
Reclining Mother and Child, 1960–1961, bronze,
90 x 35½ x 52-in.
Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
Gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation, 1963.

The Artist

It was once suggested that if Earth needed to send a perfect ambassador to inhabitants of another planet, someone who could represent the best of the human race, that person should be Henry Moore. Moore has been described by those who knew him as having a combination of the best of human traits: original, creative, genuine, responsible, kind, and above all, *ordinary* — he never let the overwhelming worldwide success he achieved go to his head.

Moore was born in 1898, a miner's son, in a small town in England's industrial north. Within a mile of his home were coal mines, chemical works, coke ovens, and potteries. To escape the grime of this setting, he took walks, and from these humble diversions he gathered many ideas from the softly molded hills as well as some actual objects — bones, pebbles, rocks — that were to figure so prominently in his organically shaped sculptures. He was also inspired by the human body, earlier cultures, and the masterpieces of Michelangelo.

Moore's work is perhaps most often associated with his reclining female or mother and child abstract forms. He created over 5,000 sculptures representing these and other themes. The United States claims more Moores than any other country, and they are enthusiastically collected everywhere in the world.

Because Moore believed that sculpture should be placed where the greatest number of people could view it from the greatest number of perspectives, he wanted his works placed in an outdoor setting. In fact, he most often created them in an outdoor studio at his home in England. He believed museums inhibited the viewer's response, both physically and emotionally, and approved of touching and even climbing on his sculptures. When we look at his larger-than-life undulating forms, we can almost feel the pleasure of sliding or crawling in and about the curves!

The Art

Reclining Mother and Child (1960-61) is an example of the female figure in a reclining or lying position that always intrigued Moore. He modeled the form in plaster, then cast it in bronze. He added the final texturizing touches to the patina of the surface by incising various lines to further bring out the form. Like many of Moore's works, it rests in an outdoors setting.

This sculpture reflects the organic forms of nature which continually inspired him. At the same time, the subject of a mother and her child projects humanity and tender affection. The sculpture is softly rectangular in shape. The forms are simple and bold with flowing contours that *contain* the characteristic holes or openings of Moore's works. This compact sculpture whose main subject is in a position of repose also possesses energy: the legs are wide apart, the upper leg raised and held in space with some effort; the shoulders roll forward from the base and the arms thrust forward forcefully and protectively to surround the child.

The forms of the sculpture burst with life, simultaneously holding in and pushing out the space that flows into and around the figures. The shape of the space is as important as the shape of the figures themselves. Moore has said, "A cave is a shape, not the mountain over it." He also stated, "By making holes through a block, you can relate the front to the back."

Why might Moore have shortened the upper arm of the mother figure? Try to visualize a completed arm. How would you position it? Why?

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

When discussing the art of any particular period, Moore said, "The real influence (on a culture) comes from the artist. Mondrian, for instance, greatly influenced the architects of his day, not the other way around." What Moore was saying was that the artist affects his time rather than the

reverse. Can you support or contest his idea using examples in art and the world around you? *Pop Art might contest this: soup can labels were abundant before Warhol created his paintings; spoons existed long before Oldenburg's Spoonbridge and Cherry interpretation. On the other hand, the winding vine or tendril is the most commonly recognized Art Nouveau motif, and this style was rapidly adopted throughout Europe and the United States, showing up in architecture, furniture, fabrics, and elsewhere.*

Subject:

During his 60-year career, the sculpture materials with which Moore worked included at least ten kinds of stone, three kinds of wood, reinforced concrete, bronze, lead, plaster, terra-cotta, porcelain, and wax. And certain themes preoccupied him. These were universal and timeless: the female form, seated or lying down; mother and child; the family group.

In what ways were these motifs like Raphael's Madonnas, Rembrandt's rabbis, Cezanne's apples, and van Gogh's flowers? *These great artists worked continually with their themes, but each effort was an original creation and the secret to their greatness lay in what they did with the subjects, not in the subjects themselves.*

Media and Techniques

Henry Moore's works have always reflected his desire to be true to the materials he used. He said he wanted to preserve the "stoniness of stone." He did not want the finished piece to appear to be stone transformed into flesh, but rather to suggest that the stone *happened* in the form of a human.

Moore's varied creations demonstrate his vast knowledge of sculpting techniques which include among others the carving and modeling processes. Unlike Michelangelo, who carved his marbles from the front view to the back, Moore worked around his block from all sides.

His sculptures started with many drawings and small, preliminary models (maquettes). He and his assistants would then reproduce them in their monumental size. The original of a piece he did for a corporation in Singapore started as a 13-inch maquette and the final version measures 35 feet!

In the end, Moore decided the process was not really important: "I don't think it matters how a thing is produced, whether it's built up, modeled, welded, carved, constructed, or whatever. What counts really is the vision it expresses; that is, it's the quality of the mind behind it rather than the way in which it's done."

Judgment:

Moore did considerable work on his sculpture after it was cast. He changed the patina, or finish, on it by burnishing or possibly using acids to make highlights and coloration. He also did considerable polishing with abrasives to smooth out the roughness left by casting. He incised lines to bring up its form. All of this work after the casting means of course that the sculpture achieved its personality when worked on personally by the artist.

Since a bronze mold can be used more than once, there exist a number of copies of Moore's originals. Theoretically, as with Rodin's works, casts can still be created for collectors after the death of the artist.

If Moore worked on his rough cast until he considered it completed, what becomes of the casts made after Moore's death? Can they be considered complete and of the quality the artist intended if they are left in their post-casting state? If trained assistants take over the finish work, is the assistant making artistic decisions and adding his style to Moore's sculpture? Since every cast must have been different in its finished state because Moore worked individually on each one, should an assistant take over a master's interpretation?

Style and Comparison

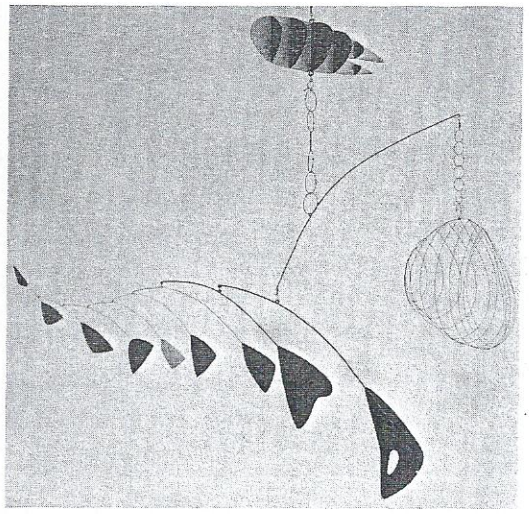
Study the other sculptures in the series. How would you describe the style of Moore's work? In your opinion, which school of art that you have studied in this series is Moore closest to, if any? *Children might cite the subject matter and smooth texture of Michelangelo's* Pieta*; the energy and minimal detail of Rodin's* The Thinker*; the organic shapes of Calder's* Lobster Trap and Fish Tail. Can you discover any association with Oldenburg's Pop *Spoonbridge and Cherry*?

Activity: Using clay, roll a long thick coil. Twist, turn, and mold the coil to make an abstract form of a figure or animal. Be sure to leave negative spaces or openings in the sculpture. Add one or more smaller coils for other forms.

Special thanks to Jackie Copeland and David Henry, Walker Art Museum, for their generous time, support, and assistance.

Sculpture

Alexander Calder, *Lobster Trap and Fish Tail.* (1939)



Alexander Calder (*call*-der), American, 1898-1976.
Lobster Tail and Fish Trap, (1939). Hanging mobile: painted steel wire and sheet aluminum, about 8-ft.6-in. h. x 9-ft.6-in. diam.
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Commissioned by the Advisory Committee for the stairwell of the Museum.
Photograph © 1992 The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The Artist

American Alexander Calder was an inventor and artist at a very early age. His room, according to his sister, Peggy, was "a maze of strings; they pulled up shades and lowered them, pulled the casement windows closed, turned the lights on and off." At the age of five, he was creating wooden animals, wire figures, and jewelry for his sister. His family encouraged him and gave him dressers and chests to hold all the junk and scraps he was constantly collecting. They also gave him workshops in which to tinker, and as the size of his art grew over the years, so did his studios.

Though Calder was trained as an engineer, he went to Paris in 1926 where he studied the unique contributions of European artists of the time whose ideas were breaking new ground. He caught their attention with his miniature animated *Circus*, which used the same ideas and techniques from his childhood, wire sculpting and scrap assemblage. His little wire figures were almost like sculptures whose insides had been cut out, leaving just the outlines.

After a visit to the Paris studio of the artist, Piet Mondrian, he arrived at the unprecedented idea of putting action into art. "I was very much moved by...the walls painted white and divided by black paintings...and I thought at the time how fine it would be if everything there moved. I went home and tried to paint, but wire or something to twist, or tear, or bend, is an easier medium for me to think in." Shortly after, the "mobile", named by Marcel Duchamp, was born.

When Calder returned to America, he had already gained enormous recognition for his innovative sculpture, and he continued painting, sculpting, and taking immense pleasure from life until his sudden death at the age of 78. He wrote to a friend, "Above all, I feel art should be happy."

The Art

Lobster Trap and Fish Tail was one of Calder's earliest hanging mobiles. Though it may look relatively small, it measures about 8-ft.6-in. high x 9-ft.6-in. in diameter. Its use of organic shapes, primary colors (and black), balance, and movement are characteristic of the mobiles Calder would continue to design. Many people especially enjoy this piece because it suggests more of a subject matter than some of Calder's other mobiles. Is recognizable subject matter important to the enjoyment of a piece of art?

Even though it is still considered *abstract*, the title tells us Calder was playing with a particular idea. Tell the "story" of the sculpture. Where is the lobster? Where is the trap? What makes you think this? What does the other element represent? *One art historian says the element on top is the lobster and the black fan-shaped metal pieces are a school of fish. Children may disagree!* Why do you suppose Calder named this mobile *Lobster Trap and Fish Tail*?

This mobile hangs in a stairwell at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Another element that contributes to the pleasurable viewing of this piece is the inexhaustible play of shadows on the nearby wall. How might the effects of this sculpture be changed in an outdoor setting? *Increased movement due to wind; size, shape, and location of shadows would change with the sun's position; gradual changes of surface due to elements of nature.*

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

Major technical advances in the twentieth century fostered innovative ideas. It was during this exciting time that Calder came to prominence. What events in America and the world can you think of that might have contributed to the way art was conceived, created, and accepted? *Many possible*

responses—two world wars, Russian Revolution, television and computer, mass production. How might these events have influenced the art of the time?

Style:

Traditionally, sculptors have achieved mass and volume by carving or modeling. **Constructivists**, post-revolutionary Russian artists, felt that sculpture should explore time and kinetics (movement). They wanted to make the spectator consider what lay beyond the three dimensions in which sculpture had always been presented, and they wanted to use modern materials and engineering techniques to express this. In this way, we might see a connection to Calder's work with mobiles.

Because Calder tried to achieve accidental or chance movement in the freely-curving organic shapes that were the substance of his mobiles, he could also be connected to the **Surrealists.** Organic shapes, those found in nature, also occurred in the work of Calder's Surrealist friends, Joan Miro and Jean (Hans) Arp.

Do Calder's mobiles fit into either of these styles or has he, in your opinion, created his own style? Explain.

Media and Techniques:

Calder explains his planning and balancing technique simply: "I start by cutting out a lot of shapes. Next, I file them and smooth them off. Some are bits I just happen to find. Then, I arrange them on a table with wires between the pieces for the overall pattern. Finally, I cut some more on them with my shears, calculating for balance this time...You put a disc here and then you put another disc at the other end and then you balance them on your finger...I begin with the smallest and work up. Once I know the balance point for this first pair of discs, I anchor it by a hook to another arm, where it acts as one end of another pair of scales, and so on." Do you think you could create a mobile by looking at one of Calder's and following his explanation?

Activity: Using string, colored cardboard or construction paper, wire, straws, paper clips, and found objects, follow Calder's instructions above to create a mobile.

All of Calder's mobiles are designed to be taken apart and lie flat so they can be stored or mailed. The smallest can fit into a letter envelope!

Subject:

From his engineering days, Calder was familiar with technology and systems of creating balance and counterbalance. His mobiles are delicately balanced suspended sculptures. The organic shapes, made of metal and hinged with links to rods, are so carefully designed and weighted that they catch even the lightest air currents, moving up and down as well as around to make complicated patterns in space. Calder's use of bright primary colors and black and white are a signature of his playful art. Calder said, "When everything goes right, a mobile is a piece of poetry that dances with the joy of life and surprises."

Judgment:

A private collector purchased a Calder mobile, then donated it for installation at an airport. The original colors were black and white, but when it was installed, the airport officials decided to change them to green and gold. Calder was very unhappy and protested the change, but he was told it was no longer his property. Since the mobile was the official property of the airport, do you feel the artist had a right to protest? Did the airport have a right to alter the artist's original work? How would the change affect the integrity and appreciation of the sculpture? What would **you** do? (Worth noting: Calder sued and won!)

Elements and Principles of Design:

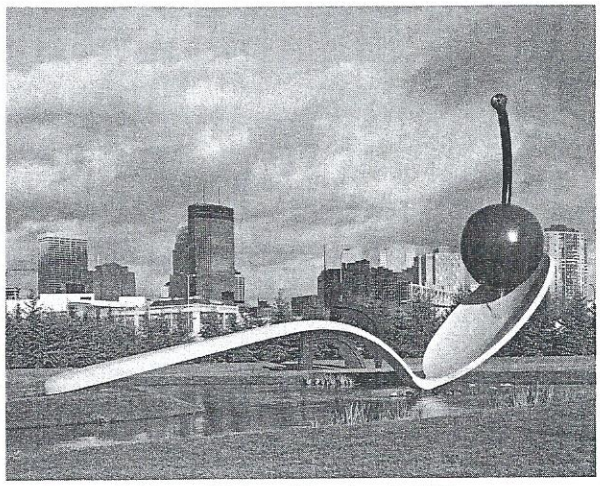
The shapes found in the mobiles of Calder and Henry Moore are described as *organic*, drawing their inspiration from forms in nature. Few shapes in nature are geometric: exact circles, squares, triangles, and so on. But some organic shapes remind us of those of geometry. Look carefully at *Lobster Trap and Fish Tail*. Can you find something that looks like a circle? A triangle? A rectangle? How do the shapes in this sculpture affect each other?

Calder understood that as the air moved the independent shapes, the sculpture would constantly be changing in appearance. How do the shapes themselves create a sense of movement? *Their curves make them appear to have a forward or undulating motion. Some of the shapes resemble an arrow indicating a feeling of direction.* In one word, what mood does this piece evoke for you? How do the shapes and colors make you feel?

Watch a mobile move. Try to see the form created as the shape moves from one place to another. As the mobile arm moves up and down as well, it will make even more interesting "invisible" forms!

Sculpture

Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, *Spoonbridge and Cherry*



Claes Oldenburg (klahss *old*-en-berg), 1929– ,
and Coosje van Bruggen, (*coo*-zhuh van *broo*-gun),
Americans
Spoonbridge and Cherry, 1985–1988, aluminum stainless steel, paint. 354 x 618 x 162-in.
Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Frederick R. Weisman in honor of his parents, William and Mary Weisman, 1988.

The Artist

Claes Oldenburg was born in Sweden but came to the United States as a very young child. His father was in the diplomatic service in New York. At the age of seven, the family moved to Chicago where Claes grew up. He graduated from Yale and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. He then returned to New York where he and his family now work and live.

Life in the two major urban centers has had a significant impact on Oldenburg's art. "The streets, in particular, fascinated me. They seemed to have an existence of their own where I discovered a whole world of objects that I had never known before. Ordinary packages became sculptures in my eye, and I saw street refuse as elaborate accidental compositions."

Oldenburg took these ordinary, everyday objects — a typewriter eraser, a hamburger, an ice bag — enlarged their scale and used startling materials, colors, and textures to create sculptures. He makes a giant banana out of plaster, a car from canvas, a drooping bathtub from vinyl — and from aluminum, a eight-and one-half foot cherry that sprays water! These sculptures often range from larger-than-life to powerful objects a hundred stories tall (a monumental toy bear) or half a mile long (a giant saw bridge). By promoting these less-than-aesthetic objects to the state of art, Oldenburg consciously attacks the pretensions of "high art" and with his wide-ranging inventions, humor, and sound mastery of his form, he has expanded beyond the boundaries of Pop Art.

On *Spoonbridge and Cherry* and most of his work since 1976, Oldenburg has collaborated with his wife, Coosje van Bruggen, a writer, art historian, and artist in her own right.

The Art

Nearly 5,000 people a day have flocked to the Walker Sculpture Garden in Minneapolis to view the growing collection of fascinating works by artists from around the world. But no other sculpture commands the awe and delight of the viewers like Claes Oldenburg's and Coosje van Bruggen's 52-foot long fountain sculpture, *Spoonbridge and Cherry*.

Made of molded aluminum, the spoon is fastened to the ground by bolts sunk in hidden concrete on a small island in a pond. At the tip of the bowl of the spoon is perched a gravity-defying twelve hundred pound, eight and one-half foot maraschino cherry whose gently arching twelve-foot stem sprays a soft mist of water. Strategically strewn around the base of the spoon's bowl are similar-size rocks which give the effect of nuts on a sundae. The overall look is whimsical, and when the stem "fountain" sprays water in the warm months, the cherry appears juicy enough to eat!

Oldenburg's plan also included a winter viewing of the sculpture when the snows of Minnesota would fill the spoon, cover the ground, and dust the cherry, turning the creation into a giant ice cream delight.

Though not a true bridge (climbing on the sculpture is not allowed), visitors are invited to sail toy boats in the pond in summer and ice skate around and under the form in winter.

Guided Analysis

Point of View:

Determine the relationship in size between the spoon in the sculpture and a *normal* teaspoon. If you were an insect on the ground, in accurate proportion to the spoon, what insect would you be? How large are you? How did you figure this out?

Style and Cultural Context:

Oldenburg has been referred to as the patriarch of Pop Art, a style that developed roughly between 1956 and 1966 in Great Britain and the United States. Pop is rooted in the urban environment. Roy Lichtenstein, another of Pop's creators, said,

Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, *Spoonbridge and Cherry*

"Outside is the world; it's there. Pop art looks out into the world." Pop is an abbreviation of *popular culture* and its basis is the belief that artists must deal with the contemporary world and with life as well as with art.

Typical sources for the expression of Pop artists have been comic strips, store window displays, package labels, advertisements, food, and ordinary household objects. In Pop art, the motif, or subject, is in no way traditional, as in a painting by van Gogh or a sculpture by Michelangelo, so it is difficult for the viewer to simply reduce the art to its formal qualities. At first glance, Pop Art seems easy to look at and understand at face value, but it usually attracts considerable attention and raises many questions.

What names of other Pop artists do you know? *Two answers might be Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns.*

Elements and Principles of Design:

Spoonbridge and Cherry is one of Claes Oldenburg's more recent (1988) monumental urban sculptures. He and his wife, Coosje, were initially asked to create a sculpture for a pond designed by an architect. The artists considered several ideas, then created one which took into account its outdoor setting, the changing weather, the effects of light and shadow, and concepts of form and function.

Since the structure was to span two small islands, there were some limitations on the design. Look at the arc of the spoon's handle. Although the curve is delicate and the handle itself appears narrow, it is extremely well-planned and the materials are durable. What structures in nature or architecture does the spoon remind you of? *Roman arch, igloo, caves, amusement park rides.*

Forms have symbolic meaning, too. What might Oldenburg have been thinking when he decided upon this particular image for the pond's centerpiece? *In reality, Oldenburg conceived of the spoon because it reminded him of a stylized Viking boat with its prow rising from the water, a strong image for the Scandinavians of Minnesota. The cherry was Coosje's idea.*

The complexities of gravity have always been part of Oldenburg's work. The massive cherry elegantly posed at the tip of the spoon looks ready to slide down the bowl and up the stem of the handle! Trace the path of the cherry's descent if it were to lose its anchor and tumble. This path our eyes take is called *movement*. This intentionally designed feature makes us look at the sculpture from many perspectives and creates further interest.

Oldenburg said of his only other fountain monument located in Miami, "It's about balance, equilibrium, planetary structure. It should look impossible, crazy." Do you think this fits *Spoonbridge and Cherry*? Explain.

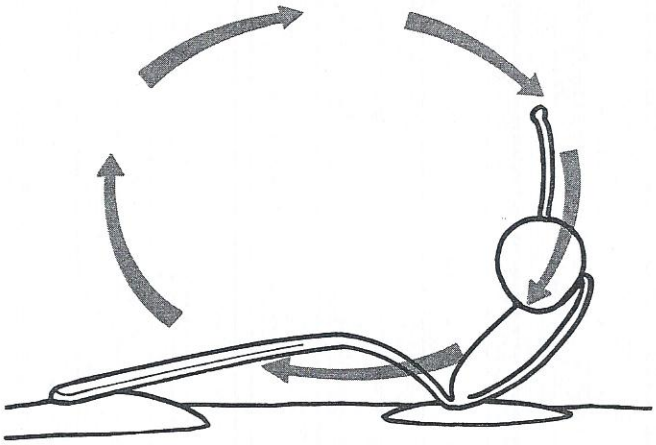


Diagram of composition showing movement.

Judgment:

"Site specific" was a term coined by the artists who created large sculptures for cities. It means that the object is chosen because in some way it fits the shape, the conditions, and the associations of the site. In what ways is *Spoonbridge and Cherry* site specific? *It spans two islands in a large pond where people ice skate in winter and float boats in summer.* What surrounding environment of a sculpture changes in time around the sculpture? *Plants grow or die away, snow falls.* Is the sculpture somehow changed too? How? Is *Spoonbridge and Cherry* a still life or a landscape? Explain your answer.

Why do you think Oldenburg placed the cherry at the top, not the bottom, of the bowl of the spoon? *Tension, excitement, balance, composition, movement.*

Comparison:

Upon close inspection, you will find similarities between the *Pieta* and *Spoonbridge and Cherry*! Can you name some? *Spoon cradles cherry / Mary cradles Jesus; smooth, polished, reflective surfaces; limited use of color; curved lines and rounded forms.* Look at the other sculptures in this series. Which one seems most like Oldenburg's piece? Which is most different? Why?

Special thanks to Jackie Copeland and David Henry, Walker Art Center, for their generous time, support, and assistance.