

3 Dimensions

The three dimensions that describe a solid object are height, width and depth. Sculpture is usually free-standing surrounded on all sides, (except under the base), by space. This is also known as sculpture "in the round" because it can be viewed from any angle.

Static and balanced or moving?

Three dimensional objects need to be stable so as not to fall over. Can an object remain balanced without depth? Sculptures that are designed to move or produce an illusion of movement are called 'kinetic'. A mobile is kinetic and consists of suspended shapes which move in response to air currents or their own structural tension.

Sculpture in the past

Sculptural objects have been made by humans for thousands of years and have been used to represent gods, spirits, ancestors, places, mythological characters, memorials of people and to document historical events. Sculptures have been endowed with spiritual powers, considered sacred and used in ceremonies, rituals and places of worship. Sculpture can be architectural, symbols of cultural exchange, expressions of personal emotion, questions and reflections about how we understand and experience our world.

Materials and techniques

Sculptures can be made out of anything. Traditional materials include stone, wood, clay and metal. Some sculptures are painted or decorated with beads feathers or precious stones. Twentieth century artists explored new materials and technologies, like plastics and fibre glass. Some sculptors constructed works using found objects which they assembled to create a new object, similar to the technique of working with collage.

Are all sculptures made to last a long time?

By mid twentieth century artists questioned established definitions of sculpture and explored new ways of working and creating. Some worked directly with nature and the environment, using materials like salt, water and earth. Artists used light, sound or their own body to represent an idea sculpturally. The processes involved in making a work could itself become the intended outcome. Art work that is not made to last is 'ephemeral' - only gaining longevity if it is documented by photograph or film/video. Installation art involves an artist creating an environment in a particular space or place using various media (video, objects, sound) which an audience is invited to enter and experience.

Open your hand, stretch your fingers open and make an 'O' with your thumb and index finger. The shape you can see through the 'O' is 'negative space'. Find sculptures where shapes have been 'cut out' of a solid material.

Research examples of kinetic art and the different techniques used to create movement. Consider ways that artists create a feeling or illusion of movement in their work e.g. reflective surfaces, pattern, repetition, curves etc.

Work in groups to research and present examples of sculpture from Ancient Egypt, Ancient China, South America and Africa. Describe the materials that were used and what the objects represented. How were they used or displayed by people at the time?

Investigate the techniques; moulding, casting, carving, chiselling, modelling and welding. Find examples of sculpture assembled from everyday objects by Picasso. Compare and contrast with Robert Rauschenberg's 'combines'. Consider sculptures relationship with painting.

Discuss how sculpture can be made from anything, refer to Arte Povera artists. Research Andy Goldsworthy's art practice. Why has his work been described as 'process art' or 'land art'? Make your own salt crystals. Photograph the different stages as they form. Enlarge the final photos to A3 on the photocopier. Display the copies as a series. Describe the installation art of the artists Yayoi Kusama and Olafur Eliasson.

Looking and interpreting

- Write three words to describe your initial response to the work.
- What might the work taste like, smell like or feel like?
- What sounds does it (or could it) make?
- Walk around it – how does it change?
- Does it remind you of anything? Describe the associations.
- Does it represent something or tell a story?
- Is the work, Abstract? Kinetic, Ephemeral, Architectural? Interactive? Poetic? Scientific?

Description:

- Identify the materials, equipment and techniques that have been used to make the work.
- Discuss the processes involved in creating the work (e.g. beginning with a sketch, experimenting with materials, making a maquette, collaborating with others exhibiting and /documenting the final work etc.)
- Describe the shapes, colour, scale, texture, patterns, sound, movement and mood.
- Identify other artists and art movements that may have influenced the artist and the work.

How the work has been made:

- Discuss how the material selected to make the work contributes in communicating its subject matter.
- How does the title of the work contribute to your understanding?
- Does the work refer to a cultural, historical, social, environmental or political event or concern? Explain.
- Describe how the positioning of the work within the site contributes to our experience and interpretation. Consider the work in an indoor gallery space and compare.
- Is humour, parody, playfulness essential to the work? Why?
- How is the work questioning our ideas about what sculpture is or what it could be?

Meanings and interpretation: