

Magdalena Abakanowicz

Bronze Crowd

Pronounced: mag-duh-LAY-nuh ah-buh-CON-uh-vich



Magdalena Abakanowicz, Polish, born 1930. *Bronze Crowd*, 1990-91. Bronze, 71 1/8 x 23 x 15 1/2 in. Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas.

Teacher's Introduction

About This Resource

This classroom resource is designed to connect Art 1 level students with primary source texts that offer opportunities for critical thinking and interdisciplinary connections with works in the Nasher collection. We suggest you invite students to first read the text and then discuss what they read in pairs or small groups before completing the interactive component. **The information on this page is provided to offer teachers a broader context to guide student discussion. The following pages may be printed and given directly to students.**

Bronze Crowd

As a child in Poland during World War II, Magdalena Abakanowicz lived through German and Soviet invasions, experiencing firsthand the horrors perpetrated by dehumanized masses under the sway of powerful leadership. Much of her mature work deals with the effects of thinking and acting as a group:

“It happened to me to live in times which were extraordinary by their various forms of collective hate and collective adulation. Marches and parades worshipped leaders, great and good, who soon turned out to be mass murderers. I was obsessed by the image of the crowd, manipulated like a brainless organism and acting like a brainless organism. I suspected that under the human skull, instincts and emotions overpower the intellect without us being aware of it.”

Bronze Crowd is made up of 36 over-life-size figures that were individually modeled using coarse fabric, then cast in bronze. The headless figures, quite literally unable to think for themselves, appear identical from a distance, confronting the viewer in uniform rows. From behind, however, the figures are hollow, and envelop viewers who walk among them.

Further Reading

The excerpt of Magdalena Abakanowicz's *Portrait x 20* is taken from:

Abakanowicz, Magdalena, and Ill Chicago. *Magdalena Abakanowicz: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago*. New York: Abbeville, 1982.

Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Historical and Cultural Heritage, Critical Evaluation | §117.52. Art, Level I (c) (3) and (4)

Social Studies: Impact of World War II | §113.42. World History Studies (c) (12)

English: Reading Comprehension of Literary Nonfiction | §110.31. English I (b) (6)

Learn More at the Nasher

You can learn more about *Bronze Crowd* and see what's currently on view by visiting the “Art” section of the Nasher website. Discover more resources and lessons in the “Learn” section, or book a guided or self-guided tour in the “Visit” section.

www.nashersculpturecenter.org

Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Bronze Crowd*

Read

The text below is an excerpt from *Portrait x 20*, an autobiographical account of artist Magdalena Abakanowicz's childhood experiences in World War II-era Poland.

War

I was nine. It was autumn. On the very edge of the park, a road led from the mill to the avenue of alders. German tanks were coming. We stood on the terrace, taken by surprise, watching. They were looking at us, standing as if on parade. I saw them for the first time, faces, uniforms.

I did not know how to hate. I did not believe it. I could not understand why they should hate the four of us on the terrace.

They fired, aiming, probably on purpose, at a wall.

I stood fearless, suddenly humiliated by their violence, helpless in the face of injustice and the impotence of my parents.

Some years later, father taught me to shoot. To clean and assemble weapons.

At night, partisans would come. Poles, Russians, very often the same people known to us and friendly. Later, more and more frequently, just robbers. Germans by day. The house exposed us, it ceased to be a shelter. The forest also became alien. I no longer went there to talk to it as before.



Magdalena Abakanowicz with *The Crowd* in the background, an exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Art at Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw 1995, photo: Wojciech Druszczyk/East News/Reporter

Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Bronze Crowd*

Discuss

As a child, Abakanowicz lived through the German and Soviet invasions of her home country and saw many of her neighbors side with the Nazis. Based on the text, how did she feel when these people confronted her family?

How does the sculpture *Bronze Crowd* (pictured on this page) reflect the experiences described in the text?

How might a group of figures without heads symbolize the behavior of some people during wartime?



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Write

The larger-than-life-size figures in *Bronze Crowd* may be seen as intimidating or confrontational when viewed from the front. When you walk among the figures, they reveal themselves to be hollow and could be seen as a shield for those who stand with the crowd.



With a partner, create one list of words that describe how it feels to be part of an exclusive group and another list describing how it feels to be bullied or excluded by a group.

Part of a group:

Excluded from group:

Abakanowicz described crowds as “brainless organisms” that do not think as individuals. Using the lists of words as a starting point, write a short story about a character who is part of a group but chooses to think for him or herself in order to change the group for the better.