

Manuel Neri

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.**

About Manuel Neri

Manuel Neri (b. 1930 Sanger, California) is an American sculptor and educator living and working in Benicia, California. He is closely associated with the Bay Area Figurative movement of the 1950s and 60s and was influenced by beatnik philosophy, funk jazz and Latin American poetry.

In 1949 he began his studies in engineering at San Francisco City College but after taking a single ceramics course taught by Peter Voulkos, he changed his focus of study entirely. He continued pursuing studio art at The California College of Arts and Crafts and at The California School of Fine Arts under expressionist painters Richard Diebenkorn, Elmer Bischoff and Nathan Oliveira. With the encouragement of Richard Diebenkorn, and after realizing that his paintings were buckling under the weight of thickly applied paint, Neri shifted his focus to sculpture. Neri has become well known for his life-sized figurative sculptures shaped after his longtime model and muse, Mary Julia Klimemko.

About Neri's work

Neri's work reveals a fascination with body language. Since witnessing the birth of his first child, his work has been inspired by the female form, which he believes possesses the essence of life. In spite of their femaleness, Neri wants his figurative works to address universal experience and emotion. His figures crouch, crawl, stretch and stand in dynamic postures and precarious contrappostos. Although uncommon in post-war contemporary painting and sculpture, Neri's work was noteworthy for combining classical materials and formal concerns with highly textured surfaces and an expressive use of color typically associated with painters in The New York School.

Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Foundations, Creative Expression | §117.302. Art, Level I (c) (1) and (2)

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

Learn More at the Nasher

You can learn more about Neri's work 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



Manuel Neri, *Carla V*, 1964, plaster, oil-based enamel, wood and wire on wood base

Manuel Neri

Read

Read the following quotations by Manuel Neri before beginning the activity below.

"I love body language that people have, the way they move, the way they position themselves. That says so much of the person for me, and this has almost nothing to do with the face. That's my interest there. In fact, a lot of times, I'll even leave the head off because I don't want to deal with that — you know, that target going straight to the face to see what that figure's all about."

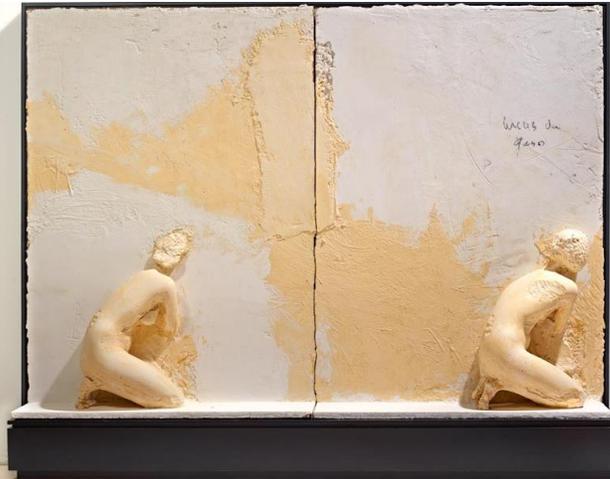
"I've told you that it's not the personality. I've always been fascinated by body language that people have, what they say with their bodies."

"When I began to really look at all of that early Greek sculpture, not just the forms involved, but what happened to the pieces with time—the missing heads and arms—the figure was often brought down to just the bare essentials in terms of structure...That's why I went back to a lot of figures and started tearing off heads and arms—because I could see that in some cases they got in the way. Often a figure had too much character to it."

Compare

Complete this activity with a partner or in a small group.

Compare the images below with Neri's description of his work above. Underline statements in the text that seem to relate to the appearance of one or more of these sculptures. Draw arrows from the underlined statements to the aspects of the sculpture they describe.



LEFT: Manuel Neri, *La Palestra No. 5*, 2001. Bronze and oil-based enamel. CENTER: Manuel Neri, *Arcos de Gesso I*, 1985. Plaster with dry pigment, wire armature, styrofoam, burlap, and wood. RIGHT: Manuel Neri, *Carla V*, 1964, plaster, oil-based enamel, wood and wire on wood base.

Manuel Neri

Read

Manuel Neri sometimes described his work as “funky.” Read below to learn about his definition of that idea before beginning the project below.

“To be ‘funky’ is to be completely casual and informal, deliberately dumb and corny, free-wheeling and spontaneous...”

“[It was about] immediacy. You’d jump into something without stopping to think, just to see what the results would be. The whole funk idea was to look into new and ideas and new materials...We treated everything equally...The same thing was junk. A lot of people used house paint. No one worried much if some of it fell off. A lot of the assemblages and paintings are still falling apart.”

Create: Make it Funky

Make your own small-scale funk sculpture using materials that you have on hand. Look at the pictures of Manuel Neri’s early sculptures made of cardboard, wire, fabric and tape as an example.

Before you begin, find a video clip on YouTube of a particular sport, dance or theater event that you find exciting. Pause the video and use the body language of one person in motion as the subject matter for your sculpture.

Make a pencil drawing with the goal of capturing the specific body language that you see.

Next, gather inexpensive materials such as wire, cardboard, paper, tape and string. Create a “funky” 3-D version of your drawing. Bend, fold, cut, tape and wrap the form to create a dynamic figure.



LEFT: Manuel Neri with an assistant in his studio. CENTER: Manuel Neri, *Wire Figure No. 2*, 1956-57. Wire, fabric and string. RIGHT: Manuel Neri, *Wood Figure No. 1*, c. 1956-57. Wood, cloth, newspaper, cardboard, wire, thread, plaster, and paint.