

Burlap Figures

This lesson plan is intended to introduce students to the art of Magdalena Abakanowicz, an internationally-renowned contemporary sculptor from Poland. Online, www.abakanowicz.art.pl contains an extensive gallery and information about this artist. Visitors to Chicago can view her latest installation — 106 figures, each about 9-ft tall, encompassing three acres in Grant Park along Michigan Avenue.

Many of Abakanowicz's sculptures are human forms and incorporate fibers, including burlap. As a medium for classroom figure study, burlap is inexpensive and can produce some very dramatic results. The heavy jute fibers create deep folds and shadows, providing a very primitive, vulnerable skin. Blick Multi-Purpose Glue stiffens and binds the burlap to a wire armature.

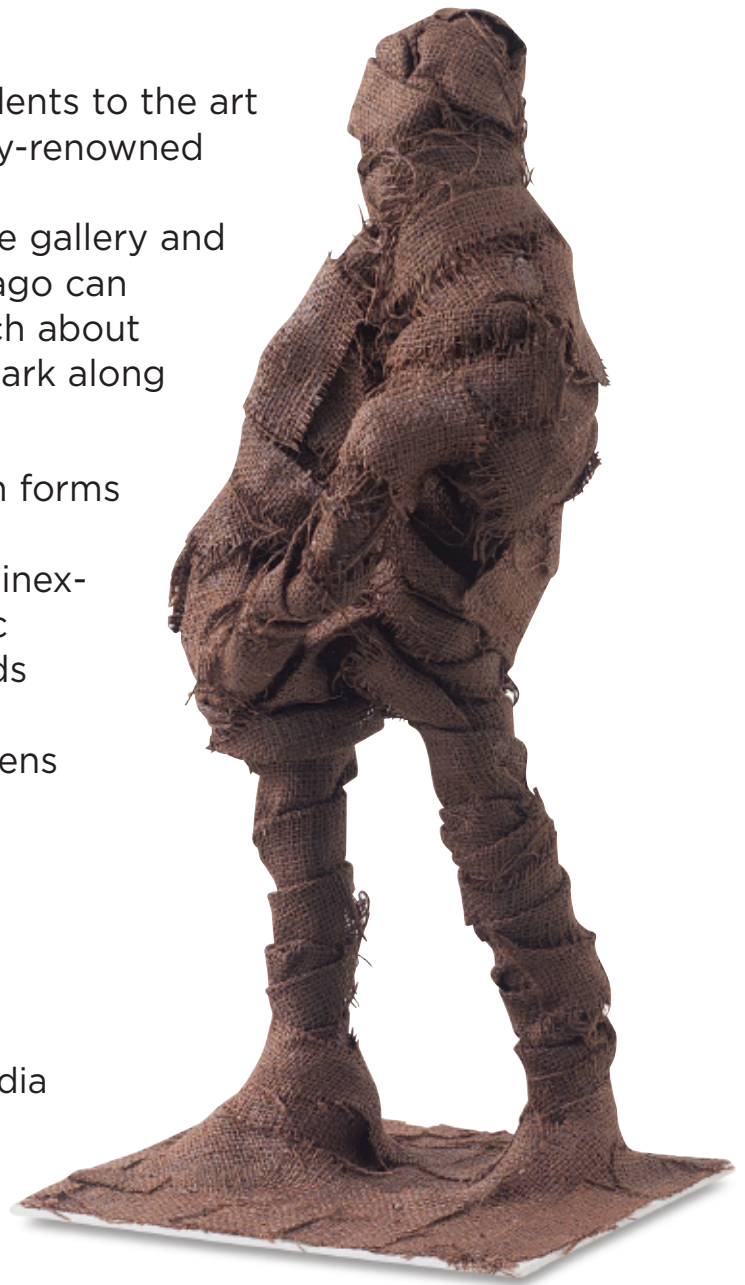
Grade Levels 7-12

Objectives

- Students will discuss how artists make media choices to communicate meaning. For example, burlap is a heavy fabric that may describe a figure carrying a physical or emotional burden. Silk would, on the other hand, describe a feeling of lightness and freedom.
- Students will study the works, ideas, influences and purposes of a contemporary artist.
- Students will use the principles of shape, form and texture to describe a sculptural human figure

Process

1. Create preliminary sketches of figures on newsprint with a pencil. Focus on structure, using continuous line to build mass. This will demonstrate the building of the figure over the armature — a wire support that will be created beneath the burlap surface.
2. Five feet of wire is required to make an armature for a 16" to 18" sculpture. Create a basic "stick" figure, bending the wire together to form legs, arms, torso and head. This will determine proportion, but sculpture will not be freestanding at this point. Aluminum wire is easy to manipulate and can be cut with scissors.



Materials

Burlap, brown (63202-8036)
36" x 1 yard per student, cut into 2" wide strips of multiple lengths

Sculpture Wire (33400-1435)
350-ft, 5 foot per student

Amaco® Wireform, Contour Mesh (33408-2650), cut 20" x 10-ft roll into fifteen 20" x 8" sections, need one per student

Blick Multi-Purpose Glue (23872-1069), gallon

Blick Mega Gesso Brush (06209-1002), 2", one per student

Fiskars Student Scissors (57016-1065) one per student

Blick All-Use Masking Tape (23006-1002)

Blick All-Purpose Newsprint (10311-2013)

Sanford Design® Ebony Layout Pencil (20411-2009) one per student

Blick Canvas Panel (07008-0810) 8" x 10" for base, one per student

Plastic bowl for mixing glue

Plastic trash bag to cover table

Process, continued

3. Build body mass and support over the wire using wire mesh. The mesh can be bent, cut, crimped and stretched to fit the form as desired.

NOTE: Wireform mesh can have sharp edges. Use heavy gardening gloves to protect hands while forming.

4. Cover the work space with a plastic trash bag. Pour 8 oz. of glue into a bowl and add 1/4 cup water. Stir until blended.
5. Place the wire armature form on the bag. Take a strip of burlap and apply the glue mixture to one side using the Mega Brush. Wrap the strip onto the wire, glue side down. Repeat, covering the top part of the figure. Leave the lower part of the figure (ankles and feet) uncovered for attaching to the base. While wrapping, overlap the strips and allow folds and drapes to occur. A textured surface is more desirable than a smooth one for this project. Allow to dry.

NOTE: Do not saturate the burlap with the glue or it will be glossy and visible on the finished sculpture.

6. Attach the feet to a canvas panel base using masking tape. The wire armature can be adjusted to achieve balance. Follow step 5 to cover the feet and board with more burlap. Frayed edges on the burlap may be left as is or smoothed down with the glue mixture.

Options

- While building the armature, use newspaper bound with masking tape instead of wire mesh, for a more economical sculpture

- Use a sponge to loosely dab Blickrylic Metallic Brass (00711-9516) over the finished sculpture to make it look like a bronze casting. Don't hide the texture of the burlap with the paint or force it down into the folds

National Standards

Content Standard #1 – Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

5-8

Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

9-12

Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes they use

Content Standard #2 – Using knowledge of structures and functions

5-8

Students select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas

9-12

Students demonstrate the ability to form and defend judgments about the characteristics and structures to accomplish commercial, personal, communal, or other purposes of art

Content Standard #5 – Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

5-8

Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry

9-12

Students identify intentions of those creating artworks, explore the implications of various purposes, and justify their analyses of purposes in particular works