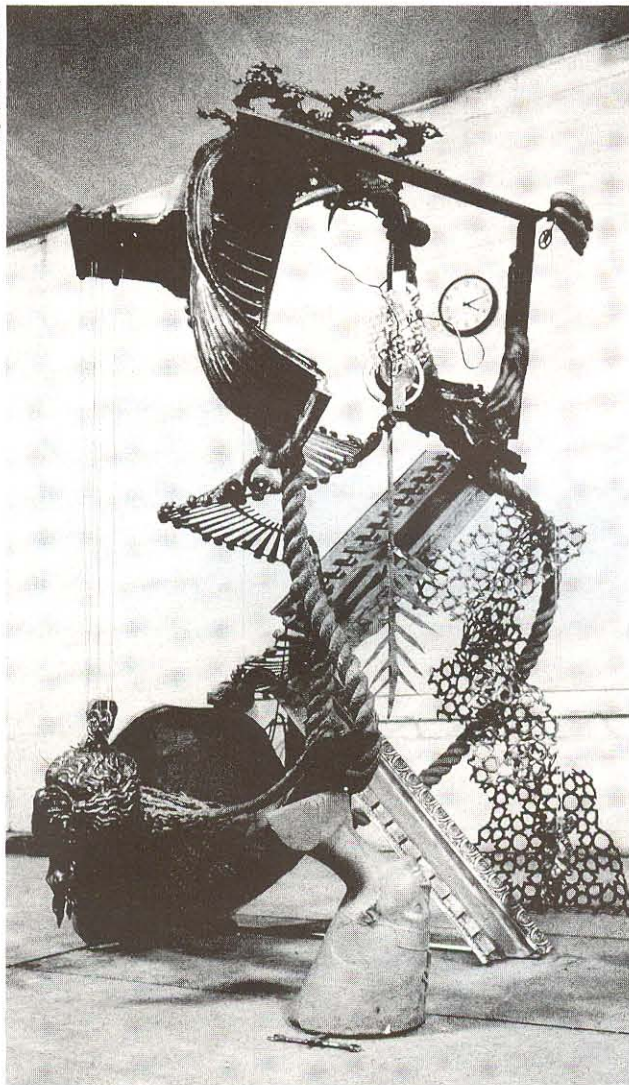


WITH

NANCY GRAVES

BALANCE

Photograph by Alan Barker



NANCY GRAVES, *Unending Revolution of Venus, Plants, and Pendulum*, 1992. 96 x 88 inches. Clockworks by Saff Tech CLOCKWORKS © 1992 Saff Tech Arts/Nancy Graves

About the Program

Behind the Scenes with Nancy Graves takes children from an understanding of balance in their own bodies to an understanding of balance in sculpture. They learn about the role of weight and gravity in physical balance, discover ways that artists play with visual balance in their work, and see how imbalance can create the illusion of motion. Nancy Graves creates a fantastic clock made of natural and architectural forms cast in bronze that balance precariously in space.

Jumping Off Activity**Balance in Our Bodies**
(10 minutes)

This activity prepares students to think about how both sculpture and the human figure balance.

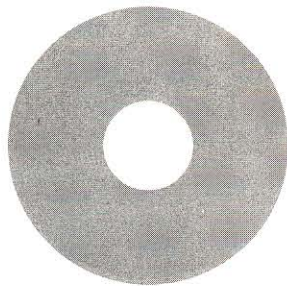
Ask students if they ever think about balancing their bodies during the day or if this is something that happens automatically. To examine how our bodies spontaneously balance themselves, tell students to stand up tall and slowly lift their right legs behind them as high they can without moving any other part of their bodies. What happens if their bodies do not compensate for this redistribution of weight? Ask students to discuss balance and counterbalance as they relate to everyday actions, such as carrying heavy book bags or adjusting their bodies as they sit down. Now ask students how these experiences help us to understand sculpture intuitively. As three-dimensional forms, both our bodies and sculpture are affected by balance and the forces of gravity. Finish by asking students how balance in sculpture differs from balance in two-dimensional art.

Viewing

Before continuing the activities, observe some of the ways artists use balance in their sculpture by viewing *Behind the Scenes with Nancy Graves*.

About the Artist

Nancy Graves was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1940. After moving to New York City during the mid-1960s, she began to construct realistic sculptures. Over time, her work has become increasingly abstract, exploring the boundaries between painting and three-dimensional art. Her large-scale pieces combine organic shapes and isolated manufactured objects with a profusion of vibrant, non-descriptive color.



Sculpture is the art of the hole and the lump.
—Auguste Rodin, French sculptor (1840-1917)



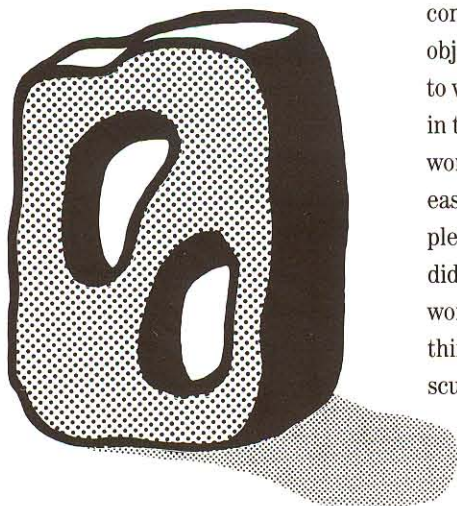
Follow-up Activities

1. Lines in Drawing to Lines in Space (30 minutes)

This activity introduces students to the three-dimensional quality of sculpture by having them translate a flat drawing into a work that interacts with space.

Have students make simple abstract drawings using only big, bold lines. Ask how they might convert their compositions into three-dimensional linear works using ordinary drinking straws. Encourage students to explore ways to connect their three-dimensional “lines” without glue. For example, a crimped tip or the fold of a bent straw can be placed inside an open end.

Discuss with the students how they translated the flat lines of their drawings into lines that occupy space and how they were able to make their sculptures balance. How do space and depth differ in sculpture and drawing? Sculpture has real depth or volume, whereas two-dimensional art creates an illusion of deep space. Also have students describe how space interacts with sculpture. Explore how *negative space*—the space between the shapes—can draw our attention to a work of art’s three-dimensional quality.



2. Transformation of Materials: Assemblage Portraits (40 minutes)

This activity encourages students to use unusual materials to create assemblage portraits.

Discuss the definition of an assemblage with students by asking them what it means to assemble something and how this could be applied to a sculptural technique. An *assemblage* is a sculpture composed of a group of unrelated, often discarded objects. Now ask if students believe that they must be able to walk completely around a work for it to be a sculpture. An assemblage is usually seen from straight on.

Have students brainstorm ways to construct assemblage portraits inside a shallow box or its top without depicting the exact physical details of a person. Students may use natural and manufactured found objects to create portraits of ordinary people from different regions of the world and different periods in history. They might research the Victorian era in Europe, the Industrial Age in North America, ancient civilization in Latin America, or perhaps contemporary or future life in Asia or Africa. Remind them to think about balancing the elements within the composition and to try to make some of the objects project into space. Also ask students to write and present descriptions of daily life in the voice of their portraits. When their works are completed, ask if it was difficult or easy to create sculptures that describe people without literally representing them. How did their thinking as they worked on the artwork portraying a person differ from their thinking when they made abstract linear sculptures in the first activity?

Related Curriculum Activities

Language Arts

A Story in Relief—Study Egyptian hieroglyphics and have the class devise its own visual alphabet that can be incised into clay panels to describe classroom events.

Social Studies

Piñatas: Latin Party Sculptures—Research the origins and meaning of *piñatas*—brightly colored, hollow paper animals filled with toys and candy. To make a piñata, students can construct the body out of cardboard or a paper bag, decorate it with layers of colored tissue paper, and trim the animal with yarn, ribbon, feathers, or glitter. Suspend the sculpture and have students try to break it open by taking turns swinging at it with a stick while blindfolded.

Science

Soft Sculpture Physiques—Divide students into small groups to research the anatomy and function of a particular human body part. Have each group create its part with unusual sculpture materials on the largest scale possible. Assemble the enormous human figure as each group reports on the function of its piece.