

# Art Masterpiece: L'Homme qui Marche I, 1961

## By Alberto Giacometti

**Pronounced:** JHA COE METTI

**Keywords:** Sculpture, Formalism, Expressionism

**Grade:** 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Month:** March/April

**Activity:** Action Figure

**TIME:** 1.25 hours

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### Meet The Artist:

- Alberto Giacometti was born on October 10, 1901 to a famous post-impressionist painter Giovanni Giacometti in the Swiss town of Borgonovo.
- When he was 18, he began his art studies studying painting at the École des Beaux-Arts and at École des Arts et Métiers in Geneva where he studied sculpture.
- In 1920, when he was 19, Giacometti traveled to Italy, where he occupied himself with famous Italian museums, churches, and art exhibitions. He became impressed by the works of other contemporary artist of that time such as Russian artist Alexander Archipenko and post-impressionist painter, Paul Gauguin. He was also intensely affected by the techniques of a famous proto-renaissance fresco painter, Giotto and a classical Renaissance painter, Tintoretto. He was also stimulated by Etruscan, African and Egyptian art. All of these styles would eventually be blended into his sculptures.
- From 1922 to 1925, Giacometti settled in Paris, occasionally attending sculpture classes taught by an influential and prolific French sculptor to perfect his skill.
- He starts his first studio together with his brother in Paris in 1925 and begins to find inspiration in plastic art of "primitive" people. He constructs "Torso" using plaster. (See picture below). He exhibits this sculpture in his first show in 1927 along with his father.
- Around 1930, he met other surreal artists and participated in the Surrealist circle until 1934. During this period he makes a lot of surrealist plastics and also drawings.
- In the second half of the 1930s Alberto Giacometti works a lot on studies of heads. His figures get smaller and smaller in size, sometimes they are not bigger than just a few centimeters, but painting remains a just as important



means of artistic expression for him. He and his brother Diego earn a living by making designs for lamps and furniture for a well-known Parisian interior architect.

- Alberto Giacometti spends the World War II years from 1939 to 1945 in Geneva. After the war he returns to Paris where he starts to create bronze objects that are thin and elongated, almost appearing as if they were without weight and defying physics. Their meager impression is intensified by the contrast with the dense bases that Giacometti places them on.
- At this point, Alberto Giacometti finds his own unmistakable style, giving his figures a maximum expression by reducing and elongating them beyond human proportions. The relation between his slim figure and space becomes the central issue of his artistic work.
- His first one-man show takes place in New York in 1934, in which he presents the skinny figures. The exhibition is a major success and marks his breakthrough as an artist and sculptor.
- He returned to Paris in 1946 and continued to be exhibited in major Galleries in New York, London, Venice, Denmark, and Amsterdam among others. He once said that he was sculpting not the human figure but "the shadow that is cast."
- Alberto Giacometti died in Chur, Switzerland on January 11, 1966.

#### **Information about the Sculpture:**

- The sculpture is cast in bronze and stands 72" tall.
- The piece is described as "both a humble image of an ordinary man, and a potent symbol of humanity:
- This piece is one of six numbered editions (plus four artist proofs) that were created for a public art project by the Chase Manhattan Plaza in New York. However, he struggled with the project and eventually abandoned the commission.
- This piece is considered to be one of the most important works by Giacometti and one of the most iconic images of Modern Art.
- This edition is located at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Another cast is located in Buffalo, NY.
- Edition number two sold in eight minutes at Sotheby's Auction House in 2010 to a private collector for \$103.7 million dollars.

#### **Possible Questions:**

- What do you think of the Walking Man? Where does your eye go first?
- Do you feel the movement of this sculpture? How?
- The following surreal terminologies were introduced with the Marc

Chagall and Rene Magritte lessons. Remind students that Giacometti was involved with the Surrealist from 1930-34. Quickly review if necessary. Ask students what is the predominant Surrealist force you see in this sculpture? Scale Change.

- **Dislocation:** Placing an object in unusual or unfamiliar surroundings
- **Scale change:** Changing an objects usual size
- **Replacement:** Replacing an expected object with an unexpected one
- **Levitation:** Floating objects, defying gravity
- **Juxtaposition:** Joining two images in an impossible combination
- Do you see other areas where the artist may have incorporated his study of African or Egyptian art....Renaissance or Post Impressionism?
- Why do you think the artist titled it L'Homme qui Marche I or The Walking Man?
- How do you think the artist was able to elongate his sculptures such as The Walking Man to defy physics or structural engineering?
- If you had to choose another base to put the Walking Man on, what would it be?

**Note to Art Guide:** set up a workstation for the hot glue guns....only to be used with supervision. The spray painting will need to occur outside (in a well-ventilated area), on a tarp, by you.

**Activity: Action Figure**

**Materials Needed:** Wooden mannequin, white drawing paper, students own pencil, pipe cleaners, aluminum foil, masking tape, metal colored spray paint, wooden blocks or foam core cut into pieces, glue gun, large tarp for the spray painting.

**Explain Activity:** students will arrange a wooden mannequin in an action pose and do a quick, stick figure sketch based on their angle of view. Using the pipe cleaners, they will form an elongated version of their sketch; wrap it first in foil and then in masking tape, mount it on the wooden block or foam core base and have it spray painted.

**Process:**

1. Arrange the class so 4-5 students are working in a group.
2. Pass out to each student a sheet of white drawing paper; they will use their own pencil.
3. Place a wooden mannequin in the center of each workstation and give the students about 2 minutes to carefully arrange it into an action pose.

4. Based on their vantage point, students quickly draw the mannequin in an exaggerated or elongated form...i.e. long neck, arms, legs, etc. Stress that this sketch does not contain any detail and may be done as a stick figure.
5. Remove the mannequins so students are left with their sketch to refer to.
6. Give each student about 5 pipe cleaners and have them begin forming their action figure.
7. As they are doing this, pass each student a sheet of foil and place a couple of rolls of masking tape for them to share.
8. Once they have formed their figure with the pipe cleaners, have them wrap it with the foil. Again...no detail!!
9. When foil is complete, wrap figure in pieces of the masking tape. Here they may form minor detail such as a nose, ears or thumbs.
10. Have the wooden blocks or foam core pieces available in another portion of the room where you can plug in the glue gun and have them select their block or foam core and position their figure on the base. Glue in place with enough hot glue so the figure is stationary.
11. Take outside and spray with the metal spray paint.
12. Have them name their sculpture. For extra credit...have them name it in another language.