

Art Encounters Teacher Notes: Still Life

Pause and Discuss

The video introduces a sculpture by Paloma Varga Weisz called *Still Life*, with suggestions to pause at specified points to discuss and respond to questions.

Learning Format

The resource can be used in class or at home. If setting it as a remote activity, you can use the **worksheet** in the pack, or the **Sculpture Poems worksheet** if running this activity. (The pack also includes Powerpoint versions of the worksheets which you can edit to adapt the activity).

Creative Activities

Although you can use the video as a standalone resource, you may want to combine it with a creative activity of your own design, or one of our suggested activities:

- Use the **Sculpture Poems resource** alongside the video, tasking students to gather ideas then write a poem or short story about the artwork
- Create artwork that responds to the themes that inspired this piece; childhood memories, play and imagination, family heritage, past generations, family heirlooms
- Task students to think of an object or objects that have sentimental value, or have a connection to family or childhood memories. They can then design a sculpture or installation that is inspired by, or incorporates these objects.

Video Transcript

For reference, we've provided the transcript for relevant sections of the video here, with questions highlighted in bold. You'll also find some discussion prompts to use in class below each set of questions, which may be useful to stimulate responses.

Still Life is an installation which includes a carved wooden figure of a child, laid on a glass bench, beneath a glass table which is covered in chemistry equipment, including beakers, flasks and test tubes. The child, seemingly a boy, wears an old-fashioned cotton nightgown. His hands are clasped at his waist and his eyes are closed.

What do you think is happening in this piece?

Does it remind you of anything?

How does it make you feel?

What story might it be telling?

PAUSE

The ideas behind *Still Life* come from the artist's own life, childhood and family. Varga Weisz's mother was a wine chemist and had a laboratory in their home, so Varga Weisz

grew up around lots of scientific apparatus around the house. She talks of playing in the kitchen by laying under a glass table covered in objects, and pretending that she was Snow White laid in a glass casket. This installation echoes that childhood memory, but the wooden figure is a carving of Varga Weisz's son, wearing an antique nightgown which belonged to the family. The flasks and beakers on the glass table in are the ones used by Varga Weisz's mother, so the piece includes several family heirlooms.

The artist chose to include several objects passed down from her mother, and create a carving of her son. Why do you think she did this?

What does the piece tell us about her feelings about her family, or families in general?

Does this new information change your perception of the piece? How?

PAUSE

Discussion Prompts

Life cycles, birth and death, history and future, repetition.

Heirlooms, family lineage – the passing down of stories, traditions, memories and characteristics.

Do you see a playful game or something darker or more clinical?

Autopsy or a fairy tale? Dark themes and death are common in fairy tales (many of which have German roots – e.g. the Brothers Grimm – so are an important part of German culture and history)

The wooden boy in the piece wears an old fashioned nightgown.

Why do you think she chose to do this? What effect does this have?

How would the piece change if he was wearing modern pyjamas, or a t shirt and jeans?

PAUSE

Discussion Prompts

Combining old with new, creating sense of timelessness

The family history of the nightgown – links the child to his ancestors

Creating sense of the other-worldly/fairy tale

Modern clothes would place it in a particular time period

Soft fabric complements the delicate features of the figure, and enhances his fragility. A genderless garment – appears quite feminine but historically worn by both men and women.

Some of the items in the piece are quite old, but the glass table and bench are simple, geometric (possibly inspired by Minimalist sculpture) and modern.

What effect does this have?

Why do you think she chose this design?

Do you see similar shapes anywhere else in the piece?

How would the piece look different if the table and bench were old fashioned?

PAUSE

Discussion Prompts

Dark lines create structure and ground the piece

The structure frames the child, possibly appearing coffin or casket like?

Modern, geometric shapes create contrast with the carved figure, and his soft clothing

The black metal frames of the table and bench echo the wire frames of the chemistry equipment. They both support something fragile and precious.

We'd love to see what your class makes. You can share images of their work with us via email to Alison.smith@henry-moore.org or on social media via:

@HMILeeds on Twitter

@henrymooreinstitute on Instagram