

Relief Sculpture

Grade 3 – Lesson 5

(*Art Connections*, Level 3, pages 92-95)

Big Idea

Relief sculptures – raised forms on a flat surface – can suggest 3-D forms in space, implying further depth with overlapping.

Learning Targets and Assessment Criteria

Target 1: Creates a 3-D organic form. (Arts EALR 1.1 *Elements of Art: Organic form*)

Criteria 1: Shapes the features of the human face with height, width and depth.

Target 2: Creates the illusion of depth. (Arts EALR 1.1.2 *Principles of Organization: Implied depth through overlapping*)

Criteria 2: Uses overlapping to suggest depth beyond the shallow space of the bas relief.

Target 3: Creates a metal repoussé bas relief. (Arts EALR 1.2 *Skills and Techniques: Relief sculpture, metal repoussé*).

Criteria 3: Both repoussés (pushes out from the back) and chases (pushes in from the front) areas of their copper reliefs.

Local Art References



Relief Fragment: Female Head, 8th-9th century, Indian
70.31
Seattle Art Museum



Plaque: Oba and Attendants
ca. 1550-1650, Nigerian, Kingdom of Benin
81.17.496
Seattle Art Museum



Silver Bowl: Lotus Blossom
6th-5th century B.C., Pre-Islamic Mesopotamia
65.32
Seattle Art Museum

Looking at Art Questions

1. All of these works of art are called **relief sculptures**. How are these relief sculptures different from free-standing sculptures that you can walk all the way around? (They are slightly raised forms from a flat background).
2. Relief sculptures that stick out a lot from their backgrounds are called **high relief**. Relief sculptures that are raised just a little from their backgrounds are called **low** or **bas** (bah) **relief**. Which do you think each of these is?
3. How do the artists in each case make it look like some parts of the image are closer to you than other parts? (Some parts actually ARE closer by being a bit more raised. Other parts appear closer through the use of **overlapping**).

4. Remember that we call 3-D objects **forms** and 2-D objects **shapes** in art. Do you see mostly organic or geometric forms in these relief sculptures?
5. The human face is made up of several interconnected organic forms. Which organic forms stick out the most on your face?
6. We are going to make relief sculpture self-portraits out of thin sheets of copper. Working thin metal is called **metal repoussé**. In French, “repoussé” means “to push back.” We are going to push out forms from the back (**repoussé** or embossing) and push in lines and other details on the front (**chasing** or indenting).
7. Like the artists we looked at, we will both literally make some parts of our faces stick out further than others, and create the illusion of depth by overlapping some forms with others.

Art Making Activity

Make a Bas-Relief Self-Portrait

Which parts of your face will you repoussé (push out from the back), and which parts of your face will you chase (indent in from the front)?

1. In your sketchbook, sketch your head, neck and shoulders. You might think about not looking straight on, but turning your face a little to get a different perspective. Remember to include some overlapping to imply depth.
2. Remember that your eyes are in the middle of your head (not $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up, at your hairline).
3. After you get a sketch that you like, tear out that page from your sketchbook, and tape it to the copper.
4. Place your copper and taped-on sketch on top of a folded piece of felt. Then re-trace the lines of portrait. When you have traced your whole sketch, detach the sketch from the copper so you are just working on the copper.
5. Practice repousséing and chasing on the scrap piece of copper.
6. Choose which parts of your portrait you will repoussé (push out from the back), and which parts you will chase (indent in from the front).
7. Keep working on your relief portrait, turning it over and back as you need to to repoussé and chase all the forms and details you want.

Each Student Needs

Please see note on master supply list re: prep for cutting/taping copper

- A sketch book
- Sketching pencil (HB)

Tips for Teachers

Before class

- Ask a parent to tape all the raw edges of the copper with blue tape for safety. (3rd graders can do this if supervised).

- A 6x9 piece of thin copper
- Blue tape to cover the sharp edges of the copper
- A small piece of blue tape to hold sketch onto copper to transfer portrait
- Wooden clay tools for embossing clay
- Black felt (also used for sumi ink painting), folded as padding underneath copper

Tips for Teachers

During class

- Demonstrate the appropriate force with which to repoussé and chase in the copper so as to make strong 3-D forms, but not to tear through the copper.

Vocabulary	
Relief sculpture	Organic forms
High relief	Metal repoussé
Low (or bas) relief	Repoussé
Overlapping	Chase

Reflecting on Our Art

- **Describe:** Which organic forms on your portrait stick out the most?
- **Analyze:** How did you imply depth in your self portrait?
- **Interpret:** What does your self-portrait express about you?
- **Decide:** What were you able to do with a portrait in copper that you couldn't with a portrait on paper?

Self-Assessment

Name _____

What does your self-portrait relief express about you? How did you show that?

What could show in a copper relief self-portrait that you couldn't on paper?

Art Background (for Relief Fragment: Female Head, Indian)

India



A Nepalese polychrome wooden statue of the Malla Kingdom, 14th century.

The first known sculptures are from the Indus Valley civilization (3300–1700 BC), found in sites at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa in modern-day Pakistan. These are among the earliest known instances of sculpture in the world. Later, as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism developed further, India produced bronzes and stone carvings of great intricacy, such as the famous temple carvings which adorn various Hindu, Jain and Buddhist shrines. Some of these, such as the cave temples of Ellora and Ajanta, are examples of Indian rock-cut architecture, perhaps the largest and most ambitious sculptural schemes in the world.

During the 2nd to 1st century BC in northern India, in what is now southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, sculptures became more anatomically realistic, often representing episodes of the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha. Although India had a long sculptural tradition and a mastery of rich iconography, the Buddha was never represented in human form before this time, but only through symbols such as the stupa. This alteration in style may have occurred because Gandharan Buddhist sculpture in ancient Afghanistan acquired Greek and Persian influence. Artistically, the Gandharan school of sculpture is characterized by wavy hair, drapery covering both shoulders, shoes and sandals, and acanthus leaf decorations, among other things.

The pink sandstone sculptures of Mathura evolved during the Gupta Empire period (4th-6th century AD) to reach a very high fineness of execution and delicacy in the modeling. Gupta period art would later influence Chinese styles during the Sui dynasty, and the artistic styles across the rest of east Asia. Newer sculptures in Afghanistan, in stucco, schist or clay, display very strong blending of Indian post-Gupta mannerism and Classical influence. The celebrated bronzes of the Chola dynasty (c. 850-1250) from south India are of particular note; the iconic figure of Nataraja being the classic example. The traditions of Indian sculpture continue into the 20th and 21st centuries with for instance, the granite carving of Mahabalipuram derived from the Pallava dynasty. Contemporary Indian sculpture is typically polymorphous but includes celebrated figures such as Dhruva Mistry.

Excerpted from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sculpture>

Art Background (for **Plaque: Oba and Attendants**, Kingdom of Benin, Nigeria)

Eight men are gathered tightly together, as if part of a time capsule from a palace where the royal regalia was visually and acoustically complex. They take us back five hundred years to a lively event that occurred in a kingdom at the height of its productivity and trade. Details of the costumes and instruments speak for each of the men, but the men's facial expressions and individual identities remain remote. At the center, symbolically larger than life, is the Oba—the king—around whom all activity revolves. This plaque leads us to consider the other Benin art in the museum's collection, all of which displays the intricate details that this kingdom is famous for. The Benin kingdom is also renowned for the longevity of its royal lineage, still thriving after a thousand years, with court officials continuing to enact processes of art and ritual that originated centuries ago.

Profiles of Royal Glory

Benin was a prosperous and highly organized city at the time this plaque was created. It had a walled urban center and several broad, intersecting avenues that served as thoroughfares on ceremonial occasions. Houses were built largely of red clay, which was washed and polished. At the center of the city was the Oba's palace, an immense complex with reception halls, courtyards, living quarters and many special shrines and altars. Each of the eight men depicted on this plaque had a distinct role in the kingdom. What they carry, how they dress, where they stand and what gesture they make indicate who they are. Recorded in brass five hundred years ago, most of these men still have counterparts in the current palace

The Portuguese at Court

To the right of the Oba is a bearded man wearing a high-crowned hat, boots, pleated jerkin, patterned hose, musket and hammer. This man is a Portuguese trader or soldier, one of many who might have aided the Oba in a war campaign or handled trade in a nearby port. The king of Portugal sent missionaries and military advisors to establish supportive relations, particularly during the reign of Oba Esigie (1517-66), who, European records suggest, was baptized as a youth in 1516 and relied on Portuguese allies to help secure his right to the throne. Guns were used for the first time in his war against the powerful Atah of Idah. Esigie adapted certain aspects of a ceremony known as *Ague* to focus on self-denial and sacrifice, partly to reflect his respect for Catholic Lent. Over time, however, his alliance with the Portuguese soured, and when the Portuguese king sent missionaries in 1538 to baptize new converts, the Oba refused to allow it.

Sword Bearer

Kneeling beside the Oba, an attendant carries a ceremonial sword of state, or *eben*, which is used to demonstrate loyalty to the Oba. To kneel is a sign of true allegiance. It is considered degrading except when required for ritual purposes. One of the punctuation points in court ceremonies is the tossing and twirling of *eben*, an event that still occurs. The presentation offers striking embellishment to the spectacles of art, costume and dance that occur at the palace.

Men With Shields

A group of three court officials flank the Oba, offering a reminder that the Oba is reliant on the support of his subjects. Personal and domestic servants of the Oba have many official duties, including shielding him whenever he makes public appearances.

Harp Player

An *akpotin*, or harp player, appears in the top right corner of the plaque. The *akpata*, the player's instrument, is used for telling stories and producing music during ceremonies in Benin. It has six or seven strings, each of which is named.

Brass Books

Leaves are carefully incised into the background of this and other plaques. Their presence raises a question about the original inspiration for the plaques. Some sources connect the leaf pattern with a river plant whose healing properties are used in the kingdom. Others point out that the word for leaf also refers to book and paper, and that books may have influenced the format and use of plaques as repositories for historical records. Further evidence for this relationship is the fact that the first brass plaques were created during the reign of Oba Esigie, an innovator who could read and speak Portuguese by the early sixteenth century.

Plaques were fastened to pillars that supported the massive flat ceilings of the palace buildings, and the brass was kept brightly polished. About nine hundred plaques are known to exist in public and private collections, with the largest assembly displayed at the British Museum. By the time of the British Punitive Expedition in 1897, however, the plaques were not installed on the pillars but were consulted on questions of court procedure.

Excerpted from:

<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/SAMcollection/code/emuseum.asp?style=single¤trecord=1&page=search&profile=objExplores&searchdesc=Oba%20and%20attendants&quicksearch=Oba%20and%20attendants&newvalues=1&newprofile=objects>

Art Background (for Silver Bowl: Lotus Blossom, Pre-Islamic)

The lotus flower appeared in legends originating both from India and from ancient Egypt. Here, on this page, I'll focus on its appearance in ancient Egyptian religion. The lotus flower played a prominent role in the version of the creation story that originated in Heliopolis. Before the universe came into being, there was an infinite ocean of inert water which constituted the primeval being named Nun. Out of Nun emerged a lotus flower, together with a single mound of dry land. The lotus blossoms opened, and out stepped the self-created sun god, Atum, as a child. (See the entry for *Utchat* for a continuation of this story.)



A slightly different version of the creation story originated in Hermopolis. In that version, the sun god who formed himself from the chaos of Nun and emerged from the lotus petals was Ra. His history went on to say that the petals of the lotus blossom enfolded him when he returned to it each night. The lotus is a flower which opens and closes each day.

The lotus flower has been featured extensively throughout the art of ancient Egypt. In various works of art, you may see it held in the hand of a god or human, serving as a border to outline a section of the artwork, unfolding to reveal various gods or humans, and many other depictions.

In the Near East (Mesopotamia), the lotus was the flower of Lilith, the Sumero-Babylonian goddess that Jews claimed was Adam's first wife.



Excerpted from: <http://www.shira.net/symbols.htm>

Assessment Checklist

Student	Shapes the features of the human face with height, width and depth	Uses overlapping to suggest depth beyond the shallow space of the bas relief	Both repoussés (pushes out from the back) and chases (pushes in from the front) areas of their copper reliefs	TOTAL 3
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
15.				
16.				
17.				
18.				
19.				
20.				
21.				
22.				
23.				
24.				
25.				
26.				
27.				
28.				
29.				
30.				
31.				
Total Points				
Percent Comprehension				

Teacher Notes:

Letter Home

Dear Family,

*Today we learned that sculpture that sticks up from a flat background is called a **relief sculpture**. Relief sculptures that stick out a lot are called **high relief**, and ones that don't stick out very much are called **low relief** or **bas (bah) relief**. We looked at several relief sculptures, including three from the Seattle Art Museum – one from ancient Mesopotamia from the 6th century BCE, one from 8th century India, and a highly intricate one from the 16th century Kingdom of Benin in Nigeria. In all of the reliefs we studied we saw artists showed depth both by pushing out certain parts of the relief more than others, and by using **overlapping** to **imply depth**.*

*We made our own **metal repoussé** self-portrait relief sculptures, in which we used both **repoussé** (pushing forms out from the back of the metal) and **chasing** (indenting lines and details in from the front of the metal). Our self-portraits showed that the human face is made up of several inter-connected **organic forms**.*

At home, you could make simple relief sculptures by cutting out shapes from cardboard and other relatively flat materials like mesh, and gluing them down to a corrugated cardboard surface to make a picture. Then you could cover the whole image with aluminum foil, rubbing enough so that the textures of the shapes appear in the aluminum foil.