Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka’s sculptures are displayed around the country including in theanmar Gardens at Iowa State University. She still plays a big part inutzifying my work.” For more than 20 years she has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka’s sculptures are displayed around the country including in theanmar Gardens at Iowa State University. She still plays a big part inutzifying my work.” For more than 20 years she has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka says she wants to be an artist to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka says she wants to be an artist to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka says she wants to be an artist to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka says she wants to be an artist to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka says she wants to be an artist to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka says she wants to be an artist to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka says she wants to be an artist to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka says she wants to be an artist to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in fine arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective conscious shape a lot of the work.” She spent her full-time career as an artist for more than 20 years. She has created large-scale rabbit head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture the family dynamics of human and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and works with the Benson Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.
DEBORAH MASUOKA
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Deborah Masuoka was born in Detroit, Michigan, and earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Fine Arts with concentrations in sculpture and ceramics. She grew up in a large family as the oldest child and wanted to be an artist her whole life, and she says, “Group dynamics and the collective spirit always play a big part in influencing my art work.” For more than 20 years she has created large-scale rabbit-head sculptures often displayed in groups that capture this family dynamic and collective spirit. Deborah Masuoka currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska and works with the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts coordinating studios, tools and equipment for artists who come to work at the Center to make large-scale sculpture.

Deborah Masuoka’s sculptures are displayed around the country including in the Reiman Gardens at Iowa State University. She has worked full-time on her art for over 20 years. Her typical routine in the studio is five to six days a week and six to eight hours a day. She says, “Making art takes a commitment of time and energy and the ability to focus over a long period of time. The most challenging aspect of making art is consistently working with an idea and exploring all the different possibilities.” For Deborah Masuoka making the work itself is the easiest part. She often works on several pieces at a time because, as she says, “Multiple pieces allow me to use my time and energy effectively and [the use of multiples] is a significant part of my creative process.”

Deborah Masuoka’s advice to students who want to be artists is to remember that, “the most important part of being an artist is working hard and staying focused on making art.”

HISTORY OF THE SITE

Deborah Masuoka’s three rabbits are located between Main Street and Pearl Street in the historic Haymarket District of Council Bluffs, Iowa. The Haymarket District was listed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1985 because of its architectural significance. From the late 19th century to the early 20th century this area was a vital commercial district. Once again it has become a center of commerce with antique shops paying tribute to Council Bluffs’ past. To connect with the past, historical features are being added to this downtown area including decorative brick walkways, mosaic tiles, historic lampposts and street signs. The Haymarket District is within walking distance of other sites important to Council Bluffs history, including Bayliss Park, which is the location for Brower Hatcher’s sculptures Oculus and Wellspring.

Deborah Masuoka hopes that her sculptures will encourage people to visit the historic Haymarket District. The three rabbits sit on their own island between the two streets providing a visual focus for the square. The artist hopes that families will enjoy visiting the rabbits, exploring how each side of each rabbit is different, and seeing that art can be fun. Deborah Masuoka says, “I love seeing the large pieces in groups in the landscape and in architectural settings” and that “the colors in the bronze pieces relate very well to the historic nature of the area.”
WORK OF ART
MEDIUM AND DESCRIPTION
Deborah Masuoka is particularly known as a ceramic artist. She has made ceramic rabbit heads weighing up to 150 pounds, a difficult task in clay. She paints these large-scale heads in colors that resemble stone, like cobalt blue, green, rust, burnt orange and yellow. She likes to work with clay because “it can be molded into any shape and records the human touch.”

The three eight-foot tall Haymarket Rabbits are cast in bronze. The layers of colors on these are made with chemicals that create both bright and muted tones. The textures, scale and colors of these bronze rabbits mimic those of her ceramic heads.

Visit the Educator Resources section of www.iowawestpublicart.org to see Deborah Masouka’s ceramic rabbit head.

Now compare the Haymarket Rabbits to her ceramic rabbit head. What similarities and differences do you see in these sculptures made in two different media?

Although the shapes of all three Haymarket Rabbits are the same, the features and designs are all different. Deborah Masuoka says, “Visually each sculpture has two distinct sides, and at times may appear to be somewhat contradictory.” Compare the front and back of the ceramic rabbit. What kinds of designs do you see? Do you see any repeated designs? How do the colors compare? How do the eyes on the two sides differ? What might these shapes suggest about the rabbit?

Deborah Masuoka says she wants “visitors to see her pieces and be left with a sense of curiosity and wonder.”

INTERPRETATION
Deborah Masuoka states that, “My personal style tends to be direct and honest, and I like to make things that have a simple shape and multiple meanings.”

Visit the Educator Resources section of www.iowawestpublicart.org to look at Albrecht Dürer’s A Young Hare, 1502.

Dürer’s watercolor rabbit is painted very realistically. How does this differ from Deborah Masuoka’s Haymarket Rabbits?

Look at these other sculptures of rabbits on www.iowawestpublicart.org:

Barry Flanagan’s The Drummer, 1941, 96” tall, bronze
Jeff Koons, Rabbit, 1986, 41” tall, stainless steel
Deborah Masuoka, White Rabbit, 2007

Compare these three sculptures to the painting by Dürer and the Deborah Masuoka’s Haymarket Rabbits. Put these works in order from the most realistic to the most abstract.

What about the works made you put them in this particular order? How are the shapes similar or different? What features of each allow you to identify it as a rabbit? What are the features that differ from a real rabbit? Why do you think Deborah Masuoka only uses the head of the rabbit for her sculptures?

Compare the sizes of the sculptures. The Flanagan and the Masuoka sculptures are about the same height while the Koons is only half as tall.

How do these sizes relate to the size of a real rabbit? How does the scale of each work change the way you think about the animal portrayed? Imagine adding the body of the rabbit to one of Deborah Masuoka’s Haymarket Rabbits. If the head is 8 feet tall, how big would the entire rabbit be?

Have you ever had a rabbit as a pet, or seen a rabbit at a fair or in a pet shop or in your back yard? Brainstorm a list of words that you associate with these rabbits.

Deborah Masuoka says that her sculptures deal with the idea of “how people interpret what they see and the information they bring with them. For example, the rabbit is seen as a prey. But if the scale is increased to 8 feet tall, the prey can be seen as the predator. The rabbit then becomes the intimidator, which opens up the opportunity to explore preconceived ideas of what certain images represent.”

Now go back and think about the 8-foot tall rabbit heads.

Which of your words would not apply to these large-scale rabbits? Can you make a new list of words you
might associate with these rabbits that are taller than you are?

Look back at Barry Flanagan’s *The Drummer.* What is this rabbit doing? Who would usually engage in this activity? Can you think of any other times that artists or writers have made animals act like human beings? What made the animals seem like human beings in these art works and stories?

Some good literary references for rabbits with human characteristics are given below. You can find media references for them in the Educator Resources area of www.iowawestpublicart.org.

Brer Rabbit
The Tale of Peter Rabbit eBook (includes illustrations)
Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* includes two famous rabbits: Mad Hatter and White Rabbit
Bugs Bunny

**VOCABULARY**

**Abstraction** – freedom from representational qualities in art, not representing any object in the physical world

**Anthropomorphic** – having human characteristics

**Bronze** – a yellowish brown metal made by combining copper and tin

**Ceramic** – made of clay and hardened by heat

**Medium** – the material or form used by an artist

**Scale** – the relative size of something

**Texture** – the tactile quality of the surface of a work of art or a visual design which represents something that can be felt by touch

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**EXPLORE BIG IDEAS**

Artists abstract forms from the natural world.

Connect With Other Art, Artists and Cultures

Look at the following sculptures on www.iowawestpublicart.org in the Educator Resources area:

- Great Serpent Mound, Ohio, c. 100 BCE – CE 700, 1348 ft. long
- Nazca Lines, Peru, c. 500 BCE – CE 500
- Deborah Butterfield, *June,* 2005, height 39 inches, steel

What do each of these forms represent? What materials do you think each was made from?

The Great Serpent Mound and the Nazca Lines were made hundreds of years ago using the natural landscape. The Serpent Mound was made by the Hopewell people of North America in a shape that was important to their cultural beliefs. The Nazca people of Peru scratched the lines on the desert plains in huge shapes only fully visible from the air. Many questions remain about why these large images were made.

Compare the Nazca Spider and Louise Bourgeois’ *Maman.*

Which looks more like a real spider? What do you see that makes you say that? What features do both share?

Look at Deborah Butterfield’s *June* and the Great Serpent Mound.

Neither of these looks exactly like the real creature. What features help you identify what they are? What would you have to add to each to make them look more realistic?

Now look at all these sculptures along with Deborah Masuoka’s *Haymarket Rabbits* and put them in order from most realistic to most abstract.

What about the works made you put them in this particular order? How are the shapes similar or different from the real creatures? Did size make a difference in your decisions?

Experiment with Art Making

Visit www.iowawestpublicart.org to look at a page from a 13th Century sketchbook. This is part of the sketchbook of a medieval builder named Villard de Honnecourt who traveled around recording what he saw and his ideas for architecture and sculpture.
On this page of his sketchbook he drew animals and human figures and connected their forms to geometric shapes.

What animals do you see? What shapes do you see?

Find a realistic image of an animal of your choice—a photocopy from a book, a printed Web image, an image from a magazine, etc. Look carefully to determine what geometric shape(s) most closely fit the animal form and then draw the shapes over the animal as Villard de Honnecourt did. Use a ruler and compass as needed. Measure the shapes carefully.

Calculate how much you will have to enlarge your shape(s) to fill a 12” x 18” piece of paper. Keeping the proportions the same, redraw your shape(s) enlarged to fill the paper.

Look again at Deborah Masuoka’s White Rabbit. She started with the shape of a large oval. What did she have to add to make us see it as a rabbit?

Now think about your shape. What will you have to add to make your animal recognizable? Using your shape(s) add only enough to make us see your animal but keep it as abstract as possible.

Using colored pencils, pastels or oil pastels add color to your abstract animal. Do you want a single color like White Rabbit or will you add texture like the Haymarket Rabbits? Do you want to add designs that refer to some feature of the animal like the eyes on the Haymarket Rabbits or will you add patterns like the scallops or spirals on the Haymarket Rabbits?

Write a short paragraph reflecting on how easy or hard it was to portray your realistic animal in an abstract way. Would you choose a different animal if you were to do this again? Why or why not?

EXPLORE BIG IDEAS

Artists throughout time have merged human and animal characteristics.

Connect With Other Art, Artists and Cultures

Look at Haymarket Rabbits. Remember that Deborah Masuoka said that by making her rabbits larger than a human she changed them from prey to predator. Often when we think about predators we think not only about large animals but also about human hunters. Artists and writers often make animals anthropomorphic, giving them human characteristics (see the discussion of Barry Flanagan’s The Drummer under Interpretation).

Some cultures have combined human and animal forms to represent supernatural beings with special powers. Look at the following on www.iowawestpublicart.org:

Horus offering a libation, bronze statue, 22nd dynasty (c. 800 BC); in the Louvre, Paris

Illustration from an Egyptian Book of the Dead, c. 1275 BC, showing the jackal-headed god of the dead, Anubis, weighing the soul of the scribe, Ani

Jade Votive Axe, Olmec 1200-400 BCE, British Museum, London.

Look at Horus, Anubis and the Olmec jade axe. What features of what animals can you recognize in each? Which parts of the figures are human like? Read the information from the British Museum about the Olmec Jade Axe to find out all the different animals that are included in this figure.

Our culture sometimes combines human and animal characteristics to create beings with superpowers. Can you think of some superheroes that combine human and animal characteristics? What powers do they get from the animals?

Many cultures have folktales about tricksters who appear in animal form, but act like tricky human beings. Have you read or heard any of these tales?

Visit the Educator Resources area of www.iowawestpublicart.org to find a variety of trickster tales.

Experiment With Art Making

Contemporary Native American artist, Harry Fonseca, has used the trickster Coyote in many of his paintings. Go to www.iowawestpublicart.org to look at a number of his “Coyote” paintings

What does Harry Fonseca do to give each coyote its own personality? Do you think these figures are more human or more animal? Why?
You are going to create an upright figure that combines features of humans and animals. Start with a 9" x 12" sheet of paper laying it down vertically in front of you. Using a ruler and pencil lightly draw a vertical line 1 inch from the left side of your paper creating a margin. Now divide the remaining 8 inches in half with a faint vertical guideline (resulting in two 4-inch vertical strips).

Now you are going to draw some horizontal lines. Measure down 3 inches from the top of your paper and draw a line from the right edge to the margin. Measure down another 3 inches (6 inches from the top) and draw another horizontal line as before.

You are going to draw a figure with its head and neck in the top strip and centered on the vertical guideline. The shoulders to waist of your figure will fit in the center horizontal strip and the hips and legs will be in the bottom section. One of these sections of your figure will be human. The other two will be based on two different animals. Decide which two animals you will draw.

Look back at Harry Fonseca’s coyotes. A coyote is a four-legged animal and yet Fonseca fit him into an upright figure.

How will you create an upright figure using your different animals? Which part will you make human? Will you use clothing on your animals or will they look more natural? If you clothe your animals what features will still suggest the animal characteristics? Draw your human part in one section and each of your animal parts in the other two sections being careful to center all the parts on your vertical guideline.

When you are finished with your drawing, carefully cut along the two horizontal lines stopping at the one-inch margin on the left. Get into groups of four to six and staple your drawings together along the left margin being careful to line them up. Now flip the different sections of your book to create many different creatures with animal and human parts. Which is your favorite combination? Why?

Give your favorite combined figure a name. Write a paragraph describing the life of your imaginary figure. Where does it live? What does it eat? What does it like to do? What special powers does it have?