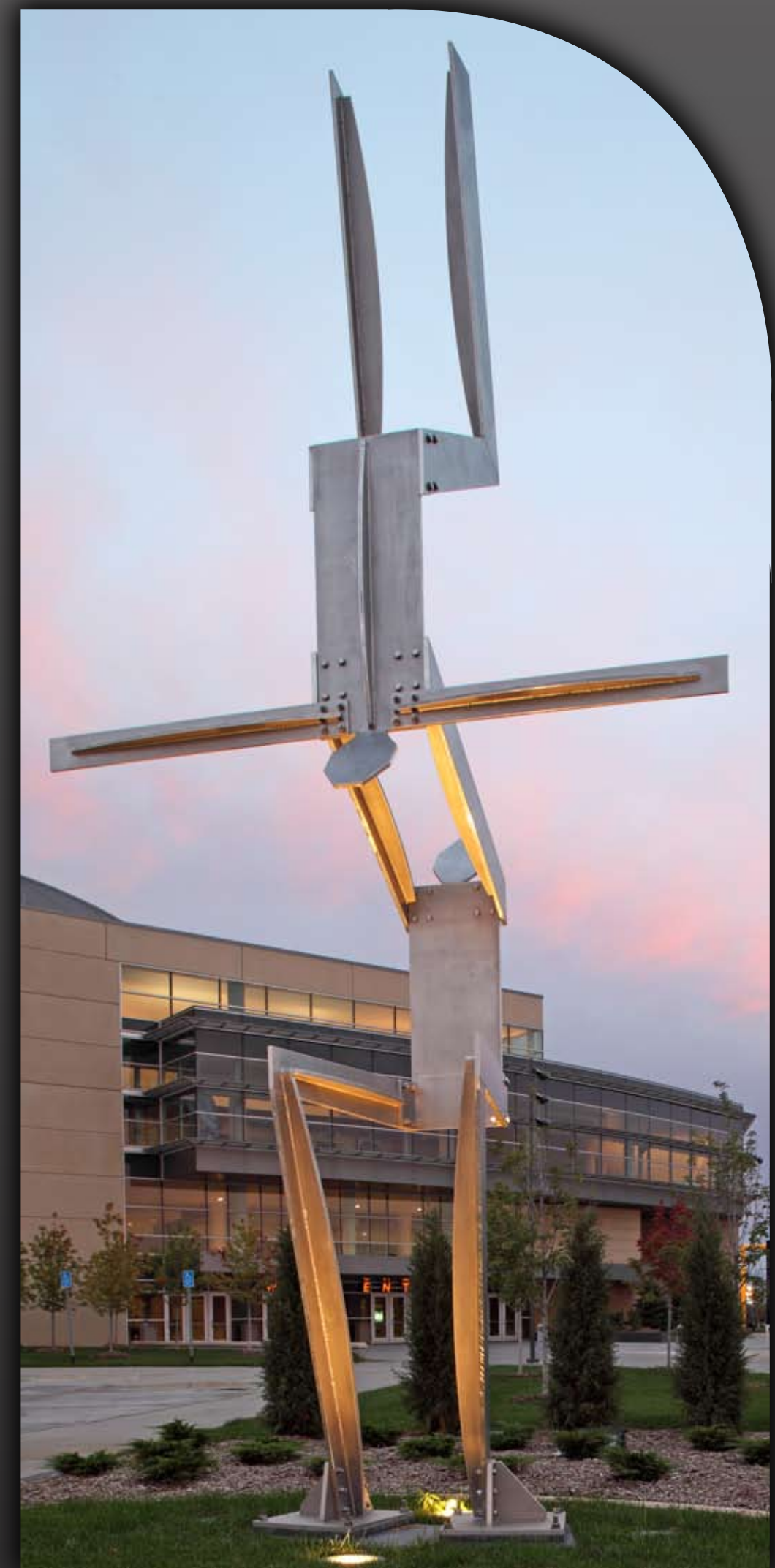




SUNRISE



CIRCUS



INTERSTATE



CIRCUS, DETAIL

IOWA

Iowa West Public Art

WILLIAM KING
MID-AMERICA CENTER
SUNRISE, INTERSTATE
AND CIRCUS

IOWAWESTPUBLICART.ORG

WILLIAM KING MID-AMERICA CENTER SUNRISE, INTERSTATE AND CIRCUS

ABOUT THE ARTIST

William King was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1925, and grew up in Coconut Grove, Miami. He says, " I was always a 'sculptor' because from the age of three I was making sculpture but didn't know what it was." His older brother and father used carpentry tools so he learned how to build things with tools as a young boy. He first thought about art as a career when he was at the Cooper Union Art School in New York City. Because one of his teachers liked what he made and suggested he could sell it, he realized that he could make a living doing something he loved: making art. The artist recognizes that the two main cultural influences on his work were growing up in Florida and his artistic career in New York City.



William King has been an artist for more than 60 years. He still works every day on his art at his studio in New York City. He works in many different media, such as clay, wood, vinyl and metal, but he likes to work on only one piece at a time. When starting a piece and choosing a medium the artist says, "I decide what material to use by what I feel like putting my hands on." Once he decides on the medium "the ideas for the art work flow into the materials." William King says that the most challenging thing about making art is doing something new with each work. He asks himself, "Have I done it before? Is the image just a repetition of something I have already done better before?" Once he begins making the piece he gets immersed in the physical labor and that comes easily. He says, "I know what I am going to do and I do it."

HISTORY OF THE SITE

The Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs, Iowa is a premier entertainment and convention center offering live entertainment and sporting events. As part of the Iowa West Public Art Master Plan three sites at the Mid-America Center have been chosen for William King's sculptures.

An important aspect of public art is its location and environment. The three sites chosen for William King's sculptures have been beautified with new trees, bushes and native grasses, lighting and paving. The subject matter of William King's three sculptures makes direct connection to the particular sites where they are located. *Circus* reminds us of the entertainment held in the Arena. *Interstate* makes connection to the location of the Mid-America Center at the intersection of two major interstate highways. *Sunrise* refers to the history and people of the Council Bluffs area. The artist says that his "images are designed to be completely legible and directly connected to the community experience." "Site-specific" sculpture is especially created to be meaningful in its location and to enhance visitors' experience of the whole environment. The site and how it looks is also important to the artist. William King says, "The better the site, the better I like it."

WORK OF ART

MEDIUM AND DESCRIPTION

William King describes his work as a "semi-abstract depiction of the figure." The figures for the Mid-America Center are made of plate aluminum with pieces bolted together. Viewers can recognize different types of figures in everyday situations, but these human beings have been exaggerated and elongated into a superhuman size. *Interstate* is 15 feet high and represents a woman driving with her hair flowing out behind her. *Circus* is 23 feet tall and represents performers under the big top. *Sunrise* is 24 feet tall and represents a man and a woman greeting the new day.

Many of William King's works are made of sheets of metal cut into flat silhouettes either bolted together or slotted together like cardboard cut-outs. He uses flat, two-dimensional forms to create his three-dimensional figures. For example, in *Sunrise*, the faces of the couple can be seen as flat shapes from the side, but are seen only as the edge of the metal from the front. Viewers will see different shapes and discover different views as they move around the sculptures.

William King has made sculpture out of a number of different materials. [View samples in the Educator Resources section of www.iowawestpublicart.org.](#) Look at *Maus*, *Maybe and Snack* from 1993, at Grounds for Sculpture in New Jersey. Now look at *Daphne and Charlie* carved in wood in 1954. Compare these two works to *Sunrise*.

These figures are made of different materials. How does that make them look different? How are the textures similar and/or different? Which of the figures look flat and which look rounded? One of these sculptures is made of a material so light the figures move in the breeze. Which do you think it is and why?

INTERPRETATION

William King's sculpture has often been associated with Pop Art, an art style in the 1950s and 1960s based on modern popular culture with images from comic books, advertisements, consumer products, television and movies. [Visit www.iowawestpublicart.org to see examples of Pop Art:](#)
Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Can*, 1964
Roy Lichtenstein, *Preparedness*, 1968
Claus Oldenburg, several large-scale works

What kinds of everyday (popular culture) objects do you see in these works?

Previous to Pop Art the major trend in art was pure abstraction. The Pop Artists reintroduced imagery of figures and objects. Joel Shapiro and William King are two artists who have been associated with this reintroduction of the figure.

Viewers often see figures in forms that are very abstract. [Look at these three sculptures online at www.iowawestpublicart.org:](#)
David Smith, *Herc*, 1952
Joel Shapiro, *Untitled*, 1989-90
William King, *Circus*, 2007

Which do you think is the most abstract? Which do you think is the most figural? What do you see that makes you say that?

Look at the titles. Do any of these titles help you to see a figure in the sculpture? Looking at Joel Shapiro's *Untitled*, what might make you see a figure?

William King represents his figures in a particular context and always gives them titles so that the viewer can recognize the context and connect it to their own experiences. Look at *Circus*.

Have you ever seen a circus? Do you recognize what these people are doing?

William King creates the context using only the figures, and yet they allow us to imagine everything around them. Using your imagination, describe the setting and what would be happening around these figures.

Compare your imaginary circus setting with George Seurat's *Circus*, 1891. [View it online at www.iowawestpublicart.org.](#)

William King says that *Circus* shows two people in perfect balance. How did both King and Seurat balance forms in their works?

The sculpture *Interstate* is at the entrance to the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and next to a major interstate. What do you see when you look at *Interstate*? What does your imagination add? How is this work site-specific?

[Look at the Nike of Samothrace \(Winged Victory\) online at www.iowawestpublicart.org.](#)

This is an ancient Greek sculpture made around the second century BCE. This ancient sculpture has been damaged and she is now missing her head and arms, so we have to imagine what she looked like originally. She represents the winged figure of victory alighting on the prow of a ship.

What about the sculpture helps us to imagine this wet and windy environment? Does anything about William King's sculpture *Interstate* suggest the environment and motion of the figure?

The *Nike of Samothrace* was made of marble and William King's *Interstate* is made of aluminum and they take different approaches to the female figure. Compare these two sculptures thinking about texture, shape and form.

Describing *Sunrise* William King says, "That's them. The original sodbusters. Doesn't show how hard they've worked, or what awaits them..." Who are these figures? What kind of work do you think they do?

William King likes to help viewers understand the meaning of his works through his titles. What do you think the title *Sunrise* tells us about this couple?

[Look at Grant Wood, American Gothic, 1930 online at www.iowawestpublicart.org.](#)

This painting also represents an Iowa couple. Who are these figures and what kind of work do you think they do? What do you see that makes you say that?

The painter, Grant Wood, has given a lot of clues about this couple and what they do and where they live. What clues does the sculptor William King give us about his couple in his sculpture *Sunrise*?

The painting *American Gothic* is now hanging in the Art Institute of Chicago and could be hung anywhere in the world. Grant Wood has had to include all the information about the environment of this couple in the painting.

William King's sculpture is located outside in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Does the sculpture's location provide us any additional clues to the couple's identity?

VOCABULARY

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

Gesture – a movement of part of the body to express an idea or meaning

Gestural drawing – sketches that describe the basic lines of the object with quick scribbles

Medium – the material or form used by an artist

Scale – the relative size of something

Silhouette – the shape and outline of someone or something typically colored in solid black

Site-specific – created, designed, or selected for a specific place or location

Tableau – a group of motionless figures representing a scene

Three-dimensional – having length, breadth, and depth - existing in real space

Two-dimensional – having length and breadth but no depth

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

EXPLORE BIG IDEAS:

Artists portray human activity through gesture.

Connect with other Art, Artists and Cultures

Look at the Egyptian sculpture of the pharaoh Mycerinus, the goddess Hathor and a figure who symbolizes one of the Egyptian provinces. This was a site-specific sculpture made to connect the people of this particular location in Egypt to the pharaoh. Notice the way the pharaoh is standing. Try standing like this with your left foot slightly forward and your weight evenly balanced over your feet. Let your arms hang down by your sides with the insides of your elbows facing forward. Make your hands into fists and without turning your arms, turn your hands so your knuckles are against your legs. How does this feel? Is this a static (rigid) or active pose?

Look at Joel Shapiro's *Untitled* sculpture again. Now try to get into the pose of this sculpture. How is this pose different from the Egyptian pose?

Many artists, including William King, use pose and gesture to show activity and movement in their works.

[Look at the following works online at www.iowawestpublicart.org:](#)

William King, *Power Tennis: EnGarde and Forehand*, 1977
Jacob Lawrence, *Munich Olympic Games*, 1971
George Seurat, *Circus*, 1891

What are the people doing in each of these works of art? How do each of these artists give you the feeling of movement? What kind of gestures are these figures making?

Now look at a ceramic pot with an image of a Mayan ballplayer (*Ball player and rubber ball*, 700-900 CE) [You can view it online in the Educator Resources section of www.iowawestpublicart.org.](#)

The ancient Mayans lived in what is now Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize, and they played a ballgame that they believed helped keep the sun moving across the sky. They played this game with large, solid rubber balls that were very heavy. They wore protective gear like the big wooden belt on this figure. The ballplayers had to keep the ball moving without using their hands or feet. What part of his body do you think this ballplayer is using to move the ball?

All these images represent athletes in motion. What other kinds of activities do you do that require movement?

Experiment with Art Making

Brainstorm a list of action verbs based on the discussion above. Have each student pick one action verb and create a sculpture with their body that suggests movement and illustrates their verb. As each student presents their sculpture, the class will guess which verb is portrayed.

[Look at the following images online at www.iowawestpublicart.org:](#)

Daumier, *Counsel for the Defense*, 1862-65
Jacques Callot, *Various figures*, 1616

These artists record the gestures of these figures. What do you think the figures are doing?

Artists often capture gestures in a type of sketch made of quick scribbles that focus on figural movement. Have two or three students present their action verb sculptures again and have the class make quick gesture drawings in pencil, charcoal or crayon.

Extension idea: Students will choose one of their gesture drawings to make into a sculpture using wire or pipe cleaners.

EXPLORE BIG IDEAS:

Artists portray human emotion through gesture.

Connect with other Art, Artists and Cultures

[Look at the following sculptures by William King online at www.iowawestpublicart.org:](#)
Caritas (Caring) Model, 1978
Amitie (Friendship), 1975
Unitas (Unity), 1993

What human emotions do they portray? What about the sculptures makes you say that?

Look at *Circus*, *Interstate*, and *Sunrise*. Do any of these sculptures suggest emotions? What about the sculptures make you say that?

Experiment with Art Making

Brainstorm a list of nouns that suggest human emotions. Have students, working in groups of two or three, create tableaux using their bodies to illustrate one of their nouns. As each group presents their tableau the class will guess which noun is portrayed.

Using cardstock or other heavy paper, have each student group create their tableau as a sculpture. They can cut paper shapes and "bolt" them together with small metal brads. Use cardboard as a base and bolt the sculpture to the base. As an alternative, students can cut slits in figures and slot pieces together. These two methods mimic the methods William King uses on a large scale to make his metal pieces.

Have students measure the height of their sculpture and calculate an approximate ratio of their sculpture to *Sunrise*, 24 feet.

EXPLORE BIG IDEAS:

Artists focus on human form to portray who we are.

Connect with other Art, Artists and Cultures

[Look at the following works of art online at www.iowawestpublicart.org:](#)
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Thomas Hart Benton, *Arts of the City*, 1932
Jacob Lawrence, *The Ironers*, 1943
Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry*, 1932-33
Edgar Degas, *Women Ironing and Portraits in an Office*, late 19th Century

What are these people doing in each of these works? What kind of jobs do you think they have? Where do you think their jobs might be? What do you see in the works of art that give you clues to who they are or what they do?

The paintings you are looking at contain information about the environments in which these people work. Compare Edgar Degas' *Portraits in an Office* with Diego Rivera's. How do you think these environments are different?

Experiment with Art Making

Review your discussion of William King's *Sunrise*. Remember he referred to both the couple's past and what might await them. As a class, brainstorm what you might include in a mural that would create an environment for *Sunrise*. How will you reflect who these people are and what they do? How will your mural indicate where they live? What other people, objects, and buildings will you add to provide clues to their setting? Do you want to suggest what awaits them in the future?

Involve all students in both planning and creating the mural. Have each student write a statement explaining his or her portion of the mural. Display these artists' statements with the mural.

CONNECT WITH OTHER SUBJECTS

The above activities and discussions address the following subject areas:

Language arts: word choice: action verbs, nouns; writing: artists' statements
Drama: gesture, pose and tableaux
Social studies: environments, occupations, history of world cultures: Egyptian and Mayan
Physical Sciences: movement, balance
Math: scale, ratio

WHAT IS IWPA?

Iowa West Public Art (IWPA) is an initiative of the Iowa West Foundation that started in 2004. IWPA is guided by a community-driven Public Art Master Plan, which selected over fifty public art sites in the City of Council Bluffs, Iowa. IWPA's vision for the year 2015 is a community with a national and international reputation for high quality art that attracts visitors from all over the world and fuels economic development. Learn more at [www.iowawestpublicart.org](#).

Curriculum author credits: Center for Innovation in Arts Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Shari Hofschire, Dr. Joanne Sowell



WILLIAM KING ABOUT THE ARTIST

William King was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1925, and grew up in Coconut Grove, Miami. He says, “I was always a ‘sculptor’ because from the age of three I was making sculpture but didn’t know what it was.” His older brother and father used carpentry tools so he learned how to build things with tools as a young boy. He first thought about art as a career when he was at the Cooper Union Art School in New York City. Because one of his teachers liked what he made and suggested he could

sell it, he realized that he could make a living doing something he loved: making art. The artist recognizes that the two main cultural influences on his work were growing up in Florida and his artistic career in New York City.

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An important aspect of public art is its location and environment. The three sites chosen for William King’s sculptures have been beautified with new trees, bushes and native grasses, lighting and paving. The subject matter of William King’s three sculptures makes direct connection to the particular sites where they are located. *Circus* reminds us of the entertainment held in the Arena. *Interstate* makes connection to the location of the Mid-America Center at the intersection of two major interstate highways. *Sunrise* refers to the history and people of the Council Bluffs area. The artist says that his “images are designed to be completely legible and directly connected to the community experience.” “Site-specific” sculpture is especially created to be meaningful in its location and to enhance visitors’ experience of the whole environment. The site and how it looks is also important to the artist. William King says, “The better the site, the better I like it.”

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Viewers often see figures in forms that are very abstract. **Look at these three sculptures online at www.iowawestpublicart.org:**

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William King represents his figures in a particular context and always gives them titles so that the viewer can recognize the context and connect it to their own experiences. Look at *Circus*.

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This is an ancient Greek sculpture made around the

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What about the sculpture helps us to imagine this wet and windy environment? Does anything about William King's sculpture *Interstate* suggest the environment and motion of the figure?

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CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS EXPLORE BIG IDEAS

Artists portray human activity through gesture.

Connect With Other Art, Artists and Cultures

Look at the Egyptian sculpture of the pharaoh Mycerinus, the goddess Hathor and a figure who symbolizes one of the Egyptian provinces. This was a site-specific sculpture made to connect the people of this particular location in Egypt to the pharaoh. Notice the way the pharaoh is standing. Try standing like this with your left foot slightly forward and your weight evenly balanced over your feet. Let your arms hang down by your sides with the insides of your elbows facing forward. Make your hands into fists and without turning your arms, turn your hands so your knuckles are against your legs. How does this feel? Is this a static (rigid) or active pose?

Look at Joel Shapiro's *Untitled* sculpture again. Now try to get into the pose of this sculpture. How is this pose different from the Egyptian pose?

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What are the people doing in each of these works of art? How do each of these artists give you the feeling of movement? What kind of gestures are these figures making?

Now look at a ceramic pot with an image of a Mayan ballplayer (Ball player and rubber ball, 700-900 CE)

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The ancient Mayans lived in what is now Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize, and they played a ballgame that they believed helped keep the sun moving across the sky. They played this game with large, solid rubber balls that were very heavy. They wore protective gear like the big wooden belt on this figure. The ballplayers had to keep the ball moving without using their hands or feet. What part of his body do you think this ballplayer is using to move the ball?

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What human emotions do they portray? What about the sculptures makes you say that?

Look at *Circus*, *Interstate*, and *Sunrise*. Do any of these sculptures suggest emotions? What about the sculptures make you say that?

Experiment With Art Making

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Using cardstock or other heavy paper, have each student group create their tableau as a sculpture. They can cut paper shapes and "bolt" them together with small metal brads. Use cardboard as a base and bolt the sculpture to the base.

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EXPLORE BIG IDEAS

Artists focus on human form to portray who we are.

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What are these people doing in each of these works?
What kind of jobs do you think they have? Where do you think their jobs might be? What do you see in the works of art that give you clues to who they are or what they do?

The paintings you are looking at contain information about the environments in which these people work. Compare Edgar Degas' *Portraits in an Office* with Diego Rivera's. How do you think these environments are different?

Experiment With Art Making

Review your discussion of William King's *Sunrise*. Remember he referred to both the couple's past and what might await them. As a class, brainstorm what you might include in a mural that would create an environment for *Sunrise*.

How will you reflect who these people are and what they do? How will your mural indicate where they live? What other people, objects, and buildings will you add to provide clues to their setting? Do you want to suggest what awaits them in the future?

Involve all students in both planning and creating the mural. Have each student write a statement explaining his or her portion of the mural. Display these artists' statements with the mural.

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