

Bottle-Body Sculptures

These curious creatures are inspired by the vibrant “Nana” sculptures of Niki de Saint Phalle

Beginning in the mid 1960s, among a new vision of feminism and the civil rights movement, sculptor Niki de Saint Phalle began creating a series of female figures that became known as “Nanas.” The term is French slang for woman, much like “chick” or “broad” would be in American slang. Defying the ideals of soft, feminine beauty embraced by former generations, her Nanas were large, wildly colorful, and boldly demanded attention.

Having once been a fashion model herself, Saint Phalle was well aware of identity issues tied to body image, especially with women. Her Nanas reflect the idea that beauty, confidence, and strength come in all sizes, shapes, and colors. Originally using cloth and wire, Saint Phalle experimented with many media, including ceramics, mosaics, polyester, and even inflatable sculpture. She collaborated on pieces with other artists and when she needed financing for her vision of monumental sculpture, she designed and marketed her own line of perfume.

The power of the Nanas often lies in the active, gravity-defying poses and colorful decorative motifs. In this lesson, sculptures are created that rise from a base, bend into a variety of poses, and are inspired by the bold colors of the Nana sculptures.

Weighted plastic bottles provide the sculpture base, forming a variety of body shapes and sizes. Wire, cloth, and glue create expressive form, extending into long necks, arms, wings — whatever the artist imagines.

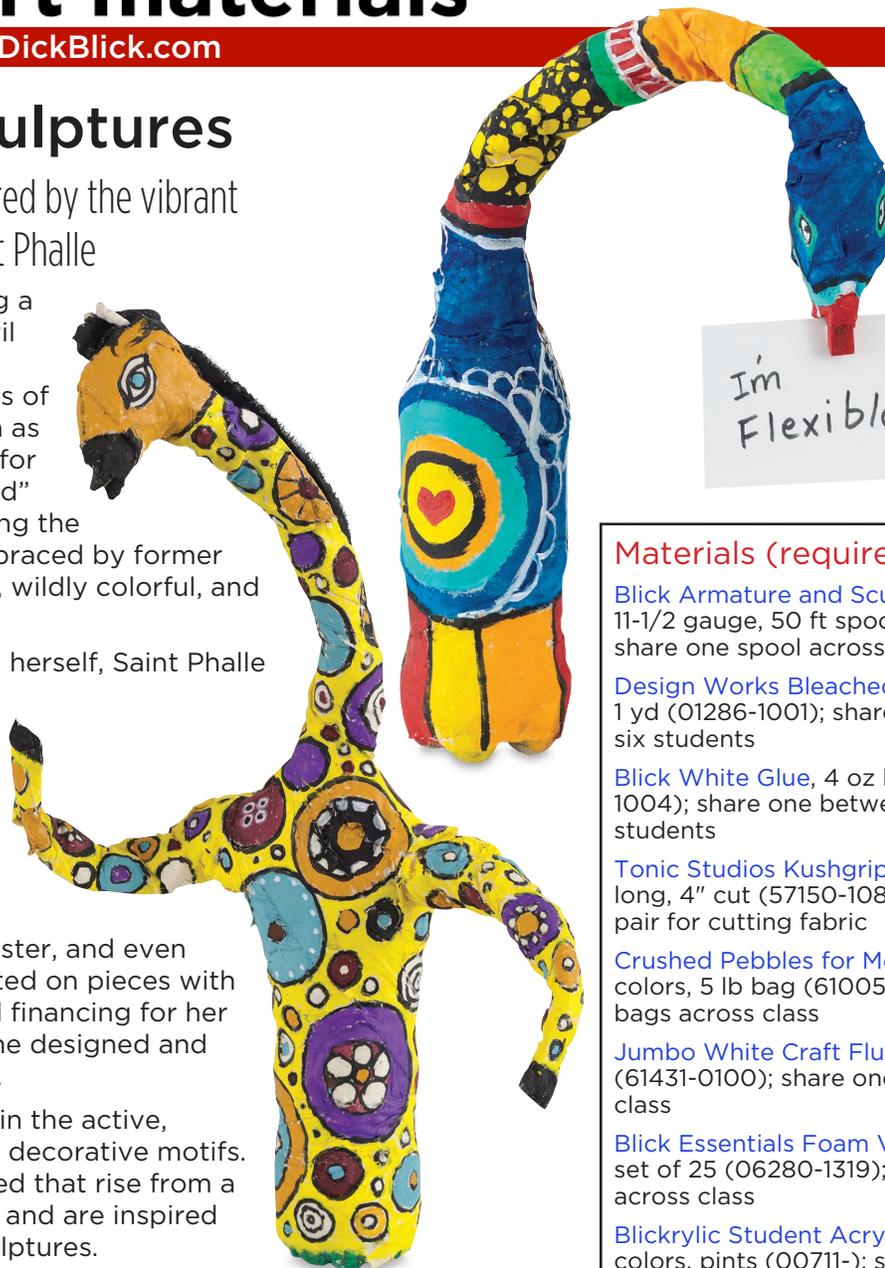
GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. View select images of Niki de Saint Phalle’s Nana sculptures. Some sculptures may be too mature for younger ages.
2. Collect plastic beverage bottles of many different sizes and shapes.
3. Cut wire into 2-ft lengths.
4. Cut muslin into strips. Muslin can be easily torn after creating a notch with scissors.

Process

1. Place pebbles in the bottom of the bottle to weigh it down. Cover the top of the bottle with plastic wrap or packing tape to seal in the pebbles.



Materials (required)

Blick Armature and Sculpture Wire, 11-1/2 gauge, 50 ft spool (33400-1155); share one spool across class

Design Works Bleached Muslin, 45" x 1 yd (01286-1001); share 1 yard among six students

Blick White Glue, 4 oz bottle (23882-1004); share one between two students

Tonic Studios Kushgrip Scissors, 8-1/2" long, 4" cut (57150-1085); need one pair for cutting fabric

Crushed Pebbles for Mosaics, assorted colors, 5 lb bag (61005-); share two bags across class

Jumbo White Craft Fluffs, bag of 100 (61431-0100); share one bag across class

Blick Essentials Foam Value 1" Brushes, set of 25 (06280-1319); share one across class

Blickrylic Student Acrylics, assorted colors, pints (00711-); share a minimum of three pints across class

Royal Langnickel Clear Choice Golden Taklon, set of 60 rounds, short handle (05891-1009); share one set across class

Optional Materials

Creativity Street Wooden Spring Clothespins, natural, large, package of 50 (62144-1338)

Classroom Yarn Assortment, all color, 5 lb (65208-1005)





Step 1: Weight a plastic bottle with pebbles and insert sculpture wire.



Step 2: Build the form using plastic wrap, cotton balls, and other materials.



Step 3: Cover the form with strips of muslin and glue.

Process, continued

2. Poke wire through the top of the bottle and insert it to the bottom. Secure the wire at the neck of the bottle with packing tape or plastic wrap. If desired, more wires can be added to create multiple appendages.
3. A number of items can be used to build form around the bottle and wires: plastic wrap or repurposed shopping bags, fabric scraps, unrolled cotton balls, polyester stuffing, heavy yarns, paper towels, and more. Secure in place with tape or glue. If the wires are to remain flexible, the materials must be flexible and not too tightly wrapped. Wrap the wires near the bottle's neck to create a smooth transition from the body and a larger area at the end of a wire to form a head.
4. Once the form has been built, cover it with strips of muslin. To apply, lay a strip of muslin flat and apply glue to one side. Squeeze the glue directly from the bottle or, as an option, place glue in a separate container and mix in a small amount of water so that it can be applied with a brush. Form the strip to the sculpture, pressing down to smooth the fabric around the materials beneath, and to help it adhere to itself as it wraps around. Repeat with multiple strips until the form is covered. Allow to dry.
5. Paint the sculpture with bright acrylic colors as desired.
6. When the sculpture is dry, bend wires to create various poses.

Options

— Attach a wood clothes pin to the end of the wire that might be the mouth of the creature. Build the shape of a head with plastic wrap or stuffing around the back half of the clothes pin. When squeezed, the clothes pin will open as a beak and can function as a photo or note holder.

— Add found objects to make the sculpture more intriguing. Gems, sequins, buttons, felt scraps, faux fur, feathers — almost anything can be used for decorative effects.



Step 4: Paint with acrylic colors and add "found" objects as desired.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

