



Juggling Man, Adriaen de Vries

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Adriaen de Vries

Dutch, about 1610–1615

Bronze

2 ft. 6 1/4 in. x 1 ft. 8 3/8 in. x 8 5/8 in.

90.SB.44

At a crucial moment in an acrobatic juggling trick, this male figure holds one plate perched precariously on the fingertips of his right hand while another plate, held by **centrifugal force**, seems suspended below his left hand. Further complicating the pose, the man looks at the ground and steps on a **bellows**. Dutch artist Adriaen de Vries based the composition of this bronze statue on a famous **Hellenistic marble** of a dancing faun, which **Michelangelo** was believed to have restored while it was in the collection of the **Medici** in Florence. Although de Vries borrowed the original statue's composition, he replaced the faun's foot organ with a bellows and substituted plates for the faun's cymbals.

This sculpture combines vitality and movement with **balance**. The strong S-curve on the figure's back demonstrates the complexity of his balancing act. The artist may also have had in mind the German word *kunststückemachen*, which means both to juggle and, more literally, to make a work of art. The exploration of a figure moving in space is characteristic of the **Baroque** style.



About the Artist

Adriaen de Vries (Dutch, 1545–1626)

Adriaen de Vries' career epitomizes the internationalism of the late **Mannerist** period. He was born in The Hague, trained in Italy, and worked mainly in Prague. His is the time-honored tradition of the itinerant artist, working for many of Europe's most discerning royal patrons. Little is known about de Vries until 1581, when he was an assistant in **Giambologna's** Florentine workshop. There he trained as a bronze worker and absorbed much of his master's sophisticated Mannerist style. De Vries' association with Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor, whose works of art formed the greatest collection of the age, began in 1593. He became court sculptor in 1601. Among de Vries' works for the reclusive monarch was a bronze relief representing Rudolf II's 1585 imperial decree that painting should be considered among the liberal arts. The idea that visual artists should be raised above the level of craftsmen developed during the Italian Renaissance, but Rudolf II made it official. After Rudolf II's death in 1612, de Vries continued working for aristocratic clients, creating numerous funerary monuments, life-size sculptures, fountains, and church fonts. In his late style, he tended toward soft, sketchy effects in his sculptural surfaces.

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Questions for Teaching

What do you think this sculpture is made of? What do you see that makes you say that?

What is going on in this artwork?

Notice the plates and how they are held in the hands. What do you think the figure might be trying to do?

Take the pose of the figure. What type of movement or action is the artist trying to capture?