



Rearing Horse, Adriaen de Vries

Rearing Horse

Adriaen de Vries
Dutch, 1610–1615
Bronze
19 1/2 x 21 1/2 x 7 in.
86.SB.488

Questions for Teaching

What is the subject of this sculpture?

What do you think is causing this horse to rear up on its hind legs? What do you see that makes you say that?

Display the alternate views of this sculpture (see last page of this document). Examine the detail image of the horse's face. What can you tell from its facial expression?

What other details do you notice in the other view of the horse? (Details such as veins and the attenuation of muscles are evident in this view.)

How long do you think a horse could hold this pose?

How do you think the artist was able to depict a rearing horse in such a realistic way? (De Vries would have been aware of the anatomy of the horse and studied how the muscles of the animal work together to hold this pose.)

Consider how this sculpture is physically balanced.

If a material such as stone or wood is used to portray an action pose like this, the sculpture would require a physical support to hold the weight. By using bronze, which has tensile strength, artists are able to depict motion more realistically than they would be able to using other materials.

Show students the sculpture *Statue of a Centaur* (<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=12126>) as an example of how an artist uses a physical support in sculpture. Speculate where the weight or center of gravity is located in this sculpture. How does the base keep the sculpture balanced?



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Background Information

This rearing horse's two rear legs serve as the sole support for the body of this large sculpted animal. Beginning about 1600, thinner, lighter, hollow casts in bronze allowed sculptors to physically balance the metal's weight on only two points. Sculptors also perfected the technique of casting bronze figures in parts, allowing for varied compositions with many projecting, separately cast elements.

Pawing the air and tilting his head to the left, the horse activates the space around him. The sculptor, Adriaen de Vries, further suggested the animal's vitality through the open mouth, flaring nostrils, and protruding veins on its belly. The lack of shoes on its hooves suggests that this horse was a stallion kept for breeding.

De Vries created more than a dozen bronze statuettes of horses with and without riders, only four of which survive and are known today. *Rearing Horse* is one sculpture signed by the artist. The horse's daring pose makes it an exceptional example of bronze casting, and the beauty of its patina, or surface treatment, gives it a luster that confirms the artist's reputation as an exceptional bronze-maker.

About the Artist

Adriaen de Vries (Dutch, about 1545–1626)

Adriaen de Vries created works for many of Europe's most discerning royal patrons. Little is known about de Vries until 1581, when he was an assistant in the sculptor Giambologna's Florentine workshop. There he trained as a bronze worker and absorbed much of Giambologna's sophisticated Mannerist style. Mannerism is a style of art that often exaggerates features of figures or animals in a non-natural way. In this sculpture, the head of the horse is smaller than the neck and body. In some ways the musculature is overemphasized, revealing the hand of the artist at work.

De Vries's association with Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, whose collection of rare works of art was the greatest of its day, began in 1593. He became court sculptor in 1601. Among de Vries's works for the 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.

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Additional Images

