

Some interpretive questions to consider for this sculpture might be:

Why would Nina Winkel choose to sculpt an astronomer?

Is this a realistic or abstract depiction of an astronomer?

Who would want to buy a sculpture of an astronomer in 1955? Why?

How do you think an astronomer might feel about this sculpture?

Step 5: Critical Assessment & Response

This final stage involves a judgment of the success of a work of art. Critical assessment involves questions of value and can include personal and subjective responses to art.

Do you think this sculpture is well done? Why or Why not?

Do you like it? Does it move you?

We hope this approach enhanced your exploration and enjoyment of this sculpture. If you like, you can try this method with other works of art. Simply ask yourself the following questions with each object:

What do I see?
(Close Observation)

What do I think?
(Analysis)

How can I learn more?
(Research)

What might it mean?
(Interpretation)

How do I feel about it?
(Critical Assessment and Response)

Nina Winkel, 1905-1990

***The Astronomer* (1955)**

Terra-cotta, 27" tall

X1983.7.39

Gift of George and Nina Winkel

With eyes trained skyward, this Babylonian astronomer studies the heavens with an expression of awe. The very stars he studies are the ones inscribed on the tablet he holds closely to his chest.

"That is done in terra cotta. Here I was thinking more or less of one of the Babylonian astronomers of the past and therefore I gave him here a sort of tablet like thing in his hand on which I indicated a few stars and the man is carrying this heavy thing and looking up to heaven. I like this piece very much it's a powerful piece. It's interesting from all sides and may be what some other works of mine... I'll travel around and show it from here, too. I have always tried to make a piece in the round interesting from all angles. It should have a front view, a main view, otherwise you feel you have to run around all the time without ever stopping, but it should have not only the front view, but other views should be interesting, too."

-Nina Winkel (October 9, 1988)

Winkel, Nina. Two Informal Lectures. 1988.
VHS video recording transcribed by Sally Booth. February 8, 1988.

Plattsburgh State Art Museum

Look Think Learn



Interactive Guide
part of a series

Look Think Learn

As a college museum, Plattsburgh State Art Museum is committed to helping visitors develop visual literacy skills – the ability to construct meaning from all that we see. One way it does this is through a method called Learning to Look. This is a five-step approach to exploring works of art that is meant to empower visitors to observe carefully and think critically about any work of art they encounter. Simply follow the steps below.

Step 1: Close Observation

Look closely at this sculpture by Nina Winkel. It is called *Astronomer*.



What do you notice about his face?
His expression?



What do you notice about his arms and hands?
What do you think he is holding?



What else do you notice about this sculpture?
The skill of the artist?
The material used?

Step 2: Analysis

Now think about all this visual information.

Who do you think this man might be?

When do you think he lived?

What was he doing during the moment captured in this sculpture? How do you know?

As you consider each of these questions, look to the sculpture for clues to support your ideas.

Step 3: Research

Now that you have had a chance to look carefully and begin forming your own ideas about this work of art, feel free to read the text printed on the back of this brochure. It provides some information that you cannot get from simply looking at the object.

When you have finished reading, consider the following questions:

Does the informational on the back of this brochure reinforce what you observed and deduced on your own? How?

Did the text mention anything you did not see or think about previously? If so, what?

How would your experience of this sculpture have been different if you read the Informational text first?

Step 4: Interpretation

Interpretation involves bringing your close observation, analysis, and any additional information you have gathered about an art object together to try to understand what a work of art means. There can be multiple meanings of a work of art. The best informed ones are based on visual evidence and outside research.