

Landmarks Guide for Adolescents



Frederick Kiesler

American, born in Austria, 1890–1965

Winged Victory

circa 1951

Bronze

Subject: Iconic forms

Activity: Using an iconic form to create both a geometric and an organic drawing

Materials: Two pieces of paper and a pencil

Vocabulary: Commemorate, geometric forms, iconic, microscopic organisms, organic forms, surrealist

i Introduction

Frederick Kiesler was trained as an architect before turning to sculpture and design. He first gained recognition in 1925 at the International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris, where he exhibited a large gridlike structure titled *City in Space*. Later, he became a surrealist and abandoned geometric forms for more organic ones inspired by sources in nature, such as animals, clouds, microscopic organisms, plants, rocks, and water.

This sculpture's title alludes to the famous Greek statue *The Winged Victory of Samothrace* from the second century BCE. Created to commemorate a military success, the female figure strides forward with widespread wings. Kiesler reinterpreted that iconic sculpture: here there is no figure, only its blackened wings collapsing to the ground. To viewers familiar with the Greek statue, Kiesler's sculpture suggests that destruction often comes with victory.

? Questions

Kiesler fled Europe to escape World War II. What does this tell you about the possible meanings of the sculpture? What kind of comment might he be making about war?

Is this sculpture more geometric or organic? What makes it so?

If you didn't know about the famous statue *The Winged Victory of Samothrace*, would Kessler's sculpture still hold interest for you? How would your interpretation of its meaning change?

Frederick Kiesler, continued



Activity

Choose an iconic image from our culture; for instance, the Statue of Liberty or Mt. Rushmore. Make two drawings of this image: one using geometric forms and one using organic ones. (You may change the original image by using only a piece of it, as Kiesler does in his sculpture). Think about the differences between the geometric drawings and the organic ones. How does form affect meaning?



Look Again

Many modernist sculptures took on classical Greek ideas or images. For instance, *Winged Victory*, Hunt's *Amphora*, Der Harootian's *Prometheus and Vulture*, and Hare's *Swan's Dream of Leda*. Why do you think this is so? What might they have in common? What might be different?



BTW

In 1959 Kiesler designed the *Endless House*, in which egglike rooms could enclose inhabitants like a womb. Kessler designed the rooms to be comforting spaces, which would enhance peaceful living.



Vocabulary

Commemorate - To mark an event, person, or place by some ceremony or observation

Geometric forms - Based on simple geometric shapes, such as circles, straight lines, or squares

Iconic - Something that is an emblem or symbol

Microscopic organisms - A life form invisible without the use of a microscope

Organic forms - Forms related to living organisms

Surrealist - An art style of the early twentieth century that emphasized imagery and visions from dreams and fantasies, as well as an intuitive, spontaneous method of creation that often combined unrelated or unexpected objects in compositions