



## **KS3 Artefact to Art Session 1: Making Art in Classical Athens**

### **Plan (one hour)**

This session explores art and artists in classical Athens. It explores the following questions: Who made art in classical Athens? What was the social status of art and artisans? In what ways were ancient ideas about 'art' different from our own?

#### **In this pack:**

- PPT with relevant images
- Pupil worksheets 1 and 2
- Supervisor/teacher session plan

#### **10 mins: Introduction**

##### *Slide 1:*

What do we think of when we think of ancient Greek art? Is it objects like these? Would the ancient Greeks have thought of these items as art?

##### *Slide 2:*

What did the ancient Greeks think of as art? The Muses as personifications of the arts. What are the major differences between what *we* think of as 'art' and what was considered to be 'art' in the ancient Greek world? (i.e. key point is the emphasis on visual arts in the modern world versus literary arts in antiquity)

#### **20 mins: Artists and craftspeople**

##### *Worksheet 1*

Artists and craftspeople

#### **20 mins: Famous artists and works of art**

##### *Worksheet 2:*

Pheidias the famous artist

#### **10 mins: Art ancient and modern**

##### *Slide 4:*

Why do we sometimes view these types of objects in museums, and sometimes in galleries? Is there a fundamentally different concept of 'art' in the ancient world from today?



### Background information:

Slide 1: images are (all 5<sup>th</sup>–early 4<sup>th</sup> century):

- Red figure Athenian vase showing Oedipus talking to the Sphinx. Oedipus famously answered the sphinx's riddle in order to free the city of Thebes from the sphinx (the question was: 'What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?'. The answer was 'a person' – i.e. a crawling baby at the start of their life, walking upright as a grownup, and walking with a stick in later life).
- The Parthenon: perhaps the most famous building in ancient Greece, this stood on top of the Acropolis hill in Athens.
- Grave stele of a woman looking into a mirror.

Slide 2: two images of the Muses from Attic pottery:

- Calliope (epic poetry); Clio (history); Euterpe (lyric poetry); Erato (love poetry); Melpomene (tragedy); Polyhymnia (sacred poetry and song); Terpsichore (dance and choral poetry); Thalia (comedy); Urania (astronomy).
- Crucially, poetry and song were the same thing in the ancient Greek world. All poetry was meant to be sung, or chanted rhythmically. While people did sometimes read to themselves, poetry was fundamentally a performance medium.
- Why are they women? Most abstract personifications were (and indeed still are today – think Britannia, for example).

Worksheet 1: artists and craftspeople

- The Foundry Cup: red-figure kylix (drinking cup) from Athens, early 5<sup>th</sup> century.
  - a) The scene around the outside of the cup depicts a scene from inside a bronze workshop. The craftsmen are heating the metal, and then hammering it into shape as a statue. The head of the statue still needs to be attached. Body parts of different statues can be seen hanging on the walls.
  - b) The artists are portrayed here positively. A number of them are heroically nude, with idealised bodies. In the inside of the cup (the *tondo*) the image was of the god Hephaistos crafting the armour of Achilles. With these images taken together, the overall impression is of metalworking as an honourable profession, with heroic implications.
  - c) The subject matter (and indeed, any depiction of craftworking) is unusual for a vase. This is particularly significant that this cup was designed for use in the symposium (which was usually an all-male drinking party for elite men). The portrayal of heroised craftspeople in such a context would have been strange (as it is unlikely that bronzeworkers would have been invited to a symposium).
  - d) The oddness of the cup comes from the clash between the social status of the people viewing the cup, and the people depicted on it. It is perhaps significant that the cup was made at the very start of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when democratic fervour and support for populism and equality of citizens was at its height following the reforms of Cleisthenes in 510 BCE which brought democracy to the city.
- Xenophon:
  - a) This quote encapsulates more of what we think standard views on craftspeople may have been in classical Athens. Xenophon was himself, however, more of an oligarch than a democrat, and this had implications for his views on acceptable citizen professions.



- b) The concern about bodily deformity comes from the classical Greek obsession with the (male) body beautiful. Ideally, elite citizen men would train their bodies for war through athletics – repetitive physical labour such as hammering metal or stone might cause uneven muscular development and strain. Being indoors all day was also considered unhealthy.
- c) All citizen men were expected to serve in Athens' arm or navy in times of war. Xenophon is therefore expressing concern that craftsmen might not be able to do this effectively because their profession (unlike that of a farmer who worked healthily outdoors all day; or a gentleman who had leisure time to spend in the gym doing athletics) did not equip them for military service.

#### Worksheet 2: Pheidias the famous sculptor

- Reconstruction of the Athena Parthenos:
  - a) This artist's impression may not be precise, but it gives a sense of the possible scene inside the Parthenon, which was famously commissioned by the statesman Pericles.
- Pausanias
  - a) This description can help to pad out the artist's reconstruction above. The detail of various elements is significant – signifying the quality of the artistry. The description of the statue's great size is also meant to impress.
  - b) Significantly however, Pausanias does not mention much about the sculptor Pheidias at this point (although he does mention him elsewhere). This implies that he is less interested in the artist than the piece of art.
- Coin
  - a) The coin implies that the statue was a well known, and recognisable by its style. In fact, this coin is only one of several reproductions of the statue type – in figurines and other smaller images.

#### Further reading:

- Hurwit, J.M. 2015. *Artists and Signatures in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge.  
Osborne, R. 1998. *Archaic and Classical Greek Art*. Oxford.  
Pollitt, J. 1990. *The Art of Greece: Sources and Documents*. Cambridge.

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