



Brooklyn Museum

Teaching Resource: Collection Highlight

Nefertiti, Egypt, Amarna Period





Nefertiti

Egypt, Amarna Period

Painted limestone, 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (23.5 x 38.5 cm)
Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 71.89

Description of the Artwork

This curved slab of limestone carved and painted with figures and hieroglyphics is a fragment of a larger scene. It depicts a standing woman with raised arms offering a bouquet of lotus flowers to a god whose multiple arms and hands reach out to accept the gift. The woman wears a flat-topped blue crown with streamers on the back and a cobra on the front. Above her is a line of hieroglyphics. Parts of the stone are scratched, chipped, or worn away.

About the Artwork

This relief once covered the base of a column in a chapel used by Egyptian royalty to pray to the solar god Aten. The woman is identified by her tall, flat-topped crown as Queen Nefertiti. Her name means, “the beautiful [or youthful] woman has come.” In ancient times, when the scene was complete, Nefertiti would have been seen with her husband, the pharaoh Akhenaten. The hieroglyphics above her head repeat the same phrase—“given life”—in two different directions. The phrase refers to the nourishing relationship between Aten and the faithful.

Background Information

At some time during her husband’s reign, Nefertiti was made coregent, the pharaoh’s equal. Proof of this is seen on other temple reliefs that depict her as being the same size as the pharaoh, or worshipping Aten alone, thus demonstrating her significance and equal power to the king. Akhenaten and Nefertiti are best known for leading a religious transformation. They tried to change Egyptian religious practice from the worship of multiple gods to the worship of one deity only—Aten, the disc of the sun. They moved the capital of Egypt from Thebes to Amarna and dedicated the new city to Aten to show their devotion.

Questions for Viewing

Describe the object. Of what material does it appear to be made?
How would it have been made?

What's going on here? What pictures and symbols are carved in the object?

Describe the woman. What can you say about her on the basis of what she is wearing and doing?

This relief is a small fragment of a larger work of art. What do you imagine the rest of the object looked like? Write your thoughts down and compare them to the background information provided here. If you were Queen Nefertiti, why might you give a gift to the god Aten?

Why might the ancient Egyptians have chosen to represent Aten as a sun disc with many arms radiating in all directions? What would that have shown people about Aten's power?

Classroom Activities

Social Studies

Conduct research at the library or on the Internet about Nefertiti and Akhenaten. When did they rule? Locate Thebes and Amarna on a map. Find other images of Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Aten. Compare and contrast the images you find with the image in this packet. Use a Venn diagram to organize your observations.

Art and Writing

Write a letter from the perspective of Nefertiti. Write to your husband or to one of your daughters. What do you imagine she thought of being a queen equal in power to the pharaoh? What do you imagine she thought of the new devotion to Aten? What hopes or concerns might she have?

Art Making

A relief is an artwork with raised shapes against a flat background, made either by carving (called a reductive technique), like the object in this packet, or by adding material (called an additive technique). Create your own additive or reductive relief. Be creative with materials (carving slabs of clay or Styrofoam, gluing string to cardboard). Look for examples of reliefs: e.g., coins, tombstones, Braille, or subway tiles. For information on how to make a plaster relief, see the Detroit Institute of Art's website: www.dia.org/education/egypt-teachers.



Judy Chicago (American, b.1939) *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79

Hatshepsut Place Setting (detail)

Ceramic, porcelain, textile

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center
Foundation, 2002.10-PS-8. Photo by Donald Woodman

The monumental installation *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago uses a ceramic tile floor and a triangular table with thirty-nine individualized place settings to symbolize the history of women. Each place setting represents a particular famous female figure and acts as a metaphor for her achievements. The names of 999 other important historical women, including Nefertiti, are inscribed on the ceramic floor. Also honored from ancient Egyptian history is Hatshepsut, who ruled as the fifth king of the Eighteenth Dynasty when she declared herself pharaoh after her husband's death. *The Dinner Party* uses art forms not typically considered high art, namely ceramics and embroidery, to create an alternative way of representing history. It invites the question, "What powerful women would you invite to your table?"

Resources

www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/onview/

The Brooklyn Museum's online collection database with a search function that indicates artworks currently on view and their locations.

www.brooklynmuseum.org/education/educators/teacher_resources.php

This webpage offers links to free web interactives and Teaching Resources (PDFs) supporting K–12 instruction.

