



Sunk Relief Representation of Queen Nefertiti. Karnak (?), Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XVIII, early reign of Akhenaten 1352–1348 B.C. Sandstone, 8¹/₄ x 16⁹/₁₆ in. (21.0 x 42.0 cm.). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Christos G. Bastis, 78.39

Educator packet for the special exhibition

Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses

on view in the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, March 23 to September 16, 2007

Sunk Relief Representation of Queen Nefertiti

Women in Ancient Egypt

Content recommended for Middle and High School students

Description and Background Information

This slab of sandstone carved and painted with a female figure and hieroglyphs is a fragment of a larger scene. A woman stands with her arms raised and receives life, represented by an ankh symbol, from the hand of the god Aten. The woman wears a wig with hints of blue pigment. The snake on her forehead, called a Ureus, was most likely part of a crown that is no longer visible. Light orange pigment partially colors her face, neck, and arms. To her left is a vertical line of hieroglyphs. Parts of the stone are scratched, chipped, and worn away.

The woman is 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. 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. At some time during her husband’s reign, Nefertiti was made coregent, the pharaoh’s equal. Proof of this is seen on other reliefs that show her the same size as the pharaoh.



Sunk Relief of a King and Queen.
Amarna, Egypt, New Kingdom, late
Dynasty XVII, reign of Akhenaten
(circa 1352–1336 B.C.). Painted
limestone, 9¹/₄ x 15³/₁₆ in. (23.5 x
38.5 cm.). Brooklyn Museum, Charles
Edwin Wilbour Fund, 71.89

Questions for Viewing

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

What’s going on? 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.

Compare the image of Queen Nefertiti in this relief to her image in the *Sunk Relief of a King and Queen* illustrated above. What is different about what she is wearing and what she is doing?

In *Sunk Relief of a King and Queen*, Nefertiti is standing with her arms raised offering a bouquet of lotus flowers to a god whose multiple arms and hands reach out to accept the gift. Who do you think the god could be? What might the many hands symbolize? (Hint: think of the sun.)

In the Classroom

Social Studies Activity

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 images in this packet. Use a Venn diagram to organize your observations.

Writing Activity

Write a letter from the perspective of Queen Nefertiti. Write to your husband or to one of your daughters. What do you imagine Nefertiti 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 Activity

A relief is an artwork with raised shapes against a flat background, made either by carving (called a reductive technique) like the objects 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: for example, coins, tombstones, Braille, or subway tiles. For information on how to make a plaster relief, see the Detroit Institute of Art's Web site: www.dia.org/education/egypt-teachers.

Web Resources

Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses

www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/pharaohs_queens_goddesses/

Egypt Reborn: Art for Eternity

www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/egypt_reborn/

Activity: Ancient Egypt at the Brooklyn Museum

www.brooklynmuseum.org/kiosk/egyptian/ancient-egypt/

PBS Online: Egypt's Golden Empire: New Kingdom: Nefertiti

www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/nefertiti.html

Books

Fazzini, Richard A., James F. Romano, and Madeleine E. Cody. *Art for Eternity: Masterworks from Ancient Egypt*. (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art in association with Scala Publishers, 1999.)

Samson, Julia. *Amarna, City of Akhenaten and Nefertiti: Nefertiti as Pharaoh*. (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips, 1978.)

Discover Other Powerful Women in History: Visit *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago

The monumental installation *The Dinner Party* (1979) 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. The installation is fitting for any class studying history and the role of women in creating and retelling history. It invites the question, "What powerful women would you invite to the table?"



Judy Chicago (American, born 1939). *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79. Detail: Hatshepsut Place Setting. Ceramic, porcelain, textile. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, 2002.10. © Judy Chicago. Photograph by Jook Leung Photography