

TITLE: Palette of King Narmer **LOCATION:** Egypt **DATE:** 3000-2920 BCE

ARTIST: _____ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Predynastic **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Greywacke

FORM:

Prehistoric and historic modes are both reflected in the image of Narmer, who is shown on the front of the palette as a wild bull tearing down the walls of a rebel stronghold and trampling the hapless enemy underfoot (the historic mode). Turn the palette over, however, and Narmer is represented as a victorious king in human form (the prehistoric mode).

FUNCTION:

The palette was used to apply makeup for the blinding sun. Although this palette was likely ceremonial instead of functional.

CONTENT:

Depicted in the design are Serpopards (leopards with serpentine necks, a.k.a. our future pets), which aren't Egyptian in origin. Their presence speaks to cultural exchange between the Egyptians and other cultures with big imaginations, such as the Mesopotamians. Hathor, a god as a cow with a woman's face is depicted 4 times on the top register.

CONTEXT:

According to the doctrine of divine kingship, the palette was a vehicle for proclaiming the omnipotence and divinity of the king. The unification of Egypt in 2950 B.C.E. created the world's first nation-state, or political territory whose population shares a common identity. The dominance of the monarchy in ancient Egyptian culture and history is highlighted by the system we use for dividing the 3000-year span between the reign of Narmer and the death of Cleopatra. King Narmer was the first in a series of rulers that reigned over a polity, meaning that political and ethical values were shared throughout nation. Fostering a sense of nationhood among the diverse peoples within the confines of ancient Egypt presented a challenge—and the creation of a strong, stable nation-state was one of King Narmer's greatest accomplishments.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

Artistic elements such as hierarchical proportions, idealization, naturalization, and the use of different materials distinguish the deified pharaoh from people of the lower classes. Take a look at the back of the Narmer Palette and notice the way in which King Narmer is standing. His legs are mid-stride and his head is in profile.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Representations of humans in ancient Egyptian art clearly demarcate the division between mighty, powerful pharaohs and lowly "regular people." The artist follows the convention of organizing the figures in registers, and rests their feet on the ground lines.

INTERPRETATION:

On the front, Narmer wears the cobra crown of lower Egypt. The lions with elongated necks might signify unification and the symbol of the bull knocking over the fortress refers to Narmer defeating his enemies. On the back the hawk is Horus, God of Egypt. The papyrus plant is a symbol of Lower Egypt. Narmer wears a bull's tail as a belt, a symbol of strength and a bowling pin shaped crown, the symbol of a united Egypt.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

TITLE: Great Pyramids, Menkaure, Khafre, Khufu and Great Sphinx **LOCATION:** Giza, Egypt **DATE:** 2550-2490 BCE

ARTIST: _____ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Old Kingdom **PATRON:** Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure (sometimes spelled Menkaura)

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:

FORM:

Approximately 100,000 men worked on the construction of the pyramids over the span of about ten years. Ancient Egyptians hand-cut 2.43 million limestone blocks that they used to build the structures. Laborers then smoothed the stones, which gave the pyramids their sleek appearance. The Great Sphinx structure, which features the head of Khafre with the body of the lion, is located south of the Great Pyramid. The walls of the pyramid meet at points that are aligned to the cardinal points of the compass.

FUNCTION:

CONTENT:

Tombs of the members of the elite surround the Great Pyramids, including family members of the ruling class and priests. Three chambers exist inside the Great Pyramid, thought to be the King's chamber, the Queen's chamber, and the help's chamber. Burying them in this way was meant to ensure that they'd be together in the afterlife

CONTEXT:

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

The Great Pyramids and the Great Sphinx are architectural representations that provide monumental settings for the worship of Egyptian deities. Ziggurats, or rectangular stepped towers, are another type of massive architecture found in ancient Egypt. These enormous architectural feats increased in opulence over time and sent a message proclaiming the authority of the rulers.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Ancient Egyptians considered pharaohs the embodiment of deities, so the grandeur of the Pyramids of Giza corresponds to the reverence ancient Egyptians felt towards their pharaohs. This sentiment led many individuals to partake in the heavy, grueling labor that it took to build the pyramids.

INTERPRETATION:

Because the pyramids were important burial sites for rulers, their shape may refer to the rays of the sun, with the ascending point guiding the ascension to the afterlife. In this way, the Great Pyramids confirm the importance of astrology and the afterlife to ancient Egyptians.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

TITLE: King Menkaure and Queen **LOCATION:** Egypt **DATE:** 2490-2472 BCE

ARTIST: _____ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Old Kingdom **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Greywacke 4'8" tall

FORM:

The queen has her left arm gripped tightly around the torso of King Menkaura, almost as if bearing the burden of his weight. She also clutches his right arm with her right hand. Their pose suggests strength.

FUNCTION:

King Menkaura stands with his left foot slightly forward, as if boldly stepping into the future—a political ethos echoed even today. In every detail, King Menkaura and his queen represent two idealized forms; their faces and bodies epitomize strength and perfection.

CONTENT:

Both figures wear simple clothing: King Menkaura wears a skirt, revealing his muscular chest, arms, and torso, while the queen wears a diaphanous gown highlighting an idealized feminine form. Together they represent stability, power, and unwavering force

CONTEXT:

Ancient Egyptian civilization was one of the world's most powerful, progressive societies, and ancient Egyptians revered their pharaohs as gods who would help their civilization continue to thrive. The powerful members of society strove to maintain stability and prosperity, which allowed others to master new trades. Because they didn't have to focus solely on agriculture and maintaining a steady food supply, individuals delved into the arts, architecture, and technology.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

The ancient Egyptian artistic canon, with its strict conventions of representation, use of materials, and treatment of forms, called the shots for many centuries. There were only short-lived periods of deviation, and innovation would only occur within the basic and established system.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

INTERPRETATION:

The statue is idealized for two reasons: to suggest the strength of the nation-state and to depict Menkaura and his wife as divine rulers. From their stoic gazes to their strong, proportional bodies, Menkaura and his queen represent the ideal ruling couple.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

TITLE: Seated Scribe _____ **LOCATION:** Saqqara , Egypt _____ **DATE:** 2620-2500 BCE _____

ARTIST: _____ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Old Kingdom _____ **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Painted limestone 1'8" tall

FORM:

FUNCTION:

The seated scribe is a burial good, or an object built for a tomb in Saqqara as a provision for the KA. However, the artist didn't create the sculpture of the scribe as a tribute to the deceased. Tombs were used exclusively to bury members of the elite. In ancient Egypt, small figurines and sculptures of servants and help would be included in the tomb. This would ensure that a deceased individual of upper or ruling class status would have help and comfort in the afterlife.

CONTENT:

The scribe is older, with a protruding tummy, and sits cross-legged in an almost meditative position while wearing a white skirt. He's shown with papyrus in his hands, which is why art historians call him a scribe. The scribe doesn't wear a beard, and his hair is short, showing off his chiseled face. The sculptor paid special attention to the scribe's facial features; he has a refined and dignified expression, a classical nose, and prominent cheekbones.

CONTEXT:

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

The seated scribe departs from contemporaneous ancient Egyptian work, which tended to be idealized and refined. The seated scribe is naturalistic.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

The artist painted over the limestone using bright, organic pigments. This is one of the first works we've seen that looks so...colorful. His eyes are carved from magnesite and are inlaid with crystal. They're rimmed in black paint, too. The attention to detail in the seated scribe's eyes suggests that the artist wanted to emphasize his alertness.

INTERPRETATION:

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

TITLE: Temple of Amun Re and Hypostyle Hall **LOCATION:** Luxor, Egypt **DATE:** Temple c. 1550 BCE, Hall c. 1250 BCE

ARTIST: _____ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Middle and New Kingdom **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Cut sandstone and mud brick

FORM:

Ancient Egyptians built this awesome temple for Amun-Re, the supreme Sun God and one of the most popular gods in Egypt. The Temple of Amun-Re and Hypostyle Hall include four main temple structures in Luxor, Egypt, and the site occupies 250,000 square meters.

FUNCTION:

CONTENT:

One of three temples, the temple dedicated to Amun-Re comprises the main structure in a vast complex that covers 60 acres; it consists of both open-air and enclosed areas. After Amenhotep III, every pharaoh expanded the temple to demonstrate his power. The Hypostyle Hall is a columnar structure that consists of 134 columns in 16 rows. The columns are 33 feet in circumference and 80 feet high, and they used to support a roof.

CONTEXT:

Ancient Egyptians didn't just build temples as tributes to the gods; their temples modeled their notion of the universe at the moment of creation. According to Egyptian mythology, Atun, the creator god, drifted off to sleep in a primordial sea called Nun. When he woke up, he created a small island before hitting the snooze button. Egyptians called the mount at the top of this island the "First Event." Egyptian temples replicate this creation myth with inner sanctuaries that represent the primeval hill.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

The use of a clerestory allowed light to enter the temple.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

INTERPRETATION:

Ancient Egyptians built temple structures to model the universe at the moment of creation. For the average Egyptian, the inner sanctuaries in the Temple of Amun-Re would've been reminiscent of the myth of Atun creating the "First Event"

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

Dynastic Egypt was pretty big, encompassing present-day Egypt and Sudan, and pretty long, including 32 different dynasties (numbered from 1 to 31 with the bonus Ptolemaic Dynasty tacked on at the end) from 3500 to 30 B.C.E. "Ancient Egypt" is a general term that includes pre-dynastic Egypt and the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. The New Kingdom period (also known as Amarna) was significant because of its cultural reforms and stylistic revolution. It ended with the start of the 21st Dynasty, so there's plenty of Dynastic Egypt that isn't also Ancient.

TITLE: Mortuary Temple of Hapshetsut **LOCATION:** near Luxor, Egypt Deir el-Bahari **DATE:** 1473-1458 BCE
ARTIST: Senenmut **PERIOD/STYLE:** New Kingdom **PATRON:** Hatshepsut

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Sandstone, partially carved into a rock cliff, and red granite

FORM:

Features 3 colonnaded terraces and 2 ramps. Visually coordinated with the natural setting. Patterns of light and dark in the colonnade are echoed in the cliffs behind. Terraces once had elaborate gardens.

FUNCTION:

Seated near Luxor, Egypt, the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut honors the female pharaoh Hatshepsut. Queen Hatshepsut ruled for two decades, during which time—like her many male predecessors—she requested that works of art and architectural feats be created in her honor.

CONTENT:

The temple features elements of Hatshepsut iconography while borrowing elements of traditional masculine art. In this work, Hatshepsut essentially asserted herself as a king, not just as a king's wife. (Get it, Hatshepsut.) Egyptian sphinxes featuring Hatshepsut's face line the lower level. The structure, precision, and order symbolize the stability Hatshepsut reinforced at the advent of the New Kingdom.

CONTEXT:

Hatshepsut was sick and tired of the same old male lines of succession. During this time, a word for "queen" didn't even exist; ancient Egyptians referred to women in power as "King's Wife." However, Hatshepsut embodied the ideal pharaoh. She assumed authority as a regent and then created an origin myth surrounding her kingdom and her rise to power to justify herself as a true pharaoh.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

This is the first time that the achievements of a woman have been celebrated in art history. Her body is interred elsewhere in the Valley of the Kings.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

The architect situated the mortuary temple on a sloping cliff to create a tiered effect. The rigidness and clean lines of the temple stand out in stark contrast to the natural, jagged rock formations of the cliff. In her portrait statues she appears in male pharaonic clothing and false beard. She kneels only before the gods. She offers plants to the sun god Amun. The site was chosen in Deir-El-Bahri because of its ancient association with the female goddess Hathor.

INTERPRETATION:

Ancient Egyptians considered the Temple of Hatshepsut to be a house of the god Amun-Re. Once a year, they carried the statue of Amun-Re to the Temple of Hatshepsut. Outside of this shrine, there are statues of Hatshepsut kneeling for just such an occasion, which shows how important he was. Pharaohs didn't kneel unless they were honoring the gods.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

Djeser-Djeseru meaning "the Holy of Holies". There was a terrorist attack in this site in 1997, where 70 people were killed.

TITLE: Akhenaton and Nefertiti and 3 Daughters **LOCATION:** Egypt **DATE:** 1353-1335 BCE

ARTIST: _____ **PERIOD/STYLE:** Amarna Period **PATRON:** Akhenaton

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Limestone

FORM:

On this small stone plaque, an artist created a relief image of Akhenaton and his daughters. Relief is a method of sculpture in which the image is carved into a flat surface to make the image stand out from the background, and this particular relief shows Akhenaton and his wife with their three daughters. The seemingly candid image appears to be capturing a special moment for this family.

FUNCTION:

Family portrait

CONTENT:

CONTEXT:

The New Kingdom period, also known as Amarna after the art style that began around the same time, was a revolutionary time of cultural and stylistic change. This representation of Akhenaton, Nefertiti, and their three daughters epitomizes those changes. The overlong proportions, wide hips, thin legs, and forward curved necks are examples of the Amarna artistic style. Even though things had changed drastically, the sun remained an artistic motif. Aten is represented as a sun disk, and the rays extend to Akhenaton's hands.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

In ancient Egypt, 1350 B.C.E. represented a major shift in art as well as a shift in the ruling dynasty. The image of Akhenaton, Nefertiti, and their three daughters exemplifies the new style of art that Akhenaton influenced, an art style known as Amarna that is characterized by increased movement within pieces with figures often overlapping. Males are generally depicted as more feminine, and this is especially true of depictions of Akhenaton.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

The new Amarna style features slack jaws, protruding bellies, curving poses and heavy lidded eyes.

INTERPRETATION:

At the end of the sun's rays are Ankh symbols (Egyptian symbol of life.) They point at the King and Queen

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

Akhenaton made other big changes as well, like changing the Sun God from Amun to Aten. He even changed his own name to Akhenaten, a name that ends—rather conveniently—with the name Aten. During his rule, Akhenaten and his wife became the embodiments of Aten in commissioned art.

TITLE: Tutankhamun's Tomb **LOCATION:** Valley of the Kings, Egypt **DATE:** 1323 BCE

ARTIST: _____ **PERIOD/STYLE:** New Kingdom **PATRON:** Tutankhamun

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Gold with inlay of enamel and semiprecious stones

FORM:

In 1922, archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the sarcophagus of King Tut inside a tomb. The sarcophagus had three layers. The first two layers were made from wood, but—in true kingly fashion—the innermost layer was gold and contained adornments in bright pigment. The painting reveals the face of King Tut adorned in a majestic suit and headdress.

FUNCTION:

The death mask on Tutankhamen's coffin was one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever made. Its original purpose was to protect (and replicate) the facial features so that the person's identity prevailed into the afterlife. Art historians believe that the ancient Egyptians wrote spells on King Tut's mask that were intended to guide their ruler to a prosperous afterlife.

CONTENT:

The image of King Tut in his golden sarcophagus suggests that he was indeed considered a deity. The golden coffin, blue headdress, and the wings depicted on his arms also point to this classification. The crook and flail are emblems of Osiris.

CONTEXT:

He was the son of Akhenaton. His parents were brother and sister. His wife was his half sister. He may have been physically handicapped due to birth defects. He was the ruler of Egypt from when he was 9 till 19.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

The idea of the death mask originated in ancient Egypt, and it was carried on in subsequent ancient civilizations, but none has captured the imagination of the modern world in the same fantastic fashion.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

INTERPRETATION:

Since their discovery, Tutankhamen's funerary objects have toured the world in various exhibitions. The splendor and extravagance of King Tut's tomb is globally recognized; it encapsulates the importance of the afterlife to ancient Egyptians.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

"Tutankhamen" translates as the "Living Image of Amen" (also spelled Amun). Amun, the Sun King, made life possible. This made him the most important deity to ancient Egyptians.

TITLE: Last Judgement of Hu Nefer **LOCATION:** Page from Book of the Dead, **DATE:** 1275 BCE
from his tomb Egypt

ARTIST: _____ **PERIOD/STYLE:** New Kingdom **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Painted papyrus scroll

FORM:

An illustration from the book of the dead.

FUNCTION:

The last judgment of Hu-Nefer is from an ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, which was buried with Hu-Nefer in his tomb—presumably as a sort of guide to reaching the afterlife. Ancient Egyptians, it seems, believed that the deceased could take physical items with them from one world to the next. This theory is supported by the Great Pyramids as well.

CONTENT:

This text contains the image of the deceased with the god Osiris deciding whether the deceased may proceed to the afterlife. The heart of the deceased is weighed against a feather on a scale. If full of wickedness (a heavy heart), it will sink and be devoured by the monster beneath it. If the heart of the deceased is light and carefree, the deceased earns a trip to paradise.

CONTEXT:

Deities and kings assumed divine attributes in Egyptian art. To indicate royalty's all-powerful status, artists often depicted deities as humans with animal heads. For instance, in the last judgment of Hu-Nefer, Anubis has the head of a jackal and Horus has the head of a falcon. Anubis is the god of embalming. The hippopotamus/lion figure is waiting to eat the heart of an evil soul. The god Thoth has the head of a bird.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

In addition to combining animal and human features, artists would use a three-quarter view and combined profile to depict godliness.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Pyramid and coffin texts date as far back as the Old Kingdom. Ancient Egyptians dictated the last judgment of Hu-Nefer on papyrus paper, which was likely invented in Egypt. Papyrus existed in droves around the Nile River Valley, so its paper was abundant.

INTERPRETATION:

From the last judgment of Hu-Nefer and structures such as the Great Pyramids, art historians have learned a lot about ancient Egyptians' strict moral expectations and material beliefs about the afterlife.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS: