

RELIEF * PORTRAITS

Topics: relief sculpture, portraiture, assemblage, drawing connections, observation, value, depth

Supplies:

- cardboard
- liquid glue
- paint brush
- found objects: bottle caps, sticks, buttons, etc
- paint (one color & white)

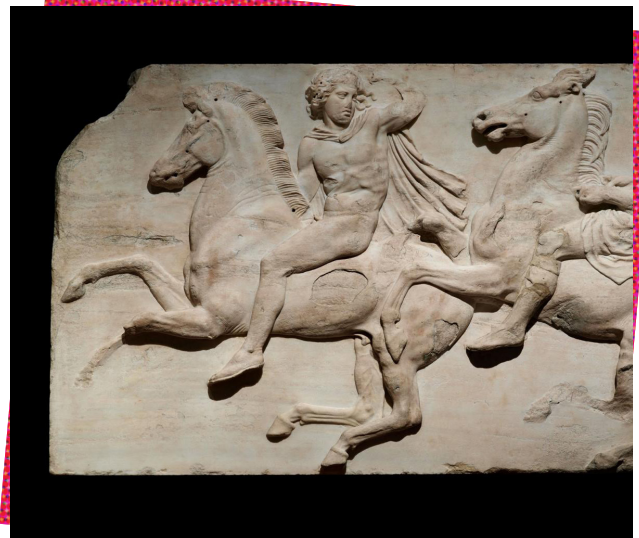
Have you ever looked closely at coins? What did you notice? The pictures and faces on coins feel bumpy when you run your finger over them. That is because each coin is a tiny relief sculpture. **Relief** is a way of making sculptures where the sculpted parts remain attached to a background. Take a look at these two sculptures. How are they similar? How are they different?



Sculpture in the round

Figure of Dionysus

The British Museum, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/greece-parthenon>



Relief sculpture

Horsemen of the Frieze

The British Museum, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/greece-parthenon>

RELIEF SCULPTURE

Some of the most famous relief sculptures were made for Egyptian temples thousands of years ago. The **Temple of Dendur** was built in Egypt about 2000 years ago by the Roman Emperor Augustus to honor the Egyptian goddess Isis. The walls of the temple have many relief sculptures that depict nature and gods. In 1965, Egypt gave the temple to the United States as a gift. It is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The parts of the relief that stick out further create **depth**. What else do you notice about the reliefs?



RELIEF SCULPTURE

The Parthenon is a temple that was built to honor the Greek goddess Athena over 2000 years ago. Even though it is no longer used as a temple, at the time it represented the power and wealth of the Greek Empire. The temple was decorated with relief sculptures that told stories from mythology as well as a procession to honor Athena.



The **National WWII Memorial** in Washington, D.C. is a third example of relief sculpture. The memorial honors United States soldiers who fought in World War II as well as the people who supported the war from home. The relief sculptures on the walls of the memorial tell the story of the war.



Let's make a relief portrait!

Think about the three examples of relief sculpture you have looked at. Can you think of others that you have seen? How are they similar? Relief sculptures are often used to honor people, places, and ideas that a country or artist feels are important or special. Think of somebody special in your life that you would like to celebrate with a relief portrait.

1 Begin by thinking about who you would like to make a portrait of. Who is a special person you know? Maybe they are a parent, a grandparent, or a teacher. Maybe they are somebody who helps you every day like a crossing guard or delivery person. Your special person will be the **subject** of your portrait.

3 Collect objects to make your portrait from around your house: buttons or bottle caps for eyes, string for hair, and cardboard to make specific shapes.

2 Observe what your subject looks like. You can look at a picture of your subject or close your eyes and picture them in your head. Do they have short or long hair? Is it curly or straight? What is the shape of their eyes? Are their lips full or thin?



4 Cut a rectangle from cardboard to make a background.

5 Make a portrait! Use glue to attach objects to your background. You could cut out a head shape from cardboard or draw an outline with string. The more layers you add to your portrait, the more **depth** your relief will have.



Let's make a relief portrait!

- 6** Choose a paint color that reminds you of your subject. Cover your portrait in one solid coat of paint. Make sure to get your brush inside all the small cracks! Let it dry.



- 7** Mix a small amount of white paint into your original color to create a lighter value. **Value** is how light or dark a color is. Colors with lighter values usually appear closer while darker values recede, or look farther away.



lighter value

- 8** Without using water, lightly brush paint all over your portrait. This technique is called **drybrush**. How does your portrait change?



Adding a lighter value increases the appearance of depth and adds texture. How else could you change the appearance of depth in your portrait?

REFLECTION

Take a look at your relief portrait. What do you notice? Does your portrait remind you of your special person? It's ok if your portrait doesn't look exactly like your subject. Many artists make portraits that feel like a person instead of looking exactly like them. What details did you add that make your portrait feel like your subject? If you made another portrait, what would you do differently?



RESOURCES & SOURCES

Resources

Read about three artists who made portraits on the Tate Modern website:

[Gwen John](#), [David Hockney](#), and [Pablo Picasso](#). Other famous portrait artists:

Mickalene Thomas, Amy Sherald, Frida Kahlo, Kehinde Wiley, Andy Warhol

Visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art [website](#) to learn more about the Temple of Dendur. Check out their [family guide](#)!

Visit the British Museum [website](#) to learn more about the Parthenon reliefs.

Visit the National Parks [website](#) to learn more about the National WWII Memorial and other U.S. memorials.

Sources

“Greece: Parthenon.” *The British Museum*, 2020, www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/greece-parthenon.

“Visiting the National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC.” *Washington.org*, Destination DC, 28 Sept. 2018, washington.org/dc-guide-to/national-world-war-ii-memorial.

“The Temple of Dendur.” *Metmuseum.org*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2020, www.metmuseum.org/en/art/collection/search/547802.

“Circulating Coins.” *United States Mint*, United States Mint, 24 Jan. 2020, www.usmint.gov/learn/coin-and-medal-programs/circulating-coins.