

Sea-Inspired Vases & The Aegean Period

(TMAHA, Chapter 5)

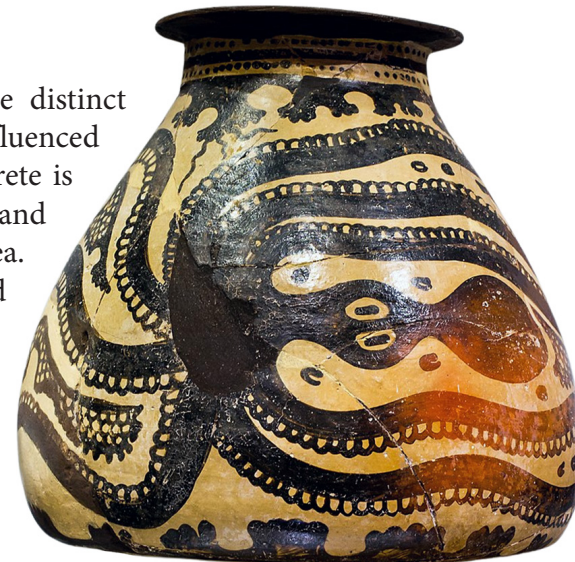
Medium: Drawing and Painting (Sculpting is Optional) **Emphasis:** Composition

Supplies: Drawing and Painting Kits (or at least the Drawing Kit with cream-colored paint and a brush) and either a Salvaged Vase or a Plastic Container. (A Sculpting Kit is Optional)

Sea-Inspired Designs

While the Aegean period (c. 2200-1100 BC) includes three distinct cultures (Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean), Minoan art was influenced most heavily by its seaside location. The Minoan island of Crete is located in the Mediterranean Sea, while the Cycladic Islands and the Mycenaean mainland are found in and along the Aegean Sea. Famous for frescos and pottery, Minoan art is also recognized for depicting movement, such as in the *Bull Leaping Fresco* and *Dolphin Fresco* in the Palace of Knossos (TMAHA, 86).

One of the most recognizable pieces of pottery from the Minoan period is the *Octopus Vase* from Knossos, c. 1500 BC (TMAHA, 87), which also evokes movement in its design. This marine theme was, in fact, a common one, as evidenced by numerous other octopus vases, including those shown here. Painted on vases of varying shapes and sizes, they similarly depict an octopus's long arms "swimming" around coral and other sea life.



While all three ancient octopus vases shown here are from c. 1500 BC, the one above and the one on the opposite page are Minoan pieces. In contrast, the one below is considered a Mycenaean imitation of the Minoan marine-style pottery.

Project Instructions

Review the Foundational Principles, as needed, particularly: #5 Composition and #8 Transferring.

While many Minoan vases included octopi, some featured other sea creatures for a similar effect. If you were the painter, what would you have chosen? Take some time to look at photos of sea creatures and then select one (or several) to depict on your own "Minoan vase." Keep in mind that you want the marine theme to stand out as well as an illusion of movement.

Compositionally, try to fill the space, as the ancient octopi vases do. Consider the best placement and direction of elements within your design to show fluidity and movement. Angled lines, in particular, give the illusion



of movement, as can overlapping. Furthermore, the Minoans are known for using organic, curvilinear lines, something a maritime theme lends itself to well.

For the full Minoan effect, I suggest limiting your colors to cream for the background and dark brown or black for the design. Your details should be created solely from dark brown or black with no application of cream (other than for the background). Depending on your preference, you may use paint, pens or markers for the details. Compositionally, work on balancing details (like the inclusion of the octopi's "suction cups") with large areas of dark flat-looking space (such as the heads and bodies in the octopus examples).

If you can find an old vase to paint over, this may be your most authentic-looking option. Otherwise, find a used plastic container (I painted an empty peanut container with the top cut off for my piece). In either case, paint your vase with cream acrylic paint and then draw or paint your sea design in dark brown or black on top of that. Because I wanted a thicker edge than the plastic provided, I added some clay along the top to give the illusion of depth and then painted the edge and inside a terracotta color. Similarly, if you prefer, you can create your entire vase from clay, partially or fully in the round, instead of salvaging an old or used container.

Designing a composition for a fully-round vase can be challenging, especially since only a portion of the design is visible from any angle. Thus, you will want to consider the amount of available space on each side when planning the focal point(s) for your vase. Likewise, transferring a design to a three-dimensional object can be difficult. Because the peanut container I used had a "bulge" on the top and bottom with a narrower center, I cut my sketch into four vertical strips. This helped them to lay flat against the container as I traced over them with transfer paper (I made sure to confirm they were lined up evenly before tracing).



Last but not least, detailing a vase requires extra care since you have to hold the piece with one hand and may be unable to rest your other hand on the surface when drawing or painting. Also, you may have to paint in stages, allowing time for the paint to dry before rotating to another section. Nevertheless, I hope you feel the extra effort has paid off once you have designed and completed your own Aegean sea-inspired vase.

Shown here are the front and back views of my Aegean sea-inspired seahorse and coral motif vase. I added some clay to the rim of an empty peanut container that I cut to appear broken. After painting the inside terracotta and the outside cream with acrylic paints, I drew my design on top with a black Sharpie.

