



Unknown (Egyptian)
Head of a Cat, 26th Dynasty (664–525 B.C.)
bronze
3 1/4 x 1 7/8 x 2 1/2 in. (8.2 x 4.7 x 6.3 cm)
Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Dwight W. Marsh,
Class of 1842, by exchange
41.5.8

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Head of a Cat 26th Dynasty (664–525 B.C.)

Cats represented the goddess Bastet and were venerated as sacred animals. Cemeteries of cats mummified in honor of Bastet have been found at her major cult sites, such as Bubastis. Bastet was associated with fertility, festivity, and intoxication. Cats were first kept as domestic pets in Egyptian homes in the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2030 BCE–1640 B.C.E.), where their mousing capabilities were admired.

Note the pierced holes that would have held earrings (now lost) and the linear details such as the whiskers, fur on the ears, and bead-like ornamentation around the neck, representing a necklace.

Sources

Andrews, Carol. *Amulets of Ancient Egypt*. 1994 (British Museum Press).
University of Texas Press, 1998.

"Cat Statuette." Metropolitan Museum of Art. Collection Catalogue Entry for Object 56.16.1.
http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/collection_database/egyptian_art/cat_statuette/objectview.aspx?OID=100000327&collID=10&dd1=10

Wilkinson, Richard H. *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*.
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DISCUSS

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How would you describe the way the artist has depicted this cat? What details do you notice? How do you think the artist feels about cats? What makes you say that? What adjectives would you use to describe this sculpture?

In ancient Egypt cats were associated with the goddess of fertility and festivity Bastet, and they were also kept as household pets to keep the mice away. Do you think this sculpture presents a pet cat or the goddess Bastet? Why?

If you could invent a mythical being inspired by an animal, which animal would you choose? Why? What attributes does your animal have that you admire?

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CREATE

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Try making a sculpture of an animal out of clay.

Use different tools to *incise* (cut into) the surface of the clay to create different textures such as fur, scales, or feathers and details such as eyes, nose, whiskers, and other facial features. Experiment with toothpicks, Popsicle sticks, or metal sculpting tools.

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