



MAY 2018

# ODYSSEY AND ORIGIN

*Anthropos #1* | Jack Whitten



**VISIT THE BMA** and  
see *Odyssey: Jack Whitten  
Sculpture, 1963–2017*  
through July 29, 2018.

Jack Whitten (American, 1939–2018).  
Detail, *Anthropos #1*. 1972. Black and white  
mulberry, wild olive wood, linen twine, and  
wire. 62 x 9½ x 10 inches. Collection of the  
Artist's Estate. Photography by Genevieve  
Hanson, NYC

What do you see when you look at this sculpture? Rich, dark wood. At the top, a vertical, semi-rectangular panel with short, sharpened branches. Just underneath, a cube-like chamber resting on a piece of carved wood that twists and tapers to a narrower point. At the center, in the lower half of the sculpture, a large, thick, bowed piece of wood reaching almost to the ground, flanked at the top with two vertical wood shapes. The entire sculpture rests on two wood forms that stand on the floor.

Now, consider that the artist—Jack Whitten—titled this work *Anthropos #1*. *Anthropos* is the Greek word for “humankind.” Does this change your view of the work? Perhaps the top panel begins to resemble a head, the chamber a chest cavity, and the tapering piece of wood the rest of the torso and waist. It becomes clear that the sculpture is indeed standing upright, in the two-legged posture that is one of the defining characteristics of humans.

Jack Whitten was a black American artist from Alabama who started his artistic career in New York, but spent 40 summers of his working life creating art on the Greek island of Crete. In Crete, he engaged the natural environment and culture—both ancient and modern—while continuing to explore his identity through the carving techniques and forms of African sculptural arts. He said that this sculpture, along with others in the *Anthropos* series, are about “the beginning, the genesis, of people.” Looking through his unique lens, Whitten saw the connections between African and Greek objects, and he created artworks that invite us all to contemplate our identities, in ways that are both specific and shared.

## CHALLENGE

Learn more about Jack Whitten's life and artistic process by viewing this video: [tinyurl.com/y78owelp](https://tinyurl.com/y78owelp).

Compare and contrast the African and Greek sculptures with *Anthropos #1*. What are the similarities? The differences?

Jack Whitten was a master carver, adept at skillfully carving a wide range of woods for his sculptures. He also used other found objects—both natural and synthetic. Using found and pre-cut pieces of wood, and other objects, find a way to represent the human form. What are the elements that make clear that the sculpture is of a human? What does your sculpture communicate about what it means to be human?

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*Anthropos #1*

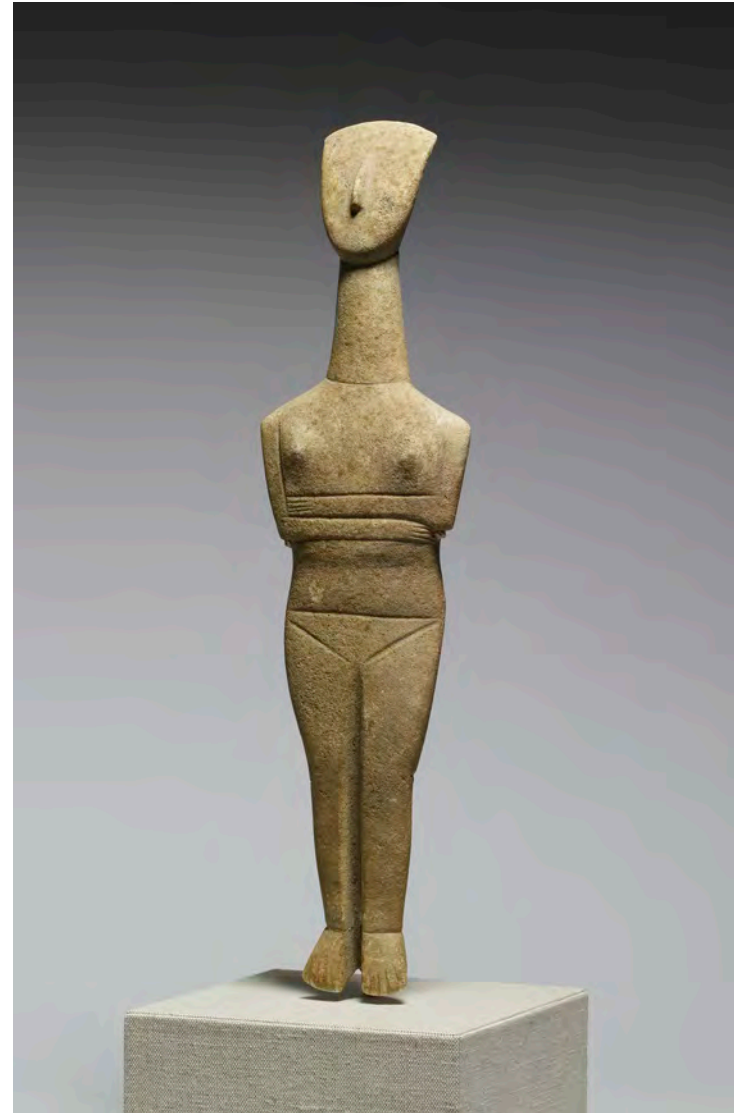
Jack Whitten (American, 1939–2018). 1972. Black and white mulberry, wild olive wood, linen twine, and wire. 62 x 9½ x 10 inches. Collection of the Artist's Estate. Photography by Genevieve Hanson, NYC



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*Female Figure (Bwanga bwa Bwimpe)*

Luluwa culture (Democratic Republic of the Congo). 1920–39. Wood.  $12\frac{5}{8} \times 2\frac{15}{16} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$  inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Alan Wurtzburger, BMA 1954.145.83



*Female figurine*

Goulandris Master (Greek, active c. 2500–2400 BC). c. 2500–2400 BC (Early Cycladic III). Marble.  $16\frac{5}{16} \times 4\frac{3}{16} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 23.253