

Greek and Egyptian Goddesses Collide!

Artemis / Bast, Fred Wilson

The all-white body of Artemis—Greek goddess of wild animals, the hunt, fertility, and childbirth—stands draped in fabric tied at the waist, the traditional garb for an ancient Greek figure. Her body is broken, and her head lies on the ground next to her along with other shards of plaster, seemingly from her body. This sculpture isn't ancient, however. Artist Fred Wilson (born the Bronx, NY 1954) assembled this sculpture in 1992. He sourced the Artemis figure from a plaster mold fabricator in New York City and purchased the Bast sculpture from the gift shop at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, also in New York City. Fred broke and arranged the pieces to look like a sculpture made long ago. Though they were not made broken, marble statues from ancient Greece are often missing limbs or facial features because of the wear they have suffered over many hundreds of years. Most often, missing pieces are never found and museums showcase these artworks as they are. The white color and broken limbs of Wilson's sculpture are reminiscent of ancient Greek and Roman marble statues in modern museums, but there is a distinct difference. Where Artemis' head should be sits the head of Bastet, or Bast, the Egyptian goddess of fertility, motherhood, and protection of the home, painted black to resemble black granite sculptures made in ancient Egypt.

Though they are from different cultures, the two goddesses have many things in common. Both are associated with motherhood. According to legend, both had twin siblings. Bast was born a lion but was transformed into a cat because of her calm and benevolent nature in comparison to her aggressive and combative twin sister, Sekhmet. Artemis was twin to brother Apollo, and the two also were starkly different from one another.

Artemis / Bast, along with much of Fred's work, encourages viewers to consider how histories portrayed as disconnected are often linked. African and Black histories are often overlooked or thought of as separate from European and white histories. The people living in ancient Egypt were living alongside those in Greece and Rome, and the civilizations influenced and interacted with one another.

Classroom Activities

- Assign a Greek, Roman, or Egyptian god or goddess to each student in class. After researching their god or goddess, invite students to share out their findings. Once each student has presented, have students compare and contrast the gods and goddesses of different cultures.
- Gods and goddesses often have marvelous stories associated with their lives. Using the research gathered from the activity above, invite students to illustrate the story of their assigned god or goddess.



Fred Wilson. *Artemis / Bast*. 1992. Plaster and paint. 39 × 23 1/2 × 23 1/2 in. (99.1 × 59.7 × 59.7 cm). Collection of Karen Reiner, Potomac, Maryland, on extended loan to the Baltimore Museum of Art. © Fred Wilson, courtesy Pace Gallery

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