ART SPOT: Paper Octopus
All Ages
30 mins

Make a moving paper octopus sculpture inspired by an ancient Greek vessel from the antiquities collection.

Supplies
A couple sheets of construction paper, a glue stick, scissors, something colorful to draw with.

Black-Figure Lekythos. Greek, 540-530 BC

This kind of Greek pottery is known as a Lekythos (LECK-uh-thoss). A Lekythos is a specifically shaped vessel used to store olive oil. Olive oil was considered sacred in the ancient world because it was such a useful substance in everyday life. It was an important and nutritious part of their diet, and it was believed to have many uses as medicine too. They used it for cosmetics, to preserve other foods, even as fuel for lighting!

These everyday practical objects were often decorated with images of things from the sea, as the sea was an important source of food, as well as a kind of highway used to connect the many islands of what we know today as Greece.

This is called a Black-Figure Lekythos because it has mostly solid black figures and designs painted onto the natural red-orange color of the clay that it’s made from. The painted design of this lekythos includes a large black octopus with neatly curling tentacles, and is actually very large when you compare it to the size of the dolphins surrounding it! Above the eyes of the octopus is a reddish circle, possibly the mantle of the octopus, the part of the body that protects important organs and helps it move.
Let’s Make a Paper Octopus!

1. On a sheet of construction paper, draw your mantle shape. It’s one large circle at the top, and then two smaller ovals underneath. This is the back of the octopus, so you can be messy while sketching it out.
2. Cut out the mantle.
3. Use your colorful drawing media to draw the eyes and designs in the mantle. If you’re unsure of what to draw, how about swirly patterns that remind you of the sea?
4. Cut your construction paper into thin strips, about 1 inch wide and about 6 inches long. You’ll need a lot of these, around 10 for each tentacle, so try stacking your paper to cut multiple strips at the same time.
5. Use your strips to create 4 paper chains. Make yours as long as you’d like, but around 10 links should be good.
6. Use a stapler to attach the tentacles to the octopus head. If you don’t have a stapler use a glue gun, or strong tape. If you’re a stickler for anatomy, you can create 4 more paper chains and attach them to the back of your octopus head for a total of 8 tentacles.

Making Paper Chains