ART SPOT:
Red-Figure Kylix
All Ages
45 mins

Learn about a Red-Figure Kylix and create a spinning drawing machine inspired by it.

Supplies
Tissue box, paper plate, string, scissors, glue, tape, paper, 2 plastic bottle caps, construction paper, markers.

Red-Figure Kylix
This is the bottom of an ancient Greek vessel known as a Kylix. A Kylix was the most popular kind of cup for wine in ancient Greece, and it was usually used during a symposium or drinking party. The shape of the kylix made it easier to drink from a reclining position, as you were expected to recline on a couch, resting on one elbow during a symposium. The shape also enabled drinkers to play kottabos, a game played by looping your finger in one of the handles of the kylix and flinging your wine sediment at targets.

Because of the unique shape and uses of the kylix, they are often decorated with scenes that would only become visible when the cup was drained or tipped all the way back. Here we see the mythological hero Herakles (more commonly known in the U.S. by his Roman name Hercules), wrestling the Nemean lion – one of the “labors” he was asked to perform as an act of penance for killing his family in a Hera-induced rage. It’s a long story, but the first of these labors was to kill and skin the Nemean lion, a monstrous lion with golden skin impenetrable to mortal weapons. Herakles got around that superpower by wrestling and then strangling the monster to death.

On the opposite side (here displayed at the bottom) a nude figure grapples with a bull, attempting to bind it with the rope already tied above one hoof. This might also be Herakles, capturing the Cretan bull (another one of his labors), but it might be Theseus, who later in the story captures the bull after it had escaped to Marathon.
ART SPOT: Red-Figure Kylix
All Ages
45 mins

Why are they nude?
Nudity, specifically male nudity is fundamental to ancient Greek culture. It appears all over the place in many different ways, but here the nudity is a way of showing that what we’re looking at is a scene from mythology, not from everyday life. In the same way that superheroes today have costumes that identify them as having super powers or superhuman ability of some kind of another, nudity was used as a kind of costume to identify a person as a heroic, divine, or semi-divine being, so heroes often were portrayed battling and performing their superhuman feats in the nude. Athletes, the closest you could get (besides war) to actually seeing heroes do their thing in real life, also trained and competed in the nude.

If a male is portrayed nude, they are often a hero, god, athlete, or a citizen being depicted on the same high moral and physical level as a hero or athlete. That’s one of the reasons why there is so much male nudity in ancient Greek art, to connect the lives of men to the positive qualities associated with heroes, gods, athletes, and mythological warriors.

Make a circular spinning drawing machine
1. Cut a slit in the top of an old tissue or other cardboard box. Make sure your paper plate can fit through it.
2. Cover your box with construction paper and glue.
3. Trace your paper plate onto a piece of construction paper, cut out that circle.
4. Make your drawings on construction paper, cut them out, and glue them to your piece of circular paper, and glue it to the plate.
5. Cut a hole slightly smaller than your bottle caps in the center of this circle.
6. For the axle, fold a sheet of paper in half lengthwise and roll it up. Slide it through the hole in the plate. Let the paper unroll until the plate no longer spins freely.
7. Cover the ends of the axle with plastic water-bottle caps. Place the axle, as shown, with the plate in the box opening. Tape the caps to the box.
8. Cover the tape and caps with pieces of construction paper and glue.
9. Tie a string to the axle behind the plate and wind it up. To make your drawing spin, gently pull on the cord.