

“Nuptial Numbness” by Nora Meadows - nmeadows@umich.edu

This piece I've titled “Nuptial Numbness” explores classical greek vessel forms, red and black figure pottery, as well as a prolonged restraint on women by use of marriage throughout history. The Greek vessel I've based this piece on is called a *Lebes Gamikos*, which is a form of marriage vessel. In ancient Greek marriage rituals themselves, this vessel would be used in the ritual sprinkling of the bride with water. The vessel typically consists of three parts, the stand, the bowl piece which would hold the water, and a lid. In the case of my inspired *Lebes Gamikos*, I chose to attach the stand to the bowl, creating one larger vessel. I chose to do this to emphasize not only a false sense of stability but the dysfunctionality of these marriages.

Often, the women getting married in ancient Greece were in arranged marriages that would benefit their family socially or financially. These women were also very young, practically children around the age of fourteen, and their husbands were often much older. Marriage in ancient Greece focused heavily on purity, fertility, and the ‘transition’ from childhood to adulthood for these women.

The focus on a woman's physicality in marriage is displayed in my piece through an anatomical heart shape on the front, and an abstract vaginal design on the back. Prior to these marriages, most women were virgins, whereas the husband typically was not.

The serpent, representative of evil and corruption, is double-headed, and seen making its way down from the handles and around the female figure. Juxtaposed with the tall male figure behind the female, I aimed to express this prolonged restriction in this way.

Traditionally, the Lebes Gamikos depicts red figures. The figures are often engaging in some sort of marriage ceremony as well. By displaying the corrupt power dynamic on a vessel that typically displays 'joyous' marital proceedings created both an interesting and contemporary change. Because these vessels were typically done with red figures, I emulated the same style through underglaze painting and clear glaze.

I relied heavily on the resources at the Kelsey Museum to inspire the surface painting of this piece. I tried a lighter orange underglaze in the beginning, as many of the 'red' figures look faded once they reach the museum. I chose the more saturated red and black to personally mimic the process of creating red-figure pottery, and to connect closely on a maker's level to the medium and historical vessel. Although my commentary for this piece so far surrounds ancient Greek marriages, the suppression of women (and children) through marriage is not an ancient topic, it is a part of a continuous violence against women. The *new-ness* is a purposeful reminder. "Nuptial Numbness" will not see a wedding day like the Lebes Gamikoi that have preceded it, but it will stand against its intended purpose for the many women forced to stand alongside a stranger.

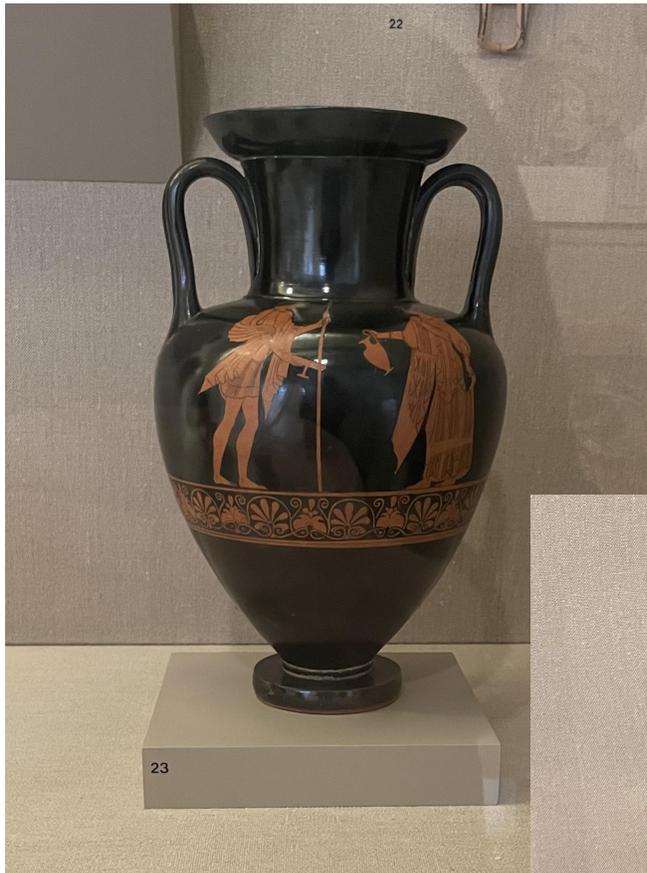
Nuptial Numbness

Ceramic - Stoneware - hand-built, Red and Black Underglaze, Clear Glaze





Objects from the Kelsey Museum that inspired this project:



Pictured:

1. *Amphora by the Berlin Painter*
2. *Amphora with Herakles Battling the Amazons (Reverse: Warriors Departing)*
3. *Bell Krater with Dancing Satyrs*
4. *Wine Jug (Oinochoe)*



