ARTIST: ROBERT PRESTON
ARTWORK: Naxos Mirror

Robert PRESTON
b. 1942 United Kingdom

Naxos Mirror 1984
Casein, dry ground pigment, charcoal, pastel, conte, crayon
and chalk on canvas
159 x 125 cm

Purchased by James Cook University from the exhibition,
DRAWINGS x 4 held at Perc Tucker Gallery in 1984 and
travelled in 1985

Photograph: Michael Marzik

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

The image Naxos Mirror is derived from the decorated flat side of an ancient pottery artefact created in the shape of a frying pan. These artefacts, found in graves in the Cycladic islands off the coast of Greece, are around 5000 years old. They nearly all represent female figures with non-functioning legs for a handle. The artist studied these ceramics in the Museum of Archaeology in Athens.

The pictures which appeared on the Cycladic frying pan vessels were either engraved or stamped and in-filled with lime or a white substance. They depict stylised symbols for ocean waves, the sun, moon and stars, dolphins, boats and occasionally seabirds. Archaeologists are not sure of the real intent of these mysterious objects, however, they are thought to have had a magical purpose. Filled with water and placed in the grave, the reflections of the moon and stars would be brought into the grave to give light to the dead as they travelled into the after-life.

Figure 1. Early Cycladic II “Frying Pans”
National Museum Athens,
(Dan Diffendale, 2008)
INVESTIGATE

*Naxos Mirror* depicts a number of symbols which are related to the ancient influences which have informed its creation. **Draw** the symbols you can recognise. Here are some clues to help you.

![Figure 2. Modern x 4 (Lay Anglicana, 2014).](image1)

![Figure 3. Vesica Pisces (Symbol Dictionary.Net, 2014).](image2)

QUESTIONS / DISCUSS

In art, a **medium** is the material that artists use to create their art work. Whatever a piece of art is made out of is its medium. The plural of medium is **media**. So, one piece of art can be made of one medium or several media. Robert Preston used a range of art media to create the *Naxos Mirror*.

Take a close **look** at the artwork and **list** which types of media were used to create it?

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Artists often make drawings from life, meaning they draw in the presence of the object or subject of their artwork. Other artists create work in their studio away from their subject. The marks we can see in Preston’s drawing suggest that the symbolic shapes have been carefully considered and measured.

**Describe** what you think the artist’s process was to create this artwork. Do you think that the artist drew directly from objects or planned the shapes in a preliminary study which evolved onto the canvas?

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