



Exploring Grecian Vases

Bernie Hrytzak

June 5 - July 20, 2019

Opening Reception: Thursday, June 6, 2019 at 7PM

Workshop: Saturday, July 20, 2019 • 1-3PM



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Within *Exploring Grecian Vases*, viewers will experience moments of innovation, deception, paradox and storytelling, all lying just below the glazed surface of first impressions. The experience is a vicarious one, offering a glimpse into Bernie Hrytzak's creative process as his focus oscillates between technical, formal, and conceptual interests.

At first glance, it may be tempting to assume that the vases are replicas of traditional Grecian vases, but instead, Bernie has specified that they serve as "inspirations" rather than "attempts to accurately copy these ancient cultures".

The production of traditional clay vessels involves building up a basic form before removing material until a final shape is realized, similar to the segmented woodturning technique used in some of the vases present. To create a segmented piece, the woodturner glues together various species of wood, stacking them like bricks into a rough form before carefully turning the work on a lathe to a desired thickness; 3/16" for the pieces in this exhibition.

Much of the artwork Bernie has produced in the past 11 years uses wood sourced from in and around Chatham-Kent, which is left to dry slowly in the woodshop, in some cases for many years, before being realized as a final piece. It is intriguing to think that, historically, Grecian vessels would have been made with locally sourced clay; similarly, as a lasting geographical record, much of Bernie's work has been produced in a region where great Carolinian forests once dominated the landscape.

Although the form of each vase varies, the pieces are differentiated by finishes and embellishments applied during the final stages of creation. This is where Bernie's artworks stand out from that of traditional woodturners; however, the representational imagery seen in some of the vases is atypical even within his own oeuvre. The clip-art style imagery on the surface of some of Bernie's work is enigmatic at times, but ultimately every piece points back toward the decorative tradition from which he has drawn inspiration: the Black Figure and Red Figure style pottery of the Archaic period. These priceless artefacts offer a glimpse into the past through their surface imagery, often portraying culturally significant events and stories.

In the case of Bernie's contemporary vases, a divergence of themes holds the work at arms' length from homogeneity. As the viewer moves from one piece to another, the imagery shifts from autobiographical, to historical, to literal visual portrayals based on considerations for the type of vessel that lie beneath the surface. Viewers will find humorous references to sport inspired by depictions of the Olympics on decorative vases, with embellishments that speak to championship and triumph. Other pieces like the psykter for cooling wine, a krater for mixing wine with water, and a kylix for drinking are all adorned with depictions of socialization and comradeship that reference either historic culture or Bernie's personal experiences. The blend of past and present posits the work as a unique indicator of history while simultaneously flattening it. The *pièce de résistance* is a vase inspired by artwork from the Geometric period in Greece. This large piece, complete with stencilled surface treatment, is an aesthetic departure from the other works. The technical demands needed to overcome its creation were well worth the effort, serving as a testament to Bernie's dedication to producing complex objects of beauty.

Exploring Grecian Vases demonstrates Bernie's in-depth research and intuitive approach to artmaking. Each vase overflows with the evidence of an artist dedicated to testing the limits of his subjects' abilities, and creating beauty from raw materials; as a whole, the exhibition extends an invitation to visit a mysterious place, transporting the viewer to disparate moments in time and cultural history through both simulation and authentic forms of creation.

Jordan Blackburn is a printmaking artist living outside Guelph, Ontario. Blackburn is also a naturalist and his playful work addresses the beauty of nature as well as the uncanny quality of human relationships with natural spaces.

