

Exekias- 'The finest Black-figure vase painter of all time'?

The vase painter Exekias painted some very beautiful vases, which date from around 530 B.C.

To determine whether Exekias was the best black-figure artist of all time, we have to first consider the other black figure artists that are among the best, and compare the work of Exekias to them. From this, one can then determine an opinion over whether or not Exekias was *the* best, or just among the best.

Other fine black-figure artists include Epiktetos, Lydos, Euphiletos, The Kuban Group, the Eucharides Painter, the Acheloos Painter, the Amasis Painter and Psiax.

These are some of the other black-figure painters that I believe to be among the best.

Exekias' most famous vase is an Amphora showing Ajax and Achilles playing a game.



This vase is a fine example of Exekias' work. It is a finely crafted piece and the skill that Exekias has that other some painters lack is that his vases come together as a whole. Each little bit of it is beautifully crafted, and then when you look at the vase as a whole, it all fits together perfectly. This is a very well crafted vase, and much attention has been paid to detail, especially on Ajax and Achilles' clothing. Unlike some other painters of the time, Exekias has planned his vase well and therefore had no problem it fitting his characters onto the vase without making them seem out of proportion, which several painters seemed to have a problem with, such as the Leagros group. The Leagros' groups' vases are not very pleasing to the eye. They seem to have as many different things going on in the painting as the painter could fit in, with no attention paid to whether it looked good, and when a character didn't really fit into the picture, they would just make it go on into the border. This shows that they did not plan carefully. Exekias on the other hand managed to compose his vases tremendously, creating vases in which everything fitted in and each item in the picture complimented another, for example in the vase shown above, the shields curve into the sides of the vase, on the bottom of the vase there is a spikey pattern pointing upwards, and in the actual picture, everything points to the centre. This makes the centre of the vase the point that the eye is drawn to, and although the vase is

not symmetrical, it seems to be symmetrical due to the precision and planning, the only non-symmetrical part being Ajax and Achilles.

Not all of his vases were of the same standard as the famous Ajax and Achilles vase. For example Calyx crater showing the chariot of Athena and gods is not nearly so well composed and looks quite messy.

I think that if not the best, Exekias was one of the best black-figure painters, and certainly has produced some of the best work to date. Whether there was another artist that produced vases that were far superior to Exekias' but they got destroyed over time, I do not know and if there is no record of them, then it is fair to say that they do not and have never existed.

His works have a near statuesque dignity that makes them have a place as major art, and the beauty of his vases is not comparable to that of any other painters. Exekias also seems to have mastered the art of $\frac{3}{4}$ view more than other painters, whose attempts were often very unrealistic.

Whether or not Exekias is the best vase painter of all time or not is also down to opinion. I think that he was a fine vase painter and if not one of the best, he was the best. Some of his vases I like more than others, but he seems to have a great artistic skill and his vases reflect this.

Bibliography:

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