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SYMBOLISM

The Assyrian Reliefs

Imagine decorating the walls of your bedroom. What might you use? Why? What would people think about you if they didn't know you and only looked at the objects on your walls? Draw some possible decorations in the column on the left and list their meanings and connotations in the column on the right. What do these objects say about you?

DECORATION	MEANING / CONNOTATION

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Symbols often add greater meaning to a work of art, revealing the distinct visual language of an individual culture. A symbol is “a form, sign or emblem that represents something else, often something immaterial, such as an idea or emotion” (MOMA). For example, the color red is often used as a symbol of passion or fury. Bedroom decorations, such as baseball mitts or records, might be symbols of a person’s passion for sports or music.

Examine the Assyrian reliefs to determine which elements could be symbolic. Begin by looking at the example below:



Two Winged, Eagle-Headed Spirits from Kalhu (Nimrud), Iraq, 875–860 BCE. Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

What do you see?

A stylized tree or plant (probably a date palm) with many leaves

What could it symbolize?

The fertility of the land, abundance of resources

What does it suggest about Assyrian society?

Importance of agriculture

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Winged Spirit of Apkallu from Kalhu (Nimrud), Iraq, 875–860 BCE. Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

What do you see?

What could it symbolize?

What does it suggest about Assyrian society?

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Winged Spirit or Apkallu Anointing Ashurnasirpal II from Kalhu (Nimrud), Iraq, 875–860 BCE. Bowdoin College Museum of Art

What do you see? (Note the carved profile on the right and the damage to the two figures on the left.)

What could it symbolize?

What does it suggest about Assyrian society?