EGYPTIAN PROPORTIONS

Objective:
Apply the Egyptian canon of proportions to representations of human beings in ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman art and contemporary life.

Egyptian artists utilized a canon of proportions for the human figure. Using a grid composed of 18 equal squares, this strict system of measurement divided the body into 18 equal parts from the hairline to the soles of the feet. The result was a standard set of proportions for all human beings depicted in wall paintings and stone sculptures. For example, the distance from the feet to the waistline was a standard eleven squares; from the waist to the shoulder five squares; while the torso and head was seven squares. This resulted in the uniform, long-legged, high-waisted appearance of Egyptian figures.

Apply the Egyptian canon of proportions to representations of human beings such as the *Statuette of Re Horakhty* (image 2), the figures of Amenemhet and Hemet from the *Wall Fragment from the Tomb of Amenemhet and His Wife Hemet* (image 3), and Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Paankhenamun from the *Mummy Case of Paankhenamun* (image 4).

Project the transparencies in the classroom, isolate the figures of Re Horakhty, Amenemhet, Hemet, Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Paankhenamun, and measure the following distances on their bodies into standard parts:

- from hairline to the soles of the feet (18 equal parts)
- from the waist to the shoulder (5 equal parts)
- from the top of the head to the chin (3 equal parts)

Compare them. Do they all conform to the Egyptian canon of proportions? Compare the Egyptian canon of proportions to proportions used in representations of the human body in ancient Greek and Roman art. Project the slides or transparencies of the *Amphora* (image 9) and the *Statue of the Aphrodite of Knidos* (image 17) in the classroom. Isolate the figures of Athena and Hermes on the *Amphora* and Aphrodite in the sculpture and divide them into 18 equal parts. Determine the measurements from the top of Athena and Hermes’ heads to their chins. Determine the measurements from Athena, Hermes, and Aphrodite’s waists to their shoulders. Compare these measurements to the Egyptian canon of proportions. What effect do they have on how the human figure was represented in ancient Greek and Roman art?

How would you measure up according to the Egyptian canon of proportions? Measure your body from the top of your head to the soles of your feet. Divide your total body measurement into 18 equal parts. Compare the measurement from your waist to your shoulder and from your chin to the top of your head to the Egyptian canon of proportions.