Cultured Canines

The Vases

by Allison Ksiazkiewicz

A Guide

ΘΕΤΙΣ ATTIC BLACK

Royal Kennel Club

Acknowledgements

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MacLeod Polychrome Globular Jar
(2025)

Skye Terriers are named after the Isle of Skye, where the breed is believed to have originated, and can be traced as far back as 1570. The English physician and renowned naturist John Caius referred to them as “Iseland Dogges” in his *De Canibus Britannicis*.

Historically, Skye Terriers were bred to control populations of wild cats, foxes, otters, and badgers, amongst others, that roamed the Scottish moorlands and prevented sheep from grazing. As these terrier packs were deemed tremendously effective in their hunting practices, crossbreeding with other canine types was banned for several hundred years in an effort to keep their behavioural instincts intact.

Today, the modern Skye Terrier breed can trace its origins directly to Captain Martin MacLeod (1794-1863), an avid sportsman and otter hunter, who bred terriers on the island for several decades.

The MacLeod Polychrome Globular Jar is inspired by a unique Late Neolithic (5300-4800 BCE) vase in the National Museum of Archaeology in Athens. The original was found at Dimini in Thessaly. Like the Skye Terrier, the vase has a squat appearance with strong, sturdy and functional proportions.

H 23 cm x W 26 cm x D 23 cm
Squat, bulbous polychrome vase.
Based on Athens, National Museum K/EAM/A1/3125.

Side A: A Scottish Skye Terrier stands facing left with its head turned towards the viewer. The canine is flanked by foxes. Below, two otters at play in a rocky stream.

Side B: Same as on Side A, though here the terrier is flanked by badgers.

MacLeod Polychrome Globular Jar
(2025)

Christie Stem Cup
(2023)

Guillaume de Palerne Amphora
(2024)

Raitsits Krater
(2024)

Christie Stem Cup
(2023)

The inspiration for this cup comes is a Mycenaean stemmed-cup in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art which features murex shells and sea anemones. Marine life was important to Mycenaean culture – and not just as a food source.

Most famously, the murex is a mollusc that was highly sought after throughout antiquity for its uses in the textile industry. Mycenaean purple dye (also known as Tyrian purple) was a pigment favoured by the wealthy because of the colour's intensity – and because several thousand murex snails were required to produce only a few drops of dye.

The Norwegian Lundehund was equally rare and highly prized. The breed was at the brink of extinction by the 1930's and its survival is attributed to Eleanor Christie, who was an experienced English Setter breeder. Historically, the Lundehund was used for hunting the puffins (and their eggs) which nested in inaccessible locations on clifftops and in crevices on the island of Værøy, off the Norwegian coast.

Hunters bred the small puffin hounds for their increased flexibility, able to climb cliffs and steep inclines, as well as to manoeuvre through narrow passages, with six toes per foot for increased grip.

H 19 cm x W 22 cm x D 17.5 cm
Tall black-painted kylix with handles.
Based on New York, Metropolitan Museum 1972.118.137.

Side A and B: A Lundehund stands at the base of a geological cross-section, looking up a cliff face, which is populated with vegetation and puffins. Beneath the hound are six-toed pawprints. The foot of the cup is adorned with murex shells.

Guillaume de Palerne Amphora
(2023)

This vase is inspired by the French Medieval romance poem *Guillaume de Palerne* (c.1200 CE), later translated into English as *William and the Werewolf* at the request of Sir Humphrey de Bohum in c.1350 CE.

According to the Middle English version, William, the young son of the King of Apulia, is kidnapped by a werewolf who is aware of a plot to kill the prince. William is taken to Rome and cared for by the emperor's daughter, Melior. Inevitably, the two fall in love.

When Melior is betrothed to another, both she and William decide to flee, disguised as bears. As they make their way south, the werewolf protects the couple by using his own scent to confuse the Roman Emperor's Bloodhounds.

On the vase, the Bloodhounds follow the scent trails of the two young lovers disguised as bears – inspired by the octopus's tentacles on a similarly-shaped Mycenaean amphora in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens.

The original vase employs a decorative aesthetic better known from Crete (1500-1450 BCE) called the Minoan Marine Style, It typically features dolphins, cuttlefish, octopuses, and starfish free-floating amongst marine vegetation and influenced later pottery styles on the mainland.

H 24 cm x W 17 cm x D 17 cm
Black-painted piriform jar with three handles.
Based on Athens, National Museum K/EAM/A1/4357.

Side A and B: Several small Bloodhounds doggedly seeking to pick up the scent of two bears.

Raitsits Krater
(2024)

Inspiration for this krater comes from a 14th century BCE Mycenaean mixing vessel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It depicts a theme commonly found on such vessels: a chariot scene. The majority of this type of vase were found within a funerary context and the iconography is usually interpreted as funerary cortege.

The scene on the Raitsits Krater is a slightly less sombre affair. Here is an homage to the Cumans, a nomadic warrior people, who at the height of their civilisation, maintained control over a vast territory stretching from the Danube to central Asia. The Mongol invasions in the 13th century forced the Cumans to begin their own large-scale migration and many settled in the Great Hungarian Plains.

The Komondor or 'Dog of the Cumans' guarded their livestock herds. Over time, while the Cumans eventually assimilated with and became absorbed by the local Hungarian culture, the Komondor remained unchanged and was largely kept separate from other breeds. The early 20th-century veterinarian Emil Raitsits wrote extensively on Hungarian dogs and was the first to prove that the Komondor and another Hungarian sheepdog, the Kuvasz, were two distinct dog breeds.

H 38 cm x W 35 cm x D 31 cm
Black painted wine mixing vessel.
Based on New York, Metropolitan Museum 74.51.964.

Side A: A young man stands, holding the reins of three horses. Above, a bird flies past. A Komondor, with its lovely corded-coat, stands by a horse while another runs towards the group. The vegetation in the background suggests fertile lands.

Side B: Two archers travel through the plains. The first is on horseback and the second rides a chariot. One lucky Komondor gets a free ride on the chariot, while two others have no choice but to keep up with the larger more powerful four-legged beasts.

Caius Bichrome Barrel Jug
(2024)

The beech tree reminds us of the stylised trees frequently depicted in ancient art. This particular tree was inspired by one featured on a Cypro-Phoenician jug at the Ashmolean Museum. In many ancient cultures, similar tree motifs are often interpreted as a Sacred Tree or Tree-of-Life, especially where featured alongside other religious symbols.

The tree on the Caius jug draws on this motif as a re-imagined family tree, illustrating the main dog types as defined in Caius' *De Canibus Britannicis* according to the breeds' attributes: hunting, fowling, pastoralism, and companionship. At the beginning of this tree, the viewer can imagine the earliest dog, or Ur Dogge, from which these different groups emerged.

Caius' manuscript, originally written in Latin, was the first book translated into English dedicated to dogs and their history. Caius' different groups are still very much relevant today as they form the basis for classifying breeds in dog show competitions, such as Crufts and Westminster.

H 25 cm x W 27.5 cm x D 19 cm
Squat, barrel-shaped bichrome jug.
Based on Oxford, Ashmolean AN1885.366.

Side A: A tall, highly stylised beech tree stands majestically and plays host to different forms of wildlife. To the left of the tree, a hare nibbles away at fruit hanging from the tree, seemingly oblivious to the howling Harrier directly beneath it. To the right of the tree, a grouse approaches the tree completely unaware that an Irish Setter has picked up its scent.

Side B: Beneath the handle, two King Charles Spaniels crouch, perhaps about to pounce, beneath the leaves of an oak tree teeming with wildlife and mistletoe. Two similar oak trees feature on both sides of the jug. On one, three rats scurry up the tree and away from a Russell Terrier keen on their capture. By the other tree, two sheep absentmindedly nibble on its leaves, under the watchful eye of a Belgian Tervuren, on behalf of its master.

Caius Bichrome Barrel Jug
(2024)

Seeley, Voelker and Hinman-Irwin
Amphora
(2024)

McNeill Amphora
(2017)

Amherst Hydria
(2020)

Seeley, Voelker and Hinman-Irwin Amphora (2024)

The Alaskan Malamute breed is named after the Inuit Mahlemut tribe who occupied the Kotzebue Sound in western Alaska and relied on these canines for their strength to pull sleds and their resilience in the hostile Arctic environment. Malamutes also provided protection from bears and assistance in hunting seal and other animals.

Today, all purebred Alaskan Malamutes derive from one of three foundation lines: the Kotzebue Line by Eva “Short” Seeley, who competed in the 1932 Winter Olympics in dogsled racing, and Paul Voelker and Dick Hinman, who are responsible for the M’Loot and Hinman-Irwin lines respectively.

The amphora was inspired by a late 7th century BCE Early Corinthian black-figure amphora in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. Between the mid-7th to mid-6th centuries BCE, Corinth was the main vase producing region in Greece. Corinthian painters were heavily influenced by their Eastern neighbours and borrowed motifs including lions, mythical hybrids (such as sphinxes and harpies), and vegetal motifs repetitively displayed in friezes.

H 47 cm x W 32 x D 32 cm
Black-figure storage jar.
Based on Baltimore, Walters Art Museum 48.2033.

Side A and B: On either side of the neck, a stylised Sun-Dog, an atmospheric optical phenomenon that appears in the sky as luminous spots 22° on each side of the sun and at the same elevation.

On the belly, five animal friezes depict cold winter scenes. From the top, forward facing owls flanked by snow geese, with Arctic terns flying overhead. Two friezes depict dog sledding scenes featuring the Alaskan Malamute, followed by a row of land animals starring the Arctic fox, polar bear, lynx, caribou, Arctic hare, and mountain goat. The bottom frieze consists of sea animals with a seal, beluga whale, narwhal, walrus, Arctic cod, Arctic shrimp, jellyfish, and starfish.

McNeill Amphora
(2017)

The Deerhound was exclusively the hunting companion of Scottish chieftains and members of their clans, bred to stalk and hunt red deer in packs. Following the Jacobite Rising in 1745, Battle of Culloden in 1746 and the subsequent collapse of the clan system, these hounds were favoured by the local nobility for sport and hunting.

By the early 19th century, their numbers dwindled almost to the point of extinction; in parallel, the red deer population also plummeted as their habitat was decimated as a result of the Highland Clearances. Those local populations evicted through the Clearances sought their fortunes further afield, in North America and Australia.

The village scene on the amphora nods to Philip James de Loutherbourg's oil painting *Coalbrookedale by Night* (1801), which symbolises the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent transformation of traditional landscapes.

The restoration of the Deerhound breed is credited to brothers Andrew and Duncan McNeill (later 1st Baron Colonsay), who developed a highly successful breeding programme in c.1825.

H 47 cm x W 25.5 x D 24.5 cm
Black-figure storage jar with lid.

Side A: On the shoulder, a Deerhound stands guard by a fallen stag. Below, a Scottish bard, whose romanticised appearance reminds us of the epic Greek poet Homer, stands proud, reciting the ancient stories that describe his family's joys and sorrows. At his feet, a Deerhound lies asleep, but instead of the red deer, the hound dreams of stalking the mythical unicorn.
Side B: On the shoulder, a hunt involving Deerhounds and a kangaroo. Below, a young aristocratic deerstalker pulls back on his hounds' leads, halting their attempts to chase a stag into the woods. Behind the young hunter, a nearby village. The tree trunk suggests recent felling in the Scottish woodlands.

Amherst Hydria
(2020)

A break in the clouds reveals an agricultural scene and mountains far below. Framing the scene are cyclamen tendrils and wheat sheafs, further emphasising the hunting and harvest themes displayed on the vase.

According to some ancient sources (Oppian *Halieurtica*, 4.647-84), the cyclamen root was used, perhaps unwisely, as a method for catching fish. In addition to poisoning the fish and thus allowing for an easier catch, fishermen were also unwittingly poisoning their own water supply.

The Saluki hail from the Middle East and North Africa, where agriculture began. As an ancient breed, they were favoured amongst the nobility in the region not only as a highly effective hunting dog, but as a companion as well.

The breed was often depicted on pottery, jewellery, sculpture, wall paintings, and other crafts. The breed still bears very similar features to those of its ancestors, in both shape and personality.

Florence Amherst is credited with the first successful breeding of Saluki sighthounds in England, in 1895.

H 38 cm x W 33 cm x D 28 cm
Black-figure water jug.
Based on New York, Metropolitan Museum 23.160.1.

Side A: On the shoulder, Canis Major, a winter constellation in the northern hemisphere, playfully chases his master, the great Orion, thus marking the beginning of spring in the Bedouin culture. On the belly of the hydria, two Saluki sighthounds play in the clouds.

Side B: Beneath the handle, two red-figure Salukis at play.

Cartwirght Dinos, view of rim
(2023)

Richmond and Gordon Eye Cup, exterior
(2019)

Richmond and Gordon Eye Cup, tondo
(2019)

Cartwright Dinos
(2023)

As is the case with many (if not most) dog breeds, the origins of the Newfoundland are obscure – and several theories have been put forward.

One theory is that the Newfoundland originated from black bear dogs brought over to the North American shores by the Vikings around 1000 CE. Another theory suggests that the breed evolved from the American Black Wolf. And a third theory put forward suggests that the Newfoundland is the result of the inter-breeding of canines brought over by European explorers in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Either way, the Newfoundland proved to be an exceptional working dog well-suited to it geographical environment of the North Atlantic. They were used by sailors to pull ropes ashore, retrieve lost fishing equipment, and rescue people from the icy unforgiving waters.

The 18th century British entrepreneur, sportsman, and diarist, George Cartwright, is largely understood to have been the one responsible for giving the breed its name.

H 23 cm x W 28 cm x D 28 cm
Black-figure wine mixing vessel.
Based on Los Angeles, JP Getty Museum 92.AE.88.

Side A and B: On the wide flat rim, a frieze depicting Canadian fishermen preparing their fishing lines. Three Newfoundland dogs make the task difficult for the fishermen by interfering with their lines. Some of the various species fished locally in Newfoundland and Labrador also make an appearance: North Atlantic lobster, Atlantic Deep-Sea Red crab, Atlantic salmon, sea scallop, limpet, whelk, Acadian redfish, and Atlantic herring.

On the inside of the neck, three Newfoundland dogs wade through water, each pulling a small boat. The boats each contain a different dog breed that represents some of the Newfoundland Dogs' ancestral bloodlines: Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, Mastiff, Saint John's Dog, Barbet, and Rough-Coat Water Dog.

As a wine mixing vessel, once filled with wine and water, the neck decoration leaves the viewer with the impression that the dogs are actually swimming in the wine.

Richmond and Gordon Eye-Cup (2019)

The eye-cup shows the Pekingese back-to-back with its cousin the Gray Wolf to defend themselves against prehistoric apex predators. As an ancient dog breed, the Pekingese is genetically one of the closest of all breeds to the wolf.

The vase nods to the bigger evolutionary pictures with references to the Cambrian Period of the Paleozoic Era. Approximately 540 million years ago, a short but intense burst of evolution resulted in the emergence of complex life forms. This event proved crucial to the evolution of most animal groups, as evidenced by the fossil record.

As an ancient breed, the Pekingese was reserved for members of the Chinese Imperial family and those living within the walls of the Forbidden City. Its introduction to the West only occurred as a result of the Second Opium War (1856-1860).

According to ancient Chinese legend, Pekingese were born when a lion fell in love with a marmoset and the gods (or, in some versions, the Buddha) reduced the lion's size. The result was a tiny dog, with a big heart and a courageous, strong character.

Today, the breed descends from dogs taken as spoils of war. The Duke and Duchess of Richmond and Gordon were gifted a breeding pair by their cousin Sir George Fitzroy.

H 11 cm x W 39 cm x D 31.5 cm
Black-figure kylix.
Interior: Inside the tondo, a Janus head depicting a wolf facing to left and Pekingese facing to right.
Exterior: A Pekingese and wolf fight atop a large, fossilised rock. Below, several examples of ancient predators that emerged from the Cambrian Explosion, including a Trilobite, Jaekelopterus, Anomalocraris, and Arthropleura (giant millipede). Under each handle are Crinoids, or sea lilies.

Charlie Epinetron
(2023)

The Salish Wool dog is now extinct but was a Spitz-type canine carefully bred over thousands of years by the Coast Salish peoples, a group of indigenous tribes living along the Pacific Northwest. For the breed to remain as pure as possible, locals kept these dogs in packs and separated from other canines on small islets reachable only by canoe.

The breed was favoured for its thick pelt that produced a high-quality yarn that was then used to weave ceremonial blankets and items of trade.

During the 19th century, the breed began to dwindle in numbers in parallel with the increasing number of settlers to the region.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the breed had completely disappeared and slowly, any reference to these dogs and their uses was known only through pictorial art and word-of-mouth.

From the Musqueam First Nations, one of very few remaining Coast Salish weavers in the early 20th century was Selisya Charlie. Her methods were passed down to her descendants who have since been instrumental in keeping their local tradition alive.

H 15 cm x W 21 cm x D 32 cm
Red-figure and sculpted white ground thigh guard.
Based on Athens, National Museum A1629.

Side A: A typical workday in the shearing shed where two young women shear two seemingly unimpressed Salish Wool dogs. The sheered fleece is then stored in bags. Spun wool hangs from hooks.
Side B: The dogs now shorn, are free to play. One appears intrigued by a ball of yarn, the other watches as a young woman spins wool using a loom and traditional Salish spindle.
The end of the object is decorated with the head of a seemingly happy brilliant white Spitz-type dog.

The epinetron was an ancient Greek tool used as a thigh guard when carding wool.

Charlie Epinetron, Side A
(2023)

Watson Calyx-Krater, Side A
(2016)

Watson Calyx-Krater, Side B
(2016)

Watson Calyx-Krater
(2016)

The origins of the Chihuahua are not completely understood. Evidence suggests that the breed descended from the Techichi, a now extinct not-as-tiny companion dog domesticated in Meso-America during the Toltec Empire (c.900-1150 CE).

Following the Toltec Empire's downfall and subsequent rise of the Aztecs, changing tastes are attributed to the introduction of a smaller and lighter canine. Like the Techichi, it was believed that the Chihuahua possessed supernatural powers, by guiding and protecting the deceased's soul in the afterlife. In order to do so, these pets were regularly sacrificed and buried with their owners.

By the 19th century, the Chihuahua began attracting the attention of Mexico's northern neighbours. The dog became a fashionable holiday souvenir for American tourists visiting the region.

In 1888, dog breeder and judge James Watson, purchased his first Chihuahua and later began breeding in earnest. It was only in 1904 that the breed was finally recognised by the American Kennel Association.

H 26 cm x W 25 cm x D 25 cm
Red-figure mixing bowl.
Based on Athens, Museums of Cycladic Art КП0026.

Side A: A leisure scene. Two young boys deep in conversation and completely oblivious to several Chihuahuas that desperately seek their attention. One lucky Chihuahua has found the perfect spot for a snuggle.

Side B: Three Chihuahuas take on a Gila Monster. Small in size does not mean small in self-perception. Rightly or wrongly, the Chihuahua does not let its size get in the way.

About Attic Black

Attic Black | Thetis Authentic was established in 2012 to research, revive and experiment with the ancient craft of making ceramics. The vases in this show were made in their studio in Athens, where Ksiazkiewicz worked closely with Dr Eleni Aloupi and her team to create objects which captures the visual conventions of ancient Greek ceramics.

About Cultured Canines

Cultured Canines is the culmination of nine-year collaboration between artist **Allison Ksiazkiewicz** and **Attic Black | Thetis Authentic**, a studio in Athens reviving the craft and technology of ancient Greek ceramics.

Displayed against the backdrop of the **Royal Kennel Club Art Gallery**'s collection, this is an exhibition which invites us to look more closely at different dog breeds and dog ownership, in perhaps unexpected ways.

Ksiazkiewicz explores the history and mythology of different dog breeds – via the style of ancient Greek pottery. The series of ceramic works combines new designs with ancient decorative and manufacturing techniques as reconstructed from ancient Mediterranean cultures. The surprising appearance of our four-legged friends on an ancient-looking vase begs for closer inspection: each object tells a story not about the gods and heroes of Greek myth but about a different dog breed.

30 Sept 2026 - 31 Mar 2027

Royal Kennel Club Art Gallery, London
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About the Artist

Allison Ksiazkiewicz is a Cambridge-based artist interested in the ways we tell stories about animals, nature and ourselves. The making of cultural identities is a recurrent theme in her work.