**How the Greek Vase Shaped Many Styles and Western Design**

By ROBERTA SMITH

If you are among the people who will see an exhibition just because the title makes you laugh out loud, “Vasemania” at the Bard Graduate Center to your itinerary. If you are uninterested in the show’s allusions to the Greek vase, you may be a certifiable vasemaniac. For everyone else, this thoughtful, elegantly installed show offers an airy, inspiring glimpse of artistic expression, assimilation and conversation.

Museums are tending more and more to mount single-subject theme shows (the dog in art, the hand in photography, the whatever in Picassoid). I’ve always thought “Vasemania” defies the formula. Including plenty of actual vases, of course, as well as prints, illustrated books, silver, painted panels, metalwork, furniture and textiles, it traces the influence of the Greek vase on objects and decorative motifs through late 18th-century European culture and into the Western unconscious.

It also provides an inspiring example of mutually beneficial cooperation between museums. Under the supervision of Stefanie Walker, special exhibitions curator at the Bard Center, and William Rieder, a curator at the Met, students at the Bard Graduate Center selected the objects in the show (and wrote the catalog essays). Not all the selections are regularly on view at the Met, so the show may be a beneficial discovery of the Met’s holdings and its collecting history. (The decorative-arts side of this history is recognizable in the catalog by Heather Jane McCormick, a doctoral candidate at Bard.) Meanwhile the students...

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The Portland Vase, left, from Etruria, a Wedgwood pottery works, and a Sèvres vase with medallions of Louis XVI (visible) and Marie Antoinette.