

EXHIBITION AT HARVARD'S ARTHUR M. SACKLER MUSEUM REVEALS THE ORIGINAL COLORS OF ANCIENT SCULPTURE

“Gods in Color: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity” makes its premiere in the United States at Harvard



“Peplos” Kore. Marble original: Greek, c. 530 BC, Akropolis Museum, Athens. Color reconstructions by Vinzenz Brinkmann and Ulrike Koch-Brinkmann. Photo courtesy Stiftung Archäologie.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (August 24, 2007)—The Harvard University Art Museums present *Gods in Color: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity* at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum from **September 22, 2007 through January 20, 2008**. This traveling exhibition of over 20 full-size color reconstructions of important Greek and Roman works challenges the popular notion of classical white marble sculpture, illustrating that ancient sculpture was far more colorful, complex, and exuberant than is often thought. The reconstructions will be displayed in the Sackler’s galleries of ancient art alongside some 35 original statues and reliefs—primarily from the Art Museums’ own collections of Greek, Roman, Near Eastern, and Egyptian art. *Gods in Color* breaks new ground as it constitutes the first large-scale effort to recreate the original appearance of ancient sculpture. The exhibition at the Sackler Museum is the first

U.S. venue of the traveling exhibition, which was previously shown in Amsterdam, Athens, Basel, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Istanbul, Munich, and Rome.

A closer look at the surfaces of many ancient statues and reliefs reveals traces of their painted decoration, suggesting that plain white marble sculpture was not so much an ancient reality as an invention of the Renaissance and neoclassical periods. Evidence of painted and gilt stone sculpture, of colorful bronze statuary, and of statues of gold and ivory puts Greek and Roman art in harmony with artistic practices in Egypt and the Near East, and with those of the subsequent

medieval period. The color reconstructions presented in *Gods in Color* are based on extensive visual and scientific analysis of original sculptures. Two short films that document the process of their creation and a display of pigments used in antiquity—as well as for the modern reconstructions—will also be shown in the galleries.

Susanne Ebbinghaus, George M. A. Hanfmann Curator of Ancient Art, and Amy Brauer, Diane Heath Beever Associate Curator of Ancient Art, are the curators for *Gods in Color* at Harvard. “White marble statues are so much a part of the traditional view of classical art that one can only begin to imagine the effect of color when confronted with these full-scale, three-dimensional reconstructions,” said Ebbinghaus. “Of course, the color reconstructions are only approximations, but I hope that they will be as eye-opening to others as they have been to me—and that they will show how much has yet to be discovered in ancient art.” Brauer adds, “The faint traces of pigment that bear witness to the originally brightly painted surfaces of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture have long been known to specialists, but have proved too faint to bring about a shift in perception. With the ongoing development of scientific methods of analysis, these sculptures are just beginning to be seen in their true colors.”

The exhibition was organized by the Stiftung Archäologie and the Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich, Germany. It represents more than two decades of research on the polychromy of ancient sculpture, undertaken by the leading authority, Dr. Vinzenz Brinkmann (formerly Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich, now Liebieghaus, Frankfurt), in museums around the world and in collaboration with a number of scholars from different countries.

Research for *Gods in Color* included technical examination of the scarce traces of paint that remain on a number of ancient works of sculpture. Raking light—extreme side light—can reveal incised details as well as subtle patterns caused by the uneven weathering of different paints on the stone surface. Similarly, ultraviolet light brings out slight surface differences—often all that has survived of the painted decoration. Analysis of pigment remains by various techniques, including polarized light microscopy, X-ray fluorescence and defraction analysis, and infrared spectroscopy, provides information on the materials and colors used. The reconstructions were

painted with authentic pigments by the archaeologist Dr. Ulrike Koch-Brinkmann, with the help of Sylvia Kellner.

“The research and documentation connected with this exhibition present an opportunity to look at our own sculpture collections in a new light, and especially reflect on our role as a teaching and research institution,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “We are grateful to the Stiftung Archäologie and the Glyptothek for the opportunity to display these reconstructions of classical sculpture and create public awareness of an exciting direction in the study of ancient art.”

Featured Works

In the galleries of the Sackler Museum, the color reconstructions are juxtaposed with original statues and reliefs of the same time periods in their current, colorless state of preservation. One gallery is dedicated to Greek sculpture of the archaic and classical periods, another to sculpture of the Hellenistic period and the time of the Roman Empire. The third gallery presents examples of prehistoric sculpture from the Greek Cycladic islands, and a sampling of colored sculpture from Egypt and the Near East.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a partial reconstruction of the west pediment of the Temple of Aphaia—a local goddess—on the Greek island of Aegina, carved in the years 490-480 BC. The color reconstructions of the pediment include representations of the goddess Athena, of two archers in different costumes, and of two warrior’s shields. Like the pediment, a frieze from the Treasury of the Siphnians at Delphi shows scenes from the Trojan War. These scenes were identified only when traces of the painted name inscriptions were discovered. Other painted copies of Greek sculptural works include three stelai, or grave markers, displayed alongside the original marble *Grave Stele of Melisto* (c. 340 BC) from the Art Museums’ collection. Based on a marble statue of c. 530 BC from the Athenian Akropolis, the two reconstructions of the “Peplos” Kore offer interpretations of what was once thought to represent a young woman or girl. Close study of the painted decoration has revealed that she is in fact wearing the dress of a goddess, probably Artemis.

Brightly colored reconstructions of part of the so-called Alexander Sarcophagus of c. 320 BC can be seen next to the Art Museums' original Amazon Sarcophagus of the late 2nd-early 3rd centuries AD, while a rosy-cheeked head of the Roman emperor Caligula (37-41 AD) allows visitors to imagine what Harvard's *Statue of the Emperor Trajan* (c. 120 AD) may originally have looked like. The exhibition also includes a copy of a Roman bronze head complete with gilding and inlays.

Credits

This exhibition was organized by the Stiftung Archäologie and the Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich. It was conceived by Vinzenz Brinkmann, Liebieghaus, Frankfurt, and Raimund Wünsche, Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich; and curated at the Harvard University Art Museums by Susanne Ebbinghaus, George M. A. Hanfmann Curator of Ancient Art, and Amy Brauer, Diane Heath Beever Associate Curator of Ancient Art. Funding for the exhibition and its publications was provided by Christopher and Jean Angell, Walter and Ursula Cliff, Mark B. Fuller, the German Consulate General Boston, the German Foreign Office, Evangelos D. Karvounis, James and Sonia Kay, Roy Lennox and Joan Weberman, Marian Marill, Markus Michalke, Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani, Samuel Plimpton, Laura and Lorenz Reibling, the Ida and William Rosenthal Foundation, and two anonymous donors.

Publications

A six-page gallery guide, featuring ten color reproductions, an essay by curator Susanne Ebbinghaus, and a checklist of the reconstructions presented at the Art Museums, accompanies the exhibition. A family activity guide, created especially for families and children to use together in the exhibition will also be available. The guide is filled with activities, games, pictures to color, and searches, is completely self-guiding, and is free to everyone who visits the exhibition. A fully-illustrated catalogue, *Gods in Color: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity*, edited by Vinzenz Brinkmann and Raimund Wünsche, published by the Stiftung Archäologie and the Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich, will be available for purchase in the gift shop or by calling 617-496-5698.

Press Preview

A press preview will be held in conjunction with *Gods in Color* on September 21, at 10:00 a.m. The program begins in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum's lobby at 10:00 a.m. with a light breakfast. Opening remarks and a tour with the curators will be conducted at 10:30 a.m.

Exhibition Programming

Gallery Talks

Arthur M. Sackler Museum
485 Broadway, Cambridge, MA
Free with the price of admission

Sunday, September 30, 2:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 18, 2:00 p.m.

Andreya Mihalow, PhD candidate, Department of the Classics

Saturday, October 20, 11:30 a.m.

Emily Gangemi, PhD candidate, Department of the Classics

Three additional gallery talks will explore the role of color in artworks of different times and regions:

Thursday, October 18, 2:00 p.m.

Susanne Ebbinghaus, George M. A. Hanfmann Curator of Ancient Art, discusses the use of color in ancient sculptures, followed by an examination of colored Renaissance prints in the Fogg Art Museums' Mongan Center with Susan Dackerman, Carl A. Weyerhauser Curator of Prints.

Thursday, November 8, 12:15 p.m.

Susanne Ebbinghaus speaks about works from ancient times, followed by a look at medieval sculpture in the Fogg Art Museums' Calderwood Courtyard with Stephan Wolohojian, curator of painting, sculpture, and decorative arts.

Thursday, December 13, 2:00 p.m.

Susanne Ebbinghaus discusses the use of color on ancient sculptures, followed by a look at polychrome Asian sculpture in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum with Anne Rose Kitagawa, assistant curator of Japanese art.

M. Victor Leventritt Symposium

December 7–8, 2007
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, lecture hall
485 Broadway, Cambridge, MA
Free admission

Information TBA at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu/events

Family Program

Color Me Classical: Creating New Looks for Ancient Sculpture!

Sunday, October 14 and Saturday, October 27

Arthur M. Sackler Museum lobby

485 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

1:30–3:00 p.m.

Free, but registration is required. Limited to 12 participants. The same workshop will be repeated on each date. To register, please call 617-496-8576.

How would you design armor for a Greek warrior? What color would you make Emperor Trajan's hair? How would you decorate the goddess Athena's dress? Over 2,000 years ago, ancient sculptures weren't white like we see them today but were brilliantly painted with bright and beautiful colors. This workshop for children ages 7 to 12 celebrates our spectacular exhibition *Gods in Color: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity*. Children will visit the exhibition, take part in gallery games and searches, and paint sculpture templates with their own colors, designs, and patterns. Materials will be provided.

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, comprising the Fogg Art Museum, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Straus Center for Conservation, Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, HUAM Archives, and the U.S. headquarters for the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museum are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Adjacent to them is the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, located at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk through Harvard Yard from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours: **Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.**; closed on national holidays.

General admission is \$9; \$7 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. Paid admission includes entrance to all three Art Museums, including study rooms, public tours, and gallery talks.

Admission is free for Harvard University ID holders, Members of the Art Museums, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, and visitors under 18 years of age. Admission is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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For more information about this exhibition or the Harvard University Art Museums, please contact:

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