

Harvard Art Museums

Fogg Museum
Busch-Reisinger Museum
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

Press Release

Harvard Art Museums Receive Milestone Gift from the National Endowment for the Humanities

Grant supports 2018 exhibition “Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings”



Wine Ewer in the Form of a Standing Duck, Chinese, Warring States period, probably 5th century BCE. Bronze. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Anonymous gift, [1944.57.4](#).

Cambridge, MA
August 12, 2016

The Harvard Art Museums have been awarded a \$325,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), in support of the Fall 2018 special exhibition, *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings*.

“At the Harvard Art Museums, we are committed to exploring how the arts can facilitate learning across disciplines. This exhibition, with generous support from the NEH, enables us to broaden the impact of our teaching and scholarship, offering provocative ideas to inspire multidisciplinary debate. Students and visitors of all ages will be invited to make valuable connections between art and humanities

concepts,” said Martha Tedeschi, the recently appointed Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums.

This exhibition, which utilizes works of art as the springboard for discussions about social practices spanning millennia and cultures, will bring together for the first time a selection of more than 60 elaborate vessels of animal shape as well as ancient and modern representations of feasts in the form of paintings and reliefs from around the world. The exhibition and related programming will re-create the rich world of ideas that found expression at ancient feasts, underscoring the importance of feasting as a social activity, as a venue of cross-cultural exchange, and as a driving force of artistic creativity. With a focus on animal imagery, the exhibition will present a wide range of ancient attitudes toward animals and will enhance visitors’ understanding of past and present human/animal relations. The exhibition will also promote “object literacy” by drawing attention to the three-dimensional nature of tangible things and the information that may be imbedded in their material, shape, and decoration.

“All the vessels in the exhibition are compelling animal studies, and many are remarkable feats of craftsmanship,” said exhibition curator Susanne Ebbinghaus, the George M.A. Hanfmann Curator of Ancient Art and Head of the Division of Asian and Mediterranean Art at the Harvard Art Museums. “Each cup or pitcher once served a guest at a banquet or party or held an offering for a deity or ancestor. In a way, they are evidence of the social networks of the past.” She continued: “Because of its wide geographic and chronological range, *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World* will powerfully demonstrate how cross-cultural dialogue has enriched many of the world’s societies over millennia.”

In addition to supporting the presentation of the exhibition, the grant will help cover the expense of bringing several archaeological objects from international museum collections to the United States for the first time. It will also make it possible to present a robust range of public programs, including in the museums’ Materials Lab and Art Study Center as well as with Harvard’s Ceramics Program, and to develop digital content related to the exhibition.

The grant also benefits an existing partnership between Cambridge Public Schools, Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), and the Harvard Art Museums, which work together to tie the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School’s studio arts program and classes in history and literature to the Harvard Art Museums’ collections, while training the next generation of teachers and museum educators to teach with museum collections. Approximately 200 high school students benefit annually from the program, which is now two years old.

“Changing perceptions of museums and their role in society, combined with contemporary ideas about cognition and human development, make today’s museums a fascinating context in which to investigate and encourage active and interdisciplinary learning. Indeed, museums are vibrant and rich environments for exploring specific subject matter, such as the big themes and ideas in the forthcoming exhibition *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World*, through the arts and humanities,” said Steve Seidel, the Patricia Bauman and John Landrum Bryant Senior Lecturer in Arts in Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. “I am very excited by the fascinating content of the planned exhibition and am confident it will integrate well with our own program themes regarding teaching in and through the arts.”

The Harvard Art Museums are among nearly 300 recipients of the latest round of [NEH grants announced on August 9](#), totaling \$79 million for humanities projects and programs across the United States. The NEH is celebrating its 50th anniversary year.

“NEH provides support for projects across America that preserve our heritage, promote scholarly discoveries, and make the best of America’s humanities ideas available to all Americans,” said NEH Chairman William D. Adams. “We are proud to announce this latest group of grantees who, through their projects and research, will bring valuable lessons of history and culture to Americans.”

Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings will be on view at the Harvard Art Museums from September 7, 2018 through January 6, 2019, before traveling to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

About the National Endowment for the Humanities

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at neh.gov.

About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums, among the world’s leading art institutions, comprise three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and four research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes Western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North

American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on Asian, ancient, and Islamic and later Indian art. Together, the collections include approximately 250,000 objects in all media. The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and the public. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in the United States.

The Harvard Art Museums' renovation and expansion, completed in 2014, builds on the legacies of the three museums and unites their remarkable collections under one roof for the first time. Renzo Piano Building Workshop's responsive design preserved the Fogg Museum's landmark 1927 facility, while transforming the space to accommodate 21st-century needs. Following a six-year building project, the museums now feature 40 percent more gallery space, an expanded Art Study Center, conservation labs, and classrooms, and a striking new glass roof that bridges the facility's historic and contemporary architecture. The new Harvard Art Museums' building is more functional, accessible, spacious, and above all, more transparent. The three constituent museums retain their distinct identities in this new facility, yet their close proximity provides exciting opportunities to experience works of art in a broader context. harvardartmuseums.org

Exhibitions, Events, and News

Our Special Exhibitions Gallery presents important new research on artists and artistic practice, and our University Galleries are programmed in consultation with Harvard faculty to support coursework. Visit the [Exhibitions](#) page for information on current and upcoming installations. Visit the museums' [Calendar](#) to learn more about lectures, workshops, films, performances, special events, and other programs that are held throughout the year. Check out *Index*, our [multimedia magazine](#), to keep up with what's happening at the Harvard Art Museums.

Members and Fellows

With access to exclusive perks and programs, Harvard Art Museums [members](#) enjoy special moments to celebrate and explore the museums' world-class collections and special exhibitions. The [Fellows](#) are a dynamic group of art enthusiasts and supporters who enjoy the most exclusive opportunities that the museums have to offer.

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

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