

# Harvard Art Museums

Fogg Museum  
Busch-Reisinger Museum  
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

## Press Release

### Harvard Art Museums Present Fall 2018 Exhibition *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings*

*Exhibition is the first to unite such a stunning and varied collection of elaborate animal-shaped vessels spanning continents and millennia*



Rhyton with the forepart of a griffin, Achaemenid, 5th–4th century BCE. Silver, partially gilded. The British Museum, London, Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, 1897, 1231.178 (124081). Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

Cambridge, MA  
August 20, 2018 (updated August 30, 2018)

This September, the Harvard Art Museums present *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings*; the exhibition brings together 75 objects—elaborate drinking and pouring vessels as well as related contextual works—from the collections of the Harvard Art Museums and nearly two dozen international lenders. Offering a glimpse into the symbolism and communal practices that found expression at ancient feasts across the ancient Near East and Mediterranean, the exhibition and its accompanying print publication, online digital feature, and rich

programming explore the importance of feasting as a social and ritual activity, as a showplace for the effects of cross-cultural exchange, and as a driving force behind artistic creativity.

While the songs, speeches, and prayers that enlivened ancient feasts are now largely lost to us, many drinking and serving vessels—a surprising number of them in the shape of animals—have survived. Taking animal-shaped vessels as performative props in the multifaceted world of feasting, the exhibition not only introduces the social and ceremonial functions of these ritual occasions, but also highlights the essential and universal role played by food and drink—and by the highly imaginative containers used to consume them.

*Animal-Shaped Vessels* is on display in the Harvard Art Museums' Special Exhibitions Gallery from September 7, 2018 through January 6, 2019; it is curated by Susanne Ebbinghaus, the George M.A. Hanfmann Curator of Ancient Art and head of the Division of Asian and Mediterranean Art. The exhibition will be shown exclusively at the Harvard Art Museums.

The accompanying catalogue, edited by Ebbinghaus, is the first comprehensive and cross-disciplinary look at these unique vessels and includes contributions by an international group of scholars. A beautifully designed hardcover volume, the catalogue is published by the Harvard Art Museums and distributed by Yale University Press. Details available at <http://bit.ly/2Ltu7MY>.

An online digital feature hosted on the museums' website at [harvardartmuseums.org/tools](http://harvardartmuseums.org/tools) will provide visitors with expanded multimedia content on the history of feasting and drinking practices in the ancient world, as well as further details on the material history of these one-of-a-kind vessels.

A sketchbook produced in conjunction with the exhibition will be available for free at the museums' admissions desk for all families and young visitors. It contains prompts for exploring the show, suggestions for close looking, and sketching exercises to encourage visitors' creativity in designing animal-shaped vessels of their own.

Major backing for the *Animal-Shaped Vessels* exhibition came in the form of a \$325,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), which supports the presentation of the exhibition, the expense of bringing the objects from international lenders, a robust range of public programs (lectures, workshops, and tours), and the production of the digital feature. Read more about the grant here: <http://bit.ly/2AXI71I>. In recognition of the generous grant from the NEH, the museums are offering free admission to all visitors on Wednesday afternoons, 1–5pm, and on the first Saturday of each month, 10am–5pm, throughout the run of the show.

"It is fitting that these varied and well-traveled vessels are intersecting for exhibition at the Harvard Art Museums, a crossroads for works of art from around the globe, from ancient to modern times, all under one roof," said Martha Tedeschi, the Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums. "By illuminating the history and making of these remarkably global objects, we invite our guests to raise a glass to what unites us across culture and time."

Ebbinghaus added: "I am excited about this unique opportunity to unite such a large selection of animal-shaped vessels from more than 20 museums in both the United States and abroad." The exhibition grew out of Ebbinghaus's longtime research interests. "Most of these vessels are old friends to me, but I have never seen them together," she said. "As a group, they allow us to discern similarities and differences in artistic forms, and as witnesses to ancient feasts in many different cultures, from Greece to China, they give us a glimpse into a variety of feasting traditions."

### **The Installation**

The exhibition includes vessels in the shape of standing or reclining animals, animal-headed cups and beakers, drinking horns, and animated pitchers. Various creatures, real and imagined, give these

drinking and pouring vessels their lifelike forms: powerful bulls and rams, majestic lions and mythical griffins, wild boars and braying donkeys, graceful birds and playful monkeys, among others. Assembling such a range of vessels for the first time, the exhibition presents a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary examination of how they spanned geography and time, across three continents and over three millennia. The international menagerie of drinking and pouring vessels vividly illustrates not just how shapes and artistic forms crossed borders and epochs, but how ideas as well were exchanged among cultures—tangible evidence of close contact and the intermingling of traditions.

Beyond their role in ritual and ceremonial drinking, animal-shaped vessels functioned variously as diplomatic gifts and tribute, the spoils of war, offerings to deities and the dead, and exotic objects of trade; they also were prized and emulated as symbols of status and prestige. Each object in the exhibition is a compelling animal study in itself, with a wealth of information embedded in its material, shape, and decoration. Many were made of rare or innovative materials—including gold, silver, bronze, glass, faience, and horn—and at the hands of skilled artists. They conveyed important information about their liquid contents and the nature of a gathering, but were also markers of social stature, identity, etiquette, and shared values.

Most of the objects in the exhibition belong to a tradition of animal-shaped drinking and pouring vessels that persisted in the Near East and the Mediterranean from the Bronze Age in the third and second millennia BCE to the advent of Islam in the seventh century; this tradition eventually extended all the way to China, via the Silk Road. Select animal-shaped vessels from other cultures and periods—including East Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America—provide further points of comparison, including the most recent work in the exhibition, a drinking horn sent to U.S. President John F. Kennedy from Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev on the eve of the Cuban Missile Crisis in September 1962. The horn is on loan from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. In addition to the animal-shaped vessels, the installation also features several related objects (pottery, paintings, reliefs, bronzes, and a mosaic) with ancient and modern representations of feasts, including Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema's painting *The Women of Amphissa* (1887), on loan from the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. A ram head mug shown in the painting is based on a fifth-century BCE vessel in the collection of the British Museum, which also is included in the exhibition. The two works are being shown together for the first time.

More than 20 domestic and international institutions have generously lent objects to the exhibition, including the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford University), the British Museum (London), the Louvre (Paris), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), and the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston).

Learn more and view a slideshow of objects at [harvardartmuseums.org/animalshapedvessels](http://harvardartmuseums.org/animalshapedvessels). The museums invite visitors to use #partyanimals and #HarvardArtMuseums to tag their posts on social platforms.

### **Related Programming**

Select programs accompanying *Animal-Shaped Vessels*, including lectures, a symposium, hands-on workshops, and tours, are listed below. For details on these and other programs, visit [harvardartmuseums.org/calendar](http://harvardartmuseums.org/calendar).

Thursday, September 6, 2018

#### **Opening Celebration—*Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings***

The opening celebration features a lecture in the museums' Menschel Hall at 6pm by University of Chicago professor Michael Dietler, whose research has focused on alcohol and feasting. A reception follows the lecture, and all museum galleries are open 5–9pm. The opening celebration is free and open to the public, but tickets to the lecture are required. Tickets are available beginning at noon on Wednesday, August 29, at the Harvard Box Office, located in

Farkas Hall, 10-12 Holyoke Street, Cambridge. Tickets may also be reserved online or by phone at 617-496-2222 for a small processing fee.

More info: [harvardartmuseums.org/visit/calendar/opening-celebration-animal-shaped-vessels-from-the-ancient-world-feasting-with-gods-heroes-and-kings](http://harvardartmuseums.org/visit/calendar/opening-celebration-animal-shaped-vessels-from-the-ancient-world-feasting-with-gods-heroes-and-kings)

Tuesday, September 18 and 25, 2018, 1–4pm (Session 1, parts 1 and 2)

Saturday, September 22 and 29, 2018, 10am–1pm (Session 2, parts 1 and 2)

**Materials Lab Workshops: Animal-Shaped Vessels**

The museums' Materials Lab hosts Kathy King from the Ceramics Studio at Harvard; King will guide visitors in examining, forming, and decorating ceramic vessels in the style of ancient Greek animal head mugs. \$30 materials fee. Registration is required and space is limited. Minimum age of 14. Please email [am\\_register@harvard.edu](mailto:am_register@harvard.edu), stop by the museums' admissions desk, or call 617-495-1440 to register.

Saturday, September 22, 2018, 10am–5pm

**Free Admission for Museum Day Live!**

The Harvard Art Museums are participating in this annual event hosted by *Smithsonian* magazine, with an offer of free admission to visitors all day. A perfect time to check out the *Animal-Shaped Vessels* exhibition! Reserve your free ticket on the *Smithsonian* magazine website and present it at the admissions desk.

More info: [smithsonianmag.com/museumday/](http://smithsonianmag.com/museumday/)

Tuesday, October 2, 2018, 6–7:15pm

**Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Contexts and Meanings**

Lecture in the museums' Menschel Hall with Kimberley C. Patton, Professor of the Comparative and Historical Study of Religion at Harvard University, and Robert B. Koehl, Chair of the Department of Classical and Oriental Studies at Hunter College, CUNY.

Saturday, October 13, 2018, 4–7pm

**Raise a Glass—A Contemporary Response to Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World**

During the opening reception for *Raise a Glass—A Contemporary Response to Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World*, an exhibition organized by the Harvard Ceramics Program and inspired by our special exhibition, the public will have the opportunity to try their hand at molding their own terracotta clay animal-headed drinking vessels with artists from the Ceramics Program. Free admission. This offsite event is hosted at the Harvard Ceramics Program, 224 Western Avenue, Allston, MA.

Friday, November 2, 2018, 2–3:45pm

**Offsite Materials Lab Workshop: Hands-on Silverworking Demonstration**

This workshop will be hosted offsite at the Harvard Ceramics Program, 224 Western Avenue, Allston, MA. \$15 materials fee. Registration is required and space is limited. Minimum age of 14. Please email [am\\_register@harvard.edu](mailto:am_register@harvard.edu), stop by the museums' admissions desk, or call 617-495-1440 to register.

Saturday, November 3, 2018, 10am–4pm

**Between Art and Asset: Silver Vessels from Antiquity to Today**

This daylong symposium will bring together art historians, a conservator, a numismatist, and a silversmith to explore the function, symbolism, and making of silver vessels. Held in the museums' Menschel Hall.

### Free Admission Days

In recognition of the generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in support of the *Animal-Shaped Vessels* exhibition, the museums will be free to all visitors every Wednesday afternoon, 1–5pm, and on the first Saturday of each month, 10am–5pm, throughout the run of the show (September 7, 2018–January 6, 2019).

Wednesdays, 1–5pm:

- September 12, 19, 26
- October 3, 10, 17, 24, 31
- November 7, 14, 21, 28
- December 5, 12, 19, 26
- January 2, 2019

Saturdays, 10am–5pm:

- October 6
- November 3
- December 1
- January 5

### Exhibition Tours

Exhibition tours complement free admission days and will be offered on select Wednesdays at 3:30pm and at 10:30am on the Saturdays listed above. Wednesday tours will conclude with a visit to the museums' Art Study Center for a close-up encounter with objects related to the *Animal-Shaped Vessels* exhibition.

### Press Preview

A preview of *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World* will be held for members of the press on Tuesday, September 4, 2018, at 3:00pm. **RSVP required** by Thursday, August 30, to [jennifer\\_aubin@harvard.edu](mailto:jennifer_aubin@harvard.edu) or 617-496-5331. Check-in inside the museums' Prescott Street entrance is from 3 to 3:30pm; the gallery tour with curator Susanne Ebbinghaus begins at 3:30pm. Parking may be available, by permit, at the nearby Broadway Garage, 7 Felton Street. To reserve a permit, please indicate the need for parking in your email.

### Credits

Crucial support for the *Animal-Shaped Vessels* project has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the Human Endeavor. In addition, the Harvard Art Museums are deeply grateful to the anonymous donor of a gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden and to Malcolm H. Wiener (Harvard A.B. '57, J.D. '63) and Michael and Helen Lehmann for enabling us to mount this exhibition and to pursue the related research. This work was also made possible in part by the following endowed funds: the David M. Robinson Fund; the Andrew W. Mellon Publication Funds, including the Henry P. McIlhenny Fund; and the M. Victor Leventritt Fund, which brings outstanding scholars of the history and theory of art to the Harvard and Greater Boston communities through the generosity of the wife, children, and friends of the late M. Victor Leventritt, Harvard Class of 1935.

Lenders to the exhibition include Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford; The British Museum, London; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts; Cleveland Museum of Art; Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Musée du Louvre, Paris; Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples; Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Orvieto; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Institute of

Archaeology with Museum, Sofia; Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University; Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Walters Art Museum, Baltimore; Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts.

### **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](http://neh.gov).



Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this project do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

### **About the Harvard Art Museums**

The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, and are comprised of 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 art, Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern art, 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 have a rich tradition of considering the history of objects as an integral part of the teaching and study of art history, focusing on conservation and preservation concerns as well as technical studies.

The Harvard Art Museums' 2014 renovation and expansion carried on the legacies of the three museums and united their remarkable collections under one roof for the first time. Renzo Piano Building Workshop preserved the Fogg Museum's landmark 1927 facility, while transforming the space to accommodate 21st-century needs. The museums now feature 40 percent more gallery space, an expanded Art Study Center, conservation labs, and classrooms, and a striking glass roof that bridges the facility's historic and contemporary architecture. The three constituent museums retain their distinct identities in the facility, yet their close proximity provides exciting opportunities to experience works of art in a broader context. [harvardartmuseums.org](http://harvardartmuseums.org)

### **Hours and Admission**

Daily, 10am–5pm. Closed major holidays. Admission: \$15 adults, \$13 seniors (65+), \$10 non-Harvard students (18+). Free for members; youth under 18; Cambridge residents (proof of residency required); and Harvard students, faculty, and staff (plus one guest). On Saturdays, from 10am–noon, Massachusetts residents receive free admission (proof of residency required). For further information about visiting, see [harvardartmuseums.org/plan-your-visit](http://harvardartmuseums.org/plan-your-visit).

### **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.

[harvardartmuseums.org/visit/exhibitions](http://harvardartmuseums.org/visit/exhibitions)

Lectures, workshops, films, performances, special events, and other programs are held throughout the year at the museums. [harvardartmuseums.org/calendar](http://harvardartmuseums.org/calendar)

Check out *Index*, our multimedia magazine, to keep up with what's happening at the Harvard Art Museums. [harvardartmuseums.org/index-magazine](http://harvardartmuseums.org/index-magazine)

### **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.

[harvardartmuseums.org/support/members](http://harvardartmuseums.org/support/members)

The Fellows are a dynamic group of art enthusiasts and supporters who enjoy the most exclusive opportunities that the museums have to offer. [harvardartmuseums.org/support/fellows](http://harvardartmuseums.org/support/fellows).

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

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