

# Ancient Roman Art

## An Instructor's Guide

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM



**Introduction** | The Worcester Art Museum has an impressive selection of art from the ancient world. The **Roman Art** gallery features stone portraits, cinerary urns, sculptures, and ancient bronze and glass.

*This gallery offers students the opportunity to explore, learn, and formulate ideas. As an instructor, this guide will aid to summarize important curriculum frameworks; this guide will also help to show how the art in the gallery can be used to enrich classroom learning. An instructor will benefit most when he or she*

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*can visit the Museum before bringing students, as this will allow the chance to look around and plan ahead.*

**Visit Preparation** | Prior to visiting, talk with students about the gallery or galleries you plan to see on your trip to the Worcester Art Museum. What do they already know about **ancient Rome**? Brainstorm a list of questions that you would like to find the answers to (some of the questions might evolve from reviewing this document). Connect these questions to different school subjects, **for example**: consider the scientific and historical differences between marble and bronze in Roman sculptures, or connect writing lessons to Roman notions of originality (that is, did the Romans “plagiarize” by copying Greek works?).

**Relevant MA Curriculum Frameworks** | *The standards are specifically aimed at students in grades 6-12; however, everyone is encouraged to make use of this guide.*

*Arts 6.3* | Students will interpret the meanings of artistic works by explaining how the subject matter and/or form reflect the events, ideas, religions, and customs of people living at a particular time in history.

*Arts 9.2* | Students will identify and describe examples of how the discovery of new inventions and technologies, or the availability of new materials brought about changes in the arts in various time periods and cultures.

*History 7.35-7.44* | *The Roots of Western Civilization: Ancient Rome, c. 500 BC/BCE – 500 AD/CE.* Especially *History 7.43* | Describe the contribution of Roman civilization to law, literature, poetry, architecture, engineering, and technology (e.g., roads, bridges, arenas, baths, aqueducts, central heating, plumbing, and sanitation).

*ELA Grades 6-12 College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening* | 2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

*ELA Traditional Literature Listings* | Students in grades 5-8 should be familiar with: Greek, Roman, or Norse myths; Students in grades 5-8 should be familiar with: A higher level re-reading of Greek mythology.

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**Guiding Questions** | (1) What do you think about this gallery? (2) From this gallery, what can you learn about the society where this art was created? (3) Pick one piece from the gallery: what do you think its purpose was? (4) Who made it and why do you think they made it?

**Deeper Questions** | (1) How did the ancient Romans use art as a tool for building a *cultural identity*? Put another way, how does art bring people together? (2) Why did the Romans often copy Greek artistic styles and sculptures? (3) What were some of the ways that citizens of ancient Rome could learn about their leaders?

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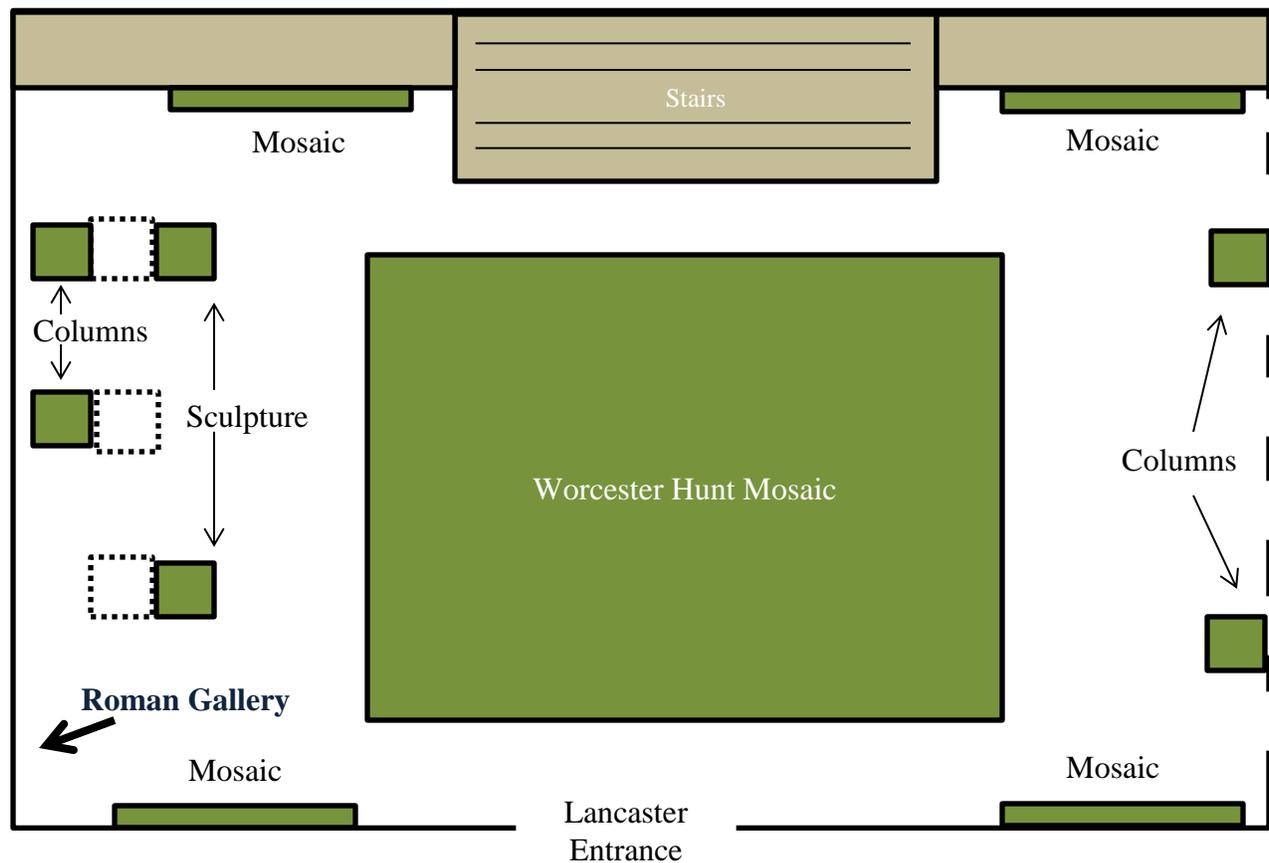
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**Gallery Layout** | *The Renaissance Court (located on the first floor immediately past the Lancaster Street entrance).* NOTE: Only Roman art is labeled below.



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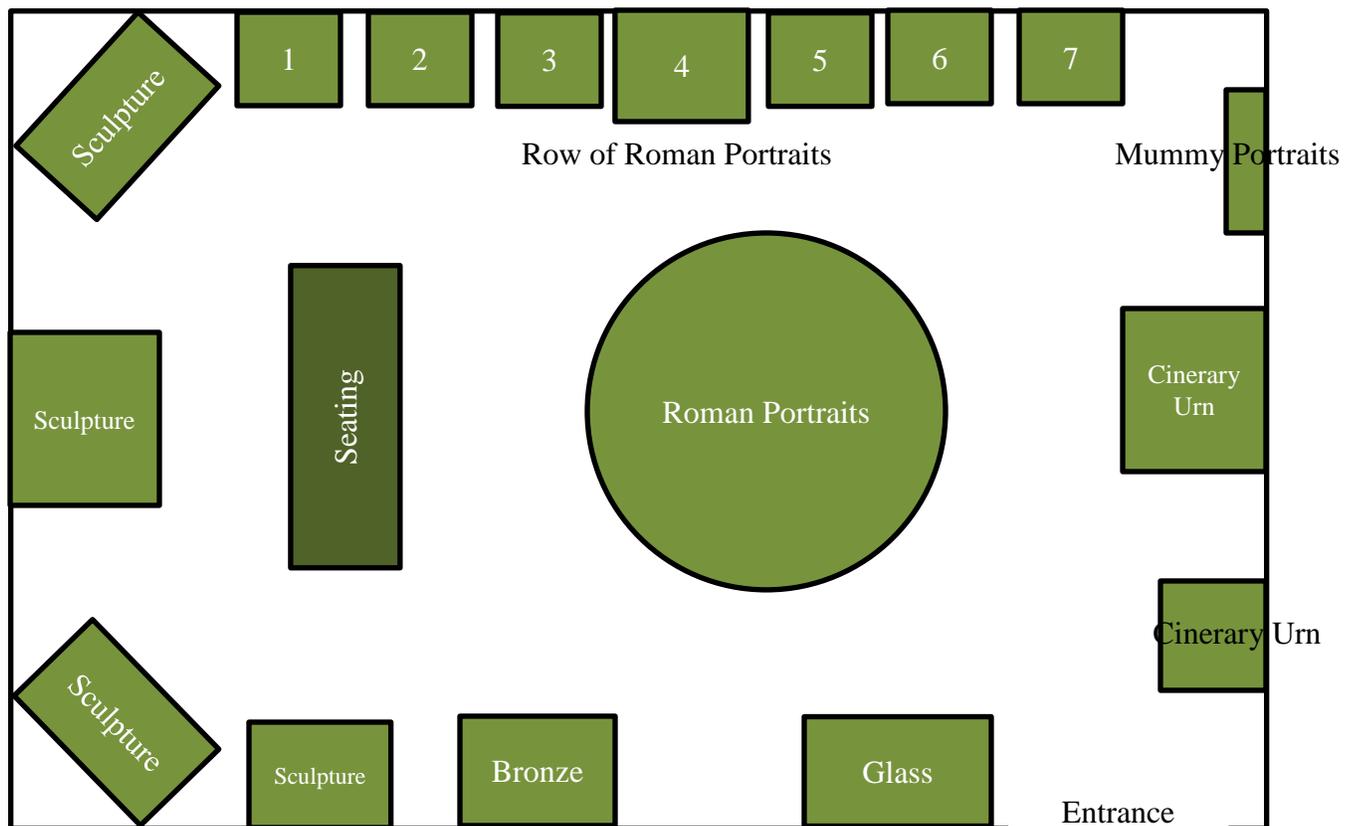
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**Gallery Layout, continued** | *The Roman Gallery (located on the first floor, just off the Renaissance Court).*



**Gallery Division** | The gallery is divided into **four** major categories: Roman innovation, death in ancient Rome, portraiture, and the Greek influence in Roman art. The Worcester Art Museum has created a gallery guide for all four of the major themes, which can be found at [www.worcesterart.org](http://www.worcesterart.org) (and two of them can be found in the gallery). They are titled “Innovations in Roman Technology,” “Memorials to the Roman Dead,” “Roman Portraits,” and “The Greek Ideal in Roman Art.”

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### Current Gallery Information | *On display.*

**Roman Art and Life (Main Display)** | The objects in this gallery were created during the Etruscan, Republican, and Imperial periods. In the second century A.D., when the Roman Empire reached its greatest extent, it covered a territory that today includes parts of more than 40 nations, from Britain to Egypt, and from Spain to Syria. Art was used to create a collective Roman identity for these diverse peoples and cultures living under Roman rule. / Throughout the Mediterranean world, Romans built towns, roads, aqueducts, theaters, and temples. Objects in this gallery come from Roman sites across the Empire: houses and villas, public baths, shrines, and tombs. / As the Romans were on the march of conquest, a dynamic exchange took place between Roman culture and the conquered peoples. For example, aspects of many local religions were assimilated by the Romans, and Greek art and artists inspired Roman art. / The enduring influence of Roman civilization can be felt in many aspects of the modern world, ranging from the foundations of Western law to the building material of concrete.

 **The Greek Ideal in Roman Art (Secondary Display)** | Ancient Romans greatly admired all aspects of Classical Greek culture. They collected, copied, and imitated Greek art. Triumphant generals returning to Rome after military victories in Greece brought back art as well as captured artists as war booty. Greek art became a status symbol for Romans—it expressed taste and learning. / Unlike Roman portraits which are realistic and individualized, the statues on this platform represent superhuman—athletes, deities, and figures from myth whose depictions are idealized and non-historical. Such sculptures are called Roman Ideal sculptures. They have generic features typical of an ideal of beauty first expressed by Greek masters like Praxiteles and Polykleitos, whose originals are now lost. Roman artists reproduced these lost prototypes in great numbers for the commercial markets. Collectors could buy Roman ideal sculpture in marble and bronze in a variety of sizes suitable for display either in their homes and gardens or for public buildings such as baths and theaters. / Typically, males are depicted as nude to emphasize their heroic god-like status. Females are usually shown draped, except for Aphrodite/Venus whose nudity expressed her sexuality. The monumental sculpture of Hygieia and the pair of Marsyas sculptures in this gallery also illustrate the Roman practice of copying Greek originals.

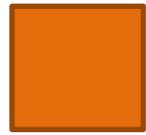
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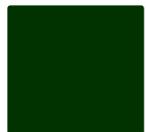
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**Roman Portraits (Secondary Display)** | Today we know our leaders through photography and television, but when the Romans lived, they knew their rulers through portraits in stone or bronze or on coins. A portrait type was produced for each emperor from which hundreds of copies were made and distributed throughout the empire. / Wealthy citizens and officials had portraits made of themselves which were set up in their homes and in public buildings like baths and theaters which they funded. Although portrait busts and statues were costly, most citizens could afford to have portraits carved on their grave stones. The more prosperous could have full-length memorial statues such as the Roman matron in this gallery. / The Romans created the first examples of realistic portraiture in Western art, including even unflattering features to emphasize individuality. This may have been due in part to the tradition of portraits of ancestors made in wax which were placed in Roman homes. Roman marble heads, especially the eyes and hair, were originally painted to increase the life-like appearance. / Some of the most famous Romans are represented in this gallery: rare portraits of the infamous Nero and Caligula, an adolescent image of the philosopher emperor Marcus Aurelius, and a bronze bust of his daughter. Other portraits remain anonymous, but we can tell when they were made by comparing hairstyle, facial type, and carving techniques with those that are identified.



**Innovation in Roman Technology (Secondary Display)** | *See separate PDF, "Innovation in Roman Technology," for this information.*



**Memorials to the Roman Dead (Secondary Display)** | *See separate PDF, "Memorials to the Roman Dead," for this information.*

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**Mummy Portraits** | Late-2<sup>nd</sup> Century C.E.,  
Encaustic on Wood



**Portrait of a Lady (a Daughter of Marcus Aurelius?)** | 160-180 C.E., Bronze

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**Portrait of the Emperor Nero** | 64-68 C.E., Marble



**Portrait of the Emperor Caligula** | 37-40 C.E., Marble

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**Hygieia** | From Bath F, Antioch, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century C.E., Marble



(left) **Marsyas** | 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Century C.E., Marble

(right) **Marsyas** | 14-68 C.E., Veined Red Marble

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**The Snake** | From Roman Egypt, 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> Century C.E., Green Granite



**Worcester Hunt Mosaic** | From Antioch, Early-6<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.

guide created by nicholas j. porcella

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