The Art Museum
The Art Museum
Ancient Rome

No civilization has had as enduring and powerful an impact on Western art as the Roman Empire. Many of the images created then were part of an art of power, perpetuating a social and political system that set the city of Rome and the imperial family at its centre. Later, from the intellectual rediscovery of Classical Rome in the Renaissance to the twentieth century, the forms and styles of culture, learning and, perhaps most importantly, authority. Roman art offered many of the models that defined ‘greatness’, both aesthetic and social, in society.

At its largest extent in the mid-second century AD, Rome’s power stretched from Britain to Syria; roughly a quarter of the world’s population lived under Roman rule, creating one of the most cosmopolitan and multicultural societies the world has ever known. Rome was governed by a republican senate when its military expansion began in the early centuries of the era. The first Roman art as a whole is in many ways an amalgamation: local patrons and artists chose the best visual means to express their messages from a range of options and styles. In many cases this meant the visual idioms of the Classical and Hellenistic Greek world. Indeed, it was Rome’s own adulteration of the arts of ancient Greece that cemented the important place held by Greek art in Western art history. As a result, perhaps what best defines Roman art, more than any other style, is the social uses to which it was put: nearly every sculpted, painted or crafted object was designed to communicate something about its subject’s or owner’s status and position.

It was the imperial system as a whole that allowed the arts to flourish. Peace and relatively uniform governance of the empire encouraged production and trade. This in turn encouraged the circulation of craftsmen, the trade in raw materials, and innovations in crafting techniques. At the same time, the economic boom created reserves of wealth that could be invested in art. For elite Romans across the empire, artworks were a worthwhile investment, for the need to use art for specific social and political purposes, that Roman art was born. Roman patrons were fascinated by the expansion of boundaries and the increasing demand. The forms and ideas of the Hellenistic Greek world were all readily adopted and adapted for new Roman patrons.

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Roman art that stretched from North Africa to Turkey. Although this image of moral decline was a popular literary theme, there was truth in the idea that the second and first centuries AD marked a turning point in Roman lifestyles and the luxury arts. As armies conquered more territory around the Mediterranean, pillaged wealth and craftsmen made their way to Rome, and the decoration of private houses grew more elaborate. It was during this period, with the influence of artists, wealth and the need to use art for specific social and political purposes, that Roman art was born. Roman patrons were fascinated by the expansion of boundaries and the increasing demand. The forms and ideas of the Hellenistic Greek world were all readily adopted and adapted for new Roman patrons.

1. Arbeiten und Elektra, 4th century BC, marble. In the Roman Forum. These statues represented, but they are frequently identified as the mythological siblings Orestes and Electra, children of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. The sculpture is a pastiche of earlier Greek statues and fourth-century Greek prototypes. The pose and style of the male figure were repeated in several similar statues groups by the same workshop, while the woman is sculpted in a pose adapted from Roman agricultural imagery, but wearing her belt low in a manner typical of the Hellenistic period. The three-quarter lifesize scale of the group was common for decorative garden statuary.

2. Hermes, from the Villa of the Mysteries (4th century BC, marble. This Hermes, signed by a second-century BC Greek artist, was probably a decorative garden statuary. It depicts rites ‘imported’ from Greece, part of the cult of Dionysos that was temporarily banned by the Roman Senate as a foreign threat to public order and morality. Greek masterpieces were brought to Rome, and new sculptures were created there to meet an increasing demand. The forms and ideas of the Hellenistic Greek world were all readily adopted and adapted for new Roman patrons.
For centuries, stories circulated about the megalomaniac First Emperor of Qin, while his huge tomb mound stood sentinel over an imperial cemetery outside Xi’an. Beneath the mound, the opulence of his subterranean palace – its central tomb chamber defended with rivers of mercury and primed crossbow – was well known in local mythology, even though those who had built the structure and then covered it with earth had been silenced by execution.

The emperor rests in peace to the present day. However, in 1974 some of his subjects began to come to light, not only to put his reign into perspective, but also to bring into focus the monstrous grandeur of this and other ancient burial concepts, and to reveal for the first time the early history of human sculpture in China. The terracotta warriors represent a great advance along the path towards realism and human expression in sculpture, which can be seen further in works displayed in Rooms 75 and 76. The lifesized terracotta figures found in four pits around the tomb mound still do their duty, protecting the emperor’s mortal remains, defending his spirit and deflecting the curiosity of archaeologists, digesting the implications of what they have found so far. The complete army probably numbered around 7,000 men, together with 150 bronze war chariots and over 100 cavalry horses.

The majority were broken, though not all beyond repair. Blame for the damage has traditionally been ascribed to rebel soldiers entering the pits in 206 BC, though the effects of an earthquake cannot be ruled out.

Officers stand some 20 centimetres (8 in) taller than conscripted men; soldiers stand and kneel on guard, armed with crossbows, swords, spears and halberds. They are clad in armour representing lacquered leather, with uniforms, headgear, shin guards and footwear appropriate to their rank and fighting role. The attention to detail even extends to the patterns on the soles of their boots. In this view, lines of armoured infantrymen stand to attention in the foreground; they have thick collars or scarves around their necks. All have their hair tied in a bun, and though the bright colours that once covered the figures have largely gone, differences in facial characteristics suggest that they may have represented actual individuals, not all of them young. Chariot teams comprised four horses, but in the interest of mobility the Qin army made growing use of archers mounted individually on horseback.

An entire terracotta administration and royal household were also intended to accompany the emperor into the next world. In adjoining pits, figures of civilian officials wearing quilted costumes stood ready, musicians were on hand to accompany dances that may have involved the bronze cranes and smaller birds found nearby, and a team of bare-chested wrestlers or weightlifters showed off their powerful physiques.

The terracottas showed, too, how far ceramic and sculptural concepts had advanced through the first millennium BC. The figures were made of clay, using techniques for simple elements such as arms, legs and torsos that would have been familiar to local manufacturers of mass-produced drainpipes; techniques familiar to metallurgists working in the bronze industry were used for moulded heads and hands. These were then finished individually with wet clay to represent the particular features of their models, and the sections joined together with more clay. Working in teams, the makers stamped their finished figures as a means of identification, and were liable to punishment for inferior work.

Exhibition: The Terracotta Warriors of Qin Shi Huangdi

Terracotta Warriors
c.214 BC; terracotta
H (average soldier): c.1.8 m / 5 ft 10¾ in
Justinian’s Great Church was breathtakingly ambitious and innovative, not only for its architecture but also for the astonishing decoration of its surfaces. Erected in only five years (532–37), it was dedicated to Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), an attribute of Christ.

The church was originally entirely decorated with non-figural ornament: marble panels in many shades on the flat walls and geometric and floral mosaics against golden grounds on the curving walls above. Perhaps at this time the use of figural representations was controversial (it certainly became so later, during Iconoclasm), or the emperor may have thought the size of the building more suited to an overall visual plan; or he may simply have wanted to install the decoration quickly. Some sixth-century mosaics remain, others have been plastered over and painted.

Most of the mosaics in the church date from the Middle Byzantine period, between the restoration of images in 843, after Iconoclasm, and the fall of Constantinople to the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, all of the figural mosaics exhibited here date to this period, the first probably created in 857/8. The mosaics are predominantly formal portraits of saints and rulers and so, to some extent, represent rather traditional art forms, though they also reveal how styles changed over time. A comparison between portraits of empresses Zoe and Eirene (2 and 3), for example, highlights the more elongated and graceful forms that characterized the twelfth century. The figures do not interact intensely with each other, because the nature of the compositions requires a formal relevance. In other contexts from the same period, for instance in manuscript decoration or wall paintings, figures can be presented in complex scenes with naturalistic backgrounds and intricate relations. In scenes such as these in Hagia Sophia, and in other mosaics of the period, such as those at Daphni and Hosios Loukas in Greece, Middle Byzantine artists frequently placed the figures against a plain gold ground, which gives an eternal, unworldly appearance but also focuses the eye on the subjects.

Hagia Sophia: Middle Byzantine Mosaic

The Mother of God is seated on a throne holding the Christ Child, with an abbreviated form of her name in Greek letters in her left hand: empress Zoe and her sister Theodora.

Justinian I’s Great Church was dedicated to Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), the city he founded, to her name in Greek letters in her left hand: Zoe and Zoe.

The earliest churches at Mystra, painted in three phases. This painting in the narthex of the Metropolis shows the drama and suffering in the Last Judgement. At the entrance to the church, with the scroll held by the angel, a billowing red canopy speaks of the recapture of Constantinople from the Latins and fall to the Ottomans. The art of this time is complex, elegant and highly refined, with confident use of shading and highlighting, particularly in faces and drapery. Perspective is not accurate, but there is strong evocation of three-dimensional space.

The earliest churches at Mystra, such as those in the Apenthiko, with the main events in Christ’s life on the vaults of the arms of the cross, the central architectural form of the church.

Mystra: Late Byzantine Wall Painting

1. Virgin and Child with Four Saints, Constantinople (11th century), mosaic; W: c.2.9 m / 9 ft 6 in

2. Virgin and Child with Four Saints, Constantinople (11th century), mosaic; W: c.2.9 m / 9 ft 6 in

3. Angel at the Last Judgment

4. Virgin and Child with Four Saints, Constantinople (11th century), mosaic; W: c.2.9 m / 9 ft 6 in

109  Hagia Sophia: Middle Byzantine Mosaic

110  Mystra: Late Byzantine Wall Painting
Leonardo da Vinci was the most imaginative and visionary artist of the Renaissance, though he finished few works. He was the archetypal Renaissance man, renowned in his own lifetime and since as a painter, sculptor, draughtsman, architect, engineer, inventor and botanist.

Trained in the studio of the Florentine artist Andrea del Verrocchio (c.1435–88), Leonardo (1452–1519) learned to model from close observation and to invent compositions through quick sketches. While still an apprentice he demonstrated a mastery of the new medium of oil painting and the sfumato technique (the use of soft shading instead of line to delineate forms and features). After leaving Verrocchio’s studio in 1478, Leonardo worked in Florence before seeking employment with the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, in 1482. In a letter, Leonardo outlined his expertise in painting, sculpture and architecture, and in hydraulic engineering, bridge building, fireworks and the construction of war machines. In nearly seventeen years at the Sforza court, he engaged in military and civil engineering projects and composed treatises on the human body and machines, the phenomena of light, shadow and perspective, the movement of water, horses and the flight of birds. He worked out his ideas in drawings, hundreds of which survive, as opposed to some fifteen paintings.

On his return to Florence, Leonardo produced the large cartoon Madonna and Child with Saint Anne and the Infant Saint John the Baptist (4). It may be a finished work, perhaps intended as a gift. The illusion of high relief stems from the chiaroscuro technique, with strongly contrasted light and dark shades. In the fiercely topical Renaissance debate, Leonardo placed painting before sculpture as the truest means of representing the natural world.

1. Head of a Woman 1.475; ink and white pigment on paper 28.2 x 19.9 cm / 11 x 7¾ in This drawing contains elements typical of Verrocchio, such as the diagonally placed eyes and hair rendered in meticulous detail. It may have been created in the years of Leonardo’s studies, though the attribution and date are disputed.

2. Heads of an Old Man and a Youth. 1495–1500; red chalk on paper 20.8 x 15 cm / 8¼ x 6 in Leonardo considered the portrayal of the intentions of the mind through the body’s gestures and expressions to be the most formidable challenge for a painter. He was also acutely aware of the fleeting beauty of youth and the deformity of old age. These preoccupations produced many sketches of both idealized and grotesque physiognomies.

3. Self-Portrait c.1512; red chalk on paper 33.3 x 21.4 cm / 1 ft 1 in x 8½ in A handwritten note dating to the sixteenth century gives this drawing the title ‘Leonardus Vincius self-portrait at an advanced age’, though scholars debate the attribution.

4. Madonna and Child with Saint Anne and the Infant Saint John the Baptist c.1499–1500; charcoal with white chalk on paper; 1.42 x 0.99 m / 4 ft 7¾ in x 3 ft 3 in Drawn on eight sheets of paper glued together, this work may have been a study for a painting, but it was never used for transfer, its outlines being neither pricked nor incised. Subtle highlights lead the eye in a circular rhythm from figure to figure, emphasizing the complex integration of the composition.

5. Lady with an Ermine (Cecilia Gallerani) 1489–90; oil on panel 54 x 39 cm / 1 ft 9 in x 1 ft 3 in Cecilia Gallerani was the mistress of Ludovico Sforza, at whose court Leonardo was working at the time. The symbolism of the ermine may reference either Gallerani’s name (galle is Greek for ‘ermine’), or the emblem of her lover. Leonardo’s original blue background was later overpainted in black.
Ostentatious patronage of architecture and art proclaimed the power of Classic-period Maya rulers. The Maya occupied southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and parts of Honduras and El Salvador from the third century BC to the sixteenth century AD. The Mayan cities were still spoken millions of their descendants. Because each royal household had equal claim to divine ancestry linked to the mythical founder with sacred origins, competition among the nobility was fierce. Common measures for social and political dominance included military campaigns to control land and labour, and intermarriage to forge advantageous alliances. Magnificent architecture and lavish personal accoutrements were created for these strategic undertakings, with size, technical mastery, aesthetic excellence and the use of precious materials all serving to emphasize the supremacy of a ruler and his state. Rulers sought out the best artists and receiver of the object as gift or reward for service. The most accomplished artists were key participants in aristocratic life and sported high status regardless of social origin. Painters were among the finest artists, who created adorning original caligraphic, brushwork outlines. Colour hue, value and saturation, sensitive renderings of the human form and narrative complexity were also esteemed attributes of Maya paintings, exemplified by the rare and sophisticated eighth-century murals of Bonampak, Mexico. The principal surviving source of Classic Maya paintings is pictorial ceramics (II–III), decorated with images of rulers and chronicling their accomplishments and the gods’ sanction of royal authority. These fine-painted vessels were used to serve food and as gifts during sumptuous feasts created by the elite, which were a key vehicle for social advancement. The host proclaimed his power by serving prodigious amounts of excellent food and presenting vessels with such exquisitely crafted gifts as magnificently painted drinking vessels created by renowned artists.

1. Painted Vessel c. 400–750 earthenware with slip; H: 16.5 cm / 6 ½ in
Two artists work inside a palace-like building, their reverent clothing suggesting status. Stripes symbolize the many different and interwoven threads of society. The man paints a mask of the Maize god atop a speech staff. The lord peers into a mirror cradled by a standing attendant, seemingly to ensure his proper comportment but more likely referring to the visionary nature of the performance. The hair is more typical of noblewomen. The hair is more typical of royal women of eighth-century Palenque. A nobleman wears a feathered headdress and clutches an incense bag in his left hand. The human face in this piece accurately reflects the likeness of the lord in a risque painting from the British Museum.

2. Painted Vessel c. 400–750 earthenware with slip; H: 22 cm / 8¾ in
Sitting above him on a bench of elaborately painted wood is a figure wearing a distinctive royal headdress. The scene has all the hallmarks of a dedication ceremony. The host is shown drinking from a large bowl, his gesture emphasizing the purity of the gift. The bowl, which is a replica of an exquisite date from a dedication ritual held during the construction of a palace. The host is depicted enjoying a drink, his posture suggesting a ritual dance or some type of theatrical performance. A nobleman wears a feathered cape and wields a sceptre and sword.

3. Painted Vessel c. 400–750 earthenware with slip; H: 19 cm / 7¾ in
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Henri Matisse pioneered the early twentieth-century revolution in colour and the development of the purely decorative possibilities of art – ‘matter rather than copying it, simplifying subjects into decoration. His compositions unite ornament and figure in vibrant arrangements of intense colour.

Matisse (1869–1954) trained as a lawyer and only became interested in art at the age of twenty-one. He moved to Paris to study painting and law and became interested in art in 1989, while undergoing traditional academic training. He simultaneously exposed to a dynamic art scene of numerous diverse styles and movements. A summer spent in Saint-Tropez in 1904 introduced him to the luminist, sunnier palette, and the following year he began to produce the expressionistic works that would inaugurate Fauvism. In Room 329, the first avant-garde movement of the new century. In 1906 he visited the Russian province of Bashkortostan in Russia, which would inspire new exoticism in his work.

Matisse not only worked against academic constructs, but also realized the other dominant movement of the time, Cubism. His development of the decorative possibilities of art – as he wrote in 1908, ‘expression and decoration are one and the same thing’. The work was purchased along with Music (1910) by Sergei Shchukin, a Russian collector. The work is the companion to the Shchukin house in Moscow, and Matisse created the final works from full-scale maquettes, altering the composition on the canvas as he went along. The distinction between the ‘decorative arts’ on the one hand, and Matisse’s concept of ‘decoration’ as an aim of painting, is, in the act of designing these paintings as ornamental panels in 1910, he began to dissolve this distinction.

In Room 33, also bought by Shchukin, seems neither physically tangible nor entirely abstract. Matisse gave it the alternative title Harmony in Red, linking the expression of colour in painting and that of harmony and dissonance in music.

Sergei Shchukin’s house in Intended for the ground floor of 1909–10; oil on canvas; 2.6 x 4 ft 3 in.

Movement was to take over the next few decades, and emphasize their leaping.

Henri Matisse creates a

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The Red Room, also bought by Shchukin, seems neither physically tangible nor entirely abstract. Matisse gave it the alternative title Harmony in Red, linking the expression of colour in painting and that of harmony and dissonance in music.

Matisse’s former model and The figure is Caroline Joblaud, an ex-model also room that also displayed Italian sculptures by Albert Marquet (1873–1947), a critic joked that he had found ‘Donatello chez les Fauves’ – Donatello at home with the wild beasts. The spontaneous brushwork and strident, unnaturalistic colours of these ‘wild beasts’, the Fauves, heralded the first avant-garde movement to break with Impressionism.

The Fauves often painted the same subjects as those explored by the Impressionists (Rooms 291–293) and the Post-Impressionists (Room 350), but their impasto brushstrokes were broader, their forms simpler, though their palettes brighter and less naturalistic, with slashing colours.

This younger generation of artists prioritized the expression of the atmosphere or character of the subject, suppressing whatever might detract from the essential elements of composition. Matisse insisted that the canvas was a two-dimensional surface to be decorated and defined by blocks and planes of colour, not made to look like a realistic window on the world, light and colour were dependent on the dictates of season, science or convention, but on the emotion and free expression of the painter.

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Danish artist Olafur Eliasson’s installations and site-specific projects transform space with elemental materials: water, light, temperature, gravity. He creates multi-sensory experiences that exercise his fascination with human perception and encourage viewers to reflect on their own awareness of themselves. Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967) is interested in phenomenology, a branch of philosophy concerned with human perception and the experience of subjectivity – that is, the sense of self.

The Weather Project transformed the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern in London, saturating it with yellow light from an artificial sun made of monochromatic lamps. The light was diffused by a screen and softened by an artificially produced fog. The sun was actually only a semicircle of lights touching the mirrored ceiling installed above the hall, creating the illusion of a complete circle. The ceiling mirrors doubled the perceived height of the Turbine Hall and allowed viewers to see themselves seeing, bathed in the yellow light and misty atmosphere.

The Weather Project
2003; mixed media; H: c.35 m / 115 ft

The Weather Project
2005; mixed media; H: c.23 m / 75 ft

Richard Serra's enormous abstract forms of weatherproof steel are streaked and motled with rust in a finish that is almost painterly. They merge the surrounding space and their own form and weight with the viewer’s reactions. The title of the seven sculptures exhibited here, installed in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, in 2005, evokes the measuring of unfolding action. As with all Serra’s work, the movement of the viewer through and around the sculptures is central to their meaning and the fourth dimension – time – is present as well. The milled steel is engineered to tilt and seemingly rotate, the curved walls swelling and retreating in a massive ebb and flow of metal, supported only by their own weight. The viewer walks between walls forming passageways that subtly alter according to the physics of the works’ axes: narrowing, widening, leaning, straightening. The effect of the obscuring steel plates can be frightening – as the art critic Robert Hughes wrote, 'the fear of being crushed like a bug on an anvil has always been present' in Serra’s work. But walk one must, for these works were made to be perceived by movement. As Serra said: 'Contraction and expansion of the sculpture result from the viewer’s movement. Step by step, the perception not only of the sculpture but of the entire environment changes.'

Created as a site-specific work for the largest gallery in Frank Gehry’s asymmetric museum, The Matter of Time also enters into a dialogue with the unconventional room, accentuating the unpredictability of the space with a tension that evokes complex reactions. The sculptures as exhibited are, from front to back, Torqued Spiral (Closed Open Closed Open Closed), Torqued Ellipse (left) and Double Torqued Ellipse (right), Snake, Torqued Spiral (Right Left), Torqued Spiral (Open Left Closed Right) and, partially visible in the far distance, Between the Torus and the Sphere; beyond, not visible here, stands the eighth work in the installation, Blind Spot Reversed.
Housing the finest art collection ever assembled, this revised, reformatted edition of *The Art Museum* offers the museum experience without the boundaries of space and time, taking the reader on a tour around the world and through the ages, presenting the finest examples of visual creativity. Its colour-coded rooms and galleries display some 1600 artworks, selected from the original collection, including paintings, sculpture, photographs, textiles, installations, performances, videos, prints, ceramics, manuscripts, metalwork, and jewel-work.

Twenty-eight curators, critics, art historians, archaeologists and artists contributed their expertise to create this art lover’s ideal museum. Together they offer informative, accessible texts that provide an all-encompassing insight into art history, and detailed descriptions and backstories about each work of art.

‘Why buy a mere art book when you could have a museum of your own? ... ranging across continents, periods, and artistic approaches, *The Art Museum* sets out to compile the perfect collection.’ – *The Times*