

To Rome and Back: Individualism and Authority in Art, 1500–1800

These companion tours offer three different perspectives of the exhibition *To Rome and Back: Individualism and Authority in Art, 1500–1800*. The first tour, *Imagine*, provides a close look at how Rome was perceived and portrayed in Italy and beyond. The second, *Journey*, centers on interpretations of Rome by outsiders who were drawn to the city for its monuments and artistic opportunities. The third tour, *Collect*, highlights how the city was depicted, on works of art and souvenirs, as a place to be remembered and preserved. Choose your way to Rome!

Even for those who have never set foot in Rome, the city can evoke powerful images and associations. It is the setting of magnificent structures from Western antiquity, including the Colosseum and the Pantheon, as well as works of ancient Roman literature and philosophy, and continues to shape how we perceive our relations to one another and to the wider world. For Catholics, Rome is the seat of the papacy, a place of pilgrimage, and a gateway to the divine. For lovers of art and culture, Rome's magnificent palaces, churches, and monuments inspire awe and generate wonder.

During the three centuries represented in this exhibition, Rome's power waxed and waned. As the artworks in these galleries demonstrate, however, the idea of Rome, with its potent hold on the cultural imagination, was remarkably persistent and assumed many forms. For some artists, Rome materialized in classical forms and ideals, in the beauty and harmony preserved in ancient Roman objects and espoused in classical texts. Others drew inspiration from Roman mythology and history, in the stories of gods and goddesses, kings and emperors, whose quarrels and sacrifices were reimagined for contemporary audiences.

The following ten objects, which are displayed throughout the exhibition's seven galleries, provide visitors a glimpse of the dynamic ways in which artists in Italy and abroad conjured Rome for their patrons and audiences. In paintings, sculptures, and decorative objects, throughout Italy and farther afield, Rome was reconceived and re-presented in countless ways.



Gallery

I

Giorgio Vasari

Holy Family with Saint Francis in a Landscape

This magnificent devotional painting was created far from Rome, for a wealthy Florentine residing in Venice. It depicts the Holy Family—Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus—together with Saint Francis of Assisi, the thirteenth-century founder of the Franciscan order, who holds the cross at left. Yet the world of ancient Rome is also very much present. The epaulette Mary wears on her left shoulder indicates that she is dressed as a Roman soldier, and the setting is not the Holy Land but the Roman countryside, with the ruins at Tivoli (outside of Rome) visible in the background.

Pictures like this one illustrate a duality in how sixteenth-century patrons and artists, like Giorgio Vasari, regarded ancient Rome: as symbolic of the pagan world that Christianity had supplanted, but also as a continuing source of inspiration and authority.



Gallery

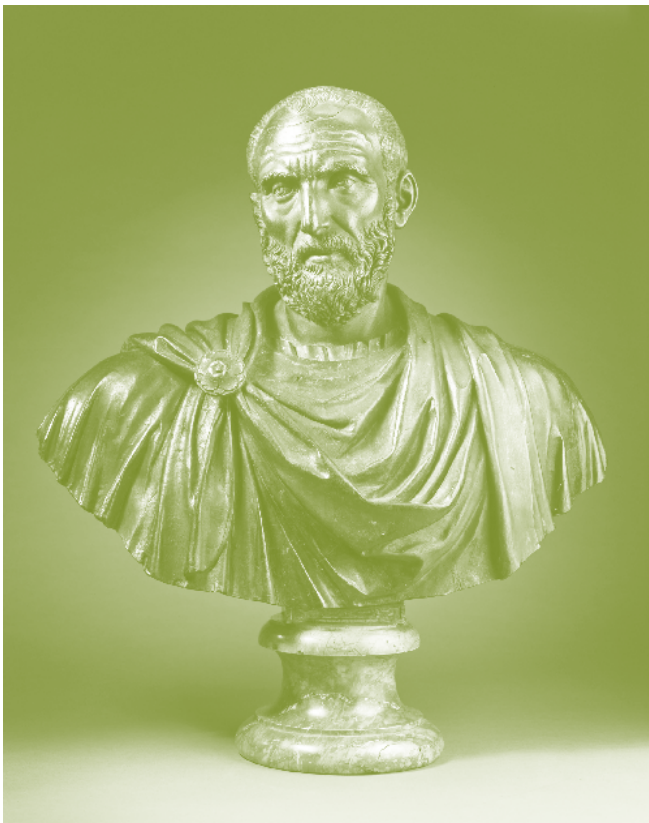
II

**Francesco Xanto Avelli
da Rovigo**

**Footed Dish with the
*Birth of Venus***

In Renaissance Italy, artists and artisans, seeking inspiration in classical mythology, represented the triumphs and battles of Roman gods and goddesses in a variety of media, including paintings, sculptures, prints, and decorative objects. The surface of this earthenware dish portrays the Birth of Venus, the goddess of love, who emerged fully grown from the sea. Maiolica objects like this one, produced by applying a tin glaze painted with metallic oxides to ceramic, were prized for their stunning color and imagery, and were purchased by wealthy patrons throughout Italy and beyond.

The figure of Venus on this charger is thought to be based on a print by the Italian engraver Marco Dente (circa 1486–1527) that, in turn, was based on a composition by the great Renaissance painter Raphael (1483–1520). Prints played an important role in the dissemination of images and motifs beginning in the late fifteenth century.



Gallery

II

Ludovico Lombardo
*Bust of Lucius Junius
 Brutus*

This sixteenth-century portrait bust depicts Lucius Junius Brutus, founder of the Roman Republic, who overthrew the tyrannical king Tarquin the Proud in 509 BC. It was commissioned by Lorenzo di Piero Ridolfi (1503–1576), whose family had been exiled from Florence after tangling with the powerful Medici clan. In this case, the story of Lucius Brutus’s triumph over his enemies may have resonated with the Ridolfi family because of its own struggles for power.

The display of all’antica statuary (works inspired by ancient models) played an important part in shaping identity in sixteenth-century Italy. This sculpture emulates the ancient Roman statue busts that also populated princely collections.



Gallery

III

Jusepe de Ribera

A Philosopher

A worn book in his hands, an aged philosopher gazes upward, his face bathed in light. Commissioned in 1636 by the Prince of Liechtenstein, this painting is one of a series by the Spanish artist Jusepe de Ribera portraying ancient Greek philosophers in moments of quiet contemplation.

While the subject is Greek, elements of the picture's style suggest a Roman imprimatur. Ribera spent time in Rome and Naples, and the picture reflects the influence of Caravaggio (1571–1610), whose naturalistic and psychologically intense pictures captivated artists who flocked to Rome in the early 1600s.

Moreover, the rediscovery and publication of classical Roman texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries generated new interest in ancient Greek and Roman philosophers.



Gallery

IV

Possibly by
Francesco Picano
*Saint Michael Casting
 Satan into Hell*

This polychrome wooden sculpture illustrates the moment from the Apocalypse when the Archangel Michael casts the rebel Satan out of heaven and into hell. Here Saint Michael, sword raised, is dressed as a Roman soldier, with ruby glass accents visible on his sandals and armor. His noble bearing and elegant features contrast with Satan's twisting limbs and agonized expression.

The sculpture's drama and movement are characteristic of the High Baroque period, when, in the mid-to-late seventeenth century, a reenergized Catholic Church, based in Rome, commissioned paintings and sculptures designed to inspire awe and wonder. Saint Michael's victory, symbolizing the triumph of the Church over heresy, and of good over evil, was a popular theme.



Gallery

IV

Ludovico Mazzanti

The Death of Lucretia

This painting by Ludovico Mazzanti also depicts a dramatic moment, but its subject was inspired by Roman history rather than religious scripture. According to legend, Lucretia, wife of a Roman nobleman and renowned for her virtue, committed suicide following her rape by the son of the Roman king Tarquin the Proud; her death sparked the revolt that led to the founding of the Roman Republic.

Mazzanti captures Lucretia as she plunges the dagger into her breast, a tragic symbol of womanly virtue. The picture exemplifies how Mazzanti and other eighteenth-century Italian artists mined ancient Roman history to create pictures of timeless resonance.



Gallery

V

Michael Sweerts

Plague in an Ancient City

An imaginative rendering of ancient Rome, or a city much like it, provides the backdrop for this scene of high drama. Their bodies draped over classical-column fragments, two female figures, idealized beauties, succumb to the plague, while nearby and behind them, others wail, grieve, or await their fate. Several of the figures, such as the man standing at left, torso exposed and elbows raised, are based on classical statuary.

Born and raised in Brussels, Michael Sweerts spent more than a decade in Rome and is best known for his more modest pictures of Roman street life. Here, however, he seems to be emulating the work of more elite artists, such as the French painter and draftsman Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), who looked to Rome’s classical past to explore weightier moral or philosophical subject matter. Indeed, this painting was attributed to Poussin for much of the nineteenth century, when it hung in a private home in London’s Cavendish Square.



Gallery

V

Guido Reni

Bacchus and Ariadne

This painting by the baroque painter Guido Reni depicts a mythological scene: the lament of Ariadne following her abandonment by Theseus (whose ship departs in the distance) and the proposal by Bacchus that she become his bride. The contrast between the dramatic subject matter and the sober way in which the figures are portrayed has led some to conclude that the painting is a *scherzo*, i.e., a playful take on a classical theme.

Reni was among the most sought-after artists of his day in early seventeenth-century Rome. Born and raised in Bologna, the artist moved to Rome at the turn of the seventeenth century and was among a school of painters, led by Annibale Carracci (1560–1609), who drew heavily on classical forms and subject matter in commissions for popes, cardinals, and members of the aristocracy.



Gallery

VII

Hubert Robert*Stair and Fountain in
the Park of a Roman
Villa*

Rome is reimagined as an idealized, romantic landscape in this monumental painting by the eighteenth-century French artist Hubert Robert. The picture's setting is a fanciful take on an actual site: the Villa d'Este, a sixteenth-century villa outside of Rome famed for its terraced gardens and fountains. Robert has included classical statuary and relief, Roman peasants, and strollers in fashionable French attire.

Robert spent more than a decade in Rome, beginning in 1754, and, upon his return to France, incorporated the city's visual landscape into decorative pictures for a wealthy clientele. The picture demonstrates how, in the late eighteenth century, Rome's past and present continued to stoke the fantasies of patrons and artists throughout Europe.

During the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, Rome, as it does today, exerted a strong gravitational pull, attracting visitors from throughout Italy, continental Europe, and beyond. Just as religious pilgrims flocked to Rome to renew their faith and experience the city's spiritual power, artists traveled there seeking inspiration from its great monuments, or to make their names by completing commissions for powerful members of the Church and the aristocracy.

Some of these expatriate artists remained in Rome, creating magnificent paintings and sculptures that continue to inspire visitors today. Others returned home or continued their travels—to places like Florence, Venice, or north of the Alps—transmitting what they had seen and learned, including new styles, techniques, and subject matter, to new generations of artists.

The following ten objects, which are displayed throughout the exhibition's seven galleries, were produced by artists who traveled to Rome and absorbed the city's cultural, artistic, and religious ferment. For these artists, and for countless others, Rome's rich history and timeless glory provided lasting inspiration.



Gallery

I

Fra Bartolommeo

Holy Family

Fra Bartolommeo spent most of his career in Florence, where he painted religious pictures for churches and private patrons. Like many Italian artists of his generation, he traveled to Rome (arriving in 1513) during a period when towering figures of Italian Renaissance art, such as Michelangelo (1475–1564) and Raphael (1483–1520), were completing monumental commissions in the city.

While the artist had not yet visited Rome at the time this picture was executed, the Virgin's idealized beauty and symmetry reflect the influence of classical models. The painting's unusual rectangular shape, asymmetrical composition, and the fact that it was painted on canvas rather than wood, have led some to conclude that it may have been intended for use as a processional banner.



Gallery

I

Agnolo di Polo

Virgin and Child

This earthenware sculpture, *Virgin and Child*, is thought to have been painted circa 1520 by the Florentine artist Agnolo di Polo. While little is known about the circumstances of its commission, the sculpture presents a striking visual comparison to the Virgin in Fra Bartolommeo's circa 1497 painting *Holy Family* (to its left in the gallery). With her elegant proportions and flowing draperies, she also resembles a classical beauty.

Earthenware, or fired clay, which had been a popular material in ancient Roman times, experienced a revival during the Renaissance and was frequently used for devotional objects like this one.



Gallery

I

Hendrik Goltzius
*The Sleeping Danaë
Being Prepared
to Receive Jupiter*

In this magnificent rendering of an oft-depicted mythological tale, Jupiter disguises himself and descends on the sleeping Danaë as a shower of gold. Seduction assumes material form in the luxury objects that litter her bedchamber floor.

Internationally famous during his lifetime, Dutch artist Hendrik Goltzius was best known for his engravings. After he visited Rome in the 1590s, Roman classicism—evident here in the picture's mythological theme and in Danaë's form—was an important element in his idiosyncratic style, which included the exaggeration of the natural world and the compression of space, as well as the uncanny ability to emulate artistic masters of the past and present.

Praised by the artist's contemporaries and subsequent collectors, the picture disappeared in the 1930s, only to reappear in a Los Angeles warehouse in 1984.



Gallery

II

Giambologna

Flying Mercury

Promised gift of Lynda and Stewart Resnick
in honor of the museum's 50th anniversary

This bronze sculpture (likely a lifetime cast made from Giambologna's model in his workshop) depicts the Roman god Mercury in flight, his body elongated and twisting, from the toe of his winged left foot to the forefinger of his raised right hand. The composition of the sculpture is consistent with descriptions of the god in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the first-century Roman epic poem that tells the story of the Trojan hero Aeneas, ancestor of Rome's legendary founders, Romulus and Remus.

Born in Flanders, Giambologna spent much of his career as court sculptor to the powerful Medici family in Florence. However, his early travels took him to Rome, where his work is first documented in 1556.



Gallery

III

Simon Vouet

*Virginia da Vezzo,
the Artist's Wife,
As the Magdalen*

Like the other pictures nearby, this painting presents a female subject of Christian devotion with her identifying attribute: in this case, Mary Magdalen holding her jar of ointment. However, Simon Vouet's picture is exceptionally intimate. He has cast his own wife as the Magdalen, and she fingers the locks of her hair suggestively.

Two distinct approaches to painting that exerted strong influences on artists in Rome at the time are apparent here: the rich colors and refined composition of Annibale Carracci (1560–1609), who completed important commissions in Rome beginning in the 1590s, and the drama and intense naturalism of Caravaggio (1571–1610).

Vouet was among a generation of French painters who traveled to Rome in the first decades of the seventeenth century, attracted by the wealth of commissions and the rich artistic culture that made the city an exceptionally dynamic place to work. And, like other Frenchmen who trained in Rome then, he ultimately returned to France, where, as court painter to Louis XIII, he contributed to the emergence of Paris as a competing artistic center.



Gallery

IV

Giovanni Battista Lenardi

The Assumption of the Virgin with Saints Anne and Nicholas of Myra

Seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Rome was dominated by the Catholic Church, which financed the construction of churches, plazas, and fountains that transformed the cityscape. Artists flocked to Rome, and many embraced the Italian High Baroque style, characterized by movement and drama that intended to inspire the devout and transport them to a spiritual plane.

The large wall on the west side of this gallery contains altarpiece paintings and religious pictures that exemplify the High Baroque style. At the center of the group is the altarpiece painting *The Assumption of the Virgin with Saints Anne and Nicholas of Myra* by Giovanni Battista Lenardi that for centuries hung in the Church of San Giuseppe dei Falegnami in the Roman Forum. In the picture, the Virgin Mary is lifted heavenward by angels, while saints and worshippers gather below.



Gallery

V

Charles Le Brun

The Descent from the Cross

Christ's pale body and ashen face transfix the viewer in this picture by French artist Charles Le Brun, who combined baroque drama with a refined classicism.

Le Brun was one of the premier artists in seventeenth-century France and completed important commissions for King Louis XIV at Versailles and Vaux-le-Vicomte and for other French aristocrats. In 1642 he traveled to Rome with Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), the leading painter of the classical French baroque style, and was heavily influenced by Italian models, including works by Annibale Carracci.

This painting likely dates from the period shortly after Le Brun's return to France, in 1646. Three other versions of it are known to exist; the LACMA version is widely accepted as the original.



Gallery

V

Michael Sweerts

Plague in an Ancient City

Michael Sweerts was born and raised in Brussels but journeyed to Rome in 1646, where he joined a group of Flemish artists who painted scenes of everyday life in the city and nearby countryside. This picture, depicting residents of an ancient city succumbing to a plague, is an exceptionally large-scale work for the artist. While the circumstances of its commission are unknown, its compositional scope suggests that the drama and monumental grandeur of Rome strongly influenced the artist.

The meaning of the painting remains a mystery. Several plagues struck Rome in the seventeenth century, including in the 1650s, but instead of representing a specific historical moment, the painting may refer more generally to human vulnerability and the hope of salvation.

Sweerts spent more than a decade in Rome before returning to Brussels. In the final years of his life, he joined a missionary group and traveled to Persia and India, where he died in 1664.



Gallery

VI

Clodion (Claude Michel)

Bacchic Scene

The eighteenth-century French sculptor Claude Michel, known as Clodion, is best known for the earthenware sculptures and reliefs of bucolic mythological scenes he produced. In this relief, a Satyr (half man, half goat) plays a flute for a woman and two hooved putti wrestling below them. The composition—loosely derived from a classical wall painting in Emperor Nero’s Domus Aurea (“Golden House”) in Rome—reflects Clodion’s interest in Rome’s classical history.

Clodion first traveled to Rome in 1762, and he spent significant time there in the 1760s and early 1770s. *Bacchic Scene* is believed to have been created during a trip to Italy in 1773, when he was sourcing marble for sculptural work for the Rouen Cathedral.



Gallery

VII

Claude Gellée
(called Claude Lorraine)
*Pastoral Landscape with
a Mill*

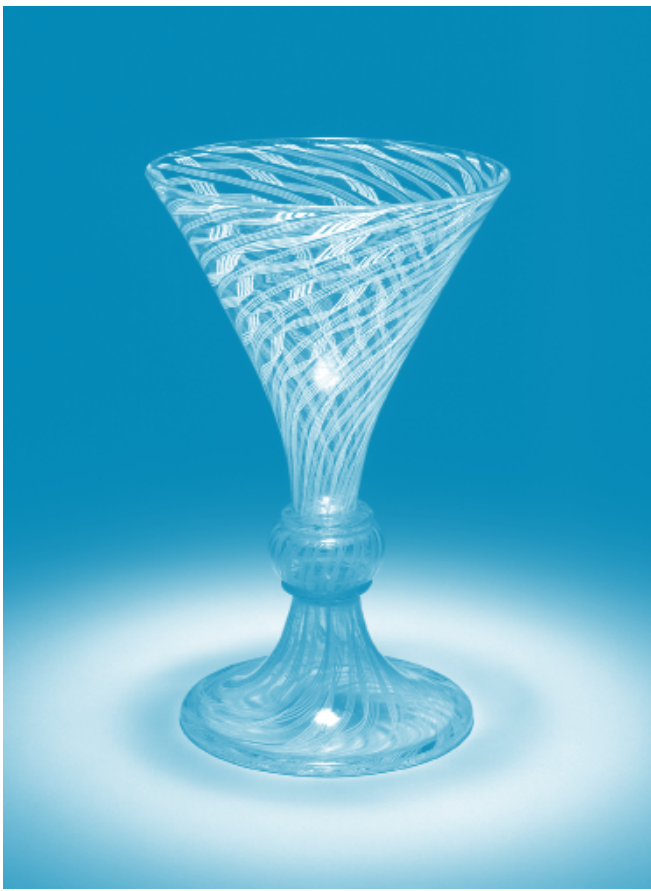
The seventeenth-century artist Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorraine, was born in the Duchy of Lorraine (today, a part of northeastern France), but spent most of his career in Rome. He is often credited with having revolutionized European landscape painting, constructing bucolic scenes that viewers were encouraged to absorb as an impressionistic whole. Here, a country windmill and peasants herding goats are set within lush foliage, and gentle hills and mountains extend into the haze.

While many of Claude's works included fictionalized versions of ancient Roman monuments, evoking the classical past, this painting presents the viewer with an idealized version of the Roman campagna. It has a timeless quality that serves as a fitting note on which to conclude this tour.

From the Renaissance through the Enlightenment, one of the ways in which Italians and other Europeans expressed their interest in images and ideas associated with Rome was through the activity of collecting. The ancient city was represented through myriad techniques and subjects in all manner of artworks. Ancient Roman forms like the portrait bust were revived, mythological and classical representations abounded, and monuments of the physical city itself cycled through the grand homes of individuals with power and wealth.

The contemporary city circulated through reproductions of the papacy's most magisterial commissions of works by artists of great renown, such as Michelangelo (1475–1564) and Raphael (1483–1520), and these works were collected alongside those referencing the ancient city. As Grand Tourism flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, artists from Rome and beyond recognized the interest in these representations, and deliberately created works for private collectors with these meanings in mind.

In essence, collecting the city through referential artworks and luxury goods established a bridge between the spirit of Rome and the collector that, among many other qualities, represented knowledge, legitimacy, constancy, certitude, and strength. While the taste for collecting Rome is centuries old, its persistent practice over time is one of many reasons why these artworks are so abundant in LACMA's collection.



Gallery

I

Goblet (top) and Bottle (bottom)

This magnificent selection of ancient and early modern glass exemplifies how certain objects were prized in part because of their emulation of ancient techniques. While the small, ancient vessels predate the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century versions by nearly 1,500 years, the later examples exhibit distinct similarities with the older works.

The Venetian goblet, made using the first-century-BC technique of blown glass, updates the method by incorporating small, twisted canes of opaque glass to achieve the same linear intricacy seen in the ancient thread-decorated bottle. Likewise, the ornately decorated *nef*, whose sail-like pyramid of trailed threads supports a trumpet-shaped fish, finds its beginnings in the comparatively humble but equally delicate blue trailed thread on the small, iridescent jug.

Although with the invention of glassblowing, glass objects became far more common in households after the first century, these later, carefully decorated examples showcase wealth, refinement, and beauty, qualities that were highly coveted by collectors.



Gallery

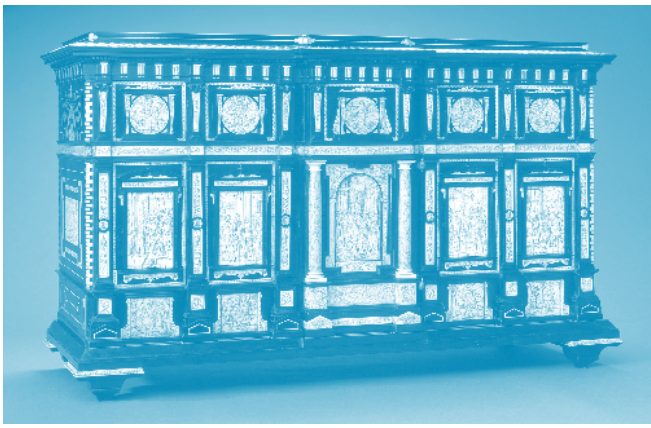
II

Tintoretto

Portrait of Marino Grimani

This portrait by the Venetian painter Tintoretto depicts Marino Grimani, an important collector of ancient Roman objects and artifacts in sixteenth-century Venice. Captured here at age forty-six (indicated by the inscription in the lower left in the portrait), Grimani became the Doge of Venice in 1595.

In his position as the highest locally elected official of the Veneto, Grimani and other members of his powerful family fought to reduce papal (read: Roman) influence in the area. Yet they deliberately assumed the heritage of ancient Rome as their own. Their extensive collection of antique statuary, cameos, and gems, amassed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and housed in their magnificent palaces in public and private areas, helped fuel Venice's captivation with Rome's classical past.



Gallery

II

Attributed to Jacobus Fiamengo The Onians Cabinet

Smaller, decorative housewares and prints depicting scenes associated with ancient and contemporary Rome were displayed in and on furniture in private homes designed to showcase one's collection. This cabinet is one such repository, made of ebony, ivory, and exotic woods and designed to hold intimate, handheld objects, such as the glass pieces in the first gallery, or the cameos and small antiquities nearby.

Humanist references are made through architectural details like the cornice, the medallions, and the central portal, which refer closely to the Palazzo Gravina in Naples (built in 1545). The ivory plaques that cover the doors and drawers invoke themes that reflect the virtues of the owner, including Justice, Prudence, and Fortitude. The central panel depicts Marcus Curtius, a mythological figure who saved Rome by hurling himself fully armed into the realm of Hades, god of death and the underworld.



Gallery

V

Alonso Cano

Christ in Limbo

Collections of paintings, sculptures, and other objects served not only to promote the status and reputations of their owners, but also had the effect of circulating forms and ideas associated with Rome far beyond the city's limits.

The Granada-born artist Alonso Cano moved to Madrid in 1638, where he had access to King Philip IV's art collection, which included many Italian works of art.

In this striking picture depicting a moment in the life of Christ, Cano has added a trio of naked figures, including a female whose form and posture are reminiscent of classically inspired nudes in Italian paintings, sculptures, and prints that would have been visible in Philip IV's collection. The Catholic Church in Spain was strongly critical of the inclusion of nudes in religious pictures, and this painting is a rare exception.



Gallery

VI

Bracelet with Views of Rome (top) and a Necklace from a Suite of Jewelry (bottom)

Long-term loan from The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Large paintings by well-recognized artists were not the only types of objects collected by wealthy individuals visiting Rome in the eighteenth century. Indeed, works of art of a far more intimate scale representing connections to the city were produced and sold, such as this suite of jewelry presenting views of classical Rome.

These exquisite accessories suggest a relationship to Rome in both subject matter and technique. They depict recognizable Roman monuments such as the Colosseum, the Pantheon, and St. Peter's, and also employ the ancient technique of mosaic. In the ancient world, mosaics were often created to decorate building projects (the floors and walls of private residences and civic monuments, for example); here the eighteenth-century artist has adapted the technique on a tiny scale, using the careful placement of hundreds of minuscule tesserae in a micromosaic to construct his design.

Wearing a necklace or bracelet of this type was a deeply personal way of showcasing an individual connection to the Eternal City.



Gallery

VI

Pompeo Batoni

*Portrait of Sir
Wyndham Knatchbull-
Wyndham*

In the eighteenth century, young European aristocrats, including many from England, traveled to Rome on a Grand Tour to complete their educations and establish their credentials. Many of them commissioned portraits as souvenirs to commemorate their journeys, and Pompeo Batoni was among the most successful Italian artists serving this wealthy clientele.

This portrait by Batoni depicts Sir Wyndham Knatchbull-Wyndham (1737–1763) surrounded by a pastiche of art and objects associated with ancient Rome, including a bust of Minerva, Roman goddess of wisdom, at the upper left. The background includes a view of the Roman ruins of Tivoli. Sir Knatchbull-Wyndham himself is cast in the pose of the Apollo Belvedere, a monumental classical sculpture unearthed in Italy in the fifteenth century that captivated generations of artists and collectors. (A small collectible bronze of the sculpture is to the painting's right.)

While the sitter died just a few years after the painting was completed, it remained in the collection of the family for the following 250 years, until LACMA acquired the work in 1994.



Gallery

VII

Carl May
*Model of the Arch of the
 Argentarii*

One of the more exceptional objects in LACMA's collection is this model of the Arch of the Argentarii, a Roman monument completed in the early third century AD that was later incorporated into a seventh-century church. Like the original monument, this small-scale model depicts sacrificial scenes and victories of Roman emperors past, but it is made entirely of cork, a lightweight and portable material.

Carl May, a German artist, created cork models of a number of different Roman monuments, which were collected in the eighteenth century for study purposes or to demonstrate the owner's connection to the classical world. Significant collections of these works can still be found in the German cities of Dresden and Kassel, and in St. Petersburg, Russia.



Through December



After December

Gallery

VII

Giovanni Battista Piranesi

Imaginary Appearance of the Ancient Capitol (top) and Another View of the Temple of the Sibyl in Tivoli (bottom)

Among the most admired and broadly circulated representations of Rome in the eighteenth century were the prints of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778). Trained as an architect and a draftsman, Piranesi developed into a master printmaker, and *vedute* (views) of the ancient city were a theme to which he frequently returned.

For four decades, he concentrated on Roman monuments, depicting many in ruin and many dramatically subsumed by the stubborn refusal of their natural settings to respect their boundaries. Piranesi's deep connection to Roman architecture was nurtured through a multi-year campaign to measure the city's monuments. He published and circulated his work throughout Europe, and his prodigious output stands as a fundamental contribution to a nostalgic vision of the city—its crumbling stone monuments succumbing to the natural landscape.

