

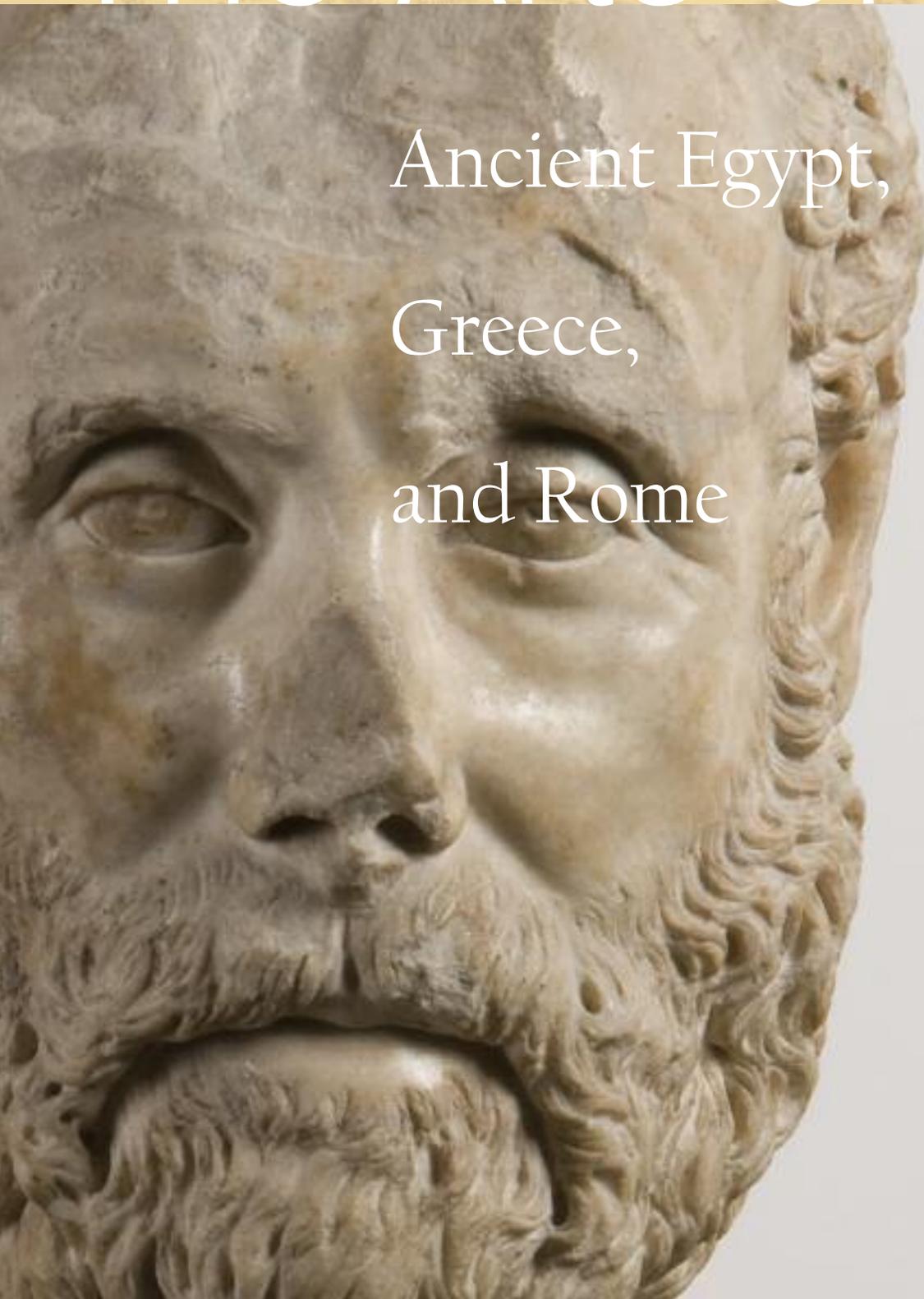
The Helen H. Berkeley Gallery of Ancient Art

The Arts of

Ancient Egypt,

Greece,

and Rome



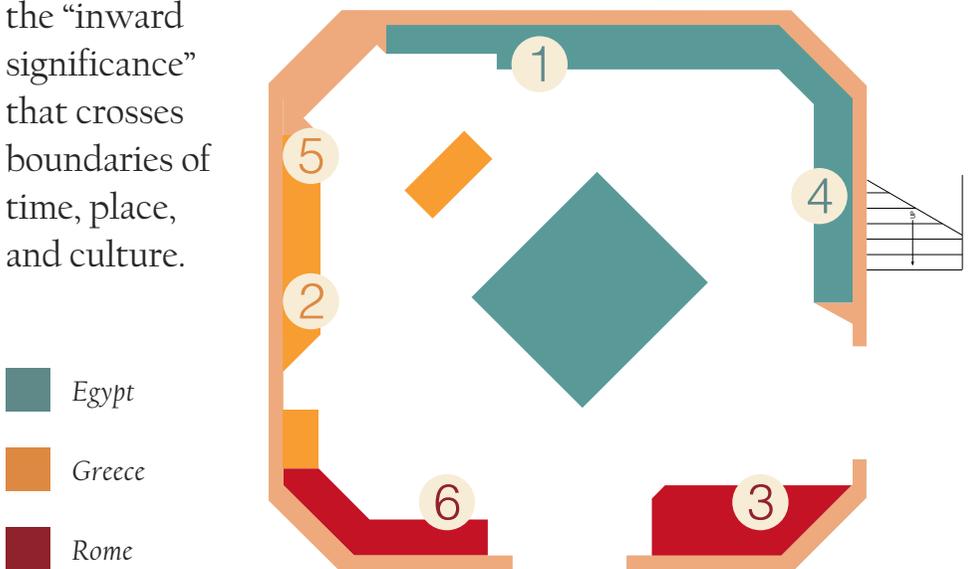
MEMORIAL
ART GALLERY
UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

“The aim of art

is to represent
not the outward appearance of things,
but their inward significance.”

—Aristotle

The works of art in this gallery represent human creativity and artistic invention from some of the world’s most influential civilizations. Many of these early artists worked to fashion a tangible, sometimes human, form for ideas, emotions, and other intangible concepts. This guide focuses on selected works of art in the Gallery’s collection, offering insights designed to demonstrate the bigger human connection, the “inward significance” that crosses boundaries of time, place, and culture.



Collection Connections:
Facing the Past | Embodying the Divine

Facing the Past

Human beings are born with a need to connect with each other. Works of art with recognizable features of the human face capture our attention and draw us in. Whether idealized, stylized, or precisely detailed, the faces of people from cultures long ago and far away help us to make personal connections across the ages.



1

It has the makings of a mystery story: a visiting expert spies a broken statue of an unknown Egyptian king, and recognizes its matching fragment in another museum. But this is a true story of a mystery solved in 1974, when this statue's top half was united with a replica of its lower half from the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo. The symbols carved on the statue base, in front of his right foot, identified this as King Ny-user-ra, who ruled Egypt during the Fifth Dynasty, just after the building of the Great Pyramids. Sculpted from Ny-user-ra's favorite red granite, this is one of only two known statues inscribed with his name.



King Ny-user-ra

ca. 2390–2360 BCE
Egyptian, Old Kingdom
Red granite
R. T. Miller Fund, 42.54



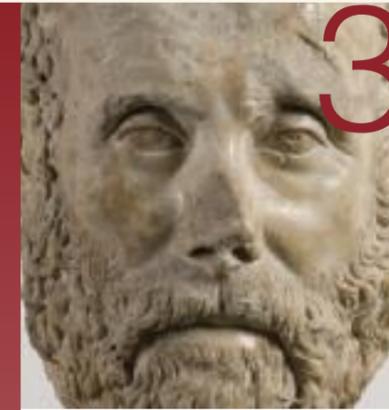
2

Imagine being on a battlefield 2,600 years ago, facing a Greek warrior peering through the cutouts of this helmet! Hammered from a single sheet of bronze, this Corinthian helmet features the almond-shaped eyes, angled cheek pieces, and spoon-shaped nose guard that came to characterize the *hoplite* foot soldiers, celebrated heroes of Greek society. Following a victorious battle, a warrior might dedicate a helmet to Ares, the Greek god of war, in thanks for protection and support on the battlefield. Burial and temple sites have revealed thousands of Corinthian helmets, evidence of the importance of the *hoplites'* status in ancient Greece.



Corinthian Helmet

ca. 633–601 BCE
Greek
Bronze
Maurice R. and Maxine B. Forman Fund, 2008.70



3

The Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero said "...an old man that has something of the youth...may be old in body, but can never be so in mind." Perhaps the Roman artist who sculpted this elderly man's head, celebrating his grizzled features, baldness, and wrinkled skin, had Cicero's words in mind. The importance of individual identity and accomplishment in ancient Roman culture inspired such specific, recognizable, "warts-and-all" portraits of public figures as well as relatives. Such sculptures, displayed in the home, demonstrated a Roman noble family's connections to important citizens, sometimes all the way back to a god or goddess.



Portrait Head of a Man with a Beard

96–192 CE
Roman, Nervan-Antonine Period
Marble
R. T. Miller Fund, 46.39

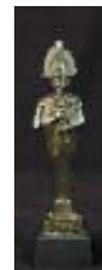
Embodying the Divine

People of the ancient world told stories of gods and goddesses to explain the unexplainable, such as the sun and moon, thunder and lightning, and changing of the seasons. But in art, even these powerful gods and goddesses assumed familiar human forms, as well as human emotions including jealousy, love, hatred, and sorrow.



4

The story of the god Osiris, the most important in ancient Egyptian culture, is full of human melodrama. Osiris, king of the gods, is killed by his jealous, evil brother, the god Seth. Osiris' wife, the goddess Isis, and her sister-goddess Nephthys search the earth for Osiris' body, find it, wrap it in linen strips, and magically bring him back to life. Isis and Osiris' son, the god Horus, grows up to avenge his father, defeating Seth to become the first legendary king of Egypt. As the mummified, resurrected king of the underworld, Osiris holds the crook and flail of kingship, symbols of his dominion over the fate of gods and humans.



The God Osiris as a Mummified Man

1069–332 BCE
Egyptian, Third Intermediate to Late Period
Bronze
Gift of the Estate of Emily and James Sibley Watson, 51.116



5

The ancient Greeks endowed their many gods with human forms as well as human behaviors and emotions. The Greeks told stories of their gods interfering in human affairs, appearing in earthly disguises, and bestowing advantages on favorite heroes and cities. The young god Dionysus spent his childhood on earth, and later taught humans the art of making wine from grapes. Appropriately, this Greek wine-drinking cup features Dionysus and his companions, half-man half-goat satyrs and female dancers known as maenads, participating in one of the wine-drinking ceremonies and festivals held throughout the Greek world in the god's honor.



Kylix with Dionysian Revelers

599–500 BCE
Greek
Terracotta
University of Rochester Appropriation for the C. Herbert Ocumpaugh Collection, 29.90



6

Cupid, the young Roman god of love and desire is, like Peter Pan, a little boy who never grew up. To this day he appears in art as a chubby, winged child, causing mischief with his bow and love-tinged arrows. The theater mask Cupid carries here may refer to disguise and mistaken identity, common themes that caused chaos in comic romance plays popular in the Roman world. The engaging image and brilliant "Pompeian red" of this fragment once enlivened the wall of a Roman house in Pompeii. Remarkably, it survived the disaster of August of 79 CE, when the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius killed the inhabitants of Pompeii and other nearby villages.



Fresco Fragment with Cupid Holding a Mask

before 79 CE
Roman; from Pompeii
Plaster, paint
The C. Herbert Ocumpaugh Collection, 28.75

What do “BCE” and “CE” mean?

BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) refer to the same time periods as the more traditional BC (Before Christ) and AD (“Anno Domini,” which means “The Year of our Lord”).

In today’s global society, constant interaction between people of all religious beliefs requires a shared, or common, way of reckoning time. Although the terms BCE and CE have their origins in the Christian calendar, they are now widely used by people of many faiths and cultures.

For this reason, the Memorial Art Gallery has adopted BCE and CE for use in its galleries.

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To learn more about works of art in the Gallery’s collection, school programs, and upcoming exhibitions and events, visit our website at

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