

The Art of Ancient GREEK Theater

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Mixing Vessel with Dionysos and Comic Actors, Greek, About 390 – 380 B.C., Red-figured volute krater attributed to the Pronomos Painter. Terracotta. Lent by the Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund.

**GETTY MUSEUM EXHIBITION FOCUSES
ON THE REPRESENTATION OF
THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE IN ANCIENT GREECE**

The Art of Ancient Greek Theater

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Villa

August 26, 2010–January 3, 2011

LOS ANGELES— *The Art of Ancient Greek Theater*, on view at the Getty Villa from August 26, 2010 – January 3, 2011, is the first exhibition in the United States in over fifty years to focus on the artistic representation of theatrical performance in ancient Greece. Assembling international loans of antiquities from many museums and private collections, the exhibition illustrates the ways in which dramatic performance was depicted in the visual arts of ancient Greece between the fifth and the first centuries B.C. The exhibition is being presented in conjunction with the Getty Villa's annual outdoor theater performance, Sophocles' *Elektra*.

"Ancient art and theater share a strong and enduring connection—one that is inspired by mythology and the social, cultural, and political realities of life in ancient Greece and Rome," says David Bomford, acting director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "With this exhibition and our annual production in the outdoor theater, we are delighted to bring ancient theater alive at the Getty Villa and invite our visitors to join us and discover how those themes found in ancient times persist today."

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The Art of Ancient Greek Theater spans centuries of artistic production throughout the cities of the Mediterranean. The exhibition showcases magnificent Athenian and South Italian vases as well as significant marble reliefs and numerous terracotta masks and figurines drawn from major collections in Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Themes of the Exhibition

Elaborate costumes, complex choreography, scenic architecture, and the mask—which continues to be an icon for tragedy and comedy—are vividly depicted in the visual arts of ancient Greece.

An introductory section introduces visitors to the architectural and physical environment of ancient Greek theater. The importance of drama to the civic and religious life in the ancient Greek world is reinforced by a large mural map, locating about one hundred ancient theaters in the Mediterranean. The map is complemented by marble sculptures of actors and poets as well as a model of the Theater of Dionysos in Athens, the home of the festival of the Great Dionysia, where the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were originally performed.

The exhibition is organized in three general themes. The first theme is devoted to the historical context of ancient Greek performance. Springing from the worship of Dionysos, theatrical performance developed out of the god's religious rites and festivals. Objects on view depict actors, costumes, masks, choruses and chorusmen, with Dionysos the god of theater as motivator and benefactor.

The second theme focuses on tragedy and the satyr plays and will present comparative installations of vase-paintings inspired by ancient performances of Athens' renowned tragedies: Aeschylus' *Oresteia*; Euripides' *Medea*, *Herakles*, *Children of Herakles*, *Andromache* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*; and Sophocles' *Oedipus*. Objects representing satyr play will be anchored by the exceptional loan of the great Pronomos Vase from the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples.

The third theme of the exhibition features comedy. Depictions of comic parodies and farces, where gods and centaurs share the stage with plotting slaves and thieves, and genre vase-painting represents costumed and masked actors in scenes on ancient stages, include some of the most vivid painting from the ancient world.

"We hope that our visitors will come away with a rich understanding not only of the context of ancient Greek theatrical performance but of the many ways artists interpreted the choruses and plays they witnessed. These vase-paintings, reliefs and figurines are often the only evidence we have for many aspects of ancient drama. Significantly, the heightened visual style and attention to details such as costumes and choreography result in portrayals of ancient actors, poets, and musicians that give us an immediate sense of their performance on stage," says Mary Louise Hart, associate curator of Antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum, who curated the exhibition.

Performance

During the run of *The Art of Ancient Greek Theater*, the Getty Museum will present Sophocles' *Elektra* directed by Carey Perloff, artistic director of the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, with a new translation commissioned from Timberlake Wertenbaker. *Elektra* will be performed in the Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman Theater at the Getty Villa on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings, September 9 through October 2, 2010. In addition, the Villa Theater Lab will present *Understanding a Satyr Play: The Trackers* on November 19 and 20, 2010.

Publication and Related Events

The exhibition will be accompanied by a companion volume co-authored by Mary Louise Hart; Michael Walton, Professor Emeritus of Drama at the University of Hull, United Kingdom; François Lissarrague, Professor at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales Centre Louis Gernet, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris; Martine Denoyelle, École des hautes études en sciences sociales Centre Louis Gernet, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art; and H. Alan Shapiro, W.H. Collins Vickers Professor of Archaeology at Johns Hopkins University.

A two-day international scholarly conference that will further explore the themes of the exhibition will be held at the Getty Villa from September 24-25, 2010, in conjunction with the exhibition and theatrical production of *Elektra*.

In addition to the conference a full schedule of public programs including gallery tours, family programs, adult education courses, point of view talks, and curatorial lectures is planned. A permanent exhibition website is designed to extend access to international audiences.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that features the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Malibu.

Visiting the Getty Villa

The Getty Villa is open Wednesday through Monday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed Tuesday and major holidays. Admission to the Getty Villa is always free. A ticket is required for admission. Tickets can be ordered in advance, or on the day of your visit, at www.getty.edu/visit or at (310) 440-7300. Parking is \$15 per car, but free after 5pm for evening events. Groups of 15 or more must make reservations by phone. For more information, call (310) 440-7300 (English or Spanish); (310) 440-7305 (TTY line for the deaf or hearing impaired). The Getty Villa is at 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades, California.

Additional information is available at www.getty.edu.

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