



DATE: October 22, 2008
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GETTY VILLA UNVEILS A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT OBJECT COLLECTION AND CONSERVATION IN THREE SIMULTANEOUS EXHIBITIONS

***Reconstructing Identity: The Statue of a God from Dresden
The Getty Commodus: Roman Portraits and Modern Copies, and
Fragment to Vase: Approaches to Ceramic Restoration***

At the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Villa
December 18, 2008 to June 1, 2009

LOS ANGELES— The behind-the-scenes challenges involved in the collecting and conservation of ancient objects will be the focus of a trio of complementary new exhibitions, ***Reconstructing Identity: The Statue of a God from Dresden, The Getty Commodus: Roman Portraits and Modern Copies, and Fragment to Vase: Approaches to Ceramic Restoration***, on view from December 18, 2008 to June 1, 2009 at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Villa.

"These exhibitions provide an opportunity for the public to see that the works of art they view in museums do not necessarily have static lives. Bringing these works to life is an exciting process that often involves determination, collaboration, and detective work," said Michael Brand, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Each of the three exhibitions highlight different challenges curators and conservators face in identifying, conserving, and interpreting objects, and in helping viewers understand their contexts and significance.

Reconstructing Identity: A Statue of a God from Dresden

Sometime during the seventeenth century, a monumental statue of a god was found in Italy. What was preserved of the original work was an imposing male figure, half-draped to reveal a masterfully carved torso. The arms, the head, and parts of the drapery were missing.



The J. Paul Getty Trust
Communications Department
1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 403
Los Angeles, CA 90049-1681
Tel 310 440 7360
Fax 310 440 7722
www.getty.edu

-more-

In keeping with the tastes of collectors at that time, the sculpture was restored to completeness with additional pieces of carved marble, including an ancient head from another work— creating a pastiche of ancient and modern stone that confused the original identity of the statue.

Over the next two centuries, the restorations were reinterpreted, removed, and replaced, and the figure assumed a variety of heads and identities including Alexander the Great, Bacchus the wine god, and the youth Antinous in the guise of Bacchus. ***Reconstructing Identity*** explores the statue's rich restoration history and the roles that aesthetics, archaeology, and art history have played as the understanding of the statue has evolved over the centuries.

"Even in the 19th century it was recognized that early restorations were sometimes incorrect and misleading, perhaps none more so than this statue," said Karol Wight, senior curator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum. "The difficult, though intriguing, question for us and our colleagues in Dresden is which of its past identities, if any, should the statue now assume?"

A workshop was held in June to address this question. A group of conservators, art historians, and curators examined the statue's history and past restorations, which were added and removed starting in the 17th century and continuing into the 20th century, and discussed alternatives for its re-restoration. The results of the workshop are on view to the public in the exhibition.



Reconstructing Identity is the culmination of a year-long conservation project undertaken with the Dresden State Art Museums, Sculpture Collection, as part of an ongoing partnership that has enabled the Getty to present exhibitions such as *The Herculaneum Women and the Origins of Archaeology*. Following the exhibition at the Getty Villa, which will include the statue and the various pieces from its several phases of restoration, the statue will return to Dresden, where it will be featured as part of the new permanent antiquities galleries in the Zwinger palace.

Reconstructing Identity: A Statue of a God from Dresden is curated by Karol Wight, senior curator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum, and Jens Daehner, associate curator

of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum. Friends of Heritage Preservation generously provided financial support for the Reconstructing Identity project.

The Getty Commodus: Roman Portraits and Modern Copies



In 1992, the J. Paul Getty Museum acquired a marble bust of the Roman emperor Commodus. Originally thought to be a work in the classical style from the 1500s, experts soon came to believe it was actually an ancient work from Commodus' lifetime.

As a prince of the Antonine dynasty, Commodus (A.D. 161–192) had his first official portraits sculpted while he was still a boy. New types of imperial portraits were often issued on the occasion of significant life events or to mark milestones in a political career, such as the bestowing of a title, the designation as crown prince, or the ascension to the throne. Each time a new type was created, it was reproduced in large numbers in specialized workshops, and the copies were distributed throughout the empire. In Commodus's case, scholars have determined that eight distinct portraits were made in his short lifetime, half before he became single ruler in A.D. 180. His fifth portrait type, issued on that very occasion, is the first to show him with a beard. More than a dozen versions of that type still exist, and the Getty bust is acknowledged as among the finest.

Today, most experts agree that the Getty Commodus is ancient. The debate over the bust's origin and date of creation, however, highlights a larger art-historical phenomenon: the copying of classical sculpture—particularly portrait busts—in the Renaissance and later periods of European art. *The Getty Commodus* showcases various methods of inquiry used by experts to establish the date and origin of works of art.

Other objects in the exhibition include Roman portrait busts that share a number of characteristics with the Getty Commodus such as a common classical origin and possibly the same archaeological context.

The Getty Commodus: Roman Portraits and Modern Copies is curated by Jens Daehner, associate curator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum, and Eike Schmidt, associate curator of sculpture and decorative arts at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Fragment to Vase: Approaches to Ceramic Restoration

Most ancient ceramic vases in museum collections like the Getty Villa have required some reconstruction since it is unusual to find these delicate vessels completely intact. Conservators are responsible for the daunting task of assembling the many broken fragments of ancient vases so that they can be studied by scholars and viewed by the public as they were intended to be seen in antiquity.

Fragment to Vase provides a behind-the-scenes look at the complex treatment processes and the aesthetic choices available to conservators. This exhibition illustrates how technical innovation and scholarly contributions all combine to reveal the beauty, form, possible intent and iconography of these incredible masterpieces.

The repair of classical vases has a long history, and approaches to restoration, and the conservation profession itself, have evolved as connoisseurship and collections have developed over the centuries. In the 1700s and 1800s, the enthusiastic collecting of classical vases created a market for intact vessels that were painted with interesting mythological scenes. Rather than preserving the ancient material, the emphasis was most commonly on presenting the illusion of an undamaged, complete object. In many cases, restorers painted over the original surface, altered fragments to make them fit together, or inserted pieces from other ceramics to make vessels more appealing to buyers. Such an early restoration is illustrated in the exhibition by a vase on loan to the Getty from the Antikensammlung in Berlin.



Conservation and restoration approaches at the Getty Villa increase our understanding of both the form and the painting of fragmentary and complete classical vases. Conservation involves thorough examination, condition assessment, preventative care, and stabilization of objects like ancient vases. It may also include the restoration, or physical reconstruction, of a vessel, guided by many factors such as iconography, painting composition, and technical details. From individual fragment to complete vase, choices are made that ultimately influence how ceramic works are appreciated.

Fragment to Vase: Approaches to Ceramic Restoration is curated by Jeffrey Maish and Marie Svoboda, associate conservators of antiquities conservation at the Getty Villa.

IMAGES WILL BE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

MEDIA CONTACT: Melissa Abraham
Getty Communications
310-440-6861
mabraham@getty.edu

Desiree Zenowich
Getty Communications
310-440-7304
dzenowich@getty.edu

Visiting the Getty Villa

The Getty Villa is open Thursday through Monday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed Tuesday and Wednesday, and major holidays. Admission to the Getty Villa is always free. An advance, timed ticket is required for admission. Each Villa ticket allows you to bring up to three children ages 15 and under with you in one car; this does not apply to events such as lectures and performances. Parking is \$10. Tickets can be obtained online at www.getty.edu or by phone at 310-440-7300. Groups of nine 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).

Additional information is available at www.getty.edu.

Sign up for e-Getty at www.getty.edu/subscribe to receive free monthly highlights of events at the Getty Center and the Getty Villa via e-mail, or visit www.getty.edu for a complete calendar of public programs.

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.

Image Credits (from front to back)

Unknown maker, Recueil des marbres antiques qui se trouvent dans la galerie du roy de Pologne, 1733, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California

Unknown maker, Roman Unknown maker, Italian Unknown, *Bust of Emperor Commodus*, 180 – 185, Roman, Marble, Object: H: 70 x W: 61 x D: 22.8 cm (2ft. 3 ½ in. x 2ft x 9 in.), Object (including socle): H: 92.5 cm, (3ft. 7/16 in.), Socle (which may not be original to the bust): H: 22.5 cm (8 7/8 in.), The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 92.SA.48

Attributed to Altamura Painter, *Fragmentary Attic Red-Figure Calyx Krater*, about 460 B.C., Greek (Attic), Terracotta, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 81.AE.219