Roman Art and Architecture

Republic

509-27 BCE
- Spanned 3 continents
- Multicultural character
- Roman temples, buildings, amphitheaters, and ports are still used today.
- Western Europe’s highways follow routes of Roman roads.
- The Western world uses concepts from their law and government, languages, calendar and coins.
- Roman use of art to manipulate public opinion is similar to contemporary political campaigns.

The Roman World at its largest: at the death of Trajan in 117 CE.
Roman Art – Key Ideas

• Roman art reflects the ambitions of a powerful empire—monumental buildings and sculptures reflect the glory of the gods and the state.

• Roman architecture is revolutionary in its understanding of the powers of the arch, the vault, and concrete.

• A history of Roman painting survives on the walls of Pompeiian villas

• Roman sculpture is greatly indebted to Greek models
Roman Art

• The Romans valued Greek cultural riches and imported their sculpture, pottery, and jewelry to adorn the capital.

• A general movement took hold to reproduce Greek art by establishing workshops that did little more than make copies of Greek sculpture.

• The single most important archaeological site in the Roman world is the city of Pompeii, which was buried by volcanic ash from Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. We know more about daily life in ancient Rome than we know about any other civilization in history.
Roman History

- Monarch (753-509 BCE)
- Republic (509-27 BCE)
- Early Empire (27 BCE – 96 CE)
- High Empire (96 – 192 CE)
- Late Empire (193-337 CE)
MERIT – Creating and sustaining the Roman Empire – 509 BCE – 337 CE

- In an Empire the worthiness, accomplishments, strength of the Emperor must be represented and fortified through Imperial art and architecture (forums, monuments, portraits [images, busts, coins]).
- The Emperor will provide growth, quality of life, and security, he will fill the people's needs (bread) as well as support the building of aqueducts, arenas, roads, bridges, walls, gates
- Merit – earning or deserving of praise (advertisement/propaganda)
  - M=Monuments
  - E=Engineering
  - R=Realism
  - I=Interior spaces
  - T=Temples
Partial model of the city of Rome during 4th c. CE
• Its plan follows the Etruscan pattern with high podium and a flight of steps on at the front,
• 6 freestanding columns are all in the deep port,
• structure is stone, overlaid with stucco in imitation of Greek marble, Ionic columns with frieze

7-3: Temple of “Fortuna Virilis” from Rome, Italy, c. 75 B.C.E.
Temple Of “Fortuna Virilis”

Pseudoperipteral-temple with a series of engage columns all around the sides and back of the cella to give the appearance of a peripheral colonnade.

Greek temple with basic Etruscan plan, The result was a pseudoperipteral temple.
The Republican architect built a Greek-inspired round temple, with Corinthian columns and frieze carved with garlands held by ox heads. The high podium can be reached only via a narrow stairway leading to the cella door. This arrangement introduced an axial alignment not found in the Greek tholos – Greek temples had steps continue all around the structure. Roman used concrete instead of masonry.
Concrete construction made possible Fortuna’s hillside sanctuary with its terraces, ramps, shops, and portico spread out over several levels. A tholos temple crowned the complex. Fortuna Primigenia, the goddess of good fortune, at Palestrina. Builders used concrete barrel vaults of enormous strength to support the imposing terraces to cover the great ramps leading to the grand central staircase.
Restored view of the Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia, Palestrina, Italy, late second century BCE

- Inspired by terraced sanctuaries of the Hellenistic East, but made with concrete barrel vaults. Shops sold food, souvenirs on two levels.
- Subjected nature itself to human will and rational order!
Roman Concrete Construction, Gardner’s p. 184
Fenestrated sequence of groin vaults
**Verism - superrealistic**

- **VERISM**: super realistic portraits of men of advanced age who held power in the Republic.
- Requested brutally realistic images in the tradition of *imagines*.
- Scholars debate if these portraits are realistic or exaggerated to make a statement about their personality.
- Often they were victorious generals who used the spoils of war to finance public works.
- Realism of the portrayal shows influence of Greek Hellenistic art.
- Full of experience and wisdom - traits.

- Portraits make statement about personalities:
  - Serious
  - Experienced
  - Determined
  - Loyal to family and state
- All Virtues much admired during the Republic.

*Head of an old man, from Osimo, mid-first century BCE, Marble, life-size*
Patrician pride in genealogy: *imagines* (portrait masks) and portrait busts of ancestors in stone or bronze were displayed in homes. (Men were ridiculed for having no *imagines*).

These portraits separated the old patrician families from the *nouveau riche*.

Holding heads of forbearers: reproductions of wax or terracotta portraits.

Wax funeral masks, possibly molded as death masks directly from deceased.

- Worn in the funeral processions by professional mourners or appropriate members of the family.
- Made of perishable materials, no funerary *imagines* can be identified with certainty as having survived.

Man with portrait busts of his ancestors, late 1st century BCE. Marble, 5’ 5” high
The sculptor based this life-size portrait of a general on idealized Greek statues of heroes and athletes, but the man’s head is a veristic likeness. The combination is typical of Republican portraiture—sculptors placed veristic heads on bodies to which they could not possibly belong, typically Republican stern and lined face, head sits atop a powerful youthful body, modeled the portrait on statues of Greek athletes and heroes.
Roman freedmen often placed reliefs depicting themselves and their former owners on the facades of their tombs. The portraits and inscriptions celebrated their freedom and new status as citizens. Slaves could not possess any family portraits because they were not people until they become freed.
Beginning early in the first century, The Romans desire to advertise distinguished ancestry lead to placement of their portraits on coins. Used images of divinities on coins, **Julius Caesar was the first to feature his portrait on the coin**, By placing the likeness of a living person on a coin violated the norms of the Republican.
On August 24, 79 CE, Mount Vesuvius, long-dormant volcano suddenly erupted, many towns around the Bay of Naples among them Pompeii were buried in a single day, the ruins had been left undisturbed for nearly 1,700 years, you can see concrete-vaulted rooms, public baths, theater and amphitheater, painted bedrooms and statue-filled gardens of private homes, Pompeii has been called the living city of the dead.
Amphitheater means “double theater”

Earliest amphitheater known, could seat some 20,000 spectators, more than the entire population, seating was by civic and military rank, Roman social hierarchy was on display at every event. Amphitheater means “double theater” because it was two Greek theaters together, shallow concrete barrel vaults form a giant retaining wall holding up the earth and stone seats, barrel vaults running all the way – form the tunnels leading to the arena, the central area where Pompeians staged bloody gladiatorial combats and wild animal hunts, in contrast Greek theater performed comedies and tragedies,
Painting found in one of Pompeii’s houses records a brawl in the amphitheater between the Pompeians and their neighbors, during a gladiatorial contest in 59 CE, fighting left many seriously wounded and led to the closing of the amphitheater for a decade, shows the distinctive external double staircases that enabled large numbers of people to enter and exit the cavea (seating area) in an orderly fashion.
Peristyle of the House of the Vettii, Pompeii, Italy, second century BCE, rebuilt ca. 62–79 CE.

- Narrow entrance sandwiched between several shops
- Large reception area, called the atrium, that is open to the sky and has a catch basin called an impluvium in the center; cubicula radiate around the atrium
- Peristyle garden in rear, with fountain, statuary and more cubicula; this is the private area of the house
- Axial symmetry of house; someone entering the house can see all the way through the peristyle garden in the rear
- Exterior of house lacks windows; interior lighting comes from the atrium and the peristyle
Atriums

Typical Pompeian house

Cubicula

Peristyle

Triclinium (kitchen)

Tablinum (home office)

Fauces (foyer)

Atrium

Impluvium

7-16: House of the Vetti
Second century BCE

House of the Silver Wedding
Masonry style that imitates the appearance of expensive marble panels placed on wall surface.

The houses of Pompeii have yielded a treasure trove of mural paintings,

True frescoes: colors applied while plaster was still damp

August Mau (1850-1909) a German art historian, divided the various mural painting styles into four “Pompeian Styles”

First Style – aim was to imitate costly marble panels using painted stucco relief, not uniquely Roman - documented in Greece during the late fourth century

Painted stucco relief. Each panel is outlined with stucco. The cornices are also modeled in stucco.
SECOND STYLE

Second Style: illusion of an imaginary three-dimensional world,

Dionysiac mystery frieze

Visual Platform
The painter opened up the walls with vistas of towns, temples, and colonnaded courtyards. The convincing illusionism is due in part to the use of linear perspective.

7-19: Cubiculum (bedroom), from the villa of P. Fannius Synistor, Boscoreale, Italy, c. 40-30 B.C.E. fresco
SECOND STYLE wall painting

recreates and extends reality

Second style of Roman wall painting – visually extends the space of the room beyond the walls. Utilizes single-point linear perspective. Presents a narrative.
- Villa of Augustus’ wife, Livia
- 1st atmospheric perspective: foreground in focus, indistinct background
- Similar to wraparound landscape from Thera, Aegean period, but more realistic.

Gardenscape, Second Style wall painting, from the Villa of Livia, Primaporta, Italy, ca. 30–20 BCE. Fresco, 6’ 7” high
Atmospheric Perspective
Indicating depth by the increasingly blurred appearance of objects in the distance

7-20: Gardenscape
from the Villa of Livia, Primaporta, Italy

c. 30-20 B.C.E.
fresco, 6’7” high
ATMOSPHERIC PERSPECTIVE DEFINITION

Same Picture

Simple definition: as colors go into the distance, two things happen. First, they become cooler (the atmosphere colors them), and they get lighter in value. A dark shadow in the distance is never as dark as the shadow at your feet. (Also known as aerial perspective.)
Atmospheric Perspective – 2\textsuperscript{nd} Example

Color values are brighter and more intense in the foreground.

Objects closer to the viewer have more detail and are modeled with highlights and lowlights to create the illusion of depth.
THIRD STYLE Roman Wall Painting (Ornate Style) - pictorial illusion is confined to "framed" images, where even the "framing" is painted on. The overall appearance is flat rather than a 3-d illusion of space. Predominantly monochrome backgrounds.

Third Style: monochromatic (one-color) backgrounds
Late Fourth Style murals are often garishly colored, crowded, and confused compositions with the mixture of architectural views, framed mythological panels, and First and Third Style motif.
Summation of previous mural styles/mixing styles is characteristic or Roman art in general.

Unrelated architectural vistas with figures of the central and upper zones: 4th Style—illusionism became popular in 50s CE.

Ixion attempted to seduce Hera, Zeus punished him by binding him to a perpetually spinning wheel.

4th Style wall paintings: Ixion Room of the House of the Vettii, Pompeii, ca. 70–79 CE.
Roman *imagines* / painted portraits

- Lawyer(?) and his wife, holding standard attributes in Roman marriage portraits: woman holds a stylus and a wax writing tablet, man holds a scroll.

- Attributes allude to their fine education . . . even if they were not.

- Like a modern wedding photograph: role playing.
Painter was a master of illusionism and devoted as much attention to the shadows and highlights of the fruit, stem, leaves, and glass jar, we won’t see this again until 17th century Dutch artist, reflective surface of the glass emphasized, composition emphasizes curves and arcs, delight in showing how light plays on a given surface, shows interest in creating spatial depth as represented on the water pitcher.

Still-life Painting:
The representation of inanimate objects, artfully arranged.
Pair/Share:
Where do you see each of the first 3 styles?