

**MUSÉE DE LA ROMANITÉ**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Temporary Exhibition**  
**11 June 2026 – 10 January 2027**

**Roman Art from the Louvre. A world of images**

**In 2026, the Musée de la Romanité is partnering with the Louvre to explore the place of art in Roman civilisation. The exhibition breaks from the aesthetic approach inherited from the modern era and collectors, inviting visitors to rediscover an art deeply rooted in Romans' everyday life and beliefs. The relics are not only beautiful; they carry functions, applications and meanings. In this exhibition, the Musée de la Romanité shows an outstanding selection of masterpieces of the Louvre: one of the world's greatest collections of ancient art.**

The Roman civilisation is characterised by the sophistication of its material culture. In public spheres as well as domestic, funerary, or religious spaces, art impregnates every dimension of life. From glassware to marble statuary, from mosaics to everyday objects, the mastery of forms, styles, and techniques reflects a conception of civilisation in which material refinement expresses the individual and collective values of Roman society. The exhibition seeks to demonstrate that Roman relics are not 'art for art's sake': works were not created solely for their beauty and aesthetic value but fulfilled concrete and social functions. They were used to honour the gods, assert a collective identity, celebrate the memory of an individual or adorn everyday living spaces. Although aesthetic was ubiquitous, it was not an end. It was a language of a society that thinks about itself, tells its story and portrayed itself through images.

ROMANITÉ



Inlaid bronze bowl: scenes of the founding of the city of Caesarea © GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski

The exhibition opens with a paradox: our contemporary museum perspective treats every Roman visual creation as an artwork, removed from its original context. The visitors' experience begins with two iconic objects in confrontation: a gladiator's helmet from Pompeii that is both functional and richly decorated, and a fragment of a mural considered as art because of its contemporary exhibition, when originally it formed part of a larger architectural setting. These pieces embody the gap between the current aesthetic perspectives and ancient practical uses, inviting visitors to reconsider what they mean by 'art'.

The first section explores the practical role of Roman art. Honorific sculptures, votive objects, architectural reliefs and precious tableware: they all illustrate a conception of art that serves social, political or religious beliefs and values. For example, a Julio-Claudian dynastic portrait demonstrates the civic value of an imperial portrait, which was a central element of the Roman public spaces. Each work is placed back in its original context, revealing how aesthetics addressed specific needs. This section highlights an art deeply embedded in daily life, where objects were not isolated, but part of a system of signs and social relationships.



Cameo: portraits of Tiberius and his younger brother Drusus the Elder © GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski

Dedicated to representations, the second section seeks to show that Roman art is a mirror of society, not because it reflects it faithfully, but because it expresses its symbolic structures and hierarchies. The works illustrate the diversity of social uses of images: the city's collective representation, the celebration of gods, and the portrayal of individuals and family. The 'Domitius Ahenobarbus' relief illustrates how civic rituals (*the cens*) bind the political community together. The bronze cup from Caesarea, meanwhile, links founding myth and local cult, embodying the city's symbolic unity. Through busts, mosaics, sarcophagi and luxury objects, visitors discover how images help asserting citizens' status, piety, and lineage, and more broadly, the collective memory of the society. Portraiture, ubiquitous in this context, operates as a social language: realistic or idealised representation, preservation memory, expression of public or family belonging.

Beyond representation, Roman art is also a speech vector. The third part of the exhibition explores the way images convey messages, sometimes political, sometimes moral, but often symbolic. They visually express the values of the Empire: victory, virtue, dignity, piety, culture. The depictions of Imperial Victory offer a paradigmatic example, used as visual slogans to celebrate the power and legitimacy of authority.

Other relics evoke the social dignity or culture of the elites, who present themselves as Greek's heirs. This section investigates the image's rhetoric in Roman society, where every object, from jewellery to monumental sculpture, participates in a codified and mastered visual communication.

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Cylindrical inkwell © GrandPalaisRmn  
(musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski

Finally, the final part of the exhibition immerse visitors in the heart of Roman artistic creation. It explores the stylistic, technical and, more broadly, aesthetic choices that shape this remarkably diverse art form, oscillating between naturalism and stylisation, virtuosity and strict formalism. The Romans borrow extensively from the Greeks, but reinterpreted them with their own cultural specificities. Mimesis, inherited from Hellenism, permeates all genres: it guides the concret representation of the perceived aspect of the world in statuary, painting and mosaic. However, the ubiquitous stylisation and ornamentation proclaim the inventive power of Roman artists, who could turn reality into motif. This section also highlights the importance of expertise and technical mastery, ranging from marble, gilding, inlay, metalwork or glasswork. These refined techniques demonstrate an art of materiality, where craftsmanship excellence is an integral part of the artistic language. Finally, monumentality expresses a political conception of beauty: the shapes' majesty becomes the visible expression of civilization. The visitors' experience ends with the widespread practice of reuse, a habit that highlights Romans sense of artistic continuity: reusing a Greek statue, resculpting an imperial portrait, or repurposing an Egyptian vase as a funerary urn.

The exhibition concludes with a contemporary reflexion: what do these works say about our own relationship with ancient art? By inviting visitors to reconsider what the Romans understood by 'art', this exhibition offers a unique perspective on the function, value and meaning of images in ancient civilisation. Conceived by the Musée de la Romanité in partnership with the Louvre, this exhibition highlights a cultural heritage where beauty is never dissociated from practical use, and each work reflects the complementarity of creativity, technique and visual communication within Roman society.

### General curatorship

**Isabel Bonora Andujar**, Curator in the Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities, Musée du Louvre

**Manuella Lambert**, Curator in the Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities, Musée du Louvre

**Martin Szewczyk**, Curator in the Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities, Musée du Louvre

**Nicolas de Larquier**, Chief Curator, Musée de la Romanité

### Executive Curatorship

**Claire Champetier**, Deputy Curator, Musée de la Romanité

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