

Museum of Classical Archaeology

Press Release

4 December 2020

Conservation in Action: the Bassae Frieze

Monday 7 December – Friday 18* December 2021

*The end of this project may extend into January

Website: <http://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum/things-to-do/things-to-do-1/conservation-in-action-the-bassae-frieze-1/conservation-in-action-the-bassae-frieze>

This December, the Museum of Classical Archaeology will be undertaking another large-scale conservation project – *in situ*, in the Cast Gallery itself, where visitors can see the work being undertaken.

MOCA has 18 plaster casts of the Bassae frieze, which have been on display since they entered the collection in the 19th century. Our collection of plaster casts are replicas: they are copies of classical statues which are held in museums and collections elsewhere in the world today. The original slabs of the Bassae frieze are on display in London in the British Museum. They were sculpted to adorn a temple dedicated to Apollo in Greece in the fifth century BCE, and they feature a busy continuous frieze telling the story of two battles, that of both the centaurs and the Amazons fighting Greeks.



Picture: Hercules
(with lionskin) fights
the Amazon queen.
(MOCA cast no.112k)

Plaster is a soft and brittle material – and many of our casts are now well over 100 years old. We are committed to preserving them for future generations, and are undertaking a rolling programme of restoration and remounting. The casts of the Bassae frieze represent a significant logistical challenge: they are hung more than three metres above our heads. When we remove these casts from the wall for essential conservation, it will be the first time they have been at ground level since they were moved to MOCA's current building in 1982. They have been on display to the public since they entered our collection in the 1880s.

The project is expected to take two weeks, but may run into January: we will not know the full extent of the work required until we have removed the casts from the wall and are able to examine them. And we intend to take our visitors on this journey with us! Not only will all work be undertaken on public view in our Cast Gallery, but we are also planning a busy programme of online engagement, so that everyone can follow along without stepping through our doors:

- Daily updates on our website
- A series of online lives and interviews (full programme to be announced on our website on Monday 7 December)
- Several online Bassae-themed activities for children



Picture: The Bassae casts are hung 3.5m high on our central divide and stretch for over 25m. Originally, they wrapped around the temple interior. (MOCA casts no.112)



Picture: A baby clings to its mother in the midst of a fight between Greeks and centaurs. (MOCA cast no.112g)

Visiting Museum of Classical Archaeology

Visitors who wish to see the conservation project in action will need to book tickets in advance using our online ticketing system. Work will already be underway when the Museum reopens to the public on Tuesday 8 December. Tickets are released every Tuesday and our opening hours are 11am-2pm on 8-10 and 15-18 December. We will then be closed for the Christmas break and will reopen on Tuesday 5 January.

Our priority remains to keep our visitors, staff and volunteers safe. We continue to have the following measures in place:

- A maximum of 20 people will be allowed to enter the Cast Gallery, at 20 minute intervals using prebooked tickets
- University teaching will not take place during visitor opening hours
- All visitors will be asked to wear face coverings
- There will be a one-way system in operation, both in the Museum and in the rest of the building (redirected around the ongoing conservation work)
- Hand sanitiser will be available at the entrances and exits to the building



Further information on the Covid-secure measures we have in place can be found on our website. We have been awarded the Visit Britain *We're Good to Go* Industry Standard mark. This means we have followed government and industry COVID-19 guidelines, have a Risk Assessment in place and have a process to maintain cleanliness and aid social distancing.

<http://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum/visit-us>



Picture:
Plaster casts
in the
Museum of
Classical
Archaeology's
Cast Gallery.
(Photography
by Alice
Boagey)

About the Museum of Classical Archaeology

The Museum of Classical Archaeology is home to one of the finest surviving collections of plaster casts of Greek and Roman sculpture in the world, housed in its atmospheric Cast Gallery. Exhibitions are displayed amongst the casts, creating new dialogues between ancient and modern, antiquity and its reception.

About the University of Cambridge Museums

The University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) is a consortium of the eight University Museums and the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Together, the UCM represents the UK's highest concentration of internationally important collections outside London. With more than five million works of art, artefacts, and specimens, the collections span four and a half billion years. The University of Cambridge Museums are funded by Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation.

For further information and images, please contact the Curator, Dr Susanne Turner
smt41@cam.ac.uk | 01223 335153
www.classics.cam.ac.uk/museum



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