

**Exhibition:** *To Rome and Back: Individualism and Authority in Art, 1500–1800*

**On View:** June 24, 2018–March 17, 2019

**Location:** Resnick Pavilion



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(Los Angeles—May 18, 2018) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is pleased to present *To Rome and Back: Individualism and Authority in Art, 1500–1800*. Assembled almost entirely from LACMA's permanent collection, this examination of Rome presents gifts from years of support to the museum's departments of Costume and Textiles, Decorative Arts and Design, Latin American Art, and Prints and Drawings, in addition to European Painting and Sculpture. The exhibition features 130 objects across a wide range of media, including painting, sculpture, paper, decorative arts (such as ceramics, glass, and cork), tapestries, and costumes. Collectively, these works reveal the importance of Rome to artists and audiences operating in a variety of contexts from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.

For more than 2,000 years, Rome has occupied a central place in the cultural imagination: as a proud republic, as a powerful then decadent empire, as the seat of Catholicism, and above all, as a link to antiquity and the classical world. While its fortunes may have waxed and waned over its long history, its classical epithet—the Eternal City—reflects the enduring power of its legacy and its unceasing ability to inspire thinkers, writers, and artists in Italy and beyond.

“We’re excited to present an exhibition that highlights collaboration across multiple museum departments,” says Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “By including collection objects and meaningful input from five curatorial areas, we are able to show how the importance of Rome as a source of inspiration is not just about European painting.”

“*To Rome and Back* is essentially LACMA’s first opportunity to display a significant portion of its European material in a narrative outside of our permanent collection galleries, and effectively showcase some of the museum’s great highlights,” says Leah Lehmbeck, acting department head of European Painting and Sculpture at LACMA and curator of the exhibition. “At the same time, we are providing context with lesser-known objects within the museum’s collection, some of which have rarely been on view.”

### **About the Exhibition**

*To Rome and Back* explores Rome as place, idea, and as a center of artistic patronage and production through three centuries. The exhibition follows the city from around 1500, when its classical structures and forms permeated art and architecture during the Renaissance, through the Counter-Reformation, when a resurgent Rome re-emerged as a powerhouse of patronage and artistic innovation, to the eve of the industrial age in the 18th century, when the city’s ancient glory seduced an increasingly mobile continent. Even at the height of its influence in the 17th century, Rome harbored deep contradictions—between ancient and novel, pagan and Christian, individualism and authority—and these tensions contribute to the dynamism of the city’s artistic legacy and its continued resonance.

The exhibition reveals Rome’s impact through seven thematic sections, which are organized in loose chronological order. The exhibition begins with a section entitled **Meanings of Rome**. Reeling from the devastating one-two punch of the city’s spiritual collapse in the wake of the Protestant Reformation in 1517 as well as its physical sack in 1527, 16th-century Rome was a city piecing itself together. Despite these setbacks for the city itself, physical manifestations of the ancient empire, the characteristics that came to evoke “Rome”—both real and imagined—were already visible in cultural production occurring elsewhere in Italy. This section of the exhibition presents a selection of 16th-century Italian paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts that were produced outside of Rome but incorporate references or allusions to the ancient city. For example, at the entrance to the exhibition, *Archangel Raphael*, sculpted of wood and exquisitely painted, wears a uniform inspired by Roman military garb. In a large devotional picture of the *Holy Family* by Giorgio Vasari, the Virgin wears garments inspired by antique dress, while the ancient ruins at Tivoli are visible in the background. The vitrines at the center of the gallery include both ancient Roman glasswork and 16th-century examples that emulated ancient Roman techniques.

The practice of **Identifying and Collecting** objects and works of art associated with Rome is explored in the next section. During the 16th-century, the papacy and Roman aristocracy commissioned new masterworks by artists like Raphael and Michelangelo; images of these new monuments, as well as ancient ones, were circulated through prints and contributed to a growing interest in Roman history, art, and architecture. Ancient material, as well as tapestries, painting, sculpture, furniture, and other domestic objects referencing the classical world through technique, subject, or style, were widely collected in patrician homes and served to bolster the collector's status and legitimacy. LACMA's portrait of Marino Grimani, by the Venetian artist, Tintoretto, depicts one such collector, and while his powerful and wealthy family fought to reduce the influence of the Roman papacy in and around Venice, they assumed the heritage of ancient Rome as their own.

The following section, entitled **A Roman Style**, examines a powerful moment of stylistic innovation that emerged in Rome at the dawn of the 17th century, just as the city was benefiting from a reinvigorated papacy, and emphasized physical and emotional realism. Largely associated with the painter Caravaggio, its influence can be detected in pictures emphasizing the quiet drama of religious and humanist figures, or in the portrayal of everyday subjects. While the style's popularity in Rome lasted only a few decades, it had a lasting impact on painting in Italy and beyond. More recently, the modern interest in realism has contributed to the popularity of this material in public collections, including LACMA's.

The next section gathers painting, sculpture, decorative arts, and textiles around the theme of **Inspiration and Awe**. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Catholic Church and other patrons commissioned works of art designed to inspire audiences with their vibrant colors, drama, and theatricality, while new conceptions of time and space contributed to the adoption of illusionistic pictorial techniques. These stirring compositions and techniques are visible in religious works of art and objects, such as altarpiece paintings and ecclesiastical textiles, as well as domestic furniture and other decorative objects.

The works in the following gallery speak to the **Classical Authority** of Rome. As the city established itself as an increasingly powerful cultural and artistic center, it continued to attract artists from beyond Italy, who absorbed the city's monuments, forms, and styles, then returned home or continued their travels to France, Belgium, Holland, Spain, and even New Spain. The concentrated and calculated use of mythological stories, antique models, and rhetorical and theatrical gesture flourished

in 17th-century Rome, and these modes of art making came to signify institutional authority well beyond the borders of the Italian peninsula.

The next section explores a preference and **Taste for the Antique** among newly mobile Europeans, particularly young, British aristocrats on the “Grand Tour,” who arrived in Rome to complete their educations and establish their reputations. Such men of means, such as Sir Wyndham Knatchbull-Wyndham, whose portrait by Pompeo Batoni is featured in this section, commissioned portraits with references to popular classical motifs and recognizable antique sculpture, and collected antiquities as well as modern replicas of classical Rome. Their presence contributed to a growing market in decorative objects showcasing loosely classical themes, as well as the incorporation of ancient forms into contemporary dress.

Finally, **A Sense of Place** includes objects produced as Rome’s power began to wane in the mid-1800s, in part due to the emergence of enlightenment thought. Many of these works of art, in their references to Rome’s monuments and ancient past, harbor an air of nostalgia that is new to these visions of place. Visitors commissioned or purchased prints, drawings, and small collectibles, as well as painting and sculpture that were produced for an increasingly globalized market. While many of these objects reference the Roman cityscape and countryside, their function is not simply documentary. Hubert Robert, for example, created a monumental and fanciful combination of 18th-century France and ancient Rome, while Piranesi circulated countless prints of actual sites alongside imagined ruins.

The exhibition’s thematic approach and its inclusion of spectacular works of art across many different media and curatorial departments will allow museum visitors to appreciate the myriad ways in which Rome inspired artists and patrons during a critical period in its history.

### **Related Programming**

Visit [lacma.org](http://lacma.org) for the latest on exhibition-related programming.

Curator-written tours are available at the beginning of the exhibition. Visitors may choose from three guides focusing on different themes.

**Credit:** This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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#### **About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, mirroring Los Angeles's rich cultural heritage and uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of over 135,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of art history from new and unexpected points of view. A museum of international stature as well as a vital cultural center for Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collection with the Greater Los Angeles County and beyond through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over 1.5 million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions more through community partnerships, school outreach programs, and creative digital initiatives. LACMA's main campus is located halfway between the ocean and downtown, adjacent to the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the future home of the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Dedicated to serving all of Los Angeles, LACMA collaborates with a range of curators, educators, and artists on exhibitions and programs at various sites throughout the County.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

#### **Image captions**

(Left) Michael Sweerts, *Plague in an Ancient City*, c. 1652–54, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of The Ahmanson Foundation, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; (Center, Left) Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Portrait of a Gentleman*, c. 1670–75, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of The Ahmanson Foundation in honor of the museum's 50th anniversary, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; (Center, Right) Unknown, *Archangel Raphael*, c. 1600, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Anna Bing Arnold; (Right) Unknown, *Cope*, 1700–25, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Costume Council Fund, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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