



MASTERPIECES OF ROMAN SCULPTURE AT THE MMFA IN 2026

The legendary Torlonia Collection will make a rare stop in Montreal
From March 14 to July 19, 2026



Montreal, December 2, 2025 – The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) is honoured to host *The Torlonia Collection: Masterpieces of Roman Sculpture* from March 14 to July 19, 2026. The final stop on a historic North American tour, this major exhibition will bring together 58 life-like marble sculptures: Roman statues, busts, and sarcophagi; stunning bas-reliefs; mythological creatures; and striking portraits of gods and goddesses, emperors, and their wives. These masterpieces are being shown in Canada for the first time.

“It is an incredible privilege for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts to present the exceptional Torlonia Collection. Unseen since the end of World War II, its riches have become the stuff of legend. The exhibition dedicated to it is an invitation to an aesthetic and archaeological discovery. It brings together sculptures, dating back two millennia, that have nevertheless survived with a vitality and freshness that make them timeless,” says **Stéphane Aquin**, the Rossy Foundation Director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

“Fondazione Torlonia is excited to be sharing the Torlonia Collection with audiences in Canada for the first time. This exceptional group of ancient sculptures is a testament to the enduring cultural legacy of ancient Rome, as well as the vision and passion of multiple generations of the Torlonia family,” adds **Alessandro Poma Murialdo**, President of Fondazione Torlonia.

“Fondazione Torlonia is delighted to present this important ensemble of three centuries of ancient treasures in Canada. This exhibition reflects not only the history of the artworks themselves, but also the legacies of their many owners: the centuries-old Roman aristocracy, acclaimed restorers, and visionary collectors. It exemplifies the ‘contemporary act’ of a long-standing principle underpinning the Torlonia Family’s practice of artistic patronage—for through art, people find their destinies to be intertwined, shaping not only what we see, but also who we become,” says **Carlotta Loverini Botta**, Director of Fondazione Torlonia.

“Assembled by a lineage of princes, the Torlonia Collection offers a rare opportunity to experience the sensory power these ancient marble sculptures still radiate today. Visitors will have the chance to meet the gaze of Roman emperors such as Marcus Aurelius, Hadrian, and Commodus, and to encounter Hercules, Bacchus, or Cupid as they walk among some of the most celebrated statues of Antiquity,” continues **Laura Vigo**, Curator of Asian art at the MMFA and head of the Montreal exhibition.

The Largest Private Collection of Ancient Roman Marble Sculptures

The Torlonia Collection is one of the most important ensembles of ancient Roman sculptures still in existence. Assembled in the 19th century by the Torlonia family, most notably by prince and banker Alessandro Torlonia (1800–1884), who founded the Museo Torlonia in 1876, the collection rivals the Vatican and Capitoline museums in both quality and scope.

A true “collection of collections,” it was built thanks to excavations on former imperial estates and through a series of acquisitions of major holdings. It comprises 623 marble works (and a single bronze work) representing Roman sculpture from the Republic through the Empire periods. For much of the past century, access to these works has been limited: they were known primarily through 19th-century publications. After spending decades out of public view, the sculptures have now been restored and are finally being presented in all their splendour.

From Rome to Montreal: A Historic Journey

The Torlonia Collection was kept out of public view from the closure of the Museo Torlonia in the mid-20th century until its presentation at the Capitoline Museums in 2020. It is now being rediscovered thanks to two international tours that brought it to the Louvre in 2024, and to the Art Institute of Chicago and the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth this year.

After generating considerable enthusiasm in Italy, France, and the United States, a selection of masterpieces from this renowned collection will now make a stop in Montreal. This

presentation offers a rare opportunity to see, outside Europe, the most prestigious private collection of ancient Roman sculpture ever gathered.

A Gallery of Larger-than-Life Characters

The Torlonia Collection: Masterpieces of Roman Sculpture brings together 58 works of exceptional historical and artistic significance. Thirty of these pieces have been newly restored and are being shown publicly for the first time in over 75 years. Visitors will have the chance to discover the many treasures unearthed by the Torlonia family on their vast estates.

These exquisitely carved Roman characters span a period from the 5th century BCE to the early 4th century CE, with the majority dating from the High Imperial period (1st–2nd centuries CE) —widely regarded as the zenith of the Roman Empire. The collection includes exquisitely carved bas-reliefs, imposing deities and mythological figures, and powerful portraits —including the celebrated *Maiden of Vulci*. Once embellished with gold leaf, gemstones, and real earrings, the face of this funerary bust continues to move viewers today.

Visitors will also encounter the renowned *Hestia Giustiniani*, the only complete Roman marble copy of a 500-year-old Greek bronze. With its stiffly pleated peplos and solemn, frontal pose, it evokes the Severe Style of 470–460 BCE, conveying strength and dignity. The exhibition further features one of the most studied ancient fragments in the world: a 3rd-century relief from Portus, Rome’s imperial harbour, on which traces of the original polychromy still remain.

Sculptures that Bear the Marks of Time

One section of the exhibition will also shed light on the crucial role that restoration treatments have played in the life of these works over time, revealing how conservation can breathe new life into them—at times through the hand of renowned sculptors from the 17th to the 19th century. Among the examples on view is the celebrated *Statue of a Resting Goat*. While its body is ancient, its head, crowned with luxuriant curls, was added in the 17th century by a young Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the future master of the Baroque, at the request of the collector and banker Vincenzo Giustiniani.

CREDITS

An exhibition co-organized by the Art Institute of Chicago and the Fondazione Torlonia, in collaboration with the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Kimbell Art Museum, and The Museum Box.

Curators: **Lisa Ayla Çakmak**, Chair and Curator of Arts of the Ancient Mediterranean and Byzantium at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), and **Katharine A. Raff**, Elizabeth McIlvaine Curator of Arts of the Ancient Mediterranean and Byzantium at the AIC. The Montreal presentation is curated by **Laura Vigo**, Curator of Asian Art at the MMFA.

Scenography: **Stéphane Roy**, guest scenographer, in collaboration with **Carolina Bassani**, Project Manager – Scenography, MMFA.

A SPACE FOR EXPLORATION AND CREATION

Open to all audiences, a **mediation space** will invite audiences to explore the “life of a sculpture”. Through sight, sound, touch, and even smell, visitors will discover the history of Roman marble, encountering the fabrics, pigments, and fragrances that once enhanced ancient statues. The space will also include a reading and discussion corner, along with a creative workshop where everyone will be encouraged to bring mythological figures to life through a collage and interactive video.

ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE EXHIBITION

In parallel with the exhibition, a **series of lectures by internationally renowned art historians** and archaeologists will offer deeper insight into the Torlonia Collection. A **conversation with the exhibition’s curators** will also give visitors the chance to learn more about the motivations and challenges that shaped the project. In collaboration with the Cinéma du Musée, a **film series** will transport audiences to ancient Rome through iconic historical classics such as Stanley Kubrick’s *Spartacus* and Federico Fellini’s *Satyricon*, along with a special double screening of Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* I and II. The program will also feature the world preview of **the first documentary ever dedicated to the Torlonia Collection**, directed by Agostino Osio, that traces the Collection’s history and follows its recent journey to North America.

The MMFA’s Bourgie Hall will pay tribute to the Eternal City with the **concert [Les Violons du Roy in Rome, from Corelli to Nino Rota](#)**. Finally, **La Buvette** and **Pyjama Morning** will be an opportunity to discover the exhibition in a festive or family atmosphere. Full details will be announced at a later date.

PUBLICATION

Published by MMFA Publishing Department, the illustrated catalogue retraces the history of the Torlonia Family and the development of their extraordinary collection. Edited by Mary-Dailey Desmarais, Chief Curator of the MMFA and holder of the Zhao-Ionescu Chair, along with Laura Vigo, the volume focuses on several of the sculptures featured in the exhibition. It also sheds light on the social significance, functions, and craftsmanship behind these masterpieces, which today form an exceptional cultural legacy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The sculptures have been restored by Fondazione Torlonia with the contribution of the Fondazione Bvlgari.

Chiomenti supports the institutional activities of Fondazione Torlonia.

Patrons: Sabino and Clara, and Grassi Giovanni and Ginette Di Schiavi.

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From left to right: Statue of Crouching Aphrodite, 1st c., Roman, Imperial Period | Portrait of a Young Woman, known as the Maiden of Vulci, mid-1st c. BCE, Roman, late Republican Period. | Portrait of a Man, known as the Old Man of Otricoli, mid-1st c. BCE, Roman, late Republican Period. Torlonia Collection, Rome. © Fondazione Torlonia. Photos Lorenzo De Masi

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ABOUT THE MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Founded in 1860, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) has been built on the generosity of multiple generations of Montrealers. Its mission is to acquire, conserve, study, interpret and present significant works of art from around the world and from every era, in the hope that members of its community and all Museum visitors may benefit from the transformative powers of art. The MMFA's collection showcases Quebec and Canadian heritage, Indigenous art and international art from a progressive and innovative perspective. It comprises close to 47,000 paintings, sculptures, graphic artworks, photographs, multimedia installations and decorative art objects dating from antiquity to the present. The MMFA's exhibitions and cultural programming aim to inspire new ways of looking at art and the history of art. As a hub of art, community and exchange and a pioneer in the provision of art therapy, the Museum collaborates with partners in the fields of community organization, education, health and technology to offer all audiences an enriching and transformative experience of art. Thus, through each of its projects, the MMFA continues to strive towards a more inclusive, accessible and just world. mbam.qc.ca

ABOUT FONDAZIONE TORLONIA

Fondazione Torlonia came into being at the behest of Prince Alessandro Torlonia, with the aim of preserving and promoting the Torlonia Collection and Villa Albani Torlonia: "cultural heritage of the Family for humanity" to be handed down to future generations. Together, as well as comprising an

exceptional artistic heritage, they reflect some of the key moments of our civilization, of the history of collecting, as well as of archaeology and restoration: the Torlonia Collection offers a significant testimony of the history of collecting items of antiquity, and Villa Albani Torlonia—a sublime testimony of the coupling of reason and nature—constitutes an unspoiled representation of 18th-century taste.

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