

Poseidon and the Sea: Myth, Cult, and Daily Life

HOOD
MUSEUM OF ART
www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu

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Poseidon Comes to Dartmouth's Hood Museum of Art This Winter



This winter the Hood Museum of Art will showcase the first major U.S. museum exhibition to focus on the ancient Greek god Poseidon and his relationship to the sea. The art on display will illuminate how ancient societies in the Mediterranean world worshipped this powerful god, who wielded immense authority through his dominion over the sea, as well as horses and diverse natural phenomena. Included in this rich exhibition are ancient vases decorated with mythological scenes and other objects that demonstrate cult worship of this god—known as Poseidon to the Greeks, Nethuns to the Etruscans, and Neptune to Romans—and aspects of daily life across the ancient Mediterranean. The exhibition will be on view from January 17 through March 15, 2015.

Poseidon and the Sea was curated by Dartmouth alumnus Seth Pevnick, Class of 1999, who is Acting Director, Chief Curator, and Richard E. Perry Curator of Greek and Roman Art at the Tampa Museum of Art, as well as a former Hood Museum of Art intern. Dr. Pevnick was inspired to

organize the show by the nearly life-sized marble statue of the god from the Tampa collection, which presides over the entrance to the exhibition. Accompanying the exhibition, Dr. Pevnick has edited a richly illustrated catalogue, with essays by several leading scholars. He will give an introductory lecture at the Hood on Friday, January 30, followed the next day by a half-day symposium.

“It is very gratifying and deeply meaningful for the Hood Museum of Art to be able to present this magnificent exhibition that has been curated by a former Dartmouth classics major and noted art historian and scholar of ancient art,” said Michael Taylor, the Director of the Hood. “The Poseidon exhibition brings the teaching mission of the museum full circle, with this former student and Hood intern bringing his expertise back to campus for the benefit of current students interested in the art of the ancient Mediterranean. We hope that this opportunity might inspire future Dartmouth-educated curators of ancient art.”

“I will always remain grateful to Dartmouth and the Hood Museum for providing me with the opportunity, as an undergraduate, to work directly with antiquities. It was there that I took my first steps towards a museum career, and it is truly gratifying now to help bring an antiquities exhibition there,” said Pevnick. “*Poseidon and the Sea* has been well received in Tampa and at

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the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, and I look forward to seeing the installation in Hanover, where we will be able to incorporate a highlight from the Hood's permanent collection.”

The works of art and material culture in the exhibition date to between 800 BCE and 400 CE, and were created by ancient Greek, Etruscan, and Roman artists and artisans. They include striking black-figure and red-figure pottery; sculptures in terracotta, marble, and precious metals; and extraordinary examples of ancient glass, mosaics, carved gems, and coins, all providing a rich picture of life in the ancient world.

Featuring over 110 works from major public and private collections in the United States and Europe, *Poseidon and the Sea* examines not only the myth of Poseidon and his place among the gods but also a range of religious cults and votive objects, as well as the myriad ways in which daily life in the ancient Mediterranean world was tied to the sea. Instantly recognizable by his trident and accompanied by fish and dolphins, Poseidon is characterized by his sturdy build, thick wavy hair, and full beard. He looms large in Greek mythology as a central figure in the battle between the Olympian gods that brought order to the world and the monstrous race of giants that threatened to overthrow them and create havoc. His most famous sanctuary was at Isthmia, where the Peloponnesos joins the Greek mainland, but he was also worshipped at landlocked sanctuaries. Votive offerings—from a small bronze horse, to schools of fish made of lead, to representations of the god himself—were meant to illuminate and impress. The exhibition also includes a monumental bronze trident from the J. Paul Getty Museum that is over a dozen feet long and is believed to have accompanied a colossal statue of the god that is now lost.

Beyond mythology and religion, however, the sea was the center of daily life in towns and cities along the coast of the Mediterranean. It provided food and other resources, and allowed for easy travel and trade. Allusions to the sea are found throughout ancient art, from cargo boats and warships to dolphins, fish, and octopi. Visitors to the exhibition will discover illustrations of fishermen and shipbuilders alongside fish hooks and ship models, blurring the line between art and artifact, bringing the world of antiquity to life, and offering an intimate look at the timeless beauty and wonder of the sea that continues to resonate with us in the present day.

This exhibition was organized by the Tampa Museum of Art. Its presentation at the Hood Museum of Art was generously supported by Claire Foerster and Daniel S. Bernstein, Class of 1987, and the Eleanor Smith Fund, the Evelyn A. J. Hall Fund, and the Marie-Louise and Samuel R. Rosenthal Fund.

About the Hood Museum of Art

The mission of the Hood Museum of Art, as a teaching museum, is to create an ideal learning environment that fosters transformative encounters with works of art. This dynamic educational and cultural facility houses one of the oldest and largest college collections in the country, with

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more than 70,000 objects acquired since 1772. Among its most important works are six Assyrian stone reliefs that date from around 900 BCE. The collection also presents art from other ancient cultures, the Americas, Europe, Africa, Papua New Guinea, and many more regions of the world. The Hood seeks to inspire and educate through direct engagement with original works of art and offers access to the rich diversity of its collections through ongoing highlights displays, special exhibitions, an online collections database, and a wide array of programs and events.

About Dartmouth

Founded in 1769, Dartmouth is a member of the Ivy League and consistently ranks among the world's greatest colleges and universities. Dartmouth has forged a singular identity for combining its deep commitment to outstanding undergraduate liberal arts and graduate and professional education with distinguished research and scholarship in the arts and sciences and its three leading professional schools—the Geisel School of Medicine, Thayer School of Engineering, and the Tuck School of Business.

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Image caption: Roman, statue of Poseidon / Neptune alongside dolphin, first century CE (Flavian [CE 69–96]?), marble. Tampa Museum of Art, Joseph Veach Noble Collection 1986.135.