



**Publication:** The Straits Times Life!

**Date:** Nov 29 2007

**Headline:** Golden Greeks

Blockbuster event #2  
GREEK MASTERPIECES  
FROM THE LOUVRE

# GOLDEN GREEKS

Paris' Louvre Museum has sent some masterpieces to your doorstep. Admire the statues and other priceless artefacts at the National Museum from next month



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ARTS REPORTER

**C**RATES are "exploding" in an exhibition hall at the National Museum. Ironically, all this drama is happening to protect some delicate objects: the



**SCENES OF WAR** (above): The belly of this amphora, a storing vessel, is covered with scenes of a battle between the Olympian gods and a race of giants.

**FRAGILE CARGO** (left): The Venus d'Arles awaits the removal of her crate at the National Museum. The Louvre has sent a large part of its Classical Greek and Hellenistic collection on tour as that wing of the museum is being refurbished.

PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE, LOUVRE MUSEUM/D. LEBEE ET C., DEAMBROSIS

priceless Greek statues on loan from the Louvre Museum in Paris for a blockbuster art exhibition here.

Called Greek Masterpieces From The Louvre, the show, which starts on Dec 9, will showcase some 130 artefacts from the prestigious French museum's collection.

About 10 free-standing statues have been transported to Singapore in special crates. The front and back walls of each crate pop out, and the statues can be wheeled out without anyone actually touching them.

The other fragile items on show include marble busts, terracotta vases and other ornaments and instruments from the 5th to 1st century BC. Together, they give visitors a glimpse of what life was like in ancient Greece.

Museum director Lee Chor Lin will not say how much it cost to bring the exhibition to Singapore, although she does allow that "to date, this exhibition has been given one of the largest allocations of funds".

It is not surprising, since the Louvre rarely loans out more than a dozen items at one time.

But the 214-year-old museum is making an exception because the wing which houses its Classical Greek and Hellenistic collection is being refurbished.

The last time the museum did renovations to that section was some 200 years ago.

So, rather than having the artworks languish in storage, parts of the collection are making their way around the world. They have been shown in Japan and China, for example, and after Singapore, will move on to Macau.

But moving these artefacts is a delicate operation.

Two Louvre employees are assigned as babysitters, a regular practice for objects of high value.

They stick close to the crates until they reach the respective museums, storage areas or cargo sections of the planes, and clear customs at the various pit stops.

They also supervise the installation of the artefacts, making sure that only art handlers and trained museum personnel touch them.

One of the couriers is Dr Anne Coulle, 43, chief curator of the department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman antiquities in the Louvre.

She says: "My career is a little strange compared to most curators. I travel. But I like it because it's a great opportunity for the Louvre to travel so much

in Asia and for two civilisations to keep in touch."

She does worry about accidents but "the professional team at the National Museum has been great".

She adds: "Even if the pieces stay in the Louvre, catastrophes can happen. There could be a fire in the museum, or floods. In fact, we moved some of the pieces from the basement because we feared that water from the Seine was seeping in."

On the Singaporean side, curator Szan Tan, 35, oversees the exhibition and planned its storyline.

She says: "The Greek civilisation has a lot of relevance to us. For example, agon, or the spirit of competition, is something that we can recognise. It is wanting to do the best and excelling in what we do."

"Other values are applicable to us, such as democracy, and an event like the Olympics."

The exhibition has been two years in the making. In 2005, the Louvre was in Asia to scout for locations the artefacts could travel to.

It approached the National Museum and a deal was struck.

The pieces on show depict Greek history spanning the Classical Greek period and the Hellenistic period.

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# Oh Venus, make my wish come true

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5th to 4th century BC, during which Greek civilisation flourished. In this golden age, the foundations of mathematics, science and the tenets of Western philosophy and politics were said to have been established.

One of the artefacts from this period is a pair of gold earrings – decorated with bull heads – discovered in a tomb in Macedonia, Greece.

The Hellenistic period took over in the 3rd to 1st century BC, after the death of Alexander the Great, when the Greek empire gradually declined and the Romans took over. The Romans made many copies of the Greek statues, many of which are destroyed now. It is the surviving ancient Roman copies that are on show in the exhibition.

Some of these antique copies include Venus d'Arles, which is 2.2m tall and weighs over 450kg. The magnificent marble statue

## Blockbuster event #2 GREEK MASTERPIECES FROM THE LOUVRE

of the partially disrobed Greek goddess of love was discovered in Arles, France, in 1651 and given to French King Louis XIV to decorate a gallery in his Versailles palace.

Only the head was found and the royal sculptor then, Francois Girardon, restored the body. In order to make the figure a Venus, he added attributes such as an apple in the right hand and a mirror in the left, both symbols associated with the goddess.

In the Singapore exhibition, visitors can find the statue in the section on religion in ancient Greece, which comprises other graceful sculptures of Greek gods and goddesses. There's one of the sun god, Apollo.

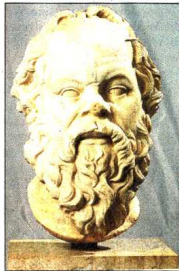
Called Apollo Sauroctonus – The Lizard Slayer, the 1.67m-tall marble piece shows Apollo as an adolescent nonchalantly leaning against a tree, about to capture a lizard that is crawling up the trunk.

Ms Tan says with a laugh: "When these sculptures were first installed, the technicians and operators said, 'These are so sweet (Hokkien for beautiful)'. Their appeal is obvious."

"People should come see the show. There might not be another exhibition like it here for 200 years."

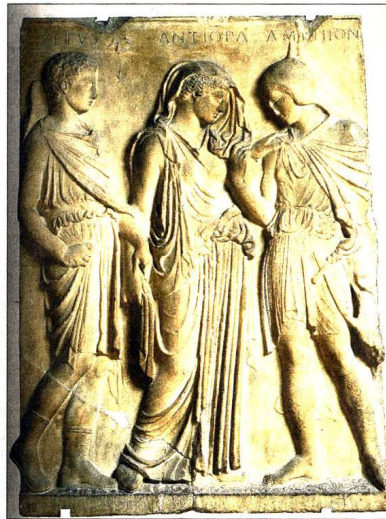
> [chiahita@sph.com.sg](mailto:chiahita@sph.com.sg)

> Greek Masterpieces From The Louvre is on at the National Museum from Dec 9 to March 16 next year. Admission is \$8 for adults and \$4 for students and senior citizens.



**SOCRATIC PROBLEM** (left): This marble bust of the Greek philosopher Socrates is thought to be a Roman copy of a lost bronze statue by Lysippos. Socrates' philosophy is known only through the writings of other men.

**STEALING BEAUTY** (right): This bell-krater, an Attic vase, shows Ganymede, a young Trojan hero known for his beauty, playing with a hoop. The other side of the vase shows Zeus, who kidnapped the youth and took him to Olympus.



PHOTOS: LOUVRE MUSEUM/D. LEBEE ET C. DEAMBROSIS

**A POET'S LOSS** (above): In this marble relief panel, the poet Orpheus has to surrender his dead wife Eurydice to the messenger Hermes after an attempt to rescue her. The queen of the underworld had warned Orpheus not to look at Eurydice. But Orpheus, doubtful of her presence, looked back and had to lose her forever.

**YOUNG SUN GOD** (left): Apollo Sauroctonus – The Lizard Slayer, dating from 350 to 340BC, is regarded as one of the best works of the Athenian sculptor, Praxiteles. Apollo was known to defeat evil creatures and have curative powers.



# More Greek goodies

THE National Museum has organised a series of activities to run alongside the exhibition. Here are the highlights:

**Public lecture:** Greek Vases Of The Pre-Classical Period by Dr Anne Coulie, chief curator of the department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman antiquities, Louvre museum  
**Time/Venue:** Dec 6, 7 to 8pm, Seminar Rooms 1 and 2, free admission

Dr Coulie has been chief curator since 2005 and specialises in pre-Classical pottery. She will introduce Greek art history to put the exhibition in context, and talk about how ceramic manufacturing techniques had evolved in antiquity.

**Film screenings:** Odysseys Of Myth: Greek Mythology In Cinema

**Time/Venue:** Feb 27 to 29 next year, 7.30pm, Gallery Theatre, tickets cost \$10. For more details and to book, log on to [www.nationalmuseum.sg](http://www.nationalmuseum.sg)

The films shown are Orphee (1950), a re-interpretation of the famous Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, by French film auteur Jean Cocteau; Szerelem, Elektra (1974), a surreal film by Hungarian director Miklos Jancso; and Taxidi Sta Kithira (1984), a poetic portrait of the consequences of the Greek civil war by acclaimed Greek director, Theo Angelopoulos.

**Interactive tour:** Ancient Greeks Alive!, for children aged five to nine

**Time/Venue:** Jan 1, Feb 7 and 8 next year, 2 and 4pm, and March 15, 2pm, tickets cost \$15 each, including the entrance ticket for the exhibition, meeting point outside the exhibition

Take your tots to discover more about Greek civilisation, its gods and personalities, in a fun and accessible tour by theatre company Act 3.