FRESH PERSPECTIVES *on the Permanent Collection from* DARTMOUTH'S STUDENTS

CHECKLIST

Roman, Egyptian
Fayum portraits, 2nd century CE, encaustic/tempera paint on wood
Yale University Art Gallery: Gift of the Associates in Fine Arts 1939; 1939.263–264

Roman
Portrait of a man, possibly reworked from a portrait of Nero, original ca. 59–64 CE, recut ca. 117–138 CE, marble
Yale University Art Gallery: Gift of Maitland F. Griggs, B.A. 1896; 1961.30

Roman
Portrait of a man, 3rd century CE, marble
Yale University Art Gallery: Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., B.A. 1913, Fund: 1999.59.1

Roman
Portrait head of a young boy, ca. 20 BCE–60 CE, marble
Gift of Mrs. William Dexter; S.965.90.14

Roman, Cypriot (?)
Portrait head of a bearded male, 2nd century CE, marble
Gift of Evelyn A. and William B. Jaffe, Class of 1964H; S.966.138

Roman
Denarius of Julius Caesar, 44 BCE, silver
Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund and through gifts by exchange; 2010.2

Roman
Denarius of Octavian, 28–27 BCE, silver
Yale University Art Gallery: Numismatic Collection Transfer, 2001; 2001.87.885

Roman
Cistophor of Hadrian, 128 CE, silver
Yale University Art Gallery: Ruth Elizabeth White Fund with the Assistance of Ben Lee Damsky; 2009.110.14

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Roman, portrait of a man, possibly reworked from a portrait of Nero, original ca. 59–64 CE, recut ca. 117–138 CE, marble. Yale University Art Gallery: Gift of Maitland F. Griggs, B.A. 1896; 1961.30

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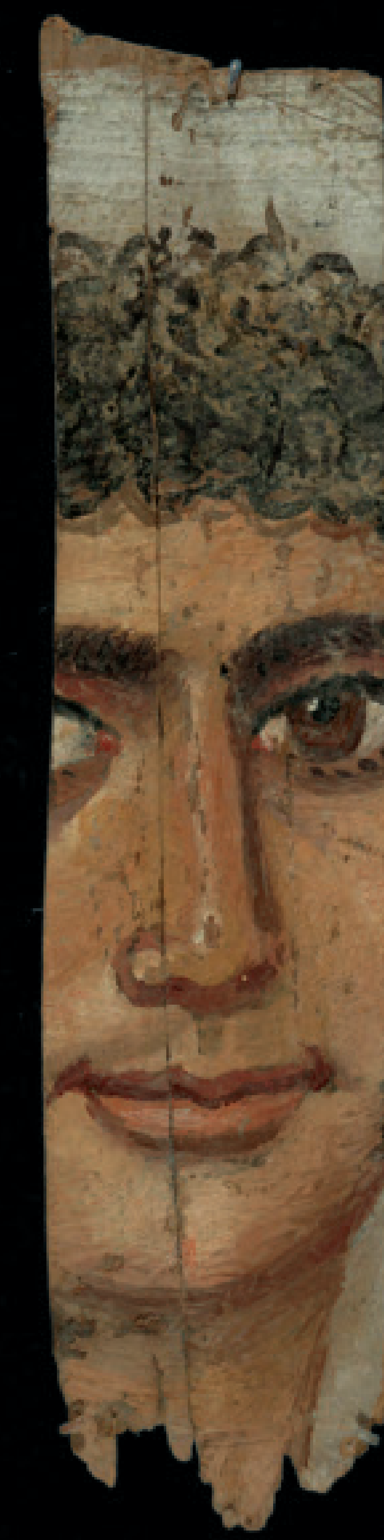
A SPACE *for* DIALOGUE



Roman, Egyptian, portrait of a youth, 2nd century CE, encaustic on wood.
Yale University Art Gallery: Gift of the Associates in Fine Arts; 1939.263

FACES OF ANTIQUITY
Portraiture of the Roman Empire



■ Roman, *denarius* of Julius Caesar, 44 BCE, silver. Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisitions Fund and through gifts by exchange; 2010.2 ■ Roman, *denarius* of Octavian, 28–27 BCE, silver. Yale University Art Gallery Numismatic Collection Transfer, 2001; 2001.87.885 ■ Roman, *cistophor* of Hadrian, 128 CE, silver. Yale University Art Gallery: Ruth Elizabeth White Fund with the Assistance of Ben Lee Damsky; 2009.110.14

Portraits, or visual representations of specific individuals, became exceptionally prominent during the Roman Empire. This installation presents some of the most widespread variations of these personal depictions, including funerary painting, sculptural busts, and coinage. Though we now view these objects primarily as works of art, they also fulfilled important political and commemorative functions, both privately and publicly, for Romans.

An inclination toward realism, with particular attention to an individual's facial features, began to emerge in Roman portraiture in the first century BCE. This interest in verity had its origins in the Roman practice of creating and displaying wax death masks of deceased family members, which, by the nature of their production, relayed detail with remarkable fidelity. These waxen masks, called *imagines*, served to advertise a family's illustrious history of public service and inspire its younger generations to strive for such success (Fejfer, 262). Sculptors began to translate the *imagines* into marble during the Republican period (509 BCE–27BCE), which subsequently became identified with remarkably accurate renderings of old men with strong physiognomies and clear signs of aging. Traces of this tradition remain in the coin showing Julius Caesar with visible wrinkles and sunken, weary eyes. Contemporary Romans would have read these physical attributes as signs of experience, devotion to public service, and military prowess—all highly esteemed virtues that were thought to be epitomized by knowledgeable and accomplished men (Fejfer, 265). As "dictator in perpetuity," Caesar would have been determined to portray himself as a capable leader, especially on the coins that passed through the hands of Romans on a daily basis.

A dramatic shift in style is reflected in the coin of Octavian (later Augustus), which was minted less than two decades later. As emperor, Augustus's official sculptural style combined Republican individuality with the more generally idealized figural renderings of the Greeks. This coin presents a young virile man with a smooth face, full tresses, and strong features. Portraits of this type emphasized youth, beauty, and benevolence of character while still accommodating individuality. Augustus consistently depicted himself in his physical prime, which in turn became the aesthetic of the era in all media, from coins to sculpture.

Portraiture also represented a shorthand of sorts. The Roman viewer was able to read the individualized parts of a pictured face and interpret the details in relation to that person's character (Fejfer, 265). As a result, imperial portraiture was an effective means of conveying a specific ideology via the way in which an emperor might choose to represent himself. For example, the emperor Hadrian (117–138 CE) expressed his philhellenism (love of Greek culture) and intellectualism by wearing a beard in all public images in an overt reference to familiar representations of luxuriously bearded Hellenic philosophers (Zanker, 218). A silver coin that bears Hadrian's portrait demonstrates this famous attribute and makes reference to his military triumphs by the laurel wreath worn on his head. Imperial sculptural portraits also included these same features causing Hadrian's image to be remarkably consistent throughout the empire.

One common way to identify portraits is through the subject's hairstyle, a distinctive and recognizable element in imperial portrait typology (Fejfer, 269). In fact, the sheer consistency of the hairstyles of certain emperors even facilitates the identification of busts that have been recut. The portrait of a man from the second century CE is believed to have been altered from an original bust of the Emperor Nero (54–68 CE), based on the distinctive hairstyle. Interestingly, the hair is obviously disproportional to the (new) face, which was more dramatically recarved than the hair. Nero was an unpopular emperor, and after his death the Roman senate declared a *damnatio memoriae,* an official condemnation of the memory of someone who had dishonored the state. As a result, all visual evidence of his existence had to be destroyed, defaced, or otherwise removed from view, suggesting his presumably numerous portrait busts as promising candidates for revision into new subjects.

With imperial portraiture so successfully circulated in numismatic and sculptural form, many citizens adopted the stylistic choices of the emperor then in power. A portrait of a man from the third century CE thus bears a remarkable resemblance to the emperor Gallienus (253–268 CE). The man's upturned gaze, crease of the brow, hairstyle, and clipped beard follow the emperor's depictions almost exactly. The popularity of imperial stylistic imitation is in fact one of the most useful methods for dating objects found outside of their original context.

In addition to sculpture, painting was a popular medium for private portraiture in the Roman world. Unfortunately, for the most part Roman painting survives only fragmentarily, with the exception of works produced and preserved in the aridity of the Egyptian climate. The tradition of encaustic, or wax, painting, as seen in the mummy portrait of a youth, emerges in Egypt following its imperial conquest by Augustus in 30 BCE. This young man is depicted with a high degree of realism—the strong gaze, as well, conveys a palpable sense of the deceased individual. These portrait paintings would have been placed on the exterior of a mummy and held in place by the wrapped bandages, according to traditional Egyptian burial practice. The incorporation of these Roman-style portraits into Egyptian funerary customs reflects the strength of the Roman influence upon personal representation throughout the empire.

Ancient Romans placed great emphasis on the accurate depiction of the individual in both public and private spheres. As we look into the eyes of the men in these various portraits, we cannot help but feel a deep connection to the ancient world in which they lived and were honored.

Kasia Vincunas,
Mellon Special Project Curatorial Intern

Some objects in this installation are on loan from the Yale University Art Gallery as part of their innovative Collection-Sharing Initiative, which has been made possible by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Roman, portrait head of a young boy, ca. 20 BCE–60 CE, marble. Gift of Mrs. William Dexter; S.965.90.14