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MAGNIFICENT ASSYRIAN PALACE RELIEFS ON VIEW AT THE GETTY VILLA

Masterworks on special loan from the British Museum in London

Assyria: Palace Art of Ancient Iraq

At the Getty Villa

October 2, 2019–September 5, 2022



Royal Lion Hunt, 875 - 860 B.C, Unknown. Assyrian. Gypsum
Dimensions: Object: H: 95.8 Å~ W: 137.2 Å~ D: 20.3 cm (37 11/16 Å~ 54 Å~ 8 in.) British Museum [1849,1222.8] [1849]. Image © The Trustees of the British Museum. Accession No. VEX.2019.2.1

LOS ANGELES - In the ninth to seventh centuries B.C., the Assyrians, based in northern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), forged a great empire that extended at its height from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and parts of Turkey in the west, through Iraq to the mountains of Iran and Armenia in the east. To glorify their reigns, the Assyrian rulers built majestic palaces adorned with relief sculptures that portray

the king as a mighty warrior and hunter, and confront visitors with imposing images of winged bulls, demons and other mythological guardians.

Assyria: Palace Art of Ancient Iraq, on view at the Getty Villa October 2, 2019 to September 5, 2022, presents a selection of these famous relief sculptures as a special loan from the British Museum in London. Among the greatest masterpieces of Mesopotamian art, the Assyrian reliefs have, since their discovery in the mid-19th century, fascinated viewers with

their vivid depictions of warfare, hunting, building works, mythology, rituals, banqueting and other aspects of Assyrian court life. Often bearing cuneiform inscriptions, some scenes show characters, events and places known from the Old Testament and ancient Greek authors. Together they represent the richest body of narrative art and iconography to have survived from the ancient Near East.

"The British Museum possesses the largest and most important collection of Assyrian reliefs in the world. The fourteen panels on view at the Getty Villa create a compelling overview of the subjects, styles, and artistic achievements of Assyria's sculptors, including outstanding masterpieces such as the 'Banquet Scene' of the last great king of Assyria, Ashurbanipal, reviled as 'Sardanapalus' in the Old Testament," says Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "At the time of their discovery, taste in Britain—and Europe generally—hewed strongly to classical models, by which standard some saw these Assyrian monuments as unrefined; but this attitude soon subsided, and they are now universally appreciated as artistic achievements of great visual and emotional power. In our own day the historical and cultural importance of these sculptures has increased with the tragic destruction by ISIS of many of the reliefs that remained in Iraq. We hope therefore that this display will raise awareness of the need to protect major heritage sites that remain at peril around the world."

The Assyrian heartland lay astride the Tigris River in Mesopotamia, in what is today northern Iraq. The reliefs in this exhibition come from the palaces of kings Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) and Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.) at Kalhu (Nimrud), Sargon II (722–705 B.C.) at Dur-Sharrukin (Khorsabad), and the last great Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668–627 B.C.) at Nineveh.

In the mid-eighth century B.C. the Assyrian Empire expanded westward to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean and Egypt, coming into contact with the Greeks in Phoenicia, on Cyprus, and along the southern coast of Anatolia (Turkey), as well as in trading colonies in northern Syria.

Assyrian palaces were imposing complexes that served both as residences for kings and their families and as the venues for official diplomatic and ceremonial functions. The most important rooms within the palaces were decorated with reliefs. Scenes in the throne room and reception halls typically emphasized the king's military prowess and his status as the all-powerful ruler, sometimes in graphically brutal terms. The king's private quarters could include beneficent mythological creatures, rituals, and other themes. The hunt was one of the most

frequently depicted royal activities, symbolizing the king's supreme power over the most fearsome enemies.

The British adventurer Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894), who led the excavations at Nineveh and Kalhu (modern Nimrud), published two series of folio-sized illustrations documenting his discoveries under the title *The Monuments of Nineveh* (1849-1853). Both series are on display in the exhibition, the complete sets of images being accessible on an iPad in the gallery. A number of reliefs on view in the exhibition were excavated by Layard in 1845-51.

This is the second long-term loan exhibition in the gallery devoted to The Classical World in Context, a new gallery at the Getty Villa highlighting cultures that influenced and interacted with the classical world of ancient Greece and Rome.

The exhibition will remain on view for three years, during which it will coincide with upcoming exhibitions on ancient Mesopotamia (March 18 – July 27, 2020), drawn from the collections of the Musée du Louvre, and ancient Persia's relationship with the classical world (2021).

Assyria: Palace Art of Ancient Iraq is curated by Timothy Potts, director at the J. Paul Getty Museum, with assistance from Sara E. Cole, assistant curator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

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The J. Paul Getty Museum collects Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts to 1900, as well as photographs from around the world to the present day. The Museum's mission is to display and interpret its collections, and present important loan exhibitions and publications for the enjoyment and education of visitors locally and internationally. This is supported by an active program of research, conservation, and public programs that seek to deepen our knowledge of and connection to works of art.

Visiting the Getty Villa

The Getty Villa is open Wednesday through Monday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed Tuesdays, Thanksgiving, December 25 (Christmas Day), and January 1.

Admission to the Getty Villa is always free, but a ticket is required for admission. Tickets can be ordered in advance, or on the day of your visit, at www.getty.edu/visit or at (310) 440-7300. Parking rates vary. Groups of 15 or more must make reservations by phone. For more information, call (310) 440-7300 (English or Spanish); (310) 440-7305 (TTY line for the deaf or hearing impaired). The Getty Villa is at 17985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades, California. Same-day parking at both Museum locations (Getty Center and Getty Villa) is available for \$15 through the Getty's Pay Once, Park Twice program.

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