

MUSEUM OF ART AUDIO GUIDE



GALLERIES 1 AND 2

2.1 Museum overview and introduction

Hi, my name is Laura and I am an educator here at the museum. Thanks for joining me! I'd like to explore the majesty and power of Galleries 1 and 2, which house a spectacular selection of paintings by the Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens.

John Ringling was a showman who understood the importance of a great first impression, and he intended these galleries to wow visitors...I think it's safe to say that they do just that! What was the first word that came to your mind when you entered this space?

In this audio tour, I'll first provide a little background about the Ringling museum and this show-stopping gallery. Next, we'll delve into the history of these paintings and their context. Finally, we'll end with a brief overview of what's going on in each work. If you're just curious about that part, feel free to skip ahead to track 2.3.

John Ringling made his money from the circus that he began with his brothers, but ultimately grew even wealthier after investing in a number of diverse ventures. One of the things he decided to spend his money on was fine art. John and his wife Mable began collecting art in earnest in 1925, and in just six years had acquired over 600 art objects. They were already living on the property, in the Ca' d'Zan mansion, when they began construction on the art museum in 1928. This building was always intended to be a public art museum that Ringlings could leave as their legacy to the people of Florida. It opened for just one day in 1930, and then opened permanently to the public on January 17, 1932.

Step into the second gallery, Gallery 2, and look at the four paintings hanging there. Because John already owned these monumental canvases when construction began on the museum, this space was designed specifically for these works of art. Many of the architectural details here mirror elements you can find in the paintings. Let me show you what I mean. Look at the painting that includes a group of soldiers and a king. If you look on the wall above the painting, you'll see swags of garlands held up by angelic figures. Now, let your eye move down to the painting itself—what do you see at the top? Little cherubic figures, known as putti, hover there holding up garlands and what appears to be a tapestry—we'll talk more about *that* later. But first, take a moment and search for some other design elements in these galleries that reflect the content of these paintings. This is also a great chance to gather your overall impressions of the works.

Although The Ringling has expanded quite a bit since John Ringling's time, the museum still has its original 21 galleries. These galleries primarily display European art, much of which was purchased by John himself. If you want to know which paintings John acquired, check out the object label next to an artwork—if it says “bequest of John Ringling,” it's from his original collection.

2.2 Context of the series

Although John Ringling worked with an art dealer to make his purchases, he was largely self-taught about art. We have his original art books, auction catalogues, and some correspondence that helps us get a sense of his personal tastes. We know that John liked big, dramatic paintings, he liked works by famous artists, and he liked a prestigious provenance, or history of ownership. The works you see here in Gallery 2 meet all of those criteria!

The story begins with Spanish ruler Isabella Clara Eugenia, so turn to the group portrait of 7 religious figures on the east wall and I'll point her out. The only woman in this painting, Isabella Clara Eugenia is shown in the guise of St. Clare, dressed in a nun's habit. Isabella's court painter and advisor was the artist Peter Paul Rubens, and she asked him to design a series of 20 tapestries that she could send as a gift to a convent in Madrid, Spain. You see, even though Isabella was Spanish, and had close family ties to the Madrid convent, she was governing the region of the Netherlands which were under Spanish rule at the time. We know that Isabella hoped to ultimately retire from public life, leave the Netherlands and join the Madrid convent, and so the gift of 20 tapestries would have been an important gesture.

So: Rubens designs the tapestries, which are then produced by a workshop and sent to Spain. But Isabella is still stuck in the Netherlands! We think perhaps she next commissioned Rubens to create a series of monumental paintings on canvas that would echo the designs of the tapestries that she'd given away. It would be a nice way to maintain ties to the convent in Spain—and of course, having the paintings on display in her court in Brussels would be sure to impress.

All this is to say that the paintings you see here were created after the set of tapestries and were made for Isabella's personal use. We're not exactly sure how many paintings there were originally, because some were lost in a palace fire in Brussels. Today, only 7 survive, 5 of which are here at the Ringling. (The other two are in France). You may be wondering, how did the artist, Rubens, manage to make so many paintings over the span of just a year or so? Like most successful master artists, Rubens worked with a large workshop of apprentices and assistants who helped him complete his commissions. And it's a good thing he did! Rubens was a busy man—not only a very successful, prolific painter, but also a diplomat who worked on behalf of the royals of 17th-century Europe—they appreciated his courtly nature and sharp intelligence. Let's turn now to each of these individual canvases, and you'll get a sense of just how brilliant Rubens was.

2.3 *The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek*

Remember, these paintings all represent designs that were originally made for a Catholic convent. They were made around 1625, over 100 years after the Protestant Reformation, when the Catholic Church was proactively countering Protestant challenges to its doctrine. In a sense, this series functions as a defense and celebration of a fundamentally Catholic belief: the Eucharist. The Eucharist, in Catholic practice, is the transformation of the bread and wine during mass to the literal body and blood of Christ. So, throughout the series, there are visual references to bread and wine—which the educated Catholic viewer, like constituents at Isabella Clara Eugenia's court, would have recognized as allusions to the

Eucharist. Let's go through the paintings in Gallery 2 one by one and talk more about the meaning of each. Let's start with Abraham and Melchizidek, which is the image of soldiers on the north wall.

This subject comes from the Old Testament. In the Catholic faith, scenes from the Old Testament are thought to pre-figure, or predict, what happens in the New Testament. The fluidity between both Old and New is evident in the choice of subjects in this series. Here, Abraham is the soldier dressed in ancient Roman armor and a red cloak in the center of the painting, facing the elderly ruler Melchizidek. Melchizidek was the priest-king of Jerusalem, and here he greets Abraham's soldiers as they return triumphant from battle. Do you see what they're passing out? That's right, bread and wine! Notice the intense look shared by Abraham and Melchizidek as their hands touch and their eyes lock—it's as if they share an understanding of the great future significance of Melchizidek's gift of bread and wine.

An element that I love about this painting is how it blends two worlds together into some strange and fictive space. Are we looking at a scene woven into a tapestry, which is then set in front of architecture? The tapestry seems to disappear in the center of the work, but it exists again at the bottom. On the far right, men are climbing up out of what seems to be real space—but is it? This confusion supports the purpose of the original commission—it celebrates the mystery inherent in the Eucharist during a mass—a moment when boundaries between worlds dissolve. Speaking of miraculous moments, let's look now at the painting on the west wall—*The Gathering of the Manna*.

2.4 *The Gathering of the Manna*

As you look at this painting, what do you notice first? Once again, I'm drawn to the confusion of space, where the figures seem to be both a design *on* a tapestry and existing in reality *on top* of the tapestry. I next look at the figures themselves. As these rubenesque bodies (yes—the term rubenesque comes from Ruben's propensity for painting fleshy people) twist and turn, it seems as though they're all in a heightened emotional state. The man on the right can be identified as Moses because of the beams of light emanating from his head. He is making a gesture of thanksgiving up toward the heavens, as little pearl-like droplets fall from the sky. Those pearls are manna, or the food of heaven, and they've been sent by God just in time to save Moses and his people from starving as they wander through the desert. The idea of heavenly food providing salvation once again resonates with the idea of the Eucharist. This painting almost pulsates with the energy and motion of the figures as they bend, swoop, and gather the manna that will save them. Let's turn now to look at another dynamic group of figures on the opposite wall: the painting of the *Four Evangelists*.

2.5 *The Four Evangelists*

You can identify the four evangelists by their associated symbols: starting at the far left, we have St Luke with his ox, St Mark with his lion, St Matthew with his angel, and young St. John with an eagle. The evangelists wrote the four Gospel accounts in the New Testament, but here, rather than sitting and writing quietly, they convey a powerful sense of movement and energy. It's quite an interesting choice to show Mark with his back to us—but it demonstrates the sheer momentum of these men and their message of salvation. The setting here—again, notice the illusion of the tapestry—looks as though the four men are on a stage. Look at the bottom, where there's a scallop shell at its base. The shell is flanked by two items—any idea what's on the left there? It's actually meant to represent a dolphin (obviously, Rubens never made it to Florida to study one in person, but instead relied on the long visual tradition of depicting dolphins this way)—and there's a cornucopia on the right filled with fruits. This decorative element is meant to suggest that the gospels will and should be spread across the world, over both land

(the cornucopia) and the sea (the dolphin and scallop shell). Let's end our tour with a painting of some of the key figures in the Catholic church who did help spread its influence. Head over to the last painting in this gallery: *The Defenders of the Eucharist*.

2.6 *The Defenders of the Eucharist*

The seven figures depicted here all lived at different times, but Rubens decided to include them together because they were all important figures in advancing Catholic doctrine. At the left are three theologians of the early church: Augustine, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great. At the far right, we have St Jerome dressed in red. Next to him is Norbert, in white, followed by Thomas Aquinas. Earlier we noted that the central figure is St. Clare, painted with the face of Ruben's patron Isabella Clara Eugenia. Rubens has put her in the ultimate place of honor, surrounded by important saints and theologians. She's also directly under the dove that represents the Holy Spirit, and basks in the emanating divine light. By including in her in this way, Rubens allows Isabella, in the guise of St. Clare, to play a key role in the entire series—both the paintings and the tapestries upon which the paintings were based. This is fitting, as throughout her life, she was an adamant defender and champion of the Catholic faith. Unfortunately, Isabella died in Brussels, never able to return to her beloved convent in Spain. Nevertheless, her portrait lives on there in the tapestry that remains a part of the convent's collection, and in the painting here today. It was through her devout faith, visionary commission, and appreciation for the masterful work of Peter Paul Rubens that this entire series came to be.



GALLERY 6

6.1 *Rest on the Flight Into Egypt*

We're exploring Gallery 6 today with The Ringling's Curator of European Art, Dr. Sarah Cartwright. Sarah will be helping us take a closer look at three of the paintings in this space. Sarah, take it away!

Thanks, Laura. I'd like to focus on Gallery 6, which is devoted to 16th century painting in Italy. The first work I'll talk about today is the large altar piece of the *Rest on the Flight Into Egypt* by Paolo Veronese. And as you approach Gallery 6 from Gallery 5, it's on the far wall at a distance in front of you, which is the west wall of that gallery and it's the only work on the wall.

This painting has become somewhat iconic of The Ringling collection because of its size and its beauty and it's one of the first works that John Ringling purchased in the area of Italian painting. And has always pretty much remained on view at the museum. So, it's a visitor favorite and a curator favorite. And as I mentioned, it's an altar piece, so it was created for an altar setting—a church setting but as we sort of zoom into the picture a little bit, I want to talk about what is unusual about it.

So, the scene itself, *Rest on the Flight Into Egypt*, is not described in the Bible per se but it was elaborated in later accounts of the journey that Joseph and Mary and their infant Christ took to flee Herod's massacre. So, this became in Italian art especially, a chance for artists to kind of express their own ideas of what this scene would have looked like and you always have certain consistent aspects of the story represented. So of course, Mary, Joseph, Christ and then there are angels who appear, miraculously, to help give the holy family food and water. And the setting is described as, usually—there are palm trees around, and the palm tree bends down or is bent down by an angel to give sustenance—dates from the palm—to the holy family. And that's what we see happening here.

Those elements are not unusual, but what is unusual here is the way Veronese constructs this composition and that is something I kind of want to encourage visitors to look at more closely. So, the figures are pushed forward in the composition, but then around them everything is very much stacked up in what seems like a piling up of elements. So, you have right above them the donkey that Mary would have ridden during this journey and then the donkey is enclosed in some kind of wooden enclosure, like a pen. And then these palm trees pile up on top and then we have figures of angels all around. And what's interesting here is that there's kind of squeezing together in a very tight space, of all these elements. And yet, Veronese makes it work beautifully and part of that is through the use of color. So, you see the lighter tones of the figures in the foreground, Mary in particular, and the Christ child. Which jump out at you due to those lighter tones. And contrasting with that is the background, which is much darker. The palm

fronds make this dark pattern in the sky, which provides kind of a shelter—the palm fronds and the tree trunks and the pen that's holding the donkey. All of this together constitutes kind of an architecture—a building almost within nature. It's not a real building, but it functions in that way. So, the artist kind of imposes an architectural order on this composition, which is interesting because usually these are set in a landscape setting with much more open space to kind of encourage the notion of the journey through the land that the Holy family was required to take. So that's one interesting aspect.

And so, in creating this architecture, as I mentioned before, we have this kind of stacking of the composition. And it's a vertical composition. It's much taller than it is wide and that, too, is somewhat unusual for this subject. The fact that it is a vertical painting and Veronese uses that to great effect, as well. He puts an angel up in the top of the painting, who is—appears to be—holding on with one arm to one of the branches of the date palm tree. And then with his other arm, throwing dates down to an angel below him, who is catching them with a cloth that's outstretched. And these kinds of details are also fascinating because these angels, presumably could fly. They have very prominent wings. And yet the way they act is much more human in their actions: holding on, up in a tree, climbing a tree almost like a young boy or girl would do. And then perching in a very, kind of precarious way. The angel in red, in the middle of the composition is sort of perched on one of the crossbars of this pen that holds the donkey. And then the other angels off to the left are climbing up to put things up in the trees. It looks like a piece of clothing hanging up in the tree. And all of these things may seem to be somewhat extraneous to the composition, but they are very calculated and one thing you can do when you're looking at a painting like this is sort of imagine what it would look like without one of these figures. Imagine the imbalance that would result. So if you removed, say the angel in the left foreground who we see from behind, who doesn't necessarily add a whole lot to the story although he is opening a piece of cloth, which contain loaves of bread, which are relevant to the story, he functions in a compositional way to lead the eye into the composition and toward the central figures of the Virgin and Joseph. And he's also anchoring the composition at the bottom left. So, if you imagine him away, you feel an imbalance emerging. And that's the case for all of these figures. There's actually a very carefully calibrated compositional balance going on here that looks accidental—that looks almost as though these figures just happen to be floating about and they end up in these positions very, very naturally.

Another element like that is the ox, off to the right, which is somewhat truncated on the right side of the composition. We only see part of the ox's head and that is unusual to appear in a *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* in general. Usually we see the donkey because that was the mode of transportation Mary was using. Here, I think it's got to be a reference Christ's nativity, to the ox and the ass who were present at Christ's birth. But if you wish away in your mind that ox, oxen head, it throws off the balance of the whole composition, and yet it seems like an afterthought. But none of these things are afterthoughts, is what I'm getting at. There's every intention behind these things. And so, there's symbolic weight to many of these choices. The symbolism of the painting and how each element relates to the subject at hand, but there are also compositional reasons for those elements to be present. So that's just one take on this painting and something to think about when you're in the gallery the next time.

6.2 *Family Group*

Okay, so if you were just looking at the *Rest on the Flight of Egypt* by Veronese, we are now going to turn to toward our left, to face the south wall in Gallery 6, to look at the large family portrait. And you see this work is sort of in the middle of the wall. This is a painting by Giovanni Antonio Fasolo from about 1565. So, only a few years before the Veronese painting which you just saw. And Fasolo actually

worked with Veronese and comes from a similar painting tradition—Venetian tradition. Fasolo specialized more in portraiture and I think this painting is a beautiful example of his work, but it is also a somewhat difficult painting to appreciate in some ways because it's so different, I think, than the type of family image we think of today, when we think of a family. And, of course, for that time period it wouldn't have been unusual at all. A large portrait like this with each family member depicted in fancy clothing, with their various jewels, etcetera. Those kinds of things were meant to convey the wealthy, high status of the family. And so those aspects are, perhaps, more understandable. But the expressions of the family members in this portrait are also somewhat different than what we think of when we think of family images today. But that, too, is partly a result of the time.

So here we have the central figure—the father—and we don't know the names of these family members. This family has not been identified yet. But we have the father standing in the absolute center of the picture. A very stern faced, column like figure, around whom the other children are depicted. So, the father has a very stern expression and the children have, kind of, they look a little bit melancholy. They look a little bit sad. This, again, is not necessarily unusual for the time, but they lack, to some degree, the kind of psychological intensity of the depiction of the father. So, clearly the father is the focus and another thing to note are sort of the poses of these figures. So, the father is very upright and stiff. And the poses of the children are much more in movement, in motion. In particular, his daughter is shown with sort of a curving, slight curving pose to break up the very strong verticality of the father. And then the older son to the right, of course, is more bent over playing with the dog or interacting with the dog but not looking at the dog. He's looking out at the viewer. In fact, two figures are looking out of the painting, the father and the elder son. Actually, the younger son is to a certain degree, as well. So that's kind of taking the painting as a whole. Looking at it as a whole, as a totality.

But as we start to zoom in on some details, there's actually a lot more nuance here than might first meet the eye. One thing I notice is the fur clothing, the fur lined cloak that the father wears. On one side, the fur drapes down in a strict vertical line, whereas on the other side it's broken. That line is curved and that contributes, ever so slightly, to a sense of movement, to a sense of softness—a softening of the depiction of the father. And provides kind of a connection to the curved line of his son's back. That same kind of broken, sort of bent line of the son's body. And there's a continuation in the diagonal, from the bottom of that curving lynx lining down through the dog and the son's leg. So, there's this diagonal that kind of moves to the bottom right of the painting, which then brings your eye back up to the father if you follow the line of the elder son's back. So, there are these concessions within the very strict frontality, monumentality of the father figure, which portray his love for his family in a little more softness than you might expect at first glance. And this is the kind of picture that really repays close looking of a good long period of time. Just standing in front of it or looking at the painting online and kind of allowing yourself to go more deeply into it.

Another place where we see that kind of softening of the father is in the very tender gesture of him clasping his daughter's hand. He put his arm around her and keeping her close. Protecting her and touching her hand. And we see that big contrast between his hand and her much smaller hand. And the age of his hand compared to the perfect, smooth softness of her skin. And so, there is a little bit of tenderness in this man who seems very stern.

The backdrop to this is probably that these children have lost their mother. That this father has lost his wife. Otherwise we would expect to see her depicted here. So, he's probably a widower. So that could explain the rather melancholy expressions of the family members. But they also seem to be very reliant on

their father and he clearly is shown as a very reliable, strong figure who will protect his family.

The other thing that I think is interesting to note is the spatial relationships of the figures here. There's some strangeness in that, especially with the overlapping of the father's leg, the position of the dog, and then the dog overlapping the older son's body. There's some ambiguity about where those figures stand in space. It looks as though the elder son is further in front, if you look at his feet, compared to the father. But then the overlapping of the dog, the strangely stiff kind of dog, who—although he's in an active pose—is strangely frozen in that spot.

These, I think, are probably peculiarities of the artist's style. A lot of his figures tend to be kind stiffly rendered in this way. And he didn't have the kind of ease, or facility with figures that, say, Veronese had. His contemporary, whose work we saw in the last painting.

So those, again, are just some points to note when you are looking at this work.

6.3 *Virgin and Child with Mary Magdalene*

Okay, so leaving the portrait of the Family Group, by Fasolo, if you turn left and face the east wall of Gallery 6, you'll see three works. And one of those is one I want to talk about next. This is a *Virgin and Child with Mary Magdalene* by the Florentine artist of the 16th century known as Il Jacone. This painting was purchased for the museum in 1955, by the museum's first Director, Chick Austin. So, it's not a painting bought by John Ringling but it's one of many acquisitions that Chick Austin made which have turned out to be very, very good. And more is known now about this artist than was known at the time when the painting was purchased. And it wasn't actually attributed to him at first. This painting was also displayed at the 1940 World's Fair in New York. The Ringling sent a number of paintings to that World's Fair and this was one of them. So, it got quite a lot of attention then. But it hasn't gotten a lot of attention, as much as I'd like, anyway now.

So, let's look at it a little more closely. So here we have a scene of two female figures. The one atop is the Virgin Mary and the one at the lower left is Mary Magdalene. And at the right is the Christ child, Mary's son. And this is a really interesting composition to me. It's typical of what we call Mannerism, which is a style which was prevalent, especially in Florence, in the early 16th century, in the wake of the sort of High Renaissance Classicism of Leonardo, and Rafael and Michelangelo. We move more into sort of more elongated figures and rather strange poses, convoluted poses, often. And sometimes strange atmospheric effects in these paintings. And this work by Il Jacone, has some of that. We see the Christ child stretched out in this long diagonal pose that is emphasized by his one outstretched leg, with the other one bent at the knee underneath him. And he reclines diagonally into the picture space. So, his body kind of leads you into the fictive space of the painting.

And then he stretches out his hand to receive an oil jar from Mary Magdalene. This is the typical attribute of Mary Magdalene because she is thought to have been the figure in the Gospels, and particularly in Luke, talks about a woman, whose actual name is not named in Luke's Gospel, who anoints Christ's head with oil a few days before his Passion in the house of Simon, and then later on, after Christ's death, comes to the tomb to also anoint the body in preparation for burial. So, this oil jar that Mary Magdalene is handing the infant Christ is a symbol of Christ's death. So, what we see here is a scene that never happened in the Bible because this is the infant Christ. And of course, in his infancy there is no relationship with Mary Magdalene in terms of Biblical text. This is a symbolic scene in which Christ is acknowledging what will happen to him as an adult. And so, it is somber. It is a somber mood and it is interesting that these

figures, Mary Magdalene's arm and her hand and Christ's hand are meeting in the center of the painting, around which there is a void. It's kind of this very open kind of negative space around it that emphasizes the dramatic quality, the meaning of this gesture about Christ's future sacrifice. And the expression of Mary, Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary, looking down, also indicates her awareness of what will happen.

And so, this scene is somewhat, as I said, somewhat somber, but it's beautifully, beautifully painted and if you look at the way the light falls on the body of Christ. The very beautiful gradations of light and dark around the body of Christ. And indeed, his body is what is given the most light here. It is what is emphasized. And that, too, will refer to the sacrifice of Christ's body at the time of his death. Whereas the faces of all the figures are kind of in shadow, it's his body that is being emphasized. This work, as I said, I think is one of the more interesting ones in The Ringling collection and I hope you take some time to examine it more closely, either in the museum or online.



GALLERY 8

8.1 *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* - Cairo

Hi, my name is Laura and I'm an educator at the Ringling. Gallery 8 is one of the most dramatic galleries in the museum, full of intrigue and great stories. While we're here, I'd like to highlight paintings of strong women who used their fortitude, wiles, or compassion to save the day.

There's nothing better than comparing two paintings of the same subject to get a better sense of each artists' stylistic choices and treatment of the story. We're lucky that this gallery allows us to make just such a comparison. The two paintings we'll look at first are both titled "Judith with the Head of Holofernes," and they are both hanging on the east wall. I'll give you a moment to find them. When you do, let's start with the darker painter, closer to the corner, by artist Francesco Cairo.

I say this a lot, but this really is one of my favorite paintings at the museum. Before knowing anything about the backstory, I'm drawn to this woman's expression as she stares directly at us. Is there a hint of a smile on her lips? A tinge of remorse in her eyes? An overall sense of callousness or even danger? Is she being confrontational? Seductive? Is she frightened? As you study her face, what do you see?

Every time I return to this painting, I read her expression somewhat differently. For me, the ambiguity of her expression is emphasized by the artist's use of light and dark here, which casts half her face in shadow. The dramatic contrasts of light and dark, where darkness becomes a dominating feature of the composition, is known as *tenebrism*, and it was a popular technique during this time to heighten the emotional intensity of a work. But I digress!

The fact that her face is half in shadow may allude to her own mixed feelings about the deed she's committed. If you're wondering what deed I'm referring to, you may not yet noticed the severed head in the lower left corner of the painting! This is the head of Assyrian general Holofernes. This subject comes from the Book of Judith, and the woman featured here is Judith herself. According to the story, Holofernes was about to ravage and destroy her city, so, to save it and her people, she seduced then killed him, ultimately displaying his head as a sign of her victory. Although Judith is considered a hero, this painting acknowledges the dark side of what she did.

This was painted in the 17th century, during what art historians call the Baroque period, when we see increasing emphasis on drama and dynamic compositions, meant to make the viewer feel the emotional impact of the story being told. For me, this certainly packs an emotional punch! Let's move on to our second depiction of Judith and see what choices the artist made there and how they affect your

interpretation. The second Judith painting is hanging on the same wall, so just scootch over a bit and you're there!

8.2 *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* - Galizia

After having studied Francesco Cairo's rendition of the same subject, we're now standing in front of the painting *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* by Fede Galizia, which was painted about 40 years earlier. What are some of the similarities you notice right away? For me, it's the composition, or the arrangement of figures, that seems the most similar. Once again, we have Judith, her maid, and the head of Holofernes. But I'm more interested in the differences.

The way that Judith is dressed is very different—here, her outfit is more beautifully elaborate and ornate...which aligns with her mission to dress up and seduce Holofernes, but also allows the artist to show off skill in painting jewels and fabrics. The details in her dress and jewelry are pretty incredible—get close and check that out. (Just remember to keep an arm's length of distance between you and the painting.)

Another big difference is Judith's position and her expression. Rather than the confrontational nature of Cairo's Judith, this Judith looks off to the side and does not directly implicate us in the story with her gaze. In your opinion, what's the effect of that choice? I wonder if she's lost in thought about what she's just done, or perhaps scanning the horizon to see if the coast is clear. This painting is also a little more gory—you can see blood dripping from the head into the bowl held by the maid.

The other big difference I'm noticing is the weapon! While the other Judith had a large, heavy sword, this Judith has a sharp little dagger. While we are looking at the blade, do you notice something unique about it? See if you can find the artist's signature and the date, 15-96. Many of the works in these galleries do not have artist signatures, as signing a work was not necessarily standard practice, so this is really unique. What's even more significant about the signature is that this artist, Fede Galizia, is one of the earliest female artists in the Ringling's collection. How cool is that? And definitely fitting on a tour about strong women.

As we leave these two Judiths, let's take a quick poll. If you're visiting with someone, you can compare answers. Otherwise, just think through these questions on your own.

In your opinion, which Judith seems the most remorseful? Which Judith seems more seductive? If you were the maid, which Judith would you rather work for? Why? Which Judith seems stronger? And finally, which painting do you prefer? Why? As you explore the museum today, I encourage you to find the paintings that resonate with you the most, and to spend some time with them. Before you leave Gallery 8, though, there's one more work I want to share with you. Turn to the north wall and find the painting called *An Act of Mercy*.

8.3 *Act of Mercy: Giving Drink to the Thirsty*

After the severed heads of the last two paintings, let's end on a note of kindness. This painting is ALSO one of my favorite paintings in the collection, but for totally opposite reasons from the Judith by Cairo. Here, I can get lost in the quiet beauty of a charitable act. The Act of Mercy taking place is "giving drink to the thirsty," and it's one of seven acts that described in the Gospel of Matthew. While the artist, Bernardo Strozzi, was a devout Catholic and actually spent over a decade living as a monk, there's not any overt religious symbolism here. Rather than a scene of saintly martyrs or heavenly angels, the people here are

incredibly real...shabby, downtrodden, and dirty. There's a humility in their interactions as they quietly accept water from a woman who cradles an enormous copper jug to fill their bowls. Strozzi is suggesting that true charity isn't an abstract virtue, but rather that it manifests in the every day choices of ordinary people.

The woman here embodies compassion as she patiently serves those in need. It would be no small feat to hoist that copper jug, especially if it was full—so not only is her inner strength and character on display here, but her physical strength is as well. Her ruddy cheeks, chafed elbows, and messy hair all suggest she herself is a peasant, yet she's taken on this act of generosity. The people she serves seem worn down by the hardships of life. If you look closely at the boy's fingernails, you'll see they are chipped and dirty, indications of hard work even at a young age. The spectrum of ages represented here, from the young boy in the center to the middle aged man to the left to the elderly man using a crutch on the right, suggest that the boy's fate may be pre-determined. It's likely only through interventions by good-hearted people that he will survive this cycle to old age.

The artist has used a dash of paint falling from the jug into the boy's bowl to represent a drop of water—see it there? To me, that suggests that the jug is almost empty, especially given the concern with which the boy and the old man watch it fall. The man's crutch is particularly emphasized, underlining his destitute status and need for charity. Yet still he seems to wait patiently for his turn while the boy is served first—which is an act of charity in and of itself that makes this scene especially poignant. This painting is a good reminder that no gesture of kindness is too small.

Thank you for studying three images of heroic strong women with me while we were in Gallery 8. There are plenty other wonderful heroes to discover in the rest of the museum, and I encourage you to make their acquaintance!



GALLERY 13

13.1 *Still Life with Plates*

Hi everyone! My name is Laura and I'm an educator at The Ringling. I don't know about you, but visiting a museum always makes me hungry! Today, I'm going to guide you through some of my favorite paintings in the still life gallery, gallery 13, and we'll explore a true feast for the senses.

I'd like to start with the painting titled *Still Life with Plates*, by Italian artist Cristofaro Munari. Now, I realize that many of the paintings in this gallery could probably be called *Still Life with Plates*, so first let's make sure we're both looking at the same artwork. This painting hangs on the west wall of the gallery, across the room from the giant *Still Life with Dead Game*...we'll get to that one in a minute. Vegetarians, you've been warned.

Have you found it? Great!

As I'm looking at this painting, the first thing that strikes me is the composition, or how it is arranged. In particular, I'm thinking about the concept of balance. While the painting is not symmetrical in its design, there is an overall sense of balance. Balance between things that are elevated vs lower, balance between light and dark, and balance in the way that the bright, vibrant colors of the fruit are scattered throughout the canvas. I'm also looking at balance in a more literal sense...the way that some of the plates and platters are so precariously balanced. That beautiful blue and white porcelain plate holding toast and flatbreads seems like it could drop and shatter, and a couple of the silver platters are resting on round fruits that could roll right out from under them.

I've been so busy noticing the formal elements—the shapes, lines, and colors- that I haven't even gotten to the food yet! Some of these foods are instantly recognizable to us, like the apples, mandarin oranges, nuts, and pears, and others may be unfamiliar. I love the texture of the two yellow, bumpy citrus fruits in the foreground. Those are citrons, which are a bit like large lemons with a thick rind and pith. Citrons are one of the three original citrus fruits from which all other citrus developed—so thank a citron the next time you eat a lemon! I think we need some sweets to counteract the sour, so let's turn to the white cone of sugar in the center of the painting. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, sugar cane was a luxury commodity imported from the New World. The sugar cone, along with the candied fruits, and other sweets pictured here were delicacies only the wealthy could afford.

But something that's so interesting to me is that, even though this painting exudes wealth and luxury, all of the objects are resting on a crumbled, cracking foundation. Why do you think the artist made

that choice? Is there a message there? The other thing that always makes me curious is why the artist decided to include a bowl that is empty on the left side of the composition. There's certainly enough food around to fill the bowl, so it must have a meaning. What do you think it could be?

As we leave this painting, take one last delicious look. If you could pick out one of these items to munch on, which one would it be? I've got my eye on those beautiful pastries resting on the silver platter.

This painting was sugar and spice and everything nice, but let's now turn our attention to something a little different: the largest painting in the gallery: *Still Life with Dead Game*.

13.2 *Still Life with Dead Game*

Sometimes when I talk about this painting with visitors, they get a little squeamish. If you're feeling really put-off by the dead game, feel free to skip ahead. However, in the context in which this painting was made, it wouldn't have been considered graphic or gory. Instead, a painting such as this confers status and plenty— not only in the abundance of animals in the larder, but in the monumental size of the canvas and the exceptional talent of the artist. A patron might use a work like this to show off wealth, to demonstrate their prosperity and ample larder, or to establish their elite status—hunting was a privilege, and access to rare birds like swans and peacocks would not have been commonplace.

This was also a chance for the artist, who was working in the circle of Frans Synders, to show off his fine technical skill in capturing minute detail. Snyder was known for painting monumental still life paintings and is considered one of the finest masters of the genre. The artist who produced this painting may have been trained by Snyder, or worked closely with him, and you can see how skillful the artist was. Look, for example, at the detail included in the string of finches at the bottom left corner. It's not just dead game, though—we also see fruits and vegetables. My favorites are the artichokes, and I also see a cauliflower in the upper left.

There's actually one living creature depicted in this scene as well. Can you find it? Look carefully in the bottom center of the painting, under the hind leg of the boar, and you'll see the yellow eyes of a black kitten peering out at all of the riches before him. Fancy feast, indeed! Why do you think the artist chose to include this kitty in the scene?

Next, we'll look at the work that includes several living animals—the painting *Still Life with Parrots* by Jan Davidson De Heem. If you're facing *Still Life with Dead Game*, De Heem's masterpiece is on the north wall to your left.

13.3 *Still Life with Parrots*

This is a painting that is literally dripping with wealth. It was made in the Netherlands in the 1600s, when merchants, traders, and others benefited from a global trading network.

Elements that evoke trade with exotic, faraway lands include: The Brazilian scarlet macaw and the African gray parrot—did you see the African gray? He can be easy to miss, but he's at the very top perched on a ring and leaning down toward the macaw. Other exotic elements include pomegranates and shells.

Although cultural values shift over time, some of the luxury items here are still considered luxury items today! The lobster, oysters, silver and gold, and the rich cloth with gold thread are still highly prized today. Speaking of the silver items, take a look at the silver vessel with the long spout. The artist has masterfully

captured the reflections of the oranges from the table in the body of the vessel. That's always been one of my favorite details. Although you'll need to keep about an arm's length between you and the painting, I do encourage you get close and appreciate all of the details here. As you look, you'll find living insects scattered throughout the scene!

The presence of those insects is one clue that luxury may be fleeting. It certainly seems like a wonderful assemblage of goods, but they won't last forever. Some of the fruit has been cracked open and peeled and we know that some of the other food will start to rot soon. I'm definitely going to steer clear of those oysters after too long. Like in the first painting we looked at, there's a precariousness to the way that the objects are piled, as though they could all come tumbling down at the slightest touch.

The other feature of this painting that always intrigues me are the dark clouds in the background. They add a certain drama to the scene, reminding us that some things are out of control: like they say, "you can plan a pretty picnic, but you can't predict the weather." Impending storms aside, I hope you'll take a moment to luxuriate in the resplendent details of the good life, so beautifully captured here by De Heem.

Thanks for joining me on a tour of some of the most delicious paintings in the collection! I hope we've whet your appetite to continue looking closely at the rest of the works on display here. Or, if we've just whet your appetite, make sure to take your snacks outside the galleries before enjoying them. The last thing we need is real insects crawling over these beautiful works.

Until next time, stay hungry!



GALLERY 18

18.1 *Drawing of the Lottery in the Piazza delle Erbe*

Hi, I'm Laura, an educator here at the Ringling. Thanks for joining me in Gallery 18. While we're here, I'd like to explore three different paintings that represent a spectrum of human experience—from the quotidian to the high-minded. We'll look at fate and fortune in three very different scenes—the first, a scene of daily life, the second, a scene from mythology, and the third, an allegorical scene, or something that represents abstract ideas. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Our first painting is a slice of life called "Drawing of the Lottery in the Piazza delle Erbe." It's on the south wall in the center of the room—take a moment to find it, then let's jump in! If you've ever spent time at a crowded farmer's market, you'll have no trouble imagining yourself stepping into this bustling scene. You can feel the crush of bodies as people jockey past each other to examine different wares, feel the heat of the bright sun streaming down, and feel the excitement of the crowd in such close proximity. You can hear the din of excited voices chattering, animals squawking, babies crying, and music playing, and the poor fellow in the foreground crying out in anguish as his horse topples over. There's plenty to taste, too, from the cheese, meat, fish, melons, eggs, sausages, and more. As for SMELLS? I'll leave that one to *your* imagination...

This scene depicts the city of Turin, in Italy. The buildings shown here actually existed in Turin's town square in 17-56, the year this painting was made. But this artwork does more than just capture a busy snapshot of daily life. As you can probably guess from the painting's title, there is a lottery drawing taking place. The annual drawing of the municipal lottery benefitted charitable institutions such as orphanages. While it is not easy to discern, it's taking place in the balcony in the background, under the blue awning. If you look closely, you can make out a small child—presumably an orphan—drawing the winning number from a box. This exciting moment of truth explains the pomp and circumstance of the surrounding figures, including the presence of a brass band! If you look carefully throughout the painting, you'll see many of the people in the square are clutching lottery tickets of their own. Who do you think will be the lucky winner?

This painting serves as a meditation on the mercurial nature of fortune. One of these townsfolk may win the lottery and have their life forever changed. By the same token, the man whose horse has collapsed has also suffered a sudden reversal of fortunes. Even the fact that the scene depicts a range of social classes—some luckier than others—reminds us that life is a game of chance. If you lived in this town in 17-56, what do you think your lot in life would have been?

Before we leave this painting, make sure you notice its beautiful frame. It's actually made from papier-mache and is original to the artwork.

18.2 *Hermes Rescues Odysseus from Circe*

Our next stop is a fantastical scene from mythology. If you are facing east (that's the side with the huge entryway into the subsequent gallery), you'll find a painting called "Hermes Rescues Odysseus from Circe" by Giovanni Paolo Panini. There are two similar paintings by Panini, so make sure you're looking at the one with Circe. The story presented here comes from the epic *The Odyssey*, which is the tale of the Greek hero Odysseus making his long way home after war. As Odysseus and his crew are sailing, they land on an island that they don't realize is ruled by a sorceress named Circe. Odysseus sends some of his men out first to explore, and when they encounter Circe, she turns them into beasts. When Odysseus goes to save them, he is met on the way by the god Hermes. Hermes give Odysseus a magic plant that will protect him from Circe's spells. Circe is so impressed by Odysseus's resistance to her powers, not realizing he's been helped by Hermes, that she ultimately frees his men and they all escape, continuing their journey.

We can see the key characters in this painting under the archway: Odysseus and Circe are at the table alone, with Hermes flying above them, dropping the magic plant in Odysseus's goblet. (the artist is taking a bit of creative license with the story here) The beasts sprawled throughout the scene are Odysseus's men! There are a lot of other characters as well—probably Circe's bewitching companions. Here, unlike in the painting of the Lottery Drawing, luck is delivered via the assistance of a helpful god, whose interference in the scene helps shift Odysseus's fate for the better.

You may be wondering...if the story is so exciting and important, why is the architecture given so much emphasis? You're right...these massive, ornate structures are certainly the predominant feature in this painting. And that's because the artist, Panini, was known as the best architectural painter of his day. By creating paintings like the two Ringling has displayed here, Panini was most interested in creating inventive settings. He borrowed elements of actual buildings and reimagined them in new ways. What do these structures remind you of? Many of the elements are familiar architectural tropes to us, even today. This impressive pastiche of buildings doesn't seem like a bad place to be trapped, except for the whole "getting turned into a beast" part. But Odysseus and his men couldn't linger there forever, as fate was calling them on. You're welcome to linger as long as you'd like. When you're ready, we'll move to our third and final work in this gallery. As we do so, let's continue to think about how architectural features can convey a message or set a certain tone. Turn to the very tall, monochromatic painting on the wall opposite of "The Drawing of the Lottery."

18.3 *Two Allegorical Figures*

This painting, titled "Two Allegorical Figures," is quite unusual! Its monumental size (over 12 feet tall!), the limited color palette, and the surface texture all make for a unique artwork. First, let's talk about the surface—if you look incredibly closely, you may notice that this is not a typical oil on canvas painting. In fact, it's a fresco that has been removed from the wall where it was originally created. Fresco, which means fresh in Italian, is the process of painting directly onto freshly laid plaster. As it dries, a chemical reaction occurs that binds the color directly to the wall.

We know that this fresco comes from a palazzo near Venice, Italy. This section was part of a much larger decorative scheme that probably spanned the entirety of a room. The part that you displayed here would have been painted high on the wall, likely above a doorway or fireplace. If you look at the artist's use of

perspective and imagine yourself standing below the painting looking up, it makes a lot of sense that this would be elevated and placed above a rectangular feature like a doorway.

Next, let's talk about the colors—or lack thereof. That's one of our biggest clues that this is not meant to represent real people. Instead, it's meant to appear as though the humans, lion, cornucopia, and obelisk are all sculptures made of bronze, set against gray marble. The artist, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, often painted frescos of fictive statuary like this. It's a way he could convey high-minded ideals, such as those represented here. Taken as a whole, this is meant to depict glory, triumph, and eternity. Let's think through those one by one: I see GLORY in the confident, almost haughty posture and expression of the woman. For me, TRIUMPH is represented by the man, who appears to be a soldier of some kind who grasps the head of a lion in one hand and holds a cornucopia of gold in the other. The obelisk in the background makes me think of ancient Egypt and how many monuments from antiquity, including obelisk, endure over time—or the idea of ETERNITY.

But that's just me! There's not just one way to interpret this grouping of figures. Take a moment now to study the details and think about what kind of message YOU get from this painting. While we'll all have a slightly different interpretation, I think we can agree that the wealthy family who originally had this displayed in their villa certainly had great fortune. What their ultimate fate was, I don't know. But it's pretty incredible that such a striking artwork ended up here in Sarasota, Florida for us to enjoy today.

Thanks for joining me in Gallery 18 for an exploration of fate and fortune in three of the incredible paintings displayed here.



GALLERY 21

21.1 *Ploughing in the Nivernais*

Hi, Laura here. Gallery 21 is one of the biggest galleries in the museum, so today I'm going to share some works that I would describe as totally epic! You're probably looking at the GIANT painting on the south wall of an emperor holding court, and you're right, that sure is epic. But before we get to that one, let's explore a few other works of art that are also monumental in their own right. Let's start by turning to the west wall, where you'll see two large paintings of animals.

I'd call these paintings epic for a number of reasons, but one is because of who painted them. These are by French artist Rosa Bonheur, who was the most successful woman artist of her day and who continues to enjoy great acclaim throughout the world. Bonheur worked in the 19th century, when it wasn't easy for women to have professional careers, least of all in the arts. Bonheur's father was a painter, and he encouraged her to pursue her own passion for painting from an early age. Bonheur also had a love of animals, and she built her reputation on creating prodigious representations of animals of all kinds—two examples of which we have right here at The Ringling!

The painting on the left is called *Ploughing in the Nivernais*. (The Nivernais is a region in central France). Here, Bonheur beautifully captures the freshly-churned earth, the heaving, sweaty oxen, and the expansive blue sky, bringing the whole scene viscerally to life. I feel totally transported into this world when I'm standing in front of the painting, as though the sun is beating down on my shoulders and my feet are sinking into soft clods of dirt. Bonheur herself wasn't afraid to get dirty—in fact, she successfully petitioned the French government for permission to wear men's pants so she could more efficiently work in typically male-dominated spheres, such as slaughterhouses and animal auctions. Bonheur also defied the gender roles of her time by cutting her hair short and living with a female partner for her entire adult life.

Family of Deer

By the time she was in her 30s, Bonheur had bought herself a chateau in the French countryside near the forest of Fontainebleau—the painting of the deer family, on the right, is set in that rocky landscape. This painting is deceptively simple when you first look at it—just some deer walking in a field. But take a moment to notice the group dynamic—each deer plays its own role, with the buck at the front of the group, head raised and alert. Whatever danger he's sensed remains imperceptible to some of the others, who continue to graze unperturbed. This dramatic moment of tension, as latent energy transforms into action, is beautifully heightened by the dark clouds that line the horizon. There's so much rippling beneath the surface here—perfectly captured by Bonheur.

21.2 *The Sirens*

Our next painting is on the opposite wall—turn around and go to the left of the marble fireplace. The painting is titled *The Sirens*, and it's a haunting riff on the epic poem *The Odyssey*. In that story, the hero Odysseus and his crew must sail past an island inhabited by sirens: mythical creatures with an enticing song. They've been warned that the song of the sirens is irresistible, so the men plug their ears with wax and tie Odysseus to the mast of the ship, rendering him unable to follow the song. Had they not taken those precautions, they likely would have ended up like countless sailors before them, shipwrecked on the sirens' island.

In this painting, the artist, Edward Burne-Jones, does not convey that exact story from the epic. Rather, he takes the idea of the sirens as his subject and uses it to create a mysterious world laden with danger and seductiveness. Take a moment to study this painting. How would you describe the mood of this scene?

Look at the siren figures on either side of the painting. What clues does the artist give us to indicate they are not regular humans? They are almost as tall as the ship in the center of the composition, and they have a translucency that makes them appear to emerge from the rocky formations they flank. Whether Burne-Jones actually intended them to be so translucent—especially compared to the highly-rendered surface of the ship—is uncertain: the artist left this painting unfinished at the time of his death in 1898. The sirens were a subject that fascinated Burne-Jones for many years, and the fact that he kept returning to the artwork makes me wonder what about it so troubled or captivated him. What questions remain for you about this work of art? What more do you want to know?

Personally, I'm curious about the metal helmets strewn about the foreground. I wonder who those once belonged to and what happened to them. I also want to know what the fate of the ship and its inhabitants will be as it glides towards an encounter with these dangerously alluring figures. We'll never know—but that's what makes this painting so fascinating.

This is a scene very much in the realm of the mythological and imaginative, but our next painting features an opposite cast of characters—portraits of real historical figures. Move now to the painting on the far right side of this same wall, titled *A Portrait Group of Parisian Celebrities*.

21.3 *A Portrait Group of Parisian Celebrities*

You may look at this group of figures gathered together rather stuffily and think...ok, how is this one epic? What I think is so cool about this painting is its original context. This is just one tiny portion of the original composition. The original was nearly twice as tall as this segment and 120 meters long (that's 131 yards, if it helps to compare it to a football field in your mind). The original artwork, called *The Panorama of the Century*, was displayed in a round building specifically created for it in Paris during the 1889 World's Fair. (The same world's fair most famous for the debut of the Eiffel Tower.) People visiting the Panorama could enter the building and walk around the painting as it took them on a visual tour through 100 years of French history. All in all, the painting contained 641 portraits of important figures from the past century. The artists who conceived of and created this epic work, Alfred Staevelans and Henri Gervex, were dedicated to making each individual portrait as accurate as possible, and they spent months researching the project.

After the world's fair ended, the Panorama was shown in other locations throughout Europe and the US, but, as you can imagine, it proved impossible for such a large painting to find a permanent home—who has the space? Ultimately, the original was cut into smaller sections, several of which survive today in museums across the world, including this one at The Ringling.

The figures in this grand romp through history were grouped chronologically, and also by subject matter. The Ringling's section features noted dramatists, writers, and composers of the mid- to -late 19th century. Today, the most famous of the group is certainly the woman dressed in white—that's the actress Sarah Bernhardt, wearing a costume from her role as a queen in a Victor Hugo play. With that elaborate white dress and confident posture, she certainly stands out!

What other figures draw your attention—and why? My personal favorite is the man on the far right, standing with his hands in his pockets and looking out at us with a rather bemused expression. That's François Jules Edmond Got, an actor. Haven't heard of him? Don't feel bad, I hadn't either. So let's conclude our time with this painting by coming up with some references that are more familiar to us today.

Think about this: which famous figures—politicians, actors, writers, and leaders - would you include if you had to develop a panorama of the past 100 years of the history of your country? What costumes, props, or expressions would you include to make each one instantly recognizable to viewers? If you're visiting with someone, compare notes on your choices.

When you're ready, turn to our final painting on this tour - the biggest work in the gallery.

21.4 *Emperor Justinian*

Ok—so here is the most epic work in this gallery—maybe in the whole museum. Look at the size of it! Although it once hung on the museum walls, it fell into disrepair and need to be conserved. It was no easy feat to get this painting treated and installed on the wall here—if you're curious about how our museum staff pulled it off, there's more information on our website about the process. Even just flipping the painting over to work on the back of it was a massive effort that took many hands.

So, why so big? The artist, Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant, hoped that bigger was better when he submitted this work to the Paris Salon of 18-86. (The Salon was France's official state-sponsored art competition—winning a prize at the Salon could launch an artist to fame and fortune.) Benjamin-Constant knew that winning a medal could solidify his reputation as an artist and bring new commissions his way. He chose Byzantine emperor Justinian the Great as his subject, and pored over ancient sources to get the 6th century costumes and jewelry exactly right.

Emperor Justinian ruled the Byzantine empire from 527 to 565, and you see him here seated imperiously as he holds court on his marble throne. He's surrounded by counselors on benches to either side of him, and they all seem to listen as the man crouching before them, wearing a hairshirt, opens a scroll with Greek writing on it. The writing is a passage from the New Testament (St. Paul's epistle to Titus), but we're not sure if the artist chose that text to convey a specific message, or just to give the painting an authentic look.

Based on your own reading of each figure's body language and expression, what do you suppose the man is conveying to Justinian? What do you think will happen next?

What role might you play if you were a character in this scene?

The huge scale of this work allows us to step right into Justinian's world—I know I sure feel intimidated in the presence of this larger-than-life ruler. The artist's eye for detail, the beautiful textures of cold marble, decorative mosaics, and rich textiles create a world that can transport us 1500 years back in time.

Thanks for joining me on an exploration of some of the works in our epic Gallery 21. There's always more to discover in the museum and I hope you'll continue your quest on the rest of your visit!



COURTYARD

Courtyard.1 Introduction

Hi there. My name is Kyle Mancuso, curatorial research fellow here at The Ringling Museum of Art. Today we are going to take a walk through the museum courtyard. Inspired by the villas of the Italian Renaissance, the courtyard is laid out on multiple levels (or parterres) and displays a number of sculptures in bronze and stone. These statues are reproductions of some of the most famous works in Western art, from ancient Greece to 19th-century Europe.

When John Ringling was buying art in the 1920s and 30s, there were few examples of ancient sculpture on display in the United States. As a result, American museums and collectors chose to purchase reproductions of famous ancient works to supplement their collections of paintings and sculpture from later periods.

Such was the case with Ringling. In 1925, during his travels in Italy, Ringling purchased dozens of bronze reproduction sculptures from the Chiurazzi foundry, based in Naples, Italy. The firm was one of many in the city with license to take molds of statues from important museum collections in Italy and abroad and to reproduce them in a variety of sizes and materials. The Ringling's collection of bronzes is one of the largest anywhere in the world and has remained a defining feature of the museum.

Now let's look at some examples.

Courtyard.2 *Laocoön*

Our first stop is on the south side of the loggia. If you have just walked out of the lobby, before you step down into the garden, take a left and walk to the end of the corridor. I will give you a minute to get over there. Just hit pause and resume the audio once you have arrived.

The set of twisting figures we are looking at is a bronze cast of the so called Laocoön group. The original was discovered in the early 16th century in Rome, and it is one of the best-known marble statues to have survived from antiquity. It would have a profound influence on later generations of artists.

The subject of the statue comes from the stories of the Trojan War, when the Greeks led by Agamemnon laid siege to the city of Troy, immortalized in Homer's epic poem the *Illiad*. The story of Laocoön is not mentioned in that text, but other accounts of the battle tell how, as the Trojans debated whether or not to accept a giant wooden horse into the city, a parting gift from the Greeks as they sailed away in defeat, a priest, by the name of Laocoön, implored them not to let the horse enter. One of the Olympian gods

sent two serpents to strangle the priest, effectively silencing him, and the horse was allowed within the city gates. That night, when the city was asleep, out poured Greek warriors who had secretly lodged themselves in the belly of the horse. They opened the city gates and helped their comrades to finally sack the city after ten long years of siege.

Here we see Laocoön, alongside his two sons, struggling to wriggle free of the serpents' coils. The effort seems in vain however, and only the older son (on the right) seems close to escape. The twisting bodies and the agony written on the face of Laocoön were stylistic elements typical of the Hellenistic period, dating from 323 to 31BC, when the contorting figure was a marker of the sculptor's ability, and anguished expressions showing the depths of human suffering replaced the muted gestures preferred by previous generations of artists.

Courtyard.3 *Discobolus*

Now on to our next statue. Return to the sitting area just outside the lobby entrance. From there, proceed down to the lowest level of the garden. I will give you a minute to get there. Please feel free to pause this audio and resume once you have arrived.

When you arrive at the central fountain, look to your left. You'll see a man hunched over with a disc in his right hand. That's the Discobolus, or discus thrower. The throwing of the discus, sometimes called a quoit, was part of the ancient Olympic games, and it remains a fixture of modern track and field. This statue has become synonymous with the Olympics, and every four years, you are likely to see a version of it appear on television.

What you are looking at is a 20th century bronze cast of a roman marble copy of a Greek bronze original. That bronze original dates to the 5th century BC and is the work of the renowned classical sculptor Myron.

How do we know all of this? So much of the ancient Mediterranean world remains a mystery to us. Texts were lost, statues destroyed, cities burned to the ground, meaning that we are only ever able to understand the tiniest sliver of ancient taste and culture. But some things do survive, and in the case of the Discobolus, a text by the ancient satirist Lucian, writing in the 2nd century AD, gives us some invaluable information about the statue. A description of the work is imbedded in a satirical dialogue and reads as follows: "Surely you do not speak of the quoit-thrower who stoops in the attitude of one who is making his cast, turning round toward the hand that holds the quoit, and bending the other knee gently beneath him, like one who will rise erect as he hurls the quoit? No, for that quoit-thrower of whom you speak is one of the works of Myron." Seldom has this detailed a description of an antique statue survived to the present day. But let's read a little more carefully, because this text poses an interesting problem. Lucian tells us that the athlete is "turning round toward the hand that holds the quoit." Look back at the statue. The head is facing forward. What is going on here?

Myron's bronze original was reproduced extensively in ancient times, and a number of copies in marble survive from the Roman period. When this version of the statue was found in the 18th century, the head was dug up separately and was mistakenly restored facing forward. Erroneous and often fantastic restorations were a frequent phenomenon in centuries past. Today, conservators more often prefer to leave statues in the state in which they are found.

So why would the Discobolus have been facing back in the first place? In the ancient competition, unlike today, the athlete was not required to aim the discus, but merely to launch it as far as possible. There was none of the complicated pirouetting visible in today's game, and the athlete who managed to throw it

the longest distance won. Little wonder then that more than one Greek myth tells of an accidental death caused by an errant discus.

Taking one last look at the Discobolus, we see him in this full-frontal view, the preferred way to look at this sculpture. The 5th century BC saw advances in the rendering of the human body, which was now shown in increased motion and with a more detailed anatomy. This is certainly the case with the Discobolus who bends and twists his muscled body. But we also see a reliance on geometric patterns, indicative of previous generations of Greek sculpture. If you look closely, you will notice the triangles of space created by, for instance, the bent legs, and the relaxed left arm. If Greek idealism was now tending toward a more naturalist approach in the depiction of the figures, it still privileged a single viewpoint, and its message was contained in the perfect harmony between part and whole.

Courtyard.4 *David*

It would be impossible to talk about the courtyard, and indeed The Ringling, without discussing *David*. He's the very tall and muscly guy standing on the bridge.

So far we have looked only at ancient sculpture, but John Ringling also purchased a number of statues that reproduce works of art from later periods: the Renaissance, the Baroque, and the Neoclassical. So it is the case with the *David*, the masterwork by Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo and without a doubt one of the most recognizable statues in the world. It is an enduring symbol of the city of Florence, where it was made and where it remains on view, and through this reproduction has become emblematic of Sarasota, a city dedicated to the tutelage and valorization of the arts.

When it was created, *David* was a veritable sensation and its genius was immediately recognized. Michelangelo, raised in Florence, had fled the city just before the fall of the powerful Medici family in 1494. But in 1501, he decided to return to his hometown, now ruled by a republican government. The story is well known: Michelangelo won a commission to create a larger than life statue from a single block of marble, which had been used and then laid aside in the previous century. Out of this previously worked marble Michelangelo carved his colossal *David*, standing over seventeen feet tall, fully nude, and assuming the familiar *contrapposto* stance, the weight of the statue resting on his anchored right leg. In his hands, the Biblical hero holds his humble armaments, the sling and stone, which he will use to slay his foe the giant Goliath.

Not since antiquity had anyone created a colossal nude statue, although the choice of subject was not new. 15th-century sculptors Donatello and Verrocchio had rendered David as a young prince, presiding victoriously over Goliath's severed head. Michelangelo however chose to show him as a powerful, muscled young man, poised *before* the battle. This sense of anticipation, of preparing for duty on behalf of an outmatched people, was to resonate for a contemporary Florentine audience in political transition and continuously at risk of internal uprising or foreign invasion.

It has long been commented that the *David* exhibits some peculiar characteristics. The hands and head for instance are very large, excessively large in fact for his rather slim body. There are many explanations for this, but one reason may be its originally proposed location. Following a century-old plan to embellish the large church in the center of the city, the famous Duomo, a number of statues were to be erected high up on the church buttresses, Michelangelo's *David* included. If *David's* head was in proportion to the rest of his body, so the theory goes, he risked appearing small and insignificant.

When the statue was finished in 1504 however, it was clear that this masterpiece would have to occupy

a more prominent position. A commission was formed to decide on an appropriate site, and many famous Florentine artists of the day weighed in: Botticelli, Leonardo, Giuliano and Antonio da Sangallo, Piero di Cosimo, and others. After much deliberation, it was decided that the statue would be placed in front of the Palazzo della Signoria, the political center of power of the Republic. There it stood for centuries, until it was removed to the Academy of fine arts in the late 19th century, where it remains today.

By virtue of the prime real estate it occupied and its subsequent glorification by art history, the *David* was copied extensively. The Ringling *David*, made in bronze from a cast of the marble original, has been the centerpiece of John Ringling's Renaissance-inspired art museum since its founding in the late 1920s.



ART COMES ALIVE: FAMILY AUDIO EXPERIENCE

Family Audio, Gallery 15: *Portrait of a Young Lady*

Oh! My feet hurt. I've been standing for this portrait for hours. Yes, hours! It can take a long time to paint a picture of someone and I've got to stand very still. My puppy, on the other hand, she doesn't quite understand. She keeps wiggling—not to mention her fur is getting all over my blue silk dress, and it is so fashionable too!

"Excuse me. Mam, mam, if you could stop moving it's quite hard to paint."

Yes. Yes! I am so sorry! Only a few more hours. Why don't you strike a pose for your own portrait and take a picture in front of mine?

Family Audio, Gallery 16: *Moonlight Landscape*

It's been a long trip, traveling on these roads. Been kind of lonely, too. Just me, my mule, and the moon. Well, the moon's hiding behind the bridge, but you knew that already. Can you see its light reflecting off the water? There's an abandoned castle back there, too. I wonder who might have lived there? And, is that someone fishing down there on the rocks? Well, hello friend! Hmm, maybe my trip is not so lonely, after all. I wonder what we'll find on the other side of this bridge. What do you think?

Family Audio, Gallery 18: *Drawing of the Lottery*

Oh my! Why are all these people in the marketplace, today? It's so crowded! Oh no! Do you see that man in the orange shirt? Look in the bottom left corner. I think he's stealing a watermelon! Shhh...let's listen in.

"Ha, ha ha ha. This watermelon is going to taste quite delicious, if I don't get caught. Shhh! Don't tell anyone what you saw."

And look! In the very front there's a white horse that's fallen down!

"All my beautiful handmade pots are destroyed! Who does this horse belong to?"

And look at all the people watching from the windows of the buildings. I wonder what they think about this scene. I can't hear anything with all this noise. Dogs barking. Chickens clucking and people laughing. Hmmm, maybe I should join them. What else do you see in the market?