

Textile : Art

in the Graeco-Roman world

Decorated textiles constituted one of the most pervasive art-forms in antiquity, the product both domestic craft and high-end, specialist artistry in every period and region of the classical world. Textile production had strong cultural and ideological resonances. Textile art is frequently alluded to in literature, imitated or reflected in other artistic traditions, and represented in different media, from Attic vase-paintings to late antique mosaics.

Because of its perishable nature, textile art has largely vanished along with some of the other great art traditions of the Graeco-Roman world, such as wooden panel-paintings. Nevertheless, a considerable number of exceptional survivals from different periods and places, like the tombs of Vergina, the Eurasian Steppe, or the so-called 'Coptic' textiles of late antique/Byzantine Egypt, give us an insight into the textile traditions that were implicated in every sphere of ancient life. Meanwhile textual sources and visual representations on other objects help to fill in the gaps and conjure up the role of textile art in the ancient imagination.

Focusing particularly on textiles with figural decoration, the workshop seeks to stimulate discussion and debate about this most enduring and ubiquitous of ancient art-forms. The historical scope is broad, but underlying all the presentations will be fundamental questions about the particular shape and challenges of textile art history and its relation to classical art and archaeology in general.