

Classical Art Research Centre Workshop

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Etruscan Art to Roman Art? A Reappraisal

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The relationship between Etruscan, Greek, and Roman art has been a matter of debate since Roman times. Whereas Roman authors seem to have had little conception of, or desire to promote, an indigenous artistic heritage, there has been a persistent idea in modern scholarship, including some of the more nationalistic treatments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that Roman art was fundamentally shaped by local practices and concerns. The debate has also been strongly influenced by R. Bianchi Bandinelli's concept of a 'mid-Italic Hellenism,' in which a synthesis of indigenous and Greek traditions preceded and countered the imported classicism of the late Republic. Nevertheless, today -- although the Etruscans continue to preface general treatments of Roman art history -- the formative role of the Greek world in the development of Roman art is generally emphasised at the expense of prior Etruscan and Italic traditions.

A recent renaissance in Etruscan studies, however, has begun to prompt a re-evaluation of Etruscan contributions to Roman culture as well as the development of more nuanced models of interaction. Etruscan influence is increasingly being elucidated in studies of Roman architecture, religious rituals, city planning, water management, numeracy, and literacy. Yet references to Etruscan influence in the field of Roman art remain relatively few and fleeting. After decades of new excavations in Tuscany and Lazio, is it still possible to argue that Etruscan models were rapidly eclipsed by Italic and/or Hellenic ones? Or is there growing evidence of a more dynamic relationship between Etruscan and Roman art from the seventh to second centuries BC? Alternatively, do recent perspectives on Roman art oblige us to move beyond the use of inflexible labels of cultural identity, such as 'Etruscan' and 'Roman,' effectively changing the parameters of the debate?

This workshop is designed to engage with these questions rather than provide definitive answers. The intention is to build on recent studies of Etruscan portraiture, wall-painting, metal-work, and votive sculpture, among other traditions, by placing their findings within the broader context of early Roman art and thus extending their potential significance for understanding the forms and social settings of ancient art more generally. The two-day workshop will accordingly bring together international scholars and students of Etruscan and Roman art to re-examine the material, explore current interpretations, and test the ground for future research and collaborations.