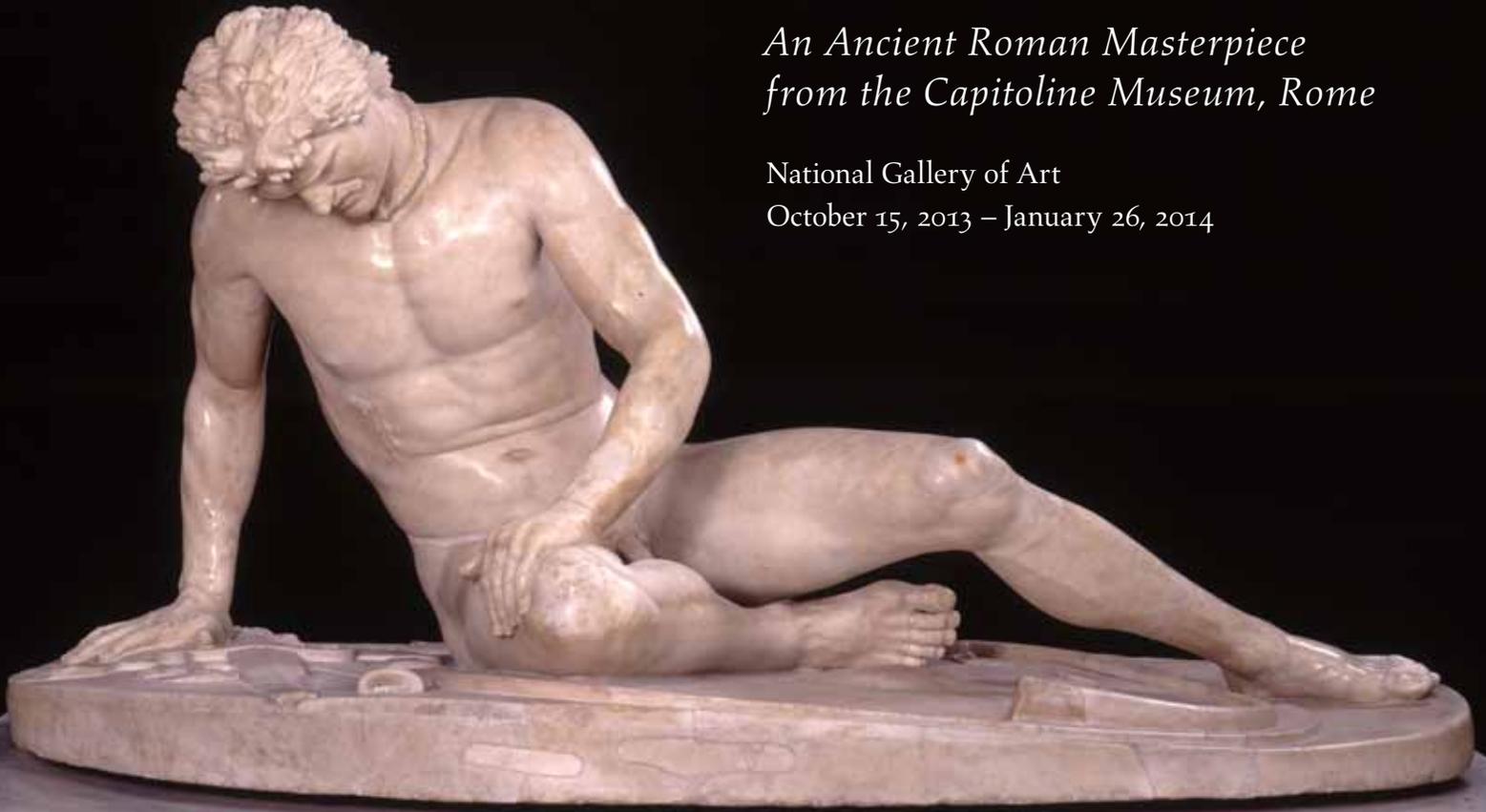


THE DYING GAUL

*An Ancient Roman Masterpiece
from the Capitoline Museum, Rome*

National Gallery of Art

October 15, 2013 – January 26, 2014



CREATED IN THE FIRST OR SECOND CENTURY AD, the *Dying Gaul* is one of the most renowned works from antiquity. This exhibition marks the first time it has left Italy since 1797, when Napoleonic forces took the sculpture to Paris, where it was displayed at the Louvre until its return to Rome in 1816. The *Dying Gaul* depicts a warrior in his final moments, his face contorted in pain just before he collapses from the mortal wound to his chest (fig. 1). As an image of a vanquished enemy, the sculpture embodies courage in defeat, self-possession in the face of death, and the recognition of nobility in an alien race. A universally recognized masterpiece, the *Dying Gaul* is a deeply moving celebration of the human spirit.

FIG. 1 (above and left detail) *Dying Gaul*, Roman, 1st or 2nd century AD, marble, 37 × 73⁷/₁₆ × 35¹/₁₆ in., Sovrintendenza Capitolina—Musei Capitolini, Rome, Italy

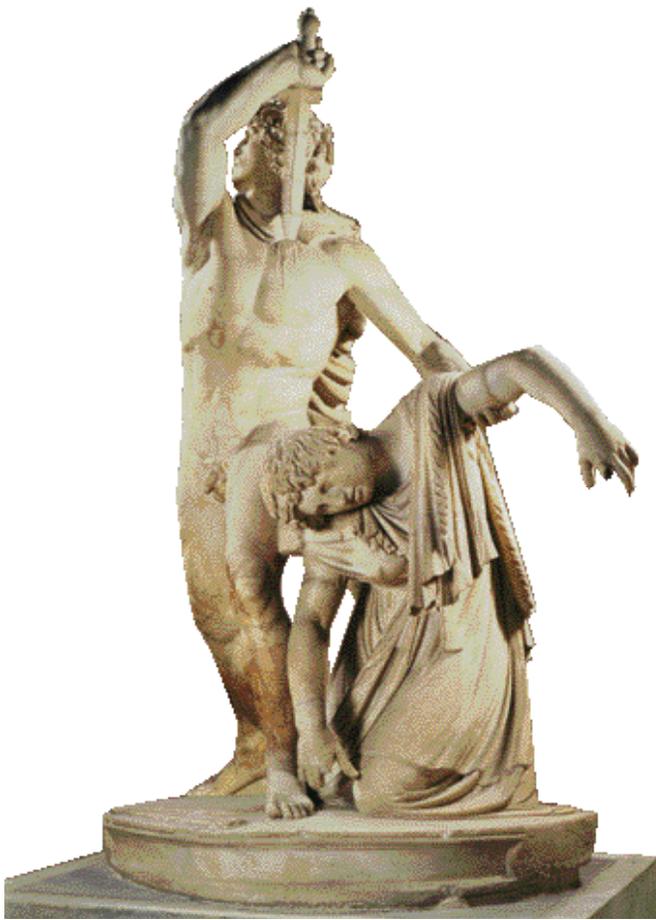


FIG. 2 Roman, *Gaul Committing Suicide with His Wife*, 1st or 2nd century AD, marble, h. 83 in., Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Altemps), Rome, Italy. Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY

FIG. 3 Giovanni Battista Falda, *View of the Villa Ludovisi and Gardens*, c. 1670, engraving, Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Altemps), Rome, Italy. Photo © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY

DISCOVERY

The *Dying Gaul* was found in Rome with another ancient marble sculpture: the *Gaul Committing Suicide with His Wife* (fig. 2). Both were unearthed in the gardens of the Villa Ludovisi (fig. 3), probably during excavations for the villa's foundations between 1621 and 1623.

The sculptures are Roman copies of Greek bronze originals created in the third century BC in Asia Minor to commemorate the victory of the king of Pergamon over the invading Gauls. In Pergamon, they most likely adorned the Sanctuary of Athena, who was the protector of the city (figs. 4–5). The Greek bronzes were evidently brought to Rome, possibly under Emperor Nero (reigned 54–68 AD), where they reminded Romans of their own proud conquest of Gaul. For both the Romans and the Pergamene Greeks, the subject also held larger significance: the triumph of civilization over barbarism.

The Ludovisi sculptures were not immediately recognized as depictions of Gallic warriors. The earliest record of the *Dying Gaul* appears in the 1623 inventory of the Ludovisi collection, in which it is described as a dying gladiator. Later, the presence of a trumpet on the plinth led the German art historian and archaeologist Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768) to propose that the subject was instead a Greek herald.



FIG. 4 Hypothetical reconstruction of the Sanctuary of Athena in Pergamon in the 3rd century BC, with the Hellenistic bronzes the *Dying Gaul* and *Gaul Committing Suicide with His Wife* (see detail below). From Richard Bohn, *Das Heiligtum der Athena Polias Nikephoros: Alterthümer von Pergamon*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1885)

FIG. 5 Hypothetical reconstruction of the Sanctuary of Athena, Pergamon (detail)



Around the turn of the eighteenth century, scholars began to recognize that the figure portrays instead a Gallic warrior. The torque around his neck, his mustache, and his leonine hair all signify a member of one of the Germanic tribes that the Greeks and Romans considered barbarians. The sculpture also conforms to ancient descriptions of Gallic warriors, noted for their bravery and ferocity. In the second century BC, the historian Polybius marveled that they fought

wearing nothing but their weapons.... Very terrifying too were the appearance and gestures of the naked warriors...all in the prime of life, and finely built men.

The *Dying Gaul's* matted locks also call to mind the first century BC historian Diodorus Siculus's report that the Gauls washed their hair with lime (fig. 1).



FIG. 6 François Perrier, *The Dying Gaul*, from *Segmenta nobilium signorum et statuarum*. Photo: Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Perrier's print is the earliest published image of the sculpture.

FIG. 7 Giovanni Francesco Susini, *The Dying Gaul*, 1630s, bronze, 8 7/8 x 16 1/2 in., Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. Photo: Finsiel/Alinari/Art Resource, NY

FIG. 8 Giovanni Domenico Campiglia, *Students Drawing the Dying Gaul in the Capitoline Collection*, c. 1760. From Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, *Musei Capitolini*, vol. III (Milan, 1821), National Library of Scotland

FIG. 9 Diego Velázquez, *Mercury and Argus*, 1659, 50 x 98 in., Museo del Prado, Madrid. Photo: The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY. Philip IV sent Velázquez to Rome to acquire plaster casts of antiquities, including the *Dying Gaul*. Velázquez based the figure of Argus on that of the *Dying Gaul*, but transferred the Gaul's arms to the figure of Mercury.



FAME

The fame of the *Dying Gaul* spread soon after its discovery, partly through an etching by the French artist François Perrier that was published in Rome in 1638 (fig. 6). Full-size replicas of the sculpture were commissioned by King Philip IV of Spain (reigned 1621–1665) and Louis XIV of France (reigned 1643–1715). Bronze statuettes produced by the Italian sculptor Giovanni Francesco Susini in the 1630s made the work available to a larger audience (fig. 7). In 1771 Thomas Jefferson, who knew Perrier's engraving, included the sculpture on a list of antiquities he hoped to acquire, presumably in reproduction, for a never-realized art gallery at Monticello. Copying the *Dying Gaul* became de rigueur for art students (fig. 8) and inspired works by Diego Velázquez (fig. 9), Jacques-Louis David (fig. 10), Giovanni Paolo Panini (fig. 11), and other artists.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a visit to the Capitoline Museum to see the original sculpture of the *Dying Gaul* was an essential stop on the Grand Tour. Europeans seeking to further their education by studying antiquities firsthand included Lord Byron, who toured Italy from 1816 to 1818. Still under the misconception that the sculpture portrayed a gladiator, he memorialized it in his poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

*I see before me the gladiator lie
He leans upon his hand—his manly brow
consents to death, but conquers agony*



FIG. 10 Jacques-Louis David, *Male Nude Study, called Patroclus*, 1780, 48 × 67 in., Musée d'Art Thomas Henry, Cherbourg. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. The back view of the *Dying Gaul* inspired David's portrayal of "Patroclus," painted while the artist was at the French Academy in Rome.

The exhibition is organized by Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza Capitolina—Musei Capitolini, and the National Gallery of Art, together with the Embassy of Italy, Washington. It is part of *The Dream of Rome and 2013—The Year of Italian Culture in the U.S.*, which is organized under the auspices of the President of the Italian Republic by The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy of Italy in Washington, in collaboration with the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

FIG. 11 Giovanni Paolo Panini, *Ancient Rome*, 1754/1757, 66½ × 89 in., Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart. The *Dying Gaul* is to the left of center.



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