

Worcester Art Museum Transfers Ownership of Bronze Bust



Worcester, MA—September 1, 2023—The Worcester Art Museum has transferred ownership of the bronze bust *Portrait of a Lady (A Daughter of Marcus Aurelius?)* to the New York County District Attorney’s Office so it can be repatriated to its country of origin after receiving new information about the object’s history of ownership. The Roman bronze bust dates to 160–180 CE and is thought to have come from a large family shrine in Turkey of an emperor, possibly Marcus Aurelius or Septimus Severus, likely a life-sized representation of one of their daughters.

The Museum purchased *Portrait of a Lady (A Daughter of Marcus Aurelius?)* in October 1966. At that time, the Museum was provided with limited information about the object’s history. The Museum was informed by the vendor that it had been found in southwestern Anatolia (the Roman Province of Lycia) that same year. Although the Museum conducted its own research at that time, it now acquires objects with greater diligence. Early in 2023, the New York County District Attorney’s Office provided new information to the Museum, prompting the Museum to cooperate with the DA’s investigation of the object’s history of ownership. The Museum had never previously received a claim or learned of any defect in ownership. Based on the new evidence that was provided, the Museum determined that the bronze was likely stolen and improperly imported, and has carried out the process of safely transferring the object.

“We are very thankful for the new information provided to us,” said Matthias Waschek, the Worcester Art Museum’s Jean and Myles McDonough Director. “The ethical standards applicable to museums are much changed since the 1960s, and the Museum is committed to managing its collection consistent with modern ethical standards.” Claire C. Whitner, the Worcester Art Museum’s Director of Curatorial Affairs and the James A. Welu Curator of European Art, added, “We are honored to play a part in the return of this Roman bust, which has been enjoyed by visitors to the Museum for over five decades.”

At the Worcester Art Museum, *Portrait of a Lady (A Daughter of Marcus Aurelius?)* has been studied as a fascinating example of ancient Roman craft. Found together but not attached as a single unit, the head and shoulders of the bust, which were probably paired in antiquity, each reflect a different quality of workmanship. While the bust and shoulders are treated summarily, the head is sensitively modeled and the hair minutely detailed in carefully combed waves. The woman's heavy-lidded gaze betrays a contemplative personality as distant as the emperors themselves.

About the Worcester Art Museum

The Worcester Art Museum creates transformative programs and exhibitions, drawing on its exceptional collection of art. Dating from 3000 BCE to the present, these works provide the foundation for a focus on audience engagement, connecting visitors of all ages and abilities with inspiring art and demonstrating its enduring relevance to daily life. Creative initiatives—including pioneering collaborative programs with local schools, fresh approaches to exhibition design and in-gallery teaching, and a long history of studio class instruction—offer opportunities for diverse audiences to experience art and learn both from and with artists.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 am to 4 pm. For more information, visit worchesterart.org.

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Image: *Portrait of a Lady (A Daughter of Marcus Aurelius?)* (160–180 CE)