

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS ST. PETE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG PARTNERS WITH PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
TO PRESENT RESTORED ANTIOCH MOSAICS AND NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN ARTIFACTS
FROM HISTORIC EXCAVATION**

Exhibition includes the MFA's five conserved mosaics from one of the great Greco-Roman cities

ST. PETERSBURG, FL (May 3, 2021) — A new exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg is presenting the famed 1930s excavation of the ancient city of Antioch through rare documents, artifacts, and the exquisite mosaics that were discovered during the archaeological dig.

Antioch Reclaimed: Ancient Mosaics at the MFA (April 10–August 22, 2021) features five geometric mosaic pavements, which date from the 2nd to the 5th centuries AD, from the MFA Collection. The MFA acquired the mosaics from Princeton University in 1964, one year prior to the museum opening to the public. After three of the mosaics were recovered from under the east lawn of the museum in 2018, all five ancient mosaics underwent an extensive conservation and preservation process to restore their original luster. An outdoor conservation lab at the museum allowed the community to observe the process.

MFA, St. Petersburg is the only arts institution in Florida with mosaics from ancient Antioch in its collection.

The MFA, St. Petersburg's mosaics are among the hundreds unearthed from 1933–1939 in what was the site of Antioch, a Greco-Roman city in ancient Syria founded in 300 BC that is now modern Antakya, a provincial capital of southern Turkey. Princeton led the Committee for the Excavation of Antioch, a group of art and academic institutions from the United States and France that excavated the area under an agreement with the Syrian government. The dig resulted in the discovery of the city center of Antioch and its wealthy suburbs, where all the mosaics were discovered covering the floors of the elegant private villas.

To retell the excavation story, Princeton University Art Museum is lending major works from its collection. In addition, the Princeton Archives is lending archival documents from the legendary dig to the MFA exhibition. These include vintage photographs, letters, telegrams,

journals and find cards, guest books, drawings, as well as newly-discovered film footage that shows the excavation in progress, and actual lifting of the mosaics from their original locations.

Antioch Reclaimed is curated by MFA Senior Curator of Early Western Art Michael Bennett, Ph.D. and Andrea De Giorgi, Ph.D., associate professor of Classics at Florida State University, and one of the leading scholars of ancient Antioch in America. The exhibition features a guided audio tour by Bennett, and a time-lapse video revealing how three of the MFA's mosaics were unearthed at the museum, and how all five were conserved and installed in the exhibition.

“This exhibition is unique for us, and for any art museum for that matter,” said Dr. Bennett. “It’s a hybrid exhibition that seams together history and art to present the riveting story of Antioch and its fascinating excavation. When you step into the galleries, you will see the beauty of the incredible art and images, and learn about the significance of the artifacts, but you’ll also experience and feel what it was like during that ancient time, and in that historical moment of archeological discovery.”

The exhibition is the second phase of a three-phase project for the five MFA mosaics. The last phase will be to permanently install all the mosaics in the MFA's Membership Garden.

The mosaics are an integral part of the MFA's 56-year-old history. When MFA Founder Margaret Acheson Stuart and Rexford Stead, the museum's first director, decided to purchase the mosaics from Princeton it signaled the downtown waterfront museum would be encyclopedic in scope, telling the history of art with a collection that spans across time and global cultures. The mosaics were the first shipment of art to arrive in the MFA's loading dock.

MFA Executive Director and CEO Kristen A. Shepherd said restoring the mosaics has been an exciting opportunity for the community to understand ancient culture and the profound importance of conserving and displaying antiquities.

“We are thrilled to be able to share a piece of history from such a pivotal time in the ancient world with our community and visitors,” said Shepherd, whose longtime affection for the mosaics began during her visits to the MFA as a teenager. “There has been such a deep and genuine interest from the public for our mosaics, and now we can all truly embrace them and their exciting journey with this one-of-a-kind exhibition.”

RELATED EXHIBITION PROGRAMS

[Virtual Cocktails & Collections](#)

Thursday, April 15 • 6:30–7:30 p.m.

Michael Bennett, Ph.D., senior curator of Early Western Art at the MFA, St. Petersburg, will present a virtual tour of *Antioch Reclaimed: Ancient Mosaics at the MFA*. Attendees are

encouraged to join with their exhibition-inspired cocktail/mocktail, and participate in the live Q&A with Dr. Bennett.

[Homeschool Hours: Ancient Archaeology featuring *Antioch Reclaimed*](#)

April 28 • 10 am–12 pm

Every month, homeschool groups and families are invited to join us as we look at the culture, history, math, and science of art using a pre-packaged activity bag. Exploring the *Antioch Reclaimed: Ancient Mosaics at the MFA* galleries, participants will travel back in time to the ancient Greco-Roman city to learn more about life in the second to the fifth centuries A.D., and how archaeologists rediscovered that life over 1,500 years later. Activities include archaeology-inspired puzzles, a scavenger hunt, and more!

[Lecture: "Was There Color Bias in the Ancient Mediterranean World?"](#)

Thursday, May 27 • 6–7:30 pm

While modern societies structure their categories of race around skin color, such identities would have seemed strange to ancient Greeks and Romans, who had their own ways of understanding race and who lived in diverse ancient societies very different from our own. Denison University professor and author Rebecca Futo Kennedy, Ph.D. discusses the different ways the ancient Greeks and Romans depicted human diversity and foreignness in their texts and art, while exploring how modern conceptions of Greco-Roman antiquity are presented as foundational to contemporary white, Western identities.

[Summer Camp: Art & Archaeology](#)

July 12–16 • 9 am–4 pm

The MFA's themed, week-long summer camps kick off with one focused on the art and science of archaeology. Rising 1st to 5th graders will spend time in the special exhibition, *Antioch Reclaimed: Ancient Mosaics at the MFA*, as well as learn how archaeologists piece together the past from Ancient Greece, to Mesoamerica, and even right here in Tampa Bay. Activities include exploring our own miniature archeology sites, puzzling together artifacts, and creating a time capsule for archaeologists of the future!

Additional programs with the curators to be announced on mfastpete.org.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

The MFA at 255 Beach Drive NE is St. Petersburg's first art museum, and houses the largest encyclopedic art collection in Florida. The collection includes works of art from ancient times to the present day and from around the world, including ancient Greek and Roman, Egyptian, Asian, African, pre-Columbian, Native American, European, American, and contemporary art. The photography collection is one of the largest and finest in the Southeast. Kristen A. Shepherd is the Executive Director and CEO. For more information, please visit mfastpete.org and follow @mfastpete on social media.

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