



DEATH & REMEMBRANCE

self-guided tour

**MUSEUM
OF FINE ARTS
ST. PETERSBURG**

DEATH & REMEMBRANCE

Oral traditions, written histories, and archaeological discoveries show that humans have always been affected by the deaths of family, close friends, and community members—and loss is often on their minds. Different cultures have developed ways of honoring and remembering the dead. Civilizations have done this through large monuments such as the Pyramids and small markers such as gravestones. Some paintings warned of death and objects were produced to help the deceased after death. Ceremonies bid the late person farewell, and objects were carried to prompt remembrance—even today. Exploring both familiar and more unique customs demonstrates how death and remembrance have always been part of the human experience.



SCAN THIS CODE FOR A MAP IDENTIFYING
THE LOCATIONS OF THE ARTWORKS

NOT AN END

Mummy Mask of a Woman, c. 100-200 A.D.

FIND THIS IN THE ANCIENT ART GALLERIES

Ancient Egyptian culture viewed death as a beginning not an end. The importance of the afterlife was such that many spent years preparing, gathering the necessary objects to be entombed, and arranging to be properly embalmed. For centuries, mummy masks, such as this, were an important aspect of the Egyptian art of death. They reflected an idealized visage and served as a substitute head. After the Roman invasion of Egypt in 30 B.C., mummy masks slowly began taking on Roman characteristics. This painted, plaster, mask—which may have been formed using a mold—depicts an Egyptian woman coiffed in a distinctly Roman hairstyle.



BELOVED WIFE

Kline Monument, late 2nd century

FIND THIS IN THE ANCIENT ART GALLERIES

This sarcophagus lid presents a sculptural depiction of a deceased woman reclining with her husband surrounded by *Erotes*, personifications of love. It is a testament to how much Mauremosthenes adored his wife, Athenodotaine. The winged boy second from the far left may represent Anteros, the personification of reciprocated love. He leans in to kiss a wingless boy to his right, possibly representing Dionysus, a god who is sometimes depicted as a child. Anteros may then refer to Athenodotaine, while the wingless boy may stand for Mauremosthenes, since he was a priest of Dionysus according to the inscription on the monument. Therefore, this pair of boys may signify the profound love shared by the married couple.



SOUND OF THE UNIVERSE

Da ma ru (Two-sided Hand-drum), c. 1875

FIND THIS IN THE ASIAN ART GALLERIES

This drum, also called a *da ma ru*, is a sacred instrument used by Tibetan Buddhists in a meditative ritual known as Tantra. It is made of two human craniums, likely of a male and a female. In Tantra, the skull symbolizes both bliss and impermanence, a reminder that earthly bodies are not as important as our spiritual journeys. The skull drum would have originally had a beaded cord. In sacred ritual, it would have been held in one hand and twisted so the bead hit either side of the drum in a heartbeat-like rhythm. The heartbeat represents the sound of the universe and the sound of one's spiritual journey to enlightenment.



DUST AND SHADOW

Edward Colyer, *Vanitas*, c. 1662-1696

FIND THIS IN THE EUROPEAN ART, 13TH-18TH CENTURIES GALLERIES

The painting's title comes from the Book of Ecclesiastes, which appears on the scroll at the center. Translated from the Latin, it reads: "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity."—this reminds us that life's accomplishments, whether learning, music, and wealth, will not last. Everything in the work suggests mortality: a skull; frayed books and sheet music; the violin missing strings; a nearly empty hourglass; and a flameless gilded oil lamp. Reinforcing these symbolic elements is another Latin inscription. Translated it reads: "We are dust and shadow." Even though the Dutch loved wealth and good living, many were also strict, moral Christians. Vanitas paintings reminded them that this life will pass, but the next world—whether Heaven or Hell—is eternal.



MEMORIAL PORTRAIT

Jules-Joseph Lefebvre, *Julia Foster Ward*, 1880

FIND THIS IN THE EUROPEAN ART, 13TH-18TH CENTURIES GALLERIES

While this portrait may not initially appear to convey death, it is a posthumous image of Julia Foster Ward, painted from a photograph. Her parents commissioned the work from Lefebvre, one of the most celebrated portrait artists of that time. The portrait's freshness probably owes to his use of a live model upon which he based the figure. In keeping with the Victorian use of flowers to communicate messages, Julia's hair is adorned with morning glories—flowers which bloom and die within a day. Their presence reminds us of the brevity of life and beauty. In addition, because they grow on twisting vines that bind other plant stems together, they have the connotation of enduring, loving relationships.



SPIRIT CHILD

Ere Ibeji, 20th Century

FIND THIS IN THE AFRICAN ART GALLERY

The Yoruba peoples have the world's highest rate of twin births—which poses many problems: twins typically have a lower birth weight, mothers must produce twice as much milk, and they require twice as many resources. For these reasons, their mortality rates are higher. After a twin dies, its spirit may temporarily return as an *abiku*, or a spirit child. It may appear to the living twin, coaxing it to leave the physical world. To keep this from happening, parents may commission a carved figure to house the spirit, caring for it as a real child—keeping it happy in the world of the living, together with its twin. If both twins die, pairs may be carved to keep them connected to their family.



DEATH WITH THE GODS

Incised Mask, c. 1000-400 B.C.

FIND THIS IN THE ART OF THE AMERICAS GALLERIES

This mask, deposited in a royal grave, is both a sensitively carved portrait, and a schematic diagram of the Olmec *cosmos* (universe). Both of these observations are remarkable. A portrait would be unthinkable at this time in the Mediterranean, where portraiture was introduced by the Romans centuries later. The upper lids of the drilled almond-shaped eyes are marked with fine incised lines, as are the contours of the full lips. The subtle gradations of the planes of the face were achieved without metal tools, using only stone implements and abrasives. The mask was probably worn by the occupant of the grave in life and perhaps incised after death. The diagram on the front surface is dominated by a central rectangle with a V-shaped notch at the top, an indication of divine transcendence. At the four corners are circles indicating cosmological coordinates. On the right cheek is a depiction of the Olmec were-jaguar, a powerful supernatural divinity. And on the left cheek is a V-shaped, notched column, a heavenly talisman. The entire schematic is a map revealing knowledge of the multileveled nature of existence.



Cover: *Incised Mask (detail)*, c. 1000-400 B.C., Gift of Louis E. Seley and sons Hervey and Elliott, Jr.
Inside: *Mummy Mask of a Woman*, c. 100-200 A.D., Museum purchase

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