



KS3 Artefact to Art Session 2: Art and Power in Imperial Rome

Plan (one hour)

This session explores art and power in imperial Rome. It explores the following questions: In what kinds of contexts do we find art in imperial Rome? Who controlled the making of art? What was the relationship between art and political power?

In this pack:

- PPT with relevant images
- Pupil worksheets 1 and 2
- Supervisor/teacher session plan

5 mins: Introduction

Slide 1:

What do we think of when we think of Roman art? What do all these images have in common? (i.e. key point is the connection to political power)

25 mins: The emperors and art

Slide 2:

What kinds of art did the emperors promote? How did it promote their political interests?

Worksheet 1

Art and the first emperor

20 mins: Non-imperial art

Worksheet 2:

Non-official art

10 mins: Art and power

Slide 3:

How is art used by states and politicians in the present day? Are there any parallels between the Roman links between art and power and our own?



Background information:

Slide 1: images are:

- Statue of the 'Venus Genetrix' type, from the Capitoline museum in Rome This worship of Venus Genetrix (literally: "Venus the mother") was promoted by Julius Caesar and the first dynasty of Roman emperors, the Julio-Claudians. They claimed that the goddess Venus was their ancestor, as she was said to be the mother of Aeneas, the founder of their family. A temple to Venus Genetrix was established in Rome by Julius Caesar, and statues representing her became a common type across the empire.
- Section of relief sculpture from Trajan's Column: This column commemorates the emperor Trajan's defeat over the Dacians (the people from around the River Danube), and was set up in 113 CE in Trajan's Forum. It shows scenes of the military campaign and the victory.
- The front of the Pantheon: The Pantheon was originally built as a temple for "all the gods" (as its name suggests) in 27 BCE by Marcus Agrippa, Augustus' right hand man. The building as we now see it was rebuilt several times due to earthquake damage, but most of it dates from the 2nd century CE and the reign of the emperor Hadrian. The inscription on the front says: M(arcus) A(grippa) L(ucius) F(ilius) Co(n)s(ul) Ter(tius) Fecit, which means "Marcus Agrippa, the son of Lucius, made this when he was consul for the third time". It was reused as a church.

Worksheet 1: Art and the First Emperor

1. Coin of Octavian
 - a. Octavian was the birth name of Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar and the first Roman emperor who ruled from 63 BCE until 14 CE. He adopted the name 'Augustus' in 27 BCE as an honorific title, implying that he brought wealth and prosperity to Rome.
 - b. This coin was minted around 27 BCE, just before his change of title. It commemorates the conquest of Egypt, and his defeat of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra and her Roman supporter and lover Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE. After the Battle of Actium, Rome was able to incorporate Egypt as a wealthy province into its empire, which secured the provision of valuable grain and other resources for the city.
 - c. Octavian is represented here as a young man, and behind him is the *lituus*, the symbolic staff of the augur (a Roman priest).
2. Prima Porta Statue
 - a. The Prima Porta is a famous statue of Augustus, probably first made around 20 BCE, but which became a model and a pattern for other smaller reproductions in later years.
 - b. Augustus is represented here in military costume, signifying his role as a successful general.
 - c. His breastplate shows the gods in the sky, beneath which are two male figures in the centre of the breastplate, facing each other. The figure on the right is dressed in 'barbarian' clothing and holds an eagle – a Roman military standard. It is thought to represent the king of Parthia (Iran), who had previously captured an eagle. The figure on the left is in Roman military



costume, and probably represents Augustus or Tiberius, recovering the eagle and subduing the Parthian enemy.

Worksheet 2: Non-official art

This worksheet features two similar images, both based on a sculpture that has now been lost, but originally stood in the Forum of Augustus. The sculpture depicted Aeneas fleeing the Fall of Troy carrying his father Anchises on his back and holding onto the hand of his son Ascanius. This statue stood in the *Forum Augustum*, but was the model for many reproductions, both official and non-official. These two reproductions give us a sense of the range of ways that people reacted to the public promotion of Aeneas, his story, and his image. They remind us that visual images are a powerful way of engaging in political discourse.

Terracotta figurine:

- Figurines such as these would likely have been kept in people's homes. People could use them for several reasons – they could be decorations, serve as toys for children, or (as perhaps intended) could be set up and honoured in a household shrine.
- Figurines like this were mass produced, made in moulds that could replicate hundreds of identical objects. This way, they could be produced and sold very cheaply.

Wall painting:

- We are not totally sure where this painting came from in Pompeii, because of the way that the site was excavated in the 18th and 19th centuries. Its style might suggest that it might be considered graffiti today.
- The dog-headed creatures are clearly meant to be amusing, as is the fact that they all have large engorged penises – a feature of actors in comic theatre (does this picture therefore suggest a comic play on the stage?). Also, the Anchises figure carries, not the household gods, but a box for gambling dice.

Further Reading:

Borg, B. (ed) 2015. *A Companion to Roman Art*. Oxford.

Galinsky, K. (ed). 2005. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*. Cambridge.

Zanker, P. 1990. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor.

DON'T FORGET!

**ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENTS TO ENTER THE ARTEFACT TO
ART COMPETITION!**

DETAILS ON THE WEBSITE: www.artefact-to-art.com