

## From Catalog to Classroom: Rehabilitating a Classics Collection for Educational Use

According to the 2004 Heritage Health Index survey conducted by Heritage Preservation and the Institute for Museum and Library Services, museums, archives, libraries, historical collections, and research repositories hold more than 4.8 billion items in the public trust, including 4.7 million works of art and 13.5 million historic objects. However, of these billions of items, very few are made accessible and available to educators, researchers, and members of the public on a regular basis. For institutions across museum sectors, 3% to 5% of collections are on display at any given time. At the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, efforts have begun to address this issue within the collection of Classical Art and Archaeology by rehabilitating this underutilized collection for educational use of many kinds.

The Classics collection at SNOMNH contains a modest 1,375 items from multiple time periods and regions, spanning the broad Mediterranean region and several thousand years. The collection is uniquely situated in a university-affiliated natural history museum, and as part of a larger Ethnology and Fine Art department. However, issues with providing public access to these items reflect those present in the larger field, as only 2.8% of the collection is currently exhibited and research requests have been few and far between. Current efforts by SNOMNH staff seek to rehabilitate this neglected collection for educational, research, and exhibit usage, through developing a better understanding of the collection's history, revitalizing documentation, providing new ways to access information, and proactively working with research collaborators on a local and regional scale.

The history of this collection dates back to the early 1930s, when it was originally developed for purely teaching purposes, prior to its 1953 incorporation into the larger University

Museum. Over the course of this history, several cyclical periods of higher and lower collection activity coincided with differing management and acquisition styles and priorities, which have shaped the collection into its current manner. Deeper research into this history using local and institutional archives, including university newspaper collections, have allowed the tracing of these patterns over time and enabled the improvement of collection-related documentation and uncovering of previously lost object information.

Additionally, documentation has been improved via the creation of a finding aid, standard in archival practice but uncommon for museum collections, of the full classical collection, which will be distributed to researchers throughout the University of Oklahoma, including students, and aims to enable the informed selection of research topics or related materials and increase the volume of research requests fulfilled. Finally, the development of a new online searchable catalog of collections allows for better interactivity and access via the inclusion of improved and updated information and emerging forms of data, such as 3D scans and photogrammetric models.