



INSTITUTE OF CLASSICAL
ARCHITECTURE & ART

CHROMOPHILIA

Interventions into institutional collections are well-established, traditionally through juxtaposing objects from different cultures or periods to challenge sanctioned histories by proposing alternatives. While COVID-19 has curtailed personal visits to the physical sites of public collections it has simultaneously expanded audience engagements with their websites and online resources. **CHROMOPHILIA** operates in this altered environment as a virtual intervention into the digital avatars of 3 plaster casts of Roman copies of even older lost Greek works, normally on display in the Cast Hall of New York's Institute of Classical Architecture & Art. *The Discobolus*, *Sleeping Ariadne* and *Demeter Ludovisi* immigrated to the United States when acquired by the Metropolitan Museum and in 2004, were part of an important group of significant casts gifted to the ICAA by The MET. For this project these three casts have been animated using techniques that imitate filter apps such as Modiface and Pixaloop that younger audiences use every day in manipulating images for their social media feed. The brightly coloured treatments as well as being historically accurate open the past up to the present in a way that is familiar to a contemporary audience. Coding is used extensively throughout all the works and is based on how close friends often hide secrets for each other in plain sight, where they must be discovered, uncovered and interpreted. An experience that is also integral to how online gaming platforms reward the solving of puzzles.

Plaster casting is a complex process fraught with limitations and difficult to cleave from the larger history and afterlife of coloniality. Like analogue photography it uses a negative to generate a positive and critical information is always lost in the process: it cannot record or transmit colour, fine detail and nuance are diminished. The histories and methodologies of casting are resplendent with compelling, under-explored themes for artists. Particularly those working with issues of memory, authenticity and power in multicultural societies like the United States or Australia, that were established through European occupation and colonisation. The art and architecture of the West's foundational cultures was richly coloured. Time and thereafter a false premise stripped away the original colour of Western Classicism's remaining artefacts, obliterating the polychromy that linked them to the world's other ancient cultures and civilisations. **CHROMOPHILIA** intervenes in this void of erased memory by engaging with the three hero images on the home page of the ICAA's Cast Hall, acknowledging their past as richly coloured, heavily coded expressions of tribal affiliation.

Consisting of three video works and a GIF, each corresponding to one of the Cast Hall banner photographs, this project is accompanied by a colouring book that can be downloaded and printed at home. Each of the videos has a unique format based on one or another of the more popular ways in which we communicate with each other during the upheavals to our social interactions brought about by COVID19. *The Discobolus* follows the 16:9 proportions of recent generation smartphones and derives its formal language from the constant refocusing of the front-facing camera, frequent glitches and degradation of the image and audio that are characteristic of video calls during periods of heavy internet traffic caused by so many people working from home. The 5:4 ratio of *Sleeping Ariadne* is based on one of the preferred Instagram formats while *Demeter Ludovisi* uses the standard 3:2 format of the smartphone camera's portrait mode.

The narrative of each work draws heavily on their object biographies, beginning with their production at one or the other specialised casting factories established by various European courts or museums; the year of their acquisition by The MET; a list of exhibitions and publications in



which they have featured and among other art historical factum, photographs taken of the sculptures over time. Troubling the polished surface of this sanctioned history are a series of encrypted messages that emerge from acknowledging that the statues themselves are elaborately coded objects whose archaic language needs to be translated for an audience no longer able to read them. Either through blinking their eyes or through switching different colours on and off, a series of secondary messages are simultaneously broadcast by the statue throughout each of the works. Based on [YouTube](#) footage of Jeremiah Denton, former Naval Aviator, Rear Admiral, US Senator and prisoner of war who, when forced by his captors to participate in a televised propaganda broadcast, blinked his eyes to deliver another message in Morse Code. This method, which uses two sequences of different signal durations to encode and transmit text has been adapted for each of the videos.

The Discobolus appears as though he is taking a selfie but as the work progresses with all the tell-tale indices of an overburdened wireless network, we begin to understand that he is in fact FaceTiming his almost identical twin - a reference to the two extant complete versions of this sculpture and to their very different histories in the 20th century. The version purchased by the Met is cast off the *Townley Discobolus* now in the British Museum. The concluding frame of the work however also features a profile photograph of his “brother” the *Lancellotti Discobolus* now in the National Roman Museum’s Palazzo Massimo which was once purchased by Hitler and taken to Germany. *Sleeping Ariadne* cites Andy Warhol’s *Sleep* in its obsessive focus on a recumbent person while adopting the frontal, fixed camera mounting characteristic of a testimonial. Ariadne and the rock on which she slumbers both disappear in the final scene, the former before the latter, suggesting how time and memory are equally fragile. How the flesh and its stone rendered monuments both decay and erode, albeit according to different timelines. *Demeter Ludovisi* began as an interview between Demeter and Mollie Wohlforth, the ICAA Cast Hall Fellow. Composed of nine questions and answers and an epilogue *Demeter Ludovisi* is intended to be experienced like an archaeological dig in which truncated sections of text are excavated randomly and reassembled into a cohesive narrative that has credibility in multiple iterations. This approach imitates the way the originals for all these statues were usually unearthed over time in fragments and carefully reassembled piece by piece.

In referencing an archaeological site this project expresses itself as a series of layers, or levels of varying difficulty and complexity in a game that need to be navigated. It recognises the interests that younger people especially have in ancestry, lineages and origin stories. **CHROMOPHILIA** was developed conversationally among its many contributors across the time and space separating Sydney from New York and the even greater distance cleaving the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome from the globalised cultures of today. Its premise is that Classicism of the West shares a polychromatic language common to all the world’s cultures and that this language remains vital to contemporary creative expression. This Artist Initiated Project argues that there is equivalence among the world’s many and varied cultures based on their shared polychromy, mythography and links to traditional practices; whether they are remembered, erased or have been otherwise suppressed. As *Demeter Ludovisi*, so pointedly reminds us “there is no such thing as a unique category of people who can claim to be without colour.”