

GLADIATORS

HEROES OF THE COLOSSEUM



expona



Temporary Exhibition

Working Title: **Gladiators, Heroes of the Colosseum**

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The exhibition, in brief
GLADIATORS
HEROES OF THE COLOSSEUM

Forever immortalized by films in the popular imagination, the gladiator locked in mortal combat for the entertainment of the crowds in the Colosseum of ancient Rome is a perpetually irresistible figure to a large spectrum of the public. Many are aware of the life and death theatrics, but few know of the behind-the-scenes intricacies of existence of the gladiators of ancient Rome. Theirs was a world of specialization, training, discipline, regulation, peril, but also hope of fame, redemption, even wealth and freedom.

Gladiators were an expression of Rome's martial ethics; by fighting well and dying well, they engendered great admiration, wild acclaim and popularity throughout the Roman world and their role as entertainers was celebrated and commemorated in high art and commonplace objects. And there was no greater expression of this phenomenon than the Colosseum in Rome, the greatest amphitheater ever built and still today one of the wonders of the world.

In collaboration with the Director of the Colosseum, Dr. Rossella Rea, the ambition of this exhibition is to illustrate this compelling, fascinating world in its myriad of complexities through traditional exhibition methods, such as the display of original objects, but also through modern replicas and models, based on rigorous scientific documentation, cutting-edge interactive technology, suggestive graphics and set design and other multimedia devices. The exhibition unfolds on two paths revealing two protagonists, interwoven by destiny: the gladiators and the Colosseum, that colossal, complex structure that was the stage upon which their fate was determined. Fact is separated from fiction through an exhibition that follows both a chronological and thematic order.

GLADIATORS – HEROES OF THE COLOSSEUM is the first international exhibition in collaboration with the Colosseum in Rome with significant original loans coming from important Italian museums and institutions, partly never exhibited before outside Italy.



Funerary Painted Slab
Parco Archeologico di Paestum



Section 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF GLADIATORIAL COMBAT & VENATIONES

Origins

According to several ancient sources, the origins of gladiatorial combat were to be found in the Etruscan civilization that preceded the dominance of Rome on the Italian peninsula. Allegedly, in the Etruscan world, it was common for armed humans to fight to death before a crowd in celebration of a holiday or as funeral rites, as suggested in 6th century BCE wall paintings in the tombs of Tarquinia in Tuscany. The ancient Greeks also held funeral games, ending in symbolic deaths/defeats of athletes in competition: a tradition that possibly was introduced to the Italian peninsula through the many colonies of Magna Grecia as early as the 8th century BCE.

Modern historians seem to dispute the ancient Etruscan attribution and identify the origins instead in Campania, the region of Italy that today is centered around the city of Naples. 4th century BCE frescoes in Paestum depict armed pairs with Corinthian (Greek) helmets, spears and round shields.



Funerary Painted Slab
Parco Archeologico di Paestum

According to the great ancient Roman historian and author of *The History of Rome* (Ab Urbe Condita), Livy (Titus Livius 59 BCE-17 CE), the first known gladiatorial games were held in 310 BCE by the Campanians to celebrate their military victory over the Samnites through symbolic re-enactment. The Samnites were the people of Samnium, the territory to the east of Campania (today known as the Molise region of Italy). Samnium's support for Hannibal and Carthage in the 2nd Punic War led to frequent punitive expeditions by the Roman army and its Campania allies.

Again according to Livy: the Samnite enemy brandished splendid, glittering, armaments in contrast to Roman morals that dictated that a soldier should be "rough in appearance, not adorned with gold and silver and should trust in iron and courage".

When victorious, Rome used the splendid armour to honor the gods, while Campania equipped gladiators to play the Samnite role for entertainment at victory feasts. Indeed, one of the earliest gladiator types most frequently mentioned is the Samnite, and gladiators were often armed and armoured to represent the enemies of Rome. As a side note, at the start of the Punic Wars, Carthage was the dominant power of the Mediterranean, with an extensive maritime empire, while Rome was the rapidly ascending power on the Italian peninsula but lacked the naval power of Carthage. By the end of the third war, after more than a hundred years and the loss of many hundreds of thousands of soldiers from both sides, Rome had conquered Carthage's empire and completely destroyed the city, becoming the most powerful state of the Western Mediterranean. The history and diffusion of gladiatorial combat throughout what would become known as the Roman Empire was linked to events in the Punic Wars against Carthage.

First Gladiatorial Games in Rome:

By all accounts, the first gladiator games in the city of Rome were held in 264 BCE by Marcus and Decimus Brutus to honor their father, Junius Brutus Pera, at the Forum Boarium (cattle market). To satisfy the commemorative duty owed to the *manes* of a dead ancestor by descendants, three pairs of gladiators (possibly Thracian slaves) fought in a *munus* (plural: *munera*) to guarantee the blessings of the gods by offering blood.



In 216 BCE, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (consul and auger) was honored by his sons with three days of gladiator games in the Roman Forum and 22 pairs of gladiators. Ten years later, the great military general and Roman statesman, Scipio Africanus staged gladiator games in Iberia (Spain) to honor his father and uncle, both casualties of the Punic Wars. Important Romans and non-Romans volunteered to be his gladiators. The shadow of the near-disastrous Roman defeat at the 216 BCE Battle of Cannae added elements of military celebration, expiation of military disaster and moral-boosting to these early games.

Overtime, *munera* (gladiator games) became widespread through the provinces and territories controlled by the Republic of Rome. In fact, small Roman *munera* were so commonplace that many went unrecorded, although of note, is the *munera* sponsored by Titus Flaminus; a lavish event, lasting 4 days in which 74 gladiators fought, accompanied by the distribution of meat, banquets and other performances, foreshadowing the future trend - evermore spectacular, sensational and opulent gladiator games.

Wherever lie the exact religious origins, gladiator combat evolved into one of the defining symbols of Roman culture; a symbol that would last for nearly seven centuries and generate an enduring legacy.

The Evolution of the Games from the Republican Age to the Late Imperial Age: from Funeral Rite to Political Manifestation; from Private to Public; from Munera to Ludi

As the early documented *munera* substantiate, originally gladiators were primarily captured soldiers made to fight with their own weapons and in their own styles. It is from these early conscripted prisoners-of-war (in particular, the Samnites, Gauls and Thracians) that the later, stylized exotic appearances of gladiator categories would evolve.

In keeping with the religious significance of the *munera*, they fought to death to exorcise another death. The commemorative sacrifice was organized and paid for by the *munerator*, normally family members of the deceased as private citizens. Later, the gladiatorial games were organized by an editor who could be the same as the *munerator* or a hired official. Although in the Republican period, a private citizen could own gladiators or a gladiatorial school, more commonly, gladiators belonged to a *lanista* (the owner of a training school) who would lease his *familia* (family of gladiators) to the editor or sponsor.

As their popularity with the public increased, gradually these events evolved into displays of aristocratic wealth and prestige with overt political implications. Their religious significance was primarily a pretense and justification for self-promotion among ambitious Roman citizens, politicians, public officials and military leaders.



Triumphantly returning to Rome and elected aedile in 65 BCE, Julius Caesar, hosted a display of 320 gladiator pairs, clad in silvered armor, in a wooden amphitheatre especially constructed for the event. His pretense was the commemoration of his father who had died 20 years before, but the result was a spectacular show of self-promotion. He would have had even a bigger show, but the Senate, fearful of the effects of the slave revolt led by Spartacus in 73 BCE and the expanding popularity and private army of Caesar, limited the number of gladiator pairs that could be kept in Rome to 320.

Then he did it again in 46 BCE, after victories in Gaul and Egypt. Hosting games at the tomb of his daughter, this extravaganza featured not only gladiatorial bouts, but also other forms of entertainment – theatrical plays and beast fights, including the first appearance of a giraffe. Caesar's showmanship was unprecedented in scale and expense and in blatant defiance of the Republican somber tradition of the munera as a funeral offering. Clearly political, it contributed to the transition of the munera into the ludi (state games) that would prevail in the Imperial Ages.

When Octavian became Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Imperator in 27 BCE, he assumed authority over gladiatorial games. He imposed conditions to limit the power and influence that a private citizen could amass through sponsoring such widely popular events and perhaps to also reinforce certain traditional Roman values of propriety. Henceforth Imperial permission was needed. He assigned the games to public officials (praetors), limited the amount of money that could be spent, claiming to save the Roman elite from bankruptcy. The number of shows per year was restricted to two to coincide with the festivals of the Saturnalia and Quinquatria. The greatest, most celebrated, most expensive shows would be the Imperial ludi, promoting respect, recognition and approval of the Emperor.

Most of his cautions went unheeded by subsequent generations of Emperors – Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, to name but a few, but the Imperial ludi evolved and expanded as a personal expression of the generosity of the emperor and an important prop to his power in maintaining the loyalty of the burgeoning population of Rome. Reportedly, in 108 – 109 CE, Trajan celebrated his victories in Dacia (today a region comprised of parts of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) in a 123-day extravaganza, involving 10,000 gladiators and 11,000 animals, perhaps the largest ever recorded gladiator spectacle.

The Origins and Evolution of the Venationes

Spectacles of beast hunts or venationes developed on a parallel course to gladiatorial combat, but had their own distinct and unique characteristics.

Again, Livy, the great historian of Rome, dates the first hunts to the year 185 BCE with the games offered by M. Fulvius Nobilior after the second Punic War. In subsequent centuries, a string of powerful men boosting their public popularity – Sulla, Pompey, Julius Ceasar, the Emperors – staged venationes featuring exotic animals – lions, hippopotamus, crocodiles. On one occasion, Caesar deployed some 400 lions imported primarily from North Africa and Syria and also introduced the first giraffe.

Not only did the people of Rome enjoy seeing these strange beasts, but even better that they were chased, killed and the meat distributed to the crowds. Often, there was also a show in which the animals performed tricks similar to the modern circus. The public so loved these shows that they became an important part, the opening act, of the day at the arena. Hunts had a religious role as well; they were dedicated to the

goddess of the hunt Diana, or to the mighty Jupiter, in his different incarnations.

The capture, transport and care of these exotic wild beasts from all around the Empire developed into a veritable industry, given the scores of animals required to produce the shows. Not all the animals sent into the arena were ferocious, but many were, and the lion was especially revered for its ferocity. To keep these animals and all the beasts that were condemned to find death in the arena, a kind of zoo was created called a *vivarium*. At least three locations have been identified in Rome and its environs as probable sites. The creatures went on public display the day before their appearance in the arena. In Rome, this happened at the vivarium near Porta Prenestina.

In early times, the animals were chained in the arena, but after Sulla (about 100 BCE), they were freed and special defenses had to be built for the safety of the audience. In the Colosseum, the wall around the arena, the podium, was approx. 4 meters tall and rounded so that the beasts were prevented from climbing on top. The beasts were not allowed to enter the doors of the arena but were confined in cages under the arena, lifted by pulleys into cubicles placed all around the podium. If the beasts refused to enter the arena, they were driven out by burning prods.

The common denominator of all venationes was that there were animals in the show; they weren't necessarily killed, and could also be trained to perform tricks, Augustus displayed all kinds of exotic and strange animals sent for this purpose by the governors of the provinces. Nevertheless, the usual hunt saw beasts matched one against the other, or against men. Scholars make a distinction between the *venatio* in which men provided with weapons fought the wild beasts, and another "show" in which men condemned to death were thrown to the beasts without any defense or hope of survival. Most of the animal vs. animal matches were classic: a lion against a tiger, or maybe



Relief with Venationes
Museo Civico, Rieti



against a bull or a bear. On occasion, the match was very unequal: hounds, or lions were loosed against deer, and sometimes to break the monotony, the Romans staged strange combination of animals such as a bear against a python. The majority of the combats, however, staged beasts against specially trained men (venatores) armed with a spear and protected by leather bands on their arms and legs.

Venatores were primarily slaves or criminals considered even viler (*noxii*) than gladiators and condemned (*damnati ad bestias*). They received a special training in the ludi like gladiators. In Rome there was the *ludus matutinus*, whose name seems to come from the fact that hunts took place in the morning. They also were divided into categories according to the role performed: hunters, archers, bullfighters etc. Fighting techniques were many: some venatores were armed as above described, others were almost naked, some fought with their bare hands or with special devices, and some wore iron plates on their chests or even a suit of armor.

In general however, venatores had little chance of survival or life expectancy, and in later Imperial times, some condemned criminals were literally thrown to the beasts or forced to be the victims of horrific reenactments, ending with their suffering and execution.

In contrast on other occasions, there was a comical element introduced into the combat, the venatore appearing in the role of a clown. Tame animals would perform tricks: tigers would let themselves be kissed; lions would catch hares and bring them back unharmed, elephants would do tricks like dancing or walking the rope.

The hunts were an extremely popular part of the spectacles. A few venatores even became so famous that their names can be found on some mosaics.

In fact, the popularity was so great that by the time of their abolition in 523 CE, tens of thousands of animals had died, and species no longer existed in their native habitats. There were no more elephants in North Africa or hippos in Nubia. It is estimated that 5-10,000 animals died in the celebrations dedicated to the completion of Colosseum, and more than 11,000 died in the greatest spectacle of all, the games of the Emperor Trajan staged to celebrate the conquest of Dacia.

Decline

By the 3rd century, gladiatorial games had passed their peak of popularity; the public favored theatrical shows and chariot racing. There are perhaps several factors – the spiraling costs of the games became an unwelcome and unrewarding tax for the lesser magistrates in the provinces who were obliged to put on such displays. Even the Emperors could ill-afford the lavish shows to which the crowds were accustomed considering the various crisis confronting the Empire at that time. Another undisputable factor was the spread of Christianity whose tenets viewed gladiatorial combat as pagan human sacrifice. In 393 CE, Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Christianity the state religion and banned pagan festivals all together.





Helmet of a Gladiator
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples



Section 2: WHO WERE THE GLADIATORS?

The Life of a Gladiator: Hierarchy, Recruitment, Legal & Social Status, Daily Life

From the Republican period and well into Imperial times, many of the gladiators who filled the gladiator schools and arenas were prisoners of war; healthy, robust captives sold into slavery and purchased by a *lanista* (an owner or manager of a gladiator *ludus* (school)). A thriving trade existed throughout the empire.

Others were criminals or slaves condemned to the arena (*damnati ad ludos*) as punishment for their crimes, the nature of which could determine their fate. Banditry, arson, rebellious acts, tax evasion are among the crimes that might result in a sentence to the arena. Other more obnoxious offenders (*noxii*) received even worse punishments with little chance of survival such as those condemned to the beast fights (*ventiones*).

By the late Republic, *autocrati*, essentially volunteers, accounted for perhaps half of the gladiator population and perhaps the most capable half. Their ranks were comprised of various types of otherwise free men: non-citizens, the indebted, the disinherited, social outcasts, or discharged soldiers, because in addition to shelter and food, gladiator schools and success in the arena provided an opportunity to fame and fortune. Volunteers required the permission of a magistrate to join a school and their contract specified their fighting style and earnings; an indebted novice could negotiate the repayment of his debt. Moreover, gladiators customarily kept their prize money and gifts. The Emperor Tiberius is said to have offered the equivalent of approx. Euro 400.000 today to retired gladiators to continue to fight.

During the 1st century CE, female gladiators start to appear in the documentation. Nero in 66 CE introduced Ethiopian women in the arena, and a spectacle during the reign of Domitian in 89 CE featured female gladiators against dwarfs. Although some Romans may have regarded these mostly exotic, erotic displays as symptomatic of the corruption of stoic, Roman values, the larger public seems to have found the novelty of female gladiators highly entertaining. Like their male counterparts, they were culled from the lowest classes of society, enslaved and probably subjected to the same rules and arduous training.

Training, Discipline, Schools:

Upon swearing their oath, those condemned to or selected for gladiator combat entered a rigorous, demanding and harshly disciplined training school. The earliest documented school is that of Aurelius Scaurus at Capua (105 BCE); its function was to train Roman legionnaires and to entertain the public as well. Few other *lanistae* are known by name, but all had the power of life and death over their extended family (*famiglia*) despite a social stigma equivalent to that of a pimp or butcher.

After the revolt of Spartacus, ownership of the schools was gradually taken over by State in order to prevent the build-up of private armies. By Imperial times the ludi were under the control of the Emperors, and usually positioned close to the amphitheaters built for these spectacles. Rome had four major schools: the Ludus Magnus, adjacent to and directly connected to the Colosseum was the largest and most important, capable of housing more than 2000.



Model of the Ludus Magnus

Every gladiator was taught to fight in a certain defined style, ideally the style best suited to his capabilities and physique; retired gladiators were often the teachers. Each style had its own weapons and armor, but not Roman military armor as that would have been an inappropriate political message.

During the daily training, non-lethal weapons were used, blunt, wooden replicas. Trainees ascended through grades (*palus*) to highest level (*primus palus*). The fighting style was learned through relentless, choreographed rehearsal. Preparation to accept an unflinching death was also part of the training as the highest value was placed upon this obligation.

Most schools were organized as barracks positioned around a central practice yard. Gladiators were accommodated in cells, strictly segregated according to a rigid hierarchy of gladiator types. Despite the harsh discipline, most gladiators were treated quite well as they represented a significant financial investment. They were provided 3 meals a day; probably a high-energy vegetarian diet consisting of staples such as barley, beans, dried fruit. It is conjectured that according to today's standards, they would be considered overweight, but that the extra padding served to protect vital organs and help heal wounds. In addition to massage, it is thought that they were treated by the most advanced medical practices of that time.

Life expectancy

When one gladiator had wounded or overpowered his opponent in the arena, the crowd would typically shout *habet, hoc habet* (he has had it). The defeated gladiator was then expected to raise his left hand with one finger extended in acceptance of his fate and perhaps imminent death, yet it was the crowd who would decide between mercy or death which was to be met unflinchingly.



Medical Instruments,
Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna

Gladiators who fought well were likely to be spared. By Imperial times, many spectacles were advertised as "missio" – mercy to be granted. "Sine missione" (without release from the sentence of death) bouts were more infrequent, most likely due to the considerable costs of training and maintaining gladiators. Although it is not known how many died in their first match, a very few survived 150 combats. Although some fought in only 2-3 munera per year, not many survived more than 10 matches or the age of 30.

Gladiators were paid each time they fought, and could earn their freedom if they survived 3-5 years of combat. Winners were awarded a palm leaf symbolizing victory and some other award such as a crown or a golden bowl or coin. On occasion for a particularly fine performance, a gladiator could win his freedom on the spot, symbolized by the gift of a wooden training staff (*rudis*) from the editor.

Coins
Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna



Types of Combat: Murmillo, Secutor, Thraex, Retiarius, etc.

As the popularity of gladiatorial games evolved, so did the many categories of combatants, distinguished by their armor, weapons and style of fighting. Rarely did gladiators of the same category compete with each other, as there was no great honor or skill in simply defeating a weaker opponent. Consequently, and of paramount importance, gladiators were paired by types in the arena; it was the asymmetry of strategies and skills that was so engaging and popular with the public. Most pairings would have a lightly armed opponent paired with heavily armed adversary in bouts of about 15 – 20 minutes. For instance a *retiarius* (netman), the most mobile of gladiators, wore no helmet which gave him superior vision, very little defensive armor leaving him more vulnerable to wounds; his weapons were a large net, a trident and small dagger; his strategy was to 'ensnare' his opponent with the net. A typical opponent was a *secutor* (pursuer) armed with a large, rectangular shield and sword; his helmet was rounded to avoid the net, but the eye-holes limited his range of vision.

Although there were also exotic, bizarre categories such as the *sagittarius* who fought with bow and arrow the most common types, in addition to the *retiarius* and *secutor*, were the following:

Murmillo (fish): short sword, visored helmet with high crest, large curved rectangular shield.

Provocator (attacker): the most heavily armed gladiator, short sword, breastplate, greave, visored helmet that extended over the shoulders

Thraex (Thracian based loosely on these former enemies of Rome): short sword (*sica*) with curved blade; visored helmet with griffin crest, shin protection, short rectangular shield.



A Wealth of Information: finds from Pompeii

Archaeological finds at the city of Pompeii have aided modern understanding of ancient Roman civilisation, including the daily lives of gladiators and the weapons they used. Many different weapons have been discovered in Pompeii.

In 62 AD, Pompeii was struck by an earthquake. Afterwards, a decision was made to enlarge the amphitheatre, which dated from 70 BC. Accommodation for the gladiators was also extended to provide more space and comfort. A gladiator school (ludus), guest rooms and storerooms were built behind the amphitheatre.



Seventeen years later, in August 79 AD, the volcano Mount Vesuvius erupted and a series of earthquakes occurred. Pompeii was buried under a deluge of stones and ash. Many people died, some from gas poisoning.

In some of the dormitories in the ludus, archaeologists have found bronze weapons, many elaborately decorated with mythological scenes. They were probably part of the men's parade armour used in the solemn procession (pompa) on the morning of the spectacles. Close by, they discovered the remains of 18 people, who were probably trying to save themselves by escaping into the open air.

After the disaster, the amphitheatre in Pompeii was little more than a ruin, but it has since been restored. The amphitheatre could accommodate 20,000 spectators. By comparison, the Colosseum held more than 50,000.



Greaves and Dagger
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples

Capital,
Colosseo, Rome



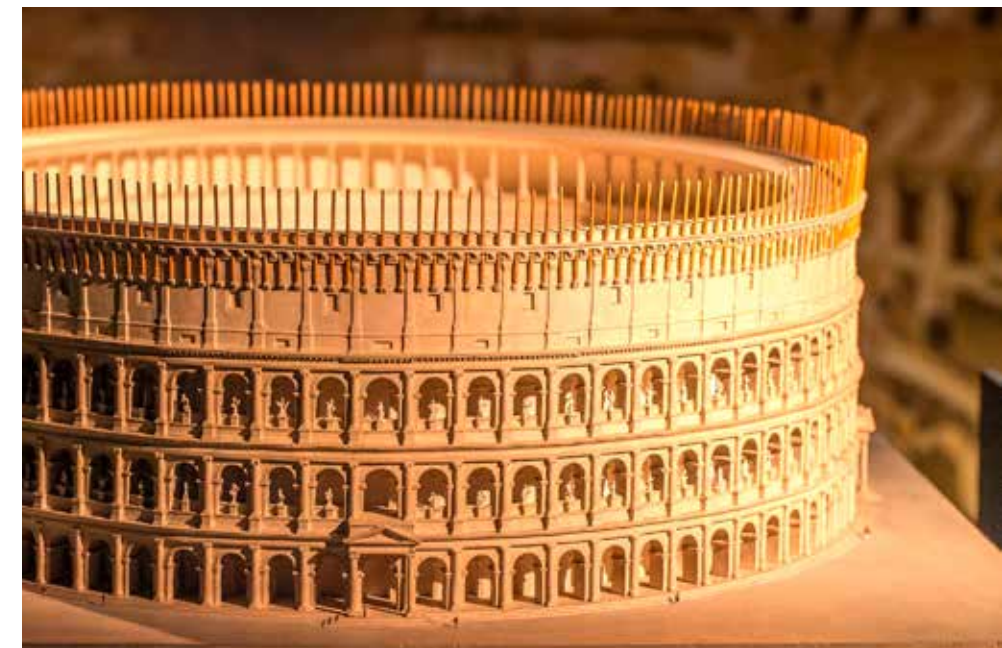
Section 3: THE AMPHITHEATRE OF THE EMPERORS: THE COLOSSEUM

History and Construction of the Colosseum

The future Emperor Vespasian was in the East when he heard that Nero had committed suicide. Although proclaimed Emperor in 69 CE, the first of the Flavian dynasty, military affairs prevented him from returning to Rome until mid-70 CE, but upon his arrival, he initiated a massive propaganda campaign in favor of his dynasty, including the ambitious construction of the greatest amphitheatre of the Roman Empire, the Flavian Amphitheatre as it was then called, but today known around the world as the Colosseum.

The construction of the amphitheatre begun in 72 CE and was intended to replace the amphitheatre of Taurus Statilius, destroyed during the fire of 64 CE. The emperor also wanted to restore to the Roman people the large portion of the city that Nero had confiscated for a grandiose, palatial complex with ornamental lake: by transforming the *Domus Aurea* into a grand arena for games and entertainment, Vespasian sought to ensure the loyalty of the people of Rome to his new imperial dynasty.

Like all amphitheatres, the building had an elliptical plan, but what distinguished the Colosseum was the scale, the dimensions and engineering feats; although its architects are unrecorded in history, its design is still admired for its innovation and complexity. The major axis measured 188 meters, the minor one 156 meters with a perimeter of 527 meters enclosing 3,357 square meters. The axis of the arena itself was 83 by 48 meters.



Model of the Colosseum

At an overall height of 52 meters, the upper structure consisted of 4 levels providing a seating capacity estimated between 50,000 and 73,000. The arch, a distinctly Roman invention, is the “basic formula”; the levels are stacked according to three architectural orders - Doric, Ionic and Corinthian style columns creating 80 arcades per floor.

The main walls were built with 100,000 cubic meters of travertine stone quarried by slaves from nearby Tivoli. The internal walls were built primarily from tufa, a common, brown volcanic rock that was then plastered and painted in variety of bright colors. Marble was used to face some seating areas or for some flooring, while the upper floors were covered by herringbone pattern of brickwork. The top level was divided into 80 compartments that contained the beams and mechanisms for controlling the huge velarium or retractable awning that could be unfurled to protect spectators from rain or sun.

Seating was divided into five levels with each level reserved for a specific class as per the prescriptions of Augustus. Entrance was controlled by tickets which would stipulate which of the 80 entrances one should use as well as row and seat number. The North entrance was reserved for the Emperor. Indeed, the crowd control features including the 80 entrances allowing for rapid, orderly entry and exit to the Colosseum is considered one of the ingenious hallmarks of its design.

But the true engineering feats lay underground, in the *hypogeum*. At the onset, the first challenge was to build the foundations for such a massive structure on naturally, marshy terrain that had been turned into a lake. The solution was found 10 meters under the bottom of the drained lake. The concrete foundations consisted of a series of tunnels and vaults. The 5-6 meters high underground hypogeum also housed all the many services areas needed to put on such elaborate extravagances from places to store scenery to cages for the hundreds of beast who could be forced into the arena in



Architectural Fragments from the Colosseum,
Colosseum, Rome

a single day. 80 vertical shafts with elevator-like mechanisms hoisted men and beasts into the arena. The gladiators were accessed by tunnels connected to the nearby barracks. Other devices permitted the arena to be flooded upon occasion for the staging of *naumacchia*, the reenactment of naval battles or as a diversion, gladiatorial combat or hunts in a watery context.

It is not known exactly how many slaves were used in the construction of the Colosseum, but estimates range from 20,000 to 100,000, many being prisoners taken during the Great Jewish Revolt which led to the sacking of Jerusalem (70 CE) and considered one of Vespasian's finest commands. It is also hypothesized that Vespasian's booty from the war paid for the enterprise, however Vespasian would die before he saw his monumental undertaking completed. It would be his son, the Emperor Titus who would preside at the inaugural celebrations in 80 CE – an extravaganza that lasted 100 days from June to September, and witnessed the dual of Priscus and Verus as well as the deaths of as many as 10,000 wild beasts from around the Empire.



Architectural Fragments from the Colosseum,
Colosseum, Rome



Relief with Gladiators
Museo la Civitella, Chieti



Section 4: THE SHOW BEGINS: ONE DAY AT THE ARENA

Games were advertised well in advance, eliciting excitement for the upcoming spectacle. Posters and billboards around the city, often in red ink, would give the reason for the games, date, number of paired gladiators to be featured, details about the venationes, executions or other kinds of entertainment, including amenities, door-prizes, food and drinks that were to be offered. For the gamblers, special programs called a *libellus*, was prepared, a type of betting sheet for the day that would show names of the gladiators, types and previous match records. Betting and partisanship was widespread and vociferous in all classes of society.

The day before the event, the gladiators were given a public banquet (*coena libera*): a last supper in which they could gorge themselves, if they so desired, on meat and other foods not normally part of their primarily vegetarian diet.



Spoon and bowl
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples

From the time of Augustus, a day at the munera followed more-or-less an established sequence. After the stands were filled, an elaborate procession (*pompa*) took place among great fanfare with the gladiators being ceremoniously led in to present themselves to the Emperor's podium. Preliminary performances might include mock battles by clowns with unlethal weapons or trained animal performing tricks, but usually the main event of the morning were the venationes or beast hunts.

The midday break as dedicated to the public execution of criminals in a variety of degrading and painful ways meant as a deterrent by setting an example of the consequences of defying Roman law and customs.

The afternoon was dedicated to the main event: the individual gladiator pairings. Weapons were ceremoniously checked and distributed by the editor or lanista. And so the gladiators stepped into the arena accompanied by more fanfare and shouts from the crowds. Both were expected to fight well and bravely according to established practices and rituals. To concede defeat, a gladiator was expected to lay down his shield and raise his index finger to plead for mercy. A referee with a long staff ensured there were no more blows as the crowd expressed their judgment by shouts and gestures of the thumb, although it is not certain if *pollice verso* meant thumbs up or thumbs down to signify death. Ultimately it was the Emperor's decision, but he was ill-advised to contradict the collective will of the anonymous public: the affirmation of the Emperor derived from his munificence in accepting the wishes of the crowd.

If no mercy was granted, then the gladiator was expected to accept his death courageously at the hands of his opponent who would stab his sword into the neck. After costumed figures personifying Charon, the ferryman of the underworld, and Mercury, messenger of the gods, tested for signs of life and certified his death, the fallen gladiator was taken away through the Porta Libitinensis while the victor with his prizes and palm branch excited through the Porta Triumphalis to fight again another day. Eventually if he survived long enough, he might be awarded the symbolic wooden sword (the rudis) of freedom.



Horn
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples



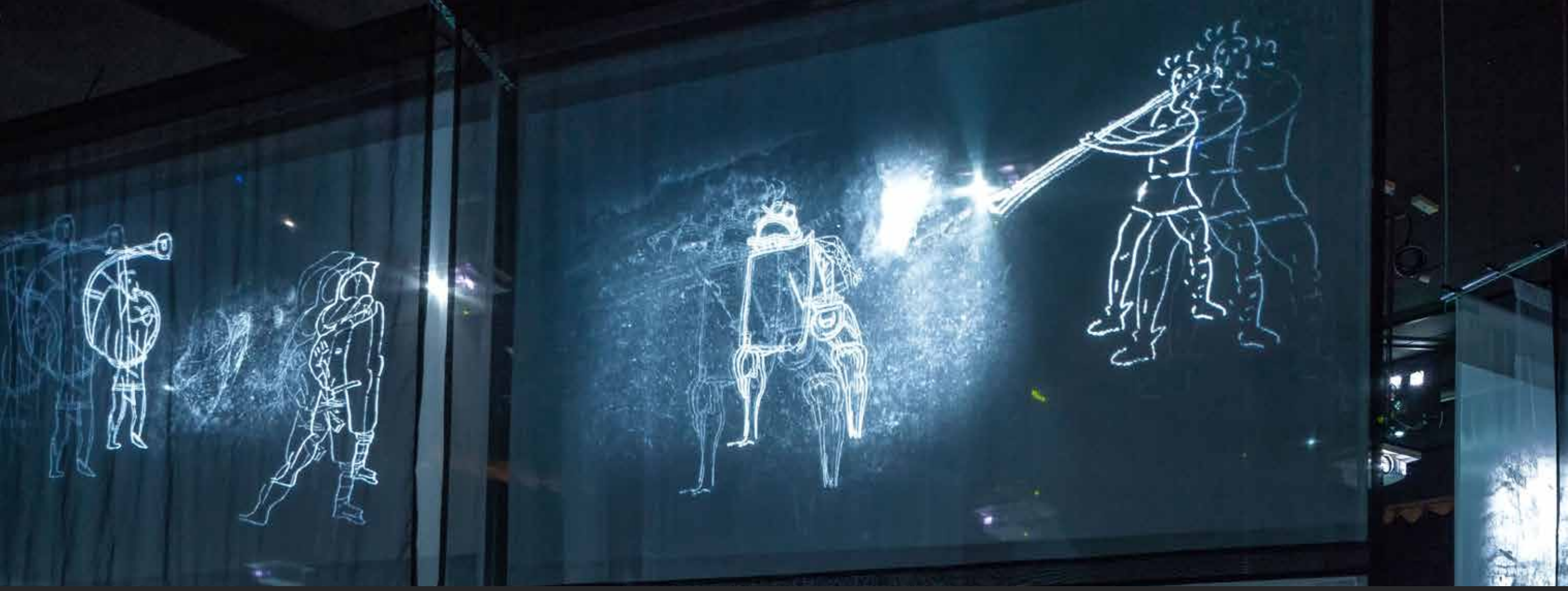


EXHIBITION DOSSIER

GLADIATORS
HEROES OF THE COLOSSEUM
EXHIBITION DOSSIER



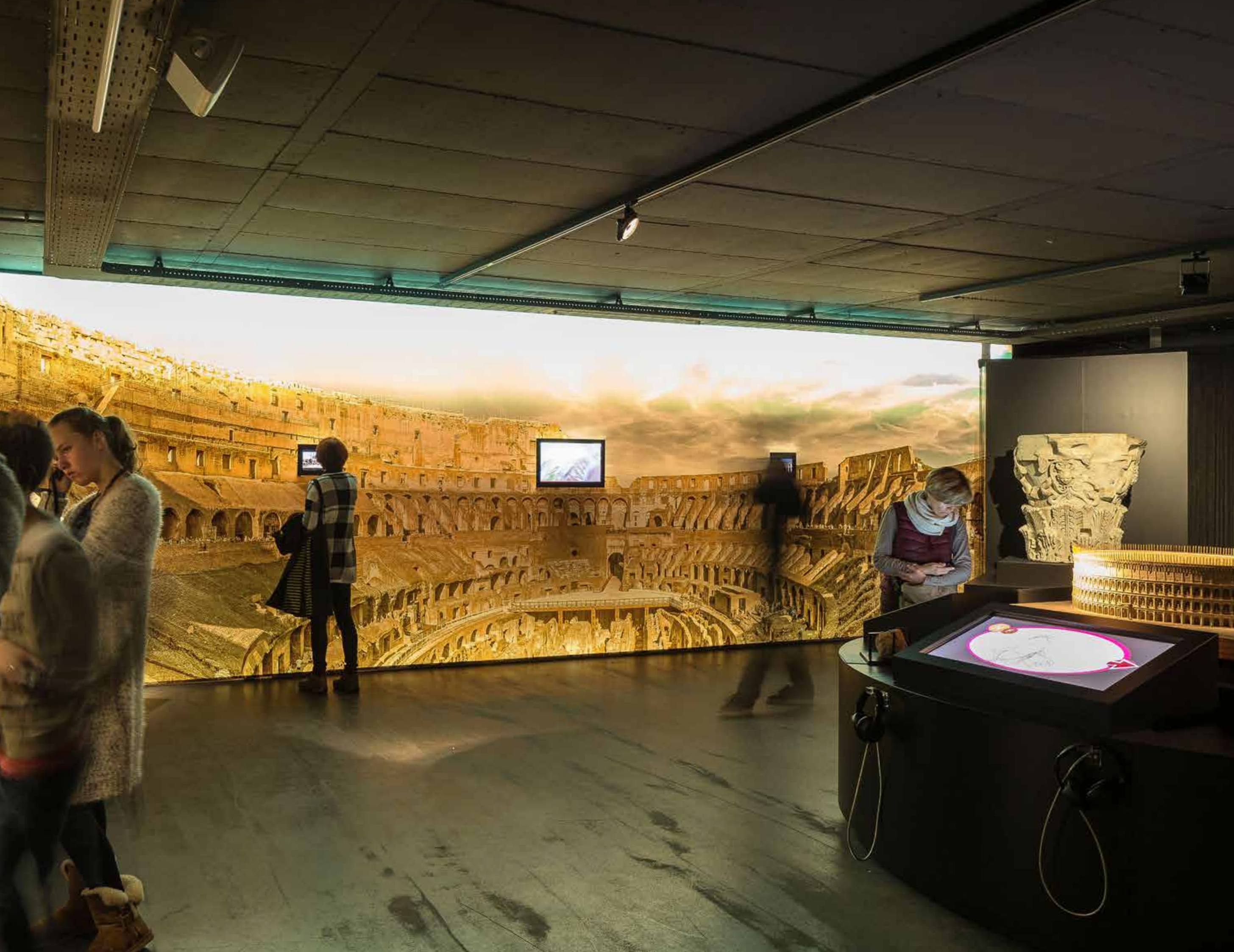
IMMERSIVE ROOM
Feeling the Arena





THE EXHIBITION
Original Artworks















GLADIATORS GALLERY
Reconstruction





THE ARMOURY
Reconstruction





GLADIATORS

HEROES OF THE COLOSSEUM

SUMMARY OF EXHIBITION CONTENTS & ELEMENTS



VIDEO PROJECTION
One day at the Arena





WORKSHOP



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