Press Release

CaixaForum Barcelona

From 15 October 2020 to 14 March 2021
The exhibition *Art and Myth. Gods at the Prado* was produced under the strategic alliance established between the Prado National Museum and "la Caixa" Foundation

**CaixaForum Barcelona invites visitors to the Olympus of the gods**

- *Art and Myth. Gods at the Prado* takes a wide-ranging look at Greco-Roman mythology and its representation throughout art history in paintings, sculptures and objects from the mid-first century BC to the mid-nineteenth century. Organised diachronically and based on 64 works from the collections of the Prado Museum, the exhibition features such key figures in art history as Rubens, Ribera and Zurbarán, among many others.

- This journey around the Olympus of the gods is divided into eight thematic sections and presents different representations of gods and interpretations of the same mythological episodes, enabling the visitor to appreciate the iconographic, geographic and chronological wealth of the Prado’s collections.

- Moreover, a number of elements, including an audiovisual featuring various voices from today’s world, seen in Barcelona for the first time, suggest comparisons between the classical discourse of the works on show with contemporary twenty-first-century myths.

---

*Art and Myth. Gods at the Prado. Dates:* From 15 October 2020 to 14 March 2021 (open to the public from 4 pm on October 15). **Place:** CaixaForum Barcelona (Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, 6-8). **Organised and produced by:** "la Caixa" Foundation and the Prado National Museum. **Curator:** Fernando Pérez Suescun, Head of Educational Content, Education Department, Prado National Museum.

@FundlaCaixa @CaixaForum #PradoCaixaForum
Barcelona, 15 October 2020. At CaixaForum Barcelona today, Elisa Durán, Deputy General Director of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, Miguel Falomir Director of the Prado National Museum (via live streaming), Lluís Noguera, Director of CaixaForum Barcelona, and Fernando Pérez Suescun, Head of Educational Content at the Education Department of the Prado National Museum and curator of the show, presented the exhibition Art and Myth. Gods at the Prado.

This is the fourth exhibition jointly organised by "la Caixa" Foundation and the Prado National Museum to open at CaixaForum Barcelona after Velázquez and the Golden Age, Goya. Light and Shade and Captive Beauty. Small Treasures at the Prado Museum. All four exhibitions were produced within the framework of the strategic alliance established in 2011 to enable audiences to discover the rich artistic legacy conserved at the Prado Museum.

Art and Myth. Gods at the Prado takes a wide-ranging look at Greco-Roman mythology and its representation throughout art history, when it has been a constant source of inspiration for countless artists.

These fabulous narratives were represented in ceramics, marble, medallions, panels and canvases like those featured in this exhibition, which presents 64 pieces including paintings, sculptures and objects dating from the first century BC to the mid-nineteenth century. The selection features works by great masters including Francisco de Zurbarán, José de Ribera, Pedro Pablo Rubens, Michel-Ange Houasse, Francesco Albani, Guido Reni, Corrado Giaquinto, Jan Carel van Eyck and Leone Leoni, among others.

The exhibition was premiered at CaixaForum Palma in November 2017 and has since been presented various venues all over the Peninsula. It now reaches CaixaForum Barcelona in a revised and extended version before travelling to other centres run by "la Caixa" Foundation until 2022.
For its presentation in Barcelona, the show, which is structured around eight thematic sections, invites visitors to compare the classical discourse that infuses the works from the Prado Museum with contemporary, twenty-first-century myths.

To this end, a new audiovisual was produced in which voices from today’s society reflect on how classical myths have survived in contemporary culture and how they illustrate current ideas about love, beauty, nature, fate, masculinity, femininity and so on. Among others, the audiovisual features the voices of the writers Luna Miguel, Bel Olid and Raül Garrigasait, the poet Antoni Clapés, the illustrator Rocio Quillahuaman, the journalist Tania Adam and the singer David Carabén.

Moreover, throughout the exhibition itinerary, phrases and ideas are projected that invite us once more to ask ourselves the “great questions” from a contemporary perspective. An excerpt from *The Iliad* on the theme of the Trojan War is recited in Greek and can be read in Catalan and Spanish projected onto the wall: from the original source to its modern translation in our languages. The text recounts an episode from the last year of the war: the anger of Achilles against Agamemnon.

Along the same lines, a series of lectures on *Myths and their Contemporaneity* has been organised with the participation of Montserrat Reig, Ramon M. Nogués, Carlota Subirós, Emilio Suárez de la Torre, Jordi Balló, Joana Masó and Victoria Cirlot. Finally, the exhibition is complemented by the publication of a catalogue including texts by the curator.

**Mythology as a source of inspiration**

Myths are stories about gods and demigods and their relations with humanity. As such, they are present in all ancient cultures and civilisations. Of uncertain origin in most cases, they were traditionally transmitted orally, gradually
changing thanks to new additions and different versions. In the case of the Greek myths, the first written records go back no further than the eighth century BC.

The protagonists of these myths were the gods of Olympus, who not only ruled over the fate of men and women, but also descended to Earth and interacted with them, sometimes adopting a human appearance that made them more relatable. Their stories also served to explain myriad phenomena of nature and the universe around. This gave rise to countless deities who personified mountains, fountains, rivers, seas, winds, constellations… as well as all kinds of trees and animal species that coexisted with humans.
EXHIBITION SECTIONS

A story to tell

Myths are extraordinary stories set outside historical time and protagonised by characters of a divine or heroic nature. Accordingly, mythology is both the body of all these myths and their study.

Through these myths, the Greeks and Romans could suggest an interpretation of the origin of the world and of different phenomena in nature or the universe. This gave rise to countless deities who personified mountains, fountains, rivers, seas, winds, constellations… and all kinds of trees and animal species. Along with heroes, these gods and demigods – always human-looking, except in the case of monsters – influenced the course of the world as the protagonists of exemplary events with a vital symbolic component.

At first, myths were unwritten narratives transmitted orally and gradually modified with new additions. Homer and Hesiod in the eighth century BC were the first to put those stories down in writing, giving names to the gods and describing their particularities. But we would not know and understand the classical myths without the contributions of other later authors, both Greek and Roman. Here we can mention particularly, among others, Apollodorus, Lucian of Samosata, Diodorus Siculus, Philostratus, Virgil and, especially, Ovid, author of the Metamorphoses, that veritable manual of Greco-Roman mythology.

An important obstacle arises when it comes to exploring classical myths: terminology. Some gods are known by their Greek names, but others are better known by their Roman denominations. Both options are used in this exhibition, depending on the success of a particular version of a myth or the titles of the works on show, which are all from the Prado Museum's collections.

The gods of Olympus

Mount Olympus was the home of the principal Greek deities, the so-called Olympian gods. At the head of them was Zeus who, after overthrowing his father, Cronus, shared his dominion of the world with his brothers. Zeus ruled the sky, Poseidon the seas, and Hades the underworld. Theoretically, the three gods were equals in power, but Zeus was considered the supreme deity of
Olympus and, therefore, of the Greek pantheon. He was also the most important Roman god, in this case assimilated as Jupiter.

Zeus entered into several marriages and had countless adventures with different goddesses, nymphs, mortal women and even some young ephebes. From these relations were born some of the most important Olympian gods, as well as other minor deities – the Horae, the Fates, the Graces, the Muses and so on – and prominent heroes, such as Perseus and Heracles, among others.

With the Oceanid Metis, Zeus conceived Athena, goddess of war and of wisdom, music and handicraft. His dalliance with Leto produced Artemis and Apollo, goddess of hunting and god of light, beauty, poetry and music, respectively. With his sister Demeter he fathered Persephone, who was abducted and taken to the underworld by her uncle Hades. From his marriage to Hera – also his sister – were born Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth, Hebe, goddess of youth, and Ares, god of war. With Maia, one of the Pleiades, Zeus fathered Hermes, messenger of the gods, while the mortal Semele gave birth to his son Dionysus, god of wine and festivity. According to some accounts, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, was also his daughter. Aphrodite married Vulcan, god of fire, born to Hera without her husband’s help.

**Free spirits**

The classical gods appear in myths accompanied by all sorts of beings and characters – often linked to different natural phenomena – that they use to satisfy their carnal needs or appetites, and also involve in their festivities and celebrations.

These characters include, particularly, the Nymphs, minor deities of nature who inhabited forests, caves and waters, becoming identified with these elements and embodying their vital energy. The Nymphs include, for example, the Naiads, the Dryads, the Oreads, the Nereids and the Oceanids. Appearing in many myths, they were all mortal and often formed part of the retinues that
accompanied certain gods, such as Artemis and Dionysus, whose followers also included the Maenads. Constantly pursued by the male spirits of nature – mainly the god Pan and the Fauns and Satyrs – they also had amorous and/or sexual relations with various Olympian gods.

The Muses, born of Uranus and Gaia or of Zeus and the Titaness Mnemosyne, lived on Olympus, where they sang and danced at the great festivities of the gods. They are also traditionally associated with Apollo, god of the arts, and were considered, individually or collectively, to inspire artists, particularly writers and musicians, even personifying different artistic disciplines and knowledge.

The three Charites – known to the Romans as the Graces – were the daughters of Zeus and the Oceanid Eurynome. They were members of Apollo's retinue and sometimes accompanied Aphrodite, Athena, Eros or Dionysus. They symbolised kindness, sympathy, and delicacy and, as life-giving forces, were associated with love, beauty, sexuality, and fertility.

**Love, desire and passion**

They say that love is the energy that moves the world. It is a feeling, a mood, a sensation and a passion. But it is also a god. At least, that is what the Greeks and Romans believed, naming it Eros or Cupid. Although his origins is are not very clear, the deity of love has always been represented as a winged child who enjoys toying with the hearts of gods and mortals, inflaming them with his torch or wounding them with his arrows. From golden arrows springs love; those made of lead, on the other hand, lead their victims to hate.

Like men and women, the gods also suffered sudden infatuations, love or lust at first sight. This is how Dionysus felt when he found Ariadne in Naxos, after she had been abandoned by Theseus, or Hermes when he saw Herse flying over the city of Athens.

Despite often difficult and stormy beginnings, many love relationships were happy and lasting, such as that of Cupid himself with Psyche, or the love between Neptune and Amphitrite, which began with a kidnapping, as in the case of Pluto and his niece Proserpine. But the myths also tell of unhappy unions, tragically interrupted by the death or loss of one of the lovers. This happened to Orpheus with Eurydice, whom he could not rescue from Hades, and also to Cephalus and Procris, whose union came to a disastrous end due to jealousy,
as Procris was killed by a javelin thrown by her husband while she was spying on him.

The case of Narcissus is unusual, as he fell in love with his own image reflected in water. Gazing at himself in a lake, he was consumed by love, dying but later metamorphosing into the flower that bears his name.

**Crimes and punishments**

Violence is inherent in human beings, and the Greco-Roman gods, who frequently took on human appearance and interacted with people, were not immune to that rule. That is why the classical myths are full of conflicts and disputes between different deities. While Cronus castrated his father, Uranus, and seized power from him, he too was overthrown by his own son, Zeus. These parricidal struggles led to two great confrontations involving numerous deities: the Titanomachy and the Gigantomachy. Such battles were seen in Ancient times, as symbols of the conflict between chaos and order.

The punishments that the Olympian gods meted out on men or other minor gods who rose up against them could be eternal. This is the case of the Furies, who suffered torments that were repeated over and over again: Tityos’s liver was devoured by two vultures every day, but grew again every night; Tantalus, suffered eternal thirst and hunger; Sisyphus was doomed to eternally roll a boulder up a hill; and Ixion was forced to spin endlessly on a winged fiery wheel. An eagle was also sent to eat the liver of Prometheus, which grew back every night only to be devoured again the next day.

Having sexual relations inside temples was a serious sign of sinfulness that the gods punished mercilessly. For example, the Trojan priest Laocoön, who was attacked by two serpents that, curling around his body, killed him and his two sons, or Hippomenes and Atalanta, who were turned into lions by the goddess Cybele and forced to draw her chariot. The gods frequently used metamorphosis, transformation, as a punishment.

**Divine and human metamorphoses**

Metamorphosis is synonymous with transformation, deception and false appearances. The major Greco-Roman gods had an extraordinary ability to
alter their physical appearance and acquire new identities. This enabled them to satisfy their desires, which were usually related to carnal pleasure.

Although his brother Poseidon did not lag far behind him – the sea god turned into a horse and a ram to possess Demeter and Theophanes, respectively – it was Zeus who most often employed this cunning deceit to satisfy his most basic instincts, and this section is dedicated almost exclusively to that king of the gods.

The deception that Zeus used most frequently was to turn himself into an animal. For instance, metamorphosing into an eagle – his most emblematic animal – he abducted the young shepherd Ganymede, taking him to Olympus to be his lover and cupbearer of the gods. On another occasion, he turned into a swan to seduce Queen Leda, with whom he fathered Helen and Pollux, while it was as a bull that he abducted the Princess Europa. But he also adopted the appearance of his daughter Artemis to seduce the nymph Callisto, and that of King Amphytryon to have relations with the man’s wife, Alcmena, who gave birth to Heracles. At other times, Zeus took the form of atmospheric phenomena to make his conquests, turning into a grey cloud to take the young maiden Io and into golden rain to possess Danae, who gave birth to Perseus, one of the great Greek heroes.

Metamorphosis was also often used as the solution to avoid the unwanted attentions of a god. Several Nymphs resorted to it, including Daphne, who was turned into a laurel tree to escape Apollo, and Syrinx, turned into reeds to elude the pursuit of the god Pan.

Heroes

Besides gods and demigods, heroes also played a key role in classical myths. They were often the children of the union between god or a goddess and a mortal, but some heroes were born to two mere mortals. We know about their great deeds, by which they achieved fame and glory.

“Swift-footed” Achilles is the undisputed protagonist of The Iliad. Shortly after his birth, his mother, the sea nymph Tethys, wife of Peleus, king of Phthia, dipped Achilles in the waters of the River Styx, making him invulnerable, except in the heel by which she held him. Achilles was raised by the centaur Chiron and, years later, played a prominent role in the Trojan War, where he achieved glory.
but also met his death when Paris struck him with an arrow in his only weak point, his heel.

Perseus, son of Zeus and Danae, also occupies a prominent place among the Greek heroes. His main feat was to defeat the Gorgon Medusa, cutting off her head. He later killed the sea monster Cetus, which was ravaging the kingdom of Ethiopia, freeing Princess Andromeda, whom he would make his wife.

Hercules – Heracles in Greek mythology – is the quintessential classical hero, embodying qualities and virtues that are considered mythical and exemplary. The son of Zeus and Alcmena, he suffered the consequences of the wrath of Hera, who made him become mad and murder his children. As a punishment for this, he was ordered to carry out the famous Twelve Labour of Hercules, with which he gained universal fame and recognition, achieving immortality and ascending to the Olympus of the gods.

**The Trojan War**

The Trojan War was the great confrontation between Greeks and Trojans, but it also involved the active and decisive intervention of many gods who, for various reasons, decided to support one side or the other.

It all started with a golden apple “for the fairest”, which Juno, Minerva and Venus all claimed for themselves. To resolve this question, Jupiter chose as his judge Paris, a young Trojan shepherd who was to give apple to whoever he considered to be the most beautiful goddess. Besides appearing naked before him to show their physical attractions, the three goddesses also made him tempting offers: Juno offered him riches and power; Minerva, wisdom and victory in battle; and Venus, the love of the fairest woman in the world. Paris decided in favour of Venus.

The fairest woman in the world was Helena, wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. Paris kidnapped her, or both fled to Troy together, and the Greeks swore to rescue her. And so began a war in which many great heroes and warriors fought, such as Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus, Diomedes, Ajax the Great and, particularly, Achilles, who is the main protagonist of *The Iliad*, Homer’s epic poem telling the story of this mythical conflict.
The war between the Achaeans (Greeks) and the Trojans lasted for many years, with neither side able to seize victory. Meanwhile, both factions were losing some of their greatest warriors. Finally, the Greeks decided to pretend to retreat, leaving behind them a large wooden horse on the beaches of Troy, inside which hid several of their best soldiers, led by Odysseus. Believing the wooden horse to be an offering to the gods, the Trojans brought it into the city, and that is how the Greeks finally took Troy, which was looted and destroyed by a great fire.
ACTIVITIES PARALLEL TO THE EXHIBITION

LECTURE BY THE CURATOR: *ART AND MYTH. GODS AT THE PRADO*
FRIDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2020, 7 pm

**Fernando Pérez Suescun** has a degree in Geography and History from the University of Madrid in Alcalá de Henares, where he began his teaching career in 1993. He has held positions at various institutions related to the art world and, since 2007, has been head of Teaching Content in the Education Department of the Prado Museum, curating various national and international exhibitions.

SEASON DEVOTED TO THE HUMANITIES
**MYTHS AND THEIR CONTEMPORANEITY**
FROM 9 NOVEMBER TO 10 DECEMBER 2020

Ancient myths remain present in all kinds of manifestations in contemporary culture. The Romantics revived figures such as Orpheus, Prometheus and Oedipus, associating them with new ideas and new artistic languages. The history of painting and literature, as well as that of photography and the cinema, contains many classical myths reinterpreted in the light of different periods and contexts.

This series of lectures suggests an interpretation of these myths in relation to different artistic and literary manifestations both past and present. The talks will also provide keys to understanding the validity of myths and their vision of such concepts as the universe, death, love and so on.

- **Myths and their contemporaneity**
  Monday, 9 November 2020
  **Montserrat Reig** discusses the contemporaneity of myths and their continuing importance in the collective imagination of Western society.
• **Where do we come from? Myths and the origins of the universe**
  Monday, 16 November 2020
  A dialogue between science and creation, in which **Ramon M. Nogués** and **Carlota Subirós** will discuss mythical cosmogonies and their links to current artistic and scientific visions.

• **Death and punishment in our mythology**
  Monday, 30 November 2020
  **Emilio Suárez de la Torre** and **Jordi Balló** explore the reasons for death and punishment in classical myths and how they have reached the contemporary world through art and film.

• **What is desire? Love and passion in myths**
  Jueves 10 December 2020
  **Joana Masó** and **Victoria Cirlot** reflect on the interpretive evolution of desire in classical myths, from antiquity to the present.

**MEDIATION SERVICE**
Monday to Friday, from 10 am to 2 pm and 4 to 8 pm, and weekends and holidays, from 10 am to 8 pm, an educator will be present in the room to answer any questions or queries about the exhibition that visitors may have. This is a free service included with the price of admission.

**FAMILY SPACE IN THE EXHIBITION**
This is a space within the exhibition intended mainly for family audiences, where an activity is suggested that invites participants to freely and creatively explore aspects of the exhibition.
Friday, from 5 to 8 pm
Saturdays, Sundays and holidays: from 10 am to 2 pm and 4 pm to 8 pm
From 15 October 2020 to 14 March 2021

CaixaForum Barcelona
Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, 6-8 08038 Barcelona.
934 768 600
icaixafornbcn@magmacultura.com

Times
Monday to Sunday and public holidays: from 10 am to 8 pm
December 24 and 31 and January 5: from 10 am to 6 pm
The centre will be closed on December 25 and January 1 and 6

Ticket sales
https://caixaforum.es/es/barcelona/
Tickets are also available at CaixaForum during public opening times

"la Caixa" Foundation Communication Department
Cristina Font: 608 582 301 / cristina.font@fundacionlacaixa.org
Press room: https://prensa.fundacionlacaixa.org/en/
@FundiaCaixa @CaixaForum #PradoCaixaForum