Immortales Exhibit Brings Roman Busts to OU Art Museum

The University of Oklahoma is collaborating with Enel Green Power, a leading global renewable energy company headquartered in Italy with a growing presence in Oklahoma for a first-of-its-kind global initiative that brings the ancient culture of Rome to Oklahoma.

NORMAN, OKLAHOMA – Immortales: The Hall of Emperors of the Capitoline Museums, Rome brings to the United States for the first time a selection of 20 busts from the collection of the world’s oldest museum, the Capitoline in Rome.

The exhibition, which opens Sept. 4 at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art on the University of Oklahoma Norman campus, offers a survey of Roman portraiture from the age of Augustus (1st century, B.C.) to the late Roman Empire (5th century, A.D.).

Sculpted busts of emperors, empresses and patricians reveal how portraits helped craft private and public images of distinguished individuals for ancient Roman audiences as well as for posterity. The exhibition will be on display through Dec. 6.

Immortales: The Hall of Emperors of the Capitoline Museums, Rome is made possible by the generous support of Enel Green Power North America, a leading owner and operator of renewable energy plants in North America. In Oklahoma, the company owns and operates four wind farms, with two additional wind sites under construction.

“Immortales represents a unique collaboration between the University of Oklahoma, Enel Green Power North America and the Capitoline Museums in
Rome,” said Mark White, the museum’s Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director and Eugene B. Adkins Curator. “This collaboration has culminated in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our visitors – the chance to see ancient Roman busts here in Norman.”

“The Hidden Treasures of Rome, which combines ancient artistic culture with some of the world’s leading research universities, is a one of a kind opportunity that enables community engagement with our company, while also cultivating discussion of our shared global history, interests and experiences,” said Francesco Venturini, CEO of Enel Green Power.

The exhibit in Oklahoma is the second phase of the Hidden Treasures of Rome program, which was launched in 2014 by Enel Green Power, in partnership with the world renowned Capitoline Museums of Rome and served as a first-of-its-kind initiative to exchange cultural, educational and technological resources and artifacts between the Capitoline Museums and U.S. universities.

The program’s expansion allows EGP-NA to bring the ancient culture of Rome to the state of Oklahoma, creating a distinctive exhibit for the university and innovative way for the company to engage with local residents and communities, Venturini said.

“Immortales is one of the most prestigious Italian cultural events of the year. It is the result of a strong cooperation between U.S. and Italian organizations both public and private,” said Claudio Bisogniero, Ambassador of Italy to the United States. “The Italian diplomatic network in the U.S. is committed to foster this model of cooperation in the name of art and culture. It allows different actors to team up, and recalls in some way the great tradition of arts patronage – in Italy we know it as ‘Mecenatismo,’ from Gaius Cilnius Maecenas – that contributed so much to the greatness of Roman art, which this exhibition celebrates.”

The exhibition focuses on three themes: the propagandistic aspects of the art form; fashion, especially coiffure as an indication of social status, character and ideology; and the role of marriage, divorce and adoption in the structuring and preservation of the fabric of Roman society.

“Immortales illustrates how Imperial Roman portraiture served to affirm and sustain an identity for ancient Roman audiences as well as for posterity,” said Francesca Giani, exhibition curator. “The Latin title Immortales (Immortals), which echoes with Hippocrates’ aphorism, Ars Longa, Vita Brevis (art lasts forever, while life ends), suggests the idea that these sculptures testify to some of the most exceptional individuals in Western history and to their attempt to defy mortality.”

This collaboration also includes the transfer of epigraphs and materials from the Capitoline museum’s Antiquarium to the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History at OU. These artifacts - dating to the period of the Roman Republic (fifth to first centuries B.C.) - are part of 100,000 pieces that were stored for more than 100 years in the Capitoline Museums’ Antiquarium but have never
shown to the public, creating the opportunity for undergraduate students from the university’s department of Classics and Letters to catalog and analyze these artifacts for inclusion in the Digital Latin Library project.

Located in the political and religious center of ancient Rome, site of the Temple of Jupiter and overlooking the Forum, the Capitoline Museums which were erected between the 1200s and the 1400s, sit atop one of the Seven Hills of Rome. In 1471, Pope Sixtus IV inaugurated the collection by donating to the Roman Senate four ancient bronze sculptures with the expressed wish to establish an institution for ancient masterpieces that would testify to his zeal for antiquity. Sixtus’ donation represented the Thesaurus Romanitatis, an invaluable collection treasured by the Church and safeguarded from pillaging throughout the Middle Ages.

Michelangelo was later commissioned with the redesign of the façades of the Palazzo Senatorio and the Palazzo die Conservatori, which, together with the newly erected Palazzo Nuovo (also a project of Michelangelo), enclosed a vast trapezoidal square.

Eventually relocating from the Palazzo dei Conservatori to the Palazzo Nuovo, the Capitoline Museums were established officially in 1734 to the display of the legacy of Imperial Rome. The complete Hall of Emperors in the Palazzo Nuovo contains 67 busts at present, the result of a nineteenth-century curatorial choice to create a survey of Roman portraiture from the Republican period to the late-Roman empire. Immortales displays 20 works from the Hall of Emperors in the Lissa and Cy Wagner Gallery at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

Additional public educational programs scheduled at the museum to coincide with the exhibition include a Family Day Sept. 20, a gallery talk Sept. 22 and an afternoon symposium Oct. 22.

More information about the exhibition and programs is available on the museum’s website at www.ou.edu/fjjma

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus. Admission to the museum is complimentary to all visitors, thanks to the generosity of the OU Office of the President and the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938 or visiting www.ou.edu/fjjma.

###

**IMAGE CREDIT**

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art opens a new exhibition of 20 Roman busts from the world’s oldest museum Friday, Sept. 4. *Immortales: The Hall of Emperors of the Capitoline Museums, Rome* surveys Roman portraiture from the age of
Augustus (1st century, B.C.) to the late Roman Empire (5th century, A.D.), including this bust of Lucius Verus. The exhibition is made possible by the generous support of Enel Green Power North America.

*Portrait of Lucius Verus* (160-170 A.D.)
Luna Marble
Capitoline Museums, Rome