

Bridges

Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome Joint Lecture Series



Tuesday, December 2, 2025, at 19h Athens time, 18h Rome.

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The Scent of Graeco-Roman Sculpture

ABSTRACT

The use of perfumes in the ancient Mediterranean world is well documented, particularly in relation to the human body and the creation of scented environments. This lecture explores a lesser-known dimension of ancient olfactory culture: the application of perfumes to sculptures. Recent research has shown that ancient statues were not only polychrome and adorned with accessories and textiles, but in some cases also scented, thereby engaging ancient viewers through both visual and olfactory stimuli.

The presentation will explore a range of source materials, focusing primarily on written testimonies, as well as archaeological and iconographic evidence related to the use of scents in ancient statuary.

By integrating the study of ancient perfumes with current research on sculpture, this talk offers new insights into the multisensory nature of art in Antiquity. It broadens our understanding of how scent functioned beyond personal, bodily care and ritual, and how it contributed to the aesthetic and experiential qualities of sculptural works.

The seminar will take place in a hybrid format, with live presence at the Swedish Institute at Athens, Mitseon 9, and online via Zoom.

REGISTER HERE to participate (in-person or via Zoom).