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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

Museo archeologico nazionale dell'Agro Falisco e Forte Sangallo

Via del Forte – 01033 Civita Castellana (VT)

Form compiled by Lorenzo Mantovani (demo-ethno-anthropologist)

Introduction

The Museo archeologico nazionale dell'Agro Falisco e Forte Sangallo is housed within Forte Sangallo, a prestigious military structure commissioned by Alexander VI Borgia, who entrusted its construction to Antonio da Sangallo the Elder in 1495. Under the pontificate of Julius II the work was continued by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger. Considered one of the most important military works of its time, the fortress served as a papal residence until the early nineteenth century, when it was converted into a prison, and during the Second World War it became a refuge for numerous displaced people.

Since 1977 it has been home to the Museo Archeologico dell'Agro Falisco, arranged in nine rooms on the piano nobile of the palace, in spaces originally used as papal apartments, and organised according to topographical and chronological criteria on the basis of evidence from the ancient Faliscan territory.

The Berman Collection, which also includes numerous archaeological finds of American origin, is currently housed in the storerooms of the fortress. A selection was displayed on the occasion of the first exhibition devoted to Eugene Berman and his collection, entitled “Passeggiate immaginarie. La collezione rivelata e l'opera riscoperta di Eugene Berman (1899–1972)”, held at Forte Sangallo from 10 January to 7 September 2025.

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Cultural Areas

Northwest Coast; Eastern Woodlands; Mesoamerica; Central America; Northern Andes;
Central and Southern Andes

Collections

#01

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Eugene Berman Collection
<i>Collector</i>	Berman, Eugene (1899–1972)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Northwest Coast (Canada); Mississippi (USA); Mesoamerica; Costa Rica; Ecuador; Northern Peru
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Northwest Coast (Canada) Mississippian (USA) Tlatilco (Mexico) Colima (Mexico) Olmec (Mexico) Veracruz (Mexico) Teotihuacan (Mexico) Zapotec (Mexico) Maya (Mexico) Mixtec (Mexico) Nahua/Aztec (Mexico) Chiriquí (Costa Rica) Diquís (Costa Rica) Taíno (?) (Caribbean)

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	<p>La Tolita (Ecuador)</p> <p>Nasca (Peru)</p> <p>Chancay (Peru)</p> <p>Wari (Peru)</p> <p>Chimú (Peru)</p> <p>Inca (Peru)</p>
<p><i>Description of the Collection</i></p>	<p>The eclectic character and curiosity of Eugene Berman are reflected in his collection, which is distinguished by the breadth and variety of the more than 3,000 objects it comprises, ranging from Etruscan-Italic, Greek and South Italian finds to Egyptian and Near Eastern pieces; from archaeological and ethnological evidence from the Americas, Africa and Oceania to Christian sacred art and liturgical furnishings, and even including natural history specimens such as fossils, shells and minerals.</p> <p>Among all the non-European objects in the collection, the American finds are the most numerous (more than one hundred) and represent a wide variety of cultures and historical periods. They come mainly from Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica, Ecuador and northern Peru. It is also worth noting the presence, albeit limited, of some objects belonging to Mississippian culture (United States) and to the Indigenous peoples of the western coast of British Columbia in present-day Canada.</p> <p>Among the American finds, the Mexican pieces constitute the largest and most varied part of the collection. They offer valuable examples of the material production of the many peoples who inhabited</p>

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	<p>Mesoamerica from prehistory up to the arrival of the European conquistadors. The objects acquired by Berman, which were much sought after by collectors, often raised issues of uncertain provenance or authenticity, and it is likely that some replicas also entered the Berman Collection.</p>
<i>History of the collection</i>	<p>The Berman Collection is the fruit of a long and unceasing process of collecting whose roots go back to the artist's childhood. It was in fact during visits to art galleries and antiquarian shops in Saint Petersburg and Paris that his interest in collecting first arose. Berman visited Mexico in 1947 and was deeply fascinated by it, but it was above all through his meeting and friendship with Earl Stendahl that his interest in so-called "primitive art" developed.</p> <p>Many of the objects in the collection were acquired after his move to Rome in 1957–58, with the precise intention of furnishing and giving character to his house-museum in Via del Plebiscito.</p> <p>From 1960 onwards Berman undertook numerous journeys in Italy, Europe, the United States and North Africa in search of furniture, furnishings, works of art and archaeological finds from all over the world. In the 1960s he purchased most of the American pieces in New York, Milan and Switzerland. Among the many collectors and dealers from whom he acquired objects were important figures such as Franco Monti, John J. Klejman, Julius Carlebach, Frances Pratt, John C. Wise, André</p>

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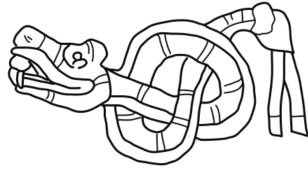
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Emmerich, Henri Kamer, Aaron Furman and Jerry Eisenberg. His intense and passionate activity as a collector continued almost until his death in 1972. While still alive, Berman had expressed his wish to donate the entire collection to the Italian state on condition that it should be accessible to the public. At the same time he received a notice from the Superintendency for Southern Etruria, which considered a substantial group of Etruscan-Villanovan vases to be of unofficial and uncertified provenance. In 1978 the Ministry officially accepted the Berman donation, assigning all the substantial archaeological material to the Soprintendenza Archeologica per l'Etruria Meridionale, specifically to the Museo Archeologico dell'Agro Falisco in Civita Castellana. Most of the ethnographic material was assigned to the Museo Preistorico-Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini" in Rome. In 1982 numerous historical and artistic artefacts and an equally large number of drawings, paintings, sketches, prints and lithographs were transferred to Forte Sangallo in Civita Castellana. In 1996 part of the ethnographic material previously assigned to the Pigorini Museum was also returned. The Direzione regionale Musei nazionali Lazio, which has taken over the management of the museum in recent years, has sought to address in a serious way the question of broadening public access to the various contexts, while respecting the artist's original and

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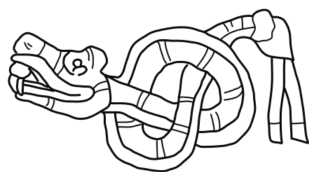
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	<p>imperative wish. Today the Berman Collection, albeit by individual sectors or cultural contexts, is gradually emerging from the storerooms of Forte Sangallo in Civita Castellana: the first major restitution to the public took place on the occasion of the temporary exhibition <i>Passeggiate immaginarie. La collezione rivelata e l'opera riscoperta di Eugene Berman (1899–1972)</i>, held at Forte Sangallo in Civita Castellana from 10 January to 7 September 2025.</p>
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<i>Web page</i>	
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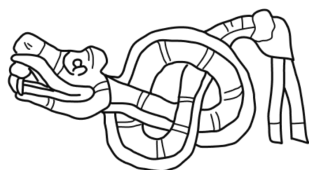
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