

## Art review: 'Monsters, Demons & Winged Beasts' and 'Divine Intervention'

By Catherine Fox

For the AJC

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The earth was a global village long before the Internet, or even the Wright brothers.

The traders who plied the Mediterranean in ancient times brought back ideas, stories and artworks as well as incense, cloth or wine. So, although we think of ancient Greece as the font of Western culture, the Iliad, Odyssey and even the Parthenon and the Venus de Milo have multicultural genealogies.

As do the fantastic creatures -- centaurs, griffins, the Cyclops and so on -- in the Carlos Museum's "Monsters, Demons & Winged Beasts."

Jasper Gaunt, curator of Greek and Roman art, has selected 150 objects dating back as early as 4,000 B.C., largely drawn from the museum's permanent collection, to pinpoint their DNA in Egypt and the ancient cultures of the Levant -- Assyria, Sumer, Phoenicia -- and to show how the Greeks made them their own.

Thus, we can see that representations of the monster Humbaba, a flat, wrinkled face with an extruded tongue depicted in objects from Assyria and Babylonia, were sources for Greek artists' renderings of Medusa.

Along the way, you'll be treated to a variety of objects -- large Greek vases, tiny bronze figurines, carved gems, chariot wheels and a sword scabbard, among them -- created by artists whose imaginings, fired by stories and images from afar, still pique ours.

"Divine Intervention: African Art and Religion" is a relatively small exhibition, but curator Jessica Stephenson manages to convey both the rich aesthetic diversity of African art across 20 cultures and the shared religious ideas these objects embody.

The 50-some objects -- mostly from the permanent collection, some never exhibited before -- were conceived as instruments enabling people to connect to, curry favor with, honor and sometimes deflect the powerful gods and ancestor spirits.

As practices vary, so does the art. The Fon people consulted their ancestors via an asen, a home for the spirits consisting of a miniature environment made out of metal cut-outs that sits atop a spike stuck into the ground. The Yoruba sculpted wood figures as memorials to the dead, often decorated with cowrie shells and paint.

Also included are works that reflect similar propitiatory practices of African Muslims and Christians.

The labels provide an abundance of illuminating information. If you care to just look, the visual power of these objects speaks for itself.

Catherine Fox is chief visual arts critic for [www.ArtsCriticATL.com](http://www.ArtsCriticATL.com).

### **Art review**

**“Monsters, Demons & Winged Beasts: Composite Creatures in the Ancient World.”** Through June 19. **“Divine Intervention: African Art and Religion.”** Through Dec. 4. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; noon-4 p.m. Sundays. \$8; \$6 seniors, students, children 6-17; free for Emory students and staff and for all on April 8, May 27 and June 10. Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, 571 S. Kilgo Circle, Atlanta. 404-727-4282 4282, [www.carlos.emory.edu](http://www.carlos.emory.edu).

**Bottom line:** Arts of Africa and the ancient Near East illuminated in different ways, with lots to look at and food for thought.

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