

Winged Beasts Descend on Carlos Museum

By [Courtney Keys](#) Posted: 02/07/2011

Imagine dozens of winged beasts mounted on the walls of a dimly lit showroom, claws bared in menacing aggression and mouths gaping in a silent shriek. When entering the most recent addition to Emory's ancient art collections, be mindful that this new display is a bit more fearsome than what you're used to at the Carlos.

"Monsters, Demons, and Winged-Beasts: Composite Creatures in the Ancient World" opened up on the third floor of the Michael C. Carlos Museum this past Saturday morning and is a monstrous ordeal indeed. If entering from the lobby of Café Antico, the very first of the creatures to greet you is the infamous and undeniable siren, beckoning seductively from a large terracotta vase. In Greek mythology, sirens were dangerous bird-women, with the head of a beautiful maiden mounted on the body of a large fowl. They sang a fatally attractive song to sailors at sea, luring them to shipwreck and death for their sport.

The "Monsters" exhibit is an exploration of the rich menagerie of mysterious creatures borrowed by the Greeks from ancient Egypt and the Near East. Composite creatures are any legendary beings made up of body parts from multiple animals, such as the bird-women sirens, the winged horse Pegasus and the Chimera, the fire-snorting lion. Centaurs, bull-men, horse-men and even the serpent-haired villain Medusa are represented in the over 150 objects in the exhibition. This unique display demonstrates the context and significance of these creatures over millennia. Each silent shriek is available for viewing at the Emory's Carlos Museum from Feb. 5 to June 19, 2011. University students are welcome for free every day the museum's open, and the general public gets free admission every Friday from 1 to 4 p.m.

The informational art descriptions tell a tale of international exchanging of ideas, citing Homer's Iliad and Odyssey as historical examples of Greece's engagement with the outside world beginning in the 8th century BC. Certain motifs learned from the Ancient Near East are represented in the Greek gems and bronze used as articles of exchange. The exhibit also includes cylinders, Greek vases, ornate armor and semi-precious jewelry made of everything from gold to papyrus and terracotta to silver.

I took my time Saturday morning, gathering first the distinct difference in mood the "Monsters" exhibition created versus the standing Greek and Roman Art Jasper Gaunt, curator of Greek and Roman Art collection just one floor down. The walls were darker, and the art was darker. The room was more still, but the images were all action.

While the exhibits are primarily from mainland Greece, "Monsters, Demons, and Winged-Beasts" tracks the prevalence of these imaginary beasts in over a dozen different civilizations. College junior Desmond Pennamon had two very appropriate words to describe the new exhibit: "Dark and beastly."

Beastly indeed, but with the right amount of beauty. The precision and detail on each vase is extraordinary. The monsters on display are as beautiful and fierce as the siren's call, perhaps with the same intentions.

— Contact [Courtney Keys](#).