The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida, plans to install its first permanent gallery of ancient art in Gallery 12 in 2020 as part of a museum-wide gallery reinstallation project. Gallery 12 highlights the museum’s large collection of ancient Cypriot art.

Gallery 12 connects viewers with history (ancient and modern), aesthetics (detail and abstraction), and art and experience (sanctuaries and tombs) through thematic and contextualized displays, including digital content. The centerpiece is a crowd of sculptures said to be from Golgoi, Cyprus.

The Ringlings envisioned a pavilion of ancient art for their museum in Sarasota, Florida. It did not materialize due to Mable’s death and the stock market crash of 1929. In 1936 John Ringling bequeathed his property to the State of Florida. Today the museum is part of Florida State University.

The Ringling’s holdings of ancient art include stone and terracotta sculpture, ceramics, glass, bronzes, jewelry, and gems from the Early Bronze Age to the Roman period (ca. 2,500 BCE to 400 CE). At 3,500 pieces today, these form the museum’s largest collection. About 2,300 of the objects are from Cyprus.

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Funding for the reinstallation project was provided in part by the Anderson Galleries of London. The resulting widespread newspaper coverage shaped the identity of John Ringling and his wife, Mable, as collectors. Excerpt from The New York Times, March 31, 1928, p. 19.

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Research on the ancient collection for the new gallery, Gallery 12, began in 2014. The projected opening date is 2020. The 200 objects for the gallery were brought together in the display space in 2018 for discussion among the director, curators, registrars, preparators, educators, guards, and other museum staff.

The first permanent gallery of ancient art at The Ringling is part of a reinstallation project, led by the museum’s director, Steven High. Transport amphoras and limestone sculptures from Cyprus in the new Asian wing speak to the theme of cultural interconnections. The collection can be searched online through eMuseum.

The Ringling Museum of Art, 1907 (Ringling SN28.1755 in second case from left facing to the right) (courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Colossal male statue head SN28.1755 said to be from Golgoi, Cyprus, on display in the Astor Library at The Ringling, 2000s (courtesy The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art)

Connecting Cultures gallery, The Ringling, view of Cypriot objects on display, February 2018 (photo by J. S. Smith)

Gallery 12, The Ringling Museum of Art, plan for the display of the ancient collection with frontal views of each section of the display placed next to its location in the gallery (plan by J. S. Smith)

Gallery 12, The Ringling, objects in display space, April 2018 (Ringling SN28.1755 at center facing viewer) (photo by J. S. Smith)