A Quest for the Deathiest Objects at the Getty Villa

Which is the deathiest of them all? Browse staff picks in the Getty Villa collection and add your favorite objects and spaces to the list by posting to Instagram or Twitter with the hashtag #DeathMatchGV. Or, nominate your picks via secret meeting at the coat check between 1:30 and 3:00 p.m. Death Salon experts will crown the deathiest object at the end of today’s talks.

FIND AND SHARE...

An object that would suit you for your tombstone. Something you’d like wrapped inside your future mummy. An object useful for cursing your worst enemy. The most gasp-worthy deathy object. The ideal setting for your future funeral banquet.

GETTY STAFF PICKS

Musical Death

Statues of Two Sirens
The song of the Sirens lured sailors in Homer’s Odyssey to crash and die on hidden rocks. These alluring sirens may have once decorated a tomb.
That’s interesting: Sirens are usually depicted as part woman, part bird.
Find it: Gallery 109 (downstairs)

Painful Death

Klylix with the Suicide of Ajax
On this wine-drinking cup, Greek warrior Ajax has fallen on his own sword after losing out on a prize he deserved.
That’s interesting: For the ancient Greek hero, suicide was an acceptable response to dishonor.
Find it: Gallery 110 (downstairs)

Loving Death

Gravestone of Sime
This memorial for an ancient Greek mother shows her surrounded by her husband and adult children.
That’s interesting: The handshake is thought to represent family unity after death.
Find it: Gallery 208 (upstairs corridor)

Sexy Death

Sarcophagus with the Moon Coming to Her Lover
The moon goddess, Selene, keeps her youthful lover Endymion asleep forever so he won’t age and die. His peaceful sleep is like the eternal slumber of death, only sexier.
That’s interesting: To ensure Endymion does not wake, the god of sleep pours poppy juice on him.
Find it: Gallery 208 (upstairs corridor)

Furry Death

Gravestone of Helena
Is this a girl’s headstone or a dog’s? Art historians debate.
That’s interesting: Like us, the Romans owned and pampered lapdogs, and sometimes included them in funerary art.
Find it: Gallery 208 (upstairs corridor)

Double Death

Mummy of Herakleides
This young Roman Egyptian, Herakleides, shares his wrapper with another, smaller mummy.
That’s interesting: Herakleides received a CT scan at UCLA in 2005.
Find it: Gallery 206 (upstairs)

Tender Death

Oil Jar with Family Members Visiting a Grave
A lekythos is a small oil container used in funerary rituals. On the vase, a young man and woman decorate a gravestone with ribbons, oil, and a flower.
That’s interesting: This woman’s short hair could be a mourning gesture—or signify her status as a slave.
Find it: Gallery 207 (upstairs)

Elegant Death

Statuette of a Dead Youth
This young man may represent one of the Niobids, children slain by the gods as punishment for their mortal mother’s boastful pride.
That’s interesting: Since ancient times, artists have found beauty in the suffering and release of death.
Find it: Gallery 209 (upstairs)

Tiny Death

Miniature Skeleton
Behold the larva conviva/is, a death-themed discussion starter used at Roman dinner parties.
That’s interesting: He used to be posable, and could shake and dance.
Find it: Gallery 212 (upstairs)

Fruity Death

Sarcophagus with Cupids Treading Grapes
Chubby, naked infants make wine on this coffin. The grapevine, reborn annually, symbolizes transcending death.
That’s interesting: The word sarcophagus comes from the ancient Greek for “flesh eater.”
Find it: Gallery 213 (upstairs)

More info on the objects above, including links to audio and video, at: bit.ly/DeathMatchGV