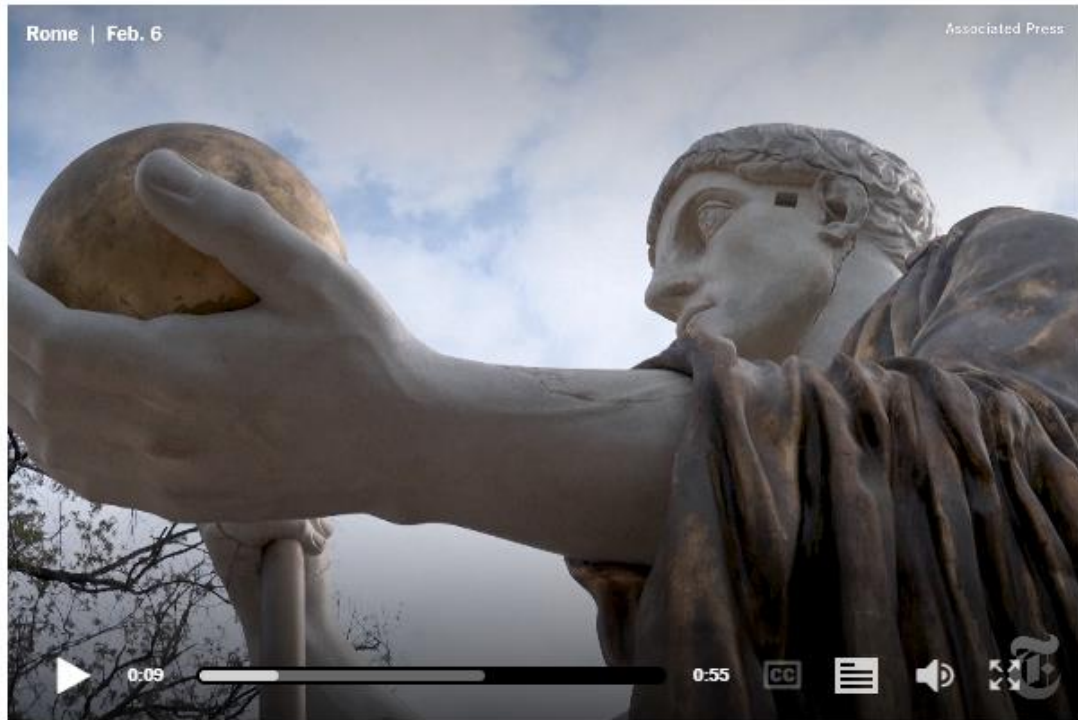


Rome's Ancient Grandeur Towers Anew With a Copy of a Colossus

A 1:1 facsimile of the statue of Constantine shows how modern technology can help recreate the past, and offers new ideas for scholarship.



Factum Foundation, a Madrid-based digital art group, analyzed 10 fragments from a sculpture of Constantine the Great, a fourth-century Roman emperor, to create a 1:1 replica. Andrew Medichini/Associated Press

By [Elisabetta Povoledo](#)

Feb. 7, 2024

[Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

It may not be authentic, exactly, or very old at all.

But the colossal statue of a fourth-century emperor, Constantine the Great, is a newly erected monument to Rome if nothing else: a homage to the ancient city's grandeur, and of its endless capacity to remake itself.

In this case, the remaking was literal.

Towering over visitors, the 43-foot seated statue was painstakingly reconstructed by a Madrid-based digital art group, Factum Foundation, from the 10 known fragments of the original sculpture. The reconstructed statue was installed in a garden in Rome's Capitoline Museums this week, close to where the Temple of Jupiter, the most important temple of ancient Rome, once stood.

The New York Times

“Seeing Constantine, on top of the Capitoline Hill, looking out at the whole of Rome, he feels extraordinary,” said Adam Lowe, the founder of the Factum Foundation, which originally created the statue for a [2022 exhibit](#) at the Prada Foundation in Milan.

The head and most of the other fragments of the colossal statue were discovered in 1486, in the ruins of a building not far from the Colosseum. They were transferred to what eventually became the Capitoline collection, and nine of those ancient fragments — including a monumental head, feet and hand — are permanently on show at the museums.

The fragments found fame from the moment they were excavated, said Salvatore Settis, an archaeologist and one of the curators of the Prada exhibit. “They have been etched by leading artists from the 15th century on,” he said, adding that the sculpture also captured the attention of more modern artists like Robert Rauschenberg, who famously photographed the pieces in the 1950s.

Five hundred years and many more technological advancements later, a team from the Factum Foundation spent three days using photogrammetry, a 3D scan with a camera, to record the fragments in the Capitoline courtyard. Over the course of several months, the high-resolution data became 3D prints, which were used to cast replicas, made of acrylic resin and marble powder.

Those were then integrated with other body parts — the ones Constantine was missing — that were constructed after historical research and discussions with curators and experts. A statue of the emperor Claudius as the god Jupiter, now at the ancient Roman altar known as the Ara Pacis, was used as a model for the pose and draping, which was originally in bronze.

“It’s through the evidence of those fragments, working rather like forensic scientists, with all the experts from different disciplines, we were able to build back something that is absolutely awe inspiring,” Mr. Lowe said, adding that new technologies were offering museums new avenues of research and dissemination.

“We’re not trying to build a fake object,” he added. “We’re trying to build something that physically and emotionally engages and that intellectually stimulates you.”

Recent scholarship on the statue has suggested the statue of Constantine was itself reworked from an existing colossus, possibly depicting Jupiter. Irrefutable signs of reworking are especially present on the colossal statue’s face, according to Claudio Parisi Presicce, Rome’s top municipal art official, the director of the Capitoline Museums and an expert on the colossus.

Indeed, some experts hypothesize that the sculpture was originally the cult statue of a temple devoted to Jupiter — the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus — which would mean that the Constantine facsimile has finally returned home.

The New York Times

“We can’t be certain that it’s the same statue, but there is some possibility that it was,” Mr. Settis said. Constantine, the first emperor to convert to Christianity, may have specifically selected a statue of Jupiter to transform into an icon of himself. “That’s one hypothesis,” he said. “It would mark a passage in Western Europe, from the pagan empire to a Christian one.”

The statue will be on show in the Capitoline garden until at least the end of 2025, officials said. Where it will go afterward, and whether it will withstand the ravages of time better than its fractured original, remain open questions.

But its creators at least tried to make it sturdy.

“It’ll be as fine as anything is outside,” Mr. Lowe said. “We hope. Of course, even during the opening there were pigeons sitting on its head. I’m afraid there’s not much you can do about that.”