

A Classic Court (Gallery 2)

Ancient Egyptian, *Funerary Book of Tamesia*, about 100 CE

The ancient Egyptian demoness/goddess Ammit is a fearsome composite of a crocodile, lion, and hippo. Called “The Devourer,” she played a role in the Weighing of the Heart, when a person who has died comes before 42 divine judges to plead their case for passing into the Afterlife. If their heart turns out to be heavier than a feather, it is tossed to Ammit, who devours it, dooming the deceased’s soul to wander forever.

B Classic Court (Gallery 2)

Ancient Greek, *Griffin Protome from a Cauldron*, about 600 BCE

The legendary griffin—part eagle, snake, hare, and lion—may have originated in ancient Iran or even ancient Egypt, but was found in cultures across Central Asia and Turkey. In ancient Greece, griffins were protective figures and were considered guardians of treasure.

C Gallery 3

Joan Miró, *Woman Haunted by the Passage of the Bird-Dragonfly Omen of Bad News*, 1938

Sometimes, monsters are of our own making. Concerned that war may be on the horizon (World War II would start the following year), Joan Miró created three fantastical creatures that together seem to embody a portent of disruption and doom beyond the control of humankind.

D Gallery 10

Wahei Workshop, *Netsuke: Tanuki*, late 19th century

The most adorable creature on this tour, the tanuki, or racoon-dog, is a real animal native to Japan. In Japanese folklore, however, the tanuki is mischievous and fun-loving and has magical powers. Tanuki often disguise themselves as humans, delighting in fooling people.



*Draco dormiens
nunquam titillandus*

(Never tickle a sleeping dragon).

Fantastic Beasts

Mythological animals, cryptozoological creatures, monsters—whatever you call them, pretty much every culture across history has them. This guide will show you where to find some fantastic beasts in the Museum.



E Gallery 16

French, *Saint George and the Dragon*, about 1480–90

A classic knight-slaying-a-dragon story, the famous battle between Saint George and the fierce, fire-breathing dragon has been depicted by artists ranging from Raphael to Rubens to Dalí. The unknown 15th-century French artist of this small painting packed it with lots of details, including the bones and skulls of the dragon's previous unfortunate victims.

F The Cloister Gallery (Gallery 14)

French, *Column Capital: Mouth of Hell*, about 1150 to early 13th century

In the Middle Ages, the Christian concept of the Last Judgment of souls, when the saved would be separated from the damned, was often depicted in art as a motivator and a warning. The fate of the damned, in particular, was typically shown in gruesome detail. This carved capital portrays Hell as a living beast into whose gaping mouth the hapless souls are being forced by tormenting demons.

G Gallery 23

Jan Jacobsz van Royesteyn, *Nautilus Cup*, 1596

Several mythological creatures of the sea decorate this spectacular cup made from a nautilus shell. The focal point is the razor-toothed sea monster at the top that bears a bit of a resemblance to that nightmare of the deep sea, the anglerfish.

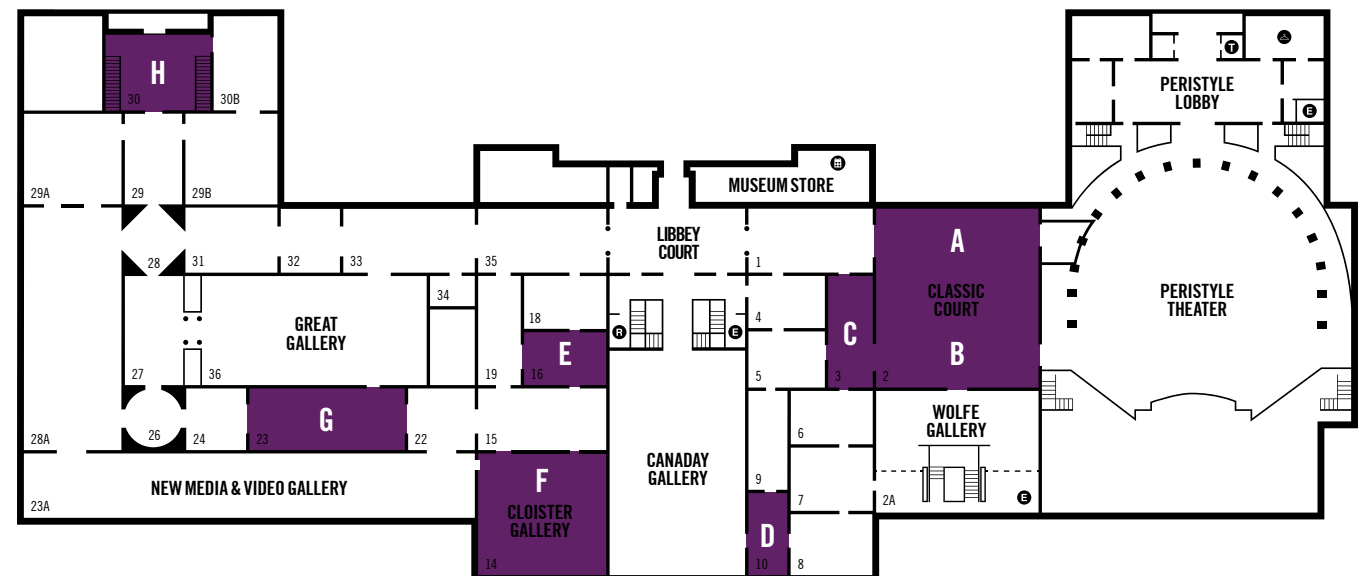
H Gallery 30

Indian, *Pair of Mythical Lions (Vyala)*, 11th century

Like many of the fantastic creatures in this guide, *vyala* (also called *yali*) are composite beasts—they have the body of a lion and the head of an elephant. They can represent the wild forces of nature, but are also strong and vicious creatures that guard Hindu temples from evil.

MUSEUM MAP

Upper Level



Please note: Some works of art in this guide may have been moved to a different gallery, be on loan to another museum, or be temporarily off view for other reasons. We regret any inconvenience.