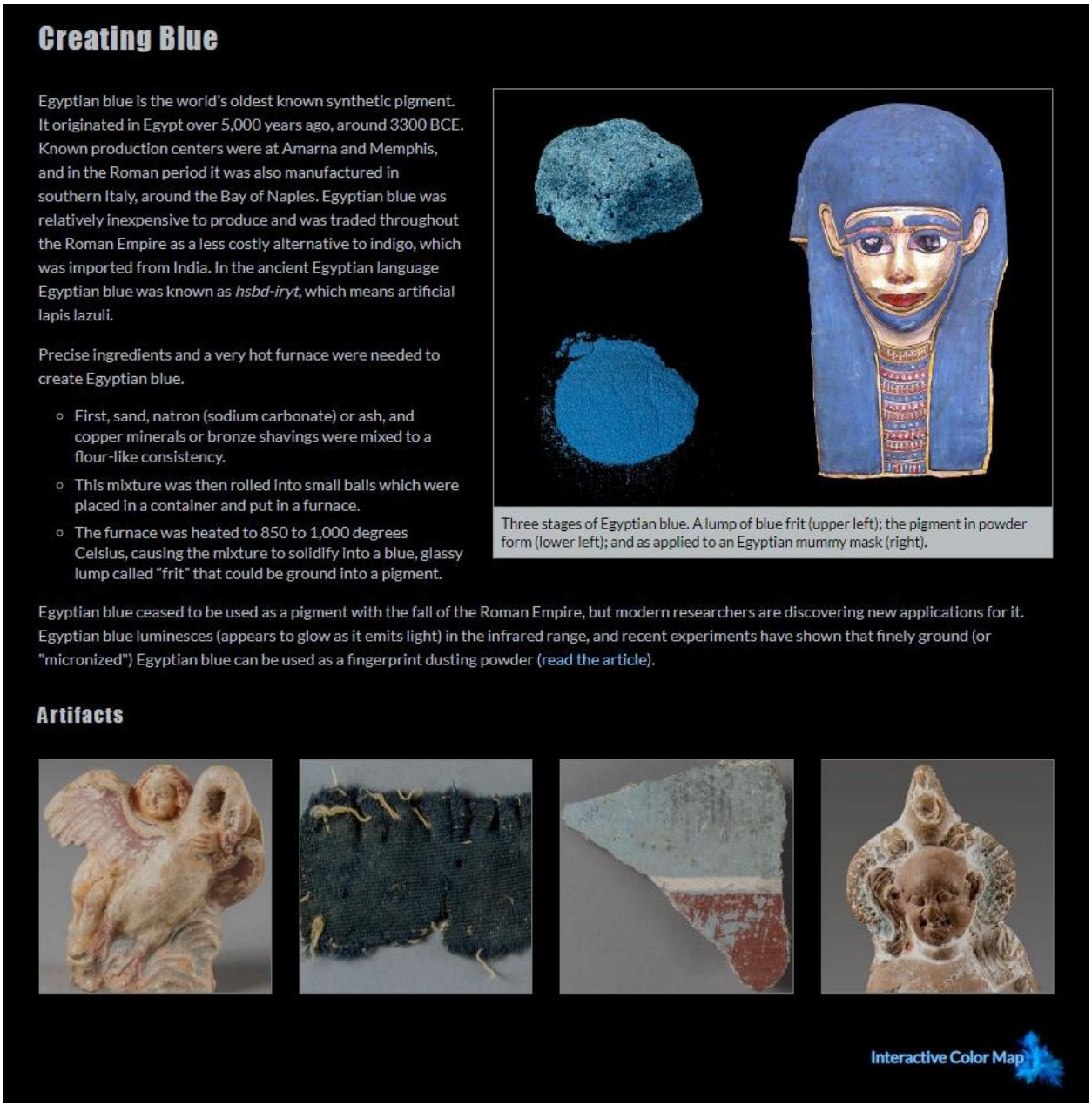
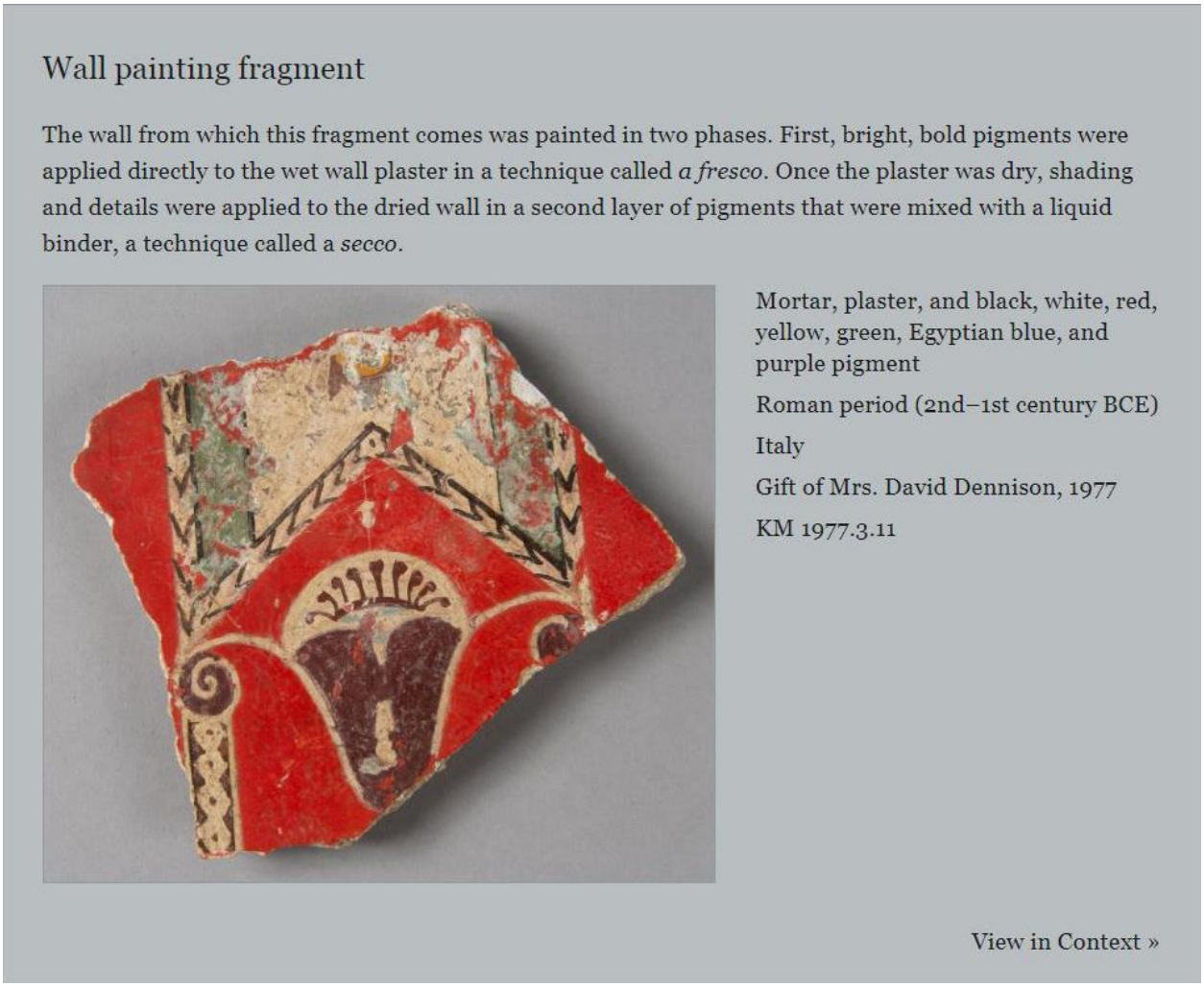
Ancient Color

This website was created as an extension to the special exhibition *Ancient Color*, presented by the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology from February 8 to May 26, 2019. We often associate ancient Rome with white marble sculpture and austere architecture, but Roman statues and buildings were actually painted in vibrant hues, and homes, clothing, and art were bright with color. *Ancient Color* examines the use of colors in the ancient Roman world, how these colors were produced, what the Romans thought about them, and how we study them today. In addition to displays of ancient artifacts from the Kelsey Museum collection, this website invites visitors to explore the scientific techniques employed by conservators who study how the Romans made, used, and experienced color.

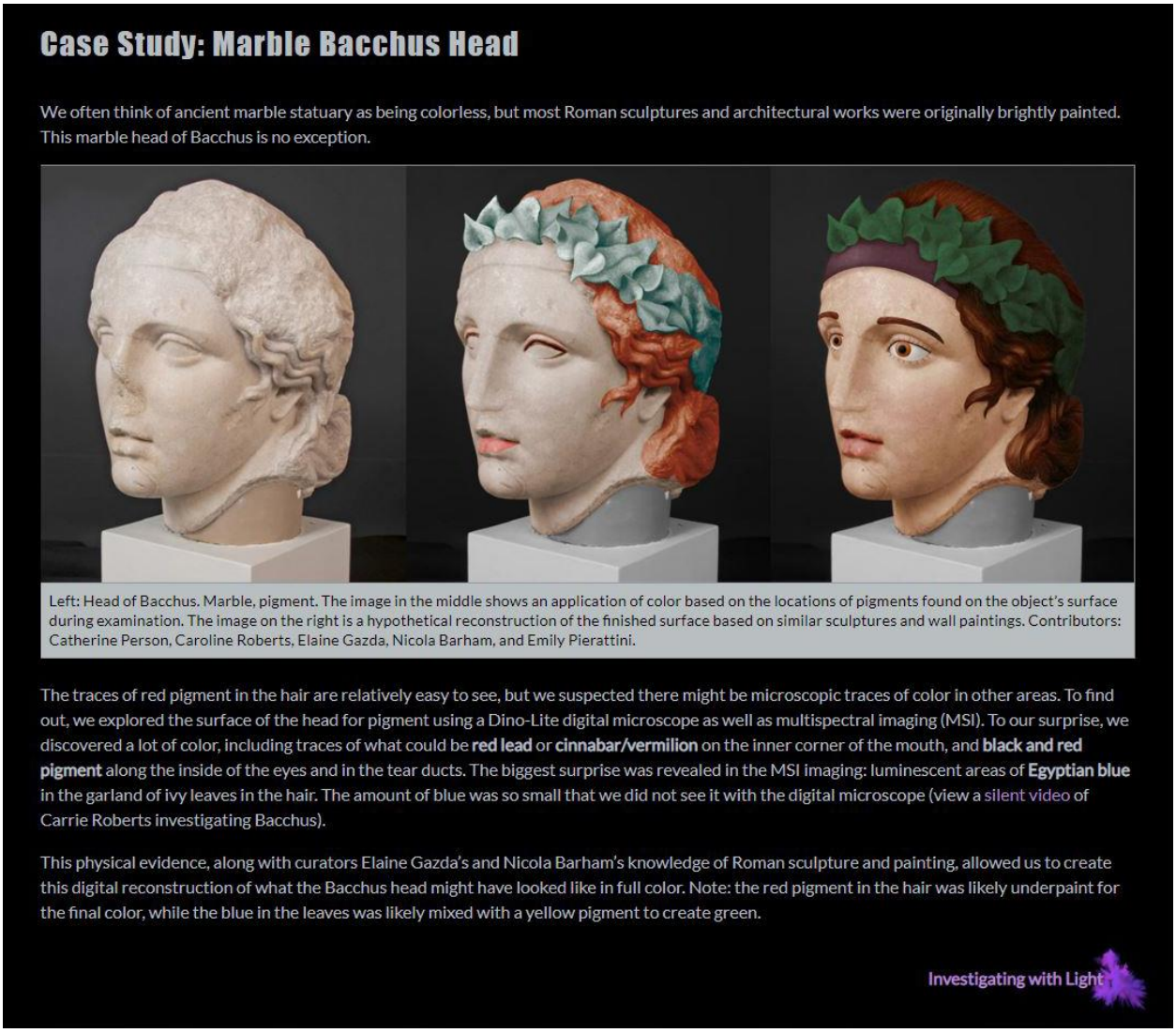
The website content is grouped around three main themes. In the *Creating Color* section, visitors learn how the Romans gathered, processed, and traded pigments and dyes. Featured artifacts include the stone mortar and pestle used to grind up raw materials, as well as ceramic bowls with traces of green and red pigments. This section also focuses on the production of Egyptian blue, the world's oldest synthetic pigment, and of Tyrian purple dye, an expensive color extracted from the mucus of a special kind of sea snail.



In *Using Color*, website visitors are invited to explore a variety of Roman-period artifacts that still preserve their bold colors, including sculpture, fragments of wall painting, funerary inscriptions, and textiles.



The *Investigating Color* section explains a variety of innovative scientific techniques used to investigate traces of color on ancient artifacts. In particular, two case studies showcase the original research performed by Kelsey Museum conservator Caroline Roberts and her colleagues at the Detroit Institute of Arts. They investigated a mummy portrait from Roman Egypt to find out what pigments were used to create this beautiful painting. The second project revealed microscopic traces of different colors on a seemingly white marble head of Bacchus and allowed the Kelsey Museum team to create a digital reconstruction of what this head might have looked like in full color.



As an important extension to the physical exhibition, the *Ancient Color* website includes lists of online resources and bibliographic references related to the use of colors in the ancient world and to the controversial issue of white antiquity. Another highlight of the website is an interactive Color Quiz that provides further information on the origin of various colors and their place in Roman culture. The website also has links to interactive in-gallery applications that showcase the production of colors and various investigative techniques in greater detail.

Credits

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