

Anatomy of a Museum label

What you're looking at when you look at a museum label

All museums are different, but most have labels to help visitors understand what they are looking at. The way a label looks and where to find it can vary (even within the same museum!) but there are a few common things to look for that will help give an object context.

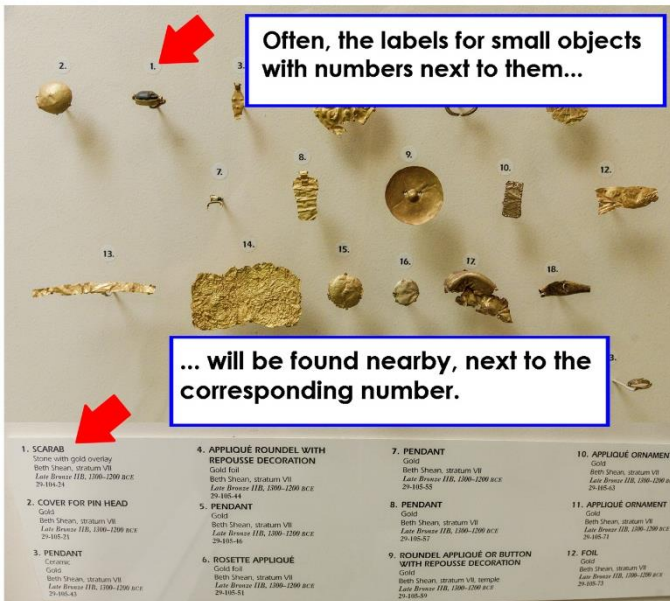
Where to find them:



Many museum labels can be found directly below or beside the object it describes.



Some can even be found on the glass case that holds the object.



If there isn't a number, sometimes there will be a small drawing to help you locate the label.



Marble funeral portrait of a middle-aged man
AD 240

The back of the head is summarily carved and the scale of this portrait is less than life-size. This suggests that the piece was displayed in a shallow niche inside a communal tomb known as a *columbarium* (dovecote), used for housing the cremated remains of the dead.

MS 250

What's in a label:

The title of the artifact. It can be descriptive or it can be what it was titled originally.

The materials the artifact is made out of.

When we believe the artifact was made. Usually a date range is given based on evidence and scientific dating methods. In this example, a Dynasty (ruling family) is also included.

Where the artifact is from or where it was found.

Statue of a Cat

Bronze with Gold Leaf

Unknown Place of Origin

ca. 945–712 BCE (Dynasty 22)

Cats were important animals in ancient Egypt. They were associated with the goddess of fertility and Bastet. At her cult places were enormous cemeteries containing sacred cat mummies in feline-shaped coffins. This hollow statue is large enough for a cat mummy to fit inside. An inscribed decoration at the neck depicts a string of beads.

E 14284

A description of the context of the artifact. It may include information about the culture from where it originated or information about its discovery. This isn't always in every label. If missing, there may be more information in text closeby.

The object number. This is a way for the museum to keep track of all the artifacts.

