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Monumental horses bring a sense of empire back to Rome

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One of the giant horse sculptures at the Colosseum in Rome
NOT KNOWN

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Dozens of sculptures of horses standing as tall as 11m and weighing up to nine tonnes have been installed in the ancient heart in Rome this week, giving the city back the kind of monumental statuary it has not seen since the days of imperial Rome.

The Mexican sculptor Gustavo Aceves used 25 lorries to bring 42 massive equine sculptures from his Tuscan workshop to Rome, where three cranes were used to erect them for display until January.

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The art world is shouting at Europe to wake up and welcome migrants rather than building walls

The largest, an 11m bronze horse, will stand outside the Colosseum, while a 7m granite horse is being installed yards away by the emperor Constantine's triumphal arch, close to where a 30m Colossus

of Nero once stood: the bronze likeness of Nero believed to have given the Colosseum its name.

“There have been no monumental works in Rome like this since the imperial era,” said Francesco Buranelli, who is curating the exhibit. “Even Leonardo da Vinci failed when he tried to create a 21ft-high bronze horse in Milan.”

Visitors studying the granite horse at the Colosseum will notice the outlines of skulls sculpted into the stone, a theme developed at the Emperor Trajan's market near by where the rest of the horses have been set up, and where some of the animals' bodies are formed by frames filled with sculpted skulls.

“The theme of the exhibit is migration,” Aceves said. “The frames are like the fishermen’s nets filled with skulls of migrants who drown at sea.”



“The horses have long been in exile, just like migrants,” says Gustavo Aceves

The horses are modelled on the horses of St Mark: four Roman bronze sculptures that the emperor Constantine installed in Turkey, from where they were brought to Venice during the 4th Crusade, only to be taken to Paris by Napoleon before being returned to Venice, where they are kept today.

“The horses have long been on in exile, just like migrants,” Aceves said.

“The art world is shouting at Europe to wake up and welcome migrants rather than building walls,” Mr Buranelli said. “This exhibit is at the heart of the Roman empire, which had African and Asian emperors. It was the mix of cultures and languages that made Rome great.”

The horses, which have been part funded by the Mexican government, have already been exhibited in Berlin and after Rome are due in Turkey, Greece, Paris and Mexico.