

# NARBO — VIA

## PRESS KIT

Arnaud Späni © Narbo Via



La Région  
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Narbonne  
AU CŒUR DES PYRÉNÉES









# Narbo Via: an ambitious project for a unique museum

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The ambition of this new archaeological museum in Narbonne, France, is to revive the prestigious ancient city that was Narbonne, by giving everyone the chance to rediscover its exceptional collections by enhancing them within a site worthy of its heritage and its history. Indeed, as the first Roman colony created in Gaul, and as the former capital of the province of Narbonne Gaul, Narbonne is a center of Roman civilization. Its ancient heritage is a benchmark on an international scale.

**The Occitanie Region, the major financier of the building, has mobilized 48.8 million euros for the construction of the building, assisted by the State (2 M€) and the European Union (6 M€).**



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## THE NARBO VIA MUSEUM IN A FEW NUMBERS

- A collection of almost 1 000 ancient works of Narbonne
- 8 000 m<sup>2</sup> of useful surfaces
- A permanent collection of 2 600 m<sup>2</sup>
- A temporary exhibition hall of 500m<sup>2</sup>
- An auditorium of almost 200 seats
- 2 pedagogical workshops
- A bookstore-giftshop, gardens and a restaurant
- A restoration and research laboratory, reserves, study and documentation rooms
- Laying of the 1<sup>st</sup> stone: November 10, 2015
- An investment project of 56.8 million euros led by the Occitanie Region

# An innovative architecture signed by « Foster+Partners » agency

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Following an international project management competition, the architectural project was entrusted to the Foster + Partners agency - which has already signed essential projects in the Occitania region such as the Millau Viaduct or the Carré d'art in Nîmes - associated with the Adrien Gardère studio for museography and the Nîmes architect Jean Capia.

The building, designed and engineered by Foster + Partners is set to become a new landmark at the entrance to the city, on a site adjacent to the Canal de la Robine.

Raised on top of a podium, the museum provides a sense of restrained civic and architectural monumentality at the entrance to the city. The building incorporates galleries for permanent and temporary exhibitions, three pedagogical workshops, an auditorium, a restaurant and a museum shop including a bookshop, as well as research, restoration and storage facilities. Externally there are formal gardens and an amphitheatre for outdoor performances.

The centrepiece of the museum is a 'Lapidary Wall', which forms a natural boundary at the heart of the museum, separating the public galleries from the more private restoration spaces. Visitors can glimpse the work of the archaeologists and researchers through its mosaic of stone and light. The flexible display framework allows the reliefs to be easily reconfigured and used as an active tool for learning.

The museum spaces are unified beneath a concrete roof canopy, which provides thermal mass and contributes to a comprehensive environmental strategy. The canopy is elevated above a clerestory, punctuated with light wells, and it extends to provide a canopy over the walkways around the museum. As part of its sustainable environmental agenda, inspired by Roman technology, the majority of the services in the building are contained within a subterranean void. The cool air is pushed out at a low level and at low velocity, allowing a smaller volume of air to be conditioned, while maintaining a comfortable environment. The large spatial volumes formed by the high ceilings create a thermal flywheel effect that naturally pushes warm air upwards, from where it is exhausted.



The architecture is informed by an honest approach to materials which extends to the expression of the coloured concrete walls. Layers of dry-mixed concrete were tamped into place on-site, the resultant stratification calls to mind not only the archaeological nature of the museum, but also the inherent appearance of Roman concrete. The structural response also follows a similar approach that is underpinned by simplicity. The walls are solid, thermally insulated and load bearing. They support the roof with reinforced concrete double-T-beams that span onto a grid of reinforced concrete beams. The glazing around the enclosure simply bolts directly into the concrete walls.

The landscaping reinforces the connection with the canal to create a tranquil natural setting. Inspired by formal French gardens and the Roman courtyard, the museum's grounds feature an amphitheatre for open-air displays and events. The design anticipates a welcoming, landscaped entrance via a new ramp that links the museum to the existing towpath along the Canal de la Robine. This will create a serene pedestrian connection to the city centre, which will now be only a short walk from the museum.

Norman Foster, Founder and Executive Chairman, Foster + Partners, said: "Our work on Narbo Via extends a long relationship between the Foster studio and the south of France. The arts are vital to the life of a city and a cultural building has the potential to reinvent and regenerate its 'sense of place', to break down physical and social barriers. Bringing together the old and the new, Narbo Via will renew the image of the museum, becoming not just a place for reflection but a creator of knowledge for future generations."

Spencer de Grey, Head of Design, Foster + Partners, said: "Roman Narbonne was a proud port city along the Mediterranean, and remains a place of significant historical importance. The Narbo Via project, therefore, involved the deft navigation of archaeology and ancient history in a contemporary context. Our approach has been to create a simple yet flexible architectural language, one imbued with a sense of monumentality and links to history and culture – essential for this museum of 'living' antiquity."

Hugh Stewart, Partner, Foster + Partners, added: "The idea of bringing the city's remarkable ancient collection into an unashamedly contemporary context was a fascinating challenge. Working with Adrien Gardère, we developed the concept of a vertical display wall running the full width of the building, which puts the exhibits at the heart of the museum."



A.Späni © Narbo Via



# THE LAPIDARY GALLERY, BACKBONE OF THE MUSEUM AND IT'S COLLECTIONS

Central element of the museum, a monumental wall made up of 760 stone blocks spread over two rows, mostly from the Roman necropoleis polises of the ancient city, opens the path to the collections. This lapidary gallery renews the memory of the Roman city, thanks to an automated device never seen before in a museum, allowing the works to be reorganized by means of an integrated lifting device. It is also a real open reserve, intended to facilitate the study and research work of archaeologists, historians and scientists hosted within the museum. This wall measures 76 meters long.



A.Späni © Narbo Via

# Narbo Martius and the province of Narbonne: an exceptional antique collection

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*Narbo Martius*, the ancient city of Narbonne, has an illustrious past, since it was the first Roman colony in Gaul and capital of the province of Gaul Narbonne. Unfortunately, it has almost no monumental remains reminiscent of its prestigious history, unlike its neighbors Nîmes and Arles. It is to give this unique heritage back its place and to make it accessible to people that the Occitania Region has embarked on the construction of a new museum dedicated to Antiquity: Narbo Via.

Through Narbo Via, the story of the Roman Empire in Gaul unfolds. The story of a city, which became the capital of the province of Narbonnaise, the first colony outside the Italian peninsula and which, until the 1940s before our era, administered the only colony under Roman law in Gaul, a synonym for full citizens of their civic rights. The past of a city at the crossroads of the Via Domitia and the Via Aquitania, sea and river routes, a strategic crossroads in the western Mediterranean.



A.Späni © Narbo Via

## UNIQUE COLLECTIONS

**With around 1,300 pieces on display, Narbo Via brings together for the first time all the ancient Roman collections of Narbonne** until then presented in the Lapidary Museum and the Archaeological Museum of Narbonne. These collections also include archaeological furniture from excavations in the ancient ports of Narbonne and from French Mediterranean major archaeological sites: Gruissan, Port-la-Nautique, Mandirac and, soon, the necropolis on the banks of the Robine. Finally, they consist in a series of painted plasters and mosaics taken from the Roman houses of Clos de la Lombarde and comparable to those found in Pompeii.

The creation of a new permanent, immersive and interactive route has been the opportunity to launch a huge collection project: travel, photographs and studies, censuses, dusting, desalination, consolidations, recoveries and restorations. These steps made it possible to take a new look at these works and to better understand their history and secrets. They are the result of collective work between scientists, archaeologists, curators, restorers, socleurs, scenographers, managers and mediators.

**Thus, nearly 1,300 works have been moved and reintegrated into a new environment better suited to their conservation and presentation.**



# A PERMANENT COLLECTION THROUGH SIX CENTURIES OF HISTORY

**The permanent route is organized around a chrono-thematic thread that begins at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, punctuated by multimedia and educational devices, in order to best reproduce the ancient history of Narbonne, six centuries long:**

- As an introduction, Narbonne is placed in time and space: prehistory, the Mediterranean, existing trade routes, geology... so many factors that prompted Rome to settle on the Narbonne site.
- The visitor will then be invited to discover this Roman capital, through city planning, the city and its monuments. The museography highlights this dimension of monumentality, as an echo to the imposing buildings of that time, testifying to the prosperity of the ancient city.
- The collection then leads to a sequence devoted to the organization of society: political, legal, social, religious, funeral practices, games and shows. Portraits, statues, funerary inscriptions... punctuate this sequence of the collection, as many traces and archives of people who lived in *Narbo Martius* 2000 years ago.
- Then, the visit offers an immersion in the luxurious *domus* of ancient Roman times and their decorations. In the extension of an *atrium*, which has a large mosaic in its center under an overhead opening, are life-size renditions of rooms in houses, with sculpted decorations, mosaics and murals. All come from the Clos de la Lombarde, a wealthy ancient district, unearthed from 1973 in Narbonne. This sequence also offers daily testimonies in wall display cases, as well as multimedia projections.



A.Späni © Narbo Via

- The penultimate section of the collection is dedicated to the commercial port of Narbonne. The economic life and the port system of this flourishing city are retraced there, with its actors, its merchant ships and its navigation techniques.
- The collection ends with the evolution of the city towards Christianity until the invasion of the Visigoths (4th-5th centuries). This sequence presents the construction of the first early Christian cathedral and exhibits sarcophagi and objects of worship showing the establishment of Christian iconography, relations with the East and the formalization of the symbol of the cross.

## DIGITAL DEVICES AT THE SERVICE OF THE VISITOR

At the center of the exhibition space, 4 digital alcoves showcase the backstage of archaeological research, its specialties and practices. Using videos, projections and interactive devices, these alcoves present:

- the rediscovery of Roman city planning in Narbonne,
- the 3 dimensions restitution of the Capitol,
- ships and navigation techniques in Antiquity (with 4 model ships),
- changes in the configuration of the port system.



A.Späni © Narbo Via

# A MUSEUM CONCEIVED AS A PLAYGROUND OF A KNOWLEDGE FACTORY AND A TRUE PLACE OF LIFE

Echoing the museum's permanent collection and temporary exhibition, the cultural program includes guided tours, educational workshops, experimentation and creation workshops around the collections via the Fab Lab and the Narbo Lab, family or toddler tours, lectures, behind-the-scenes tours of the museum and its storerooms... Anchored in its territory, Narbo Via builds, for its programming, partnerships with its cultural neighbors: médiathèque (Library), art school, theatre... Narbo Via works on its accessibility for the public with disabilities or for those who are far from the museum, for social, physical or geographical reasons. To this end, the interpretation team has designed an adapted cultural offer, such as visits in French sign language, but also outside of the walls, for schools, leisure centers, hospitals, associations, companies..



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## A PROGRAM THAT PROMOTES CONVIVIALITY, MEETINGS CONVIVIALITY AND MEETINGS

The program also includes regular festive events, linked to national and local events: the European Night of Museums, the RendezVous in the Gardens, the European Archaeology Days, the European Heritage Days and the Rencontres d'Archéologie de la Narbonnaise.

Like the Roman festivals, banquets, concerts, shows, projections, re-enactments, festive evenings or artistic performances will also bring together visitors, artists and specialists around a historical theme, artistic, culinary or sporting practices, to enjoy with family or friends the joys of discovery in a fun and unusual way. At the heart of this program, the performing arts will occupy a special place. They will be an opportunity to offer new ways of looking at the collections and to create bridges between antiquity and contemporary creation, in order to make this museum a real living «factory» of knowledge, both a forum and a citizen's laboratory.



## A LIVING SPACE OPEN TO THE CITY

Conceived as a real place of life, the museum offers several convivial spaces including a bookstore-giftshop, large gardens and, soon, a restaurant. **The ambition is to make Narbo Via not only a place to visit, but also a place to frequent and to return with pleasure.**

The bookstore-giftshop, managed by the establishment, offers visitors a wide range of books and editions, derived from the collections of the museum and local products linked to the regional territory, such as local culinary specialties.



Foster N.Young © Narbo Via

## NARBO VIA, A GREEN MUSEUM !

The combed gardens of the museum feature Mediterranean plants, resistant to heat and drought: cistus de Montpellier, lanvandins, euphorbias, thyme...

There are also around **a hundred vines**, planted on March 31 in the presence of the President of the Region Occitanie, a link between the different Mediterranean cultures. These vines bring together old and modern grape varieties from different regions of France: Brun Fourca (Provence), Grenache noir (Languedoc), Madeleine angevine... Finally, they are made from grape varieties resistant to climate change, such as Barbera from Italy or Marroquin from Morocco, now cultivated in southern Mediterranean countries. These vines also meet the criteria of organic farming.

## OUR SHOP

We only sell local wines and try to promote AOC, AOP and IGP wines from the region: Corbières, Minervois, La Clappe, Fitou, and many others.

These are mainly winegrowers with the Vignobles & Découvertes label, «Les Vignobles de la Via Domitia en Languedoc», thanks to the partnership with the label that the Narbo Via obtained. We also promote other wines by alternating them with sales throughout the year.



O.Tankéré © Narbo Via

## OUR RESTAURANT

*Cadence au Musée* is the restaurant of the Narbo Via Museum, open from Wednesday to Sunday, during the Museum's opening hours. It is possible to take a coffee or breakfast in the morning, lunch at noon and a tea time in the afternoon.

The restaurant has 70 covers indoors and the same number outside on the terrace, facing the river banks of the Robine. *Cadence au Musée* offers bistronomic cuisine with a daily market menu and a new menu every week. It focuses on cooking with fresh, local and seasonal products,

Cultural projects will also be worked on with the Museum's interpretation and programming department. Through an accessible, inventive and high-quality gastronomic offering, Narbo Via is strengthening its commitment to making the museum a real living place open to all, where it's a pleasure to meet and experience in different ways the links between our contemporary practices and the history of the Region.



L. Martin-Rolland © Narbo Via

# A shared and collection management of the museum

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Since February 1, 2020, the Narbo Via museum has been a public institution organized, managed and funded by a partnership governance that brings together the French State, the Occitanie Region, Grand Narbonne and the City of Narbonne. Carole Delga, President of the Region Occitanie, has been appointed President of the Board of Directors.

This status allows the institution to operate autonomously. Equipped with a scientific council, the public institution Narbo Via implements and animates the scientific and cultural project of the museum. It also participates in the networking of archeology in Occitania: sharing of engineering, co-production projects, communication and circulation of audiences, research projects and enhancement of heritage: all fields of collaboration and exchanges are mobilized with other archaeological and museum players.

The Amphoralis potters' village in Sallèles-d'Aude (20 minutes of Narbonne by car) is an ancient site of mass production of Roman amphorae. It presents a garden where more than 160 species listed by Latin agronomists are cultivated and an arboretum. It also has expertise in experimental archeology (with ovens and buildings reconstructed according to knowledge of Roman techniques).



A.Späni © Narbo Via



## A PLACE OF EXCELLENCE FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Archeology is at the heart of the museum's scientific and cultural project. The latest archaeological research in the area, scheduled excavations and preventive excavations, contribute to the enrichment of knowledge of the ancient heritage. Archeology is thus presented as a discipline and human adventure, with its missions of discovery, conservation, restoration and restitution. **As a research center in ancient archeology as well as an archaeological museum, Narbo Via is a valuable tool in the development of research.**

A laboratory for the study and restoration of archaeological furniture, in particular for its painted plasters, as well as specific reserves and study rooms, are dedicated to the research work of the museum's scientific teams and for higher education. Close partnerships with the collective research project of the ancient ports of Narbonne, but also with French laboratories and universities, are being set up. They focus on research around ancient ports, preventive archaeological excavations, as well as epigraphy and the restoration of ancient monumental ensembles. These exchanges with the research world will allow Narbo Via to update its scientific discourse and transmit it to the public, because one of the Narbo Via's initial goal is to bring archaeological research into dialogue with interpretation.



## NARBO VIA, A PROJECT SERVING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERRITORY

**The public institution is developing a strategy of national and international partnerships** in order to make it a real lever of economic and tourist attractiveness for Occitania. The museum also has a policy of economic partnerships through sponsorship projects, the rental of its spaces, and the hosting of business tourism or events.

Narbo Via is also part of a regional policy to enhance the ancient past very present in the territory and the Mediterranean arc (South and North shores), with archaeological sites and museums, or even with maritime or ancient museums of the Mediterranean.

# VESTIGES OF THE FUTURE

From May 2023 to January 2024 (possible extension of three months), Narbo Via has been presenting *Vestiges of the Future*, a contemporary art exhibition among our permanent collections.

*Vestiges of the future* - what a paradox! The title, bringing together two fundamentally opposed terms, speaks to us and touches on the very purpose and challenge of this exhibition. It invites a bold confrontation between ancient and contemporary works. Twenty-one works from the Musée régional d'art contemporain (regional museum of contemporary art) in Sérignan, in the South of France, are displayed around the collections, based on thematic or formal affinities. Two other works are also on display at the Horreum and at the Amphoralis site-museum in Sallèles-d'Aude (20 km from Narbonne by car). Their resonance with the Museum's permanent collection invites us to take a closer look at the history of art, quotation, misappropriation and rupture.

This approach is part of our desire to question our relationship with history and creation. Given the archaeological collection on display to the public, is there a continuum and a unified vision of artistic creation? At the Narbo Via museum, which is dedicated to Roman archaeology, chronology has a strong hold on the permanent exhibition, in order to make the historical discourse as legible as possible. With *Vestiges of the Future*, it is this discourse that is questioned in an unexpected light, through the presentation of objects from different periods and of different kinds.

*Vestiges of the Future* also aims to challenge our preconceptions about art and heritage, playing on the paradox between derision and the sacredness of works of art. The Narbo Via museum is an ideal setting for this kind of experiment: an archaeological museum devoted to Roman history and civilisation, its primary vocation is not to question the nature of the work of art. And yet, from the outset, the building and the museography of the permanent exhibition were conceived as an aesthetic showcase, atypical for this type of history museum, with a minimalist, uncluttered approach. By mixing contemporary works with ancient artefacts, and presenting works of art that don't look like works of art, with others that aren't, even though they look like works of art, the tour aims to unsettle visitors.

Finally, to answer the eternally difficult question «What is a work of art? *Vestiges of the Future* poses another question, «What is a museum?», and stimulates our thinking about the heritage significance of contemporary works. By the very fact of their arrival in a museum, these works become part of a heritage process, helping to write the history of art in the present. Hence the apparent paradox in the title of this two-part tour: these contemporary works are already part of our heritage, bearing witness to our civilisation for future generations.

NARBO —  
— VIA

CONTEMPORARY ART  
EXHIBITION



FROM 24/05/23  
TO 31/12/23



# VESTIGES OF THE FUTURE



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# OPENING HOURS

Museum Narbo Via:

Off season 10 a.m.-6 p.m. (1<sup>st</sup> October - 30 April)

High season: 10 a.m.-7 p.m. (2 May - 30 September)

Weekly closing day: Monday

Address: 2 avenue André Mècle, 11100 Narbonne, France.

Telephone: (+33) (0)4 68 90 28 90.

Annual closing days:

1<sup>st</sup> of January,

1<sup>st</sup> of May,

25<sup>th</sup> of December

Horreum:

Off season 10 a.m.-12 a.m. - 2 p.m.-5 p.m. (1<sup>st</sup> October - 30 April)

High season: 10 a.m.-1 p.m. - 2 p.m.-6 p.m (2 May - 30 September)

Weekly closing day : Monday

Address: 7 Rue Rouget de Lisle, 11100 Narbonne

Telephone: (+33) (0)4 68 32 45 30.

Amphoralis :

Off season 10 a.m.-12 a.m. - 2 p.m.-5 p.m. (1<sup>st</sup> October - 30 April)

High season: 10 a.m.-1 p.m. - 2 p.m.-6 p.m (2 May - 30 September)

The gardens and the store of Amphoralis welcome you from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., continuously. Possibility to picnic on the spot.

Weekly closing day: Monday. And Sundays in low season (except the first Sunday of the month)

Address: 2 avenue André Mècle, 11100 Narbonne, France.

Telephone: (+33) (0)4 68 90 28 90.

# PRICES

Generous Free entry policy for the 3 sites : -26 years old, recipients of minimum social benefits, the disabled adult allowance, the solidarity allowance for the elderly and the specific solidarity allowance, journalists under presentation of proof, school teachers preparing their visit, holders of ICOM cards and ICOMOS, holders of the guide-lecturer card, accompanying persons with disabilities, asyleum seekers.

Free entry for all: the first Sunday of each month and during national events (European Archeology Days, European Heritage Days, etc.).

## Entrance fees to the Narbo Via Museum:

Full price: 9 euros

With Guided Tour: + 2 euros

Full price for temporary exhibition:

Full price: 7 euros

## Entrance fees to Amphoralis and Horreum:

Full price: 5 euros

With Guided Tour: + 2 euros

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