

MONMOUTH COLLEGE  
SIENKEWICZ LECTURE  
ON ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY



# DR. MONT ALLEN

SCHOOL OF ART & DESIGN – SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

## DICING WITH DEATH

GAMES, CONTESTS, AND THE WORLD  
OF PLAY ON ROMAN SARCOPHAGI

FOURTH ANNUAL SIENKEWICZ LECTURE ON ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY

7:30 PM **NOV 12**



**DELIVERED VIA ZOOM:**

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**MONT ALLEN** is Assistant Professor of Classics & Art History at Southern Illinois University, where he teaches courses in Greek Mythology and various aspects of Greco-Roman Art. After winding through three separate undergraduate degrees — in Geography, the History of Religion, and Modern European History — the study of Classics and ancient Greek and Roman Art finally sunk its claws into him for good. He earned his Ph.D. in Ancient Art History from UC–Berkeley in 2014, and hasn't looked back since.

**ABOUT THE TALK:** The public face of Roman art is painfully sober. In the privacy of their tombs however, free to cast off their stern public personae, Romans surrounded themselves with art of a different nature. Here, on the elaborately carved sarcophagi that dominated the Roman visual imagination of the second and third centuries, the imagery does something entirely different: it plays. Diminutive Pans wrestle with wee goat kids, Sirens face off against Muses in singing competitions, and Cupids role-play as charioteers, giddily racing their carts around the Circus Maximus. Scenes of games, contests, and play appear with astonishing frequency here — on the sides of coffins, in the face of death — as nowhere else in Roman art.

What forms did this play take on Roman coffins? Why did Romans ground play so deeply in the domain of death? And what would happen with the coming of Christianity?

The Thomas J. and Anne W. Sienkewicz Lecture on Roman Archaeology was established by an anonymous donor in 2017 to support the annual archaeological lecture series sponsored by the Monmouth College Department of Classics and the Western Illinois Society of the Archaeological Institute of America. Tom Sienkewicz was Minnie Billings Capron Chair of Classics at Monmouth College from 1985 until 2017. During his career he taught a wide range of classics courses, many with strong archaeological features, including Classical Mythology, the Ancient Family, and Africa in the Ancient World. In 1984 he founded the Western Illinois Society of the Archaeological Institute of America, which, since its inception, has hosted hundreds of archaeological lectures at Monmouth. His wife, Anne, has been a loyal supporter of archaeology and over the years has hosted countless speakers.



1853