Room 0:

Vergil *Aeneid* 8.184-300: 1st C BCE, Rome. In this scene, King Evander is showing Aeneas' the sights of Rome and explaining the background to the cattle market and altars of the Forum Boarium south of the Palatine hill:

King Evander said: 'No idle superstition, or ignorance
of the ancient gods, forced these solemn rites of ours,
this ritual banquet, this altar to so great a divinity, upon us.
We perform them, and repeat the honours due,
Trojan guest, because we were saved from cruel perils.
Now look first at this rocky overhanging cliff, how its bulk
is widely shattered, and the mountain lair stands deserted,
and the crags have been pulled down in mighty ruin.
There was a cave here, receding to vast depths,
untouched by the sun's rays, inhabited by the fell shape
of Cacus, the half-human, and the ground was always warm
with fresh blood, and the heads of men, insolently
nailed to the doors, hung there pallid with sad decay.
Vulcan was father to this monster: and, as he moved
his massive bulk, he belched out his dark fires.
Now at last time brought what we wished, the presence
and assistance of a god. Hercules, the greatest of avengers,
appeared, proud of the killing and the spoils of three-fold
Geryon, driving his great bulls along as victor,
and his cattle occupied the valley and the river.
And Cacus, his mind mad with frenzy, lest any
wickedness or cunning be left un-dared or un-tried
drove off four bulls of outstanding quality, and as many
heifers of exceptional beauty, from their stalls.
and, so there might be no forward-pointing spoor, the thief
dragged them into his cave by the tail, and, reversing
the signs of their tracks, hid them in the stony dark:
no one seeking them would find a trail to the cave.
Meanwhile, as Hercules, Amphitryon's son, was moving
the well-fed herd from their stalls, and preparing to leave,
the cattle lowed as they went out, all the woods were filled
with their complaining, and the sound echoed from the hills.
One heifer returned their call, and lowed from the deep cave,
and foiled Cacus's hopes from her prison.

At this Hercules's indignation truly blazed, with a venomous
dark rage: he seized weapons in his hand, and his heavy
knotted club, and quickly sought the slopes of the high mountain.
Then for the first time my people saw Cacus afraid, confusion
in his eyes: he fled at once, swifter than the East Wind,
heading for his cave: fear lent wings to his feet.
As he shut himself in, and blocked the entrance securely,
throwing against it a giant rock, hung there in chains
by his father's craft, by shattering the links, behold
Hercules arrived in a tearing passion, turning his head
this way and that, scanning every approach, and gnashing
his teeth. Hot with rage, three times he circled the whole
Aventine Hill, three times he tried the stony doorway in vain,
three times he sank down, exhausted, in the valley.
A sharp pinnacle of flint, the rock shorn away
on every side, stood, tall to see, rising behind
the cave, a suitable place for vile birds to nest.
He shook it, where it lay, it's ridge sloping towards the river
on the left, straining at it from the right, loosening its deepest
roots, and tearing it out, then suddenly hurling it away,
the highest heavens thundered with the blow,
the banks broke apart, and the terrified river recoiled.
But Cacus's den and his vast realm stood revealed,
and the shadowy caverns within lay open,
no differently than if earth, gaping deep within,
were to unlock the infernal regions by force, and disclose
the pallid realms, hated by the gods, and the vast abyss
be seen from above, and the spirits tremble at incoming light.
So Hercules, calling upon all his weapons, hurled missiles
at Cacus from above, caught suddenly in unexpected daylight,
penned in the hollow rock, with unaccustomed howling,
and rained boughs and giant blocks of stone on him.
He on the other hand, since there was no escape now
from the danger, belched thick smoke from his throat
(marvellous to tell) and enveloped the place in blind darkness,
blotting the view from sight, and gathering
smoke-laden night in the cave, a darkness mixed with fire.
Hercules in his pride could not endure it, and he threw himself,
with a headlong leap, through the flames, where the smoke
gave out its densest billows, and black mist heaved in the great cavern.

Here, as Cacus belched out useless flame in the darkness,
Hercules seized him in a knot-like clasp, and, clinging, choked him
the eyes squeezed, and the throat drained of blood.
Immediately the doors were ripped out, and the dark den exposed,
the stolen cattle, and the theft Cacus denied, were revealed
to the heavens, and the shapeless carcass dragged out
by the feet. The people could not get their fill of gazing
at the hideous eyes, the face, and shaggy bristling chest
of the half-man, and the ashes of the jaw's flames.
Because of that this rite is celebrated, and happy posterity
remembers the day: […] and as guardians of the worship of Hercules,
we set up this altar in the grove, which shall be spoken of for ever
by us as 'The Mightiest' [Ara Maxima], and the mightiest it shall be for ever.