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**POMPEII AND THE ROMAN VILLA:
ART AND CULTURE AROUND THE BAY OF NAPLES
PREMIERES AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART,
WASHINGTON
OCTOBER 19, 2008–MARCH 22, 2009**



Stabiae

View of a harbor town, 1st century BC - 1st century AD

fresco

Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli

Washington, DC—Luxurious works of art excavated from the opulent houses of the urban elite in Pompeii and from nearby imperial villas along the shoreline of the Bay of Naples illustrate the region's importance as an artistic center in the first exhibition devoted to ancient Roman art at the National Gallery of Art. The exhibition will premiere in the nation's capital, October 19, 2008, through March 22, 2009, and travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, May 3 through October 4, 2009.

Overview

In the first century BC, the picturesque Bay of Naples became a favorite retreat for vacationing emperors, senators, and other prominent Romans. They built lavish seaside villas in the shadow of Mt. Vesuvius where they could indulge in absolute leisure, read and write, exercise, enjoy their gardens and the views, and entertain friends. The artists who flocked to the region to adorn the villas also created paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts for the residents of Pompeii and nearby towns. *Pompeii and the Roman Villa* presents some 150 works of sculpture, painting, mosaic, and luxury arts, including recent discoveries on view in the U.S. for the first time and celebrated finds from earlier excavations. Exquisite objects from the richly decorated villas reveal the breadth and richness of cultural and artistic life, as well as the influence of classical Greece on Roman art and culture in this region.

Partners and Support

Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with the cooperation of the Soprintendenza Regionale per i Beni Culturali e Paesaggistici della Campania and the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompeii, and the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici delle province di Napoli e Caserta.

Exhibition Highlights

The region around the Bay of Naples became an artistic center of exceptional sophistication during the first century BC, when artists created sculpture, paintings, mosaics, and luxury arts for patrons in Pompeii and neighboring towns—Herculaneum (modern Ercolano), Stabiae (modern Castellamare di Stabia), and Oplontis (modern Torre Annunziata). The sumptuous villas built by Roman aristocrats along the shoreline influenced and fostered this artistic flowering. Julius Caesar, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero owned seaside villas in Baiae (modern Baia); the emperor Augustus vacationed in Surrentum (modern Sorrento), Capreae (modern Capri), and Pausilypon (modern Posillipo); and the lawyer Cicero had homes at Cumae (modern Cuma) and Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli) as well as in Pompeii. The artists commissioned to adorn these lavish villas also worked for well-to-do residents of Pompeii and Herculaneum who emulated the lifestyles of the powerful elite.

This exhibition of more than 150 works reveals the shared artistic tastes and cultural ideals of the villa owners and townspeople, particularly their reverence for the arts of ancient Greece. Drawn from the collections of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, and from site museums at Pompeii, Boscoreale, Torre Annunziata, and Baia, as well as museums and private collections in the United States and Europe, the exhibition is organized in five sections:

Patrons at Home focuses on portraits of the proprietors and inhabitants of the maritime villas or the well-appointed houses of Pompeii and surrounding towns who owned the types of objects in the exhibition. Works of art include marble or bronze portraits of members of the imperial family and individualized private portraits such as that of Gaius Cornelius Rufus, found in the atrium of his family's house at Pompeii in the 19th century, but never before lent for exhibition. The portraits will be exhibited in the context of the interior furnishings of the residences. Frescoes depict seaside villas, marine delicacies available from the Bay of Naples, and intimate genre scenes. Silver wine cups decorated with the episodes from the Labors of Herakles, a mirror with a lively scene of cupids fishing, colorful glass vessels, and gold jewelry reflect the owners' taste for luxury.

Courtyards and Gardens presents bronze statues and fountains, marble sculptures and reliefs, and frescoes that decorated the colonnaded courtyards at the very heart of Roman villas and houses. Much of the garden sculpture depicts wild animals and Dionysos, god of wine, theater, and nature, with his entourage of satyrs and maenads. Frescoes portray peacocks, swallows, magpies, and other birds as well as flowers and various flowering shrubs, including roses, laurel, and oleander. Evoking the setting of Plato's Academy, which is portrayed in a mosaic in this section, gardens were also places for reflection and learning.

Moregine: A highlight of the exhibition is a dining room from the site of Moregine on the Sarno River south of Pompeii. Discovered in 1959, the site was excavated in 1999–2001 when the walls from its flooded dining rooms were removed in order to preserve their frescoes. The exhibition features three dining-room walls decorated with images of Apollo, god of the arts, with the muses, shown floating against a red background and framed by elegant architectural fantasies. Ancient Roman dining rooms were often located to offer diners a view of the garden, an arrangement echoed in the installation of the Moregine frescoes at the National Gallery.

The Legacy of Greece: This section demonstrates the Roman reverence for classical Greece and conveys the taste for antiquities that characterized the art collections formed by wealthy Romans around the Bay of Naples. Cicero's correspondence with his art dealer reveals a burgeoning market and illuminates why, by the first century BC, Greek artists moved to Italy to fill the many orders for statues, busts, and paintings produced in the Greek artistic tradition. The Roman patrons commissioned works of art in the full range of Greek styles, including a marble statue of Artemis in an archaic style current in the 6th century BC and a monumental sculpture of Aphrodite that echoes the classical style of the 5th and 4th centuries BC. A portrait of Homer, an equestrian statuette of Alexander the Great, and a relief depicting scenes from the Trojan War exemplify the Roman appreciation of works representing Greek subjects and themes.

Rediscovery and Reinvention focuses on the impact that the 18th-century excavations and rediscovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum had on the art and culture of the modern world. During the 1700s, the Bourbon excavations around the Bay of Naples yielded vast numbers of antiquities. The Bourbon publication of the finds, the illustrated volumes of *Delle antichità di Ercolano*, increased public familiarity with the finds and refueled the rage for classical antiquities. Reproductions of the antiquities grew into a major industry, and Pompeiana soon permeated travel writing, affecting the art, interior design, and culture of Europe with Britain, and finally North America. Great houses in Europe and eventually even rooms in the United States Capitol were decorated in the Pompeian style, characterized by paintings of architectural fantasies or of maenads floating against brightly colored backgrounds.

Curator, Catalogue, and Documentary

Carol Mattusch, Mathy Professor of Art History at George Mason University, is the guest curator of the exhibition.

The fully illustrated catalogue for Pompeii and the Roman Villa is written by Mattusch, with essays by Mary Beard, professor of classics, University of Cambridge; Bettina Bergmann, associate professor, Mount Holyoke College; Stefano De Caro, Direttore Generale per i Beni Archeologici, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Roma; Professor Pietro Giovanni Guzzo, Il Soprintendente, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei; and Kenneth Lapatin, assistant curator of antiquities, The J. Paul

Getty Museum. Published by the Gallery in association with Thames and Hudson, the 360-page catalogue includes 312 color and 53 black-and-white illustrations. It will be available from the Gallery Shops for \$60.00 (hardcover) and \$40.00 (softcover) in October 2008. To order, call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or email mailorder@nga.gov.

Lead funding for the catalogue is provided by the Leon Levy Foundation.

Documentary Film:

Pompeii and the Roman Villa, a 30-minute documentary produced by the department of exhibition programs at the National Gallery of Art to accompany the exhibition, examines the explosion of artistic activity on the Bay of Naples that began in the first century BC. The film includes original footage shot in the villas and houses on the Bay of Naples, including Pompeii, where many of the objects were found preserved in the ash that covered the area after the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79.

Related Programs

The Gallery will offer a diverse program of lectures, films, gallery talks, and family activities related to the exhibition. All programs are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For more information, call (202) 737-4215 or inquire at the Information Desks.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering the East and West Buildings. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags

must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 x 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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