

**LACMA PRESENTS OPULENT PORTRAITS, FRESCOES, SCULPTURE, AND  
DECORATIVE ARTS EXCAVATED FROM LOST CITY****Unearthed Treasures Centered Around First Century BC Rome**

Los Angeles—The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples*, on view at LACMA May 3 through October 4, 2009. Having premiered at the National Gallery of Art, the exhibition features rare ancient works of art excavated from the houses of the urban elite in Pompeii and from nearby villas along the shoreline of the Bay of Naples, illustrating the region's importance as a major artistic center.

"LACMA is pleased to bring such profound ancient treasures to the West Coast," said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director.

"Pompeii was a place where art and creativity flourished, where patrons and artists alike coalesced to form a thriving cultural hub—much like Los Angeles today."

"Unlike other Pompeii exhibitions, which have focused on daily life in antiquity, with displays of cooking pots, medical instruments, and dead bodies, this exhibition, for the first time, concentrates on elite Romans who deliberately presented themselves as highly cultured by collecting classical Greek art, then already hundreds of years old," said Kenneth Lapatin, Associate Curator of Antiquities at the Getty Villa, and guest curator of the exhibition at LACMA.

The Bay of Naples first came to be known as the heart of artistic sophistication during the first century BC, a time when artists created sculpture, paintings, mosaics, and decorative arts for patrons in Pompeii and neighboring towns—Herculaneum (modern Ercolano), Stabiae (modern Castellamare di Stabia), and Oplontis (modern Torre Annunziata). The 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 imperial villas also worked for well-to-do residents of Pompeii and Herculaneum who emulated the lifestyles of the powerful elite.

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 and Proprietors**

Focusing on portraiture, this section features images of people who lived in the maritime villas and the well-appointed houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum who owned the types of artworks in the exhibition. Works of art include frescoes depicting porticoed seaside villas and marble and bronze portraits of private individuals and members of the imperial family who ruled during the first century AD, including an exquisitely carved cameo portrait of Octavian from a private home, signaling the owner's respect for the imperial family. In contrast to the idealizing style and characteristic features that link the imperial portraits, the private portraits are distinctly individualized, to judge from the fine spare features of Gaius Cornelius Rufus, whose portrait was found in the atrium of his family's house at Pompeii. Artful gold earrings, necklaces, and bracelets that belonged to ancient elites are also displayed here.

### **Interiors**

As displayed in this portion, Roman villas and houses were richly decorated with frescoes, as well as moveable furnishings. A particularly elegant highlight of the exhibition is a dining room (*triclinium*) from the site of Moregine on the Sarno River south of Pompeii. Discovered in 1959 and further excavated in 1999-2001, the frescoes were removed in order to preserve them from flooding. These paintings, which depict Apollo, god of the arts, and the Muses shown floating against a red background and framed

by elegant architectural fantasies, have never before been shown in the United States. Other frescoes include intimate genre scenes, such as a girl studying her reflection in a mirror. This section of the exhibition also features actual silver mirrors (one adorned with a lively scene of cupids fishing), opulent silver wine vessels decorated with floral and mythical scenes, technically sophisticated glass vessels, and an exquisite obsidian cup inlaid with Egyptianizing scenes.

### **Courtyards and Gardens**

Seen here are frescoes depicting gardens with date-palms, oleanders, laurel, daisies, peacocks, doves, swallows, and magpies that convey the tranquility of these places designed for thought and relaxation (*otium*). Evoking the garden setting of Plato's Academy, which is portrayed in a mosaic in this section, gardens were also sites of learning and metaphors for the sacred grove. Among the garden sculptures on view are bronzes from the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum (the model for the Getty Villa in Malibu), marble sculptures from the imperial villa at Oplontis, and a collection of marble reliefs from the House of the Gilded Cupids in Pompeii. Works of art representing Dionysos (Bacchus to the Romans) and his followers were particularly popular in gardens, and the exhibition includes a bronze fountain-figure in the form of a fat Silenos riding a bloated wineskin and a marble sculpture of a satyr struggling with a hermaphrodite. In contrast, the bronze boar attacked by dogs from beside a pool fed by a serpent seems to have been plucked from a wilder setting. Thus nature in its many guises is redesigned within the home, and the free spirit of Dionysos and his followers is comfortably contained for the enjoyment of the inhabitants and their guests.

### **Taste for the Antique**

Clearly demonstrated in this section is the Roman reverence for the world of classical Greek antiquity. Cicero's correspondence with his art dealer reveals a burgeoning market for ancient art, and Augustus in his new empire sought to revive the notion of the golden age of Periclean Athens in the fifth century BC. Roman patrons acquired Greek originals in diverse media and commissioned works of art in the full range of Greek styles. The various pastimes enjoyed by the elite along the Bay of Naples also

reflect their enthusiasm for Greek literature, myth, and thought. Portraits of Homer, the philosopher Epicurus, and playwright Menander attest to the importance of intellectual pursuits as leisure pastimes as do frescoes of writing instruments and works of art depicting episodes from the *Iliad*. Greek artists moved to the Bay of Naples to fill the many orders for statues, busts, and paintings. Works in the archaic style include a marble Artemis, goddess of the hunt, and a bronze statue of a youth (*kouros*). The taste for the classical style is exemplified by a marble relief with a scene from the Trojan War, a marble head of the well-known type of the *Athena Lemnia* by Pheidias, and a drawing on marble depicting a Greek fighting a centaur. Later styles are represented by a bronze equestrian statuette of Alexander the Great and a fresco of the Three Graces.

### **Rediscovery and Reinvention**

Here the exhibition focuses on the impact of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rediscovery and excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum on the art and culture of the modern world. During the 1700s, Mount Vesuvius erupted frequently, the Bourbon excavations around the Bay of Naples yielded vast numbers of antiquities, and the publication of the illustrated volumes of the *Delle antichità di Ercolano* greatly increased public familiarity with the finds, refueling the rage for classical antiquities. Reproductions of antiquities grew into a major industry, and Pompeiana soon permeated travel writing, affecting the art, interior design, and culture of Europe, Britain, and finally North America. This section of the exhibition features eighteenth and nineteenth-century paintings, rare books, early photographs, reproductions, and souvenirs.

### **Curators, Catalogue, and Documentary**

Carol Matusch, Mathy Professor of Art History at George Mason University, developed the exhibition for the National Gallery of Art. Kenneth Lapatin, Associate Curator of Antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum, is guest curator at LACMA. The fully illustrated catalogue for *Pompeii and the Roman Villa* is written by Matusch, with contributions by Lapatin, Mary Beard, Bettina Bergmann, Stefano De Caro, and Pietro Giovanni Guzzo.

**Credit:** *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 Direzione Regionale per i Beni Culturali e Paesaggistici della Campania and the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.

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**About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography—and represent Los Angeles' uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a new contemporary museum on its campus, BCAM. With this expanded space for contemporary art, innovative collaborations with artists, and an ongoing transformation project, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

**General Information:** LACMA is located at 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. For more information about LACMA and its programming, call 323 857-6000 or visit [lacma.org](http://lacma.org).

**Museum Hours and Admission:** Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, noon-8 pm; Friday, noon-9 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11 am-8 pm; closed Wednesday. Adults \$12; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+ \$8; children 17 and under are admitted free. Admission (except to specially ticketed exhibitions) is free the second Tuesday of every month and on Target Free Holiday Mondays. After 5 pm, every day the museum is open, LACMA's "Pay What You Wish" program encourages visitors to support the museum with an admission fee of their choosing.

**Press Contact:** For additional information, contact LACMA Press Relations at [press@lacma.org](mailto:press@lacma.org) or 323 857-6522.

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