

Designed for High School Students

Discovery Guide

Pompeii and the Roman Villa:
Art and Culture around the
Bay of Naples

National Gallery of Art, Washington
October 19, 2008–March 22, 2009

SALVE*, as the Romans would say—
greetings and welcome to *Pompeii
and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture
around the Bay of Naples*.



For the imperial family and Rome’s wealthy, a lavish villa on the Bay of Naples was the ideal spot to enjoy various pleasures: invigorating exercise in parklike surroundings; the best food and drink; the most refined décor; the newest entertainments; and the solitude to read, write, and think. Townspeople in places like Pompeii and Herculaneum copied the lifestyle of the villa owners to the extent their means allowed, and many locals were very rich themselves. It was a climate in which the arts could prosper—

as you’ll discover as you explore the exhibition. We owe this remarkably detailed look at the past to the destruction brought by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79.

Here are six activities you can do as you tour the exhibition, plus suggestions for things you can do LATER—at home or back in class.

*pronounced “SAHL-way”

1

Consider the connection between how a portrait looks and what it does.

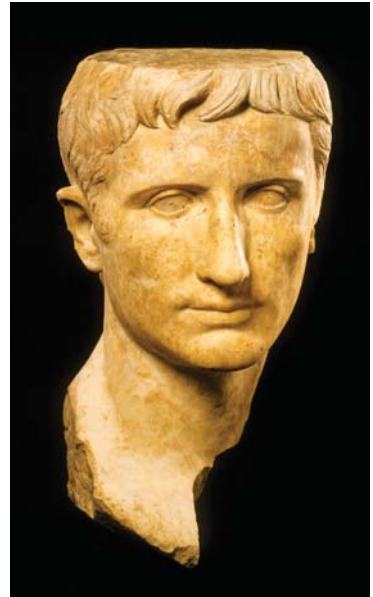
Start by learning a little about this man whose portrait you'll see in the first room.

[His] eyes were clear and bright, and he liked to believe that they shone with a sort of divine radiance: it gave him profound pleasure if anyone at whom he glanced keenly dropped his head as though dazzled by looking into the sun.

—Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*

Augustus (63 BC–AD 4)

Gaius Octavius (called Octavian) was the adoptive son—political heir apparent—of his great-uncle Julius Caesar. After Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC by rivals fearful of his concentration of power, several opposing Roman armies battled across the Mediterranean to gain control. The entire region was devastated by war. Finally, in 31 BC near Actium in northwestern Greece, Octavian defeated the combined forces of Cleopatra and Marc Antony and was established as *princeps*—first citizen. He embarked on a series of policies to bring peace and stability, reemphasizing old moral values and rebuilding many religious and civic institutions. He found Rome a city of bricks, he said proudly, and left it a city of marble. In 27 BC, he became Rome's first emperor with the title Augustus (which we use as his name today) and eventually *pontifex maximus*—head priest. Regarded as a savior, he was later also called *pater patriae*—father of the country. Although institutions of the old Roman Republic, such as the Senate, were retained, power now resided with the emperor (and/or his armies) until the end of the Roman empire.



Augustus, early 1st century AD, marble, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland

Did you know?

There are more portraits of Augustus than of any other Roman. Idealized images of him were sent out as models across the empire, where they were reproduced in countless portraits and installed in public buildings. Wealthy people also displayed his image in their homes as a way of showing support—and borrowing some of the emperor's prestige for themselves.

Consider these pairs of words, then circle where you think Augustus' portrait fits on a sliding scale.

I.....|.....|.....|.....|.....IO
HOT COOL

I.....|.....|.....|.....|.....IO
EXPRESSIVE REMOTE

I.....|.....|.....|.....|.....IO
DYNAMIC STATIC

I.....|.....|.....|.....|.....IO
IMPERFECT FLAWLESS

I.....|.....|.....|.....|.....IO
OLD YOUNG

I.....|.....|.....|.....|.....IO
REAL IDEAL

Do your marks tend to fall more to the right side than the left?
If so, then you've characterized Augustus' image as IDEALIZING.

His handsome features were perfected to an even greater beauty, becoming something like those of Apollo, god of reason and light who was also Augustus' personal patron. Like a god, Augustus seems immutable, unchanging, and deathless; in fact, his portraits never aged over his 41-year reign. His image—strong and serenely confident—was effective propaganda. It suggested his sure command and the harmony his reforms had brought to a war-weary populace.

Why do you think Augustus wanted his image to appear this way?

What qualities of character do you think he was promoting?

What aspects of his rule was he emphasizing?

What kind of connection was he attempting to make with the Roman people?

What impression does the portrait make on you?

Suppose Augustus had not chosen an idealized look and instead his portrait could best be described by words at the opposite end of the sliding scale. What impression might **that** image have made on the public?

Although Augustus' face has been idealized, these works are clearly a portrait of an individual. In images that were to serve as a symbol of his personal rule, Augustus **had** to be recognized as himself. The calm, steady gaze and broad forehead, the short, wavy hair that falls in comma-like curls, as well as the ears that stick out a little on top are all immediately recognizable even today.



Portrait of Augustus in profile, 1st century BC–1st century AD, onyx, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli



Gaius (Caligula), 1st century AD, Parian (?) marble, Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei, Baia

The next four emperors were members of the same Julio-Claudian family. Not all were related to Augustus by blood, yet all their portraits look a bit like his. This is no accident: the similarity associated these rulers with their predecessor and his authority.

Look for this “family resemblance” in the portraits of Caligula and Nero in this room. Write down a few facial features the Julio-Claudians share.



Nero, 1st century AD, marble, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts

LATER find some presidential portraits—which of them do you think are idealized?

2

Some of the most familiar figures from Greek and Roman mythology adorn the household objects in the next two rooms.

Look for the characters listed below. Indicate where you found them. Then explain what tipped you off to their identities—besides the label, of course! If you need help, check pages 8–10 for clues.

	on which object I found it	how I recognized it
a centaur	_____ on a wall painting _____	_____ half-horse body _____
a maenad	_____	_____
a satyr	_____	_____
Pan	_____	_____
Herakles	_____	_____
Dionysos	_____	_____
Aphrodite	_____	_____
Apollo	_____	_____
Zeus	_____	_____
Eros	_____	_____

Suppose you were decorating similar objects for your own use. What characters or stories would you choose?



Etienne-Maurice Falconet (French, 1716–1791), *Venus of the Doves* (detail), date unknown, marble, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection



Paul Manship (American, 1885–1966), *Diana and a Hound*, 1925, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mrs. Houghton P. Metcalf

Who's who

Here are the most important members of the Greek and Roman pantheon. They can often be identified by their **attributes**—things they wear, carry, or do that are specific to them.

The figures of ancient mythology are indeed immortal; they live on in the arts. All the sculptures illustrated on pages 8–10 come not from around the Bay of Naples but from the collections of the National Gallery of Art and were made in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries!

The twelve gods

Aphrodite (Roman name: Venus), Goddess of love.

Attributes: Eros (her son), slipping bodice or nudity, pearls, apples or quince, doves, swans

Apollo God of light and reason, healer of diseases (but also sender of the plague), also god of music and poetry and the patron of the muses (who represented the arts and sciences).

Attributes: lyre, bow, laurel wreath or branch

Ares (Roman name: Mars), God of war. Attributes: armor and weapons, vulture, dog

Artemis (Roman name: Diana), Goddess of the hunt, twin sister of Apollo, protector of women and children. Attributes: bow and arrows, the moon

Athena (Roman name: Minerva), Warrior goddess devoted to wisdom and crafts. Attributes: arms (helmet, shield, spear), snaky cloak or breastplate (aegis), owl

Dionysos (Roman name: Bacchus), God of wine and fertility, patron of the theater. Attributes: grapes and vines, ivy leaves, panther, drinking vessels, theatrical masks, maenads and satyrs, deerskin, usually shown as a young man or child

Eros (Roman name: Cupid), Young god of passion and romantic love, son of Aphrodite. Attributes: bow and arrows, wings

Hephaistos (Roman name: Vulcan), God of the forge, fire, and metalworking, husband of Aphrodite. Attributes: forge, hammer, tongs, fire

Hera (Roman name: Juno), Wife of Zeus, goddess of marriage. Attributes: pomegranate, peacock

Hermes (Roman name: Mercury), Messenger god and god of commerce, protector of travelers. Attributes: traveler's hat, cloak, winged sandals, snake-twined staff (caduceus)

Poseidon (Roman name: Neptune), God of the sea, horses, and earthquakes. Attributes: trident, horses, sea creatures

Zeus (Roman name: Jupiter), Supreme god, god of the sky. Attributes: thunderbolt, eagle, usually shown enthroned



Michel Anguier (French, 1612–1686), *Neptune with a Hippocamp*, model 1652, cast probably 1652/1680s, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Patrons' Permanent Fund



Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, possibly with Auguste Rodin (French, 1824–1887; French, 1840–1917), *The Abduction of Hippodamia* (*L'Enlèvement d'Hippodamie*), model 1877/1879, cast after 1877, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington, William Nelson Cromwell Fund



Florentine, *Farnese Hercules*, c. 1550/1599, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Stanley Mortimer

Other characters from myth

Centaurs Half-horse, half-man creatures best known for drunkenness, riotous behavior, and carrying off women

Herakles (Roman name: Hercules), The semidivine hero who accomplished twelve labors to gain immortality. He is known by his muscular body and club and by trophies he collected during his labors, including the skin of the Nemean lion.

Maenads (Roman name: Bacchantes), Ecstatic female followers of Dionysos seen in abandoned dance and carrying thyrsi (pinecone-topped staffs)

Pan Half-man, half-goat who played the seven-reeded pipes—an instrument of his own invention—while tending his flocks. He also had a mischievous side and was known to cause **pan-ic**.

Satyrs A race of goat-men with tails, pointed ears, and goat-like legs. Followers of Dionysos, they were inveterate chasers of nymphs (young female nature spirits).

When you go upstairs, continue to look for these gods and characters.

LATER track down the story behind the gods' attributes; many are related to a god's function or to a particular myth.

3

Design a dining room to impress a guest from Pompeii.

After you've climbed the steps, you'll look across a garden to a Roman dining room.

Roman dining rooms (triclinia) were not simply places to eat. They were rooms in which to entertain and to display one's wealth and cultivation; they were often the most lavishly decorated area of a house. Banqueting usually began in the late afternoon and went on well into the night. Diners reclined on couches for the evening. Along with elaborately prepared food, entertainment might include dancers, musicians, acrobats, poetry readings, and performances from popular plays.

Apollo was the patron of the muses—appropriate figures to inspire conversation during an evening in a triclinium. Some think it is a portrait of the emperor Nero. Do you think it looks like the portrait in the gallery downstairs? Nero and his entourage may have used this very room while traveling to imperial villas around Naples. Nero fancied himself a fine musician and actor, and he identified closely with Apollo. Anyone who attended a performance by Nero—who was cruel and quite mad—had better be lavish with his praise!



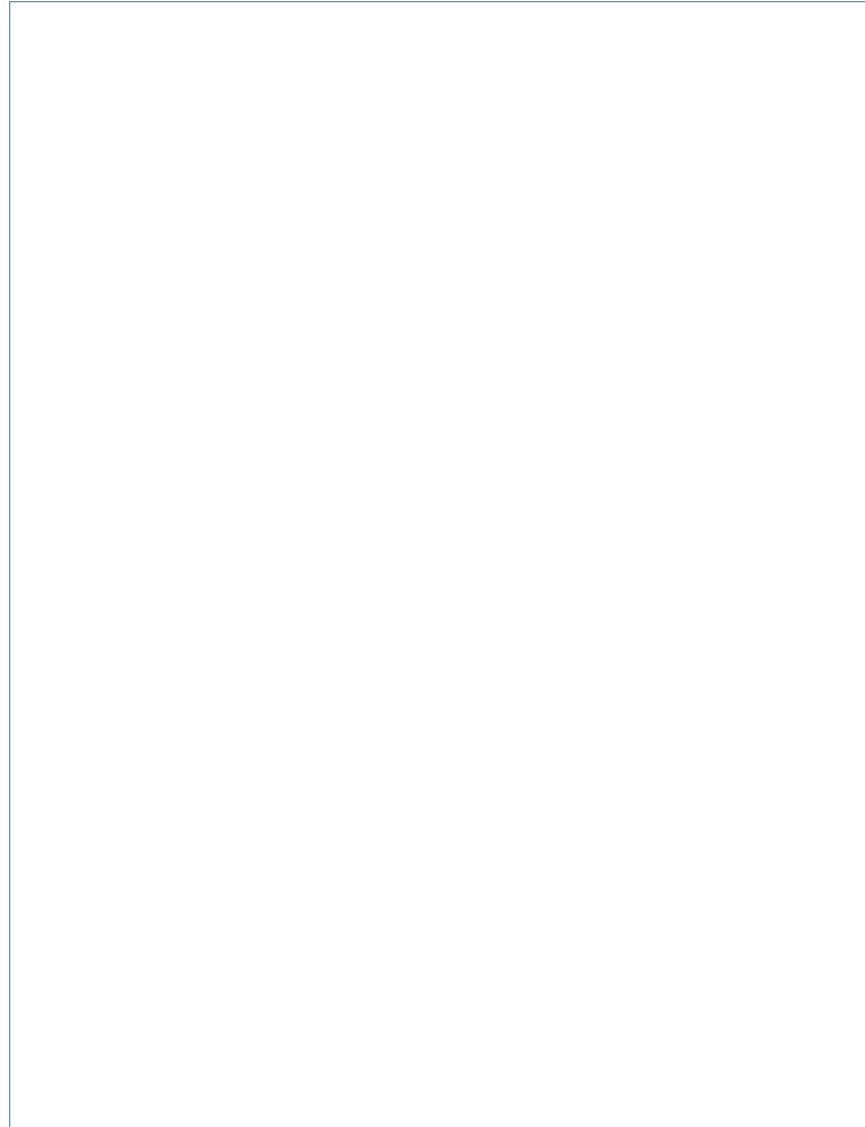
Apollo with muses Clio and Euterpe (detail), 1st century AD, fresco, Ufficio Scavi, Pompei

Decorate your own triclinium with a theme from ancient life or myth—one that would be appropriate to the room's function.

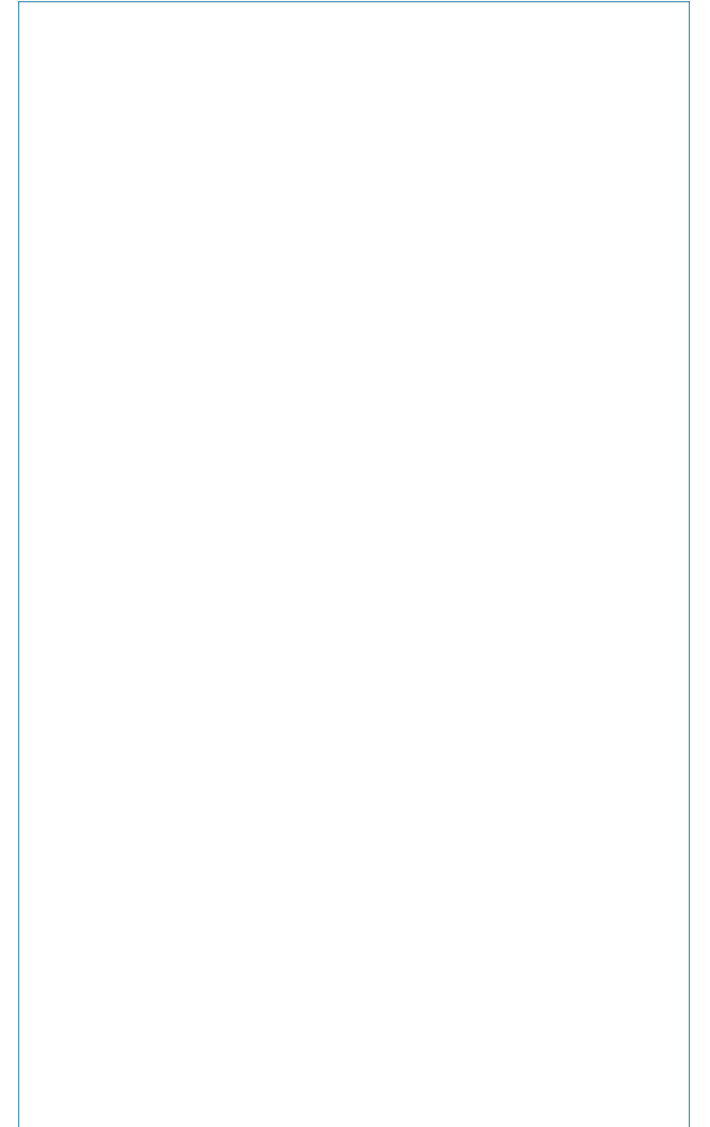
left wall



back wall



right wall



Rules for diners

Diners at one house were admonished by inscriptions around the wall:

1. Wash your feet, and a slave will dry them. A cloth covers your couch—keep it clean!
2. Do not flirt with another man's wife. Watch your language.
3. Don't fight or argue—otherwise, go home.

(From the House of the Moralist, Pompeii)

LATER imagine that you spent an evening in the dining room you designed. Describe the experience in a letter—the setting, guests, live entertainment, food and servers, vessels and silverware, and what the conversation was like.



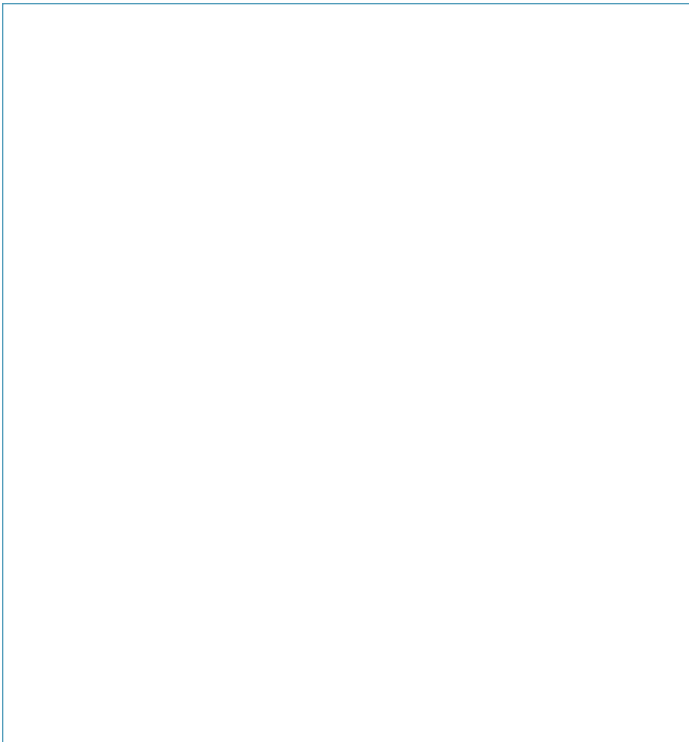
Patella with hunt scenes on handle and rim (detail), mid-1st century AD, silver with gilded details, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli

The exhibition continues past the room where the video is shown.

4

See two styles of ancient art.

Drawing is one of the best ways to really see and understand something. In the space below, sketch details of the faces and garments of these two goddesses. The idea is not to create a perfect likeness but to figure out how each artist approached his work.



LEFT: *Artemis (Diana)*, 1st century BC–1st century AD, Pentelic marble, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli; RIGHT: *Aphrodite*, probably early 1st century AD, Pentelic marble, Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei, Baia

Did you know?

The linear, more geometric look of Artemis and the three-dimensional and windblown appearance of Aphrodite characterize two styles of Greek sculpture: ARCHAIC and CLASSICAL. Both were admired, adopted, and adapted by the Romans. The appreciation of Greek culture and art became something of a status symbol.



Detail of Artemis (Diana)

Once you've completed your sketches, break into groups to discuss these questions:

Was one statue easier to draw?

How effective were lines alone in capturing Artemis or Aphrodite?

Were you tempted to use light and shadow more for one than the other?

Did you find more repeating patterns on one statue than on the other? What about more regular geometric shapes?

An archaic Artemis

Artemis was the Greek goddess of the hunt and twin sister of Apollo. You can recognize her by the quiver she wears. This statue was probably made in the first century AD, but it has the look of Greek statues made six hundred years earlier in what we call the archaic period.

Archaic works emphasized stylized, decorative patterns.

Which of the descriptions below do you think would characterize an archaic statue? Which do you see—or don't see—on **this** Artemis?

- her fixed smile mirrors curves in her brows and almond eyes
- her pose is natural and lifelike
- she turns to one side
- the curls of her hair, shaped like little snails, make a regular pattern
- she looks lively and energetic, but her stride is a little stiff and does not really shift her body
- we get a good sense of her body through her dress
- her dress fans out in regular folds—and they seem unaffected by gravity!

A classical Aphrodite

This statue depicts Aphrodite, goddess of love. The partly transparent dress slipping off her shoulder is a dead giveaway. Like Artemis, she must be a Roman creation of the first century AD made in a much earlier style—this time, a more naturalistic, classical style like that of sculptures made in Athens in the late fifth century BC. Sculptors at that time especially loved the look of windblown drapery, which reveals the body beneath.

Classical styles express harmony and balance, a timeless beauty. What looks classical about this Aphrodite?

What does not?

- her face is calm and serene, but without much expression
- she distributes her weight in a natural way
- she appears agitated
- her dress looks as if the wind is blowing it
- drapery falls naturally over her body and reveals it
- her pose is a little stiff and awkward
- regular patterns appear in her hair and dress

What characteristics does the sculpture of Aphrodite share with the portrait of Augustus?

What do you think attracted Roman patrons to works in the archaic style?



Detail of Aphrodite

Now, you decide: classical or archaic? Find these other sculptures and discuss with your classmates which style you think the works exhibit and why.

TOP: Tray-bearing kouros (youth) or Apollo (detail), 1st century BC–1st century AD, bronze, Ufficio Scavi, Pompei; *Head of the Athena Lemnia* (detail), probably early 1st century AD, Parian marble, Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei, Baia; BOTTOM: *Bust of a kouros (youth) or Apollo* (detail), 1st century BC, bronze, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli; *Statue of a young man* (detail), perhaps 1st century BC, marble, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli



If you have time, visit the Sculpture Galleries in the West Building, where you'll see the long life of these ancient styles. The Renaissance rediscovered the classical style, which influenced all the arts in later centuries. But you'll notice that in the early twentieth century, some artists were drawn more to the streamlined look of archaic works.

5

An eyewitness account

Move into the final section of the exhibition, called **Rediscovery**.

When Mount Vesuvius erupted, Pliny the Younger (age 17) was staying with his uncle, who was also named Pliny. The latter was a noted writer on natural history as well as commander of the fleet in nearby Misenum. Pliny the Elder sailed toward the eruption to evacuate people and get a firsthand look. You could say he was killed by curiosity—overcome by gases, he died on the beach at Stabiae.

Many years later Pliny the Younger wrote an account of the disaster in letters (*Epistles*) to his friend, the historian Tacitus. Here are a few excerpts.

On August 24, at about the seventh hour [early afternoon] my mother pointed out to him [the elder Pliny] a cloud that had just appeared. This cloud was unusual in appearance and exceptionally large. . . . The general appearance and shape of the cloud were those of an umbrella pine.



Pierre-Jacques Volaire (French, 1729–1802), *The Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius* (detail), 1777, oil on canvas, North Carolina Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the Alcy C. Kendrick Bequest and from the State of North Carolina, by exchange

My uncle decided to go down to the shore and investigate on the spot the possibility of any escape by sea, but he found the waves still wild and dangerous. A sheet was spread on the ground for him to lie down, and he repeatedly asked for cold water to drink. Then the flames and smell of sulfur which gave warning of the approaching fire drove the others to take flight and roused him to stand up. He stood leaning on two slaves and then suddenly collapsed. . . . When daylight returned on the 26th—two days after the last day he had seen—his body was found intact and uninjured, still fully clothed and looking more like sleep than death.

We experienced many amazing and terrifying things. For the carts . . . were being carried off in different directions, even though the ground was level, and they didn't stay in the same place even when they had been wedged with stones. Also we saw the sea dragged back into itself and then apparently driven back by the shaking of the earth. . . . many sea creatures were stranded on the dry sand. In the other direction a terrible black cloud, split by jagged and quivering bursts of fiery air, gaped open to reveal tall columns of flame. They were like lightning bolts, but even bigger.

Some prayed for death because they were afraid of dying. Many of them raised their hands to the gods in supplication, but even more took this disaster as a sign that the gods were no more and the world had been overtaken by an endless night.

[A]shes began to fall again, this time in heavy showers. We rose from time to time and shook them off, otherwise we should have been buried and crushed beneath their weight. I could boast that not a groan or cry of fear escaped me in these perils, had I not derived some poor consolation in my mortal lot from the belief that the whole world was dying with me and I with it.

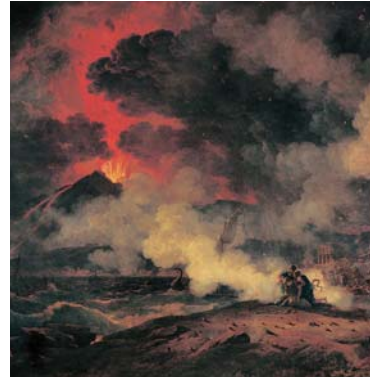
At last the darkness thinned and dispersed into smoke or cloud; then there was genuine daylight, and the sun actually shone out, but yellowish as it is during an eclipse. We were terrified to see everything hanged, buried deep in ashes like snowdrifts.

—Pliny the Younger, *Epistles*

Another major eruption occurred in 1631, and Vesuvius erupted with some frequency in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though with much less violence. Paintings of eruptions were enormously popular with tourists, whether they were contemporary views or imaginative reconstructions of the events of AD 79.

Compare the view by Valenciennes, which shows Pliny collapsing at Stabiae, to the one by Volaire, set in the eighteenth century. What visual sources could Valenciennes call on, in addition to Pliny's account? What elements of Pliny's account can be seen equally in Volaire's scene painted some 1,700 years later?

LATER look for influences of the Greek and Roman styles and forms you have seen in this exhibition in your own twenty-first-century world.



Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes (French, 1750–1819), *Eruption of Vesuvius (detail)*, 1813, oil on canvas, Musée des Augustins, Toulouse

6

Facts (are often hard to pin down!)

Archaeology involves a lot more than pulling buried remains from the ground. A lot of reasoning is required to make sense of discoveries. As you leave the exhibition, think through these two questions, which are less straightforward than they might first appear.



Michele Amodio (Italian, 1850–1880), *Plaster cast of a fallen man with vessel*, c. 1870, albumen print, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

How many people lived in Pompeii?

This question has bedeviled archaeologists. The figure has ranged from 6,000 to 30,000! Most scholars now think about 12,000 people lived inside Pompeii’s city walls, with a similar number living outside of them. Many different methods have been used to produce estimates. For

example, one counted the number of seats (20,000) in Pompeii’s amphitheater—but of course not everyone attended at once and we know that people from other towns traveled to Pompeii for events too.

Here are some other methods. Consider their strengths and weaknesses.

- figuring an average density across the town's physical extent
- figuring an average number of people per house
- counting the beds, rooms, or latrines
- looking at data from more recent periods of history

Your turn: Can you think of other methods? What information would give an accurate number of people in **your** house? Or **your** town? Would archaeologists in the future be able to detect that kind of evidence?

When did the eruption happen?

You will usually read that the eruption started on August 24, AD 79. The year is certainly right. The month, the season . . . well, there is some room for discussion about that.

Where did the date August 24 come from? Pliny the Younger specified a date in a letter to Tacitus (read excerpts on pages 19 and 20). The letter has come down to us via several manuscripts. Some of those give that date of August 24, but there are about a dozen other variations. (Such discrepancies are found in almost all ancient texts. Since they were all copied out by hand at different times, errors and misinterpretations were almost inevitable.)

Alternate dates include **October 30, November 1, and November 23**. These put the eruption in the fall. What types of archaeological evidence could be indicative of the season?

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.

The exhibition in Washington is made possible by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

It is also made possible by Mr. and Mrs. Joe L. Allbritton.

Bank of America is proud to be the national sponsor.

The exhibition in Washington is also supported by The Charles Engelhard Foundation and by Mary and Michael Jaharis.

Additional funding in Washington is provided by Robert and Arlene Kogod, the John J. Medveckis Foundation, and the Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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Produced by the division of education and the publishing office,
National Gallery of Art.

The works of art from Italian collections were lent to the exhibition under the authorization of the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.