

Beyond the Vesuvius Barrier: Colors and Continuities in Ancient Roman Painting

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ROMA: LA PITTURA DI UN IMPERO, SCUDERIE DEL QUIRINALE, ROME, 24 SEPTEMBER 2009–17 JANUARY 2010, curated by Eugenio La Rocca, Serena Ensoli, Stefano Tortorella, and Massimiliano Papini.

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In the exhibition *Roma: La Pittura di un Impero*, the Scuderie del Quirinale has mounted a display of more than 100 paintings from four centuries of artistic production, drawing in large part upon the resources of the National Archaeological Museums of Rome and Naples, as well as the Vatican and six additional European museums. The significance of “empire,” as curator Eugenio La Rocca explains in his press release, should be understood with reference to Roman society during the Imperial period rather than to the phenomenon of imperial power. Proposing to reveal the central importance of painting throughout Roman society, the curators want not only to stress its independence and originality over and against the too-common imputation of dependence upon Greek artistry but also to reveal surprising continuity with pictorial culture from the Renaissance onward. Brought forth in celebration of the decennial anniversary of this special exhibition space housed in a remodeled 18th-century building—originally constructed as a carriage house for the nearby Palazzo del Quirinale, which was once a papal residence

and is now home to the president of the Italian Republic—the exhibition owes its sponsorship to the president, Giorgio Napolitano, and its organization to the Azienda Speciale Palexpo and Mondomostre in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Culture and the Superintendencies of Rome and Naples.

Antiquity was colorful. La Rocca faults the superior durability of marble sculpture, with its vanished and hence unacknowledged colorings, for sustaining false impressions of white as the dominant color of ancient art. Because this seeming purity so appealed to the classicizing bias that dominated Renaissance and 18th-century aesthetics, popular views of ancient art have always been slanted toward sculpture to the disadvantage of painting. The nature of written testimony has much to do with this disequilibrium. Although the names of master Greek artists, both sculptors and painters, were household knowledge in antiquity, the works of the sculptors can be conjecturally recognized in Roman copies, whereas their counterparts in painting have no reliable traces. Among the Romans, La Rocca reminds us, we know the names of only two painters, both mentioned by Pliny the Elder in the art historical chapters of his *Natural History* (53.118–20): Studius, a painter of the Augustan period, and Famulus, who worked in Nero’s Golden House. Finally, our knowledge of actual painting is inevitably limited by the repertoire of pictorial survivals, the preponderance of which have emerged from the ongoing excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum and other Campanian sites buried by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 C.E. But, as La Rocca notes, the products of this single

area so abruptly destroyed are not sufficient for understanding the development of painting throughout the Roman world. Consequently, the exhibition has two main aims: (1) to extend its reach beyond the accidental terminus of 79 into later moments of the empire, and (2) to consider thematic and stylistic continuities of painting while highlighting historically grounded influences on pictorial evolution (e.g., the close relationship of painting and politics and the forms of rapport between artists and patrons).

With a resurgence that can be traced back to the 1979 bimillennial anniversary of the Vesuvian cataclysm, exhibitions that focus on affected sites in Campania and their artworks have become increasingly frequent and prove to be perennially popular. In 2003, the international traveling exhibition *Storie da un'eruzione: Pompei, Ercolano, Oplontis*, which originated in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, focused largely on material evidence for the lives and fates of the Campanian cities' unfortunate inhabitants; it also facilitated the debut of two stunning discoveries from recent excavations: Villa 6 at Terzigno and a hospitium (inn) at Moregine.¹ Most recently, in 2007, the National Archaeological Museum of the Palazzo Massimo in Rome hosted *Rosso Pompeiano: La decorazione pittorica nelle collezioni del Museo di Napoli e a Pompei*, an exhibition accompanied by a lavish catalogue combining full pictorial coverage with scholarly essays.² As the title might suggest, the almost exclusive dedication of this exhibition to items from Naples gave prominence to mythological paintings. Notwithstanding the overlapping of a few minor images with *Rosso Pompeiano*, two differences of the current exhibition are its longer chronological extension and its display of varied genres, including large paratactic wall segments from Roman museums, several topical subjects, and a selection of ancient portraits featuring some mummy portraits from Egypt's Fayum area.

Entering on the ground floor, visitors may orient themselves with a timeline that encompasses the show's chronological reach from 179 B.C.E., when Flaminius conquered

Philip V of Macedon and when Ennius was writing, to Constantine's foundation of the city of Constantinople in 330 C.E. This timeline coordinates the images on display with historical events, literary highlights, and other significant artistic monuments. Immediately at the turn of the spiral ramp leading to the exhibition galleries, visitors, looking upward, confront two wall segments from the columbarium of the Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome.³ In this prefatory position, these wall segments, comprising several registers of niches and painted images, are thematically selected to serve as a microcosm of both the social reach and the artistic topics of the exhibition. Because they are commonly associated with the burials of freedpersons (former slaves), columbaria represent painting across class boundaries, while the finely rendered sacral-idyllic landscapes and the abundant birds and fruits that comprise the predominant motifs of these paintings prefigure the landscapes and still-life subjects seen on a grander scale along the subsequent route of the show. Although the viewer, at a remove of several feet, would need keen eyesight to make out fine stylistic distinctions, the audio guide suggests a tripartite division of the workmanship, crediting the landscape artists with finely detailed renditions in swift, sure strokes, the painter of birds and still-life motifs with a skillful molding of forms by means of dense shading and attention to detail, but noting, by contrast, the simpler linear outlines employed by the artist of the mythological vignettes. Although this description is stylistically accurate, viewers must turn to the catalogue to see the painting of Hercules rescuing Prometheus,⁴ which, along with other mythological subjects, appears on a third columbarium wall segment currently displayed in the Palazzo Massimo rather than in the exhibition.

The exhibition space of the Scuderie, located on two upper stories, offers a sequence of spacious long halls, whose almost uninterrupted interconnection fosters the illumination of continuities, although the present varied installation layouts give a distinctly different appearance to each. The exhibition divides thematically into two parts. The first

¹ Guzzo 2003, 86–9, figs. 1–4 (Terzigno, Villa 6); 169–77, figs. 1–6 (Moregine); Bergman 2006, 498.

² Nava et al. 2007.

³ La Rocca et al. 2009, 151–55, 264, no. I.1 (Rome,

Museo Nazionale Romano, Walls C, F).

⁴ La Rocca et al. 2009, 153, 264–65, no. I.1 (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Colombario di Villa Doria Pamphili, Wall B).

floor, labeled as “Decorative Systems,” shows an array of large panel segments, several of which occupy entire walls, in combination with some complementary small subjects. On the floor above, a variety of panels in different sizes are displayed according to significant categories: mythological subjects, landscapes, scenes of daily life, still lifes, and portraits. All the galleries are darkened but with no disadvantage to viewing, since the paintings, cleverly illuminated from behind, stand out clearly against glowing penumbras that offer less peril to their colors than would direct frontal illumination. Within the galleries, only the wall on one side displays paintings; the other unfolds the exhibition narrative through wall panels containing large paragraphs, in both Italian and English, that coordinate the painted subjects with historical events. This text plays off a traditional chronology of stylistic evolution against some indications of the social contexts for the images. A supplementary and more detailed stylistic narrative available on the audio guide is the vehicle for explanation of the aesthetic and thematic continuities that the exhibition aims to dramatize. In view of the absence of individual explanatory placards for each painting, the audio guide is absolutely necessary for a full appreciation of what the exhibition curators have set out to communicate. But it must be rented for an additional €3.50 above the €10 admission fee.

The sequence of paintings and text panels on the first floor tells a story of historical development in accordance with the conventional vocabulary of the four Pompeian styles formulated by the 19th-century German art historian August Mau,⁵ which encompass the city’s painting from its apparent beginnings to the inevitable terminus of 79 C.E. In this exhibition, the phase best represented is the so-called Third Style, which flourished during the Augustan to Julio-Claudian years of 30 B.C.E. to ca. 30 C.E.; this concentration may have been chosen not only because of the available material but also for its emphasis on landscape

subjects, a major thematic interest of the show. The examples displayed in galleries 1–4 are mostly paratactic segments: the customary decorations of corridors and porticoes, whose spaces the user experiences while moving through them.⁶ Only a small fragment from a Pompeian house⁷ represents Mau’s initial type of decoration to which he gave the name “incrustation,” on account of its imitating marble veneers with varicolored patterns and veining, a style found not merely in Italy but also throughout the Mediterranean world. Here given the name “constructed style,” it is more familiarly called First Style or, more explicitly, Masonry Style.⁸

The remainder of gallery 1 holds examples from the repertoire of the Second Style, whose keynote is the depiction of architectural elements with a semblance of perspectival illusion. Such a change is immediately apparent in the trompe l’oeil rendering of drafted margin masonry on a segment of orthostate wall from Solunto adorned with garlands, fascia, and a comic mask.⁹ Figments of illusionistic projection appear in the herm figure, garland, and shuttered pinakes of a wall segment from the House of the Cryptoporticus. An even more intriguing feature is its adventitious graffiti: a cluster of incised line sketches at the centers of both orthostate panels presents lively scenes of hunters on horseback or on foot combating formidably large beasts.¹⁰ Next, visitors arrive at two panels from the Vatican’s *Odyssey* landscapes,¹¹ a series—originally found in a house on the Esquiline Hill in Rome—depicting adventures Ulysses recounted at the court of the Phaeacians in books 9–12 of Homer’s *Odyssey*. These first and most picturesque panels of the series show the rocky harbor and the mountainous country of the cannibal Lastrygonians who made short work of the majority of Ulysses’ ships. Notwithstanding that the original viewers of these paintings would have seen them above eye level, at the top of a paneled porticus wall—the same position in which visitors ordinarily view them in the

⁵Mau 1902, 456–70.

⁶This observation was influentially first put forward by Scagliarini-Corlaità 1974–1976.

⁷La Rocca et al. 2009, 156, 265, no. I.2 (Pompeii, Scavi Archeologici, Depositi della Soprintendenza, inv. no. 87283).

⁸Laidlaw 1985.

⁹La Rocca et al. 2009, 157, 266, no. I.3 (Palermo,

Museo Archeologico Regionale “Antonio Salinas,” inv. no. 2300).

¹⁰La Rocca et al. 2009, 158, 266, no. I.4 (Pompeii, Scavi Archeologici, Depositi della Soprintendenza, inv. no. 59469B).

¹¹La Rocca et al. 2009, 160, 268–69, no. I.6 (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Sala delle Nozze Aldobrandini, inv. no. 41016).

Vatican Museums—the eye-level installation here is a special treat, allowing clear perception of such faint background details as the winds that drive Ulysses’ fleet from its homeward course and the graded recession of the landscape in aerial perspective, with diminished figures on the mountainside heaving boulders at the Greeks. A complementary small panel lent by the British Museum enlarges upon the mythology of Ulysses. In this Fourth Style seascape, the hero’s ship passes the cliffs of the Sirens, who are shown here with chunky turkeylike bodies on gawky birds’ legs (fig. 1).¹² The large wall segments comprise what the audio guide’s stylistic narrative calls Second Style IIa. But here, continuity collapses when the wall text mentions a subsequent phase IIIb, consisting of large-scale architectonic illusion, which is not represented in the exhibition, and this lacuna is thus left to the visitor’s imagination to supply.

As mentioned above, the audio guide best highlights what the curators want visitors to see in the paintings. Figure drawing, for example, is often explained as the work of multiple hands, as in the *Odyssey* landscapes, where the strongly molded physiques of the hostile giants in the foreground contrast with middle- and background figures of a sketchier, more elongated type. As landscapes change from substantial perspective renditions to vignettes against white backgrounds, the audio guide directs viewers to notice the quick sketch technique that populates shrines, groves, and villas with an abundance of slender figures engaged in activities such as flock tending, votive homage, or just hanging out. Additionally, the guide asks us to understand that the distribution of the figures exhibits a conception of spatiality markedly different from the logically structured perspectival recession developed by Renaissance painters. Reconciling these landscapes with what Vitruvius calls *ars topararia*, La Rocca suggests that elements from real environments were transformed into landscapes of fantasy.¹³

The next gallery places us squarely within the Augustan milieu. Here, the transition to the



Fig. 1. Roman fresco panel of Ulysses and the Sirens, detached from a black wall, probably at Pompeii, 34.0 x 33.5 cm, ca. 50–79 C.E. (Fourth Style). London, British Museum, inv. no. 1867.0508.1354 (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

stage of interior decoration wherein large-scale illusion flattens into finely articulated details on a surface is marked by a polemical citation from Vitruvius (*De arch.* 7.5.2), who censures the taste of present-day patrons and painters in abandoning the realistic vocabulary of painting for what he calls “monstrosities incapable of existence.” Such impossible figures appear in the slender caryatid supports that articulate sequential panels of White Corridor F (fig. 2) and Black Room C of Rome’s Villa Farnesina,¹⁴ a luxurious Tiberside establishment discovered in 1879 in the course of digging for flood control along the river’s banks. In the White Corridor, the caryatids support a frieze zone featuring a series of delicately sketched landscape panels. Positioned in a hexagonally configured alcove between white and black wall segments is a full reassemblage of the three large vignette landscape panels from another category of villa, the exurban so-called Villa of Agrippa Postumus, located on the slopes of Vesuvius near present-day Boscotrecase,¹⁵ which was discovered during the construction of the Cir-

¹² La Rocca et al. 2009, 162, 269–70, no. I.7 (London, British Museum, inv. no. 1867, 0508.1354).

¹³ For further discussion of spatiality in Roman landscape painting, see La Rocca 2009.

¹⁴ La Rocca et al. 2009, 168–79, 272–74, nos. I.11, I.12 (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massi-

mo, inv. nos. 1232, 1233 F1-F2 north wall of Corridor F; inv. no. 180 C5 south wall of Triclinium C).

¹⁵ La Rocca et al. 2009, 180–85, 275–76, no. I.13 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. nos. 147501–147505).

cumvesuviana railroad. In its original setting, this room stood in a line of three overlooking the Neapolitan gulf. Although the current installation is hexagonal rather than rectangular, as the chamber would originally have been, this coherent assemblage nonetheless presents the exhibition's best approximation of a fully decorated spatial surrounding.

The final gallery of the sequence moves visitors abruptly into an eclectic installation combining works of Augustan, Julio-Claudian, and Flavian dates. Augustan is embodied in the *Aldobrandini Wedding*,¹⁶ one of the most celebrated and most influential of the paintings found during the Renaissance. Another example of the Third Style, brought from the restoration workrooms of Pompeii, is of particular interest, since it was reassembled from fragments found in a plaster dump, which were most likely discarded because of earthquake damage. Originally, this painting belonged to the decoration of a spacious room in the House of the Golden Bracelet,¹⁷ one of the multistoried terraced houses at Pompeii's western wall, which enjoyed a view of the gulf and whose waters once washed at their garden walls. Even now, examples of paintings from three stylistic periods are visible in its labyrinthine rooms connected by interior staircases. Although a grandiose entrance room on the upper floor would have housed this composition, some of its details coincide in drawing and execution with the best known salvage—the complex of mosaics and garden paintings from the outdoor triclinium on the lowest floor of the building.¹⁸ A key example in our stylistic narrative, the painting represents a stage of transition when glimpses into exterior prospects had begun to pierce the closed, two-dimensional format of Third Style walls: here, a colonnaded hemicycle seems to reach beyond the wall surface into undefined space. Exquisitely slender columns—some painted in imitation of *opus sectile*, others with delicate floral patterns—frame this aedicula, aptly illustrating for viewers the intricacies of what Mau called the Ornamental Style.¹⁹

Despite this transitional marker, the architecturally complex Fourth Style that comprises



Fig. 2. Roman fresco segments from the gardens of the Villa Farnesina, Rome (Trastevere), north wall of Corridor F, 182 x 148 cm and 182 x 610 cm, before 30 B.C.E. (Second Style, final phase). Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, inv. nos. 1232, 1233 (courtesy Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali-Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma).

more than half of our surviving Pompeian decorations might have been given more space in this exhibition. Here, its chief presence is the monumental Telephus panel from the so-called Basilica at Herculaneum²⁰ that serves as the poster icon for the exhibition (fig. 3). This is an important painting, whose discovery—along with its companion pieces (Theseus, Achilles, and Olympus)—close to the outset of 18th-century excavations, might be given credit for the continuation of the project owing to the discoverers' exuberant comparison of the authoritatively sculptural quality of its figures with the stylistic mastery of Raphael. Given this collocation of youthful heroes, the building, which recent research has identified as an Augusteum, might possibly have fulfilled the role of a gymnasium, which in ancient cities was as much a place for intellectual activities, such as lectures and philosophical conversations, as for athletic training.

¹⁶ La Rocca et al. 2009, 180–85, 280, no. II.1 (Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. no. 69631).

¹⁷ La Rocca et al. 2009, 186–89, 276–77, no. I.14 (Pompeii, Scavi Archeologici, Depositi della Soprintendenza, inv. no. 86075).

¹⁸ Jashemski 1993, 348–58; di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007, 326–27.

¹⁹ Mau 1902, 464–66.

²⁰ La Rocca et al. 2009, 200–1, no. II.2 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 9008).



Fig. 3. Roman fresco of Hercules and Telephus, from the so-called Basilica (Augusteum), Herculaneum, 218 x 182 cm, ca. 50–79 C.E. (Fourth Style). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 9008 (courtesy Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei).

As visitors enter the initial second-floor gallery, which is devoted to mythological subject matter, they find the chronological narrative carried over by a summary explanation of the kinds of ornamentation characteristic of Third and Fourth Style wall designs. The pieces on display belonged to such decorative wall contexts before their removal by 18th-century excavators intent on producing treasures for the collections of the Bourbon kings of Naples. This decontextualization contrasts sharply with 20th-century excavation practices, as exemplified by the Boscotrecase Red Room landscapes,²¹ the preservation of whose entire decorative ensemble has enabled the reconstruction in gallery 4. Thus, the visitor's walk through these reconstituted Roman rooms replays the experience of seeing these same wall paintings in their usual housing in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. Their display in the current venue is welcome, however,

²¹Supra n. 16.

²²La Rocca et al. 2009, 202, 204, 206.

²³Cited in La Rocca et al. 2009, 288, no. II.13.

²⁴La Rocca et al. 2009, 216, 288–89, no. II.13 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 9295).

because the Naples galleries have been closed for many years for building renovation.

In the case of mythological painting, contextualization is most acutely needed to aid viewers in imagining how such images were positioned within the hierarchies of subjects that made up the complex decoration of a room with so-called picture-gallery walls. The 19th-century watercolors of full wall schemes reproduced in the catalogue show the symmetrical design of such multi-component ensembles²² and thus reveal that the three mythological panels had been framed within Third Style wall schemes, with their flattened perspective and elaborate colorful ornamentation. Four dancing maenads against black backgrounds, whose lightness and grace Winckelmann famously celebrated,²³ were actually at the centers of black-colored panels in a Third Style wall.²⁴ Still-life images—largely devoted to provisions for the table—and landscape vignettes were most commonly found in the frieze zones bordering the upper portions of aediculae. Floating figures, such as the Zephyr bearing Venus against a red background (fig. 4), were centerpieces for the elaborately bordered side panels that commonly flanked the aediculae of Fourth Style walls.

Two later mythological interpretations in lunettes complete this selection. The first, from a third-century C.E. funerary context on the Via Ostiense, is an allegorical rendering of Prometheus contemplating his creation of a doll-like figure representing humankind while Athena stands ready to endow the inert figure with intellect.²⁵ The second, a fourth-century C.E. image of Perseus and Andromeda from a nymphaeum along the Via del Teatro di Marcello,²⁶ attests the continuity of mythological culture along more traditional lines.

The heading “Otium Space” in gallery 7 introduces three pictures with a statement in the wall panel text about the inseparability of public and private life in the domestic sphere, yet it immediately separates them in a definition of *otium* (leisure or freedom from occupation) that paradoxically pits the nobler pastime of philosophical study against the

²⁵La Rocca et al. 2009, 221, 291, no. II.17 (Rome, Museo della Via Ostiense).

²⁶La Rocca et al. 2009, 291–92, no. II.18 (Rome, Antiquarium Comunale, inv. no. 4478).

“bodily and spiritual pleasures” of the bedroom and the banquet. That the representative bedroom scene²⁷ is only mildly erotic is probably just as well, considering the large numbers of elementary school children who troop through the galleries. The banqueting representation, brilliantly chosen despite its slightly scrappy state of preservation, shows an outdoor dining area shielded by curtains and populated by seated and reclining women wearing festive garlands.²⁸ One pours perfume and another plays the double pipes, while two slave attendants look on curiously from behind the curtain. The catalogue entry informs us that this virtually unknown painting was paired with a banquet scene of mixed male and female company, which in turn has a close counterpart in the House of the Chaste Lovers. Discussing these better-known examples, Dunbabin proposes that they “have only a limited relationship to actual Roman dining practices, but instead conjure up a very different set of associations which look back to the Hellenistic world.”²⁹ Likewise, the catalogue description, stating that Roman women did not dine alone, places the exclusively feminine scene within a Greek cultural context, perhaps reflecting a circle devoted to the poetry of Sappho. But one should not forget the many exclusively feminine rituals of the Roman calendar that did involve both music and drinking without male company, especially the mysteriously secretive ceremony of the *Bona Dea*.

The room devoted to daily life presents a sampling of painted commercial and ritual activities. Two examples from Pompeian civic life are the well-known bread distribution stall³⁰ and the segment of the forum frieze from the *Praedia Juliae Felicis* that shows three bystanders reading notices attached to equestrian statues in the forum colonnade,³¹ providing evidence both for citizen literacy and for the decoration of the forum space. An interesting novelty here is a virtually unknown portion of a frieze excavated from the upper story of the hospitium at Moregine, depicting a sacrifice attended by a large congregation outside a wall.³²

²⁷ La Rocca et al. 2009, 229, 294, no. IV.1 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 110569).

²⁸ La Rocca et al. 2009, 230, 295, no. IV.2 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 9016).

²⁹ Dunbabin 2003, 52.

³⁰ La Rocca et al. 2009, 232, 296, no. IV.4 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 9068).



Fig. 4. Roman fresco fragment of Zephyr and Venus, from the Casa del Naviglio, Pompeii, 73.0 x 67.5 x 6.0 cm, ca. 54–68 C.E. (Neronian, Fourth Style). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 8830 (courtesy Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei).

Aspects of this lively scene intimate journalistic authenticity—the disorderly crowding of the spectators, the vivacity of their hand and arm gestures, and the evidence of social hierarchy in the differentiated widths of the purple stripes bordering their white tunics and togas. Because the animals being offered—a sow, a bovine (probably a cow), and a ram—belong to the high-profile *suovetaurilia*, which is normally connected with performances *pro populo* such as purifications of the citizen body or army, this ceremony portends significance. Perhaps, as the catalogue entry proposes, it is a dedication that has particular meaning for the owner of the inn.

From the Vatican Museums comes a small white-ground panel recovered from the Ostian necropolis of the Via Laurentina,³³ which depicts the loading of a small wooden cargo ship, identified by inscription as the *Isis Gimniana*. The steersman, Farnaces, and the owner,

³¹ La Rocca et al. 2009, 233, 296–97, no. IV.3 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 9071).

³² La Rocca et al. 2009, 234, 298, no. IV.6 (Pompeii, Scavi Archeologici, Depositi della Soprintendenza, inv. no. 8193).

³³ La Rocca et al. 2009, 237, 300, no. IV.9 (Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, inv. no. 79638).

Abscantius, are also identified. A measuring device held by a young slave indicates that the cargo sacks contain grain. With their hierarchical clothing and rigid postures, these personages resemble the lineup of grain workers in the second-century black-and-white mosaic of Ostia's Hall of the Grain Measurers³⁴ and complement this work as testimony to the economic function of Ostia and its inhabitants' pride in their occupations.

The two galleries devoted to portraiture, representing a variety of times, locations, and techniques, are among the exhibition's highlights. Two well-known Pompeian faces—the mosaic portrait of a well-adorned, mature woman from a domestic tablinum pavement³⁵ and that Pompeian poster couple, Terentius Nero and his wife³⁶—are shown in proximity with so-called Fayum portraits that attest the cultural hybridization of Egyptian mummification with Graeco-Roman awareness of individuality through naturalistic representation—if these beautiful, slightly haunted-looking faces can indeed be considered naturalistic. Both encaustic and tempera techniques are represented in a sequence of examples ranging from the Neronian period of the mid first century through the third century (fig. 5), whose changing hair styles reflect those of contemporaneous sculpted portraiture and thus bear witness to their cultural connection with Rome.³⁷ But these large and semipublic faces are complemented in the exhibition by the less-publicized genre of miniature portraits painted on glass, some overlaid with gold leaf. Two masculine faces separated by three centuries present a striking instance of continuity in representational customs: the earlier comes from Pompeii,³⁸ the later is from an unknown third-century context and depicts an elderly gentleman,³⁹ the plasticity and exactitude of whose facial contours rival those of the life-sized mummy portraits. No bedroom or banquet scene speaks quite so revealingly of the intimacy of personal presence within a domestic context.

³⁴ Clarke 1979, 43–4, figs. 53, 54.

³⁵ La Rocca et al. 2009, 254, 302, no. VI.1 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 124666).

³⁶ La Rocca et al. 2009, 255, 303, no. VI.2 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 9058).

³⁷ La Rocca et al. 2009, 246–57, 304–8, nos. VI.4, VI.15; see 256, 308, no. VI.14 (Zurich, Archäologische



Fig. 5. Roman mummy portrait of a woman in tempera on wooden panel, from er-Rubayat, Egypt, 31 x 17 cm, ca. 210–240 C.E. Zurich, Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zurich, inv. no. 3801 (S. Hertig; courtesy Archäologische Sammlung der Universität Zurich).

As has become customary in recent years, the monumental exhibition catalogue is the real blockbuster, and it quite outdoes the show itself, both visually and in its informational and interpretive content. Making up the first section of the volume, the collection of 10 essays by La Rocca, his fellow curators, and six additional scholars expands the conceptual dimensions of the exhibition with genre-based thematic explorations on such topics as daily life, landscape, theatricality, and late antiq-

Sammlung der Universität, inv. no. 3801) for fig. 5.

³⁸ La Rocca et al. 2009, 245, 303, no. VI.3 (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 132424).

³⁹ La Rocca et al. 2009, 258, 309, no. VI.16 (Arezzo, Museo Archeologico Nazionale "Gaio Cilnio Mecenate," inv. no. 14973).

uity. All essays are well illustrated with comparanda in color photographs that supplement the contents of the show. A 92-page section contains generously sized color reproductions of every picture in the exhibition, as well as magnifications of significant details. Only the reassembled Red Room is missing, although the individual panels are separately presented, as we have always seen them in Naples.⁴⁰ Nineteenth-century watercolors show the full wall contexts of several mythological compositions, and these provide the clearest illustrations of the Third and Fourth Styles. The 48 pages of the catalogue raisonné are packed with detailed factual information and interpretive suggestion. A timeline and bibliography complete the volume.

This is an exhibition with ambitious aims, not simply in the number and variety of its objects but even more in what it urges its viewers to learn and take away. It has brought some familiar items out of recent sequestration and introduced a few others that are either unknown or overlooked. One must especially appreciate the curators' purpose of extending our contacts with Roman painting in both territory and time and hope that it will set a precedent for more and even farther-reaching ventures that will likewise help break the Vesuvius barrier.

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⁴⁰ La Rocca et al. 2009, 180–89.