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# CONTEXTUALISING ART AND NATURE

Maureen Carroll

## INTRODUCTION

The Romans credited themselves with the invention of two forms of visual display that intimately connected art and nature. The first was the development of landscape design (*ars topiaria*) involving the ornamental clipping of plants such as box, cypress and plane in the shape of animals, figures and even letters of the alphabet. The art of topiary, although referred to already in the middle of the first century B.C. (Cicero, *Letters To Quintus* 3.1.5), was formally developed by a man of equestrian status named Gaius Matius in the latter half of that century (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 12.6.13). The second invention linking art and nature was the genre of landscape painting. Whether the wall painter Studius first introduced this genre in the Augustan period, as Pliny the Elder claims (*Nat. Hist.* 35.37.116-117), or he was the first major figure to fully develop this style, as Ling (1977: 3) suggests, the subjects chosen for his paintings were landscape gardens, groves, woods, hills, coasts, villas and seascapes, all inhabited by people and animals engaged in various everyday activities.

It is clear from the above that the garden itself could be a form of art in its layout and design, as well as in the choice and manipulation of plants contained therein. This is especially so in the context of domestic architecture where the garden could act as a setting for sculpture, fountains and paintings. The Roman house also acted as a canvas for virtual nature, its interiors being adorned with depictions of designed gardens as well as untamed landscapes.

In the following, the archaeological evidence for Roman gardens and the display of works of art in that context is explored. A comparison of real gardens with virtual gardens is attempted, exploring how both might have been seen and experienced by Roman viewers. Rather than focusing on house and villa gardens solely as expressions of status and wealth, we will also consider other possible meanings. Finally, a discussion of the public gardens and parks of Rome as art galleries and museums is warranted.

## ROMAN GARDENS

Since the pioneering work of Wilhelmina Jashemski in Campania from the 1960s to 1980s, a wealth of archaeological, scientific and visual evidence has been compiled on gardens, groves and planted spaces in Roman urban and rural locations at Pompeii and in the Vesuvian region (Jashemski 1979 and 1993; Ciarallo and Mariotti Lippi 1993). She excavated large plots of land in and around Roman houses, tavernas, gymnasia and other establishments, demonstrating that almost every building in Pompeii had one or more gardens when the city was destroyed in the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Excavating at rural sites such as Boscoreale and Oplontis, Jashemski revealed the existence not only of modest working farms densely planted with vines, fruit trees and vegetable gardens, but also luxury villas with several formal gardens and parks as well as interior rooms painted from ceiling to floor with garden scenes (Jashemski 1987). We

now have a better idea in this region than anywhere else in the Roman world what types of vegetation grew in a Roman garden in Italy in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. and how these plants were arranged spatially. Some of these house gardens and villas warrant a closer look, as they will serve as a basis of comparison for a discussion of painted landscapes.

At the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro (VI.17.42) on the western limits of Pompeii, the lower level of the building was taken up by a garden with climbing plants on the long sides of the yard and a central path flanked by box hedges leading to a semicircular pool at the east end (Jashemski 1987: 74-75, figs. 45-50) (Fig. 1). These hedges were probably clipped, as one would expect in topiary. Just behind the pool was a dining room (*triclinium*) (room b) with a marble fountain and paintings and mosaics with a garden theme (Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007: Cat. No. 3.B.44). The walls of another dining room adjacent to the *triclinium* also were decorated with scenes of a profusion of garden plants, water features and sculptures (see below). Both rooms opened onto the garden so that virtual and real garden space blended into each other.

A similar arrangement of raised planting beds, paths and climbing plants in the courtyard is apparent at the Casa dei Casti Amanti (IX.12.6) on the Via del Abbondanza (Ciarallo 1992: 40-42; Ciarallo and Mariotti Lippi 1993; Bergmann 2008: 56-57, fig. 6). Excavations have shown that the geometrically arranged beds contained small cypress trees and roses, with shorter plants and a reed fence around the edges. A favourite garden activity is depicted on the wall of a room off the courtyard; in this scene men and women banquet under the trees and in the shade of an embroidered canopy (Leach 2004: pl. XII; Varone 2007: 139-140, fig. 3).

Careful excavation in the courtyard of the Casa dei Vettii (VI.15.1) in the northern part of Pompeii revealed planting beds in geometric patterns, visible by the heaped mounds of earth in which the plants once grew (Jashemski 1979: 35, figs. 54-59) (Fig. 2). This garden possessed sculptural decoration in marble and bronze, as well as ground-level pipes bringing water from the aqueduct to feed decorative fountains, statues and marble water basins on pedestals (Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007: Cat. No. 3.B.36-43). The garden occupied about a third of the entire space of the building, providing most of the light for the house and creating an area enlivened by the colours and scents of plants and flowers and the sound of babbling water and birdsong. All of this opulence and luxury was immediately visible upon entering the house, as the garden lay on the axis of the door and the vestibule.

While the house of the Vettii family possessed numerous pieces of sculpture, another Roman house in the same city block in Pompeii was even more richly decorated in the first century A.D. with statues and reliefs. The Casa degli Amorini Dorati (VI.16.7) had a U-shaped pool in the centre of the peristyle garden, and various marble statues, reliefs (*pinakes*) on thin columns as well as marble herms were arranged throughout the garden; many of these had Dionysiac themes (Jashemski 1979: 38-41, figs. 60-67; Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007: Cat. No. 3.B.19-35; Mattusch 2008: 72-73, Cat. No. 73-77). Small marble statuettes of animals and woodland creatures nestled in the vegetation of the planting beds, the juxtaposition of wild nature and the cultured order of the garden manifesting itself clearly. Hanging from the architrave between each column of the peristyle were circular marble plaques or *oscilla* and theatre masks of the same material. Although we have no information on the original vegetation in this peristyle garden, it is clear that this particular space formed a focal point for the display of works of art deemed appropriate in theme for a garden.

Cicero (*Letters to Atticus* 12.25.1) in the first century B.C. referred to the luxury villas of the Roman elite round the Bay of Naples as properties of pleasure, and archaeological exploration of these large estates provides valuable evidence for such luxury in landscaping and decoration

with sculpture and paintings (D'Arms 1970; Howe 2004; Guidobaldi and Pesando 2007). The Villa Arianna at Stabiae on the Sorrentine peninsula, for example, had a large peristyle courtyard with view of the sea (Jashemski 1993: 308-310). Kathryn Gleason's excavations demonstrate that it was designed with long raised planting beds and rows of trees and shrubs with walkways or paths between them (Gleason 2010). Hundreds of root cavities of different kinds of small trees, shrubs and groupings of herbaceous plants have been uncovered in the raised beds, each one laid out differently. Statues or other garden monuments may have been placed in the garden, but the primary focus appears to have been the wide array of displayed plants. In this villa, the garden was to be viewed and experienced from different vantage points, through the windows or from the porticoes, or as one strolled along the garden paths.

Investigations at the villa of Poppaea at Oplontis revealed over a dozen gardens, parks and planted areas in excavated parts of the residence (Jashemski 1979: 289-314; De Caro 1987; Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007: Cat. No. 3.B.2-14; Mattusch 2008: Cat. No. 87-91). At this villa built in the mid-first century B.C., and later enlarged and refurbished, probable box hedges lined the paths in the park to the north where thickets of oleander and a row of plane trees grew in raised beds (Fig. 3). These plantings and paths shaped space and directed the moving visitor across the area, the experience of viewing and moving being enhanced by viewing axes through windows, doors and gardens within the villa (Bergmann 2002: 99-107). In a large peristyle garden in the southern part of the villa, laurel trees were planted at regular intervals to reflect the rhythm of the portico columns. Forty-five different sculptures, both figural groups and portrait herms were arranged among the garden plants, the association with art and nature being particularly close on the east side of the swimming pool where a statue stood in front of each oleander, lemon and plane tree. A large marble bell crater decorated with reliefs functioned as a fountain possibly at one end of this pool (De Caro 1987: 96-98, fig. 13; Mattusch 2008: Cat. No. 91). The villa also had a wing of guest rooms connected to each other by tiny, planted courtyards, the courtyard walls being painted with garden vegetation and marble fountains on a gold ground (Fig. 4).

After this brief survey of the physical evidence for art and nature in domestic contexts, it is important to consider what the inspiration for these gardens might have been. The earliest Italic houses of the fourth and third centuries were characterised by a small *hortus* solely for kitchen produce, but after the Roman exposure to Greek private and public architecture and the grand Hellenistic palaces of Greece, Egypt and Asia Minor in the third and second centuries B.C., domestic architecture in Italy underwent a transformation. Peristyle courtyards were built into Roman houses, but, unlike the peristyle in Greek houses, the Romans embraced this space as one to be landscaped (Carroll-Spillecke 1989 and 1992). The range of images in these green spaces suggests that the inspiration for them came from sites in the Greek world. On the one hand, statues of gods, goddesses and semi-divine creatures, herms with portraits of gods, votive reliefs and *pinakes* in the Roman house clearly allude to the sacred realm and are reflections of ancient Greek sanctuary groves filled with votive images and dedications. The republican poet Albius Tibullus (*Elegies* 3.3.15) referred to such gardens as "plantations that imitate sacred groves". Public and religious art of the Greek past became private art in Roman villas, although it did not lose its religious and cultic meaning entirely. The images of Greek philosophers, athletes and Muses, on the other hand, derive from the gymnasias and schools in the suburbs of Greek cities of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, particularly Athens. These celebrated institutions attracted many wealthy and educated Romans as places to study Greek philosophy and rhetoric. The archaeological evidence for context and content of Roman gardens, and, as we shall see, the evidence provided by Roman garden paintings and written testimonies of Roman collectors of Greek art, confirm these associations in the perception and design of the Roman garden.

## ROMAN PAINTINGS OF GARDENS AND LANDSCAPES

In the late republican and early imperial periods, the art of painting walls and panels with garden scenes and landscapes flourished. Three genres of such paintings are discussed in this section: gardens as large-scale murals in interior rooms and along the corridors of peristyle courtyards; the portrayal of architectural settings with enclosed gardens and groves covering the entire walls of interior rooms; and, finally, sacro-idyllic and villa landscapes painted on panels. The first two genres belong to the second and third style of Roman painting (ca. 80-20 B.C. and 20 B.C.-A.D. 20), the latter to the third and fourth styles (ca. 20 B.C.-A.D. 20 and A.D. 20-79).

*Ars* and *natura* were often seen in opposition in ancient art theories, the highest praise generally being reserved for the accurate rendition of nature itself. Playful alterations, unrealistic or fantastic depictions of nature prompted the architect Vitruvius in the late first century B.C. to state simply that “pictures cannot be approved which do not resemble reality” (*On Architecture* 7.5.3-4; Elsner 1995: 51-58). Pliny the Elder in the advanced first century A.D. was fascinated by naturalism in art, reciting anecdotes of birds being fooled by realistically and naturalistically painted grapes or of horses neighing at a particularly realistic depiction of one of their own (*Nat. Hist.* 35.7.23, 35.36.65-66, 35.35.95). The Roman interest in artificial depictions of nature is well illustrated by paintings of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. in elite residences and middle-class houses, both in the capital in Rome and in Pompeii and its surroundings.

The finest and most beautiful garden murals within an enclosed space adorned an underground dining room at the family estate of the empress Livia at Prima Porta near Rome (Gabriel 1955; Kellum 1994). In this room decorated around 30-20 B.C., the actual walls appear to be a verdant garden and they dissolve in the dense thickets of vegetation and blue sky above (Fig. 5). The line between art and nature is deliberately blurred. The viewer stands in the midst of this garden, separated from it by a dainty reed fence. Behind this fence is a grassy path with bunches of acanthus, ivy and other plants and various birds, and on each of the four walls, trees (spruces, a pine and an oak) also grow out of the lawn. The intertwined and dense groupings of flowers, shrubs and trees in the next plane can be seen behind a low marble balustrade. The vegetation is arranged according to height, so that poppies, daisies, chrysanthemums, roses and other flowers occupy the foreground, behind which space is taken up by pomegranate, quince and lemon trees, oleander bushes and palms. More distant, and silhouetted against the blue sky, are laurel trees. Throughout the scene, birds of all manner perch on branches, peck at fruit or fly through the air. But this is not simply a reproduction of nature. Different types of vegetation that fruit and flower at different times of year do so all at once in this composition, and all plants are carefully arranged to allow the viewer to see and experience different shapes, colours and species. There are no humans in the garden, and yet everything is arranged with the viewer in mind. The tame bird in a golden cage on the marble balustrade reminds us that this is a man-made garden landscape, one created by art to go “beyond anything you could find in the real world” (Beard and Henderson 2001: 55). As Carey (2003: 112) notes, nature is subjugated by artifice. The overarching impression is of fertility, harmony and peace, all qualities inherent to and carefully reflecting the ideology and symbolism of the rule of Augustus (Kellum 1994: 221).

Roughly contemporary are the garden murals in a large apsed hall in the villa of Maecenas on the Esquiline hill in Rome (Steinby 1996: 70-74). Like Livia’s garden room at Prima Porta, this room was underground, and the inclusion of outdoor garden space in virtual form links them closely. The surviving rectangular hall, the so-called Auditorium of Maecenas, probably functioned as a dining room. The large niches in its walls and in the semi-circular apse at the end are painted to give the illusion of looking out through windows onto the gardens of the estate, catching glimpses of blue sky, shrubs, trees and flowers with reed fences (Michel 1980: 376-377; Jashemski 1993: 383-385; Paolucci 2007: 73-76, figs. 1-2). Marble fountains of various shapes

and birdbaths are arranged on the lawn in front of the fences, some of them very similar to the one we have seen in the swimming pool garden at Oplontis (De Caro 1987: 96-98, fig. 13; Mattusch 2008: Cat. No. 91). Through the use of external vistas, the walls of this room appear permeable.

Outside Rome, the garden murals that come closest to these can be found in the dining room (Fig. 1, room a) next to the marble *triclinium* in the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro (VI.17.42) in Pompeii, the decoration dating possibly to the Tiberian period (PPM 1991: 44-145; Jashemski 1993: 348-358; De Carolis 2007: 144-147, figs. 3, 5; Bergmann 2008: 58-60, fig. 8, Cat. No. 65). This dining room opens out onto the real garden, and its walls are painted to give the illusion of being in another part of that garden (Fig. 6). At the back, laurels are silhouetted against a blue sky; closer to the viewer are medium-sized plants such as dwarf plane trees, oleanders and viburnum bushes, while ivy, daisies, lilies, roses, poppies, short palms and arbutus bushes grow behind a reed fence in the immediate foreground. Birds of various species populate the bushes and plants. Bubbling marble fountains and birdbaths, marble herms and painted *pinakes* with Dionysiac imagery are arranged throughout the garden. Dangling above are round *oscilla* and theatre masks. A whole range of Egyptian statues, sphinxes and Egyptian-themed *pinakes* decorate the painted garden in this room and the neighbouring *triclinium*, such motifs reflecting the popularity of Egyptian exotica following the conquest of Egypt and its incorporation into the Empire in 31 B.C. (Knauer 1993: 13-18; Swetnam-Burland 2007).

In one of the bedrooms (*cubiculum* H) in the Casa del Frutteto (I.9.5) at Pompeii, the depicted garden is filled with even more works of sculpture (Michel 1980: 386-390; PPM 1990: 1-137; Jashemski 1993: 317-322; De Carolis 2007: 143-144, figs. 1-2). Trees such as oleander, cherry and lemon are depicted behind a trellis fence. On every wall of the garden paintings, Egyptian statuettes are arranged in the foreground, and marble *oscilla*, theatre masks and garlands are suspended above the tops of the trees. In a second bedroom (*cubiculum* I), naturalistic fruit trees behind a wall appear to be lit up against a black night sky. In both *cubicula*, the garden is articulated by very thin upright pillars, so that vegetation and fantasy architecture share the same walls. The garden here in the mid-first century A.D. no longer appears to continue off into the distance, as it did at Prima Porta.

While garden murals such as these could transform the interior room of a house into a virtual garden, they could also be deployed in the immediate vicinity of a real outdoor garden to optically enlarge or add depth to the planted area. In the garden in the House of Venus Marina (II.3.3), for example, the whole back wall of the planted peristyle was decorated with murals of garden vegetation and sculpture on either side of a panel of Venus on a sea shell (Jashemski 1979: 63-66; Carey 2003: 128-131; Bergmann 2008: 65-67, figs. 13-15) (Fig. 7). Upon entering this space, the viewer could take in a garden instantly that manifests itself both in *ars* and in *natura*. Garden shrubs and plants grow behind a trellis face, and in the foreground of one scene is a white marble statue of Mars on a pedestal and, in the other, a white marble fountain filled with sparkling water. The play between art and nature is further enhanced by the presence of a (painted) bird who is tricked into pecking at the berries growing on the ivy frames of both paintings as if they were real. As this example demonstrates, the Romans delighted not only in the imitation of nature but also the playful juxtaposition of reality and artifice that invited the viewer to recognise the trickery for what it was. Another favourite location for painted garden plants were the walkways or corridors leading to real gardens, as if the paintings were to prepare the viewer for the plantings he would encounter outdoors (Fig. 8).

Another genre in landscape painting consists of murals in which architectural vistas are glimpsed through portals or beyond a wall. Of particularly high quality are the paintings in Poppaea's villa

at Oplontis painted shortly after the middle of the first century B.C. (Jashemski 1979: 289-314; Jashemski 1993: 375-379; Leach 2004: 75-79). Similar scenes executed about 40-30 B.C. decorated the walls of several rooms in the villa of P. Fannius Synistor in nearby Boscoreale (Williams Lehmann 1953; Bergmann 2010). Although these images are reminiscent of the *scenae* of theatres, the symbolism of cult statues, votive columns, altars, garlands, and incense burners point to the sanctified nature of the space beyond. The large tripod in the midst of grand colonnades and trees in the *triclinium* at Oplontis, for example, leaves no doubt that a sanctuary to Apollo is portrayed (Leach 2004: 78, fig. 57) (Fig. 9). These compositions affording the viewer glimpses of trees and votive monuments through the columns of porticoes are immediately relevant to the archaeological evidence for the sacred groves of Roman temples. Recent excavations at the sanctuary of Venus in Pompeii, for example, have shown that this temple of the mid-first century B.C. stood in a sacred grove consisting of rows of trees on three sides of the temple, the grove in turn being enveloped by porticoes on the edges of the precinct (Carroll 2008; Carroll 2010). The design of landscaped temple precincts continued to be employed well into the third century A.D. The so-called East temple in Thuburbo Maius in Tunisia and the temple of Elagabal on the Palatine in Rome, for example, were laid out with rows of trees flanking or framing the temple (Jashemski, 1995: 573, figs. 13-14; Villedieu, 2001a, 2001b; G. Rizzo, 2001).

The sacred sphere is also seen in a third genre of Roman frescoes, in so-called sacro-idyllic landscapes. Unlike the garden murals and temple complexes that covered the entire wall, these landscape 'panels' imitating framed paintings do not dominate but are only a small part of the overall decorative scheme. Some of the most beautiful examples can be found in the imperial villa of Augustus's friend and son-in-law Agrippa at Boscotrecase (von Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990). In the Black Room of this villa, small landscape vignettes float in the middle of monochrome panels, each one executed in an exquisite and impressionistic, even sketchy, fashion. Rural shrines consisting of a few remains of ruined buildings, a tower or a votive column are located on rocky outcrops, a few gnarled trees casting a bit of shade on the tiny figures of humans and animals moving around in and around the sanctuary. These possibly represent the style of paintings attributed to Studius, as discussed in the introduction. There is no attempt to create real depth or the illusion of imaginary views out of the room onto adjacent landscapes; this third style of Roman painting acknowledged the two-dimensionality of the walls on which these paintings were executed.

Related to these third style paintings in their small size are the vignettes of villa landscapes typical of fourth style painting. Like the earlier second style garden murals seen at Livia's villa at Prima Porta or in the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro at Pompeii, these villa landscapes correspond very well to the archaeological evidence for villa gardens. Beautiful villa vignettes are preserved in many houses and villas in the Vesuvian region (Camardo 2004: Cat. No. 4, figs. pp. 27, 31; Mattusch 2008: Cat. No. 2-3) (Fig. 10). These virtual villa gardens consist of rectangular planting beds, paths and pools, all elements of real garden landscaping we have seen, for example, at the luxury villas in Campania. In fact, the large peristyle garden in the seaside Villa San Marco at Stabiae, with its rectangular, central pool and double rows of plane trees surrounded by the colonnades, could almost be taken from a contemporary wall painting (Barbet and Miniero 1999; Barbet 2004).

## **THE EXPERIENCE OF REAL AND VIRTUAL GARDENS**

Pliny the Younger's descriptions of his Tuscan and Laurentine villas and their surroundings in his *Letters* required the ancient reader to imagine landscapes, perspectives and spatial relationships (Bergmann 1995; von Stackelberg 2009: 125-134). In his letter to Domitius Apollinaris, he asks his friend to picture the landscape of his Tuscan villa and the complex of

buildings and gardens he is about to describe (*Letters* 5.6). Artifice and the skills of the *topiarius* are praised in Pliny's description of his hippodrome. The variety of the plantings and the different vantage points from which to view the complex are reminiscent of the planting beds of different designs and the pathways recently excavated at the Villa Arianna at Stabiae: "Having passed through these several winding alleys, you enter a straight walk, which breaks out into a variety of others, partitioned off by box-row hedges. In one place you have a little meadow, in another the box is cut in a thousand different forms, sometimes into letters, expressing the master's name, sometimes the artificer's, whilst here and there rise little obelisks with fruit-trees alternately intermixed". As Pliny states, these owed their beauty to art.

Pliny's villa on the coast at Laurentum near Ostia is a seaside villa, and his description in his letter to Gallus returns repeatedly to views of the sea from his many windows as well as "the coast, and the beautiful villas scattered along the shore line" (*Letters* 2.17). At this villa, a spacious dining-room looked out upon a garden with walkways bordered by hedges of box and rosemary and flanked by a shady climbing vine. In front of the garden was a terrace that Pliny not only enjoyed the sight, but also the smell of, as it was "fragrant with the scent of violets". Nowhere does Pliny describe statues, sculpture or a collection of art in his villas or gardens, but he writes of a summer-house in his Tuscan villa "enclosing a small area shaded by four plane-trees, in the midst of which rises a marble fountain which gently plays upon the roots of the plane-trees and upon the grass-plots underneath them". Another room in the villa has marble-panelling and garden paintings with birds among the branches of the foliage, clearly one of those garden rooms whose walls are disguised by the painted garden, as we have already seen them.

Pliny's descriptions of his surroundings appeal to all the senses. There is the sense of movement in descending a terrace, the sound of water gushing through pipes in a marble *triclinium* fountain, the perception of temperature with breezes cooling and sun warming the rooms, and the sense of touch at walking along a garden path so soft "that you may walk bare-foot upon it" (*Letters* 2.17). His descriptions invite the reader to experience everything by imagining the scenes unfolding, something that anyone familiar with the appearance and spatial layout of Roman villas and gardens should have been able to do. Moreover, Pliny's descriptions of the landscape in which his Tuscan villa was located allude to the perfection of the situation: "You would be charmed by taking a view of this country from the top of one of our neighbouring mountains, and would fancy that not a real, but some imaginary landscape, painted by the most exquisite pencil, lay before you, such an harmonious variety of beautiful objects meets the eye, whichever way it turns" (*Letters* 5.6). Pliny's contemporaries would have known what kind of painted landscapes and villa scenes he was referring to.

One of the most interesting surviving texts for understanding how the ancient viewer might have seen and experienced paintings of landscapes and gardens is the *Imagines* of Philostratos (Lehmann-Hartleben 1941; Elsner 1995: 23-39). In this text, Philostratos describes sixty-four panel paintings in the elite Neapolitan home of his host, narrating them vividly before an audience of young men as an exercise in how to interpret paintings and to appreciate what is esteemed in them. For Philostratos, painting is imitation by the use of colours and light and shade, an art form able to capture human figures as well as "houses and groves and mountains and springs and the air that envelops them all" (1.1). Realism and imitation of nature are most highly praised: "I was deluded by the painting into thinking that the figures were not painted but were real beings..... I shout at them as though they could hear and I imagine that I hear some response" (1.28).

Like Pliny's appreciation of his landscaped villas, viewing painted landscapes and nature was a sensual experience. Philostratos praises the delicate and dewy look of roses in one of the

paintings, claiming that “they are painted fragrance and all” (1.2). He asks his audience if they caught anything of the fragrance hovering over the depiction of a garden (1.6), and he instructs them often to listen carefully when they might hear things such as “herds of cattle lowing, and the music of the shepherd’s pipes” echoing in their ears (1.12). Not only scents and sounds are imagined, but also the movement of people, animals and vegetation. In his description of a painting of a marsh, for example, Philostratos writes that “in the midst of the pool amaranth flowers are nodding this way and that, sweet clusters that pelt the water with their blossoms” (1.9). This is pure interpretation of static images, but the Roman eye did not see them as static. Virtual nature could behave like real nature, if the imagination could see beyond the artifice.

### GARDENS AS ART GALLERIES

From the middle of the first century B.C., leading aristocrats and emperors transformed the appearance of the empire’s capital by building large colonnaded precincts in which groves and gardens were laid out. Pompey the Great brought back living trees from his eastern campaigns – the balsam from Judaea, the Ethiopian palm, the Asiatic plane – and paraded them as ‘captives’ in his triumphal procession in Rome in 61 B.C. (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 12.20.20, 12.54.111-112). Contemporary descriptions of the magnificent *porticus* he built and dedicated in 55 B.C. in the capital reveal that the open space within the colonnades was planted with rows of plane trees where one could stroll and admire fountains, statues and famous Greek paintings in the shady gardens and the porticoes hung with a canopy of woven gold cloth (Ovid, *Art of Love*, 3.387; Propertius, *Elegies*, 2.32.20; Martial, *Epigrams* 2.14.10; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 35.34.59; Kuttner 1999). Gleason (1994) rightly calls this the “first public park of Rome”.

More than a century later, the emperor Vespasian built his temple of Peace (*Templum Pacis*, or *Forum Pacis*), in the heart of Rome to celebrate the conquest of Judaea in A.D. 70. Contemporary written accounts of this complex and recent archaeological evidence confirm that the *Templum Pacis* was lavishly adorned with gardens and sculptures, making it a combination of botanical garden and open-air museum (Meneghini 2006: 159; La Rocca 2001: 196-207). Josephus (*Jewish War* 7.5.7) highlights the beauty and scope of this art gallery: “He also adorned it with paintings and statues by the greatest of the old masters. In fact, in that temple were collected and deposited all those works that men had hitherto travelled over the whole world to see, longing to set eyes on them even when scattered in different lands”. Suetonius (*Life of Vespasian* 18) tells us that Vespasian also displayed masterpieces of Greek art, including the Venus of Kos by the fifth-century master sculptor Praxiteles. Many celebrated works of art looted from Greece and Asia Minor had been kept by the emperor Nero in his private palace, the Domus Aurea, Vespasian subsequently moving them to his *Templum Pacis* where the enjoyment of these pieces was no longer a prerogative only of the imperial house (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 34.19.84). Recent archaeological exploration of the *Templum Pacis* has revealed more fragments of statue bases with inscriptions referring to statues by Athenian sculptors such as Praxiteles, Kephisodotos and Parthenokles, as well as fragmentary bronze and marble statues of Greek philosophers (La Rocca 2001: 197-201; Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2007: 66, figs. 606-61). Furthermore, these excavations have demonstrated clearly, that landscape architects designed the open courtyard with rows of long marble-clad water basins and planted it with the red *Rosa gallica* (Rizzo 2001: 238-239). An analysis of the soil in amphorae used as plant pots confirms the presence of remains of this plant, but it is not unlikely that other kinds of shrubs and trees, possibly highly symbolic exotica from Vespasian’s campaigns in Judaea, were planted here as well (Macaulay-Lewis 2008: 212-217; Pollard 2009). Paintings and probably many statues were displayed in the porticoes surrounding the courtyard, but some of the sculptures were arranged in the open courtyard in conjunction with the vegetation and water elements (Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2007: 68).

The collection and display of Greek art in a landscaped setting was certainly not limited to the public sector. In fact, the most notorious collectors of ancient art in the late Republic were the elite and fabulously wealthy families who took over the suburbs of Rome for their vast private villas and parks (*horti*) (Cima and La Rocca 1998; Paolucci 2007; Liverani 2007; von Stackelberg 2009: 74-80). The gardens of the very wealthy historian and contemporary of Julius Caesar, C. Sallustius Crispus, for example, were situated on the Pincian hill in the north-western part of Rome, and they contained various buildings, pavilions and fountains as well as groves, gardens and parks (Steinby 1996: 79-81; Hartswick 2004; Liverani 2007: 91-92; Piranomonte 2007). Many famous works of ancient sculpture from public and sacred spaces in the Greek world were prominent features of the *Horti Sallustiani*, including Greek mythological sculptures of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. as well as marble copies of dying Gauls, the famous bronze statues set up in the third century B.C. in Pergamon by king Attalos I to celebrate their defeat (Germini 2008: 124-147).

Even more associated with luxury were the *Horti Luculliani*, also on the Pincian hill, which belonged to L. Licinius Lucullus (Steinby 1996: 67-70; Liverani 2007: 90-91; Germini 2008: 147-160). These gardens laid out around 60 B.C. were influential for all subsequent elite and imperial estates around the capital. Plutarch (*Lucullus* 39) considered the *horti* of Lucullus, with their sumptuous buildings, porticoes and baths, too extravagant; his paintings and sculpture “-he collected with vast expense, lavishly bestowing all the wealth and treasure which he got in the war upon them, insomuch that even now, with all the advance of luxury, the Lucullan gardens are counted the noblest the emperor has”. Lucullus also brought back cherry trees from the Black Sea as spoils from his eastern campaigns, and introduced the species to Italy, probably in his own *horti* (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 15.30.102).

For insight into the shipment of art from Greece and the eastern Mediterranean for wealthy patrons and collectors in Roman Italy, the ships that sank with their cargoes off the North African coast at Mahdia and off the Greek island of Antikythera around or shortly after 80 B.C. are of particular value (Hellenkemper Salies 1994; Weinberg et al. 1965). The cargoes reflect the themes of sanctuary and the schools of philosophy associated with the gymnasium. These included statues, statuettes and reliefs depicting gods and mythical beings, Greek athletes, Greek philosophers, satyrs and herms. Some of the pieces belong to the Classical period, while others are copies manufactured in the first century B.C. for the Roman art market (Fuchs 1959; Grassinger 1991; Ridgway 2002: 226-240). There is little doubt that many of the pieces on these ships were destined for the villas and gardens of wealthy, cultivated Romans in Italy (Carroll-Spillecke 1994).

One of the most avid Italian collectors of Greek art in the first century B.C., Cicero, wrote numerous letters to his friend Atticus in Athens, requesting him to locate and purchase originals and copies suitable for Cicero's villas and gardens. In 67 B.C. Cicero (*Letters to Atticus* 1.8) wrote to his friend: “I have paid L. Cincius the 20,400 sesterces for the statues from Megara in accordance with your letter to me. As to your herms of Pentelic marble with bronze heads, about which you wrote to me--I have fallen in love with them on the spot. So pray send both them and the statues, and anything else that may appear to you to suit the place.....above all, anything you think appropriate to a gymnasium and terrace”. Cicero recognised the appropriateness of objects to create the desired atmosphere; he recreated “a school like the Greeks” at his villa at Tusculum and wanted sculpture appropriate to a gymnasium setting where he could experience leisure or *otium* of an intellectual and physical sort (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.4). Other elite patrons in Italy shared Cicero's passion for Greek art, both original pieces and copies (Bartman 1991; Beard 2008). The existence of nineteen replicas of a statue group of a satyr and a hermaphrodite, one of which was placed in the garden next to the swimming pool at Poppaea's villa at Oplontis,

illuminates the supply and demand of the Roman market in Greek art (De Caro 1987: 98-100, figs. 15-16; Di Pasquale and Paolucci 2007: Cat. No. 3.B.14; Mattusch 2008: Cat. No. 90).

Although himself a collector, Cicero accused the provincial governor Gaius Verres of art theft, claiming that he “carried off by force some of the most beautiful statues from Chios” and other sites in the eastern Mediterranean (*Against Verres* 2.1.49-51). Cicero, in the same court speech for the prosecution, demanded to know where the plundered paintings and statues from Samos had gone: “I mean those which I lately saw in your house against every pillar, and also in every space between two pillars, and actually arranged in the grove in the open air?”. In reality, Verres had behaved no differently than any other wealthy and cultivated Roman, including Cicero, who could afford to purchase or purloin coveted works of Greek art for their personal enjoyment and prestige in their villas, porticoes and gardens.

This investigation of planted spaces known through archaeological exploration, of the depiction of gardens, plants and sculpture in painting, and the role of art in landscaped precincts and estates has confirmed that the ancient Romans took pleasure not only in nature around them, but also in the effective juxtaposition of reality and artifice.

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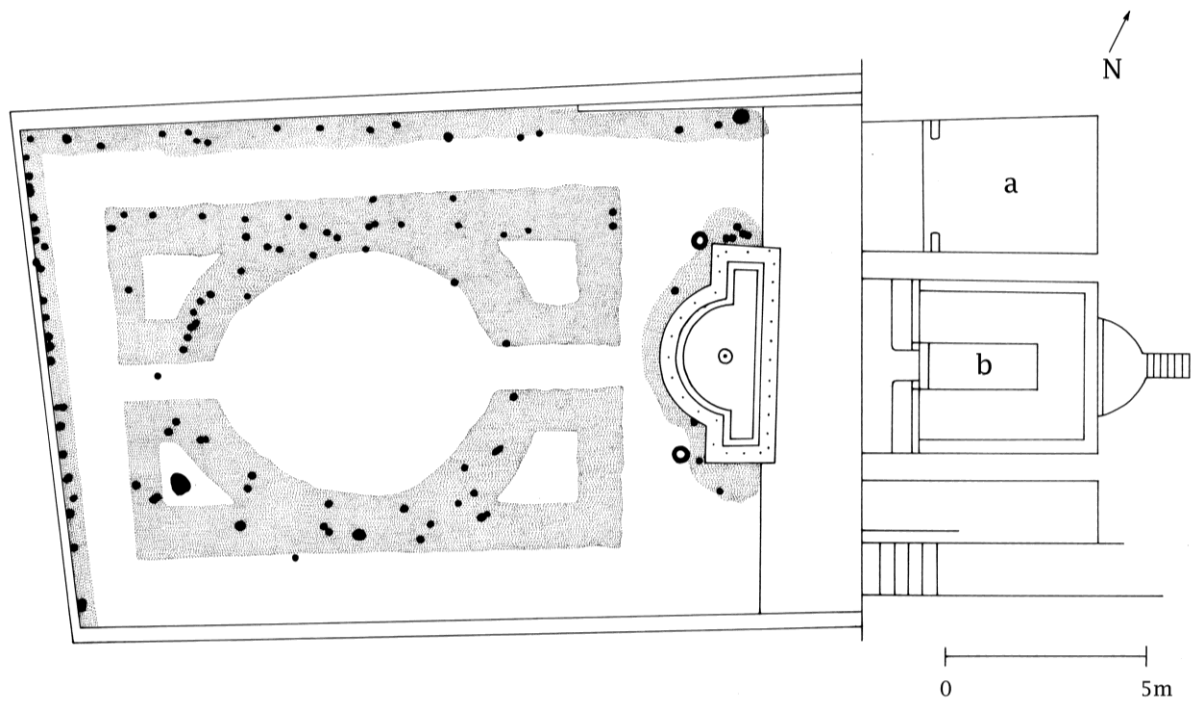


Fig. 1 Plan of the garden level and adjacent dining rooms in the Casa del Bracciale d'Oro (VI.17.2) in Pompeii. The black holes represent root cavities, the grey areas are configurations of plants. Drawing J. Willmott.



Fig. 2 Peristyle garden in the Casa dei Vettii (VI. 15.1) in Pompeii. Photo author.



Fig. 3 The north park of the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis, replanted after Jashemski's excavations. Photo author.



Fig. 4 Garden painting from a suite of rooms in the east wing of the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Photo author.



Fig. 5 Garden painting in the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta. Photo author.



Fig. 6 Garden painting in one of the dining rooms in the Casa del Bracciale D'Oro (VI.17.2) at Pompeii. Photo courtesy of Wolfgang Rieger.



Fig. 7 Peristyle garden in the House of Venus Marina (II.3.3) in Pompeii, with garden murals at the back of the peristyle. Photo author.



Fig. 8 Painting of garden plants and birds behind a trellis fence in a corridor leading to the swimming pool garden in the villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Photo author.



Fig. 9 Wall painting depicting a sanctuary and grove of Apollo in the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Photo author.



Fig. 10 Painted villa landscape from the Villa San Marco at Stabiae. Photo author.