

## **POMPEII: PHOTOGRAPHS AND FRAGMENTS**

*Contemporary and historical photographs of Pompeii as well as selected ancient objects offer a fresh perspective on the first-century Roman town*

March 2–August 19, 2018

March 2, 2018, New Haven, Conn.—The ancient city of Pompeii—both destroyed and preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79—has captured public imagination since it was first excavated in 1748. Questioning the established perception of Pompeii as a city frozen in time, *Pompeii: Photographs and Fragments* highlights the changing representations of the site since its rediscovery. The exhibition presents contemporary photographs by William Wylie and An-My Lê, M.F.A. 1993, and a selection of 19th-century photographs by Edmund Behles, Robert Rive, and Giorgio Sommer alongside an 18th-century etching by Francesco Piranesi and ancient art from the Gallery's collection. Through these objects, *Pompeii: Photographs and Fragments* explores both the ancient history of the Roman town as well as its more recent history as an active excavation site.

The exhibition was inspired by two projects that Wylie and Lê undertook during their Gallery-sponsored Happy and Bob Doran Artist Residencies in Praiano, Italy. Wylie's large-scale photographs of Pompeii, taken between 2013 and 2017 and recently brought together in a book published by the Gallery titled *Pompeii Archive*, document the passage of time—the ongoing cycles of deterioration and preservation that mark the site as a living landscape. Wylie studied the work of Giorgio Sommer (1834–1914), whose photographs of Pompeii became world famous in the mid-nineteenth century. The images taken by Sommer and other nineteenth-century photographers reveal how the initial archaeological excavations and restoration work at Pompeii actively transformed the site into a picturesque ruin. Wylie's images revisit the site some 150 years later, recording the ongoing evolution of the ruins as a result of natural and human intervention.

Lê's artist's book *Praiano-Naples* (2013–16, printed 2017) juxtaposes sweeping views of the Bay of Naples with details of the erotic artworks that were excavated at Pompeii and are now held in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. While excavations at Pompeii and nearby Herculaneum revealed these cities to be rich in erotic artifacts, including statues, frescoes, and household items decorated with sexual themes and fertility imagery, 19th-century moral sensibilities led to the

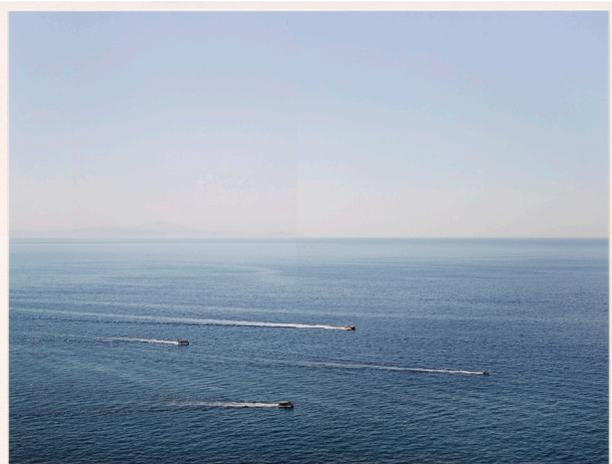


William Wylie, *Peristyle, House of the Colored Capitals or House of Ariadne (VII.4.31)*, 2015. Pigmented inkjet print. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of the artist. © William Wylie

artworks being housed in a locked room at the museum—long referred to as the Secret Cabinet—for nearly 200 years. The rich color images in Lê’s accordion-folded book reveal both an intimate look at ancient Roman culture and an appreciation of the timeless natural beauty of the region.

Complementing these photographs are fragments of wall paintings from Herculaneum, which was also destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, and a range of quotidian objects, including pottery, glassware, and coins from the period and region. These objects animate the photographs and enrich our understanding of life in first-century Pompeii.

“Wylie’s large-scale, black-and-white photographs and Lê’s small, color photographs in her artist’s book are remarkably distinct,” states Judy Ditner, the Richard Benson Assistant Curator of Photography and Digital Media and curator of the exhibition. “But both artists are deeply engaged



An-My Lê, page from *Praiano-Naples*, 2013–16, printed 2017. Artist’s book with 21 chromogenic prints mounted on paper. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of the artist. © An-My Lê

with the traditions of landscape photography, employing a large-format view camera to compose their images, just as the nineteenth-century photographers who first recorded the sites did. Lê’s views of the tranquil Tyrrhenian Sea make it hard to imagine the violent eruption that wiped out Pompeii and left it buried for centuries,” she continues, “while Wylie’s photographs capture a stillness that is starkly different from the site experienced by tourists. Both artists have brought their personal sensibilities to bear on a much-imaged place, yielding works that feel simultaneously contemporary and timeless.”

## On View

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## Related Publication

*Pompeii Archive*

William Wylie

With an essay by Sarah Betzer and an afterword by Jock Reynolds

Handsomely illustrated and grand in scale, this book features images by American photographer William Wylie (b. 1957) taken over the course of five years. The photographs reanimate the ancient city of Pompeii, showing the ongoing cycles of deterioration and preservation that mark it as a living landscape. Wylie captures Pompeii’s former grandeur, including its terracotta reliefs and wall paintings, while also drawing attention to the signs of an active excavation site, from plaster casts in glass cases to ceramic fragments in storage facilities. His elegant compositions and command of light and shadow highlight how natural phenomena, pollution, and human intervention are

continually reshaping the city. People, however, are notably absent in the photographs. Wylie beautifully documents Pompeii's present by engaging with the tenuous relationship that the archaeological site maintains with the past.

120 pages / 12¾ × 11 inches / 83 duotone illustrations / Distributed by Yale University Press / 2018 / Hardcover / Price \$35; Members \$28

## **Related Programs**

### **Gallery Talk**

Wednesday, April 25

12:30 pm

“Pompeii: Photographs and Fragments”

Judy Ditner, the Richard Benson Assistant Curator of Photography and Digital Media

Lisa R. Brody, Associate Curator of Ancient Art

All programs are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For more detailed programming information, visit [artgallery.yale.edu/calendar](http://artgallery.yale.edu/calendar).

## **Exhibition Credits**

Exhibition organized by Judy Ditner, the Richard Benson Assistant Curator of Photography and Digital Media. Exhibition made possible by Mary Jo and Ted Shen, B.A. 1966, HON. 2001, and the Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund

## **Yale University Art Gallery**

The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

## **General Information**

The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September–June); and Saturday–Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at [artgallery.yale.edu](http://artgallery.yale.edu).

## **Press Contacts**

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