With "The Multiple Lives of Pompeii", a new publication from the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut sheds light on the modern history of Pompeii – from its excavation and restoration history, to heritage preservation, and art historical discourse and musealisation. By means of an interdisciplinary approach between the humanities and the natural sciences it proposes a framework for future investigations of the site.

Background

Pompeii is not just an ancient city buried by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 and later rediscovered and unearthed; it is rather the ongoing product of a long history of excavation and a large number of restorations, reconstructions, and museological reconfigurations. Like a palimpsest, it is an imaginary as well as a material entity that has constantly been reshaped by the events of history, its perception through the centuries, and changing tastes. At the same time, the myth of Pompeii, which still fires the human imagination, has had an extraordinary impact on archaeology, art, museology and architecture for over two centuries.

This book brings together the results of the research project Pompeii Arch&Lab; (2015–2019) carried out by the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut (KHI) and the Fraunhofer-Institut für Bauphysik (IBP) in Holzkirchen, in collaboration with the Parco Archeologico Pompei and Università di Napoli “Federico II”.

About the book

"The Multiple Lives of Pompeii" is concerned with the history of restoration, reception and musealisation of Pompeii and encourages interdisciplinary discourses between the humanities and the natural sciences including insights from archaeology, art and architectural history, cultural heritage, conservation and science, geography, material science, material technology and building physics. The book focuses on surfaces and environments: two different physical, spatial, and conceptual dimensions of the city which are simultaneously opposites and complementary. The reception of Pompeii and much of its modern history have affected its surfaces and their various modifications through natural and anthropogenic impact over the centuries. The surface – decorated or not – is the site of cultural expression, legibility and experimentation. And whereas surfaces are merely two-dimensional, heritage environments are comprised of spatially connected ensembles: their archaeological remains on-site, those removed from their original context and also their reception and afterlife.

The book engages with three main themes, starting with Excavation and Restoration History, moving on to Heritage Preservation and Plaster Surfaces, and concluding with Art Historical Discourse and Musealisation. The contributions in this book, which include historical and current approaches to conservation, issues of representation and transmission, and a focus on colour, light, materiality and aesthetics, show that the reception and preservation of Pompeii are inseparably intertwined.

The book offers a new perspective on Pompeii, bringing together a unified discourse on the preservation of both natural and built heritage, in which local bio-diversity concerns come together with global approaches to heritage.
conservations and the idea of shared cultural values.

About the research project Pompeii Arch&Lab;

The preservation of ancient sites is one of the great challenges of the present day. By bringing together the art historical expertise of the KHI in Florence and the technological expertise of the Fraunhofer Institute for Building Physics (IBP), the aim of this collaborative project (which ran from 2015 to 2019) was to make a substantial contribution to our understanding of the history of Pompeii since the 18th century fundamental to the preservation of its monumental heritage.

From a natural science perspective, the restoration procedures used on the Pompeian originals and their durability were analyzed in detail. Special emphasis was placed on the study of architectural surfaces and mortars. From an art historical perspective, Pompeii proved to be a fascinating archive of the history of restorations since the 18th century.

The project brought together source materials from over 250 years of restoration and musealisation history in Pompeii in order to be scientifically analyzed and researched for the first time. These materials were used as part of innovative approaches to the historical study of Pompeii. The knowledge gained about the design and shaping of the site since the 18th century has established a basis for future collaborations and for further reappraisal of the city and its museum presentation in its multi-layered ancient as well as modern temporalities.

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Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

The Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, founded in 1897, has been an institute of the Max Planck Society since 2002. Its research focuses on the histories of art and architecture in a transcultural perspective over a wide chronological and geographical range. A prime concern is to combine historical research with a critical engagement in current debates and challenges, for example urbanism, ecology, aesthetics, heritage, migration and diversity, the future of museums, media and material cultures and the digital transformation, among others.

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Pompeii, wall painting, detail, 2017
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