



# The Last Days of Pompeii: Decadence, Apocalypse, Resurrection

*Victoria C. Gardner Coates, Kenneth Lapatin, Jon L. Seydl*

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Destroyed yet paradoxically preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79, Pompeii and other nearby sites are usually considered places where we can most directly experience the daily lives of ancient Romans. Rather than present these sites as windows to the past, however, the authors of *The Last Days of Pompeii: Decadence, Apocalypse, Resurrection* explore Pompeii as a modern obsession, in which the Vesuvian sites function as mirrors of the present. Through cultural appropriation and projection, outstanding visual and literary artists of the last three centuries have made the ancient catastrophe their own, expressing contemporary concerns in diverse media—from paintings, prints, and sculpture, to theatrical performances, photography, and film. This lavishly illustrated volume—featuring the works of artists such as Piranesi, Fragonard, Kaufmann, Ingres, Chassériau, and Alma-Tadema, as well as Duchamp, Dalí, Rothko, Rauschenberg, and Warhol—surveys the legacy of Pompeii in the modern imagination under the three overarching rubrics of decadence, apocalypse, and resurrection.

Decadence investigates the perception of Pompeii as a site of impending and well-deserved doom due to the excesses of the ancient Romans, such as paganism, licentiousness, greed, gluttony, and violence. The catastrophic demise of the Vesuvian sites has become inexorably linked with the understanding of antiquity, turning Pompeii into a fundamental allegory for Apocalypse, to which all subsequent disasters (natural or man-made) are related, from the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 to Hiroshima, Nagasaki, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina. Resurrection examines how Pompeii and the Vesuvian cities have been reincarnated in modern guise through both scientific archaeology and fantasy, as each successive cultural reality superimposed its values and ideas on the distant past.

An exhibition of the same name will be on view at the Getty Villa from September 12, 2012, through January 7, 2013; at the Cleveland Museum of Art from February 24 through May 19, 2013; and at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec from June 13 through November 8, 2013.

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