My Getty Research Project
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M y Getty
What do you most admire about the Getty Villa? Historian Emma Southon on what inspires her to care for the ancient world.

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

I've made a career of thinking about the past. I've explored it as a scholar, taught it as a professor, and now I'm helping to preserve, share, and elucidate it as Getty's president and CEO. Going forward, I want to find even more creative ways for Getty to honor the world's art and culture.

For one, we can build stronger partnerships worldwide to share our collections. We recently did just that in an unprecedented model of co-curation launched by my predecessor, Jim Cuno: along with the Berlin State Museums and the British Museum, we sent artworks to the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) museum in Mumbai for its exhibition Ancient Sculptures: India Egypt Assyria Greece Rome. The goal was to give Indian visitors the chance to see their own ancient culture in relation to others’. Critically, the curation was all undertaken locally. Partnering with peers, we can also look at daunting global issues from multiple perspectives and deploy all types of brains—as we’re doing for this fall's PST ART: Art & Science Collide, a SoCal-wide collaboration among scores of institutions to present 60+ mind-blowing exhibitions.

I want us to share more of Getty’s capacity: because we’ve been given so much and others haven’t. Because climate change and global conflicts aren’t ending, and more art will need the kind of expert conservation that Getty, with its expertise and reach, can provide. We have long given young people who dream of, but can’t afford, a career in the historically privileged museum world a leg up via paid, hands-on Getty Marrow internships. And we are expanding our “pay it forward” approach via the Getty Prize, which recognizes leaders in the art world like Mark Bradford and supports organizations of the awardees’ choosing: this year the nonprofit Arts for Healing and Justice Network.

In LA, we can make the Getty Villa and Getty Center less intimidating, more dynamic, and more welcoming—to all visitors, no matter their native language, knowledge of art history, or familiarity with museums. And we’ll explore passed-over stories, such as those about women in antiquity (see p. 10) and the enslaved people who made houses like the Villa dei Papiri run. (Take our newest Getty Villa tour, “The 99%.”) We’re giving away our art—88,000 downloadable artworks for free for any purpose you like thanks to our new open content program. There are already many fans of ancient culture—its Roman, sexy, terrifying myths, which still inform Hollywood (how great is O Brother, Where Art Thou?), its Athenian democracy (still, at least for now, the model for ours), the enduring wisdom of its philosophers. I was scrolling on my phone the other day when this gem from Plato came up, like by thousands: “The price good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.”

How incredible, really, that lives lived two millennia ago were in some ways not so different from our own, and that we can still learn from them. It is one of our tasks here at Getty to help make that possible. Something to ponder as you stroll through the Getty Villa this spring, enchanted, surely, by the truly stunning world gifted to us by J. Paul Getty. Happy 50th, Getty Villa!
Getty Party Opens Frieze Los Angeles

For the third year, Getty partnered with Frieze to host a festive kickoff party at the Getty Villa Museum for Frieze Los Angeles, an international art fair that draws contemporary artists, galleries, museums, and collectors for a weeklong celebration of art and ideas.

Afternoon showers cleared just in time for the opening presentation by L.A. Dance Project, with dancers Daphne Fernberger and David Adrian Freeland, Jr., performing a lyrical duet from artistic director Benjamin Millepied’s *Be Here Now*. L.A. Dance Project is one of many organizations participating in Getty’s upcoming PST ART initiative.

Getty President and CEO Katherine E. Fleming and Frieze Director of Americas Christine Messineo welcomed the lively audience, thanking them for helping make Los Angeles and Southern California an international hub for arts, culture, and technology. They toasted cross-border collaborations and connections and announced a new partnership between Getty and Frieze to create unique visitor experiences for PST ART: *Art & Science Collide*, which opens in September 2024.

Fleming invited all to return for PST ART and thanked the event’s host committee, which included Anissa and Paul John Balson II, Megan and Peter Chermin, Jared Ellner and Owen Thiele, Ariel Emanual, Casey Fremont and Brandon Crowe, Rosetta and Balthazar Getty, Lauren Halsey and Monique McWilliams, Maria D. Hummer-Tuttle and Robert H. Tuttle, Alicia Mifiana and Bob Lovelace, Jari and Pamela Mohr, Cath-erine Opie, Tina Perry-Whitney and Ric Whitney, Jordan D. Schnitzer, Curt Shepard and Alan Hergott, Michael S. Smith and James Costos, Hank Willis Thomas, and Deborah Willis.

First launched in 2019, Frieze Los Angeles this year attracted a record number of galleries and collectors to the weeklong events, adding to its reputation as an international destination for people everywhere passionate about contemporary art.
Ever since the Villa dei Papiri was rediscovered in 1750, its library of charred papyrus scrolls has presented a captivating mystery. Carbonized by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, the scrolls were heated into cylindrical black lumps, hiding the treasures of their ancient writings. Over the centuries scholars were able to open and partially read some of the scrolls, but their methods caused them great damage. Exploration stopped for over a century, until in 2015 Dr. Brent Seales and his team at the University of Kentucky pioneered the use of X-ray tomography (similar to CT scans) to detect traces of ink on the scrolls. This breakthrough led to the Vesuvius Challenge, launched in 2023 by Silicon Valley entrepreneurs Nat Friedman and Daniel Gross in partnership with Seales. An international public competition, the Vesuvius Challenge offered more than $1 million in prizes to competitors who could decipher the writing. Over a thousand people started working on the problem using open-source machine learning and AI technologies. Just seven months later the first challenge was met, and the first full word was digitally detected on one of the scrolls: "PORPYRAC," or "porphyra," meaning “purple” in ancient Greek. By the end of 2023, the grand prize winners had met the challenge and read four passages of text within two scrolls: ΠΟΡΦΥΡΑϹ, or "porphyras," meaning "purple" in ancient Greek. By the end of 2023, the grand prize winners had met the challenge and read four passages of text within two scrolls.

On March 16 at the Getty Villa Museum, Seales, Friedman, Getty antiquities curator Ken Lapatin, and papyrologist Federica Nicolardi gave presentations about the Villa dei Papiri and the search for the scrolls’ meaning. The award winners then received their prizes.

Going forward, the Vesuvius Challenge team will try to decipher the rest of the known scrolls, including hundreds still buried at the Villa dei Papiri. If successful, they may unlock enormous revelations about the history and literature of the ancient Mediterranean world.

**Vesuvius Challenge Winners’ Big Night**

Frieze party (cont.)
Neeks, Safoura & Sana  
Irvine, CA

Neeks: The cool thing I saw today was the fountain with the water coming from the mouth of the tiger!

Safoura: My favorite thing so far has been the Persian emperor display. I’m originally from Iran, so that’s the one I really liked and was so excited about when I saw it.

Sana: Mine was where the coins were. It was really cool and had different shapes and colors.

Lincoln, Westley & Adelaide  
Irvine, CA

Lincoln: My favorite thing was the garden and the fountains and the little rock paths.

Westley: My favorite thing was going to the museum.

Adelaide: My favorite thing was the garden and fountains.

Yesom  
South Korea

This is my second time at the Getty Villa. Nowadays I’m obsessed with “good luck” and “good fortune.” [The plaque] says this sculpture means good fortune and good luck. I’m also obsessed with gender equality, and I feel proud of a solo sculpture of a woman.

Marisol, Mariana & Yasmine  
Tijuana, Mexico

Marisol: I just walked in and it felt very peaceful and very beautiful.

Mariana: I actually came here once in high school, and we didn’t get to explore that much, but I remember this garden! This is a really nice place for photos and to hang around for a while. All the views and details have impressed me.

Yasmine: The topic of this culture is something that I am very passionate about; so far, finding and seeing it in this gorgeous location, plus the view, has left me breathless and very excited.
What We Get Wrong about Women in Ancient Rome

Podcaster and historian Emma Southon shares what you probably didn't learn in history class

By Erin Migdol
Editor
J. Paul Getty Trust

WHEN YOU IMAGINE LIFE IN ANCIENT ROME, do you ever picture women working as doctors or running their own businesses?

If not, then historian, author, and podcaster Emma Southon has some unexpected, definitely delightful stories to tell you about how women actually lived in ancient times.

In her most recent book, *A History of the Roman Empire in 21 Women: How Women Transformed the Empire,* she shares a side of Roman history you may not have learned in school. In her podcast *History Is Sexy,* she answers the history questions you probably don’t have time to research yourself. And on her podcast *Women in Ancient Rome,* she shares a whole new perspective on the role of women.

You say on your website, “I just truly love and hate the Romans.” Why such strong feelings?

I love and hate them for the same reason: they’re horrible, but they don’t think they’re horrible. They genuinely believe themselves to be the best of all people. In Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History,* there’s a part where he’s describing all the races that he knows of in the world, and he says that the most blessed in terms of every sphere of professionalism except the army and law.

When I first started researching women, the amount of relative freedom they had was surprising, because so much of what you learn about them is that they were legally not allowed to do a bunch of things considered important. I had to step outside those old-fashioned lenses of what history is. That tension between the image they have of themselves, and that is so much money and she can. You just see women all over the place, doing everything and being very visible and engaged in their communities in quite powerful ways.

How possible was social mobility at that time? Could women improve their social standing, or fall?

One of the nice things about the Roman Empire is that there was a fair amount of social mobility. The most common method was to be enslaved and then freed, largely because there were so many enslaved people, and the enslaved population was constantly being replenished because of war. Romans would free people in their wills or as a present. So you have an entire class of what were called freed people who were once enslaved but now had some citizenship rights. That was a big step up—you were still under an obligation to your former owner, but it was significantly better than what it had been. Once you were there, you could marry up as well, because freed people could marry free people.

What’s the biggest misconception people have about women’s lives in ancient Rome?

The main misconception is that women in the Roman Empire were universally, horribly oppressed. Or that they were locked inside and not allowed any access to life outside of the kitchen, or some 1950s imagined version of what Roman femininity is. This massively homogenizes the Roman female experience by basically making it into an elite Roman female experience. Because as soon as you say, “All women just stayed in the kitchen,” you’re only talking about women who could afford to stay in the kitchen. You’re automatically erasing all the enslaved people, and the enslaved population was constantly being replenished because of war. Romans would free people in their wills or as a present. So you have an entire class of what were called freed people who were once enslaved but now had some citizenship rights. That was a big step up—you were still under an obligation to your former owner, but it was significantly better than what it had been. Once you were there, you could marry up as well, because freed people could marry free people.

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How would you describe the average Roman woman’s ability to be part of society?

Very free, to be honest, other than politics. Women couldn’t go into politics or law, and they couldn’t command armies. Because politics and war are the spheres through which we typically see history, women have been totally excluded. But when you start looking at social history, religion, business, commerce, and really any other area, then women were out and about very happily doing all kinds of things. Unlike ancient Greek women, they were going to dinners, to the theater, to parties; they could do a lot with their own property. You had women in virtually every sphere of professionalism except the army and law.

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Q & A

It could go the other way too. You could become enslaved or lose your status by not behaving properly. Romans were very hierarchical, and they made their hierarchy really visible. You could only wear certain clothing if you were of a certain rank; for example, you could only wear gold rings if you were of the equestrian rank [the second-highest social rank in Rome, below senator] and above.

What beauty standards were women expected to adhere to at that time?
Your classically beautiful Roman women had pale skin, because if you were tanned, then you worked outside and couldn’t be in the shade or spend time indoors. About 20 years ago, a 2,000-year-old pot of cream in a watertight tin was found in London. The cream inside was still intact and had finger marks in it. Scientists were able to analyze the chemical makeup and found it was used to make skin paler. Romans also liked very dark eyes, and they loved a big, bushy eyebrow.

Fashion tended to focus on hair more than clothing, because clothing was fairly simple most of the time. Hair fashions changed an awful lot, and they’re really fun to look at, because you occasionally find these phases of intensely huge hair that was clearly done with hairpieces, because no one could possibly do that with regular hair.

Do you have any favorite women of ancient Rome?
I do. I have an undying love for Agrippina the Younger. She was a Roman empress from 49 to 54 CE, sister of Caligula, mother of Claudius, and mother of Nero. She is the perfect kind of horrible Roman woman who you’d never want to invite for dinner. She’s so arrogant and so utterly convinced of her own borderline divinity and supremacy over everybody. She just doesn’t seem to think that anything that applies to everybody else applies to her. She decides, “I’ll just be the empress,” and it basically takes murdering her to make her stop. Nero tries to kill her three times. One time he’s betrayed because her household likes her too much—he tries to get the army in Rome to kill her, and they say they won’t do it. He tries to poison her, but it turns out she takes antidotes. He tries to drown her by ramming a boat that she’s in, and it turns out she can swim really well. Eventually he has to give up and just stab her.

And she wins every argument she’s in. People are so hostile to her because she’s a woman in spaces that women are not allowed to be in. Every so often she’ll fall out with whomever the emperor is, and then they’ll have a closed-door conversation and she’ll come out having not only gotten over the argument, but now several of her friends have important jobs and her best friend is now the procurator of Egypt. You can imagine Nero sitting there going: “No, that wasn’t how this was supposed to go. How did I end up agreeing to this?” So I love her for that. I just think she is a force of nature.
Antiquities conservator Marie Svoboda tells us about the APPEAR project, a Getty-driven collaboration to uncover the mysteries of ancient mummy portraits

When I joined Getty in 2003, I was captivated by the Villa’s collection of funerary portraits: 16 images of deceased individuals painted on wooden panels or linen shrouds, 14 originally attached to their mummies’ wrappings. The likenesses were created during the Romano-Egyptian period in Egypt, dating from the first to the third century CE.

The portraits are amazing—expressive and alluring, like 2,000-year-old snapshots that represent some of the best-preserved examples of ancient painting. What intrigued me the most was that little is known about who their creators might have been. Were their artists part of organized workshops? Where did the materials used in their creation come from, and how were they used? I had many questions.

Then I had an idea. What if conservators, scientists, and scholars around the world researched the methods and materials of as many portraits as possible, and logged that information into one shareable location? (We think some 1,028 mummy portraits exist in global collections.) The bigger the pool of information gathered, the less anecdotal and more conclusive the data would be. Plus, if such a project existed, collaborators might be inspired to use the accessible platform to conduct long-delayed research.

We could compare methods—like ultraviolet and infrared imaging, radiography, and other scientific tools for highly accurate, noninvasive analyses available at Getty and other partner institutions—and share our collective resources and findings. To do this, Getty could build a database capable of compiling and sharing this information, and we’d make data entry as easy as checking boxes. Were the portraits gilded? Check. Was the wood type imported or one locally sourced? How was the pigment applied? Egyptian blue used—as an underdrawing, mixed with other pigments to brighten or imitate rare colors, or used simply as blue?

In 2013 this idea became a reality with the launch of the Ancient Panel Paintings Imaging, Analysis, and Research (APPEAR) project. Since that time, 59 museums around the world have made over 400 individual entries into the database. Experts have worked in teams or combined their efforts, including Caroline Cartwright, a wood anatomist at the British Museum, who has identified the types of timber employed in crafting funerary artifacts, and Joy Mazurek, a binding media specialist at the Getty Conservation Institute, who has analyzed over 60 portraits.

Other Getty colleagues have also contributed to the APPEAR project, including staff from Antiques, Web & Digital Initiatives, Communications, and Publications. The last released Mummy Portraits of Roman Egypt: Emerging Research from the APPEAR Project, a 2020 publication resulting from a 2013 conference at the Getty Villa, where conservators, conservation scientists, and other presented papers sparked by APPEAR. The volume has had far-reaching impact, not only as a resource for the study of ancient painting and its methodology but also as an inspiration for further research and exhibitions.

One such exhibition was the Harvard Art Museums’ Funerary Portraits from Roman Egypt: Facing Forward (August 27–December 30, 2022), a thought-provoking look at modern technical studies of Romano-Egyptian funerary materials and the ancient artistic practices they revealed. During that show, a second APPEAR conference took place at the Allard Pierson, Amsterdam, where 17 presentations provided a continuum of research complementing the first conference at the Villa. The Allard Pierson gathering concluded with an experts’ session where participants could examine portraits outside their vitrines/storage. This privileged opportunity enabled an up-close and personal inspection of the artistic techniques and manufacture, not to mention inspiring discussions with like-minded colleagues.

The exhibition at the Allard Pierson, Face to Face: The People Behind Mummy Portraits (meant to coincide with the APPEAR conference but delayed due to COVID), followed a year later and featured information gleaned from APPEAR as well as new data obtained from a collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Conservation–Art+Science.

What is discussed at these conferences? What has come to light after 11 years of the APPEAR project?

In sum, we now know that some woods and other materials were not available locally and had to be imported, that there was creative substitution, such as using a sparkling yellow mineral (orpiment) to imitate gold, that a green pigment produced by combining indigo with orpiment is 500 years older than the historical record had indicated, and that the artists who created mummy portraits were highly skilled and resourceful professionals. One very new discovery was that a small group of images, after being incorporated into their mummy wrappings, were “varnished” with a mysterious coating made of hen egg. Was this applied for symbolic, religious, or practical reasons? We still have much to learn.

By comparing makers’ painting styles and materials, we’ve also identified possible workshops and the hand of individual artists. While exploring technical imaging and analytical methods, we’ve revealed things previously invisible, such as the abundance of natural dyes used as pigments and the 2,000-year-old coating, a feature only recognized through images (ultraviolet fluorescence) uploaded to the database and whose purpose we are still exploring.

Looking forward, I’m excited that the second volume of Mummy Portraits of Roman Egypt is scheduled to be released in late 2024, and that a new and improved platform for collecting data has been completed, allowing project statistics to be tabulated for a public-facing visualization.

I also know that we’ll be making many more unexpected discoveries, gaining a better understanding of ancient painting technology, and possibly finding answers to additional ancient secrets about mummy portraits in global collections.

Collaboration is a powerful thing, and its success is due to the support of the Getty team and the gracious contributions of the APPEAR project participants, who have shared their knowledge and resources.

To learn more about the APPEAR project, visit https://www.getty.edu/projects/appear-project/.

APPEAR conference participants examine mummy portraits from the Allard Pierson collection during the experts’ session, October 21, 2022. From left: Ben van den Bercken, Bettine Verkuijlen, Anke Kobbe, Cecilie Brøns, and Giovanni Verri. Photo: Yosi Pozeilov

One of the portraits from the APPEAR project. Photo: Yosi Pozeilov

This ultraviolet image of Mummy Portrait of a Bearded Man reveals fluorescence due to the presence of an ancient egg coating and evidence of an organic pink lake pigment (detail at bottom left and right). The vast expanse of egg coating under magnification. Mummy Portrait of a Bearded Man, about 150–170 CE, Romano-Egyptian, Encaustic on linen wood. Getty Museum.
50 YEARS OF THE GETTY VILLA
As it evolved from a private estate to a vibrant hub for antiquity, the Getty Villa Museum became a beloved Los Angeles institution

By Erin Migdol
Editor
J. Paul Getty Trust

To the Los Angeles Times art critic, it was “an incredibly eccentric extravaganza.” To visitors interviewed by a New York Times reporter, it was “gorgeous, just marvelous” and “an intellectual Disneyland.” But to founder J. Paul Getty, the Getty Villa was simply “what I felt a good museum should be, and it will have the character of a building that I would like to visit myself.”

Since opening to the public in 1974, the Villa has inspired passion—from visitors, who drive up Pacific Coast Highway to spend a day among its immersive architecture and artwork, and from staff, who enjoy its intimate, family-like atmosphere and commitment to bringing the ancient world alive. Where else in Los Angeles can you peruse treasures of the ancient world, then gaze out at the shimmering ocean?

As the Villa celebrates its 50th anniversary, we journeyed back to its early days as a collector’s seaside retreat and traced some of the most memorable moments in its colorful history. Let’s raise a chalice to the next 50 years!
1954: The Ranch House
The Villa’s story begins with the Ranch House, as it would come to be known: a sprawling residence atop 64 acres in oceanfront Pacific Palisades. Getty bought the property in 1945 for his fifth wife, Teddy, to offer space for her to ride horses and to house his growing art collection. He had been bitten by the art bug decades earlier, and his holdings included decorative arts, paintings, and objects from antiquity.

“In his memoirs, Getty talks about his belief that art is a civilizing thing, and to be civilized, you need to appreciate art,” says Kenneth Lapatin, curator of antiquities at Getty since 2002. “And the money was always important to him. He saw collecting as an opportunity not to buy low and sell high—because he didn’t intend on selling—but to get good value and acquire outstanding objects. And he wrote about it as a form of addiction he tried to quit many times and couldn’t.”

Getty left the US permanently for England in 1951, but he continued to add to his collection at the Ranch House and opened it to visitors in 1954 as the J. Paul Getty Museum. For a few days each week, people could drive up to the Ranch House and browse the collection, which was displayed in a separate wing of the residence. Visitors could even see some marble sculptures displayed outside.

Besides his interest in art’s “civilizing” qualities, Getty was also attracted to the tax benefits of turning his art collection into a museum. “When Teddy was around 100 years old, I got a chance to ask her questions about Getty’s early collecting, and she said, ‘Well, you know, Paul never met a tax deduction he didn’t like,’” Lapatin remembers.
1968: Building the Villa

As his collection outgrew the Ranch House, Getty began working with architects to draw up plans for a new museum. He rejected proposals for Spanish, Renaissance, and modern buildings, instead opting to re-create the Villa dei Papiri—an ancient Roman luxury home that had fascinated him for decades. Named for the library of charred papyrus scrolls found within it in the 1750s—the only library from antiquity to survive with its contents—the building was buried by the same eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE that had destroyed and paradoxically preserved Pompeii. Getty never saw the ancient villa (it remains buried under 75 feet of volcanic debris) but knew of its art collections, recovered by a Swiss military engineer working for the king of Naples, who mapped its plan. Today, most scholars believe that the sumptuous seaside retreat was constructed by Julius Caesar’s father-in-law. Getty hired Norman Neuerberg, a historian of ancient Roman architecture, to ensure that the new structure would be as historically accurate as possible, despite modern necessities like air ducts and elevators.

A few months before the Villa opened, Getty asked another consulting architect, Stephen Garrett, to move from England to California and run the place in his absence. Garrett’s daughter, Rebecca, was eight years old at the time and remembers her entire family viewing the experience as a grand adventure. “I know that my father really liked the construction part of it because Getty was very involved,” Rebecca says. “Getty wanted photographs of everything—cement they poured, trucks coming in, things like that. Most other people, it seems, found Getty incredibly difficult. But my father loved working for him because he told him what he wanted and was very straightforward.”

Where thoughts can thrive

In 1975, deputy director Stephen Garrett wrote to J. Paul Getty: “I have come more and more to the opinion that the library is a vital part of our operation. Like a garden fertilizer, its existence may not always be obvious, nor its applications noticed, but its effect on growth and performance are very considerable.” The early library at the Villa was strictly for the use of museum curators, and it consisted mostly of J. Paul Getty’s personal collection of books on antiquities, decorative arts, and paintings. By the 1980s, the idea of creating an art history library covering global topics took hold, and the library opened to the public in 1997 as the Getty Research Institute, part of the new Getty Center, turning that early vision of a space to fertilize intellectual growth into a reality.

—Rituparna Roy, Graduate Intern, Getty Research Institute
1974: The Getty Villa Opens

On January 16, 1974, the Villa opened its gates to visitors. Getty had wanted his friend, President Richard Nixon, to attend the opening, but Getty’s aide Norris Bramlett talked him out of it, given the Watergate scandal. Still, plenty of other visitors arrived and seemed to love wandering the grounds and gardens, exploring the art, and marveling at the Roman architecture. The “culturati” critics weren’t so enthusiastic though. While modern architecture was all the rage, Getty had created this ode to the classics, Lapatin explains. Digs like “cheap,” “garish,” “Hollywood,” and “Disneyland” littered their reviews.

Although Getty died just two years after the Villa opened—without ever seeing it in person—he left his entire estate to the J. Paul Getty Trust and is buried on the property. Through his correspondence, it’s clear that he wasn’t pleased with the critics’ negative response to his project—possibly even unhappier than he let on, Lapatin suggests.

“A lot of the initial reaction was, ‘Oh, crazy billionaire does this gauche thing,’ and he thought he was doing something nice for the people of Los Angeles,” Lapatin says. Getty never saw how the criticisms gave way to accolades, as local and international visitors flocked to this interpretation of an ancient Roman estate in the middle of Southern California. Micah Fields-Cosey, who has worked at Getty as a security officer since 1995, first visited the Villa on an elementary school field trip around 1979 and remembers being awed by the site’s beauty and grandeur.

“It just felt like a totally different place than where I came from, in the inner city,” she says. “The way it was set up with all the marble, it just took our breath away. I think that was the only time I really paid attention on a field trip.”

Staff who were there in the early days remember the Villa as a museum working to find its footing—people figured out what they were doing as they went along, and a sense of camaraderie and family permeated the halls. “We had fewer rotating exhibitions and almost no outgoing loans,” says Marie Svoboda, who worked as a graduate intern at the Villa in 1995 and then returned as an antiquities conservator in 2003. “We had fewer commitments than we have today, so things were a little bit more social and relaxed, and we had the opportunity to admire and savor the collection and grounds.”

Even the docent program began in a somewhat ad hoc fashion, eventually coalescing into a well-oiled machine. Patti Amstutz became a guide in 1979, though at the time, docents jokingly referred to themselves as the “T and P” group, since they spent so much time telling visitors where the Tea Room and bathrooms were.

“We stood on the ledge at the end of the Outer Peristyle garden, and we would chat for no more than 10 minutes to visitors to give them a little bit of background on the Villa,” Amstutz says. “And then we would go sit on a chair in front of the little bookstore, which was nothing larger than a closet.”

Over time, the strength of the collection grew, conservators tackled the latest techniques and technology, and the Villa began to prove itself as a powerhouse among museums. “I looked at Getty like it was Mount Olympus,” Svoboda says. “It was such an amazing place to be because we were always organizing conservation events that really proved at the time that we were leaders in the field and very ambitious. It was incredibly desirable to be a part of it all.”

Above: Bing Crosby (right) performs at the Getty Villa.

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Garrett

Left: Stephen Garrett with the first visitor to the Getty Villa, January 16, 1974
As beloved as the Villa had become, by the mid-1980s its facilities could no longer support the crowds of visitors and expanding conservation department (a priority of Garrett, who served as director of the Getty Museum until 1984). As soon as the Getty Center opened in 1997, the Villa closed to fully prioritize an extensive renovation led by the architectural firm Machado and Silvetti Associates. Over the next decade, the Villa was transformed. Structural improvements, like seismic retrofitting, and accessibility features made the site stronger and safer. New design elements included windows and skylights on the museum’s once-enclosed second floor and tiled floor patterns. Additional construction included an Entry Pavilion and the Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman Theater (embellishments that direct visitors down toward the museum entrance, evoking the feeling of descending into an archaeological dig), plus a café, store, and auditorium. Unseen but equally important additions included a loading dock, freight elevators, and an X-ray room.

The European paintings, decorative arts, and other articles in Getty’s collection moved to the Center, allowing the Villa to lean into its identity as a hub for antiquity. The Ranch House was then converted to offices and a library, and new structures for laboratories gave staff more space to conduct research. What’s the biggest challenge scholars encounter in the program? “When they don’t want to leave,” Sekyra says. “This is one of the few programs that supports scholarship of the ancient world that isn’t very narrow,” Canepa says. “It brings in people from multiple disciplines. At least for the art history and archaeology of the ancient world and museum studies, the GRI’s Villa program is the most important research institute of its type.”

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2006: The Villa Scholars Program
After what is now the Getty Research Institute was founded in 1982, then director Kurt Forster spearheaded the Getty Scholars fellowship program so that academics could come to Getty and conduct research under the umbrella of a common theme. Scholars of antiquity were always included in the program, but after the Villa remodel, a separate Villa Scholars Program was launched. The program’s participants have their own offices at the Villa and focus their research on an antiquity-inspired theme, usually for about three months. “The Villa has a more intimate character than the Center, so there is sometimes more collaboration among scholars and Villa staff,” says Alexa Sekyra, head of the Scholars Program.

Researchers have gone on to write articles and books, generate new ideas for exhibitions, plan conferences, and even come back to work full-time at Getty. The scholars’ investigations have led to unexpected discoveries—something Matthew Canepa, professor of ancient Iranian archaeology at UC Irvine and a two-time Villa Scholar, knows all about. As he was walking back to work from lunch one day during the 2019 program, he passed a lab where a conservator was cleaning a silver Parthian vessel. The conservator invited him in to take a closer look. That chance encounter led Canepa to discover inscriptions on the vessel that had never been published before, and a new method of dating Parthian silver vessels. Moreover, the study of Hellenistic and Parthian luxury material has become a major focus of his current research, an expertise that he contributed to the Getty Museum’s recent Persia exhibition catalogue and that he hopes will culminate in a future monograph.

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Looking Back with Jeffrey Spier

The Anissa and Paul John Balson II Senior Curator of Antiquities retires after 10 years at the Getty Villa

If you’ve visited the Getty Villa Museum in the last 10 years, chances are you’ve explored an exhibition brought to life by Jeffrey Spier—who no doubt helped you discover some fascinating new perspectives about the ancient world along the way. Spier bid farewell to Getty in January, wrapping up a career that included a stint as a visiting Villa Scholar in 2013 (his focus of research: ancient gemstones) and 10 years as a Getty senior curator. As head of the Antiquities Department, Spier overview dozens of exhibitions, including the Classical World in Context series; reimagined the Villa’s galleries in 2018; and helped decide what antiquities to acquire for Getty’s collection.

Before closing this chapter, Spier took a few moments to reflect on his time at Getty and his proudest accomplishments.

First impressions of the Villa: I studied classical archaeology at Harvard and then moved to Los Angeles in 1978, so I saw the Villa just a few years after it opened. It wasn’t a professional visit, though I did have a pleasant chat with the first curator of antiquities, Jiri Frel. He was so nice to me, even though I was just out of college. Eventually I went back to school, to Oxford, but I’d often come back to visit the Villa. I admired its collections and the architecture—I always thought it was a beautiful and serious place with a good vision. The interesting thing was that the oldest critics didn’t like it.

How to build an exhibition: Getty Villa exhibitions might be academic, intellectual shows. But they’re very beautiful and engaging too. A good example is the Classical World in Context series, where we’re trying to tell a very complicated story, a thousand years or more of the history of relations between the Greeks and the Persians or Egyptians, for example. So we brainstorm: What objects should we pick that illustrate that story? What objects do we borrow—and who will lend things to us? You have to take all of those things into consideration.

Favorite exhibitions: Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World was actually held at the Getty Center because it was such a big exhibition. I thought that was beautiful and included really important loans and interesting objects. Another favorite was the recent exhibition Persia: Ancient Iran and the Classical World! This story was an especially important part of ancient history that’s probably not as well known as it should be, and it resonated with our visitors because of the enormous Iranian community in Los Angeles.

I also loved working with my colleagues Davide Gasparotto and Anne Woollett on Rubens: Picturing Antiquity. Art from antiquity was so important to Peter Paul Rubens, who was a collector and a scholar, and his love for ancient art and culture greatly influenced his paintings. And I’ve loved our little shows, like The Gold Empire from Avesticum. It was just a one-room show, but the object was really striking and not well known. Everyone was impressed by that one.

Biggest challenges: Getting objects on loan to exhibitions. Getty has an excellent reputation for handling artwork and mounting important exhibitions, and we’re resources to do it, but you still have to borrow those valuable, fragile things. And we try to be ambitious, so sometimes the artworks are quite big or unusually fragile. You have to go to the other museums or lenders and convince them that the exhibition is important enough to justify these loans. Sometimes that’s very difficult.

Another challenge is combining our conservation work with our exhibitions, even though we’re well known and skilled at conserving ancient objects that need work. Maybe the most ambitious all was for the Egyptian show, when we had a five-ton granite obelisk that was in pieces and needed to be put back together and stabilized. It takes a lot of planning, but our team has done wonderful work.

Proudest moments: When lenders come and are so impressed with what we’ve done with their objects. It’s gratifying to have professionals acknowledging your work. But even more rewarding to me is seeing the visitors’ reactions to our exhibitions. Sometimes they have personal connections—when we had the Persian show, Persian families came to see it, and when we had Assyrian art from the British Museum for Assyria: Palace Art of Ancient Iraq, the Assyrian community came. They felt a great identity with the art. I saw visitors crying in front of objects.

Favorite artwork at the Villa: Being very nearsighted, I like little objects—gems, the little bronzes in the Greek gallery from 500 BCE. I like the sculpture. I love the statue of Jupiter upstairs, and that gallery always looks great under the skylight. I also appreciate the ingenious mounting, thanks to our conservators and mountmakers. The big Roman marble sarcophagus featuring the Muses is fragmentary and restored from dozens of pieces, but the way it’s displayed and hung on the wall, it looks like it’s floating.

What I’ll miss the most: My colleagues. Getty is a collaborative place—there are dozens and dozens of people here, from conservators and prep, curators and designers, and all the public programs people. And the security officers. I love our security officers. They’re the front line, and I really enjoy talking to them. I’ll miss all the people here very much.

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2015–18: Gallery Reinstallation

Before Timothy Potts, Maria Hummer-Tuttle and Robert Tuttle Director of the J. Paul Getty Museum, started his tenure in 2012, he told then Getty President and CEO Jim Cuno, “I’d love to be here, but I want you to know that I think the Villa needs to be re-envisioned.”

The change Potts envisioned was reinstalling the Villa collection to highlight its quality and importance as ancient art history—as the Getty Center does for the post-antique collections. Since 2006, the Villa’s collection of Greek and Roman art had been organized by subject matter and theme, with galleries dedicated to topics like Dionysos and the theater and gods and goddesses. Potts felt this thematic style of organization, which brought together objects from very different times and places, made it hard to trace the evolution of styles, subjects, technologies, and narratives that made ancient classical art distinctive and influential. “To understand art history, you have to see the very real influence that earlier art has on the next generations,” he says.

From 2015 to 2018, Potts led an overhaul of the Villa galleries, grouping objects by eras and regions to help visitors more clearly see how ancient classical art and culture evolved over more than 3,000 years. This gave curators the opportunity to display objects that had been in storage for decades—frescoes from a house excavated near Pompeii, for instance—and made it easier for visitors to appreciate the beauty and significance of artworks like the coes from a house excavated near Pompeii, for years. This gave curators the opportunity to display the best things, but we also thought, ‘How you think of that?’” says Jeffrey Spier, recently

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2018: The Classical World in Context

Potts also pitched another project that would address a historical narrowness in Getty’s collection of ancient art: the fact that it encompasses only the “classical” cultures of Greece and Rome, reflecting a narrowly European view of these as the most artistically advanced and important. “In fact, Greco-Roman art was itself the product of extensive cultural interaction throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East,” says Potts.

“Clearly, there was a much bigger and more interesting story to be told, but we didn’t have the collections from other cultures to do this. The only solution to this problem I could come up with, and I think it was the right one, was to initiate a series of exhibitions, bringing in major loans from museums around the world, that would put Greek and Roman art in its broader context.”

This brainstorm became *The Classical World in Context*, a series of exhibitions, publications, and research projects that investigate and celebrate the connections that ancient Greece and Rome had with their neighbors near and far, from Britain to China. The series began in 2018 with *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World* (held at the Getty Center); *Persia: Ancient Iran and the Classical World* followed in 2022.

These exhibitions have led to some of the highest attendance numbers the Villa has ever seen, though ultimately Potts says his goal is simply to give viewers a solid foundation in the art and culture of these ancient civilizations. “We want them to be the best exhibitions that can be done on each culture’s connections with the classical world—with loans from major museums all around the world.”

Conservators at the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) and the Getty Museum work to study, clean, repair, and protect ancient art, frequently sharing their expertise with museums and cultural institutions around the world. Above, antiquities conservator Marie Svoboda (right) and GCI associate scientist Monica Ganio perform a macro-XRF scan of the *Mummy Portrait of Isidora* (detail), 100 CE, attributed to the Isidora Master. Encaustic on linden wood; gilt; linen. Getty Museum

The Villa's littlest guests may not be allowed to touch the art in the galleries, but in the Family Forum, they’re encouraged to be hands-on. Kids can find activities and crafts that help them explore ancient art in an interactive way.

Below: At the annual College Night, local students are invited to explore the Villa after hours, with an evening of free music, food, scavenger hunts, raffles, workshops, gallery tours, and performances. Since the first College Night in 2006, the event has attracted thousands of students each year. These participants even dressed in their finest togas at the 2019 event!
2024: What’s Next

As the Villa embarks on its next 50 years, treasures and stories from the ancient world continue to come alive within its halls. On view now is Sculpted Portraits from Ancient Egypt, which features stone works on loan from the British Museum, and Picture Worlds: Greek, Maya, and Moche Pottery, which explores how painted pottery served as a dynamic means of storytelling and social engagement. This fall, Ancient Thrace and the Classical World: Treasures from Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece, the next exhibition for The Classical World in Context, goes on view. Potts says that Getty will continue to collect antiquities with good provenance, and he looks forward to continuing the Villa’s program of research and conservation treatments on especially important antiquities from around the world.

OCT fans can anticipate this summer’s Memnon, a play produced in collaboration with the Classical Theatre of Harlem—“the history of an Ethiopian king that is never told, or is kind of forgotten,” explains Ralph Flores, senior public programs specialist for the Villa’s theater performances. Hopefully, any drama at the Villa will remain onstage. Although its first 50 years have established it as the ultimate American destination for discovering art and life from the ancient classical world, the journey hasn’t always been smooth. In 2008, Getty repatriated more than 40 objects to Italy and Greece after discovery of evidence that they had been illegally excavated. “But in recent years,” Potts says, “Getty has adopted stringent acquisition standards and, as appropriate, responsibly returned antiquities where there is evidence of wrongdoing.” This has made possible a number of research, exhibition, and conservation collaborations between Getty and Italy in the past decade. “I hope and believe that our relations with Italy, Greece, and many other countries of the Mediterranean will continue to evolve in positive ways that benefit us all,” he says.

When it comes to the Villa itself, rest assured that its charm and character won’t change anytime soon. Potts recognizes that among museums, it is unique in its ability to share the story of the ancient world in an immersive environment. “The combination of the art, the architecture, the gardens, the fountains, the landscaping around it, the view of the ocean, it’s so perfect. The best thing you could do is leave it pretty much alone.”

If J. Paul Getty were alive today and visited the Villa, would he like what he sees? Lapatin thinks so. “What he was really interested in was history and beauty and the presentation of these artifacts, the stories they can tell, and how we can learn from them,” he says. “And I think the Villa does that even better now than it did before.”
Among the ancient treasures showcased in the Getty Villa exhibition Picture Worlds: Greek, Maya, and Moche is a cylindrical terracotta vessel made more than 1,000 years ago, probably for Maya nobility. The surface is elaborately painted with a scene depicting the birth of the sacred cacao tree, the source of what premodern Maya culture considered food of the gods.

But the uniqueness of the vessel went beyond what the eyes could see. When in motion, it made a rattling sound, thanks to the ceramic pellets the potter placed in its three hollow feet.

“When you lifted the vessel, not only were you looking at it and smelling whatever it might have contained, but you were hearing it as well,” says David Saunders, associate curator of antiquities, who organized the exhibition.

The Maya pot, a product of the Mesoamerican civilization that once spanned Central America, is just one example of the inspiration humans across millennia have found in a humble ball of clay. Molded, coiled, thrown on wheels, and fired into pots, clay played a crucial role in human progress, enabling prehistoric peoples to store, transport, and cook food. Today its allure is stronger than ever.

More artists are exploring the medium of clay, helping to elevate what had long been considered craft into fine art. The ranks of hobby potters are booming too, leading to a proliferation of pottery studios and classes locally and across the country.

“People are desperate to find communities where they belong—not at home and not at work,” says Gwen Robertson, executive director of Sierra Madre’s Creative Arts Group, a nonprofit arts space with a bustling ceramics program. “That’s what we really seek to develop in our program. People come here to be a part of a community, and clay is what brings them together.”

The surge in popularity of pottery making has been especially notable in the past four years. After COVID-19 forced life online, people young and old began to hunger for the tactile and meditative satisfaction of hands on clay.

“The demand for wheels, kilns, and clay materials exploded during the pandemic,” says ceramic artist and educator Wayne Perry, who has led popular workshops around Los Angeles, including at the Getty Center and Getty Villa. “You had to be on a waiting list to buy a kiln, and the clay I was using went from 45 cents to 98 cents a pound. Pottery has really taken off.”

Ceramicists like London-based Florian Gadsby and Tampa, Florida–based Kelsey Ford have become social media sensations, their seductive videos of wheel throwing offering a welcome alternative to doomscrolling and endless Zoom meetings. Also fueling the trend are celebrities like Brad Pitt and Seth Rogen. Rogen, who sells his own line of ceramics, described pottery making as “like yoga, if you got a thing at the end.”

Ceramics studios are busier than ever as we tire of scrolling and crave making things with our hands. But little has changed since antiquity, it turns out, when it comes to the best ways of shaping a bowl or firing a pot.
Everything Ancient Is New Again

What remains largely unchanged from ancient times are the methods for making pottery: “The techniques we use today of coil building, pinch pots, or even wheel throwing are the same techniques the ancients used,” says Nathan Murrell, ceramics director at the Community Center of La Cañada Flintridge, which recently doubled its ceramics space to accommodate the burgeoning demand. “They link us directly to the past.”

In *Picture Worlds*, visitors have an opportunity to learn about the “multifold and multifarious” practices used in making pottery, according to Saunders. “The Greeks used the wheel for potting,” he noted, “whereas the Moche material that we’re displaying is typically mold-made. The Maya vessels are often coil-formed. So there were different technologies and skill sets in play in different parts of the world.”

The show focuses on Greek, Moche, and Maya cultures because of their preeminence in producing ceramics with complex narrative scenes. A striking Greek cup loaned by the British Museum, for example, illustrates the deeds of the Greek hero Theseus in seven tableaux that unfold “almost like a graphic novel,” Saunders says. Supernatural scenes spiral around a vessel produced by the Moche, who flourished between the first and eighth centuries CE in what is now northern Peru. “Pottery production has been virtually universal around the globe, but this confluence of utilitarian vessels adorned with depictions of gods, heroes, and ritual activities is quite peculiar,” Saunders notes. “The chance to explore these three cultures is a really enriching way to think about them from a fresh perspective.”

The current pottery-making craze has cross-generational appeal. “I was really drawn to the fact that time flies when you’re working in the studio,” says Sarah Waldorf, 33, who manages Getty’s social media team. “Your hands are dirty, so you can’t check your phone. And I’m always on the Internet.” Pamela Mills, 70, an efficiency consultant from Pasadena, says she was drawn to ceramics in 2021 out of an urge to exercise a different part of her brain. “When I got to be a senior, I said, I have to learn something that is out of my comfort zone,” she says as she shapes a set of plates by hand at the La Cañada community center. “The techniques we use today of potting,” he noted, “whereas the Moche material that we’re displaying is typically mold-made. The Maya vessels are often coil-formed. So there were different technologies and skill sets in play in different parts of the world.”

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Some novices are drawn specifically to ancient pottery methods. Tucson pottery educator Andy Ward, who founded the website AncientPotteryhow in 2019, gives online classes on hand building Mesoamerican pottery replicas. His YouTube channel has 145,000 subscribers. Ancient forms also inspire many contemporary artists. Painter Brad Eberhard took a pottery class at the La Cañada center a few years ago with his then five-year-old son and liked it so much that he signed up for adult classes. Now he is immersed in clay five days a week at Pasadena’s Green & Bisque Clayhouse, which has doubled its number of classes since 2021 and has up to a two-year wait for membership. He says his deep curiosity about the “universalism of human creations through the centuries” informs his contemporary interpretations of Egyptian canopic jars, which he began exhibiting last year along with other ceramic sculptures.

Others who have turned to pottery making in recent years say they are driven by a desire to learn about their cultural traditions. “I’m half Mexican, but it wasn’t something I grew up feeling very connected to,” says Alyson Brandes, a 2020 graduate of Chapman University and former Getty Marrow Undergraduate Intern placed at the American Museum of Ceramic Art in Pomona. “In college I started taking a lot of classes on Mesoamerican art, Brazilian art, Chicano art, and I really liked the shapes. I also did ceramics all four years in elective art courses.”

At Creative Arts Group, where she works as the ceramics lab technician, Brandes displays her witty, round jugs inspired by Moche vessels. She gives her creations a contemporary spin by painting product labels on them. One of her pieces is labeled “Inca Kola,” while another touts a popular Mexican beer. “With the shape, I’m trying to connect to some type of heritage—but the imagery relates to my suburban upbringing,” says Brandes, who grew up in the San Gabriel Valley.

“Every culture has a history of pottery, but I was finding a lot of kids who were disconnected from their cultural roots,” says Perry, whose mother is Mexican and father is Black. “To raise awareness and create career pathways, he began giving free and low-cost pottery workshops in historically marginalized communities about 10 years ago. The pottery scene is growing more inclusive and diverse: Perry recently participated in the first national convening of Black potters, organized by the Hambridge Center in Atlanta. He also points to the emergence of ceramics studios like POT, which describes itself as a creative space for and by people of color. Founded in 2017 by Mandy Kolahi, POT offers classes in English, Spanish, and Farsi at its studios in Echo Park and Mid City Los Angeles. It strives to keep classes affordable and draws a diverse, millennial-age crowd. “We have a lot of people who come to us because of our focus on cultural preservation and celebration,” says Kolahi, who teaches Iranian pottery making.
At UCLA, part of what draws students to the ceramics studio is its emphasis on the collaborative nature of working with clay and how clay can be used to advance social justice.

"Ceramics are made in a group setting," says artist Anna Sew Hoy, who heads the UCLA program. “People help each other to load and fire the kilns and then to unload them. They’re taking shifts because firing takes hours. They help each other lift their work and give each other advice about technical details, like how to make a particular glaze.”

Sew Hoy and colleague Candice Lin spread that communal spirit through the Yummy Bowl Benefit, a fundraiser launched three years ago to help address food insecurity on campus. At this year’s event, about 70 potters with varying degrees of experience spent a day on campus making bowls, which will be filled with food donated by the Hammer Museum’s Lulu restaurant and sold for $20 each. Last year the event raised $10,000 for the campus food pantry. “Our students really benefit from this idea of working together, and ceramics is a great excuse for that,” Sew Hoy says.

Simpler desires have led other potters to throw clay. “It helps me zone out and takes my mind off day-to-day work,” says Alex Capasso, a cancer genetic counselor who was shaping a teacup at a pottery wheel on a recent Monday evening at the La Cañada community center. Nearby, Sandy Erickson, a software project manager at Jet Propulsion Laboratory, was laboring over a ramen bowl. “It’s something I can create, like a computer program. Plus,” she says, “I really want a ramen bowl.”

In that respect, Erickson may not be so different from the artisans of ancient times. Early potters also were driven by practicality—storing grain, transporting wine, cooking a soup or stew. But utility may not have been their sole concern.

Think of the noise-making Maya pot or the Greek vessel painstakingly painted with mythical scenes. Were they just meant as containers, or did they also satisfy an urge for creative expression?

“That is a big but fascinating question,” Saunders says, one of many that Picture Worlds explores. “What is inarguable is that pottery offers a tangible way to connect with the past and to reinvigorate traditions of craft.”

Elaine Woo is a freelance journalist in Los Angeles. Her last story for Getty magazine was “The Link between Creativity and Mental Illness” (Spring 2023).
Makayla Rawlins was an undergraduate intern at a university museum when she came across an object that affected her so much, it changed the trajectory of her life.

While helping to photograph the museum’s collection, which includes Native American acquisitions, Rawlins picked up a Hopi kachina doll and found herself overcome by sadness. Some of the doll’s feathers had been torn off, its ear had been broken, and seemingly random pieces had been glued back together.

She wondered why objects like this were not cared for with the same levels of dedication and respect as items from other cultures.

“I am native—Luiseño or Payómkawish from Southern California—but I’m not Hopi. I felt that strong connection because I just knew that if that were a Luiseño piece by an artist from my nation, I would not want it to be treated in this way,” Rawlins says. She also knew that most Indigenous folks don’t get to see behind the scenes at museums or hold these kinds of works, and so her question became, “How can I advocate for these collections since I am here?”

This encounter started her on a path to becoming a conservator trained in the care of cultural objects and materials through the UCLA/ Getty Interdepartmental Master’s Program in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Now in its 20th year, this three-year offering uses purpose-built conservation and research laboratories at the Getty Villa and is the only graduate conservation program on the West Coast. It’s also the only US graduate program that focuses on the conservation of Indigenous and archaeological materials.

Together, UCLA and Getty are teaching aspiring conservators how to care for Indigenous and archaeological objects.
Filling a Void in Conservation Education

In the 1990s the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) conducted research on education gaps in the conservation field and found a void in US graduate conservation training programs. Of the three university-based offerings at that time, none were dedicated to Indigenous and archaeological heritage. All were focused on the conservation of fine art such as Western easel paintings, sculpture, and works on paper.

Part of the GCI’s mission is to create pathways for learning—courses, trainings, and publications—that advance the global practice of conservation. So, the GCI took on the challenge of creating a graduate degree program to fill the void in conservation education.

“Getty fortunately realized that we were not really teaching what needed to be taught in archaeological and Indigenous cultural heritage conservation in the US,” says Glenn Wharton, professor of art history and current chair of the UCLA/Getty program.

Getty began to search for a university partner with which it could design and establish an objects-based graduate conservation program. In 2001 it found its match in UCLA—one of the premier US research universities.

UCLA has well-regarded programs across the physical and social sciences, and degree planners knew that students would have ample opportunities to work with individuals from other disciplines. This is an important aspect of conservation, since projects so often require a team of experts from multiple domains. Because UCLA and Getty have complementary resources and areas of expertise, the program was built to offer students an array of important experiences—from learning in the classroom to working in museums and in the field.

Once the program was well established, the GCI stepped back from its active role, though Getty and UCLA continue to maintain a close relationship. Getty staff frequently contribute their knowledge and expertise through guest lectures and beyond.

Today, students and faculty focus on a broad range of cultural heritage objects. This emphasis gives students greater depth of knowledge about metals, ceramics, stone, adobe, and organic substances from plants and animals. They encounter these materials in the labs at the Getty Villa, where they undertake much of their study. However, learning how such items should be treated also requires, when possible, that conservators engage with the people who use the objects and whose cultural heritage they belong to.

Collaborating with Communities

During the fall term last year, Rawlins went with one of her classes to the Barona Cultural Center and Museum in San Diego County for a three-day field trip to look at baskets that the museum potentially wanted treated. The group from the UCLA/Getty program listened to the museum staff’s concerns, met with tribal council and community members, and worked with a basket weaver who demonstrated her technique and shared information about gathering materials. At the time, the students were learning treatment techniques for baskets, including how to repair broken stitches, as well as the ethnobotany of the plants involved in their making.

After the field trip, Rawlins began the task of repairing two baskets, thought to have been made at least 100 years ago, both of which required stitch repairs. “I chose two, because the first one was really small, and then there was a second one that could potentially be from my tribe back home,” she says.

To repair the baskets, she first had to identify the different materials used to make them. Once she had done so, she and the other students presented this information to the museum and proposed their treatment plans. Once treatment began, students stayed in contact with the community about their progress and presented their work again when they finished.

Community members asked for x-ray imaging of the baskets so they could better understand the internal structures of the objects. Students shared this and more. They were able to deliver photographs of the baskets before and after treatment, detailed images of the materials used, and close-ups of the structures.

This kind of direct collaboration with community stakeholders is a central part of the UCLA/Getty program. “For me, this is exactly the kind of work that I’m looking for in my career, because I want to work directly with the communities, with cultural centers that don’t have access all the time to a conservator,” Rawlins says.
Last year Makayla Rawlins learned treatment techniques for baskets, including how to repair broken stitches, as well as the ethnobotany of the plants involved in their making.

Reciprocity, a Core Program Value

Paths into the UCLA/Getty conservation program are as varied as the people who take them. For participant Tom McClintock it began with an encounter with a rock art site in Southern California. “I was really blown away,” he says. “I loved being outdoors, the images were graphically powerful and enigmatic, and it was a place that felt very at risk—to the elements and to human interference. And so, everything kind of clicked, and I thought this was something I could focus on.”

The UCLA/Getty program was the only US graduate conservation program with a curriculum that would accommodate McClintock’s interest in rock art. He began studying at UCLA in 2013. During his third-year internship, McClintock worked with the Njanjma Rangers, an Indigenous land management group based in the community of Gunbalanya, east of Kakadu National Park in Australia’s Northern Territory. Called West Arnhem Land, this area has a very large collection of rock art sites. Community leaders there were concerned that dust from an unpaved road might be damaging the many paintings. Before the local government could be convinced to address the issue, the community needed evidence to demonstrate that it was indeed dust from the road, and not simply ambient dust, affecting the artworks.

McClintock’s principal project during his internship was examining the impacts of this road. But this was just one aspect of his work—there was much else that needed to be done. He spent time consulting with rangers and community members to draft an illustrated bilingual glossary of conservation terminology in English and Kunwinjku to develop a shared vocabulary for discussing the condition of rock art sites.

McClintock also visited dozens of these locales, photographing many of them for the first time, and, where possible, recording the sites’ Indigenous names. At the conclusion of his internship, he gave all the images to the ranger group. This kind of reciprocity—which benefits both the community and the researchers—represents conservation best practices and is a core value of the UCLA/Getty program.

At the end of his time with the Njanjma Rangers, McClintock prepared a report for the territorial government that was used as the principal evidence in the proposal to seal the road, which is what the community wanted.

McClintock graduated in 2016. The connections he made through his professors led to the work that he does now as a staff member at the GCI since 2018 and as Getty’s representative to the international Rock Art Network.

Toward a More Inclusive Future

In January 2024 major US museums, including the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the Field Museum in Chicago, announced they would be closing exhibition halls and covering displays featuring Native American cultural heritage. These moves came in response to updated federal regulations requiring institutions to work with the Indigenous groups whose cultural heritage has been displayed and obtain their consent to show their objects.

Reciprocal practices—which allow the wider world to learn about and appreciate Native communities, but also give resources and control to the communities themselves—are a mainstay of UCLA/Getty’s programming. As Rawlins and McClintock’s work shows, students can learn both to care for cultural objects and sites and to honor the communities to which this heritage belongs. In this way, the work of preserving the past can continue while a more inclusive future can be built, together. ■
Headless No More

The most memorable acquisition in the Villa’s recent history? How about the marble head long missing from our decapitated Draped Woman?

Whoever deprived this Roman woman of her head wasn’t particularly careful about it. Eduardo Sánchez, an associate conservator at the time, was fairly certain the head was broken off intentionally with a drill in combination with hard impacts to the front of the neck. When the head was brought to the Villa, Sánchez helped create a lightweight replica of the broken neck surface to test its fit to the neck break on the body. The fit was perfect, except for some missing fragments in the front of the neck.

Seeing the statue’s face—one that clearly replicated a specific woman’s large, deep-set eyes and serious look—Spier and his team couldn’t stop wondering who the work depicted. He assumes the Roman figure must have had significant wealth and status to have such a large sculpture made of her. Because depictions of the wives of Roman emperors were often on coins, a hunt through currency of the period began. The team also combed through 19th-century catalogues and travel guides in French, Italian, and Latin, hoping to find a description or drawing of the statue.

Meanwhile, the sculpture underwent meticulous conservation, and the head was rejoined to the body with a steel pin and epoxy resin. The gaps at the neck were filled in and painted over, making the decades of decapitation invisible.

The finished statue is now in the Villa’s Gallery 207, admired by thousands of visitors each year. But the identity of its sitter—giving side-eye thousands of years ago and today—is yet to be discovered.

By Lyra Kilston
Senior Editor
Getty Museum
Those winners would surely have celebrated their victories with wine—diluted wine, mind you (usually 1 part wine, 2 parts water). The ancients believed that only dangerous, uncivilized barbarians drank their wine straight. Diluting wine was also a practical health measure, as the water quality in ancient times could be questionable; mixing it with wine could make it safer to drink.

Affluent ancient Romans drank that watery wine—and ate their meals—while reclining in rooms furnished with dining couches—a triclinium.

While not watching sports games and drinking, Romans also loved going to the theater. The Theatre of Pompey was the 1st permanent theater built in Rome and likely held 17,500–20,000 audience members strictly segregated based on class, gender, nationality, profession, and marital status.

Also gigantic: a system of 50,000 miles of roads that connected the Roman Empire, allowing troops (well over 1 million, if you count auxiliary soldiers) to easily conquer new lands, and traders to travel and bring back wealth. The empire was more than 1.7 million square miles at the pinnacle of its power, with 1 out of every 4 people in the world living under Rome's control.

Visible from those roads: aqueducts that delivered fresh water from up to 57 miles away for people's baths, fountains, and even toilets. (Some ancient aqueducts still provide water to modern-day Rome.)

Speaking of toilets: the public commodes archaeologists found in Pompeii had 20 seats in a row with no partitions between them. There was probably still a line though; Pompeii supported between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants when it, and the nearby Villa dei Papiri, were destroyed in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

Villa educators dedicate themselves to surfacing that buried culture—they offer 30+ guided tours daily to school groups and the general public. Worldwide audiences can enjoy Getty’s collection too; last year 17 Villa antiquities traveled on loan to 9 exhibitions and were seen as far away as Mumbai, India, 8,695 miles to the west of the Getty Villa.

Sculpture of Heracles (Lansdowne Herakles), about 125 CE, Roman. Marble. Getty Museum

**Stats**

**Getty Villa–related facts that might surprise you**

Number of times J. Paul Getty visited the Getty Villa after it opened in 1974: 0. (He had settled into a Tudor mansion, Sutton Place, in Surrey, England, and hated to fly. He died two years after the Villa’s opening, at the age of 83.)

Of the 1,180 objects on display today, 185, or just over 15%, were acquired by J. Paul Getty (or during his lifetime). But in 1976 he left nearly $700 million (worth about $83.9 billion today) to the J. Paul Getty Trust for “the diffusion of artistic and general knowledge”—thus the other 995 objects.

J. Paul Getty’s #1 most prized object: the Lansdowne Herakles, a 6’4” marble statue from about 125 CE, found in 1790 near the ruins of the villa of the Roman emperor Hadrian outside Rome. In his book The Joys of Collecting, Getty wrote that he bought the work for £6,000 (in 1951).

In Heracles’s gallery (left): a marble floor with some 4,000 marble tesserae (pieces). It copies one at the Villa dei Papiri, the inspiration for the Getty Villa. Engineer Karl Weber found the floor 100 feet underground, buried by the 79 CE eruption of Mount Vesuvius. About 92% of the Villa dei Papiri is still underground.

Speaking of the Villa dei Papiri archaeological site: the Getty Villa features 55 replicas of bronzes found there. Meanwhile, scholars are starting to “read” (via CT scans and AI) 1,000+ carbonized papyrus scrolls once housed at the Villa dei Papiri (see p. 7).

But back to that Herakles statue... if you’re wondering why he and the subjects of so many other ancient sculptures are depicted naked, it’s because the Greeks believed nudity was powerful, ideal, and beautiful. You’ll also see slender, toned, ageless male bodies on many of the 42 amphorae (decorated ceramic vessels) on view at the Villa. As many as 140 amphorae are known to have been awarded to one winner for victory in a single contest at the Panathenaic games at Athens. Each vase could hold more than 10 gallons of olive oil. (Games like the Olympics awarded the winner only a crown.)

Those winners would surely have celebrated their victories with wine—diluted wine, mind you (usually 1 part wine, 2 parts water). The ancients believed that only dangerous, uncivilized barbarians drank their wine straight. Diluting wine was also a practical health measure, as the water quality in ancient times could be questionable; mixing it with wine could make it safer to drink.

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Sculpture of Heracles (Lansdowne Herakles), about 125 CE, Roman. Marble. Getty Museum
Inside Pompeii, a new book of photographs, finds color and life in empty spaces

For centuries, a thick grey blanket covered the urban fabric of a living city,” he writes in the introduction to the new book Inside Pompeii. “The shops and the domus lining the street are an invitation to keep exploring the stories of others. Stories that are not so different from our own. Working, living, engaging in community and family life... What has changed? Nothing! This is Pompeii, a glimpse of other people’s lives, through a fissure in time.”

Out now from Getty, Inside Pompeii features Spina’s many photographs accompanied by introductory essays as well as short texts on the various locations and homes, which are briefly paraphrased below.

House of Paquius Proculus
A guard dog greets you as you enter this home. Further toward the atrium, two centaurs and a goat are featured. Look up and see birds and animals in black and white. The building features decor that dates back to the 2nd century BCE to just before the eruption of Vesuvius. Interior decoration changed with the trends.

With its relatively intact roads, homes, and food counters, the ancient city of Pompeii feels both familiar and very far away.

The city, preserved under the ash of Mount Vesuvius’s explosion nearly 2,000 years ago, has been dug up, looted, conserved, and ultimately protected. And in 2019, photographer Luigi Spina was commissioned by the Archaeological Park of Pompeii to photograph the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

More than two million tourists a year visit the site, but Spina was able to photograph it without the crowds. Training his camera predominantly on buildings once belonging to the upper classes, he captured frescoed walls, intricate mosaic floors, and views of an ancient landscape through open windows.
From top to bottom:
Praedia of Julia Felix, II.4.2 © Luigi Spina
House of Venus in a Shell, II.3.3 © Luigi Spina
House of the Vettii, VI.15.1 © Luigi Spina
All photos: Luigi Spina

Praedia of Julia Felix
Julia Felix, the last owner of this complex—which spanned two city blocks—was recorded in a lease announcement painted on the building’s façade. For rent was a luxurious bath complex, and a series of shops, with associated lodgings on the first floor, and further residential rooms on the upper floor.

House of Venus in a Shell
This home belonged to one of the most prominent families in Pompeii. A painted wall shows garden scenes, one featuring a fountain with a water basin, the other a statue of Mars.

House of the Vettii
This was the property of two wealthy traders, Aulus Vettius Conviva and Aulus Vettius Restitutus. Scenes painted on the walls show aspects of wine production, indicating that the Vettii brothers were likely involved in viticulture.


From top to bottom:
House of the Cryptoporticus, I.6.2 © Luigi Spina
House and Thermopolium of Vetutius Placidus, I. 8.8 © Luigi Spina
All photos: Luigi Spina

The House of the Cryptoporticus
Windows overlooked an airy garden. Decorations adorn the walls, including illustrations from the Iliad, accompanied by the names of the gods and heroes depicted.

House and Thermopolium of Vetutius Placidus
A thermopolium was a place to buy hot food. This particular counter was discovered during the 2019 excavations.

House of Venus in a Shell
This home belonged to one of the most prominent families in Pompeii. A painted wall shows garden scenes, one featuring a fountain with a water basin, the other a statue of Mars.
Buried by Vesuvius: The Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum
Edited by Kenneth Lapatin
The Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum, the model for the Getty Villa, is one of the world's earliest systematically investigated archaeological sites. Buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, the Villa dei Papiri was discovered in 1750 and excavated under the auspices of the Neapolitan court. Buried by Vesuvius: The Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum offers a sweeping yet in-depth view of all aspects of the site. Presenting the latest research, the essays in this authoritative and richly illustrated volume reveal the story of the Villa dei Papiri's ancient inhabitants and modern explorers, providing readers with a multidimensional understanding of this fascinating site.

J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM
276 pages, 9 × 11 inches
187 color and 16 b/w illustrations, 1 illustrated gatefold map
Hardcover
US $65

Persia: Ancient Iran and the Classical World
Edited by Jeffrey Spier, Timothy Potts, and Sara E. Cole
The founding of the first Persian Empire by the Achaemenid king Cyrus the Great in the sixth century BCE established one of the greatest world powers of antiquity. Persia addresses the political, intellectual, religious, and artistic relations between Persia, Greece, and Rome from the seventh century BCE to the Arab conquest of 651 CE. Essays by international scholars trace interactions and exchanges of influence. With more than 400 images, this richly illustrated volume features sculpture, jewelry, silver luxury vessels, coins, gems, and inscriptions that reflect the Persian ideology of empire and its impact throughout Persia’s own diverse lands and the Greek and Roman spheres.

J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM
432 pages, 9½ × 11½ inches
409 color and 7 b/w illustrations, 3 maps
Hardcover
US $65

Picture Worlds: Storytelling on Greek, Moche, and Maya Pottery
Edited by David Saunders and Megan E. O’Neil
Satyrs and sphinxes, violent legumes, and a dancing maize deity star in the stories painted on the pottery produced by the ancient Greek, Moche, and Maya cultures, respectively. Picture Worlds is the first book to examine the elaborately decorated terracotta vessels of these three distinct civilizations. Although the cultures were separated by space and time, they all employed pottery as a way to tell stories, explain the world, and illustrate core myths and beliefs. Each of these painted pots is a picture world. Readers will be rewarded with a better understanding of each of these ancient societies, fascinating insights into their cultural commonalities and differences, and fresh perspectives on image making and storytelling, practices that remain vibrant to this day.

J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM
208 pages, 9 × 10 inches
121 color and 27 b/w illustrations, 3 maps
Paperback
US $40

Legion: Life in the Roman Army
By Richard Abdy
The scale and organization of the Roman army was unprecedented in the ancient Western world, leading to it becoming the West's first permanent, pensionable military profession. Through the advent of the “career soldier,” the Roman army created an avenue for noncitizens to gain enfranchisement, build wealth, and advance their social standing upon the conclusion of their designated term of service. This story focuses on the soldiers, their families, and the many other people who belonged to the military communities scattered throughout the empire to illuminate what life was like for these individuals. Through scholarship and the letters left behind from common soldiers—such as two ordinary provincial recruits, Claudius Terentianus and Apion—we’re afforded a deeply personal and micro-level view of military life.

J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM
320 pages, 7½ × 10 inches
250 color illustrations
Paperback
US $45
Villa Legacies

Since opening in 1974, the Getty Villa has drawn generations of visitors with extraordinary collections, iconic architecture, and serene gardens that serve as a living link to the past. Philanthropic individuals inspired by the Villa’s unique mission have invested in Getty, establishing their own legacies at this idyllic spot overlooking the Pacific. As the Villa celebrates a half century, we are delighted to highlight the generosity of these donors.

Balson Family Endowed Fund

Anissa and Paul Balson have cultivated a lifelong connection to the Villa that extends across generations. They are passionate collectors and arts philanthropists whose support for Getty runs deep. They have been active members of both the Paintings Council and the Villa Council, which Paul chaired, and in 2021 created the Balson Family Endowed Fund to further the work of the Villa. In recognition of their gift, the senior position at the Villa was named the Anissa and Paul John Balson II Senior Curator of Antiquities.

“Donating to Getty provides needed support for the Villa’s outstanding curators, conservators, and programs. It also supports the larger mission of Getty, which funds global research and conservation projects and provides significant resources to other museums and cultural institutions. Getty has become a leader in the greater arts community, and we are proud to support its mission.”

—Anissa and Paul Balson

Michael Silver Fund

Michael Silver, a dedicated supporter of Getty and cultural institutions throughout Los Angeles, brings an unusual perspective as founder and CEO of the world’s leading manufacturer of advanced and engineered materials. His belief in the mutual importance of art and technology, and fascination with the study and conservation of the Villa’s artifacts, led him to create the Michael Silver Fund to support the Villa’s programs. In honor of his gift, the Michael Silver Family Gallery, which houses rare coins, carved gemstones, and other precious materials from the ancient world, was made the Villa’s first named gallery.

“My love for the Getty Villa is rooted in a deep appreciation for the preservation of the past and its ability to inform the future. Being interested in archaeology and antiquities as much as the art collection, I find it extremely rewarding to support both its research and curatorial programs.”

—Michael Silver

Wells Family Herb Garden

Luanne and Frank Wells were great friends to Getty, making lasting contributions to the institution through their generosity and leadership. In 2008, Luanne established the Wells Family Herb Garden Fund to support and enhance the herb garden at the Getty Villa. The garden, long a favorite of guests and staff alike, remains an enduring tribute to the Wells family’s commitment to making art and the environment more accessible to all.
EXHIBITIONS

Make free, timed reservations for the Getty Center and Getty Villa Museum at getty.edu.

Getty Villa

Picture Worlds: Greek, Maya, and Moche Pottery
Through July 29, 2024

Sculpted Portraits from Ancient Egypt
Through January 25, 2027

On Thin Ice: Dutch Depictions of Extreme Weather
May 28–September 1, 2024

Conserving Eden: Cranach’s Adam and Eve from the Norton Simon
Through April 21, 2024

Drawing on Blue
Through April 28, 2024

Blood: Medieval/Modern
Through May 19, 2024

First Came a Friendship: Sidney B. Felsen and the Artists at Gemini G.E.L.
Through July 7, 2024

Hippolyte Bayard: A Persistent Pioneer
Through July 7, 2024

Camille Claudel
Through July 21, 2024

Mercedes Dorame: Woshaa’axre Yaang’aro (Looking Back)
Through July 28, 2024

Untold Stories of a Monumental Pastel
Through October 20, 2024

Online

Mesopotamia
mesopotamia.getty.edu

Persepolis Reimagined
persepolis.getty.edu

Return to Palmyra
getty.edu/palmyra

FINAL FRAME

When walking through the galleries at the Villa, you may not have noticed this miniature bronze skeleton measuring less than 3 inches tall. Were Romans goth? Obsessed with death? Visitors, including our school audiences, stop and take a look, struck by how cool the Romans really were.

In Petronius’s satirical novel the Satyricon, a nouveau-riche dinner party host named Trimalchio shows off his own miniature skeleton, posing its movable limbs, and recites a poem about enjoying life to the fullest while one still can. This Getty skeleton, like other known larvae convivales, or “banquet ghosts,” could have been a highlight of Roman dinner parties like Trimalchio’s. Considering the high mortality rate in ancient times, we can appreciate this concept.

Walking through the Getty Museum Store recently, my jaw dropped and I couldn’t believe my eye sockets—there on display was a reproduction of the Getty skeleton! Carpe diem!

—Bonnie Wright, Manager of Villa Education, Getty Museum
Learn how CT scans and AI are letting scientists and historians look inside more than 1,000 papyrus scrolls carbonized by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. Over the centuries, many have tried to open and read these papyri in the hope of discovering great lost works of antiquity, only to damage the scrolls by slicing them down the middle or peeling off the outer layers, breaking them.

“*The Herculaneum collection is the only complete library ever discovered from antiquity. I believe there’s still unknown treasures to be found in the material that is not yet unwrapped. A technical solution would allow us to extract more information.*”

—Computer scientist Brent Seales