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**John Cabot University**

Department of Art History

Master of Arts in Art History

*Curating Nature: The Experience of Artifice and  
Environment in Roman Luxury Villas*

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## Abstract

Between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD, the Roman luxury villa gained architectural expression and a new interest in the pleasure garden as a “space.” These spaces were marked by their luxurious elements, including fruiting trees, marble statuary, and bubbling fountains. Traditionally, scholarship has analyzed these components individually, as parts that form an implicitly static setting for the social interaction of the elite. However, the formulation of the luxury villa is also characterized by experimentation; hence, by examining the form of the pleasure garden in elite villas spaces, the intersections between painted and real gardens, as well as the viewer experience in the garden, this thesis will argue that the garden is simultaneously a spatial environment and a work of art. It will thus adopt a holistic ‘total site’ approach to the pleasure garden and its villa context as a way to understand the implications of the garden within the visual landscape of the villa. I suggest the term curation to recognize this fabrication as intentional, and to embed the garden with greater meaning and agency than previously appreciated. The result is an assemblage, composed of multiple layers of entangled object–human networks. These function together to form not only the social role of the garden, but also the garden experience in Roman villa culture. This thesis employs a novel interpretive framework: at the core of this methodology is an analysis of climatic and archaeological data, as well as contemporary theories related to spatial interpellation, semiotics, objecthood, and museum studies. The aim is for a reframing of the agency of the *garden space* within the entangled visual assemblages and constructed experiences that characterize the early Imperial luxury villa.

## **Dedication**

There are no words to express my gratitude to my mother, Denyse Comini, who always reciprocated my excitement, listened to every frustration with sympathy, and became an art historian alongside me because of it. I dedicate this thesis to her.

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I am also grateful for Dr. Lila Yawn, director of the Master’s in Art History program at John Cabot University, who fostered my understanding and appreciation for the urban environment of Rome and its spatial settings. She also introduced me to Kyler Harper’s *The Fate of Rome*, and the idea of incorporating climate science into the study of art history. Her encouragement of my passion for the sciences and insightful feedback helped make this thesis possible.

Finally, I am grateful to my loving family and friends who have nothing to do with art history and archaeology, but always listened, attempted to understand, and provided a different perspective. They never stopped supporting me through my journey (even when I no longer wanted to go to medical school) and encouraged me to follow my love for art history because “it put a smile in my voice.”

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# 1. Introduction

*Ante porticum xystus in plurimas distinctus concisusque buxo; demissus inde pronusque pulunius, cui bestiarum effigies inuicem aduersas buxus inscipit; acanthus in plamo, mollis et paene dixerim liquidis... Pratum inde non minus natura quam superiora illa arte uisendum...*

Pliny Ep. 5.6.16, 18

In front of the portico is a terrace laid out and divided up by box trees trimmed into many shapes; from there, a bank falls away on a slope, on which box trees delineate figures of animals facing from either side; on the plain is what I would almost call a pool, so liquid seems the acanthus that grows there... From there stretches a meadow no less of a must-see on account of its natural quality than the previously laid out garden...<sup>1</sup>

The sensory description provided by Pliny the Younger of his own garden villascape is at once enchantingly personal as it is pretentiously idealized, emphasizing the setting's natural artifice. To imagine a garden with animal-shaped trees and pools of acanthus seems fantastical and invites one to imagine such a landscape. Yet for Romans during the later Republican and early Imperial period, such a dream was not only possible, it existed. From the 1st century BC, public and private gardens began to transform from functional fields into lavish arenas of greenery, water features, and artworks. Specifically, in the domestic sphere, Roman aristocrats began to cultivate huge luxury gardens in their private villa estates, forming their own outdoor pleasure parks at home. Archaeologically, much evidence for the existence of these extravagant gardens comes from the Campania region, as a result of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. The scholarship regarding Roman gardens is extensive, detailing the various forms these spaces took as well as their uses within the Roman world.

Yet, while scholarship has often discussed the significance of the garden, it is always defined in passive terms as a stage setting for occupants to act. I propose that gardens should

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by: Diana Spencer, *Roman Landscape: Culture and Identity*. Greece & Rome. New Surveys in the Classics, No. 39 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 128.

be reconsidered as having agency, meaning they have an ability to effect change and subsequently affect their occupants. This proposal is grounded in scholar Amy Russell's theory of spatial interpellation, which describes the ability of a space and its architecture to hail an audience into a certain subject position.<sup>2</sup> This effect can be equated to objects, and their ability to influence humans. Gardens are not only "made" like objects and imbued with a particular purpose by the human production, but are also fabricated spaces that function as catalysts by creating viewing experiences and performative opportunities, which in turn respond to and achieve the intentions of their production.<sup>3</sup> The primary focus of this thesis will be on non-productive luxury villas from Campania, with consideration also of examples from Pompeian townhouses and the Villa of Livia in Latium.<sup>4</sup> This array provides significant potential juxtapositions, as not only were their owners of a presumed similar economic and social standing, but their position overlaps spatially in central Western Italy and temporally during the late Republic/early Empire. This time period is a crucial era for scholarship on Roman history, as it serves as a pivotal moment at the intersection of great change, economically, politically, climatically, and societally.

Following the creation of the *pleasure garden* during the late Republic, domestic gardens moved away from being organic, productive vegetable patches to constructed spaces created for business, entertainment and relaxation.<sup>5</sup> I will examine the form of the pleasure garden through the lens of *curation*, as the process by which the space is activated to embed it

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<sup>2</sup> Amy Russell, "Political space and the experience of citizenship in the city of Rome: architecture and interpellation," in *Urban Space and Urban History in the Roman World*, ed. Miko Flohr (London: Routledge, 2020), 19-38.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Hodder, "The 'Social' in Archaeological Theory: An Historical and Contemporary Perspective," in *A Companion to Social Archaeology*, eds. Lynn Meskell and Robert W. Preucel (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Some modern art historians and archaeologists refer to this form of villa as "villae otium." In Latin, "otium" meant leisure. Thus, the villae otium are leisure villas, which were countryside homes of the wealthiest, most prominent families of the Roman aristocracy.

<sup>5</sup> Pleasure garden were gardens built for relaxation, entertainment, and luxury. Boasting water features, fruiting trees, colonnaded walkways, statuary, wall paintings, and landscape views, the pleasure garden was a carefully planned and executed formal garden design, found typically in homes and villa of Rome's upper classes.

with agency and meaning. Though the primary focus is on the pleasure garden, the evident visual, experiential, and conceptual links between these as curated spaces and those of the villa as well as with the surrounding landscape, means that I will further consider gardens as part of these greater settings. The aim of this thesis is to examine the late Republican/early Imperial pleasure garden as a ‘total site’ and as part of a visual landscape that includes built and natural environments, painted and planted spaces, and the manners in which these may be activated through viewing and movement.

This thesis will analyze gardens and garden paintings as interrelated aspects. The manner in which these spaces were curated for enjoyment, as well as how they function will demonstrate the relationship between the garden and its occupants. The Augustan-era luxury Villas Arianna and San Marco at Stabiae and the Villa A (Villa of Poppea) at Oplontis provide central case-studies for this, given the unique design of their gardens (Figures 1.1, 1.2, 1.3).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, it is necessary to emphasize the “realness” of these garden spaces, despite their artificial assemblage. These grandiose, lush garden spaces would not be possible without certain political, social, topographic, and architectural changes that occurred during the late Roman Republic. Equally important to these historical changes is the optimal climate at the time, a natural phenomenon which not only fostered the growth of the Roman world itself, but which informed the conception of garden spaces—from the fantastical possibilities of garden designs to the botanically intricate possibilities of painted garden spaces.

Part of the passive character with which Roman gardens have traditionally been considered in art historical scholarship is a result of the fact that as an architectural-spatial

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<sup>6</sup> In terms of ownership: The Villa A at Oplontis might have been owned by Poppea Sabina, a member of a wealthy Pompeian family and the consort of Nero starting from 62 AD; The Villa of Arianna (Villa A) has not yet had any specific owners proposed, but based on the scale and quality of the villa, the owner would have been a member of the senatorial or newly elevated equestrian order; The Villa San Marco owner likely had a long and distinguished lineage based on two obsidian cups that were found. Additionally, a stamp with NARCISSI/AVGVSTI L. was found in the Villa San Marco, which refers to Narcissus the freedman who worked as a secretary of correspondence (*libertus ab epistulis*) for the emperor Claudius.

environment, gardens are often analyzed in catalogue-like terms or evaluated for just one of their components. In doing so, gardens become simplified to being a setting, a foil, for the villa and the villa owner and not considered in the totality of the formulation of the villa conceptually and spatially. To engage with the complexities and inherently fluid nature of the villa garden, this thesis will, as noted, adopt a more holistic view, one in which the denotations of a garden are explored, and one in which the curated environment is understood as an intentional assemblage of multiple acting elements. To extricate the various layers of these complex spaces, these gardens will be acknowledged as a layered creation, in which the entanglements of context, creation, and form compose the semiotics of the space in order to have a more comprehensive sense of gardens and of their role within the villa space as a whole. This will be explored by making use of museum studies methodologies in discussions of contextualized code-switching, morphing and becoming, and intentionality as approaches for understanding the networked agency of garden spaces. Together with environmental studies, curation hence frames the discussion of gardens as a collective environment; one that is simultaneously real and unreal, natural and artificial, and in which the embedded interplay of these form an expressive whole that is uniquely effective in the context of their particular Roman framework.

## 2. Climate

To discuss Roman gardens without first properly acknowledging the climate within which these spaces were able to grow and develop would be to neglect the unusual, but fortunate circumstances of the Mediterranean between c. 300 BC–350 AD. Many recent climate studies have determined that during the period from the mid-Republic until the mid-to-late Empire, Europe and the Mediterranean region experienced an extended period of a warm and stable climate, and this period is known as the warm Classical Optimum.<sup>7</sup> The paleoanthropologist Carole Crumley describes the climate as “Mediterranean—warm, dry, and unusually stable. The usually volatile climate of the continent was less variable than at any time since the middle Holocene.”<sup>8</sup> However, while climate scientists agree upon the high temperature that defined this period, the classification of it as dry has been contested in more recent years, with the latest evidence pointing towards greater precipitation in many regions. Nevertheless, the notion of a warmer, stable climate during this period of antiquity is consensually supported. As such, Crumley finds the relationship between climate and the expansion of Roman society to be direct, on account of increased Roman agricultural production and military conquest, in previously unfavorable regions.<sup>9</sup> In terms of greenery, industrial-scale farms, known as *villae*, were producing abundant amounts of cash crops allowing the increasing nutritional needs of the Roman population to be met.<sup>10</sup>

Of particular relevance to the current study is the climate period termed the Roman Climate Optimum (RCO) or “Roman Warm Period,” of which the chronological boundaries

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony J. McMichael, Alistair Woodward, and Cameron Muir, *Climate Change and the Health of Nations: Famines, Fevers, and the Fate of Populations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 141.

<sup>8</sup> Carole Crumley, “Contextual Constraints on State Structure,” in *Alternativity in Cultural History: Heterarchy and Homoarchy as Evolutionary Trajectories*, eds. Dmitri M. Bondarenko and Alexandre A. Nemirovskiy (Moscow: Center for Civilizational and Regional Studies Press, 2007), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Carole Crumley, “Contextual Constraints on State Structure,” 12.

<sup>10</sup> Carole Crumley, “Contextual Constraints on State Structure,” 12.

ascribed are c. 200 BC to 150 AD; a brief, but significant phase in the late Holocene climate. To appreciate the significance of this phenomenon, it is essential to describe the conditions that made it possible. It is worth bearing in mind that the geographical extent of the Roman world made it extremely variable in terms of weather, and that climate change effects could be extremely local, with many diverse microclimates.

However, while these microclimates are significant, there are several regional and global mechanisms that affect this area. In terms of regional patterns, in the western Mediterranean the climate is affected by two atmospheric high pressure systems: the Atlantic (Icelandic Low, with moist westerlies coming from the ocean), and the Mediterranean (Azores High, with drier and warmer winds from the west).<sup>11</sup> Conversely, the eastern Mediterranean is affected by the continental northeast Europe (Siberian High, with drier cooler air) and Subtropical High, a pressure system located over the ocean around 30° N which reduces precipitation.<sup>12</sup> These climate mechanisms are indicated in Figure 2.1. Both the Atlantic and Mediterranean are affected greatly by the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), an index system to describe the strength of the two pressure patterns in the atmosphere: a low near Iceland and a high near the Azores islands. The NAO indicates wind, temperature, and storms, especially during the winter. The NAO has two modes: positive and negative. When positive, the Mediterranean region experiences cool, dry winter weather. Comparatively, when negative, the Mediterranean is subject to moist, warm winter weather. A 2016 study by Faust, *et al.* identifies the RCO as negative NAO until around 250 AD when it switches to the positive mode (Figure 2.2).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, during the RCO, the negative NAO brought warm, wet weather to the Mediterranean, and southern and central Europe.

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<sup>11</sup> Anthony McMichael et al., *Climate Change and the Health of Nations*, 142.

<sup>12</sup> Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*, The Princeton History of the Ancient World. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Johan C. Faust et al., "Norwegian fjord sediments reveal NAO related winter temperature and precipitation changes of the past 2800 years," *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 435, (2016): 84-93.

Climate scientists and archaeologists have identified a range of climate proxies, which function in place of direct meteorological measurements and allow scientists to reconstruct the climatic conditions of the past, including the early Roman Empire. Two of the most important of these are solar radiation (insolation) and volcanic activity.<sup>14</sup> These global “climate-forcing” proxies are substantial because they tend to be ambiguous and fickle. Yet, the RCO is defined by high, stable solar activity and low volcanic activity, which greatly contributed to fostering a warm, wet, and steady climate. In terms of the sun, there are physical tracers used to find the levels of insolation during the RCO. These tracers are cosmogenic radionuclides, such as the isotope Beryllium-10, because higher solar activity reduces cosmogenic radionuclides in the atmosphere, which fall to earth and become stored in ice sheets.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, by measuring the isotopes (such as <sup>10</sup>Be) in ice cores as inversely related to solar activity, the amount of sun reaching earth during the RCO can be established.<sup>16</sup> These calculations indicate that the Romans were fortunate with a period of high and stable solar activity, especially from 350 BC to 350 AD (Figure 2.3).

In the same way, volcanic activity was favorable to the Romans, in terms of the overall period. While this might seem surprising given the consequences of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, this period stands out to scientists as exceptionally low in terms of volcanic activity (Figure 2.4).<sup>17</sup> In fact, “of the twenty largest eruptions in the last two and a half millennia, none fall between the death of Julius Caesar and the year 169 AD.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, between the late Republic and the Justinian eras, there are no years in which

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<sup>14</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 44; and, M. McCormick et al., “Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire: Reconstructing the Past from Scientific and Historical Evidence,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 43, no. 2 (2012): 175.

<sup>15</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> McCormick et al., “Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire,” 175.

<sup>18</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 44.

substantial post-volcanic cooling occurred.<sup>19</sup> Volcanoes greatly influence the climate because when an eruption occurs, the gas and dust particles spewed into the atmosphere cool the planet by shading incoming solar radiation.

To further support the hypothesized warm temperature during the RCO, several other proxies have been used: planktic *G. ruber* shells to reconstruct historic sea surface-level temperature from the Sicily Channel; tree-ring series from Central Asia and Europe; mineral deposits in cave formations from Iberia, Austria, Greece, Israel, and Turkey; Alpine glacier movements (growth and melt); and, Greenland ice cores (chlorine levels to indicate sea ice retraction).<sup>20</sup> All point to a nearly unanimous consensus of an unusually stable period of warm temperatures during the RCO. As if the temperature was not evidence enough of the Romans' good fortune, the abnormal precipitation levels and flooding over the Mediterranean, despite the aforementioned microclimates, are remarkable to the point of disbelief. Whereas solar radiation and volcanic activity have more of a global affect, rainfall distribution is high variable by region and totally inconsistent. And yet, all physical evidence and human testimony from the RCO points to a period of rain and humidity across much of the Roman territory.

In addition to testifying to the warmth of the RCO, tree rings are affected by precipitation. Tree rings from Northeastern France show that from 200 BC to 300 AD precipitation was extremely consistent during the month of June (Figure 2.5).<sup>21</sup> This data is in itself exceptional because the wet season in Europe is typically from October through to April. Therefore, consistent rainfall during the month of June in Europe was completely abnormal. This anomaly is further supported by written testimony attesting to the curious

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<sup>19</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> See: G. Margaritelli et al., "Persistent Warm Mediterranean Surface Waters during the Roman Period," *Nature: Scientific Reports* 10, (2020): 6; and, Marx, Haunschild, and Bornmann, "Climate and the Decline and Fall of the Western Roman Empire," *Climate* 90, no. 6 (2018): 14.

<sup>21</sup> McCormick et al., "Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire," 181.

seasonality of Tiber flooding that occurred during Roman times. Well-known Roman figures, such as Pliny the Younger, Ovid, and Ptolemy, describe the rain and flooding that occurred during the early Empire.<sup>22</sup> Compared to the medieval and modern era where flooding follows the established rainfall model of fall and winter, the pattern of flooding during the Roman period was early spring and late summer (Figure 2.6).<sup>23</sup> This pattern is supported by the weather calendar of the notable first century Roman writer and agronomist, Lucio Giunio Moderato Columella, who documented the summer precipitation in Rome.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the Tiber flooding supports the portrayal of the period as “wet,” given that Tiber flooding was high from the third century BC until the third century AD, compared to the somewhat nonexistent flooding of later centuries (Figure 2.7).<sup>25</sup>

The aforementioned evidence for a warm, wet climate that was unusually stable during Rome’s expansion into what would become a huge empire, is all to say that the climate proved to be a remarkable ally to the Romans. “Alongside trade and technology, the climate regime was a silent, cooperative force in the seemingly virtuous circle of empire and prosperity.”<sup>26</sup> Why does the climatic fortune of the Romans matter? And why should this scientific data be taken into account when discussing the perception of Roman gardens? Without the phenomenon that was the RCO, the ability to create these complex, multifaceted garden spaces would never have existed. Thus, the climate of the period was a fulcrum for the changes that occurred, allowing these gardens to become what they would.

To illustrate, archaeological and written evidence both indicate the ability for plant and insect species to flourish outside of their normal territories on account of the prolonged abnormal climate. A 2001 archaeoentomological study by Harry Kenward finds that the

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<sup>22</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 47-48.

<sup>23</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 15.

nettle bug (*H. urticae*) was able to survive farther north than its typical British habitat during the Roman period.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Pliny the Elder in the first century wrote that beech trees, which previously only existed in the lowlands, had become a mountain plant.<sup>28</sup> Finally, studies of food sources and Roman vineyards demonstrate that vines and olives were able to be cultivated farther north than previous centuries during the RCO.<sup>29</sup> In sum, the consistent warmth and rainfall throughout the late Republic and early Empire (the RCO) extended the boundaries of cultivation and enriched the productivity, “[turning] the lands ruled by Rome into a giant greenhouse.”<sup>30</sup> By acknowledging the unusual climate the Romans experienced, we can appreciate how it was possible for these extraordinary green spaces to grow, prosper and transform alongside the political, social, and architectural changes that were occurring simultaneously.

Utilizing climate as the framework from which to comprehend the aforementioned changes is integral to understanding the Roman garden during this particular period, because it made the development of these lavish green spaces possible. However, this effect should also not be simplified into a causal force, which removes the agency of the humans and objects involved. More plainly, while climate enabled the creation of the setting for this historical transformation of society and architecture, all of the other elements involved are equally responsible for this change, and thus, should be acknowledged. For example, climate allowed for the growth of gardens to be favorable and rich, which led to higher yields of crops and plants, and subsequently, the success of the economy. Yet, it also meant that gardens could become more diverse and creative spaces, meaning each individual owner could fashion and form their own garden however they wanted. Due to this, the creation of

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<sup>27</sup> Harry Kenward, “Insect Remains from the Romano-British Ditch Terminal at the Floden Hill Rectilinear Enclosure,” in *Reports from the Environmental Archaeology Unit (York)* 49, (2002): 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> A.G. Brown et al. “Roman Vineyards in Britain: Stratigraphic and Palynological Data from Wollaston in the Nene Valley, England,” *Antiquity* 75, (2001): 706-757.

<sup>30</sup> Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 53.

lush realities occurred within these spaces, as is made evident by Pliny's earlier description of a garden in which box trees are shaped into animals, and acanthus spills into a natural lush meadow. In this way, a villa setting of idealized natural artifice was not only possible, but desired and assembled.

Likewise, the climate supported the traditional notion of villas as productive spaces, which combined with the morality associated with land ownership facilitated the creation of luxurious, elite villas. During this time, it was customarily expected that aristocrats would pursue the creation of a villa garden, because it was not only possible given their wealth, but morally justified.<sup>31</sup> With these traditional and imaginative frameworks, it can be seen that the climate, while integral, was not the only enabling factor in the creation of these gardens. Therefore, as previously stated, the agency of the other elements involved in the formation of the luxury Roman garden must be explored.

In the following chapter, an engaged survey of the field will illuminate the most recent theories and approaches to Roman archaeology and gardens, all of which have emerged out of the so-called material turn. In doing so, the political, social, and architectural context under which the particular garden form in question emerged will be presented. These associated approaches comprise part of the fabric of my thinking and have allowed me to develop my own methodology for studying the Roman garden, which relies upon objecthood, entanglement, and viewership. This leads into Chapter Four, where I will investigate the internationality and associations of gardens to study their effect on Roman garden design and the eventual experimental luxury villa form. Hellenistic influence on Roman garden design and form will be examined to elucidate the manner in which the idea of curating a garden space in Roman society was introduced. This curation and a part of the garden's ensuing

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<sup>31</sup> Annalisa Marzano, "Roman Gardens, Representation and Politics," in *Plants, Politics, and Empire in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 17.

agency is analyzed in Chapter Five, which discusses the double reality of real and painted gardens in the villa setting. The chapter analyzes the ways in which natural scenery was reimagined into artworks to function in tandem with and independent from their “real” garden counterparts. Lastly, Chapter Six will focus on the presence of the viewer within gardens, which allows for the interchange between garden environment and human occupant to be analyzed. With this final chapter, my employment of the term “curation” is best clarified, as theoretical frameworks of museum studies explain the relationship between viewer and garden, which illuminate not only the curation, but the resulting garden *experience*.

### 3. State of the Field

Scholarship on ancient Rome has often concentrated on the late Republic/early Empire, with the intention of describing the Roman world during this particularly dynamic time in history. Recently, however, in the past decade alone, researchers have taken a new approach to understanding the complexity of this historical reality by reframing how objects are interpreted. Scholars have moved away from formalism's focus on the solely visual aspects of art and structuralism's emphasis on context, towards an approach referred to as "materiality." This new methodology has allowed iconography to remain fundamental to the study of art, while focusing on the social, historical, and physical circumstances surrounding an object's existence. In this way, an object's context is still considered, however, form and function are also given precedence. Therefore, both the development of the Roman world and the role and impact of objects within that world are being equally studied.

Foregrounding my consideration of a garden's agency is materiality theory, also known as thing theory, a concept introduced by Martin Heidegger. It distinguishes between "objects" and "things," in that an object represents an idea, whereas a thing stands for itself as a reality independent of perception.<sup>32</sup> Given that a work of art is a representation of an entity, it can only be understood as an object, not a thing. This distinction forces us to see the layers of any object in the sense of its various functions and meanings that allow it to represent an idea, or several intersecting ideas. In terms of the human world, it is formed by objects, all of which have agency. However, these objects and their agency are not independent from one another. Rather, the layers of an object obligate an understanding of objects as entities entangled in relations with other objects and with humans, and as a result, ultimately become

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, transl. W.B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1967), 37.

consistent of these relations.<sup>33</sup> This is seen in the entanglement of the garden with colonnaded walkways, known as “peristyles.” These entanglements of relations, or object networks, are as important in forming an object’s agency, as are its tangible characteristics.<sup>34</sup>

The way in which a spatial setting, like a traditional material object, has agency is explored in recent work by scholar Amy Russell. Russell builds upon Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation to explain how architecture can “interpellate” or call an individual into a certain position.<sup>35</sup> Russell does so by employing terms outlined in Karen Dale and Gibson Burrell’s chapter “Space and Organization Studies,” which describes how a space organizes its occupants and designates roles through processes of enchantment, emplacement, and enactment.<sup>36</sup> As a result, Russell provides a theorized methodological system that outlines the interaction between a space and humans, interprets the framework and organization of space, and establishes the idea that a space can have agency.

### **Politics, Prestige, and Privacy in Roman Society**

As previously mentioned, this paper focuses on a time period of great transformation, as the Roman Republic was transitioning into what would become the Empire. As illustrated in various works by Darryl Philips, Amy Russell, and Penelope Davies, the topography of Republican and Augustan Rome cannot be separated from the significant political and social

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. J. Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 49-53.

<sup>34</sup> Ian Hodder, “Human-thing entanglement: towards an integrated archaeological perspective,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 1 (2011): 154-177; Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Amy Russell, “Political space and the experience of citizenship in the city of Rome: architecture and interpellation,” in *Urban Space and Urban History in the Roman World*, ed. Miko Flohr (London: Routledge, 2020), 19-38.

<sup>36</sup> Russell, “Political space and the experience of citizenship in the city of Rome: architecture and interpellation,” 24; Gibson Burrell and Karen Dale, “Space and Organization Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sociology, Social Theory, and Organization Studies: Contemporary Currents*, eds. Paul Adler, Paul du Gay, Glenn Morgan, and Mike Reed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 684-708.

changes that were occurring at the time; and, thus, these issues must be studied together.<sup>37,38</sup>

Of particular note is Russell's *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome* (2016), which provides a fundamental overview of the evolving architecture and political scene from the early Republic to the early Empire in Rome, all while seeking to analyze the intersection of "public" and "private" spaces.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, one of Russell's principal examples is the Theater and Portico complex of Pompey, an extremely relevant case study to the investigation of Roman gardens (Figure 3.1).

To provide context, during the late Republic, a divide within the Senate began to emerge leading to two different political groups/ideologies, known as *populares* and *optimates*. Most famously, Julius Caesar, Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (aka 'Pompey'), and Marcus Licinius Crassus formed the First Triumvirate in 60 BC, a political alliance of *populares* within the Roman Senate. Around this same time, Pompey seized the opportunity to construct a novel permanent theater in the Campus Martius, which included an expansive porticoed garden and *curia*. Perhaps, one could go so far as to say that Pompey was providing

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<sup>37</sup> For recent scholarship on the political and social landscape of Republican Rome, see: Fabio Barry, "The Temple of Hercules Victor in Foro Boario (Aedes Aemiliana). Design, dating, 'decorated Doric,' and domes," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 66 (2021): 19-91; Penelope J.E. Davies, "Rome: the emergence of a Mediterranean capital," in *A Companion to the Archaeology of the Roman Republic*, ed. J. DeRose Evans (Hoboken: Wiley, 2012), 441-58; Penelope J.E. Davies, *Architecture and Politics in Republican Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Penelope J.E. Davies, "Constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing civic memory in late Republican Rome," in *Omnium Annalium Monumenta: Historical Writing and Historical Evidence in Republican Rome*, eds. Kaj Sandberg and Christopher Smith (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 477-512; Amy Russell, *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Amy Russell, "On Gender and Spatial Experience in Public: The Case of Ancient Rome," in *TRAC 2015*, eds. M.J. Mandich, T.J. Derrick, S. Gonzalez Sanchez, G. Savani, and E. Zampieri (Oxford: Oxbow, 2016), 164-176. Adam Ziolkowski, "Civic ritual and political spaces in Republican and Imperial Rome," in *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome*, ed. Paul Erdkamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 389-409.

<sup>38</sup> For recent scholarship on the political and social landscape of Augustan Rome, see: Darryl A. Philips, "Reading the landscape of Augustan Rome: *Aeneid* 1.421-429 and the building program of Augustus," in *Urbans Dreams and Realities in Antiquity. Remains and Representations of the Ancient City*, ed. Adam M. Kemezis (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 229-245; Darryl A. Philips, "The civic function of Agrippa's Pantheon," *Latomus* 75 (2016): 650-676; John Rich, "Consensus rituals and the origin of the principate," in *Il princeps romano: autocrate o magistrato? Fattori giuridici e fattori sociali del potere imperiale da Augusto a Commodo*, eds. J.L. Ferrary and J. Scheid (Pavia: IUSS Press, 2015), 101-38; Amy Russell, "Inventing the Imperial Senate," in *The Alternative Augustan Age*, eds. Josiah Osgood, Kit Morrell and Kathryn Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 325-341.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Language of Public and Private," in *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 17-37.

a micro-city to the public, in its inclusion of entertainment, politics, nature, artwork, and more. It has been proposed that the unified form of Pompey's complex, and his inclusion of a curia, makes reference to the Italic fora, suggesting a bold attempt to shift the focus of the city away from the Forum Romanum.<sup>40</sup> This suggestion is fitting given that Pompey was nothing short of a political opportunist, reflected in the manner by which he seized the opportunity to build the complex following Caesar's election to consul, after a brief stint of denial for Pompey by the Senate. Thus, Pompey attempted to rearrange the political setting in Rome and at the very center of this site was a public garden.

Yet, for Russell this "complex, more than any of its predecessors, [represents] the privatization of a significant portion of Rome's public space."<sup>41</sup> Thus, Russell rejects the notion of Pompey's garden as merely "public." Russell finds that the physical connection of the complex to Pompey's own home and private *horti*, spatially identifies a direct connection to Pompey and the private sphere.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, since Pompey was the sole benefactor and patron of this one-of-a-kind structure, the complex can only be seen as private and exclusive in and of itself. Hence, Russell's argument forces one to query the slippage of Pompey's garden as public and private, as well as its role and function within Rome's transforming political and social spheres. Russell's model of Pompey's complex introduces the notion of Roman gardens as fluid spaces where leisure and politics can occur simultaneously: presented as publicly accessible and, yet in fact, be conceptually private.

While Pompey's complex can be interpreted as a physical representation of Rome's political realm during the First Triumvirate, it also reveals the concurrent social changes that were affecting the urban topography. Starting from the second century BC, the disparity

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<sup>40</sup> Kathryn L. Gleason, "Porticus Pompeiana: a new perspective on the first public park of ancient Rome," *The Journal of Garden History* 14, no. 1 (1994): 13.

<sup>41</sup> Amy Russell, "Pompey and the privatization of public space on the Campus Martius," in *The Politics of Public Space in Republican Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 153.

<sup>42</sup> Russell, "Pompey and the privatization of public space on the Campus Martius," 153.

between Rome's classes grew, affecting the control the Senate had over the *populus*, given the increasing number of poor people. Dispossessed peasants and the poor were forced to move in droves to the urban center of Rome causing the population of the city to increase exponentially. The density of people in the center caused subsequent problems as housing, food, and sanitation were in short supply. Penelope Davies' interpretation of Pompey's garden focuses on the manner in which Pompey's complex is a response to the increasing crowding of the urban landscape.

Gardens were the privilege of the wealthy; and as buildings encroached on the city's sacred groves, and hordes of people packed into squalid noisy accommodations or lacked housing altogether, Pompey's gardens provided the urban plebs with a place of refuge, with shady promenades, the peaceful sound of running water, and a museum of artworks to call their own.<sup>43</sup>

Davies' analysis of the role of Pompey's complex is significant, first and foremost, because it identifies that Pompey's provision of the garden was an ongoing social experimentation to create a new setting for Rome's elite. More importantly though, Davies distinguishes a crucial perception using Pompey's complex, and that is the association of gardens with prestige. As such, it is evident that the garden as an architectural feature became deeply entangled with Rome's elite population, as a result of the political and social revolution occurring during the first triumviral period.

The association of gardens to politics, prestige, and privacy was not limited to seemingly "public" spaces. The trend of garden building, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next subsection, disseminated into the domestic sphere as townhouses and villas sought to emulate the effect and implications of the public monuments, such as Pompey's complex. Elite owners did this by architecturally and visually linking their social position to these "public" structures, by constructing their own lavish gardens in their villas.

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<sup>43</sup> Penelope Davies, "Pompey, Caesar, and Rivals," in *Architecture and Politics in Republican Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 234.

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, in *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1994), investigated the notion and logic of alluding to these triumphal monuments in reference to the house.

Starting from the 1990's, Wallace-Hadrill introduced a trend in modern scholarship towards thinking about Roman houses in terms of their social use and function, as well as their inherently public nature. Furthermore, Wallace-Hadrill emphasizes the ability of the house to encourage movement and performativity, because it acts "as a stage deliberately designed for the performance of social rituals."<sup>44</sup> These ideas are crucial to understanding the "social coding" of the Roman home, including its particular spaces, such as the garden. Moreover, the social coding of the house is further designated by its ornamentation. Wallace-Hadrill finds that the social function of domestic decoration resides in its allusion, that is, the ability to "[evoke] a world of buildings outside the domestic context within which they operate."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, gardens that were meant to evoke their public counterparts would feature similar decoration, such as portico-like walkways, greenery, statuary, and fountains. The Villa San Marco is an evocative example; looking at the layout of the central garden (3-5-9-20), one immediately notices the connection in shape to Pompey's garden (Figures 3.2). The length, width, centrality, and semicircular arch all resonate with the layout of Pompey's garden, portico, and theater.

Furthermore, Wallace-Hadrill expanded the concept of the home's "social coding" to the physical movement of people within the spaces, terming it the "social flow."<sup>46</sup> This flow of the house is established by the underlying social pattern to the house, but more importantly, by a hierarchy of intimacy, as the Roman owner determined in which rooms he

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<sup>44</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Articulation of the House," in *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 60.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Language of Public and Private," in *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>46</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, "The Articulation of the House," 38.

admitted his visitors.<sup>47</sup> The implication of this is that the house is composed of flexible spaces, and yet there are intrinsic boundaries. This applied to all spaces, including the garden peristyle, which became a space associated with the reception of elite peers. This allowed for politics to be conducted in the garden setting, as the space articulates and provides a stage for performative engagement with *paideia*, as occupants stroll amongst the greenery and fountains. For example, in the central garden (3-5-9-20) of the Villa San Marco, the Augustan period addition of twenty plane trees arranged in two rows on each side of the garden, as well as a *nymphaeum* in the apsidal head (64-65-G-H) and a marble-basined pool (15), all serve as physical and visual obstructions to slow the movement of occupants (Figures 3.3, 3.4).<sup>48</sup> Thus, the plantings create paths, which articulate the movement within the space.

However, despite the evidently public nature of the home, due to its function in Roman society as a place of business-like affairs, the “boundaries” defined by Wallace-Hadrill cannot be overlooked. “The Roman upper class was small in number and almost incestuous in familial ties so these suburban villas must have been considered the only places where privacy could be obtained.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the home allowed occupants to find privacy for engagement and conducting business within their elite circle. Andrew-Wallace Hadrill’s work during the late twentieth century has led more recent scholarship to delve into the implications of decoration, as seen in Ambra Spinelli’s “Beyond social and functional interpretations of wall paintings.” Further, scholarship on the Roman domestic sphere has homed in on Wallace-Hadrill’s notion of intrinsic boundaries, in the form of *vistas*, wall

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<sup>47</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, “The Articulation of the House,” 59.

<sup>48</sup> Mantha Zarmakoupi, “Case Studies,” in *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 72.

<sup>49</sup> Kim J. Hartswick, “The Roman Villa Garden,” in *Gardens of the Roman Empire*, eds. Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, Kathryn L. Gleason, Kim J. Hartswick, and Malek Amina-Aïcha (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 73.

paintings, and doorways.<sup>50</sup> M. Taylor Lauritsen, Evan Proudfoot, Joanne Berry, and Nikolaus Dietrich have all published in just the past decade on this particular topic.<sup>51</sup> In doing so, these authors have continued the conversation surrounding the framework of spaces within the Roman house, and made progress towards further elucidating the social flow and coding of the home.

In sum, starting from the middle Republic it became not only appropriate, but expected for Rome's aristocrats to construct villas. "Because one's social and political positions were so tied to land, ownership of property and dignified dwelling was of constant concern."<sup>52</sup> The expectation to build garden spaces was a result of the setting's direct ties to the nobility of Roman society, as previously described by Davies. Thus, in addition to being a private space of leisure, interpellation and performativity also occur in the garden, as the space calls upon its occupants to carry out their social role.

## **Peristyles, Pleasure Gardens, and Panoramas**

### *Peristyles*

Around the end of the Roman Republic, Roman houses and villas began to incorporate portico-like spaces with a colonnaded walkway, as is recorded in the archaeological finds from Pompeii and the surrounding towns of Stabiae, Herculaneum, and Oplontis. The introduction of these spaces into the domestic realm as well as their connection

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<sup>50</sup> Ambra Spinelli, "Beyond social and function interpretations of wall paintings: mythological imagery in the tablinum at Pompeii and Herculaneum," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 35, 1 (2022): 177-193.

<sup>51</sup> See: M. Taylor Lauritsen, "Doors in domestic space in Pompeii and Herculaneum: a preliminary study," in *TRAC 2010*, eds. Dragana Mladenovic and Ben Russell (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 59-75; Evan Proudfoot, "Secondary doors in entryways at Pompeii: Reconsidering access and the 'view from the street'," in *TRAC 2012*, eds. Annabel Bokern, Marion Bolder-Boos, Stefan Krmnicek, Dominik Maschek and Sven Page (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2012), 91-115; Joanne Berry, "Boundaries and control in the Roman house," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 29, 1 (2016): 125-141; Nikolaus Dietrich, "Spatial Dimensions in Roman Wall Painting and the Interplay of Enclosing and Enclosed Space: A New Perspective on Second Style," *Arts* 8, 68 (2019): 1-26.

<sup>52</sup> Kim J. Hartswick, "The Roman Villa Garden," 75.

to public civic and triumphal monuments has been a subject of abundant interest for scholars recently, including in terms of interpellation, display, and memory.<sup>53</sup> Samuli Simelius' recent book *Pompeian Peristyle Gardens* (2022) provides a comprehensive overview of this scholarship, in that it employs these works as well as Simelius' own primary research to accurately reconstruct over two-hundred peristyles from the Campania region. Simelius does this in order to elucidate specific patterns in peristyles, such as architectural features, number of colonnades, ground area, decoration, and water installations. His extensive research of these ancient structures allows modern scholars to visualize the evolution of the peristyle prior to and after 79 AD in the Bay of Naples, as well as other Roman regions. For these reasons, Simelius' work serves as a reference point from which to interpret the development of peristyles.

The peristyle trend moved north during the Julio-Claudian era from Campania to the Lazio region, as is evidenced by the villas surrounding the city boundaries. The term used for these domestic spaces is "peristyle," originating from a combination of the Greek words *peri* and *stylos*, which translates to "a portico around."<sup>54</sup> While the Latin word *peristylum*'s use in Italy began at the end of the Republic, Simelius is careful to point out that the technical term "peristyle" or "peristyle garden," meant to indicate an open space surrounded by colonnades paired with a garden, is a convention of modern scholarship.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See: Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, "Political Museums: Porticos, Gardens and the Public Display of Art in Ancient Rome," in *Collecting and Dynastic Ambition*, eds. Susan Bracken, Andrea M. Galdy and Adriana Turpin (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar, 2009), 1-22; Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, "The city in motion. Walking for transport and leisure in the city of Rome," in *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii. Movement and Space*, eds. Ray Laurence and David J. Newsome (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 262-289; Ida Östenberg, "Power walks: Aristocratic escorted movements in Republican Rome," in *The Moving City. Processions, Passages and Promenades in Ancient Rome*, eds. Ida Östenberg, S. Malmberg and J. Blørnebye (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 13-22; Maggie L. Popkin, *The Architecture of the Roman Triumph. Monuments, Memory, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Amy Russell, "Political space and the experience of citizenship in the city of Rome: architecture and interpellation," in *Urban Space and Urban History in the Roman World*, ed. Miko Flohr (London: Routledge, 2020). 19-38.

<sup>54</sup> Samuli Simelius, "2: Pompeian peristyle gardens," in *Pompeian Peristyle Gardens. Studies in Roman Space and Urbanism*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022), 15.

<sup>55</sup> Simelius, "2: Pompeian peristyle gardens," 15.

In terms of Roman architecture, the earliest peristyle-like garden space in a domestic context is attributed to the *Casa del Fauno* in Pompeii, dated to the second century BCE (Figure 3.5).<sup>56</sup> However, Simelius finds the manifestation of these domestic colonnaded spaces into the dominant, embellished peristyles that academics refer to today, occurred during the middle of the first century BC. This prevailing form of peristyle tended to be paired with inner garden spaces, furnished with fountains and sculpture, and considered a place for display, as can be seen in both gardens (1-2 and 3-5-9-20) of the Villa of San Marco (Figure 1.2). As such, it can also be stated that garden spaces changed in design and concept during the late Roman Republic, as they were linked with these colonnaded walkways.

### *Gardens*

While garden spaces during the Roman Empire are often discussed in conjunction with domestic lodgings, the reality is that gardens existed in many forms, including small shop gardens, commercial vineyards, and immense, public horti. However, the trend towards ever-increasing “private” gardens is undeniable and begs further investigation, beyond the social and political implications. The 2017 anthology *Gardens of the Roman Empire* proves invaluable to understanding the metamorphosis of gardens during the late Republic, especially given the researchers involved in its production. Chapters by Kim J. Hartswick, Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, Bettina Bergmann, Maureen Carroll, and Kathryn L. Gleason cover some of the most recent research on the topic of Roman gardens from some of the most distinguished scholars in this particular subject, as evidenced by their other recent works.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Simelius, “2: Pompeian peristyle gardens,” 15.

<sup>57</sup> See: Kim J. Hartswick, *The gardens of Sallust: A Changing Landscape* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, “Political Museums: Porticos, Gardens and the Public Display of Art in Ancient Rome,” in *Collecting and Dynastic Ambition*, eds. Susan Bracken, Andrea M. Galdy and Adriana Turpin (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar, 2009), 1-22; Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis, “The Use and Reception,” in *A Cultural History of Gardens, Volume 1: Ancient Gardens*, ed. K. L. Gleason (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 99-118; Bettina Bergmann, “Staging the supernatural: interior garden of Pompeian houses,” in *Pompeii and the Roman Villa. Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples*, ed. Carol C. Mattusch (Washington: National Gallery

Likewise, Eric Morvillez's chapter, "The Garden in the Domus," serves as a crucial starting point to understanding the movement from areas of organic, productive greenery to manufactured attractions.

Somewhat evidently the earliest function of garden spaces was purely functional in terms of producing food. This is apparent from the design of traditional Italic homes, many of which contained a space known as the *heredium*, which was more of a vegetable patch than a place for lounging or socializing.<sup>58</sup> As described by Morvillez, "originally the garden, whether connected to the house or separated from it, was seen from an economic and familial point of view."<sup>59</sup> However, starting from around the time of the Samnite period (fourth century BC), garden spaces in a private urban context began to transform from these *necessary gardens* into spaces of luxury and pleasure, shifting the use, perception, and form of these spaces.<sup>60</sup> This change affected both public horti and private gardens, as they metamorphosed from an organic, utilitarian design into grand, manicured areas for loitering and social activity.

This refinement meant that the physical appearance of the garden space was crucial, with every element weighted in its symbolic implications. As such, private and public gardens of the Roman Republic and Empire are considered to be highly constructed spaces, in which their arrangement, decoration, and environment were meticulously planned and

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of Art, 2008), 51-65; Bettina Bergmann, "The concept of boundary in the Roman garden," in *Le Jardin dans l'antiquité*, eds. Kathleen Coleman and Pascale Derron (Vancouver: Fondation Hardt, 2014), 245-289; Bettina Bergmann, "Garden Paintings in Villa A," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero. The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, eds. Elaine K. Gazda and John R. Clarke (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 96-110; Maureen Carroll, *Earthly paradises: Ancient gardens in history and archaeology* (London: British Museum, 2003); Kathryn L. Gleason, "Porticus Pompeiana: a new perspective on the first public park of ancient Rome," *The Journal of Garden History* 14, no. 1 (1994): 1-15; Kathryn L. Gleason, "Plants of the Roman Garden," *Gardens of the Roman Empire*, eds. Wilhelmina F Jashemski, Kathryn L Gleason, Kim J Hartswick, and Malek Amina-Aïcha (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 455-480; Kathryn L. Gleason, "The lost dimension: pruned plants in Roman gardens," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 28, 3 (2019): 1-28.

<sup>58</sup> Eric Morvillez, "The Garden in the Domus," in *Gardens of the Roman Empire*, eds. Wilhelmina F Jashemski, Kathryn L Gleason, Kim J Hartswick, and Malek Amina-Aïcha (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 19.

<sup>59</sup> Eric Morvillez, "The Garden in the Domus," 19.

<sup>60</sup> Eric Morvillez, "The Garden in the Domus," 20.

executed. Kathryn Gleason and Michele Palmer’s “Constructing the Ancient Roman Garden” outlines the nature in which gardens were assembled and presents the idea that the form of the space is connected to the identity of its owner. Gleason and Palmer explain how gardens came to provide a different setting for performativity, “within which men and women of status and leisure might stroll comfortably in their [...] fine clothes, with the kind of bearing and gait that expressed their *Romanitas*, or identity as Roman citizens and aristocracy.”<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, Gleason and Palmer find that it was the garden landscape itself with its “choreographed views, collections of plants, water features, and an abundance of art,” which prompted discussion of *paideia* amongst visitors.<sup>62</sup> Artworks within and surrounding gardens included classical marble and bronze statuary, as well as wall paintings (Figure 3.6).

Interestingly, one of the most common frescoes seen on the surrounding walls of gardens were fictive “garden frescoes,” which many archaeologists argue was meant to make the garden seem larger. This can be seen in the central peristyle garden (3-5-9-20) of the Villa San Marco, where the three walls of the peristyle (*porticus triplex*) (3-5-20) included framed landscape-like paintings of trees, resembling windows looking outwards (Figures 3.7, 3.8).<sup>63</sup>

While the presentation of the garden itself is fundamental, if the frame of analysis is pulled back, the placement of the garden within the arrangement of the home reveals further multiplicity in the function of the space. In the domestic context, owners began to rebuild their former gardens into *pleasure gardens*, specifically incorporating the peristyle feature. Homes were reorganized around the garden peristyle, onto which reception rooms and triclinia opened, effectively connecting the various rooms of the home, but also creating a new space for leisure and aesthetic enjoyment on a somewhat more private scale. As such, in

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<sup>61</sup> Kathryn Gleason and Michele Palmer, “Constructing the Ancient Roman Garden,” in *Gardens of the Roman Empire*, eds. Wilhelmina F Jashemski, Kathryn L Gleason, Kim J Hartswick, and Malek Amina-Aïcha (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 372.

<sup>62</sup> Gleason and Palmer, “Constructing the Ancient Roman Garden,” 372.

<sup>63</sup> Zarmakoupi, “Case Studies,” 70.

the domestic sphere, these private gardens took on the appearance of a “planned, planted backdrop rather than the rustic, cultivated, and productive landscape of earlier Roman villa gardens,” yet in function, they represented an intersection of productivity and relaxation.<sup>64</sup> In sum, while the role of the garden as a place of function and productivity was not lost, its purpose expanded to include providing enjoyment and opulence.

### ***Gardens in Roman Luxury Villas***

The scale of private garden spaces seemingly becomes limitless with the creation of “the luxury villa,” a term of modern scholarship. This new form of villa expands on the size and aspects of the *villae urbana* and *rustica*, to form a palatial structure in the countryside. The publications of John R. Clarke and Thomas Noble Howe have been influential in their analysis of the luxury villas of Oplontis and Stabiae, particularly in terms of construction and social significance.<sup>65</sup> However, it is crucial for any analysis of Roman villas and their gardens to begin by referring to archaeologist Wilhelmina F. Jashemski (1910-2007), a pioneer in the field of garden archeology, who excavated at Pompeii, Villa Boscoreale, Oplontis, and Hadrian’s Villa in Tivoli. Her research and expertise were fundamental to the development of archaeobotany and the study of ancient Roman gardens. Accordingly, Jashemski’s book, *The Gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius* (1979), provides a standard from which to comprehend the scope and design of Roman luxury villa gardens.

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<sup>64</sup> Hartswick, “The Roman Villa Garden,” 75.

<sup>65</sup> See: John R. Clarke, “Retrieving the Decorative Program of Villa A (‘of Poppaea’) at Oplontis (Torre Annunziata, Italy),” in *Beyond Iconography: Materials, Methods, and Meaning in Ancient Surface Decoration*, eds. Sarah Lepinski and Susanna McFadden (Boston: Archaeological Institute of America, 2015), 97-108; John R. Clarke, “Building history and aesthetics of the “Villa of Poppea” at Torre Annunziata: Results from the Oplontis Project 2005-2014,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, eds. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P.R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 75-84; Thomas Noble Howe, “The social status of the villas of Stabiae,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, eds. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P.R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 97-119.

Jashemski finds the architectural language of peristyle gardens disseminated from townhouses to luxurious country villas.<sup>66</sup> However, while the inclusion of a colonnaded walkway in conjunction with a garden remains consistent between the transition from a smaller home to these grandiose pleasure villas, the garden setting in these villas takes on an unprecedented design as wealth, opulence, and bounty reach a new limit. These spaces were usually decorated with frescoes, mosaics, fountains, statuary and even pools of water. “In the country, where space was not at a premium, pools could be large indeed.”<sup>67</sup> The pool of the Villa San Marco (15) is a testament to this as it was 30 meters (98 feet long) (Figure 3.3). Additionally, these villas came to include multiple gardens, rather than just one.

However, perhaps the greatest difference between the gardens of these luxury villas and their predecessors is the landscape. Whereas townhouses and smaller country villas were forced to look inward and be organized around a central garden space due to spatial limitations, luxury villas could look outward.<sup>68</sup> Gardens were included centrally, but also peripherally in these structures, and views inward and outward were fundamental to the organization and construction of the villa. In this way, the villa came to integrate the landscape, whether that be of the countryside, mountains, meadows, or the sea. “The intimate gardens within the villas, the great formal gardens that immediately surround it, and the striking beauty of the natural scenery were all integrated and combined into one harmonious whole that was indescribably satisfying and beautiful.”<sup>69</sup> Situated 200 meters away from the ancient coastline and 40 meters up on a hill terrace of the Lattari Mountains, the Villa San Marco had a panoramic view of the entire gulf of Naples (Figures 3.9, 3.10).<sup>70</sup> During the Julio-Claudian period, the Villa San Marco added the upper peristyle garden (1-2) from a

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<sup>66</sup> Eric Morvillez, “The Garden in the Domus,” 18-19.

<sup>67</sup> Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii: Herculaneum and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius*, (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas Brothers, Publishers, 1979), 335.

<sup>68</sup> Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii*, 335.

<sup>69</sup> Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii*, 335.

<sup>70</sup> Mantha Zarmakoupi, “Case Studies,” 68.

neighboring villa, which measured about 113 meters in length along the cliff edge. With its three-sided peristyle (porticus triplex), a viewer in this garden would have had an uninterrupted vista of the landscape and bay (Figure 3.11). In this way, the Villa San Marco and its contemporaries become permeable spaces, but also experiential, as they require a viewer to move and engage with the various views of the landscape. In sum, the architecture of a luxury villa garden became a curated ensemble of natural organic scenery and artifice, joining the landscape and garden to create a complete environment.

Evidently, Jashemski's discovery of the integration of landscape into the villa garden has led recent modern scholarship to query the implications of this trend. The resultant permeability raises questions about the boundaries of these villas, especially regarding the regulation of inside/outside. In this way, the connection of the villa and villa owner to nature, the exterior environment, and climate also comes into question. Mantha Zarmakoupi has written extensively on the subject of Roman villas since 2008, making her one of the foremost scholars on the topic in recent years.<sup>71</sup> Zarmakoupi's recent article, "Roman Luxury Villas: Environmental Considerations and Seasonal Uses," discusses the various spaces of the villa and their role in meditating the inside/outside of the house as well as identifying the cultural dynamic between Romans and their environment. Zarmakoupi argues that the incorporation of the landscape results in a "perforated architectural body."<sup>72</sup> Consequently, beyond operating as a thermal buffer, Zarmakoupi finds these perforations, including the garden

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<sup>71</sup> See: Martha Zarmakoupi, "Designing the landscapes of the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta," in *Essays in Classical Archaeology for Eleni Hatzivassiliou*, eds. D. Kurtz et al. (Oxford: Studies in Classical Archaeology, 2008), 269-76; Martha Zarmakoupi, "Porticus and cryptoporticus in luxury villa architecture," in *Pompeii. Art, Industry and Infrastructure*, eds. Eric Poehler, Miko Flohr and Kevin Cole (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 50-61; Martha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mantha Zarmakoupi, "Private villas: Italy and the provinces," in *A Companion to Roman Architecture*, eds. Roger B. Ulrich and Caroline K. Quenemoen (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 363-380; Martha Zarmakoupi, "The intermediality of landscape in the decorum of Roman villas," in *Principles of Decoration in the Roman World, Decorative Principles in Late Republican and Early Imperial Italy (Decor) vol. 2*, eds. Annette Haug and M. Taylor Lauritsen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 177-192.

<sup>72</sup> Mantha Zarmakoupi, "Roman Luxury Villas: Environmental Considerations and Seasonal Uses," in *The Archaeology of Seasonality*, eds. Achim Lichtenberger and Rubina Raja (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2021), 252.

peristyle, are meant to operate as cultural markers in contrast to the natural landscape, indicating the transition from inside to outside.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, Zarmakoupi finds these liminal structures to visibly render the cultural relationship Romans had to climate patterns.<sup>74</sup> More specifically, Zarmakoupi asserts that these structures “became a part of a statement of dominion over nature and thus the owners self-presentation.”<sup>75</sup> While this characterization many not be wholly accurate, this approach is extremely new and evolving rapidly. Yet, this does not discredit the fact that this architectural change most likely had greater implications beyond solely access to a “beautiful view.” Ultimately, the analyses of Zarmakoupi demonstrate that gardens in luxury villas might be one of the best typologies for elucidating the *Roman* perception of their gardens as well as the relationship Romans had to nature.

### **Playing with a New Perception: Agency, Globalization, and Framing**

As shown in the above-mentioned subsections of this chapter, the research on the changes of the late Republic/early Empire, including issues relevant to the study of gardens, is extensive. From the numerous art historical studies of the past decade, it becomes apparent that scholars have continued to develop newer, more specific approaches out of the material turn. As a result, these works are not only effective, but they have opened new areas of concentration and interpretation in the field of art history. However, while these works are crucial for establishing the form and function of gardens within Rome, during a significant period of political, social, and architectural transformation, they circumvent a complete perception of the complexity of the garden. In order to resolve this, it becomes necessary to apply some of these newer sub-methodologies, including object agency, globalization/koine, and framing.

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<sup>73</sup> Zarmakoupi, “Roman Luxury Villas: Environmental Considerations and Seasonal Uses,” 254.

<sup>74</sup> Zarmakoupi, “Roman Luxury Villas: Environmental Considerations and Seasonal Uses,” 254.

<sup>75</sup> Zarmakoupi, “Roman Luxury Villas: Environmental Considerations and Seasonal Uses,” 254.

Eva Mol's chapter "Object ontology and cultural taxonomies," comes most directly out of a more "classic" materiality approach, in that the object itself is at the center of the analysis. Mol argues for the application of materiality in Roman archaeology, and for a move away from a predominantly historical basis. Mol responds to the convoluted question of, "Can we understand history from objects?," by introducing the notion of object agency.<sup>76</sup> Mol argues that all objects shape us, which is reflected by the importance placed on classifications, and thus proving objects have agency.<sup>77</sup> Hence, human categorization demonstrates that humans understand the world through objects and therefore objects define how people see the world.<sup>78</sup> This can be seen in the semantic distinction of a *hortus* from a *nemus* from a *porticus* within the primary sources. Ultimately, utilizing Mol's explanation, an object's agency is dependent upon all of its constitutive elements because each is necessary to form the object and its function.

However, if the scope of the object is pulled back from the individual object itself, the materiality of the object takes on a greater meaning in terms of its form, function, and context. The "human" world, as previously stated, is formed by objects, all of which have agency. However, these objects and their agency are not independent from one another. Rather, the layers of an object obligate an understanding of objects as entities entangled in relations with other objects, and as a result, ultimately become constituted by these relations.<sup>79</sup> These entangled relationships, or object networks, are as important in forming an object's agency, as are its tangible characteristics. If an object's network is considered in the global ethnoscape, as established by Miguel John Versluys, it becomes evident that an object possesses both a universal meaning and a localized meaning, both of which are significant to

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<sup>76</sup> Eva M. Mol, "Object ontology and cultural taxonomies. Examining the agency of style, material and objects in classification through Egyptian material culture in Pompeii and Rome" in *Materialising Roman Histories*, eds. A. Van Oyen and M. Pitts (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017), 170.

<sup>77</sup> Mol, "Object ontology," 172.

<sup>78</sup> Mol, "Object ontology," 172.

<sup>79</sup> Mol, "Object ontology," 187.

the interpretation of the object.<sup>80</sup> Given the Roman Empire's globalized nature, objects took on shared cultural meanings; as a result, the whole *oikumene* can be viewed as a hyper-network of universalization in which people, goods, and ideas are exchanged.<sup>81</sup>

Simultaneously, the particularization of styles, objects, and ideas in a local context allows for new meanings and understandings to develop, and reflects object agency.<sup>82</sup> This concept is reflected in the presence of "Hellenistic" porticoes in Roman gardens, a repeated configuration which is internationally recognizable. Yet, this does not change the fact that each Roman garden was designed by a different owner with different tastes, and for this every garden had an individualized form.

Still, one particular, but critical, element which has not yet been acknowledged is the role of humans within the interpretation of any object, including gardens. Coming out of the material turn, another methodology, known as "framing," also seeks to acknowledge all of an object's constitutive elements, but it goes further by avoiding a hierarchy and by incorporating the role of the viewer. Jennifer Trimble's article, "Framing and social identity in Roman portrait statues," defines an artwork's components as frames, which can be shifted to acknowledge the various aspects of any work.<sup>83</sup> These frames include the medium, the setting, the patron, and more. For Trimble, each of these aspects should be given equal importance when perceiving any work. For example, a garden's international influences are valued and considered the same as its localized form. Furthermore, like Mol's approach to materiality, Trimble's system of framing evidently focuses on the object and its agency.

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<sup>80</sup> Miguel John Versluys, "Roman Visual Material Culture as Globalising Koine," in *Globalisation and the Roman World. World History, Connectivity and Material Culture*, eds. Martin Pitts and Miguel John Versluys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>81</sup> Versluys, "Roman Visual Material," 154-155.

<sup>82</sup> Versluys, "Roman Visual Material," 155-158.

<sup>83</sup> Jennifer Trimble, "Framing and social identity in Roman portrait statues," in *The Frame in Classical Art: A Cultural History*, eds. Verity Platt and Michael Squire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

However, her approach also incorporates viewers and their own agency, because Trimble argues that an artwork's value is dependent upon being seen. In doing so, Trimble fosters a mutual relationship between object and viewer agency. If a hierarchy can be avoided in the contemplation of artwork, art historians can come to understand every frame as integral to a work, including its viewers. What underlies Trimble's argument about framing, however, is the power of the viewer to shift the different frames in a continuously dynamic process. For instance, in any garden, it is dependent upon the viewer to notice the vista or ponder the cultural origins of the peristyle. Ultimately, an object and its agency are meaningless without the presence of viewers, their acknowledgement of the work, and their ability to see an object's different frames, and in this way, viewers become an intrinsic element to an object.

At this point it needs to be clarified that my paper does not seek to critique or discredit any of the aforementioned scholarship, and as such, my thesis should not be understood as a historicist intervention. Rather, I am suggesting that these works and their methodologies should be forced into a position of coexistence, where all of these "frames of interpretation" are considered equally. Thus, I will continue to draw upon various scholarship as well as original research in order to elucidate the layers of the garden. Only by doing so, can the Roman garden be truly understood in its comprehensive whole.

## 4. Curation and Form

*For villas in Italy, the pleasure garden and the colonnaded peristyle with free-standing colonnades had been distinct concepts with contrasting associations: the pleasure garden denoted the luxury of the East, while the architecture of peristyle and portico evoked the strenuous discipline of Greek educational institutional and venues.<sup>84</sup>*

As noted in the quote by Martha Zarmakoupi, the pleasure garden combined the architectural language of several cultures, including the Greek gymnasium and Eastern gardens, to form a multifaceted garden space that blended function and luxury. For Zarmakoupi, by incorporating the Eastern pleasure garden inside the structure of the Greek peristyle, “Roman designers ‘tamed’ the unruly nature of the corrupting ‘Eastern’ influence, constructing spaces in which pleasure was made acceptable to owners who wished for luxury without imputation of decadence.”<sup>85</sup> In this way, Zarmakoupi finds that Eastern foreign pleasures were being morally controlled by Romans.<sup>86</sup> This notion is critical because Zarmakoupi utilizes these cultural associations to not only suggest the relationship Romans had to these gardens, but to theorize how the form of the peristyle represents the Roman perception of the Hellenistic world, which they had been in contact with starting from the mid-Republic.

Furthermore, Zarmakoupi is illuminating an extremely particular moment in history, in which Rome was in direct contact with the East Mediterranean, and therefore, actively absorbing their cultural art forms and developing their own. This vibrant period of cultural exchange would result in subsequent experimentation within Roman architecture, including gardens. As a result, garden design would draw on multiple foreign structure-types, as well as

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<sup>84</sup> Mantha Zarmakoupi, “Landscape at the “Villa of Poppea” (Villa A) at Torre Annunziata,” in *Roman Villas in the Mediterranean Basin*, eds. G. Métraux and A. Marzano (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 89.

<sup>85</sup> Zarmakoupi, “Landscape at the ‘Villa of Poppaea’ (Villa A) at Torre Annunziata,” 89.

<sup>86</sup> Zarmakoupi, “Landscape at the ‘Villa of Poppaea’ (Villa A) at Torre Annunziata,” 89.

attempt to meet the needs of the local context, creating a visually-entangled form. Consequently, when particular forms, such as the traditional inward-looking peristyle, became normalized in Roman society, the approach to garden design continued to evolve, reaching a novel multiplicity of associations and meanings. Thus, it is from this experimentation that the notion of curating gardens emerged, as Romans sought to create a space that was uniquely their own.

### **Inspiration and Associative Values**

The characterization of Roman gardens as an appropriated combination of Greece and the East has been a longstanding perception of these spaces. Starting from some of the earliest twentieth-century scholarship on Roman gardens by Ellen Churchill Semple in 1929, the association of Roman gardens to Greece and Egypt is evident. Semple describes how, “like the Egyptian and Greek gardens, [Roman gardens] were formal in design and were connected with the dwelling, so that life indoors and out was not divorced.”<sup>87</sup> Words such as “Hellenistic,” “Greek,” “Eastern,” “Egyptian,” and “Persian” are frequently seen within academic publications regarding Roman gardens, continuing into the twenty-first century. However, it was not until recently with the material turn that the motive behind these cultural labels began to be questioned.

Returning to Eva Mol’s chapter “Object ontology and cultural taxonomies,” Mol finds the categorization of Roman objects, especially in terms of cultural style, problematic.<sup>88</sup> In particular, Mol focuses on the material agency of objects in terms of how they are classified culturally and stylistically. Mol describes how cultural classifications are problematic because they fail to represent Roman perception in their own world, rather than the

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<sup>87</sup> Ellen Churchill Semple, “Ancient Mediterranean Pleasure Gardens,” *Geographical Review* 19, no. 3 (1929): 439.

<sup>88</sup> Mol, “Object ontology,” 169-172.

Hellenistic world, and therefore do not represent Roman use.<sup>89</sup> Hence, while the continued perception of gardens as a blend of Greek and Persian cultures is not erroneous, it needs reconsideration because it fails to comprehend the agency of the garden, and also fails to fully discern their purpose to Romans.

Thus, a new analysis is necessary to recognize the influences and associative values of these garden spaces, without allowing them to succumb to the monochromatic distinction of “Greek peristyle” and “Persian garden.” Hence, this chapter will take a semantic approach, dissecting labels frequently seen in connection with gardens, and their function. At the core of this evaluation is the recurring theme of fluidity, which allows for the multiplicity of the garden’s associations to be acknowledged, while simultaneously conceding to the slippage of the space in the global ethnoscape that was the Mediterranean.

### *Greek Portico and Eastern Garden*

Evidently, the Greek portico and Persian garden are critical points within the discussion of the international nature of Roman visual material culture. However, it is imperative to point out that these features were not attached to a singular cultural context as it seems given their labels. For example, according to Samuli Simelius, the prevalence of colonnaded courtyards can be found in many ancient cultures. “The origin of the peristyle as an architectural feature is unclear, and it is questionable whether an origin can be defined, as a colonnaded courtyard is a widespread feature in architecture.”<sup>90</sup> While Simelius acknowledges the connection [of the Roman peristyle] to the Hellenistic world, he points out that the space was also seen in Etruscan architecture.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, scholar Linda Farrar finds

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<sup>89</sup> Mol, “Object ontology,” 171.

<sup>90</sup> Simelius, “2: Pompeian peristyle gardens,” 15.

<sup>91</sup> Simelius, “2: Pompeian peristyle gardens,” 15.

the peristyle was a mixture of Hellenistic, Persian, and Etruscan architecture.<sup>92</sup> Such claims lead one to question, if this is the case, why are Roman gardens so often associated in modern scholarship with a Hellenistic context? While the pure form of the Roman peristyle may resemble related features from several cultures, Romans were applying their perception of the quality, function, and setting created by the Greek portico specifically, to their own peristyle for reasons that will be described below.

Starting with the physical appearance of the garden's frame in the form of the peristyle, the visual resonance between the colonnaded walkways of Greek educational institutions and the Romans' domestic peristyles and public porticoes is irrefutable. The format of a three- or four-sided semi-open colonnaded walkway, decorated with painting and sculpture is resounding, leading scholars to conclude that the Romans assimilated the model of eastern and western Greek palaces, *gymnasia*, *palaistra*, and philosophical schools, which were defined by these tight, inward-looking colonnaded spaces.<sup>93</sup> Hellenistic examples can be seen in the courtyard of the palace at Aigai in Macedonia, the Portico of the Trajaneum from Pergamon, as well as the Great Altar at Pergamon (Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). The chain of events is typically seen as Hellenistic royal, public and religious complex were the initial inspiration for the public portico in Roman architecture, which arrived first, as Roman Republican sanctuaries and triumphal monuments employed the portico feature, including the Portico of Metellus and Theater of Pompey (Figures 4.4, 3.1).<sup>94</sup> The logic was to associate these public structures to those of the Hellenistic kingdoms, conveying royalty.<sup>95</sup> Then, evidently, as described by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's theory in Chapter Two, Roman designers wished to

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<sup>92</sup> Linda Farrar, *Ancient Roman Gardens* (Gloucestershire, U.K.: Sutton, 1998), 17.

<sup>93</sup> Ann L. Kuttner, "Culture and History at Pompey's Museum," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-) 129, (1999): 346.

<sup>94</sup> Mantha Zarmakoupi, "The Architectural Design of the Peristylum-Garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas," *Urban Living in the Eastern Mediterranean. 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC – 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD*, (2010): 622-623.

<sup>95</sup> Inge Nielsen, "Royal palaces and type of monarchy: Do the Hellenistic Palaces reflect the status of the king?," *Hephaistos* 15, (1997): 137-162.

incorporate the grandiose character of these Roman public monuments into domestic architecture.<sup>96</sup>

But, as described by Zarmakoupi, “it was not merely the public, monumental and sumptuous character of these structures to which Romans aspired. The peristylum and porticus structures were foremost representative of the architecture of the Greek education institution, the gymnasium [...]. It is not by chance that Latin authors located philosophical discussion in the peristylum-garden.”<sup>97</sup> Zarmakoupi supports this claim with a direct quote of Catulus, narrated by Cicero:

*...num tandem aut locus hic non idoneus videtur, in quo porticus haec ipsa, ubi ambulamus, et palaestra, et tot locis sessiones, gymnasiarum, et Graecorum disputationum memoriam quodam modo commovent?*

...surely you do not think this is an inappropriate place (sc. for discussion)? Here, where this portico, in which we are now walking, and this palaestra, and sittings at so many places, awaken somehow the memory of the *gymnasia* and the philosophical disputes of the Greeks?<sup>98</sup>

The acknowledgement by Catulus of the space’s connection to the Greek portico indicates an awareness of not only the form of Greek architecture, but of its function in the Greek culture. Further, the statement demonstrates that Romans utilized their porticoes and peristyles as the Greeks did, for discussions and the display of *paideia*.

For Cicero, at his villa at Tusculum, it is evident that he sought to affirm this association with the gymnasium through appropriate sculptural display, and a similar approach has been proposed for the Villa of the Papyri. In fact, Cicero refers repeatedly to his peristyle garden as an “Academy,” as demonstrated in his letters.

*Quod ad me de Hermathena scribis per mihi gratum est. est ornamentum Academiae proprium meae, quod et Hermes commune est omnium et Minerva singulare est insigne eius gymnasi. qua re velim, ut scribis, ceteris quoque rebus quam plurimis eum locum ornes.*

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<sup>96</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Language of Public and Private,” in *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>97</sup> Zarmakoupi, “The Architectural Design of the Peristylum-Garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas,” 623.

<sup>98</sup> Zarmakoupi, “The Architectural Design of the Peristylum-Garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas,” 623.

I am very grateful for what you say about the Hermathena. It's an appropriate ornament for my Academy, since Hermes is the common emblem of all such places and Minerva special to that one. So please beautify it with other pieces, as you promise, as many as possible.<sup>99</sup>

The statement about the herm being a common emblem of “all such places” demonstrates that these Hellenistic statuary programs were associatively appropriate decorum for the peristyle structure. This makes the latter a space for a fabricated display, particularly in the form of statuary or painting.

Similarly, the physical green space of the pleasure garden, separate from the peristyle is often associated to the luxury pleasure gardens of East Persia. The inclusion of grand water features and ornamental plantings is “assumed” to have been inspired by Persian *paradeisoi*, such as the hanging gardens in the palace of Babylon, the park around the palace of Pasargadae, and the palace of Dareios in Susa (Figure 4.5).<sup>100</sup> These green spaces are said to have in turn inspired the public and royal parks of Alexandria, such as the *basileia* of Alexandria and in the palace of the Seleucids in Antioch (Figure 4.6).<sup>101</sup> All of these aforementioned gardens represent some of the most opulent, sumptuous green spaces to have ever existed, in their incorporation of tiered gardens, lush vegetation composed of various species of trees, plants, and flowers, as well as fountains, pools and cascading waterfalls. Given that Rome was actively engaging with Pergamon, Alexandria, and Athens, these spectacular elements came to be included in many of Rome's public hortiscapes, such as the *Horti Sallustiani*, as well as in the palatial gardens on the Palatine (Figure 4.7). Likewise, but perhaps not on quite the same scale, private owners began to mimic these features in their

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<sup>99</sup> Letter Nine, 9.3, first half of 66 B.C.; The letters to Atticus are from D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1965). Translations of the letters to Atticus from *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* and of the letter to Gallus from *Cicero's Letters to His Friends* (Harmondsworth, 1978) are also Shackleton Bailey's; For an analysis of the role of Hellenistic statuary programs in Rome, including Cicero's, see: Miranda Marvin, “Copying in Roman Sculpture: The Replica Series,” *Studies in the History of Art* 20, no. 7 (1989): 24-45.

<sup>100</sup> Zarmakoupi, “The Architectural Design of the Peristylum-Garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas,” 624.

<sup>101</sup> Zarmakoupi, “The Architectural Design of the Peristylum-Garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas,” 624.

gardens, creating an environment of leisure and luxury. While it is uncertain that the incorporation of pleasure gardens into the Roman domestic sphere was a conscious cultural reference, the visual resonance in terms of luxury and pleasure seemingly invokes the royal gardens of the Hellenistic and Persian East.

### *Hellenistic Koine and Slippage*

The clear visual resonances between Roman gardens and their Hellenistic features evidently indicate a connection between the various cultures, reflecting the dynamic circulation of material culture. Hence, greater consideration should be given to the globalized, yet particular nature of the Roman world. From the third century BC, the Mediterranean was an interconnected world because of Roman control. Consequently, Roman material culture looked like a blend of cultural styles, suggesting they were components of the Roman identity, rather than foreign influences.<sup>102</sup> In particular, as Rome engaged with the Hellenistic East, which had a short, but significant period of domination from 300-100 BC, it sought to draw on the dominance of these kingdoms by borrowing from the language of its visual culture. Due to this, Rome drew on the repertoire of Hellenistic architecture and traditions, and utilized visual resemblance, in order to convey its dominance within the Mediterranean. In particular, Tonio Hölscher finds that from 200 BC, the already global Hellenistic culture was “brought to a time-space compression through the Roman conquest of the oikumene and its institutionalizations.”<sup>103</sup> As such, Rome was drawing on this system of universalized images within the *oikumene*, in order to resonate throughout the Mediterranean world.

In the system of universalization, the architectural features of the Greek portico and Persian garden make up a common type of “material culture available around the

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<sup>102</sup> Versluys, “Roman Visual Material,” 148.

<sup>103</sup> Cited in Versluys, “Roman Visual Material,” 164.

Mediterranean and Near East – a *koine* or ‘common language’ used and supplied and further developed by all participants.”<sup>104</sup> Hence, the term *koine* acknowledges the cultural contact occurring in the Mediterranean at the time, in terms of visual cultural material, but allows for the continual reformation of its corpus by its participants. Rome’s engagement with the Hellenistic world is what allowed it to interact with this *koine* and begin experimenting with its own architectural forms, as it came to incorporate its own perception of these elements.

An example is evident in the Portico of Pompey, a novel triumphal monument with the ability to generate the unique effect of a theater-garden space, given the grand portico surrounding the space (Figure 4.8). When it comes to where Pompey may have taken inspiration for the design of his Theater Complex, scholars tend to focus on the external, foreign influences of the Eastern Mediterranean such as Halicarnassos, Priene, Xanthos, Sidon, and Pergamon.<sup>105</sup> While effective, if the frame is shifted to cover more internal regions, such as the southern regions of modern day Italy, corresponding forms can be found there in domestic architecture as well. The Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum is a fitting comparison because the villa and theater are contemporary to one another, with both being constructed around 60 BC. Both of these structures possessed a traditionally Hellenistic inward-looking portico/peristyle, decorated with a statuary program, surrounding an ornamental garden (Figures 3.1, 4.9, 4.10, 4.11). As such, these two spaces both draw on the *koine* of Greece and Persia.

In addition, the Villa of the Papyri retains the uniquely Roman atrium (Figure 4.9). Indeed, in the Villa of the Papyri, the *koine* of a Roman atrium, a Hellenistic peristyle, and a Persian ornamental garden are all present in one site. Therefore, Rome was not only being globalized by its predecessors, but actively globalizing the Mediterranean, all through

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<sup>104</sup> Versluys, “Roman Visual Material,” 154.

<sup>105</sup> Jane DeRose Evans, “Prostitutes in the portico of Pompey? A reconsideration,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 139, (2009): 136.

participation in the *koine*.<sup>106</sup> As such, the sharing of a visual language in this way can be understood as a circular system of interconnections and entanglement, with objects related semantically rather than linearly.<sup>107</sup> Under those circumstances, the garden could be seen to function as a palace, a public monument, a gymnasium, and a hanging garden, demonstrating the slippage of the space. Therefore, due to this '*koine culture*', the formula of pleasure garden surrounded by peristyle functioned all around the *oikumene*, meaning as a global phenomenon which was a part of a recognizable universalized object network; the Roman garden was effective in all settings.<sup>108</sup>

Yet, the Roman visual idiom of the villa garden clearly and deliberately articulates a distinction between itself and its Eastern sources. First, the grouping of colonnaded-walkway and pleasure garden is unique and distinctly Roman, in that "Roman designers developed an architectural language that transformed the existing Hellenistic and Roman architectural vocabularies."<sup>109</sup> This concept is significant because it saw the garden and peristyle, become entangled. Thus, the Roman garden should be considered a composite creation, rather than two individual, separate pieces put together. Furthermore, while it is obvious that Roman gardens drew on these particular features of their Eastern and Hellenistic predecessors, their form, fabrication, and function were different in order to meet the needs of Roman elite society, a process defined as *particularization* by Versluys.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, if Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's approach to the Roman home in general is applied to these gardens alone, it is not the pure form of the space which is distinctly "Roman," but the social use of the space as it functions within the elite circles. For instance, while the Portico of Pompey may visually resemble a traditional Greek portico, its fluid public and private nature, as well as its political

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<sup>106</sup> Versluys, "Roman Visual Material," 159.

<sup>107</sup> Versluys, "Roman Visual Material," 154-155.

<sup>108</sup> Versluys, "Roman Visual Material," 155.

<sup>109</sup> Zarmakoupi, "The Architectural Design of the Peristylum-Garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas," 626.

<sup>110</sup> Versluys, "Roman Visual Material," 155.

and social function was unique. Crucial to this process of particularization, is the continued experimentation of the garden form, beyond the influences of the Hellenistic East, as the space sought to fulfill the demands of the Roman culture. Therefore, these spaces came to have distinctly “Roman” features, present only in gardens of the Roman culture. These particularizations reveal distinctly Roman ideas, such as the inclusion of *cryptoportici*, *nymphaea*, and landscape.

Furthermore, when the needs of Romans changed due to transformations occurring in their world, the format of their garden began to vary during the Julio-Claudian period. In this way, the global phenomena noticeably can be particularized to the Roman culture, and more specifically, the needs of the Roman culture at the time, and remain effective individually. For example, while in earlier Roman townhouses and villas the garden held a religious and economic significance, in the later Roman luxury villas the garden space took on political and decorative implications.<sup>111</sup> This is evident in the ornamentation of the gardens with plantings and water features, as well as the *peristyle* for discussing business, in comparison to the organic garden spaces of the earlier Republic.

This trend is clear in the experimental form of the Villa A at Oplontis and the Villa San Marco at Stabiae. Compared to the Villa of the Papyri, with its inward-looking four-sided rectangular *peristyle*, the Villa A at Oplontis has several gardens, none of which have a completely enclosed *peristyle* (20, 59, 92) (Figure 1.3). Additionally, rather than the statuary being placed in the *peristyle* (80), a row of statues was set up in front of the trees along the eastern side of the pool (Figure 4.12). Likewise, the Villa San Marco has a central garden (9) which is surrounded by a three-sided *peristyle* (*porticus triplex*) for the northern half (3-5-20), while the southern half is surrounded by a *hemicycle-nymphaeum* (64-65-G-H) (Figure 1.2). Additionally, both of these villas had framed vistas in at least one of their gardens, through a

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<sup>111</sup> Zarmakoupi, “The Architectural Design of the *Peristylum*-Garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas,” 625.

three-sided peristyle (40-59 at Villa A and 1-2 at Villa San Marco), meaning the gardens were outward-looking towards the Bay of Naples (Figures 1.2, 1.3).

For Zarmakoupi, it is “the conservatism and the freedom expressed in the design of [the peristyle pleasure garden which] are at the core of the luxury villa culture, in that they fit and at the same time deny to be fitted into a canon of architectural design.”<sup>112</sup> Therefore, while it is effective to acknowledge the “cultural contact” evident in Roman art, including gardens, scholarship needs to refrain from classifying these spaces as “integrative,” meaning as a combination of two or more things to form a system.<sup>113</sup> Rather, in these theoretical terms, Rome and its visual culture was “aggregative,” and as such, distinctly Roman.<sup>114</sup>

### **Constructing Nature**

In addressing the cultural factors that informed the architectural design of these gardens, as well as their articulation in Rome, an important concept regarding the construction of these spaces can be inferred. The ability of Romans to experiment with these forms, whether on a global or local level, introduces the idea of the garden space as fabrications capable of being curated. While it is undeniable that the gardens of Roman antiquity were “real” and “natural,” in that the trees, plants, flowers and pools were all alive and growing, the reality is that these spaces were built environments, impossible without human intervention. The creation of this environment often occurred in “unnatural ways,” demonstrated by the animal-shaped trees and combinations of species never found together in nature. Thus, the garden environment must be recognized as constructed and engineered. For instance, in comparison to modern “landscaping” which seeks to generate a low maintenance, naturalistic effect, Roman gardens are “more akin to the practice of garden making in the

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<sup>112</sup> Zarmakoupi, “The Architectural Design of the Peristylum-Garden in Early Roman Luxury Villas,” 626.

<sup>113</sup> Versluys, “Roman Visual Material,” 165.

<sup>114</sup> Versluys, “Roman Visual Material,” 165.

Renaissance and French Classical eras.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, this process of “garden making” was a manipulation, involving the control of the land, water, plants, and views.

As described earlier, it is with perception of the Hellenistic portico as a place for display, and the entanglement of the peristyle and garden, that the notion of curating a display within the peristyle-garden space is introduced. The most traditional form of display, derived from Hellenistic predecessors, were statuary programs which formed a collective quasi-art gallery. This is demonstrated through Cicero’s Letters as well as the statuary programs present in the Portico of Pompey and the Villa of the Papyri. However, as gardens came to be more ornamented with lush vegetation and water features, as well as incorporating framed vistas of the landscape, the focus of the display shifted from the collection of decorative objects, to the visual experience of the space itself.

If the luxury villas discussed here are considered, they represent the culmination of this experimental trend in their inclusion of the natural landscape. “Interior landscapes were elaborately embellished with water and sculptures, and were surrounded by views of painted, sculpted, and real landscapes; the perforated architectural body of the villa open up its spaces to engage with both inner and exterior scenery.”<sup>116</sup> If the Villa of the Papyri is compared to the Villa San Marco, the minimal sculptural display found to date at the Villa San Marco does not mean that a visitor would be lacking for an aesthetic experience. Rather than being a setting in which to merely reside, the garden functions as any other object, imbedded with meaning, associations, and agency, and capable of being manipulated for gratification. In sum, if this aggregation of components is perceived as a curated assemblage, they cease to be

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<sup>115</sup> Kathryn Gleason, “Constructing Nature: The Built Garden, With Notice of a New Monumental Garden at the Villa Arianna, Stabiae.” *XVII International Congress of Classical Archaeology Meetings between Cultures in the Ancient Mediterranean, Roma 22-26 Sept. 2008*. Session: The Gardens of the Ancient Mediterranean: Cultural Exchange through Horticultural Design, Technology and Plants (Rome: 2008), 9.

<sup>116</sup> Mantha Zarmakoupi, “Roman Luxury Villas,” in *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20.

regarded as individual components and isolated types, and instead, become a dynamic experience in which the built environment is meant to be enjoyed.<sup>117</sup>

Hence, it is through Roman appropriation of Hellenistic architectural forms that the garden became associated with Greek and Eastern institutional and palatial structures. Likewise, it is as part of this *koine* that the Roman garden sought to meet traditional forms, and to respond to contemporary interests and concerns. This *particularization* continued to introduce more experimental forms, meeting its apex in the luxury villa format. Most importantly, however, is the introduction of the notion of fabricating a garden space, which began with physical statuary programs, such as those seen in the Portico of Pompey and the Villa of the Papyri, but continued to develop into a total curation of the entire space into one cohesive garden experience.

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<sup>117</sup> Jane Fejfer, "Displacing Artefacts: towards a framework for studying collecting in the ancient Roman world," in *Beyond "Art Collections": Owning and Accumulating Objects from Greek Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, eds. Gianfranco Adornato, Gabriella Cirucci and Walter Cupperi (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 29-54.

## 5. Seeing Double: Painted Gardens

It is with modern archaeology's ability to reconstruct the plans of these luxury gardens that the form of the gardens, including specific elements such as the plant species, can be analyzed to unprecedented degrees. Kathryn Gleason's reconstruction of the great peristyle garden (H-Z) at Villa Arianna in Stabiae provides one of the most detailed descriptions of a horticultural display from one of these gardens, which was located on a leveled terrace in the western hills of Varano, overlooking the Bay of Naples (Figure 5.1).<sup>118</sup> In 2007, Gleason and the archaeological team managed to reveal one of the largest formal gardens to date in the Bay of Naples, measuring around one hundred-eighteen by thirty meters.

Despite missing more than ten meters of the garden due to landslides, which occurred as recently as 2008, and any obvious garden architecture, the presence of a few small basins, earth paths, raised planting beds, and root cavities has allowed for the rectangular garden's design to be recreated (Figure 5.2).<sup>119</sup> Gleason describes the garden's four central *ambulationes* (promenades), which run the length of the garden in the east-west direction and were separated by narrow raised beds of plantings (83.0-84.0 meters in length and 0.50-1.0 meters in width) (Figure 5.1).<sup>120</sup> The width of these *ambulationes* varies between 3.50 meters to 4 meters. From the root cavities, it is known that each plant was 1.2 meters apart along the row and the rows were composed of a variety of small trees and shrubs, including a palm species and multistemmed woody plants.<sup>121</sup> Wider planting beds were found to the north and

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<sup>118</sup> Gleason, "Constructing Nature: The Built Garden," 8-15; Kathryn Gleason, "The Garden Surface," in *Excavation and Study of the Great Peristyle of the Villa Arianna, Stabiae, 2007-2012. Quaderni Di Studi Pompeiani 2*, (2016): 67-81.

<sup>119</sup> Gleason, "Constructing Nature: The Built Garden," 11-12.

<sup>120</sup> Gleason, "Constructing Nature: The Built Garden," 12; Gleason, "The Garden Surface," 78.

<sup>121</sup> Gleason, "Constructing Nature: The Built Garden," 12; Gleason, "The Garden Surface," 79.

south of the *ambulationes*, with the beds being parallel in two rows.<sup>122</sup> These planting beds contain about two hundred root cavities, which range from tiny herbaceous plants to larger shrubs and trees, including oleander and laurel.<sup>123</sup> The cavities are in clear lines or grouped (including grouping by species-type) which indicates deliberately placed vegetation.<sup>124</sup> Artifacts from the garden beds were recovered from small areas of debris, and include wall painting fragments, ceramic fragments, and mollusk shells.<sup>125</sup> Additionally, stake holes for light fencing, possibly a low reed fence, were discovered at the end of each of the beds.<sup>126</sup> Reconstructing the arrangement of one of these planting beds based on these cavities reveals an arrangement of layered planes: small herbaceous plants lining the walk in front of the fence, immediately behind the fence were plants and shrubs, and behind the shrubs were cavities of small/medium trees (Figure 5.3).<sup>127</sup>

Gleason claims with certainty that “until the discovery of this garden, no archaeological evidence has existed for such a garden display of this scale.”<sup>128</sup> Gleason finds that this garden bears striking similarity to ancient garden paintings, given the fencing and layered planes of lush vegetation, such as the painted Garden Room at the Villa of Livia in Prima Porta (Figure 5.4).<sup>129</sup> She avoids declaring any generalizations regarding if the paintings inspired or were inspired by the gardens, but asserts that this discovery challenges the notion that garden paintings represent an idealized garden, not existent during Roman antiquity.<sup>130</sup> If this is in fact the case, it forces scholarship to consider the natural scenery seen in these gardens as reimagined into works of art and vice versa.

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<sup>122</sup> Gleason, “Constructing Nature: The Built Garden,” 13.

<sup>123</sup> Gleason, “The Garden Surface,” 69.

<sup>124</sup> Gleason, “The Garden Surface,” 69.

<sup>125</sup> Gleason, “The Garden Surface,” 69.

<sup>126</sup> Gleason, “Constructing Nature: The Built Garden,” 13; Gleason, “The Garden Surface,” 69.

<sup>127</sup> Gleason, “The Garden Surface,” 70-71.

<sup>128</sup> Gleason, “Constructing Nature: The Built Garden,” 13.

<sup>129</sup> Gleason, “Constructing Nature: The Built Garden,” 13.

<sup>130</sup> Gleason, “Constructing Nature: The Built Garden,” 13.

While evidently the paintings remain static and fictional as artists compressed multiple seasons of florae into one single image, Gleason's findings invite a discussion of these works as a depiction of garden design that Romans were actually curating in their gardens.<sup>131</sup> This would not only embed these paintings with greater agency in relation to the garden as well as to the villa-dweller, but it would also establish these works as intrinsic to the garden, rather than supplementary as has been done in the past. While prior scholarship tends to talk about these paintings as a backdrop to the garden, in terms of merely extending the scope of the space, the conclusions at the Villa of Arianna redirect the significance of these works to be in conversation with the garden space, as artifice plays off artifice, creating a completely curated environment.

Therefore, these paintings must be analyzed as integral parts of the built space they are meant to embellish, activated to enhance the agency of the garden environment by the viewer. Consequently, the double vision of garden and garden paintings presents a rare intersection in that both are "real," as the garden is a genuine green space filled with plants and the paintings are true fresco; however, both are also unreal, in that they would not be possible without human intervention. In this way, the curation of these paintings and the garden together reflect the entangled relationships between artworks and viewers, as discussed in Chapter 4; this chapter will examine the scope of this agency utilizing several types of garden painting.

### **Extending the Garden with a "Garden"**

The purpose of embellishing a garden with a "garden" has often been reduced to an illusionistic extension of the space for reasons of scale and grandeur, as was described above.

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<sup>131</sup> Gleason, "Constructing Nature: The Built Garden," 14.

Bettina Bergmann's chapter "Frescoes in Roman Gardens" (2017) is compelling by giving more agency to these paintings than earlier scholarship, and by considering the playful dialogue occurring between painting and greenery.<sup>132</sup> However, Bergmann keeps with the perception of these paintings as dramatic backdrops or wallpapers, supplementary to the space.<sup>133</sup> Instead, if these paintings are reconsidered in terms of their inherent role in the built environment, they work simultaneously with the garden to interpellate viewers. In particular, if Nikolaus Dietrich's theories regarding wall paintings are applied to garden paintings, these works serve to create a stage and decorum for the social interaction of the real people in the garden.<sup>134</sup>

Dietrich's exploration of second style architectural vistas is an effective frame through which to analyze garden paintings, because many are a part of the second style in their perspectival vistas into imaginary gardens. In particular, Dietrich examines how the viewer is denied a full view of the splendid vista occupying the center of the wall by a strategically placed shear wall or barrier.<sup>135</sup> For example, barriers can be seen in both the garden paintings of the House of the Menander and the House of the Arches, which decorate the walls of the houses' peristyles in both houses. In the House of the Menander, an alcove in the south-west corner of the peristyle features painted ivy-covered columns separating a view of a grove, filled with winding trees and ornamental birds, diffused by a hazy green light (Figure 5.5, 5.6, 5.7).<sup>136</sup> The lower zone is closed by a red-colored wall, upon which the columns rest (Figure 5.5). Similarly, but more evident, the entire north wall of the peristyle in the House of the Arches is painted with apsidal niches, separated by ivy-lined red columns

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<sup>132</sup> Bettina Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," in *Gardens of the Roman Empire*, eds. Wilhelmina F Jashemski, Kathryn L Gleason, Kim J Hartswick, and Malek Amina-Aïcha (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 278-316.

<sup>133</sup> Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," 315.

<sup>134</sup> Nikolaus Dietrich, "Spatial Dimensions in Roman Wall Painting and the Interplay of Enclosing and Enclosed Space: A New Perspective on Second Style," *Arts* 8, no. 68 (2019): 1-26.

<sup>135</sup> Dietrich, "Spatial Dimensions in Roman Wall Painting," 8.

<sup>136</sup> Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," 293.

(Figure 5.8).<sup>137</sup> In these niches, rich vegetation surrounds marble water basins held up by centaurs and sphinxes, spouting water into the reservoir (Figure 5.9).<sup>138</sup> The lower zone is perforated by a geometric fence, which appears white and wooden, similar to a modern trellis fence.

In both instances, with their columns and the red wall/white fencing, their function is to direct the gaze of a viewer toward the wall's center, emphasizing the mystical garden which seems to go beyond its barriers, while simultaneously denying the viewer access. Yet, this overlooks the location in which these works are situated and the effect being created. According to Dietrich, second style paintings activate the social relationship present amongst the real people in the space, specifically by creating a spatial hierarchy that aids the social hierarchy.<sup>139</sup> This is demonstrated by the presence of the barriers, which prevent the person standing in front of the painted wall from “[being] projected into the illusionary space behind [them].”<sup>140</sup> As was described earlier, gardens served as a place for conducting business within the home as well as accommodating elite peers, meaning the space would host people of different ranks within the aristocratic Roman circle. In the House of the Menander, the framing element created in the south-west alcove by the red wall bordering the vista suggests it may be a spot in which the dominus could pause and be framed during a discussion with his guests.

In the House of the Arches, the positioning of the fresco along a wall of the peristyle garden designates the space as one of movement, with no fixed spot. Yet, this does not negate the ability of the work to activate the social function of the space.<sup>141</sup> The centralizing effects

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<sup>137</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 295.

<sup>138</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 295.

<sup>139</sup> Dietrich, “Spatial Dimensions in Roman Wall Painting,” 10.

<sup>140</sup> Dietrich, “Spatial Dimensions in Roman Wall Painting,” 13.

<sup>141</sup> Dietrich, “Spatial Dimensions in Roman Wall Painting,” 17. The central, participatory role of the viewer is discussed in detail in Chapter Six. Dietrich states of the viewer's relation to the wall painting, that as

of the repetitive painted decoration hence “[invite] people to perambulate to and fro in this corridor, instead of using it as a mere functional passage.”<sup>142</sup> The garden paintings serve to stimulate the social role of the garden as a space for elites to walk and discuss their matters. In the Villa San Marco, the repeating garden *pinakes* seen in the central peristyle (3-5-20) would serve the same purpose (Figure 3.7). Present in both the western and eastern porches of this peristyle, the paintings are best preserved on the eastern side. Located in the upper register, each of these fictive windows, which are almost a meter (94 centimeters) in height, contain a central tree, set against a white background with a simple yellow sun shining from above (Figure 3.8). In this case, the window is completely inaccessible, with the whole frame serving as a barrier. Similar to the House of the Arches, the centralized repetitive decoration would encourage movement in this peristyle space. Hence, in both cases the perspectival breaking of the vista demonstrates the simultaneous agency of the paintings and the garden space to enchant and encourage performative engagement.

The perspectival breaking of the vista is presented in an even more complex manner in the Villa A at Oplontis, where the barriers become physical in addition to visual. In the east wing of the villa, a “garden room enfilade” forms a unique series, as four miniature garden rooms run parallel to the pool (near 63-68-70-87).<sup>143</sup> These spaces were meant to be seen, but not entered, through large window openings on the north and south walls (Figures 5.10, 5.11). Bergmann refers to these spaces as “small painted light wells,” where the real gardens blended with the painted ones “to produce a seemingly infinite succession of sunlit fountains and plants.”<sup>144</sup> The paintings all contain similar elements of bubbling fountains,

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decorations, they were intended for viewers as social “actors in the space who are meant to be moving, interacting, viewing *and* being viewed” (page 17).

<sup>142</sup> Dietrich, “Spatial Dimensions in Roman Wall Painting,” 15.

<sup>143</sup> Bettina Bergmann, “The Gardens and Garden Paintings of Villa A,” in *Leisure & Luxury in the Age of Nero: the Villas of Oplontis Near Pompeii*, eds. Elaine K Gazda and John R. Clarke (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 101.

<sup>144</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 298.

profuse greenery, marble statuary, and ornamental birds, yet each is unique, in that every garden space differs in size, shape, location, window type, and decoration (Figure 5.12).<sup>145</sup>

The ability of a viewer to move into positions where the light wells could be seen in a series indicates designs intended to create intriguing visual resonance, which would alter depending on the quality of the light and the angle of sun throughout the day (Figure 5.13). Thus, what is effectively created is an entire wing of the villa in which a viewer takes an active role in moving to see the various perspectives and angles, creating a three-dimensional layered vista. According to Bergmann, this movement would have occurred in the portico along the pool (60), where the viewer could see the painted gardens to one side, and the pool, surrounded by cultivated trees and marble statuary to the other (Figures 1.3, 5.14).<sup>146</sup> Additionally, if a viewer wanted a closer look at the garden rooms, a narrow corridor parallel to the peristyle provides a slower, more intimate experience, since it abuts the garden rooms. As such, this “garden room enfilade” serves to encourage movement and social performativity, similar to a standard peristyle-garden, but in a space that lacks this traditional form. At the same time, the windows of the painted light wells serve as an effective frame in which the host could pause in front of the backlit display, emphasizing their social position in front of their guests.

In all of the aforementioned instances, the garden paintings are set against actual garden spaces, where the interplay between painting and vegetation is obvious. Consequently, this introduces a question regarding the necessity of the garden in order for a painted garden to be visually resonant. Is the agency of these artworks only effective in these semi-outdoor spaces, where the two garden forms are in direct visual interaction? Evidently, indoor garden rooms existed, seen most famously in the Garden Room at the Villa of Livia in Prima Porta.

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<sup>145</sup> Bergmann, “The Gardens and Garden Paintings of Villa A,” 102.

<sup>146</sup> Bergmann, “The Gardens and Garden Paintings of Villa A,” 102.

How then does the garden painting enchant once completely removed from the garden space it is meant to evoke?

## Indoor Gardens

The House of the Fruit Orchard contains two garden rooms, one directly off the atrium and the other inside the house off the central peristyle (Figures 5.15, 5.16). While these rooms have tall ceilings, they are only wide enough for one or two people to stand in at a time. In both rooms, all four walls are painted as well as the vault in Room c. In Room b, above the black dado, plants and shrubs rise from a recessed area, behind a short, yellow reed fence (Figure 5.15).<sup>147</sup> Slim white pillars create a tripartite division on each of the walls, with a slender architrave resting across it, acting as a ledge for the ornamental birds, as well as marble vessels and *pinakes*.<sup>148</sup> In the central zone, a red-frame *pinake* is flanked by two marble statues in each of the wings, all of which are painted as if they are emerging out of the vegetation. Garlands and swinging masks hang down from the ceiling, set against a clear blue sky.

Room c is entirely different, as bright green foliage is set against a stark black background (Figure 5.16). Presented from an elevated viewpoint, above the back dado, inside a wooden lattice fence is a central, golden *uraeus* (sacred to Isis).<sup>149</sup> On top of the fence, set against a paler gray background, marble water basins are flanked by flowering bushes. In the upper zone, slender white columns, bushes, and trees rise, although they do not seem to be located behind the fence. Each of the walls has a central tree, flanked by two trees in the wings. On the back east wall of the room, the focus is a fig tree, with a snake slithering up the

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<sup>147</sup> Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," 288-289.

<sup>148</sup> Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," 289.

<sup>149</sup> Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," 289.

trunk.<sup>150</sup> Ornamental birds are painted as either flying against the black sky or resting on the trees. The vault is painted with a canopy of vine leaves and clusters of grapes, embellished with Bacchic masks and objects.<sup>151</sup>

Similar to the semi-outdoor garden paintings, the employment of a barrier is ever-present, in this case even more so, as both rooms were meant to be enjoyed by reclining viewers, and as such, the fencing would have seemed more imposing. Accordingly, the space functions similarly to the previous painted examples in its creation of a stage in which its occupants are active participants and responding to the painted environment. However, as a walled indoor room, the garden rooms do not function as a “through” space in which one is intended to move, but rather as a “to” space in which one is supposed to remain statically. In a static space, these barriers function in a manner similar to the red wall in the alcove at the House of the Menander, providing a natural framing device that draws the focus back into the center of the room and on the viewers in front of it. Additionally, the size of the room would have permitted only a few people to stand in it at a time. Thus, this space would have been more “exclusive” by nature, given that only one or two people could be in the room at a time. However, in order to function on its own, completely removed from the actual garden, the effect is contingent on the fantasy, that is, the ability of the detail, quality, and composition to transport a viewer into a garden. The rooms at the House of the Fruit Orchard manage to do this through their employment of local species of trees and birds, fostering a familiar environment for their occupants. Additionally, it must be said that the fabrication of these rooms in the House of the Fruit Orchard might be a result of the inability of the extremely small actual garden to act upon its occupants (Figure 5.17).

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<sup>150</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 289.

<sup>151</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 289.

Near the House of the Fruit Orchard, Jashemski discovered an orchard, which was covered by wooden pergolas.<sup>152</sup> The orchard had trees which grew apples, cherries, pears, and figs, varieties of species that had been recently imported to the area in the first century AD due to the more temperate climate.<sup>153</sup> The trees present in both of the rooms include lemon, plum, fig, pomegranate, cherry, and pear, all of which could be encountered in Pompeii during this period (Figures 5.18, 5.19, 5.20).<sup>154</sup> In fact, carbonized pomegranates were discovered in a *villa rustica* at Oplontis.<sup>155</sup> The presence of so many fruit trees is unique according to Jashemski, who states that “fruit trees are rarely found in wall paintings, with the exception of those in the House of the Fruit Orchard.”<sup>156</sup> Likewise, the grouping of birds reveals a garden trend of the period, in the inclusion of an aviary.<sup>157</sup> Archaeological evidence reveals that at least three houses in Pompeii may have had aviaries in their gardens, where ornamental birds were collected and admired.<sup>158</sup> In this way, the garden rooms of the House of the Fruit Orchard are able to enchant because of their reference to local fruit orchards as well as neighboring gardens, and their ability to transform an otherwise indoor space into one of these familiar outdoor spaces from all sides.

The capacity to transform an indoor space into a garden is contingent on illusion. Yet, is this illusion only effective if the garden space created is possible? I would argue no, because these rooms work (meaning enchant) due to their fantasy; that is, the fantasy of a

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<sup>152</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 291.

<sup>153</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 291.

<sup>154</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 291; Wilhelmina Jashemski et al., “Plants: Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Plant Remains, Graffiti, Inscriptions, and Ancient Authors,” in *The Natural History of Pompeii*, eds. Wilhelmina F. Jashemski and Frederick G. Meyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 154.

<sup>155</sup> Jashemski et al. “Plants: Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Plant Remains, Graffiti, Inscriptions, and Ancient Authors,” 153.

<sup>156</sup> Jashemski et al. “Plants: Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Plant Remains, Graffiti, Inscriptions, and Ancient Authors,” 154; Evidently, the house received its name for this characteristic.

<sup>157</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 291; George E. Watson, “Birds: Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Skeletal Remains, and Ancient Authors,” in *The Natural History of Pompeii*, eds. Wilhelmina F. Jashemski and Frederick G. Meyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 357-400.

<sup>158</sup> Watson, “Birds: Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Skeletal Remains, and Ancient Authors,” 358-359.

garden inside. Therefore, the fantasy can mimic actual spaces, but it can also create gardens where species of flora and fauna would never be seen together in nature. For instance, in the House of the Golden Bracelet, an garden room *oecus* was situated next to a triclinia, both of which opened on to a geometric garden. Wilhelmina Jashemski was responsible for excavating the garden area and found it to have contained a central oval planting bed with mounded borders, trapezoidal beds in each of the corners, perhaps demarcated by box hedges (Figure 5.21).<sup>159</sup> The garden *oecus* was set into the northern corner of this area, open to the garden, but with an obvious separation in its door jambs. As such, while these paintings still remain visually connected to the garden, they were delegated to their own space and could only truly be seen in the narrow space they occupied.

In the *oecus*, a high mosaic vault depicted a rose trellis, and the three walls were covered in painting to simulate a lush garden (Figure 5.22).<sup>160</sup> Similar to the aforementioned paintings, the focus of the north and south wall is a spouting marble water basin, with ornamental birds resting on its edge.<sup>161</sup> Flanking the basin are fictive marble herms, holding up marble *pinakes* of recumbent maenads.<sup>162</sup> Dense flora and fauna fill the space behind the basin, set against a bright blue sky (Figure 5.23). From the top of the wall, masks hang down into the cloudless sky. Again, a horizontal fence is present in the lower register, demarcating a barrier between the viewer and the lush realm behind it.

The space functions as a static “to” space, similar to the House of the Fruit Orchard, and like this the size of the room would have permitted only a few people to stand in it at a time. Consequently, this space would have been more “private,” meant for closer acquaintances of the villa-owner who had been invited in, rather than casual guests. This

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<sup>159</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 291.

<sup>160</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 292.

<sup>161</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 292.

<sup>162</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 292.

added exclusivity is also fostered by the paintings, which create a private garden separate from the more “public” outdoor garden space.

As a result, the room is not dependent on and does not respond to the outdoor garden space. The all-encompassing nature of the paintings, in addition to their detail and vibrancy, foster a fictive garden space that acts on its own, and is only enhanced by the actual garden just outside; the smells and sounds of the garden would have aided in the illusion being created just inside. Thus, the wall paintings were meant to convey a sense of the outdoor garden, not recreate it. This is further supported by the numerous species of birds depicted in the House of the Orchard. Ten ornamental birds are portrayed, presenting eight different genera which were known to inhabit the Bay of Naples area due to similar migratory patterns (Figure 5.24).<sup>163</sup> However, each of the species lived in diverse ecosystems and would reside in the garden only in particular moments. For example, the black-billed magpie preferred the countryside and would have been found frequently in gardens throughout the area.<sup>164</sup> The blue rock thrush, however, preferred rocky habitats, and would only fly temporarily into the countryside during the summer.<sup>165</sup> What is created by evoking such a biodiverse environment is a garden space completely different from the one which abuts it. Where the House of the Fruit Orchard mimicked an actual luxury garden, here this would have been unnecessary and unfulfilling in purpose. Instead, the room establishes a spatial hierarchy in comparison to the actual garden that, in turn, would have been activated by standing in such a lavish space. Since this would only occur at the invitation of the villa-owner, a distinct social hierarchy is evident.

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<sup>163</sup> Watson, “Birds: Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Skeletal Remains, and Ancient Authors,” 357-400.

<sup>164</sup> Watson, “Birds: Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Skeletal Remains, and Ancient Authors,” 373-375.

<sup>165</sup> Watson, “Birds: Evidence from Wall Paintings, Mosaics, Sculpture, Skeletal Remains, and Ancient Authors,” 384.

This notion of a fictive garden space culminates in the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta's subterranean garden triclinia, measuring 5.90 by 11.70 meters.<sup>166</sup> The space, which is now reconstructed in Palazzo Massimo in Rome, was entirely enclosed except for a doorway in the eastern wall and reachable by a descending staircase. The only light would have come from a skylight in the barrel vault or lamps placed around the room.<sup>167</sup> The colorful garden scene appears continuous as it runs around the four walls without interruption by any vertical divisions (Figure 5.25). Abundant with images of flowering trees, dense shrubbery, and ornamental birds, a viewer's first impression is of having been absorbed into a hazy, rich grove (Figure 5.4). However, a viewer would subsequently recognize that the scene is not organic but, instead, quite controlled by the horizontal fencing presenting in the lower register: a yellow wooden fence separates a shallow lawn-like area containing six symmetrically placed trees in alcoves of a marble balustrade, which divides the space from the dense vegetation behind. In the garden scene, there are no marble sculptures, water basins, or *pinakes*, just a singular bird cage.

Looking closely, one can notice the strikingly (accurately) rendered various birds, of which there are seventy distinct species, as well as the more than twenty types of trees, shrubs, and flowers (Figures 5.26, 5.27).<sup>168</sup> Like in the House of the Golden Bracelet, there are numerous plants and birds from different seasons exist in the same space. As a result, the fresco can be interpreted as providing a timeless image of fruitfulness and prosperity, important associations for Livia and her new husband Augustus as he sought to validate his rule.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, excavations which occurred at the villa from 1996 to 2000 found an

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<sup>166</sup> Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," 287.

<sup>167</sup> Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," 287.

<sup>168</sup> Bergmann, "Frescoes in Roman Gardens," 287.

<sup>169</sup> I'm grateful to Georgianne Cushmore for providing me her unpublished paper on "Hospitality Theatrics of Roman Villa Dining Room Frescoes," which included an analysis of the Garden Room at the Villa of Livia.

artificial terrace, which would have supported a monumental hanging garden (75 x 75 meters) (Figure 5.28).<sup>170</sup> Scholar Barbara A. Kellum's states of the garden room and hanging terrace:

I do not wish to imply that the laurel-informed Garden Room painting reproduces the laurel grove at the villa [of Livia]. Rather, the existence of the actual grove at [Prima Porta] effects a mutually informing relation between the Garden Room and the Augustus of Prima Porta, making them distinct but congruent parts of the same equation.<sup>171</sup>

Here, it is apparent that Kellum is aware of the independent nature of the two spaces, yet she acknowledges their effect as “parts of the same equation.” The fictive nature of the garden room allows it to be independent from the luxury planted space above, but have similar agency as the actual garden space.

However, unlike the previous two indoor garden rooms, the Villa of Livia's garden room was not narrow and could fit several people, and served a dining function. This role of the space is crucial because dining is consistently understood by scholars as a ceremonial act, performed in a stage-like manner.<sup>172</sup> In a dining area, guests reclining on *klinai* would be at a prime viewing angle for the effect of the framing fence (Figure 5.29).<sup>173</sup> In this way, as described by Dietrich, second style wall paintings come to resemble the *scenae frons* of an ancient theater, which frames the actor for the various spectators of the room.<sup>174</sup> This effect, however, is conditional on the presence of several interacting figures, which would only be possible in a garden room with the scale as that in the Villa of Livia. Hence, the agency of the garden room can be understood as the same of a theater, calling upon the various “actors” to engage performatively with its space and with their spectating peers.

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<sup>170</sup> Bergmann, “Frescoes in Roman Gardens,” 288.

<sup>171</sup> Barbara A. Kellum, “Construction of Landscape in Augustan Rome: The Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas,” *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (June 1994): 222.

<sup>172</sup> Eleanor Winsor Leach, “Patrons, Painters, and Patterns: The Anonymity of Romano-Campanian Painting and the Transition from the Second to the Third Style,” in *Roman Art in Context: An Anthology*, ed. Eve D'Ambra (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 147.

<sup>173</sup> Kaja Tally-Schumacher and Niels Paul Niemeier, “Through the Picture Plane: Movement and Transformation in the Garden Room at the Villa ad Gallinas at Prima Porta,” *Chronika*, (2016): 65.

<sup>174</sup> Dietrich, “Spatial Dimensions in Roman Wall Painting,” 12.

In sum, painted gardens should be not only recognized as an integral element of the built garden space, but also as having their own agency which functions in dialogue with a garden or independently. The agency of these paintings serves to encourage movement, direct focus onto a space's occupants, and engage its viewers in the enactment of their social roles. However, this agency only exists because of the curation which occurs in fabricating these spaces. Furthermore, this curation was dependent upon the favorable climate, which allowed for these extravagant, lush gardens, painted and alive to be not only imaginable, but possible.

## 6. Viewership, Movement, and Space

The careful curation of these spaces indicates the active role, the agency, of these in the luxury villa and in the relationships this invites with the viewer, not the least since the curated garden is dependent upon the presence of a viewer to experience it. A consideration of the role of the viewer hence provides a prism for analyzing the garden in its totality, in conjunction with all the intersecting aspects and layers that have been discussed in earlier chapters. I am including the viewer as the last layer of the garden, in reference to the active visual dialogue created between the garden and a viewer. As such, I propose that the viewer should be considered not a passive observer or reactive consumer, but a part of the garden's curated assemblage, as intrinsic to the work as any of the other layers.

A discussion of viewership relates to my principal assertion of the garden as a curation, in that the presence of viewers transforms the garden from an empty space to a dynamic setting, in which all of the components interact and experience the curation. This effect may be compared to that of a gallery, as the mutual agency of the garden and its viewers functions similar to a curated gallery experience. While thinking in these terms is not typical for the ancient world, it has been done in past art historical scholarship in reference to sculptural display, such as that seen at the Theater of Pompey and the Villa of the Papyri. Jane Fejfer's article, "Displacing Artifacts," establishes the practice of collecting as a paradigm in antiquity. Fejfer analyzes the sculptural assemblage at the Villa of the Papyri using novel theoretical frameworks of materiality and museum studies.<sup>175</sup> Fejfer asserts the importance of theoretical analysis, because despite the effectiveness of literary and

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<sup>175</sup> Jane Fejfer, "Displacing Artifacts: Towards a Framework for Studying Collecting in the Ancient Roman World," in *Beyond "Art Collections": Owning and Accumulating Objects from Greek Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, eds. Gianfranco Adornato, Gabriella Cirucci, and Walter Cupperi (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 29-54. I am following Fejfer in using the word "assemblage" rather than "collection" or "program" to highlight the difference between ancient and modern approaches, as connoted by the words.

archeological data, “collecting is about objects and the way objects are part of social interaction.”<sup>176</sup> In doing so, artifacts can cease to be regarded as isolated components, and instead, be seen as part of an intentional assemblage that is not only dependent upon a viewer, but made dynamic by the material and immaterial social agents at play.

This thesis has discussed the garden as an assemblage, and utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Fejfer and the methodology of museum studies is not only fitting, but serves to elucidate my choice of the term “curation.” In this way, I seek to explain the layering of the garden as a gallery experience, allowing for the garden to be comprehended in its entirety. Thus, this chapter reframes different approaches introduced by Fejfer in her article, and employs them within the subject of my investigation, in order to query the entirety of the curated garden experience, including the role of the viewer.

### **Contextualized Code-Switching**

As specified previously in this paper, the entanglement of objects in a network is what allows us to understand the relations of the entities at work as well as the agency of the object. However, beyond object networks, the process by which objects are assembled requires a consideration of the ways in which “objects become central for shaping and maintaining human networks.”<sup>177</sup> Consequently, human agency is considered, but does not place either the object or human in a hierarchy. Rather, both are considered centrally to the various social and material networks.

Part of human agency is rooted in the reception of works of art, including a viewer’s knowledge, expectations, and ignorance. This connects to an object’s agency, because part of its agency is imbedded in the notion that viewers would have knowledge of an object’s

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<sup>176</sup> Fejfer, “Displacing Artifacts,” 32.

<sup>177</sup> Fejfer, “Displacing Artifacts,” 34.

networks. For instance, in any garden, it is presumed an ancient viewer would understand the peristyle as connoting of Greek gymnasia and palatial architecture. However, this presumption is dependent upon the context of the peristyle as well as the viewer, because while a reference to a Greek gymnasia is possible it could also be recognized as just an Italic peristyle. This connects to the idea of universalization versus particularization, because there is the existence of a largely shared visual literacy, and a local visual literacy, both of which utilize object networks. In reference to Chapter Three and John Miguel Versluys' theories of globalization, the consideration of an object's simultaneous universal and localized meanings, relates to the concept of code-switching. However, whereas universalization and particularization tend to focus on the object's agency, code-switching emphasizes the agency of a viewer to interpret the dual or multiple identities that function within a single art work.<sup>178</sup>

First introduced and utilized in linguistic studies, the notion of code-switching was then applied by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill to objects in order to explain Roman imagery and the convenience of switching codes, especially in relation to elements correlated with several different cultural identities.<sup>179</sup> For instance, the model of code-switching has been employed to elucidate the programmatic variation in use of material (marble, bronze, terracotta, and limestone) in Roman Cypriot sculpture as a manifestation of both a local and global identity in the Roman Empire.<sup>180</sup> What is implied in this way of understanding a work's multiple meanings and functions is the role of the viewer to grasp the multiple identities, but more importantly the possibility of choosing to focus on one or several codes. As such, the viewer as much as the object creates perception and experience.

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<sup>178</sup> Jane Fejfer, "Marble mania: Code-switching in Roman Cyprus?," *Herom. Journal on Hellenistic and Roman Material Culture* 2, no. 1 (2013): 172.

<sup>179</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "To be Roman, go Greek. Thoughts on Hellenization at Rome," in *Modus Operandi. Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickma*, eds. Michael Austin, Jill Harries and Christopher Smith (London, Institute of Classical Studies/University of London, 1998), 86-87.

<sup>180</sup> Fejfer, "Marble mania: Code-switching in Roman Cyprus?," 192-195.

For example, in the case of the Villa Arianna, the great peristyle garden exhibits several codes. A viewer could choose to notice the great peristyle surrounding the garden, which is traditional in its rectangular shape, or the size of the garden (108 by 58 meters) in the mountainside, both of which demonstrate the villa-owner's elite status in Roman society (Figure 1.1). Instead, a viewer could choose to focus on the multiple species of vegetation and fencing, or the panoramic vista over the Bay of Naples through the open northern wall of the peristyle. In the latter, the garden is defined by a network of inter-object relations, as the garden connects to painted gardens or the natural landscape of Stabiae, perforated by other villa complexes.

In the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta, the garden terrace contains several of the same codes as those of the Villa Arianna, but the codes are even more complex because of the garden's entanglement with Augustus' political ideologies. The terrace contained a laurel grove, surrounded by a pi-shaped portico which faced outwards in the direction of the landscape and Alban mountains (Figure 5.28).<sup>181</sup> Allan Klynne relates the shape of the garden terrace to the sanctuary of Athena in Pergamon, indicating another potential code.<sup>182</sup> The garden's lack of integration with the villa has led Klynne to interpret the visual impact of the garden as a deliberate act to dominate the visual landscape in order to serve as a political symbol of the sacral dimension of Augustus' rule.<sup>183</sup>

Likewise, the notion of code-switching is evident in primary literature, specifically in Pliny the Younger's writings regarding his Tuscan villa property. Pliny compares nature to an artificial structure: "*Regionis forma pulcherrima. Imaginare amphiteatrum aliquod immensum, et quale sola rerum natura possit effingere.*" [The region is exceptionally

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<sup>181</sup> Allan Klynne, "The laurel grove of the Caesars: looking in and looking out," in *Roman Villas Around the Urbs: Interaction with Landscape and Environment: Proceedings of a Conference at the Swedish Institute in Rome, September 17-18, 2004*. Swedish Institute in Rome, 1-9 (Rome: Swedish Institute in Rome, 2005), 1-9.

<sup>182</sup> Klynne, "The laurel grove of the Caesars," 7.

<sup>183</sup> Klynne, "The laurel grove of the Caesars," 8.

beautiful. Imagine an amphitheatre on such a vast scale that nature alone could fashion it.]<sup>184</sup>

In doing so, Pliny demonstrates a possible visual frame of reference, but more importantly, reveals the ability of a viewer to form their own perception through their own reception of the space and application of “codes.” In this way, the viewer is responsible for activating the various meanings present within any garden space.

### **Infinity: Morphing and Becoming**

Drawing on the assemblage theory of Manuel DeLanda, Fejfer asserts the necessity of seeing assemblages as an infinite process that are constantly in flux and never fixed.<sup>185</sup> This is in part due to their formation through social processes.<sup>186</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that while the individual components of any assemblage are fluid, some components are “more firm while others change quickly.”<sup>187</sup> In doing so, Fejfer encourages for assemblages to be conceived of as a “multiplicity of assemblages,” rather than a “fixed totality.”<sup>188</sup>

In the case of a garden, this fluidity is first and foremost evident in the ephemerality of the space, as the living flora and fauna “change quickly” depending on the season. While the climate was stable during the RCO, the temperature evidently varied throughout the year as well as with the local weather, which would have affected the living components of the gardens. However, in comparison, the painted gardens can be thought of as “more firm” in that they can obviously be painted over at any time, but they were not susceptible to the continual flux of climate conditions. Similarly, the marble “furniture” of the garden in terms of statuary, fountains, colonnades, and benches may seem even more fixed, but can be

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<sup>184</sup> Pliny, Ep. 5.6.7, 11. Translation by: Diana Spencer, *Roman Landscape: Culture and Identity*. Greece & Rome. New Surveys in the Classics, No. 39 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 127.

<sup>185</sup> Fejfer, “Displacing Artifacts,” 38.

<sup>186</sup> Fejfer, “Displacing Artifacts,” 38.

<sup>187</sup> Fejfer, “Displacing Artifacts,” 38.

<sup>188</sup> Fejfer, “Displacing Artifacts,” 39.

considered a variable in terms of their visibility. During the winter, with less vegetation, they would be more visible, while in the summer they would be less apparent, demonstrating a shifting visual emphasis and experience. In this way, a multiplicity of assemblages is apparent in any garden space. The “garden room enfilade” at the Villa A of Oplontis provides a good example, here the four “real” gardens with their vegetation together represents one assemblage, the painted gardens together represent another, one painted garden with its real garden represents yet another, and all four painted with their real gardens represents another still. As such, the curation of the garden room enfilade represents an infinite process, that is repeatedly morphing into something new and creating new potential experiences.

Yet, perhaps the most fluid component of the curated garden experience is present in the moving viewer, whose interactions within the garden constitute another assemblage all together. The curation of the garden experience is successful through the creation and arrangement of different spots for engagement, in which the garden enchants its occupants to perform their social role. However, it is also a viewer’s decision which way to move, where to move to, when to pause, and for how long. Thus, the positioning of the viewer within the garden allows for the enactment within this space and the embodiment of human performance. This idea is critical to any discussion of spatial agency because it demonstrates how “any form of architecture only assumes its social reality by being caught up in bodily movements and social activities.”<sup>189</sup> So, while the garden fosters a social space and directs experience, the moving viewer is integral in the co-creation of this garden experience.

Villa A at Oplontis is a particularly excellent example where the garden room enfilade encourages movement, while also being dependent upon the movements of a viewer between the four spaces, including the order, direction, and time. For example, a viewer could choose

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<sup>189</sup> Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen, “Architecture in motion,” in *Elements of Architecture: Assembling archaeology, atmosphere and the performance of building space*, eds. Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen (Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2016), 234.

to pause at any one of the rooms for an indefinite amount of time, continue past all of them in the adjacent portico without stopping to consider them, or visit them in a random order.

Additionally, a viewer could approach these garden rooms from multiple angles, and be given a different experience every time, based on the painting, light, and vista, all thanks to the curation of this space in this manner (Figures 6.1, 6.2).

Likewise, the great peristyle of the Villa Arianna, was reliant on movement given the *ambulationes* that ran the length of the garden as well as the dense vegetation in the various planting beds (Figure 5.1). Described as a “strolling garden” by Thomas Howe, experiencing the various features of the great peristyle garden required a viewer to move given the size of the garden (108 by 58 meters) and the distinct spaces created by the vegetation.<sup>190</sup> Each of these sections forms an individual setting, having intentionality and agency. Kathryn Gleason’s reconstruction of two of the Villa Arianna’s planting beds, taking into account their pruning, produced “a garden design in which specimen plants are easily observed, like sculpture, at a height comfortable for strolling, as well as stationary viewing” (Figure 6.3).<sup>191</sup> Based on the proposed height of the plantings, a person standing in the walkway of one section would not be able to see many of the other areas of the garden, and thus, would have to perambulate in order to enjoy the entire display and space. The activation of the experiences present within the curated whole are entirely reliant on a moving viewer.

## **Intentionality**

As a curated space the intentionality of the villa owner in the creation of the garden allows for the ideas and meaning behind the assemblage to be questioned. It is in the intentionality behind the curation of the garden that the nature of its assemblage resembles a

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<sup>190</sup> Thomas N. Howe, “A Most Fragile Art Object: Interpreting and Presenting the Strolling Garden of the Villa Arianna, Stabiae,” *Actual Problems of Theory and History of Art* 8 (2018): 691–700.

<sup>191</sup> Gleason, “The Garden Surface,” 77.

gallery. To assemble the various layers of the garden into one cohesive, fabricated environment is comparative to the curation of a sculptural display, such as that seen in the peristyle of the Villa of the Papyri. That is not to say that the various components of the garden do not have their own agency which controls the manner in which they are assembled without human intervention. In fact, Fejfer discusses assemblages as “the result of more autonomous processes, of assemblages of objects that have emerged randomly or unexpectedly [...] as the result of object agency.”<sup>192</sup> However, Fejfer does not discount the role human agency plays in structuring a collection or embedding it with meaning, a process which she refers to as “human intentionality.” It is with this intention that my term “curation” is best illuminated because it focuses on the active process of selecting, organizing, and looking after the items in an assemblage, which consequently activates the space. Hence, the curation of the garden is a self-aware process of assembling the various layers to create an environment conceived to be most meaningful when together, while still being subject to the agency of individual objects.

The selection of the various elements to include in one’s garden space by a villa owner is one of the most crucial aspects of the curation, because in addition to their agency, they are selected for their “thingness,” that is their material properties.<sup>193</sup> This selectivity is seen in Cicero’s sculptural assemblage in the peristyle of his Academy.

*Hermae tui Pentelici cum capitibus aëneis, de quibus ad me scripsisti, iam nunc me admodum delectant. qua re velim et eos et signa et cetera quae tibi eius loci et nostri studi et tuae elegantiae esse videbuntur quam plurima quam primumque mittas, et maxime quae tibi gymnasi xystique vedebuntur esse.*

I am already quite enchanted with your Pentelic herms with the bronze heads, about which you write to me, so please send them and the statues and any other things you think would do credit to the place in question and to my enthusiasm and to your good

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<sup>192</sup> Fejfer, “Displacing Artifacts,” 36.

<sup>193</sup> Fejfer, “Displacing Artifacts,” 37; A work of art’s material properties include its style and aesthetic qualities, medium, size, and material.

taste, as many and as soon as possible, especially any you think suitable to a lecture hall and colonnade.<sup>194</sup>

As can be seen by Cicero's letter, the selectivity that occurs in the curation of the garden space is intentional, but not prescriptive, demonstrating the mutual agency between human and object. This selectivity occurred frequently for garden statuary programs, as is evident in the archaeological data for many villas, most recently, a Roman villa by Lake Nemi. Pia Guldager Bilde describes the garden as having been equipped with a herm gallery, with seven herms found in different materials, including white marble, bigio marble, and green marble.<sup>195</sup> Evidently, while the owner of the villa by Lake Nemi preferred herm statues for the garden, the material was unconstrained. Such a practice is demonstrated also by Cicero, who very clearly has a certain style of statue in mind, but gives freedom to Atticus to make the decisions about the individual statues, revealing openness.

Furthermore, selectivity allows for the composite form of the garden to be possible because it enables new human-object networks. As has been discussed, every object or component of the garden has its own agency and network, meaning each element is an invested object alone. However, when selected and assembled together for these individual properties, the components gain networks through their assemblage. For example, while a garden painting functions on its own, it gains a new network when placed in a dining triclinium with candelabra, *klinai*, and elite diners. Therefore, while any one of the elements that compose a garden, such as the plants, the frescoes, the peristyle, have their own object network, when placed together the individual components become a part of an entangled

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<sup>194</sup> Letter Four, 4.2, February 67 B.C.; The letters to Atticus are from D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1965). Translations of the letters to Atticus from *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* and of the letter to Gallus from *Cicero's Letters to His Friends* (Harmondsworth, 1978) are also Shackleton Bailey's; For an analysis of the role of Hellenistic statuary programs in Rome, including Cicero's, see: Miranda Marvin, "Copying in Roman Sculpture: The Replica Series," *Studies in the History of Art* 20, no. 7 (1989): 24-45.

<sup>195</sup> Pia Guldager Bilde, "The Roman villa by Lake Nemi: from nature to culture – between public and private," in *Roman Villas Around the Urbs: Interaction with Landscape and Environment: Proceedings of a Conference at the Swedish Institute in Rome, September 17-18, 2004*. Swedish Institute in Rome, 1-9 (Rome: Swedish Institute in Rome, 2005), 4.

relationship. It is through these entangled relationships that a composite arrangement emerges, that is, the *Roman* garden.

In the central garden of the Villa San Marco (3-5-9-20), the selection of a peristyle form resembling the Theater of Pompey, the framed view through the triclinium (16) doorway towards the Bay of Naples, and a stucco-decorated nymphaeum (64-65-G-H) placed at the end of the pool in a hemicycle wall all represent appropriate individual elements of Rome's established architectural language, that would be recognizable in any setting (Figures 3.2, 3.10, 6.4). Yet, it is when they are assembled together that their agency and significance entangles to create the composite garden space. Hence, it is through the intentionality by which these elements were selected for the Villa San Marco that the garden's meaning becomes activated.

In sum, given the assembled nature of the luxury pleasure garden, I have proposed a reframing for the interpretation of the garden utilizing museum studies. The parameters of museum studies provide an untried analysis of the relationships between objects and humans within a garden space, as well as the ways in which the garden becomes activated during the curation process. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks outlined by Fejfer provided a method by which the Roman garden experience can be investigated in its totality.

## 7. Conclusions

A final aspect remains to be examined: the relationship between the curated garden and the landscape vista. In this, the juxtapositions of garden and nature, as well as artifice and reality, are presented. Compared to the external authentic landscape, the garden is dependent upon heavy duty fabrication and intellectual activity to cement the symbiosis between human, villa, and nature.<sup>196</sup> “Landscape means something different from environment or space: it foregrounds cultural context and emphasizes the relationship between humankind, nature and the inhabited world.”<sup>197</sup> Yet, when framed in the context of the villa, the landscape is similar to the painted gardenscapes because it is relational to the garden. The vista is a representational reference to space, present but not accessible, adding to the spatial experience of the accessible garden. In the interplay between garden and vista, the resonance of the garden with the natural landscape creates its own landscape. Yet, the landscape is not totally objective, because the vista is framed (by architecture and viewing context), and hence, managed.<sup>198</sup> The framed vista with which the landscape is visible is part of the curated experience and thus, while the landscape is natural, a viewer’s experience of the landscape is made and no longer natural. In this way, even nature becomes a part of the curation, all of which formed the garden experience that was unique to ancient Rome.

This experience, and the manners in which it occurs in the pleasure garden, was the overarching interest of this thesis, which aimed to reveal the significance of the garden, for its

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<sup>196</sup> Diana Spencer, *Roman Landscape: Culture and Identity*. Greece & Rome. New Surveys in the Classics, No. 39 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 129.

<sup>197</sup> Spencer, *Roman Landscape: Culture and Identity*, 1.

<sup>198</sup> Ian Sutherland, “The Architectural Framework of the Great Peristyle Garden at the Villa Arianna,” in *Excavation and Study of the Great Peristyle of the Villa Arianna, Stabiae, 2007-2012. Quaderni Di Studi Pompeiani 2*, (2016): 47. Ian Sutherland’s description of the great peristyle of the Villa Arianna, where on the northern side, parallel to the cliff edge, there is an evident lack of columns along most of the length, except for short porticoes of five columns at each end, demonstrates a significant case of an architectural framing of a vista.

role as a space at once artificial and natural, political and leisurely, public and private.

Introduced during the late Republican period as a space for Rome's elite, the pleasure garden was a fabricated space, defined by its opulence and prosperity. The garden's importance is attested to by the effort with which villa owners constructed and decorated their spaces, the addition of several gardens in many of the luxury villas, and the numerous primary sources describing or referencing gardens.

Recent modern scholarship has begun to recognize the significance of the climate during ancient Rome and its role in the expansion and subsequent fall of the Empire, but climatic data has rarely been applied to understand particular developments, such as the garden. The reality is, however, that the climate was crucial to the introduction and subsequent development of the garden in Roman society. It allowed for the curation of the space to be possible, but more importantly, enabled a rich, natural landscape to resonate as an artistic subject, which translated to garden design in built spaces and painted representations. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Roman Climate Optimum (from 200 BC to 150 AD) brought a warm, wet and stable climate to the area of the Roman Empire during the most crucial stages of its growth. The RCO saw various global and local mechanisms functioning harmoniously to bring relative stability for almost 400 years.

The NAO which is responsible for wind, temperature, and storms over Europe and the Mediterranean was consistently negative during the RCO, which brought warm wet weather to the Mediterranean and Europe. Likewise, high, stable solar activity and low volcanic activity, contributed to the warmth of the RCO and consistency in temperature. More locally, tree ring data from Europe shows the RCO had consistent rain and humidity. This is supported by written testimony in primary literature of flooding being during summer, which is contrary to Rome's typical flooding during the fall/winter. This natural anomaly of climate during the RCO is crucial to the development of these complex garden spaces because it

allowed for their creation, manipulation and prosperity, with plant species able to flourish outside of their normal territories.

While climate can be perceived as a foundational agent that made the development of these gardens possible, their introduction and adaptation to Roman society was reliant upon the intervention of humans and objects. Thus, other enabling factors need to be considered, many of which have been examined in modern scholarship in the past two decades alone. With the introduction of materiality theory and notions of objecthood, the role of space and its transformation alongside Roman society has been the subject of great critical debate. In Chapter Three, utilizing the works of Amy Russell and Penelope Davies, I argue that gardens can be interpreted as fluid spaces for leisure and politics signifying an association with prestige. Additionally, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill theories regarding the agency of the house to encourage movement and performativity, a phenomenon which he describes as social coding in decoration and boundaries, can be applied to the perception of outdoor garden spaces in the same manner.

Outside of societal transformations, architectural changes aided the development of the form of the luxury villa garden. The emergence of the domestic peristyle following the portico's employment in public monumental and triumphal architecture, saw the garden and the peristyle form entangled within Roman architecture. Likewise, the transformation of gardens from organic, productive vegetable patches to luxury pleasure gardens, ultimately, resulted in villa gardens, which were more expansive, more opulent, and more decorated than their urban predecessors. Still, according to Wilhelmina Jashemski, the greatest difference between gardens of the domus and villa gardens is their outward looking nature in the inclusion of landscape through framed views that, as argued above, fashioned a perforated villa form that blurred the boundaries of outside and inside. The development of the aforementioned methodologies out of materiality has gone a long way in developing a more

complete understanding of the garden's form and function in Roman society. Yet, they circumvent a total perception of the garden because their approach is primarily from an archaeological or architectural standpoint, founded in the garden as a spatial environment. I argue that if the garden is thought of in the same terms as an object, then the agency and complexity of the space can be better understood. To form the interpretive framework of this thesis, Eva Mol's approach to object agency, object networks and entanglement, Miguel John Versluys' use of globalization theory, and Jennifer Trimble's framing approach to consider viewer agency, allow for a more comprehensive perception of the garden.

Crucial to understanding the Roman garden is understanding its inspiration and associative values, as shown in Chapter Four. As Rome sought to articulate its position globally, it relied on the widespread architectural language of the Hellenistic East to inspire its visual culture and convey dominance within the Mediterranean. Thus, there is a clear visual resonance between the Roman garden and Hellenistic institutional and palatial architecture, such as the Greek portico and the Eastern (Persian) pleasure garden. Yet, while these two structures (portico and pleasure garden) represent common elements within the global ethnoscape of the Mediterranean during Roman control, when put together in an aggregation, a distinctly Roman space is created. This space was not only localized in its form and function in Roman culture, but continued to be further adapted to Roman culture through experimentation, as is evident in the comparison of the traditional, more Hellenistic form of the porticoes of the Theater of Pompey and the Villa of the Papyri, to the experimental form of the luxury villas at Stabiae and Oplontis.

However, perhaps more important than the experimental garden form which emerges as a result of Rome's international position, is the fact that the experimentation introduces the idea of these spaces as fabrications, or built environments, that are capable of being curated. This is first seen in tangible statuary displays, such as those at the Portico of Pompey and the

Villa of the Papyri, and also in primary sources, such as *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*. Later, during the early Empire, the notion of curating became less focused on a physical program and more centered on the visual experience of the space itself with all of its decorative components functioning together.

Evidence of this visual experience arises in the reconstruction of these garden spaces, as made possible by modern archaeology. Reconstruction of the Villa Arianna's great peristyle garden by Kathryn Gleason revealed the garden's design and form as highly planned and curated, including elements only previously seen in paintings of gardens, such as layered planes of vegetation and fencing. This discovery encouraged new analysis of the dialogue between painted gardens and garden spaces, and its subsequent effect upon a viewer. In Chapter Five, the application of Nikolaus Dietrich's theories regarding second style wall paintings to garden frescoes revealed how their role is integral to the enchantment and social function of the garden space, demonstrating these paintings as intrinsic to the garden space rather than as a supplementary backdrop. Through several different case studies of paintings in urban houses and countryside villas around the Bay of Naples and Rome, it is apparent that garden paintings can direct movement, emphasize social hierarchies of occupants, and encourage viewers to enact their social roles. Additionally, the case studies showed how this effect is possible in the presence of "real" garden spaces as well as by reference to gardens, due to the ability of the paintings to enchant through their framing effects and fictive nature, all of which is only made possible by their conscious curation.

Another significant frame through which the garden needs to be perceived is through viewership. This is because the presence of the viewer is integral to the garden: the space is both reliant on a viewer to experience it as a "space," as well as subject to the agency of the viewer to articulate it as such. The mutual agency of garden and viewer is comparable to a curated gallery experience, and hence Chapter Six introduced the effectiveness of using

theoretical frameworks of museum studies to understand the garden as a curated assemblage. The employment of Jane Fejfer's theoretical frameworks of ancient assemblages and museums studies to garden spaces served to illuminate the garden experience, the role of the viewer, and my use of the word "curation."

First, the garden is continually recontextualized by a viewer through code-switching, a linguistic notion which has been applied to objects. Code-switching shows how an object's agency is entangled with a viewer's agency, because it is up to a viewer to perceive the various meanings present within any object, and activate the codes as they desire. Similarly, as an assemblage, the garden is constantly "morphing and becoming," in the sense that it is always in flux and represents a multiplicity of assemblages rather than a fixed totality. This can be seen in the ephemeralness of the space due to the living flora and fauna as well as the position of the moving viewer, who activates the experiences by moving in a particular order, direction, or timing. Finally, a garden is subject to the intentionality of the villa owner during its creation, in conjunction with object agency, as the garden assemblage is structured with a particular intention. This is evident in the selectivity during the garden's curation, which creates new entangled human-object networks that ultimately form the garden.

Through the composite analysis adopted by this thesis it has become clear that beyond being an architectural-spatial environment, the Roman garden was made and functioned similar to any other work of art. In fact, given its prominence in Roman society, it is not surprising that many modern historians, such as Patrick Bowe, find the Roman garden as partially responsible for inspiring later Renaissance and Baroque garden building.<sup>199</sup> Yet,

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<sup>199</sup> Patrick Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 3; Bowe states: "Roman gardens influenced the great Italian gardens of the Renaissance, the early nineteenth century Neoclassical gardens of the Western world, as well as twentieth-century gardens in England, France, and the United States, most notably the garden at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, California. Roman gardens are an essential part of the continuum that is the garden history of the Western world." A specific example Bowe provides in his fourth and final chapter (pages 141-161) is the Renaissance garden of the Palazzo Guisti in Verona (p. 147).

while modern art history is quick to recognize these later early-modern spaces as a genre of art, the same consideration is not often extended to the Roman garden. As a result, scholarship has often studied the garden as a physical environment or matter of individual architectural elements. To resolve this incompleteness, this thesis aimed to demonstrate how a Roman garden needs to be considered as a built environment, constructed in a network of spatial, social and material relationships, that form an intentional assemblage of multiple acting elements. In doing so, the role of the garden is elevated from a pleasurable backdrop to its rightful place as an agent within the Roman culture, capable of shaping experiences of nature and supporting social interactions. Through this understanding, a new interpretative framework emerges, that utilizes methodologies typically applied to objects, to reframe the agency of the garden space and appreciate the *madeness* of the curated garden experience.

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