

THE ART OF THE FRESCO

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Peacock

In 79AD Mount Vesuvius near Naples erupted and covered the ancient town of Pompeii and its surrounding countryside in lava and ash. Although the disaster devastated the city at the time, killing its citizens and burying everything, the buildings and works of art were preserved for centuries under the ash. Since few paintings have survived from this era, Pompeii is one of the few precious sources for much of what we know about ancient painting and decoration.

With the same eruption the summer resort of Herculaneum was also buried as were dozens of private residences. Amongst these there are three villas that are particularly noteworthy: Boscoreale and Boscotrecase (north of Pompeii and nearer to the volcano), and Nero's wife Poppea's villa on the sea at Torre Annunziata (ancient Oplontis).

Poppea's Villa was not uncovered until 1964. It is an example of Second and Fourth Style Roman painting that has remained in a remarkable state of preservation.

At one end of the villa there was an open-air olympic -sized swimming pool (*natatio*) measuring 67 x 17 metres, enclosed with a peristyle. Giving on to this area are a series of rooms, interspersed with real gardens, whose inside walls are also decorated with trompe l'oeil gardens.

"Peacock" comes from a wall in one of these rooms. This detail depicts a marble krater. From its centre gushes a fountain of water and on its edge is perched a superb peacock.

£900

86cm x 56cm

Poppea's Villa at Torre Annunziata (Oplontis), Italy

c.60 AD