



NEW EXHIBITION AT THE MEADOWS MUSEUM EXPLORES THE 18TH-CENTURY BAY OF NAPLES, THE BOURBON COURT'S DISCOVERY OF POMPEII, AND THE ALLURE OF AN ERUPTING VESUVIUS

DALLAS (SMU)—May 8, 2024—Set during one of the most dynamic moments in Western history, *The Legacy of Vesuvius: Bourbon Discoveries on the Bay of Naples* looks at the groundbreaking archaeological excavations sponsored by the Bourbon King Charles VII of Naples—the future king of Spain—and his wife, Maria Amalia, and continued by his son and successor Ferdinand IV, and demonstrates their formative influence on art and thought in the Age of Enlightenment. Comprised of nearly 50 objects, the exhibition's unique combination of Roman archaeological material from the excavations at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and other sites, mingled with 18th-century paintings, porcelain, and prints—including major loans from Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Wellcome Collection—will provide an exciting introduction to the archaeological treasures of this period and their formative influence on contemporary artistic production. The Meadows Museum, SMU, is the sole venue for the exhibition, which will open on Sept. 15, 2024, and run through Jan. 5, 2025.

“When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE, in a near instant it preserved the art and material culture of the thriving Roman cities around the Bay of Naples. While these archaeological sites were known in the early modern period, it was thanks to the patronage of the Bourbon monarchs in the 18th century that their systematic excavation was undertaken. The result was nothing short of ‘Roman-mania’ as recently unearthed objects inspired contemporary artistic production, from fashion to furniture, and cemented the Bourbon tastemakers as the force behind Neoclassicism” said Amanda W. Dotseth, the Linda P. and William A. Custard Director of the Meadows Museum. “Upon assuming the throne as Charles III of Spain, the Bourbon monarchs brought their taste, and crucially, their artists with them to Madrid where the archaeological discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii inspired new styles and forms in Spanish art, changing it forever. By bringing together ancient artifacts and the 18th-century objects they inspired, this exhibition celebrates the lasting impact of visionary patrons—a fitting subject given the Meadows Museum was itself founded by such a collector with a vision, Algur H. Meadows”

“We are excited to introduce Dallas to Naples, its connection to Spain, and the profound impact the Bourbon excavations had on the cultural and artistic landscape of 18th-century Europe,” said Michael Thomas, professor and director of the Edith O’Donnell Institute of Art History at The University of Texas at Dallas and the exhibition’s curator. “At its core, this exhibition celebrates the discovery of what is arguably the world’s most famous archaeological site, Pompeii, as well as other ancient sites destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. The exhibition captures the innovative vision of Charles and Maria Amalia in the years just before they assumed the Spanish throne. The reigns of Charles and his successor Ferdinand define the ‘Golden Age’ of Naples when the city rose to the forefront of artistic production and cultural influence.”

The Legacy of Vesuvius will unfold across several galleries that define different topics. The exhibition begins with an overview of key historical personalities from the period, emphasizing the royal family's significant role. Featured prominently in this room are depictions of Charles VII and Maria Amalia, by Francesco Liani, an esteemed Neapolitan artist. A depiction of a youthful Ferdinand by Bourbon court painter Anton Raphael Mengs captures the 8-year old monarch on the occasion of his accession to the throne. Antonio Joli's landscape painting *The Royal Procession of Piedigrotta, seen from the West* documents a royal procession that includes Charles and Ferdinand in a gilded carriage set against a panoramic view of the city of Naples, the city at the center of this exhibition.

The next section will showcase finds discovered near the royal palace at Portici which included the ancient city of Herculaneum. These finds include Roman wall paintings, documents cataloging Bourbon finds, as well as 18th-century renditions of ancient artifacts in biscuit porcelain, and 19th-century copies of the famous bronzes from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum. Additionally, a copy of Karl Jakob Weber's detailed plan of the Villa's walls, excavation tunnels, and "find-spots," along with excerpts from the Bourbon-commissioned work "Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte" ("The Antiquities of Herculaneum Exhibited") will be on display.

In the next gallery, visitors will see a selection of frescoes that were recovered from both public and private contexts from Pompeii and Stabiae, including a wall painting from a *lararium* (household shrine) in Pompeii; a fresco and gladiator helmet from the gladiator barracks in Pompeii; and frescoes from the Villa Arianna, Stabiae. Also in this gallery are several objects from Temple of Isis in Pompeii, excavated during the reigns of both Charles and Ferdinand. This temple served as a center for the worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis and documents the influence of Egyptian culture in Roman religious practices. On display will be ancient artifacts unearthed during the Bourbon-led archaeological efforts at the temple, including frescoes depicting sacred landscapes alongside imagery of priests conducting rituals. Among the other notable items will be a bronze *sistrum*, an instrument used in ceremonies by the priests of Isis.

The next section will highlight the Bourbon court's fascination with Naples' picturesque landscapes. Antonio Joli's pair of evocative paintings depicting King Charles' departure to Spain provides perspectives from both the maritime and coastal vantage points. Another work by Joli captures Ferdinand's hunting party in front of the Capodimonte palace with the city of Naples as the backdrop. Jakob Philipp Hackert's work depicts Ferdinand in his favorite pastime, hunting, while also capturing the natural beauty of the Neapolitan coastline. Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun's portrait of a young Francis of Bourbon features Mount Vesuvius in the background, further underscoring the connection between the landscape and the Bourbon court. A nighttime scene of the *Eruption of Mount Vesuvius on the Ponte della Maddalena* (1782) by French artist Pierre-Jacque Volaire emphasizes the sublime beauty and terror of the volcano.

Looming over much of this history were the many eruptions of Mount Vesuvius itself, which will be explored by the prints of Pietro Fabris in the next room. Sir William

Hamilton commissioned Fabris to record the scientific properties of Vesuvian eruptions in his publication, *Campi Phlegraei: Observations on the Volcanos of the Two Sicilies* (1776). Hamilton, a British diplomat, archaeologist, and volcanologist served as the British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples from 1764 to 1800. His tenure in Naples provided him the opportunity to indulge in his passion for classical antiquities and led to significant contributions to the fields of archaeology and volcanology.

Lastly, the exhibition demonstrates the influence of these discoveries on the art of the Bourbon court and the enduring impact it had on the artistic production associated with the Grand Tour. This room includes examples of royal furniture and porcelain from the famed factories at Capodimonte.

The Legacy of Vesuvius: Bourbon Discoveries on the Bay of Naples is a collaboration between the Meadows Museum, SMU, and the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History at The University of Texas at Dallas. The exhibition is curated by UTD Professor Michael Thomas, PhD, Director of the O'Donnell Institute, with support from Heather Bowling, Research Coordinator at the O'Donnell Institute, and P. Gregory Warden, PhD, the Mark A. Roglán Director of the Custard Institute for Spanish Art and Culture at the Meadows Museum.

A fully illustrated, hardcover catalogue published by Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers—and sponsored by The Custard Institute for Spanish Art and Culture—will accompany the exhibition, with essays by Michael Thomas, P. Gregory Warden, Robin Thomas, Eric M. Moormann, Carmine Romano, and Agnieszka Anna Ficek. Essay topics include multiple aspects of the Bourbon Court and Vesuvian archaeology. Each object will have a catalogue entry, written by Heather Bowling, Domenico Pino, and Lynley McAlpine.

About the Meadows Museum

The Meadows Museum is the leading U.S. institution focused on studying and presenting the art of Spain. In 1962, Dallas businessman and philanthropist Algur H. Meadows donated his private collection of Spanish paintings and funds to start a museum at Southern Methodist University. The museum opened to the public in 1965, marking the first step in fulfilling Meadows's vision to create "a small Prado for Texas." Today, the Meadows is home to one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of Spanish art outside of Spain. The collection spans from the 10th to the 21st centuries and includes medieval objects, Renaissance and Baroque sculptures, and major paintings by Golden Age and modern masters.

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