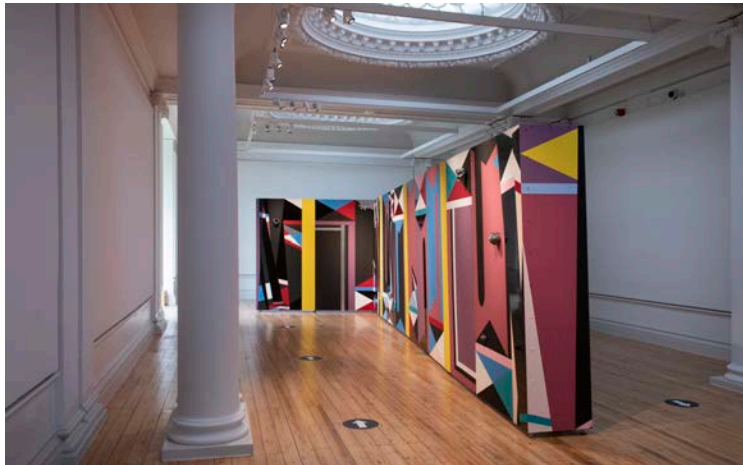


Roman Wall Paintings and Lessons for Modern Meaning

A review by Ella Nixon

The study of Classics is often perceived to be redundant in the modern age. Thomas Paine, writing in the eighteenth century, struggled to identify its utility for a progressive society. However, *Expanded Interiors: Restaged* at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, creatively juxtaposes Roman wall paintings with contemporary art to assert the relevance of the ancient past to the current day.

Catrin Huber created her installation pieces in response to the Roman wall paintings left behind within the former homes of those killed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. At essence, her art speaks to the rhythmic relationships between historical and contemporary spaces as expressed through visual practice.



Catrin Huber *Along or Through*

A reoccurring motif, such as that of closed doors, could be read as the threshold between this world and the next; the tomb, a sacred place. Thus the real – the here and now – was connected to metaphysical worlds evoking past, present, future, and the eternal.

Fictional Roman wall painter

Catrin Huber, *Along and Through*, Expanded Interiors Re-Staged, Hatton Gallery (Photo: Colin Davison); and gallery text

The main exhibition comprises three rooms by Huber. *Along or Through* (2018) contains a free-standing wall decorated with abstract patterns. Its vibrant colours contrast brilliantly to the white gallery walls and natural light-filled interior. Attached to the wall are 3D printed face-shaped cups inspired by the original terracotta artefacts encountered by the artist during her research. Their impish expressions engage the viewer to evoke the fictional conversations Huber imagined between the Roman wall painters and herself whilst creating the installations.

In contrast, *The Corner Escape* (2021) has a dark and private ambience. In the middle of the space is a constructed four-wall structure. Its exterior is aluminium. Curious, the visitor is led clockwise around the structure until they are met with an opening. Once inside, the effect is magnificent: the vibrant illuminated red abstractions emanate glorious warmth.



Catrin Huber, *The Corner Escape*, Expanded Interiors Re-Staged, Hatton Gallery (Photos: Colin Davison)

Rosie Morris' commissioned room continues the theme of domestic privacy. Primarily, this impression is created by the inclusion of a drawn curtain painted realistically in oil and the outline of a fireplace. Patterns inspired by original Roman wall paintings and mosaics are projected into the space, recalling those lives lost to the eruption. The common historical yearning for home suddenly bears the flavour of tragedy.

Rosie Morris

In/Out/of this world

Expanded Interiors
Re-Staged commission

The magical power of representation stimulated the imagination, but we also highlighted the act of viewing and created an awareness of the physical nature of painting.

Fictional Roman wall painter



Rosie Morris, *In / out / of this world*, Expanded Interiors Re-Staged Commission, Hatton Gallery (Photo: Colin Davison); and gallery text

The exhibition's careful use of empty spaces and light imbues the air with intense emotions. The ancient past asserts itself by beckoning the visitor to reconceptualise their domestic spaces in response to tragedy. To the imagined discontent of Paine, it can be concluded that *Expanded Interiors: Restaged* proves the relevance of the old Latin phrase:

'Ars longa, vita brevis' (Art is long, life is short).