

Remarkably, those scholars missed the opportunity to comment on the metal alloys and associate the Mensa with the tradition of alchemy and Hermeticism. In the nineteenth century the Mensa became an iconic complex of images for the Esoterics. The history of the Mensa's ownership tells how it moved from Rome to Venice, Padova, Rome (where it did not find a buyer), to Mantova and Turin. The Mensa escaped various wars; the sack of Mantova once, three wars in Turin, and its confiscation by Napoleon and final restitution from Paris, all of which help to tell the history of northern Italy pre- and post-unification.

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PAUL MELLON CENTRE ROME FELLOWSHIP

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*Performing ancient sculpture: Vernon Lee and psychological aesthetics*

Vernon Lee (born Violet Paget, 1856–1935) was a prolific author writing on literature, feminism, economics, art history and psychological aesthetics. Widely influenced by Walter Pater, Lee translated his impressionist approach to aesthetic appreciation into the modern language of psycho-physiological aesthetics. In 1895 Vernon Lee started a collaboration with her lover, the painter Clementina Anstruther-Thomson (1857–1921), on a number of aesthetic experiments to assess how agreeable and disagreeable forms in ancient sculpture relate to our organic life. In their co-authored article 'Beauty and ugliness' (*Contemporary Review* 72 (1897), 544–69, 669–88), Lee and Thomson employed the concept of *Einfühlung* (empathy) to demonstrate how form is apprehended through mimetic embodied processes.

As the Paul Mellon Centre Rome Fellow at the British School at Rome, I have had the chance to investigate Lee's experiments directly in front of ancient sculpture. In particular, I have focused on a number of statues held in the collections of the Vatican Museums and Museo Nazionale Romano. By using Lee's 'Gallery diaries', partly published in 1912 (in V. Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (London)), I was able to reconstruct Lee's network in Rome and focus on the role that women played in her experiments and in the dissemination of her ideas. Research in the Archive and the Library at the BSR has illuminated the importance of her exchanges with archaeologists of the time, including Emmanuel Löwy and Eugénie Sellers Strong, but also with women's body culture, in the figure of Diana Watts, who read Löwy's theories to develop a number of gymnastic exercises inspired by ancient statuary.

Research at the Bibliotheca Hertziana has been useful to review literature on aesthetic psychology and its influence on art historical writings at the *fin de siècle*. Also, I have expanded my readings in the field of phenomenology and critical museum theory while I was developing the argument of my chapter. During the period of my Fellowship, I have completed the chapter of my monograph that deals with Lee, and have also started to collect some of the illustrations that will go in the book. In this chapter, I explore the resonance of Lee's work on ancient statuary in conjunction with modern representations of the New Woman. Dialogue with other award-holders has been invaluable in helping

me to envisage the importance of the concept of ‘aesthetic sociability’ in Lee’s writings, especially with regard to her critique of modern museums and spectatorship.

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## ROME FELLOWSHIPS

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### *Ezra Pound’s Italian afterlives*

As Rome Fellow at the British School at Rome, I conducted research on American poet Ezra Pound’s late years in Italy, and his post-war impact. Pound’s influence on twentieth-century poetics is widely recognized as unparalleled. The legitimacy of his work, however, is often called into question, with claims that his endorsement of Italian Fascism and anti-Semitic views disqualify its aesthetic achievements. Studies on Pound’s political life end with his repatriation at the end of World War Two to face trial for his pro-Axis propaganda, but his cultural and political significance did not end there. To form a better picture of Pound’s reception, I have been exploring his relations with writers, publishers and translators, such as Vanni Scheiwiller, Enrico Pea, Fernanda Pivano, Edoardo Sanguineti and the neo-avant-gardes, Giovanni Raboni, Charles Olson, Eugenio Montale, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Allen Ginsberg. An image emerges of Pound as a compromised father-figure for a subsequent generation of poets; and I have been tracing the campaigns for the poet’s rehabilitation — by Scheiwiller, his Italian publisher, for example — and the resistance with which these were met.

Spending a prolonged period of time in Italy has been crucial to the project, as Pound lived there for three and a half decades. Pound also wrote in Italian, and in the ’50s his work appeared in Italy before being published in the USA. It was to Rome that Pound began to travel regularly from his home in Rapallo in 1941 to broadcast scripted radio speeches, which included propaganda for Mussolini’s regime — political activity that cost him almost thirteen years in a criminal asylum in Washington. In May 1958, when Pound was released, his treason indictment dropped, he set sail back to Italy, where he would spend his final fourteen years. Pound’s has been read as an exile’s return — however, this ‘homecoming’ to a drastically changed country was fated to be charged with disillusionment. Rather than disavowing his previous views, Pound adopted a public silence. As his writing dwindled, he became something of a celebrity, and this has contributed to his enduring legacy. In this sense, Rome has provided an optimal vantage-point from which to gauge Pound’s topicality in contemporary cultural and political discourse. Since 2003, the poet has been adopted as the symbolic figurehead of CasaPound, a neo-Fascist populist party with its headquarters in Rome. Pound is, to my knowledge, the only poet to have a political party named after him; and I have sought to identify which aspects of his life and work have been co-opted by this organization, and why it has clung to this ideal of Poundian descent, despite repeated legal challenges. In Italy, certainly, Pound’s political catastrophe is crucial to his legacy — and CasaPound seems equally attracted to an idea of Pound as anti-capitalist economist and as persecuted poet-maverick.