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Gardens and Villa of Livia, Prima Porta, Rome
 External Project Status Report
 March 2022

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1. Premise, Mission, and Objectives

Premise

This proposal aims to revitalize an ancient area of Rome through a multidisciplinary research project considering biodiversity in all its implications. The project functions in a contemporary key, manifested by a fusion of public and private forces, and expressed through art, horticultural activism, digital platforms, preservation, and archaeology. Seeking to rephrase ancient methods for future generations, the project is inspired by an extraordinary, in many places still verdant, suburb once considered Rome's "first door." Prima Porta, Rome, is also known as the property of Livia Drusilla, wife of Augustus, mother of Tiberius, and eminent Roman matron. This research project is inspired by a culture of sustainability ongoing over millennia, a metaphor for a vibrant, multicultural Rome, with archaeological and horticultural patrimony of national and global relevance.

The present-day area once constituting the farm, gardens, and villa of Livia still offers an untouched landscape, in some corners, through which to sense the ancient pulse of the Mediterranean. By celebrating this venue through study, art, and attention to its plants, the project aims to suggest how biodiversity has always figured in the corridors of spiritual and political power. The natural yet also artificial landscape at hand includes many now endangered species. The project hopes to show the symbiosis possible between plants and humans.

A world-renowned fresco cycle celebrating Mediterranean horticulture adorned the cool subterranean summer pavilion in Livia's country seat. These frescoes, today conserved at Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, are among the most charming examples of landscape painting in the entire history of art. They offer a unique opportunity to gaze at ancient flora and fauna, in metaphorical and allegorical form. The plants are a subtle reminder of ancient female nature deities, once considered to be the very embodiment of prosperity.

The archaeological site of the villa of Livia *ad Gallinas Albas* in its original location at Prima Porta offers a fertile ground to revitalize values of stewardship, sustainability, and harmony with nature.

The medicinal and culinary garden of the Villa of Livia, as well as its formal gardens, demonstrate sustainability and innovation, the interplay between science and society, and the relationship of art and nature. All these are positioned around the figure of Livia as Mother of Rome, a vision that Augustus sought to underscore. To rethink what was once the most important garden in the Roman Empire, a multidisciplinary team of artists, classicists, biologists, archaeologists, food historians, private enterprise, botanists, bio-engineers, art historians, architects and philosophers have been assembled to facilitate a dialogue among varied disciplines and promote biological and cultural diversity.

Mission

Our mission is to bring biocultural diversity to everyday dialogue. This task requires two things: a deep understanding of our situation and effective communication.

All substantial change, a paradigm shift, needs a visual language that can capture the public's attention and reshape people's perceptions. Our goal, therefore, is to bring together leading researchers and visual thinkers, and then to present their findings, theories and ideas, synthesizing the ancient and contemporary, going beyond the dichotomy of scientific and humanistic. This dialogue is possible through art, the ultimate universal language.

Objectives

- Communicate **biodiversity, sustainability, continuous cultural practices including agriculture**
- Raise public awareness of **heritage and ecological conservation**
- Envisage biodiversity as cultural diversity
- Promote biodiversity as environmental and **economic sustainability**
- Emphasize **collective responsibility** and **global impact**

Methods

- **Curatorial, Editorial and Publication**, with podcasts and contributions from experts, artists, scholars (commissioned May 2021, sponsor Suzanne Deal Booth).
- **Research** published in *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, Scholarly Journal, Fine Arts Academy, Gdańsk (2022)

- **International Network** of local projects working in the same direction as *Universal Gardens* (April to June 2021, letters of outreach to UK, France, Switzerland, Germany, USA, et al.)
- **Website and Database** (September/October 2022, proposed to ENEL Foundation)
- Series of focused **exhibitions, performances, and happenings**
- Series of **public** talks, conferences, and symposia (2022 -2023)
- Interaction of **contemporary art, science, and archaeology (ongoing)**

2. Phase I: Valorization of Villa of Livia, Rome

Project Proposal

Valorization of Site of Villa of Livia, Rome through:

Temporary contemporary art installation

Restoration and display of the *natatio* mosaics

Reconstruction of Livia's private garden

- Research on plants in both domestic and formal garden
- Reconstruction of the garden
- Sponsorship for long term maintenance

Digital reconstructions of the Villa and the triclinium fresco

Suggested Institutional Interventions (MiC - Ministry of Culture)

- **Permanent didactic materials** at Villa of Livia
- **Ticket** paired with Palazzo Massimo and House of Livia on the Palatine Hill

Interventions coordinated by Municipality Roma XV

- **Signage** (outside the Villa, in Piazzale Flaminio train station to Villa of Livia, from Prima Porta train station to Villa di Livia)
- Parking and **accessibility**
- Museum Gift Shop and Café

COMMUNICATION

- Exhibition catalogue
- **Public** performances, round tables, concerts
- Sponsor **recognition** events
- **Conferences** with partner universities and UN agencies
- **Workshops** with schools and universities at Villa of Livia
- **Collaboration** with Municipio Roma XV for awareness and communication in Prima Porta

Phase II: Online Presence

Database (next step)

- To feature a selection of scholarly and scientific **research**
- Collection of **artworks, artists, and curators**
- List of **researchers, activists, professionals, public figures**; their biographical and contact information

Editorial (commissioned)

- **Written contributions**, essays, interviews, opinion pieces
- **Artistic contributions**, including but not limited to, poetry, visual art, photography music, video and cinematographic art, design, short fiction
- **Podcasts - Video interviews**
- **Online lectures**

Network (established)

- Biodiversity **projects** on a global scale (links and contacts)
- Biodiverse **farms, gardens, villas, parks and sites**; A Preliminary Network (links and contacts)

Social Media (commissioned)

- Instagram, Twitter and Facebook
- **Amplifying editorial** content and producing **exclusive curated content**
- **Promoting the archeological site(s) on international level**
- **Mailing list** and monthly **newsletter**

Phase III: Current Research and Publications

- **Editorial concept established**
- Scholarly publication in **book** format: collected volume of **interdisciplinary** papers from specialised historians, classicists, microbiologists, botanists from partner institutions, with works by **contemporary artists**
- **Publisher**
- **Research published in scholarly journal, *Sztuka i Dokumentacja / Art and Documentation***, Fine Arts Academy, Gdańsk, Poland
- Printed using **unburnished, recycled, biodegradable** materials

Interdisciplinary papers:

Laura Borghetti, Ph.D.; Giulia Maria Paoletti, Ph.D.; Silvia Ronchey, Ph.D.,
“Biodiversity in Byzantium, between patrons, manuscripts and botanical travels”

Giulia Caneva, Ph.D., “Summary of Augustan Botanical Message”

Crispin Corrado, Ph.D., “Biodiversity in the Ancient Roman World”

June di Schino, Ph.D., “Livia’s Garden: A Paradise for the Table”

Margaret Kneller, Ph.D., “On Biodiversity in the Ice Age at Prima Porta” [TK title]

Cornelia Lauf, Ph.D., “The Livian Paradigm: Agricultural and Environmental Politics with Art”

Nicolas Liney, Ph.D.; “Biodiverse poems, posthuman poets: gardens in/as imperial Roman poetry”

K. Sara Myers, Ph.D., “Botanical Imperialism and Metamorphic Biodiversity: Livia and Ovid”

Phase IV: Global Awareness Campaign

- The sum of previous phases repeated in other locations, with the aim to create a **global awareness** campaign of the villa of Livia and its implications
- Creation of **site-specific** projects in partnership with **local institutions**, museums, universities and partners
- **Contemporary art** exhibitions with artists and curators, **local** and **international**
- Local **archaeology**, historic **works** of art, and cultural **traditions**
- **Conferences, lectures and workshops**, held locally and streamed online



Installation in the ancient *natatio* of Livia

Estimated completion date: Summer, 2023

Mosaic 940 x 560 x 110 cm; border mosaics: 100 cm

Courtesy the artist, Barbara Prenka

Proposed partner: Bisazza SPA

