The Perception of the Sex Worker in the Museum Context: The Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum of Naples

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Introduction

The display of any art depicting scenes which may be deemed inappropriate through the eyes of a Euro-American viewer, is often contentious. Whether, or not, these items should be displayed at all within a museum, given the label of "art", and the ages of those who should or should not be permitted to view such objects, are all topics discussed both within the academic world of museums and in the public forum. Within this thesis, the focus will be the importance and relevance of the Secret Cabinet in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and its display and curation of art featuring Roman sex workers.

The main research aim is to assess the importance of the inclusion of art depicting Roman sex workers in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples and the manner in which it is displayed. The way in which this will be assessed is by studying the various display techniques, in isolation and in combination, used within the museum to exhibit these artworks. This will be done with the objective of discerning whether the techniques used and implemented, at the design of the curator, can impact upon the way in which art, of a subject that is not usually so open to the public, is consumed by the audience.

Firstly, as the individual in charge of displaying the artworks, the role of the curator must be discussed. This will include both a theoretical discussion of the agency of the curator as well as more seemingly mundane aspects, such as politics and funding, which can shape the message of an exhibition and thus the techniques of display. Next the techniques used in the museum's exhibition display, which the curator has control over, will each be assessed to determine the impact that they can have on the way in which an artwork is perceived. Alongside this, factors which the curator has to contend with, such as locality and the museum space, will also be discussed. Each of these aspects of display are individually important but they come together to influence the overall message regarding the artworks, including those depicting Roman sex workers. Research done on each of these aspects, predominantly using Stephanie Moser (2010), and I will build on this research by implementing her theories on the aspects of the

display within the Secret Cabinet of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples to help determine how the audience may receive the artworks. The fact that museums are seen as an influencer within the public sphere, as well as generating academic discourse, means that the message that is portrayed regarding sex workers is paramount.

Then, a brief history of the collection and its displaying of the Secret Cabinet will be illustrated in order to provide a detailed context of the artworks within this study and to show the tumultuous history of the collection and its display within the museum. This is important to discuss when considering the collection as it has a history of censorship and restriction, with regards to its display and curation, therefore, it is an important aspect to consider whilst assessing the display of the collection and the artworks which feature Roman sex workers. The life of the Roman sex worker will be then outlined. This provides an understanding of the context in which the art was created and an understanding of the role of the Roman sex worker within their society. This is information which the curator will be aware of and, therefore, may impact upon the way in which they display the art works. The visitor in the audience may not have such an in depth knowledge and, therefore, it is important to consider such information regarding the sex worker and if it is passed on through the methods of display. The previous academic literature which has focused on the analysis of erotic artworks, including those depicting sex workers, will then be discussed in order to show the development of views within academia. Therefore, the position of this thesis in relation to previous academic studies will be evident.

The role of the museum in defining erotic art, and specifically defining art as featuring sex workers, will then be assessed. Museums have a great influence both within the sphere of art history and the public discourse. Therefore, it is important to consider this aspect as it can construct and influence the narrative surrounding sex workers thus reaffirming the importance of this study in considering the display, specifically, of Roman sex workers. This will then be followed by several focused examples of artworks and the way in which they are displayed in the Secret Cabinet. For each of these examples, the role of the curator and the theory of display

will be applied and from that it will help to draw conclusions on the importance of displaying artworks of Roman sex workers and help to discern the picture of them created for the audience.

1 The Power of the Curator

Agency is defined as the capacity of humans to influence their own life chances and those of others as well as the ability to affect the formation of social realities in their own social sphere (Barfield; 1997, 4). Agency is also defined as the engagement of people in complex processes of interaction, such as through language or material culture (Gardner; 2008, 95).

Bourdieu combined agency and structure to create the framework of habitus (Zolberg, 1994, 56; Gardner; 2008, 99). Habitus is the regulated form of improvisation that characterises daily life (Calhoun and Karaganis; 2009, 196). The central idea Bourdieu's research is the concept of habitus, which refers to the "cultural baggage" of an individual and how it compares to others (Zolber; 1994, 56). A person's habitus is influenced by their upbringing including: social, economic, and cultural elements, and is always present in a person's thinking, even if they are unaware of it (*Ibid*.). This is important when considering the choices made by a curator or group of curators as their own habitus will impact upon the choices that they make with regards to the display of art works, and in this study artworks which feature sex workers, whether they are conscious of such influences or not. Museums have sought to understand this concept and how it affects the way in which art is perceived by those having less knowledge, in order to develop display techniques which are inclusive of everyone regardless of their education or background (Zolberg; 1994, 57). The National Archaeological Museum of Naples states in its most recent outline of plans and budgeting that:

> "The Museum delivers a complex service, offering its visitors many different options, which can contribute towards improving their general level of enjoyment and understanding in their visit ... we will prepare a new plan for presenting the exhibitions and using the Palace, designing new, innovative itineraries, which will be developed around specific thematic areas that take account of the different categories of public visiting the Museum and their various needs, gleaned from our field surveys and listening projects. The itineraries will, therefore, take into consideration the visitors'

> differences in terms of demographics (children, teenagers, young adults, adults, senior citizens), level of cultural preparation (newbies, enthusiasts, experts) and the specific needs of some categories of users (visitors with sight or hearing disabilities), for whom we will prepare additional aids." (National Archaeological Museum; 2016, 65).

This indicates that the Museum is aware of the varying habitus that each visitor possesses and is attempting to ensure that this is catered to in the ways in which it displays its artworks and the facilities that the museum offers. Within this study, this is key as each individual who observes the Secret Cabinet and the art which features Roman sex workers comes with varying levels of knowledge regarding the lives of the Roman sex worker. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration when assessing how the displayed Roman sex worker may be perceived and understood by the audience, and whether the attempts made by the museum do in fact make a difference.

However, habitus also focuses on shared cultural dispositions within a social group that can constrain and enable action (Gardner; 2008, 99). This approach is sensitive to cultural variation and appreciates how structures can empower people differently due to their social status. Tyburczy (2016, 7, 8) looks at the emotional habitus of museum display and states:

> "whether or how this habitus is shared across different exhibitions in separate museums, not only furnishes the tone of a display but also invests the display with certain feelings about the objects and bodies exhibited".

Bourdieu's theory has recently been used in combination with feminist theories (Adkins and Skeggs; 2004). Therefore, this approach offers a flexible understanding of agency and it also acknowledges varying social groups, such as the Roman meretrix. It also helps to understand the effect of the display of an exhibition on the visitor, which is one of the aims of this thesis. Thus, due to these factors Bourdieu's theory will be the definition of agency used within this thesis, as its works well when combined with feminists' theories as well as within the museum context.

When understanding agency, the importance of acknowledging the scale in which any actions

occur is often stated by contemporary scholars. Gardner (2004; 37) looks at the scale of agency within the micro context, this category only includes the individual. This scale refers to when a person's actions within the social milieu are considered to be enacted by him/herself rather than as a part of a group, although the 'involvement' must also be considered. 'Involvement' refers to the fact that an action has to happen relative to something else, such as the social or physical world, for it to be acknowledged as an action in the first place (Gardner; 2008, 95). This scale of agency, concerning individuals, will be applied to the curator; where their actions can be distinguished from the institution within which they work or any external factors that may affect curatorial choices.

The meso context, describes the characteristics of people or groups in which they belong, Gardner states, these are more nominally abstract and thus number of individuals included in categories increases (Gardner; 2004, 37). The meso context includes the aspects: status, age, gender, religion, community, and kin-group (Gardner; 2004, 44). Within this study, this would include the curator acting as: a member of staff within the museum, a member of the "curatorial community" within the city, and, within Italy, and as an individual who lives within the city whose history is displayed within the museum. The museum states that one of its primary aims currently is "the Museum intends to be the international spokesperson for its history and its territory, contributing towards exporting the image of the Museum, of Naples and of Campania." (National Archaeological Museum of Naples; 2016, 61). Therefore, the curator is also acting within the macro context, which is more nominally abstract than meso context and includes a greater number of individuals in its categories. This would apply to the curator being a member of the "curatorial community" internationally as well as the international academic consequences as a result of his/her choices made within the museum.

2 The Elements of Exhibitions and their Impact

Moser (2010; 22) states that the creation of exhibitions in now the role of designers as well as curators, with museums acting as agents within society and their role in disseminating knowledge, the way in which objects are presented cannot be overlooked. The creation of an exhibition is now recognised as a creative form of expression (Dernie; 2006, 6). Exhibitions are created in varying contexts with many different aims and although the impact of display techniques can differ significantly, it is still important to consider these elements when assessing the impact of museums in creating meaning for the audience (Moser; 2010, 23). The devising of an exhibition is:

> “Focused on the content of the works to be displayed and concerns the ordering of these works as a sequence, to be understood within relation to each other and in dialogue with the conditions of the viewing environment.” (Dernie; 2006, 6).

Moser (2010; 23) states that the range of factors involved in exhibition production can assist in the understanding of the capacity of museum displays in creating knowledge. It is important to consider how these aspects can influence the audience’s understanding of what is being displayed (*Ibid*.). As well as helping to highlight the key aspects of displays within an exhibition, the components of presentation can reinforce and complement each other in a “system of representation” (*Ibid*.). Though sometimes seen as extra aspects of displays and exhibition, details such as lighting, spatial arrangement, or display furniture work together to help create an environment where the visitor can learn about and gain an understanding of culture or history, as well as more abstract concepts such as gender, race, or civilisation (*Ibid*.). Ultimately, the exhibition design creates a dialogue between the object and the space in which they are displayed (Dernie; 2006, 6). Therefore, it is important that each of these aspects aspects are taken into consideration and assessed within this study. Though the curator may not be explicitly discussed here, it is important to note that many of these aspects are in fact under the control of the curator. Thus, these vehicles are used as a technique by the curator to facilitate

conveying information and a message to the audience, and so will enable an understanding of the importance of these aspects with regards to the Roman sex worker in the Secret Cabinet.

2.1 Architecture, Location, Setting

Moser (2010; 24) emphasises the importance of the architectural style of the building in which the exhibition is situated, as well as the location and setting of the museum itself when evaluating the importance of museum displays within epistemological structures. The visitor's experience begins on the approach to the museum, with the architecture of the building as well as its location communicating information about the museum and its collection (*Ibid*.). It is important to note that this is an aspect which the curator has little to no control over, therefore it is an aspect which they must reconcile with when considering their exhibition display.

The building that the National Archaeological Museum of Naples occupies now, was built in 1585 by Don Pedro Giron as a *cavallerizza*, a place designed for the craft of horsemanship, however, construction was not finished (Pozzi *et al.*, 1984, 2; National Archaeological Museum of Naples, 2016, 13). In 1612, the building was then absorbed into the new construction of the university by architect Giulio Cesare Fontana (Pozzi *et al.*; 1984, 2). It then became the museum in 1806, with further restoration occurring in 1816 (Pozzi *et al.*; 1984, 2, 3). The building is a large and imposing site, with columns at the entrance, and now painted a striking pink colour (See Fig. 1). The Neoclassical style architecture is imbued with a sense of authority and visitors will acknowledge that they are going into a "Temple of Learning" once they have entered (Moser; 2010, 24). Thus influencing the ways in which they absorb and assimilate the knowledge and perceive the artefacts that the museum has to offer prior to even entering within. The fact that the museum is also located so closely to the site, the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, in which many of the artefacts on display were found, is also significant. As many of the visitors will have recently visited the site prior to their expedition to the museum, thus they may already have gleaned information regarding the lives of those individuals, including sex workers, who lived in Pompeii. Not prominently located within the main body of the

building The Secret Cabinet is secreted on the First Floor almost hidden away from public view (See Fig. 2).

Figure 1 - The National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Italy

Figure 2 - Floor Plan of National Archaeological Museum of Naples

2.2 Space

Moser (2010; 24) defines space not just the physical specifications of the rooms of the exhibition, but also the way in which visitors move throughout the space or the way in which the exhibition guides them through it. Current museological practice also endeavours to create a space in which the visitor is able to absorb and process the information and the message of the exhibition (Moser; 2010, 25). This is usually done by the creation of several "spatial zones" (*Ibid*.). This technique is implemented by the curator within the Secret Cabinet.

The Secret Cabinet starts with a room that is themed around "Domestic Spaces" (Levin-Richardson; 2011, 325). This is a small room with individual display cabinets containing a small number of items within them (Grobman; 2010). Moser (2010; 25) states that viewing individual objects in a small room can enable the visitor to engage with art in a more informal manner, therefore presenting the culture it was part of as less removed and abstract. In regards to how this may impact the way in which the art depicting sex workers is perceived, it enables the visitor to fully engage with the art, therefore creating a more open understanding of the individuals and the society in which they lived that the art represents.

The next section of the exhibition is room about the erotic art present is presented in "Gardens" (Levin-Richardson; 2011, 325). This section begins with a long corridor with frescoes displayed on either side, which then ends in a small square room (Grobman; 2010). Moser (2010; 25) states that when artworks are in long, thin galleries it creates a sense of formality and encourages the visitor to march past. This means that the visitor is more likely to glance at the frescoes rather than to stop and engage with the art and those depicted therein, in order to avoid the build up of individuals behind them in the corridor. Thus, inferring that the works are presented in such a manner that they do not need to each be individually observed but seen as a whole. The small room at the end of the corridor display individual works, this now allows for individual visitor engagement with the artworks enabling a more familiar perception.

The third section of the Secret Cabinet is “Banqueting and Brothels” (Levin-Richardson; 2011, 325). This is a larger square room, with a set of glass cabinets along the right-hand side (Grobman; 2010). From the entrance to the exit is a straight carpeted line, with a rope barrier along the left-hand side directing the visitors (*Ibid*.). The left wall then features several frescoes, with individual artworks displayed on the two side walls (*Ibid*.). The use of the rope is a clear boundary between the frescoes and the visitor, creating a sense of removed detachment between the visitor and artwork, as well as creating a sense of a long gallery within the large square room thus encouraging the visitors to walk along it, rather than to stop and observe.

The final section of the Secret Cabinet is “Street” (Levin-Richardson; 2011, 325). This is a small room with objects displayed on the walls and in cabinets (Grobman; 2010). Again, the small room creates an intimate observation of the artworks, this means that the visitor can engage with the Roman ideals and the narrative of their lives told through these artworks. The use of a several small rooms within the secret cabinet , allows for a “small-scale” viewing that allows the visitor to engage with “subplots” and presents the information in a less intimidating manner (Moser; 2010, 25). The experience of the visitor is more personal, helping them to think about the sex workers within the art from a less detached or academic point of view.

One key aspect to note is that the Secret Cabinet is accessed through a large metal gate, this creates an imposing space through which the visitor must enter and leave the exhibition, it reinforces to the audience the idea that the space that they are about to enter is secretive and purposefully removed from the remainder of the exhibitions. Therefore, the visitor enters the exhibition with the preconceived idea that the artworks, and those depicted within them, are situated on the fringes of society and occupy a removed location. Whereas, during the time of the sex workers life, they would have been located within the centre of society and seen as a part of everyday society for many (Glazebrook and Tsakirgis; 2016, 107, 173).

2.3 Design, Colour, Light

The aspects of design, colour, and lighting within the exhibition are critical factors (Moser; 2010, 25). These affect the message that is conveyed, acting as a vehicle for the curator, to the visitor as the context and the way in which an object is presented can influence the way in which it is understood by the visitor (Dernie; 2006, 6). With museums located in historic buildings, such as the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, any changes to all three of these aspects may be difficult to implement as it is often necessary that as many original features of the fabric of the building as possible are retained (Moser; 2010, 25).

The method of design display varies throughout the rooms of the Secret Cabinet (Grobman; 2010). Many of the objects are displayed within wooden cabinets with glass fronts (See Fig. 3), Moser (2010; 25, 26) states that this can define the objects within as "curiosities". The use of wood reinforces the age of the objects, conveying to the visitor that the objects are from a society and time that is far removed from the one in which they live. This may impact upon the reception of the art depicting sex workers, with the visitor perceiving the sex worker as part of an object rather than as an individual. The statues displayed within the "Garden" sections of the Secret Cabinet are placed on pedestals, with some allowing the visitor to move around them (Grobman; 2010). This encourages the viewer to observe the artworks from all angles and to fully engage with all aspects of the statues. In the "Street" section of the Secret Cabinet, the walls feature wooden doors in order to create the feeling of being located on an actual street in Pompeii (*Ibid*.). (See Fig. 4). There are also artworks attached to the walls to show the way that they would have been displayed during the period (See Fig. 4).

The heavy metal black gate that is situated at the entrance to the exhibition (See Fig. 5), is an intimidating aspect with the colour reinforcing this. However, the brass used for the plaque creates as sense of intrigue. The "Domestic Spaces" and the "Street" sections are decorated with a neutral colour scheme, the walls being a cream colour (*Ibid*.). The use of a neutral

backdrop allows the visitor to focus solely on the objects displayed (Moser; 2010, 26). The long corridor of the "Garden" section is painted black (Grobman; 2010) (see Fig. 8). This creates a stark comparison to the frescoes on the wall, ensuring their prominence as focal points within the space. The small room of the "Garden" section has walls decorated with paintings of foliage on the lower half than blends into yellow paint on the top half (*Ibid*.) (See Fig. 6). This choice, made by the curator, makes the visitor feel as if they are in the original context in which the objects were displayed. The frescoes located in the "Banqueting and Brothels" section are displayed on a cream wall (Grobman; 2010). This provides a neutral backdrop for them to be observed from, but they are each highlighted with a square of patterned, red stenciling (See Fig. 7) (Grobman; 2010). This showcases each fresco individually, even though they are displayed as a group. Which allows the audience to observe the sex worker depicted in each fresco, rather than a generalisation of all Roman sex workers.

Within the "Domestic Spaces" section of the Secret Cabinet windows provide natural lighting for the observation of the artifacts (Grobman; 2010). The frescoes in the long corridor of the "Garden" section are each individually lit and highlighted, as are both the statuary in the small room of the same section, and the frescoes in the "Brothels and Banqueting" section (*Ibid*.) (See Fig. 8). Moser (2010, 26) states that light within the exhibition context , though directed by the curator, can bestow meaning on objects, and the use of individual lights for each fresco illustrates the importance of each one. The cabinets in the "Domestic Space", "Brothels and Banqueting", and "Street" sections are lit from the top inside the cases (Grobman; 2010) (See Fig. 3). This can affect the way in which objects appear and groups together the objects (Moser; 2010, 26). Therefore, the implementation of a restricted palette of lighting and colour unifies the various areas of the exhibition into one cohesive whole; whilst emphasising certain individual items that the curator deems worthy of a longer examination by the visitor. The curator is thus very much leading the narrative and influencing the visitor experience and ultimately their opinions of Roman sex workers and sex workers in general.

Figure 3 - Display Cabinet in "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum of Naples

Figure 4 - Door and Phallic Decoration in "Street" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum Naples

Figure 5 - "Garden" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum Naples

Figure 6 - Gate at the entrance to the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum of Naples

Figure 7 - Frescoes in "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum of Naples

Figure 8 - Frescoes in "Gardens" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum of Naples

2.4 Subject, Message, Text

Moser (2010; 26) states that the subject and message of the exhibition is most emphatically presented through textual information displayed alongside the objects. The phrase "GABINETTO SEGRETO", displayed on the plaque of the gate reinforces the "illicit" nature of the objects contained therein thus influencing the visitor before they have entered the exhibition (See Fig. 5). The thematic display of the Secret Cabinet is accompanied with didactic plaques, in Italian and English, displayed in each section detailing the social and cultural roles of sexuality in Roman society (Levin-Richardson; 2011, 327). By making this choice, rather than a chronological display, the exhibition highlights subsets of the material which allows an active role in the understanding of the culture and its material (Moser; 2010, 26, 27). These texts provide a general summary of the artworks displayed in the Secret Cabinet. Some of the objects within the display cases are accompanied by a brief description of what an object is and its date, but no more information regarding interpretation or use. This allows to visitor to come to their own conclusion regarding the object, rather than being directed by the curator, therefore, they are being influenced by their personal habitus and any prior knowledge of the Roman sex worker. However, in her study Levin-Richardson (2011; 327, 329) states that only 5% of the tourists visiting the exhibition read the didactic plaques displayed in each section. This suggests that the visitors are more absorbed in the viewing of the objects rather than reading any information provided with them. It may also be due to reticence or embarrassment because of the sexual nature of the objects, with individuals aware of the social taboos surrounding sex and them not wanting to appear overly fascinated with such objects (Adams and Frances, 2003, 58; Gaimster; 2000, 15). However, Fisher and Langlands (2011; 313) state that if interpreting the text provided on the walls in the exhibition is seen as evidence of embarrassment associated with discussions of sex, then the texts are now a result of the history of censorship in the museum's past and the move towards changing this in the present. Therefore, the text provided with the objects is of even more importance if the exhibition seeks to lessen the stigma that surrounds sex and sex workers, acting as an educational tool to change people's perceptions.

During one of his visits to the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Delehanty (2011; 211) notes that outside of the Secret Cabinet there are two didactic panels that indicate what is to be found inside. The panel aimed at adults tells a history of the collection, as discussed earlier, and the numerous closings and re-openings of the Secret Cabinet (*Ibid*.). The second panel is designed for children, explaining why anyone under the age of 14 years is unable to enter the room when unaccompanied, it is a conversation between two children, Napolitano and Camilla;

Camilla: ‘‘Why does that sign say ‘Secret Room,’ Napolitano. What’s behind that gate?’’

> Napolitano: ‘‘Listen, Camilla, in those rooms there are paintings, sculptures, mosaics, vases, and other things that depict sexual scenes. Sex with myths [mythological figures] and common people. That’s why they are prohibited to young people not accompanied by an adult.’’ Camilla: ‘‘Like us, then. But what could be so terrible in there? We see everything on TV or in the papers, and lots of us study sex education in school.’’ Napolitano: ‘‘You’re right, Camilla. Adults still treat us as infants, or worse, like we’re naive. I have been with my father in there lots of times, and it didn’t embarrass me at all. To start off, there are paintings and sculptures that were in ‘‘lupanari,’’ or brothels, of Pompeii, and they depict men and women making love. Then there are objects, lanterns, tripods, and charms made of bronze or terra cotta in the shape of sex organs.’’ Camilla: ‘‘You mean thingies? Why?’’ Napolitano: ‘‘Don’t laugh! Look, for the ancient Greeks and Romans sexual eroticism were not sins. They were considered for what they were, a means of love, pleasure, and conception. And don’t say ‘thingie’ say ‘phallus,’ the Greek word. The phallus was reproduced in every material and size—there are very large ones! It was a symbol of fertility and was therefore considered a good luck charm by everyone. Venus (Aphrodite for the Greeks), the goddess of love, beauty and fertility was for a long time among the most worshiped and represented divinities around. They see her quite involved with her lover, Mars (Ares in Greek).’’ Camilla: ‘‘Well then, Napolitano, why are we such prudes today in modern times?’’ Napolitano: ‘‘Maybe

because between ancient and modern times a different history has passed!'' (Delehanty; 2011, 211, 212).

This story that is written by the curator through the eyes of children, in a mature yet informative nature, illustrates the objects within the Secret Cabinet in an unsensationalised manner. It helps the visitor to understand the context of the artworks, even if they do not see them for a year or two, and helps to humanise the sex worker rather than seeing them as objects used within society. However, Delehanty (2011; 213/214) states that on his next visit to the museum, the plaque had been removed. This step, made by the curator of the exhibition, is a clear example of where improvements to the message and text could be made with regards to providing a clear message regarding erotic art and art depicting sex workers. This well-told story provided an honest view of such artworks and portrayed it in a positive manner that had the capability of ensuring a positive opinion of Roman sex workers. Therefore, this is an evident example of the importance text within display and where the curation of the Secret Cabinet could be improved.

2.5 Display Types

Moser (2010; 28) expresses the importance of the use of display types other than the artworks themselves. This includes: casts and reproductions, modern day objects used as tools of comparison, maps, illustrations, photographs, models, dioramas, interactive games or computer presentations, audio-guides, or sensory displays (*Ibid*.). Dernie (2006, 10) states that visitors to museums today, now perceive art as entwined with fashion, film, architecture, and design with technology now included in the museum context. Within the Secret Cabinet, the only one of these techniques used are the audio-guides which a visitor can rent, with information provided about the Secret Cabinet as well as the rest of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples (Levin-Richardson; 2011, 327). However, only 5% of tourists

make use of this feature (*Ibid*.). Therefore, there is room for additional display types within the Secret Cabinet for further education and reinforcement of the exhibition message.

2.6 Exhibition Style

The exhibition style refers to the communicative role assigned to the objects on display (Moser; 2010, 28, 29). The Secret Cabinet is an object-led exhibition, with all of the objects inside either categorised as “erotic” objects or objects which have previously and continue to be deemed as not appropriate for all, or any, viewers. Though the creation of this room may now be seen as a curious and risque attraction to the museum, it also suggests the implicit message about the objects on display. This includes the social idea that sex is something to still only be discussed behind closed doors, or that sex workers and their rights are a section of society to be shied away from rather than openly debated. Fisher and Langlands (2011; 313) state that the museum and its display do not function as a representation of a more enlightened, modern view of sex and sex workers but, rather, that they illustrate the distance between the views held during the Roman period with their lack of sexual inhibition which deeply contrast with the views around sexual art and objects in modern society. Within the Secret Cabinet, there are efforts to contextualise the objects, by placing them in themed rooms, Moser (2010; 29) states that this has the potential to create emotion within the visitor and encourages the visitor to experience the objects instead of taking on a passive viewership. Therefore, the creation of the Secret Cabinet allows the viewing of the objects with a recognition of what they are and highlighting them as “erotic” objects rather than dispersing them among the rest of the collection. However, in contradiction, their purposeful exclusion can create a preemptive opinion by the visitor regarding the collection and, therefore, those depicted within the artworks.

3 The Secret Museum in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples: The History of the Collection and its Display

The king of Naples, Charles Bourbon III, promoted the exploration of the Vesuvian towns buried by the eruption of 79 AD, this commenced in 1738 at Herculaneum and in 1748 at Pompeii (National Archaeological Museum of Naples, 2018; Fisher and Langlands, 2011, 308). This lead to the discovery of the vast amount of ancient artworks, artefacts, and buildings now known from the two cities. Among the objects and artworks found in the excavations were many erotic objects: painted scenes and frescoes, mosaics, painted and engraved utensils and trinkets, and statuary (Tyburczy; 2016, 26).

The first of several volumes cataloguing the finds at Pompeii and Herculaneum appeared in 1757, however, the volume which discussed the erotic material was separate to the others (Johns; 1982, 19, 20). Late 18th century Italian archaeologists and cultural custodians became the first to attempt to create a place to display and observe objects which, in the 21st century, are called pornography (Tyburczy, 2016, 26; Delehanty, 2011, 212). However, Fisher and Langlands (2011; 302, 303) discuss whether the narrative surrounding the history of the collection and its censorship is altogether accurate, positing that the objects having been locked away and restricted as soon as they were discovered is a false narrative. The first mention of the concept of the secret museum within the Herculaneum Museum is of room XVIII in 1795 which stored the "obscene" objects that could only be seen by a visitor with a particular permit (Gaimster; 2000, 10).

In February 1819, the future Francesco I visited the museum, which had since been relocated to the Palazzo degli Studi, and was of the opinion that all of the obscene objects should be moved to a private room (Gaimster, 2000, 11; Pozzi *et al.*, 1984, 51). This room, consisting of around one hundred objects, was called *Gabinetto degli Oggetti Osceni* "Cabinet of Obscene Objects"

but was then renamed the *Raccolta Pronografica* “Pornographic Collection” in 1823 (Myerowitz, 1992, 133; Gaimster, 2000, 11; Pozzi *et al*., 1984, 51). The collection could only be viewed by those of “mature years and sound morals” (Gaimster; 2000, 11), this preserved the objects whilst shielding any visitors deemed morally vulnerable from unexpectedly viewing depictions of sex (Bull, 2017, 229; Clarke, 2013, 141; Delehanty, 2011, 212; Tyburczy, 2016, 26, 27). The housing of objects in a secret room created the marginalisation of erotic objects, with the Secret Museum functioning as a private space for white, elite men to discuss such artefacts (Tyburczy; 2016, 27).

Walter Kendrick (1996, 17; 1987, 11) states that the origins of the word pornography and the contemporary problems associated with it can be traced back to the excavation of these erotic Roman artefacts in 1795 and the curators’ responses to them. (Clarke; 2013, 141). However, the act of restricting access to these objects invariably lead to the promotion of the collection with the number of visitors requests increasing from 20 to 300 in the space of two years; with widespread awareness of the objects inside (Gaimster, 2000, 11; Fisher and Langlands, 2011, 303). The secret museum was then walled in with bricks, in 1852, by Prince Sangiorgio Spinelli who was the director of the museum so that “memory of it would be dispersed as much as possible” (Pozzi *et al*., 1984, 51; Antonelli *et al.*, 2016, 686; Clarke, 2013, 142). In 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi ordered the collection to be reopened and catalogued (*Ibid*.). By 1861, the once Museo Borbonico became the National Museum for Naples (Gaimster, 2000, 11; Clarke, 2013, 142).

In 1866 a catalogue entitled the “Pornographic Collection” was compiled by Giuseppe Fiorelli (Gaimster; 2000, 11). This catalogue is the first attempt to scientifically classify sexual material culture in the 19th century and meant that the “secret museum” became an official curatorial concept, influencing the canon of curating (*Ibid*.). However, Antonelli *et al*. (2016, 689) states that the way in which the artifacts were described in the catalogue was also a form of censorship, as it chose to ignore the sexualised contents of the secret museum in the descriptive texts and engravings. In 1871, Famin published a book concerning the Secret

Cabinet and its contents and in the introduction came to the defence of the decision to include the objects, which had been deemed problematic, as a service to scholarship and as a method for reinforcing the moral superiority of Catholicism (Fisher and Langlands; 2015, 93, 94). The collection then underwent many changes over the next few decades, mostly to its detriment, and was closed again in 1931 during the fascist period (Pozzi *et al*.; 1984, 51). It was then reopened in 1972, however, it was incomplete with many previously displayed artifacts missing (*Ibid*.). The collection, at that time, was composed of various erotic objects;

> "Black and red-figure vases; of frescoes and mosaics with erotic scenes; of *ithyphallic* statuettes in terracotta, bronze, or marble; of divinities, fauns, dwarfs and grotesque caricatures; and of objects of everyday life (such as mirrors, oil-lamps, braziers) and cult, such as *tintinnabula* with phalli and bells" (Pozzi *et al*.; 1984, 51, 52).

It was not until 2000 that the collection was formally reopened to the public and that all the artefacts became available for the public to view, although, there were still some restrictions imposed (Tyburczy, 2016, 26; Antonelli *et al*., 2016, 687). Since 2005, the collection is now kept in a room formally called the *Gabinetto Segreto* "Secret Cabinet" (Antonelli *et al*.; 2016 689). The fact that the objects are still isolated, housed in their own section, maintains their status as "obscene" (Fisher and Langlands; 2011, 313). Fisher and Langlands (2011; 303) state that the secret museum, by purposefully encouraging the audience to reflect on the history and the contents of the exhibition, illustrates two opposing cultures, the sexually liberal ancient Romans and the more restrictive nature of society since the objects discovery, and poses the question of where the visitor places themselves within this spectrum.

Today, the Secret Cabinet is described by the Museum as such:

> "This section was created to gather together material of an erotic nature, then considered immoral, found mainly at the Vesuvius sites. The display includes artefacts from the pre-Roman era, frescos from private houses and brothels (known as lupanars) of Pompeii, and a wide assortment of phallic amulets of various appearance in different

> materials. Of particular interest are the Pan and the Goat from the Villa of Papyri at Herculaneum, the bikini-clad Venus and an ivory statue from central Asia that can be traced to a goddess of fertility, found in a house at Pompeii." (National Archaeological Museum of Naples; 2016, 25).

The Secret Cabinet exhibition today, thematically groups material in line with their location in Pompeii and Herculaneum (Levin-Richardson; 2011 325). The decor of each section mirrors each of these locations, providing the original context informing the viewer of their correct position in the city (*Ibid*.). The route that the curator intended for the visitor is illustrated in the space with small arrows indicating the path to take through the thematic rooms starting with domestic spaces, then gardens, then brothels and banqueting contexts, and ending with streets (*Ibid*.). Most prominent within the collection today are the frescoes, but they are also exhibited with statuary and small finds (*Ibid*.), and some of these frescoes and small finds depict sex workers. Throughout the exhibition, there are didactic plaques in firstly Italian and then English which provide information on the role of sexuality within Roman culture and society (*Ibid*.). Roman curators and art historians frequently label any mortal Roman woman depicted semi-nude or nude as whores, regardless of other factors; such as setting or context of the image (Strong; 2016, 118, 119), this is evident within the Secret Museum at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and it is those objects, labelled this way, that will be analysed within this article.

4 The Roman Sex Worker

4.1 The Life of the Roman Meretrix

Today in academia the term sex worker is the most frequently used in order to express the agency of the woman herself (Schwartz; 2017, 9). Within modern Euro-American society, any term that is used to refer to a promiscuous woman comes tied with negative connotations (Strong; 2016, 11). The same can also be said during the Roman period; and the understanding of the terminology used in reference to Roman sex workers is key to understanding their position within society as well as their perception by others (Strong; 2016; 10).

Meretrix is the term most frequently used during the Roman period for sex workers (McCoy, 2006, 177; Olson, 2006, 193; Hubrankova, 2014, 8, 12) which comes from the Latin, *mereo* to earn (Flemming; 1999, 40). It was a term used frequently by Cicero in his court speeches as well as in comedic plays, especially those by Plautus (McCoy, 2006, 178; Duncan, 2008, 257; James, 2006, 225, 226). Strong (2016, 4) uses the term *meretrix* (whore) as a woman who specifically exchanged sex for money, however, he then states that *meretrix* later became a term used to refer to a woman with economical autonomy and who was unrestricted due to the lack of ties to any man. Chrystal (2017) states that a *meretrix* enjoyed sexual freedom but that it was attached with social stigma. Roman sex workers were looked down upon, sometimes even being referred to as *infames* (the notorious) (Glazebrook and Tsakirgis; 2016, 174). This shows that, as with the term "whore" today, the word *meretrix* was attached to a woman who was not constricted by patriarchal values but expressed their own agency with their body. Some Roman texts used *meretrix* interchangeably with *scortum*, however, *scortum* is more associated with sex workers of lower status with *meretrix* acting as a more general term for sex workers (Strong; 2016, 11). The Roman "whore" was seen as a selfish woman who prioritised herself over concepts such as the supportive wife or mother (Strong; 2016, 6), an idea which has continued ever since within Western society. The idea of a woman's worth being linked to

whom she is married or her societal value being linked to her ability to procreate is one which prevails in contemporary society, and is a concept that is still being fought against within popular media as well as academia (Bernard; 1975, 10). Myerowitz (1992; 151) states that sex, both in contemporary society and in ancient Rome, is perceived as “women’s business”, due to the feminine biological processes of pregnancy and birth. However, when it becomes sex work, the focus then turns to the pleasure of the patron.

Within Roman society, both Flemming (1999; 41) and McGinn (2003; 170) argue that there was no place for the idea of the high-class, educated courtesan or *hetaira* so prevalent within Greek writing and art, who provided entertainment and intellectual discourse as well as sex for the elite men at the symposium (Strong; 2016, 5). Romans practised what might be considered perversions in contemporary society without acknowledging them as such (Varone; 2000, 9). However, Strong (2016, 6) describes the *meretrix* as:

> “both theoretically ostracised and ubiquitous insiders ... they played both inherently subordinate roles as sexual objects and potentially dominant roles as economically independent agents”.

Within literature surrounding Pompeii, discussions of the numbers and locations of brothels and the locations were sex workers were present is frequent (McGinn, 2006, 161; Glazebrook and Tsakirgis, 2016, 118, 170). Ray Laurence (1994, 73) states that the sale of sex was restricted to parts of Pompeii where society's elite women and children would not encounter it. However, it is expressed that sex work within Pompeii was necessary for maintaining social order, with the respectable women, *matronae*, placed at the top of society and the *meretrix* at the bottom (McGinn; 2006, 171).

However, it is always important not to view the life of a sex worker, at any point in history, through rose-tinted glasses or to glamourise the lifestyles lived by those women. Strong (2016; 14) states that in contemporaneous sources, such as poetry and comedic writings, *meretrices* were represented, falsely in her opinion, as freelance sex workers who worked profitably

without male supervision. Most Roman women were under the control of their fathers or husbands, and although most *meretrices* were not subject to this, they were still mainly slaves or freedwomen with obligations to their patrons and their procurers (*Ibid*.). The concept of the Greek hetaira, a courtesan with education and certain privileges, is touted by some scholars, such as Clarke, as existing with Roman culture, however, in reality there is no representation of such sex workers within literature or art (Strong; 2016, 134).

Flemming (1999, 40) states the importance within academia of moving away from the writing about sex work within the Roman period, only as a way of understanding the history of men's sexual preferences or of the history of men making women sexual objects within society. There is also the difficulty of a lone male point of view when studying classical texts written about sex workers, as there are very few texts written by women and none by women who worked as sex workers (Lewis; 2002, 99).

4.2 Literature surrounding art depicting meretrix

Many examples of erotic art have been found which date to the Roman period, however, the most prominent example within literature are the findings from Pompeii. The depictions during the Roman period differ considerably from the earlier Greek traditions and reflect a more restrictive opinion regarding sex workers. The depictions are heterosexual with an erotic ambience rather than the vivid orgies of sympotic pottery (Myerowitz; 1992, 138). The most prominent depictions from Pompeii are the *tabellae*, the frescoes and paintings depicting erotic scenes (*Ibid*.). These erotic paintings were frequently found in brothels but also in locations such as the home or on the street (Glazebrook and Tsakirgis; 2016, 173). However, erotic themes were also found on terracotta figures and lamps, small bronze household utensils, as well as sculpture (Johns, 1982, 117; Varone, 2000, 57).

During the time of the excavation of artworks depicting sex workers, in the late 18th and early 19th century: the finding of which created the term "pornography" meaning "pictures of

whores", any woman depicted partaking in a sexual act or in partial or full nudity was labelled a sex worker (Strong, 2016, 19, 118, 141; Myerowitz, 1992, 138; McCoy, 2006, 197). This categorisation of women persisted through academic interpretations of the artwork throughout the 20th century and is still present in some scholarly work in the 21st century (Strong, 2016, 119; Kilmer, 1993, 159; Warren, 1973, 97). Otto Brendel (1970; 62-69) suggests that the paintings of *meretrices* were meant to be observed as part of a series that was accompanied with text. Strong (2016; 118) states that the analyses of Roman erotic art are often affected by the prejudices and biases of the 20th century, for example, Roman erotic art being made solely for the purpose of the male gaze (Myerowitz; 1992, 148), ignoring the sexuality of women. Moreover, that the relevant social context of the art has not been applied, but, that of the view of modern scholars (Strong; 2016, 119). This means that some modern scholars do not take into account the differences between the contemporary view of women, sex, and sex workers and the views of Roman society. But instead, these scholars often apply their own opinions, or even prejudices, whether knowingly or not, to their assessment of such art. Therefore, when assessing the purpose of, and reasoning behind Roman erotic art; it is important to have an understanding of the role of women, as well as sex workers, within Roman society at the time of the arts production. Strong (2016; 15) states that any discussion of representations of *meretrices*, both positive and negative, must include whether or not the woman possessed agency over her life.

If the categories of nudity and taking part in sexual acts are discounted as a method of determining whether or not a woman is a *meretrix*, then other factors may be applied. Strong (2016; 119, 120) expresses the importance of considering the physical context of the art, the way in which the figure is portrayed, and the activities, not just of the woman, that are featured in the artwork. Varone (2000, 45) states that at Roman banquets nude girls would act as servers and objects illustrating this have been found which indicates a link between sexual pleasures and feasting at banquets. The paintings of Pompeii depicting sex workers have most frequently been found within brothels, Baths, and private, elite homes (Strong; 2016, 121). It is thought that those located within Baths or brothels may have served as a menu of sorts, advertising the

activities offered within; or illustrating the experience or prowess of those that worked there (Levin-Richardson, 2011, 321; Strong, 2016, 121). However, the finite number of sexual positions and activities depicted may suggest that the idea of the *menu* might not be as true (Levin-Richardson; 2011, 321). In many of these paintings, the women seems to take an active role indicating passion and dominance, which may have spoken for the agency of the *meretrix* within her work. However, this desire has been interpreted by some scholars as indicating that the women depicted must be sex workers for them to be depicted enjoying sex (Strong, 2016, 128).

The way in which a woman was dressed during the Roman period, and still today, signified the woman's rank, status, and morality (Olson; 2006, 189). Both prostitutes and adulteresses were identifiable from their chosen clothing, the toga (Olson; 2006, 192). Roman sex workers were meant to wear yellow togas as a distinguishing feature during comedic performances (Strong, 2016, 132; Olson, 2006, 195). However, Orson (2006; 195) states that the only surviving representation of such a toga is a written description of a statue of a teenage, virginal heroine named Cloelia. Literary sources illustrate that sex workers wore clothing that varied according to their hierarchy within the profession, from togas, elegant makeup and clothing of the more popular sex workers, to complete nudity which indicated the lowest kind of sex worker (Olson; 2006, 195, 197). Some sex workers would wear foreign headwear in order to make themselves stand out from the crowd thus attracting customers (Olson; 2006, 195). However, Olson states that there is "no visual evidence for the dress of the Roman prostitute" (2006, 195). The type of intercourse depicted in the art, is also not a clear cut indication as to whether the woman is a sex worker (Strong; 2016, 137; Kilmer, 1993, 33). In addition, there are only a fixed number of positions possible for sexual intercourse, due to the anatomy of the human body, and this is evident in the examples from the paintings (Myerowitz; 1992, 153). Strong (2016; 137) states that fellatio may be the one indicator that the woman depicted was a prostitute, as it was seen as shameful and only an act a prostitute or slave would perform.

Myerowitz suggests a more egalitarian interpretation of Roman sex scenes, that they are not created from a hierarchical, male gaze, but that they objectify both women and men, which she deems an inevitable part of human socialisation (Richlin; 1992, xxi). She takes a feminist theory approach to her analysis of the *tabellae* from Pompeii, emphasising the importance of reflection within oneself when viewing and understanding art retrospectively (Myerowitz; 1992, 149). Roman erotic painting may have didactic meanings, however, these meanings do not include rape and the scenes depicted are free from sadism, which is evident in modern pornography (Myerowitz; 1995, 151, 152) and well as in Greek erotica (Lewis; 2002, 124). Kappeler (2013; iii) refers to an analogy from the theory of realism, stating that sexism is present in all cultural representation, and that one should be aware of who is holding the mirror and what angle they are holding it from. The sexist representation within pornography is as much constructed by a sexist society as it itself constructs (*Ibid*). Myerowitz (1995; 154) states that in Roman erotic painting women are sex objects but so are men. This is a departure from the idea that any depiction of a woman naked or participating in intercourse should be identified as a sex worker; but acknowledges that in these scenes there is more than just the woman depicted, there is also the man. Therefore, whether or not the curator of the Secret Cabinet is aware of these varying opinions on the categorisation of sex workers, and whether they choose to acknowledge or ignore them, it is important for this study to be aware of this academic discourse surrounding the Roman sex worker when discussing their display within the museum context.

However, as this thesis focuses on the art and the manner of its display within the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, for the purpose of this thesis an artwork which the museum has deemed as depicting a *meretrix* or sex worker will be treated as such. Though these categorisations made by the museum and curator may or may not be accurate, according to the academic views previously discussed, it is the way in which they have classified the artworks and which they have chosen to portray to the audience. Therefore, these are the artworks that will be analysed, though during the analysis there will be an awareness of the various academic positions of who can be considered a sex work within Roman art.

5 The Erotic on Display in Museums: its role in creating discourse and the canon

Museums are a physical metaphor for the ways in which people today view the past (Gaimster; 2000, 10). The ways in which erotic art have been displayed affect the way in which they are perceived, and it is important to recognise the role of the museum in influencing public opinion. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) states that:

> "Objects in museums are subject to curatorial procedures of registration, documentation, and classification which have, in the main, resulted in their allocation to a fixed physical and conceptual position within the collections, which in turn has tended to generate a fixed meaning".

This power of the museum is especially clear in the example of erotic art. The effect of viewing erotic material in a public domain has been under discussion for the past 200 years (Fisher and Langlands; 2015, 96). Tyburczy (2016; xiv) states that museum exhibitions which display diverse sexualities often become contentious and can become political weapons. This includes depictions of sexual acts as well as subjects that go against social norms: this may include anything not deemed heteronormative, fetishes, and sex work. Though the audience to the museum may not be directly aware of the historical context of the artworks, each individual visiting the museum carries their preconceived ideas regarding erotic art, whether aware or unaware. This is known as the individual's *habitus*, a theory by Pierre Bourdieu (2017).

> "To study the history of sexual display, therefore, is to pay attention to the challenges of presenting all kinds of controversial forms of knowledge in museums, in particular the display of issues that are considered anathema to public discourse". (Tyburczy; 2016, xvi/xvii).

The more inclusive approach to the history of sex work and the art depicting it can have implications on those who work in the industry today (Adams and Frances; 2003, 49). Sex is a sensitive subject for public discussion among many societies (Farberow; 2017, 4) and it covers

the taboo topics of female genitalia as well as menstruation and contraception (Adams and Frances; 2003, 55). Some of the issues which museums now face include what kind of material culture can be used to represent an honest history of sex and sex work, and, how can these objects be contextualised (*Ibid*.). The public perception of sex is that it is private and can fit into categories of either the moral or immoral, rather than being perceived as part of the economics or politics of society, or scholarly interest (Adams and Frances, 2003, 58; Gaimster; 2000, 15). However, using the term sex worker rather than prostitute makes them more visible in society highlighting their employment situation (*Ibid*.). If museums and galleries also make this distinction it can allow sex workers to be viewed in a more inclusive light rather than as something scandalous or sordid (*Ibid*.). Therefore, it is important for erotic art and art depicting sex workers and associated with them is displayed within a museum context to clearly highlight the "work" aspect related to their lives.

Museums, in one of their roles, organise and display objects and in doing so they create structures and a narrative which provides the visitor with an understanding of those objects (Tyburczy; 2016, 6). Up until the late 20th century, all objects from ancient cultures which were considered to be inappropriate were classified as "obscene" and, unless they were deemed to be of significant artistic merit they were locked away in special collections (Johns, 1982, 9; Bull, 2017, 226). The exclusion or inclusion of certain subjects or groups within the narrative of museums has implications for how such groups, like sex workers, are regarded (Adams and Frances; 2003, 50). The choice to segregate and hide material which was deemed "obscene" has distorted the public perception of such material and any change in view will, and is taking time to occur (Johns; 1982, 9). The display of objects or art associated with sex, precisely present the ideal of sexual life and the values of a specific time and location (Tyburczy; 2016, 10). Today, it is known that sexual customs and conventions vary according to cultures and this aspect of human behaviour is a significant cultural indicator just as important as all other aspects of societies (Johns; 1982, 9). Another role of the museum is an entertaining leisure activity and by displaying erotic artworks and objects, the museum provides a casual context in which there is space for discussion and thoughts on sex (Tyburczy; 2016, 10). Since the initial

discovery of sexual and erotic artefacts and artworks, discussed in the following section, museums and similar institutions face the issues: moral, political, and logistical, of how to display sexual material (Tyburczy; 2016, 26). There are also different challenges faced by local and national museums when exhibiting erotic art, art and objects associated with sex workers (Adams and Frances, 2003, 62; Sender, 2013, 2528). With national museums fitting into the transnational contexts of the sex industry, both in the past and present, and this can create additional pressures when ensuring the story illustrated by the museum narrative provides a more inclusive picture. Adams and Frances (2003; 64) state that if a museum approaches these types of objects and artworks associated with the sex industry as a history of an occupation, such as with the Roman sex workers on display at the Secret Cabinet, it recognises sex workers as citizens within a society and as an important part of the collective past.

6 Bronze vessel-handle with an erotic scene

The first example from the Secret Cabinet of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples to be analysed is a bronze vessel-handle dated to the 1st Century CE (Johns; 1982, 28). The handle depicts a seated man during *a tergo* copulation with a standing woman (See Fig. 9). There is a blanket which covers the bench that the man is seated on. Behind the couple, there are leaves depicted, this intimates that the act may be occurring outside or in a courtyard. With the *a tergo*, it is unknown whether anal or vaginal intercourse is taking place, but the use of anal intercourse as a way of sex workers protecting themselves from pregnancy is thought to have been common (Johns; 1982, 134).

The vessel-handle is displayed in the “Brothels and Banqueting” section of the Secret Cabinet, located on the right bottom of three shelves, with three other objects in the display cabinet located on the right of the room (See Figs. 3 and 10). On the shelf is a small placard describing the function, material, and the date of the object; “vessel-handle, bronze, 1st century AD”. The whole cabinet is toplit, thus ensuring that no one object is highlighted over any other which encourages the audience to observe each artifact in turn and consider them of equal importance with regards to their art historical value and social significance during the period. Therefore, the curator conveys the message to the audience that an artwork depicting a sex worker, such as this vessel-handle, is to be considered as equal to other items within the case. However; the object is placed on the bottom shelf of the display case, relegating it and reducing its significance to the audience. Because the visitor will naturally focus on artworks that are at eye-level making them more easily observed. The remainder of the artefacts positioned in the display case are extremely phallocentric, and with the inclusion of this piece in the display case, the focus of the observer is directed onto the male depicted on the vessel-handle rather than the female. Therefore, rather than considering the sex worker when observing the vessel-handle it is more likely that the client and his importance within Roman society will be considered by the audience with the meretrix appearing as a secondary afterthought. If there was the possibility of rearranging the display of this object, the curator may consider a case

which displayed this object on its own as an example of a sex worker depicted on a household object. However, another recommendation may be to display the object with others which focus more on the female rather than a series of phallocentric objects.

The sexual intercourse depicted is *a tergo*, the favourite position among Romans (Younger, 2004; Johns, 1982, 134). However, it is also deemed to be a submissive position and less egalitarian, with 20th century writings, such as Foucault, emphasising the power of the penetrator and the subordination of the penetrated (Younger, 2004; Strong, 2016, 137). Sutton (1992; 25) states that *a tergo* illustrates a woman being used impersonally with no emotional relationship between the couple. Yet, there are accounts from the period labelling it *leania* (the lioness), providing more agency to the woman during the act (Younger; 2004). The inclusion of an *a tegro* depiction within the exhibition is to be expected, as they are so frequent and illustrate the everyday habits of the Roman citizens (Johns; 1982, 134). However, as Johns (1982; 134) states this position is more comfortable for men, illustrating that the man's pleasure is most important and the woman's comfort is disregarded. Though, this opinion does not account for individual preferences of women or sex workers. The image of the sex worker promoted the curator to display it within the exhibition, and though the image may have had a negative impact of the agency of a sex worker during the time it was made, in this context it portrays the struggles that sex workers face and allows them to tell their story. Within the text describing this artwork the woman is referred to as a "prostitute" rather than as a sex worker. The curator's linguistic choice regrettably negates some of the positive affirmations and removes agency from the sex worker depicted as (Schwartz, 2017, 9; Dennis, 2008, 12). However, this is consistently the term used throughout the exhibition, and is preferable to the curator using terms such as "whore". Thus, here the curator is still making an active choice to recognise the sex worker as an individual rather than an object. In future, with the possibility of updating the exhibition texts, though this is dependant on factors that the curator must contend with such a funding, there should be consideration of changing the texts to use the more inclusionary term of sex worker.

Figure 9 - Bronze Vessel Handle with an Erotic Scene, Pompeii, 1st Century CE. Located in "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

Figure 10 - Bronze vessel handle (left) in "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum of Naples

7 Marble Relief of Lovers

The next example from the Secret Cabinet is a small marble relief that was discovered in Pompeii and dates to the mid-1st Century CE. The relief depicts a heterosexual couple during sexual intercourse (See Fig. 11). The man is lying down on top of a blanket, lifting himself up slightly on one arm with the other arm resting behind his head, and with one foot crossed over the other. The woman is depicted on top of him with one leg astride and one leg resting on his chest, one hand resting on her own knee and one hand resting on the knee of the man. The woman hovers over the man with his genitalia visible, indicating that coitus has not yet fully commenced. The man's face is focused on their joining, while the woman looks to her right and away from him. The woman depicted astride a man is the second most common seen position in Roman erotic art (Younger; 2004), also known as *Venus pendula* (Varone; 2000, 59). This position is seen as more sexually dominant, as the woman can control her own sexual stimulation and requires her active cooperation during coitus (Younger, 2004; Johns, 1982, 137). The woman is also physically positioned above the man, making it a visual representation of the power of a woman over a man. Particularly relevant in the way in which sex can change relationships of power and invert the status quo, this image shows a woman in control of the interaction. Therefore, it makes its inclusion within the exhibition important as it provides a different narrative for part of the experience as a female sex worker. The curator, here, has ensured that multiple narratives around the agency of the Roman sex worker are being conveyed to the audience. The sex worker is not just a passive object used by the client but here an active participant in control of her own satisfaction as well as the man's.

In the Secret Cabinet, this artwork is located in the "Brothels and Banqueting" section of the exhibition, prominently on the side wall to the right of the frescoes (See Fig. 12). This is the only artwork displayed there, a decision by the curator that highlights the importance of the piece and influences the focus of the visitor. This choice ensures that a piece, which portrays the sex worker in a positive manner, a manner which the audience may not have been exposed to previously, is actively considered by the audience. The piece is also hung on a cream wall and

downlit, with the neutral background allowing the artwork to become the focal point with the lighting further emphasising the relief. Again, this is a display choice by the curator that influences the visitors, their emotions, and their knowledge. Throughout the exhibition, and with this example, the brief description of the artworks states: what it is, its material and its date: relief, made of marble, and 1st Century CE. For this piece, the label is located on a freestanding mounting inside the rope barrier dividing the room and is encompassed within the information regarding the frescoes. The text that accompanies the “Brothels and Banqueting” section provides context information for the objects but does not explain in detail each individual one (Grobman; 2010). Within the text describing this artwork the woman is referred to as a “prostitute” rather than as a sex worker. The curator’s linguistic choice by using a derogatory term removes agency from the sex worker reducing her to an object rather than being regarded as a human being (Schwartz, 2017, 9; Dennis, 2008, 12). Though, as previously stated, this term is viewed in a more positive manner by the general public than “whore” yet the audience’s habitus means that that each individual will have their own preconceived notions associated with the term prostitute. Other than the recommendation previously stated with regards to the change of language, the various display techniques implemented by the curator enable an interesting and positive perception of the Roman sex worker with the ability to change the habitus of the audience with regards to their opinion of the meretrix.

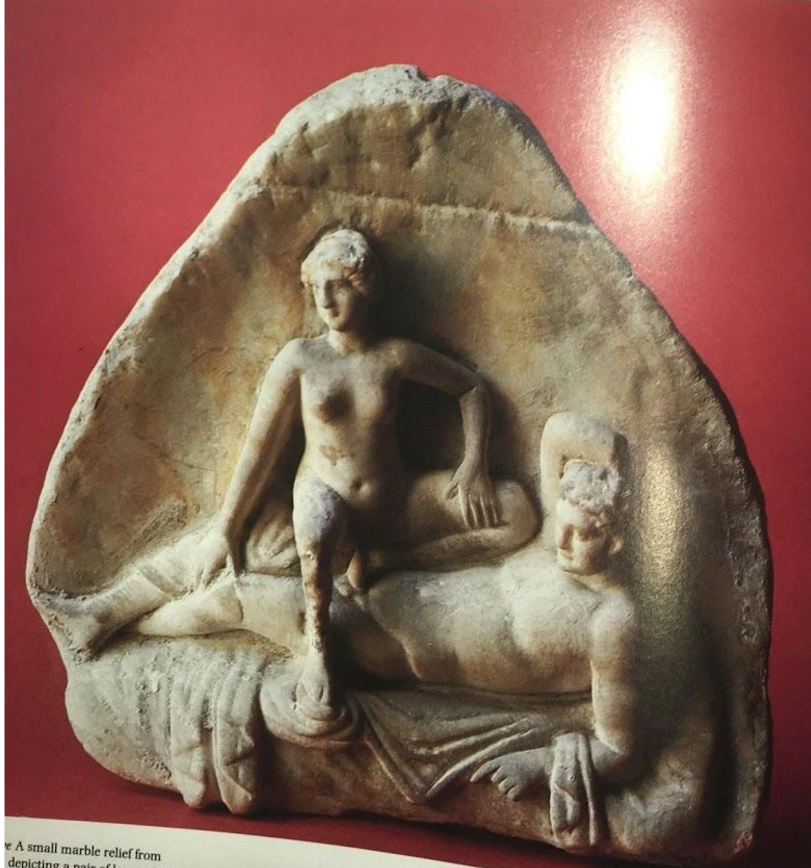

Figure 11 - A small marble relief, Mid-1st Century CE, Pompeii. Located in the "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum Naples

Figure 12 - Marble relief in the "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum Naples

8 A Roman wall-painting of lovers

This example is one of the wall paintings described as “lovers”, dated to the 1st Century CE (Johns; 1982, 135) (See Fig. 13). Wherein a heterosexual couple are engaged in face-to-face intercourse, the woman positioned on the edge of a blanket covered bed with her legs placed over the shoulders of the man, one hand is placed on the bed, the other lifted in the air. The man is standing up and grasping the woman by the hips. This position means that the thighs of the man are visible in the painting (Johns; 1982, 136). Johns (1982; 136) states that this method of congress is also more comfortable for the man than the woman, as with *a tergo*, as the woman’s rib-cage can be compressed, making breathing laborious, and the angle of penetration can cause pain. However, the man standing up rather than being horizontal on the bed does lessen these factors (*Ibid*.).

The fresco is located in the “Brothels and Banqueting” section of the Secret Cabinet on the left wall, situated on the fourth and final column on the right, bottom row (See Fig. 14). The fresco is hung on a cream wall with a wide, brown frame and then framed again by, the very Roman in style, red stenciling on the painted wall, which helps to highlight and separate the frescoes, enabling the visitor to focus on each individual example (See Fig. 14). Therefore, although many of the paintings are of a similar style and content, this curatorial choice ensures that the visitor considers the Roman sex worker depicted in each painting as a separate individual. This conveys the information that many women were part of this profession during the Roman period and helps to educate the visitor of the scale of the sex trade and of its prevalence at that time. The fresco is also individually toplit, further reinforcing this information.

The fresco is the only illustration of this sexual position in the Secret Cabinet, however, the fresco is competing for audience attention amongst eight others and the painting is removed from the visitor due to the distance created by the rope barrier in the “Brothels and Banqueting” room. This use of space to create a physical barrier between the artwork and the visitor can reinforce that the audience are removed, both in time period and understanding,

from the life of the Roman sex worker. Therefore, this curatorial decision may not help to mould or change the visitor's knowledge or understanding of the meretrix. If a future redesign of the space within the "Brothels and Banqueting" room of the Secret Cabinet were possible, the removal of this physical barrier would be beneficial. However, the barrier may be in place to protect the artworks themselves which would make altering the display more problematic. Its placement of one among many and it being set back create an emotional distance and, therefore, the visitor cannot fully engage with the artwork or the sex worker depicted. As with the rest of the depictions of nude women in the Secret Cabinet, this woman is described as a "prostitute" rather than a sex worker, the curator again removing agency from the woman depicted by using this term this outmoded method of nomenclature (Schwartz; 2017, 9).

Figure 13 - Roman wall painting of lovers, 1st Century CE, Pompeii. Located in the "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum Naples

Figure 14 - Fresco depicting heterosexual couple during intercourse (right) in in the "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum Naples

9 Lamp with fellatio scene

This artefact from the Secret Cabinet is a Roman lamp, made from clay, with a fellatio scene, dated to the 1st Century CE (Johns; 1982, 137, 139). The scene depicts a heterosexual couple in which the man reclines on a bed, wearing a toga that has been lifted up to his stomach with one hand, while his other hand holds the back of the woman's head gripping her hair (See Fig. 15). The woman, is nude and crouches on top of the bed, her arms either side of the man's leg with her mouth open, positioned above the erect penis of the man. Though a very common occurrence in Greek art, the depiction of fellatio is rarer in the Roman period (Johns; 1982, 137, 139). During the Roman period, there was deemed to be two types of oral-penis stimulation, the Romans distinguished between *fellatio* (performed by the mouth of the penetrated) and *irrumation* (performed by the penis of the penetrator) (Younger; 2004). Therefore, this illustrates who is thought to have control in the act (*Ibid*.). Strong (2016; 137) expresses that literary sources, contemporary to the time of the lamps production, argue that oral-penis stimulation is the most shameful act and that only a *meretrix* would have performed it. This view combined with the forceful hand of the man depicted, indicating *irrumation* (the rape of the mouth), strongly illustrate the power-relationship between the man and woman and indicate that she was indeed a sex worker. This image of a sex worker portrays a blunt reality of the life of a Roman sex worker. Here is a woman performing an act, possibly against her will, and being treated and portrayed as an object to be used by a man. Its inclusion by the curator ensures that the harsh realities of the life of a Roman sex worker are on display, enabling visitors to understand more clearly the darker aspects of the Roman sex trade. This artwork may change that habitus of the visitor and the preconceived ideas of the choices that Roman women and sex workers were able to make during their lives. The choice of the curator to include this artwork, though its image is emotionally charged, is commendable.

The lamp is displayed in the "Brothels and Banqueting" section of the Secret Cabinet. It is displayed in the wooden and glass case on the right side of the room, on the left bottom area of

three shelves (See Fig. 3). The fact that the case is wooden emphasises the age of the lamp, conveying to the visitor that the lamp, and those depicted on it, are from a society and time that is far removed from the one in which they live. This may impact upon the reception of the art depicting female sex workers, with the visitor perceiving the female sex worker as part of an object rather than as an individual. The text provided with the lamp states the basic information, allowing the visitor to draw their own conclusions about how the lamp was once used and perceived when first made and used. The object is toplit by the light used for the entire display case, this means that the lamp is viewed together with the other objects instead of being singled out. Therefore, the visitor will consider this artwork to be of equal importance with regards to its art historical value and social significance during the period. In so doing, the curator conveys the message to the audience that an artwork depicting a sex worker being treated in such a way is as common as the other artworks and depictions within the display case. This can be understood in two ways: firstly that this kind of treatment of sex workers was very common and their wide-scale mistreatment was just part of their everyday experiences and should so be dismissed, or that these women's suffering was so prevalent and must be acknowledged and that it is also important for the audience to be aware of this. Therefore, it is unclear whether this display technique would create a sympathetic audience to the Roman sex worker or, conversely, an indifferent view of their suffering. Here, the addition of a specific text in association with the object, though still in the display cabinet, would be helpful to offer insight into the mistreatment of Roman sex workers and emphasise the hardships of these women to further educate the audience and influence their habitus with regards to the meterices.

Figure 15 - Roman Lamp with a fellatio scene, 1st Century CE. Located in the "Brothels and Banqueting" Section of the Secret Cabinet, National Archaeological Museum Naples

Conclusion

The Secret Cabinet of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and its collection have faced many trials over the two centuries since the discovery of the items at Pompeii. The fact that the objects themselves still exist and have not been destroyed is a wonder. That they are even on display now within the museum is also highly comendable due to the fact that many of the public who visit today are still shocked and scandalised by the erotic art (Levin-Richardson; 2011, 324). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that, however the artwork is displayed within the Secret Cabinet, its inclusion in a collection and its display to the public is incredibly important. Just the act of inclusion itself, illustrates to the public and to other museums, that the information provided by the objects and the representation of those depicted, including the female sex workers, is too important to be censored.

However, as an exemplar for the display of art which features Roman sex workers, it is important to analyse all of the display methods and techniques used by the curator of the Secret Cabinet to discern whether these curatorial choices do indeed impact upon the way in which the public perceives the sex worker. This reveals that for there to be a change in which the way a Roman sex worker is perceived by a vistor, and thus engendering a change in their habitus, it must be efeceted through the curator and their methods of display. The curatorial choices are the primary influence as to whether the sex worker herself is acknowledged and considered, regardless of whether that is in a positive or negative manner. The analysis of each of these methods has revealed that they can either draw attention to or direct attention away from the artworks, and therefore the sex workers depicted. The use of painting and colour, within the themes of the rooms, helps to provide a context for the audience. It creates an environment in which the visitor can place the sex worker within their original context and thus helps to create an understanding both of their lives and of them as individuals. The lighting highlights the marble relief, yet, conversely it detracted from lamp and the vessel handle. The display of lots of artworks and objects grouped together help to provide a broad narrative for

the erotic art of Pompeii and the lives of sex workers, however, regretably individual pieces get lost in this display which means that so too do the individual stories. The issues of language occur frequently throughout the exhibition, with there being little information provided in general and the use of the term "prostitute" throughout.

The example of the lamp is very important, as it illustrates the often difficult life of the Roman sex worker. Therefore, the story can help the audience to see the Roman sex worker as an individual and to create empathy for their often burdensome situations. This may then filter out into the public conciousness and so help to improve overall the public perception of Roman sex workers, because the museum not only impacts on a macro scale through it being a world renowned institution; but also in that the visitors to the museum are international, coming from all over the world, thus being able to share and discuss information that they have gained from their visit to the Secret Cabinet globally. This exchange of views may occur either in interpersonal discussions or even from the sharing of information via Social Media platforms. This further reinforces the message that museums function in society as a place to disseminate knowledge and also have the ability to change the view of the public.

Overall, it must be acknowledged that not every single piece within an exhibition can be highlighted as the most important or individually displayed, this is theoretically impossible even without consideration of exhibition size and space, not to mention cost. The display within the Secret Cabinet provides a space in which the story surrounding erotic art and the sex workers of Pompeii can be told to an audience today. Though there may indeed be budgeting restrictions, and there was little mention of changes occurring in the Secret Cabinet in their most recent funding report (National Archaeological Museum; 2016), if changes to the Secret Cabinet could occur, I believe that the most important area to focus on and change would be an updating of the language used with the exhibition. This would mean ensuring that the words used properly provide agency to those depicted and that sufficient information is available about the objects, as well as those depicted, and their histories. This would help to provide clear information to the audience meaning that it would be more likely to impact on their habitus. However, the

other uses of techniques provide effective illustrations of the aspects of the life of the sex worker and their inclusion within the collection sends a message to the audience, as well as other museums, that it is important to tell accurate and honest histories about all members of societies and that events and individuals should not be erased from the narrative even if it may cause a few to blush.

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