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Dangerous Perfection: Ancient Funerary Vases from Southern Italy

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In 2008, the Berlin Antikensammlung initiated a project with the J. Paul Getty Museum to conserve a group of ancient funerary vases from southern Italy. Monumental in scale and richly decorated, these magnificent vessels were discovered in hundreds of fragments in the early nineteenth century at Ceglie, near Bari. Acquired by a Bohemian diplomat, they were reconstructed in the Neapolitan workshop of Raffaele Gargiulo, who was considered one of the leading restorers of antiquities in Europe. His methods exemplify what was referred to as “une perfection dangereuse,” an approach to reassembly and repainting that made it difficult to distinguish what was ancient and what was modern.

Bringing together archival documentation and technical analyses, this volume provides a comprehensive study of the vases and their treatment from the nineteenth century up to today. In addition to lavish illustrations, two in-depth essays on the history of the vases and on Gargiulo’s work, as well as detailed conservation notes for each object, this publication also features the first English translation of Gargiulo’s original text on his understanding as to how ancient Greek vases were manufactured.

This is the companion volume to an exhibition on view at the Getty Villa, from November 19, 2014, to May 11, 2015, and then at the Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin from June 17, 2015, to June 18, 2017.

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