

*Lonely Planet: Campania Felix* is the first part of a triptych in which Susan Kooi (1988) travels to Italy, Portugal and Japan to work with various traditions of ceramic crafts. The project reflects on how artefacts signify meaning during their lifespan and are carriers of meaning for extraction in the future. Susan Kooi seeks evidence of the object's use and meaning, both real and fictitious, with the resulting stories forming a publication. This alternative travel guide accompanies the objects on view in the exhibition at MAMA (Rotterdam) and tells the tales of these artefacts that are found and made by Susan Kooi in the Italian region Campania.



**mama**

SUSAN KOOI *Lonely Planet* ~ Campania Felix



LONELY PLANET

CAMPANIA FELIX



SUSAN KOOI



LONELY PLANET

PIANETA SOLITARIO

EENZAME PLANEET

Lonely Planet ~ Campania Felix  
by Susan Kooi

With text contributions by

Hanna Bervoets  
Maurits de Bruijn  
Nathalie Hartjes  
Vincent Hunink  
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Marloes de Vries



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Ancient texts are coagulated human experiences – signs of life from the past. They testify to the thoughts, emotions, and ideas of individuals who have ever breathed and existed. Very often, we know them by name as great poets, famous thinkers, politicians, generals, and sometimes emperors.

In education and science, the acknowledged masterpieces of classical literature still play an important role. We particularly study the most famous books over and over. Ancient writers such as

Homer and Virgil, the poets of Greek tragedy, and philosophers, such as Seneca, are a constant source of inspiration. The ancient writers still have much to tell us in the twenty-first century. Their voices continue to resound generation after generation.

But what if one was not a well-known name? What if one's texts were not transcribed as faithfully and stored as those of the great? What if one has written in a

language no longer so evident for later subsequent readers? Then it is unlikely that one's thoughts will make that great leap forward.

Without bridging distances in time and place, they remain temporary and local.

For a long time, this sad fate seemed destined for the approximately ten thousand examples of graffiti found in Campanian Pompeii. The story is well known: the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 buried the town of Pompeii under ash, lava,

## Voci da lontano

I testi antichi sono un coagolato di esperienze umane. Sono dei disegni di vita dal passato. Essi testimoniano pensieri, emozioni e idee di individui che un tempo hanno respirato e vissuto. Non di rado li conosciamo per nome: grandi poeti, famosi pensatori. Politici, generali, a volte imperatori.

In materia di istruzione e scienza, i famosi capolavori della letteratura classica giocano ancora un ruolo importante. Studiamo ripetutamente soprattutto i libri più famosi. Dall'antichità abbiamo scrittori come Omero e Virgilio, i poeti della tragedia greca e i filosofi come Seneca, che costituiscono ancora una costante fonte di ispirazione. Ancora nel XXI secolo, gli autori antichi hanno molto da dire. Generazione dopo generazione, le loro voci continuano a risuonare.

Ma cosa succede se non si è stato un nome importante? Cosa succede se i tuoi testi non sono stati trascritti in modo fedele e conservati così come quelli dei grandi autori? O se hai utilizzato una lingua non familiare ai lettori posteri? Allora è improbabile che i tuoi pensieri arrivino lontano. Non riescono a superare velocemente le distanze di tempo e luogo, rimangono temporanei e locali.

Per un lungo periodo, questo triste destino sembrava esser riservato a circa diecimila graffiti ritrovati nella città campana di Pompei. La storia è nota: l'eruzione del Vesuvio del 79, la città di Pompei sepolta sotto cenere, lava e pomice, e solo nel periodo moderno la scoperta e gli scavi. Oro brillante, marmi, dipinti colorati e mosaici l'hanno vinta facilmente sui graffiti. Poiché questi erano solo "ordinari" e di solito anonimi. Saluti, maledizioni, comunicazioni o

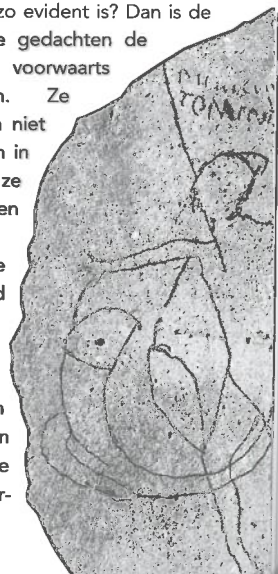
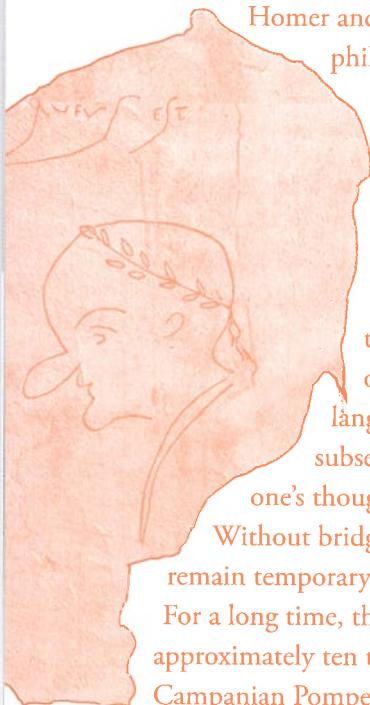
## Stemmen van ver

Oude teksten zijn gestolde menselijke ervaringen. Levenstekens uit het verleden. Ze getuigen van gedachten, emoties en ideeën van individuen die ooit hebben geademd en bestaan. Niet zelden kennen we ze bij naam: grote dichters, beroemde denkers. Politici, generaals, keizers soms.

In het onderwijs en de wetenschap spelen de erkende meesterwerken uit de klassieke literatuur nog altijd een belangrijke rol. We bestuderen vooral de beroemdste boeken telkens opnieuw. Uit de klassieke oudheid zijn schrijvers als Homerus en Vergilius, de Griekse tragediedichters en filosofen zoals Seneca een blijvende bron van bezieling. Ook in de 21ste eeuw hebben de oude schrijvers nog veel te zeggen. Generatie na generatie blijven hun stemmen weerklinken.

Maar wat als je geen grote naam bent geweest? Wat als je teksten niet zo getrouw zijn overgeschreven en bewaard zoals die van de Allergrootsten? Wat als je een taal hebt gebruikt die voor latere lezers niet meer zo evident is? Dan is de kans klein dat je gedachten de grote sprong voorwaarts kunnen maken. Ze overbruggen dan niet snel de afstanden in tijd en plaats, ze blijven tijdelijk en lokaal.

Dat droeve lot leek lange tijd weggelegd voor de ongeveer tienduizend graffiti die zijn aangetroffen in het Campanische Pompei. Het ver-



divieti, ritornelli divertenti di canzoni, barzellette, indovinelli, enigmi, a volte accompagnati da disegni abbozzati. Ma anche oscenità, perché quelle sono vecchie come il mondo.

I graffiti pompeiani sono scritti nel latino volgare, nel modo in cui la gente parlava allora. Errori di ortografia, frasi confuse, grammatica scorretta. Parole che non conosciamo dalla letteratura e che quindi non possiamo tradurre con certezza. E a peggiorare le cose, spesso non è chiaro il motivo per cui i testi sono stati scritti sui muri e una grande parte è conservata in maniera frammentaria.

Anonimi, scorretti e popolari. Spogliati di contesto e pieni di lacune. I complicati graffiti di Pompei sono stati rimossi e conservati nelle cantine dei musei. Descritti freddamente in un'illeleggibile e scientifica collezione di lavori, lontani dal grande pubblico. Anche dopo gli scavi, le tante voci di Pompei riecheggiano deboli.

Ma poi sono stati riscoperti: da archeologi ed esperti di letteratura, i quali hanno nuovamente riaperto questa fonte di vita romana. E ancora da linguisti, poeti e artisti. Il materiale di base urla interazione. Gli scienziati stanno cercando di descrivere e spiegare tutto dettagliatamente. Gli artisti rinnovano i testi in altri modi. Susan Kooi riporta in vita alcuni graffiti di Pompei nell'estraneo ambiente di una galleria olandese. Testi riportati a grandi lettere e in grassetto, su muri bianchi e istituzionali. E in questo caso tradotti, naturalmente, nel latino dei nostri giorni: l'inglese. Così facendo, Susan riempie le lacune, come solo gli artisti possono

haal is bekend: de uitbarsting van de vulkaan Vesuvius in 79, het stadje Pompeï bedolven onder as, lava en puimsteen, en pas vanaf de vroegmoderne tijd ontdekt en opgegraven.

Glanzend goud en marmor en kleurrijke schilderijen en mozaïeken wonnen het gemakkelijk van de gebruiksteksten op de muren. Want die waren maar 'alledaags' en meestal anoniem. Begroetingen, vloeken, mededelingen of verboden, grappige refrainen uit liedjes, geintjes, raadseltjes, puzzeltjes, soms met flauwe tekeningen erbij. Obsceniteiten ook, want die zijn van alle tijden.

De Pompejaanse muurteksten zijn geschreven in het volkse Latijn zoals dat toen gesproken werd. Spelfouten, verhaspelde zinnen, verkeerde grammatica. Woorden die we niet kennen uit de literatuur en dus niet met zekerheid kunnen vertalen. En tot overmaat van ramp is vaak onduidelijk waarom ze op de muren zijn gezet en is een groot deel alleen fragmentarisch bewaard.

Anoniem, fout en volks. Ontdaan van context en vol gaten. Het lastige tekstmateriaal uit Pompeï werd weggehaald en opgeborgen in kelders van musea. Kil beschreven in onleesbare, wetenschappelijke verzamelwerken, ver weg van het grote publiek. De vele stemmen uit Pompeï klonken dus ook na de opgravingen maar zwak.

Maar ze worden herontdekt. Door archeologen en letterkundigen, die deze rijke bron van Romeins leven weer aanboren. Door taalkundigen, dichters en kunstenaars. En het elementaire materiaal schreeuwt om interactie. Wetenschappers proberen alles precies te



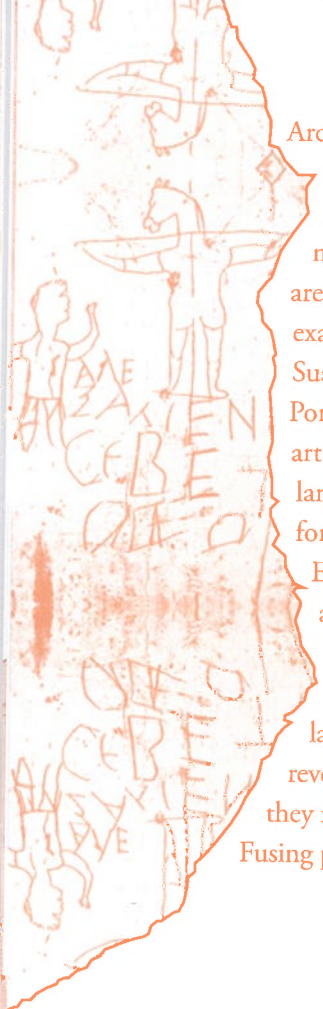
and pumice, only to be discovered and excavated in the early

modern period. Glossy gold and marble and colourful paintings and mosaics easily took precedence over the everyday texts found on the walls, because they were just 'ordinary' and usually anonymous.

Greetings, curses, communications or bans, funny refrains from songs, jokes, riddles, puzzles, sometimes with silly accompanying drawings; obscenities too, because they occur in all eras.

The Pompeian wall texts were written in the Latin then spoken by the people. Misspellings, scrambled sentences, incorrect grammar. Words that we do not know from literature and, therefore, cannot translate with certainty. And, to make matters worse, it is often unclear why the graffiti were put on the walls, and for a large part, why they have been only partly preserved.

Anonymous, erroneous, and plebeian, stripped of context, and full of holes. Pompeii's difficult text material was removed and stored in museum basements. Coldly described in unreadable, scientific collections, away from the general public. After the excavations, many voices from Pompeii resounded, but only faintly.



They are, however, being rediscovered. Archaeologists and writers, as well as linguists, poets and artists, are tapping into this rich source of Roman life. And the elementary material is screaming for interaction. Scientists are trying to describe and explain everything exactly. Artists interpret the texts in other ways. Susan Kooi brings to life some graffiti texts from Pompeii in the alienating environment of a Dutch art space, inscribed on institutional white walls in large, bold letters. And, of course, in translated form, in this case in the Latin of our times: English. In this way, she fills the empty spaces, as only artists can: in her way, using her creativity.

Through the detours of place and time, language, and form, *Lonely Planet* (Campania) reveals the thoughts of long dead Pompeians, as they may once have been. As they could have been. Fusing past and present. The ancient Pompeians are us.

farlo: con la propria forza, attingendo alla creatività.

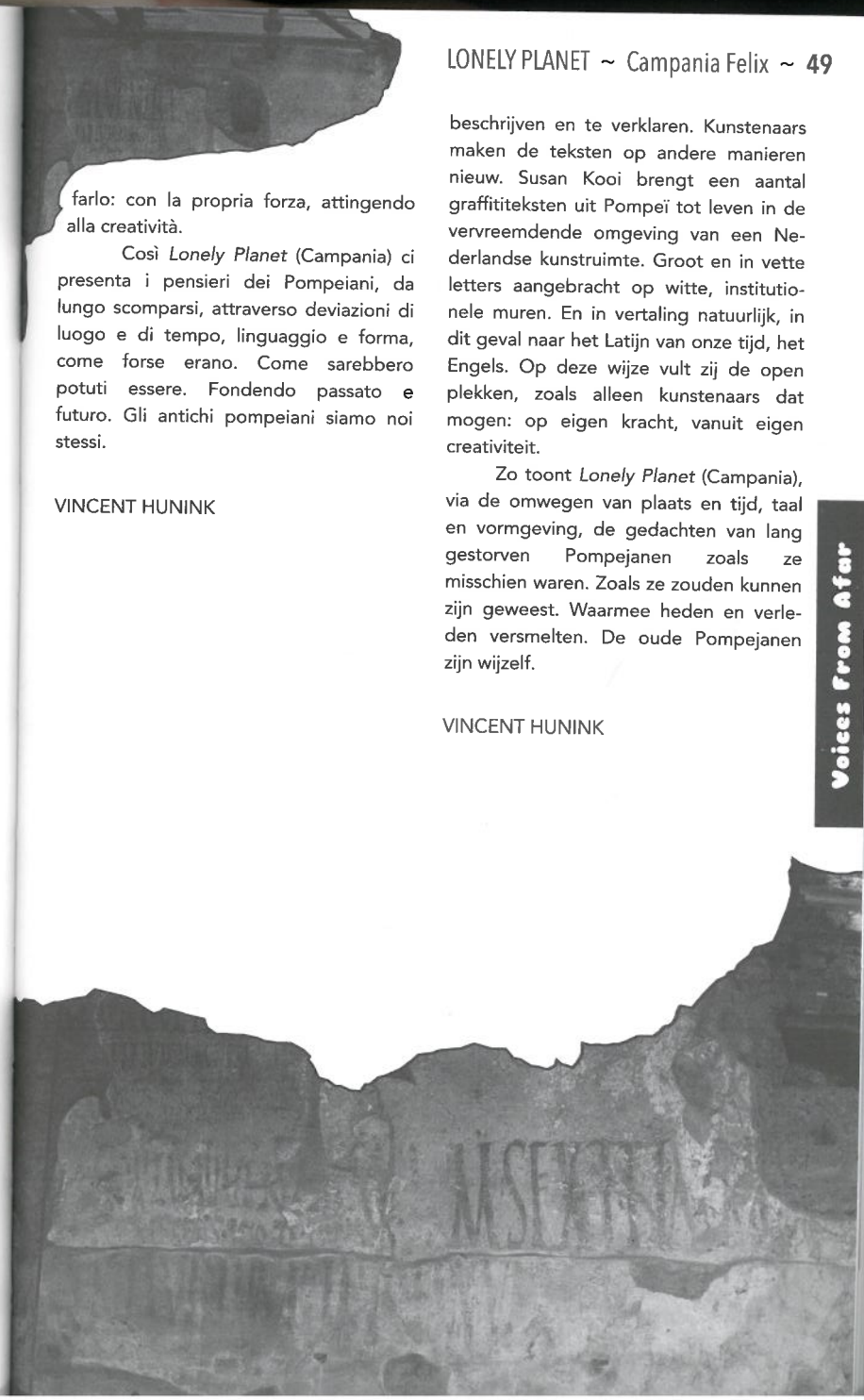
Così *Lonely Planet* (Campania) ci presenta i pensieri dei Pompeiani, da lungo scomparsi, attraverso deviazioni di luogo e di tempo, linguaggio e forma, come forse erano. Come sarebbero potuti essere. Fondendo passato e futuro. Gli antichi pompeiani siamo noi stessi.

VINCENT HUNINK

beschrijven en te verklaren. Kunstenaars maken de teksten op andere manieren nieuw. Susan Kooi brengt een aantal graffititeksten uit Pompeï tot leven in de vervreemdende omgeving van een Nederlandse kunstruimte. Groot en in vette letters aangebracht op witte, institutionele muren. En in vertaling natuurlijk, in dit geval naar het Latijn van onze tijd, het Engels. Op deze wijze vult zij de open plekken, zoals alleen kunstenaars dat mogen: op eigen kracht, vanuit eigen creativiteit.

Zo toont *Lonely Planet* (Campania), via de omwegen van plaats en tijd, taal en vormgeving, de gedachten van lang gestorven Pompejanen zoals ze misschien waren. Zoals ze zouden kunnen zijn geweest. Waarmee heden en verleden versmelten. De oude Pompejanen zijn wijzelf.

VINCENT HUNINK



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SUSAN KOOI was born in Leeuwarden in 1988 and graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in 2012. She has since then been active as a multidisciplinary visual artist, based in Amsterdam. Next to her individual artistic practice, she is part of the performance duo echo+seashell and a founding member of artist initiative Samet Yilmaz. Susan Kooi has previously exhibited solo works such as *Comet Vintage*, *Dragon of Time*, *Fossils*, *Pterodaustro*, *Australopithecus (Fertile Soil For Melancholy)*, *Blue Earth* and *Lutra Lutra Lutra*, and collaborative works such as *The Castle*, *U.F.O.*, *Timeless People*, *Lucy 2012*, *RW NW PRT M HRW* and *Nature*.