

MARY PECK

American, born Minneapolis, MN, 1952

Stadium from the portfolio *The Temples of Greece*, 1979

Gelatin silver print, 4 1/8 x 5 1/8 inches

Gift of David C. and Sarajejan Ruttenberg, 1987.1.5

This photograph of the stadium at the ancient Greek site of Epidaurus elicits a reflexive response: the romantic feelings that well up while viewing a classical-period ruin set amid the scenic wilderness of the Peloponnese. One might be tempted to make the typical tourist presumption that the landscape has not changed since antiquity. However, a close examination reveals things to be otherwise. The tree in the foreground, as well as those on the left encroaching on the stadium, look young, no more than a few years. They betray an area stripped bare after decades of intensive excavations, and only recently reclaimed by nature. Viewed from a distance, the white stones on the right resemble grazing sheep, reinforcing the false impression of a bucolic landscape. In fact, they are the exposed seats of the stadium, which is largely intact, but covered by a layer of earth to protect it from the elements after excavation.

Peck took this photograph before UNESCO declared Epidaurus a World Heritage site in 1984. In the 1970s, clearly concerns more prosaic than presenting the ancient archaeology to an appreciative audience informed site management. Only visible with effort in Peck's photograph, but undeniably there, are electrical lines irreverently bisecting the stadium. Since Peck visited Epidaurus, much has changed at the site. The electrical lines have been removed. But the trees are still present. They have matured, shading a recent reconstruction of seats on the left-hand side of the stadium. In contrast to 1979, the view has been tamed, in keeping with contemporary trends toward increasing the comprehensibility of archaeological parks. Epidaurus may have lost some of its romantic appeal, but it is still one of the most celebrated sites of ancient Greece.

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