Rome is blooming—and not just from a botanical point of view. Long-closed archaeological sites and museums have at last reopened their gates, and, in a twist for a city known for its ancient treasures, contemporary-art venues are buzzing as never before. It's a striking juxtaposition of old and new, and more than a little surprising, given recent reports of state cuts to arts funding (not to mention last fall's dispiriting news of artifacts in Pompeii collapsing due to neglect). And yet the air of rebirth here is unmistakable: Nearly everywhere you look, 3,000 years of art and architecture are on magnificent display.

Perhaps the most significant development is in the Roman Forum, that vast archaeological park in the city center, where more than two decades of restorations have made
travels

Rome's most ancient nucleus of culture and politics all the more visible and tangible. Visitors can now tour the Temple of Venus and Rome, which dates from the second century, as well as follow a newly mapped itinerary through the House of the Vestal Virgins, which could previously only be seen from a distance. Professor Andrea Carandini, who has supervised the Forum's extensive refurbishment, calls this "the most beautifully preserved dwelling in the whole of Rome." Spring should also see tourists admitted (after a temporary winter-time closure) to the Colosseum's recently opened underground levels where gladiators prepared for combat.

Another historic novelty is the National Gallery of Ancient Art at the Palazzo Barberini, one of Italy's most spectacular Baroque palaces. With many of its spaces accessible for the first time, visitors can now see two grand staircases designed by rival geniuses Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Francesco Borromini; masterpieces by Raphael, Filippo Lippi, Caravaggio, and El Greco; and a mind-bogglingly vast and detailed frescoed ceiling by Pietro da Cortona.

All is not frozen history, however. Rome has finally emerged as a contemporary-art destination, thanks chiefly to Ziho Matta's monumental, fluid MAXXI, the National Museum of 21st Century Art, which opened in May 2010. MACRO, another showcase for contemporary art, located in a former Peroni beer factory in Rome's Navona district, tripled its gallery space last year with an avant-garde glass-and-steel extension designed by French architect Vittorio Gregotti. And Larry Gagosian's glamorous three-year-old outpost near the Spanish Steps continues to draw transatlantic art lovers to Rome's vibrant gallery scene. The best local spaces include Galleria Alessandra Bonomo, Galleria Valentina Bonomo, Federica Schiavo Gallery, Magazzino d'Arte Moderna, and Galleria Lorenz O'Neill. "Having grown up in Rome, I can remember seeing lines for movies or the opera—today people line up for contemporary-art shows," says gallerist Valentina Moncado, whose book retracing the lives of the artists who have lived or worked on the via Margutta, including Picasso and De Kooning, is about to be published by Allemandi.

But what of those reports about government cuts to cultural institutions? Some say there's a silver lining. "There's been a flourishing of individual enterprise and private patronage," says curator Peter Benson Miller, whose show on Phillip Guston doubled visitors to the Museo Carlo Bilotti in the Villa Borghese. MACRO has received a substantial grant from the electric company Enel, while Diego Della Valle, president of the Italian leather-goods group Tod's, made headlines in January with his firm's $5 million donation to the ongoing restoration of the Colosseum. Privately funded exhibition spaces, such as Fondazione Pratiches-Cerone and Fondazione Giuliani, are also proliferating, and the foreign academies continue to thrive. From May 25 to 28, visitors to the American Academy in Rome will be able to tour artists' studios and the newly refreshed gardens. Another garden, one of the city's loveliest (if lesser known), is now open at the Villa Torlonia, a glittering venue for 20th-century Italian painting.

And as if that weren't enough, the via Margutta will host a series of shows, spectacles, and parties this June, coinciding with the release of gallerist Moncado's book on its artistic past. So when next in Rome, be sure to do as the Romans: Immerse yourself in culture, but don't miss out on the fun. —MARELLA CARACCIOLO