



# Transient Permanence

## Mari Lending

There are few places where the tenacious dichotomy of copy and original deconstructs itself more forcefully than in the trajectory we refer to as classical sculpture. This process is intrinsic to the assumed origins of the classical and the idea of the antique original, and despite the existence of celebrity pieces such as the Venus de Milo, the Laocoön, or the Farnese Hercules, objects that crowds have lined up for centuries to see in Paris, Rome, and Naples, respectively. Few statues can be authorized as first, original versions: the history of classical sculpture is as much a history of the serialized original as of the serial copy, as Salvatore Settis and his team exquisitely displayed in the concurrent exhibitions *Portable Classic* and *Serial Classic* at the Prada Foundation in Venice and Milan in 2015. While the Milan edition revolved around seriality, materiality and surface, the Venice exhibition displayed antique repetitions through scale, miniaturization and portability. Hackneyed conceptions of origins and originality collapsed in the line-up of a Farnese Hercules series in Palazzo Corner della Regina on the Grand Canal, and in the numerous antique variants and derivatives of iconic statues such as the Discobolus and the Crouching Venus in Milan. Entering these two spaces was a profound bodily experience of the repeatability, versatility, and adjustability of the classical tradition.

### KEYWORDS

Serialized Originals, Reproductions and Innovation, Antiquities as Novelties, Emerging Global History

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Originales serializados, reproducciones e innovación, antigüedades como novedades, historia global emergente

Although discontinuity is fundamental to a tradition constituted by objects lost and found, the classical still connotes continuity, uniqueness, even integrity. Still, since the Laocoön was excavated in Rome in 1506 or Nike of Samothrace arrived in Paris in May 1864 as a set of crated pieces transported on three ships from Samothrace to Constantinople, via Piraeus, to Toulon, before traveling to Paris by train and eventually installed prominently in the Daru stairwell in the Louvre, the history of classical sculpture is a history of missing body parts,

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### Fig. 01

A brand new ancient monument under construction in the Cour vitrée at the École de Beaux-Arts in Paris in the 1870s, materializing an archeological researched and gloriously fictional edition of the ruin of the temple of Castor and Pollux at the Forum Romanum. "La Cour vitrée: installation des colonnes monumentales après 1870." École des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

misplaced heads, interchangeable attributes, inventive replacements and continuous innovation. The classical tradition connotes universal standards and timeless beauty, while timeliness, contingency, specificity and local contexts becomes a pressing matter when turning to singular objects; to the antique marbles and bronzes, as well as to their plaster reproductions. “Archaeology deconstructs this false uniqueness,” observes Settis: “It does so by discovering and demonstrating the seriation of copies from the originals, the iterative production of originals in ancient workshops, and the convergence of the artist and public in the perception of art.”<sup>1</sup> Resurrected as broken archaeological bodies and inscribed into new frameworks of exhibition, collecting, valuation, and restoration, they testify to the reproducibility of precious antiquities.

In the history of what I call plaster monuments—the full scale editions of architectural works that started travelling the world when new casting techniques developed in the mid-nineteenth century allowed bigger and lighter casts—the classical became part of an increasingly global, historicized panorama. The individual productions and the collections they became part of—the still existing ones, as well as the traces of the ones that were consigned to storage, destruction, and oblivion in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—signify innovation and variation. In the galleries, the portable monuments were presented as relative to time and place, to display emerging theories on history, such as chronology, teleology, evolution, comparison, style, influence, and national traditions.

We witness today a bursting interest in the history and historicity of architectural reproductions, and a new awareness of how different editions of monuments were part of the invention and canonization of the monuments in situ, but also how the serialized editions form part of their perception, reception, interpretation, and provenance. When looking at different editions of architectural works *ex situ*, we see historical objects that interrogate concepts of originality, irreproducibility, aura, and authorship. The idea of the precious original, the tenacious cult of authenticity, the obsession with indigenous materiality, the modernist ideology of honesty, and essentialist conceptions of site-specificity are all challenged by the historical patina of the multiplied casts.

“No copies, no originals,” states Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe, when proposing how a work’s aura might migrate from a corrupted original to high-end facsimiles. “To stamp a piece with the mark of originality requires the huge pressure that only a great number of reproductions can provide.”<sup>2</sup> The new interest in an architectural mass media that was until recently doomed obsolete, and the study of specific productions and series, demonstrate that reproductions are artifacts that in their own right sign up for inclusion in the history of art and architecture. Across languages, the nineteenth-century plaster monuments were referred to as casts, facsimiles, models, reproductions, and reconstitutions. To these terms can be added more, such as replicas, repetitions, multiples, and variants. Interchangeable, this nomenclature reflects objects that document, preserve, and hand down works of the past, while destabilizing positivist conceptions of authenticity, permanence, and originality. Additionally, this tradition and the work of *formatori*, art historians, archeologists, architects, preservationists, museum directors and curators, let us see more clearly that a number of contemporary art works, similarly, allows insight into facets of architecture that the originals for many different reasons, are incapable of.

**HISTORICIZED  
CLASSICS**

The classical tradition indeed plays a part in the history of architectural casts. In Athens, Lord Elgin and his team commenced the tradition of casting bits and pieces of the Parthenon, when spoliating the temple in the first years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. New inventive ensembles of the original marbles and fresh casts were always part of the Parthenon installations in the British Museum, until the art dealer Joseph Duveen had the marbles chemically cleansed to look more classical white and the cast thrown out upon the inauguration of his eponymous gallery in the museum in the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Editions of the Doric temple furnished museums, schools, public institutions and private homes across the western world, and sometimes their origins convey unexpected provenance.

For instance, from the early 1890s, the Florentine émigrés formatori Pietro and Emilio Caproni offered the Parthenon frieze from the Caproni Gallery in Boston. Their constantly updated sales catalogues assured that their productions were “made from the originals”, while adding authorship to the works when emphasizing their “exclusive right” to make and sell the series.<sup>4</sup> In London, Domenico Brucciani had been the official caster of the Elgin Marbles since 1857, when the stock of molds at the British Museum were transferred to his workshop, and they appeared in different editions in the company’s sales catalogues.<sup>5</sup> Authorized by the collaboration with the British Museum, Brucciani & Co remained the obvious place to get them. In Boston, however, the Caproni brothers recommended their production, not only because these slabs were cheaper and easier to transport for an American audience—the cost of the frieze “packed and delivered onboard train at Boston would be \$575,00”—but also, and slightly more surprising, because their productions were better than those manufactured by their British competitors: “The way they make them, they are all twisted and uneven, some of the slabs higher than others, which makes the cost of putting them into place almost as much as the original cost of the reliefs and they are cast of clear plaster without reinforcement at the back so that there is generally a great deal of breakage while in transit, while our slabs are made on a wooden frame, reinforced with burlap and are made all same height,” as the Capronis persuasively elucidated to a potential buyer.<sup>6</sup>

At the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, for the 1877 inauguration of architect Félix Duban’s glass-covered courtyard, full scale casts of the most canonical specimens of the Doric and Corinthian orders faced each other across the cour vitrée, manifesting the school’s classical curriculum (fig. 01). While the northwest corner of the Parthenon with three columns had been commissioned by the Commission des Monuments historiques during an archaeological expedition in 1844, the Temple of Castor and Pollux on the Roman Forum, an obligatory destination for grand tourist for centuries, was a novelty, and an entirely in-house affair. The awe-inspiring French version of the Roman monument, was a monument also to the students’ exercises in depicting ruins on paper in two temporalities: in its actual and its presumed pristine state. Amplifying the inventive dimension at work when realizing the monument restored, and to full scale, the monument was the result of the combined efforts of three Prix de Rome recipients, under the direction of the school’s chief molder Alexandre de Sacy. While the Roman ruin’s celebrity was inseparable from its iconic three columns, this Parisian reconstitution made a new conception of the ruin, with its highly stylized

entablature resting on two flawless capitals. Rather than communicating a dilapidated remnant of antiquity, the fragment re-represented an imaginary, ideal whole. Eliding concerns with decay and material historicity, it presented a spotless, gloriously fictional monument. As part of the students' everyday environment, this plaster monument was designed to display the perfection of antiquity, not the passing of time.

Other classical works also appeared in the galleries and in the market with fascinating temporalities. After the French excavations at modern Kastri/ancient Delphi in the 1890s, the unearthed artifacts remained in Greece due to new legislation on the export of antiquities. The Louvre's *atelier de moulage* boldly translated the debris from the porch of the Treasury of the Siphnians into a novel, ancient Greek monument that premiered at the French archeological section at the 1900 Exposition universelle in Paris. Until the modernist refurbishment of the Daru stairway in 1934, it proudly marked the entrance to the Louvre alongside the many times redesigned Nike of Samothrace, a true original in flux. The modern French invention—initially a copy without an original—soon traveled to museums around the world, serving to showcase developments in early Greek architecture by denoting a nonexistent structure in Greece (fig. 02).

These classical specimens were all caught in historicizing gestures: their purpose was to display architecture as an historical phenomenon, relative to place and time.

#### POST-CLASSICAL

The challenging of the classical tradition unfolded at the same time, and in plaster, as recently unearthed ruins, reevaluated national buildings, and architecture from far-flung regions manifested timeliness and change in western galleries. A defining post-classical moment in

this world of serialized architecture can be pinned down to the 1867 Exposition universelle in Paris, when Henry Cole, the director at the South Kensington Museum, had fifteen European princes sign a *Convention for Promoting Universally Reproductions of Works of Art for the Benefit of Museums of all Countries*.<sup>7</sup> The signatories hereby confirmed “their desire to promote” the exchange of national monuments as rapidly developing reproductive technologies allowed for the dissemination of architecture on an unprecedented scale.

Soon, a number of novel ancient architectural works were set in motion as global patrimony. Among the national monuments that premiered in Paris were medieval Norwegian stave church portals from two recently demolished churches, the first cast fragments from the twelfth-century Angkor Wat temples, as well as portrayals of ancient Indian architecture arranged by the South Kensington Museum to demonstrate the future museums of reproductions envisioned in the Convention. The first outcome of the convention was the casting of the Norwegian stave church fragments. After the exhibition closed, Cole brought the wooden portals back to London, and immediately had them cast, displayed, and canonized as world heritage by means of reproduction.<sup>8</sup> 1867 also marked the beginning of a 60-years French tradition of casting and displaying the Angkor Wat temples, resulting in what Michael Falser terms “back-translations”: pointing to the complex exchanges between the partly fantastical reproductions and the restoration work that took place in situ. Appearing in different guises in Parisian exhibitions,



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Fig. 02

The porch of the Treasury of the Siphnians at Delphi premiered in plaster perfection in Paris in 1900, produced at Louvre's *atelier de moulage*. Until 1934, it proudly marked the iconic entrance to the museum alongside the Nike of Samothrace. The Louvre, Paris, c. 1901. Musée du Louvre, département des antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines.

including “ageless and spotless” versions, the Cambodian temples became part of a temporalization of the exotic through its inclusion in Western galleries, lifted from eternal presence to periodized chronology.<sup>9</sup>

The medieval Norwegian churches, the Cambodian temples, as well as a number of Indian Buddhist monuments were already described in James Fergusson's 1855, two-volume *Illustrated Handbook of Architecture: Being a Concise and Popular Account of the Different Styles of Architecture prevailing in all Ages and Countries*.<sup>10</sup> An important plaster entrepreneur, Fergusson had served as the manager of the relocated Crystal Palace with its ten architectural courts displaying plaster monuments from Egypt and Assyria to Alhambra and the Renaissance. In Paris 1867, he presented the Sanchi Tope and the Amravati Stupa by means of more than 500 photographs, original fragments, as well as plaster casts, to give “character to the exhibition, but also to enable students to judge of the merit of the specimens of the true dimensions.”<sup>11</sup> The following year he published *Tree and Serpent Worship*. The lithographed frontispiece of the richly carved northern gateway of the Great Stupa at Sanchi in sandstone, was momentarily translated from paper to plaster. In the winter of 1869, architect

Fig. 03

After the ten meters tall plaster facsimile of a gateway at the Sanchi Tope was installed in the Architecture Courts at the South Kensington Museum, several editions were produced for museums across Europe. From Henry Rousseau, *Catalogue sommaire des Moulages, illustré de nombreuses planches en similitude gravure*, 2<sup>e</sup> édition (Brussels: Musées royaux du Cinquantenaire, 1926), 98.



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and Lieutenant Henry Hardy Cole of the Royal Engineers, superintendent of the Royal Archaeological Survey of India, embarked on a mission to help fulfill his father Henry Cole's vision of a virtually boundless museum of architecture. H. H. Cole's report on the casting of the eastern gateway, on site, exemplifies the dimensions of such an undertaking. More than a hundred people were involved in casting the gateway, and the enterprise resembled the moving of actual buildings in terms of planning, equipment, competence, logistics, and shipping.<sup>12</sup> When this ten meters tall "plaster facsimile" of an ancient Indian gateway landed in London in 1870, and new editions were made for other European museums, it expanded the canon in time and space (fig. 03). The traveling object's "off-site career" changed the reception of the Buddhist stupa in Europe, while the "*in situ* monument [was] continuously refracted by its portability and reproducibility," as Tapati Guha-Thakurta

has shown.<sup>13</sup> This geographical expansion prompted synchronizing of non-Western histories and the genealogies of non-Western objects. In European galleries, the temple was folded into the history of Western antiquity, or as a catalogue entry from 1874 puts it: “the great Buddhist Tope at Sanchi are wonderful records of the state of art in India at the period of the commencement of the Christian era.”<sup>14</sup>

New, imposing casts kept appearing, expanding the canon within the same developmental time frame. While the region of Galicia had been characterized by its “impenetrable obscurantism” in Richard Ford’s bestselling 1845 *Handbook for Travellers in Spain*, John Charles Robinson, the superintendent of the art collections at the South Kensington Museum, thought differently when arriving at Santiago de Compostela two decades later. Exposed to the twelfth-century, three-arched Portico de la Gloria, he saw a “masterpiece for all time,” waiting to be “reproduced by moulding, photography and hand delineation.”<sup>15</sup> The next fall Domenico Brucciani, together with the museum’s photographer Thurston Thompson, traveled to Spain with detailed instructions concerning what to cast and photograph. Back in London the Spanish west-façade defined the width of one of the two architectural courts at South Kensington Museum, while the documentary and curatorial efforts revived a “national and international interest in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela as a monument, and as a pilgrimage destination (fig. 04).”<sup>16</sup>

Cycled through time, the monuments became timely and were assigned their proper place in history by becoming exhibits. Testimony to a synchronizing contemporaneity, producing simultaneity in the perception of monuments from across time and place, the plaster monuments displayed a relativized and relational canon deprived of universal standards and historical absolutes. Selected, hierarchized and exhibited according to evolutionary theories, the monuments were appropriated into world history. The cast galleries worked as full-scale, three-dimensional encyclopedia of an emerging global history of national monuments that could be experienced spatially, synoptically, and simultaneously, as in a museum without walls.<sup>17</sup>

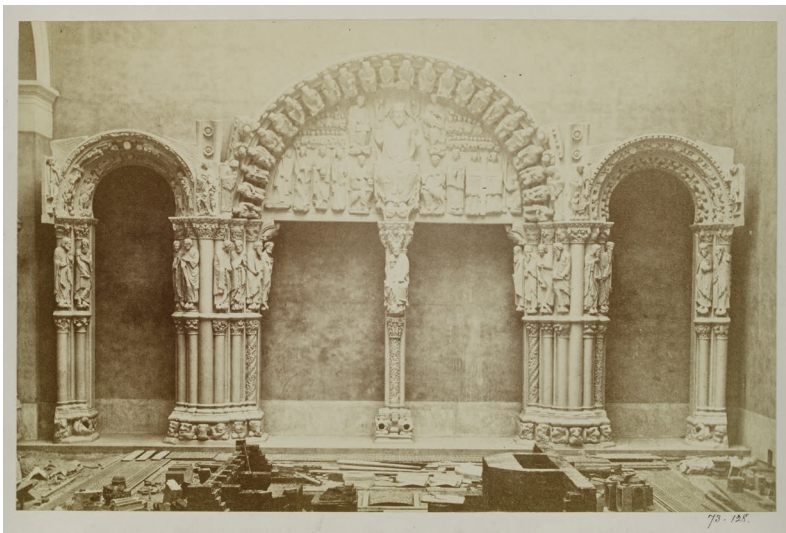


Fig. 04

Building Portico de la Gloria at the South Kensington Museum. Isabel Agnes Cowper, *Cast of Portico de la Gloria; Archivolt of Central Doorway, the Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela in Spain*. Albumen print, 1868. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



**NEW ORIGINALS**

The plaster monuments were always presented as a substitute for the grand tour. In 1812, while creating his home museum in London, John Soane was fantasizing about what posterity would make of his plaster heaven at Lincoln's Inn Fields: "It is difficult to determine for what purposes such a strange and mixed assemblage of ancient works or rather copies of [cast from] them, for many are not of stone or marble, have been brought together—some have suggested that it might have been to the advancement of Architectural knowledge by making the young Students in that noble & useful Art who had no means of visiting Greece and Italy some better ideas of ancient Works."<sup>18</sup> In the 1880s, the newly incorporated Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York aspired to make the world's most all-encompassing display of architecture from across time and space, to surpass the leading European collections, such as the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, the South Kensington Museum, and the two distinct Parisian collections at the *École des Beaux-Arts* and the *Musée de sculpture comparée*. The plan was to have "European scholars come to New York as they now go to Rome, Athens, or the other great centers of the study of art."<sup>19</sup>

Yet, the plaster monuments did more, and something radically different, than simply presenting audiences for the monuments of the world—at home. They provided insight into specific details that the originals did not allow for, for a variety of reasons. Nowhere is the *raison d'être* of 19<sup>th</sup> century cast culture better captured than in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927). As a young boy, the main character Marcel, visits the Trocadéro Museum in Paris, particularly admiring a plaster portal from the medieval church in the fictitious Norman town Balbec. The museum is however everything but fictitious: it is the *Musée de sculpture comparée*, conceived by Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc in the 1840s, opened to the public in the Palais de Trocadéro in 1882, and the most ambitious attempt to inventing in plaster the French past as a solid, national tradition of stylistic development. Audaciously transplanting Winckelmann's theory on how Greek art evolved from childhood and adolescence toward mature perfection before decline, it founders aimed at showing how the same development repeated itself in the French tradition. The curators saw no reason to distinguish between the original work and its reproduction: a cast has "the complete scientific value of the original and thus deserves to be examined with the same interest (fig. 05)."<sup>20</sup>

Within the frame of a novel, the young Marcel recurrently visited the fashionable museum at the Trocadéro height during the 1890s, and fell in love with the Balbec portal.<sup>21</sup> When finally in front of the church, he however immediately realizes that the original does not measure up to the copy. Not only is the church trivialized by its surroundings, by prosaic elements such as a square, a café, a billiard saloon, a bank, a bus station, streetlights, and trams. Marcel is also discouraged to discover that it is located in Balbec-en-Terre and not, as he believed, in Balbec-Plage, "soaked by the spindrift blown from the tumultuous deep," inseparable from the Norman topography and built of stone quarried from "wave-washed cliffs." Expecting the church itself, "the real things!" to be more imposing than its plaster version in Paris, it turns out to be "much less." Reduced to "nothing but its own shape in stone," the original is the victim



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of time and reality, caught in what Proust sensationally termed “the tyranny of the Particular.”<sup>22</sup> Proust’s receptivity to the reproduction and the sentiment that the monument’s irreducible particular does not reside in its material authenticity, would certainly have pleased the architects, restorers, artists, molders, directors, curators, archivists, and photographers involved in what became one of the most influential collections of plaster monuments. The Trocadéro promoted the benefits of plaster far beyond the commonsensical opinion that a good reproduction is more valuable than a poor original. The reproduction could reveal aspects of a work undetectable in the fragmented reality of the real world, and the mounting of architectural fragments aimed at a realism in the experience of details impossible in situ. In fact, the museum boldly claimed that a perfect cast is not only “plus exact que l’original,” but in its plaster perfection closer to the monument’s moment of origin, and as such in a sense closer to the original than the original itself.<sup>23</sup>

Proust’s museum philosophy also points towards contemporary art practices that in many respects align with the work of the 19<sup>th</sup> century formatori, in regards of critical issues such as scale, ideality, reality, historicity, materiality, patina and surface.

A key work in Factum Arte’s production that has drawn global attention to shifting conceptions of originals and copies is the facsimile of Paolo Veronese’s *Wedding in Cana*, recreated in its original setting in 2009. Andrea Palladio commissioned the painting for the refectory of the San Giorgio monastery in Venice in 1553. In 1797 the nearly 70-square-meter painting was cut into six when brought by Napoleon to the Louvre, where later it underwent a series of restorations. Given the compromised status of the original painting, the facsimile severely problematizes notions of originality. With its microscopic surface topography documenting the work of time, and presented in its intended architectural setting—without the gilded frame and glass, at the right height, and lit by the luminous reflection of the *laguna*—the new Venetian Veronese not only allows for a deeper understanding of the original painting but has changed forever the perception of its

Fig. 05

A plaster cast from the Erechtheion caryatide purchased from the British Museum displayed in the twelfth-century gallery at the Musée de sculpture comparée, adjacent to the Smiling Angel from Reims Cathedral. From Paul Frantz Julien Marcou, *Album du Musée de sculpture comparée*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1897).

Fig. 06  
 The facsimile of *The Wedding at Cana*,  
 created by Factum Arte in 2007 and  
 installed in its original site at the refectory  
 of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice.  
 Courtesy of Factum Arte.



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slightly tortured Parisian counterpart (fig. 06). By placing the facsimile in a situation which the original itself cannot attain, the work demonstrates that copies cannot easily be separated from the works they evoke: Replicas, reinventions, restitutions, restorations, and facsimiles are part of the lives of precious objects.

Factum Foundation's staff of artists, conservators, archaeologists, art historians, and technicians digitize, create, recreate, and replicate spaces, surfaces, and objects in ways that tend to throw accustomed conceptions of chronological order into turmoil. The fact that facsimiles of this eminence have the capacity to complicate time and temporalities of objects, was eminently showcased in Factum's Piranesi productions from 2010, presenting a series of latent nonexistent originals<sup>24</sup> (fig. 07). The transformation of two-dimensional design schemes from the mid-eighteenth century into three-dimensional objects of striking contemporaneity, estranged by their 250-year delay, produced entirely new and unforeseen fabrics that testify to a defining moment in the moral and aesthetic valuation of high-quality facsimiles.

Also other casting techniques allow us to see well-known objects in new ways, such as the latex cast of the interior of the upper half of Trajan's Column, hung from the ceiling next to the original at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2015. Rather than depicting the exterior spiraling frieze of this Roman war monument, the flimsy latex cast displayed quantities of perfectly preserved dust and dirt accumulated from the 1860s when the plaster monument was constructed, gathered in the relief of its cylindrical brick core. Re-pictured as a piece of Victorian engineering, this cast from a cast displayed yet another odyssey in materiality. In an earlier piece in *The Ethics of Dust*-series, the architect-preservationist Otero-Pailos' peeled off the same kind of latex used by preservationists to clean polluted buildings off an



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exterior wall of the Doge's palace, and mounted it in the Arsenale during the Art Biennale in 2009 (fig. 08). This latex cast preserved and revealed that which is normally removed, the auratic patinating substrate conventionally regarded as waste. Atmospherically, these translucent latex screens documenting dust and dirt, radically shift our awareness of the fragile and unprotected objects while presenting pollution as an *objet trouvé*.

The sculptor Rachel Whiteread has confronted 19<sup>th</sup> century cast culture very directly. In 2003 her crispy plaster white "Untitled (Room 101)" landed in the East Court at the Victoria and Albert Museum, placing a BBC office demolished the same year (immortalized in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eight-Four*) amongst pieces such as the enormous central doorway of the San Petronio Basilica, cast in Bologna in the 1880s, and the electrotyped edition of Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise from the baptistery in Florence. In 2003, "Untitled (Domestic)" (a fire escape staircase) appeared at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. The Hall of Sculpture, a Beaux-Arts gallery designed as an inverted version of the Parthenon cella, provided a twisted spatial frame that strongly enhanced Whiteread's own spatial inversions.

A lesser-known relative of Whiteread's groundbreaking "Ghost" (1990)—rematerializing a room in a demolished Victorian rowhouse in North London—can be admired at a lake north of Oslo. Also the *Gran Boat House* (2010) is a positive from a negative. Here, one amongst a substantial row of simple, old boat houses deemed for demolition served as a mold for a concrete cast. The concrete object sensually documents the corrugated led roof, the wooden construction and the paneled walls, while patina and weathering, such as fresh moss under the cornice, adds to the site-specificity of this new original, while marking the work of time.

While the plaster monuments strived to represent fragments of monuments as close to the original work as possible, in positive form, Whiteread's ghost structures exposes the positive form of a negative space. They produce a different kind of echo of 'the real thing' and manifest a lasting, spectral quality of lost, vernacular buildings. Also these contemporary casts in plaster or concrete, addresses issues of absence

Fig. 07

Mantelpiece designed by Giambattista Piranesi and published in *Diverse Maniere d'adornare i cammini* (1769), materialized for the first time as a physical object by Factum Arte. After its premiere at Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice in 2010, it was on display at *Diverse Maniere: Piranesi, Fantasy and Excess* at Sir John Soane's Museum in 2014. Photo by Alicia Guirao del Fresno, courtesy of Factum Arte.

Fig. 08

*The Ethics of Dust: Doge's Palace* in the Arsenale during the 2009 Venice Art Biennale, with the latex cast preserving microscopic layers of history in the tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century formatore and their productions of plaster monuments. Collection of Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Foundation T-BA21.

Fig. 09  
 In 2007, Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (Domestic)* landed in the Hall of Sculpture at the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh. The inverted Parthenon frieze below the skylight was produced by the formatore Pietro and Emilio Caproni, who offered the piece from the Caproni Gallery in Boston. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Domestic)*. Cast plaster with various armatures, 2002. Hall of Sculpture, 2007–08. Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh.



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and presence, destruction and production. Similarly to the plaster monuments, the representational level of Whiteread's architectural casts are complex and highly productive (fig. 09, 10).

**PRODUCTION AND PERFORMATIVITY**

“As the trend away from theory’s abstraction has moved the tectonic plates of research more and more towards materiality, so has its manifestation in ‘things’ attracted greater interest,” Alina Payne observes, when describing how works of art and architecture are collected and consumed, detached and detachable, discrete and unrooted.<sup>25</sup> The last decades have witnessed a return to a very physically received past. The desire to rethink spaces and objects, and the return to objects spanning from documents to monuments, is clearly grounded in something else than a play with the past as a repository of form. Today’s intellectual climate is aligned neither with the “wie es eigentlich gewesen ist” of nineteenth-century positivism, nor Enlightenment fantasies of primordial states. It is rather a disinterest in origins and pristine states that characterizes this return to historical artifacts across media, while emphasizing both the history and historicity of objects.

In lieu of nostalgia, ideas of permanence, origins, and authenticity, we are witnessing a preoccupation with how artefacts behave, change, move, work, and fluctuate, with how they circulate in time and space. Distorted temporalities and unexpected returns are part of the unruly and sometimes traumatic lives of objects. The plaster monuments evoke the historicity of both the old and the new, and show how reproductions carry an inherent productive and liberating distance from their sources. Before an image, however old, “the present never ceases to reshape,” as Georges Didi-Huberman puts it. Likewise, before an image, however recent, “the past never ceases to reshape.”<sup>26</sup> In the presence of these performative, productive image-objects, we might also “humbly recognize” that “we are the fragile element, the transient element, and that before us it is the element of the future, the element of permanence. The image often has more memory and more future than the being who contemplates it.”<sup>27</sup>

The practice of replicating art and architecture corroborates a profound hermeneutical definition of tradition as a process of continual reinvention. Exploring how the handing down of monuments and documents relies on their reactualization in interpretation, Hans-Georg Gadamer, in the most fundamental work on interpretation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, argued that “ideas are formed in tradition,” shaping relative meanings in a history conceived of as a fluctuating whole.<sup>28</sup> Seen as three-dimensional documents that are both documenting the life and shaping the afterlife of art and architecture, the plaster monuments tie back to the textual tradition prior to the birth of the author, the invention of originality, and the modern obsession with permanence and the unique. Salvatore Settis’ repeatable, versatile, adjustable classics, ran parallel with a tradition in which documents were continuously transcribed and commented on.<sup>29</sup> Its ethos was captured by Erasmus in the early sixteenth century as “Friends Hold All Things in Common”—pointing to a world where repetition and invention were part of sharing something collectively owned.<sup>30</sup> RA



Fig. 10

The patina of Rachel Whiteread's *The Gran Boat House* (2010) at a lake north of Oslo, documents in concrete the weathered properties of the lost wooden structure and its corrugated led roof. Iphone snapshot by Mari Lending.

## Notes

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- 04.** *Supplement for 1914 to Catalogue of Caproni Casts: Reproductions from Antique, Medieval and Modern Sculpture*, Boston, 1914, p. 2.
- 05.** JENKINS, Ian, "Acquisition and Supply of Casts from the Parthenon Sculptures from the British Museum, 1835–1939," *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 1990.
- 06.** Letter from Pietro Caproni to director John Beatty, December 4, 1905. Hall of Architecture Archive, Heinz Architectural Center Library Collection, Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh.
- 07.** To mark the 150 years anniversary of Cole's Convention, the V&A and twenty-four museums from across the world, reiterated the document in the age of digital reproduction. CORMIER, Brendan (ed.), *Copy Culture. Sharing in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2018.
- 08.** LENDING, Mari "Preserved in Plaster," *ibid.*
- 09.** FALSER, Michael, *Angkor Wat. A Transcultural History of Heritage. Angkor in France. From Plaster Casts to Exhibition Pavilions/Angkor in Cambodia. From Jungle Find to Global Icon*, vol. 1–2, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2019. FALSER, M., "Krishna and the Plaster Cast: Translating the Cambodian Temple of Angkor Wat in the French Colonial Period," *Transcultural Studies*, no. 2, 2011, p. 4.
- 10.** The two volumes added up to almost 1000 pages and 800 illustrations. The scope was even more all-inclusive when Fergusson's four-volume *A History of Architecture in all Countries from the earliest Time to the Present Day* (John Murray, London), appeared from 1865 onward, corroborating the Cambodian temples, the Norwegian portals, and the Indian monuments.
- 11.** FERGUSSON, James, *Tree and Serpent Worship: or Illustrations of Mythology and Art in India in the first and fourth Centuries after Christ. From the Sculptures of the Buddhist Topes at Sanchi and Amravati*, India Museum, London, 1868, iii.
- 12.** For Cole Jr.'s five months of training in casting in London prior to the expedition, see Singh, Kavita, "Sanchi, in and out of the museum", *Sculpture Journal*, vol. 28.3, 2019.
- 13.** GUHA-THAKURTA, Tapati, "The Production and Reproduction of a Monument: The Many Lives of the Sanchi Stupa," *South-Asian Studies* 29, no. 1, 2013, pp. 15–16.
- 14.** COLE, H. H., *Catalogue of the Objects of Indian Art exhibited in the South Kensington Museum*, George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, London, 1874, pp. 13–14.
- 15.** John Charles Robinson quoted from BAKER, Malcolm, "The Reproductive Continuum," in FREDRIKSEN, Rune and MARCHAND, Eckart (eds.), *Plaster Casts, Plaster Casts. Making, Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2010, p. 497.
- 16.** GRANT, Lindy and WALKER, Rose, "Accidental Pilgrims: 19th-Century British Travellers and Photographers in Santiago de Compostela," *British Art Journal* 1, no. 2, Spring 2000, p. 10.
- 17.** LENDING, Mari, "Promenade among Words and Things: The Gallery as Catalogue, the Catalogue as Gallery," *Architectural Histories*, 3(1), 2015, p. 20.
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- 19.** ROBINSON, Edward, "Report of Mr. Edward Robinson," November 13, 1891, in Special Committee to Enlarge Collection of Casts Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1892, p. 9.
- 20.** COURAJOD, Louis and MARCOU, P.-Frantz, *Musée de sculpture comparée (moulages). Palais de Trocadéro. Catalogue raisonné publié sous les auspices de la commission des Monuments historiques. XIVe et XVe siècles*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1892, III.
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- 23.** ENLART, Camille *Le Musée de sculpture comparée au Palais du Trocadéro*, Librairie Renouard, Paris, 1911, p. 3.
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- 25.** PAYNE, Alina, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2012, p. 11.
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- 27.** *Ibid.*
- 28.** GADAMER, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method* (1960), trans. Joel Weinheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Sheed & Ward, London, 1989, xxxv.
- 29.** Argued in-depth in LENDING, Mari, "Reciting the Tomb of Tutankhamun," *Perspecta* 49, 2016.
- 30.** See EDEN, Kathy, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the Adages of Erasmus*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 2001.

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