

## **Casted Plaster: art or craft?**

**Congress 22-23-24 November 2023 Maastricht  
Zuyd University of Applied Sciences | Rocaille | Stichting Het Nederlandse Interieur**

The art of cast plaster: the growing interest in interior and reproduction practices.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, cast plaster ornaments and figures have regained interest. Plaster collections of nearly 200 years old are being dusted off and are regaining their place in art history. In addition, old cast building ornaments are now in need of maintenance, replacement or restoration. At home and abroad, increasing attention is being paid to the preservation of these collections. Most recently in a 2021 symposium in Lisbon "The Art of Plaster - between creation and reproduction - study and preservation." In Maastricht, Bureau Europa presented the topic with Stucco Storico in 2019. In 2015, during "Casting, a way to embrace the digital age in an analogue fashion" in Berlin, this topic was discussed extensively and very diversely.

The aim of the congress and exhibition is to create both national and international attention to the application of cast plaster in three manifestations: the building ornament, plaster models for art (craft) education and plaster moulds in the ceramic industry. Contemporary applications in interior construction, art education and ceramic production are also discussed.

The use of casting moulds to make interior ornaments dates back to Roman times. From the Renaissance onward, we see the use of casting moulds to manufacture repeating elements on walls and ceilings increasing again. As cast building ornaments began to be manufactured industrially, their use takes off in the 19th century, and can be found in countless interiors in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Plaster is also used to make casts of numerous objects up to and including humans and animals. For the study of art objects, collections are established from the Renaissance onward. In Maastricht, a large sculpture collection has been preserved within the Zuyd University of Applied Sciences. In 2023, this collection exists 200 years. Ample reason to draw attention to this category. To this day, casts are made in Paris, London, Brussels and Berlin, among others. The universities of Lisbon and Strasbourg, for example, are proud of their large collections and also build parts of their curriculum around them.

Plaster moulds also play a role in the production of ceramics. With the start of industrialization, two types of plaster moulds come into use: printing jigs and casting moulds. Plaster moulds are particularly practical for both processes because the plaster absorbs water from the clay or from the casting clay, thus speeding up the process of drying. To this day, plaster moulds are used in the manufacture of ceramic objects. A ceramics and plaster workshop should not be lacking in arts and crafts education (design).

## **The subtopics within the congress**

### ***The building ornamentation***

Repetitive building ornamentation in plaster lends itself perfectly to prefabrication given that modeling repetitive elements on site takes more time than first casting elements in moulds and then placing/sticking them.

From Roman times we find moulded ornaments in the interior. Over the centuries, this has produced an amazing wealth of interior decorations that are inseparable from the architecture of the interior: texture, rhythm, imagination, decoration, design, variation. Wooden counter frames are used for repetitive elements. The search for the use of flexible, stretchable materials in order to then be able to mould even non-self-relieving ornaments yields results during the 18th century. First glue and gelatin are used as flexible materials, later also latex. In the 20th century these were followed by artificial rubbers and silicones.

From the second half of the 18th century, studios that begin to specialize in industrial manufacture of cast building ornaments in plaster, among other materials. One of the first and still existing studios is Jackson & Sons in London. Around 1800, studios in Berlin follow the school of Schinkel, Joseph Beunat in Paris and Silberling and Bennewitz & Co. in the second half of the 19th century in Amsterdam. Through sample sheets and catalogs, their building ornaments are sometimes used to this day.

On the first day of the congress we will look not only at the applications in the past but also at the contemporary use of cast building ornamentation in the interior and new developments taking place in this field at home and abroad, including 3D-printing.

### ***The cast plaster sculptures***

In the field of collections of cast objects, several subjects can be distinguished: collections for art (industry) education, museum collections and collections originating from artists' studios. The museum collections could consist of collections of sculptures and architectural fragments from different art historical periods such as, for example, the Classical period. The same also applies to collections for art (industry) education. The latter, however, are much more diverse and include architectural fragments as well as anatomical models. The collections coming directly from artists' studios show something completely different: they often include casts of the same studies, which the artist wanted to keep for a longer period of time.

The second day of the conference will focus on the questions associated with these collections. The focus will be on the exchange of experiences of the people who work with these collections: curators, conservators, restorers, teachers and students. The program will investigate the nature and construction of the collection and conservation and restoration. But also: what taste does a collection reflect? What function do the plasters have in the museum collection, for cultural heritage, what context in sculptural history? What to do with an artist's studio? How do we see processes of creativity reflected in the plasters? Themes about what is old and valuable, what is new and surprising, and the changing appreciation of the collections over time are thus also addressed. Exchanging experiences, "do's" and "don'ts", and the "best practices" in making them accessible to the public will be included. Ultimately, the continuity of these collections is about raising awareness in management, use and development both in the Netherlands and in surrounding countries.

***The plaster casts***

The third day of the conference focuses on the plaster casting moulds of the manufacturing industry. Wherever pottery and porcelain was produced, plaster moulds were an indispensable part of the production process from the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition to the pottery and porcelain itself, collections of plaster moulds have also survived. Themes in this congress will be the production process, the historical development and the design of the moulds. This will include the role of moulds that have played in the development of the pottery and porcelain industry. Finally we will discuss, the role plaster moulds still play in the industry today and the role they play in contemporary design education. Another theme is how to deal with the preserved collections: education, presentation and interaction. Again, awareness of the existence of such collections at home and abroad can contribute to the preservation and development of knowledge

**The congress**

The congress will explore the topics outlined above. The thematic lines that may emerge in all sub-topics are:

- historical awareness/ art history
- production
- education, study collections
- conservation, restoration
- exhibition, museum, digital
- new possibilities

The official languages for the conference are Dutch and English.  
No interpreters will be used.

**Organizing committee**

**Marjan Melkert MSc**, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences

**Valentijn Carbo MA**, Stichting Het Nederlandse Interieur (SHNI)

**Dr. Wijnand Freling**, Rocaille B.V.

**Scientific committee*****All sections***

**Remco Beckers MSc**, Curator / Project coordinator / Bureau Europa, Platform for architecture and design

**Marta Costa Frade PhD**, Faculdade De Belas-Artes Universidade De Lisboa

**Dr. Wijnand Freling**, Rocaille B.V.

**Marjan Melkert MSc**, Conservator Academische Gipsotheek, Maastricht Institute of Arts

***Building ornamentation***

**Professor Dr. Johan de Haan**, Senior Conservator Museum Paleis Het Loo

**Dr. Eloy Koldewey**, Senior Specialist Historic Interiors, Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed/  
Utrecht University

**Dr. Pieter Vlaardingerbroek**, Architectural historian, Monumenten en Archeologie Gemeente Amsterdam/Utrecht University

***The cast plaster sculptures***

**Drs. René van Beek**, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam

**Dr. Dick van Broekhuizen**, head of collections and research, museum Beelden aan Zee

**Marjet van de Weerd MSc**, Cultural Sciences advisory Board of the Academische Gipsotheek Maastricht

***The Plaster Moulds***

**Dr. Serge Langeweg**, Coordinator Collection & heritage, Discovery Museum

**Dr. Claartje Rasterhoff**, Assistant professor Cultural Policy & Management at FASoS and director of the Maastricht Centre for Arts & Culture, Heritage and Conservation of the Maastricht University.

**Call for papers**

Those interested in making a substantive contribution to this conference are invited to submit an abstract in English of up to 400 words, including title, name, accompanied by a short CV of up to 50 words, to [papers@castedplaster.nl](mailto:papers@castedplaster.nl) by **30 May 2023**.

By 30 June 2023, the committee's choice will be announced to the participants.

***The final text***

Texts for publication in eBook and in print must be in by the first of October, 2023, for peer review. Evaluation criteria are: relevance to the subtopic (0-3 out of 8), quality of the proposal (0-3 out of 8), consistency, formality and clarity in writing (0-2 out of 8).

***General rules***

The text consists of a maximum of 5,000 words -- all inclusive (titles, authors, abstracts, texts, figure captions, maximum of 6 full-color illustrations, footnotes and bibliographic references).

***Format***

- Helvetica Neue size 12, justified, space 1,2, no space between paragraphs.
- Maximum of 5 keywords in English or Dutch.
- Abstract in English or Dutch in 50 to 60 words.

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***References***

APA 7<sup>th</sup> referencing.

**Information**

The website [www.castedplaster.nl](http://www.castedplaster.nl) provides more information on the sub-themes, as well as a brief bibliography. Other information can be obtained by sending an email to [info@castedplaster.nl](mailto:info@castedplaster.nl).