

Is a plaster cast a replica or an original?

And what function has it in a museum context?

'Plaster provides the most naïve and faithful copy of its original; neither marble nor bronze can provide this.' That is what Humbert de Superville, director of the cabinet of plaster statues in Leiden has written in 1822. How are plaster casts considered and used nowadays in museum collections?

In the Allard Pierson, more than 1,000 heritage collections of the University of Amsterdam are preserved and are partly on display. One of these is the plaster collection consisting of 278 large plaster copies, mainly of sculpture from the classical world. The collection has its origin in the Museum of Reproductions that opened its doors in The Hague in 1920. Its first director and also initiator was the banker Constant Willem Lunsingh Scheurleer (1881-1941). He regarded his collection as *study material and as a collection to enjoy delightfully*.

The plaster sculptures have different functions in the galleries in the Allard Pierson. The traditional function of a plaster cast was that of a model in art academies where drawing was taught. In this way, a plaster cast is seen as a sculpture that is used as a tool in drawing education. As early as the 16th century in Italy, artists were urged to use plaster copies of statues from classical antiquity as models. At the Allard Pierson, this feature has been reinstated. How does this work out?

The plaster sculptures also lend themselves to research the original classical sculpture which was colorful in antiquity. With modern (projection) techniques on the casts, we bring the sculptures to life again. Bright colors were used, not pastels. Interestingly, the details in the colors also show the details in the sculpture and so, thanks to the color, we can study the sculpture better. Projection is used with plaster casts and not with originals.

Plaster casts can have several functions in presentation in the galleries of a museum. They are not presented as an addition merely for aesthetic purposes.; they can be integrated with ancient artefacts in an archaeological display. In this way, the narrative is enriched. But it requires a thorough explication for visitors. The contribution for the article and the symposium goes into more detail on how this can be worked out for a museum context.

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