

A collection of plaster models at the marble museum, a local artistic heritage

The origin of the stone industry in Belgium goes back as far as the Roman occupation. The marble industry, with the oldest pieces of testimony goes back to the 16th century. For more than three centuries, the marble workshops were located in the South of Belgium and the most important industry was in the village of Rance where a bright red marble was extracted. The use of this red marble spread throughout Europe and beyond. During this long period, a large number of customers came from abroad. This red stone was used in abundance for the decorations of palaces, monuments, castles, private houses... Local sculptors also worked other marbles to diversify their creations such as white marble, black, blue stone, onyx...

The museum opened in 1979 just after the closing of the last exploitation in Rance. Five years later, the last workshop closed and the marble industry became a « souvenir ». In order to preserve this heritage, the museum gathered together all the testimonies in relation with this industry such as the plaster models but just few were found. The realization of a sculpture in natural stone asks rigor and method in direct link with the material because each small modification on the marble is permanent.

The plaster cast is used as a reference point during the work and allow the transfer from the model in plaster to the marble. One of the most important workshops in Rance, worked for years to answer to the orders of sculptures of customers and most of the plaster casts, in connection with this large past work were discovered two years ago and offered at the museum. It's an exceptional heritage of more than 700 models which had been kept in an old barn. It means that all these models have somewhere a « twin » in marble in Belgium or abroad. No documents and archives were found and the museum is working to identify, preserve, keep the pieces in good condition and valorize them. The first challenge was the cleaning and the inventory which is still in progress. The second is to decide which models to restore and according to which criteria? My participation in this congress could help me to meet specialists on this matter and colleagues who run this kind of material.

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