

## **“La Croce” by Leonardo Bistolfi (Revoltella Museum, Trieste, Italy): restoration, preliminary studies of the execution techniques and informative contents for the museum**

This contribution focuses on the plaster cast "La Croce" (c. 1899 - 1904) by Leonardo Bistolfi (1859 - 1933), preserved at the Civic Museum Revoltella in Trieste (Italy). Along with the model displayed at the Civic Gallery of Modern Art in Turin (Italy), these two sculptures are the stages preceding the final work in marble, the funerary monument dedicated to Tito Orsini (1906), placed in Staglieno Cemetery in Genoa (Italy).

The restoration of this monumental sculpture (430x300x280 cm in size) was part of a program of conservation and maintenance of nearly 60 museum's sculptures. The restoration process provided an opportunity to analyze the sculpture more closely, and a careful and thorough cleaning operation using gel-supported aqueous solutions reestablished a better reading of the original surface, previously covered by substantial dirt deposits. During and after the cleaning operations we were able to examine the sculpture's surface more clearly: we began a preliminary study of its technical aspects, not yet fully understood as they vary among different areas. In fact, we found signs of two different casting techniques, such as pink plaster traces (which can be related to the "waste mold" casting technique) and characteristic lines along the joints possibly linked to the "plaster piece molding" technique. A mapping of the entire sculpture was therefore conducted, including its back, a complex wooden structural armour, not visible to the public; the information we discovered during the restoration were gathered and combined with a bibliographical research on the execution techniques of Leonardo Bistolfi, who extensively used plaster as an artistic material, both for large models for statuary and for making casts: even of this plaster cast he made two other casts, two character heads from the sculptural group (the Youth and the Philosopher).

The results of this preliminary study have been published in illustrative panels and pamphlets, with the aim of disclosing more precise and complete notions about the casting process and explain how we can still recognize its marks on the surface of the artwork, a topic rarely explored in museum information boards or didactic panels. Along with the operations necessary for the restoration of the cast, attempts were also made to highlight both its artistic and technical features, in order to improve their understanding and make these casting processes and information accessible and understandable to the public in a museum setting.

**Irene Rovatti:** Restorer with master degree in "Conservation and restoration of cultural heritage" at Academy of Fine Arts "Aldo Galli" (Italy), with specialization on wall paintings, mosaics, stone materials, plasters and stuccos. Experience of restoration of plaster casts has been gained through works in both museums and ancient buildings. Two publications on the subject of the master degree thesis.

**Claudia Ragazzoni:** Founding partner and technical director of OPERA EST, has been working in the restoration field since 1987 in Italy and abroad. Restorer specialized in architectural and archaeological intervention, with extensive experience and collaborations with museums, religious institutions and private collectors.