

## **“The Gilded Collector: Copies, Casts, Fabrications and the Formation of American Taste (c. 1870-1940)”**

A two-day Workshop, to be held at Brown University, May 2-3, 2025

Copies and imitations of ancient and medieval artifacts hold a curious place in the history of collecting. Disdained by the arbiters of elite taste, ignored by the general public, gleefully exposed by scholarly experts, replicas, casts, and imitations have always attracted a certain type of collector undeterred by popular indifference and deaf to the Siren song of authenticity. What motivates institutions and individuals to acquire, knowingly or unknowingly, copies or imitations of ancient or medieval artifacts, often beside or in addition to ‘genuine’ materials? Although the phenomenon is by no means limited to the USA, the focus of this workshop will be on American collectors and collecting practices from the late nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century, with a concentration on the Golden Age of the American acquisition of antiquities and replicas, ca. 1870-1940.

During this period, even as international banking fueled a mania for acquiring cultural property as an expression of power, a variety of different motives inspired the collectors of replicas and imitations that “aimed above all at recreating a past even more to the taste of modern readers [or viewers] and scholars than was the real antiquity uncovered by technical scholarship.” Historical veracity and authenticity in these contexts were less important than evocative recreation of an imaginary ethos of a period and place. For these purposes ‘genuine’ artifacts, copies, and creative reconstructions all held equal, if different, value. Ready to supply all three were the dealers who stood between the crafters and the buyers of antiquities and antique reproductions, middlemen able to service the needs or to take advantage of the vanities of collectors of all sorts, as the opportunity offered.

“The Gilded Collector” workshop will bring together a group of historians, art historians, archaeologists, and curators to investigate the diverse motives and practices of the buyers of reproductions of primarily European artifacts in the American milieu between the end of the American Civil War and the outbreak of World War II.

### **Abstracts**

#### **Lisa Anderson-Zhu (The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore) “Henry Walters and the Taste for ‘Real’ Antiquity”**

This paper explores the art collecting practices of Henry Walters (1848-1931) from the late 19th to early 20th centuries in the context of his elite social network. Through frequent travel to Europe from the mid-19th century until his death, Henry Walters was shaped by the tastes for ancient art as it was displayed in 19th century Europe, but he was also a tastemaker of the arts of antiquity on his own shores. Sometimes referred to by contemporaries as “the richest man in the South,” Henry Walters was on the board of trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the collections committee of the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge, MA. He also maintained a private art gallery in Baltimore that was open to the public on certain days, and to his friends and associates more regularly, while also displaying artworks in his private homes in New York, Newport, and Wilmington, NC. On his death in 1931, he bequeathed his art gallery and 22,000 artworks, including almost 5,000 antiquities, to the City of Baltimore, forming the

core holdings of the Walters Art Museum. As with every museum, fakes of different kinds (forgeries, pastiches, misidentified objects, and a few copies) are in storage and even in the galleries at the Walters Art Museum, from gems to marbles to almost all of the “Minoan” artefacts collected before 1931. Intentional copies of ancient art, which were collected as artworks in their own right, took the form of small scale bronze replicas and reconstructions created in the Renaissance and later. Unintentional copies, forgeries, and imaginative recreations of antiquities came to the collection through large purchases, such as all 1,700 objects of an Italian palazzo collection, and through curated purchases offered by dealers like Dikran Kelekian (1868-1951), who helped to shape Henry Walters’ collections of antiquities and Islamic art, while others were purchased directly from noted sales and dealers in Paris, London, and New York. These acquisitions will be considered through the lens of the intimate, public-facing, and scholarly spheres that they and their collector inhabited in the Gilded Age.

**John Bodel (Brown University) “*Tituli ficti*: Pseudo-epigraphy and the American Imagination”**

Copies and imitations of Greek and Latin inscriptions occupy a curious intersection of the brisk intercontinental traffic in classical antiquities that characterized an important period of American self-definition during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In an acquisitive era, at the peak of a century-long rise in global (and American) inequality of wealth, amidst a moderate influx of simple Roman tomb inscriptions and a flood of plaster casts of European statuary and sculpted monuments, a variety of copies and casts and fabrications of Greek and Latin inscriptions found their way into American private and public collections. This paper provides a summary overview of this heterogeneous material, considers briefly the motives and intentions of the collectors of it, as well as the ultimate fate of the objects, and offers some reflections on what this history implies about the American reception of the epigraphic legacy of classical antiquity.

**Mac Carley (Brown University) “‘Athens of the South’?: The Nashville Parthenon, Craftsmanship, and Community”**

This paper examines the object history of classical models to shed light on the reception of antiquity by the diverse audiences of the post-Reconstruction South. In 1895, the state of Tennessee commissioned a full-scale reproduction of the Parthenon, including a recreation of the Athena Parthenos statue, as the centerpiece of its centennial statehood celebration. The Parthenon was used at the centennial and afterwards as an exhibition hall for artwork and performance. As a public monument, it was renovated with more permanent materials, including casts of the Elgin Marbles, due to popular demand in the 1920s. The project took on a variety of influences from the different parties involved: it was led by Confederate associates, funded by railroad tycoons, commissioned female and immigrant sculptors, and was visited by millions of tourists. As an explicitly global event, the Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition sought both to commemorate its history as a state and position itself within the cosmopolitan, dynamic society of the future. The Nashville Parthenon used the visual language of classical antiquity to evoke an ethos of artistry and connoisseurship; its endurance over time reveals a range of responses to the production, preservation, and display of replicas from the ancient world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Simone Ciambelli (University of Bologna) “The Greeks and Romans Go to College: Copies of Greco-Roman Statues in the Public Spaces of U.S. Campuses”**

Starting with the two copies of imperial statues publicly displayed at Brown University (the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius on Lincoln Field behind Sayles Hall and the Augustus of Prima Porta now in the Wriston Quad), this paper considers what the intended purposes of these replicas were at the time of

their installation (education? aesthetics? cultural prestige?), the evolution of these contexts, and their cultural influence on campus life in the subsequent years up to the present day. Among the numerous classical statues displayed on American campuses and visible to all, I will discuss the Discobolus at Harvard, the Murphey Hall Statues at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, the Nike of Samothrace at the Ohio State University, and the Athena Lemnia at Bryn Mawr College.

### **Robert Cohon (Kansas City Art Institute) “Half-truths: Re-carved Ancient Sarcophagi at Hammond Castle”**

Between the late 1920's and early 1930's, millionaire-inventor John Hays Hammond, Jr. purchased many ancient marbles from the Rome-based dealer Armando Pacifici for his pseudo-Medieval castle in Gloucester, Massachusetts. He also purchased seven sarcophagi that Pacifici alleged dated from the 2nd to 8th century. By examining their marble types, measurements, iconography, and state of preservation, I found that they are ancient Roman sarcophagi that were originally plain or minimally decorated, but reworked with elaborate reliefs by forgers in Rome. This was a common practice on the Rome art market in the early part of the 20th century, and it is possible to assign some of these reworked sarcophagi to particular groups of forgers.

### **Francesca D'Andrea (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa) “The Scipio Barbatus Sarcophagus Type: Mythmaking and Reception in New England Cemeteries”**

This paper examines the widespread use of the Scipio Barbatus sarcophagus type in American cemeteries during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focusing on selected examples from New England. It analyzes the adoption of this sarcophagus type for funerary monuments within the broader context of the myth-making phenomenon following the discovery of Scipio's tomb in 1780. Who were the (almost exclusively male) individuals who chose to be commemorated in this way? What were the meanings, motivations, and levels of awareness behind the use of this monument, which was widely copied and quickly became a mass product and "must-have" among Americans of diverse professional and intellectual backgrounds? Can we trace the evolution of the use and personalization of these replicas and analyze this evolving trend from both a social and historical perspective?

### **Martha Easton (Saint Joseph's University) “Ambience and Authenticity: Pseudo-Medieval Objects and Spaces at Hammond Castle and Beyond.”**

Hammond Castle was built between 1926-1929 on the coast of Gloucester, Massachusetts. Its owner, John Hays Hammond Jr., was one of the most important inventors of his generation, and one end of the building housed the utilitarian laboratory where he and his team worked on projects in the fields of military weaponry, radio, radar, and music reproduction. But the rest of the structure, where Hammond lived and entertained, was built to emulate various architectural styles and spaces of the Middle Ages. Inside, dramatic rooms pull visitors into the past with their medievalized appearance. All of this is augmented by Hammond's eclectic bricolage of authentic, reproduction, and pastiche objects.

Like many other better-known collectors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (some of whom were his friends), Hammond was interested in creating a historical context for his art collection, even if that context had to be invented. This paper will focus on Hammond's collection of pseudo-medieval objects, many of which he acquired with the full knowledge that they were reproductions. For example, he commissioned Jacques Simon of Reims, France, to create the stained glass windows for the largest room in the castle, a mashup of a church nave and the great hall of a medieval manor house.

I will also discuss Hammond Castle's place within the larger context of the taste for atmospheric installations of art objects, including period rooms in museums. While Hammond was by no means the first American collector to arrange his objects in a historicized setting, his castle had a direct effect on the most famous museum of medieval art in the United States. After visiting Hammond Castle shortly after it opened, John D. Rockefeller Jr., the primary patron of The Cloisters, replaced its original architects with Allen and Collens, the Boston-based firm Hammond had selected to design his whimsical castle.

**Mary-Evelyn Farrior (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) "The Original Does Not Look Like This: Plaster Casts and the Early Collection Practices of Classical Antiquities at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston"**

In 1904, the Assistant Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA) outlined his stance against plaster casts, which occupied nearly half of the exhibition space in the MFA's Copley Square building, in various letters and essays. After lamenting the casts' lack of emotional force in a letter to the MFA's president, Prichard suggested that they ought to each be inscribed "THE ORIGINAL DOES NOT LOOK LIKE THIS" on their bases. Within the year, the Committee on the Museum voted on the fate of the MFA's cast collection, leading to their deaccession and ultimate dispersal across the globe. This talk will examine this critical moment in the history of the MFA, when the involvement of prominent figures such as Rodolfo Lanciani and Edward Perry Warren helped transform the Museum's collection of antiquities from plaster copies to original masterpieces. The growing collection of Greek and Roman, together with the critical need for a new building, caused the young Museum to quickly define its priorities, both aesthetically and pedagogically: a debate which is best captured in the treatment of the cast collection. Drawing on museum and departmental archival material and tracing the journey of the MFA's casts, this talk provides insight into the Gilded Age attitudes surrounding copies and originals, the role of the museum in American society, and the lasting ramifications of these decisions.

**Graham Oliver (Brown University): "Reviving a Gilded Age: Casts bearing Ancient Greek Inscriptions as Educational Tools"**

This presentation explores the lost legacy of casts of ancient Greek culture that once dominated the campuses of colleges such as Brown and RISD and uses the New England region as a case study. The supply of casts by firms such as the present-day Caproni Brothers (Woburn, MA) offer little for those who wish to use casts to illustrate the presence of ancient Greek writing. But the cast collection can help serve that audience. By looking first at the presence of Greek inscriptions on the collection of casts at the Slater Museum (Norwich CT), this paper explores aspects of the legacy (and reception) of the gilded age and the role that such cast collections can serve for educating (and illuminating) the general public as well as the student, with particular focus on ancient Greek writing. Casts have been used in recent times to provide opportunities for international viewers to see examples of reproductions of ancient artefacts that might not otherwise travel from their home museum. In the early 2000s, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture commissioned an exhibition of copies to present 'The Greek Script'. This material, and the casts in collections such as The Slater Museum, can offer a unique way for the student to engage with inscribed materials from antiquity that squeezes and photographs might otherwise fail to do. The luster of the Gilded Age has long faded, but there are ways for us to revive its brilliance not only through (re)discovering the few remaining examples of the cast materials from the late 19th and early 20th centuries but also by commissioning new casts for the 21st century.

**Gretel Rodriguez (Brown University) “A Tale of Two Casts: The Portal of Saint-Gilles in Paris and Pittsburg”**

This paper explores architectural casts of the Romanesque portal of Saint-Gilles du Gard, in Southern France, created for European and American collections. The intricately carved façade of this 12th-century abbey is reminiscent of the ancient Roman architectural legacy that characterizes the region, which was preserved well into the middle ages in former colonial centers such as Arles and Nîmes. In the late 19th century, interest in this by then dilapidated European corpus, led to the creation of lavish casts galleries in museums and private collections on both sides of the Atlantic. Here I focus on two plaster casts of the Saint-Gilles portal: one created in Paris in 1889 as part of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc’s efforts to revive the French national patrimony; the second—purportedly the largest architectural cast ever created—was commissioned in Pittsburg around 1907 by the industrialist Andrew Carnegie for his extensive collection of classical and medieval antiquities. A close examination of these ambitious replicas sheds light on how the classical heritage was absorbed and transformed during the European middle ages, as well as revealing particular attitudes towards the production, collection, and display of architectural casts during the Gilded Age.