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Plaster Cast Collections from the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in Context: Examining Culturally Determined Significance through Environment and Time

Résumé

En examinant deux ensembles de moulages de plâtre classiques dont la vie a commencé lors de l'Exposition universelle de 1904 à Saint-Louis, je retracerai la manière dont l'espace, le contexte et le temps ont instauré la fonction, les significations culturelles particulières et l'authenticité de ces moulages. Indépendamment du fait que ces collections sont apparues dans un environnement similaire, elles ont été adaptées à différents usages culturels et intentions, et leurs mouvements dans différents environnements et à travers le temps leur ont fait acquérir de multiples niveaux de signification culturelle.

Abstract

Through an exploration of the lives of two sets of classical plaster casts that began at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, I will track how space, context, and time established the function, specific cultural meanings, and authenticity of these casts. Regardless of the fact that these collections began in a similar environment, they were adapted for different cultural uses and agendas and accrued multiple levels of cultural significance in their movements through different environments and through time.

Plaster casts occupy a suspended position between original works of art and reproductions. Although used both in antiquity and the early Renaissance, this humble material was embraced in the 19th century for its promising capabilities to replicate antique statues with precision. In America, during the second half of the 19th century, cast collecting became an extremely prevalent practice both in private and public realms. In the public sphere, plaster casts in museums were not only valued for their civilizing effects but also afforded Americans a unique opportunity to view a more complete canon of antique sculpture. Since museums were associated with most colleges and universities by the end of the 19th century, plaster casts also took on a critical role in archaeological pedagogy.

The meanings generated by plaster casts were in no way fixed or singular; according to

anthropologist and art historian Christopher Pinney, objects have the ability to “migrate endlessly, cutting back and forth across new times and contexts” (2004: 206). Plaster casts inherently do this through their temporal references to the original statues that they replicate. In fact, art historian Michael Camille’s work on the power of medieval plaster casts suggests that the process of replication facilitates the objects’ ability to take on new meanings (1996: 199). The changing classifications and displays of plaster casts further multiply their associative functions. In this essay, I will establish the function and specific cultural meanings of two collections of classical plaster casts that first appeared at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri. It is not my intention to unpack specific meanings behind every subject choice or iconographic theme of the specific collections but rather to

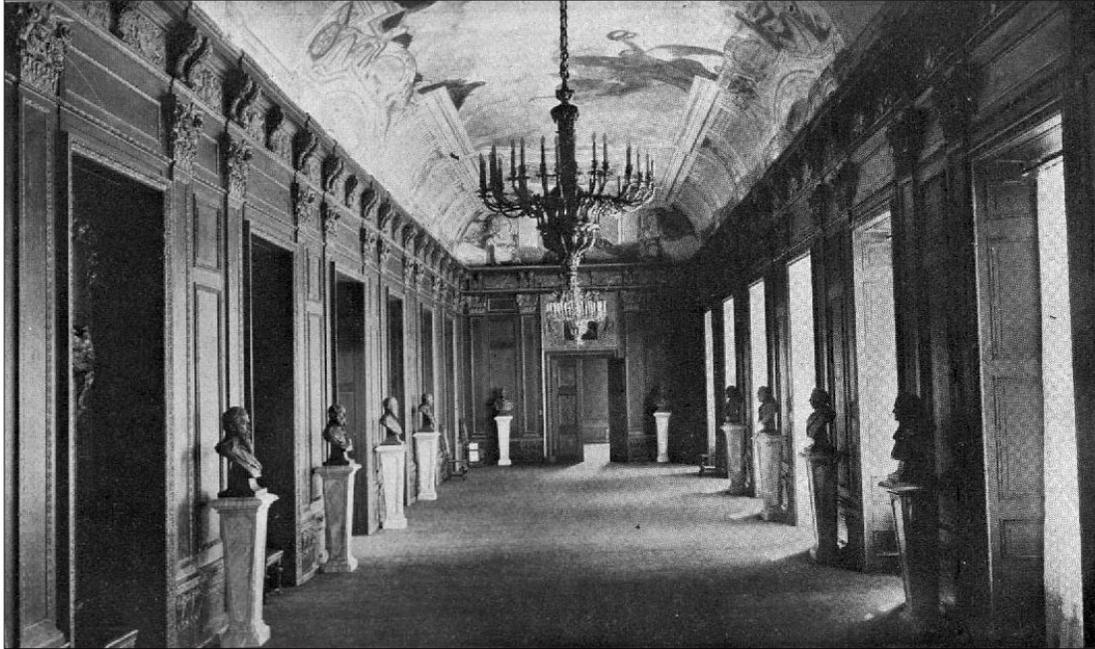


Fig. 1
*August Gerber's busts
of Prussian leaders in
the Main Hall of the
German State Building
(Gerber 1910: 85).*

cursorily examine the range of meanings evoked by these collections.

Because of the nature of my argument, this essay will be organized into fair and post-fair functions of the cast collections, examining the changing scope of authenticity, functions, and meanings of the casts. I will look to primary sources to reflect how associations with genuineness and legitimacy were implied when artists, collectors, and viewers referenced craftsmanship and colour when evaluating the casts' quality and historical accuracy. I will then demonstrate how the criteria used to judge plaster casts was in flux by the turn of the century in America and how these criteria highlighted tensions present between the fine arts and mass production, as demonstrated by the fluidity in meaning and function of plaster casts. I will point to conceptions of authenticity as they begin to emerge in relation to the collections of plaster casts specifically. While the term was absent at the turn of the century, it gained currency later in the 20th century as a criterion of judgment and complicated how plaster casts were received.¹ Additionally, I will contextualize these collections in time, examining how their cultural meanings and functions have changed since their formation and their recent resurgence as valued artifacts by their institutional owners. Ultimately, I contend that a single plaster cast communicates many

truths, underscoring how their flexible conceptions of function and authenticity become fixed by the specific environments in which they were—and are—received and understood.

1904 Fair Functions

While collected casts were displayed in a myriad of venues, one of the most formative moments in cast collecting, for the purposes of this essay, was at the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in 1851 in Hyde Park, London. The plaster casts of ancient statues were divided into displays of different periods, Greek and Roman, Gothic and Renaissance, modern Italian and French, and modern English and German sculpture, and these groupings enabled comparison. The "Prospectus of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851" announced: "The French, Germans, and Italians will cease to be the only European nations busy in educating the eye of the people for the appreciation of art and beauty" (Kenworthy-Browne 2006: 174). This attitude foreshadows the wave of nationalism that also arose in connection with casts at American world fairs.

World fairs in America were sites of contact with large crowds and as such they readily lent themselves to the dissemination of knowledge. They worked to shape public taste of the masses through overwhelming exhibitions, static or

Fig. 2
August Gerber's plaster casts present in the German University exhibit in the Palace of Education. His cast of Athena Lemnia is at the centre of the exhibit with busts of noted Germans around the perimeter (Gerber 1907: 118).



living, of anything from technology to art. In fact, fair buildings, filled with exhibits, were strikingly similar to museums themselves (Harris 1990: 114-20).² While the functions of world fairs were multivalent, serving as anything from an anthropological field research station to an imperial dream city, the fair's importance as a locus for didacticism and nationalism will be particularly pertinent for this essay.³ Indeed, the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, celebrating the westward expansion of America, took on the central theme of the "University of the Future." The president of the exposition, David R. Francis, believed that fairs should display only the highest products from industry, art, and science (Parezo and Fowler 2007: 19, 32). This essay will investigate how plaster casts at the fair reflected these goals.

August Gerber at the 1904 Exposition

August Gerber, a celebrated German plaster caster from Cologne, Germany, displayed his casts at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition and promoted them as both celebrations of German nationalism and educational objects. Gerber displayed just fewer than two hundred ancient, modern, and Italian and German medieval casts across various palaces at the world fair.

Nationalistic Functions

The variety of locations at which Gerber's casts were exhibited at the fair contributed to the importance of the casts in Germany's celebration of its national identity. Gerber's casts were on view in the German State Building, Palace of Education, Palace of Varied Industries, and, most prominently, in the Palace of Liberal Arts (Gerber 1904: 9, 18). Germany was, in fact, the centre of the plaster cast movement in Europe and thus it is logical that it would promote this strength with one of its most successful cast makers (Nichols 2006: 117).⁴ The rise of nationalism during the 19th century fostered an ideal environment for museums and cast makers alike to promote their national heritage and to push for national art production (Frederiksen and Marchand 2010: 7). In considering their context in a building specifically dedicated to Germany and their commission by the state, it becomes clear that the casts in the German State Building were especially evocative of this nationalism and celebrated the nation through their subject matter: they represented leaders, scholars, musicians, orators, champions of liberty, and scientists who appropriately illustrated the achievements of the German people (Fig. 1). Gerber's plaster busts of notable Germans, such as Winckelmann and Goethe, placed in the German Educational Exhibit, promoted the importance of Germany in the fields of art history and classical studies

(Fig. 2; Gerber 1904: 8). Thus, the context of these casts demanded a nationalistic spirit advancing the nation of Germany and the German educational system.

The casts also championed Germany through their materiality and manufacture since they embodied exquisite craftsmanship and archaeological accuracy as claimed by Gerber himself in his catalogue (1904: 21-23). At the very centre of the German University Exhibit stood Gerber's cast of Athena Lemnia, which served as the axis around which the other exhibits rotated. Its central position represents the great importance of classics and antiquity in general to the university exhibit (1904: 23-40). Also, the original statue from which the cast of Athena Lemnia was taken was in fact a reconstruction, pieced together by the German archaeologist and art historian, Adolf Furtwängler.⁵ Again, displaying this cast of Furtwängler's reconstruction boasted of German scholarship and lent legitimacy to the statue. Therefore, the cast of Athena Lemnia highlighted interests in promoting German involvement not only in classical archaeology but also in art history.

Colour as Didactic and a Marker of Accuracy

The ways in which August Gerber focused on the materiality and, specifically, the colour of the casts, contributed to their perception as accurate art objects and enhanced their educational value. Although plaster casts traditionally remained white in order to facilitate comparison, Gerber went against this trend, stating that his were toned, bronzed, or painted in accordance with the original to ensure that the viewer received a correct impression of the work (Gerber 1904: 8).⁶ Gerber believed that colour would lead to a better understanding of classical art: "All these casts ... enable one to understand the different kinds of classical art, as white casts cannot possibly do" (Gerber 1904: 17). This assertion would explain why Gerber put so much effort into ensuring that he portrayed the original colours of works of art. In fact, in regard to his bronze-coloured casts, Gerber claimed, "the artistic imitation is so perfect that any one without touching the sculpture would believe it to be nothing less than real metal" (Gerber 1904: 17). In this concern

with reception, Gerber revealed that he was interested not only in dictating that the viewers see his casts as works of accurate art but also in ensuring the didactic role of his casts.

Perhaps the most significant demonstration of colour as a tool of accuracy is demonstrated by the way in which Gerber chose to produce the cast of Athena Lemnia, essentially creating a new work of art (Fig. 2). Although the original sculpture was made of marble, Gerber coloured it as antique bronze, referring to the original Greek, bronze Athena of Lemnos that Phidias was believed to have made instead of the Roman copy as reconstructed by Furtwängler (Gerber 1904: 8). In this way, Gerber suggested that his cast was even more accurate than the sculpture from which it was moulded. His bronze would evoke the ultimate original copy of Phidias, changing the meaning of the cast through temporal references. During this period, plaster casts were not always coloured. In fact, it was thought that colour might divert from the actual form of the sculpture. Therefore, art educators and teachers generally preferred the whiteness of the casts (Van Rheeden 2001: 220-21). This preference suggests that Gerber was not falling in with a trend to colour the casts but was colouring them in order to promote his vision of referring to the statue from which the mould came.

The way in which Gerber coloured Athena Lemnia was not a singular example as is noted by the way in which he addressed colour in his 1904 catalogue of his exhibit. Gerber listed the works, not necessarily by their original material, but by the "material" in which he coloured them. For example, he also championed the original Greek medium and not the surviving Roman marble copy in his listing for the *Apoxyomenos*, which is as follows: "Statue APOXYOMENOS, Vatican, Rome, bronze" (Gerber 1904: 11) (Fig. 3). In this way, Gerber continually suggested that his plaster copies were more original than the original copy of the statue on which it was based.

August Gerber and Education

One of the primary aims of the firm of August Gerber was to supply plaster casts for educative purposes, an aim that was supported by their display within the German Educational Exhibit.

Here, the exhibitions of casts, reflecting the influence of both Gerber and the government, demonstrate fluidity in function. These exhibits were very select and designed with the purpose to exhibit items with which North American educators had limited familiarity (Gerber 1904: 5). Furthermore, Gerber was perhaps more interested in disseminating his casts and in their educative and nationalistic values than in financial gains since he provided his casts free of charge to the German State Building. However, this is the only venue in which it can be proven that he definitively donated the casts, and his motivations behind the donation might simply reflect a desire to advertise.

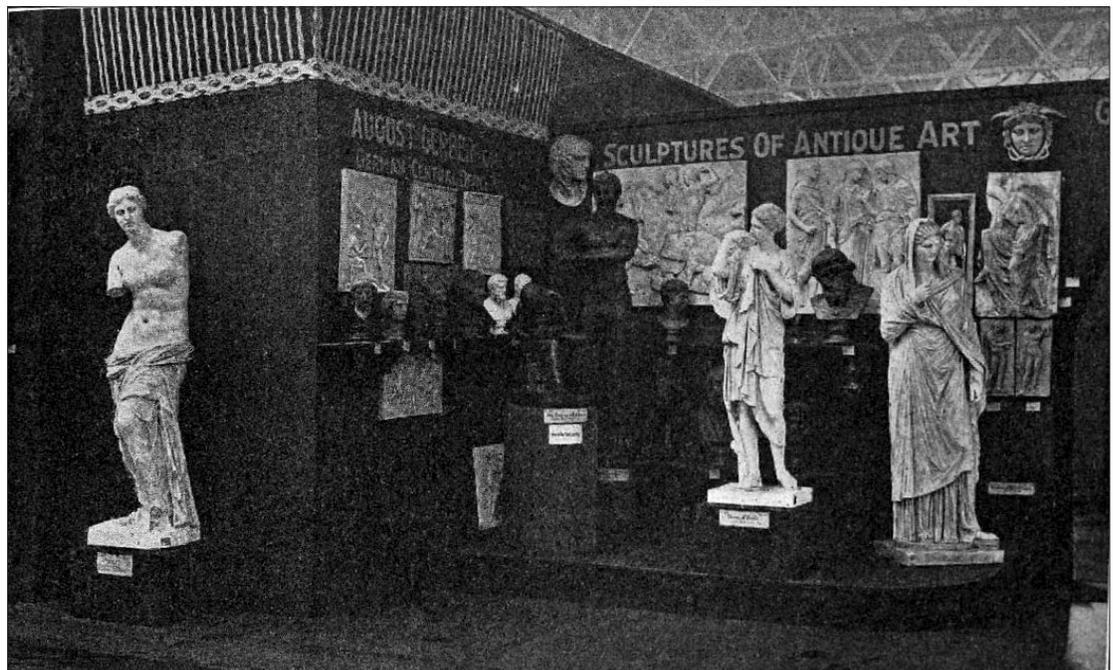
Gerber's plaster casts displayed in the German University Exhibit of the Palace of Education were in accordance with the German educational exhibit's mission to educate visitors about the accomplishments of the Empire's universities. Since the section of the exhibit of the universities was limited, the exhibitors decided to "include things belonging to the last ten years and arousing more than a local interest" (1904: iii, vi-vii, 45). Gerber considered his casts instructive, stating that both students and the general public would be interested in "collections of artistic casts made up in this manner" (Gerber 1904: 17). These casts included busts of noted Germans and

the Athena Lemnia statue and would thus be instructive in the history of German scholarship.

Gerber's casts were promoted instead as aesthetic artworks in the Classical Gymnasium Exhibit devoted to the German school based primarily on the classical literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans (Bahlsen 1904: 6). The casts were described as "artistic wall decorations" and comprised ancient and medieval statues as well as an assortment of classical and modern busts of noted writers and philosophers (Bahlsen 1904: iv-v). The purpose of the wall decorations was "to educate the taste and esthetic feeling of young people rather than to influence their intellects or enlarge their knowledge" (Bahlsen 1904: v). So while these plaster casts had a didactic function, it was not to teach students the history of art as in the university exhibit but rather to promote taste, much like plaster casts were to civilize the general public. Gerber even claimed that his prices did not reflect that of a monopoly, but rather could be afforded by rich and poor institutions alike, allowing for all to cultivate artistic sense and good taste (Gerber 1910: 11). This claim highlights the role that casts played in the world at large as a tool to refine and cultivate taste in educative settings.

However, Gerber's exhibits in the Palace of Education were not the only ones that revealed his didactic interests. Gerber's attitude toward his exhibits in the Palace of Liberal Arts indicate

Fig. 3
August Gerber's plaster casts of *Antique Art* in the Palace of Liberal Arts. Note the plaster cast of the *Apoxyomenos* colored bronze next to the cast of *Artemis of Gabii* (Gerber 1907: 119).



that they served as accurate objects to educate the public in the history of art—not just in aesthetic appreciation. In the Palace of Liberal Arts the casts were grouped into Sculptures of Antique Art, Sculptures of the Italian Middle Age, Sculptures of the German Middle Age and Sculptures of Modern Art, following the typical classification systems used in textbooks of ancient sculpture and art at the time, such as the sculptures in the Portico of the Fine Arts Palace representing the great periods of art. This presentation as works of art, rather than as ornamental elements in an environment, and classification according to culture and chronology, would suggest that they were being treated as if genuine objects in a museum and would therefore necessitate their viewing as legitimate artworks. Indeed, their very presence in the Palace of Liberal Arts, celebrating artistic achievements, required the casts to be viewed as such.

August Gerber's casts at the fair demonstrate how important context and environment can be when determining the agenda and artistic quality of the collection. Even within Gerber's largely didactic collection of casts, meaning was nuanced in relation to their different locations at the fair. Casts in the German Building promoted nationalism; in the Palace of Education they promulgated the importance of learning; and the casts located in the Palace of Liberal Arts demanded treatment as works of art.

The United States National Museum at the 1904 Exposition

Unlike August Gerber's exhibits located primarily in the Palace of Fine Arts and Palace of Education, the United States National Museum's (USNM) plaster cast display, created by the Old World Archaeology directors Cyrus Adler and Immanuel Casanowicz, was created specifically for the Smithsonian Institution exhibit in the U.S. Government Building at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. The display was on a considerably smaller scale consisting of fewer than fifty plaster casts taken from original Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman statues and arranged by culture. Like the classical plaster casts that were part of Gerber's exhibitions, the USNM collection was didactic in nature



but focused on instructing fairgoers about the aesthetic achievements of humankind, including those of the indigenous Americas, as opposed to the history of Western art. The casts of ancient artworks were promoted as accurate in order to further the USNM's objective of promoting Mesoamerican and Native American Indian objects as genuine works of art. These meanings were determined directly by the indigenous casts and artifacts displayed in conjunction with the classical plaster casts.

Themes and Goals of the Exhibit

According to the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, G. Brown Goode, the USNM became involved in expositions in order to educate American visitors and impress foreign ones and he stated that "all of this is accepted without complaint, because though the Museum undoubtedly loses much more than it gains on such occasions, the opportunity for popular education is too important to be neglected" (SIA, Record Unit [RU] 55, box 19, folder 9). Numerous agencies, including the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the Division of Anthropology and the USNM, dictated the subject and theme of the exhibit. The plaster casts fell in line with the educative themes of the exposition and its mission to educate visitors about the pinnacle of humankind's

Fig. 4
Plaster casts exhibited as part of the Department of Anthropology display in the U.S. Government Building. The classical plaster casts are displayed by culture on the left. To the right, divided by a narrow walkway, are the plaster cast temples and sculptures of Mesoamerica and the Native Americans (SLA Image #2009-2212).

achievements by promoting Mesoamerican and North American Indian works as art.

The Department of Anthropology's exhibit within the USNM also adhered to the goals of the Division of Anthropology, an entity at the fair that was located on the opposite side of the fairgrounds from the U.S. Government Building. William J. McGee, the chair of the Division of Anthropology, asserted that these exhibits should trace the course of human progress (Parezo and Fowler 2007: 49). By including both indigenous and European works, the exhibit undoubtedly achieved this goal.

The classical plaster casts, arranged according to culture, were only one segment of the Department of Anthropology's exhibit in the USNM's space in the U.S. Government building (Fig. 4). The remaining portion of the exhibit included Mesoamerican and North American Indian artifacts and plaster casts.⁷ During preparations for the fair, one of the organizers described the exhibit's goals as "covering the entire range of arts and manufactures of the Native American peoples, so selected as to illustrate their artistic or esthetic development; the specimens chosen in each case to be the best examples of their kind" (NAA, Holmes to F. W. True, December 16, 1902, outgoing correspondence, BAE, 1902). The director of the Department of Anthropology, William Henry Holmes, stated of the exhibit: "I hope to make this extremely attractive, since it will bring together examples of the best work, the finest carvings, paintings, sculptures, etc., found in America" (SIA, RU 70, box 62, folder 16, November 16, 1902, letter from Holmes to F. W. True). Therefore, selecting only the best and most aesthetically pleasing works of indigenous art advanced the art of the Americas as well as inherently presented an evolutionary model in comparison with the casts.

The classical plaster casts ultimately evoked a comparison with the indigenous works of the Americas. The final anthropology exhibit as described by the USNM was as follows: "The theme was to show the aesthetic achievements of the Native American peoples. In conjunction with this was shown some of the works of art of ancient civilizations of the old world" (SIA, RU 70, box 70, folder 3). In this comparative context then, it was critical that the plaster casts were seen as works of art that then worked to promote

the indigenous arts of the Americas to a similar status. Despite the fact that the plaster casts as a whole were divided from the Mesoamerican and North American artifacts by means of a narrow walkway, they were still connected to one another through their materiality. In addition to plaster casts of indigenous sculpture, there were also plaster architectural models that were especially commissioned for this exhibit and would have been clearly visible from the classical plaster cast section. This section included models of the Temple Xochicalco, the Temple Hall of the Columns, the Temple of the Cross, the House of the Governor in Uxmal and the Castillo and presented the most comprehensive display of Native American architecture seen in a public exhibition (SIA, RU 70, box 70, folder 1: Report on Exhibits of the Department of Anthropology and the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1905). Even more blatant was the incorporation of two pieces of indigenous pottery on top of the screens dividing the classical plaster casts (Fig. 4). Therefore, regardless of the fact that the casts and indigenous artifacts were not intermingled, they were clearly intended to reference one another.

Although archaeological and ethnographic materials often coexisted with the rationale that classical study was incomplete without including more medieval studies, and thus encouraged an evolutionary model, I would argue for their primacy as artworks. In fact, it was necessary that the plaster casts be regarded as accurate artworks in order to present the Mesoamerican and North American ethnographic materials and artifacts, some of them the very same medium of plaster, as aesthetically valuable artworks (Beard 1993: 4).⁸

Casts Promoted as Artworks

The classical plaster casts that were specifically chosen and organized by Adler and Casanowicz demonstrate concerns with accuracy. The fact that they obtained "original casts" directly from museums and distinguished cast makers suggested that they were high-quality casts and thus made certain that they were historically accurate works of art.⁹ The cast of the head of the Diskobolos is unique in this collection of plaster casts because its original label survives, describing the work as a "cast of a marble copy in

the Lancalotti Palace, Rome.” This label suggests that Adler was making the viewer aware of its reproductive status and was not as concerned with its originality, demonstrating the tensions that exist in plaster casts. Since Adler sought to promote Native American art through its correlation to canonical works, only the casts’ reference to the original was important. Its association with the original enhanced the status of the American artifacts displayed in conjunction with it, essentially reclassifying these ethnographic objects as works of art.

Anomalously included with the Egyptian casts was an “original” Roman portrait. Adler pushed for the purchase of this portrait because, according to a letter he wrote, this was a sort of painting that was “not known to exist ... until a few years ago, when a collection was found in Upper Egypt.” He continues,

this collection is the only one known and is probably 2000 years old. I was very anxious to have a specimen of this lost art in the exhibition, as being something rare and unique and illustrating one important phase in the history of the arts. (SIA, RU 70, box 61, Adler to Raveln, Aug. 4, 1904)

The importance of this portrait is further attested by the fact that Adler originally wished to purchase two encaustic portraits, but was only able to afford to purchase one (SIA, RU 70, box 71, folder 4; MSC, accession record no. 43048). Although this piece stands out because it was the only non-plaster cast material exhibited, I would argue that its medium was acceptable because its value as a work of art far exceeded the need for it to be sculptural in form. As Adler stated, this was a recently discovered art form, at least to the USNM, and thus it placed the Department of Anthropology within the current developments of the art world, again emphasizing the importance of aesthetics. I would suggest that the portrait, out of all the “real” classical artifacts the USNM was in possession of at this time, was purchased and displayed because of its status as a newly discovered art form, which indicated that the plaster casts were also chosen for their artistic merit and educational functions. The plaster casts might also be regarded as genuine artistic works despite the fact that the encaustic portrait displayed alongside the reproductions blatantly questioned their legitimacy. In this context, then,

the plaster casts and encaustic portrait lent each other artistic accuracy and signified the difficulty of attaching any fixed meaning to the plaster casts.

Casts as Symbols of Art and Empire

A series of Roman reliefs from the Arch of Trajan at Benevento symbolize the USNM’s struggle to promote the objects in their exhibits as both works of art and of empire. The casts were acquired from The American School of Classical Studies in Rome and were not originally slotted for the exhibit. When first investigating plaster casts, H. Langley, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, wished to instead obtain a cast section of the Column of Trajan for the centre of the Rotunda, adjacent to the department’s exhibit. Not only was the column symbolic of the height of ancient art in Rome, but it also spoke to the height of the Roman Empire and Roman imperial power. In a letter, Langley wrote, “I want to have it in evidence that the Museum exists for art as well as for science, and such a thing as this column is a most suggestive reminder” (MSC, accession record No. 42866). The Column of Trajan, then, was intended to promote the USNM as an art institution as well as a place of natural history and science. In addition, Langley asserted that while world fairs commonly used European art to show an evolution of humankind, this particular exhibit was more concerned with the idea of “art” than evolution. Since the museum was unable to acquire the piece, the Smithsonian Institution decided to commission a local plaster artist to make a *Goddess of Liberty* instead for the rotunda.¹⁰

Nonetheless, the USNM purchased another piece of architectural sculpture from the reign of Trajan for the amount of \$316, the greatest amount the department spent on a single group of casts from the same monument, signifying the enormous importance of the reliefs (MSC, Accession record 42866, LPX Order #459). By displaying these reliefs, the USNM promoted a comparison with the indigenous American objects in the exhibit that incidentally also highlighted the tensions between the evolutionary model and the objects as works of art. This

comparison was further facilitated by the fact that the *Arch of Trajan* relief panels spoke highly to empire, emphasized especially by the ways in which the plaster casts were divided into cultural empires. The cast relief of the personification of Mesopotamia on bended knee before Trajan is particularly jarring since this scene of submission, in relation to the indigenous plaster casts displayed nearby, implies that the Department of Anthropology was referencing empire-building. This may indirectly relate to the empire-building of the Mesoamerican cultures whose art, including casts of deities and rulers, was displayed nearby, thus drawing a comparison between the two (SIA, RU 70, box 79, folder 1, Report of the Department of Anthropology, 1905 by Holmes, 31). If the cast of Mesopotamia was an allusion to empire-building, the relief would then also resonate with the greater exposition at St. Louis itself, since it was in celebration of the acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase and the possibility of an American empire. The fact that they chose another victory monument from the reign of Trajan signifies the USNM's interests in connecting old and new world archaeology through empire and the displaying of art with themes of conquest.

The plaster casts present at the USNM's exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition were utilized to represent the primary concern of the Department of Anthropology in displaying ideal ancient works of art, embodying some of the greatest civilizations of the past, in order to promote indigenous objects as valid works of art. The department's primary interests are further evidenced by the fact that at the following and smaller 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial in Portland, Holmes chose only to send the Mayan plaster model temples, which were considered the most striking objects from the exhibit (SIA, RU 70, box 65, folder 10; SIA, RU 70, box 70, folder 3). The long-validated standing of the classical casts displayed in this exhibit served to augment the status of the anthropological collections and place them also within the realm of acceptable art. In order for this to be accomplished, it was critical that the plaster casts were seen as genuine works of art themselves. It was this specific context within indigenous art and artifacts that mandated that these casts be viewed as artworks. This exhibit reveals the ability of plaster casts to

accrue multiple levels of significance: asserting the casts as artworks, promoting indigenous, ethnographic materials as works of art, paralleling the idea of evolution in the Americas and Europe, and stressing the similarity of empire-building. By exhibiting these plaster casts at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the USNM was appealing to the public for this change in the discourse of Mesoamerican and North American art.

Post-Fair Functions

In this section of the essay, I will introduce how the term "authenticity" complicates the discourse around plaster casts, as can be demonstrated by the infamous "Battle of the Casts" at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston. Interestingly, this public battle took place at the same time as the 1904 fair, demonstrating the flux in the reception of plaster casts at the turn of the century. The museum, originally founded as an educational platform, became sacralized over time, placing primacy with aesthetics. The argument between Edward Robinson, the director and curator of ancient art at the MFA, and Matthew Prichard, the assistant director at the MFA, began with a proposition to move the plaster casts into a new building away from the authentic art objects. Prichard saw true, aesthetic beauty only in originals, while Robinson supported the plaster casts and their didactic uses. In the end, the plaster casts were moved to storage, Prichard lost his job, and Robinson resigned (DiMaggio 1982: 36; Wallach 1998: 56). Thus, during this time period, plaster casts were being removed from museums as they were increasingly considered inauthentic.¹¹ This battle embodies the ways in which authenticity and the cult of the original began to shape the fate of plaster casts.

One of the major, although by no means singular, causes for the decline in plaster casts was the idea of the cult of the original that began taking root in the 1880s and 1890s. The idea of authenticity began to emerge and assert itself as a defining factor in the valuation of art.¹² Museums saw themselves as a temple of the arts that only housed objects of high aesthetic taste. Consequently, even third-rate "original" objects took precedence over a reproduction of

a canonical work. Casts were viewed as mere mechanical reproductions and their very presence among authentic artworks was seen as degrading to the originals.¹³ Increasingly, the museum experience moved away from the strict moral and intellectual refinement of the public and turned to aesthetics.¹⁴

The post-fair relocations of the Gerber and USNM collections demonstrate the fluidity of meaning surrounding the reception of casts at the turn of the century. This simultaneous embrace and disapproval of the plaster cast relays the transitory nature of this period and dictates a more pluralistic approach to art.¹⁵

The Gerber Collection

Acquisition and Reception of Casts

The fate of August Gerber's casts demonstrates the very fact that amidst this ongoing debate between the authentic and the reproduction, plaster casts still could retain value as educational tools. Gerber's plaster casts specifically targeted educative venues, as is evidenced by the plaster cast collection at Southeast Missouri State University, located in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, which was purchased in 1904 directly from Gerber at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Mr. Louis Houck was a member of the Board of Regents at the State Normal School in Cape Girardeau who, while visiting the fair, became especially interested in the German exhibit of plaster casts and made an offer to take some of them back with him to the Cape Girardeau Normal School, now called Southeast Missouri State University (Mattingly 1979: 100). Mr. Houck corresponded with both August Gerber and the president of the Normal School, Washington Dearmount, and eventually purchased the plaster casts for \$1,888.25 on October 19, 1904. All of the plaster casts purchased by Houck, except for several from the Palace of Education exhibits, came from Gerber's main exhibit at the Palace of Liberal Arts, which might suggest that Houck was more interested in establishing a history of art than one of art appreciation.

The academic community of Cape Girardeau heralded the arrival of the plaster casts. On October 25, 1904, President Dearmount at the Normal School declared the fifty-eight plaster casts from the world fair had won first prize and a gold medal at the fair (SEMO, President's Office Subject Files, box 1335, file 11). In the local paper the collection was described as "a collection of statuary that for its kind is not excelled or even equaled by any school in the country" (*Cape Girardeau Democrat*, December 24, 1904). Dearmount himself stated that the casts were "much superior to any casts that [he] ha[d] ever seen" (SEMO, President's Office Subject Files, box 1335, file 11, June 12, 1905, Letter from the President of the Faculty). These primary sources designate accuracy and artistry as indicators of value. Furthermore, the December 1904 Bulletin of the State Normal School stated that all of the plaster casts purchased for the Normal School bore the label "Sold—Missouri State Normal School, Cape Girardeau" (SEMO, Bulletin, State Normal School, December, 1904). This label was put on the plaster casts that were still on exhibit at the fair, thus advertising the Normal School and their participation in the classical tradition as well as the availability of Gerber's casts for purchase.

After arriving in Cape Girardeau, the plaster casts were slated for exhibit in Academic Hall's main corridor under the advisement of August Gerber. In fact, Gerber's overseeing the installation of the casts was actually a stipulation of his contract (SEMO, President's Office Subject Files, box 1335, file 11, June 12, 1905, Letter from the President of the Faculty).¹⁶ I would suggest that this is not only an indication of his dedication to the educative nature of plaster casts but also of a certain devotion to his award-winning artistic works. In March of 1905 the plaster casts were exhibited in the west end of the main corridor of the new Academic Hall, as per Houck's stipulation that a room where they could be permanently displayed would be dedicated to them (Fig. 5). These casts certainly proved applicable to the school's mission to train students to become public school teachers (Mattingly 1979: 71; SEMO, *Bulletin of the Missouri State Normal School, Catalogue*, 1904: 5).

Fig. 5
The plaster casts, purchased by Louis Houck, displayed in the Main Hall of Academic Hall at the State Normal School in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. "Statuary in Academic Hall, Cape Girardeau Normal School, ca. 1910," University Photographs Collection, Special Collections and Archives, Southeast Missouri State University.



Casts as Didactic

The casts properly fit within the language-concentrated curriculum of the school, and the school's dedication to the field of classical study is demonstrated by the fact that it had an entire path of study devoted to Latin. In fact, during the presidency of Dearmount there were three courses of study: a one-year Common School or sub-Normal course, and the four-year Latin and English courses. In conjunction with both the Latin and English courses, students studied free-hand drawing, ancient, medieval, and modern history (SEMO, President's Office Subject Files, box 1251, file 5, Courses of Instruction). The ancient history class spent two-thirds of its term discussing Greek and Roman history, and all three of its textbooks were devoted to the same subjects (SEMO, *Bulletin of the Missouri State Normal School, Catalogue*, 1904: 23). As was common in education at the time, it is extremely likely that this subject, in addition to the drawing courses, would have made use of the plaster casts. Further evidence of the collection's being used for didactic purposes is the care of selection that denotes a truly comprehensive collection including casts from antiquity, the German and Italian Middle Ages, and Modern periods.

I would suggest that the placement of the plaster casts in Academic Hall, the academic heart of the school at that point, as well as the community and school's pride in these works, dictated that they be viewed as both artworks and valuable tools in education. The way in which reports of these casts emphasized their value and award-winning status would suggest that they were regarded as accurate, especially in consideration of the plaster casts' value to the school as one that esteemed a classical education. In this environment, the casts took on a more authoritative educative role and allowed SEMO to participate in classical education trends at universities throughout the United States.

Dispersal and Neglect

As plaster casts were increasingly viewed with more hostility, the educators' utilization of the casts likely decreased in the 1920s in conjunction with changing policies of the school, including changes in curriculum that did not as heavily favour the classics. Despite this, casts remained in the Academic Hall until 1959, when they were dispersed throughout campus to make room for additional classroom space. The year prior, the university had formed a committee to determine the distribution of the plaster casts and

whose aim was to allow the works to continue to serve as tools of learning for the students, rather than to go into storage (Crow 1975). However, their usefulness in didactic situations as individual units, rather than as a collection, should be questioned. Despite these intentions, it was lamented that all the labels from the plaster casts were no longer present, further removing the objects from being considered genuine or having educational value. Additionally, many of the casts fell into disrepair during this period of dispersal across campus. Although the casts remained in situ, it was likely out of convenience more than anything else, as their disposability was readily demonstrated when the space was needed for another purpose.

United States National Museum Collection

The ways in which context dictates meaning is well illustrated by the fate of the casts from the 1904 world fair exhibit of the United States National Museum, now called the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). The plaster casts have remained with the NMNH since their exhibition at the fair despite the diffusion of the USNM into different divisions within the Smithsonian Institution. Although the casts have remained in the collections, they appear to have never been utilized as they were at the fair, only being exhibited again once more in 1922 under the direction of Casanowicz.

1922 Exhibit

When Casanowicz displayed the plaster casts from the fair eighteen years later, a seismic shift in attitudes toward plaster casts had taken shape. Again, despite tensions between the authentic and the copy, the Old World Archaeology department still utilized the plaster casts, although it is difficult to determine whether they had any pedagogical purpose. In Casanowicz's 1922 exhibit a large number of plaster casts were displayed along with genuine, classical artifacts (Casanowicz 1924: 445). Simulacra, in addition to those casts at the 1904 fair, such as casts, models, and electrotyped gems were included in the exhibit along with "real" classical objects, including pottery, jewelry, and bronzes (Casanowicz 1924: 490-96). The catalogue of the

exhibit states that all artifacts from the classical world that the museum owned at the time were displayed along with other Old World artifacts. I would suggest that this context within an amalgamation of authentic artifacts attests more to the sheer amount of material that the museum owned and therefore functioned more as a signal of the breadth of collection than for any strict pedagogical purpose. In fact, the Smithsonian actively collected exhibition material from world fairs to help prove to Congress that they required more museum space (Rydell 2006: 137-38). After this 1922 exhibit ended, the plaster casts were put into storage, where they still remain.

Cast into Storage

The life of the plaster casts after the 1922 exhibit at the NMNH illustrates how resilient, or perhaps how easily forgotten, these plaster casts are. All of the plaster casts from the initial exhibit are still present; the only missing casts were destroyed because of damage that was beyond repair. The first location was a storage site in Alexandria, Virginia, where facilities were not ideal and resulted in crates being stacked one on top of another, likely explaining the current damage to some of the casts. The casts remained here until 1972 when they were moved to the Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland, where the objects are all now in premium storage crates individually catered to the size and shape of the plaster casts. The fact that these casts not only survived the tumultuous downfall of casts but were also deemed worthy to move to the new storage place in Suitland is indicative of their importance. However, tensions are still present because, although the casts are still physically present, they remain hidden from the general public.

The Current State of Cast Collections

Revival of Casts

Despite the fact that many collections faced storage, neglect, and destruction during the first three quarters of the 20th century, the fates of some plaster casts were spared with the revival

of casts that began in the 1970s and 1980s and continues still today (Stone 1987: 33). The resurgence really began to take shape after the publication of *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* by Haskell and Penny in 1981 that brought further attention to the rise in popularity of plaster casts that began in the late 15th century (Nichols 2006: 119). Following this renewal in interest, museums and universities began once more to utilize their cast collections.¹⁷ They were deemed valuable to both university and public museums as didactic tools to teach the history of art, mythology, and drawing.

Revival of the Gerber Collection

This type of revival is noted with the plaster casts of August Gerber that ended up at the State Normal School, now Southeast Missouri State University. In 1975, the casts were again put in the public eye by a front-page article in the *Southeast Missourian*. The article bemoaned the fate and destruction of some of the plaster casts. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that in the following year, what thirty-eight casts remained from the collection were gathered, restored, and then transferred to the Southeast Missouri Regional Museum by the director at the time, James Parker. The casts remained in the museum until it relocated and the decision was made not to include the casts since the new museum would focus on the archaeology, history, and fine arts of the southeast Missouri region (Southeast State Missouri University 2007). In 2007, The class of 1957 raised \$100,000 dollars in order to have the casts restored and moved to the new Aleen Vogel Wehking Alumni Center, where they now line the walls of an auditorium area (Fig. 6).

This exhibit of the plaster casts in the Alumni Center has interesting implications in terms of the reception of the objects. While no longer in an authoritative museum setting that lends the objects authenticity, the casts are still promoted as significant. While most of the casts are on the perimeter of the space and delimited by a velvet rope that serves as a boundary for visitors, the plaster busts that occupy the stage of the auditorium effectively place the casts in an authoritative role and position of prestige

within the space. In this auditorium environment, the function of the casts is to provide an appropriate aura for a reception space rather than any sort of overarching didactic purpose as they had previously commanded in the university or museum setting.

Stasis of USNM Casts

It is important to note that the collection of classical plaster casts at the NMNH of the Smithsonian Institution currently remains in storage. It is perhaps unusual that a museum of natural history would even have such a large collection of plaster casts—around 150 total, including casts that were also displayed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. The plaster casts are large items and take up a great amount of space in storage facilities, so it is intriguing that they still persist in a natural history museum with no curator in classical archaeology and few formal connections to the field of art history. I posit that this collection has survived the neglect and destruction often sustained by casts in art museum and university settings in the mid-century because they were in a natural history museum where they essentially remained hidden in plain view, on the whole spared from being physically destroyed.

The context of a museum of natural history provided an environment more embracing of reproduction than an art museum. While there are other artworks from the classical world in storage along with the plaster casts, only several are on exhibit in the Western Cultures Hall. In a natural history museum, “real” objects and reproductions are regarded on a more equal level. In the discipline of anthropology, reproductions are not always viewed with the same stigma as they might be in an art museum. In fact, taxidermy, an exhibition practice originating from international expositions and regularly featured in museums of natural history, is a process of replication that echoed the function of plaster casts as they stood for the experience of the authentic and were meant to be didactic (Wonders 1989: 131-42). A simple keyword search of “cast” in the NMNH artifact database comes back with about 2,500 results. Perhaps, then, the plaster casts of antique



Fig. 6
Plaster casts exhibited in the Barbara Hope Kem Statuary Hall of the Aleen Vogel Wekking Alumni Center at Southeast Missouri State University. Photo by author.

subjects in the NMNH are valued as authentic objects within the context of other reproductions in a natural history museum and have thus been retained.

Conclusions

The collections of the plaster casts of August Gerber and those of the United States National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition promoted the didactic potential and artistic qualities of their casts. However, their very different physical locations and environments commanded distinctions in these meanings—Gerber promoted Germany and education at the secondary and university levels while the USNM strove to create a lineage of purely “American” art. In their fair functions, these casts were judged by historical accuracy, quality, and materials in order to promote their casts as accurate and legitimate art objects to achieve their respective agendas.

After the fair, both collections went on to serve distinctive purposes as well, although it is

during this time that authenticity was increasingly associated with casts as a criterion of judgment. The tumultuous nature of this period is noted in these collections that were both utilized and cast aside during this time. While the collections at the NMNH might have existed in an extremely static sense, their continued presence over a long period of time reflects how the natural history museum more welcomingly embraced replicas. The casts now residing on SEMO’s campus reflect the importance of temporality and larger trends in relation to casts. Although utilized for years as educational tools, the casts were neglected and fell out of favour only to subsequently be revived, echoing contemporary trends.

Tracing the entirety of the life histories of these plaster cast collections reveals how the passage of time and changing environments directly determine meaning and the notions of authenticity surrounding plaster casts. These cast collections that were specifically created for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition are now objects that no longer serve a strictly functional purpose. Overall, the current value of the two col-

lections does not lie in didacticism, but rather the casts retain value as markers of cultural artifacts with storied histories. Although these collections of plaster casts often physically remain static, it is

their movement through different environments that shapes the way in which the viewer receives them as art objects, reproductions, or some liminal space in between.

Notes

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1. "Authenticity" is a 20th-century word that is often imposed on art of the past, further complicating developing notions of imitation. This term, in its division between the real and unreal, relates to aesthetics. I will examine authenticity's transformation in conjunction with plaster casts from the 19th century, during which imitation was heralded, to the 20th century, when authenticity became the primary criterion for judging plaster casts. The shift in taste began in the early decades of the 20th century as a response to consumer culture and as an attempt to push art beyond mere copying. This, however, was not a smooth transition, as will be noted in the complexity of the discussion of plaster cast collections. For a more detailed elucidation of this term and its implications, see Orvell (1989). Lears also discusses more broadly how anti-modernism incited a search for the authentic at the turn of the century (Lears 1981).
2. Robert Rydell, historian and extensive researcher of world fairs, provides further information on the connections between world fairs and museums (Rydell 2006).
3. See Rydell (1984) and Harris (1990: 111-31) for further information on world fairs as didactic and nationalistic sites.
4. Gerber was awarded gold and silver medals by the state in 1883 and 1902. In fact, in 1917, the College Art Association of America published a report on reproductions for the college museum and art gallery in which they postulated that August Gerber was "the best cast-maker and worth all the others put together" (Robinson 1917: 16). Thus, Gerber's status was secure outside of Germany as well.
5. This reconstruction had been challenged by scholarship briefly during Furtwängler's lifetime, but more extensively in the 20th century (Hartswick 1998).
6. This was not the only exhibition where Gerber demonstrated concern with colour. In a bulletin for the Pennsylvania Museum, colour is noted, along with texture, as the distinguishing element that made Gerber's casts so accurate (Barber 1905: 85).
7. The plaster casts of indigenous sculptures were acquired from museum sources, namely the Peabody Museum in Cambridge, and thus illustrate high-quality reproductions (SIA, RU 70, box 79, folder 1, Report of the Department of Anthropology, 1905 by Holmes).
8. The common practice of displaying plaster casts and materials side by side is noted in several museums, including the Fitzwilliam, which at its beginnings displayed plaster casts and materials from Fiji side by side (Beard 1993: 5). Like the USNM, the Auckland War Memorial Museum in New Zealand exhibited indigenous, Māori objects in direct relation to European plaster casts in order to invoke a comparison. According to a 1913 guide, the guests were invited to not only learn about Māori culture, but were also to pay homage to the genius of the people group whose carvings rivalled even the picture-writings of Egypt. The inclusion of plaster casts and the indigenous roots of New Zealand were reflective of and as important as these ancient cultures. This would suggest that the plaster casts actually worked to promote the status of the Māori objects as works of art (Cooke 2010: 585-90).
9. The plaster casts displayed by the USNM were acquired from major cast makers from around the world. For example, they went straight to museum cast makers such as D. Brucciani of the British Museum, Eugene Arrondelle of the Louvre, the prominent American cast makers P. P. Caproni & Bro., and the American School of Classical Studies in Rome, thus ensuring "original casts." Furthermore, plaster casts that were acquired, but not exhibited, are important for indicating that there was a degree of selectivity in what was exhibited in this exhibit, suggesting that the plaster casts needed to have a certain monumental presence. This was the case with a set of eleven casts of Arretine wares was given by the MFA as a gift but not displayed (MSC, accession no. 42371; Catalogue card 229701-11).

10. The department contacted P. P. Caproni & Bro. regarding the column and they wrote back stating that they were unaware of any existing moulds (SIA, RU 70, box 62, folder 16, Holmes to True). This is interesting because at the time the South Kensington Museum had been in possession of a plaster cast of the Column of Trajan since 1864, so clearly moulds did exist (Bilbey and Trusted 2010: 473-75). Perhaps the *Goddess of Liberty*, an allegorical symbol of American democracy, was meant to evoke a comparison with the indigenous traditions of empire building.
11. It should be noted that plaster casts were not only being removed from museums, but also other institutions. Art academies also encouraged their removal beginning after the Second World War. This was spurred by the thought that plaster casts were symbols of academicism and not of creative authenticity (Bury 1991: 123). Art academies also began to place a greater emphasis on life-drawing and painting over sculpture (Wallach 1998: 55).
12. Paul DiMaggio thoroughly discusses this emerging distinction of the institutionalization of high culture and sacralization of art taking place from 1880-1910 in his essay "Cultural Entrepreneurship in 19th-Century Boston: The Creation for an Organizational Base for High Culture in America."
13. Walter Benjamin championed this idea of the loss of the aura of a mechanically produced object in his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
14. See McClellan (2003) and DiMaggio (1982).
15. Historian Lawrence Levine proposes such a pluralistic approach to culture of this period stating that "worthy, enduring culture is not the possession of any single group or genre or period, who conceive of culture as neither finite nor fixed but dynamic and expansive" (Levine 1988: 255). Similarly, Michael Leja advocates the acknowledgement of the existence of both academicism and modernism at the turn of the century in America and the opportunities these offered the viewer (Leja 1996).
16. This was a standard practice of Gerber. In a 1905 Philadelphia Museum Bulletin, Gerber is also recorded as having physically been present at the time of the installation of his casts (Barber 1905: 85).
17. The Horace Smith Collection of Plaster Casts at the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum in Springfield, Massachusetts, was restored in 1978 after having been in storage for years (Haskell 2002: 16). One of the most prominent examples of cast revival during the 1980s was that of the Cast Courts at the Victoria & Albert Museum (Bury 1991: 124). A more recent example is the 2003 revival of plaster casts at University of California, Berkeley, some of which were present at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition (Miller 2005).

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