Plaster as an art material (Brussels, 10-11 Oct 17)

Brussels, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Oct 10–11, 2017
Deadline: May 5, 2017

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Uniqueness and multiplication: plaster as an art material
International Conference

Scientific direction :
Géraldine Patigny (KIK-IRPA)
Tom Verhofstadt (vzw Epitaaf)

The study of plaster objects is experiencing a true revival, amongst others attested by the scientific conferences of the past years. Plaster, a material of low value often used for reproductions, has been part of sculpture practice for centuries. The conferences and publications of the past years have discussed a wide range of subjects related to plasters, from the restoration and valorisation of plaster collections to the study and possible implementation of conservation and restoration campaigns.

The Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA, Brussels), is the Belgian federal institution committed to the inventory, scientific study, conservation and promotion of the country's cultural heritage. The Institute, whose chief mission is research and public service, represents a unique instrument for the Belgian heritage, both movable and immovable. Amongst others active in the historical study, conservation and restoration of these objects, KIK-IRPA has partnered up with Epitaaf. Since 1989, this non-profit volunteer organization manages the former sculptor’s and mason’s studio of the Ernest Salu dynasty, active in Laeken (near Brussels) between 1872 and 1983. As a funerary art museum they have a substantial collection of plaster moulds and models that were manufactured in the studio. The wide range of approaches presented on this international conference will allow us to study different aspects of plaster objects.

The conference will take place at the KIK-IRPA in Brussels on 10-11 October 2017 and consists of three sessions:

SESSION 1 – Plaster (and plaster moulds), their role and signification within the studio activity
This session will focus on the role of plaster (as a material for sculpture or architecture), plaster moulds (casts) and plaster models in art history. The following topics could be addressed: plaster for which use, the use and or role of plaster in the artist’s training, in an institutional context (academy, art education) or in that of the studio? The authenticity and position (status) of plaster in the artistic process (design, intermediary state, model, art work)? The added value of plasters, prints and photos in the artist’s studio? The representation or the role of plasters in the practice of the artist’s studio, and more particularly their position within an artist’s oeuvre and its diffusion?

The significance or status of plasters as autonomous objects?

SESSION 2 – Plaster collections, their origins, aim and future
The aim of this session is to put together a survey of existing plaster collections as museum collections, not in the form of an exhaustive inventory, but in order to get a broad and general view of the wide range of differences (and significations) of the collections to get insight in the collection building and composition of the different plaster collections. The lines of approach are the collections' history and objective. How should one go about their presentation (museology) and what is the status of plaster collections within a public (museum), semi-public (university, academy) or private context (artist's collection).

SESSION 3 – Conservation and restoration of plasters (and plaster moulds)
This session is the logical continuation of session 2. Due to a renewed interest in plaster objects, regardless of their context, repairing them has once again become a priority. Which conservation and restoration techniques are best suited for plaster and plaster objects? Should a different approach be adopted with regards to their presentation and status (within art history or as an educational tool)? Can the material or technique used tell us more about the period, place of origin or author of the plaster? These topics are preferably evoked through case studies and examples of best practices, by choice concerning so-called masterpieces.
The official language of the conference is English (submissions in French or Dutch are also accepted).

Candidates are invited to submit their proposals to Géraldine Patigny (geraldine.patigny@kikirpa.be) at the latest on May 5th 2017. This should include an abstract (up to 300 words) and a brief CV (max. 1 page). The conference organizers are unable to cover travel and accommodation costs for speakers. Interested parties are encouraged to apply for aid from their respective institutions. The Scientific Committee will inform all the applicants of the final selection on June 16th 2017.

Reference:
CFP: Plaster as an art material (Brussels, 10-11 Oct 17). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 25, 2017 (accessed Nov 11, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/15053>.