

Foreword

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The International Seminar on Conservation of Modern Bronzes, organized in the Museum of Contemporary Art of University of São Paulo (MAC USP), between November 22 and 23 of 2012, was a closed event, for invite experts only (art historians and conservators), in which we've chosen some study cases to debate the methodologies and issues raised by conservation of sculptural works, from the first half of the Twentieth century, cast in bronze. The decision to do an event geared toward experts started from three important assumptions. The first concerned the fact of the study cases analyzed have been effectively sensitive to the history of their institutions. Secondly, as such, they have been or shall result in intervention or restoration project. Finally, the seminar happened as the first part of a short course on Conservation and Restoration of Metal Sculptures, coordinated by metallurgical engineer Virginia Costa and restorer Antoine Amarger (both from Institut National du Patrimoine, France), in the Museum, on the week from November 26 to 30 of 2012. The joint of the seminar with a short course - which shall have its second part held shortly - aimed to contribute to the improvement of restoration professionals from São Paulo's institutions, as well as to discuss conservation as a field of interdisciplinary research. We could say that if since the 1940s, in countries like France, Italy, Britain, the United States, art museums have begun a process of diversified professionalization of its groups of restorers, who would initially specialize on different artistic collections (by artistic medium, historical period, stylistic school, etc.), also began to have an increasing interaction with some technical areas (metallurgy, for example) and scientific areas (especially physics and chemistry). It is worth to recall that the restorer Vilma Basilissi opened her communication on the restoration of the Milanese bronze *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* by Umberto Boccioni giving us a brief history of the creation of the former Istituto Centrale per il Restauro of Rome (now Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro, organization of the Ministry of Culture of Italy), founded in 1939 with its project elaborated by art historian Giulio Carlo Argan and conservator Cesare Brandi (first director of the institute), whose principle was based on the latter called "critical restoration", thus involving several knowledge areas in the management and preservation of artistic heritage. From the 1980s we would witness a new great leap in the field of conservation and restoration with the broad development of non-destructive analysis techniques, a result of scientific research in nuclear physics, among others.

In the case of Brazil, the largest center of preservation and restoration of cultural heritage of the country lies in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, and it was recently created the first undergraduate course in conservation and national restoration - the Center for Conservation and Restoration of Mobile Cultural Property (CECOR), of the School of Fine Arts of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). There are some initiatives between São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Londrina, within public universities (in the case of São Paulo, meaning USP) for the widespread of the use of new research tools for conservation and restoration, and the attempt to enlarge the area from the perspective of academic research. This seminar was also supported by the Center for Research of Applied Physics to the Study of Artistic and Historical Heritage (NAP FAEPAH), coordinated by Professor PhD. Márcia Rizzutto (IF USP), and hopes to have contributed in some way to the construction of a reflection on the conservation and restoration of cultural property in the country.

However the bulletin published herein, does not include all the presentations held on the seminar, since precisely the contributions from Virginia Costa and Antoine Amarger escaped from the study cases, aiming at discussing the general principles for the conservation of, not only bronze, but other alloys, and should hereafter contribute to a basic hand-book on conservation of metal sculpture. Therefore, the texts published here departed from the interaction of historical research relating to the conservation area and were produced from specific study cases, namely:

1. The sculpture by Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (original in plaster, 1913, now belonging to the collection of MAC USP)
2. The sculpture of Marino Marini, *Great Horse* (bronze, 1952, also belonging to the collection of MAC USP)
3. The series of 73 sculptures by Edgar Degas (bronze, posthumous casting, ca. 1919-1932, now belonging to the collection of MASP)¹

Concerning the sculpture by Boccioni, although the focus is the restoration of the two plasters (*Unique Forms* and *Development of a Bottle in Space*) today in the collection of MAC USP, understand the casting of bronze Milanese not only help us document the bronze versions we have in the collection, as it was also essential to reconstruct the history of the original plaster and posthumous bronze castings - we added to the end of this report, in the form of a timeline, along with a chronology of the sculpture of Marino Marini. The inclusion of these two chronologies aims to contribute on the study of the sculptures of these artists that belong to the collection of MAC USP, whom do not have a consolidated catalog *raisonné* - unlike Edgar Degas, whose mapping and history of originals and casts of his sculptures in bronze is widely discussed in specialized

¹ In the final panel, in fact, we started from the Degas' bronzes of MASP, but they were only part of a larger collection of bronze sculptures of the museum that has been the object of studies and intervention proposed by Karen Barbosa and Anna Ramus, as we shall see.

literature since the 1990s². Moreover, they, in the end, had a common origin: we talk about three artists whose production became well-known in the first half of the Twentieth century, in which the practice of the lost wax casting - technique mainly master by artisans trained within the Italian *Accademie* of the period - became current and also witnessed transformations and important technical jumps³. One of the landmarks of modern sculpture of this period is precisely the possibility of use of the greenish patina, for example, that seemed to mimic the coloration of the Greco-Roman bronzes dug out in droves also in this period, and so appreciated by the dominant figure of the era: Auguste Rodin⁴. The study cases discussed thus lay its practices on the Italian and French foundry ateliers of the first half of the Twentieth century, when the use of the lost wax technique allowed artists to give the surface of their bronzes texture and materiality. In the first decades of the century, there was a debate that loomed between sculptors and art critics that the lost wax, allowed, thus, the preservation of the “artist’s hand” on the surface of bronze⁵ - an unfolding, ultimately, of the question the originality of the sculpture, of its unique character, of a masterpiece against the growing market in commercial bronze foundries, sculptures sold through catalogs, reproduced *ad infinitum*... Rodin is, hence, the emblematic case in this regard: at the same time that as an artist obsessively followed the casting of his sculptures in bronze (a classic example is his monumental *The Thinker*, in the bronze version completed in 1905, to the exhibition on Carnegie International, USA), is the sculptor who places the paradigmatic issue of posthumous casting⁶. In the cases discussed in this seminar, there are two artists whose bronzes are posthumous: Degas and Boccioni. Although Marini is not a case of casting posthumous bronze sculptures, its practice raises questions about the legislation that was constructed throughout the Twentieth century in an attempt to define forgeries (in sculpture, the so called “surmoulages”, i.e. casting in bronze from another cast⁷) and unauthorized casts. Marini even made castings from his

2 The first general catalog of Degas sculptures had been done by John Rewald. See John Rewald. *Degas. Works in Sculpture. A Complete Catalogue*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1944. His work was later revised and updated by Anne Pingeot and Frank Horvat (See Anne Pingeot & Frank Horvat. *Degas Sculptures Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux*, 1991.) But it was Sarah Campbell who published the first catalog raisonné of castings in bronze of the artist’s sculptures. See Sara Campbell, “A Catalogue of Degas’ Bronzes”, *Apollo*, August 1995, pp. 10-48.

3 See, for example, the article by Jean Adhemar about the rediscovery of the Degas’ originals in wax. See Jean Adhemar, “Before the Degas Bronzes”, *Art News*, November 1955, pp. 34-35, based on an interview with the founder master of the house Hébrard, Albino Palazzolo, responsible for the process of lost wax casting of Degas sculptures. See also P.F. Martin. *1838-1910: Renaissance de la Fonte à Cire Perdue pour les Statuettes de Bronze*; DEA History of Techniques, undated, Library Jacques Doucet, Paris, or Jacques de Caso et alii. *Cat. Exh. Metamorphoses in 19th Century Sculpture*. Cambridge (MA): Fogg Art Museum, 1975.

4 See Rosalind Krauss, “Narrative Time: The Question of *The Gates of Hell*” In: *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1998 [1st. Edition, 1977], p. 7-37.

5 This is between the lines of Edmond Claris’ famous poll responses, for example. See Edmond Claris. *De l’Impressionnisme en Sculpture.. Paris: Ed de la Nouvelle Revue*, 1902.

6 When he died in 1917, Rodin left in will his studio with all his originals to the French State. Through this same document gives the power to make castings of his sculptures in bronze. The Rodin Museum, with headquarter in the home/studio of the artist in Paris, has an office of sales and authentication of bronzes of the artist until today. See “Respect du Droit Moral” on the museum’s website: <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/fr/professionnels/respect-du-droit-moral>.

7 The academic practices, established in the Nineteenth century, that helped constitute the authentication rules (and therefore the market ones) of casting of modern sculpture in metal. It is always considered that the original matrix is a version of the sculpture in plaster, clay or wax produced by the artist. Reproductions in bronzes or marbles executed from the version in plaster, clay or wax as matrix are considered original works of the artist. Otherwise not.

bronzes⁸. Moreover, since at least the mid-Nineteenth century, it was common foundries to produce model bronzes to perform large-scale castings. This was, as a matter of fact, a legitimate way of preservation of the original, in more fragile materials, for future castings. This seems to have been, for example, the solution adopted for the production of the bronze casting of the sculptures by Degas, of which there is a series with the inscription “modèle”, that belongs today to the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California⁹.

We are also talking about artists who have other things in common. Like his Italian counterparts, Degas made his training, deliberately, in Italy - the birthplace of his father family, originally from Naples. So, in a sense, the Italian tradition would later appear in his sculptures. We are also talking about three artists, as many of the period, for whom the practice of sculpture appears almost as a natural consequence of the practice of painting: Boccioni and Degas were painters before sculptors, and Marini worked the painting and the sculpture in parallel. Finally, they were three artists who reinterpreted, each in their own way, the practices and poetic of traditional sculpture, starting mainly from experimentation with the most various materials. Boccioni and Degas went very far in these processes, threatening, even, the physical integrity of their works¹⁰. And if Marini seems to not have reached such extreme, on the other hand, he experienced a lot with wood, bronze and plaster, mainly in the treatment of surfaces and the use of pigments and patinas. Moreover, in all three cases, the fragmentary presence of their sculptural productions in major collections of modern art in the world goes, it seems, through the translation of some of the works in bronze. Thus, *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* by Degas, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* by Boccioni, and the figure of the horse and rider as Marini worked on them seem to count for all production of these artists. They have become central nucleus from which radiates all the rest of the sculptural practice of these artists - becoming the key to understanding their sculpture work - and their versions in bronze, erased completely the high degree of experimentation that it involved. Degas was not exactly an avant-garde artist, but his relationship with the artistic avant-garde movements of the early Twentieth century is still waiting for a gaze capable of perceiving him as a kind of refresher of the classical tradition, and perhaps for this very motive, a modern one. Marini appears

8 In addition to the testimony of an expert such as Carlo Pirovano - in conversation with the author on March 23, 2012, Milan - the "Great Horse" leads us to suppose this practice. The bronze sold to Matarazzo was from a second casting, and not bronze that was exhibited at the Venice Biennale. Are located today two bronzes: the São Paulo one and the one sold on the same year to Nelson Rockefeller. The two Marino Marini foundations in Italy are not aware of an original in plaster. Carlo Pirovano, art historian, since a very young age, followed the work of Marino Marini. He was responsible for the establishment of the foundations and museums Marino Marini in Florence and Pistoia, and began working on the inventory of the complete works of the artist, which remains unpublished.

9 For a brief history of the casting process of Degas sculptures with references of the authors who have addressed the issue, see Ana Gonçalves Magalhães, A série S de bronzes de Degas no MASP" In: Cat. Exp. *Degas: O Universo de um Artista*. São Paulo: Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2006, pp. 63-75.

10 Degas used from traditional materials (wax, clay, plaster) to improvised materials such as pieces of paper, burlap, and bottle stopper. Also, never made use of a professional frame for his sculptures: they were practically sustained by a kludge of wires, nails and eventually pieces of wood that give them support - which often led to ruin. Boccioni also tried a lot. Although not in the case of the MAC USP plasters, it is possible to see that in the case of "Antigrazioso" in the original version, exhibited in the Gallerie La Boétie in Paris, in 1913: the bust of Boccioni's mother, made in perfectly white plaster, is crossed by a piece of wooden stairs, a frame of a window, and what appear to be tissue pieces in the original photograph. The plaster, which now belongs to the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna of Rome, keeps very little of the diversity of materials used by the artist.

in the Italian art scene in time of overcoming the avant-garde, turning once more to aspects of realism and traditional practices, but also not completely refuted the avant-garde practice - by overlapping, as suggested by the text of this Chiara Fabi volume, references as diverse as Greek and Roman sculpture and Oriental sculpture. Finally, Boccioni, an avant-garde by excellence, seems, particularly in the case of *Unique Forms*, to adopt the traditional practice of sculpting to shape his new perceptions of sculpture. In his famous *Manifesto Tecnico della Scultura Futurista* from April, 11 of 1912, Boccioni claims for the new futuristic sculpture a precursor, namely, Medardo Rosso (1858-1928). It is from the work of Rosso that Boccioni could elaborate the notion of “sculptural environment” or “environmental sculpture”, proposing a sculptural way of apprehending the movement and its lines of force. On the other hand, he does not seem to have adopted the wax and more precarious materials that Rosso use for his sculpture, and saw, perhaps, on Rosso’s ideas (more than in his practice) elements for a modern concept of sculpture. In this sense, Boccioni is, indeed, an avant-garde artist.

The point is that through such emblematic works, museums started telling a parallel history of modern sculpture, which today might be able to be reinterpreted in the light of a history of art that incorporates the materiality and artistic techniques as well as important aspects to dialogue with these objects. Firstly, we have to review, especially in the history of modernism, the role that reproductive technologies (and this also involves sculpture) have in the dissemination and reception of modern art, and the relationship they have with the art market and art system in general. Coupled to this, there is the question of authorship, the idea of unique artwork, the genius in a romantic sense - a contradiction innate to modernity. The modern sculpture should, therefore, be reevaluated, not only for their ideas and practices, but by its materiality: with the close partnership between distant fields of knowledge, prior distant from museums, we are learning from new revelations that materials and techniques bring us, for times jeopardizing notions already sedimented by the history of art.