

Ruxandra-Iulia Stoica / Graciela Ainsworth
Ruminating on Reflections

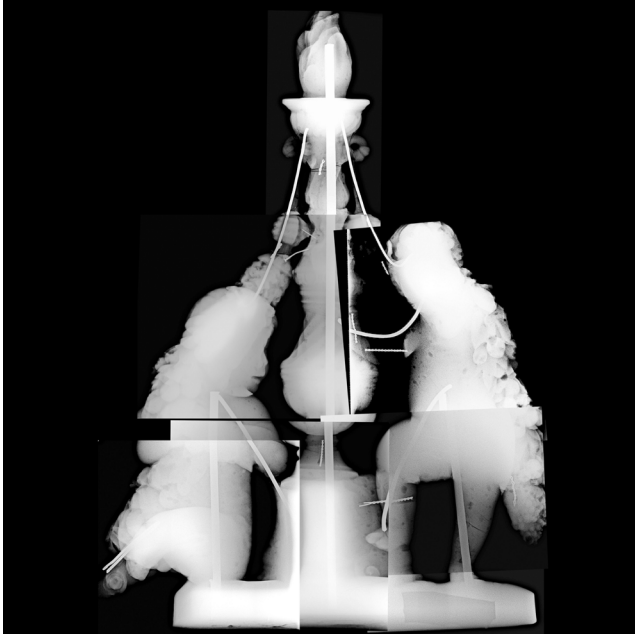
The piece is an invitation to reflect on the ambiguous condition of plaster casts in a school of art: at the same time copies for daily use and historical artefacts.

Although the two groups form a pair, their state of conservation could not be further apart as they had very different lives. One acquired a position of pride in the old library of the college, being well maintained, repaired and given a bronze-like surface patina. The other was found all broken and with many parts missing, left behind during a studio relocation and consequently close to being lost forever.

Non-invasive analytical investigations by digital X-ray showed that, rather unusually, the casts are not hollow and their internal structure of wood, metal and bone, includes wire and nails. They, corroborated with surface stratigraphy, also revealed the many repairs and layers of paint their use in a school of art afforded. The lower group is only half-cleaned, as their condition is a permanently transitory one. The surface tests on its base, although barely visible to the naked eye, suggest the further possible futures of their condition.

The casts reflect each other in a literal take on this idea as the two, non-identical groups of *putti*, from which they were made, mirror each other's position as they flank one of the door pediments in Sala dei Gigli, Palazzo Vecchio (Florence).

The current intervention, questioning and reflecting on plaster casts in art and architecture, is quite possibly a state they least expected to be found in!



Composite image of X-rays of the top pair of putti showing its internal structure composed of wooden blocks in the base and metal rods supporting the vertical parts. Twisted wire and nails were used to secure in place various subsequent repairs. Darker spots reveal bubbles of air in the mass of the plaster.



A broken foot reveals that the internal structure of the top pair of *putti* includes animal bone, as a very light, strong and durable material. This is not easily detectable on the X-rays due to its density being close to the density of the surrounding plaster.



Stratigraphy of the lower pair of *putti* showing multiple layers of surface paint.



Surface cleaning tests on the back of the lower pair of *putti*:

1. Natural enzymes (saliva)
2. Conservation grade spirit soap
3. White spirit
4. V & A emulsion solvent
5. De-ionized water



The top pair of *putti* was restored in 1984 by Vincent Butler, sculptor and lecturer at the Edinburgh College of Art. The inscription on the back reads, in Italian, in true Renaissance spirit: *Restaurato da Vincenzo 1984*.