

DEEDS OF A CAST

INVESTIGATION AND CONSERVATION TECHNIQUES
DEMONSTRATED IN THE PLASTER CAST DEAD CHRIST

AN EXHIBITION BY THE EDINBURGH CAST COLLECTION

WITH THE FILM:

'CONSERVING THE EDINBURGH COLLEGE OF ART CAST COLLECTION'

31 JANUARY - 6 FEBRUARY 2011 AND 22-27 MARCH 2011

EDINBURGH COLLEGE OF ART
SCULPTURE COURT UPPER GALLERY

MONDAY TO FRIDAY: 10AM - 6PM

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY: 10AM - 2PM

Recent research has resulted in the recovery of appreciation of the Edinburgh College of Art's Cast Collection as one of the finest cast collection of the early 19th century in the United Kingdom. It was originally acquired for teaching the ideal human form to art students but in the 20th century the human body declined in importance in favour of non-objective art as a primary aim of art. Consequently cast collections all over the world diminished. We are now seeing a revival of interest in form and meaning, and the collection has found new uses within contemporary art education. In 2008/9 the Cast Collection received substantial funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund that has enabled conservation and interpretation of the collection.

The exhibition and film document the conservation programme, illustrated through of one of the most important casts in the collection: the *Dead Christ* from Michelangelo's *Pietà* in St. Peter's, Rome.



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

While changing values in art education have led to the destruction of many of the world's cast collections, the Edinburgh Cast Collection represents a remarkable survival still displayed in the setting designed for it in 1910. Besides being an early example of a publicly available teaching collection and a vivid illustration of the type of art education that prevailed from the Renaissance to the early 20th century, the Edinburgh collection is historically significant in two more ways: for the intrinsic historical and archaeological value of its many early and unique casts, and for its cultural and architectural contribution to the re-invention of Edinburgh as the 'Athens of the North' in the 19th century.

THE PROJECT

The early 19th century and the Scottish Enlightenment are rarely presented to the public except in book form so this is a valuable opportunity to enhance that understanding. By offering historical knowledge in an accessible way, the project will contribute to the general public's awareness and understanding of their cultural heritage. In turn this will enhance their spiritual understanding of the importance of place and heritage. These values will encourage an attitude of possession, care and responsibility.

The Edinburgh Cast Collection is a significant, publicly accessible, heritage resource for Scotland that requires research, interpretation and promotion of its cultural and historic values to a wider audience. On another level, it is an appropriate resource for creative interpretation and experimentation with art and architectural form.

CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The collection consists of authentic heritage items in an authentic setting, which the extensive conservation treatment of the collection will protect it for future generations. It will also produce a framework for the collection's maintenance, promotion and monitoring beyond the lifetime of this project, as well as practical guidelines, through a conservation management plan. This will secure the conserved collection as an integral part of the A-listed building of ECA by:

- providing guidance for conservation treatment, display, handling and future care and use of the collection
- establishing a monitoring process to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the collection is preserved

Conservation encourages a planned approach to future care, and promotes collaboration and understanding by encouraging supervised student interventions and internship and volunteer programmes.

Short-medium term (2-4 years)

All pieces in the collection are undergoing cleaning and inspection. All the larger architectural and free-standing statues are undergoing structural repair (and a small number of historically significant casts with broken and missing parts will be restored). New plinths are being provided as required.

Long term (10-15 years)

For the longer term, after the conservation treatment has been finalised, it is recommended that only routine maintenance cleaning is carried out.

An archive of all existing condition reports, details of previous and current conservation treatments, the criteria for determining conservation priorities, and expertise used in the project will be available for future consultation.

www.eca.ac.uk/casts

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