

6.13 NIKE OF SAMOTHRACE



Cast before conservation



Cast after conservation

6.13.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE OBJECT

TITLE: Nike of Samothrace; copy of the marble Greek sculpture, from 2nd century BC; also called Winged Victory of Samothrace.

NUMBER(S): 074, P056 (144)

TYPE OF OBJECT: Plaster cast with a metal/wooden structure inside.

MAKER: Musee du Louvre

SIGNATURE/INSCRIPTION: Hallmark of Musee du Louvre on back of the base.

DATE: Unknown

OWNER/LOCATION: Edinburgh College of Art, Lauriston Place, Edinburgh, EH3 9DF.

DIMENSIONS/WEIGHT (APPROX): H: 4000 mm W: 1900mm D: 2200mm

Weight (approx):

6.13.2 BRIEF CONDITION REPORT BEFORE CONSERVATION

STRUCTURAL STABILITY: Stable, but some movement to the wings and to a piece of projecting drapery on the back of the cast.

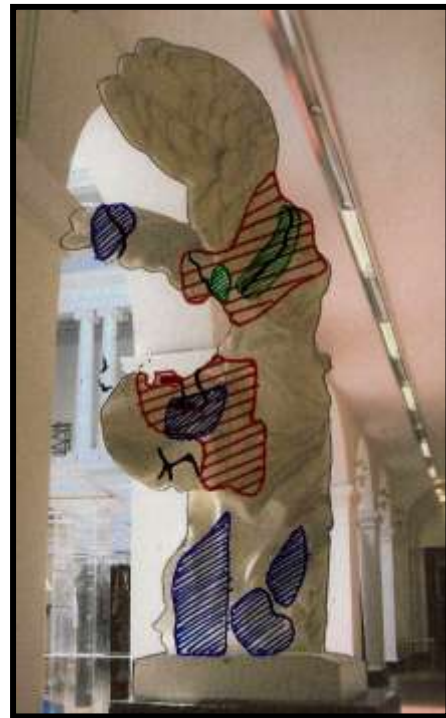
SURFACE DUST AND DIRT: Severe, 100% coverage.

VISIBLE PAINT LAYERS/UNSIGHTLY MARKINGS: The upper most layers are the modern two part patina of cream-white paint and a dark pigmented to the surface of the cast; several paint and drip marks.

CHIPS AND LOSS: Several small chips on surface of the cast; one big chip to the projecting drapery on the back of the figure; several hairline cracks on wings and on drapery; missing areas associated with joints between wings and figure.

ABRASIONS: Severe cut abrasions at rear drapery.

PREVIOUS REPAIRS: From college archives we know that casts were treated many times but unfortunately the documentation is not very detailed, so we don't know what treatment exactly they received. Around 1990, almost all the free standing casts were painted with a two-part patina consisting of a cream-white paint with an over-layer of pigmented wax. From verbal information we learned that the wings were detached at some point. They are now fixed permanently to the rest of the cast.



Cracks

Chips, abrasions and missing surfaces

Paint splashes

Areas of previous repairs

6.13.3 ORIGINAL MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

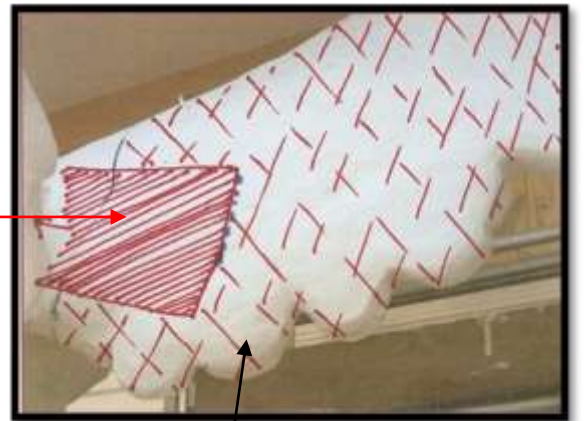
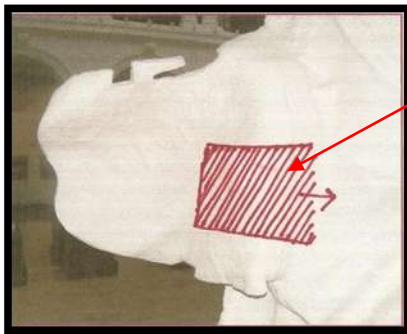
The object is a plaster cast with an internal metal/wood reinforcing structure and a wooden frame at the underside of the base. The surface of the sculpture is cream-white. To find out the stratigraphy, and to identify the materials of the polychromed layer, samples of the plaster with paint from Cast of Parthenon Seated Goddesses were taken and sent to the University of Northumbria for analysis. The photograph of a cross-section of the sample shows two layers of white paint and a layer of varnish underneath.

The cast was tested with a metal detector by CMC in order to investigate the internal metal structure.

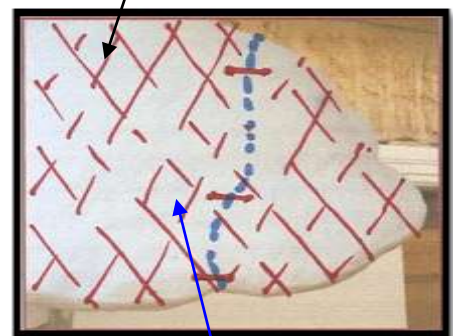


There were several fixings found within the wings and lower drapery detail:

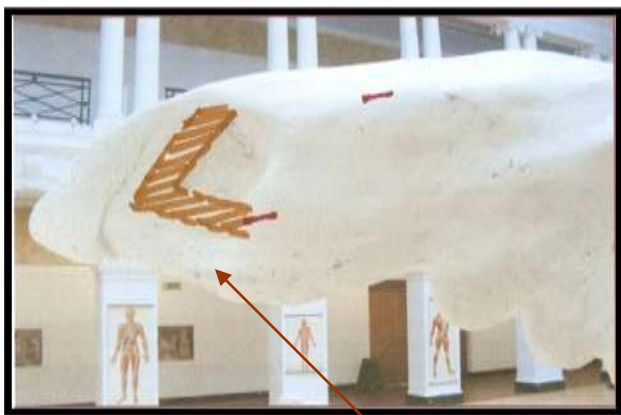
Large metal plates at every joint



Metal mesh within entire wings



Three 70mm fixings at wing tip



Two small fixings securing the wood fixing

Graciela Ainsworth Sculpture Conservation

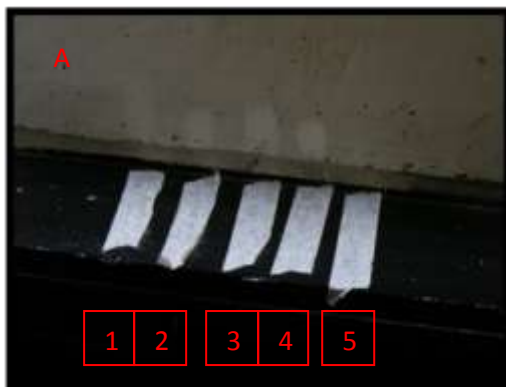
6.13.4 TREATMENT REPORT

- Prior to any conservation treatment, the cast was photographed. This photographic documentation was continued throughout all conservation processes.
- Initially, the cast was dry cleaned with soft brushes and Wishab Sponges with a rubber-nozzled vacuum to pick up the loose dust and dirt.



Wing during dry cleaning

- Following a variety of wet cleaning spot tests, the surface of the cast was cleaned with 2-5% Vulpex liquid soap, using cotton wool swabs.



A – cleaning tests (1 – natural enzymes, 2 – V&A mix, 3 – 5% Vulpex, 4 – white spirit, 5 – Anjusil) B – cast during wet cleaning

- All areas of raw plaster were given an application of 10% Paraloid B72 in acetone to provide an isolating layer between the original plaster and the repairs.

- Areas of loss, and chips were filled with white micro-balloons mixed with 12% Paraloid B72 in acetone.
- Area around wooden frame on the bottom of the base was filled with an inert filler to provide extra strength.



After the repair work to the base of the figure, but before in painting.

- All the fills were toned out with acrylics, mixed with matting agent, to match the surrounding patina.
- Finally, the entire cast was given an application of micro-crystalline wax so as to protect the surface. Prior to application the wax was mixed with pigments: ivory black and raw umber.
- The plinths for the casts were conserved by a separate contractor. In order to do so the cast had to be lifted off the old plinth and, following work to the new plinth, it was relocated on to it. The handling of the cast involved building a scaffold tower for access, close to the Plaster Cast, then manoeuvring an A-frame aluminium gantry with block and tackle into position over the sculpture, and locating slings securely to the cast with Plastazote softening to protect the plaster. This ensured the sculpture was safely supported during its removal and installation onto the new plinth. In order to minimise the potential for future damage, caused by vibrations during the moving of the cast around the college, a softening layer of Plastazote was placed between the new plinth and base of the cast.

6.13 .5 MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

CLEANING

The cleaning programme would involve the trained operatives, wearing the appropriate PPE, (nitrile gloves must be worn to protect the plaster as well as the operative) removing the loose dust using soft brushes and a vacuum cleaner with a rubber nozzle that would have muslin attached to its end. The muslin prevents any potential damage to the plaster from being lost in the vacuum cleaner. Any fragments that are dislodged, and their locations on the cast, should be documented and wrapped carefully in acid free tissue prior to being stored in a safe location. A trained conservator should be contacted immediately in order to repair the damage.

NB At no time should cleaning products or any liquid (including water) be used.

STORAGE AND DISPLAY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The display of the piece should be given emphasis. For example, displayed pieces should have associated information by way of, say, a plaque that would indicate what the piece is and its history. "Do Not Touch" signs for the pieces on permanent display are recommended.
2. No repairs should be undertaken without a trained conservator in attendance
3. Literature about the collection should be made available to staff, students and visiting groups to develop a greater appreciation of the objects.
4. A complete catalogue of all the objects in the collection, and their locations, should be undertaken and, should any piece be moved the new location should be continuously monitored and noted.
5. Safe gaps between the pieces, and their plinths, and the swing doors should be maintained at all times.

HANDLING AND CARE RECOMMENDATIONS

Certain measures should be taken prior to and during the moving of these pieces:

1. It is recommended that all technicians and at least one member of the Curatorial/Archives Dept. should complete a course in sculpture handling. Any moving of sculpture should involve the attendance of at least one person who has attended such a course. The National Galleries of Scotland can supply the name of a recommended course.
2. A manual on the handling of sculpture should be made available to staff and students. ('The Care and Handling of Art Objects' by Shelley is recommended.)

3. Before handling an object it should be examined closely and any old repairs and structural weaknesses noted. Do not test or probe areas that appear weak. Never grasp projecting elements (arms, etc.) of the object as they will not support the weight.
4. Gloves should always be worn when handling or touching objects as acids and salts from perspiration can damage many materials especially plaster.
5. Report any damage to the object immediately and collect all fragments before leaving the area.
6. The object should be well protected with padding in the form of foam, Plastazote and bubble-wrap especially any fragile or projecting areas that are likely to catch on doorways etc.
7. Avoid haste and confusion while handling as this can result in injury to the handlers or damage to the object. The route to be taken, door sizes and the space for the object at the receiving end should be assessed before a move begins. Two people, at least, should be present throughout the move, one of them to open doors, steady the object where necessary and watch parts of it that the carrier cannot see.