

7. HANDLING & MOVING OF FREE-STANDING CASTS

Plinths are an integral part of any sculpture. They allow the object to be at the optimum height for viewing and may be designed to separate or link the piece with its surroundings. The appearance and properties of the plinth, like colour and texture, can make a significant difference to how each sculpture is viewed.

Specifically for the Edinburgh College of Art, the condition of the plinths as 'movable platforms' for the casts is vital, due to the requirement for the manoeuvring of the casts. Therefore the structural integrity of the plinths should be sound and the castors easy to use. Another important characteristic of a plinth is its dimensions. Within the ECA the plaster casts are located in college corridors and stairwells where constant pedestrian traffic makes them extremely vulnerable to accidental damage, especially the fragile areas of the sculpture that project, protrude or overhang. It is therefore imperative that the dimensions of the plinth should be adequate, in shape and size, to prevent of any part of the sculpture from being vulnerable.

Due to the continually deteriorating condition of the plinths, the works to conserve, restore and alter them were running simultaneously to the conservation of the plaster casts. These plinths were repaired and modified by another contractor, Thorsten Hanke.

Plaster Cast Sculptures required to be temporarily relocated to facilitate works to plinths:

1. P001 Seated Goddesses
2. P002 Reclining Goddesses
3. P003 Dionysos
4. P004 River God
5. P006 Horses of Helios
6. P007 Running Goddess
7. P008 Seated Goddess
8. 021 Bust of St. Joseph
9. 044 Dead Christ
10. 056 Nike of Samothrace
11. 059 Apollo Sauroktomos
12. 060 Discobolus
13. 071 Smuggerius

Casts 2, 3, 6 and 7 which are displayed on a main stairwell had to be lifted in situ due to the impossibility of transporting them in to the studio or any other suitable space. All other casts were moved to the studio, or to the empty Sculpture Court when possible.

Plaster casts are very fragile while, at the same time, being heavy and unwieldy which makes them difficult to lift and manoeuvre. To minimize any risk to the casts, a Method Statement and a Risk Assessment were formulated. Only experienced and trained operatives were used

with appropriate PPE and all Health and Safety measures in place. The public was excluded from the area where lifting & shifting was completed, for example the staircase was cordoned off during these works. Manual handling was kept to a minimum, and an aluminium A-Frame gantry was erected over the sculptures and two trolleys with two chain hoists were used to facilitate the lift with slings being positioned at front and back of the sculpture to ensure a straight and balanced lift. Before lifting, each sculpture was assessed for any structural consequences which may result from moving it. Ratchet straps and/or supports were used to maintain the structural integrity of the sculpture where necessary. As an added precaution for the 'Victory Nike' large winged statue, an aluminium scaffold was used as an observation tower to continually assess the structural integrity of the sculpture as it was moved. Softening (Plastazote) was used to protect the plaster surface and, where necessary, wooden splints, to avoid stress being exerted on fragile protruding areas.



Moving of the Seated Goddess on top of the main staircase

Once the cast was clear, the old plinth was immediately removed from under the gantry and replaced with a strong pallet with Plastazote softening over its surface. This allowed for the cast to be slung for the least amount of time possible before being lowered on to the pallet. Once the slings were removed, the cast could then be safely moved on a pallet truck to a previous position, or to a temporary storage area in studio.



Plaster casts in temporary storage in studio

Once the four casts on the main stairwell were on their pallets, a protective wooden barrier was constructed around them so as to prevent access by the public and minimize danger of any accidental damage in areas of heavy pedestrian traffic.



Casts on main staircase

As the new plinths became available, the casts were individually sited upon them in the same manner as they were removed. A piece of black Plastazote (10mm thick) was cut to the shape of the casts' bases so as to act as a non-conspicuous softening between the base and the new plinth.

As a result of some of these new plinths being faulty, the process had to be repeated a second time for the majority of these casts.

The casts were then wheeled into position for display.



Cast of 'Nike of Samothrace' during lifting and shifting



Casts during their move on to new plinths