

The image shows a large, ornate interior space, likely a museum or gallery. The architecture is classical, featuring a two-story structure with white columns and arches. The ground floor has several arches, each containing a statue. In the center of the ground floor is a large, ornate stone structure, possibly a tomb or a monument. The upper floor is reached by a balcony with a black metal railing. The ceiling is high and features a large skylight. The overall atmosphere is grand and historical.

# THE EDINBURGH COLLEGE OF ART

cast collection and architecture



Edinburgh College of Art  
The University of Edinburgh  
Lauriston Place, Edinburgh, EH3 9DF

Edinburgh College of Art (Listed category A)

Designed 1907-10, completed 1911

Architects: George Washington Browne (1853 - 1939)  
and James More Dick Peddie (1853-1921)

While changing values in art education have led to the destruction of many of the world's cast collections, the Edinburgh collection represents a remarkable, though partial, survival still displayed in the setting designed for it between 1907 and 1911.

The collection was acquired for teaching students drawing of the ideal, that is, classical human form. This studio was known as the 'Antique School', and its counterpart, the 'Life School', taught students drawing of the live or non-ideal human form.

Despite many losses it remains a remarkably coherent example of an educational cast collection. Another aspect that makes this one of the most distinguished cast collections in Europe is the outstanding quality of the casts acquired in over 100 years of its history. After the mid-nineteenth



*The sculpture Gallery in the Royal Institution Building in the 1890s (Photo: ECA Archive)*

century casts were supplied to educational institutions all over the world on an industrial scale by firms such as Brucciani, but the archives of the Edinburgh collection enable us to trace the acquisition of individual, specially commissioned casts some of which record details of sculpture since lost by erosion and accident. The collection's history contributes to our understanding of the role of art education in Edinburgh during the late Enlightenment, and its contribution to the city as the 'Athens of the North'.

#### Trustees Academy

The plaster casts belonged to the former Trustees Academy (the design school of the Board of Trustees for Manufactures and Fisheries in Scotland) in Edinburgh, the first public school of art in Britain founded in 1760. They were acquired for training ornamental artists in draughtsmanship. From the 1820s the collection was housed in the Royal Scottish Academy building on Princes Street (formerly the Royal Institution) - a Doric 'temple'



*Goddess Nike removing her Sandal from the Temple of Nike Apteros (Photo: Graciela Ainsworth Sculpture Conservation)*



*Dying Gaul (Photo: John K. McGregor)*

of the arts modelled on the Parthenon of Athens by W. H. Playfair in 1823 and further enlarged by him in 1836. When the building's interior was destroyed to adapt it for the use of the Royal Scottish Academy, the casts were transferred to the newly founded Edinburgh College of Art.

#### Elgin Gift

The Athenian casts in the collection are outstanding. Unusually, the Trustees had acquired some Parthenon casts made for them shortly before Lord Elgin sold his entire collection to the British Museum in 1816. Elgin was so impressed by the educational ambitions of the Trustees Academy that in 1827 he donated casts of four panels of the frieze of the Temple of Nike Apteros and metopes (large sculpted panels on the outer frieze of the Doric temple) from the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens from his personal collection. The Elgin Gift set in motion a significant and enduring policy of acquiring only the best first or second impression casts from expert moulders and sculptors.

Italian casts, 1820s and 1830s

From the 1820s the agents of the Trustees Academy in Italy commissioned a number of moulds: in 1822 they obtained a 'first impression' of the Graeco-Roman marble of the Dying Gaul in the Capitoline Museum in Rome which cost 45 Crowns, and in 1831 they obtained permission to mould The Dead Christ from Michelangelo's Pietà in St. Peter's, Rome. A series of casts were acquired in Florence in 1836: the Gates of Paradise and the Dying Adonis, and possibly other Florentine casts shipped to Edinburgh in that year, were originally commissioned by the French neoclassical painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres for the French Academy in Rome. It appears two sets of casts were made, and the Trustees were able to acquire these invaluable pieces for their collection. In 1835 the Albacini Collection of 255 Graeco-Roman busts, considered to be the best of its kind then available, were imported from Florence. The Trustees' architect, W. H. Playfair, designed the shelves for their display in the building at the Mound.



*Parthenon, North Frieze XXXVIII, Riders*



*Parthenon East Frieze, VI, The Heroes*



*Triglyph-metope-triglyph fragment from the Parthenon representing a centaur in battle with a lapith*



*Princess Margaret Tomb*



*Reclining Goddess from East Pediment of the Parthenon*  
*(Photos: John K. McGregor)*

## Partenon casts from the British Museum

In 1837 the Trustees purchased a complete set of Parthenon casts from the British Museum. All of these, except for the West Frieze casts, were made by Richard Westmacott. Elgin had never removed the marbles of the West Frieze from the temple – instead he had had them moulded. The moulds were sold to the British Museum (with the marbles), and two sets of casts were struck from them. These are known as the ‘Elgin Set’. Until now it has been thought that immediately afterwards the moulds were destroyed. However, the Trustees’ archives show that the moulder Pietro Sarti owned these moulds in 1836, but it remains unclear how these survived or how they came to be in Sarti’s possession. A recent comparison of the seam lines on the College’s casts with the ‘Elgin Set’ in London shows that the two sets have been made from the same original moulds. The Elgin archives contain the receipts of Elgin’s Italian formatori (mould makers), Bernardino Ledus and Vincenzo Rosati, for the making of the moulds in Athens in 1802.

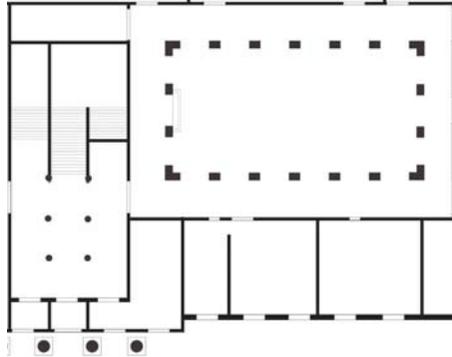
Two Parthenon pediment sculptures – the Seated Goddesses and the Reclining Goddesses had been made shortly before 1830 as a special commission for the French government and the Vatican, but they were never delivered and instead purchased for Edinburgh. These and the remainder of the casts made by Westmacott were installed in Edinburgh in 1839.

## Architectural Casts

The new building in Lauriston provided the governors of the College with more space for large architectural casts. These included a special commission in 1912, at the request of Sir Robert Rowand Anderson, for casts of the magnificent Princess Margaret’s Tomb and the Sedilia from Lincluden Collegiate Church (c.1456), and in the same year Sir Robert Lorimer, architect and governor, travelled to Belgium and France to buy new casts. One of these is probably the cast of the late mediaeval Tomb of Ferry de Gros, Lord of Dyeghem Nieuwland.

## Architecture and display

The main building of Edinburgh College of Art is a Beaux-Arts design. On the exterior this is most evident in the strong symmetry and the pronounced end bays with their tall French, mansard-style roofs with beautifully executed lead flashings. The Sculpture Court is modelled on Felix Duban's design of the Glass Court at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, Paris which was built for the display of plaster casts. However, the proportions of the public areas differ from that used in Paris because of the intention in Edinburgh of displaying the Parthenon frieze. The architects derived the wall height from a multiple of the height of the frieze panels, and they also derived the bay widths of the arcades, entrance hall and main staircase from the width of a triglyph-metope-triglyph unit of the Parthenon; these units are displayed at the ends of the west arcade. The strong classicising element is surprising in an Edwardian building, especially when we consider that the College was completed just as Mackintosh was designing his radical proto-Modernist library



Fragment of the plan of the ECA Main Building, showing the entrance vestibule, main staircase and Sculpture Court

wing at the Glasgow School of Art. The College's classicism was a tribute to the cast collection's history and to Playfair's neo-Greek architecture.



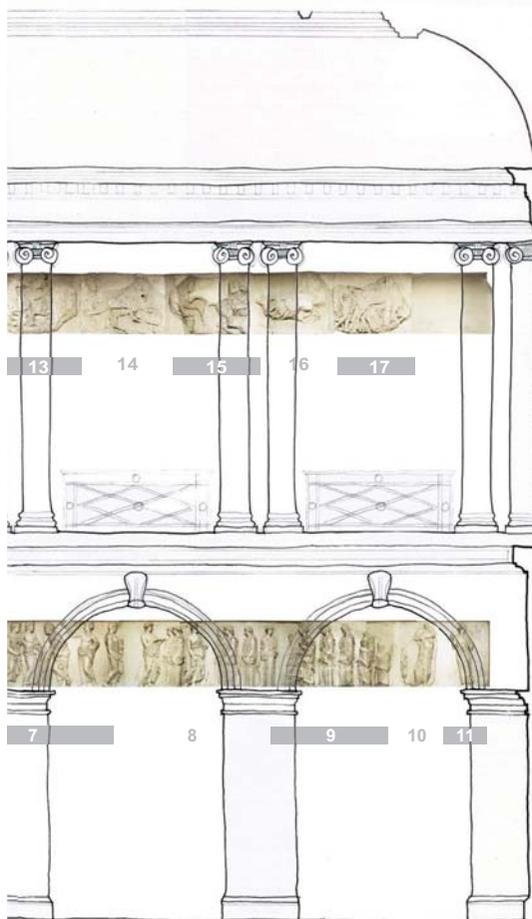
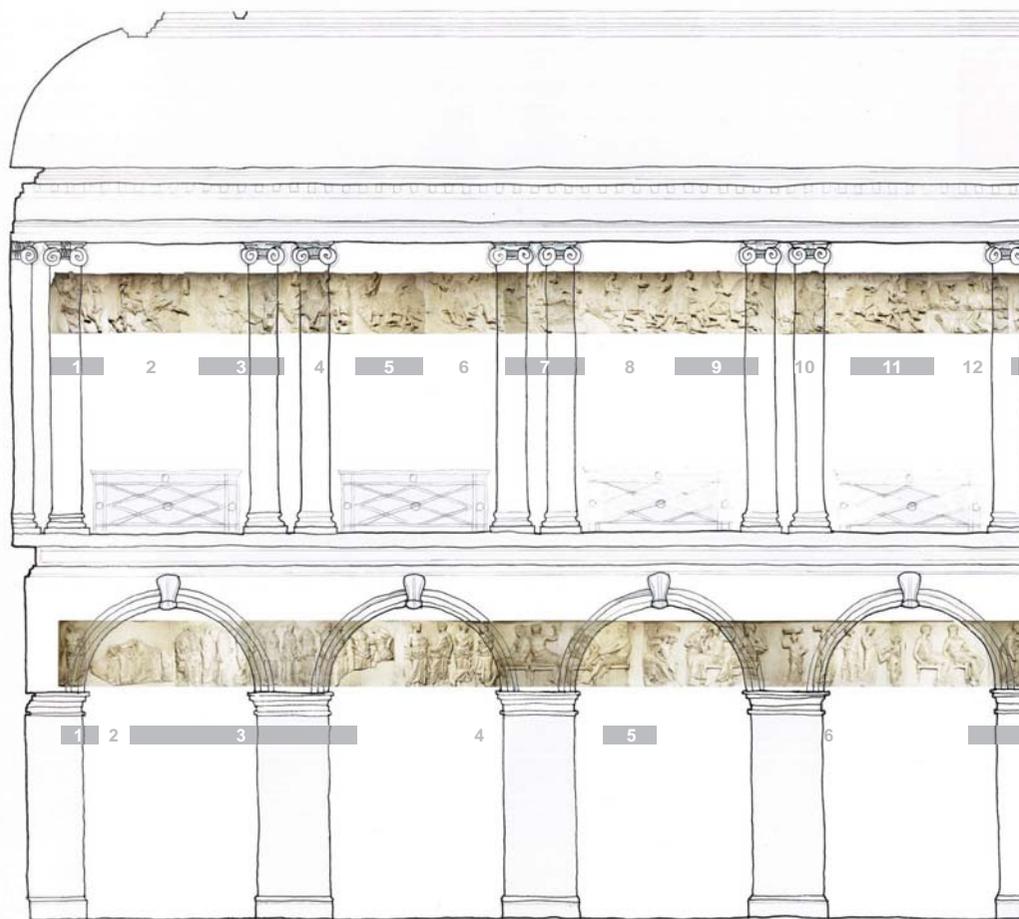
The Sculpture Court



Discobolus  
(Photos: John K. McGregor)



Entrance vestibule



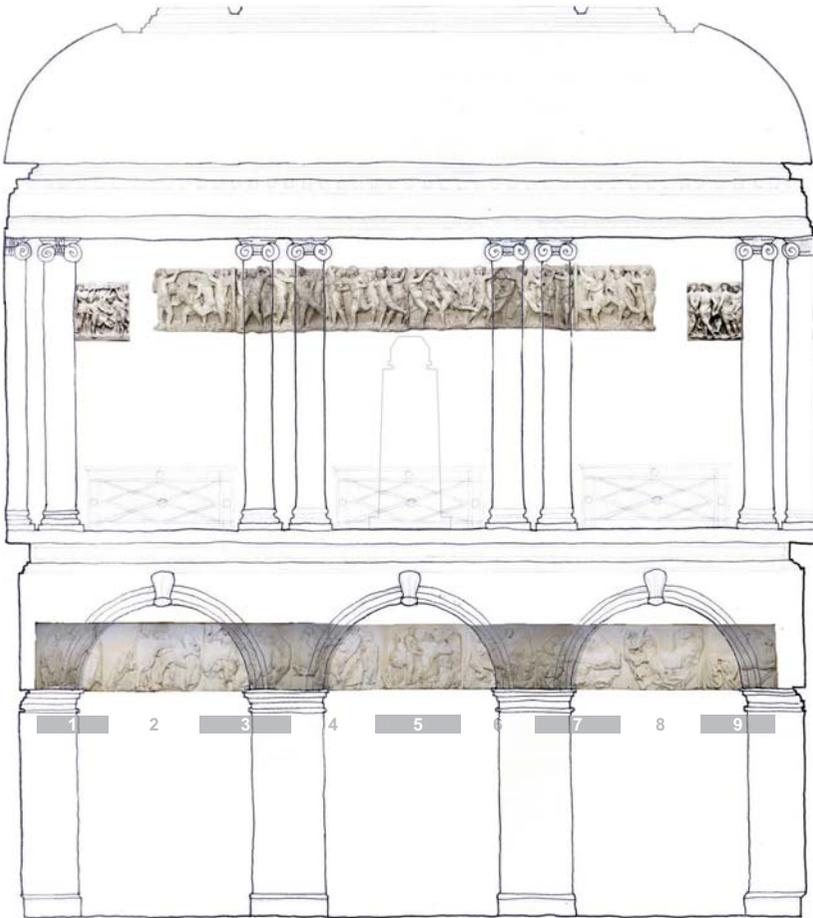
## North Wall

Upper Gallery: South Frieze of the Parthenon

1. South Frieze, I, Riders (Fragment)
2. South Frieze, III, Riders
3. South Frieze, V, Riders
4. South Frieze, VI, Riders
5. South Frieze, VII, Riders
6. South Frieze, VIII, Riders
7. South Frieze, IX, Riders
8. South Frieze, X, Riders
9. South Frieze, XI, Riders
10. South Frieze, XII, Riders
11. South Frieze, XIII, Riders
12. South Frieze, XXII, Riders
13. South Frieze, XV, Riders
14. South Frieze, XXI, Riders
15. South Frieze, XIX, Riders
16. South Frieze, XIV, Chariot
17. South Frieze, XXV, Chariot

Ground Floor: East Frieze of the Parthenon

1. East Frieze, I, Heroes and Girls
2. South Frieze, XXXV Apobatai
3. East Frieze, III, Heroes and Girls
4. East Frieze, IV, Gods and Goddesses
5. East Frieze, VI, Louvre (fragment)
6. East Frieze, V, Gods and Goddesses
7. East Frieze, VI, Girls
8. East Frieze, The Heroes, VII
9. East Frieze, VIII, Girls
10. North Frieze, V, Tray bearers
11. West Frieze, I, Man



## East Wall

Ground Floor: South Frieze of the Parthenon

1. South Frieze, XLIV Youths leading cattle
2. South Frieze, XXXVIII Youths leading cattle
3. South Frieze, XLII Youths leading cattle
4. South Frieze, XL, Youths leading cattle
5. South Frieze, XLI, Youths leading cattle
6. South Frieze, XXXIX, Youths leading cattle
7. South Frieze, XXXI, Chariot
8. South Frieze, XXX, Apobatai
9. South Frieze, XXIX, Chariot

Upper Gallery: Reliefs from Florence Cathedral

Centre Panels: Cantoria by Donatello, Old Sacristy

Side panels: Cantoria by Luca Della Robbia, New Sacristy



*Cantoria by Luca Della Robbia, New Sacristy at Florence Cathedral (Photos: John K. McGregor)*

## South Wall

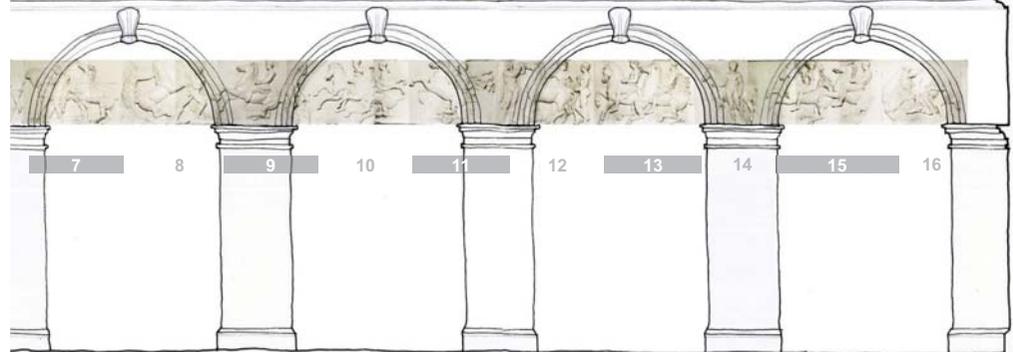
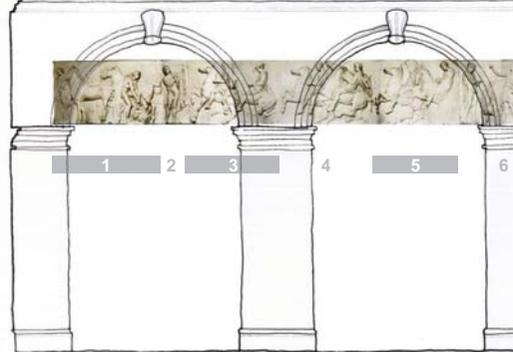
### Upper Gallery: North Frieze of the Parthenon

1. North Frieze XXIV, Riders
2. North Frieze XXVIII, Riders
3. North Frieze XXXII, Riders
4. North Frieze XXXIII, Riders
5. North Frieze XXXIV, Riders
6. North Frieze XXVI, Riders
7. North Frieze XXXV, Riders
8. North Frieze XXXVI, Riders
9. North Frieze XXXVII, Riders
10. North Frieze XXXVIII, Riders
11. North Frieze XXXIX, Riders
12. North Frieze XL, Riders
13. North Frieze XLI, Riders
14. North Frieze XLII, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
15. North Frieze XLII, Riders Apobatai (fragment)
16. North Frieze, XXIII, Chariot Race
17. North Frieze, XVIII, Chariot Race
18. North Frieze, XXI, Chariot Race



### Ground Floor: West Frieze of the Parthenon

1. West Frieze, XV, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
2. West Frieze, XVI, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
3. West Frieze, IX, Riders
4. West Frieze, X, Riders
5. West Frieze, XI, Riders
6. West Frieze, XII, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
7. West Frieze, XIII, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
8. West Frieze, XIV, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
9. West Frieze, VI, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
10. West Frieze, VII, Riders
11. West Frieze, VIII, Rider preparing for the cavalcade
12. West Frieze, III, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
13. West Frieze, IV, Riders
14. West Frieze, V, Riders preparing for the cavalcade
15. West Frieze, II, Riders
16. North Frieze, XII, Chariot Race



The project encompassed the research, conservation, and interpretation of the cast collections at the Edinburgh College of Art and the University of Edinburgh.

The project produced a database based on research into the intrinsic historical value of the many early and unique casts in the collection and investigated its cultural and architectural contribution to the re-invention of Edinburgh as 'Athens of the North.'

The most appropriate conservation treatment was chosen for individual or groups of plaster casts on the basis of tests and analysis of their different historic surface coatings, structures and fixings. A total of 113 wall-mounted and free-standing casts were successfully conserved during the project.

The interpretation developed through the project ensures that the collection is available as a resource for students, scholars, artists and the general public alike.

The project concluded with a special exhibition documenting contemporary artistic engagement with the historic casts, the history of the collection and the conservation process. This marks a new lease of life for a major cultural heritage resource unique to Scotland.

The project was enabled by major grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, Esmé Fairbairn Foundation and Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland.

Further information: <http://sites.ace.ed.ac.uk/casts>



Editor: Ruxandra-Iulia Stoica  
Text: Margaret Stewart  
Graphics: Joanna Wemyss and Susan Mitchell



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*Edinburgh College of Art*

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