

The afterlife of sculptures: posthumous casts and the case of Medardo Rosso (1858–1928)

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Introduction

In 1996, Tate Modern discovered that a sculpture in its collection labeled *Grande rieuse*¹ (date of creation of subject 1891/1892) by Medardo Rosso, hitherto considered a lifetime cast, was actually a posthumous cast made under the auspices of his son Francesco. The museum's website reports that this misattribution posed a challenge to the object's 'authenticity', raising questions about its 'status and value'.² Tate evidently felt that this change of attribution placed into question the object's desirability and suitability for exhibition.

At the time of acquisition in 1986, there had been no reason for Tate to doubt what it called the cast's 'authenticity', presumably meaning its status as a lifetime cast. The object had come directly from the descendants of the artist via a reputable British dealer, Philip Granville of Lords Gallery, and it was accompanied by a signed bill of sale from Medardo Rosso's granddaughter, dated 17 August 1965, in which she guaranteed the work's authorship by her grandfather as an 'authentic' cast by Rosso. The cast bore an inscription by the artist's granddaughter with her name, 'Danila Rosso Parravicini' and the words 'Opera Medardo Rosso' (Work [by] Medardo Rosso). Such a guarantee of authorship highlights the question of how broadly the concept of 'authenticity' can be interpreted in the case of a posthumous cast. In fact, *Grande rieuse* is a cast made legally by Rosso's son from the artist's plaster models, but possibly using different materials and techniques than those used by his father.

Tate's concerns about its cast's 'authenticity' have been further validated by the *Catalogue Raisonné* of Rosso's *œuvre* published in 2009. The catalogue separated into different sections the plaster, wax, and bronze casts believed to be by Medardo from those that were cast by others from his plaster models after his death. Authors Paola Mola and Fabio Vittucci emphasized differences in quality between 'original' and 'authentic' lifetime casts and posthumous 'copies', or 'reproductions' by his son:

Of an inferior quality, outside of any comparison with the works by Medardo Rosso, these works [by Francesco Rosso] are on the contrary regularly confused with the originals to the point that even in public collections frequently we find them next to each other without any indication that lets one distinguish the authentic ones from the copies (legal,

¹ See: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rosso-laughing-woman-large-version-t04846> (accessed 30 April 2017).

² <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rosso-laughing-woman-large-version-t04846> (accessed 30 April 2017).

totally legal but yet always posthumous reproductions). So as to avoid that certain relaxed forms, certain deaf yellows, overlap with our perception of the liveliness of the originals, we herewith give the list of casts by Francesco in public museums, leaving out the more innocuous list of private collections, which are destined moreover to sadden some future exhibition.³

While this viewpoint rightly encourages proper labeling, it still leaves open questions about Rosso's posthumous legacy, as shown by the case of Tate's cast: there is a need to clarify what constitutes an 'original', 'authentic' Rosso, and where should meaning and value be located for the posthumous casts. Is the value, 'originality', and 'authenticity' of Rosso's work found in the plaster model(s), the casts, or both? How does an owner define posthumous works made from the same models as the lifetime works? Does the existing definition intend to mean that the posthumous cast is in itself not a well cast object, being legally authorized but not made or supervised by the artist? Is there a single standard of quality by which to measure these works?

Tate Modern is not alone in this problem. Many public institutions and private collectors own casts by Rosso that are now considered to be posthumous. There is no scholarly or institutional consensus about how to label these casts, or whether to display them or circulate them in exhibitions. Rosso's posthumous casts are frequently traded on the art market through intermediaries such as auction houses. Their attribution as 'authentic' works by Rosso is at times avoided, at times questioned, leaving buyers with an uncertain sense of their status and value. This situation persists because Rosso's materials, casting processes, and his ideas about his legacy are not fully understood. Whereas the art market and the law demand from experts a clear answer to the question of authenticity and attribution, I believe that Rosso's case cannot be limited to a binary question, 'whether a work is genuine or fake, either by the artist in question or not by him'.⁴ A more nuanced approach is necessary.

The changing perceptions of posthumous casts

Posthumous casts are certainly not limited to a single artist or his/her legacy, or even to a single time period in art history. Posthumous reproductions and copies

³ 'Di qualità inferiore, fuori da ogni paragone con le opere di Medardo Rosso, questi lavori sono invece di regola confusi con gli originali al punto che anche nelle pubbliche raccolte non di rado li troviamo figurare le une accanto agli altri, senza alcuna indicazione che permetta di distinguere gli autentici dalle copie (legali, legalissime ma pur sempre riproduzioni postume). Per evitare dunque che certe forme rilassate, certe gialle sordità, si sovrappongano nella nostra percezione al vivo degli originali diamo a seguito l'elenco delle fusioni di Francesco conservate nei pubblici musei, tralasciando la più innocua lista dei privati, destinata al più a intristire qualche futura esposizione', Paola Mola and Fabio Vittucci, *Medardo Rosso: Catalogo ragionato della scultura*, Milan: Skira, 2009, 361.

⁴ Eugene Victor Thaw, 'Foreword', in Ronald D. Spencer, ed., *The Expert versus the Object. Judging Fakes and False Attributions in the Visual Arts*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, ix.

have always existed. They go as far back as copies of Greek sculpture made by the Romans. However, the attitudes towards these copies have changed over time. In the case of Roman copies of Greek sculpture, the copies were neither denigrated nor considered 'inauthentic' with respect to the often-absent Greek originals. At times, copies and later reproductions were thought to possess auras stronger than the original. In the nineteenth century, copies of ancient and Renaissance sculptures were highly prized and placed in museums. Rosso himself produced such reproductions of past art, which he often signed with his own name.⁵

Today's negative view of posthumous casts is culturally conditioned and framed by a specific historical mindset. Its roots go back to the creation of a nineteenth- and twentieth-century aesthetic that prizes 'originality', 'authenticity', and 'genius' above all else. This change of attitude led to a re-evaluation of posthumous casts, even in the case of the once-prized Roman copies of Greek originals.⁶ The changed attitude was born as both a byproduct of and a reaction to increased mechanical reproduction during the industrial revolution, which dramatically improved the speed, efficiency and ability to perfectly replicate and mass-produce identical copies and therefore put at serious risk the value of the artist's hand.⁷ This reproducibility went along with the appreciation of a unique intellectual, social, cultural, and commercial product as well as a modernist aesthetic predicated on inimitability. As Anthony Hughes and Erich Ranfft believe, 'twentieth-century anxieties concerning artistic integrity and commercial exploitation'⁸ confirm that the negative relationship to the posthumous cast issue is historically and culturally circumscribed. The consequences are often detrimental to historical understanding: studies have shown how these attitudes have 'distorted the writing of history to give a false sense of the priorities and practices that actually prevailed in artists' studios'.⁹

Re-examining definitions and terminology

Because of its negative connotation today, the word 'posthumous' is rarely mentioned on museum websites. Yet it is important to reclaim the use of the word without value judgment. Posthumous casts are three-dimensional art objects reproduced by mechanical means after an artist's death from models that were

⁵ For a critical analysis of Rosso's reproductions of ancient art, see Sharon Hecker, 'Rosso's Reproductions from the Past', in Sharon Hecker, *A Moment's Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017, 188–192.

⁶ See Kate Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁷ Jacques de Caso, 'Serial Sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France', in Jean Wasserman, ed., *Metamorphoses in Nineteenth-Century Sculpture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, 3; Meredith Shedd, 'A Mania for Statuettes: Achille Collas and Other Pioneers in the Mechanical Reproduction of Sculpture', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 120, July–August 1992, 36–48.

⁸ Anthony Hughes and Erich Ranfft, eds., *Sculpture and its Reproductions*, London: Reaktion Books, 1997, 3.

⁹ Hughes and Ranfft, eds., *Sculpture and its Reproductions*, 3.

made by the artist during his/her lifetime. They are distinguished chronologically from lifetime casts, which are sculptural objects reproduced personally by the artist or by a professional foundry under his/her oversight or with his/her authorization. Posthumous casts are subdivided into two categories: (1) authorized casts made legally by heirs or an institution designated by the artist, and (2) unauthorized posthumous casts taken from the artist's models without his/her consent, *surmoulages* (casts taken from casts), and outright fakes (casts made from no known model). These categories apply only to modern and contemporary sculpture, for after a certain date there are no longer heirs or designated institutions left to authorize or protect an artist's legacy. At that point, the responsibility for distinguishing between lifetime and posthumous casts, whether authorized or unauthorized, falls into the domain of art history.

In the authentication process of a painting, there are only two conclusions: original or fake. In the case of sculptures, which are inherently reproducible, the question is more complex. The connotations of the word 'original' deserve further consideration when applied to sculptures. The generally held notion is that lifetime casts are of greater market/intellectual/spiritual desirability because they were made under the artist's control and are part of his artistic vision. There can be no argument with that. A problem arises when the word 'original' is substituted for 'lifetime', or when 'original' is used to distinguish lifetime casts from posthumous ones, for this implies that posthumous casts are 'not original' and 'not authentic': posthumous casts are seen in some ways as false representations of the artist's vision.

Another problem with the word 'original' is that art historians have repeatedly questioned the idea of an 'original' in mechanically reproduced sculpture.¹⁰ Only the very first model made by the artist (for example, a subject first modeled in clay) can be considered the 'original'. In sculpture, the original clay model is actually destroyed in the process of creating more durable models in plaster from which to make casts, which means that an original no longer exists.

'Authentic', the key word used in connoisseurship and attributions, presents similar problems to the word 'original'. Authorized posthumous casts can in some senses be considered 'authentic', but according to different standards. They can be considered closer to the artist's vision than fakes because they are taken from the artist's lifetime plasters. Authorized posthumous casts convey the artist's basic idea. The execution of the object (materials, processes, and surface details) may be different.

A further layer of complexity can be seen when posthumous casts are authorized but the artist's intention for the posthumous works is not clear. Even if Auguste Rodin and Medardo Rosso favored posthumous casting of their works, it is not clear whether they meant for their posthumous works to look like the casts that were eventually made. Furthermore, in the case of Edgar Degas, where the artist

¹⁰ See, for example, Rosalind E. Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition', *October*, 18, fall 1981, 47–66; reprinted in Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985, 151–170.

expressed no clear intention, one cannot know whether he intended his works to be cast at all, and the same applies to Umberto Boccioni and Honoré Daumier. Yet no matter whether there had been an expressed intent or not, posthumous casts exist. What terms to use about posthumous casts as compared to lifetime ones is left for later generations to decide.

Art law and the art market use this terminology in different ways. From a legal standpoint, when the artist has sanctioned posthumous casting, casts produced after the artist's death are considered to be just as 'original' and 'authentic' as lifetime casts.¹¹ At the same time, as art lawyer Karen Sanig maintains, 'there are no harmonised laws in relation to the creation, additional casting, and selling of posthumous bronzes which leaves an uncertain landscape in a legal context'.¹²

The art market adopts a more variable and slippery approach to these terms by loading them with value judgments. At certain times, the market exalts distinctions and depends upon them to create an artistic taste, preference, and greater economic value for lifetime casts (designated as 'authentic' and 'original') over posthumous ones. At other times, the market blurs the distinctions so that posthumous casts can be considered just as 'authentic' and 'original' as lifetime ones and this is driven by considerations of economic value. Many institutions and *catalogues raisonnés* adopt this ambiguous approach.

The public is caught in the middle. Posthumous casts are not viewed *a priori* negatively when seen in museums, galleries, or private collections. For example, posthumous bronzes of works by Rodin, Degas, Boccioni, Brancusi and Rosso are highly appreciated by audiences without designation of differences. Today, museums have gone further than in previous decades by providing two sets of dates for posthumous casts: the date of creation of the subject or model and the date of casting. But is a viewer able to use this information intelligently? Can the public truly understand differences between lifetime and posthumous casts based solely on these two dates? The two dates do not give enough information to understand the history of the casts and evaluate their differences in materials, surface quality, and processes from lifetime casts.

Case-by-case

A case-by-case analysis has proven to be the best approach, but it should be an analysis that does not stop at value judgments related to originality and authenticity. Rather, the public should be better informed about the ongoing debates about posthumous casts in the case of each artist. Over the past decades there have been numerous thought-provoking scholarly discussions surrounding posthumous casts. But they rarely reach the general public, even in simplified form. When thinking about exhibitability and desirability, viewers should be encouraged to move beyond a strict judgment of inferior/superior quality. To paraphrase curator

¹¹ Karen Sanig, 'Law and practice in relation to posthumous bronzes: jurisdictional differences', in *Posthumous Bronzes in Law and Art History*, Saint Petersburg: The State Hermitage Museum, 2012, 104–112.

¹² Sanig, 'Law and practice in relation to posthumous bronzes', 111.

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and author John Tancock in a discussion of posthumous casts of Degas' works, the artist's hesitation should be balanced against the viewer's pleasure.¹³

To give a few examples, scholars have written on Rodin's posthumous *Gates of Hell* begun in 1881 but never completed and never cast in bronze during the artist's lifetime, authorized by Rodin shortly before his death in 1918 and first cast between 1926 and 1928.¹⁴ These debates, which raise fascinating questions about the conditions and reasons why Rodin's monumental work was never finalized in his lifetime, do not appear on museum websites. Art historian Ruth Butler notes that in Rodin's lifetime, the *Gates'* unfinished state was a major part of their appeal. When the *Gates* were first exhibited in plaster in 1900, critics noted a 'weird object with some parts apparently finished and others indicated only by numbers scrawled in pencil on the white surface'.¹⁵ As Butler writes, 'there was a widely shared impression that the work would never be finished', with some reviewers opining that it was 'better that it remain only a project'.¹⁶

A second example is Degas, who never cast his wax sculptures in bronze and expressed contradictory opinions about seeing them in this medium. According to art historian Patricia Failing, the nearly 1400 bronze casts of Degas' sculptures are all 'posthumous, unauthorized by the artist, and cast in a material the artist never used', which makes for an uncertainty about what counts as an 'authentic' cast.¹⁷ Yet these contradictions are never fully clarified for the public. Failing notes that 'although many of the serialized Degas bronzes were patinated to suggest the colour effects of the waxes, these replicas cannot convey the sophistication of the artist's command of light and colour'.¹⁸ Such differences are described in Daphne Barbour and Shelley Sturman's groundbreaking study on Degas' waxes.¹⁹

Nor are viewers provided with an understanding of the differences in surface finish and patination between some bronzes cast in Rodin's lifetime and others cast after his death, as described by Alexandra Parigoris.²⁰ Likewise, the research of Jeanne Wassermann to distinguish the numerous kinds of posthumous bronze casts made of Daumier's plaster sculpture *Ratapail* (subject created c. 1851), is rarely discussed in museum presentations of these casts.²¹ According to Fogg

¹³ Quoted in Sylvia Hochfield, 'Problems in the reproduction of sculpture', *Art News*, 73:9, November 1974, 28.

¹⁴ See, for example, Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avante-Garde', 151–170.

¹⁵ *New York Tribune*, Supplement, 2 September 1900, 393, quoted in Ruth Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 356.

¹⁶ 'Chronique de Paris', *Illustration*, 30 June 1900, 406, quoted in English translation in Butler, *Rodin*, 357.

¹⁷ Patricia Failing, 'Degas' sculpture. The inside story', in Kathryn Brown, ed., *Perspectives on Degas*, New York: Routledge, 2017, 155.

¹⁸ Failing, 'Degas' sculpture', 155.

¹⁹ Suzanne Glover Lindsay, Daphne Barbour and Shelley Sturman, *Edgar Degas Sculpture*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

²⁰ Alexandra Parigoris, 'Truth to Material', in Anthony Hughes and Erich Ranfft, eds., *Sculpture and its Reproductions*, London: Reaktion Books, 1997, 132–136.

²¹ Jeanne L. Wasserman, *Daumier Sculpture. A critical and comparative study*, Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1969.

Museum's conservator Arthur Beale, 'a good percentage of the fine details of modelling and textural tool-work that can be seen on the original plaster casts and the unbaked clays is lost in the translation to bronze'.²² This implies no value judgment about the existence of posthumous casts, but rather a caveat for the viewer to understand the difference between the posthumous and the lifetime object.

Finally, museum websites on Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (date of creation of subject 1913) could benefit from Parigoris's study of how these posthumous bronze casts of his plaster have affected readings of the sculpture.²³ Today there are references on museum websites to the bronze of the sculptures, for example: 'the polished metal alludes to the sleek modern machinery beloved by Boccioni and other Futurist artists'.²⁴ But the public is not told that Boccioni never used these materials or cast this work in bronze in his lifetime.

Towards transparency

Tate Modern had several options available upon discovery of *Grande rieuse's* posthumous status: it could have chosen to remove the cast from display, sue the dealer and/or the family for not fully disclosing the cast's posthumous status, or leave the cast on display and ignore this new information. The museum decided to strike a balance between public interest in seeing the work and the awareness that the work is posthumous. It continued to exhibit the cast, but also publicly disclosed its findings by posting a detailed discussion on its website. Tate refused to shy away from artistic and ethical issues deriving from this potentially damaging reattribution, instead making them an important part of the work's historical interest and offering the cast as a tool for further debate on the subject.

Tate openly discussed its process of discovery, detailing its path of re-attribution of *Grande rieuse* from a lifetime to a posthumous cast. In doing so, Tate paved the way for a new approach to naming, describing, and discussing posthumous casts. Its website entry demonstrates how the art market, institutions and collectors can face the responsibility of clarifying to audiences just what kind of object they are looking at by stating when and how it was cast, by whom, and under what authority and conditions.

Naming and describing transparently is an important first step to better understanding the complex identity of such works. The issue is as much art historical as it is art historiographic, for it sheds light on what one chooses to write about posthumous casts, how one writes about them, and where one locates meaning and quality for these objects. As Hughes and Ranfft contend in their study of sculptural reproductions, 'acknowledgement of replication, far from diminishing the interest objects hold for us, as we might perhaps fear, enriches their fascination'.²⁵

²² Quoted in Hochfield, 'Problems in the reproduction of sculpture', 28.

²³ Alexandra Parigoris, 'Truth to Material', 143–144.

²⁴ <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81179?locale=en> (accessed 30 April 2017).

²⁵ Hughes and Ranfft, eds., *Sculpture and its Reproductions*, 5.

Tate's example is significant because it squarely faces institutional doubts about calling into question the value, legitimacy and status of a sculptural object. Fuller disclosure can promote a greater understanding of the complex roles that posthumous casts play in artists' legacies. This helps to avoid lack of clarity and combats insufficient or erroneous information, which instigates misattributions and errors that continue to encourage dubious art market transactions, in turn negatively affecting the institutions and private collectors who buy these casts. By making the information available, Tate protects unsuspecting audiences so that they may enjoy viewing a posthumous cast but are not misled or misinformed about what they are actually looking at.

This process can be supported by the law, for it is the law of each country that can establish (a) who is entitled to make posthumous casts; (b) how many casts can be made (in some countries); (c) whether an artist's moral right has been in any way compromised by the appearance of a posthumous cast; (d) that full disclosure of all relevant information is being made.

Greater transparency has long been recommended by the College Art Association, which issued a statement of ethical standards on bronze casting, published in 1975. The statement declared that:

All posthumous casting or reproduction of an artist's work must be clearly identified by information supplied on the work of art itself, when possible, as well as on all invoices, bills of sale, catalogues, and advertising. This information should include the date of the new cast, the name of the foundry, the size of the edition, and whether or not the work is a *surmoulage* or of a different scale than the original (...). Museums and galleries should clearly and fully label works in their collections by providing information on the original date of the sculpture's creation, the actual date of the cast if known, or an indication that the date is not known. If, for example, an artist never cast a bronze from a plaster, the posthumous bronze sculpture should be so identified on the label and so noted in the museum gallery or auction catalogue. The authority for the posthumous casting should also be credited.²⁶

However, these standards need to go further and deeper.

The role of visual assessments

The CAA Standards do not address visual and material dissimilarities between lifetime and posthumous casts of the same subject. The law does not treat these differences and their importance, either. Describing and understanding such differences, however, is crucial. Visual comparisons are extremely useful as a starting point, for they highlight important aesthetic distinctions in materials and surface texture, which can affect the visual and perceptual effects for the viewer.

In the case of Tate *Grande rieuse*, the cast looked different from a lifetime cast

²⁶ <http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/sculpture> (accessed 30 April 2017).

by Rosso. Tate reports that it conducted a visual assessment of its cast in comparison to lifetime casts.²⁷ Tate's then-Chief Conservator of Sculpture, Derek Pullen, and a Rosso expert, Luciano Caramel, concluded that the bright yellow shade of the wax did not look like the darker shade they found in some of Rosso's known lifetime wax casts. Tate thus noted that, 'even if [*Grande rieuse*] had been cast from an early example (and could be said, therefore, to be close to Rosso's vision of how the sculpture should be), the choice of the particular shade of yellow wax used was clearly not the artist's'.²⁸ This statement can be confirmed if one compares the Tate cast, for example, to the fragmented wax head of *Grande rieuse* at Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Milan, known to be a lifetime cast.²⁹

Furthermore, the good condition of the Tate cast seemed to differ from the lesser condition of known lifetime casts. The Tate cast also did not display what its conservator described as a 'crumbly texture' that is found in lifetime wax casts by Rosso. The freshness of the white plaster found on the backside of the Tate cast did not resemble the rougher, dirtier look of the plaster found in lifetime casts.³⁰ Based on its visual assessment, Tate concluded that its cast of *Grande rieuse*, 'now accepted (...) [as] a relatively recent cast' made by Francesco, visually matches a plaster model found in the family-run Medardo Rosso museum in Barzio and demonstrates consistency with elements in other casts known to be by Francesco.

Visual comparisons, however, have their limitations and cannot be generalized. For example, there are cases of cleaned, varnished, or restored lifetime works by Rosso that can be bright in color and smooth in surface quality, but are still undoubtedly lifetime works.

Scientific analysis

I believe that examinations cannot be limited to visual comparisons. Technical analyses should be used to confirm or refute these impressions. In a team study I led in 2015 on known lifetime casts of Rosso's *Bambino ebreo* (c. 1892/1894), the team observed that many of Rosso's lifetime wax and bronze casts of the same subject demonstrated noticeable differences in color and texture, with addition of scratches and air bubbles, and in some cases different colors of layers of wax or even different

²⁷ Tate does not mention which casts were used for the comparison. No lifetime wax casts of the full-sized *Grande rieuse* are known to exist today. Several wax casts of the work in its fragmented form as a head exist in museums, as well as several full-size plaster models and a bronze cast. They have yet to be studied systematically.

²⁸ <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rosso-laughing-woman-large-version-t04846> (accessed 30 April 2017).

²⁹ See: http://www.tribune.com/report/2015/03/medardo-rosso-la-forma-assoluta/attachment/medardo-rosso-grande-rieuse-1903-04-gam-milano-saporetti-immagini-darte_xl/ (accessed 30 April 2017).

³⁰ See Sharon Hecker, 'An *Enfant Malade* by Medardo Rosso from the Collection of Louis Vauxcelles', *The Burlington Magazine*, 152:1292, 2010, 728, fig. 32; Henry Lie, 'Technical Features in Rosso's Work', in Harry Cooper and Sharon Hecker, eds., *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, 81, fig. 54 and 85, fig. 61.

shades in the same wax.³¹ Sampling confirmed subtle differences in wax composition and has led us to create a database of Rosso's lifetime wax compositions, with which Francesco's waxes can be compared in the future. White light digital scanning has provided a basis for understanding the subtle differences in the forms of some of Rosso's lifetime casts, suggesting that he used different plaster models for casting the same subject, and even different fronts and backs from different models. Yet even technical analysis is not sufficient by itself to distinguish posthumous casts made from Rosso's plaster models. Verifiable and externally documentable provenances, in combination with visual and technical analyses, can allow such distinctions to be made.

From a visual assessment of casts such as *Grande rieuse* known to have been commissioned by Francesco, it seems clear that some are homogeneous in finish, both in color and surface texture, in ways that seems different from Rosso's lifetime materials. Francesco's plaster backs and the way the works have been cut and smoothed at the bottom seem similar to each other but different from ones known to be by Medardo. This suggests that Francesco may have used different materials and processes from his father. Such a hypothesis still has to be confirmed through sampling in a more systematic fashion.

Medardo Rosso's processes and practices

Tate concluded about its cast that 'there [is] no evidence to suggest that the artist intended, let alone authorized, a cast such as [*Grande rieuse*] to be made'.³² For a fuller understanding of Rosso's posthumous casts, two further elements are needed: an art historical examination of Rosso's ideas and casting practices during his lifetime and his expressed wishes for his posthumous legacy. Within the panorama of modern sculptors, Rosso shows a wide array of practices that suggest that he did not feel the need to maintain a univocal position about casting. Over the course of his career, Rosso continually shifted, reconsidered, and revised his casting choices to fulfill different needs, at times embracing divergent ideas and practices without giving signs of internal struggle.

It is widely believed that Rosso cast all of his own works. This needs to be examined in light of the facts known today. Like most nineteenth-century sculptors, Rosso employed mechanical reproduction. He modeled a number of original subjects in clay (fewer than fifty, an unusually restricted number for a sculptor of his time), from which he or a foundry cast more stable plaster models, and from these plaster models made many further casts in plaster, wax and bronze. The processes by which Rosso made these casts, however, varied over time between works he had cast professionally and works he cast on his own.

Documents show that in his early years in Milan in the 1880s, Rosso used professional foundries such as the Fonderia Giovanni Strada to have his bronzes

³¹ See Sharon Hecker, *et. al.*, *Medardo Rosso. Bambino ebreo. A Critical Study of Modern Serial Sculpture*, London: Archetype, 2018.

³² <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rosso-laughing-woman-large-version-t04846> (accessed 30 April 2017).

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cast by the lost wax (*cire perdue*) method.³³ It is known that Rosso was involved in the casting processes there and made specific decisions along the way, but the extent of his involvement is not known. In a letter to a friend in which he complained about the foundry's shoddy work on a cast, he wrote: 'I don't have my own foundry but I know my business and this is not the first day that I am among bronzes'.³⁴ After he moved from Milan to Paris in 1889, Rosso wrote about continuing to send old and new terracotta models back to the Strada foundry in Milan to have them cast in bronze. Letters confirm that he included specific instructions about the casting process to be used, suggesting his desire to exercise authorial control over the making of his casts and that he was very protective of his terracottas because they were the first version. He insisted on maintaining control and expected precise replication: 'I do not want others to make creations on my stuff. Good or bad I want my own stuff'.³⁵

All this might suggest that Rosso had a single trusted foundry upon which he relied, one that knew his ideas about how he wanted his casts to look. But in other letters Rosso spoke of sending works to be cast by a second founder in Milan named Mazzantini (my research suggests that Mazzantini may have been an employee at the Fonderia Cesare Bianchi), as well as another unnamed foundry in Turin.³⁶ Moreover, in a letter from Paris to the artist from Rosso's brother Michele in Milan, Michele mentions Rosso requesting five casts of *Birichino* (Ragamuffin, 1882) to be made by Mazzantini. The Strada, Mazzantini, and Turin casts all have to be considered 'authorized' lifetime casts.

Furthermore, shortly after his arrival in Paris, Rosso approached the top French foundry owned by Ferdinand Barbedienne to cast an edition of his sculptures.³⁷ Barbedienne was known for producing serial sculpture *en masse*

³³ Documents at the Chamber of Commerce in Milan reveal that Strada's offices were on via Solferino 26 but that the foundry was located on via Amerigo Vespucci 11. For a detailed discussion of Strada, see Sharon Hecker, 'Reflections on Repetition in Rosso's Art', in Harry Cooper and Sharon Hecker, eds., *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, 149 (no. 55).

³⁴ 'Non ho fonderia ma il mio affare lo sò e non è il primo giorno che sono fra i bronzi', Carteggio Medardo Rosso–Felice Camerini (1889 giugno–1892), Milan, Biblioteca d'arte–Biblioteca archeologica, Centro di alti studi sulle arti visive, CASVA (referred to hereafter as 'Rosso–Camerini Correspondence'). See L22 dated 12 February 1890, published with errors of transcription in Jole De Sanna, *Medardo Rosso: O la creazione dello spazio moderno*, Milan: Mursia, 1985, 132–133; some parts published with minor errors in Elda Fezzi, *Medardo Rosso: Scritti e pensieri*, Cremona: Turrini, 1994, 130–131 (no. 52). See transcription and English translation in Cooper and Hecker, eds., *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*, 137.

³⁵ 'Non voglio che altri faccia creazioni sulla roba mia. Buona o cattiva voglio la roba mia', Rosso–Camerini Correspondence. See L23 dated 14 February 1890, transcribed and translated in Cooper and Hecker, eds., *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*, 138.

³⁶ See Alberto Grubicy to Medardo Rosso, 20 December 1900; Michele Rosso to Medardo Rosso, 5 June 1891; Medardo Rosso to Michele Rosso, 1 April 1891. Parts of these letters are transcribed in Mola and Vittucci, *Medardo Rosso: Catalogo ragionato*, 56 and 262. The letters are housed in the Archivio Medardo Rosso, Barzio.

³⁷ For a detailed discussion, see Sharon Hecker, 'Everywhere and Nowhere: Medardo Rosso and the Cultural Cosmopolitan in *Fin-de-siècle* Paris', in Susan Waller and Karen Carter, eds.,

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(Rodin's *The Kiss* was cast 329 times in four different sizes, edited directly by the foundry). Barbedienne was disinterested in Rosso's offer, although it is not known why. One might imagine what it would have done to Rosso as an artist if he and Barbedienne had signed a contract and his work had been serialized *en masse*. Barbedienne may have sensed that Rosso would have been unwilling to relinquish control or simply concluded that Rosso was not yet well known and therefore his work was not easily marketable.

Rosso did not allow any foundries to place their stamps on his casts, making it impossible to determine which Italian foundry made which of his casts. His insistence on not having foundry stamps is highly unusual for the time. The custom was to delegate casting to a foundry, which would place its stamp on the work. Some foundries, such as Barbedienne, for example, became so famous that often its stamp became more important than the sculptor's name.

Rosso did not number his foundry casts, nor did he limit his production of these casts to a certain identifiable number. Numbering and limiting were practices that were being gradually introduced during the last decade of the nineteenth century to protect sculptors from unscrupulous foundry practices and as an assurance of originality for the buyer.

Rosso signed only some of his casts, some of which contain personal dedications. As art historian Charlotte Guichard states, artists' signatures had long been considered a guarantee of authorial uniqueness, originality and authenticity.³⁸ Had Rosso chosen to sign all the casts produced by him or under his supervision this would have provided a way to protect his name, his works, and his buyers. By choosing not to sign many of his casts, he destabilized the authorial mark normally attached to the artist's signature on an artwork.

Rosso, for the most part, did not keep records of sales or gifts, despite the fact that record keeping was common practice at the time. It is therefore not known which of his professional casts were made when or by which foundry, or how many casts of each subject were made. Except when personal correspondences, official receipts, or a museum register has survived and a cast can be traced back to its owner, in many instances it is not known to whom Rosso's professionally made casts were sold or gifted.

It is interesting to consider a case in which Rosso authorized a collector to cast his work but later changed his mind. He sold a bronze called *Innamorati sotto il lampione* (Lovers Under the Lamppost, 1883), to a collector named Pietro Curletti in 1883 along with rights to cast unlimited numbers, which the collector did. Curletti had no artistic background but he did use Strada, one of Rosso's Milanese foundries, to make the casts.³⁹ These bronzes have yet to be located and identified.

Strangers in Paradise: Foreign Artists and Communities in Modern Paris, 1870–1914, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015, 148.

³⁸ Charlotte Guichard, 'La signature dans le tableau aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles : identité, réputation et marché de l'art', *Sociétés & Représentations*, 25:1, 2008, 47–77.

³⁹ On Curletti, see Alberto Grubicy to Medardo Rosso, 24 August 1900; 26 September 1900; 23 October 1900; 29 October 1900; and 20 December 1900, Medardo Rosso–Alberto Grubicy Correspondence, Archivio Medardo Rosso, Barzio. Some parts of some of these letters are transcribed Mola and Vittucci, *Medardo Rosso: Catalogo ragionato*, 235–236.

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In 1900 Rosso was upset to discover that Curletti was still making casts in the Strada foundry and wanted to bring legal action to stop the collector. He eventually decided not to proceed with his case on the advice of a dealer. Perhaps Rosso was magnanimous in the moment but unhappy later. The Curletti casts are 'authorized' but not 'approved' lifetime casts, made legally but without the artist's involvement. In the absence of records, they cannot be quantified or distinguished from any posthumous casts of this same subject.

Rosso's personally made casts

Another layer of ambiguity is added to the story in 1895 when Rosso also began to cast many of his works in his own private foundry he built in Paris. This was highly unusual for the time. In his private foundry he cast new subjects made in Paris but also recast his earlier Milanese subjects, now not only in bronze but also in wax and plaster, selling all as finished works. These special casts are highly experimental in nature. Identifying them can be useful for Rosso's casting chronology.

As I have shown elsewhere, Rosso continued to use the traditional *cire perdue* process but now he began to use this process in unorthodox ways. In these casts, Rosso subverted all the rules of a properly finished cast.⁴⁰ Traditionally, after a work was cast, a team of specialized craftsmen would carefully finish the cast so as to hide all artifacts, errors, or flaws left over from the casting process. The finished work would include a smooth polish finish, traditional forms of patination, and shiny wax coatings, all intended to make the work look as perfect and seamless as possible. Rosso's self-cast works, on the contrary, are replete with and flaunt casting flaws, accidents, and artifacts of casting. They included air bubbles from the casting process, gashes and rips in the mold, as well as left over screw holes, nails, channels and sprues in the bronzes, or, in the case of his waxes, gobs of gelatin that adhered to the wax from its mother mold.⁴¹ In doing so, he transformed each cast, inherently a multiple, into a unique object with its own imperfections and flaws. Rodin also left marks of process on his sculptures, but to a far lesser extreme.

Rosso further intervened on his finished casts in idiosyncratic ways, for example by carefully and selectively chasing away parts of the investment left over from the casting process that is normally removed, or by adding rough blobs of materials such as plaster to the backs and bottoms of his finished objects in order to shift their inclinations, or through the use of different kinds of bases. Therefore, in this special group of hand-made casts, Rosso utilized and benefitted from the casting process, but his actions overturned the time's practice of producing identical, mechanically repeatable, smooth and polished serial sculpture.

Perhaps Rosso used this strategy in order to give an air of uniqueness and personal involvement in each of his serial casts. This makes sense, for sculptors were

⁴⁰ For a detailed illustrated study, see Hecker, 'Reflections on Repetition in Rosso's Art' and Lie, 'Technical Features in Rosso's Work'.

⁴¹ See Derek Pullen, 'Gelatin Molds: Rosso's Open Secret', in Harry Cooper and Sharon Hecker, eds., *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, 95–102.

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beginning to search for ways to counter serial sculpture's technical perfection by exalting their own hand's role in the process of making. These casting flaws, however, were rarely noticed or discussed in Rosso's time. Conceivably they were simply accepted as part of his overall unorthodox project or were read as 'modern'.

Today, our contemporary eyes are particularly attuned to visualizations of process and any signs of access to it. This has led to the paradoxical value judgment that the more flawed looking cast by Rosso is the more 'authentic' and 'original' cast. Meaning is further invested in these flaws due to the absence of a reliable signature on his casts. The 'flaws' in the casts thus function as authorial signs or indexes for values of 'originality' and 'authenticity'.

The prevailing view today is that these privately made casts are Rosso's only way of casting. The 'flawed' casts are the connoisseur's standard by which Rosso's work is measured. Dealer Doug Walla notes in an interview that 'Rosso cast his own works. (...) He didn't put any work out to foundries: he actually had a foundry in his studio. (...) A lot of what's in the lifetime casts are chance happenings. There are certain irregularities in these casts that Rosso liked, approved of, actually thought were an embellishment to the piece, and allowed to remain a part of the object'.⁴²

A new understanding of Rosso's reliance on numerous external professional foundries to cast more traditional-looking sculptures complicates this scenario. This practice confirms that he accepted both methods.⁴³ Furthermore, the fact that Rosso never allowed the professional foundries to place their marks on his casts suggests that despite certain marked visual differences, Rosso did not feel the need to create a distinction or prioritize between the more traditional-looking professional foundry casts and his own idiosyncratic hand-made casts.

One example is a work known as *Malato all'ospedale* (Sick Man in the Hospital, date of creation of subject: 1889) made in Paris and known to have been first cast in a professional foundry in Italy in 1889, but also cast by Rosso privately in his Parisian foundry (casting date unknown, but post 1895).⁴⁴ Today *Malato all'ospedale* is only appreciated through the experimental-looking hand-made casts. The professional foundry casts of this same subject, like the five *Birichino* casts made by Mazzantini, would include none of what has come to be known as Rosso's 'signature' casting errors but they are still lifetime works.⁴⁵ To be sure, in each case, there was always his oversight, and in this sense all Rosso's lifetime casts can be distinguished conceptually from the ones cast posthumously without his supervision. But with the exception of the 'flawed' casts, such a distinction cannot always be made visually.

⁴² See Doug Walla quoted in Sylvia Hochfield, 'Cast in Doubt', *Art News*, 88:2, February 1989, 113.

⁴³ To date no documents have surfaced regarding Rosso's casting in his final period when he returned to Milan from Paris.

⁴⁴ Rosso-Cameroni Correspondence. See L18, dated 26 January 1889, published in Luciano Caramel, ed., *Mostra di Medardo Rosso (1858–1928)*, Milan: Società per le belle arti ed esposizione permanente, 1979, 102–103.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that well-made fakes that artfully display these casting 'flaws' now regularly appear on the market.

Rosso on posthumous casting: ideas and practices

A final question for discussion is Rosso's wishes for posthumous casting. In general, the most direct way to assess issues of posthumous casting would seem to be to identify an artist's intentions through a will and a study of his/her writings, actions, and material practices during his/her lifetime. An artist may express an explicit wish for his/her works to continue to be reproduced after death, authorizing certain people, and/or according to specific criteria such as a limited number or by using certain materials and processes. Alternatively, an artist may express an explicit wish for his/her works *not* to be reproduced after his/her death, for example by stating this in a will or by destroying the plaster models from which future casts can be derived.

In Rosso's case, his highly ambiguous lifetime scenario is complicated even further when it comes to his ideas about posthumous casting. Were one to draw a conclusion only based on today's appreciation of Rosso's deep interest in casting his own works, which is now often the case, one might conclude that he would never have approved of others casting his works after his death. Surprisingly—because Rosso always surprises—the opposite was true. Rosso fully and repeatedly accepted the idea of his works being cast by others after his death.

For example, in 1908, an entry in the diary of Rosso's close friend, the French poet Jehan Rictus, states: 'Rosso says he is going to make out his will for the benefit of his friends'.⁴⁶ More specifically, in 1909, Rictus noted in his diary: 'Here is Rosso who wants to make out his will and bequeath me a work or two to reproduce in case he dies'.⁴⁷ Rosso likely wished to leave Rictus a plaster model or two in case of his death so that the destitute Rictus could make casts and gain a measure of financial security. It is not known if Rosso ever followed through on his idea or if Rictus would have accepted the gift, for Rictus, author of *Les soliloques du pauvre*, was proud of his impoverished way of life and may not have agreed to the offer. No model by Rosso was listed among Rictus' belongings at his death.

Another example occurred shortly before Rosso's death in 1928, in which he gifted a surprise crate to a Venetian attorney friend, Mario Vianello Chiodo, containing seven plaster models, with a handwritten self-declared will in which he gave Vianello Chiodo the right to make from these models as many casts as he pleased. Rosso detailed no specific aesthetic criteria or limitations.⁴⁸ Be this as it may, by Italian law Francesco Rosso, as the artist's son, and his future descendants, all also had the legal right to continue to cast from Medardo's plaster models after the artist's death in any way they pleased.

⁴⁶ 'Rosso dit qu'il va faire son testament à profit d'amis', Papiers de Jehan Rictus, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, département des Manuscrits, NaFr 16149, Journal 52, 22 October 1908, 27r.

⁴⁷ 'Voilà Rosso qui veut faire son testament et me léguer une œuvre ou deux à reproduire en cas de mort', Papiers de Jehan Rictus, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, département des Manuscrits, NaFr 16150, Journal 54, 21 May 1909, 113r.

⁴⁸ For a full account, see Hecker, 'Reflections on Repetition in Rosso's Art', 60–62.

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In the will to Vianello Chiodo, Rosso wrote: 'That which you have of me in your house, if tomorrow I cease to exist here (that is, I die) remains your property. (...) Of this my will—a legacy for you—it is understood that for my works in plaster that you have—you may reproduce them both in bronze and in wax—tomorrow in case you need to. This is intended also for your—my [sic] Mamma Mery Marcella'.⁴⁹

Neither Vianello Chiodo nor Francesco Rosso had any artistic background, nor were they aware of or given insight into Rosso's idiosyncratic casting processes. Among the posthumous casts created over the following decades, Vianello Chiodo's casts are easily traceable, for he kept precise records and worked only with the Fonderia Artistica di Verona. Aside from the first cast made for the Museum of Modern Art, all of his casts are numbered. An interesting case among the Vianello Chiodo casts was this cast commissioned by MoMA's then Director Alfred H. Barr for the museum, in which Vianello Chiodo and Barr decided on a particular patina that was very far from Rosso's own visual vocabulary, but was considered by both to be perfectly fine to make, and the results were much-praised by the museum. Indeed Barr wrote to Vianello Chiodo that 'without exception the Committee was enthusiastic, both about the work itself and the beautiful patina which was achieved under your supervision'.⁵⁰ We cannot know whether this patina was consistent with Rosso's ideas, for Rosso's patination methods have not yet been studied systematically.

Given Rosso's heirs' wishes that he should limit his casting, Vianello Chiodo eventually sold the plaster models. Some models went to museums, thereby ending the casting from these models.⁵¹ Others are owned by dealers and remain on the market. Should a dealer or future buyer choose to make a cast from the Vianello Chiodo plaster models, how would we define that cast? Would it still be considered a posthumous cast from a plaster given by Rosso to Mario Vianello Chiodo? It seems that any future plasters, waxes, or bronzes cast by dealers from Vianello Chiodo's plasters would have to be considered unauthorized, for Rosso did not give the dealer permission to cast. From this it might be surmised that it is crucial to

⁴⁹ 'Quanto hai di me in casa tua, se domani manco qui di esistere ((cioè muoio)) resta proprietà tua...Di questo mio testamento—lascito per te—è inteso che per le mie opere gesso che hai—puoi riprodurle sia in bronzo che in cera—domani se il caso bisogno tu avessi. Questo detto s'intende anche per i tuoi—miei Mamma Mery Marcella'. In a letter dated 9 October 1960, the Rosso family agreed that Vianello Chiodo had the right to reproduce a limited number of works but only until his death. The foundry used by Vianello Chiodo would be the Fonderia Artistica Veronese in Verona, directed by Mr. Scarpabolla, and the works would be cast by Mr. Brustolin. Each work was to be numbered and stamped by the foundry. Number 1 of the *Uomo che legge* is not numbered on the work because it was made for and sold to MoMA before the agreement was made with the family, but the next two casts of that subject would bear the numbers '2' and '3'.

⁵⁰ Alfred H. Barr to Mario Vianello Chiodo, 23 May 1960, London, Archives of Marco Vianello Chiodo, unpublished.

⁵¹ See, for example, the contract between Mario Vianello Chiodo and Douglas Hall Keeper of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, dated 29 January 1973, which states as a condition 'that no more casts should be taken', London, Archives of Marco Vianello Chiodo, unpublished.

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reconstruct and render transparent each object's history of making and/or commission. Verifiable and externally documentable provenances, where possible, remain the best tool for art historians to distinguish a chain of ownership and events.

Francesco Rosso had his casts made by professional foundries in Milan (not the one Medardo used) from his father's plaster models for decades after Medardo's death. The two foundries were Fonderia M.A.F. and Fonderia Battaglia. He then sold these posthumous waxes and bronzes to collectors and museums as works by Medardo—which they were, in some very real legal sense, since they were authorized and came from his models. But at the same time, as Tate Modern noted with *Grande rieuse*, a cursory visual examination suggests that Francesco used different criteria.

Given this complicated panorama, it is certain that Rosso accepted and permitted posthumous casting despite (or in addition to) his own interest in casting during his lifetime. Furthermore, it is questionable whether he cared about how posthumous casts of his works would have looked. Rosso's reasons for allowing his works to be cast posthumously were numerous. He realized that his plaster models held the potential for financial value for others in the future, and he probably enjoyed the idea of being able to continue to disseminate his works in any way possible. One cannot map Rosso's comments and practices on a timeline, or claim that after a certain point in his career when he became better known he had a change in attitude. To be sure, Rosso's practice was part of his greater strategies of propaganda, in order to assure his renown on a long-term basis. He deployed numerous other types of strategies to this end, which are beyond the scope of this essay.⁵² By permitting posthumous casting of his works, Rosso may have believed that the 'idea' was more important to him than the realization or materiality of the artwork. This would conflict with his Parisian experiments, where materiality was an important element of the casting of his works.

Ultimately, originality and authenticity in sculpture are unlike originality and authenticity in painting. The market and institutions must strive to keep the public better informed by giving more carefully detailed descriptions of provenances, as well as material information regarding each cast without shying away from the problems and contradictions. They should maintain ongoing debates about posthumous casting transparent and alive rather than hidden. Rosso once said: 'One does not die, one just moves, one changes apartments'.⁵³ Perhaps he thought of the afterlife of his sculptures in the same vein. They do not 'die' but rather just move into another category.

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⁵² On Rosso's numerous strategies, see Hecker, *A Moment's Monument*, 145–178.

⁵³ 'Non si muore, soltanto ci si sposta, si cambia d'appartamento', Medardo Rosso, cited in Mario Vianello Chiodo to Margaret Scolari Barr, November 1959, unpublished, London, Archives of Marco Vianello Chiodo.

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is a leading authority on Medardo Rosso. For her work on Rosso she has received numerous honors from the Getty, Fulbright and Mellon Foundations. Her exhibitions include *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*, co-curated with Harry Cooper at the Harvard University Art Museums (catalogue Yale University Press, 2004), and the retrospective *Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form*, co-curated with Tamara Schenkenberg at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation. Her latest monograph is titled *A Moment's Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture* (University of California Press, 2017). It was awarded the Millard Meiss Publication Fund. Sharon has also published extensively on key twentieth-century Italian artists such as Lucio Fontana and Luciano Fabro. She is co-author, with Marin Sullivan, of *Untying the Knot: The State of Postwar Italian Art History* (Bloomsbury, 2017).

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