

Sharon Hecker (ed.), *Finding Lost Wax: The Disappearance and Recovery of an Ancient Casting Technique and the Experiments of Medardo Rosso*

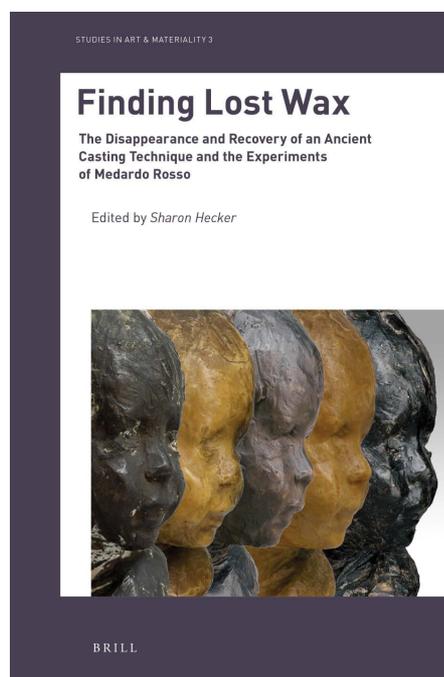
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The origins of the comparative study of editioned sculpture can be traced back to two exhibitions staged by the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts: *Daumier Sculpture: A Critical and Comparative Study* (1969) and *Metamorphoses in Nineteenth-Century Sculpture* (1975). Both exhibitions had substantial catalogues conceived and edited by Jeanne L. Wasserman. She had started out, with her businessman husband, as a collector, particularly of sculpture. A chance encounter in the early 1960s led her to a voluntary position at the Fogg Art Museum, where the director, John Coolidge, encouraged her interest in nineteenth-century sculpture: 'You know, nobody is doing sculpture in this area at all. If you wanted to pursue your interest in it, you would have the field to yourself', he told her.¹

Wasserman had accumulated a collection of Honoré Daumier sculptures, and noted inconsistencies between the works themselves and the literature on them. Coolidge invited

her to investigate the discrepancies and mount a small show. By good fortune, the Fogg had a young conservator, Arthur Beale, who shared Wasserman's curiosity in sculpture, particularly for techniques and materials and the comparative study of different casts and variants. The Daumier sculptures were made in bronze, clay, terracotta and plaster – but were they modelled or cast and what exactly was the sequence of their making? There seemed to be several editions, with slight differences between them. Which ones were the originals? Indeed, they raised a question which has dogged subsequent scholarship of cast sculpture: what exactly is an original? By measuring the sculptures and conducting two years of research in Europe (financed by her husband), they worked out, to the horror and disbelief of Daumier's French dealers, that most of the sculptures were posthumous and that they differed considerably from his models. They had opened a can of worms which are wriggling to this day.

The Daumier project grew arms and legs, and thanks to input from graduate students it developed into a major exhibition and a 265-page reference work. It was followed by an even more ambitious exhibition, *Metamorphoses in Nineteenth-Century Sculpture* (1975), in which variants of the same work, by Jean-Antoine Houdon, Antoine-Louis Barye, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, Auguste Rodin, Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Daniel Chester French, were exhibited side-by-side; in the catalogue each variant was examined in forensic detail. Wasserman focused on organizing the loans and took a step back from writing. The catalogue featured an extraordinary introductory essay by Jacques de Caso, a recent visiting professor at the Fogg and one of very few academics interested in this area at the time. His essay 'Serial Sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France' comprised thirteen pages of closely argued text and ninety-four lengthy, tightly printed footnotes which must have spawned dozens of PhDs. Centring on materials, techniques, law, industry, contracts, prices, copyright and so on, the Daumier and *Metamorphoses* publications opened many doors; they made French nineteenth-century sculpture seem new and relevant.



Front cover of *Finding Lost Wax: The Disappearance and Recovery of an Ancient Casting Technique and the Experiments of Medardo Rosso*

(photo: courtesy of Brill)

They shaped scholarship in the 1980s and the thinking behind the Musée d'Orsay, where sculpture occupies a pre-eminent place in the central hall and the first-floor wings, and is interpreted in terms of technique, material and the market.

The comparative and technical approach to editions is particularly suited to the work of the Italian sculptor Medardo Rosso (1858–1928), since he made variants of all his sculptures (there are about forty), in different materials, throughout his life. Existing in variants in wax, plaster and bronze, they were never editioned; none of them is numbered and each one is unique. They even went by different titles. Some are pitched on their plinths at different angles; the bronzes are often partially covered with different amounts of the grog and investment from the casting process; and the wax and plaster works are often in different colours. The polar opposite of mantelpiece serial sculptures churned out by bronze *éditeurs* such as Barbedienne and Susse, Rosso's works exhibit spectacular, crusty surfaces, marked with holes, nails, bubbles and ragged seams. Some of the patinas have oxidized and gone chalky white, as if they had endured volcanic heat. Put two of the 'same' sculptures next to each other and you are drawn into an irresistible 'spot the difference' exercise.

Famously, Rosso did his own lost-wax casting in a makeshift foundry of his own making, and actively courted differences in each cast. He seems to have spent the last twenty years of his life casting variants of works conceived decades earlier. He turned the idea of chronology on its head in that he continually recast and fiddled with earlier models, using them as source material for his experiments. If we add Rosso's fiery character and political views into the equation (he was kicked out of art school in Milan for punching someone who had refused to sign his petition), and his bitter spats with Rodin, we have an irresistible exemplar of the forgotten, misunderstood Romantic genius testing the very boundaries of art. He would make a good subject for a film, played by someone like Mickey Rourke.

Medardo Rosso scholarship is made up of a small number of ardent scholars

who have worked in the field for decades. The mother figure of Rosso studies, at least in the English-speaking world, is Margaret Scolari Barr, wife of Alfred Barr, the celebrated director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. She organized the first museum show of Rosso's work in America, at MoMA in 1963, and produced a catalogue which is still essential reading. Luciano Caramel, whose first article on Rosso appeared in 1961, had the field to himself for many years, and although he gathered together a huge amount of primary documentary material and wrote some important essays, he never produced a definitive study.² One suspects that he was too close to the subject to do so. Auction catalogues used to state that the sculptures they were offering for sale would be included in Caramel's 'forthcoming' catalogue raisonné, but it has yet to appear. Even so, Caramel's research helped weed out the posthumous casts which were made, legitimately, by Rosso's son, and were long understood to be lifetime casts.

In the mid-1990s Giovanni Lista published two good books (in French), which are rich in original archival material, clearly laid out and exploited a new and important source, the diaries of Rosso's friend Jehan Rictus.³ Paolo Mola, who worked with Luciano Caramel on a Rosso exhibition at the Palazzo della Permanente in Milan in 1979, has since produced some substantial publications, including a catalogue raisonné in collaboration with Fabio Vittucci (in Italian), and a bafflingly opaque catalogue, *Rosso: The Transient Form*, published by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice in 2007.⁴

Sharon Hecker, who has edited the book under review, *Finding Lost Wax: The Disappearance and Recovery of an Ancient Casting Technique and the Experiments of Medardo Rosso*, has been working on Rosso for nearly thirty years, following a PhD on his funerary monuments at Berkeley, California (1999), where she studied under Jacques de Caso, and a move from America to Italy. She has written some twenty scholarly articles, essays and books on him. Her most important contributions to the literature are *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*, organized with Harry Cooper at the Fogg Art Museum

in 2004 (it was the first museum show of Rosso's work in America since the MoMA show of 1963), and *A Moment's Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture*, a stand-alone book published in 2017.⁵ She co-curated *Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form* at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in St Louis in 2016 and has written several key articles for the *Burlington Magazine*.⁶ The Fogg Art Museum show of 2004 was held in the new Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, which was, appropriately, built on the site the Fogg had used for the *Metamorphoses* show nearly thirty years earlier.

Hecker's new book lies in the tradition of the two Fogg Art Museum catalogues. The first part deals with the revival of lost-wax bronze casting in the last decades of the nineteenth century and features a medley of essays on France, America, Germany, Britain and Japan. The second part centres on Rosso. The book originates in a study day and a conference organized in conjunction with the Peter Freeman gallery in New York in 2014.

The longest and most substantial essay in the first section, Élisabeth Lebon's 'Sculptor Founders in Late Nineteenth-Century France: The Role of Wax Casting', is outstanding. Originally a primary school teacher who conducted research in her spare time, Lebon traces the revival of lost-wax casting in France, beginning with the father-and-son team of Honoré and Eugène Gonon. Their foundry, which ran from 1829 to 1892, was for much of that time the only lost-wax (*cire-perdue* in French) foundry in France. Their earliest competitor was Pierre Bingen, who set up in the 1870s. Until then, all the other foundries, and there were scores of them, used the sand piece-mould technique. Honoré Gonon's wax casts seem to have set tongues wagging early on. Jean-Jacques Feuchère's biographer noted in 1853 that Feuchère 'was not the artist of *cire-perdue* bronzes – this luxury of people who push taste to an extreme'.⁷

Essentially, sand casting was cheaper and could be done on an industrial scale, while lost-wax casting was, at least in its early days, more time-consuming, expensive and risky. But it did, if it was done correctly, usually

lead to finer results and that was its trump card. Sculptors who were keen to show their technical brilliance, and collectors who were keen to display their connoisseurship and taste, were drawn to lost-wax casting, with its secretive formulas and almost magical, transformative processes. By the 1870s and 1880s, mass-produced sand-cast bronzes and gimcracks in spelter were acquiring a bad name and the lost-wax technique offered an alluring way forward. Still, it was more complicated. Lebon does not mention it, but there is an interesting statistic concerning the sculptor Louis Dejean, whose contract with Barbedienne records that he made about 25% on most sales but 50% on lost-wax casts, because it took so long to rework them.⁸

Towards the end of the century, more lost-wax foundries emerged in France and abroad. Lebon introduces a cast of characters that is heavy on Italian craftsmen – notably Claude Valsuani, who had his own foundry, and Albino Palazzolo, who made bronzes for the Hébrard Foundry. Lebon's essay in this volume is based on her own book, *Font au Sable – Fonte à Cire Perdue: Histoire d'une Rivalité*, published in 2012.⁹ That book, in turn, develops from research undertaken by Lebon for her peerless dictionary of French bronze foundries, *Dictionnaire des fondeurs de bronze d'art: France 1890–1950*, published in 2003.¹⁰

Ann Boulton's essay, 'A Tale of Two Foundries: Art Bronze Casting Comes of Age in America', tells the story of the Henry-Bonnard Bronze Company and the better-known Roman Bronze Works (launched by a young Italian craftsman, Riccardo Bertelli). Some of this history will be familiar to those who have read Michael Shapiro's *Bronze Casting and American Sculpture 1850–1900*, published in 1985,¹¹ but Boulton notes that she has benefited from a resource unavailable in 1985: a keyword internet research facility on the entire back catalogue of the *New York Times*. One surprising fact that emerges is that the earliest documented lost-wax cast in America dates from as late as 1899. Boulton, the former sculpture conservator at the Baltimore Museum of Art, has published extensively in this area (particularly on Barye and Matisse) and she handles her source material with skill and subtlety.

She does not fall for the argument that lost-wax casts are necessarily superior to sand casts, but she does pinpoint some fine details which the cowboy sculptor Frederic Remington could change in wax but could not have done via sand casting.

Veronika Wiegartz's essay concerns the revival of lost-wax casting in Germany in the 1880s and 1890s (once more thanks to input from Italian foundrymen) and focuses in particular on the Gladenbeck and Noack foundries. Wiegartz acknowledges that there is still much to discover about the German foundries, that some bronzes may be a combination of wax and sand casting, and that it is often impossible to tell which process has been used. Gelatine moulds crop up repeatedly across the essays, pointing to the important fact that while they were not essential to the lost-wax technique, they facilitated it enormously, allowing the speedy production of multiple casts, and in doing so reducing costs.

In the essay on Britain, Rebecca Wade focuses on Enrico Cantoni, once more an Italian craftsman. Wade argues for the close connection between the production of plaster casts of ancient works for museums and industry, and the developing field of bronze casting. Cantoni is an interesting and little-known figure, but by focusing on him we do not get a rounded understanding of the lost-wax revival in Britain. This is a history that can be traced back to Alfred Gilbert's trip to Naples in 1878 in order to cast his *Icarus* via the lost-wax method. On his return he tried to relaunch lost-wax casting in Britain, as too did Harry Bates and Edward Onslow Ford. In 1884 *The Times* reported that the lost-wax method 'is beginning to be greatly preferred by the most accomplished sculptors to the ordinary method of casting in sand. Certainly the crispness and sharpness of mould ... should direct attention to this method, which enables the actual touch of the artist to be far more clearly seen than in statues cast on the older plan.'¹² Again, it was the idea of quality that scored in the battle between sand and lost-wax casting. A full account of lost-wax casting in Britain would have Gilbert and the bronze founder Alessandro Parlanti at its centre, not Cantoni.

There are two essays on Japan, both of which involve the surprising and engaging story of the Sicilian sculptor Vincenzo Ragusa. He was invited to teach in Japan from 1876 to 1882, married a Japanese woman, and then returned to Sicily. The first essay by Massimiliano Marafon Pecoraro introduces us to Ragusa. The second, by Yasuko Tsuchikane, focuses on Ragusa's influence in Japan, or rather, in terms of lost-wax casting, his lack of influence. With a few exceptions, Japanese casting techniques seem to have continued the traditional craft or 'mane' techniques rather than Italian lost-wax techniques. And none of Ragusa's students, who went on to create the first wave of bronze monuments in the early years of the twentieth century, used the lost-wax method.

The second part of the book is devoted to Medardo Rosso and is substantially written by Sharon Hecker herself, but with additional essays by other specialists on technical matters such as the scientific analysis of the waxes he used, and a comparative analysis of ten casts of the same model (*The Jewish Boy*), and how they differ and why. Hecker's longest essay focuses on Rosso's period in Paris from 1889 until his return to Italy in 1918, and his own foundry set-up. It was very unusual for a sculptor to also act as bronze founder. The broad outlines of his practice are well known, and his champagne parties have entered into legend, but the exact nature of his practice is laid out here in detail. Hecker quotes one visitor: 'Rosso does not sculpt the material; he polishes it, flays it, fades it, patinates it, and, as if by magic, animates it' (p. 177). Although we know that his foundry was in Montmartre, it is not clear exactly where it was. Hecker argues that Rosso deliberately flaunted the process of manufacture, leaving all sorts of holes, nails, seams and marks visible; and that his approach to the idea of reproduction and originality was new. Her observation that Rosso was, unusually for a bronze founder, not from an artisanal background, and that he seems to have had no formal training in sculpture, is, surely, central. It was precisely his lack of training, and his unwillingness to acquire traditional training, that shaped his work.

1. On Wasserman (1915–2006), see the interview with her by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art Oral History Program, 1993–94, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jeanne-l-wasserman-11984>, accessed 27 December 2021.

2. L. Caramel (ed.), *Medardo Rosso: Impressions in Wax and Bronze* (exh. cat.), New York, Kent Fine Art, 1988; L. Caramel (ed.), *Medardo Rosso* (exh. cat.), London, Arts Council/South Bank Centre, 1994. See also Caramel's introduction to *L'Impressionismo nella scultura* (exh. cat.), Lugano, Galleria Pieter Coray, 1989.

3. G. Lista, *Medardo Rosso: La Sculpture Impressionniste*, Paris, L'Échoppe, 1994; G. Lista, *Medardo Rosso: Destin d'un Sculpteur 1858–1928*, Paris, L'Échoppe, 1994.

4. P. Mola and F. Vittucci, *Rosso: The Transient Form* (exh. cat.), Venice/Milan, Peggy Guggenheim Collection/Skira, 2007; P. Mola and F. Vittucci, *Medardo Rosso: Catalogo ragionato della scultura*, Milan, Skira, 2009.

5. S. Hecker, *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Art Museum, 2004; S. Hecker, *Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2017.

6. S. Hecker, 'Medardo Rosso's first commission', *The Burlington Magazine*, 138, 115, 1995, pp. 817–22; S. Hecker, 'Ambivalent bodies: Medardo Rosso's Brera petition', *The Burlington Magazine*, 142, 1173, 2000, pp. 775–77; S. Hecker, 'An *Enfant Malade* by Medardo Rosso from the collection of Louis Vauxcelles', *The Burlington Magazine*, 152, 1292, 2010, pp. 727–35.

7. J. Janin, *Notice sur J. Feuchère*, Paris, 1853, p. 10, quoted in P. Fusco and H. W. Janson (eds), *The Romantics to Rodin: French Nineteenth-Century Sculpture from North American Collections* (exh. cat.), Los Angeles County Museum of Art and George Brazillier, New York, 1980, p. 267.

8. Barbedienne Papers, Archives Nationales, Paris, AN 368/AP/3. Barbedienne, who are normally associated with sand casting, branched out into lost-wax casts in 1921.

9. É. Lebon, *Font au Sable – Fonte à Cire Perdue: Histoire d'une Rivalité*, Paris, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Éditions Ophrys, 2012.

10. É. Lebon, *Dictionnaire des fondeurs de bronze d'art: France 1890–1950*, Perth, Australia, Marjon Editions, 2003. There is an English version, *Dictionary of Art Bronze Founders: France 1890–1950*, Perth Australia, Marjon Editions, 2014. It features the text alone and is best read in conjunction with the illustrated French version.

11. M. Shapiro, *Bronze Casting*

Hecker provides fascinating information on the foundries in Milan, particularly Strada; and she debunks the oft-repeated idea that Rosso cast works in the factory of the collector Henri Rouart. Rosso only began to promote himself as a sculptor-founder from 1895. Hecker cites previously unpublished accounts in which Rosso appears almost as a wizard or alchemist, courting accident, making up his own recipes, and shunning the conventions of chasing and patination. Other accounts come from the diary of Rosso's friend Jehan Rictus, where the sculptor is described as 'diabolical' and likened to a Cyclops. Rosso certainly put on a performance and seems to have invited controversy. Some of the best information in Hecker's essay is tucked away in footnotes, and one notes disagreements over matters of fact, approach and opinion put forward by Mola and Vittucci in their *Catalogo ragionato*, published in 2009. One matter not considered by Hecker is that Rodin favoured sand casts. By openly specializing in lost-wax casts, operating a rustic, homespun foundry, and inviting people round to witness the casting days (he is alleged to have added pans and gold rings into the mix), Rosso was publicly declaring their fundamental differences.

Another idea not explored here, and which is beyond the remit of the book, concerns the moment when Rosso stopped making new models, and focused instead on making experimental casts of earlier works – around 1906. He sought, as Hecker argues, to emphasize the unique qualities of each and every work. Two related tendencies, which share the same goal, developed at exactly the same time, and this is surely no coincidence. The first was direct carving, which emerged around 1906, when sculptors such as Joseph Bernard and Brancusi eschewed the pointing machine and instead carved directly into their material. The second is the numbered, limited edition. This practice, which is bound up with lost-wax casting, emerged at the same time, and is seen in, for example, the bronzes of Matisse. The careful numbering of casts and edition sizes (as in, for example, '1/10'), had the effect of making each bronze seem rare and special.¹³ All three approaches – Rosso's one-off casts, direct carving and

limited editions – emerged in the early 1900s, and they were all designed to repudiate mass production.

Hecker's other main essay concerns Rosso's approach to serial production. She argues that his focus on the conditional and the fugitive are integral to the meaning of his work, that the term 'reproduction' does not fit Rosso, and that the power of his art lies therein. She uses the sculpture *The Jewish Boy* as a case study, looking at the variations in the different models and even the variations in the titles it carried over the years. The six remaining essays deal with comparative and technical analysis of *The Jewish Boy*, prompted by the bringing together of ten versions of the work at the Peter Freeman gallery in New York in 2014. Colour-coded 3D-mapping of the different casts enables us to see microscopic differences between each work. 3D-mapping will no doubt serve as a vital tool for the study of Rosso's work (and that of other sculptors), but as the authors state, small differences could have come about because of wear and tear over the years. Anyway, a lot of the differences are clearly visible to the naked eye. Frustratingly, given the effort that must have gone into this whole exercise, the photographs are tiny, poor and badly lit. The charts and graphs are interesting, but large photographs of the works, identically lit, would have been more useful.

There are two final short essays, one by Lluisa Sàrries Zgonc on the restoration of a wax cast (done with the help of 3D scans of other casts) and another by Andrew Lacey, a contemporary artist-founder. He asks a central question: was Rosso's idiosyncratic approach deliberate or down to a lack of skill? He answers, candidly, that he does not know. It is probably a bit of both.

The book is a mine of useful material. It is the best publication in English on the revival of lost-wax casting in the closing decades of the nineteenth century; it is an essential source for archival detail on Rosso; and it points a way forward for the use of scientific analysis in the study of variant casts. But there is quite a bit of repetition across the essays and there are big gaps – ironically, the history of lost-wax casting in Italy is one of them. The Neapolitan sculptor Vincenzo Gemito (1852–1929) is

and *American Sculpture 1850–1900*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1985.

12. *The Times*, 19 May 1884, quoted in R. Dorment, *Alfred Gilbert: Sculptor and Goldsmith* (exh. cat.) London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1986, p. 110.

13. An early and securely dated example of a numbered edition is Matisse's *Head of a Child*, cast by Bingen et Costenoble and inscribed '2/10': it was certainly made by April 1908, when it was bought by a German collector. The 1/10 example would presumably have been cast a little earlier and it has been argued that Matisse began to number his editions around 1906. See C. Duthuit and W. de Guébriant, *Henri Matisse: Catalogue Raisonné de l'Oeuvre Sculpté*, Paris, Claude Duthuit Éditeur, 1997, no. 16, p. 40.

barely name-checked, but he set up his own lost-wax foundry in Naples in 1883 and is central to the story. The book's origins in a conference are evident and, like a conference, the ground is unevenly covered.

What Rosso needs is a big, definitive, factual statement: a large-format book with his biography clearly laid out with rigorously footnoted precision, from start to finish, referencing all the letters, diaries, newspaper reports, interviews and exhibition catalogues, and drawing on all the archival material held at the Museo Medardo Rosso in Barzio. It needs to be accompanied by large, high-quality photographs (it is striking

just how bad the photographs in the specialist Rosso literature are). There are scores of books, essays and articles on Rosso, but they tend to focus on specific details, take issue with each other, pay too much homage and over-interpret his legacy. Additionally, they are in a mix of English, French and Italian. At present, there is no obvious place to go to if one is looking for a definitive, reliable, factual answer on anything concerning Rosso. That, we must hope, will be Hecker's next step: writing a standard, complete biography of Rosso. She is well placed to do it.

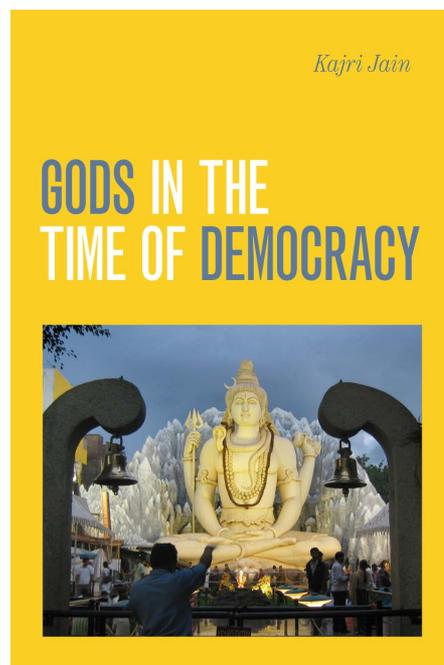
Patrick Elliott

Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Time of Democracy* Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2021, 360pp., 14 colour plates + 110 b&w images. ISBN limp 978-1-4780-1139-2, cloth 978-1-4780-1034-0

Kajri Jain's *Gods in a Time of Democracy* is a powerful example of how art historians are increasingly studying the networks among politics, religion, economics and aesthetics to demonstrate how aesthetics are implicated in political change. The dozens of monumental icons that have been erected throughout India and its

diaspora since the 1980s are the book's subject, culminating with the *Statue of Unity*, a 597-foot sculpture of India's first home minister and deputy prime minister, Vallabhbhai Patel, erected in Gujarat in 2016. Jain uses the term 'icon' to describe a spectrum of images that includes both secular and religious figures, and the term 'iconopraxis' to refer to 'what people do with icons and icons do with people' (p. 123). She thus considers creation, patronage, discourse, use and reception to understand the reappearance of the monumental statue and the entry of religious icons into public space (from temple space) during India's economic reforms of the 1990s. It is not enough, Jain asserts, to ascribe the ascendancy of the monumental icon in India to the rise of Hindu nationalism. '[N]o aesthetic form – no work, medium, or genre – is in and of itself inherently or permanently progressive or regressive, radical, or reactionary. It is, rather, an assemblage of processes that can lend themselves to politics in multiple, often contradictory, ways' (pp. 255–56). Each monumental sculpture is thus presented here as a 'bundle of multiple interlinked processes', rather than a contained and stable totality (p. 10), and 'each chapter is approached as a set of processes, presented as if it were an optical filter over a lens or a layer of information on a map' (p. 24).

As the reader's knowledge of each layer or filter expands, so does their



Front cover of *Gods in the Time of Democracy* (photo: courtesy of Duke University Press)

understanding of these monumental statues, representing Hindu deities such as Buddha, Shiva, Hanuman and Krishna, as well as some political figures. A helpful timeline and map show the approximate location and relative scale of 76 monumental statues that had been erected or proposed in India and its diaspora by 2018. Some of the same monumental icons, like the 108-foot seated Shiva at the Char Dham pilgrimage and cultural complex at Solophok Hill, in South Sikkim, reappear throughout the book, but each time they arise, Jain situates them within a different network of processes and signification, such as making and materials, politics and power, and mobility and mass communication.

Chapter 1 is about the histories and capacities of concrete, and the sculptors and patronage systems responsible for the physical construction of these monumental deities and political leaders. Chapter 2 describes the relationships between statues, democracy and publics in contemporary India: the 'statue wars'. In this chapter, for example, Jain addresses the desecration and purification of statues dedicated to the social reformer B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), to demonstrate 'a correlation between opportunities for economic and social mobility and an intensification of emergent iconopraxis' (p. 116). In northern and western India, memorials to Ambedkar, leader of the Dalits (the 'untouchables' or lowest social caste), came to be venerated almost as religious idols. Ambedkar statues proliferated after his death as a way for Dalits to assert their presence and stake claim to space, and again in the late 1990s under the leadership of Kumari Mayawati. As a result, in both periods the sculptures were subject to desecration and criticism, ensuring Dalit leadership an ongoing place in the public discourse.

In chapter 3, the author focuses on three sites where tourism, leisure and ritual coexist. Each site is home to a monumental sculpture: the 85-foot Mangal Mahadev sculpture at Birla Kanan, New Delhi, the 65-foot seated Shiva statue at the Shivoham Shiva Temple in Bangalore, and the 123-foot Shiva at Murudeshwar. Jain proposes the relevance of 'iconic exhibition value'

as an alternative to Walter Benjamin's concepts of cult value and exhibition value, to refute 'the assumption that exhibit value or spectacle in religious images is an indicator of secularization in some simple sense' (p. 176). Iconic exhibition value is more accommodating – than either cult value or exhibition value – of the realities of contemporary iconopraxis, where icons operate at the permeable boundaries between religion, the secular and art. Jain shows how sites of direct public worship that do away with the intercession of priests and that foster tourism and leisure as much as ritual enable inclusion and access.

Chapter 4 links the circulation of new monumental forms in India from the 1980s onward to the mass mobilization of people enabled by the growth of highways and the automobile industry at that time. Monuments introduced in previous chapters, such as the Murudeshwar Shiva and the Char Dham pilgrimage site, are revisited here in the context of mobility, speed and territorial speculation. Finally, chapter 5 addresses the relative scale of the statues in question, 'or rather the processes of scaling' (p. 26). Jain writes that it is important to 'to analyze the regimes and processes within which scaling takes place rather than simply analyzing built forms as static objects' (p. 233).

The only downside of the book's structure as a series of layered filters, if it can be considered one, is that this concluding chapter on scale is somewhat anti-climactic. To understand monumentality, Jain asserts that one must first appreciate the properties of concrete, the relationship between patrons and sculptors, the use of icons by the Dalit community in Uttar Pradesh to occupy public space, and the correlation of spectacle and speculation. Thus, the reader already knows the answers to these questions before Jain poses them in chapter 5: 'who or what is being scaled up or down here in relation to what or whom, and where and when, in what materials, within what frames of value, what enactments of equality or hierarchy, what layered infrastructures of the sensible?' (p. 225). The self-evidence of the linkages between scale, mass mobility, concrete construction, democracy and iconopraxis that the author arrives at in the last chapter

may have been her intent. Chapter 5 doubles as a conclusion, which is useful, especially in a book as dense as this one, in which the writing alternates between direct and circuitous.

Jain's methodology draws from Jacques Rancière's notion of the sensible, which involves seeing the artwork as more than a discrete, static object but as integrally connected with multiple and evolving societal forces. While beautifully applied to this complex and fascinating subject of monumental icons in India, this methodology is not entirely novel for scholars of public art, for whom these layered networks, or 'assemblages', have already been critical tools of investigation. Historians of public art know that objects and images are not stable. Their meanings are contingent. Likewise, those of us who study public sculpture are familiar with the 'logic of authenticity by mimesis' (p. 238) in which objects are valuable and meaningful precisely because of their familiarity and repetition, not their originality. Yet it is still gratifying to see these phenomena laid out so clearly with such indisputable evidence.

There are also instances where the discourses of public art might benefit by heeding what Jain has demonstrated. By 1997, two years after Mayawati became chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, 15,000 Ambedkar statues had been installed, including the Bhim Rao Ambedkar Monument to Social Change in Lucknow, featuring a bronze sculpture of Ambedkar by Ram Sutar, modelled after Daniel Chester French's seated marble Lincoln in Washington, DC. Non-Dalit media criticism of these proliferating Ambedkar statues was intense, but the criticism nonetheless kept Mayawati in the news. This conflict and antagonism 'was what it took to bring Mayawati's

Dalit monuments into visibility and onto a plane of commensuration and equivalence with monuments to Gandhi or Lincoln' (p. 116). '[F]ar from destroying images or their power', Jain writes, 'desecrations and iconoclashes, whether or not they are framed in explicitly iconoclastic terms, serve only to generate more images or intensify efficacy, indeed to sacralize them' (pp. 103–14).

Gods in the Time of Democracy is a convincing, well-researched and lavishly illustrated volume that speaks to the critical role of aesthetics in politics and society. It is also a much-needed addition to the scholarship on public sculpture in India, which has largely focused on British imperial sculpture. The approach of decentering the location and moment of an object's production, of expanding aesthetics beyond images and art, may be in tension with traditional object-focused art historical institutional practice, as the author acknowledges, but what alternatives are there? With every year, there are fewer and fewer specialized art history professorships in the academy. It is in art historians' best interest to think outside our discipline and outside the box of institutional parameters and categories. On the one hand, Jain shows, the process of understanding India's monumental statues can help expand the scope and salience of art history. On the other hand, she concludes, 'if the statues are a symptom of the ongoing verification of Dalit equality', as she argues, 'it is not the further production of statues, but this verification, proceeding apace in spite of the statues, that [Jain's book] seeks to recognize and amplify in its own modest measure' (p. 27). The insularity and disciplinary elitism of art history serves no one.

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