

Reviews

Anthony Hughes and Erich Ranfft, eds.,
Sculpture and its Reproductions, London, Reaktion Books, 1997

Review by Philippe S en echal

University of Leeds lecturer Anthony Hughes and expressionist sculpture specialist Erich Ranfft have compiled nine essays on the role of reproduction in the creation and perception of Western sculpture, from Ancient to Modern times. These stimulating and indeed provocative articles revive our consideration of this central issue eight years after Kathleen Preciado's publication of the Washington symposium papers (*Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies, and Reproductions*, Studies in the History of Art, XX, Washington, 1989), which marked the radicalization of the postmodern views maintained by Rosalind E. Krauss in her well-known essay "The Originality of the Avant-Garde: A Postmodernist Repetition" (October 18, Fall 1981, pp. 47–66; published in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1985, pp. 15–170, Fr. tr. Paris, 1993 and 1995).

Krauss begins with the example of Rodin, who was devoted to the general conception of the plastic arts and their possible avatars, concentrating on creating plaster models, leaving the carving of marble and enlargement of models, as well as the casting and patination of his bronzes to assistants, and accepting that a museum be dedicated displaying his bronze works after his death. She thus renounces any value conferred on the notion of the original in contemporary sculpture. In Hughes and Ranfft's collection, British artist Edward Allington claims and takes one step further the credo: "Sculpture is a reproductive art—that is part of its beauty." His article, "Venus a Go Go, To Go," defends and illustrates sculpture as a triumph of reproduction, making extensive use of polychromatic repetition, varying scales, and ancient masterpieces, such as *Venus de Medici*, *Nike of Samothrace*, or *Discobolus*.

Though Krauss's argument proves valid amongst certain plastic artists, it is highly nuanced by Alexandra Parigoris. In her analysis of Julio Gonz alez's posthumous bronzes, Krauss suggests that the bolts, springs, and other industrial artefacts used by the artist only

constitute a *minor* aspect of the work and that it is the final, assembled object—not the assemblage itself—that matters and thus legitimizes subsequent versions. In this type of sculpture, composed by welding together disparate elements, how can one speak of minor regions? Why not recognize the primary activity as the determining function, a base for an esthetic verging on surrealism, that, for the intermediary-artist, consists of associating pieces of diverse realities into a new poetic whole? Furthermore, Parigoris insists rightly on the capital importance of the polished finish in Brancusi's work, and thus on the unique and artificial creation of an aura. Each of the Rumanian sculptor's castings was finished with pride; each one-of-a-kind version received an individual surface treatment, a unique result of the interaction of metal and light.

The term *aura* undeniably refers to Walter Benjamin's well-known article, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction," published in 1936 in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (reprinted in *Écrits français*, J.-M. Monnoyer, ed., Paris, 1991, p. 140–192/English reference, reprinted in *Walter Benjamin: Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., London, 1970, revised edition 1992, pp. 211–44). Using two- and three-dimensional reproductions of Michelangelo's statues as a basis, Anthony Hughes postulates that contrary to Benjamin the multiplication of copies has not diminished the para-religious prestige of Buonarroti's works, rather, it has caused the birth of a certain secular devotion.

German expressionism's general acceptance of wood carving as the most essential artistic form is dismantled by Erich Ranfft. In fact, the preferred materials of the expressionist artists were clay and plaster, which would only then serve—and not always—to sculpt wood or stone.

For her part, Miranda Marvin attacks one of the central tenets held by archeology since the nineteenth century—that of the obligatory presence of a well-known Greek model as the basis for Roman plastic artworks. From *Diskophoros* of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek in Copenhagen and other sculptures of a similar kind, she endeavors to show that it is vain to want to return to a single prototype of Polykleitos, emphasizing the richness brought about by associations invented by Roman sculptors, who, unwilling to copy, adapted Greek models according to need, to iconographies,

to materials, or to diverse commonplaces. This plea on behalf of Roman art and its sense of variation also demands further study on the material history of Roman sculpture, on the quarries that were the source of the marble, and even on the sponsors, rather than on haphazard philological diagrams.

Marjorie Trusted, too, places emphasis on the number of variants and on the variety of reactions to particularly highly-regarded originals in sixteenth and eighteenth century Spanish terracotta and polychromatic wood sculpture. Several terracotta reliefs representing a *Pietà* were long considered copies—even fakes. However, they were produced in Juan de Juni's workshop from a single mold created from the master's model; they were legitimate replicas. At the end of the seventeenth century, Luisa Roldán assembled small-scale terracotta groups that met with great success. She designed several basic compositions, took a mold of some of the main figures, which could then be reproduced and combined as desired for the subject of worship chosen. And, of course, in the case of the numerous Andalusian sculptures of the *Virgin of Sorrows* and the innumerable versions of *St Francis of Assisi in his grave*—wood sculpture in relief and in the round inspired from the Pedro de Mena creations of around 1662–1663 through the nineteenth century, we cannot speak of copies, but rather, of more or less distant references to a standard type.

The difference between the *Urbild* and derivative works can also provide a forum for ideological paradox, as illustrated by Neil McWilliam. *Art Nouveau* sculptor Jean Baffier (1851–1920), an extreme right anticapitalist expressing nostalgia for the medieval guilds, tried to make the tableware he showed at the Salon starting around 1892 an example of national art, reintroducing ancestral origins to help the True French people return to a simplicity that was at once rural and refined. But, unfit for distribution through artisanal guilds, the tableware was issued in gilded bronze and pewter by Siot-Decauville and was available by catalogue. With this, the *ouvrier-sculpteur*, as Baffier liked to call himself, could not escape the commercial law he had so condemned and his work became a luxury product like so many others, purchased by snobs seeking pseudo-rustic decor.

On the other hand, notes Malcolm Baker, certain high-luxury commodities such as the Northern ivories carved for the princely nineteenth century *Wunderkammer* were copied in the eighteenth century, sometimes using the same materials, sometimes using other sophisticated materials like wax or Böttger stoneware, before they were reproduced using materials accessible to a larger public, such as Wedgwood ceramics or James Tassie's glass paste. Although one of the greatest masters of *Kleinplastik*, Francis van Bossuit, had a catalogue of his own work, *Statue's or Art's Cabinet* (Amsterdam, 1727) illustrated with Matthew Pool's engravings. The transcription into two dimensions gave a pictorial character to his compositions, which were then used as a convenient stock of decorative patterns. For a Giambologna, the production of derived works was a tool for promotion and European celebrity, while for the Northern ivory workers, who were forgotten by dominant historiography, intensive production could not prevent them from slipping into anonymity.

Finally, observing the actual impact of antique models on English academic teaching, from Lely to Haydon, Malcolm Postle states that the collections of plaster casts certainly reinforced an elite esthetic and contributed to the codification of the education given to young artists, though it gave rise to some criticism, especially the issue of anatomic accuracy. While Hogarth's reprehension of antique casts is extremely well-known, less so are the ambitious attempts of Rysbrack, who proposed an improved version of the *Farnese Hercules* by using nude models, or Benjamin Robert Haydon, who preferred marbles to the traditionally admired Elgin masterpieces and gave primacy to the use of live models in his teaching.

It is clear that this collection must not remain limited to a narrow readership, or reserved for a specialized public. Without assuming the status of doctrine, the studies brought together by Hughes and Ranfft all have the probity to address issues of method well beyond the historical examples they discuss, to emphasize the fertile ground of reproduction in Western sculptural practice, and to introduce substantial nuances, if not refutation, to quite a number of hackneyed affirmations.

Translated from the French by Jill Cairns