

Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces Dialectics of an Exhibition

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John Cabot University

The Graduate School
Department of Art History and Studio Art

Master of Arts in Art History

Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces
Dialectics of an Exhibition

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Abstract

This thesis chronicles the logic and layout of *Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces* exhibition, curated by Dr Salvatore Settis and Dr Carlo Gasparri, and mounted at the Capitoline Museums, in 2020. The exhibition presents a long-awaited view of the highpoints in Roman sculpture, as collected by one of the great princely families of *caput mundi*. It is the result of decades of research. Its popular appeal, yet rigorous scholarly methods are presented with utmost subtlety, and complex visual and expository techniques. The exhibition's resolution of distinct, and often contradictory, concerns lies in the precise use of historical curatorial methods. These methods, recast under an ahistorical tendency, are used pragmatically to construct visual statements dealing with restoration, collection practices, taste and meaning of classics. The exhibition is an emblematic example of curatorial practice of the twenty-first century and offers a practical and historical guide to construction of taste in relation to antiquities. To understand the language of the exhibition, syntactical, historical and semantic formulations are put under investigation. In that regard, this paper takes the Torlonia Exhibition as a case study and investigates the dialectic and linguistic foundations of curatorial practice, taking a look at our contemporary situation.

Acknowledgments

Electa, for their openness and willingness to have me access the primary sources.

Dr Carlo Gasparri and Dr Salvatore Settis, who had to endure my interviews and showed nothing but utmost erudite rigour and scholarly commitment, allowing me to glimpse at the workings of the Exhibition.

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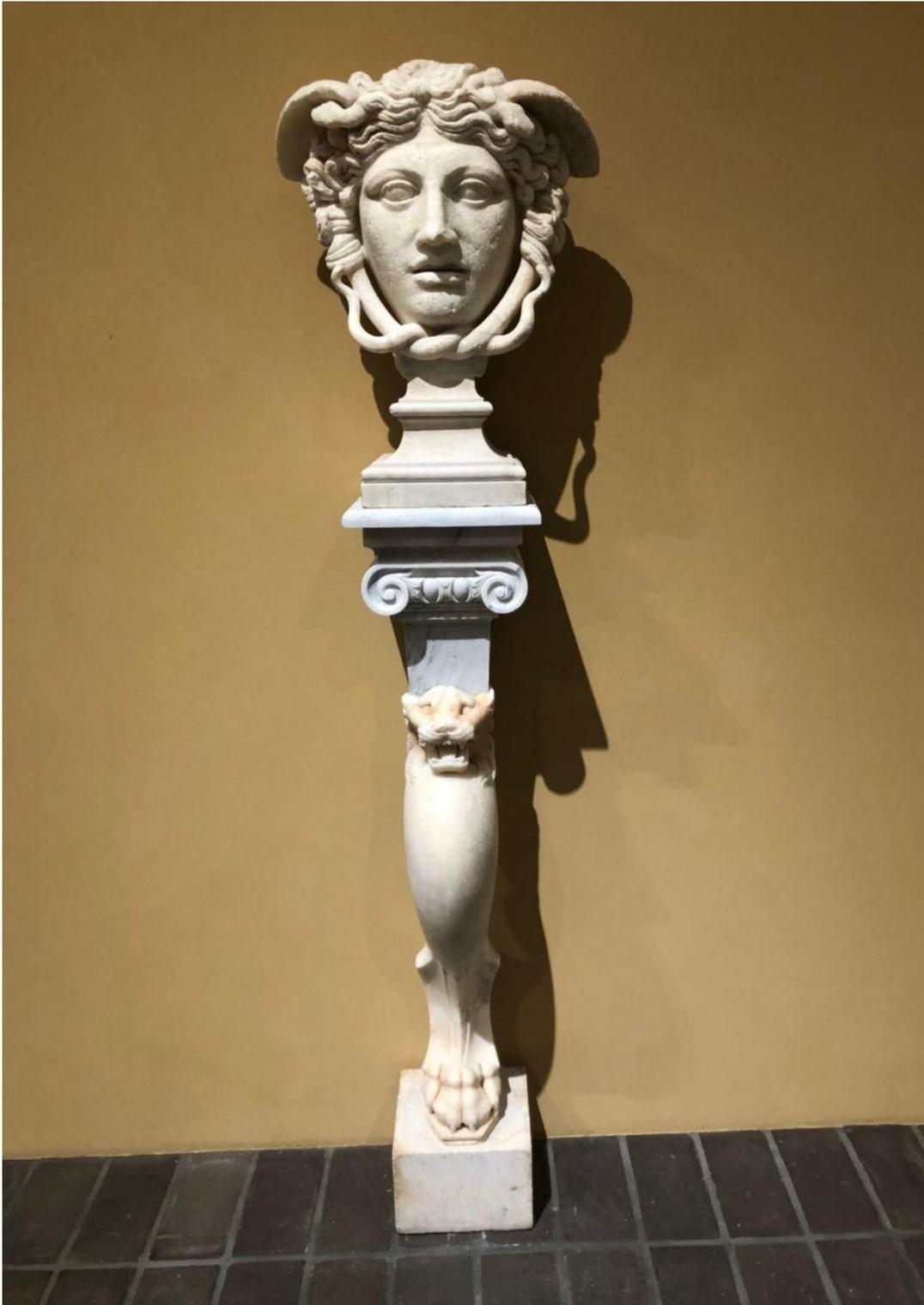
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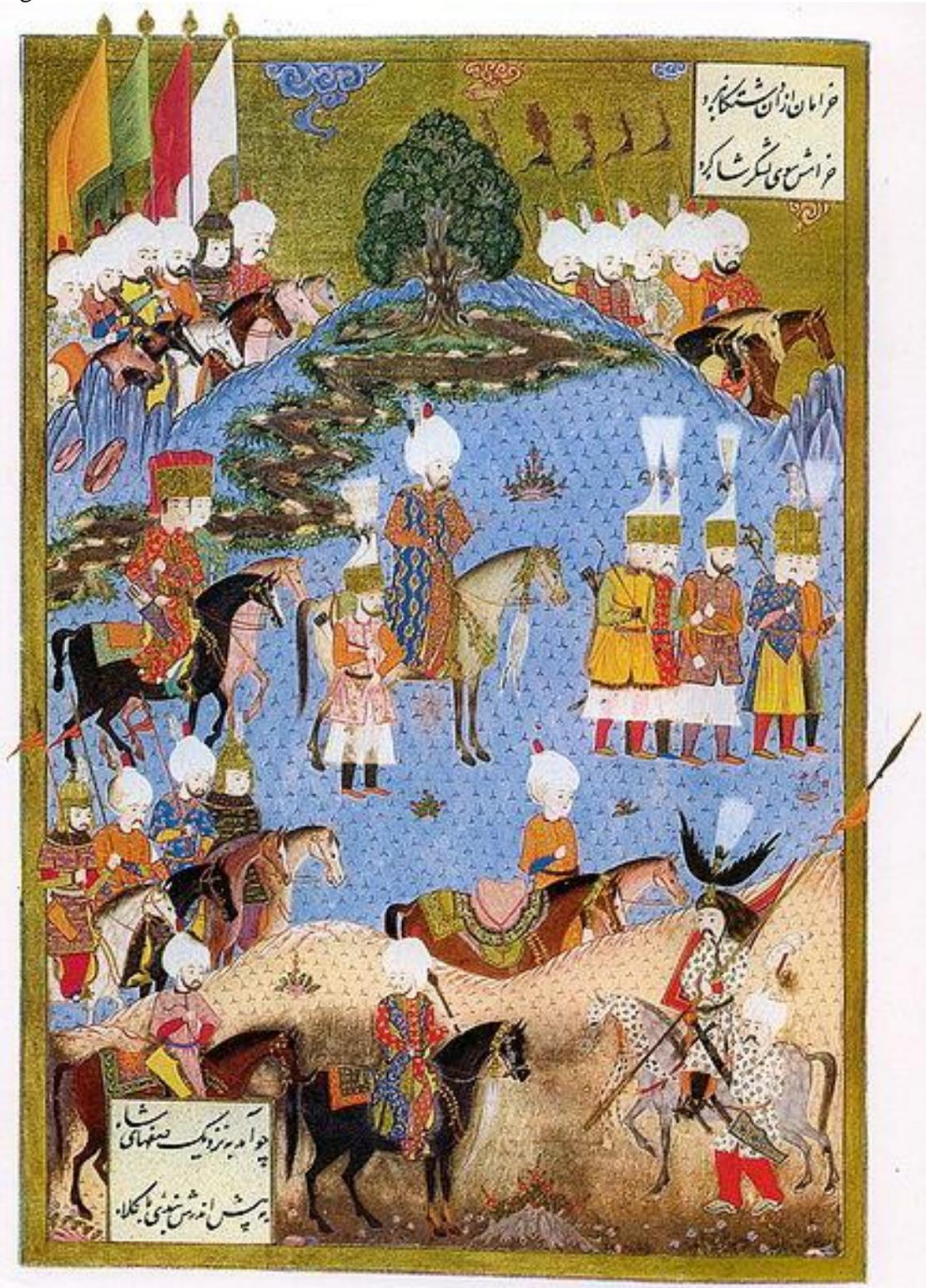
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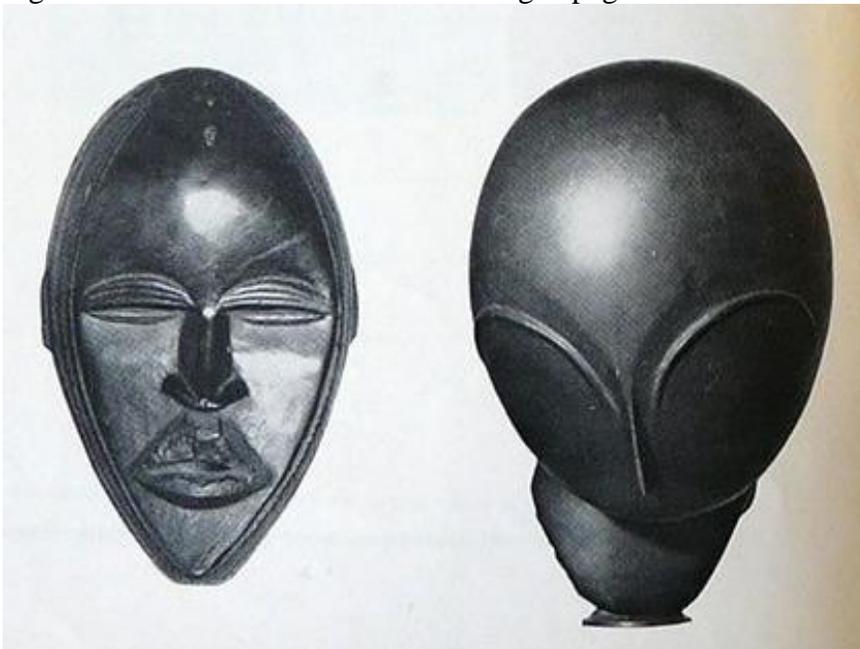


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²¹ <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/creating-ancestors-affinities-rhetorical-analysis-african-art-story-modern-art/> credit: Nana Leigh

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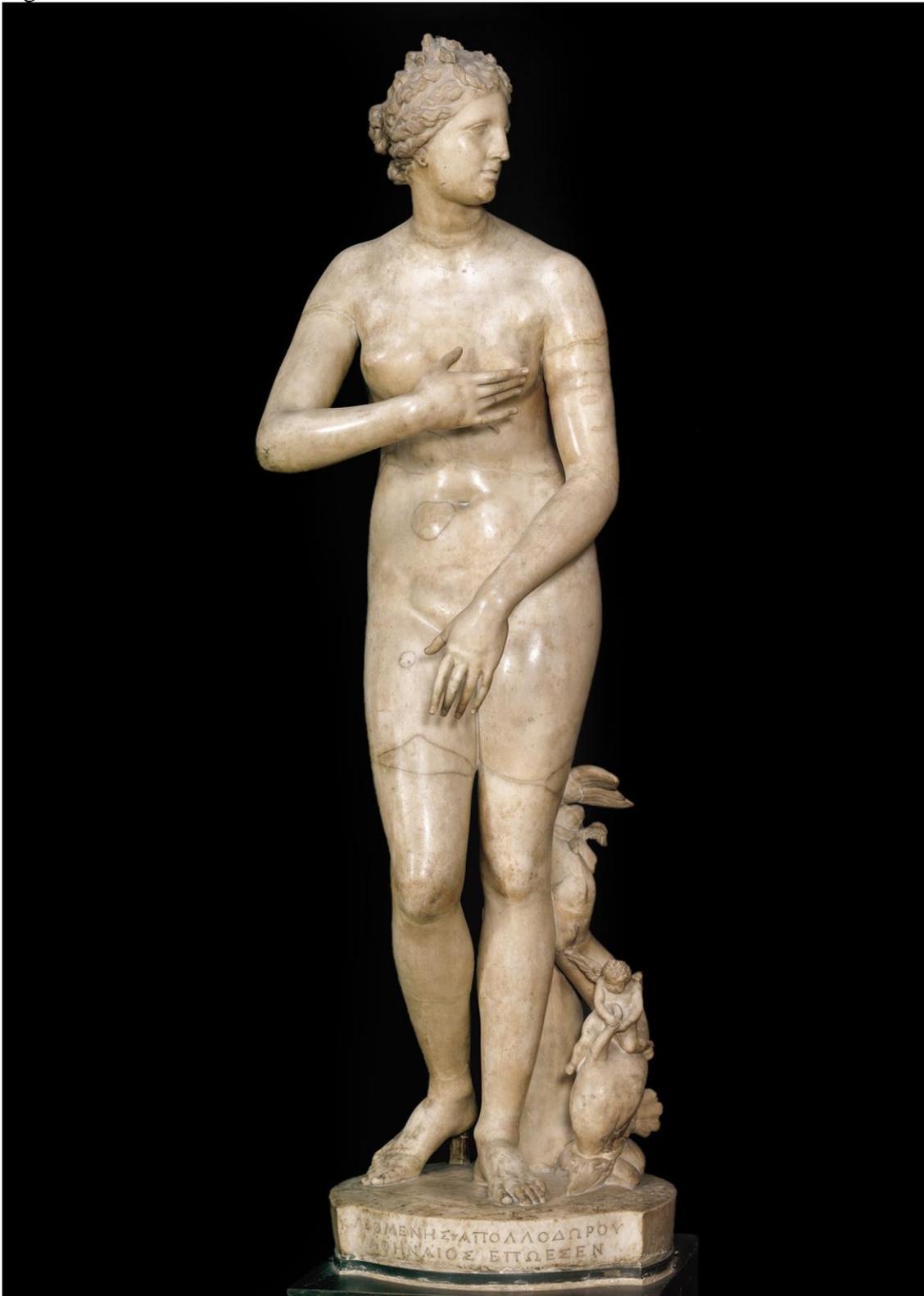
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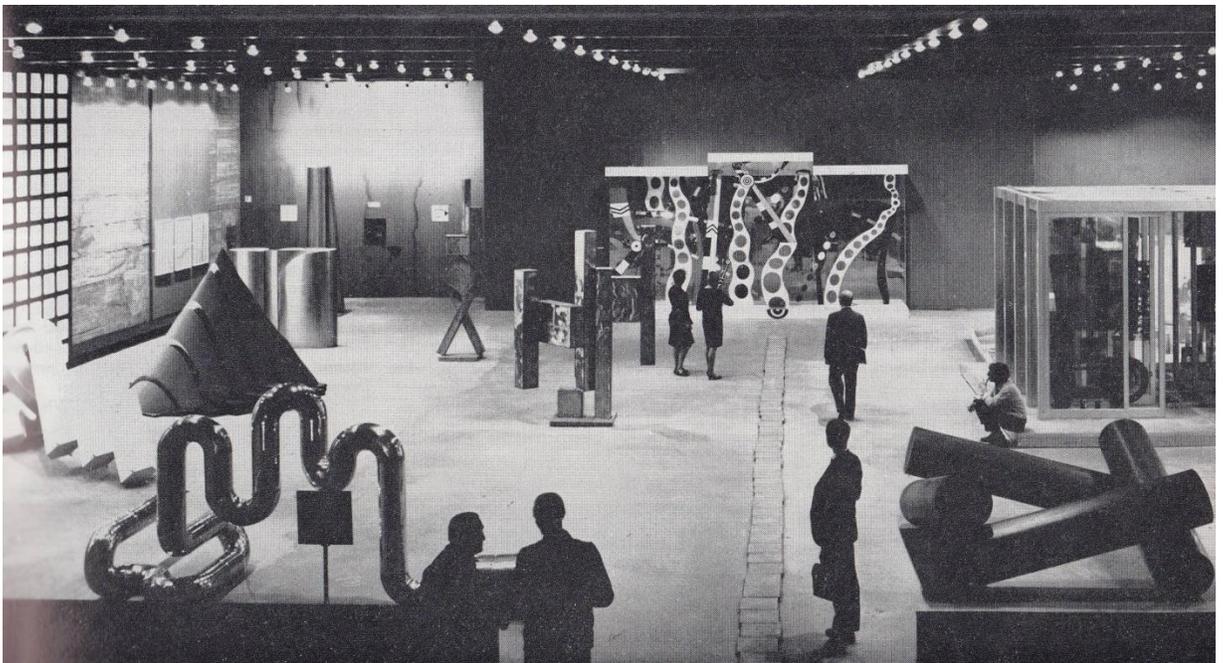


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²⁹ documenta 5, documenta archive Stadt Kassel, 1972.

³⁰ documenta 4, documenta archive Stadt Kassel, 1968.

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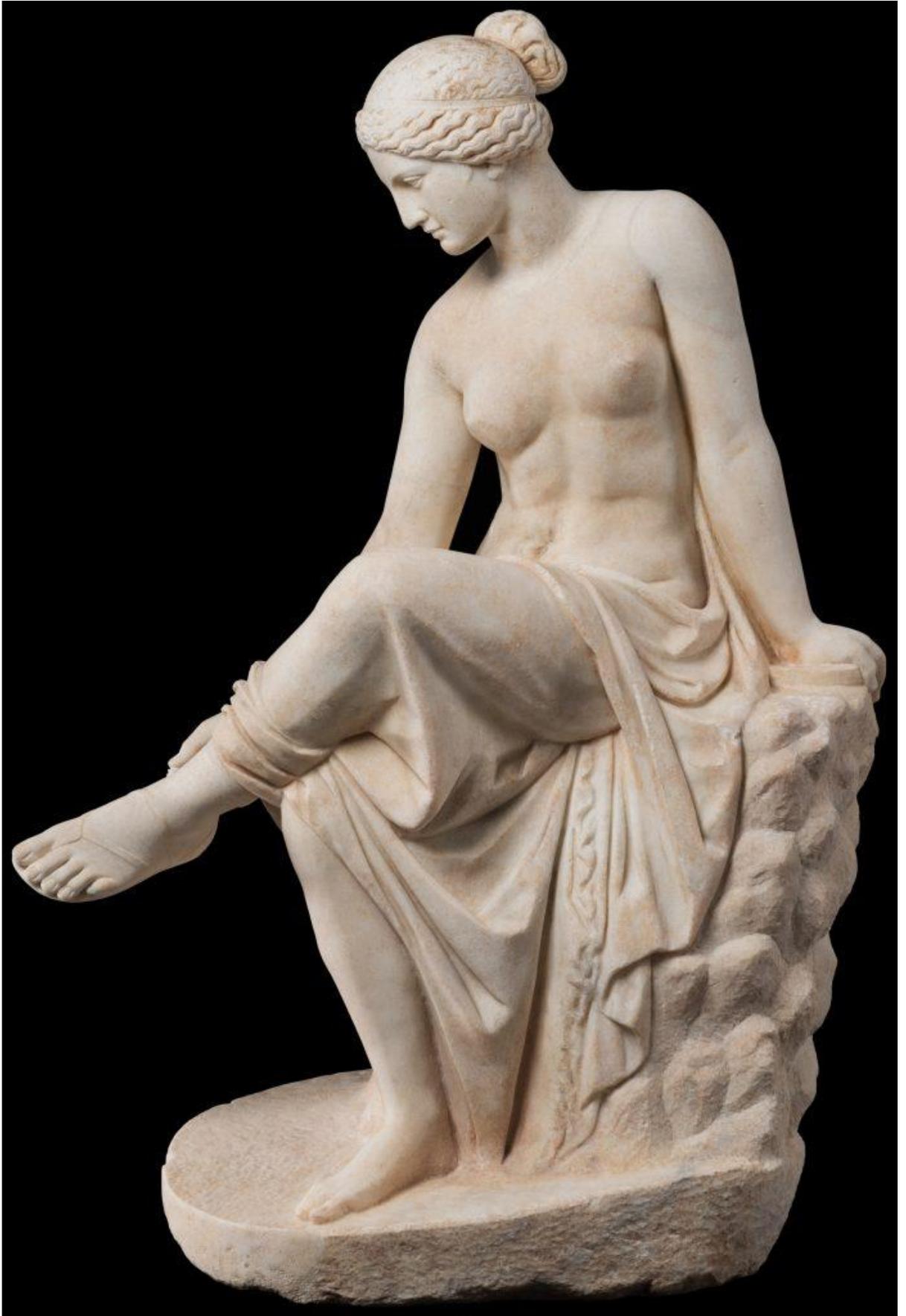
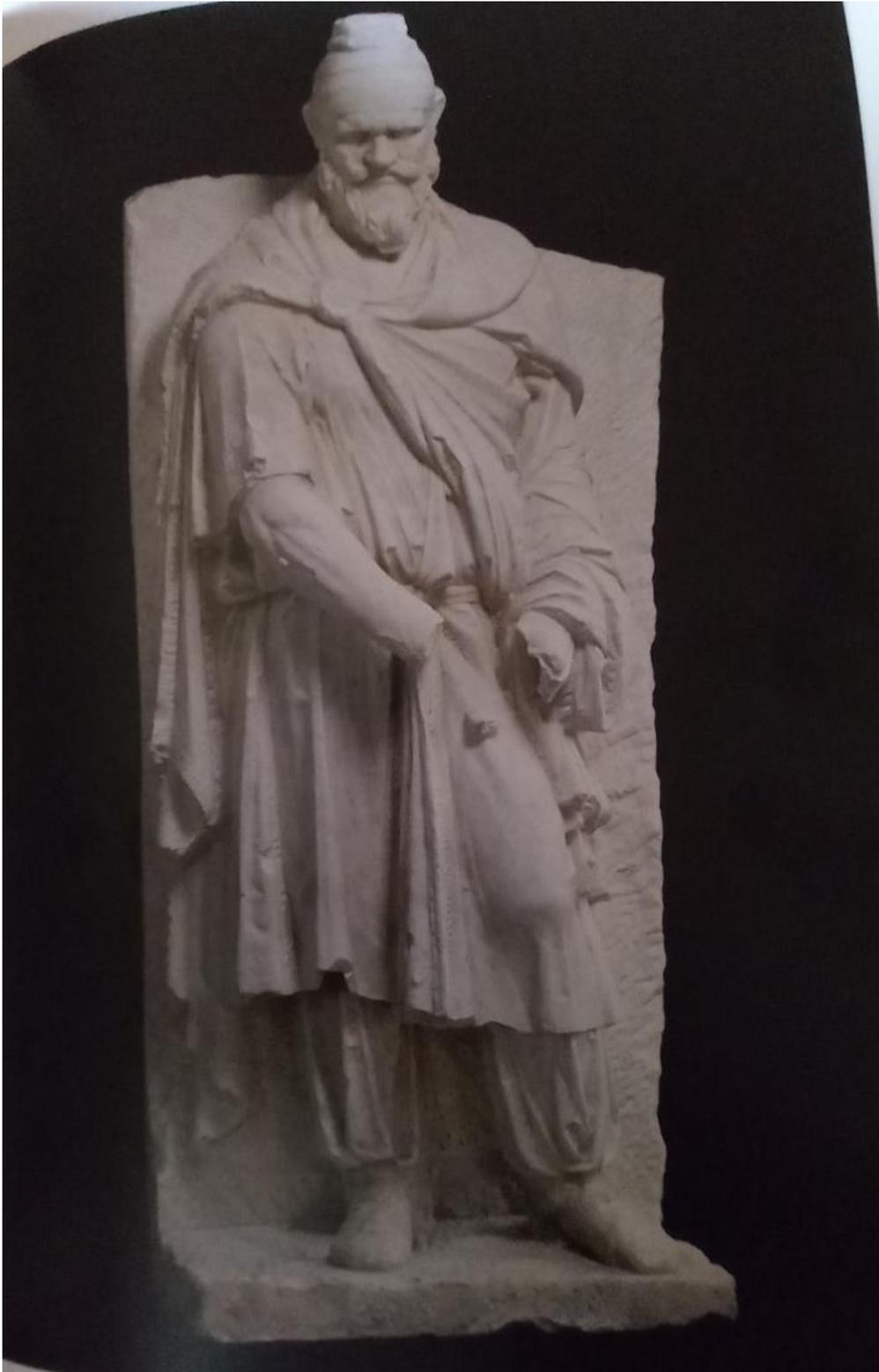


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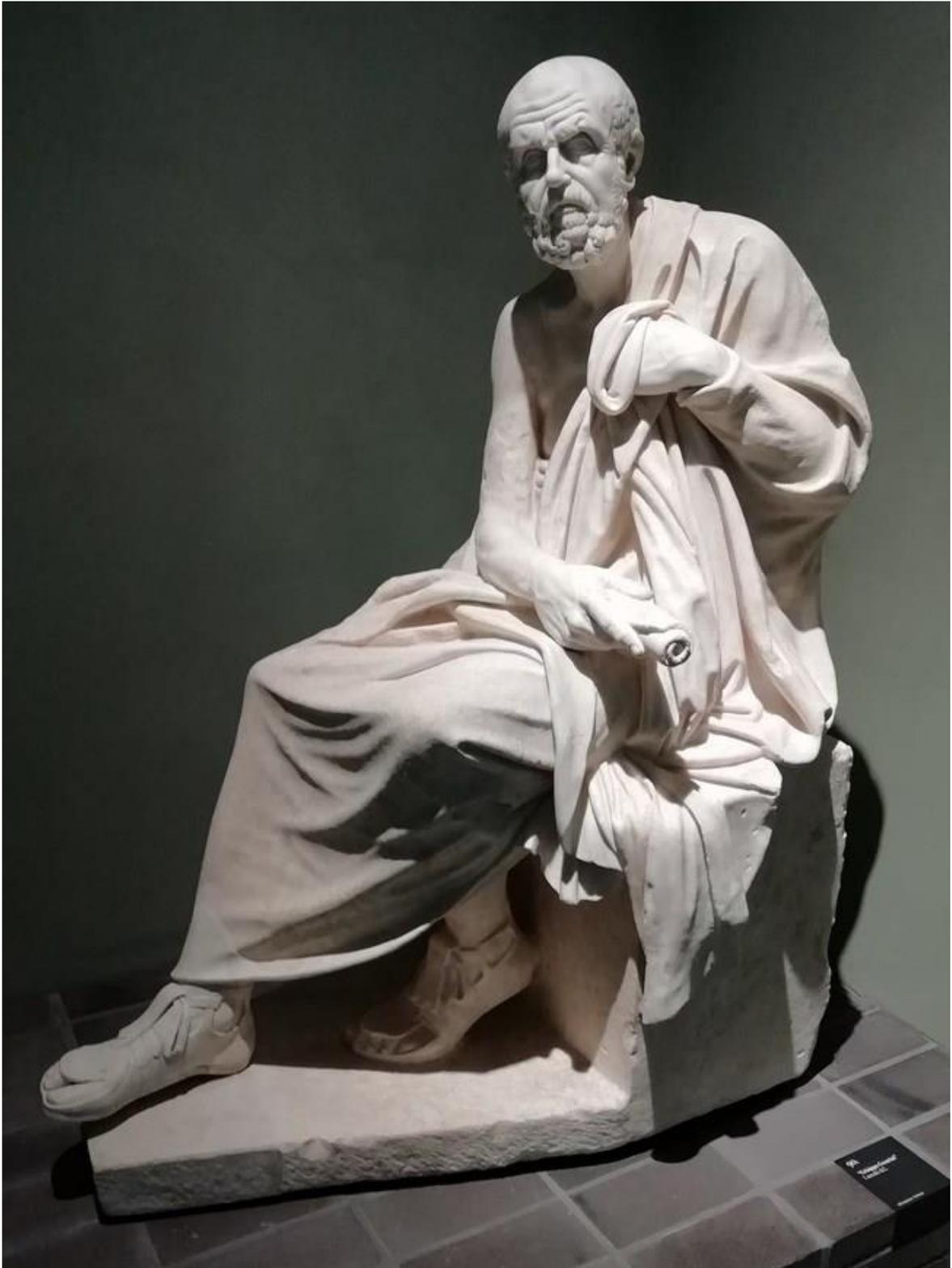
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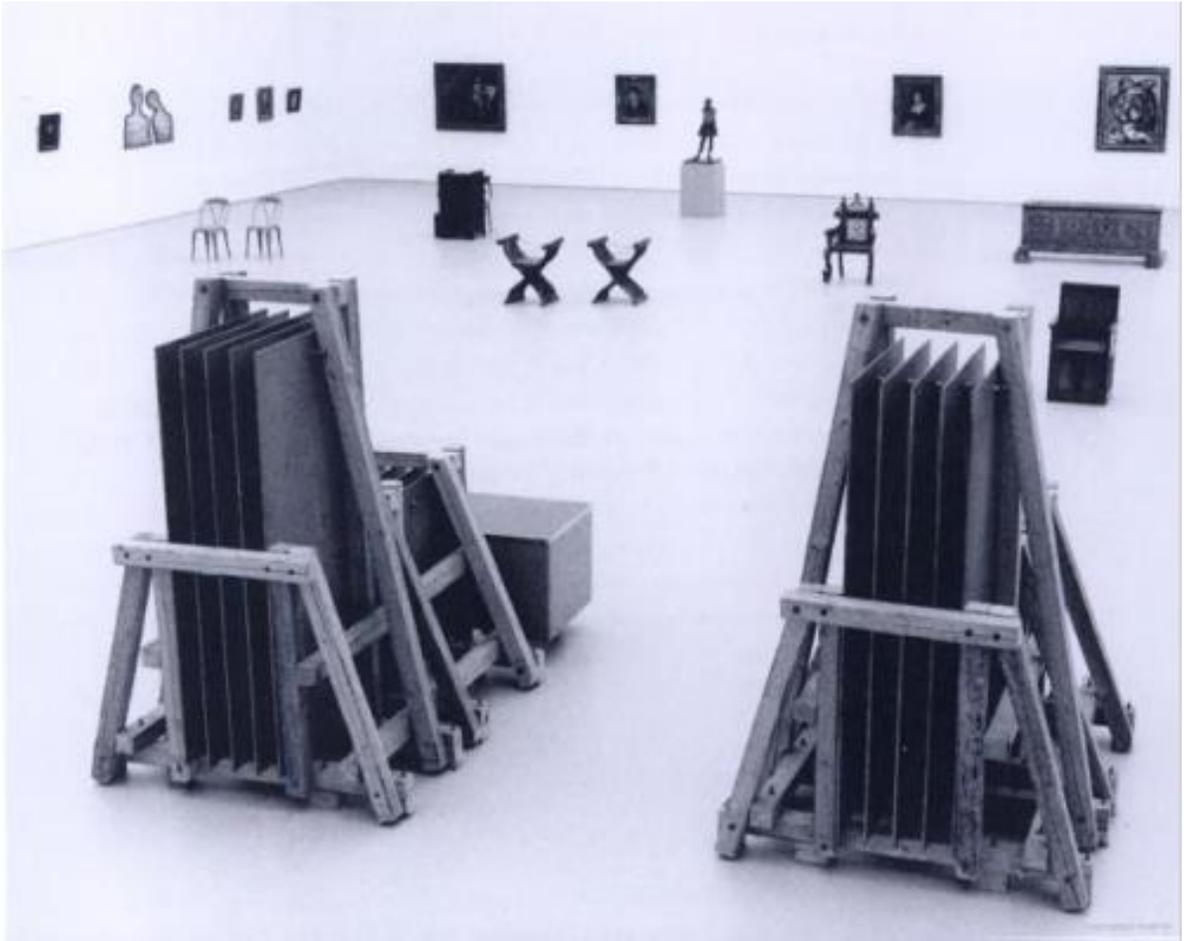
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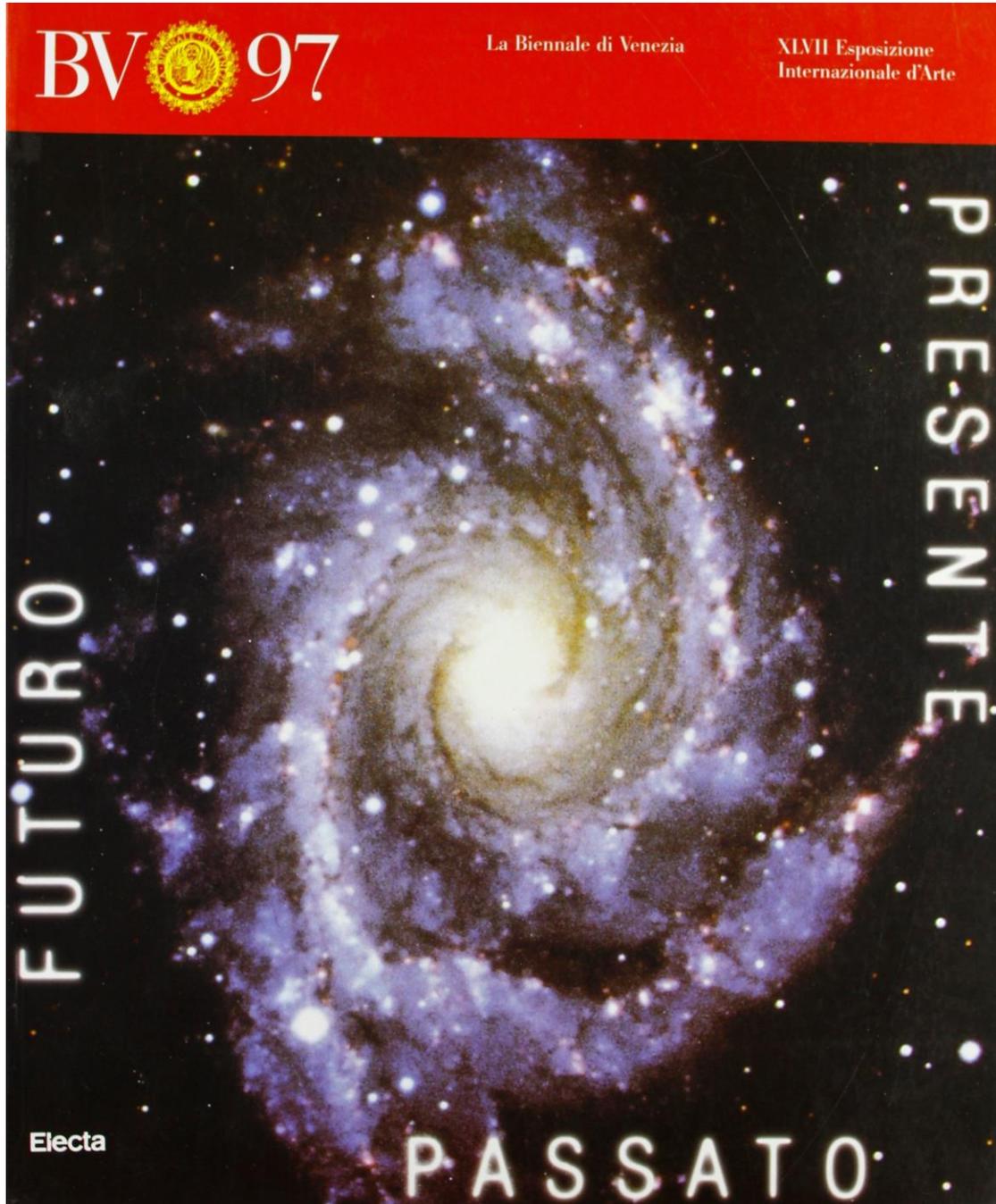
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1 Introduction

The *Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces* exhibition, curated by Dr Salvatore Settis and Dr Carlo Gasparri opened this year, for the first time in nearly four decades, the marvels of the Torlonia Family. We will investigate the exhibition's circumstances, methods, and mechanisms.

A. Torlonia Collection History

The last princely collection of antiquities in Italy was formed by the Torlonia family in a decision to expand their assets and holdings with the acquisition of Roman marble sculptures. They began by acquiring the Cavaceppi collection in the beginning of the nineteenth century –though there is not an exact date for the acquisition, and it may be as early as 1788 or as late as 1820. These marbles, terracotta and pilaster-casts were stored and exhibited in various houses of the family, such as Palazzo Bolognetti in Piazza Venezia, Palazzo Giraud in the Borgo, Palazzo Torlonia on the Nomentana.

Along with the acquisition of the Cavaceppi collection, Giovanni Torlonia (1754-1829) also oversaw the first archaeological projects commissioned by the family in Roma Vecchia, particularly the Villa of Quintili and Maxentius. These excavations seem to have started in 1809 and continued for several decades.

At this point, perhaps, the most important actor in the family history, Prince Alessandro Torlonia (1800-1886) becomes *paterfamilias*, and it is an understatement that he was very keen on growing his family collection. Under his care, the vast Giustiniani

Collection, whose nucleus consists of two hundred and seventy marbles, was acquired. The Giustiniani, themselves were forced to give up on their collection due to increasing financial difficulties, a position emblematic of the changing times and the gradual erosion of the *ancien régime*, but also a foreshadowing of the fate of the Torlonia. The collection, acquired in 1825 was again exhibited in family's residences.

After the conclusion of initial archaeological excavations during the late 1840s or 1850s, Alessandro commissioned, a second set of excavations, this time not only in the city but also in family estates in Sabina and its environs. These excavations most notably led to the rediscovery of the Portus Augusti, the port of Imperial Rome in 1878.

In 1866, again under Alessandro, the collection and the villa of Albani is acquired – another family, victim of the times, due to their very close connection to the heart of the old regime, as Cardinal Alessandro Albani was a nephew of Pope Clement XI himself.

These acquisitions and finds, now at an inventory of 570 items, are subsequently stored in the Palazzo Torlonia, located on via Lungara, after the acquisition from the Corsini. In 1876, the first catalogue is produced. This catalogue, however, contains no images and consists only of a few lines for each item.

The 1804 catalogue, in turn, is the first real catalogue of the collection, with photographs and *saggi* associated with each of 620 items. The catalogue, written (or more likely edited) by Carlo Ludovico Visconti, entitled, *I Monumenti del Torlonia Museum riprodotti con la fototipia*, was subsequently gifted to leading cultural institutions, figures, other princely antiquarians, and some prominent researchers. This follows the strategy of a similar publicity campaign by the Kingdom of Naples, with the Herculaneum excavations, nearly a century earlier.

Alessandro's collection, at this point, can be listed as a major collection of antiquities among other great institutions, as Carlo Ludovico notes: "una serie di busti e di ritratti, la quale, segnatamente nella romana iconografia imperiale, sorpassa e di numero e di bellezza le raccolte notissime del Vaticano e del Campidoglio." This is not a hyperbole on the part of the learned prince, but an indication of a greater ambition in Alessandro. The aim of the collection is not simply to adorn the residences of the family, but to exhibit them publicly. The second catalogue, in light of this, serves as a public statement of this intention.

Alessandro's idea, however, was left mostly unrealised. The collection, then firmly on via della Lungara, was only open to the public in small groups and often upon request and without a guarantee of permission. By the beginning of twentieth century, this system was more or less formalised. Apart from a relocation and closure during the War, for safety, the management of the collection did little to change this course.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, in the late 1940s and 1950s, there was increasing pressure from the Italian State to open the collection to the public. In 1951, there is a proposal for the acquisition of the collection by the State along with the palazzo on via della Lungara, however it was not realised due to a disagreement with the valuation of the collection. Then in 1979, the family attempted to divide their Lungara property into multiple condominiums. A scandal ensued, resulting in the retirement of the collection from public eye and the acquisition of the palazzo by the State. There are several other attempts to nationalise the collection, notably in 1981 and 1991, however, all ultimately fail.

This is the point where the Torlonia exhibition comes into play. After nearly four decades that the Torlonia collection was closed to the public eye, in 2016, finally, an agreement is reached by the Ministry of Culture and the Torlonia Foundation, whereby the collection is to be exhibited in the city of Rome, followed by a world tour and subsequently, a permanent location found, in which the collection could be exhibited publicly. The minister of Culture, Dario Franceschini remarks that it is an example of the cooperation between the public and private sectors, coming to a mutually desirable outcome,⁴⁸ that is, finally a truly public display of the collection, while respecting the family's ownership.

Four years later, the exhibition was scheduled to open to the public in the March of 2020 until June of that year. Due to the pandemic it was postponed several times, finally opening on the 14th of October, until its untimely closure later next month. It still stands that the exhibition will travel to other major global spaces, such as the Louvre, however, the exact locations and schedule are not announced. Ultimately, after its world tour, the collection will be housed in a permanent location, stated, without certainty, as *a* Palazzo Torlonia.

The exhibition can be seen as a preface for the permanent museum to be opened in the future, and it therefore orbits around the twin gravitational centres of research and aesthetic taste, consequently producing a third focus, history of taste. In other words, in relation to the artefacts in question, on the one hand, the exhibition treats them as objects of scholarly research, as objects of history, on the other hand, as objects of aesthetic admiration, as objects of taste. At the intersection of these two distinct conceptual schemes is the narrative that is central to the Torlonia exhibition, the research on history

⁴⁸ "La Collezione Torlonia" La Repubblica, 12 October 2020. Accessed: 5 April 2021.

of ways of looking at antiquities, exemplified through collecting practices of the Torlonia family in their period of immense expansion and the ways in which today's viewer can relate to them, in other words, as we see it, research on the material history of taste.

B. Dramatis personae

This multi-faceted project can only be realised by a curatorial team that is not only versed in antiquities, but also in the evolution of the rapport towards them. This is precisely why Salvatore Settis and Carlo Gasparri are the ideal curators of the exhibition.

Carlo Gasparri is an archaeologist and an art historian, who has been involved with prominent princely and public collections, such as Farnese, Naples Archaeological Museum, Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme, Massimo and Palatino, and is a member of the Academia de' Lincei, as well as working at the Torlonia collection since nineteen-eighty, starting immediately after its closure to the public. Consequently, Dr. Gasparri can be considered among a few scholars who had direct access to the collection and indeed he has been working on their various aspects, such as restoration, provenance, authentication and iconography for an extended period of time.

Dr Settis is also an archaeologist and art historian. He has been the director of the Getty Research Institute. The Scuola Normale Superiore 2015 exhibitions at the Prada Foundation, *Serial Classic* and *Portable Classic* both deal with the processes of copy, imitation. and creative reproduction surveying across different cultural and historic spaces. Even in his earlier work, the interplay between the ancient artistic object and its perception in contemporaneous and later periods play a considerable part. For instance, in

1986, he curates *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana* that deals, in three volumes of catalogue, with this precise dynamic through the history of Italian art.

Finally, there is the last piece of the puzzle, because the exhibition, however successful in terms of its scholarly research, if presented in a way that fails to capture the viewer, cannot be a successful show. That is why a mode of installation that addresses the unique requirements of particular groupings and architectural spaces needed to be constructed. In the Torlonia exhibition, this is achieved by David Chipperfield Architects Milan.

2 First room as promise of that to come.

Passing the reception area, through a short corridor, the viewer's attention is immediately captured by a series of marble busts, arranged as if for a family photograph, in three levels and against a dark red background. The viewer cannot readily see all of the figures, as the bronze statue of Germanicus, with his august pose and impression, stands between this bust "family" and the viewer. (Fig. 1) Refocused on the marble busts and Germanicus avoided, the viewer begins to identify the figures. Among these busts standing on the black faux brick panels (continuous with the floor as if *opus latericium* – but most clearly is not, as the layers do not vary in their composition) – are a bleached group of men *and* women, some familiar to the average viewer, some only to the learned student of history. Commencing with the top left corner, the bust of so-called Sylla,⁴⁹ to the bottom right corner, that of the so-called Elena Fausta, there is a "chronological" arrangement. Now, this chronology should not be misleading, it is not a chronology of strictly productions, but of subjects, which in this case, only present a diversion in extremes. The so-called Sylla is placed at the beginning simply because Sylla is the earliest among the bust group. To his right is a bust of Pompey the Great and to that general's right, the so-called divine Livia, and so forth. Stylistically, this chronology does not hold. The statue of so-called Sylla would fit better with Nero-Domitian-types or even early Severans due to the detailed hair and expressive facial expression. (Fig. 2)

⁴⁹ I say so-called, because these are busts made in a long day after and are only presumed to be Sylla or Marius, etc. Their identification and ontological status are strictly speaking hypothetical.

When the stylistic conditions of the bust correspond to the life of the subject, these concerns disappear. In other words, the bust series can be considered as a progression of imperial styles from the Augustan (early first century BCE) to Theodosian (late fourth c. CE) periods.

This bust group is positioned against a red panel that frames the statues and not the room. It only extends for another metre from the start of the base of the top row, leaving the architectural elements of the room visible to the viewer as a background. This creates a semi-open space (at least in comparison to a complete red wall scenario) in which the viewer can position herself not in a complete space but in a constructed space. The primary room (ie the physical, architectural room) is visible even as the secondary room (ie the conceptual, designed room) dominates the visual experience. This forces the viewer to realise two things: firstly, that whatever experience the viewer is going to have is going to be constructed, it is something to be staged; and secondly, that whatever the viewer sees is part of something larger, with the remainder explicitly not shown. What this thing that is not shown is open to interpretation, however, for the meanwhile, it could be the rest of the Torlonia collection.

In the object-in-white-cube type of exhibition, the relationship between the object and the space is simple and readily analysed: the object's form is the space and the whiteness that surrounds it is the negative space.⁵⁰ In our case, the bust group is the space and the red background is the negative space. It serves to facilitate the viewing of the space, creating a neutral eye-rest, forming a continuous framework that correlates and unifies the discrete objects. Steven Peterson offers a succinct division of spaces along these lines: the space that the object occupies is the figural space; the space that

⁵⁰ Bian O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube*, (California: University of California Press, 1999).

surrounds the object is the continuous space; what is left in-between is the derivative space.⁵¹ This ultimate frame is what this author refers to as negative space. The russet background can indeed be taken as the continuous space that ultimately gives rise to the derivative space and at the same time the architectural background can be taken as the continuous space of this red background. This is a viable, yet delicate interpretation. The question of this secondary continuum needs to make two things ultimately clear. (I) The red background is the immediate viewing framework of the busts, while the architectural elements are mediated. The visual narrative created among the busts cannot be separated from the redness of the negative space, while the introduction of the architecture is simply a decision (however learned and interesting) that can be made without. (II) The architectural space is the ultimate continuous space. In final analysis, those twenty marble portraits are in the architectural room and not in the constructed illusion of the red-walled room; indeed such a room does not exist.

On the left-hand-side of the room, the viewer sees three other busts, formally separated from the imperial group across. These are republican busts of a young woman and two elder men. Of the two male busts, the first is the so-called Euthydemos of Bactria, with the second unnamed. (Fig. 3) These busts create a direct contrast with the bust group central to the viewing of this room. The imperial style often favours a youthful face over an elderly one (although with notable exceptions) and here, the two *veristic*⁵²

⁵¹ Steven Peterson and Barbara Littenberg, *Space and Anti-space*, (ORO Editions, 2019).

⁵² It is questionable if the Euthydemos bust is veristic. Temporally and stylistically it fits into the veristic style of Greece, but in all other respects it stands out. We are often told that Hellenistic kings follow an Alexander-like divine style emphasising youthfulness etc and that veristic style is a middle-class phenomenon, with initial examples coming from trading cities such as Delos. The bust checks all formal boxes and no material ones. Perhaps, we can call this a *veristicist* style. For a detailed and encyclopaedic, albeit dated, account cf. Gisela M. A. Richter “The Origin of Verism in Roman Portraits” *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 45, and R. R. R. Smith, “Roman Republican Portraits” *The Journal of Roman Studies*,

busts show ample evidence of age and immediately separate themselves to create a comparative viewing experience. With these older statues visible, the imperial style gains a new context. Now, the chronology of the subjects and styles in the bust group can be seen in relation to, and more importantly as a continuation of, these old men and old busts.

Reading the label, the viewer learns that this first room is representative of the core of the Torlonia Museum collection and reading the catalogue, she learns that in the original museum, a series of busts (these or those that are similar) would have been exhibited in a similar fashion.⁵³ Surely the architectural framework and the interior design would be radically different, but beyond that, this comparison is still curious. Is the bust group in the first room arranged this way *because* they were shown in a similar fashion in the Torlonia Museum or they merely *happen to* be arranged in a similar fashion? To answer that, a similar question should be posed for Room VII.

Room VII, featuring twenty-seven statues and more than seven different coloured marbles, is the largest and most intricate room of the entire exhibition. (Fig. 4) On the right-hand-side (in relation to the entrance to the room, for this and all subsequent relative positions) of the entry there is another bust series, this time starting with so-called Scipio Africanus and ending, quite appropriately, with Augustulus.

The left-hand side features five larger statues and statue groups and is installed symmetrically: Meleager, a Rondanini-type Medusa, a married couple group, Rondanini-type Medusa, Aphrodite with Eros. (Fig. 5-8) The installation of this wall is too elegant

Vol. 71: 24-38, and for a more recent account, particularly the first sections of Jeremy Tanner, "Portraits, Power, and Patronage in the Late Roman Republic" *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 90.

⁵³ *Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces* - Exhibition Catalogue Salvatore Settis and Carlo Gasparri ed. (Electa, 2020), 136.

and attentive to gender. The central married couple is flanked with two Medusas on *trapezophora*, one with a lion's, the other with a griffin's head. On the side of the husband is Meleager and on the side of the wife is Aphrodite. Suddenly, the group becomes a gendered composition, even Meleager, whose statue does not involve any sexual or romantic features, embodies an idea of gender. The composition can thus be read as following. The human couple in a familial composition representing the social aspect of love, sex, or marriage with decorative *trapezophora* symbolising the dangerous (lust leads to divine punishment) nature of these. And at both extremes two divine figures as reminders and ideals. Aphrodite can be read in two ways and that changes the reading of Meleager: Should she be the ideal female, then Meleager would be the ideal male, which is not entirely inconceivable as he is virile and honest etc. Similarly, Aphrodite can be the facilitator of love, in which case Meleager, who is son of Ares, would become the representation of the violence and destructive face of love. This installation (with additional statues) was also used in the original viewing space.⁵⁴

Finally, in the centre of Room VII, there are nine statues, of which four are pairs. At the end of the room, across the entrance, is Hestia, flanked by two Isides, both in the guise of Ceres. (Fig. 9) In the centre, looking at Hestia are two Aphrodites and behind her, looking at the entrance are two Praxitelian satyrs. (Fig. 10) All pairs are similar to each other, however, with slightly different dating. For instance, one satyr is from the beginning of the second century, while the other is from its conclusion.

Overall, the main feature that defines Room VII is balance and this is manifested physically and conceptually in symmetry and gender. The above reading of the right-hand side is pertinent to the overall composition of the room. Series of imperial busts (all

⁵⁴ *Exhibition Catalogue*, 218.

male) to the left, an impressive Hestia-Isis installation at the centre and a mixed male-female group in the centre and the right-hand-side. Not in quantity but in quality, the room seems to be organised in a considered balance for sexes. This balance is also seen in the installations: for each statue group, there is a central axis of symmetry. A central figure is flanked with a pair of copies or statues with comparable subject matters. This kind of installation is reminiscent of the original modes of exhibiting of the eighteenth century and is accordingly noted: “L’esposizione [del luoco originale] aveva due caratteristiche *ricorrenti*, [our italics] ben rappresentate in questa sala: un allestimento organizzato secondo studiate simmetrie e il ricorso a restauri eleganti e ricercati.”⁵⁵ Here the notion of studied symmetry marks a central distinction. The symmetry in this case is not simply for visual composition or stylistic continuity, though they may be achieved nonetheless, but for the learned taste of the viewer. The Hestia, for instance, flanked with Isis, is not only a visual statement but also a historical one. The central goddess, so-called Hestia, was at the centre of a debate about the identity of the figure depicted, since the eighteenth century, initially “si ipotizza[va] che il simulacro raffigurasse Demetra.”⁵⁶ With this debate in mind, the statues of Isis, both of which depict the Egyptian goddess syncretised with Ceres (*in interpretatione Graeca* Demeter), attain a new layer of meaning. These statues, all of which depict different goddesses, were at some point in their long lives thought to be or were practically perceived as being Demeter.⁵⁷ One can

⁵⁵ *Exhibition Catalogue*, 221.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 243.

⁵⁷ On the subject of syncretism, refer to J. Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods. Myth, Salvation and Ethics in Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras*, Leiden: Brill, 2008. For its more religious implications, see Siv Ellen Kraft “‘Mix or Not to Mix’: Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism in the History of Theosophy” *Numen*, Vol. 49. 2.

even conceive of a renaissance-style pun with the eastern character of Isis and Hestia being associated with west.⁵⁸

That these statues were installed as they are in the exhibition is a bit of a reach, and not a claim made by the curators. What is said, however, clearly is that a central premise or a conceptual method of installing is preserved. In other words, the answer to the initial question posed above, if the bust group in Room I was so because of a loyalty to the original installation, is seen as approaching such an interpretation. While it is true that the original installation is pertinent to the exhibition, it is not followed *mot-à-mot*. In a way, the original is taken in its historical context and the idea behind it is investigated. Subsequently, this idea is reinterpreted in a contemporary context. The exhibition, in other words, does not aim to recreate the exact viewing conditions of the collection in eighteenth century Palazzo Torlonia, but instead tries to recreate the concerns that were already present then and improve upon them through techniques developed since. What are these techniques?

⁵⁸ Hestia is also the name of one of the night nymphs, called Hesperides.

3 Techniques, Historical and Dialectical

A. Chronological

Sensu stricto this is not a method that is invented in the twentieth century, however, given its overwhelming use and continued influence in all methods of display, and particularly in an archaeological context, its discussion cannot be avoided.

Starting with the very first public exhibition, that of the Grand Galerie of the Louvre, the arrangement of objects to highlight a historical progress, evolution or refinement (depending on the assumption of linearity) of style has been central to exhibitions.⁵⁹ There are two parallel narratives in chronological exhibitions. On the one hand, there is the chronology of historic events and on the other hand, there is the chronology of art historical events, as exemplified with the chosen objects. These two histories are, for the large part, fed from each other in the process of meaning production. For a viewer who is utterly ignorant in early Soviet history, an exhibition that features works of Tatlin, Ostoumova-Lebedeva, Malevich and Laktionov would not make much sense and the progression from the avant-garde to constructivism to naïve art and to realism would raise more questions than it answers. (For a sample, see Fig. 1-5) In essence, to understand the sudden break in the abstract tradition and return to a realist model only makes sense when the historical events, in this case the implementation of Stalinist programmes, render the visual chronology meaningful. Alternatively, however,

⁵⁹ Andrew McClellan, “The Musée du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor During the Terror” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70. 2, 304-5.

for someone who is educated in that history, but ignorant in early Soviet (or general) art history, a certain meaning, however imperfect, can be produced. In other words, the primary narrative in chronological exhibitions is history and not art history.

This method is often used in archaeological museums that follow the lineage of prehistoric, Bronze/Iron age, Greek (archaic and if any classical), early Roman (copies of classical and Hellenistic Greek), Republican, Imperial, and so forth. Happily, the Torlonia exhibition, nearly religiously, avoids this method. It is used only in two occasions, both of which are series of Imperial portraits, both of which discussed above.

There are two reasons for evading this method. Firstly, as noted, it requires the viewer to be sufficiently knowledgeable in the field for the exhibition to work to its fullest potential. This is fostered by the provision of textual narratives in the form of brochure or labels and in wall text, which have become becoming increasingly popular in archaeological museums since the last decades of the twentieth century: Perhaps, with the popularisation of what is now called museum interpretation – or installation techniques borrowed from artists such as Barbara Bloom, Braco Dimitrijevic, Hans Haacke, and Joseph Kosuth.⁶⁰ The trend indicates that there will be even more edification in the future, however, museum pedagogy faces many challenges. On the one hand, there is the risk of under-informing, therefore not letting the viewer produce the intended meaning. To counter that, more information can be provided, but then there is the chance of boring, angering, or otherwise losing the interest of, the viewer. In any case, it is highly dubious that an exhibition that gives a textbook for a brochure would have any success.

⁶⁰ In reference to the conversations I had with Dr Cornelia Lauf.

Secondly, there is a growing concern for novelty in research. Chronology, however useful, is a method that produced certain linear historical narratives and the informed viewer and the scholar are well acquainted with them. The curatorial task is to find new ways of looking at old objects and making new connections and at that, chronological method fails. In a time of rejecting all linear, single-stranded histories, chronology has few chances of providing new angles on the research.

Albeit, there is the counter-tendency that chronological display has already produced in itself, viz. relativism. This inner tension between the drive to produce a linear narrative that *arrives* at something, while at the same time rejecting a deeper meaning into that is to be *arrived*. An interesting case here is Karl Ernst Osthaus' Folkwang Museum, at its peak in 1912. (Fig. 6) In its conception at Hagen, Osthaus has a systematic programme of educating the local industrialists (not the workers, incidentally, but the factory owners), by a series of what would today be called cultural relativist installations of latest Parisian modernist paintings put next to pre-industrialist Persian or other "uncivilised" artefacts. By 1912, under the influence of Henry van de Velde, Osthaus' Hagen Museum has already become the Folkwang Museum, cleared of its selection of natural history section (which we will discuss on a more theoretical level later) and focused particularly on both substantially and formally modernist institution, featuring French modernism within a German architectural space to match.⁶¹ (Fig. 7) This is the point of departure from the strict pedagogical emphasis to a sensory-experiential, in a sense even spiritual elevation. This is the start of the relativistic process that will soon dominate curatorial practice.

⁶¹ Katherine Kuenzli, "The Birth of the Modernist Art Museum" *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 72. 4, 505.

As a consequence of these concerns, the Torlonia exhibition makes use of chronology only when it is utterly necessary, ie in Rooms I and VII. The series of imperial portraits make natural sense (not that other methods would not) when displayed chronologically. This chronology is already a determinate of the viewing experience by introducing the notion of continuity and discontinuity that sits at the centre of the exhibition, in relation to the objects themselves as historical artefacts, but also as a continuity of the Torlonia's collection and their discontinuity to today's notion of displaying. Indeed, as discussed briefly above, such a method is also illustrative of the development of style and therefore can be considered as a sort of a stylistic display.

B. Formalist/Stylistic

In stylistic exhibitions, objects from distinct times, spaces, schools and so forth, are arranged in such a way that the viewer cannot help but notice a shared stylistic or formal characteristic. These styles or formal elements then become an essential part of the viewing experience, in a way, retrospectively forcing a certain interpretation onto the objects themselves. For instance, a sixteenth-century Ottoman miniature of a poet reading and a Baroque scene of Mary's Ascension both use asymmetry and curvilinear narrative to direct the eye in viewing the picture. (Fig. 8 and 9) Here, the curator's goal is to show to the viewer that a similar mode of composition or formal organisation is common in different objects. However, the curator makes no generalisation or suggests a reason for the existence of such a similarity. She merely states that these two aspects share a certain formal value, for whatever reason they may.

Having seen the museum distinctly seen as what had already openly acknowledged in the pre-war period, viz. what Althusser calls the ideological state

apparatus, the curators of the post-war era have naturally become a bit timid.⁶² Any claim for generality or any value judgement based on content could be seen as a continuation of that overtly ideological school. Therefore, an exhibition that centred on a certain theme, historical school or any other content arranged in a way that implied a positive value towards a certain substantial moral, political, historical, social or psychological reality would be at odds with the de-nazification or de-fascistification process, and subversion of authorial narratives which in some ways constitute the European cultural scene in the decades after the Second War.⁶³ In the field of art history, the museum adopted the notion of style, and in the university, the discussion of form, as useful categories for interpreting art history.

For instance, when we come to the *Moderne Kunst – Nieuw en Oud* (Modern Art – New and Old) in 1955, in Stedelijk Museum, the notion of “negerkunst (negro art)” comes to exemplify the concept of “old modern art.” (Fig. 10) Sandberg’s curatorial practice can be compared to the Hagen Museum’s display of “uncivilised” artefacts, however, this time, the ideological position that the same object serves is reversed. Here, the curatorial agenda is to capture an essence (of modern art) that can be illustrated by the accidental or essential quotations or referring-backs to the primitivist language. The point

⁶² In that sense, the shift is less about the role the museum plays in the society but more in its perception. For a more detailed analysis on this, please refer to the precise collection: T. Bennet, C. Mercer and J Woollacott ed. *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, (London: Open University Press, 1986), particularly the former’s introductory notes. However, we must admit we subscribe more to the reading that is presented in Nizan Shaked, *The synthetic proposition: Conceptualism and the political referent in contemporary art*, (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2017), particularly the section on the intrinsic relation between art, museum and political action, 113-5. Furthermore, we must also acknowledge that this process of subverting the ideological connotation of the institution of museum, while preserving its denotation is a continued struggle. For an analysis of how this occurs in the transition from Mao to Ping in the context of China, refer to Denise Ho, “Museum” in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, (New York: ANU Press, 2019). For a post-colonial context, see Henry Chiwaura, “Museum practices as perpetuators of an ideology: A Zimbabwean perspective,” in *African Museums in the Making*, (Laanga, 2015).

⁶³ T. Lewis, *Walter Benjamin’s Antifascist Education: From Riddles to Radio*, (New York: SUNY, 2020), 126.

Sandberg makes is not that to emphasise the progress of the modern artist through comparing it to a “primitive” artefact, but on the contrary to show two veins that feed modern art: the old, primitivism, and the new, industrial modernity. In juxtaposing these seemingly opposing sources, he is able to demonstrate firstly that modern art, if there is a certain character to it, does not lie reaffirming the myth of progress or teleology, but bring about a sense of timelessness.⁶⁴ At the point of this conceptual reversal (from the chronological display), the precise mode of display, indeed can remain with the chronological arrangement. He puts an African ancestral wooden figure, where a snake is weaving itself through opposite a bronze figure by Lipschitz. Similarly, a Brancusi bronze is found by a sub-Saharan mask. (Fig. 11-14) In these installations, the tension intrinsic to the chronological display is resolved by the rejection of its initial premise: that there is a movement in art.⁶⁵

However, this, in turn, creates a new tension, because even if the trap of relativism is avoided by emphasising an artefact in its instrumentality to the cause of modern art, its original context is lost. This will, soon, become an apparent contradiction not only for the African artefact but for the object of modernity, as well.

In the Torlonia exhibition, only Room IV is exclusively arranged stylistically. Here, on the left-hand-side of the room is a reclining male personification of the Nile (the Barberini Nile) with a granite tub in front of it. (Fig. 15) This central composition is flanked by two marble kraters, on whose base are griffins and whose *trazephora* are

⁶⁴ Nelson Goodman, “The End of the Museum?” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 19. 2, 57. On the continuity of the notion of timelessness, particularly in contemporary art, also see Terry Smith, “Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity” *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 32. 4.

⁶⁵ Nina Leigh, “Creating Ancestors and Affinities” *Stedelijk Studies*.
<https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/creating-ancestors-affinities-rhetorical-analysis-african-art-story-modern-art/> Accessed: 5 April 2021.

sphynxes. (Fig. 16) On the right-hand-side is a sarcophagus depicting Dionysos in India and above the sarcophagus is a reclining Greek female on a *kline*. (Fig. 17) In the centre is a Neo-Attic altar with three figures in profile and procession. Above the altar is placed a bust of a youth, so-called Ptolemy. (Fig. 18) In this room, the unifying feature is the Egyptianising elements. Each object participates in this Egyptianising style in a greater or smaller extent. For some, viz the kraters, Nile and Ptolemy, this should be obvious, but for the others a certain reflection is needed. The altar on which the Ptolemy bust sits features a pose that is commonly associated with Egyptian style (even today!), i.e. profile procession, with both legs visible and both arms extended.

Ultimately, this style is nowadays avoided for the same reason it was once popular: it does not allow the curator to make claims. It is used, as with chronological style, when the content dictates it. These objects could have been arranged in any other way to make a claim, however, it is more interesting to see them in light of a certain style as they are all featuring Egyptianising elements and noting that create a stronger visual reading than other alternatives.⁶⁶

C. Historic

Historic (not historical!) style aims to recreate an original viewing context through architecture, interior design, and lighting. It was extremely popular in the infancy of museology in the US, where complete interiors of French apartments were brought over to house French paintings. Similar efforts were done in Europe, especially

⁶⁶ Stephanie Moser, "Reconstructing Ancient Worlds: Reception Studies, Archaeological Representation and the Interpretation of Ancient Egypt" *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 22. 4, 1268.

in cases of Oriental, exotic or ancient *specimens*.⁶⁷ In general, most great excavations of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries follow this trend. The proposed museum for the Pergamon Altar in the Museum Island, as well as the unrealised, then abandoned project of a palace for Priam's treasure, the *Chambre Didyma* to house the finds from the Temple of Apollo, all fall into this modern notion of recreating a historic viewing space. This is later abandoned for financial (it is expensive) and art historical consideration, as it was the case in lavish displays in Boston Museum.

In the case of the Torlonia exhibition, there is some concern for the historic recreation; however, as discussed above, it is not a complete physical recreation but a conceptual one. The interior design does not mimic the design of Villino Torlonia, nor does it even pretend to bear any similarity to it. The illustrious interior decorations, with baroque niches and neoclassical orders are completely lacking in the exhibition in the Villa de' Caffarelli. Indeed only certain general ideas are preserved. For instance, for Room XI featuring a personified Nile, a replica of Medici Venus and an Athena, it is said that were "pose sull'ingresso del giardino [che era] ricco di sculture."⁶⁸ (Fig. 19) It is not even clear (perhaps not even to the curatorial team) if these were indeed those sculptures in the garden or if they were shown together as they were. Ultimately this is not a useful question. What is more interesting, and what is indeed pursued by Settis and Gasparri, is that there were certain ways of looking at these sculptures and arranging them in certain ways, and even though sometimes stylistic, yet, more importantly they were about certain

⁶⁷ Indeed, here the influence of the early museology is more pertinent than ever. The museum was thought to be a scientific institution where *specimens* would be collected and exhibited in their *natural habitat* for the learned viewer. This holds equally for the natural history, archaeology and fine arts. Two opposing views, even though they converge substantially on the identification of the problem with modern museum are Karsten Schubert, *Curator's Egg*, (London: Ridinghouse, 2009) and David Carrier, *Museum Scepticism*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁶⁸ *Exhibition Catalogue*, 288.

ideas and performative ontologies. In other words, in the Torlonia exhibition the historic mode of display is secondary to what will be called a thematic exhibition style. The themes, in turn, could be guided by the concerns that guided the original exhibition. The recreation, therefore, is less about the physical installation and more about the thematic or relational organisation of these objects.

D. Thematic

Even though the notion of arranging objects through a shared theme is not a new idea, the thematic mode of display comes to its maturity in the mid-twentieth century. Thematic exhibitions generally centre on a single concept or notion that serves as a starting point or inspiration for the artists. It is initially formulated in the 1950s but becomes a major method only after 1968. In the *Tendances de l'art en France 1968-1978/79*, Derivery, Dupré and Perrot write “Qu’est-ce donc qu’un artiste, au vu de cette exposition ? C’est un fabricant de tableaux, de beaucoup de tableaux, capable de remplir une galerie avec une série sur le même thème.”⁶⁹ It is a phenomenon of the times that often this “same theme” is political, however, over time the politics is replaced with general concept.

This method, however influential and ground breaking, poses some difficulties for the archaeological exhibition, for a simple reason: the artist is non-existent. The great innovation of the thematic exhibition is *demystification* of the art and artist.⁷⁰ The process

⁶⁹ “Tendances de l’art en France 1968-1978/79” *Expositions, Histoire et Critique des Arts*, Vol. 11. 12, 89.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 79. For a detailed account on the process of dematerialisation and demystification see Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2016), or Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Art Demystified*, in Henri Neuendorf “Art Demystified: What Do Curators Actually Do?” *Artnet News*, Published: November 10, 2016, Accessed: 5 April 2021, and *A Brief History of Curating*, (Geneva: JRP, 2008), especially the sections on Szeemann, Siegelau, Zanini and Lippard. The

of production, curation, interpretation, acquisition and collection are made transparent and became part of the artistic production itself. It is no surprise that this was promoted and championed by *soixante-huitards* as, simultaneous to art, a similar process occurs in the political sphere, also and the relationship between social “progress” and artistic “innovation” come bear new kinds of relations.⁷¹ With the artist almost categorically out of the picture in dealing with antiquities, the demystification cannot go anywhere beyond the curatorial demystification. In these transparent exhibitions (as transparent as the entrance to the Louvre or Pompidou), the exhibition becomes a rapport of the dialogue between the curator and the artist and the viewer is invited to take part in it, even though that part is usually a non-speaking one. When the artist is long dead and most pieces cannot be attributed, this dialogue is at best imaginary. Therefore, in the archaeological context, the thematic exhibition becomes much less impotent than the transformative success it enjoyed in the world of contemporary art.

This, however, does not mean that it is irrelevant. There are two ways that this kind of exhibiting is pertinent to an archaeological exhibition: Firstly, it creates a unique challenge in terms of the demystification process. How to demystify an artist whose name, origin, workshop, working methods, tools, ideological stance, and social role are unknown, if the key to mystery is the combination of ignorance and curiosity? This will be addressed below. Secondly, there is a more superficial implication. Even though the dialogue is not present, an imaginary dialogue can be constructed.

term is coined by Seth Siegelau and exhibited in *The Artists Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement*, 1971.

⁷¹ Peter Osborne, “Imaginary Radicalisms: Notes on the Libertarianism of Contemporary Art” in *ISMS: Recuperating Political Radicality in Contemporary Art*. 1. Constructing the Political in Contemporary Art, *Verksted*, Vol. 8.

One result of the rejection of the myth of the authorial intent or artistic authority that is emblematic to the period that follows the events of late 1960s is the gap of authorhood. This is perhaps best marked by the emergence of the “star-curator.” In the instance of documenta 5: *Befragung der Realität – Bildwelten heute* (Questioning Reality – Picture-worlds today) in 1972, curated by Harald Szeemann alone, the inner-antagonisms of this emancipatory conception of art (and art history) become slowly visible. (Fig. 20) One central theme of documenta 5, in direct contrast to the abstract art oriented earlier documentas is the notion of *realities*, intentionally in plural and unashamedly pluralistic. (cf. Fig. 21) The construction of the “individual mythologies” that constitute “individual realities” as “parallel visual lives” comes to constitute the emancipation of the museum from the dicta of the artist, performing that demystification process. Szeemann juxtaposes the “high” and “low” in an effort to allow the viewer to construct her own “individual mythology” of what art is. Where, she finds photorealism and brutally naked political reality, a tableau-vivant and an advertisement poster. (Fig. 22-25) Indeed, the success of documenta 5 is clear from the reaction it attracts, a criticism in unison from the left and the right. For the right, the documenta is the reduction of art into a pseudo-philosophical sociology, a view on art that is solely based on process and plurality, without affirming or rejecting what art ought to be. From the left, it was not radical enough in its emancipatory subversion. Indeed, this may be true, in the sense that the conceptual dimension of the hundred-day “event” is comparatively tamed, in comparison with later reiterations of the documenta.

The plurality of this historic moment, in transforming art into a question of what art can be is strictly speaking emancipatory. It is a paradigm shift. However, this

emancipation from the myth of the author also brings about the myth of the curator's authority. After all, the gap ought to be filled. This is the inception of the star-curator. She is a sort of a guru that becomes the ultimate authority on how to frame art. This tension between the artist and the curator in the space of authority can be followed even in the career of Szeemann himself, this will be a point we will address in Chapter 5.

Now, in terms of Torlonia exhibition, the fitness of the thematic, demystifying approach clearly has its merits. Indeed, we may (and indeed in the following chapter we shall) argue that the ontological position of the archaeological object, however detailed and troubled a journey it has before ending up in the Torlonia Exhibition, is comparable to this paradigm of the rejection of the myth of the authorial creation.

In terms of practicality, however, we see a series of thematic arrangements in the exhibition. One, for instance, Room II, can be read around the theme of life. The room is organised to depict the life of a human in more or less chronological terms. Upon entrance, to the right-hand-side, the viewer is greeted by a statue of a female and a series of three athlete statues. The first one, the female, is the group of Eirene and Ploutos (Peace and Wealth) and as it usually is the case, Eirene is holding the baby Ploutos on her hand. (Fig. 26) In turn, Ploutos is holding a small cornucopia and is reaching the face of Eirene. Then there are the boys. All attributes of an athlete statue, which are generally redundant to list, are evident: youthful, muscular, and boyish. All three of these boys are in *contrapposto* and in action. (Fig. 27) One is stretching his hair tie, therefore his arms are extended, another is pouring oil onto his body, his left hand framing his lower torso and his right arm extended over his head. In the middle of the room are two statues, one of a nymph and the other of a satyr. (Fig. 18) These two are positioned in a way that even

though they are individual statues, it looks as if the satyr is making an advance towards the nymph. Then, there is the mysterious statue, no 33. This statue, the catalogue notes, is not in the exhibition due to its continuing restoration.⁷² However, it is a statue of a Dacian prisoner, with a long beard and elderly face. (Fig. 29) It is unclear where he would be positioned in the room but it seems likely that it is closer to the satyr-nymph, in the middle of the room, than the athletes are. Finally, on the left-hand-side of the room are two large sarcophagi and two funerary reliefs that are hung on the wall next to them. (Fig. 30)

This room is organised as a life-journey. The first figure, Eirene holding baby Ploutos is childhood and then comes youth, represented by the athlete statues. Then, the centre of the room, adulthood and love and matrimony lead to the old age, symbolized by the Dacian prisoner. Finally, the ultimate destiny is alluded to by the funerary reliefs and the sarcophagi. Looking at the objects through this thematic reading change the way they are seen. The athletes that would be unremarkable in another context, as being examples of a cliché style of idealised youths, with perfect muscular structure and boyish faces, suddenly become representative not of an ideal boy but a manifestation of a real human. In this context, the long-familiar attributes attain new meaning when compared to the (non-existing) old slave. Their youthfulness and open arms contrast with the closed arms of the prisoner. Their distant gazes become antithetic to the reaching hand of the baby Ploutos. The playfulness of the satyr and his open posture, mischievous smile, become signs of living when taken in relation to the closed sarcophagi.

Room III (featuring a cup and a relief of Herakles), Room V (with an Odysseus statue and a warrior group), Room VI (with a Marsyas and Apollo holding the skin of

⁷² *Exhibition Catalogue*, 190.

Marsyas) and Room XII (composed of statues of a muse and a philosopher) also make use of this thematic/transparent method of display. (Fig. 31-33)

E. Ahistorical

The maturity of the ahistorical method, born from the untenable antagonisms of the star-curator, demystification and plurality, is seen in Harald Szeemann's 1988 exhibition *Ahistorisches Denken* in Rotterdam, even though there are distinguishable traces of the method even in earlier exhibitions, e.g. the *When Attitudes Become Form* of 1969. The method is the manifestation of the *events* of 1980s in two ways, one positively, one negatively.⁷³

Firstly and negatively, it is a direct response to the museum boom that the 1980s saw with the liberalisation of the (cultural) "marketplace." With the number of museums rapidly increasing, the strong political messaging of the museum of the post-1968 period and the thematic or chronological modes of display came to repeat themselves. The museum before the 1980s was concerned with its self-representation, and following the post-modernist spirit, as an institution of authority this sentiment of healthy self-critique came to negatively define what a museum was.⁷⁴ Any thematic arrangement, however transparent in organisation, was ultimately an exercise of an authority that forced a certain way of looking at the public. The label was a supposed "correct interpretation" and the choice of artists was an authoritarian, non-democratic process in which the

⁷³ Here, I am strictly using the terminology of Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), where the notion of event is what retroactively constitutes the being in a given material context.

⁷⁴ Shubert, *Curator's Egg*, 67.

viewer had no say.⁷⁵ In other words, the revolution of the thematic museum in shifting the focus from style to content was ultimately a self-defeating premise.

Secondly, the effects of neo-liberalism are analytically *sine qua non*. The very definition of what was an institution was changing. The rejection of “reliance” on the state on issues like employment, health-care, education, housing, and so forth, signal a shift from a guarantee to a contract.⁷⁶ Indeed, the role of the state was no longer to provide a minimal set of services to the public, but to facilitate the public in creating the maximal enjoyment to themselves. Similarly, the museum, being another institution of authority as the post-modernists clearly showed, followed suit. The task of the curator, under this new paradigm, is no longer to present to the public a common, agreed-upon way of reading or interpreting a group of objects, but to facilitate them in creating an enjoyable experience for themselves, through whichever reading and interpretation of the content

Furthermore, the notion of universality, under a distinctly neo-liberal framework, is also present in the ahistorical display. In putting together works of different periods, schools and styles, the ahistorical curator offers a window unto what is so clearly universal in these discrete episodes. In putting Breughel’s *Tower of Babel*, Beuys’ pieces of furniture and Rubens’ *Three Crosses* in the same room that is a space for its space-ness in virtue of its being completely white, and without any labels or identification or interpretation, Szeemann, a precursor of the post-modernity, manages to point to the viewer a direct experience of the universally subjective position of “spiritual confusion,” even feeding from primary phenomenological or sensory experience, one that motivated

⁷⁵Shubert, *Curator’s Egg*, 89.

⁷⁶Minerva Cuevas, *Curating with light luggage*, Liam Gillick ed. (Munich: Revolver Publishing, 2005), 24.

these artists to creation.⁷⁷ (Fig. 34) Indeed the historical condition and its material necessity that is the context of these works is not all-important, as the *experience* (one that the viewer is invited to share) is itself universal in all cultures and periods.⁷⁸ The task of the curator, then, is to be like a mid-wife, to help the viewer come into that experiential space through the works of art already present, which are the manifestations of that same token.

Commonly, the ahistorical mode goes hand-in-hand with the stylistic considerations, not on the part of the curator only, but more importantly in the artist also. Szeemann's 1988 exhibition features works predominantly from sixteenth century onwards, not by accident but because the notion of style emerges as a fundamental category of artistic production and art historical analysis around that period. A notable exception is the *Venus de Milo*; however, given its position in the debate of style, it does not stand as a counterexample. (Fig. 35)

At this juncture, *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) stands as a point of paradigm shift in the relationship the curator has to the object as a direct manifestation of post-modernity. We will discuss this later in Chapter 5.

To appreciate the essential challenge of using an ahistorical method effectively in the archaeological content, a series of distinctions and clarifications need to be made.

⁷⁷ Deborah Meijers, "The Museum and the Ahistorical Exhibition" in *Thinking about exhibitions* Reesa Greenberg; Bruce W Ferguson, Sandy Nairne ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 6.

⁷⁸ Morgan von Prella Pecelli, Trajal Harrell, Travis Chamberlain, Ben Pryor, Jonah Bokaer and Patricia Milder, "Curating Contemporary Performance" *A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 34. 1, 186.

4 Ahistorical Aspects

I. Archaeology between Art and Natural History

Firstly, what is a Museum? We have hinted at this point above, however, at this point some formal position ought to be established. Commonly, the birth of the Museum is modelled upon the Louvre or the British Museum. Both mark, in historical terms, a transition from the way objects of interest (e.g. art, antiquity, fossils, books, relics etc.), from a private (aristocratic) to a public (middle-class, popular) eye. The difference is that in the case of the Louvre, this transition is a break, a revolutionary discontinuity and in the case of the British Museum, it is a century long process of reform, it is evolutionary. In terms of a modernist, liberal ideological position, the thing that ought to mark the *essence* of a museum is its publicness and that is why from that same perspective, the Louvre would be a better model for the modern museum, because from its inception in the revolutionary fervour, it is established as an ideological state apparatus. It shows to the French people, in a pedagogical way, firstly their common human heritage, then, after the 18th Brumaire, the fruits of their conquest, and their superiority over the backwards regimes of Europe.

We do accept the liberal position that the essence of the museum (as an institution) is being for the public. However, if this is taken to be the case, then there is a problem, because predating the Louvre by at least some twenty years (if taken more liberally, by three centuries!) is the Capitoline Museum. In fact, this is a trend in Italian

principalities of reforming the way artefacts (and in particular art and antiquities) are understood in public life.⁷⁹ The Real Museo Borbonico opens to the public in 1777; Museo Oliveriano in Pesaro, in 1756; Museo di Paolo Orsi, as Museo del Seminario in Syracuse in 1780... These can be seen as insightful reading of the political climate and accordingly preventative measures to bolster a sort of local ideological narrative. In this sense, that most of these museums were focused on antiquities, and at that local antiquities, could be seen as the narrative power these objects enjoy in the Italian context.

Even in the “first public” museum, the Louvre, a substantial number of antiquities were exhibited; however, they were mostly aesthetic objects, just like art under a traditionalist reading.⁸⁰ The museum was not required to narrate *the history of the Romans or Greeks, but the art of sculpture*. Even during the period of the extensive projects of the early 1900s (such as the excavations of the Forum and Ostia in Rome) the way these were interpreted was closely tied to (if not fully determined by) the aesthetics (even though as a means to a political end) and not to research: the Forum becomes an *ikona* of pride for the currently constructed Italian identity.⁸¹

A curious case, in explaining this is the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Established in 1881 and opened in 1891 by Osman Hamdi (1842—1910)⁸², it was one of

⁷⁹ Marcello Barbanera and Nicola Terrenato, *L'archeologia degli italiani*, (Milan: Editori riuniti, 1998), 29.

⁸⁰ McClellan, *Musée du Louvre*, 308.

The prestigious epithet of ‘the first museum’ is a contended one by the British Museum and the Louvre. I take it to be the Louvre, simply due to the fact that it was public. Unlike the British Museum, the Louvre opened its doors to the members of all classes. As being totally public is a defining concept of the notion of museum, that epithet must be bestowed upon the revolutionary Louvre.

⁸¹ James Packer, “Report from Rome: The Imperial Fora, a Retrospective” *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 101. 2, 308

For instance, the excavation of the Forum in 1905, even though deeply impressive in the sheer amount of labour and its discoveries, did not aim to teach Roman political or religious life to the public, but instead to posit what being Italian meant.

⁸² A man worthy of a section on his own, a Renaissance man of the *fin-de-siècle*, a pioneer in photography, a painter, an archaeologist, a collector, a curator, a teacher and the first mayor of Kalkedon,

the earliest places to be strictly devoted to the installations for teaching of the local culture to a public audience. Through local finds and his private collection, Osman Hamdi, who was up-to-date with the movements and shifts happening in the European intellectual landscape, arranged his museum to start with fragments from “early local peoples,” then took a quick jump to pre-Greek civilisations, then formulated a precise division of the time under the periods of Hellenics, Alexandrians, Romans and early Turks (i.e. pre-Ottoman).⁸³ The collection had no category of the Byzantines, for the local Greek population still called themselves *Romans* (more precisely, *Rûm*, from mediaeval *Rhoûmos*); in other words, the curator spoke the language of the audience. The initial ideological and performative function of the museum of archaeology is to *teach* the public, it cannot teach without speaking the audience’s language. Nevertheless, this is a dynamic structure, because, in linguistic terms, what is “teaching” if not actively trying to change the language spoken.⁸⁴ The task that fell on Osman Hamdi is not only to present the history of the land to its dwellers in terms that they could understand, but more importantly allow them to see their own land in a different way. It is a way for him to construct a synthetic identity that is neither Turkish, nor Roman, but *Anatolian*. In this sense, if nothing else, his private attempt is comparable to Royal Italian archaeological enterprises, in the precise aim at synthesising a contemporary identity through a shared heritage, albeit for different cultural or ethnic groups.

after conducting (unscientific for our standards, but comparable, sometimes beyond his western European counterparts) excavations, manages to convince the Sultan to donate a koshk (a large palazzo) so that they can be show to the public.

⁸³ Renata Holod and Robert Ousterhout. *Osman Hamdi Bey & Amerikalilar / Arkeoloji Diploması / Sanat*, exhibition catalogue, (Istanbul: Pera, 2012), 23. Fix cit.

⁸⁴ Lynne Sullivan and Terry Childs, *Curating Archaeological Collections*, (Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2013), 73-5.

In this sense, the museum of archaeology is comparable to the museum of natural history. Both aim to show the public a greater reality that is older and greater than they are. In the case of the natural history, that greater narrative is nature, and her various creations, each aiming to inspire awe in the viewer. The size of the fossils; the cataloguing of *all* known species; the spectacle of most exotic plants make a metaphysical statement about the position of the human in relation to the planet habited. The exhibits were tamed specimens of the normally great and often dangerous things. The flower from the Amazon may not seem so dangerous but the Amazon is. The viewer was given a chance to experience the extent of the creations of the God/Nature, in the comfort of a public space. Then, the metaphysical statement: we are the masters of nature, embodying the positivist spirit fully. Kant's description of the sublime is worthy of remembering: a sensation that arises from "fearfulness without being afraid"⁸⁵ or the Sensation (i.e. the fearfulness) being overshadowed by Reason (i.e. knowing there is nothing to fear).

A similar reading is possible for the museum of archaeology, as it emerged from the museum of art as independent institution, perhaps due to the influence of positivist and scientific methodology establishing itself through the nineteenth century. These museums too exhibit things that are greater than the viewer is; they too inspire awe and fearfulness in their sheer magnitude or intricacy. The viewer feels that she is in the presence of something so old that it should not have been possible (for ultimately the viewer sees history as a linear progression from miserable to comfortable). She naturally asks, "How did they do that?" However this is only a heuristic question that can be useful for so long. Simply because the object-matter of the museum of art and archaeology are

⁸⁵ Kant, *Judgement*, 28d.

both human-made. Therefore, it must be the aesthetic judgement and not the sublime that guides the viewing of antiquities.⁸⁶ However, differing from fine arts, antiquities (as seen above) are ways to teach their histories to the people and change the way they see and perform themselves. It is therefore no surprise that a tenor of nationalist rhetoric is often the rule for early museums of archaeology.⁸⁷ Both the revolutionary and reactionary theses of such museums are dictated by nationalist or imperialist agendas, respectively. In other words, the task is to create either a national consciousness or a way to let the public think as if it participates in the empire.⁸⁸ This process does not require the viewer to *understand* but simply realise through reasoning (indeed, it may work better if the viewer does not understand anything at all). This is the paradox of the museum of archaeology. To function, it needs to have objects of aesthetics as substance and objects of natural history as form. It is a *bastard* institution.

This paradox is “solved” in practice by the introduction of distance. Just as Kant notes, the distance between the viewer and the lighting is what makes the experience sublime. Similarly, a distance not in space, but in time has to be introduced for the antiquities. Without that distance, the viewer would be ambivalent to the objects or, worse, be carried away by them. It is a critical balance between the production of no meaning and multiple meanings, where the institution aims at one.

⁸⁶ A Hegelian reading is preferable here to a Kantian one, because it gives a more precise definition to beauty and as casting it as an ideological term, therefore is more applicable to art.

⁸⁷ The French National Museum of Archaeology was first called Gallo-Roman Museum, then Celtic and Gallo-Roman Museum, etc.

⁸⁸ Annie E. Coombes, *Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities*, OJA. Vol. 11. 2, 61.

This illusion of participation is indeed a curious one and it seems to have been prevalent in all venues of life. It is said that in Victorian England, under the assumption that sexual pleasure was reserved for the “rational sex,” the “fairer sex” was advised to “just close your eyes and think of England.” This is a very accurate demonstration of that illusion of participation. A direct quote is found in “Canada at war!” *The Windsor Daily Star*, 2 November 1940.

II. Mind the Gap: Temporal and Spatial Distance

There is an unbridgeable gap between the viewer and the antiquity. This is not simply due to an anthropological problem with the way these objects are viewed, but more so the shifts in their symbolic meaning through history, and the inner-contradictions apparent in these historic moments.

Firstly, starting with the ancient moment, even as Aristotle notes, the statue of Apollo a sculptor makes “stands for” Apollo.⁸⁹ The sculptor in creating a statue, indeed gives a form to the marble, and that form, what he calls the “formal cause” is the god himself. It would serve as a bridge between the god and the mortal. However, precisely because of this, the viewer will be inherently alienated from the god, because the thing that she sees can never capture the *essence* of the god, but at best be an approximation. Aristotle views this as a cathartic moment when in something non-divine, an experience arises, however, he is also quick to dismiss this as temporary and ultimately not genuinely spiritual moment. Plato, similarly, is only too eager to ban all visual art, because, as he rightly observes they are mere faulty copies of reality, which itself is a faulty copy of the Ideas.⁹⁰

In this paradigm, the theory of art as representation (*mimesis*) plays a central role. For Aristotle, the reason the sculptor needs to put the god in the form of a human is that his ability to capture the essence of the divine is limited to his own representational imagination. This is why, perhaps, there is what we now call “idealisation” in Greek sculpture, because the point is to capture the great in terms of real. In essence, this is the manifestation of the first gap: the gap between the real and the ideal.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 34a.

⁹⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 10.

Now, the dialectical opposite of this position can be found, for instance, when we look at *Augustus in the guise of Apollo*. There are two ways to read this. On the one hand, it could be said that Augustus, a mortal human, takes on the appearance of Apollo. Even if not physically, at least ideologically, his symbolic representation and Apollo's symbolic representation merge to state that Apollo is to be found in Augustus, in a sense, the Emperor is the God walking on earth.

On the other hand, it could be read as Apollo takes on the appearance of Augustus. Here, the ideological statement is the exact opposite: Augustus is the closest we can get to Apollo. In this case, Augustus becomes a symbol through which we can grasp the very presence of the Apollo. In other words, the emperor's essence is closer than any one of us to the divine presence of the God. In this case, the God is the Emperor reigning in Olympus.

In both of these contrary readings, the statue serves as an acknowledgement of the gap between human and mortal. This gap, may only be bridged by the introduction of an ideological apparatus, a symbolic meaning that is going to fix the reference of what that statue means. In any case, these two readings cannot be simultaneously true and indeed, the history of Greek and Roman art show that to us precisely. After fourth century, the art of monumental sculpture fades away, unable to stand its inner-contradictions, not being able to bridge the gap.

The second moment in the history of ancient sculpture is early modernity, starting with Renaissance. Here, again, the ancient sculpture presents itself in a dual-nature. On the one hand, it is an object to be studied by artists in a studio. On the other hand, it is an object to be adored and exhibited in a palazzo.

When an artist studies an ancient object, she does so to learn of the “ancient masters” to perfect her own art. It is a greatness that is long lost and in need of recovered by the hand of the artist. Her own art becomes, if not an imitation, an interpretation of the ancients and the meaning of the ancient statue becomes an unattainable object of desire.

Similarly, for the princes of Renaissance, the ancient sculpture is also an unattainable object of desire. However, their desire is in collecting. There is a mania, an obsession with owning these sculptures and showing them to their peers. Here, the unattainability is driven not from the impossibility of capturing a quality, as it is with the artist, but quantity. No matter how many great, much sought after pieces she has, the collector can never be satisfied. The Torlonia family, albeit a late example of this, is a very accurate representation of this phenomenon.

The impossibility, qualitatively or quantitatively, of capturing the ancient sculpture thus creates another gap. This dual nature is similarly untenable and a synthesis of the two categories emerges soon, with the notion of public museum, where the object can be seen both as a study and as a collection. However, the ancient sculpture in museum, too, brings about its own inner-contradictions.

With the rise of archaeology as a discipline, one that aids other disciplines through unearthing — quite literally — primary evidence, it comes to see the ancient sculpture as a historical document. This has a natural consequence of an extreme carefulness, due to a fear of damage to data, towards the object. When it puts the sculpture in a museum, it also erects a transparent wall around it (sometimes literally, as well) from the very public it proclaims to be serving.⁹¹ It is a recent phenomenon that

⁹¹ James Putnam, *Art and Artifact: Museum As Medium*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 55.

photography is allowed in museums, with flash photography still forbidden. No visitor is allowed to feel the softness of the marble, the coldness of the bronze.

At the same time, the ancient statue in a museum is often to be looked in awe, as we explained in above section. This is the true gap of the contemporary viewer with the antiquities. It is at the same time an object of sublime and of science, of scholarship. A cold, but distant object, which the viewer can only see but never feel.

Here, Torlonia Exhibition returns to solve this contradiction. The vision of Settis and Gasparri is not to present these object as distant, cold objects of pure scholarship but as artefacts of a way of being. In his Prada twin-exhibitions, Settis deals with this issue. A possible solution to the inner-antagonism of contemporary classicism, for him, is classicism not only as an intellectual and scholarly practice, but as an ontological performance, a way of seeing the world, interacting with it and *touching* the classics, without physically touching them.⁹²

In that sense, *Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces* presents this notion of *classicism qua being*, through its fine treatment of research and sensuality to its viewer. The exhibition does not try to recreate the original viewing setting, but translates it into the language of contemporary viewer, in visual terms that she can understand and appreciate. It is a research exhibition, as much as a *researched* exhibition. It invites the viewer to be curious, to ask her own questions by presenting carefully researched scholarship in a formally contemporary visual landscape.

⁹² Salvatore Settis and Anna Anguissola, *Serial Classic*, 2015, Fondazione Prada.

5 Curation as a Linguistic Practice

A. Curation as a Formal Linguistic Practice: History of curation shows that curatorial method is methodical choice of curatorial methods

Throughout this paper, we have treated methods of curation as sets of practices that have developed organically and as a response to certain historical material conditions. In this scheme that we have presented, the practice of curation ought to be understood as a very particular way of meaning production. Let us now illustrate the mechanics of this process.

Initially, there is the object. The object is and always ought to be a statement on its nature. There are two arguments for this. Firstly, analogically speaking, the object – whatever it is, from a piece of mineral to the Venus de Milo, from a bronze pin to a urinal – can be acted with as if there is a creator with an intention. In case of the urinal this is most clear. In case of the mineral, one may need to resort to a teleological position or do as those naïve Christian modernists do, taking the fossil to be put there by the God to create an illusion of depth, not too dissimilar to setting a scene in the stage. Therefore in any case, this object is indeed the materialisation of a precise idea or a less-precise intention, in both cases the interpretation of and an answer to a certain context, the question being “what is it that I am doing?”

Secondly, there is the argument from authority (in its most literal sense, of author-hood). That this thing is put here for us to see retroactively recasts that object in a

different light.⁹³ This is no novelty. However, it also recasts the viewer's self-portrait as well. The viewer is not only invited to question the nature of the object, but acknowledge that any definition she could give would be exhausted by her intimate contingencies, as well. This is where the supposed dialogue happens in an authorial viewing space.

In case of a piece of art, this is *simpliciter* the case. The object (if any) is the manifestation of a conceptual scheme that is itself a question concerning what is art.⁹⁴ This is art. This is why style or what is contingent or particular is determined by the historical and material context, and therefore is secondary to the essential or universal idea, which is in a sense pure. Furthermore, this is also why such a practice is always political, because it is by definition a critique of human practice.⁹⁵ It forces the question “why do we do it like this” which is the exact definition of (feminine) hysteria.⁹⁶

Even though the object of hysteric self-doubt is historically determined, i.e. the social conditions are more or less responsible for the epithets attributed to “woman.” However, the experience of hysteria is time-less. Indeed the question is not whether I fit into the historically determined category, but what I am subjectively. The self-doubt and consequent inability to create a stable narrative dominate the primary experience and everything seems as happening at once. This is the purest sense of contemporaneity.

⁹³ Herbert Marcuse, *A Study on Authority*, (London: Verso, 1936), 14.

⁹⁴ Blake Stimson “Conceptual Work and Conceptual Waste” *Discourse*, Vol. 24. 2.: 121-151, 133.

⁹⁵ Hito Steyerl “Look out, it’s real!” in ISMS: Recuperating Political Radicality in Contemporary Art. 1. Constructing the Political in Contemporary Art, *Verksted*, Vol. 8.

⁹⁶ In Freudian and more so in Lacanian psychotherapy, there are two kinds of neurosis (subject’s disassociation with reality) one is obsessional neurosis, where the subject questions *his* subjective existence (this is also called masculine) and the other, hysteric neurosis, where the subject questions *her* objective existence: You call me a daughter, a mother, a lover, etc. but am I all those things? Am I a woman? What is a woman? See Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, (New York: Macmillan, 1985) and particularly Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

In case of archaeological objects, as outlined above, this process is more intricate. The contemporaneity is conceptually there, but at the same time there is a failure of the ego in trying to grasp of what it is intended as a statement. This is primarily due to the distance in question and, as a result of that, the ambiguity of the category of perception – sublime or aesthetic?

A piece of antiquity is an object of art; however, its original conception (that is the material and conceptual space in which it is created) is lost to the contemporary viewer. Therefore, the object can be treated as an object of marvel (more akin to a piece of rare mineral or dinosaur bones) instead of an object that stands for a statement (that is art). This gap leaves the curator with two choices. Either she may reconfigure the object as an object of beauty, in which case the artistic conception is replaced by the perceptual reception, or she may reframe the object as an object of ideology, e.g. educating the public or inspiring nationalism or reinforcing the empire, in which case, the artistic conception is exhausted by the curatorial intent. In either case, the meaning production is not due to the object or the artist, but the curator. Indeed, in this case, the role of the curator is comparable to the artist rather than the curator of art, in the sense that whatever the curator of antiquity does, she approaches the objects in question as ready-mades and puts them in a context that is deemed different (or indeed higher) than the original functional space they occupied.

In the case of aesthetic organisation, there are notions of style, taste, pleasantness, sensation, spectacle, etc. In case of ideological organisation, there is the process of constructing a common or public identity. In its most benevolent form, this is pedagogy, in its darkest, a dangerous form of violent identity. In both cases, the task of the museum

curator is to create a common language for the public. This common language can be to facilitate the access to public good or to drive of public consumption. In other words, at which point does art stop and advertising start?

In a strictly modernist conception, the *raison d'être* of the museum is to present to the public the opportunity to participate in the discourse or at least feel as if participating in it. However, this modernist consensus is and has been, now for a while, eroding. With the museum becoming a large event-organising institution rather than a place of scholarship and its presentation to the public, a new kind of post-modern performativity is created.⁹⁷ Now, the part practices of authentic modernist techniques are repeated and continued, but without actually believing in their ideological motivations. This performativity of constant self-reinvention is unavoidably cynical.⁹⁸ Even at the level of language, this is clear. The terminology used is continuous with the scholarly jargon, but without the theoretical rigour that grounds it. A term in becoming the concrete meaning of a conceptual notion becomes a synonym of an ordinary word, its semantic precision stripped away and content emptied. It is a continuity of forms without the substances.

This nonetheless can create a common language, even though hollowed out, has currency, but that language would consist of words that do not mean anything. At this point, words of Marx in the Communist Manifesto are insightful: “[under capitalism] everything that is solid melts into thin air.” The Museum as an institution and the curator as its ideological agent in material history, are already melting the common language it was set out to construct, one thought to be as solid as any other institution at its

⁹⁷ Marius Wulfsberg “What to do with what is Left” in ISMS: Recuperating Political Radicality in Contemporary Art. 1. Constructing the Political in Contemporary Art, *Verksted*, Vol. 8.

⁹⁸ Sharon McDonald, “Exhibitions of power and powers of exhibition: An introduction to the politics of display” in *Politics of Display*, Sharon McDonald ed. (London: Routledge, 1997), 7.

inception.⁹⁹ As its replacement, the public is presented with a cynical performance that nevertheless creates a performative common language.

In essence, then, the notion of curation can be analysed as symbolic meaning production. The object stands for a statement and the curator arranges these statements in such a way that when they are *read* in conjunction there is a greater understanding. This is what philosophers of language call a social division of linguistic labour. As outlined by Hilary Putnam, it works on two levels.¹⁰⁰ Firstly, there is the initial baptism, the inception of a linguistic notion that refers to a certain thing. Then, there is the primary utterance, where a member of the linguistic community uses the notion initially baptised by the baptiser to refer to that same thing. Then, is the secondary utterance, where a distant member of the linguistic community uses the same word to refer to the primary utterance, which in turn refers to the initial baptism. This is a causal chain of reference.

For instance, the person who discovers that what is made of two hydrogen atoms per oxygen atom baptises ‘water is H₂O’ and subsequent references to water refer to this baptism, thereby establishing an unbroken chain of references: her student uses water as H₂O and publishes a paper, and the reader of that paper when referring to water refers to the notion as it appears in the paper, which refers to the initial discovery. A similar process of linguistic division of labour happens in our case, too.¹⁰¹ The artist produces the initial meaning (initial baptism), then the curator puts this meaning in a visual installation

⁹⁹Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, (London: Verso, 1983), 121.

¹⁰⁰Such is called a “natural kind” and is first definitively articulated by Saul Kripke, *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures*, (Oxford: OUP, 2013). However, for a continuation of the analytic category of natural kinds, see Hillary Putnam “The meaning of ‘meaning’” *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* Vol 7. Also, Hilary Putnam and Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, “La divisione del lavoro linguistico” *Athanos*, Vol. 7.

¹⁰¹Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*, (Milan: Bompiani, 1968), 49.

(primary utterance), and the viewer that sees it arrives at a certain conclusion (secondary utterance). The meaning, therefore, is produced not as a dialogue between the artist and the viewer, but among the artist, the curator, and the viewer, becoming more and more complex at every ring of the chain of references.¹⁰²

One question, then, is the position of the museum in relation to the initial baptism and secondary utterance. The object of art retains its *essential meaning*, i.e. its initial baptism throughout, however, at each point in which it is “quoted” by the ideological practices of curation, installation, critique, cataloguing, etc, it is added a secondary utterance. This works the same way the notion ‘H₂O’ functions in a scientific-linguistic community. What is the *essential meaning* of a piece, then? That meaning is empty, because inevitably it refers to itself and says nothing more than pointing out a certain possibly conception of what it is to be an object. This is why the secondary utterance will come to dominate its semantic space.¹⁰³

B. Curation as Pragmatic Linguistic Practice: History of curation shows that curatorial discourse is discursive choice of curatorial discourses

Within the framework of the semantic space of an object of interest (artistic, archaeological, natural historical, etc.), then, every curatorial method is a set of organic practices that have developed as a consequence of certain historical, ideological, and material conditions, and naturally with inner contradictions, and more importantly as answers to certain concerns, thereby enforcing certain categories of knowledge, while

¹⁰² It is important to notice that this process of primary and secondary utterances also have ontological implications and at the point of ontology, we can call it a dialectic process, because it is in constant change and self-creation. Each subsequent layer adds a new perspective to the previous ones.

¹⁰³ Nathalie Zonnenberg, *Conceptual Art in a Curatorial Perspective*, (Valiz/vis-à-vis, 2019), 19.

negating other concerns and discarding other questions. It is precisely these unanswered (even unanswerable) questions that formulate the inner contradictions.

The mode identified as chronological or historic above is the product of the experience of modernity, a desire to formulate grand narratives and is dominated by the myth of progress. Starting with Denon's Louvre and climaxing with Bode's Kaiser Wilhelm museum, the chronological display reinforces a teleological structure that is punctuated by progress, emblematic of the optimism of modernity. It centralises not style but development of style, as if the career of an artist (or history of art itself) is to attain a certain style. Here, the myth of the ancient plays a large part. It questions how a style has developed and what is the end of its development; it does not question what style is and what the elements that determine a style are. The museum, consequently, is the place of participating in this grand narrative, in essence, an agent of the progress that it manifests, leading the public forwards to whatever ends.

As the progressive premise of modernity and the influence of the institution of the museum are crushed, the grand narrative of progression of history as manifested through the development or maturation of style, leaves style in its place. This curatorial discourse, identified as formalism above, makes no great claim on the direction of history, emphasises the necessity to appreciate the way form interacts with content, while avoiding defining that content. It nevertheless does not seek to make any assertions on why particular forms appear in certain contexts, and how that context may be influencing the form and content simultaneously.¹⁰⁴ This timidity is also echoed in the self-identification of the museum and its desire to be free of its totalitarian legacy.

¹⁰⁴ Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

Eventually, however, this formalist paradigm also breaks, with the ever-increasing demand for a way to investigate social realities and against the (ironically) authoritarian workings of the museum. However hard the post-war museum had tried to free itself from that past, it in fact reaffirms it, as the ultimate decision-making process in what is deemed a formally superior art is at the heart of what defines it. The contradiction of the post-war curation was its insistence in the procedure of artistic-meaning-production, while refusing to partake in social issues.¹⁰⁵ May 1968 is the manifestation of this contradiction, as the demand is the diametrical opposite: museum as a social agent, while making its bureaucracy as transparent as possible. This radical change of tone is perhaps most evident in Szeemann's documenta in comparison to Bode's fourth.

In turn, what has been called a thematic mode of display, even though revolutionising in the presenting immediately relevant and interesting content, thereby turning the curator into an intermediary between the artist's conception and the viewer's understanding – perhaps biased towards the artist – fails to appreciate the need of emergence on the viewer's part. This is again due to the focus of the curatorial practice, on the artist rather than the viewer, which eventually leads to the *new museum*, dominated by corporate concerns and spectacular shows that appeal to the public.¹⁰⁶ This, in turn, defines a new role for the curator, as an intermediary that manages to bring art to the viewer through her choices based on her taste, becoming what is now commonly called “the arbiter of taste.”¹⁰⁷ If the viewer simply wants to experience something, then the curator indeed curates an experience, suspended in a temporality that captures the

¹⁰⁵ Day, *Dialectical*, 26.

¹⁰⁶ Cecilia Ribaldi, *Il Nuovo Museo: Origine e Percorsi*, (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2005), 285-6.

¹⁰⁷ Meijer, *Ahistorical*, 9.

viewer.¹⁰⁸ At that, the viewer need not know the concrete material conditions of a piece, nor does she need to know a detailed historiography of a particular technique or tradition; *as long as it works, it works*. The most extreme version of this, where no accompanying evidence is provided, was identified as an ahistorical mode of display above; however, the underlying principle is indeed what should be associated with an ahistorical (or ahistoricist) method.

Now, what *Magiciens de la Terre* marks is the paradigm shift in the category of universal subjectivity.¹⁰⁹ At a climate where ‘international art exhibition’ means “now with some Germans included” the 1989 exhibition marks the invention of an interpretative space, where the artist’s creation and conception does not determine what is art. Instead, art becomes a notion highly contingent upon the material circumstances in which it is produced. This production can have no claim to universality and therefore the authorial position of the artist is now to be interpreted through the curator, bending and reflecting it as a prism. Using, once again, the terminology of the theory of social division of linguistic labour, the museum stops exhibiting the primary utterance and replaces it with the secondary utterance.

Magiciens de la Terre multiplies the authorial intent, showing it to be a plurality and thereby reveal the institutions that support, assumptions required for and systems constructed on the notion of *author-ity*. It calls into question, quite correctly, the identification of the universal subject (that is the artist and the viewer) of art as “white, male and western.”¹¹⁰ It shatters the stable narrative of the Cold War Europe, where there

¹⁰⁸ For an interesting version of this point, cf. Sue Spaid, *Philosophy of Curatorial Practice*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ Paul O’Neill and Annie Fletcher, *Curating Subjects*, (London: Open Editions, 2007).

¹¹⁰ Jean-Hubert Martin, *L’art au large*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), 49.

is the East and the West (though one may say feeding from each other constantly) and where Africa and Asia (aptly called Third World) are battlegrounds for their conflict. *Magiciens de la Terre* simply points that this narrative is untenable in the age of popularised jet engine and (nearly) instant telecommunication. (Fig. 1)

It sharply recognises the way challenges of a globalised world. At this point, we must return to Marx and recognise how deeper a meaning his insight has. This is the evaporation of what is (or merely thought to be) solid under capitalism. After realising such notions of authority as author and museum are indeed historically contingent and consequently terms that exert a power in their inclusions and exclusions, the curator is presented with an impossible decision. Either she may reject to partake in this tragedy by redefining what her job is, or she may transform this tragedy into a post-modern cynical farce and continue playing the linguistic game of authorial intent and institutional credibility.¹¹¹ At this juncture, *Magiciens de la Terre* is a naïve attempt at the former. The latter, we now call the New Museum, where sensual perception exhausts pedagogy.

¹¹¹ Masha Gessen, “on how to survive an autocracy” in e-flux, Published: 2018, Accessed: 4 April 2021. <https://www.e-flux.com/podcasts/>

6 Conclusions; Archaeology of an Exhibition

In the light of these two linguistic considerations, viz. the symbolic and discursive meaning productions, the Torlonia Marbles becomes an answer to the question of how to meaningfully exhibit antiquities. On the one hand, there is the problem of ascribing a nature to the objects themselves beyond simply positing them as objects of admiration. Above, we have put the object of archaeology as a synthetic construct between the object of aesthetic and object of nature. The archaeological artefact shares the form of object of art but its substance is diluted through the similarity to object of natural history. The almost uniform method of creating a meaning for the archaeological object then is through the introduction of a notion of taste. Taste, in this case, is the universal aesthetic judgement materialised in a particular contextual or historical space and its subsequent systematisation.

This historicism may be *prima facie* overt or covert. The difference lies in the discourse the curator attributes to the narrative constructed around the objects in question. Even though it is nonetheless true that any exhibition is a statement on what an exhibition is and what can be called an exhibition, the curator may or may not chose to take the objects as organic artefacts with their own histories. Above, we have presented what is now called ahistorical method in this same paradigm. Now, the discourse presented in the visual narrative may also question how things past relate to the present appreciation of the exhibition, this is found in Germano Celant's work.

In this sense, the Torlonia exhibition follows Celant's curatorial vision in bringing forth the objects as part of a historical process and manifests different ways of presenting them to the viewer through its internal organisation. Even at its face-value, the internal organisations of the rooms (or more precisely sections indicated by the colours) not only present different ways objects of antiquity can be presented but draws close inspirations from they have been indeed presented in the Torlonia Villas and apartments. In this sense, the first room becomes a direct reference to the way the portrait busts were shown in their imposing glory in the Torlonia Museum.

This can be contrasted with the thematically oriented second room, where the young athletes are put together in a series. Even though such a composition is not to be found in the Torlonia Museum, the contemporary composition echoes a sentiment found in the original display. In any case, the formal recreation of an original viewing is not the fundamental concern. Instead, the aim is the recreation of a substance that is shared and somehow translated to the contemporary viewer, as if she is viewing it in its original display conditions. In that sense, the series of imperial busts in Room VII can be read in dialogue with the first room and as presenting an alternative to it.

In other words, through reforming the exhibition as not an exhibition of antiquities but an exhibition of their exhibition, the Torlonia Marbles manages to solve the problem of primary meaning production. This way, Drs Gasparri and Settis indeed create a viewing space in which the objects are seen through a strictly historical prism, however, in this strict conceptual organisation, a space for liberation from historicity occurs. Because the narrative among the rooms and the object installations are a theoretical given, the inner-arrangements are liberated from that historicising

consideration. This is why each room can be read not only as a methodically and theoretically complete narrative, but also visually so.

Simply because the universal concern of the curatorial choices is pedagogical, the particular choices can be guided by aesthetics. Above, we have tried to illustrate such choices with the historical methodologies they draw from, without making precise comparisons – i.e. we have not put Room IV and Bode's Kaiser Wilhelm from 1910 or Celant's 1997 Biennale – because to do so is not helpful. The Torlonia Exhibition's curatorial vision is already clear, viz. teaching about the Torlonia Collection's history through simulacra of the original viewing settings, translated to the language of contemporary viewer and only the methods of how that is to be achieved draws from historical sources. In other words, the substance is concrete and the form is creative. This also why after their division into main historical periods, the choice of which marble made it to the exhibition is purely aesthetic.

How the universal idea is materialised in the concrete particular and how that particular retroactively transforms the universal is interesting. Because the exhibition operates in a universally pedagogical framework, and because of that the particulars are purely aesthetic, these particular artefacts tend to be in excellent shape. There is no object that lacks a nose or arms, as is normally the case when one sees in an archaeological museum. This indicates heavy restoration, to a point that these restorations are visible and indeed in some cases with dubious success. Consequently, the exhibition also invites the viewer to notice and reflect on the process of restoration and preservation. In this conceptual space, then a secondary pedagogical concern arises: what is restoration, why do we restore, what is the purpose of restoring at all? This realisation retroactively

reconfigures the viewer's conception of Torlonia family and their collection. The viewer understands that there has been a substantial paradigm shift in the way notion of preservation is understood. This shift is from aesthetic-value to research-value. Subsequently, she is then invited to realise that the functional meaning of antiquities has also shifted from ornamental to evidentiary. Where they used to be things to be displayed in a house, they are now things to be displayed in a museum.

Indeed in this historical narrative, the exhibition positions Principe Alessandro Torlonia at the turning point. (And here, the universal again retroactively reinterprets the particular, which was itself retroactively reconfigured by the particular, etc. This is what we call a dialectic process and this is what we tried to show above in our reading of history of curation.) Because he is among the earlier great collectors to imagine, to dare to imagine, a public museum. He, in other words, indicates a shift in our conception of antiquities and their aesthetic ideology. They are no longer the objects of ornamentation but of research, which in itself is the materialisation of the universal idea, where archaeology becomes independent of art, both as a science and as a type of museum.

Principe Alessandro Torlonia's museum, unfortunately does not realise, but marks the start of a journey, both in his family and European history. As this is also the point where old aristocratic collections are dying out and are either appropriated into state-run, public (ie middle class) institutions or themselves have to turn into a semi-public institution, because collecting is becoming an expensive hobby to maintain. This is the death of the old rich aristocratic upper class and the conquests of the *nouveau riche* bourgeois middle class. In his family's history, it is a journey that continues to our day. The *Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces* Exhibition is intended as a travelling

exhibition that ultimately leads to the creation of Museo Torlonia, in collaboration with the state, finally becoming a semi-public institution, as imagined first by Principe Alessandro Torlonia. This museum he imagined, at its time, would be large enough (nearly 792 pieces) to compete with the likes of the Vatican, the Louvre and, of course, *the Capitoline*.

At this juncture, the location of the exhibition becomes of another layer of symbolic meaning. Now, the Torlonia Collection is exhibited in the Capitoline Museums, an institution historically rivalrous with it. In this dramatic irony, the viewer then realises that this is *sensu stricto* not true, because the exhibition is indeed not in the Capitoline's usual exhibition space, villa dei Conservatori, but in Caffarelli, otherwise known as Museo Mussolini. (Fig. 2) Now, with this understanding of the location, the exhibition also implies what is the next shift in the taste of antiquities, at least in Italian context. The choice of Caffarelli is due to its spaciousness, making the construction of a secondary viewing space easier. This is in turn, in all likelihood due to the way fascist architecture understood public space and domination of the viewer, making her feel smaller, etc.

Then, the viewer comes to question what a museum *is*. It is a place where the public can see their common heritage, objects of admiration from their past. It is a place where scholars study these objects; it is above all a place of research. Without explicitly stating that museum is not only comparable but in certain ways superior to the university as a scholarly institution, the Torlonia Exhibition simply reminds the viewer of its feasibility and perhaps its complimentary nature to the university, both for public education and scholarly research.

Before we conclude, we ought to say a few words of our methodology and why dialectics is the precise way through which we can make sense of the (Torlonia) exhibition's processes. It is precisely because in the Torlonia exhibition, as with all good – ie masterful, well-thought, pedagogically concerned, grounded, etc – exhibitions, it too operates in two distinct levels. The first level is the general idea of the project. The curatorial team have a clear picture in their vision. In our case, this is the ontological performance of classicist subjectivity. As a consequence of this, all decisions that follow stem from this clear vision. Above, we have examined how this leads to the liberation in the more practical decisions. This is the secondary level. Now, let us call this a material plane, as opposed to the ideal. Material conditions of the exhibition are by definition arbitrary, but at the same time, because they are all pre-determined by the ideal, they are also necessary. The central idea that is explored in these material constructs is, for instance, taste. The exhibition very sublimely takes the viewer to a small journey in the concrete history of taste, through a particular case-study and has her question her own understanding of taste, all the while presenting (hence sublimely) taste-full objects.

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Appendix 1 Postface

As I was finalising the above paper, chanced upon a postcard from the gift shop of the exhibition. On a black background was the Venus, in her glory and performative shame in covering herself. I asked myself, “To what does this postcard refer?”

The first answer I had was that it referred to the statue in the exhibition; that it was a memento, a souvenir of the sensory and scholarly experience of that I, as a viewer, had lived in the exhibition; that it was a physical symbol of what I had taken home from the exhibition, both literally and figuratively. This answer was satisfactory enough until I realised that it was neither correct, nor interesting. Because in reality, when I had seen that postcard, what came to my mind was not the exhibition, or what I learned from it or how I felt seeing it.

What I felt when I saw that postcard was the pure — *sublime*, if my jargon can be excused one last time — aesthetic sensation. It was, after all, a beautiful woman in a delicate pose. Her soft marble body was cast against the black background. Her hair was mesmerising; her body was fragile yet captivating. She was an object of beauty in my eye, and that it was from the Torlonia mattered only too little at the point of immediacy.

Then, the infinitely clever papers I have read and infinitely interesting lectures I have attended came rushing to my head: this “type” was the first in Greek sculpture that had shown a nude woman. This is the shift from late classicism to early Hellenistic art. This is the point the Greeks discover the beauty or sublimity of the feminine form. It marked a historic shift and was a document of its time.

Then, I asked why does she hide herself? The answer is clear. Because as a god, were she to reveal her true beauty, no mortal could resist it. She was in fact doing us a favour in covering herself. This was not just a feminine form; it was *the* feminine form.

Then, this seemed counter-intuitive, because I knew that this was a statue, made of marble, created by a sculptor. How could it be that she is a divinity? It is just stone. But, then, it was another favour for us. The gods have given us the tools to contemplate them, so that we can understand them. Because in their pure, naked form, it would again be too much for us. It was not a god that was depicted there; it was the closest we could get to a god. It is plagued by our weaknesses and faults. It is the ever-lasting symbol of our curiosity to understand greatness, but at the same time our fear of it, lest we become its slaves.

So, there was my answer. That postcard refers to all these at the same time. Its reference is contradictory. It refers to a god and a stone; it refers to a decoration and to a historic document; it refers to an exhibition that tries to capture all these, an exhibition that is scholarly and sensual. These contradictions are what make that postcard and this exhibition worth studying. These contradictions are what forced me to see it as dialectic, because that postcard is the dialectical history of an object condensed in a 14.8x10.5 cm, available at 1 euro. It is what Hegel would call, the Geist concentrated in one single point, reaching out the world.¹¹²

¹¹² Hegel, *Letter to Niethammer*, 1806. He writes this after seeing Napoleon, who died 200 years ago, in May 1821. Indeed, I saw my Napoleon in this exhibition, in that postcard.

Appendix 2 Interview with Dr Carlo Gasparri

The following interview was conducted and subsequently edited by us, indicated by “Ged.” with Dr Carlo Gasparri, the co-curator of the *Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces* exhibition, indicated by “Gas.”

GED. You have been involved with the Torlonia Collection from very early on. How does it feel that it is finally made public?

GAS. Ovviamente è stata per me una grande emozione. Ma soprattutto sono lieto che questa mostra sia il primo passo di un progetto che porterà alla riapertura al pubblico di tutto il Museo.

GED. In the papers it was reported that following the world tour, there would be a more permanent viewing setting for the collection. It is rumoured that it would be Palazzo Torlonia Giraud, is that true?

GAS. No, il Palazzo Torlonia Graud è stato già preso in considerazione in passato come sede per il museo, ed è stato elaborato un progetto espositivo (cfr. L. de Lchenal, *La collezione Torlonia di sculture antiche*, in *Invisibilia*, catalogo della mostra Roma 1992, pp. 123-137), ma è stato abbandonato perché si è rivelato impraticabile per motivi tecnici e di statica del palazzo. Attualmente il migliore candidato è la Villa Rivaldi, un complesso del XVI secolo situato sopra via dei Fori Imperiali, di fronte alla Basilica di Massenzio

GED. Of course, the Torlonia collection is the last great princely collection that is in private hands. What can we learn from their history?

GAS. Attraverso la storia del Museo Torlonia noi intravediamo la lunga e complessa vicenda del collezionismo di antichità a Roma dal '500 in poi, e possiamo comprendere come, nelle diverse fasi storiche, sia cambiata la visione e l'interpretazione dei resti del patrimonio formale antico.

GED. Prince Alessandro Torlonia, the grandfather of current Prince Alessandro, was keen on collecting, perhaps in the pain of economic disaster. But even with him there was an understanding of antiquities as a public objects, his great ideal was the Museo Torlonia. How do you see antiquities in today's world?

GAS. Non credo che il Principe Alessandro avesse problemi economici alla fine del secolo scorso; certamente il suo è stato un progetto culturale, così come c'è un programma dietro le molte iniziative di committenza artistica della Famiglia Torlonia nell'800.

Il rapporto del mondo contemporaneo con le antichità è molto cambiato rispetto al XIX secolo. La attuale istruzione scolastica, la formazione culturale della maggior parte della popolazione non permette di stabilire, come era possibile in passato da parte delle classi colte più elevate, un rapporto e una comprensione diretta delle immagini e del significato del materiale antico. Chi entra oggi in un museo ha bisogno di leggere un cartellino per sapere che un rilievo rappresenta, per es., il ratto di Proserpina; come anche, se entra in una chiesa, non sempre comprende immediatamente quale episodio biblico o quale santo è raffigurato in un affresco. Tuttavia esiste un grandissimo interesse

verso questi materiali da parte del mondo contemporaneo, un interesse talvolta irrazionale (si pensi all'entusiasmo per i Bronzi di Riace, indipendente dal loro significato, ancora non concordemente stabilito), che è spesso sollecitato da iniziative spettacolari e molto attraenti, ma non utili sul piano del progresso culturale. Bisognerebbe fare lo sforzo di guidare il pubblico, dopo averlo attirato, verso una maggiore comprensione storica del significato di questi resti antichi, e del loro rapporto con la nostra cultura moderna.

GED. There is an aesthetic dimension, certainly, but also a pedagogical aspect. What makes these marble statues special?

GAS. Come ogni scultura antica le sculture del museo Torlonia ci parlano della religione, dei miti, della storia, delle usanze del mondo greco e romano. Le sculture di cui conosciamo il luogo e il contesto di rivenimento ci aiutano a ricostruire complessi monumentali (vale a dire ville imperiali, le necropoli, etc); quelle di cui conosciamo solo la storia collezionistica ci raccontano come si è evoluta la storia del gusto e l'interesse per l'eredità formale antica nel corso del tempo.

GED. The circumstances of the Torlonia Collection raise questions about the private-ownership of common heritage. If we see the museums and collections as custodians of that heritage, what is the role of the art historian?

GAS. Le collezioni private sono il segno materiale dell'interesse verso l'antichità di grandi personalità del passato. Lo storico dell'arte ha il compito non solo di studiare e divulgare la conoscenza scientifica del materiale, ma di far comprendere il significato, il programma che è dietro una grande collezione e il suo allestimento.

GED. What is the story that the exhibition is telling? It is arranged to show the growth of the Torlonia Collection over time and how the collecting practices, taste, restoration change over time. What should the viewer take home from the exhibition?

GAS. Il visitatore attraversando le sale della mostra rivedrà, come in un film, svolgersi all'indietro la storia di un patrimonio antico che attraverso il tempo ha avuto sempre nuovi significati, ha simulato artisti e studiosi, appassionati d'arte e importanti personalità del pubblico internazionale.

GED. The Torlonia Collection has more than six hundred marbles but in the exhibition we saw ninety-two of them. What was the mechanism to decide which ones made it in?

GAS. I pezzi sono stati scelti con il proposito di fornire una immagine delle varie fasi formative del Museo, e insieme di presentare sculture particolarmente significative anche sul piano estetico e storico.

GED. The exhibition was in Capitoline Museums, but not inside per se, but in the Museo Caffarelli. What was the reason for that decision? *(It could be the versatility of the space.*

It is much harder to construct the viewing space in the Capitoline)

GAS. All'interno del Palazzo dei Conservatori non c'era lo spazio e la possibilità di inserire le quasi 100 sculture (alcune molto pesanti) e di mantenere un carattere unitario all'esposizione, isolandola dal contesto monumentale del palazzo e dai materiali che già vi sono esposti. Villa Caffarelli era l'unica soluzione disponibile; anche gli ambienti delle Scuderie del Quirinale non potevano sostenere il peso dei marmi.

GED. These panels and viewing spaces were of course produced by Chipperfield Architects Milan. In the catalogue they detail the process of the production, with digital imaging and models. Can you walk me through that process? (*eg statues were chosen, then their models sent to CAM, then there was a back-and-forth with the preferred installation?*) In particular, how do the narrative, the choice of the objects and the briefs to CAM work together?

GAS. Il progetto è partito con la scelta delle opere, fatta dal collega Salvatore Settis e me, poi è stata raccolta la documentazione grafica e le misure dei materiali, che sono state spedite allo studio CAM; il progetto espositivo è stato elaborato in una serie di incontri a Roma in studio o nel Palazzo Caffarelli, attraverso la elaborazione di grafici e modellini, lavorando anche a distanza con l'invio del materiale grafico e fotografico. Ci sono stati incontri in loco per la scelta dei materiali e dei colori, e per lo studio della illuminazione.

GED. As we mentioned, the Torlonia Marbles is going to be travelling. I read New York and Paris, the Louvre, if I remember correctly, were on the list of destinations. What is the full list?

GAS. Per ora la tappa al Louvre potrebbe essere la prima possibile, ma tutto il cronoprogramma dovrà essere riformulato in conseguenza delle modifiche che il coronavirus ha imposto ai progetti dei vari Musei.

GED. If I were to also see the Torlonia Exhibition in, say, Paris, which differences would I see?

GAS. E' possibile che le sculture vengano esposte (per es. al Louvre è previsto di utilizzare gli appartamenti di Anna d'Austria) in ambienti più monumentali, con maggiore spazio per il materiale illustrative, che nella nostra mostra era affidato al dépliant fornito a ogni visitatore.

GED. (*Installation? Constructed panels? Room order?*)

GAS. Nelle future esposizioni non dovrebbe cambiare l'ordinamento del materiale, dato che il catalogo è già pronto nella versione inglese. Per la mostra del Louvre è prevista una ristampa del catalogo in francese, e questo potrebbe consentire spostamenti tra le sculture, sempre all'interno della stessa sezione.

GED. Walking through the rooms, it seemed to me that each room told a self-contained story. Is that a fair assessment? What is the determining factor? How do the scholarly concerns fit?

GAS. L'esposizione è stata proprio studiata per offrire, in ogni sala o coppia di sale, una immagine conclusa di un capitolo della storia della collezione, andando indietro nel tempo.

GED. Room One is a grand opening scene, the Pompeii red panels and a series of statues, so-called Sylla to Theodosius. If the first impression is a contract for what is to come, what do you promise us here? Also, why Germanicus, a product of the excavations and the only non-marble artefact so central in this room?

GAS. La prima sala presenta quello che è stato uno dei temi principali del Museo Torlonia – la ritrattistica imperiale, che è anche uno dei temi principali degli studi della famiglia Visconti - ma nello stesso tempo vuole anche essere una presentazione immediata di quelle che sono le componenti del Museo: esemplari da collezioni più antiche (molti dei busti sono Albani, Cavaceppi, Giustiniani,), ritrovamenti di scavo (la Fanciulla di Vulci, il Germanico in bronzo, che dà subito l'idea dell'importanza del Museo: pochi Musei hanno sculture in bronzo).

GED. Room Two with the athletes and the sarcophagi, etc, what is the story of that room? (*I think it is the story of life, from childhood to beyond death, becoming immortal through story told in the steles*) The catalogue also notes that there was supposed to be a Dacian slave in the room? What happened to him? If it were possible, where would he be positioned?

GAS. La Sala II vuole presentare una scelta significativa dei luoghi di scavo della famiglia Torlonia, e dei contesti che sono emersi: le sculture atletiche di Porto e il rilievo con navi, le necropoli del Suburbio con i sarcophagi, e le ville con le loro collezioni d'arte (il rilievo votivo greco, un prezioso oggetto di antiquariato) e la colta riproposizione di famosi gruppi scultorei del passato (Satiro e Ninfa). Non è stato possibile esporre la statua del Dace perché si è rivelata troppo pesante per essere poggiata sul pavimento, sotto il quale si trova subito il podio del tempio arcaico di Giove Capitolino.

GED. What about Room Three? It is one of the most exquisite compositions? What brings these pieces together?

GAS. Nelle due sale dedicate al Settecento abbiamo voluto ricreare lo Zeitgeist dell'epoca, la leggerezza e l'eleganza nella scelta dei materiali e degli oggetti, caratteristica della villa del cardinale Alessandro Albani, che è stata un modello per la comprensione e l'esposizione dell'Antico per tutta la società europea.

GED. Finally, the most illustrious Room Seven – it seems that there are four parts of the room. The imperial bust series, the Isis as Demeter group with their niches, the group of five with two medusas, and those in the middle, including the Bernini goat. What is the story in this room?

GAS. La sezione Giustiniani vuole di nuovo dare una idea generale di quella che era la grande Galleria di sculture del Palazzo Giustiniani (che conteneva decine e decine di marmi) e delle sue diverse componenti: un celebre opus nobile (Hestia), l'interesse per le statue in marmo colorato (Isidi, busti), il tema dell'Amore sensuale (le Veneri) e quello moralistico della Concordia coniugale (i coniugi); il mondo dionisiaco, alternativo (Satiro e caprone), la Magnificenza dell'Impero (i busti), la cultura antiquaria (Artemis Efesia, Apollo e Marsia, la bottega della macellaia)

GED. What was the choice behind the colours of the panels, for instance the Pompeii red for the first room and the Giustiniani Collection; the earthly brown for the second room and the Torlonia excavations? (*Perhaps is for the aesthetic experience, Pompeii red for the emperor busts, light blue for the Barberini Nile*)

GAS. I colori sono strettamente collegati col gusto del tempo rappresentato nelle diverse sale. Il rosso pompeiano era il colore di fondo delle pareti del Museo Torlonia, un colore

che andava di moda dall'inizio dell'Ottocento in poi in tutti i grandi musei, introdotto nei Musei Vaticani sotto la direzione del Canova, un colore che serviva a sottolineare il contorno delle figure. Il marrone è un colore neutro usato per ambientare i marmi di scavo, emersi dal terreno.

Nel Settecento si usava invece un colore definito "color aria" che suggeriva una atmosfera vibrante e luminosa intorno al marmo antico; lo spiega molto bene Winckelmann nella famosa pagina in cui descrive l'Apollo del Belvedere.

Il giallo oro è un colore tipico delle tappezzerie dei grandi palazzi patrizi romani. Il verde, usato per le sale con le sculture delle collezioni cinquecentesche, allude alla vegetazione, all'ambiente naturale nel quale erano spesso esposte le statue antiche, in giardini, ville etc.

GED. The exhibition also shows how the concept of restoration changed from nineteenth century to today. This is parallel with the development of archaeology as a more "scientific" discipline. Do you think there is something lost today that perhaps, say, Bernini understood better?

GAS. Noi siamo faticosamente arrivati a comprendere cose che i restauratori e gli scultori del passato già avevano intuitivamente capito: per es. solo alla fine del '700 si arriva a comprendere che le sculture conservate nelle collezioni romane non erano opere d'arte greche, ma copie di sculture greche eseguite dagli scultori di età imperiale, e che quindi si potevano avere più copie di uno stesso modello. Nel '500 questo era già chiaro ai restauratori e collezionisti, e in molte raccolte romane si potevano vedere vicine più

repliche identiche di uno stesso originale (per es. nella Galleria di Villa Medici, di Palazzo Colonna, etc.).

GED. What is the point of restoration? Is it preferable to leave the fragments as they are? (*Maybe, restoration ought to be framed as not making a copy of the original but as “imaginative re-creation,” filtered through the historical context*) The exhibition points out these historical practices. Do you take this historical relativism to be justified?

GAS. Almeno dagli inizi del secolo scorso è stato chiaro che una scultura emersa incompleta dallo scavo non doveva essere integrata: la copia del Discobolo di Mirone rinvenuta a Casteporziano nel 1906 non fu integrata dal mio bisnonno, che era restauratore al Museo Nazionale Romano, ma solo ricomposta da 14 frammenti. Allo stesso modo, mentre nella seconda metà del 900 è stata praticata una eccessiva Entrestaurierung delle sculture provenienti da collezioni storiche, con l'idea di recuperare l'aspetto originale della scultura (idea sbagliata, perché questa era già stata alterata dall'intervento di integrazione), oggi siamo convinti che i restauri moderni vadano conservati (rendendoli leggibili) come segno della biografia della scultura, che spesso è più interessante del pezzo in sé.

Appendix 3 Interview with Dr Salvatore Settis

The following interview was conducted and subsequently edited by us, indicated by “Ged.” with Dr Salvatore Settis, the co-curator of the *Torlonia Marbles. Collecting Masterpieces* exhibition, indicated by “Set.”

GED. You have curated or co-curated many exhibitions, indeed on antiquities. Where does the *Torlonia Marbles* stand among them? How was it a different challenge?

SET. A few years ago I curated at the Fondazione Prada the twin exhibitions *Serial Classic* (in Milan) and *Portable Classic* (in Venice), two projects where I started from two interrelated concepts (namely, seriality and dimensional reduction of Classical art), and we ended up assembling several works from at least fifty museums worldwide. I would say that the Torlonia exhibition is exactly the opposite: we had a very important collection to start from; the point was to find a concept (or a narrative) well suited to it.

GED. It was a journey of four years that was the preparation of the exhibition. How does the exhibition compare to its initial inception, if there is one?

SET. The exhibition very much corresponds to the concept I had in mind, and my co-curator Carlo Gasparri has been instrumental in choosing the right pieces to represent it.

GED. That process (*hopefully leading to the opening of Torlonia Museum*) was described as cooperation between “private sector and the state.” Do you agree with that? Is there a collective responsibility for the antiquities? Does this also mean public ownership?

SET. According to the Italian Constitution (article 9), the landscape and the artistic, archaeological and historical heritage belong to the Nation, and therefore are under the supreme protection of the State. This doesn't mean that private ownership of buildings or collections isn't allowed. In Rome itself you may find an extremely important princely collection, bought more than 100 years ago by the State, which now forms a public museum of Galleria Borghese; and an equally important princely collection still owned by the prince Doria-Pamphilj in the family palace. The agreement between the Ministry of Culture and the Torlonia Foundation stipulates that the collections of the future Museo Torlonia will be their property, while the State will help finding a building where to make it accessible to the general public.

GED. Given the exhibition employs ancient objects of a historic collection, how were you informed, if any at all, by the "original" viewing setting?

SET. We kept a few features of the 1880's Museo Torlonia, such as the relevance of imperial portrait-busts, or the 'Pompeian red' as the wall colour of the show's first room: in the Museo Torlonia it was the colour of all the 77 rooms.

GED. Of course, antiquities are objects of research in themselves, for ancient material culture and society (and your work addresses this at length) but they also have a secondary documentary value, manifesting the taste of the times. Is this what the exhibition captures in the Torlonia?

SET. The Torlonia collection, formed as it was throughout the 19th century, reflects first of all the family's ambitions and their need for owning a collection of antiquities as

powerful as those of others, older, princely families of Rome. It is actually a ‘collection of (older) collections’ that wonderfully represents a cross-section of the social and cultural practice of collecting not just in Italy, but in Europe.

GED. It is as if, antiquities are one of the constant actors and witnesses of western art history. Is it correct to see them as pedagogical objects, as well as aesthetic? What can we learn from them?

SET. A pedagogical aim was probably in Alessandro Torlonia’s mind, when he wanted to add some plaster casts in order to clarify the role and meaning of some sculpture. But this aspect of the process was discontinued after his death in 1886.

GED. What is the story that the exhibition is telling? It is arranged to show the phases of the Collection’s history. Is it fair to compare it to a case study? What should the viewer take home from the exhibition?

SET. In my view it is far more than a case study. It is, as mentioned, an unrivalled cross section of collecting in Rome from the 15th through the 19th century, and at the same time the Museo Torlonia marks the end of large princely collections in Rome and Italy at large.

GED. In that sense, can we call the *Torlonia Marbles* a *research exhibition* (or *researched exhibition?*), in a way, a visual statement of a thesis you may have developed and presented in a paper? How would such a paper differ from the exhibition?

SET. The catalogue, starting from my own opening essay, provides the conceptual and historical framework for the exhibition. I would call it both a *researched exhibition* (in that a significant amount of research was required while working at the project) and a *research exhibition* (in that it invites further research).

GED. The exhibition, as a medium of presenting research, reaches (*as much as I hate to admit*) a far larger audience than a peer-reviewed paper, how does this trade between “scientific precision” and more visible platform influence the narrative of the research? Does it affect the substance, for example, the statues chosen, groupings, compositions?

SET. By no means. There is, I believe, no compromise between scholarly precision and ‘visible platform’. I am convinced that exhibition projects should care simultaneously for several (not just two) levels of visitors. It is not just possible, but advisable, to offer scholarly information to scholars while displaying interesting narrative suited to trigger in non-specialists various forms of interest and curiosity. The common background is, I think, the convergence and interaction between two principles: providing serious information and raise, at both scholarly and non-scholarly level, a number of inspiring question marks.

GED. The aesthetic and the pedagogical feed each other. What is the correct way to position them?

SET. My point would be, rather, how to clearly distinguish between ‘information’ and ‘pedagogy’.

GED. Then, what is the position of the art historian and the curator? Are they the custodians? Is it fair to read the *Torlonia Marbles* as an act of preservation of heritage?

SET. Either we are all (including the larger public) custodians of our past, or it is bound to disappear. Specialists are entitled to offer and distribute historical and art-historical information more than anybody else, yet they are not entitled to consider themselves *the* privileged custodians of history or culture.

GED. Indeed, our viewing of the ancient artefacts is influenced (*if not determined*) by their history. Practically, we distinguish them from pieces of (fine) art. Where do you see ancient art? Is there something ambiguous or incomplete with our definition of it?

SET. The most important point, to my mind, is to realise that “ancient” art is, at least in Europe, an essential part of an ongoing historical and cultural process, without boundaries between different and subsequent eras.

GED. If so, does the absence of artist’s authorship create a creative space for creation for you as the scholar and the curator? Where does the curator stand? Where do you place your authorhood?

SET. Curatorial ‘authorhood’ is important, and should be recognisable as such, if not for other reasons in order to be open to criticism. In our view (I believe Gasparri agrees with me on that) our ‘authorhood’ in this exhibition is both very strong and extremely respectful of the sculptures on exhibition.

GED. Historically ancient art was an anchoring point in defining taste. Where do you see them now?

SET. In a continuously changing balance between many vantage points, as is proper of contemporary art and thought.

GED. Particularly in Italian context, historically there is a secondary meaning to ancient Roman art, as a unifying force. (*Indeed for all western art.*) Do you think this is pertinent today?

SET. Up to a point. The emphasis on *romanità* during the Fascist regime caused a strong reaction in the opposite direction. Now, I think Roman art should be viewed rather as a unifying factor (by no means the only or the main one) for all the cultures around the Mediterranean, to say the least.

GED. Prince Alessandro marks the transition from princely collection to public museum. Why is this a significant moment in history?

SET. The first public museum worldwide was the Museo Capitolino, founded in Rome in 1733: therefore the public museum, an institution so familiar to us, is a relatively recent innovation. Its seeds were the private collections from the 15th century onwards in Rome, and this is the main narrative thread of the Torlonia exhibition. If we want to understand what a museum is about, knowing this process is very important. Also because, being a recent institution with a birth date, the museum might also have in its DNA an expiration date.