ERCOLE FARNESE 4.0
COPY OF COPY OF COPY (ALMOST ORIGINAL)

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The essay reconstructs the initiatives promoted in the field of art copies from the Fine Arts Academy "Pietro Vannucci" of Perugia: an artistic cenacle founded in 1573 that, even today, boasts a plaster cast gallery in which hundreds of plaster casts of author statues are exhibited –from Michelangelo Buonarroti to Antonio Canova. In recent years these initiatives were sealed by the idea of designing the concept of a multimedia replica of its own plaster cast gallery and, moreover, by the idea of placing at the entrance to the headquarters, between the façade of the Oratory of San Bernardino and the façade of the church of San Francesco al Prato, a one-to-one scale copy of the plaster cast of the *Ercole Farnese* –one of the most famous statues of antiquity– made by 3D printing with polylactic acid filaments: a bold hypothesis, not only from an environmental point of view, because it has an undoubted visual impact, but also and above all from a cultural perspective, because mistrust of the artistic value of copies continues to persist even in an era, such as the present, characterised by maximum technical reproducibility.

In the project for the municipal center at Florence, I imagined restored statues in the piazzas, like the alabaster Davids for tourists, thinking all the while that the copy is never entirely dissociated from the original, that in the plastic paintings of Venice with their ever-present lightbulb, hung in poor but decent kitchens among the family portraits, the mistery of the theater, whose performance is so important for us, is evoked again. (Rossi, 1981, p. 54)

BEYOND MIMESIS

Copying or interpreting? Reproducing or reinventing? Transcribing or transfiguring? For centuries, Western art has found itself at a crossroads, the redefinitions of which have followed one after the other incessantly, without interruption, until Walter Benjamin's famous vaticinium –only apparently definitive– on the death of the aura. But today, the aura has come back to life in other forms and, above all, the world of art, bringing with it the world of architecture, have been checked by the advent of new possibilities of mimesis granted by technological and cultural evolution, which have in themselves revitalised the copy-original dichotomy. It reopens the wound that was never really healed, inflicted at the end of the sixteenth century by the birth of art academies and, with them, the proliferation of plaster cast galleries: that is, since "the teachability of art is based on the formula 'drawing from drawings, drawing from casts, drawing from life'" (Cassese, 2013, p. 32).

THE *ACCADEMIA DEL DISEGNO* PLASTER CAST GALLERY IN PERUGIA

In the late spring of 1573, ten years after the establishment in Florence of the *Accademia e Compagnia dell'Arte del Disegno*, instituted by Cosimo I dei Medici by borrowing from the *Compagnia del glorioso messer Santo Luca Evangelista* thirteenth

century, was founded in Perugia the *Accademia del Disegno* (Belardi, 2012): a cenacle entirely similar to the Florentine precedent in that it too aimed to cultivate the reproductive-didactic practice of drawing from plaster casts, but above all, it also aimed to integrate the pragmatic character of the craft, handed down in a private workshop with the doctrinal character of the lessons given in public classrooms. All this was not without pressing cultural claims, since the birth of the sixteenth century academies also stemmed from the aspiration of younger artists to achieve "a valid theoretical preparation" (Boco, 1989, p. 15), and not without intricate social implications, as the success of the academies also stemmed from the interest of older artists in confirming "their membership in the restricted world of the cultured" (Irace, 1993, p. 481). This was an epoch-making achievement that promoted the artist from 'artifex' to 'inventor', marking a precise "watershed between the medieval guilds and the conception of art as a fusion between Art and University" (Castagnaro, 2003, p. 57), but above all, it codified a new type of building, that of the Fine Arts Academy, which was mostly housed in pre-existing buildings, but

Fig. 1 Plaster cast gallery of the Fine Arts Academy "Pietro Vannucci", Perugia.

Fig. 2 *Ercole Farnese, aula magna* of the Fine Arts Academy "Pietro Vannucci", Perugia, nineteenth century.

within which, the plaster cast gallery took on a fundamental role: a place devoted to the assimilation of the aesthetic and proportional canons that mark the idealised human figure through the exercise of drawing from actual plaster casts of classical statues. As recommended by Leon Battista Alberti (1464/1998, p. 6) for didactic purposes –"*Quando igitur similitudines sectantur, a similitudine ipsa ordiendum est*"– and by Giovanni Battista Armenini (1587, p. 49) for practical purposes –"*haverne copia per poter servirene poi ne' loro bisogni*". But above all, as theorised by Giorgio Vasari, according to whom

> whomever therefore wishes to learn to express the concepts of the mind and any other thing by drawing, needs, after his hand has become somewhat accustomed to it, in order to become more intelligent in the arts, to practice drawing relief figures, either of marble or stone, or of plaster figures made on the spot, or on some beautiful ancient statue, or indeed reliefs of models made of earth, or naked, or with rags buried on them, which serve as clothing; for this reason, all these things, being motionless and without feeling, are very easy for the one who draws them, which is not the case with living things, which move. (1550/2004, p. 74)

Fig. 3 Glycon, *Ercole Farnese*,
National Archaeological Museum,
Naples, third century AD.

Hence the reasons why plaster cast galleries, precisely because they were a place devoted to the practice of 'drawing from casts', were the driving force behind the knowledge of antiquity and the spread of classical taste. So much so that they still represent a fundamental component of the identity heritage of the main Italian academies: Bologna, Brera, Carrara, Florence, Genoa, Macerata, Naples, Palermo, Perugia, Ravenna, Reggio Calabria, Rome, Turin and Venice. Notwithstanding, the plaster cast gallery at the ancient *Accademia del Disegno* in Perugia is unique: both in terms of its past and its future. In fact, the lack of an adequate civic statuary patrimony, together with the lack of artists expert in plaster cast composition, forced its founders, the painter Orazio Alfani and the architect-mathematician Raffaello Sozi, to resort to the mediation of Vincenzo Danti—member of the *Accademia e Compagnia dell'Arte del Disegno*, but above all a native of Perugia—to purchase four Michelangelo plaster casts (Mancini, 2011) made entirely or perhaps only partially (Belardi et al., 2015) on the *Tempi del Giorno* that seal the Medici tombs of Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, and Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, in the New Sacristy of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence: *Giorno*, *Notte*, *Aurora*, *Crepuscolo*. However, this first acquisition was not followed by other acquisitions, presumably also due to the small size of the first academic building in the church of Sant'Angelo della Pace. The endowment of the Perugian plaster cast gallery was in fact limited to the four Michelangelo plaster casts until, after the transfer of the Fine Arts Academy to the former monastery of the Olivetans in Montemorcino at the beginning of the nineteenth century and then to the former convent of San Francesco al Prato at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was continuously implemented not only by direct acquisitions, stimulated by the activism of the directors of the biggest European museums on the antiquities market for art copies, among whom Wilhelm Bode, director of the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in Berlin, stands out (Galli, 2003, p. 159), but also by donations received from great artists, such as Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen, as well as from public institutions, such as the Kensington Museum in London and the Municipality of Perugia.

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It was also the Municipality of Perugia itself, in 1818, that donated to the Fine Arts Academy "Pietro Vannucci" of Perugia the *Ercole Farnese*, a monumental plaster cast made in the Neoclassical period by an unknown artist on the marble copy –found in 1546 during the archaeological excavations commissioned by Pope Paul III at the Caracalla thermal baths in Rome– made in turn in the Hellenistic period by Glycon on the bronze original cast in the Alexandrian period by Lysippos, in which the son of Jupiter is portrayed leaning sideways on his club covered by lion's skin while he rests after exertion. The copy, which is characterised by its considerable size –it is 317 centimetres high– and which is currently kept in the vestibule of the *aula magna* in the former convent of San Francesco al Prato, is a real landmark, celebrating in itself the capacity of the *Accademia del Disegno* –transformed in the neoclassical period into the Fine Arts Academy– to preserve the plaster casts acquired in five hundred years of history, without neglecting to enhance them and, therefore, bring them into the future. As early as 2013, twenty-four bronze copies of the four Michelangelo plaster casts, made using the lost wax technique in the laboratories of the Massimo Del Chiaro Art Foundry in Pietrasanta, were the protagonists of an extraordinary travelling cultural event, entitled *Michelangelo in Cina*, which started from Beijing and ended up in Shanghai: an initiative of great resonance, organised

Fig. 4 Paolo Belardi, Valeria Menchetelli, consequential phases of the digital replication process of the *Ercole Farnese*, 2016.
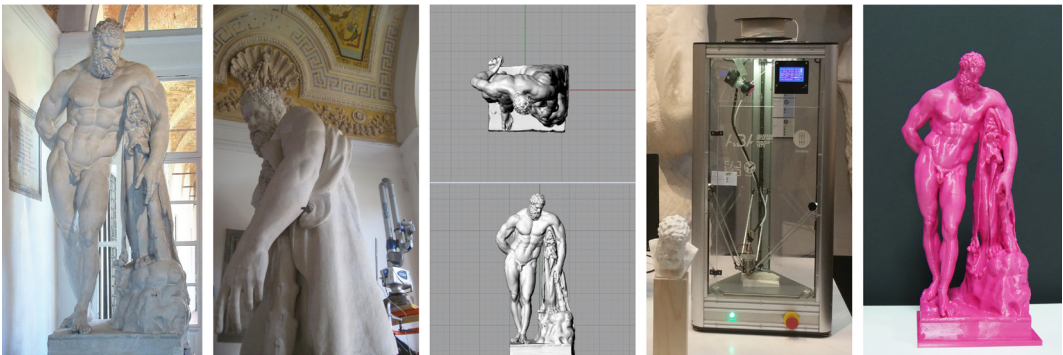
Fig. 5 Relevo, digital model of the *Ercole Farnese*, 2016.

**Fig. 6** ABA FabLab, 3D printing of the anatomical parts of the *Ercole Farnese*, 2016.

by virtue of a special framework agreement stipulated by the Fine Arts Academy with the Heng Yuan Xiang Museum, as well as the Italian Cultural Institute in Shanghai (Belardi & Menchetelli, 2018a). Subsequently, in 2015, a marble copy of Antonio Canova's *Tre Grazie*, made by sculptor Massimo Galleni using the traditional technique of dots on the plaster cast donated by the same artist to the Fine Arts Academy in 1822, became part of the artistic collection of the *Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia*. Finally, in 2016, in collaboration with the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering of the University of Perugia, as well as the XiangShan Centre for Cultural and Artistic Exchange in Shanghai, the Fine Arts Academy promoted applied research aimed at designing the concept of *4DGypsoteca* (Belardi & Menchetelli, 2018b): a multimedia replica of its own plaster cast gallery, conceived along the lines of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London – where there is a section of plaster casts dedicated to drawing enthusiasts– and intended for the Chinese academy market –which, due to a lack of plaster cast galleries, are forced to omit drawing from plaster casts from their teaching programmes– in which the cultural values of the concept of

Fig. 7 Paolo Belardi, Simone Bori, Paul Henry Robb, *4DGypsoteca*, perspective section, 2016.
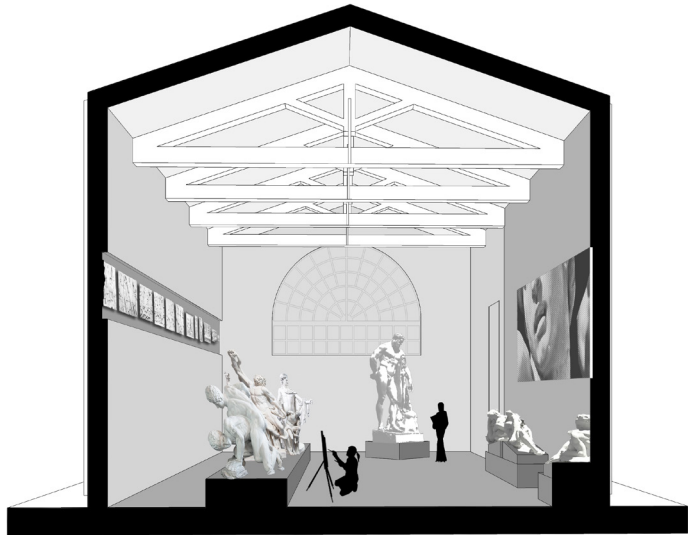
copying were amplified and elevated to power. *4DGypsoteca* in fact, while presenting a selection of the approximately 120 plaster casts conserved in the plaster cast gallery of the Fine Arts Academy, proposed the same interior setting as the original –but with a layout inspired by the one designed by the Futurist painter Gerardo Dottori in the 1940s– while on the outside it presented a basilica-like form punctuated by the sequence of frames and made even more abstract by the white colour. The initiative was not followed up, but the digital clones of the planned plaster casts exhibited in *4DGypsoteca* were nonetheless acquired by laser scanning techniques and underwent a process of double optimisation: on the one hand, for the purpose of making material copies

Fig. 8 *Oltre la mimesis. Dalla copia della realtà alla realtà della copia*, banner.

Fig. 9 From left: Aldo Rossi, *project for the Municipal Center at Florence*, axonometry, 1974; Carlo Aymonino, *project for the completion of St Mark's Basin in Venice*, perspective, 1985; Vittorio De Feo, *project for the Monument to the Resistance in Fidenza*, elevation, 1987.

by 3D printing —emulating the scanning activities of the British Museum in London— and on the other hand, for the immersive visualisation of immaterial copies that can be experienced by VR viewers —emulating the virtual reality activities of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. On the strength of this unusual heritage, the Fine Arts Academy wanted to qualify its commercial activity with the surplus of cultural value. First, it promoted the conference *Oltre la mimesis. Dalla copia della realtà alla realtà della copia —Beyond mimesis. From the copy of reality to the reality of the copy*— which took place in Perugia from 19 to 21 May 2016 under the care of Paolo Belardi and Gian Luca Grassigli and which was attended by illustrious speakers including Marcello Barbanera, Chiara

Fig. 10 Paolo Belardi, Matteo Scoccia, Felice Lombardi, renovation project for the entrance to the Fine Arts Academy "Pietro Vannucci", plan, 2016.

Fig. 11 Paolo Belardi, Matteo Scoccia, Felice Lombardi, renovation project for the entrance to the Fine Arts Academy "Pietro Vannucci" of Perugia, elevation, 2016.

Fig. 12 Paolo Belardi, Matteo Scoccia, Felice Lombardi, renovation project for the entrance to the Fine Arts Academy "Pietro Vannucci", alternative hypotheses, render, 2016.

Casarin, Flavio Piero Cuniberto, Pietro Carlo Pellegrini, Gianluca Peluffo, Giuseppe Pucci and Franco Purini. Then, it advanced the idea of taking advantage from the digital clone of the plaster cast of the *Ercole Farnese*, both because it is one of the most famous statues of antiquity and because "in the course of contemporary age, replicas, copies, reproductions of all kinds have made [it] a 'daily meal' able to reflect changes in aesthetic tastes and convey new meanings that the ancient statuary conjures up in the contemporary world" (Foresta, 2016, p. 1): from Jason Seley to James Perkins and Jeff Koons. In particular the Fine Arts Academy considered the *Ercole Farnese* useful for its reproduction by 3D printing, not only on a small scale for merchandising purposes, but also on a one-to-one scale for artistic anatomy lessons and for communication purposes (Belardi et al., p. 759). Hence the idea of placing at the entrance to the headquarters, between the bas-reliefs by Agostino di Duccio on the façade of the Oratory of San Bernardino and the polychrome marbles recomposed by Pietro Angelini on the façade of the church of San Francesco al Prato, a one-to-one scale copy of the plaster cast of the *Ercole Farnese* made by 3D printing with purple polylactic acid filaments.

COPY OF COPY OF COPY (ALMOST ORIGINAL)

This is a bold hypothesis, not only from an environmental point of view, because it has an undoubted visual impact, but also and above all from a cultural perspective, because mistrust of the artistic value of copies continues to persist even in an era, such as the present, characterised by maximum technical reproducibility. Despite the fact that many of the works of art that stand out in our historic centres are now copies –from the sculptural group of St. Mark's Horses in Venice to the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome– and despite the fact that there is no lack of illustrious precedents for the use of copies of author statues, especially in the post-modern age –Aldo Rossi, in 1974, with the project for the Municipal Center at Florence, Carlo Aymonino, in 1985, with the project for the completion of St Mark's Basin in Venice, and Vittorio De Feo, in 1987, with the project for the Monument to the Resistance in Fidenza– and despite the fact that the twenty-first century bioplastic copy of a nineteenth century plaster copy of a third century AD marble copy of a bronze statue from the fourth century BC can be reasonably interpreted as a genuine original. This is what Peter Greenaway claimed in an interview with Pierluigi Panza in response to criticism of the installation of a facsimile of Paolo Veronese's painting in the Cenacolo Palladiano on the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore *Le Nozze di Cana*.

Fig. 14 Jeff Koons, *Gazing Ball, Ercole Farnese*, 2013.

> Since the invention of photography, we should have appropriated the idea of mass reproduction of the image. Otherwise, wouldn't we have to ask ourselves where, for example, the original of *Gone with the Wind* is? However, those who are attached to the idea of the aura of the work should also be satisfied with our work, because we make the object eternal by placing it in a spiritual space. Today it can be said, almost without irony, that a well reproduced image can be better than the original. (Panza, 2009)

As demonstrated by the long series of Hercules lined up as part of the exhibition *Portable Classic*, set up in 2015 in Venice in the Ca' Corner della Regina palace on the initiative of the *Fondazione Prada* (Settis et al., 2015).

Fig. 15 *Portable Classic* , Ca' Corner della Regina palace, Venice, 2015.

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