



1 View into the exhibition »The Lost Museum. The Berlin Sculpture and Paintings Collections 70 Years after World War II« (Berlin, Bode-Museum, 19 March to 27 September 2015)

Julien Chapuis

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## Donatello and Renaissance Sculpture – A Chronology

After successful collaborations on various archaeological subjects, such as the Merovingians or the Bronze Age, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the Pushkin Museum have embarked on a new common endeavour, this time in the field of art history. In June 2015 the two institutions joined forces to research, restore, publish, and exhibit over fifty works of Renaissance sculpture, several by key artists of the period, which for over seventy years had remained out of sight, gradually vanishing from the awareness of art history and the public. The next few years promise to be rich in discoveries and new art-historical insights. Before this happens, however, it seems appropriate to pause and examine the road travelled thus far.

In May 1945 two fires raged in the Friedrichshain bunker, in which major collections from the Berlin Museums had been stored for safekeeping.<sup>1</sup> In 1958/59 the Soviet Union returned to the German Democratic Republic some 1.5 million museum objects that had been sent to Moscow and Leningrad in 1945 – 1946.<sup>2</sup> It wasn't until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the re-unification of Germany, however, that the collections in East and West Berlin could be compared and the extent of the losses grasped. Great uncertainty remained about countless works of art: had they been destroyed, or might they still exist?

Michael Knuth, curator of Italian sculpture at the Bode Museum until 2010, spent decades grappling with the legacy of the Friedrichshain catastrophe. His hopes that some of the great sculptures once in Berlin had survived received a boost in the 1990s from discoveries by the art historians Konstantin Akinscha,

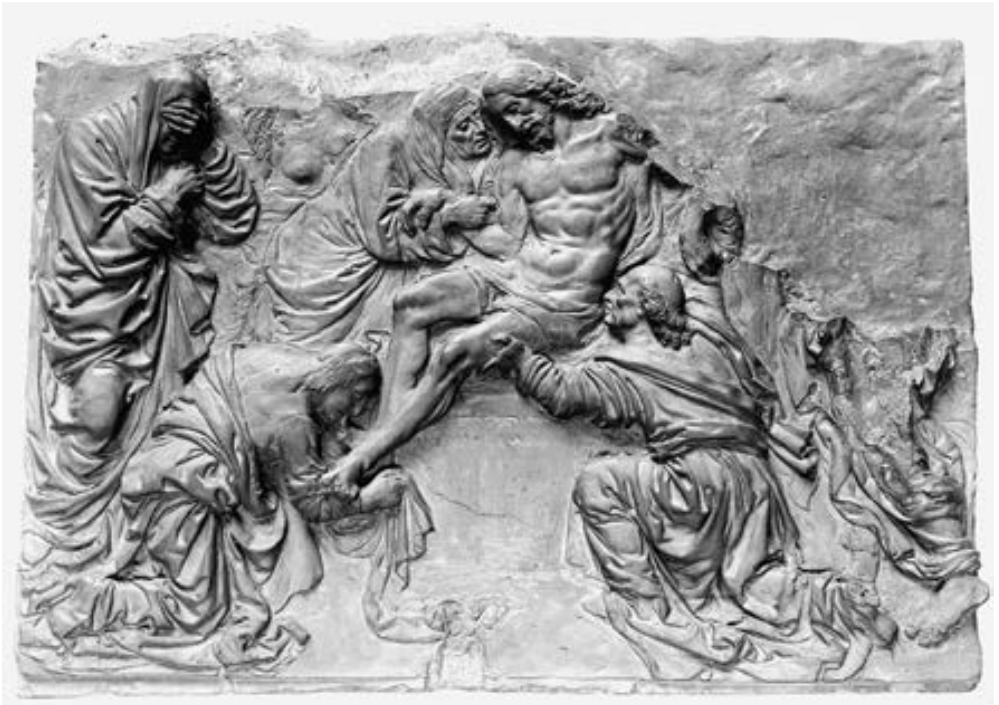
Grigori Koslow, and Clemens Toussaint.<sup>3</sup> They published Russian documents dating from 1946 and 1955 attesting that over 40 works from the Berlin Sculpture Collection were being kept in Russia. Among them were major works by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano, Donatello, Mino da Fiesole, and Verrocchio. Despite the importance of the works of art involved, this discovery met with relatively little response in the scholarly literature.

Together with Lothar Lambacher, curator for medieval art at the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Michael Knuth compiled the »Verlustkatalog« of the Skulpturensammlung, the catalogue of works of art missing since World War II, which appeared in 2006. In the introduction, buried in footnote 20, is a reference to Akinscha, Koslow, and Toussaint's publications followed by a list of the inventory numbers of the works involved; the objects themselves are not identified by artist or subject matter.<sup>4</sup> The individual entries for the works in question do not mention that they had been transferred to Russia and may still be there. For every sculpture, the user of the »Verlustkatalog« must check whether its inventory number appears in footnote 20 of the introduction to establish whether it is one of surviving works. As a result, most art historians remained unaware of the existence of these sculptures.

In the two and a half years that I was fortunate to work with Michael Knuth, he frequently addressed the question of works from Berlin in Russia. In 2008, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the return of the cultural objects by the Soviet Union to Berlin, he mounted in the Bode Museum a documentary exhibition titled »Spasiba« (Russian for »thank you«; without catalogue), in which he presented a plaster cast of Verrocchio's »Entombment« relief as an example of a work presumably still in Moscow (*fig. 2*) – today, we know that indeed it is preserved there. Michael Knuth's untimely death in September 2010 prevented him from pursuing his long-held conviction that a dialogue with the Pushkin Museum was as indispensable in art history as in archaeology.

In October 2013 the Skulpturensammlung contracted Neville Rowley to compile a scholarly catalogue of works by Donatello and his circle. Although my initial intention was, out of practicality, to restrict the scope of the catalogue to sculptures still in Berlin, Neville Rowley soon convinced me that, in view of the general oblivion for works once central to the Berlin collection, the catalogue must also discuss the works missing since 1945 (and not just as a checklist at the end). His research became for many of these objects the first systematic art-historical engagement since the Second World War and provided the necessary foundation for our current cooperation with the Pushkin Museum.

It was also in 2013 that Marina Loshak succeeded Irina Antonova as director of the Pushkin Museum. That autumn Günther Schauerte, Vice President of the



2 Pre-war photograph of Andrea del Verrocchio's »Entombment«, ca. 1480, terracotta, 29 x 43 cm. Formerly Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin (Inv. 117); currently Pushkin Museum, Moscow (Inv. 3C-12)

Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, visited Marina Loshak to discuss various collaborative projects between Berlin and Moscow already underway in the field of archaeology. Encouraged by the positive tone of the conversation, Günther Schauerte told me that the time had come for the Berlin art-historical collections to engage our Russian colleagues as well.

Because of Neville Rowley's Donatello catalogue, it was quite obvious that the first collaborative project with the Pushkin Museum must focus on this artist. Considered since the time of Giorgio Vasari a founding father of the Renaissance – along with the architect Brunelleschi and the painter Masaccio – Donatello is the domineering figure in fifteenth-century sculpture. Furthermore, his name is well known and the documents published by Akinscha, Koslow, and Toussaint suggested that two key works attributed to him, the marble »Flagellation« and the bronze »John the Baptist«, were still preserved, albeit damaged.

In January 2014, I accompanied Günther Schauerte and Manfred Nawroth, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin's scientific coordinator for all cooperation pro-

jects with Russian museums, on a trip to Moscow. In the director's office at the Pushkin Museum, I handed Marina Loshak a binder with photographs of some 27 sculptures from Berlin listed in Akinscha, Koslow, and Toussaint's publications of the 1990s, telling her that I wanted to work with her on making these works accessible to the public once again. Her response was very encouraging: she too wanted to bring the sculptures back to light, to publish and to exhibit them.

Both as a historian of sculpture and as the head of the institution where these works were housed until World War II, I must do everything to have them researched, restored, published, and put out on view, whereas the question of restitution is one that must be decided on the political level. This conviction, which reflects the official line of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, stems from a powerful experience I had on my first visit to Russia in 2003. Seventeen years previously I had gone to the Netherlands to study art history. A poor quality, grainy black-and-white slide of the painting »Place de la Concorde« by Edgar Degas was shown in a lecture. The painting had art historical importance as an early example of the influence of photography on painting. Indeed, all the figures are looking in different directions, but the middle of the painting was empty, as if the artist had actually used a camera. In the scholarly literature that I read at the time, it was assumed that the painting, which was in the Gerstenberg Collection in Berlin until World War II, had been destroyed. Nowhere was there anything written about its colouring. In 2003 I was in the Hermitage for the first time. There I saw »Place de la Concorde« (*fig. 3*). In front of the original, I forgot that this was an early composition without a centre. What a magnificent work it is! The execution of the painting is extremely sensitive, and the harmony between the grey of the clothing and the yellow-beige of the sand is among the most beautiful in Degas' work. As a Swiss who lived in New York at the time, I did not pause to reflect about where the painting was being kept. I was just glad that this superb picture still existed and was accessible.

In conjunction with the Moscow trip, Günther Schauerte had contacted Britta Kaiser-Schuster, Head of the Deutsch-Russischer Museumsdialog, with a special request. The Deutsch-Russischer Museumsdialog had been founded on the initiative of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and the Kulturstiftung der Länder in 2005 to foster scholarly exchange between museum professionals on the issue of the war losses of both countries. Questions of restitution are excluded from this purely scientific context, as this matter can only be resolved at government level. The Deutsch-Russischer Museumsdialog oversees the »Transportlisten« project<sup>5</sup>, which compares the Akinscha-Koslow documents mentioned above with the catalogues of losses of German museums, in an effort to find out more about the possible whereabouts of missing objects. This pains-



3 Edgar Degas: »Place de la Concorde (Vicomte Lepic and his Daughters)«, 1875, canvas, 78,4 cm x 117,5 cm. Previously in the Gerstenberg Collection, Berlin; currently in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg

taking work has unearthed a wealth of information, especially since the Russian documents have not been published in their totality, nor have they been translated. Given the positive tone of the discussions with Marina Loshak, the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz and the Kulturstiftung der Länder agreed that the »Transportlisten« team should devote its attention next to the losses of the Skulpturensammlung. This process began in autumn of 2014 and is nearing completion at the time of writing.

In November 2013 already, Neville Rowley and I had visited the Gipsformerei, the plaster-cast studio of the Berlin Museums, which has been casting objects for them since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It contains the moulds of many sculptures that have been missing since 1945. Neville Rowley wanted to see casts of two missing works by Donatello: the marble relief of the »Flagellation« and the bronze figure of »John the Baptist« (fig. 4). This visit made a strong impression on both of us, as until then we only knew these sculptures from the few available black-and-white photographs. Although these convey a sense of the works' compositions, they reveal little about them as three-dimensional objects.

By contrast, this is what plaster casts – exact replicas – do. On 8 May 2014, pointing out that the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II was only a year away, Neville Rowley recommended that we mark the occasion by mounting an exhibition using casts from the Gipsformerei and, when these were not available, photographs of missing works.

The exhibition »The Lost Museum«, which was held from March to September 2015 in the Bode Museum, shed light on the historical circumstances of the 1945 fires, the subsequent recovery of vast quantities of works of art by the Allies, and their return to the divided city of Berlin in the 1950s (*fig. 1*). With the help of plaster casts and photographic reproductions in original size, masterpieces of the Berlin sculpture and painting collections were intended to be brought back into the public consciousness. The exhibition also explored the ethical and practical problems behind the restoration of art damaged by war. The Deutsch-Russischer Museumsdialog offered crucial support by providing wall texts and objects labels for the first, documentary, section and for the conclusion on collaboration today with Russia. The Zentralarchiv and the Gipsformerei were also valuable partners; the exhibition presented for the first time floor plans of the Friedrichshain bunker with notations of the collections being re-arranged in April 1945, a discovery that had been made during the preparations for the show by Petra Winter, now Head of the Zentralarchiv.

»The Lost Museum« stated that a number of sculptures, of which casts were presented, were most likely to this day kept in Moscow, as could be inferred from the archival material. This was the case of the »Portrait of a Young Girl« by Mino da Fiesole and the »Entombment« by Verrocchio, as well as of the »Flagellation« and of »John the Baptist« by Donatello. A wall text titled »Art as Compensation?« by Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov of the Deutsch-Russischer Museumsdialog gives a sense of the matter-of-fact tone of the didactics in the exhibition:

»After the military turning point in the winter of 1943, consideration was given in Moscow as to whether the cultural losses of the Soviet Union should be compensated for by targeted confiscations from German collections [...] Works from the Berlin Gemäldegalerie and Skulpturensammlung left the city in several long transport trains. In the USSR they primarily went to the Pushkin Museum in Moscow and the Hermitage in Leningrad. The idea of creating a [»Museum of World Art«] was already abandoned in 1945, and the works were stored in highly secure, secret storerooms, the existence of which the public only learned of in the course of perestroika.«

In June 2015, Marina Loshak signed a cooperation agreement with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz on the subject »Donatello and Renaissance Sculpture«.



**4** Modern plaster cast of Donatello's »John the Baptist« (1420s/1430s, bronze, originally 84 cm high) in the exhibition »The Lost Museum« (Bode-Museum, 2015). The original sculpture today is in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow (Inv. 3C-8).

Its stated aim is to research, restore, publish, and exhibit works of art once in Berlin and now in Moscow, so that they can once again be the object of enjoyment by the art-loving public and the focus of scholarly debate. Marina Loshak also introduced Vasily Rastorguev as the designated curator of sculpture – he had seen »The Lost Museum« in Berlin beforehand and knew our approach and convictions, which he shared. It is on this memorable occasion that, for the first



time, Manfred Nawroth, Neville Rowley, and I saw five sculptures by Donatello and his circle that had been considered lost until then, including the »Flagellation« and »John the Baptist«, plus a small plaquette attributed to the school of Sansovino.

Three months later, in September 2015, during the symposium »Donatello and the Lost Museum«, organized by Neville Rowley and myself, Vasily Rastorguev presented images of the works we had seen in Moscow. This was the first time that images of the works in their current condition were shown to a scholarly audience, which comprised some journalists who reported on Rastorguev's presentation.<sup>6</sup>

The exhibition »The Lost Museum« was put together in some ten months, which did not allow a catalogue to be available during the run of the exhibition. It appeared in November 2015 and includes most of the wall texts and object labels. The postscript by Marina Loshak, contains photographs of Donatello's »Flagellation« and »Saint John the Baptist« in their current state »reproduced here, as a promise of more discoveries to be made.«<sup>7</sup> The catalogue was presented at a symposium celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Deutsch-Russischer Museumsdialog at the Bode Museum, in which Marina Loshak participated.

Although this text was written in the summer of 2016, this is the yearbook for 2015. The events that unfolded in the first half of the current year will be the subject of another report. Suffice it to say that significant progress has been made, especially in the areas of communication, publication, and conservation.<sup>8</sup>

#### Anmerkungen

1 Julien Chapuis / Stephan Kemperdick (eds.): *The Lost Museum. The Berlin Sculpture and Paintings Collections 70 Years after World War II*, exh. cat. (Berlin, Bode-Museum, 19. 3. – 27. 9. 2015), Berlin / Petersburg 2015, pp. 11 – 22.

2 Ibid., pp. 23 – 28; see furthermore the contributions to the *Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz* 45, 2008/2009 published on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the return of museum, archive, and library holdings to the German Democratic Republic.

3 Konstantin Akinscha / Grigori Koslow / Clemens Toussaint: *Operation Beutekunst. Die Verlagerung deutscher Kulturgüter in die Sowjetunion nach 1945: zusammengestellt nach bisher unveröffentlichten Dokumenten aus Archiven der russischen Föderation*, Nuremberg 1995; id., *Russische Dokumente zur Beutekunst. Bemerkungen zum Aktenfonds Akinscha/Koslow im Archiv des Germanischen Nationalmuseums*, in: *Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums* 1997, pp. 137 – 154.

4 Lothar Lambacher (ed.): *Skulpturensammlung: Skulpturen. Möbel (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Dokumentation der Verluste, Vol. 7)*, Berlin 2006, pp. 15 – 16, note 20.

- 5 <http://www.kulturstiftung.de/kriegsverluste-deutscher-museen/> (accessed on 27.9.2016); and Britta Kaiser-Schuster: Gemeinsame Aufklärung von Kriegsverlusten. Ein Zwischenbericht zu den Projekten des Deutsch-Russischen Museumsdialogs, in: *Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz* 49, 2013, pp. 284–294.
- 6 See Didier Rykner, *Réputés disparus pendant la guerre, deux Donatello réapparaissent*, in: *La Tribune de l'Art*, 6 October 2015 (<http://www.latribunedelart.com/reputes-disparus-pendant-la-guerre-deux-donatello-reapparaissent> [accessed on 15.9.2016]).
- 7 Marina Loshak: Postscript, in: *Chapuis / Kemperdick: The Lost Museum* (as note 1), pp. 140–141.
- 8 In March 2016, Manfred Nawroth, Neville Rowley, and I returned to Moscow, this time accompanied by Paul Hofmann, since December 2015 Head of Conservation at the Bode-Museum and a specialist in the treatment of sculpture damaged by fire. In the course of five days, 26 sculptures were examined and treatment options were discussed with Igor Borodin, Head of Conservation at the Pushkin Museum, and his staff. On 3 May 2016 Vasily Rastorguev and Neville Rowley held a joint lecture at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, during which they presented 59 Renaissance sculptures that had been in the Berlin collection until their transfer to the Soviet Union in 1945–1946. The Pushkin Museum's Department of Conservation website provides a first insight into the project: <http://www.museumconservation.ru/projects/donatello/index.php?lang=en> (last accessed 24.11.2016).