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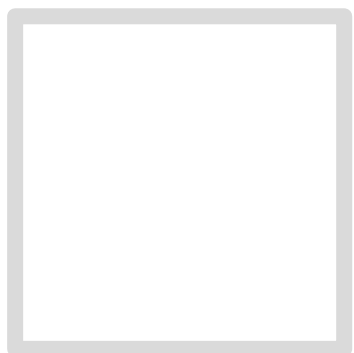
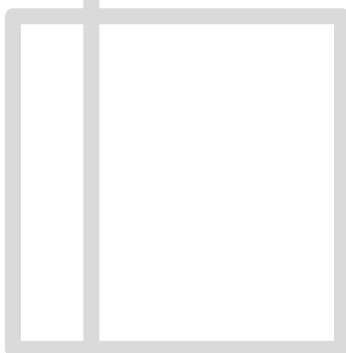


Donatello and Berlin

Research, Memories and Rediscoveries

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a cura di Neville Rowley





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*This volume brings together contributions on sculptures from the Italian Renaissance which are (or were) in the collection of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, starting with the key example of Donatello. Some of these objects, thought to have disappeared since the end of the Second World War, are in fact still preserved on the territory of the Russian Federation. They are presented here in their current state for the first time since 1945.*

The present volume was conceived as the conference proceedings for the “Donatello and the Lost Museum. Research, Memories and Rediscoveries” colloquium held on 17-18 September 2015 at the Bode-Museum in Berlin. It has taken almost seven years to gather part of the lectures that were given during the event. Several texts have also been added, dealing with the two main themes of the colloquium: the collection of Italian Renaissance sculptures belonging to the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (starting from the figure of Donatello), and the damage caused to many works from the collection by two fires in the Friedrichshain bunker in Berlin, at the end of the Second World War. In this introduction, I would like to briefly retrace the genesis of this symposium, organized jointly with Julien Chapuis, as well as the significant changes that occurred since then.

Between 2013 and 2015, I was commissioned by the Berlin Museums to compile an online catalog of some forty Donatellian works that belongs (or belonged) to their sculpture collection<sup>1</sup>. This is not to say that this museum has ever possessed so many works by Donatello: besides two established masterpieces, the so-called *Pazzi Madonna* and the *Putto with Tambourine*, only a handful of other objects are considered autographs. All of these pieces were acquired between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century by the legendary director of the Berlin Museums, Wilhelm (von) Bode. However, Bode’s acquisition policy was far from entirely directed toward the acquisition of autograph objects. In fact, numerous reliefs in bronze, terracotta, stucco, papier-mâché, as well as productions by contemporaries were added to the Berlin collection because they were considered to be more or less direct reflections of Donatellian inventions – and, more generally, of that “Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy” praised by the Swiss art historian Jacob Burckhardt, Bode’s master of thought<sup>2</sup>. According to Bode’s publications, the Donatellian

nucleus in Berlin amounted to nearly one hundred objects. The decision to limit my catalog to about forty items was therefore more a practical than a scientific one: I only had two years.

It has always been clear, however, that my study should also include the works that were not at the center of Donatellian studies. This neglect may have been due to the fact that the attribution to the master had long since fallen into disuse, without a convincing alternative emerging in the literature<sup>3</sup>. There were also an important number of objects that had disappeared at the end of the Second World War: thus a bronze *Saint John the Baptist* and a marble *Flagellation*, considered genuine Donatellos when they were exhibited at the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (today's Bode-Museum). Since their disappearance in the Friedrichshain fires, very few specialists had taken an interest in their case, to the point that they had almost disappeared from the collective memory.

From the start, my research has benefited from the unfailing support of three prominent specialists in the sculpture of this period: Francesco Caglioti, Laura Cavazzini and Aldo Galli. This close scientific relationship materialized in an article taking up the journey of the young Donatello<sup>4</sup>. The contributions of these scholars formed the backbone of the first half-day of the September 2015 colloquium: Francesco Caglioti gave a one-hour *lectio magistralis* devoted to Bode's interest in Donatello, insisting in particular on the role of Hans Semper. Aldo Galli's talk discussed the production of terracottas and stuccos in Florence at the beginning of the fifteenth century, a revival in which Donatello played a leading role. Laura Cavazzini's presentation re-evaluated three neglected sculptures from the Berlin collection closely linked to Donatello's art.

Also worth mentioning is Giancarlo Gentilini's inaugural talk on this first day, which was devoted in part to a mysterious jester's head in stucco once kept in Berlin and missing since 1945: could it be a derivation of a Donatellian invention? The work has not resurfaced, but a cast of it has been on display since 2019 in one of the rooms of the Bode-Museum, which recreates as closely as possible the cabinet of the outstanding Berlin collector and donor James Simon<sup>5</sup>. Volker Krahn's contribution, which focused on Bode's attributions of bronze objects to Donatello, has already been published elsewhere<sup>6</sup>. Philippe Malgouyres was to talk on the "difficult intersection" between Donatello and the *bronzetti*, but was unable to travel to Berlin for the symposium. It will be useful to read his positions in a chapter of his recently published catalogue of Italian Renaissance plaquettes in the Louvre<sup>7</sup>. My own intervention was devoted to the findings I had made during the preparation of my online catalogue; its publication and a recent book on the subject have made this text somewhat obsolete<sup>8</sup>. This is also the case



for the last conference of 17 September, held by Vasily Rastorguev, and to which I will return later.

Besides Laura Cavazzini's paper, the first part of the volume is thus mainly constituted by other texts directly related to the Italian Renaissance sculpture collection of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, without limitation to Donatello and his times. Mike Riddick discusses Bode's taste for Donatellian plaquettes, while Alison Luchs focuses on a painted stucco bust of *Saint John the Baptist*, which Bode always considered a work by Donatello. Since it disappeared in 1945, the bust has hardly been studied, despite its historical significance. Carsten Schneider reports on the restoration that he conducted of a terracotta relief still in Berlin, known as the *Alessandri Lunette*, which was long mistaken for a nineteenth century forgery but should be considered as a fifteenth century object (and most likely as an early work by Luca della Robbia). Fabio Gaffo studies in detail a stucco bust of Lorenzo the Magnificent, purchased early by the Berlin Museums as a Renaissance piece, but which turns out to be probably a modern copy of an original terracotta by Andrea del Verrocchio. Gabriele Fattorini attributes to the Sienese sculptor Il Marrina a stucco bust of *Saint Catherine of Siena*, which was acquired during the Nazi era for the sinister "Führermuseum" in Linz and is currently stored at the Bode-Museum. Finally, Matteo Ceriana describes the scientific career of the late curator Michael Knuth and his exemplary commitment to the Italian sculpture collection of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin between 1978 and 2010. The first part of the present volume should therefore be considered more as a collection of essays than as symposium proceedings.

Let us return to the subject of Vasily Rastorguev's talk, which was a real bridge between the two days of the 2015 symposium. I wrote earlier that the search for the "missing Donatellos", primarily the *Baptist* and the *Flagellation*, had been one of the focal points of my catalogue. Not that I hoped to ever see such works again; honoring their memory was my primary ambition. In contrast to other Donatello productions in Florence that had disappeared for centuries (such as a terracotta *Joshua* or a stone statue of abundance, called the *Dovizia*), the Donatellos once in Berlin could always be studied by means of reproductions: in addition to black-and-white photographs, the plaster-cast studio of the Berlin Museums, the Gipsformerei, also preserved real-scale casts of them<sup>9</sup>. It was following a visit to the Gipsformerei with Julien Chapuis that came the idea to organize an exhibition at the Bode-Museum, in the spring of 2015, to mark the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and of the fires that caused the disappearance of (or serious damage to) a large part of the Berlin collections.

To the casts of the lost or burned sculptures would be added full-size reproductions of the missing paintings, also kept before the war in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum. In the exhibition, I was asked to conceive a small room dedicated to Donatello. The casts of the *Baptist* and the *Flagellation* were presented next to two works damaged by the fires of 1945, which had been secretly transported to the Soviet Union and returned to East Germany in 1958.

This close connection between my research on Donatello and the exhibition, entitled “The Lost Museum”, quickly convinced us that the Donatellian study day that I had planned to organize in Berlin could be advantageously complemented by a second day that would deal with the broader issues related to the consequences of the Friedrichshain bunker fires. Several contributions from this second day are published here, starting with an article by Regine Dehnel summarizing what is known about these two fires, which unfortunately retain their share of mystery. Anastasia Yurchenko (who did not speak in 2015) sheds useful light on the lists of “equivalent” works of art that the Soviets drew up during the war, anticipating their final victory and a removal of Berlin’s collections in reparation for the immense cultural damage inflicted by the Nazi invasion on their soil. Anna Aponasenko focuses on the restoration of works damaged in the bunker fires and transferred to Leningrad in the immediate post-war period. Even if this operation was an important preparation to massive restitutions, the latter were only partial, as shown by Guillaume Nicoud’s study of a marble statue by Antoine Denis Chaudet depicting *Napoleon as a Legislator*, still kept today in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg<sup>10</sup>.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, several contributions, notably by Konstantin Akinsha and Grigorii Koslov, have emphasized the fact that a huge amount of artifacts displaced after the war by the Red Army had not been restituted<sup>11</sup>. In the Berlin symposium, it was therefore edifying to see Akinsha’s thoughts, two decades after his groundbreaking book on the subject. In 1997, one of his articles, co-authored with Koslov as well as Clemens Toussaint, took as an example the many objects of the Berlin sculpture collection which, according to the Soviet archives, were transported from the burned Berlin bunker to Moscow in 1946 and never returned<sup>12</sup>. This was the case with Donatello’s *Baptist* and *Flagellation*. Anyone who had read the 1997 article could only hope that both sculptures had survived the Friedrichshain fires.

Shortly after her appointment in 2013, the director of the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, Marina Loshak, declared she was open to discuss with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (which oversees the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) about the works displaced from Berlin at the end of the war that were still in her museum.

It is worth noting that such discussions did not consider the legal status of objects claimed by both Germany and Russia: this has to be discussed at State level. The main purpose of this dialogue between museums was to identify these works, publish them and, in many cases, restore them. For the sculpture collection, my Donatellian catalogue was considered a good starting point. In June 2015, a few weeks after the opening of the exhibition on the “Lost Museum”, we were thus able to travel to Moscow with Julien Chapuis. Our colleagues at the Pushkin Museum opened their storerooms, allowing us to see with our own eyes six works formerly in Berlin and widely thought to be lost since 1945 – including Donatello’s *Saint John the Baptist* and *Flagellation*. We immediately invited Vasily Rastorguev from the Pushkin Museum to come and present these objects at the Berlin colloquium – which he did, in German, on 17 September 2015. To say that the emotion was strong is an understatement. Shortly thereafter, the first color photographs of the two “resurrected” Donatellos were published by Marina Loshak in the catalogue of the exhibition on the “Lost Museum”<sup>13</sup>. The rediscovery was presented jointly by Moscow and Berlin.

The following years saw the active continuation of such collaboration. In May 2016, no less than sixty sculptures now in Moscow were shown by Vasily Rastorguev and myself in a lecture at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, the text of which is reproduced in this volume (the six works seen in June 2015 having already been the subject of a scientific publication<sup>14</sup>). There were also other joint lectures and seminars, both in Berlin and Moscow but also at the University of Trento, and close collaboration on restoration projects: this sharing of expertise was very advantageous since many works in both museums were damaged in the same fire<sup>15</sup>. In the summer of 2016, a Russian website also published several hundred objects displaced after the war, described merely as being on the territory of the Russian Federation<sup>16</sup>. Some three hundred sculptures are identified here by Paul Hofmann, who as Head of Conservation at the Bode-Museum played a fundamental part in what we immediately (and improperly) called the “Donatello Project”.

As this volume was about to go to press, the Russian invasion of the Ukraine on 24 February 2022 changed everything: Hermann Parzinger, president of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, immediately declared a freeze on all collaborations with Russian institutions. The “Donatello Project” was no exception. The present publication was intended to be a milestone in a common journey that should have included an exhibition, a *catalogue raisonné*, and a number of restorations of the rediscovered works; unfortunately, such objectives are no longer relevant. Let us hope, however, that the numerous sculptures published

here in color for the first time will not be further collateral victims of a conflict that goes beyond them, and that would condemn them to wander ever longer in the limbo of art history and common memory.

This publication would not have been possible without the immediate adhesion and constant support of the two editors in chief of the journal «Predella», Gerardo de Simone and Emanuele Pellegrini, nor without the exemplary professional work and personal commitment of Silvia Massa, Elisa Bassetto and Elisa Bernard. I would like to profoundly thank all of them, as well as the two anonymous reviewers who carefully read all the contributions. My greatest thanks go to the various authors, both for the scientific importance of their contribution and for their patience, which was sometimes severely tested. At the Berlin State Museums, I would like to thank Babette Buller and Manfred Nawroth, and – last but not least – Julien Chapuis, who not only prompted my Donatellian research, but also suggested it could be used to open the door to a dialogue with Moscow. It was he who was supposed to retrace here the history of the “Donatello Project”, as he had already done some years ago<sup>17</sup>. I have no doubt that he will write on this topic again in the future, for our great benefit.

- 1 This catalogue was published in 2016 on the website <www.smb-digital.de> (and can now also be retrieved on <www.recherche.smb.museum>, last accessed 30 April 2022).
- 2 See M. Seidel, *Das Renaissance-Museum. Wilhelm Bode als 'Schüler' Jacob Burckhardt, in Storia dell'arte e politica culturale intorno al 1900. La Fondazione dell'Istituto Germanico di Storia dell'Arte di Firenze*, ed. by M. Seidel, Venezia, 1999, pp. 55-109.
- 3 This was the case, for instance, of a bronze bust often identified with a Portrait of Ludovico Gonzaga and recently mistaken for a vulgar forgery, when in fact it is a work by Niccolò Baroncelli, as August Schmarsow had already proposed in 1889; see N. Rowley, *Donatello berlinese*, Roma, 2022, pp. 68-73.
- 4 F. Caglioti, L. Cavazzini, A. Galli, N. Rowley, *Reconsidering the Young Donatello*, in «Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen», LVII, 2015 (2018), pp. 15-45.
- 5 See N. Rowley, *Das James-Simon-Kabinett. Zur Geschichte eines Raumes in Wilhelm Bodes "Renaissance-Museums"*, in *James Simon, Briefe an Wilhelm von Bode 1885-1927*, ed. by O. Matthes, Wien-Köln-Weimar, 2020, pp. 31-59 (esp. p. 58 fig. 21).
- 6 V. Krahn, 'Ein Blick in Donatello's Werkstatt': *Berliner Bronzen – Wilhelm von Bode und die Zuschreibungsfragen*, in «Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen», LVII, 2015 (2018), pp. 53-65.
- 7 P. Malgouyres, *De Filarete à Riccio. Bronzes italiens de la Renaissance (1430-1550). La collection du musée du Louvre*, Paris, 2020, pp. 71-93.
- 8 See Rowley, *Donatello berlinese*, cit.
- 9 N. Rowley, *À la recherche des Donatello perdus, de Florence à Berlin*, in «Figura. Studi sull'immagine della tradizione classica», III, 2015, pp. 227-253.

- 10 Petra Winter, Bénédicte Savoy and Julien Chapuis had also presented papers on 18 September 2015.
- 11 See mainly K. Akinsha, G. Koslov, *Stolen Treasure: the Hunt for the World's Lost Masterpieces*, London, 1995.
- 12 K. Akinsha, G. Koslov, C. Toussaint, *Russische Dokumente zur Beutekunst. Bemerkungen zum Aktenfonds Akinscha/Koslow im Archiv des Germanischen Nationalmuseums*, in «Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums», 1997, pp. 137-154.
- 13 M. Loschak, *Postscriptum*, in *Das verschwundene Museum. Die Berliner Gemälde- und Skulpturensammlung 70 Jahre nach Kriegsende*, ed. by J. Chapuis, S. Kemperdick, Petersberg, 2015, pp. 140-141.
- 14 N. Rowley, *Donatello Forgotten and Rediscovered. On Five Works of Art Formerly in the Berlin Museums*, in «Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz», LI, 2015, pp. 140-163.
- 15 I refer mainly to the site <<http://www.museumconservation.ru/data/specprojects/donatello/en/index.html>>.
- 16 The catalogue starts from the page: <[www.lostart.ru/move/ru/1414609/](http://www.lostart.ru/move/ru/1414609/)> (last accessed 30 April 2022).
- 17 J. Chapuis, *Donatello and Renaissance Sculpture – A Chronology*, in «Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz», LI, 2015, pp. 130-139.



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