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THE RITUAL AROUND REPLICA: FROM REPLICATED WORKS OF ART TO ART AS REPLICA (Part I)

Sally Malenka

In a museum culture, objects considered unique, original, or of outstanding craftsmanship are the foundation of acquisitions, collections care, and exhibition. An original may be understood through the concept of time, or that which comes first in narrative time, and establishes an author behind the creation of the work of art. Much of our effort as conservators evolves from understanding the effect of time on the artist's intent or use of the object, or the effect of time on materials. The term "replica" would at first suggest an opposing concept. A replica must be that which comes after the original. Still, a replica is part of the same narrative time of the original, and this makes it the "excitable object" discussed in Part II, affecting our perception of the object, the author-effect (the aura of the author), or the narrative space. The replica must refer to or substitute for, and in some cases define or re-define the original, but always reveal itself as distinct (Millhauser 1995:51, 53).

Knowledge of the space or location, time, scale, style, history, and material and techniques exposes the replica. This paper will illustrate examples of replicas from the sculpture and decorative arts collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; (museum identification numbers are indicated in parentheses after the object name). Part II steps back from the art historians' interpretation of original and replica to explore the term "replica" from a philosophical point of view.

For the conservator, replicas may be a tool for compensation for part or whole of an object. In the straightforward example of a pair of Argand lamps, ca. 1840, (1946-074-001, -002) the top ring to support glass prisms was missing on one of the lamps.¹ A mold was taken from the extant ring and a replica was made by electrotyping. The copper electrotype was electroplated with silver, and epoxy was used to reinforce the back and interior of the electrotyped shell. The compensation creates the illusion of the pair of lamps in their entirety, and the replica is undoubtedly an accurate replacement for the missing component. In the next example, however, the replication is undoubtedly an incorrect interpretation of the original, although the illusion of completeness is effectively attained. A jade inset was missing from the top of a Qing dynasty incense burner (1935-010-028).² A photograph of the object at the time of acquisition showed the presence of a jade inset, although its form and design are not visible and there is no written description. The object was displayed in an 18th C. English period room, and the loss was significantly distracting. A decision was made with the curator to compensate this loss with a copy of a jade inset from an intact incense burner of the same period. A silicone rubber mold was made of the jade and the replica cast in polyester resin, tinted with dry pigments. The polyester replica was mechanically secured to the lid with a threaded rod and nut through a pre-existing hole. The replica in some way evokes a sense of jade, but in no other way can it be considered correct for the object, and it has no direct reference to the missing original. The context for the replica has shifted the identity: when a replica is part of an object, it occupies the same narrative

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time and space as the original, and thereby allows the deception to be believable.

Replicas may also be made to preserve the entire object, usually in anticipation of loss of or wear on the original. William Rush's 1825 wood sculptures, *Allegory of the Schuylkill River (Schuylkill Chained)* and *Allegory of the Waterworks (Schuylkill Freed)* (12-1937-001, -002), were originally situated above the entrances of the millhouses of the Fairmount Waterworks.³ The precedent for replacing William Rush's fragile outdoor sculptures was set as early as 1872 when *Nymph and Bittern* (021-1940-001) was cast in bronze, a material in which Rush never worked; the bronze is on display at the PMA (Bantel 1982: 114-117). The casting was prescient. By 1900 only the head of that sculpture remained and is now at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. In 1939 casting of only the head of *Schuylkill Freed* was proposed as a "very acceptable piece [for the Phillips Academy] to represent Rush in the absence of an original work", although this was never carried out.⁴ In 1978, fiberglass reinforced polyester replicas of both *Schuylkill Chained* and *Freed* were made, an improvement over metal to interpret a white painted wood surface, and now sit above the millhouse entrance. The originals were conserved in 1982 and are displayed on long term loan at the PMA from the Commissioners of Fairmount Park. The molds were destroyed to preclude the possibility of other copies. The fiberglass copies, 22 years after their fabrication, are now being considered for conservation by the City of Philadelphia. In the case of *Nymph and Bittern*, the bronze replica, in combination with written records and graphic images, defines our knowledge of the original. In the case of *Schuylkill Chained* and *Freed*, the replicas physically occupy the narrative space of the original. If the impact of the original is diminished by removal from the site, the impact of the replica is enhanced, and its care and preservation is approached in a manner in keeping with an original work of art.

Replicas may be used to define and preserve something less tangible than material: the legacy of an artist. Thomas Eakins' plaster working models were cast in bronze by his wife, thirty years after Eakins' death.⁵ Although they were never intended as finished artworks, many of these objects may be found in museum and private collections, "[representing] a complex history of the artist's working methods, the promotion of the artist's reputation by his wife and students, and a history of collecting including the casting and recasting of sculpture" (Meighan et. al. 2000). The museum casts are now the subject of research and conservation to evaluate the sequence of casting.

Once an entire object is replicated, the replica itself may assume a status or use, particularly within the museum context, that is equivalent to the "original". The existence of a unique replica may enhance its perceived significance. Hector Guimard's tray (1949-043-001), like other examples of Guimard's work including that of the Paris subway stations (now largely replaced by replicas of the originals), is a superb art nouveau design. The original is a fire gilded copper alloy tray, signed and dated 1909, now in the Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris (Inv. 18101). Guimard duplicated some of his works for use in his home, and the PMA tray is an electrotype copy of the original. He did not choose to have multiple originals made by casting, and the electrotype is not signed.⁶ The gold electroplating on the electrotype was worn away in the center, and was treated

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with nitrocellulose lacquer tinted with dry pigments. The replica successfully substitutes for the original because of the lack of multiple copies, the close association with the designer, and perhaps because the image of the object is not immediately familiar. The museum label simply reads “gilded copper” and neither reveals or denies the existence of the original.

In the 19th C., replicas of originals were considered appropriate acquisitions for a museum or collector, to allow juxtaposition of objects for scholarly purposes (Haskell and Penny 1981:117-124). They may still function that way today. 19th C. plaster copies of sculptures from the Medici Chapel in Florence, *Dawn, Dusk, and Lorenzo d’Medici*, were borrowed from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (013-1997-001, -002, -003). They were treated for display in the exhibition, *Rodin and Michelangelo*, in 1997; (the first venue was at the Casa Buonarroti, Florence, where replicas were unnecessary).⁷

However, often 19th C. copies became generations removed from the original molds and the quality of the copies declined (Haskell and Penny 1981:123). Processes of copying, including sand casting, stone pointing, and electrotyping, became increasingly mechanical and allowed multiple copies to be made, sometimes without regard to the original material. The Milton shield (1984-133-001) is such a copy, an electrotype of a repoussé silver and damascened iron shield in the Victoria and Albert Museum.⁸ The original was designed and crafted in a Renaissance revival style by Leonard Morel-Ladeuil for Elkington and Company, and was awarded a gold medal at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1867. Many copies of the shield were sold over a thirty year period to individuals and museums to disseminate knowledge of the work “necessary to the progress of art” (South Kensington Museum 1873:A2), to allow ownership of an image of good taste and design, and to recoup losses for Elkington and Co. for the expense of the original (Elzea and Elzea 1976:101). The PMA shield has been the impetus for extensive research to investigate the appearance of the copy, the techniques of plating, and the degree to which it approximated the appearance of the original. It has been displayed in the permanent galleries since 1995, its significance found not only in its reference to the original, but also in its process: a new technology applied to reproducibility.

If knowledge of the reference is lost, the narrative is interrupted, and an object may enter the world of fakes. A 16th C. Italian mirror (046-1991-001) was brought into the lab for purchase consideration.⁹ After examination under the binocular microscope and by x-radiography, the mirror was revealed to be an electrotype replica. The story was pieced together, when the original, a damascened iron mirror at Ecoen outside of Paris, was found, and another electrotype was uncovered in the electrotype collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Modern cast white metal replicas are still available for purchase at Ecoen today.

Period rooms, when viewed through the lens of the concept of replica, reflect varying levels of authenticity and replication. The period rooms at the PMA were collected under Fiske Kimball, architectural historian and director of the museum between 1925 and 1955, and one of the leading proponents of using period rooms to establish context and history for art objects. All period

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rooms have an element of replication, whether in concept, in location, or in material, a fact not lost on contemporary critics of Kimball's approach (Conn 1998:225-230). Collectively, the period rooms may be considered replicas of an idea, and one that can never be truly experienced: Kimball's evolutionary walk through time (Conn 1998:226). When we enter a period room, our perception of the object shifts from viewer to participant. The Lansdowne Room (1931-104-001), an 18th C. Robert Adam Room, and the Hotel Letellier (1928-052-001), an 18th C. French room, retain much original material, accurate interpretation of replicated material and close approximations of original dimension and experience of space.¹⁰ We call these rooms original or authentic, because replica of part does not overwhelm the authenticity of the whole. Each has been the focus of extensive research and conservation. On the other hand, the Medieval cloister (1928-057-001) is made up of columns and capitals from sites in the Rousillon region of France, and includes some modern pieces. For decades after its acquisition it was referred to as St. Genis, until recent scholarship clarified that only four columns and capitals undisputedly came from that cloister, which had been disassembled in 1924, eight others were from the same period and region, and the rest modern assemblages.¹¹ In 1988 the museum supported efforts to allow St. Genis to rebuild its cultural heritage, by providing silicone rubber molds of the capitals at the museum.¹² The replicas remain replicas in their material, but they now also have an authenticity of location that the originals no longer do. They are *metaphorical* replicas by *substituting* or standing for the original. The early 20th C. interpretation of a French salon, from the New York home of Mrs. Eleanor Elkins Rice (1939-041-062), is perhaps the best example of a room as *metonymic* replica, where the room *refers* to an idea, based on designs by the French architect Jacques-Ange Gabriel (1698-1782), but without direct reference to an original. The room is situated between two "authentic" French period rooms in the museum, and excellent 18th C. furniture and ceramics are displayed. In spite of clear labels interpreting the room, the illusion is effectively complete.

Scale models are also types of replicas, but their deception is far more obvious. A model of the Chinese Reception Hall (1929-163-001) made in the 1930s during the WPA was reassembled during the treatment of the painted ceiling.¹³ Plans for the model include eventual exhibition, which is somewhat surprising when the original and authentic room, accurately interpreted in its replicated parts, is only a few steps away. The change in scale- the model is 6' x 5' and the room is 40' x 35'-- allows an enjoyable shift in perspective for the viewer. Importantly, the deception is immediately detectable visually, and differs from the example above of the Rice room, by requiring no other intellectual background or knowledge of original.

In all of these examples, replicas may assume a status in the museum that includes preservation. In the 20th C. through the work of Marcel Duchamp, the potential for all artworks to be replicated is re-envisioned as the replica as the work of art. *Paris Air* (1950-134-078, -78a), one of Duchamp's readymades, will serve as an example. The first version was an ampule of serum, emptied and resealed by a pharmacist, which Duchamp gave to his patrons, Walter and Louise Arensberg, when he returned from Paris in 1919. The second version, also a gift to the Arensbergs and at the PMA, was made in 1949, after the original one was broken and repaired. A

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third version dates to 1963 and an edition of eight was made in 1964, authorized and approved by Duchamp, and thereby redefining “readymade”. Even on Duchamp’s own terms, “In art, and only in art, the original work is sold, and it acquires a sort of aura that way. But with my readymades a replica will do just as well” (Naumann 1999:293), it is still impossible for us not to become entangled in words: “original readymade”, replica, version, copy, or edition, and question, rightly or wrongly, whether the original concept is present in the later editions.¹⁴ For conservation reasons, the first *Paris Air* has never been loaned from the museum; the 1949 replica has traveled several times. In the end, the existence of this and other replicas has aided the preservation of the earlier versions by limiting loans of the more fragile, more intact or more deluxe versions of his works. We remain bound to the idea of earliest, first, or original.

Sherrie Levine responds to Duchamp’s lead and plays with ideas of originality by appropriating the artwork of those who preceded her. Levine created *Newborns* in 1993, as an installation in the Museum Studies series, where an artist is invited to make new works that respond to the PMA’s collections. She selected Brancusi’s 1915 marble sculpture, *Newborn*, as her departure point. The role of the conservator was critical in making a high quality mold and cast of the original.¹⁵ Levine then had six casts made in glass. These were displayed on pianos, a direct reference to the display of a Brancusi *Newborn* at Kettle’s Yard, the home of H.S.Ede in Cambridge, England. As viewer’s we are placed in an uncomfortable and ambiguous position of original-replicas-new original.

Of these examples, which truly fit a definition of “replica”? Should we limit the term to only those works where the artist is the author, or authorizes the act of replication? Are the examples of replicating for compensation of part or whole simply examples of copying, or do meanings shift when a viewer is deceived? And who is the knowledgeable viewer-- the scholar, the educated public, the conservator with scientific tools of detection? Does the identity of a replica change when it receives in the museum the same care, display, and status previously reserved for the original? Underlying these examples are changing attitudes and theoretical underpinnings toward replica and original. For the conservator called upon to treat or evaluate a replica, the challenge is in understanding its relationship to an original, while respecting that the replica too has a significance distinct from, but not necessarily less than, that of the original.

Acknowledgments

The projects and treatments included in this paper represent the work of many individuals over many years. They are credited by endnote citations. I would like to thank particularly Andrew Lins, Melissa Meighan, and Donna Farrell.

Endnotes

1. This object was treated in 1989 by Sally Malenka.
2. This object was treated in 1989 by Sally Malenka.
3. The replication of these sculptures was carried out in 1978 with the coordination of the Conservation Department of the PMA, headed by Marigene Butler. The treatment of the sculptures was carried out by Andrew Lins and Richard Kerschner in 1982.
4. Marceau, June 19th, 1939. Marceau had also proposed the replication of both sculptures in 1937 by casting in metal, possibly aluminum; this too was never carried out.
5. This research and treatment is currently being carried out by Melissa Meighan for a forthcoming publication and exhibition. Julie Solz and Catherine Williams have assisted in the project.
6. The tray is composed of two halves, the front an electrotype and the back a spun copper sheet; the interior rim is reinforced with a lead solder, detected through x-radiography. The absence of the signature on the electrotype suggests that the copy was made from an original pattern rather than a mold taken from the cast tray.
7. This treatment was carried out by Donna Farrell in 1997.
8. This research and treatment was carried out by Andrew Lins and Sally Malenka in 1995.
9. Examination of this object was carried out by Andrew Lins, Melissa Meighan and Sally Malenka in 1991.
10. The Lansdowne Room was treated in 1986 by Marigene Butler, et. al. The Hotel Letellier was treated in 1995 by John Childs, et. al.
11. The examination and research was carried out by Eda Diskant, Department of European Decorative Arts, who published extensively on the cloister, and Melissa Meighan, and is summarized in PMA documents of 1985 (Conservation file 1928-057-001). The replication of the capitals was carried out by Andrew Lins in 1986-89.
12. Two other original capitals at the Louvre were also returned to St. Genis.
13. The model was reassembled by Mary Culver and Sally Malenka in 1996.

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14. With respect to the Schwarz replicas, Naumann writes: "if [Schwarz] wanted to retain the idea presented in *Paris Air...*, for example, he would have had to arrange for the glass vials to be broken and resealed in Paris. Years later, at least one collector questioned whether or not Schwarz took this necessary step..." (Naumann 1999:249). For the 1949 replica, Duchamp arranged for the replica to be made in Paris (Naumann 1999:167).

15. Donna Farrell made the mold and wax positive in 1993; the wax positive was used by the glass maker.

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