



Daedalus

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PROPOSAL FOR TREATMENT

Object: Plaster Casts @ Pierce School Brookline Ma

Artist/Date: circa 1900

Material: Plaster

Prepared For: Town of Brookline

Overview

The 16 plaster relief panels (friezes) are copies of the *Triumphal Entry of Alexander into Babylon* by Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844). The original marbles were made from 1812-30. The plaster copies @ Pierce School were made by the Caproni company in the late 19th century.

According to the Thorvaldsen Museum: “Bertel Thorvaldsen was one of Europe’s most famous artists in the 19th century and by far one of the most famous and influential artists Denmark has ever had”

A link to the Museum, where the artist’s bio and work can be found in more detail can be found here:

<https://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en>

The initial friezes were made for a visit by Napoleon to the papal palace in Quirinal Hill (Italy) in 1812. More detail about the history of the original artwork can be found in the links here, and at the end of this section of the proposal:

<https://www.villacarlotta.it/en/the-museum/the-salon-of-marbles/thorvaldsens-frieze/>

<https://arkivet.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/documents/ea8371>

https://palazzo.quirinale.it/palazzo_en.html

The Caproni Company, located in Boston, was active around the turn of the 20th century. They were mold makers and fabricators and made copies of thousands of artworks and architectural objects. During this time, America was growing and the taste for Classical and Neo-classical art was at its peak. Caproni’s plaster casts were used to decorate schools and municipal buildings all over the country; *This was the same company that made the Parthenon casts- removed from Lincoln school and installed at BHS in 2004.* The early Caproni casts used first or second generation molds which transferred almost all of the details of the original artwork to the plasters. Here is a link to an early Caproni Catalog:

<https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0468/9773/files/1910-Caproni-catalog-Seventy-Seven-Photographic-Views-of-Schools-2of2.pdf?1241>

You can find copies of some of Thorvaldsen’s artwork online (at the Caproni collection and other online sellers), including a few (but not all) of the friezes in this assembly; these casts are not as fine as the earlier 19th century works



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THE THORVALDSENS MUSEUM AT

ABOUT DOCUMENTS CHRONOLOGY PERSONS SUBJECTS RELATIVES

Search The Documents Year by Year

We are now to speak of the magnificent frieze, upon which rests Thorvaldsen's acknowledged supremacy in the *bas-relief* branch of statuary. Late in the autumn of 1811, Napoleon ordered a papal palace upon the Quirinal hill to be prepared for his reception against the month of May following. Great exertions were made by the Roman artists to complete the requisite decorations, but it was not until the beginning of March that a proposal was made to Thorvaldsen to contribute his share to the embellishments of the intended imperial residence. Three months only could be allowed him to complete his task. Short as was the period, he gladly undertook a frieze for one of the spacious saloons, and selected for its subject the triumphal entry of Alexander into Babylon. This is no place for a detailed description; but we may briefly state that the subject is divided into three sections, or series of groups; the first series representing the Babylonians in expectation of the conqueror's triumphant approach; the second, the *magi* and great men going forth in procession with their offerings to meet and propitiate him; the third, Alexander attended by his army; and that the spirit, boldness, and freedom of the various groups, so far surpass all modern competition, that should we seek a comparison, we could only refer to the Elgin marbles, with which no modern artist aspires to rivalry. This frieze procured Thorvaldsen, from the Italians themselves, the title of Patriarch of *Bas-Reliefs*.

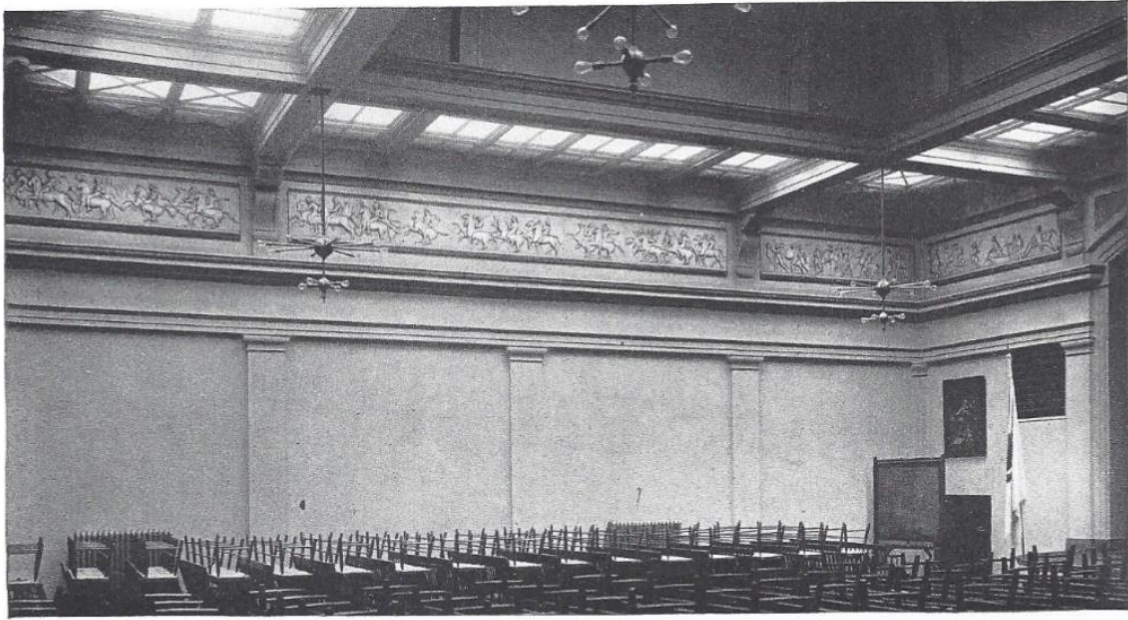
Thorvaldsen anxiously desired that his native land should possess a marble copy of this his master-piece, and Denmark cherished a corresponding wish. Financial difficulties delayed its gratification; but they were at length overcome, and in the course of the years 1829, 30, and 31, the frieze, with some additions, required by the greater size of of [sic] the hall for which this copy was intended, was completed in marble, and it is now, we believe, the glory of the Knights' Hall in the castle of Christianborg. Another marble copy is in the *Palazzo* of Count Sommariva, upon the Lago di Como; and in this last Thorvaldsen has introduced a group, representing himself delivering the work to the Count. The head of this small figure bears a much stronger resemblance to the artist, than do the other busts and portraits amongst the engravings, but none of them give an idea of the commanding genius that lives in his eye, or of the sweetness and simplicity that characterize his rough features.

We have gone through Professor Thiele's first volume, the only one that has reached us, or we believe yet seen the light, and should now proceed to speak of the opinions entertained by less partial and perhaps more adequate judges than our author, of the relative merits of Thorvaldsen and Canova; but the remarks and statements into which we have been already led leave us little to add. By way of peroration, however, and



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Historic
Photo from
Caproni
Catalog at
Gardner
School in
Allston
circa 1900

Assembly Hall, Thomas Gardner School, Allston, Mass., decorated with a continuous frieze of the Triumphal Entry of Alexander into Babylon, *from the Caproni collection.*



First group
of friezes
West Wall

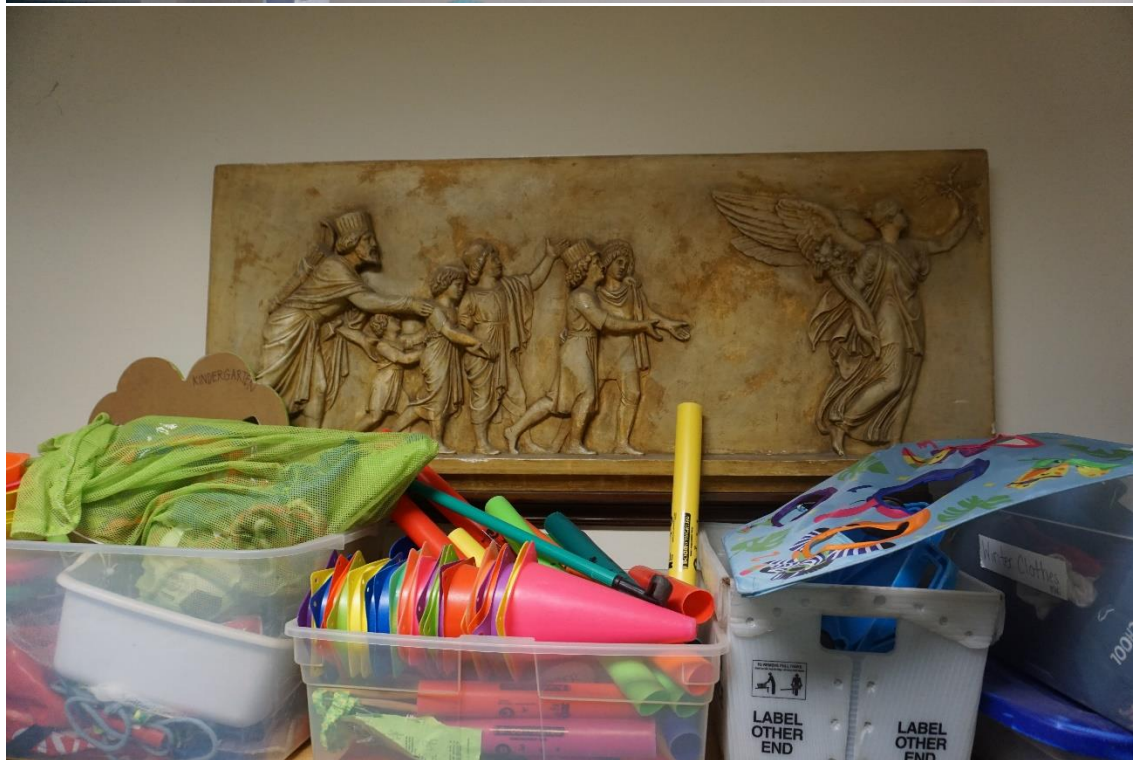


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2nd & 3rd
group of
friezes





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4th & 5th
group of
friezes





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6th group of
friezes



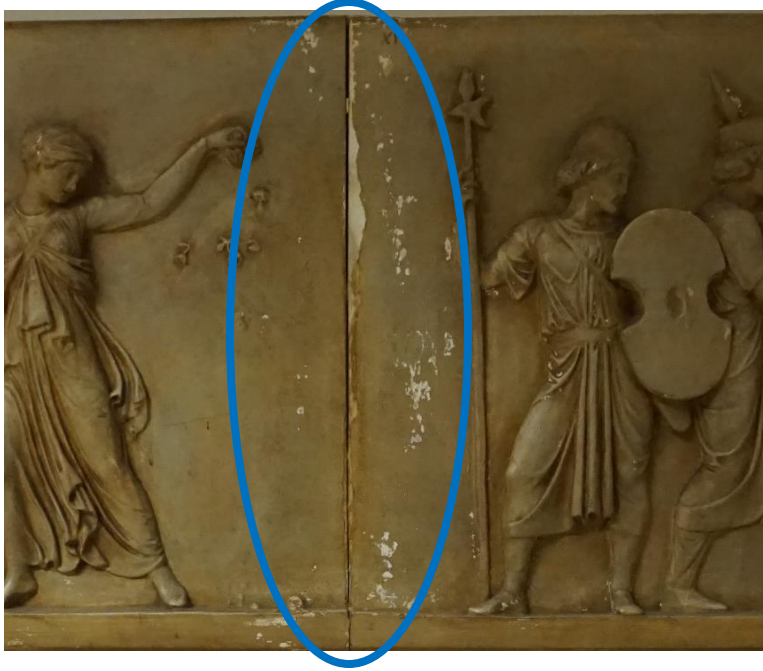
7th group of
friezes-

East Wall



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Details of damage
(blue) and build-up
of accretions
(green)





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Details of damage
(blue) and build-up of
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Current Condition

The sections were displayed on the wall of the 1st floor of the (Old) Pierce School Building.

Each panel is approximately 24" tall and range from 30-65" long.

The panels and wooden plinths were removed from the Pierce School on July 10th 2024.

They are currently being stored in Daedalus' conservation studio.

The surface of the plasters is covered with brownish-yellow substance which is likely a shellac/varnish layer which has degraded and absorbed particulates from the building.

The majority of the panels have some small chips and losses to the original surface. These are primarily on the edges of the casts—there is some damage to the sculpted forms on several panels.

Proposed Treatment

Stabilization Repairs and documentation

The casts should be inspected and documented with photographs and a written description of the condition of each plaque.

Stabilization of flaking and cracks that needs to be addressed prior to the removal of coating.

These tasks may include:

- Injection of cracks with adhesives formulated for use on plaster objects
- Surface repairs to flaking areas using adhesives and plaster repair material.

Surface Treatment

The surfaces should be cleaned of degraded varnish and soiling.

Testing should be conducted to determine the most efficient cleaning method which will not damage the original surfaces. This may include both chemical treatments such as organic solvents & conservation gels and/or mechanical techniques such as using stainless scalpels and picks under magnification & the use of an Nd:Yag conservation laser.



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Once free accretions the surfaces should be repaired as needed using a combination of materials to stabilize cracks and re-form losses. This may include injection with adhesives, structural supports to the back of the casts with plaster/ burlap and repairs to the forms using plaster repair materials.

The panels should be consolidated with a solution of 3% B-72.

The surface of the panels should be painted to match the original coloration; likely a cream color which approximates the look of marble. More investigation should be conducted into the surface color as the process moves along. It is likely that original layers may be revealed during the cleaning process.

Re-installation & Documentation & Storage

The panels should be stored in an alarmed, temperature controlled facility until the owner is ready for the re-installation. The Panels should be stored on shelves and not stacked.

The panels should be brought back to the Pierce School and installed on the 2nd Floor

In coordination with the building design team a plan for the how panels will be mounted in the new space should be developed; the best way to mount objects like this is to provide a support on the bottom, and hold the sections in place from the top. More discussions should be had about approaches as the process moves along, this will include the option of re-using the wood plinths.

The owners may decide to set the panels in a different configuration to better reflect the story; more research should be done to determine where each panel was sighted in the original configuration.

A written report and photographic report detailing the treatments should be provided to the owner upon completion of the project.

Cost Estimate For Treatment

\$66,000

All work should be in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of The American Institute for Conservation of Artistic and Historic Works

JC 07/2024