

Ancient Sculptures and National Museums: Universal and Local Claims of Antiquity

Johannes Siapkas and Lena Sjögren

Department of Archaeology and Ancient History

Uppsala University, Sweden

johannes.siapkas@antiken.uu.se lena.sjogren@antiken.uu.se

Introduction

Almost any National Museum in the Western world with art and/or archaeological exhibitions makes associations with ancient Greece and Rome. Ancient sculpture is in many ways emblematic for high culture. In particular, marble and bronze sculptures of the Greek classical style from the fifth and fourth centuries BC are revered as works of high art. In the field of reception research, which concerns post-antique appropriations of the classical heritage, several studies elaborate on the collecting and display of ancient sculpture from a historical perspective.¹ These studies tend to concentrate on particular periods, collectors, early acquisitions of ancient sculptures to museums, and the fate of famous sculptures in private collections and public displays. Ideological discussions are often focused on how the European nobility associated itself with the classical heritage. There is, however, an apparent lack of analyses of contemporary exhibitions. Reception research has largely avoided to problematize present-day appropriations of the classical tradition. These studies provide us with a historical background to our scrutinisation of the position of ancient sculptures today.

As a material category, ancient sculpture epitomizes classical ideals and ultimately a common artistic legacy for Western culture. In other words, it is in its capacity as exemplary art worth emulating that ancient sculpture often has been displayed in museums. The preservation of this status today is visible in, for instance, the National Museum in Stockholm – a museum primarily exhibiting pre-twentieth century Swedish and West European art. Although the museum does not display any authentic objects from ancient Greece and Rome references are made the classical heritage. To reach the museum's upper galleries where the

1 For example Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique. The lure of Classical sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven & London 1981); Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and aesthetes in the sculpture galleries of the British Museum 1800–1939* (London 1992); Dietrich Boschung and Henner von Hesberg (eds.), *Antikensammlungen des europäischen Adels im 18. Jahrhundert als Ausdruck einer europäischen Identität* (Mainz am Rhein 2000).

permanent picture collections are displayed, the visitor walks up through a monumental staircase adorned with replicas of the Parthenon-frieze. Reaching the upper stairwell, the visitor further encounters plaster casts of famous classical sculptures (masterpieces) placed in niches, for instance the *Laokoon* group, and *Venus de Milo*. Two monumental paintings by Carl Larsson are placed high up on each side of the stairwell. Both adhere to the spirit of national romanticism that flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century. One painting depicts a pre-Christian ritual (“Midwinter sacrifice”) while the other shows the triumphal entry to Stockholm of Gustav Vasa, the first king of Sweden. Distinctive national artistic and historic features are here connected with the classical heritage. Thus, before entering the picture galleries in which the development of Western painting is presented, the visitor is imbued with the essential knowledge of the origins of Sweden’s cultural heritage; both in a particular vernacular setting and in the general context of West European art.

The present arrangement of this exhibition room is one of the best examples of how a national museum through the display of ancient sculptures claims a universal antiquity.² These plaster casts emphasize traditional art historical principles since they are viewed as exemplary pieces of art with primarily aesthetic qualities that transcends spatial and temporal boundaries. As objects of art, they represent the general ancient origin of Western art and the exhibition thereby corresponds with an art historical approach in research. The study of ancient sculpture holds today an ambivalent position in-between art history and archaeology. There is a strong tradition of analysing inherent artistic properties and the development of styles over time, i.e. ancient sculptures are separated from the very cultural contexts that produced them. On the other hand, ancient sculptures can also be regarded as archaeological objects. Elaborations from this perspective emphasize the functions and meanings of sculptures in their original cultural setting.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse how this ambivalence between art and archaeology is visualized in contemporary exhibitions of ancient sculptures. It is also our intention to relate these exhibitions to analytical concepts (terminology) that frequently occur in museological research. We will exemplify these concepts with a selection of museums from Germany, Switzerland, Greece and USA. Our paper is part of a larger study “The Petrified Gaze: Displaying the Ideals of Antiquity” where we investigate how the academic discipline classics and museums under mutual influence establish and preserve an idealised view of antiquity. In the framework of an idealised antiquity, ancient sculpture appears as a suitable analytical object because of its emblematic qualities.

Terminology – Dichotomies of Museums

The distinction between an art (historical) museological tradition and an archaeological – also referred to as ethnographic, anthropological, or historicizing – museological tradition is fundamental in museum studies. According to these conceptual schemes, art museums are characterised by the tendency to exhibit unique and singular works of art. In this tradition the aesthetic qualities of the objects are stressed, not the least through the practice to display only

2 The present-day appearance of the upper stairwell is the result of various additions and removals, since the building’s inauguration in 1866. It is only the Parthenon frieze that remains as it was intended from the beginning, while some of the plaster casts, removed in the early twentieth century, were relocated in the niches in connection with a temporary exhibition in 2002. Carl Larsson’s painting depicting Gustav Vasa was finished in 1908, while the controversial painting “Midwinter sacrifice” from 1911 was reinstated in 1992. For the changes of this space from 1866 onwards see Solfrid Söderlind, “Från ädel antik till gammalt gods”, in Solfrid Söderlind (ed.), *Gips. Tradition i konstens form* (Stockholm 1999), p. 115–155 and Karin Sidén, “Tekniska lösningar och ideologiska ställningstaganden. Nationalmuseibyggnadens interiör och dess förändringar”, in Mikael Ahlund (eds.), *Konst kräver rum. Nationalmusei historia och framtid* (Stockholm 2002), p. 40–58.

few and exclusive objects considered as aesthetically pleasing.³ In this museological tradition the exhibited objects is the end; they refer only to themselves. In contrast, in the archaeological museums the singular aesthetic qualities of the exhibited objects are of secondary importance. The emphasis is on the original cultural contexts of the objects. They are exhibited because of their representativity and not because of their intrinsic aesthetic qualities. The object facilitates a better understanding of another (past) reality. It refers to another external reality.

Conceptualisations of museums by scholars from a variety of disciplines, analysing a variety of aspects, are guided by this or similar analytical distinctions. For instance, Stephen Greenblatt introduced the pair “resonance” and “wonder”.⁴ Exhibitions informed by the principle of resonance direct the visitor’s attention towards an external taxonomy and away from the intrinsic qualities of the objects. Exhibitions permeated by the notion of wonder, on the other hand, highlight the unique qualities of the exhibited objects. Here the visitor should be impressed by the aesthetic qualities of the single objects. These exhibitions are not pointing towards an external taxonomy. Resonance and wonder can be associated with the above-mentioned archaeological and art museological traditions respectively.

Another example is Carol Duncan who makes a distinction between “aesthetic” and “educational” art museums.⁵ Educational museums exhibit objects as part of a historical (art historical) development. Aesthetic art museums, on the other hand, are governed by the aim to present unique and aesthetic objects. In other words, educational museums refer to an external taxonomy which informs the visitors, whereas the aesthetic museums are not referring to an external reality. Similarly, Michael Ames elaborating on anthropological museum traditions identifies a dichotomy between a “contextualist” and a “formalist” tradition.⁶ A distinction between collections exhibited in accordance with “aesthetic” qualities and “scientific/cultural” exhibitions, which are organised according to an external taxonomy or original cultural contexts, is also made by James Clifford.⁷

Despite the different intellectual contexts, all these schemes conceptualise museums according to a division between art exhibitions, focusing on the single aesthetic objects, and archaeological, focusing on external taxonomies. It is important to keep in mind that the fault line should not only be drawn between archaeological museums on one side and art museums on the other side.⁸ Different parts of one museum, or even exhibition, can be associated with the different traditions. That is, we should expect to discern the art tradition at one point or another in an archaeological museum, and vice versa. These notions permeate museum exhibitions in general. Furthermore, these analytical pairs should be viewed as ideal abstractions. Several scholars also stress the fluidity of the concepts and the on-going re-definition of collections due to changing (discursive) circumstances. On a general level, it seems that exhibitions were organised according to scientific/cultural (Clifford), educational (Duncan), and contextualist (Ames) principles during the 19th or early 20th centuries and that there has been a development towards aesthetic exhibitions during the 20th century.

3 Llewellyn Negrin, “On the Museum’s Ruins”, *Theory, Culture and Society* 10, 1993, p. 97–125.

4 Stephen, Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder” in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of Museum display* (London 1991), 215–251.

5 Carole Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside public art museums* (London 1995), p. 4–5, 16–17.

6 Michael Ames, *Museums, the public and anthropology: A study in the anthropology of anthropology* (Vancouver 1986), p. 39–42.

7 James Clifford, “On collecting art and culture”, in James Clifford (ed.), *The predicament of culture. Twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art* (Cambridge Mass. 1988), p. 222–226.

8 In addition, other distinctions have been proposed. For instance, Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio. A study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century Britain and France* (Cambridge 1984), p. 77–92, elaborates on two kinds of exhibition rooms, which are common in historical museums.

The scope of our project is to analyse exhibitions of ancient sculptures. Although only halfway through our visits to museums, we have noted that a distinction between an art historical and an archaeological museological tradition is relevant also for us. Exhibitions of ancient sculptures can be sorted along an art – archaeological spectrum. Accordingly, sculptures, most often single masterpieces, are exhibited in a way that highlights their unique aesthetic qualities, at one end. At the other end of the spectrum, we have exhibitions that emphasize the original cultural setting, the archaeological context of the sculptures. Aspects pertaining to issues such as the origin of the object, the date of manufacture, the function of the object, and the relations between the exhibited objects, feature prominently in the archaeological exhibitions. Nevertheless, our impression so far is that most exhibitions of ancient sculptures are to be found somewhere in-between these extremes. Ancient sculptures are separated from other categories of objects in the exhibition and displayed in separate rooms, or spaces, in order to illustrate an art historical development. The focus is on the development of styles, schools, artists, influences between artists and schools, etc. These “historicizing art historical” exhibitions refer to an external taxonomy based on stylistic notions, but not necessarily to an original archaeological setting. Within these exhibitions, masterpieces tend to be singled out and presented in ways that enforce their aesthetic qualities, in accordance with the art museological tradition identified above.

There is yet another factor which has been neglected in the above-mentioned analytical schemes. It is our impression that exhibitions of a “local” antiquity, regardless of the exhibited objects, are more often archaeological. For instance, museums at archaeological sites and regional museums in Greece and in Germany, in which finds from one specific site or region are exhibited, emphasize the original cultural/archaeological context of the finds. The exhibited objects are used to illustrate another past reality, a local history. On the other side, large museums (for instance, the Altes Museum in Berlin, Vatican Museums in Rome, the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston) with a “universal” outlook underscores the aesthetic sides of classical antiquity. That is, in international museums, with a focus on a universal art history where antiquity often serves as a point of origin for a Western art historical development, the exhibits highlight the aesthetic qualities of the ancient objects, or contextualise them along an art historical development. These museums are not exhibiting objects from one confined region, but acquire objects from all corners of the ancient world. This means that the image of antiquity that is mediated in the museums differs remarkably between universal and local exhibitions; in universal exhibitions antiquity is portrayed as an exemplary period with artistic geniuses and other “great men of history”, whereas local exhibitions tend to stress the unique – social, everyday – traits of the regional development. On general terms, we can associate the universal exhibitions with the art historical museological tradition and the local with the archaeological tradition.

This analytical pair can further be associated with a historical development. The universal tradition can be associated with the long history of Western claims that have been made on antiquity. Antiquity has been cast as the origins of a western tradition and classical objects have been collected and exhibited according to their aesthetic qualities. Acquisition and display of the classical heritage was an important way to articulate the claims on the classical heritage. The practice of acquisition, which in effect means that the objects are acquired on a one-by-one basis, facilitates the universal exhibitions of ancient collections and contributes to the emphasis on the unique aesthetic qualities of the objects. Furthermore, the universal tradition can also be associated with the tradition of displaying plaster casts of ancient

sculptures during the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹ The widespread practice to present antiquity through plaster casts of a set of well-known sculptures indicates that universal museum has a tradition of displaying antiquity according to aesthetic principles.

Exhibitions of Ancient Sculptures

We want to stress that we do not regard these discourses as mutually exclusive but rather as analytical abstractions, which aid us to sort out and analyse exhibitions of ancient sculptures. In other words, the local and the universal should be regarded as aspects of exhibitions of ancient sculptures, which are discernable in most exhibitions. In the following, we will present some examples of exhibitions of ancient sculptures in order to illustrate our conceptual scheme.¹⁰ Several other factors, beyond this scheme, may have influenced these exhibitions, for instance, when a museum was founded. However, these factors fall beyond the scope of this paper.

At one end of the spectrum, we have museums which exhibit ancient sculptures as any other category of archaeological artefacts. This means that the aesthetic qualities are ignored, or at least, subdued and the original cultural setting of the sculpture is highlighted in the exhibition. This kind of exhibition is more common in small(er) museums which display objects from a confined geographic area, whether a single archaeological site or a larger region. The new exhibition in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inaugurated in September 2006, is an example of an exhibition in which ancient sculpture is displayed in a local/archaeological fashion (fig. 1). The exhibition in the museum as a whole is organised thematically. The emphasis of the exhibition is placed on the narration of the ancient history of Thessaloniki and Macedonia. This is enforced by an exhibition design where information texts, illustrations, cases, and objects, are placed in a way where they intrude on each other. This design negates exhibitions where the isolation of the objects underlines their aesthetic qualities. An illustrative example of this is a sculpture of *Venus Genetrix* exhibited together with other finds from the sanctuary it was found in. Here the sculpture is first and foremost an object with religious functions. The meaning of the sculpture in the original cultural setting is underscored. This can be contrasted with the displays of *Venus Genetrix* in the Metropolitan in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Getty Villa in Los Angeles, and the Louvre, where the copies are exhibited isolated or in displays which stress art historical aspects.

The association of the finds with the architectural complex in which they were found is indeed a common kind of archaeological contextualisation in museums. The site museums at Olympia and Delphi are arranged in a chronological order. This order is, in turn, sub-divided by entities/rooms organised according to buildings. The primary narrative in both of these museums is the history of the respective site during antiquity. Nevertheless, both exhibits depart from the determining archaeological order in the display of individual sculptures considered to be masterpieces. The *Charioteer* in the Delphi museum, *Nike* by Paionios in the Olympia museum, and the *Hermes with the infant Dionysos* in the Olympia museum, are all

9 Plaster casts were largely removed from museums in the 1920s, see Marden Fitzpatrick Nichols, "Plaster cast sculpture: A history of touch", *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 21, 2006, p. 118f.; Alan Wallach, "The American Cast Museum: An Episode in the History of the Institutional definition of Art", in *Exhibiting contradiction. Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst Mass. 1998), p. 38–56.

10 One photograph of the exhibition in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki is included in this article. We do not include any images of the other exhibitions discussed, since the requests for permissions to publish photographs from these museums had not been processed at the time of the deadline for the publication. Therefore, we refer to the various museums' webpages for images from the exhibitions.



Figure 1. Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. The display of Venus Genetrix. Photograph: authors (published by permission from the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki).

exhibited isolated in small rooms specially designed for the exhibition of these particular sculptures.¹¹ In these displays, the unique aesthetic qualities of the sculptures are underscored. These sculptures might have a context that can be tied to the site, but no attempts are made in the exhibitions to associate them with their original cultural setting. The aesthetic emphasis obscures the specific chronological and spatial information that is crucial from an archaeological point of view.

However, not all regional museums in Greece have masterpieces, and in these, it is hard to distinguish the universal aesthetic discourse. In these museums, which primarily address archaeological issues, the preferred taxonomic principle is either chronologic or geographic. The archaeological museum in Kavalla in northern Greece, for instance, contains objects from a handful sites from the surrounding region. The exhibition is organised geographically and each site is presented in one or several rooms. Sculptures are displayed side by side with other kinds of objects. Despite the lack of information-texts, which in our view is crucial for archaeological presentations, the arrangement nevertheless stresses an archaeological understanding of the objects, since they are displayed as one entity. In the regional museum of Argos on the Peloponnese, the sculptures are gathered in one room. The absence of other objects coupled with an arrangement in which the sculptures are placed close to each other, highlights the sculptures as a category rather than as unique objects. Although the sculptures are isolated from other categories of finds and thus this exhibition would conform to a “historicizing art historical” principle, we should also keep in mind that there is no detectable order in the presentation of the sculptures that enables the tracing of a stylistic development.

11 Delphi Archaeological Museum: http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/1/gh151.jsp?obj_id=3404. Olympia Archaeological Museum: http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/1/gh151.jsp?obj_id=7126. Accessed on 9 May 2007.

In addition, several museums in Germany exhibit ancient sculptures according to local/archaeological aspects. The exhibition in the Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Köln, for instance, is arranged thematically.¹² In the main exhibition room on the first floor, most of the exhibited objects are arranged on “islands” built of concrete which the visitor can walk around.¹³ Each “island” presents a theme, and contains primarily statues, grave reliefs, and architectural fragments, but also other types of objects. In general, aesthetic aspects are absent in this exhibition and the objects are used to illustrate an archaeological past. A couple of exceptions are noteworthy. First, although sculptures are not ordered separately other categories, such as oil-lamps, are. In other words, the “historicizing art historical” principle is not entirely absent from the Köln museum. Second, singular aesthetic qualities are stressed in the exhibition of a copy of head of a sculpture by Praxiteles, a famous Greek sculptor. Furthermore, the thematic arrangement comes at odds with one fundamental archaeological aspect. In the Römisch-Germanisches Museum the exhibition presents us with a static coherent image of antiquity, without an internal chronological development.

In comparison with Greek regional museums, the German museums tend to organise their exhibitions around themes which highlight the local and mundane everyday life in the province more than the public official life. The local – universal dichotomy does not always correspond with the archaeological – art dichotomy. For instance, in the Badisches Landesmuseum at Karlsruhe the exhibition on the ground floor spans from the first pre-historic civilisations – Egypt, Mesopotamia, Aegean Prehistory – via the ancient Greeks to the Roman Empire.¹⁴ This exhibition is archaeological since the themes around which the exhibition is organised, e.g. democracy, gods and heroes, trade and production, domestic life, contributes to an understanding of social and historical aspects of the past beyond art historical developments. The exhibited objects illustrate various aspects of antiquity; they refer to an external past reality. The universality of the exhibition at the Badisches Landesmuseum should not be associated with aesthetic principles but rather with the selected themes, which emphasize the high culture of antiquity. The universality of the exhibition on the ground floor emerges more clearly, when it is contrasted with the exhibition in the basement in the same museum. In the basement, it is local cultures, the La Tene, the Hallstadt culture, and the local Roman culture, that are presented. This exhibition is also arranged thematically; but the local objects, the focus on provincial everyday aspects, as well as the marked differences in exhibition design, manifests a distinct contrast between the mundane everyday life in the provinces of the Roman Empire and the high public culture of the Imperial epicentre of power.

The National Archaeological Museum in Athens is the central museum for archaeological finds in Greece and exhibits ancient objects from all over Greece.¹⁵ The exhibition is organised according with the categories of finds; ceramics are exhibited as one entity, sculpture as another, bronzes as third, etc. A clear distinction is made between pre-historical and historical periods. The pre-historical exhibition is not divided according to categories of

12 Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Köln: <http://www.museen.koeln.de/roemisch-germanisches-museum>. Accessed on 9 May 2007.

See also, <http://www.zum.de/Faecher/G/BW/Landeskunde/rhein/staedte/mittelrhein/koeln/rgm/index-htm>. Accessed on 9 May 2007.

13 See Hans-Joachim Schalles and Friedrich Gross, "Untersuchungen zur Objektpräsentation im Römisch-Germanischen Museum Köln", *Hephaistos: Kritische Zeitschrift zur Theorie und Praxis der Archäologie und angrenzender Wissenschaften* 1, 1979, p. 129–143 for a description and analysis of the Roman exhibition on the first floor.

14 Badisches Landesmuseum in Karlsruhe: <http://www.landesmuseum.de/website>. Accessed on 9 May 2007.

15 National Archaeological Museum in Athens: http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/1/gh151.jsp?obj_id=3249. Accessed on 9 May 2007.

finds, but geographically. In the pre-historic parts of the museum, finds from one site are presented together. The pre-historic exhibition is more archaeological since this presentation facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the original cultural setting. In contrast, the exhibition of sculptures in a series of rooms, without other objects, is a presentation that underscores the stylistic development and corresponds thus with the “historicizing art historical” tradition. Nevertheless, there are also discursive fluctuations in this museum. The art tradition, in which the singular aesthetic qualities are stressed, is discernable in association with the display of masterpieces. Well-known sculptures, e.g. *Poseidon, the Horse and Jockey from Artemision*, and the statue group of *Aphrodite, Pan, and Eros*, are surrounded by a low “fence” of glass, which indicates their uniqueness and distinguishes them from other exhibited objects. The aesthetic discourse is also visible in a room with a distinct design which separates it, and the sculptures in it, from the rest of the exhibition. Only masterpieces are exhibited in this room, e.g. the *Diadoumenos*, a version of the *Capitoline Venus*, and the above-mentioned equestrian group. In sum, also the exhibition in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens oscillates between the two discourses that have been identified above.

In exhibitions pertaining to a universal antiquity, the spaces in which ancient sculptures are displayed often give a colourless, calm impression. There is a minimum of contrast between the white marble sculptures and the surroundings. Walls painted in light colours and natural lighting, together with enhanced artificial lighting, create illuminated rooms where little disturbs the visual field of the visitor when admiring the sculptures. Statues are spaciouly arranged which stresses their aesthetic uniqueness. Labels and information texts are kept to a minimum not to interfere with the general visual experience of clean spaces. Such rooms for ancient sculptures can, for instance, be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Antikenmuseum in Basel, Liebieghaus in Frankfurt am Main, and the Glyptothek in München. All exhibitions can, to varying degrees, be defined as exhibitions displaying a universal antiquity.

The exhibition of ancient Greek antiquities in the Metropolitan, which reopened in 1999, is the most recent of the four.¹⁶ Unlike the other three, it is part of a large-scale art museum. Although the exhibition concerns ancient Greece the messages conveyed are of more universal kinds. Firstly, the exhibit is placed on the first floor at the beginning of the left wing. In other words, it is potentially one of the first exhibitions that visitors to the museum encounter, which accentuates the role of ancient Greek art as the early origin of Western art. The exhibition is organized around a large classicising sculpture gallery reminiscent of an ancient basilica. This exhibition is ordered after one of the most enduring art historical discourses in the study of ancient sculpture, the so-called *Kopienkritik* with roots in nineteenth century-research.¹⁷ The central issue has been in what ways copies made in the Roman period can be used to reconstruct lost Greek masterpieces from the fifth and fourth centuries BC (the classical period). In an appeal to artistic connoisseurship, references are made to famous Greek sculptors and their production. Accordingly, in the sculpture gallery the mastery of Greek sculptural art can only be illustrated through Roman copies. There is no apparent chronological arrangement of the sculptures, since there is a focus on the classical style. Sculptures are rather presented as examples of ideal types like the naked male, the draped female, busts of women and grave reliefs. An explanatory panel informs the visitor of the importance of Roman copies in the study and reconstruction of Greek masterpieces. Since the main issue is the artistic faithfulness of the copy to the original statue several versions of the

16 Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: <http://www.metmuseum.org>. Accessed on 9 May 2007.

17 Jerome J. Pollitt, "Introduction: Master and Masterworks in the study of Classical sculpture", in Olga Palagia and Jerome J. Pollitt (eds.), *Personal styles in Greek sculpture* (Yale Classical Studies, 30), (Cambridge 1996) p. 1–15.

same type can be on display, as is the case of the *Diadoumenos*. The main purpose of this exhibition is not to explain the function and meaning of these sculptures in ancient Greek societies. Rather, the sculptures appear as timeless objects of exemplary art.

A similar statement on the importance of the Roman copy in the study of Greek sculpture is made in the Antikenmuseum in Basel.¹⁸ Ancient sculptures are exhibited in a large sculpture hall created in the 1960s. The visual experience is here similar to that of the sculpture gallery in the Met – a large illuminated hall with discreet colours and statues in a spacious arrangement. Most of the statues are fragmented Roman copies, but the appearance of the original Greek masterpieces is stressed. Labels show sketches of how some of the original statues looked like. Like in the Metropolitan, the statues are not organized according to chronological developments, but rather in groups of different types that exemplify famous Greek statues. Little information conveys how Greek sculpture functioned in ancient Greece or for that matter what their role was in later Roman contexts. Instead, exhaustive texts explain different art historical aspects of ancient sculptures. Again we see that the timeless aesthetic quality of the classical style in ancient sculpture embodies a universal antiquity.

The Liebieghaus in Frankfurt is an art historical museum which exhibits only sculpture in a chronological order, from ancient Egypt to the 20th century.¹⁹ The stylistic development of sculptures is in focus, and it can be characterised as “historicizing art historical”. The exhibition design is minimalist and bright, which together with the scarcity of exhibited sculptures creates an aesthetic impression. Within this general aesthetic presentation, one ancient sculpture is singled out. The so-called *Frankfurter Athena* is the masterpiece in the Liebieghaus. It is exhibited in a room alone, with nothing to disturb the visual field. The isolation underlines the unique aesthetic qualities on this sculpture, along the lines of the art museological tradition.

Another example of the aestheticizing mode of displaying ancient sculpture can be found in the Glyptothek in München.²⁰ It is a museum solely devoted to ancient sculpture, which implicitly gives the exhibition an art historical slant. Inaugurated in 1830, its purpose was to display the antiquities of the Bavarian king Ludwig I.²¹ The museum was almost entirely bombed out at the end of the Second World War and the present exhibition was opened at the end of the 1960s.²² Rooms with whitewashed brick walls create barren spaces in which the sculptures are sparingly presented. Information panels are found in discreet places, such as doorways, and there are no labels by the statues, which would disturb the visual impression of the separate statues. These rooms form stark contrasts to the nineteenth-century exhibition where sculptures were displayed in gaudy decorated rooms.²³ Interestingly, photographs of old exhibitions in each room inform the visitor of the difference. Today’s exhibition oscillates between taxonomy and aesthetic display. Thus, while the rooms are roughly organized after the stylistic development of ancient sculpture from the archaic Greek period (6th century BC) to Roman Imperial times there is a distinct focus on timeless masterpieces. For instance, the famous *Barberini* faun, dating to ca 220 BC, is placed in the middle of a small rotunda early

18 Antikemuseum in Basel: <http://www.antikenmuseumbasel.ch>. Accessed 9 May 2007.

19 Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung: <http://www.liebieghaus.de>. Accessed on 9 May 2007.

20 Glyptothek, München: <http://www.antike-am-koenigsplatz.mwn.de/glyptothek>. Accessed on 9 May 2007.

21 James J. Sheehan, *Museums and the German art world from the end of the old regime to the rise of modernism* (Oxford 2000), p. 62–70.

22 Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton 1996), p. 363–368.

23 Elianna Gropplero di Troppenburg, "Die Innenaustattung der Glyptothek durch Leo von Klenze", in Klaus Vierneisel and Gottlieb Leinz (eds.), *Glyptothek München 1830–1980: Jubiläumsausstellung zur Entstehungs- und Baugeschichte. 17 September bis 23 November 1980* (München 1980), p. 190–213.

in the exhibition and thereby presented as a masterpiece. The educational aspirations of the museum are here overshadowed by aesthetic ideals.

Summary

In this paper, we have elaborated on two discourses that shape the display of ancient sculptures in museums; one (more) locally bound archaeological mode, and a second art historical arrangement pertaining to (more) universal ideals of antiquity. Although both of us approach this subject from an archaeological point of view, we would like to stress that it is not our intention to value one discourse over the other as a better way of representing antiquity. This paper is a first attempt to identify overriding traditions that dictate how ancient sculptures are presented in contemporary exhibitions. The sample of museums analysed shows that there is no clear-cut division between the two discourses. Archaeology transcends into art and vice versa. Ancient sculptures, in particular masterpieces regarded as crucial for the art historical stylistic development, are often treated as unique art objects. Archaeological exhibitions display individual sculptures on the basis of aesthetic principles and emphasize thus timeless aesthetic qualities, for instance the display of the *Charioteer* in the Delphi museum. On the other side, “historicizing art historical” arrangements can be criticized for isolating sculptures from their original cultural setting, but in reality, this taxonomy coincides with exhibitions in archaeological museums, which present objects in typological series. In the end, it seems that museological developments have only had a marginal effect on the displays of ancient sculptures, since they still often are presented as exemplary ideals.

References

- Ames, Michael. *Museums, the public and anthropology: A study in the anthropology of anthropology*. (Vancouver 1986).
- Bann, Stephen. *The Clothing of Clio. A study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century Britain and France*. (Cambridge 1984).
- Boschung, Dietrich and Henner von Hesberg, eds. *Antikensammlungen des europäischen Adels im 18. Jahrhundert als Ausdruck einer europäischen Identität* (Monumenta artis Romanae, 27). (Mainz am Rhein 2000).
- Clifford, James. “On collecting art and culture”, in James Clifford (ed.), *The predicament of culture. Twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art*, (Cambridge Mass. 1988), p. 215–251.
- Duncan, Carole. *Civilizing Rituals: Inside public art museums*. (London 1995).
- Fitzpatrick Nichols, Marden. “Plaster cast sculpture: A history of touch”, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 21, 2006, p. 114–130.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. “Resonance and Wonder”, in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of Museum display*, (Washington DC 1991), p. 42–56.
- Gropplero di Troppenburg, Elianna. „Die Innenaustattung der Glyptothek durch Leo von Klenze“, in Klaus Vierneisel and Gottlieb Leinz (eds.), *Glyptothek München 1830–1980: Jubiläumsausstellung zur Entstehungs- und Baugeschichte. 17 September bis 23 November 1980*, (München 1980), p. 190–213.
- Haskell, Frances and Nicholas Penny. *Taste and the Antique. The lure of Classical sculpture 1500–1900*. (New Haven & London 1981).
- Jenkins, Ian. *Archaeologists and aesthetes in the sculpture galleries of the British Museum 1800–1939*. (London 1992).
- Marchand, Suzanne L. *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970*. (Princeton 1996).

- Negrin, Llewellyn. "On the Museum's Ruins", *Theory, Culture and Society* 10, 1993, p. 97–125.
- Pollitt, Jerome J. "Introduction: Master and Masterworks in the study of Classical sculpture", in Olga Palagia and Jerome J. Pollitt (eds.), *Personal styles in Greek sculpture* (Yale Classical Studies, 30), (Cambridge 1996), p. 1–15.
- Schalles, Hans-Joachim and Friedrich Gross, "Untersuchungen zur Objektpräsentation im Römisch-Germanischen Museum Köln", *Hephaistos: Kritische Zeitschrift zur Theorie und Praxis der Archäologie und angrenzender Wissenschaften* 1, 1979, p. 123–148.
- Sheehan, James J. *Museums and the German art world from the end of the old regime to the rise of modernism*. (Oxford 2000).
- Sidén, Karin. "Tekniska lösningar och ideologiska ställningstaganden. Nationalmuseibyggnadens interiör och dess förändringar", in Mikael Ahlund (ed.), *Konst kräver rum. Nationalmusei historia och framtid* (Nationalmusei skriftserie N.S., 17), (Stockholm 2002), p. 40–58.
- Söderlind, Solfrid. "Från ädel antik till gammalt gods", in Solfrid Söderlind (ed.), *Gips. Tradition i konstens form* (Nationalmusei Årsbok, 45), (Stockholm 1999), p. 115–155.
- Wallach, Alan. "The American Cast Museum: An Episode in the History of the Institutional Definition of Art", in *Exhibiting contradiction. Essays on the Art Museum in the United States*, (Amherst, Mass. 1998), p. 38–56.