Session 8

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Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture: The Influence of Context and Collaboration in Sculptural Practice from the 18th Century to the Present

This session incorporates papers which, collectively, explore the impact of context and collaboration on the practice and profession of sculpture in a wide ranging assembly of individuals, groups and geographical locations. During the period in question, sculptural activity was transformed by urban expansion, the parallel development of teaching institutions, museums and exhibition culture. The emergence of Modernism and the impact of the wars invariably influenced not only the conceptual framework for the medium of sculpture but the relationships borne from these events. Did the diversity of sculptors’ practice influence or challenge other cultural forms, such as literature or the conventional critical hierarchies of subject, medium and form? What is the impact on current understanding of cultural geographies in relation to the metropolis and the regions? The sculptural medium is a uniquely collaborative process, involving studio assistants, carvers, foundries, architects and other specialist craftsmen, how has this working process challenged accepted ideas of authorship and status?

MARJAN STERCKX
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Women Sculptors and their Male Collaborators: Common Practice?
The practice of sculptors calling on collaborators to help transform their ideas into works in durable materials has a long tradition. By signing the eventual sculpture, the sculptor becomes the only ‘real’ author, while most of those helpers remain anonymous. When, from the late 18th century onwards, successful women sculptors also started to use (mainly male) assistants, the practice was called into question. Even though they tried to protect or defend themselves in different ways against such accusations, many a sculptress was reproached for unjustly claiming the authorship of her works. An anonymous satire published in 1838 will be considered as a case study.

AMY MECIOWSKI
Victoria and Albert Museum

Waxing and Waning: The Casella Sisters and the Revival of Renaissance Style Wax Portraits

In this paper I will examine the collaborative working practice of the Casella sisters, Nelia (1884–1930) and Ella (1884–1913), and the role of their renaissance style wax portraits in establishing their professional status. In the revival of this portrait style they demonstrated their expert handling of the material and laid claim to a well-established tradition, thus legitimising their position in the art community. Together with their diverse artistic production (as wax sculptors, miniaturists, illustrators and poets), this fashioned them as 'renaissance women' in their own right, enabling them to stake claims for themselves as professional practitioners rather than genteel hobbyists.