



The Making of Matisse's Bronzes

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The first exhibition in twenty years devoted to the sculpture of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and jointly organized by the Baltimore Museum of Art, The Dallas Museum of Art and the Nasher Sculpture Center, presented a welcome opportunity for a technical study of his bronzes. The study was undertaken at the Baltimore Museum of Art by Objects Conservator Ann Boulton and Curator of European Painting and Sculpture, Oliver Shell.

Unlike Degas, another painter who made sculpture, Matisse exhibited his sculpture early and often and cast his first bronzes in 1906 only seven years after the creation of his first sculpture. He continued to make sculpture throughout his life, modeling the last one three years before his death. In total about 80 different sculptures were created, most cast in limited bronze editions of ten. Matisse cast editions sporadically over decades as the market or exhibition schedule demanded with the result that early casts within one edition were sometimes separated by as many as forty or more years from later casts in the same edition. Some editions were completed after his death by his family who destroyed most of the original plaster models at the completion of each edition.

This talk will describe the results of the technical study that included the examination of more than 120 casts some of which were subjected to x-radiography, 3-D computer modeling and alloy composition analysis (performed at the Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute (then SCMRE) by Jia-sun Tsang, Dr. Charles Tumosa and Sarah Pinchin). Moldmaking techniques Matisse used to convert clay to plaster and that resulted in series of works such as *Madeleine I* and *II* and the *Backs* will be described. His choice of sand casting for bronzes made prior to 1925 and lost wax casting used after that date will be discussed and compared.

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Topics in Museum Conservation

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MCI Theater

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