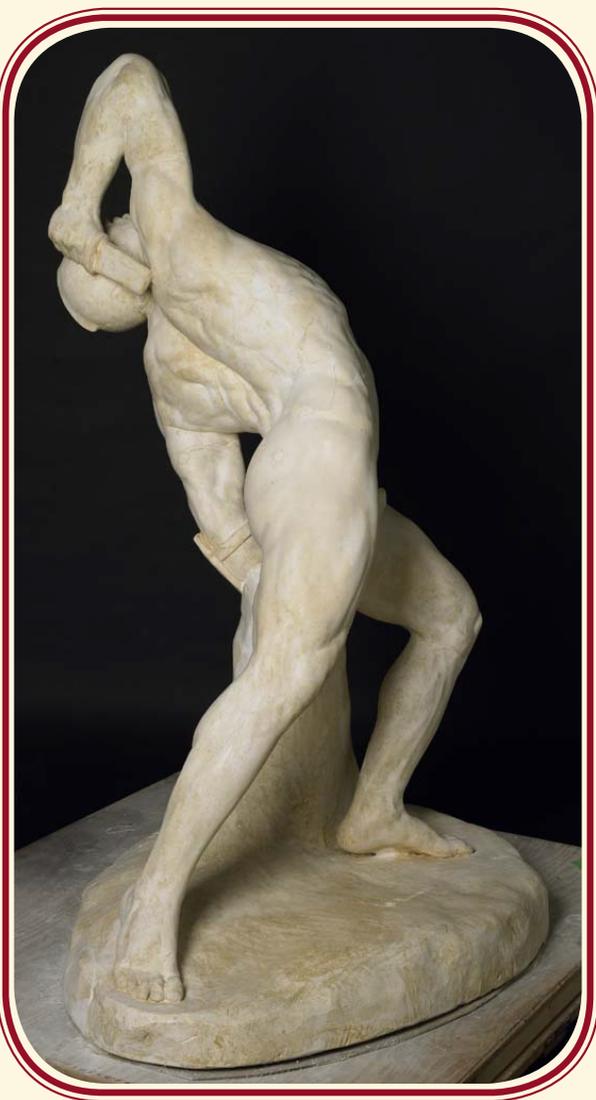


William Rimmer's Falling Gladiator: A Puzzle in More Ways than One



Carol Grissom
Senior Objects Conservator
Museum Conservation Institute



The reopening of Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2006 presented the perfect opportunity for thorough conservation and technical study of a plaster statue of a Falling Gladiator (1861). This original model was given to the Smithsonian in 1915 by the daughter of its creator, William Rimmer (1816-1879), often considered the most gifted sculptor of his time working in the United States and sometimes referred to as the Yankee Michelangelo.

Historic photographs reveal that the statue was already damaged by 1882. In the 1940s it was badly broken by a falling ladder. The statue was painted many times throughout the years, no doubt to cover both damage and dirt. Moreover, it was molded twice, first in 1862 for a plaster copy sent for exhibition in Europe and again in 1905 for making bronze castings. Substances applied to free it from molds used to make the copies would have caused subsequent layers of paint to stick poorly. So, by the 1990s layers of repaint and filling material disguised much of the figure's sculpted detail. The surface had become a magnet for visitor's fingers that could not resist peeling paint.

This talk will describe recent treatment of the statue and results of technical study, including X-radiography. Curatorial questions regarding changes made to the statue since casting and whether it was a professional or amateur casting will be discussed.

MCI
Topics in
Museum
Conservation

3:45 Wednesday
May 31, 2006

MCI Theater
Museum Support
Center

4210 Silver Hill Road
Suitland, MD 20746
301-238-1240



Smithsonian
Museum Conservation Institute