

Last year while I was on an exchange in Paris I met a professor who was talking about how art institutions deal with their collections. During the 1900s All European art schools had large collections of plaster/Gips models for study purposes. In passing, this professor in Paris mentioned how students of an art academy in The Netherlands had smashed and buried their plaster collection during the 1960s. It caught my attention and I asked the professor which art school he was talking about, he told me it was the Royal Academy of Art The Hague.

I was fixated with this romanticised idea that buried somewhere was the smashed plaster collection that had been disposed of in the 1960s. When I returned to KABK after my exchange I sought to try to find this missing plaster collection, or what remained of it...

I looked through the records and discussed with the Librarians but none bought any light as to what happened with the disposed of works of the plaster collection.

At the end of February 2023, I uncovered a "hidden/lost" basement of the KABK and upon searching it I found the site where all of these smashed plaster works had come to rest. It is a place that hasn't been touched or seen the light for over 40 years. Buried beneath the ground and scattered across the soil were tonnes of plaster fragments, details from architectural reliefs, hands from classical Greek sculptures and piles everywhere of smashed plaster sculptures lying there like a graveyard of a former museum.

I approached the site with excitement to uncover and piece together these fragments of the smashed collection. Working like an archeologist, I set up the basement with lights, large tables and began to categorise the findings, while keeping the discovery a secret from the academy and people above. After a few weeks of sifting through the sand and soil and piles of plaster I was able to start to piece together some of the pieces like a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces that I had been finding were made around the late 1800s as plaster copies of classical greek roman and gothic sculptures.

I've been in close conversation with The Allard Pierson Collection in Amsterdam as their collection of plaster sculptures is formed from the old collection of the KABK, the Allard Pierson saved a handful of plaster works that would have otherwise been destroyed during a contemporary Beeldendstorm during the 1960s.

For the graduation show of the academy this year I will present this story, it is something that has not been addressed by the academy and something that is all but unknown about by the staff and students and Alumni of the past 40 years, there are small rumours that the students of 60s buried the plaster collection but the fact that they have been smashed and buried under the academy is something that is unknown to the institution and has never been addressed. I want to tell this story and to be able to share it with a wider audience, it is something that is in my opinion so relevant for the way that we view the institution and it has completely shaped the academy that we stand within today.

For the exhibition on the 30th of June 2023, I have arranged to loan pieces from the surviving plaster collection and bring them back to present within the academy. These pieces were the ones that were saved from destruction in the 60s by The Allard Pierson collection, they have remained in Amsterdam until now when they will be returned for the first time back to the Royal Academy of Art The Hague and presented in the gallery of the academy where they used to be on view over 60 years ago. These plaster figures will be presented alongside the previously unseen and unknown about smashed plaster pieces. These are the pieces that I have been excavating and restoring from the hidden basement of the academy.

The images in this publication show the bringing back together of parts of the former collection.

On the morning of 14/06/2023 Hizkia van Kralingen packed and transported 3 plaster figures and the head of Zeus from the Allard Pierson collection in Amsterdam to the Royal Academy of Art The Hague, this was following my loan request to the Museum that was submitted on the 04/05/2023. The payment for the transportation and installation by Hizkia was paid for by myself on the 12/06/2023.

The images on the left hand pages were recorded by Lenna Carlton on the 14/06/2023 at the Royal Academy of Art The Hague.

The images on the right hand pages are from the collection of the Royal Academy of Art The Hague, the glass slides were photographed in the the same building during the 1930s and digitalised by Ernst Bergmans in 2005.

Thanks to,

Allard Pierson collection  
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*Whitehouse*

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