

The Lady on the Pedestal

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Times change, wounds heal and yesterday's torments become history. The world was not remade by the militant students of the 1960's and the greening of America proved not to be an eternal spring.

On the Columbia campus, where so much of the militant student protest of the 1960's was focused, Daniel Chester French's 1930 statue of Alma Mater became central to the demonstrations. She was a somewhat overaged witness to the greening of America. Her classical calm remained unruffled even when her chair was damaged by a bomb.

Now French's Alma Mater has been restored in the spirit of the 1970's. In a moving ceremony, the four-ton bronze was reinstalled on the steps of Low Library

after a summer away for repairs. The bomb-damaged chair segment has been recast, the cracks of time have been repaired and a "new" patina applied. This new-old finish guarantees a blend of maturity and innocence that eluded the 1960's. Moreover, this man-made state of grace has been covered with an acrylic lacquer to protect against weathering, air pollution and any further erosions of time.

The young demonstrators were not so lucky. They have been aging and developing their own patinas of experience, joy and sorrow and have seen their ideals transformed and modified. That kind of revisionism is a process common to history, and art. Youth finds it surprising. The lady on the pedestal does not.

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