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UKETA, Yoshito. *Atelier of Casting from Life by Edouard Dantan: Between Creation and Mechanical Technique*

“Casting” is a process to make a mold of an object from materials such as plaster in order to create a reproduction of that object. This technique enables us to achieve with ease a true to life replica by a mechanical means. It is therefore considered to be simple craftsmanship that lacks artistic quality in terms of modern art, which regards creativity as the most important aspect of an artist. In a reconsideration of casting, this paper focuses on the painting, *Casting from Nature*, by Edouard Joseph Dantan (1848–1897), which dares to treat “casting” as the main motif of a painting, and analyzes the significance of its ambivalent expression of an atelier of creation on the one hand, and a mechanical technique on the other.

This painting depicts the moment of removing a cast of a leg from a nude female model by two male craftsmen. First, we position this painting in relation to the tendency of other atelier paintings at the same time period, and analyze its unique character. Scholars have identified a contrasting element to this painting regarding the casting and the myth of Pygmalion, but this characteristic is not clearly explained. This paper presents a concrete argument on this relationship by analyzing several motifs in the painting, including, for example, the nude model, stool, and the reproduced sculptures in the background. The atelier depicted in this painting is in reality that of the manufacturing site of the ceramic company Haviland at Auteuil, but we cannot discern the identity of this particular professional atelier by simply looking the painting. Because in fact, this painting adopts many motifs of earlier atelier paintings that are usually employed to honor an artist, so the impression that this setting is a private and anonymous artist’s atelier is strengthened. The reproduced sculptures in the background, the nude model and many other motifs transform this enclosed casting atelier into that of the “artist” and honors the work of casting as an artistic creation. The interpretation of the Pygmalion myth in the nineteenth century has the same character as that expressed in this painting by Dantan.

The motifs that play a decisive role in this painting are the reproduced sculptures in the background. The motifs in Atelier paintings usually pay homage to the person depicted or the artist himself. In this painting, the *Rebellious Slave* by Michelangelo is depicted, which was considered a masterpiece in the history of sculpture. In contrast, the *Head of Wax*, which is positioned on the top of the shelf, is less famous today but was at that time a highly esteemed work. This sculpture was considered by scholars in the nineteenth century to have been made through the process of casting. Moreover, we can also see sculptures in Tuscany from the fifteenth century, which were undergoing a re-evaluation in the nineteenth century and which were discussed in relation to the technique of casting.

In sum, these reproduced sculptures contribute not only to show the traditional history of sculpture, but also to do honor to the act of casting by referring to its history.

Thus, this painting is a kind of parody of previous atelier paintings that honor the “authoritative” artistic creation. Criticisms of this painting in the nineteenth century show also a tendency to compare this scene of casting from nature to a creative activity, for example by assimilating the nude model to “Venus”. By reappropriating the traditional devices of the atelier, like that of Pygmalion, and including reproduced sculptures that are suggestive of the diverse discourses on casting in the nineteenth century, Dantan assimilated the act of casting to that of creation, and highlighted another aspect of the artist’s image in the modern world.

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