

## PLASTER REPLICAS OF ART

From its earliest colonial history until its maturity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American art was closely tied to its English and continental roots. While European travel and training was the *sine qua non* of an American artist's education, there were also ways artists, designers, and architects could study the great European works of art at home.

Many sought instruction and inspiration through imported pattern books and similar European publications. Plaster casts of sculptures from antiquity through the Renaissance also played a crucial role in art training and education. Seldom exhibited today, examples are worth seeing and considering when approaching American art.

The plaster casts in the Museum's collection from Italian works belonged to Louis Comfort Tiffany. They came to the Morse when the McKeanes acquired artworks and artifacts from the remains of Tiffany's Long Island country estate, Laurelton Hall. Tiffany had purchased them from P. P. Caproni & Brother of Boston—a firm known for producing high-quality plaster casts. Tiffany himself had a keen interest in plaster casts for instructional purposes. As a consultant to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, he helped the institution acquire plaster casts of important European works.

Beyond their role in history, these plaster replicas are interesting for their striking verisimilitude and craftsmanship. Making molds for reproductions is an art in itself, and before digital imaging and advancements in materials, it was an even more demanding craft. As our examples demonstrate, such molds produce a quite handsome result when done with real skill.