



The restoration was directed by
Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities

It was performed by
Stone Materials Restoration Laboratory

in collaboration with
Cabinet of Scientific Research

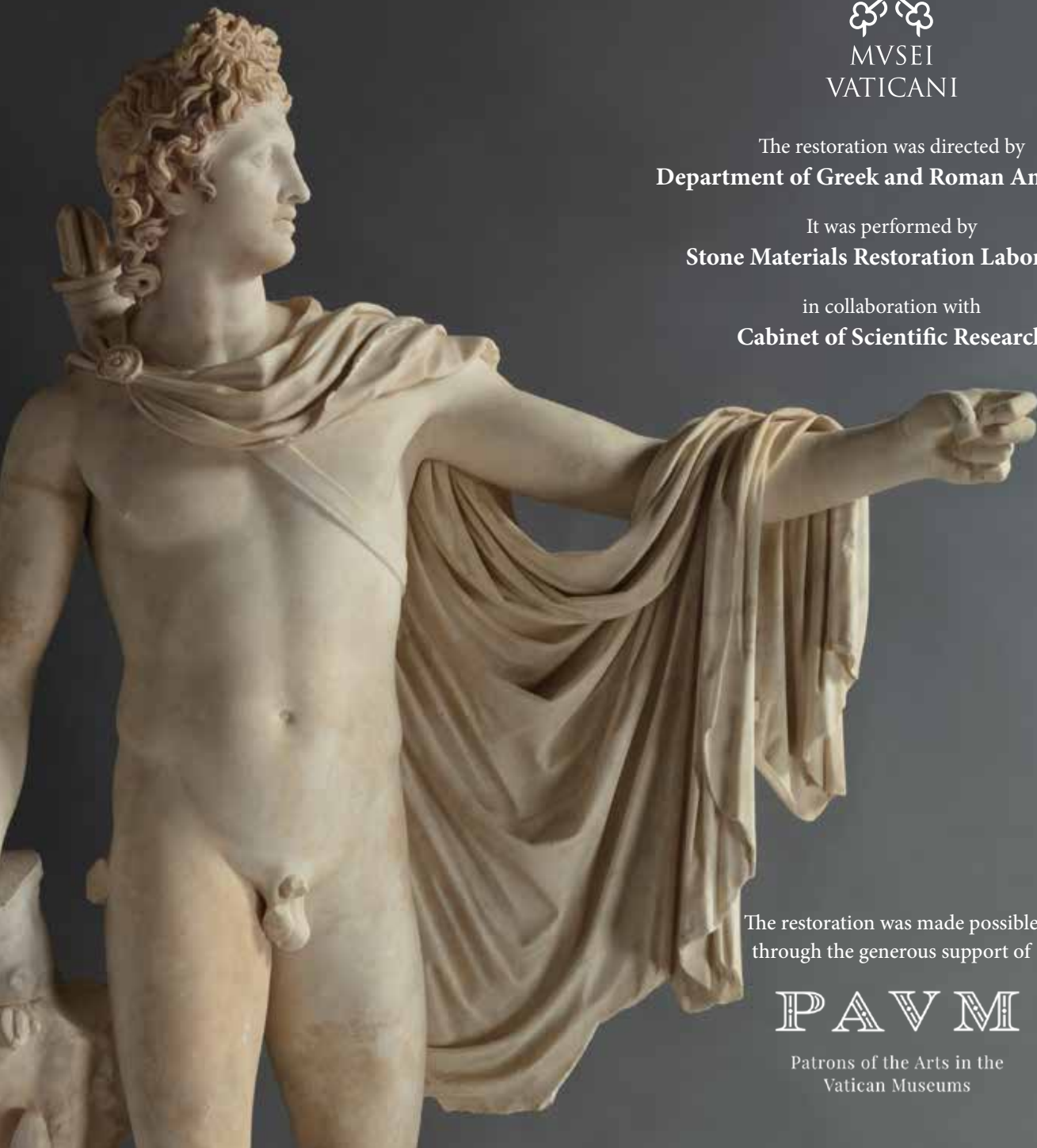
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APOLLO BELVEDERE

**RESTORATION AS BALANCE
BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY
AND PHILOLOGY**



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The *Apollo Belvedere* is undoubtedly one of the most famous and celebrated masterpiece of the papal collections. In December 2019, when the monitoring of the statue detected structural issues, the alarm was immediate. The challenging years of the pandemic followed, but thanks to the generous support of the *Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums*, a complex study project was launched to identify the most appropriate methodologies for the delicate restoration, aimed at ensuring lasting stability for the Apollo.

The statue, discovered in Rome in 1489 on the Viminal Hill, was brought to the Vatican between 1508 and 1509 at the behest of Pope Julius II, who was setting up the Courtyard of Statues in Belvedere with a composite iconographic program focused on the mythical origins of ancient Rome. At the time, the Apollo must have been intact, only missing the left hand and the fingers of the right hand. However, by 1511, there is a record of an «iron» being inserted into the statue, perhaps for anchoring to the wall of one of the niches in the Courtyard. Between 1532 and 1533, the restoration by Giovannangelo Montorsoli was carried out, who, according to Vasari, «refashioned the left arm that was missing from Apollo». However, renaissance engravings, like that of Francisco de Hollanda (1), show that the intervention also involved replacing the right forearm and integrating the top of the tree trunk on which the new arm rested.

The numerous fractures visible on the statue today - base, tree trunk, ankles (2), knees, right arm, and parts of the mantle - are the result of the sculpture's long life. It has been exposed outdoors since its discovery and subjected to tampering and significant movements, such as the Napoleonic one to Paris (1798-1815) and the more



recent but unfortunately not painless one for exhibitions organized in the United States (1983).

After considering various solutions, the current fragility of the statue necessitated the choice of reintroducing a support, as previously decided by Antonio Canova, using advanced technology: the rear element in carbon fiber, anchored to the base, utilizes exclusively existing holes and recesses and can reduce the weight on the most delicate fractures by about 150 kg. Additionally, the tension exerted by the bar (3) mitigates the imbalance of the center of gravity towards the left arm, which, extended forward, is also heavily burdened by the mantle. The posture of a dynamic Apollo shooting arrows, scenographic and well-executable in the original bronze - dating back to 330 BC, perhaps the work of the Athenian artist Leochares - proves to be a rather daring solution in marble. Perhaps this is why no other faithful replicas of this masterpiece of Greek bronze work have survived, even though there must have been a tradition of copying in the Roman period.

An extraordinary discovery in the 1950s allowed the recovery among the ruins of the imperial palace of Baia, north of Naples, of hundreds of plaster fragments belonging to a workshop that possessed molds taken directly from the original masterpieces of Greek bronze work from the 5th and 4th centuries BC, which enabled the creation of faithful marble copies for the wealthy clientele of the Phlegraean area. Among these plaster fragments was recognized the missing left hand of the Apollo Belvedere.

It seemed appropriate to take the opportunity of this restoration to give back to the shooting god the "original" hand, inserting, in place of Montorsoli's hand (4), a cast of the Baia cast (5): the gesture has become more natural, the hand proportionate and light.

Another arrow has been launched, and the scientific community will be able to judge the merit of a philological experiment, which is entirely reversible.