



What Is This Statue Doing Up In the Air?

The marble statue of a seated Dionysos with a Lion (MS 5483) has been a familiar landmark in the center of the Museum's Roman Gallery for many years (see back cover). As we embark on an exciting new program which will culminate in the opening of three new exhibitions—"The Roman World," "The Etruscan World," and "An Introduction to the Classical World"—some 100 of our Roman and Etruscan sculptures are being brought under the close scrutiny of conservators and curators.

The beginning of this process was the recent removal of the 1,500-pound Dionysos from its position by a team of riggers, and the construction of a temporary workroom within the gallery. This summer, freelance conservator Tamsen Fuller will be "on view" through the workroom's window. She will be documenting the existing condition of each piece, researching previous restorations, analyzing ancient pigments and stucco, cleaning the pieces, repairing previous joins, and removing post-ancient iron pins and adhesives.

There are many extraordinary pieces of sculpture in the Museum's Mediterranean Section collections and some present unique research questions. In the case of the Dionysos with a Lion, its record of ownership is complete going back to 1622, yet there are some intriguing questions about its use and the date of certain parts of the statue. It was purchased for the Museum in 1911 by Lucy Wharton Drexel from a dealer in Rome. The dealer, in turn, bought the statue at an auction of the Nazarene College in Rome which had acquired the statue in 1622.

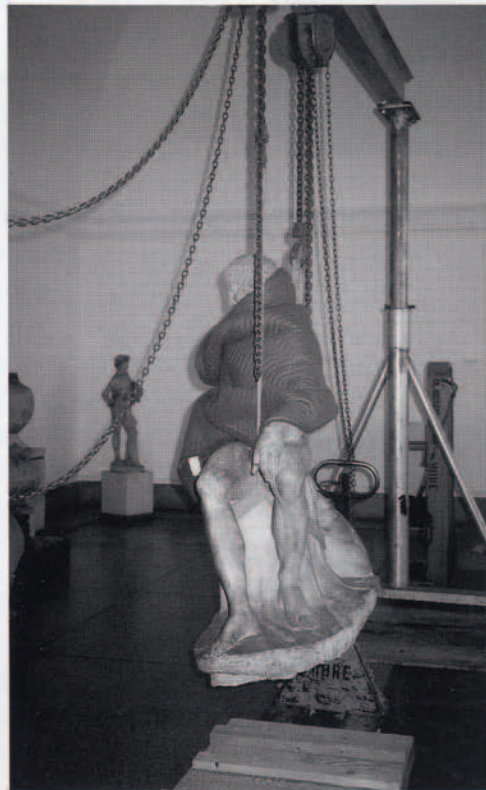
We do not know the ancient provenience of the statue, although this type of statue group would have been fitting decoration for a Roman

villa, perhaps in an outdoor setting. There are holes cut through parts of the statue which do not appear to be original, but were probably

later attempts to outfit the statue as a fountain. The statue was restored at some point in its history: the muzzle of the lion and the head of Dionysos, as well as some of his fingers, toes, and a piece of a lower leg, are all additions. These restorations may be the work of a Renaissance sculptor, and thus are also of historic and artistic significance. Radiographic images and ultraviolet light examination will be used to answer some of the technical questions about the restoration. Perhaps they will also shed light on the date of the post-Roman additions.

With the re-opening of the Classical Galleries in Fall 2002, the Dionysos statue will once again be greeting visitors to the 3rd floor galleries in the new "Introduction to the Classical World" exhibition.

Irene Bald Romano
Co-curator, Etruscan and Roman Exhibitions



The swaddled Dionysos is moved preparatory to conservation.