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FOVNDATION

FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
IN CONSERVATION



From rabbit skin glue to point mapping

11-03-2014

The last Opinion piece was about seasons and the Solstice - it was hard, when that was written, then to anticipate what is happening now, just a few weeks later. Spring has arrived and the seemingly endless winter is behind us. You can feel the re-birth in the air.

So it wasn't a coincidence that last week saw the opening of an exhibition at Sir John Soane's Museum in London of work by the Factum Arte workshops - work in materialising concepts that the extraordinary Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) designed but rarely realised except in wonderful and evocative prints.

In doing this work - and I really urge you to visit the exhibition which is on until late May - Factum Arte developed techniques and processes that are now part of the workshop's repertoire. The porphyry altar, bronze and gilt tripods, the impossible silver coffee pot computer modelled from various living and still objects, the extravagant, shimmering, chair - all of these required the application of old and of completely new artisanal skills.

The visitors are not only fascinated to see Piranesi's often crazy ideas and combinations become real but also to see the results of some of the processes - casts and moulds, elements 3D printed from elaborate computer models, slivers of surface and lumps of scagliola all jumbled together in a Soanesque display - among Soane's collection.

The revelation of these exhibits is a refreshing one - it brings us all closer to the extraordinary work that the modern artisan is able to do using ancient skills and materials - rabbit skin glue and lost wax casting - alongside advanced technologies like 3D modelling, surface mapping and materials experimentation which are themselves becoming accepted in the new world of technology in conservation.

So this Spring the exhibition (Diverse Maniere: Piranesi, Fantasy and Excess) in London allows a view into the work - and a hint of the extraordinary processes - that Factum Foundation depends on, the constant Spring that is the Factum Arte workshop. It is very often exciting, sometimes frustrating, endlessly innovative, always constructive and never, never boring. And it creates opportunities for the Foundation to do things and work with objects in ways that were just not possible before - that is what is most refreshing.