

Innovation and Best Practice for International Standards on Sculpture Study and Management

CASE STUDY NO. 1

MEDARDO ROSSO, BOOKMAKER, CA. 1893-1895

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STUDY CASE NO. 1

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BOOKMAKER	
Artist	Medardo Rosso
Date of creation of subject	ca. 1893–1895
Casting date	Unknown, but post-1928 and pre-1964
Material / Technique	Bronze
Dimensions	17.72 in. x 12.2 in. x 13.78 in.
Edition / Numbering	
Owner	Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna
Location	Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna

Premise: This Report was requested of me by the BISS Creative Europe Cooperation Project, for whom I was invited as an Invited Expert. This Report is not to be used in part or in whole for publication purposes, unless permission is first obtained from the author.

1. Description of the artwork

This is the link to the museum website page on the sculpture:

<https://www.mumok.at/en/online-collection/detail/der-buchmacher-920>

The museum website gives the following information:

“Medardo Rosso

Dear Buchmacher

The Bookmaker

1894

Bronze Casting

7.72 inch x 12.2 inch x 13.78 inch

erworben | acquired in 1964

Inventory number: P 49/0”

There are several inaccuracies, errors, and labelling omissions on this webpage.

A correct labelling should read:

Artist name: Medardo Rosso (b. Turin 1858 - d. Milan 1928)

(*note: birth and death dates of artist need to be given in order to understand the lifetime vs. posthumous status of the cast).

Title of work: *Bookmaker*

Date of creation of original subject by the artist: ca. 1893–1895

(*note: museum website says 1894—see below on dating of the work)

Date of cast: unknown, but post-1928 and pre-1964

(*note: museum website does not state casting date or posthumous status of the cast—see below on casting history of the subject)

Material: bronze

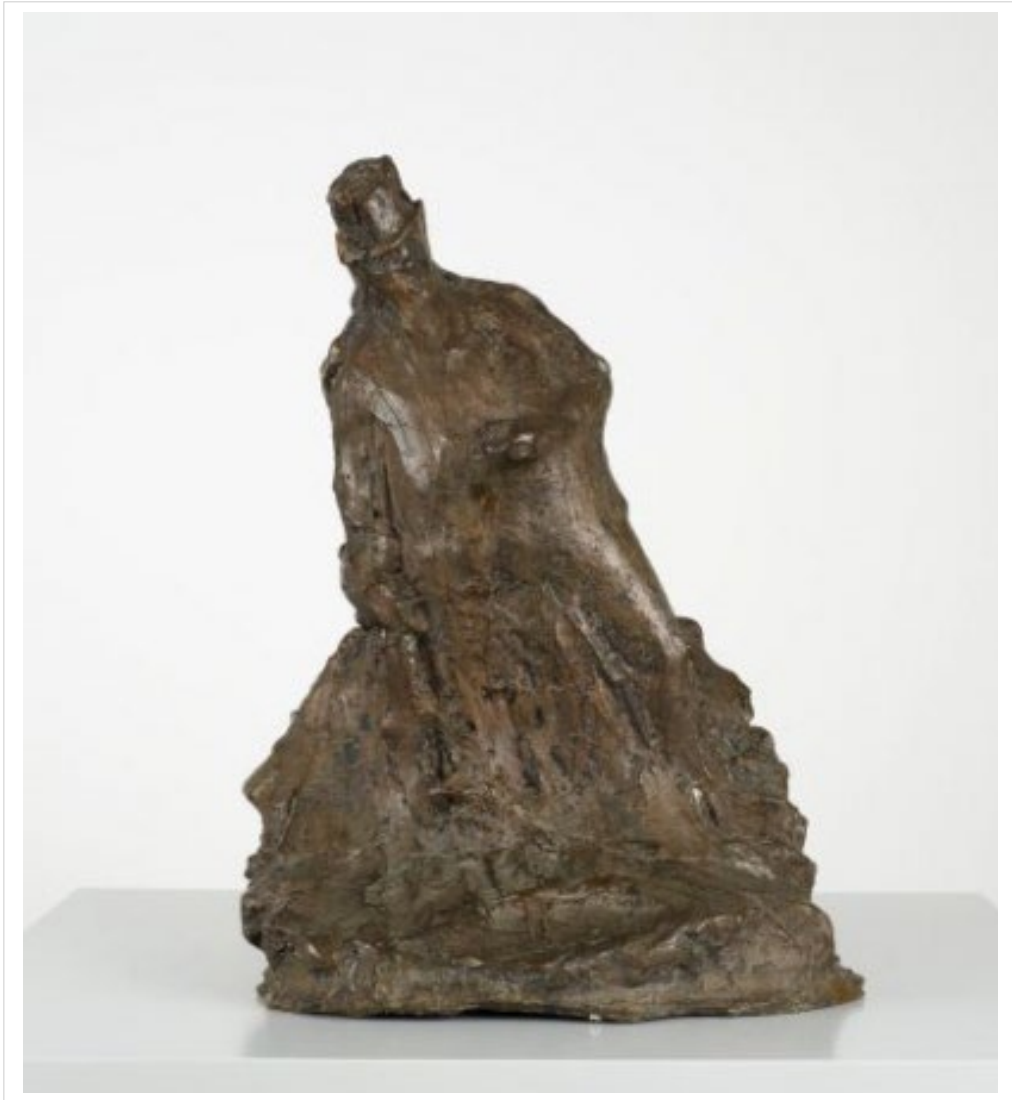
Dimensions: 17.72 in. x 12.2 in. x 13.78 in.

(*as per museum website)

Location: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna

Provenance: Mario Vianello-Chiodo, sold to museum in 1964

(*note: provenance is not stated on museum website, nor the authorizing body for the cast—see below on why this information is crucial)



2. Challenge and approach

The task is to study the information given on the website of the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, about a cast of Medardo Rosso's *Bookmaker* with respect to a possible relabeling using the BISS Standards.

2.1 Description of Sculptural Subject and Possible Dates of Creation

Bookmaker is a subject that the Italian/French sculptor Medardo Rosso modeled in clay during his first decade in Paris, where he emigrated from Milan in 1889. Due to scant documentation about Rosso's life in the 1890s, the original clay subject's exact date of creation remains uncertain.

Rosso never exhibited casts of this work in the 1890s, making it difficult to date with precision. Scholars, including myself, agree that its date of creation most likely ranges sometime between 1893 and 1895¹.

The sculpture appears in studio photographs that are presumed to be from that period.

The work is often considered to be a specific portrait, however the male subject depicted in this work hovers between figuration and abstraction. In a 1902 publication, Rosso gave the title as *Portrait de M.M...*, suggesting a wish to preserve the subject's anonymity².

The work's stated subject—a bookie at the horseraces—can only be inferred from its later title, and perhaps by the barely discernible binoculars the figure is said to be holding in one hand³. Although scholars link the work's iconography to Edgar Degas and his horserace scenes, Degas never depicted a bookie.

Bookmaker is one of Rosso's most avant-garde creations due to its radical diagonal inclination of the figure. It is part of a series of works by the artist that attempt to depict physical unbalance in sculpture. The subject is one of two small full-bodied male figures that Rosso made to slant sideways and backward (the other is *Uomo che legge* [Man Reading], ca. 1894–95). Honoré Daumier was the first to make such an attempt with his revolutionary *Ratapail* (1851). Degas, who was a great admirer of Daumier, would become fascinated by the backward-slanting figure and would depict numerous examples in his paintings and pastels of the late 1870s and early 1880s. Rosso is known to have expressed a kinship with Degas and his innovative visual experiments.

Although rooted like a traditional sculpture in a base composed of a tuft of matter, Rosso's diagonally inclined figure is perceived by the viewer as illogical, for its off-center pose challenges rational notions of sculpture as mimicking the human body's true poses. In this work, the

¹ The range of dates given for this work is based on the fact that Rosso himself gave more than one date, including 1893 in Claris, E. (1902). *De l'impressionnisme en sculpture: Auguste Rodin et Medardo Rosso*. Nouvelle Revue, 23; and 1894 in Rictus, J. (January 3, 1913). *Le Sculpture de Lumière. Un Précurseur: Medardo Rosso. Comoedia*, 1. There was no *Bookmaker* exhibited at Rosso's show at the Bodinière in 1894. It is first mentioned in an article of 1896, thus 1895 is also a possible date. See de Sainte Croix, C. (March 1896). Medardo Rosso. *Mercure de France* 17, 390. For further information and a summary of previous literature on the dating of the work, see Hecker, S. (2017). *A Moment's Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture*. University of California Press. 161–167, 267 n.10, 293 n.82, 299 n.136

² Claris, E. (1902). *De l'impressionnisme en sculpture: Auguste Rodin et Medardo Rosso*, 23.

³ Mino Borghi believes that the binoculars are in his right hand. See Borghi, M. (1950) *Medardo Rosso*. Il Milione, 67.

sculptor daringly dislocates sculpture's vertical, centered axis and so undermines the traditional idea of sculpture as rooted and freestanding. *Bookmaker* may well have informed Auguste Rodin's thinking during his final stages of work on the diagonally tilted monument to Honoré Balzac (1898)⁴.

2.2 Lifetime vs. Posthumous Casts

In general, in Medardo Rosso's *œuvre*, there are three strands of casts made from the artist's lifetime plaster models:

- lifetime casts made by the artist
- posthumous casts made legally by Rosso's son, Francesco
- posthumous casts made legally by Rosso's friend, Mario Vianello-Chiodo

Aside from works that fit into the above 3 categories, there may be other sculptural objects that were cast either from the artist's plasters or not, which may or may not have been authorized. These casts are still being located and studied.

Medardo Rosso's art has been re-examined in recent years. Scholarly research now indicates that some of the sculptures once thought to have been lifetime casts made by the artist were in fact authorized casts made legally after his death by his son, Francesco, from the sculptor's original plaster models⁵.

In 1999-2004, together with a team of scholars and conservators/conservation scientists, we researched the history of Rosso's lifetime and posthumous casts through a study with the Harvard University Straus Center for Conservation and a related exhibition⁶. In my catalogue essay, I described for the first time the different strands of posthumous casts legally made by Rosso's son and those posthumous casts made legally by his friend, Mario Vianello-Chiodo.

In a 2009 *Catalogo ragionato*, Paola Mola and Fabio Vittucci separated the sculptor's *œuvre* into works they consider to be lifetime casts and those that they believe are undocumented or have been cast by his son Francesco, as well as those cast by Vianello-Chiodo. They have deemed the authorized posthumous casts to be inferior to the lifetime casts.

In a 2017 essay published in the *Journal of Art Historiography*

<https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/hecker.pdf>

I critically examined the implications of Rosso and posthumous casts in general, including the different art historical, market and legal status of these objects.

⁴ Hecker, S. (2017). *A Moment's Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture*. University of California Press, 161–2.

⁵ One example of these is the wax cast *Grande riuse* at Tate Gallery. Available online: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rosso-laughing-woman-large-version-t04846>. Accessed 24 June 2019. On this subject, see Hecker, S. (June 2017). The afterlife of sculptures: posthumous casts and the case of Medardo Rosso (1858–1928). *Journal of Art Historiography* (16), available online: <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/hecker.pdf>, Accessed 22 July 2023. For Rosso's technique, see Hecker, S. (Ed.). (2020). *Finding Lost Wax: The Disappearance and Recovery of an Ancient Casting Technique and the Experiments of Medardo Rosso*. Brill

⁶ The catalogue that resulted is: Cooper, H. and Hecker, S. eds. (2003). *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*. Exhibition catalogue Harvard Art Museums, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Focusing on the case of the *Bookmaker*, the original clay model was lost after its creation when the work was transformed into the more durable medium of plaster by a process of molding. Only two plaster models of the *Bookmaker* from the artist's lifetime were found after his death⁷. For convenience, I shall call them Plaster A and Plaster B. There may or may not have been other lifetime plaster models that are lost or did not survive.

During the artist's lifetime, one of the two (Plaster A) was used as by Rosso as a working plaster. At a certain point, he sold this plaster to a collector as an exhibitable object. This was probably the primary plaster that was sold by Rosso to French collector Henri Rouart, which then passed on by inheritance to his son Louis Rouart, who then sold it to Francesco Rosso after Rosso's death. Francesco Rosso then sold it to collector Gianni Mattioli.

Another plaster (Plaster B) was kept by the artist. This plaster, perhaps a secondary plaster taken by the artist from a primary plaster during his lifetime, was given by Rosso in 1927 to his friend the lawyer Mario Vianello-Chiodo, along with a letter of authorization from the artist to make future reproductions. No specific instructions regarding casting techniques, materials or patinas were given by the artist to his friend.

After the artist's death, the second plaster (Plaster B) also became a collectible and exhibitable sculpture in its own right. Therefore, both these plasters are to be considered working models for making casts in wax and bronze as well as exhibitable sculptures (Plaster A in the artist's lifetime, Plaster B after the artist's death). Plaster A is currently in a private collection and has been shown in exhibitions. Plaster B is owned by and on exhibit in a public museum⁸.

Although Vianello-Chiodo is not the owner of the artist's moral rights, the written authorization by Rosso gave Vianello-Chiodo the legal rights to make posthumous casts after the artist's death from Plaster B, according to no specific artistic criteria. Thus, threshold criteria for authorization of posthumous casts, made by the artist to a third party who was not the holder of the artist's moral rights, have been met⁹.

The Vianello-Chiodo posthumous casts that he made from Plaster B can be distinguished from those casts made by the artist during his lifetime through archival information, small visual surface differences, slight size differences, and at times through material analysis. The Vianello-Chiodo posthumous casts can also be distinguished from those casts made from Plaster A by Rosso during his lifetime, and then from those casts made from Plaster A by Rosso's son, Francesco, after the artist's death. Francesco may have made posthumous casts legally from this plaster, as he was the holder of the artist's moral rights, but he had them made according to different professional foundry techniques when compared to those used by his father, which tended to be more experimental.

⁷ One of the two known plaster casts is listed in Mola, P. & Vittucci, F. (2009). *Medardo Rosso: Catalogo ragionato della scultura*. Skira. 308, n. I.30a. It belonged to Henri Rouart, then to his son Louis Rouart, who sold it to Francesco Rosso, who sold it to Gianni Mattioli.

⁸ This cast is listed in Mola, P. & Vittucci, F. (2009). *Medardo Rosso: Catalogo ragionato della scultura*. Skira. 310, 1.30d. It was willed by Rosso to Mario Vianello Chiodo and is now in the Kunsthalle Mannheim.

⁹ Regarding posthumous casts and legal rights, see Hecker, S. & Karol, P. J. (Eds.). (2022). *Posthumous Art, Law and the Art Market. The Afterlife of Art*. Routledge Taylor & Francis.

I have also found other posthumous casts that may or may not have been authorized by the artist's heir and still need to be researched.

With specific reference to Vianello-Chiodo, his documents indicate that he used his plaster model (Plaster B) to make 3 posthumous casts:

- 1 wax cast, which Vianello-Chiodo sold to MoMA in 1960
https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_3437_300062266.pdf
- 2 bronze casts, one of which Vianello-Chiodo sold to the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna in 1964
<https://www.mumok.at/en/online-collection/detail/der-buchmacher-920>

Given that Rosso did not specify how to have these casts made, Vianello-Chiodo was free to choose the foundry techniques, alloys, and patinas without adhering to the artist's lifetime techniques.

Vianello-Chiodo sold his plaster model (Plaster B) to the Kunsthalle Mannheim in 1964. It can be seen here: <https://www.kuma.art/en/node/12670>. The museum label describing this work gives no information but for the artist's name, sculpture title and an imprecise date.

After 1964, when Vianello-Chiodo sold his plaster, no further casts were made from the Vianello-Chiodo plaster by him or by the Kunsthalle Mannheim. There have thus been no other casts made from Plaster B after those mentioned above.

3. Application of BISS Standards and conclusion

On its website, The MMK Stiftung Ludwig:

- Does not give the artist's birth and death dates.
- inaccurately lists the date of creation of the clay model.
- does not indicate that the cast is posthumous.
- does not indicate the cast's possible range of posthumous casting dates.
- does not give the provenance history or the authorization for this cast.

Therefore, the current labelling on the website is inaccurate and misleading.

Based on this analysis, the correct **BISS** label for this cast would be:

- ✓ Posthumous Cast Authorized by the Artist

In addition, the artist's birth and death dates and the correct date of creation of the clay model should be accompanied by the cast's possible range of casting dates. The museum should also cite the source that authorized the casting of this object (Mario Vianello-Chiodo, by authorization of the artist, from a plaster model gifted to Vianello-Chiodo by the artist, with the right to reproduce the work as he pleases).

The casting criteria of this cast are unknown, and the patination criteria is unknown.

Dr. Sharon Hecker, Ph.D.

4. Literature

- Borghi, M. (1950) *Medardo Rosso*. Il Milione.
- Claris, E. (1902). *De l'impressionnisme en sculpture: Auguste Rodin et Medardo Rosso*. Nouvelle Revue.
- Cooper, H. & Hecker, S. (2004). *Medardo Rosso: Second Impressions*. Yale University Press. <https://harvardartmuseums.org/exhibitions/2484>
- Hecker, S. (2017). *A Moment's Monument: Medardo Rosso and the International Origins of Modern Sculpture*. University of California Press.
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- Rictus, J. (January 3, 1913). Le Sculpture de Lumiere. Un Précurseur: Medardo Rosso. *Comoedia*.
- de Sainte Croix, C. (March 1896). Medardo Rosso. *Mercure de France* 17.