

Abstract: Falling between the Cracks: U.C. Berkeley's Plaster Casts
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In the trend of allowing collections of plaster casts of ancient sculpture to fall into disuse, increasingly common since the twentieth century (most famously of late in Basel), U.C. Berkeley can be considered ahead of the curve: in fact, the vast majority of its three hundred plaster casts has never left storage, never been displayed, and never been made accessible to the public. The casts have also been subject to substantial—if entirely unintentional—neglect, which in some cases turned destructive: when the casts were stored for decades under the bleachers of the soccer stadium, they suffered heavy rain damage—a form not of active but nevertheless passive destruction. Unlike the European and East Coast collections it was meant to emulate, the West Coast collection never became the teaching resource it was intended to be.

This paper proposes that the collection's ill fortune is due in part to a traditional, arbitrary division of academic disciplines in which the cast collection found itself on the wrong side. The origins of the collection were auspicious enough, thanks to two windfalls that were deeply formative for the local area: the famous Hearst family's donations to the University of California, and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition held in San Francisco in 1915. But most of the casts acquired by these avenues were bequeathed to a museum whose mission and even name was devoted to Anthropology, where these objects of Classical Archaeology were conceptually homeless. The history of this collection thus illustrates how our own modern divisions of knowledge have real-world, sometime disastrous consequences for physical objects.