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# Polychromy

*in Ancient Sculpture  
and Architecture*

*edited by*

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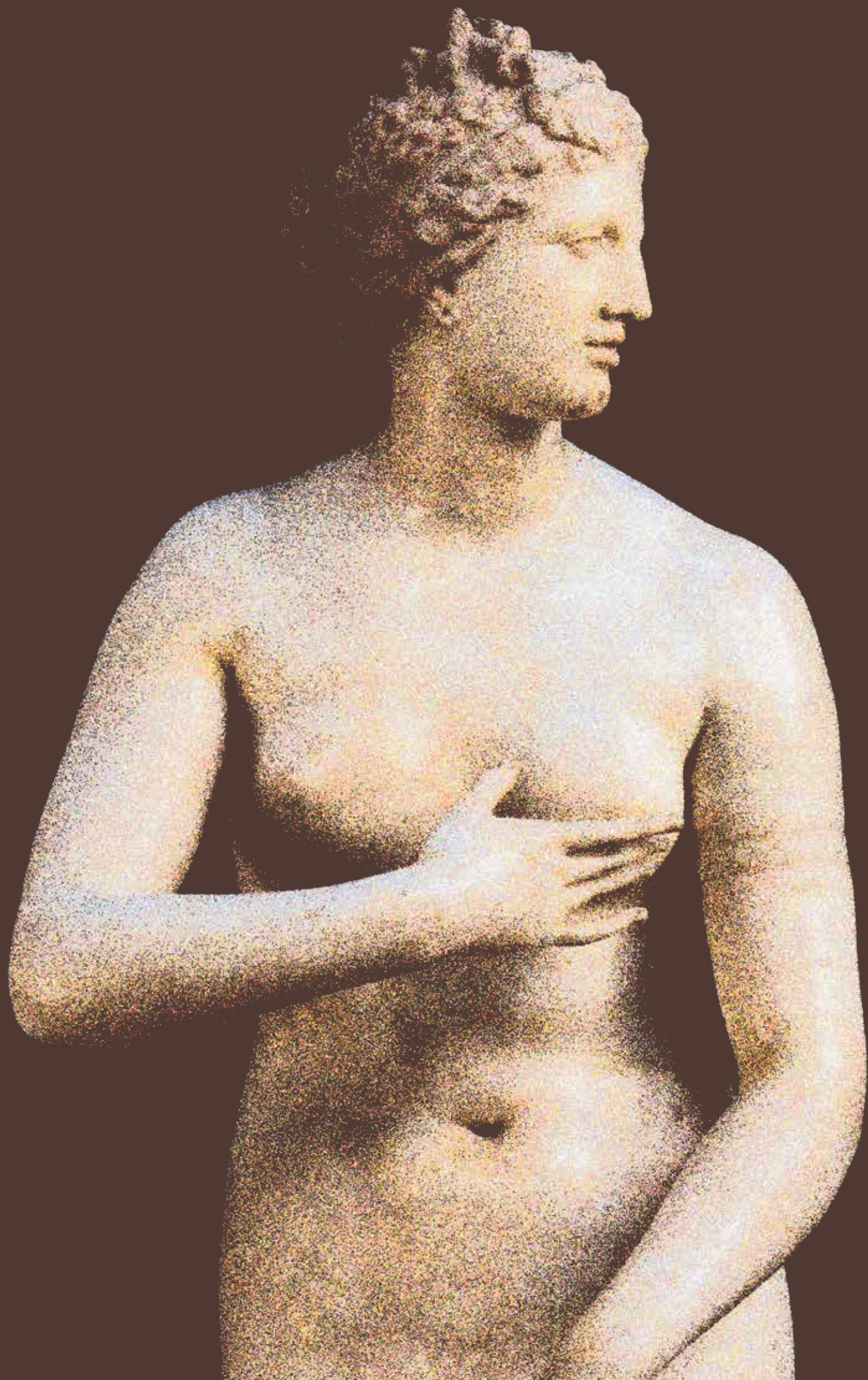
# Polychromy

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## A Place of Education

During my time as Director of the Uffizi, and in fact even before I occupied that exalted position, I always clung firmly to the principle that a museum should be a place of education (and not just of education to art). Education is played out at different levels. There is dissemination, which is the most democratic kind of education (as long as it is scientifically and historically sound, of course), and then there is advanced research (which in turn becomes the object of up-to-date dissemination in the future).

I was eager to make room for both kinds of education because I believed strongly in the need for a comprehensive approach. That same belief also prompted me to foster interest in involving the more out-of-the-way areas of the country, where I sought to use the “Città degli Uffizi” exhibitions to bring specialist studies out to the people of those areas in an attempt to fill out their awareness of their cultural nobility – an awareness that the exclusively economic interpretation embodied in the word “enhancement” discourages every time those areas are denied investments capable of fostering their rebirth and every time substantial funds are allocated to large museums in the certain knowledge that they guarantee a return on investment.

It was in the spirit of this belief that, towards the end of my time at the Uffizi, I was delighted to accede to a request submitted to me by Fabrizio Paolucci, Paolo Liverani and Andrea Pessina to host a conference in the gallery exploring colour in ancient sculpture, a field that is both present and very much alive in the Uffizi even if it is occasionally overlooked or neglected. The idea (which has now come to fruition) was to host a conference of experts, yet open to all, that one could already sense would increase our knowledge thanks to the rich interplay of scholarly experience promoted at the conference. This book clearly shows that that hope was well-placed. Yet we must remember that all of this was invariably accomplished with an eye to its subsequent dissemination for the benefit of wider education.

*Antonio Natali*

Former Director, Galleria degli Uffizi







# Chromology Revisited

In recent decades, society has seen several crossings from monochrome (or rather oligochrome) to polychrome environments. Sometimes they followed directly from technological progress, such as the step from black-and-white to color photography or television, or from computer screens with green or orange letters on a black ground, to the rich color displays of modern laptops, tablets or smartphones. Sometimes the switch from one color to many is mainly a cultural one, as it was the case with polychrome tattoos, which now have almost superseded blue ink. In some instances, new technologies lay the bases for cultural phenomena, which take on a life of their own. This is true for the recent fashion to illuminate historical buildings in different colors for special occasions (rather than in such a light, which ironically is being perceived as neutral because it is polyspectral), and its variation to project colorful moving images onto their surfaces.

The conceptual difference between monochromy and polychromy is rooted in the physiology of the human eye (and indeed of vertebrates at large), which is characterized by rod cells, which enable us to see at dusk and night, and cone cells, which are far less sensitive, but allow for color vision. Interestingly, the rods are distributed widely on the retina's periphery, whereas the rods are concentrated in the center. Therefore Plato's allegory of the cave, which precisely describes the change from rod to cone vision as well as the "blindness" due to desensitized rods at the return into the cave, also implies a process of focussing and centralization.

Human trichromacy has favored the use of primary colors in all cultures, especially when color is employed and conventionalized for signage and symbolic purposes, whereas its mimetic function triggers polychromy, as explored in two exhibitions, which at the distance of a decade contextualized virtually the same historical works and groupings with different examples of contemporary art: *The Color of Life* held at the Getty Villa in 2008, and *Like Life* at the Met Breuer in 2018. Having contributed to the former, it was a fortuitous coincidence that among my duties on the first day after I had arrived in Florence in order to take office as the Director of the Uffizi Galleries, was the closing of the conference on Polychromy in Ancient Sculpture and Architecture, now published in the present volume. Four months later, it was followed by an exhibition on polychrome wood sculpture in the Renaissance (*Fece di scoltura di legname e colori*". *Scultura del Quattrocento in legno dipinto a Firenze*), which solidified the museum's commitment to research on sculpture, with many other initiatives following suit – of which perhaps most significant was the recovery of the gallery's ancient name (*Galleria delle statue e delle pitture*), which reminds us that throughout most of its history, until the very beginning of the twentieth century, the Uffizi were chiefly famous as a museum of ancient statuary.

*Eike D. Schmidt*

Director, Gallerie degli Uffizi







This book collects the papers presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> Round Table – *Polychromy in ancient sculpture and architecture* – held in Florence (4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2015), hosted by the Uffizi Gallery in the wonderful hall of San Pier Scheraggio, in cooperation with the Department SAGAS (History, Archaeology, Geography and Arts) of the University of Florence, the Istituto per la Conservazione e la Valorizzazione dei Beni Culturali - Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Sesto Fiorentino, Firenze and the Soprintendenza della Toscana (now Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Firenze e per le province di Pistoia e Prato - Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali).

Along with the proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Round Table (Athens 2013, in press) this is the first time we publish the results of the meeting of a group of scholars particularly focused on the polychromy on stone and other materials in Classical Antiquity. After the exhibition *Bunte Götter – ClassiColor – I colori del bianco* (Munich – Copenhagen – Vatican City 2003-2004), in September 2009 Jan Stubbe Østergaard invited some colleagues for the first Round Table at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen. It was a small group, a dozen of persons gathered around the table of the library of the Glyptotek. Since then, the meeting has taken place annually and has become a regular appointment<sup>1</sup>. Every year new colleagues join the group and among them several young researchers: a clear sign of the vitality of the members and of the interest of the topic itself.

In the first meetings the urgency was to build a network of scholars and institutions – at least one for each country, if possible – in order to exchange news and results, to compare methods and to debate the rapid development of research in this new field. In those years there were other occasions for meeting, during conferences and exhibitions held in various countries, but the Round Table grew up regularly as an essential moment for sharing experiences in a friendly and familiar atmosphere.

After seven intense years and as many Round Tables, the time was ripe for publishing the results of the meetings and we hope that this can be the beginning of a series. A “polychrome” series: because every number will be freely decided and published by the hosting institution(s). During the last Round Table held in Paris, the group decided to transform the frequency in a biyearly appointment, in order to give the members the time for more accurate research and the editors the time to publish the proceedings, which is always hard engagement.

This volume collects – with a couple of exceptions – the papers presented at the Uffizi Galleries. We have decided to add as keynote at the beginning of the book the lecture given by Salvatore Settis at the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> Round Table in Copenhagen (2014), which for several reasons has never been published. This paper has a particular importance: it places the topic in its wider context and makes it clear that from the outset, research on colour is not simply a technical and analytical matter: without a careful and integrated analysis there is no progress. The topic touches upon very important and general themes, reaching some fundamental questions about the scope and relevance of the study of the past.

This conference was also a special occasion for the life of the Uffizi Galleries: it was opened by the Director – Antonio Natali – and closed by the successor – Eike D. Schimdt – during his first day as Director. To both we are very grateful for their continuous help, support and encouragement.

#### The Scientific Committee

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*Fabrizio Paolucci*

Gallerie degli Uffizi

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<sup>1</sup> 2010, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek; 2011, London, British Museum; 2012, Frankfurt, Liebieghaus; 2013, Athens, Acropolis Museum; 2014, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. The abstracts of the first five meetings were published in the *Preliminary Reports* of the project Tracking Colour on the website of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek: <http://www.trackingcolour.com/publications/preliminary-reports>.





