

The gift of a god

The story of the University of Melbourne's God of Artemision

Steve Martin and Zora Sanders

In 1926 some fishermen working off Cape Artemision in Greece hauled in an unusual catch. In their nets they found a muscular bronze arm, which later proved to belong to a spectacular, life-sized statue of a Greek god. The bronze idol had lain in a sunken Roman galley, undiscovered for more than two thousand years; probably the statue was plunder being shipped to Italy between the second and early first century BCE—a time when there was a high demand for Greek art and statuary among wealthy Romans.¹ In 1928 the body of the statue, covered with a protective crust of barnacles and other marine accretions, was lifted to the surface from the sea floor,

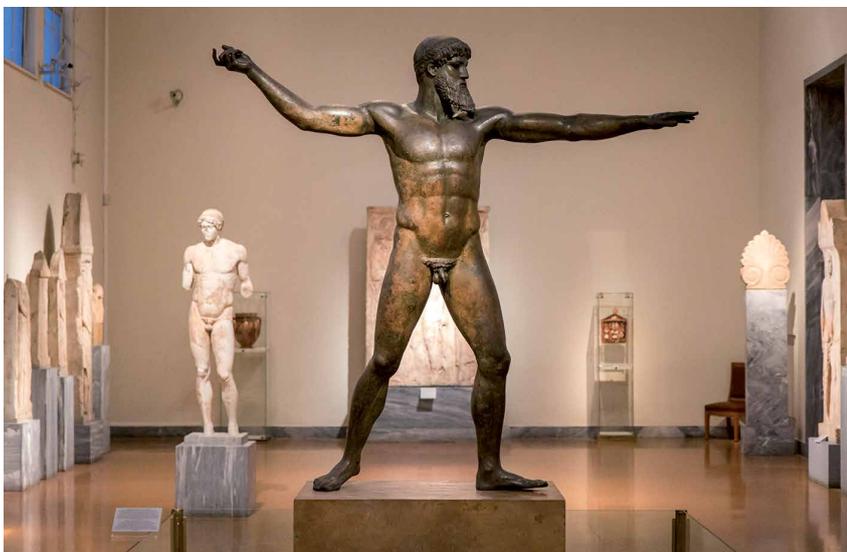
having never made it to a Roman villa, private garden or public pedestal.²

The bronze was created in about 460 BCE, probably in one of the many temporary foundries established at the base of the Acropolis in Athens. Scholars agree that the figure is that of a god, rather than a hero or specific person.³ It bears a strong resemblance to other depictions of both Zeus and Poseidon, but because this god is missing his attribute—his identifying weapon or symbol—the question of whether he is Zeus (with a cone-ended thunderbolt) or his brother Poseidon (with a trident), remains a source of scholarly debate.⁴ Reassembled and conserved in 1929,

and now on permanent display in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, Statue of Zeus or Poseidon (pictured below) is acknowledged as an extremely rare and particularly fine surviving example of Greek bronze statuary of the Early Classical period.⁵

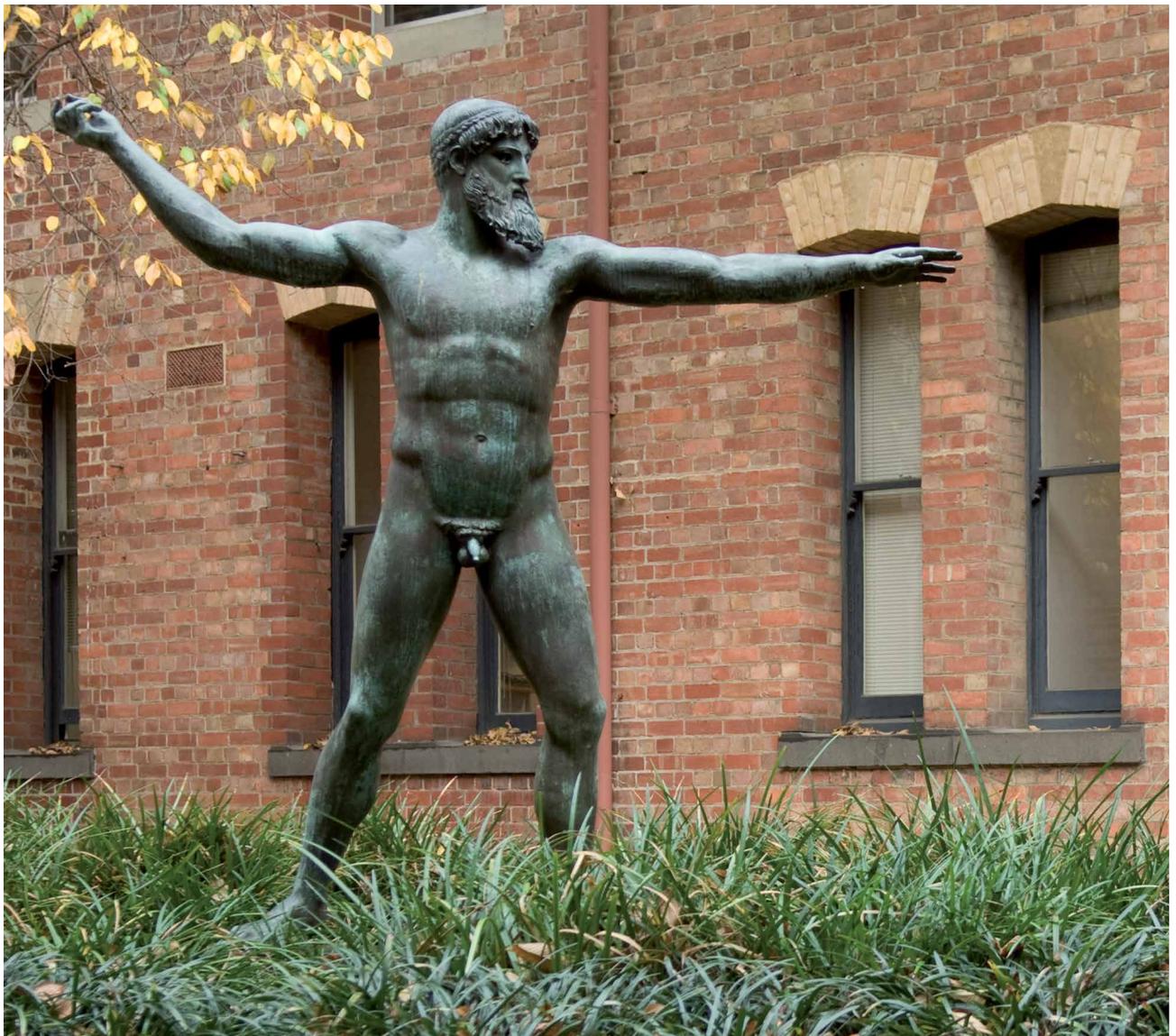
In 1953 the Greek government gave a bronze replica of the statue, referred to as the Poseidon of Artemision (c. 1953) to the United Nations headquarters in New York, where it remains on public display in the General Assembly lobby.⁶ The second official replica, known as Replica God of Artemision (c. 1956), is part of the University of Melbourne Art Collection (pictured opposite).⁷ This cast was approved by the Greek government and today can be viewed on permanent display in the courtyard of the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Building on the Parkville campus.

How did a bronze replica of the God of Artemision end up in the grounds of a university in distant Melbourne? If the story were an ancient Greek drama, it would be led by the protagonist, followed closely by the secondary main character—the deuteragonist—while the third-most influential character would be understood as the tritagonist. The records tell us that the protagonist in this story was the first Herald Professor of Fine Arts



Opposite: Unknown sculptor (Greece),
Statue of Zeus or Poseidon, c. 460 BCE
(found on the sea bed near Cape Artemision
in northern Euboea), bronze, height 209 cm.
X15161, National Archaeological Museum,
Athens. Photograph by Michael Turtle.
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itinerary-ancient-athens-greece](http://www.timetravelturtle.com/itinerary-ancient-athens-greece).

Below: Attributed to Fonderia Artistica
Ferdinando Marinelli (near Florence), after
unknown ancient Greek sculptor, Replica God
of Artemision, cast c. 1956 after an original of
c. 460 BCE, bronze, approx. 202 × 210 × 50 cm.
1958.0025, gift to the University of Melbourne
by the Greek Orthodox Community of
Melbourne in 1958, in commemoration of
the XVI Olympiad held in 1956, Classics and
Archaeology Collection, University of Melbourne
Art Collection. Photograph by Lee McRae.



at the University of Melbourne, Sir Joseph Burke (1913–1992). Our deuteragonist and tritagonist are respectively the Greek Ambassador to Australia from 1953 to 1956, His Excellency Dimitri M. Lambros, and his successor (from 1956 to 1961), His Excellency George Christodoulou. These two diplomats make for compelling main characters because of their tireless efforts working with Burke and the Greek Orthodox Community in Melbourne. Finally, we have the antagonists: the vandals who made their presence felt after the unveiling ceremony.

Sir Joseph Burke (pictured opposite) held the position of Herald Chair of Fine Arts for 32 years, from 1946 to 1982; it has been said that ‘art history in Melbourne began with his appointment in 1946’.⁸ Burke’s letters discussing the sculpture are held in the Joseph Burke and Department of Fine Arts files at the University of Melbourne Archives, and references to the statue start to appear during Melbourne’s summer of 1955, in the lead-up to the games of the XVI Olympiad, which were held in Melbourne in November–December 1956. The documents tell us that Professor Burke, in consultation with a close friend, Sydney-based archaeologist and classics scholar Professor Dale Trendall, conceived

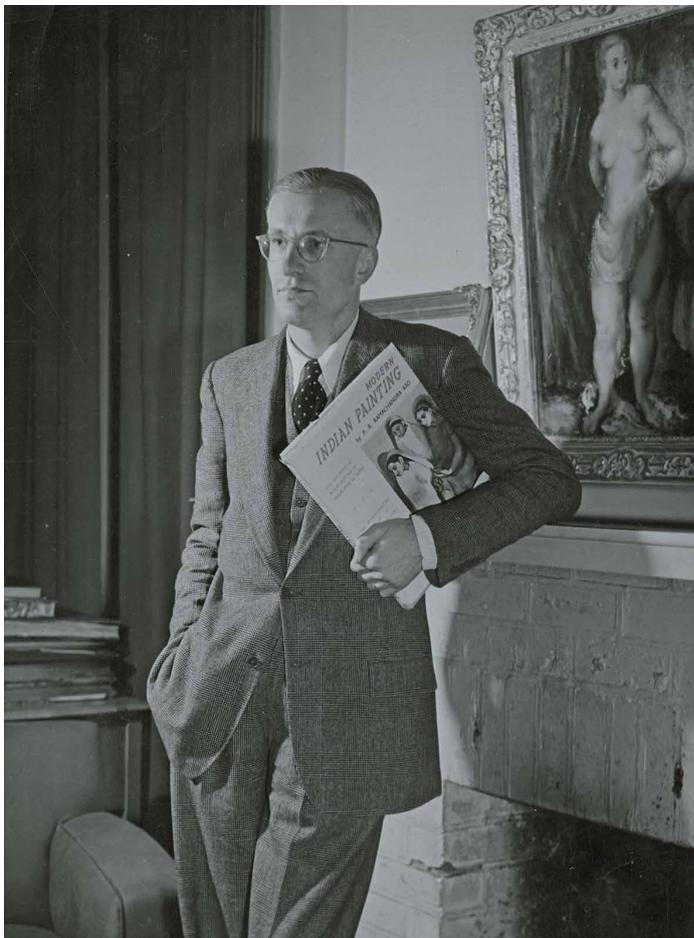
the idea of the replica to decorate the newly designed Beaurepaire Physical Education Centre (now called the Beaurepaire Centre).⁹ The replica was given as a symbol of the Greek–Australian ties forged in wars of the 20th century, as well as to commemorate the centenary of the University of Melbourne and the XVI Olympiad. Cultural gifts were exchanged between Australia and Greece in the mid-20th century to honor Greek–Australian relations: the Melbourne donation was probably inspired by the gift by the Greek government and the University of Athens of a plaster cast of the sculpture known as ‘Marathon boy’ to the Nicholson Museum on the occasion of the University of Sydney’s centenary in 1954, as a token of their gratitude for Australia’s assistance to Greece during and after World War II.¹⁰

In 1955, Joseph Burke’s correspondence with Ambassador Lambros (stationed at the Greek Embassy in Canberra) outlined the options for importing samples of Greek marble from Athens to Melbourne. Burke had asked Lambros to help source the samples and to advise on the shipping of stone for plinths that would support figure statues that he was proposing (but had not yet sourced) for the forecourt

of the Beaurepaire Centre.¹¹ In one of the letters, Lambros revisits a well-received speech on modern Greek architecture that Burke had delivered to a captive audience 12 months earlier while opening a modest architectural exhibit at Melbourne’s Greek Consulate. Lambros had sent Burke’s ‘concise eulogy’ to dignitaries in Athens, after being encouraged by the Greek secretary to the legation, Mr Alexander Xydis, who had attended the 1954 opening and thought Burke’s speech ‘remarkable’.¹² Perhaps this endorsement by Greek officials gave Burke the confidence to propose the idea of the bronze replica as a donation? After all, Burke had already been working with Lambros to prepare the foundations for classical statues, showing the forethought to plan for complementary plinths that would be fabricated with marble imported from Greece.¹³ In August 1955 Burke secured support for a gift of the replica from Ambassador Lambros, who in January 1956 confirmed the official approval of the Greek government.¹⁴

It was not difficult for Burke to gain support for the idea from the benefactor of the university’s sports centre—the businessman, politician and former champion swimmer Sir Frank Beaurepaire—because

Professor Joseph Burke, c. 1954,
photograph by Clifford Bottomley,
silver gelatin photographic print,
25.0 × 15.3 cm. BWP/25159, Joseph
Terence Burke, Personal Papers,
University of Melbourne Archives.



Beaurepaire had already invited Olympic countries to offer gifts that would adorn the building.¹⁵ One item credited to this particular endeavour is a bronze bust (1955) of long-distance runner Emil Zátopek, now

also in the University of Melbourne Art Collection.¹⁶ This portrait bust by Martin Reiner was a gift of the Hungarian Olympic Committee in commemoration of the 1956 Olympics. The young architect who

designed the Beaurepaire Centre, Roderick I. MacDonald (1922–2014) of Eggleston, MacDonald & Secomb, proposed from the start the idea of an artistic as well as an athletic centre. Burke applauded MacDonald for presenting a concept that upheld the ancient Greek ideal of the union between body and mind.¹⁷ In the spirit of this union, a mural was commissioned from Melbourne artist Leonard French: *Untitled (Symmetry of sport)*, 1956, is a major work of art, an architectural feature of the building's interior, and can be viewed on the first floor.¹⁸

Lambros took to Burke's idea of the gift with great enthusiasm, writing to officials in Greece and quoting passages from Burke's correspondence.¹⁹ He persuaded the board of the Greek Orthodox Community in Melbourne to raise funds towards the significant costs, and as a result the deal was approved.²⁰ Lambros then went about rallying successful Melburnians of Greek background to support the donation. Australia's post-World War II immigration program attracted some 250,000 Greek emigrants, of whom a large proportion settled in Melbourne.²¹ Records held at the General State Archives in Athens and the Greek Orthodox Community in Melbourne show that Lambros and

his successor, George Christodoulou, worked tirelessly with the Greek Orthodox Community to ensure that the funds were raised and the gift secured.²²

The Greek Orthodox Community planned for the replica to be cast in Italy.²³ The Fonderia Artistica Ferdinando Marinelli (Ferdinando Marinelli Artistic Foundry), which lies on the outskirts of Florence and dates its operations back to the early 17th century, is the likely producer of the replica; on its website the foundry still proudly displays an image of a full-size replica of the bronze God of Artemision, titled 'Poseidon of Athens', and states that the company's moulds were 'created through moulds made directly on the original'. Unfortunately, the infamous Florence floods of 1966 destroyed the foundry's records, so any documents from the fabricator that could confirm that the University of Melbourne's replica was cast there have been lost.²⁴

Minutes of Greek Orthodox Community meetings held in Melbourne record that moulds were indeed taken from the original statue in Athens and sent to Italy for casting.²⁵ The finished replica was then to be shipped to Melbourne on the Greek-flagged *Kyrenia*, a vessel that also brought many waves of Greek emigrants to new lives in

Australia, and the same vessel that Lambros had earlier proposed to transport the samples of Greek marble to Melbourne.²⁶ The replica was ready by 1956, but world events then intervened. The Suez Crisis closed the canal, stopping the *Kyrenia's* Australian route. The cost of air freight was prohibitive, and for many months the replica sat waiting to leave the foundry, only making the trip in May 1958, by which time the Olympic Games had come and gone, Sir Frank Beaurepaire had died, and George Christodoulou had succeeded Dimitiri Lambros as Greek ambassador to Australia.²⁷ The delay was so long that even the student body began to notice, and the student newspaper *Hark!* ran a satirical article speculating that President Nasser might have nabbed the sculpture for himself.²⁸ Eventually the Suez Canal reopened and the bronze was able to make its voyage, though the *Kyrenia* was no longer making the journey and an Italian ship was employed for the job.²⁹

The replica was formally presented by Ambassador Christodolou to the University of Melbourne on 10 September 1958. At the ceremony both Burke and Christodoulou delivered impassioned and eloquent speeches, later published in the *University Gazette*, which praised the statue's aesthetic and symbolic

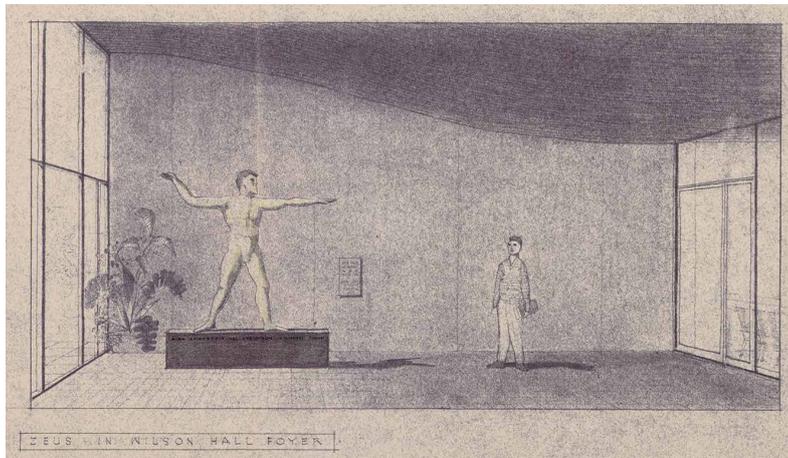
qualities, and celebrated the bonds of friendship between Greece and Australia.³⁰ Burke said of the bronze, 'It is to our own age what the so called Theseus figure of the Elgin Marbles was to the nineteenth century, and Apollo Belvedere to the eighteenth'.³¹ Yet even at the ceremony not everything went smoothly—on the advice of contemporary Greek-speakers, the inscription for the statue's plinth spelled 'Artemision' as 'Artemission', which, although not an actual mistake, seems to have struck some in attendance as a glaring misspelling, prompting classics professor A.K. Hunt to publish an explanation in a subsequent issue of *Farrago*.³² Most jarring of all, however, was that during the ceremonial presentations someone in the audience called out '*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes!*'—the famous line from Virgil meaning, roughly, 'Beware of Greeks bearing gifts'. It's hard to imagine a time when a Latin heckle would be well enough understood for anyone to get the 'unhappy joke', but apparently it was understood enough to cause offence among the Greek officials in attendance.³³ Their reaction seems justified, given the Greek Orthodox Community's collective generosity in funding the significant costs

Wolfgang Sievers, Beaufort Centre
forecourt, c. 1959, silver gelatin photographic
print, 25.0 × 19.0 cm. Unit 61, file 529,
1986.0037, Records of the Department of
Fine Arts, University of Melbourne Archives.
© National Library of Australia.

of producing and transporting the sculpture.³⁴ The heckle is an example of the discrimination frequently faced by Greek-Australians during that period, and to make a joke at their expense in the midst of presenting such a generous gift, intended to be a symbol of friendship and unity, seems particularly pointed and mean-spirited.

From the beginning there were concerns about the statue's location.³⁵ Its position outside the Beaufort Centre (pictured right) made it easily accessible to anyone who might come onto campus, and at the time the sight of a naked, life-sized human figure was still a controversial one in Australia.³⁶ After a couple of incidents, including a paint attack on the sculpture within weeks of the presentation, discussions on a suitable alternative location flared up.³⁷ Burke wrote a stirring article for *Farrago*, condemning the act and calling upon students not to be bystanders when witnessing such vandalism, while acknowledging that 'The special problem is that nude statues in open or unprotected places are still the exception in Australia'.³⁸ Only months later there was a third attack, when in 1959 a vandal disfigured the sculpture's penis with a hacksaw. The perpetrator was arrested, and Burke appeared as a witness for the





Office of Rae Featherstone (University of Melbourne architect, 1957–72), *Zeus in Wilson Hall foyer* (detail), 4 November 1958, blueprint, 29.0 × 60.0 cm. Unit 48, file 1/174, 1978.0039, Joseph Terence Burke, Personal Papers, University of Melbourne Archives. © University of Melbourne.

prosecution, though perhaps not entirely effectively, as the young man successfully appealed against his conviction.³⁹ Eric Thake, director of art at the Royal Melbourne Technical College and a distinguished sculptor, was employed to model in plasticine a new penis for the statue, and worked with the Metallurgy Department at the University of Melbourne to cast and re-attach the appendage.⁴⁰ Burke stated (possibly in exasperation) that he would support the idea of casting a bronze fig leaf to hide the statue's nudity until 'more enlightened times when it could be removed'.⁴¹ Happily, the more enlightened times arrived swiftly, and the censorship by fig leaf does not appear to have ever been applied.

As a result of these attacks, an alternative location for the statue was proposed, inside the foyer of the new Wilson Hall, built to replace the Gothic Revival structure that had been destroyed by fire in 1952.⁴² A scale drawing (pictured above) was requested from the office of the university architect, Rae Featherstone, to help visualise Burke's proposal of the replica in the modern interior, but the move never eventuated, because of concerns voiced by the vice-chancellor, Sir G.W. Paton, about the limited space and heavy foot-traffic in the foyer.⁴³

In 1965 Professor Brian Lewis, the university's first dean of architecture, made a bid to move the sculpture to the Architecture Building that he had designed, and which was soon to be completed. When rebuffed, Lewis wrote to Burke: 'I suppose that in the University of Melbourne even Olympus is controlled by the Vice-Chancellor'.⁴⁴ Surprisingly, the replica was lent to the City of Melbourne for display in the Treasury Gardens during the 1969 Moomba Festival. After returning to the university it eventually settled in a new home inside the Beaurepaire Centre, in the trophy hall overlooking the swimming pool. Unfortunately, chlorine is anathema to bronze, and signs of the much feared 'bronze disease' were noticed on the statue's surface, necessitating another move in 1994 to the courtyard of the Elisabeth Murdoch building.⁴⁵ Here the god remains, in a location largely safe from vandals, but seldom seen by many in the university community, let alone the wider public.

Today, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, which cares for the University of Melbourne Art Collection, including the Classics and Archaeology Collection and the public art, is redeveloping its 2002 *Sculpture on campus* booklet⁴⁶ into a self-guided

sculpture walk, to be provided as a downloadable app, which the museum will offer to encourage visitation of the university's sculpture collection on campus. The replica God of Artemision will be featured on the walk as arguably the most significant of a large number of casts of ancient works held in the University of Melbourne Art Collection. These copies, mostly electrotypes and plaster casts of ancient works, were purchased in the early 20th century from British and Greek museums for teaching art in the 19th-century classical tradition.⁴⁷ But a replica in bronze is more than just a copy; it is a continuation of the original lost-wax production process, which uses a series of moulds in wax and plaster or clay to produce one or many editions of the same object in bronze. Burke himself recognised the importance of the replica's material and production method, saying at the presentation ceremony: 'this is not a plaster copy but a bronze replica. I stress this point because ... A replica in bronze is cast in the same material and by the same method from a reconstructed mould printed, so to speak, from the original'.⁴⁸ Because the lost-wax process necessarily involves the creation and destruction of a wax model, all bronzes cast this way are, in one sense, replicas.

The ‘original’ that stands in Athens today may have simply been one of an edition, or a replica of an earlier bronze made to order, and in this sense the statue standing now in the Elisabeth Murdoch courtyard is simply a (much) later edition of the same work.

The replica tells an important story about the ties between Greece and Australia in the mid-20th century, as well as connecting many significant figures of the period, such as Joseph Burke, Dimitri Lambros and Frank Beaurepaire. These were people who helped shape Australian culture in a period in which Australia was rapidly changing, modernising and developing a new, outward-looking identity. They saw the replica bronze as an expression of this new identity, and of the values they shared as individuals: the importance of artistic expression, the necessity of collaboration and friendship between nations, and the democratic ideals fought for in World War II, which led to migration programs by the Australian Government to support the post-war immigration of Greeks to Australia. The university’s God of Artemision is a replica, but it is also a profoundly significant object in its own right, with a story and history that deserve recognition and appreciation.

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- 4 John Boardman, *Greek art*, London: Thames & Hudson, p. 53.
- 5 Tzachou-Alexandri, ‘Some remarks on the bronze God of Artemision’, pp. 86–95. At the time of writing, the National Archaeological Museum in Athens refers to this work by two different titles: ‘Bronze statue of Zeus or Poseidon’ (on the museum’s online catalogue) and ‘Poseidon of Artemision’ (on the exhibition label); Hemingway, *The horse and jockey from Artemision*, p. 87.

6 *United Nations gifts: Poseidon of Artemision: Gift ID: 129G*, New York: United Nations, www.un.org/ungifts/content/poseidon-artemission (viewed 9 September 2018).

7 After our research, the sculpture’s title, date and accession number in the University of Melbourne Art Collection catalogue were amended to: Untitled (Replica God of Artemision), (c. 1956), 1958.0025. Formerly the catalogue details were Untitled (Zeus or Poseidon), (c. 1940 cast), 1956.0016.

8 Jaynie Anderson, ‘Interrogating Joe Burke and his legacy’, *Melbourne Art Journal*, no. 8, 2005, pp. 88–101.

9 J. Burke to D. Lambros, 25 July 1955. Unit 61, file 531, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne Archives (hereafter UMA).

10 Marathon boy, c. 1952, plaster cast, 136 × 46 × 46 cm. NM2008.17, presented to the Nicholson Museum in 1954 by Ambassador Lambros: ‘the cast of “Marathon Boy”, presented to the University of Sydney on the occasion of its centenary celebrations, by the Greek government and the University of Athens as a token of their gratitude to this country for assistance it gave to Greece during and after the recent world war’ (A.D. Trendall, Report to University of Sydney Senate, 1954, University of Sydney Archives). Our thanks to Maree Clutterbuck, collections manager, Sydney University museums, for her assistance here.

11 J. Burke to D. Lambros, 24 February 1955. Unit 61, file 531, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA.

12 D. Lambros to J. Burke, 16 July 1955. Unit 61, file 531, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA. The precursor to Burke’s 1954 speech was probably his article ‘Lessons from Greece: Australia’s links with Mediterranean’, *The Family: Monthly Greek Literary Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 31, 1 September 1953, pp. 49–50. Unit 29, file 13/25, 1978.0039, Joseph Terence Burke, Personal Papers, UMA.

- 13 Burke's personal approach to securing gifts of cultural material is evident in a speech he delivered at the annual dinner of the Society of Collectors, held in the private dining room of the University of Melbourne Union on 22 October 1971: 'For one gentleman to ask another for money, however good the cause, can be ... deplorable. The civilised procedure is to put opportunities for generosity in the way of one's friends so that they don't notice it until later'. Unit 29, file 14/6, 1978.0039, Joseph Terence Burke, Personal Papers, UMA.
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- 17 J. Burke to Sir Frank Beaufort, 21 July 1955. Unit 61, file 531, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA.
- 18 Leonard French (1928–2017), Untitled (Symmetry of sport), 1956, enamel paint on concrete, approx. 550 × 198 × 711 cm. 1956.0034, commissioned 1956, University of Melbourne Art Collection; R. MacDonald to J. Burke, with transcript notes by Alan McCulloch, 20 March 1956. Unit 61, file 531, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA.
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- 30 J. Burke and G. Christodoulou, 'A gift from the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne', *University of Melbourne Gazette*, vol. 14, no. 3, 22 December 1958, pp. 39–41. Unit 61, file 529, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA.
- 31 Burke and Christodoulou, 'A gift from the Greek Orthodox Community', p. 41.
- 32 Harold Arthur Kinross Hunt, 'Work of art', *Farrago*, 23 September 1958, p. 8.
- 33 G. Christodoulou to J. Burke, 6 October 1958. Unit 61, file 529, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA.
- 34 Charpantidou, 'Greek Orthodox Community'.
- 35 Christodoulou to Burke, 6 October 1958.
- 36 J. Burke to G. Paton, 21 March 1961. Unit 61, file 529, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA.
- 37 J. Burke to H. Hunt, 29 and 30 September 1958. Unit 61, file 529, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA.
- 38 Joseph Burke, 'Zeus—what the Profs. Say', *Farrago*, 23 September 1958, p. 8; J. Burke to W. Tickner, 13 April 1961, enclosing draft article for *Farrago*, 'Zeus and the vandals'. Unit 61, file 529, 1986.0037, Records of the Department of Fine Arts, UMA.
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- 48 Burke and Christodoulou, 'A gift from the Greek Orthodox Community', p. 41.