

# NY Met to let French make 3D copies of two 16th-century sculptures

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New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art will let French artisans make 3D replicas of the sculpture 'Pieta With Donors' for display in the chateau where it and another 16th-century sculpture originally resided.

Two 16th-century sculptures, jewels of French Renaissance art, have been on display since 1908 at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

But thanks to [modern technology](#) and an unusual agreement, precise 3D copies will be made and installed in the French castle where the originals long resided.

The facsimiles plan is the fruit of a rare partnership between the Met, as the New York museum is known, and the Dordogne department in southwestern France.

The statues, both from the early 1500s and by an anonymous sculptor, represent Biblical scenes entitled "Entombment of Christ" and "Pieta With Donors."

A tourism promotion agency in the Dordogne, Semitour, will be working with the Atelier of Fac-Similes Perigord (AFSP) to make the replicas over the coming months.

For nearly 400 years, the originals graced the chapel of the Biron chateau in the Dordogne.

Built on a strategic promontory, the sprawling fortress comprises buildings from different eras, including a dungeon dating to the 12th century.

Damaged and rebuilt repeatedly through the centuries, the chateau has belonged since 1978 to the Dordogne department, which declared it a historic monument, Dordogne president Germinal Peiro said during a visit to the Met.

## **Digital copy**

The technology to be employed in copying the sculptures was described to AFP by Francis Rigenbach, who heads the Perigord atelier, and C. Griffith Mann, the Met's medieval art curator.



A copy of the 16th-century sculpture 'Entombment of Christ' will be placed back in France's Biron chateau, where it sat for centuries.

Using 3D scanners to make digital images of the sculptures, artisans will be able to create replicas without having to move or disturb the monumental originals.

"By making a digital 'cast,'" said Rigenbach, "we can employ non-invasive techniques" to produce identical copies.

He added that "90 percent of the artistic work" will involve reproducing signs of wear, such as the patina on the ageing marble originals—though both statues are considered exceptionally well-preserved.

The replicas, to be returned to their original spots in the Biron chapel, will cost around 350,000 euros (\$375,000), Rigenbach added.

His atelier is famed for having copied the celebrated Lascaux cave—including its prehistoric wall art—for a museum in Montignac, in northern Perigord.

That allows visitors to feel as if they were visiting the cave itself, which was closed 60 years ago to avoid damage to the fragile site, said Sebastien Cailler, who manages the Biron chateau.

"And when you see these facsimile sculptures in Biron, you'll surely feel the same emotion as if you were standing before the originals," he told AFP in New York.

The two statues, whose value was recognized by historians and collectors in the late 18th century, were sold in 1907 by the last marquis of Biron to wealthy American banker John Pierpont Morgan, who was then president of the Met board.

In the 1950s, Dordogne and the Biron castle negotiated with the Met for four years in a vain effort to recover the statues.

In 2018, Perigord officials revived talks with the Met; four years later, technological tests were undertaken, and then on February 15, the agreement was signed in New York.

This type of unusual deal ensures that art works can exist in two places, Mann said, while adding that his museum, with its millions of annual visitors, "seems like the safest place to have the sculptures for their long-term preservation."

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