



# Editorial

## Creation and Destruction

**A**rt history is about creation – but at least as often about destruction. In the process of making a new artwork, part of it may be irretrievably lost. And once it has been made, a work is left to withstand the test of time. What has survived and what does that tell us about what has gone?

One intriguing example of this in the Rijksmuseum's collection is the story behind the twelfth-century figure of Shiva in his form as the Nataraja that illustrates his role as a creator and a destroyer of the world. How was this statue of a dancing god cast, with its intricate form with outstretched arms and leg, who weighs in at roughly 300 kilos with his base? The article in this issue argues that it was cast using the lost-wax method; a figure made of wax was encased in a mould of clay and then heated. The wax melted and the cavity left in the mould formed the negative in which the metal was subsequently cast. A photograph of the modern process for producing these statues shows a wax figure still half hidden in the mould, as if it is waiting to be born; in fact, it shows the model ready to be melted. The treatment of the cast image, scraping, filing and polishing, produced the end result: a figure of a god that had to be able to withstand the centuries, and in this case has done so. A new wax form, which was destroyed in the manufacturing process, had to be made for each new creation.

Even when models were not melted during the process, but were made as sketches or designs, their fragility meant that they seldom survived. The Rijksmuseum recently acquired a sixteenth-century model for Ammannati's bronze sculpture of the Genius of the Medici in Florence; he has a globe in his hand – the cosmos – which spouted water. One of the few surviving early wax *modelli*, it is around thirty centimetres tall. A *genius*, the Latin for creator, protected all creation and encouraged creativity. Both the *modello* and the bronze survived and embody the beginning and end stages of the production process. Between these two stages there was a life-sized wax model which, as in the Shiva, once formed the core but was lost in the manufacturing process.

Mankind's reverence for and awe of the cycle of creation and destruction was universal and timeless. Life and creation were fragile and could be wrecked at any moment; some divinity was sure to be deemed responsible for it. Double destruction lies at the heart of the article about the painted panels showing the life of St Elizabeth and St Elizabeth's Flood named after her. The middle panel or *caisse* of the altarpiece was lost, and the two shutters were sawn crosswise, so there are now four panels. Two of them show how in 1421 water breached the dikes, devastating the area around Dordrecht and rendering it uninhabitable; these are on permanent display in the Rijksmuseum. The other two, which are kept in the museum's depot, depict scenes in the life of the saint, who devoted herself to charity. The work lost its original meaning when the altarpiece was dismantled: together the images presented the charity extended by the residents of Dordrecht to the refugees from the surrounding area as an example and encouraged charitableness in general. The theme of the work was not so much the disastrous floods as a punishment sent by God, but rather the humanity that can overcome destructive forces.