

# TWO CHEERES FOR LONDON

This past December, two extraordinary mid-eighteenth-century lead sculptures from the historic Portuguese palace of Queluz (see *ICON*, Spring 2004) returned to their native London where they are undergoing a dramatic restoration at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Cast by renowned British sculptor John Cheere, the sculptures were part of a large consignment of works commissioned in the late 1740s by the Infante Dom Pedro, the future Dom Pedro III (1717–1786), for display in the gardens and fountains of his private retreat and hunting lodge.

The scale of the commission for the gardens—designed by the French goldsmith Jean Baptiste Robillion—was exceptional, and it is believed to have numbered 98 pieces, perhaps the largest-ever order for lead statuary.

To create the statues, molten lead was poured into molds made of plaster, the finished sculptures being structurally reinforced by internal iron supports, or armatures. Most of the garden's statues have classical or biblical themes, from *Samson Slaying the Philistine* to gods and goddesses of the Greco-Roman world. Some are more playful, depicting leaping dolphins, monkeys with castanets, and serpents with water jets.

At least 22 of the statues have survived, although all are in desperate need of conservation. Due to weathering and water penetration over the centuries, the iron armatures have rusted, causing the lead statues to partially collapse.

The two statues now in London—*Aeneas Carrying his Father Anchises* and *The Rape of Persephone*—are being conserved as part of World Monuments Fund ambitious £1 million campaign (so far £100,000 has been raised) to restore the surviving garden sculptures. In March, the two statues return to Queluz, where they will be displayed in their original setting for the first time in 50 years.

—WILL BLACK



COURTESY W&A/BRITAIN (2)



**PLUTO AND PROSERPINE and AENEAS AND ANCHISES**  
 About 1742–46 by JOHN CHEERE (1709–83)  
 (On loan from the Palácio Nacional de Queluz, Portugal)

These two lead sculptures are on temporary display. They were part of a large order of 98 lead figures for Queluz (just outside Lisbon, the palace of Infante Dom Pedro (later Dom Pedro III). The order was placed by the Portuguese ambassador to London, and delivered here in 1749, towards the end of Cheere's life spent in lead garden sculpture, and had a workshop at Maple Farm, Essex.

These classical subject matter and dramatic figural compositions are typical of 18th- and 19th-century garden sculpture. One group shows Pluto, god of the underworld, seizing Proserpine as the girl flees; the other shows Aeneas, carrying his father Anchises from the burning city of Troy, the boy also given a dramatic and unusual pose.

The two sculptures are in the course of being conserved, a project funded by the World Monuments Fund, United Kingdom and Portugal; the nearby light sculpture, the work of Henry Bacon, their installation here is sponsored by the Henry Moore Foundation.



