

130-year-old statue at Smithsonian arts building heads for a facelift

By [Michael E. Ruane](#), Published: February 8, 2012

“Industry” sat suspended for a moment, swaying at the end of the construction crane cables. Not a fold of her gown was ruffled. Not a hair was out of place. Her eyes had the same faraway gaze they’ve had for 130 years.

All around her Wednesday, as she was lowered to the flatbed tractor-trailer parked on the Mall, rough-looking men bustled: Guys in hard hats. Guys with cigars. Guys with wrenches in the pockets of their jeans.

But they were careful with fair “Industry” as they took her from the roof of the Smithsonian Institution’s venerable [Arts and Industries Building](#): She and her sisters, “Science” and “Columbia,” were going on a journey.

The zinc figures, which make up the three-part, 10-foot-tall statue [“Columbia Protecting Science & Industry.”](#) were removed from above the north entrance of the building as part of a multimillion-dollar renovation of its exterior.

Crews needed access to the cracked stone on which the sculpture sat.

The three pieces were separated from one another and then lifted with the giant crane one at a time in an operation that took all day.

The three, resembling huge chess pieces, were scheduled to be trucked Thursday to a facility in New Jersey for conservation.

The sculpture was the work of New York-based Czech artist Caspar Buberl, who created a host of pieces across the country in the years after the [Civil War](#). He died in 1899.

Many of his statues are commemorations of the war, in places such as Gettysburg, Richmond and Alexandria, where he created “Appomattox,” the somber sculpture of the Confederate soldier on South Washington Street.

He also created the 1,200-foot-long frieze made up of hundreds of Civil War figures around what is now the National Building Museum.

The Smithsonian sculpture was installed when the new Arts and Industries building opened in the early 1880s.

The elegant brick structure, which has had several incarnations over the decades, fell into severe disrepair in

recent years and was shuttered in 2004.

Restoration of the exterior began in 2010.

“For me, it’s a thrill,” Smithsonian Secretary G. Wayne Clough said Wednesday after watching the first part of the sculpture, “Science,” come down. “Just fixing this building up, repairing it, giving it a chance to really live.”

“It’s got a great life ahead of it, and a wonderful history behind it,” he said. “This is living history, and to look in the face of one of those statues that I’ve only seen from a distance, and see how beautiful and dramatic they are. That’s art.”

Clough said he hoped to have the work done by next year and the building reopened to the public in 2014.

He said that, among other things, the roof and windows are being replaced, and that wrought-iron elements are being replaced with structural steel.

The white statues, which Clough said “take you back to another time,” are striking.

As each one was lowered, Smithsonian officials gathered by the flatbed to marvel.

The representation of “Science,” a female figure robed in a flowing gown and long head scarf, is depicted reading a huge open book. Beside her, an owl is perched on a globe. One of the pages of the open book bears what appeared to be century-old graffiti. Someone had carved “B.F. Taylor” and “1880.”

“Industry,” which came down shortly before 1 p.m., is similarly garbed but holding a sledgehammer and seated beside an anvil. “Columbia,” whose arms are outstretched protectively, was lowered a little before 5 p.m. The pieces will be restored by Kreilick Conservation of Oreland, Pa.

“We’ll be removing the paint that’s . . . deteriorated,” said T. Scott Kreilick, head of the firm, “making any repairs that are necessary, repainting them and then bring them back when they’re ready to reinstall.”