

Feature

Freud gets a makeover

This July the Freud statue outside the Tavistock Centre got a much needed wash and brush up.

Outdoor sculptures in London have a tough time of it: the vicissitudes of the weather, the pollution, the pigeons... So it is no surprise that the bronze sculpture of Freud outside the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, which was partly responsible for introducing Freud's psychoanalytic theories to British medicine, is receiving a much needed restoration.

Led by Lucy Branch, Senior conservator at Antique Bronze, the restoration team started work on Monday 5 July by giving the sculpture and its plinth a steam clean. Then they began the careful restoration work by hand, using fine copper brushes and pumice powder to remove corrosion.



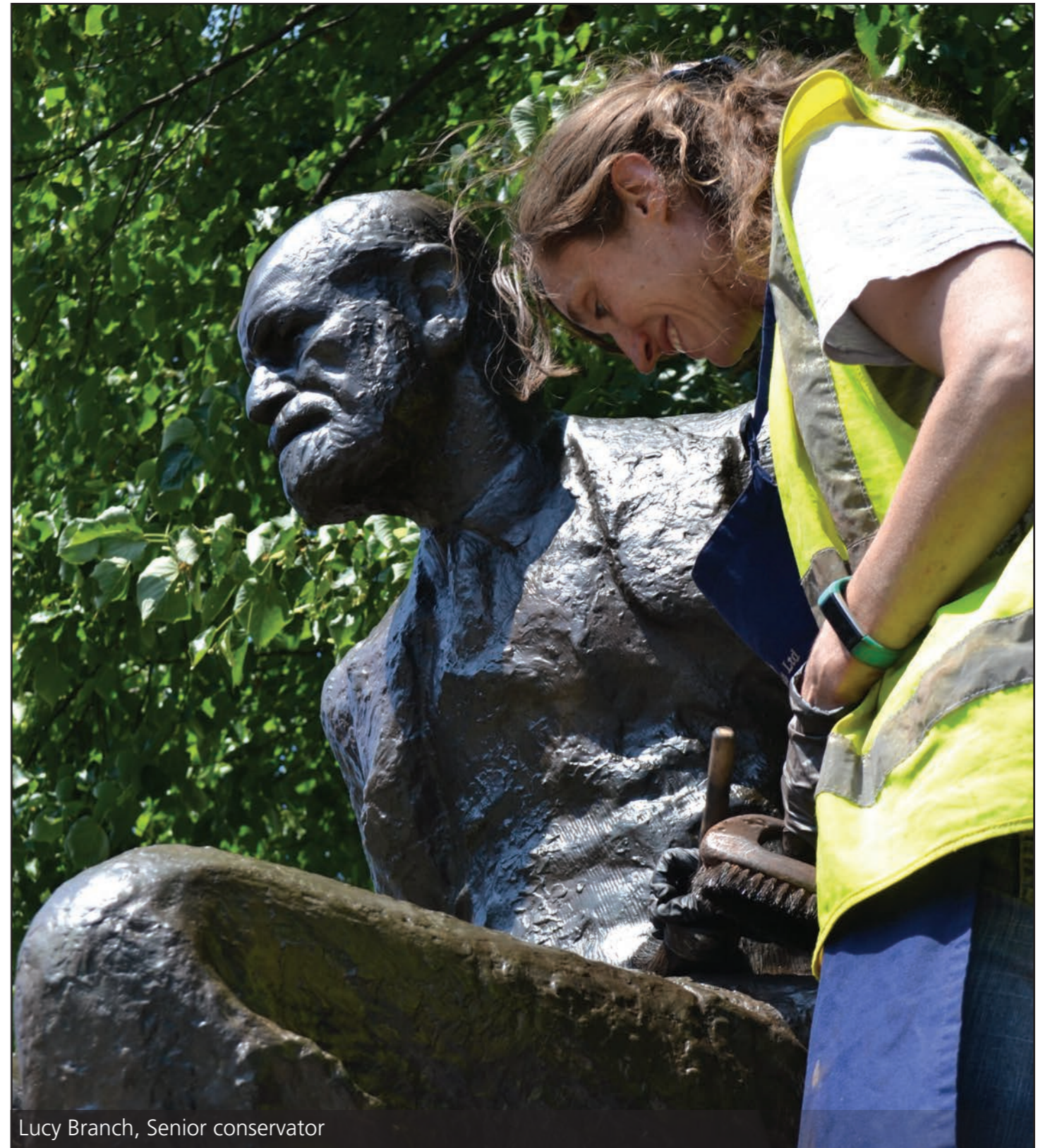
Georgina Seltzer, cleaning the statue

patterns so they need to be blended out by hand – you want the sculpture to be seen as the artist intended and not have your eye drawn to areas of degradation.”

The restoration work is made more difficult by the hot weather. With the full sun on the sculpture it gets very hot causing the cleaning materials to melt and evaporate. The public have also been very interested in what is going on and Lucy says: “It is important to be able to engage with people, while getting on with the work, but we have had quite a few rude comments.”

The sculpture is by the Croatian artist Oscar Nemon, who grew up in Osijek on the borders of the Austro-Hungarian empire. He studied in Vienna in the 1920s, which is where he first developed an interest in the work of Freud. He then moved to Brussels, becoming a well-known portrait sculptor. In 1931 he received the commission to sculpt Freud for his 75th birthday. Freud was a little uncertain, but agreed to let Nemon sketch him in brief sessions between one patient and the next.

Overnight Nemon produced a preliminary clay and that won Freud over. Nemon continued to work for several years visiting Freud whenever he passed through Vienna on his way to Osijek and then finally in London in 1938, after the political situation had led both men to leave mainland Europe.



Lucy Branch, Senior conservator

It is these London sittings that led to the final harsher, more abstract sculpture in terracotta which were used for the bronze sculpture that now resides outside the Tavistock Centre.

On seeing the sculpture Freud commented in his diary: “The head, which the gaunt, goatee-bearded artist has fashioned from

the dirt — like the good Lord — is very good and an astonishingly life-like impression of me.”

Lucy Branch is similarly appreciative of the work saying: “When you get close to the sculpture it is really beautiful, with clearly defined tool marks on the surface. Freud is seated in a very dominant pose, making

this a powerful sculptural figure, but also a fine representation of a man drawn from life.”

The restoration work will be completed with more colouring work. Then layers of protective coating will be added, to make the statue as stable as an outdoor statue can be.