

Moving Juno

Over the past decade or so, Littleton, Mass., masonry contractor Mike DeBlasio has completed a number of challenging projects for Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. But late last year, the MFA handed DeBlasio and a hand-picked team of specialty subcontractors a truly monu-

mental challenge: helping museum conservators move a recently purchased 1,900-year-old marble figure of Juno from a private estate in Brookline, Mass., to the museum, a five-mile trip by road.

At 13 feet 8 inches, Juno (wife of the Roman god Jupiter) was the largest classical sculpture in the U.S. But the harsh New England climate had not been kind to her. Since being imported from Rome in 1904 by a wealthy Boston couple, her surface had been etched by acid rain and streaked with green moss. Worse, a century of freeze-thaw cycles had created or worsened some potentially disastrous cracks, including one that ran three-fourths the way through her body at waist level.

To stabilize her for the move, the team first used a 4-foot diamond saw blade, operated by Prime Drilling and Sawing Services of Worcester, Mass., was used to slice Juno's head from her body.

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Next, using a specially made coring bit, they bored a vertical 2-inch hole from the statue's neck into her torso to accept a stainless-steel tension rod. Then, to anchor the rod itself, DeBlasio used an extended $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch bit to drill a perfectly centered 18-inch hole in the base of that larger bore — the bottom of which lay nearly 9 feet deep in Juno's solid marble interior.

After that smaller hole was etched with dilute muriatic acid (introduced by way of a long tube), the tension rod was epoxied in place and carefully tightened to 125 foot-pounds against a steel plate on the figure's neck. DeBlasio recalls the last few turns of the wrench as the most nerve-racking moment of the entire project. "Believe me, I was sweating," he says. "It was a relief when nothing let go."

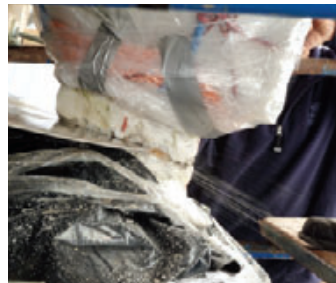
Once the fully tensioned rod was grouted in place, the reinforced goddess was enclosed in a welded steel cage and immobilized with plastic bags containing a lightweight high-slump concrete aggregated with perlite. Then, after a couple of months in storage, she was trucked to the museum, craned through a skylight opening (clearing it with 2 or 3 inches to spare on each side), and conveyed on rollers along a series of temporarily reinforced hallways to the institution's Behrakis Gallery, where she has been on display since mid-April. This summer, museum visitors will be able to watch as she's cleaned and restored by conservators. — *Jon Vara*



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▲ While the unrestored statue of Juno cut a majestic figure, 2,000 years of wear and tear had left their mark, adding considerably to the challenge of moving the 6-ton figure.

► Encased in a custom-made steel enclosure, the reinforced statue was plucked from the site by crane and placed in storage for a couple of months. Later, the same rigging and hauling contractor, Shaughnessy and Ahern of Boston, would ease the figure into the museum through a skylight.



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