

ART UPDATE

BY INTI LANDAURO

ONE OF THE LOUVRE'S most famous masterpieces, the 2,000-year-old "Winged Victory of Samothrace," is disappearing for a nine-month makeover.

Early next month, Louvre experts will move the discolored statue and its equally grimy marble base, designed as the prow of a ship, into a nearby room that will serve as a restoration lab. "Winged Victory's" touch-up will be broadcast on a dedicated website, soon to be activated.

A representation of the Greek god Nike, the statue is among the top five works to see at the Louvre Museum, which draws nearly 10 million visitors per year. Visitors who see "Winged Victory," which has been perched at the top of the museum's majestic Daru staircase for 130 years, might be surprised to learn it is actually made of white marble. Years of accumulated dust and filth have turned it a dirty yellow. The restoration will return the statue to its original white color.

French diplomat and amateur archaeologist Charles Champoiseau found "Winged Victory" with only one wing in 1863 during his expedition to Samothrace, a Greek island near Turkey's Dardanelles Straits. In preparation for the debut of the 9-foot statue at the Louvre more than a century ago, experts added a new right wing in plaster, symmetrical to the left wing that remained unscathed. They also added a missing left breast, to connect the bona fide wing to the torso.

Unlike other restorations, which return a work to its

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A Greek Goddess Gets A Makeover

The Louvre's 'Winged Victory of Samothrace' will undergo a nine-month restoration that will rejuvenate its complexion



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original state, the Louvre's experts say the Winged Victory's modifications have become part of its identity. "It's not only a Hellenistic masterpiece, it is also a historic example of 19th century art" because of the way it was restored, says Ludovic Laugier, who heads the project for the Louvre.

Despite the historical inaccuracy, it is highly unlikely Winged Victory will lose its reconstructed wing, Mr. Laugier says.

Art historians have long debated how works of art should be restored. The risk is that restoration goes too far, says Michel Favre-Felix, the director of the French Association for the Respect of Artistic Heritage's Integrity, and "faux-fies" works of art. Last year, the cleaning of Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece "The Virgin and Child with St. Anne" ended in acrimony and two members of the museum's specially appointed scientific committee resigned, saying the restoration team had brightened the painting's colors beyond the artist's intention.

"You don't want to do something later generations will regret," says Mr. Favre-Felix.

According to recent discoveries on Samothrace, the statue's right wing was originally very different from the left, says Bonna Wescoat, who directs current excavations at the Sanctuary of the Great Gods on Samothrace. It was probably designed in a way to show the effect of the dominant winds blowing on the island, she added. Adding a plaster wing "isn't something we would do now."

Winged Victory originally stood in Samothrace on a cliff towering over the Sanctuary of the Great Gods, a complex of a dozen temples dedicated to different deities. It was probably made in the second century B.C. and fell from its pedestal in an earthquake centuries later. The statue is made of white marble from the Cyclades island of Paros.

Winged Victory didn't survive its fall intact. In addition to its missing wing, it was broken in several pieces and its head and arms were lost. "Making arms was too complicated and fortu-

nately they didn't try the head," Mr. Laugier said.

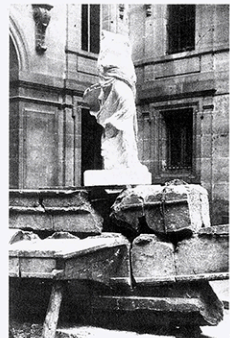
The Louvre has appointed a new scientific committee to oversee each step of the restoration—and deflect any criticism. The cleaning involves applying water with cloth compresses, with no rubbing, and using minimal amounts of chemicals, if safe. The restoration team will test the cleaning on tiny portions of the marble first to observe the effect.

One of the questions the committee will be grappling with is how to portray the plaster wing. Mr. Laugier would like to paint it to make it look similar to the marble wing, blurring the fact that it is a modern addition. Mr. Favre-Felix, who doesn't have a say in the restoration, says the Louvre should be more transparent about the statue's different parts.

Over the years, many visitors to Samothrace's museum have written on the victory's book that they would like the statue returned to its homeland. However, Greece has no current request to return Winged Victory. Rather, the country is focusing on protecting and re-



The 'Winged Victory of Samothrace' at the Louvre, left, the right hand from the original statue, above, an attempt at reconstructing the monument in 1879.



storing monuments on its territory, says Dimitris Matsas, the Greek archaeologist in charge of Samothrace, who is part of the Louvre's scientific committee.

Since the original discovery, researchers have found several more fragments in the ruins of the sanctuary, enhancing historians' knowledge of how Winged Victory once looked. Greece has lent the statue's broken hand with two fingers to the Louvre, where it is displayed in a glass case alongside the monument to which other bits retrieved by the Champoiseau expedition will be added.

Other fragments recently found, including bits of the original right wing and the ship's ram, will remain in Samothrace, displayed near the Greek museum's plaster copy of the Louvre's statue—complete with the faux wing.