Donato Bastiani, Restorer and Artist of the OI

Until the 1970s, when the OI first employed a professionally trained conservator to oversee the preservation of the collection, this work was carried out by restorers and preparators, Donato Bastiani being the foremost among them. He was an Italian sculptor who moved to the United States as a teenager and was hired to assist in the casting of thousands of plaster figures for use during the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. His first engagement with the OI was reconstructing the colossal winged bull (lamassu), followed by the other relief panels from the OI’s excavations at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Sharrukin), in the early 1930s. He then turned his expertise to such monumental objects as the statue of King Tutankhamun excavated at Medinet Habu and the Achaemenid sculpture excavated at Persepolis. Unfortunately, there are no written records of his work, only a collection of photographs preserved in the OI Museum Archives, a selection of which we’ve gathered here. His approach included not only connecting fragments, but filling in missing sections with modern materials, resulting in monumental museum displays that represent with wondrous precision to visitors the original visual impact and splendor of these pieces.