

Controversial statue gets a makeover

by [Alessandro Speciale](#) in the [February 8, 2012](#) issue

Just eight months after being unveiled, a controversial statue of Pope John Paul II in Rome is receiving a major makeover. The 16-foot statue, which stands just outside the city's main railway station, since last May has been met by harsh criticism from locals and art experts alike.

The Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, criticized it for bearing "little resemblance" to the image of the late pope and described the head as "excessively spherical." Federico Mollicone, president of Rome's city council culture commission, called the statue "a permanent and sacrilegious mud stain" on the memory of John Paul II.

More than eight out of ten people who responded to a poll by the newspaper *Il Messaggero* said they didn't like the statue, and Rome Mayor Gianni Alemanno was forced by the criticism to form a commission of experts to evaluate its fate.

Now, scaffolding surrounds the statue, and in the coming weeks it will get a new head, the pope's cape will be modified and the sculpture will be placed on a higher pedestal. Its outer layer of paint will be restored because rain and smog turned the bronze green, and new lighting will be set up around it.

Sculptor Oliviero Rainaldi responded to criticism last May by saying the foundry didn't adequately execute his design. The statue is hollow inside, leading many to compare it to "a sentry box." Rainaldi said the design was meant to showcase the late pope's desire to welcome humanity. —RNS