
Articles You May Have Missed

“This Could be Monumental,” *Los Angeles Times*, 01/06/05

Motivations get tangled as countries tussle over the return of artifacts. A telling case in point: the Obelisk of Axum. The Obelisk of Axum is an elaborately inscribed stone monolith, 78 feet from base to tip, that spent most of the 20th century in the middle of a busy Roman piazza.

In the eyes of many an Ethiopian, it's 180 tons of evidence that 20th-century Italy snapped up treasures in Ethiopia, then resisted their return for half a century with the same lawless zeal that Italian leaders accuse U.S. museums of displaying. Then in 2002, lightning struck.

Amid a Roman storm, a bolt from the sky struck the obelisk, which had no lightning rod attached, breaking off several feet of granite in chunks. This substantially undercut the argument that the Italians could better care for the artifact than the Ethiopians could.

In early 2005, after nearly 60 years of promises deferred, Italian leaders delivered the obelisk back to its homeland, where it awaits reconstruction.

“Statue’s Restorers Hope to Repair Greco-Italian Rift,” *The Guardian* (UK), 01/03/06

Italian restorers are working to try to repair a priceless ancient Greek statue, and the results of their work will have diplomatic consequences. In an incident that went almost unnoticed at the time, the authorities in Athens last year suspended all further digs by Italian archaeologists in Greece and slapped a five-year ban on an Italian lecturer.

The sanctions were imposed after officials learned that the 4th-century BC statue, found in an Italian dig on Crete, had fallen and been smashed in transit.

“Hammer Blow,” *Financial Times* (UK), 01/27/06

It's not a new development, but increasingly, it has become impossible to ignore the fact that the world of high art (and the acquisition of large amounts of it by private collectors) has expanded well outside its traditional Western borders. A milepost will be planted this spring, when Christie's opens its newest auction house - in Dubai.

“Stressed Workers Enjoy Art for Heart’s Sake,” *The Guardian* (UK), 01/09/06

Visiting a museum is a good way to relieve stress, says a new study. Analysis of 28 City high flyers who spent their lunch break viewing art found their stress levels fell by 45% after 40 minutes at the Guildhall art gallery in London.

“Where’s that 38-ton Serra?” *Los Angeles Times*, 01/22/06

The Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid has lost a 38-ton steel sculpture by American artist Richard Serra, the museum said. The museum, one of the Spanish city's largest and most popular, commissioned the work - four stark, steel slabs - in 1986 and acquired it a year later for about \$220,000.

After being exhibited, it was placed in a warehouse in 1990 with a company that specialized in storing large-scale artworks. But that company was dissolved in 1998, said daily newspaper ABC. When the museum's director, Ana Martinez de Aguilar, decided a few months ago to display the sculpture again, no one could find it, the museum said. Police are investigating.

“Shoelace Costs Museum Dear as Vases are Shattered,” *The Guardian*, 01/31/06

It must be a curator's sweatiest nightmare. Beyond the collection being swiped by thieves, the museum burning to the ground or, of course, your funding being withdrawn, there is always the dread possibility that some malign, clumsy, or plain unlucky member of the public might destroy a prize holding.

That has happened at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. According to witnesses, an unfortunate visitor tripped over his shoelace and fell on to three Qing dynasty vases, shattering them. The vases had been placed - rather optimistically, perhaps - on a windowsill on a staircase.

“Sewer Gas Linked to Museum Blast,” *Los Angeles Times*, 01/25/06

The explosion inside Finland's National Museum on Monday may have been caused by methane gas from Helsinki's sewer system, the Finnish news agency STT reported Tuesday. The news outlet quoted police as saying that

the gas apparently flowed into a store-room next to the silverware exhibition from a floor gully and was ignited by a spark from an electricity switchboard there. STT said the explosion damaged doors and windows but no one was hurt. The museum is closed Mondays.

“Lost Treasures of Constantinople Test Turkey’s 21st-century Ambition,” *The Guardian* (UK), 01/25/06

Working on an ambitious train tunnel to connect Asia and Europe, workers stumbled on the original port of Constantinople, a maze of dams, jetties and platforms that once was Byzantium's hub for trade with the near east.

Metin Gokcay, Istanbul city archaeologist, is intrigued and baffled by the subterranean stone tunnel which, measuring 1.8 metres by 1.5 metres, is too big to have been used for sewage or as an aqueduct. But if Mr. Gokcay remains in the dark as to the function of the ancient tunnel, his excavations have led to a stunning discovery that could jeopardize Turkey's most ambitious engineering project - a new rail and underground system traversing the Bosphorus and connecting Europe to Asia via a high-speed railway.

“Delight at Caravaggio Discovery,” *BBC*, 01/26/06

Two paintings in a French church have been declared Caravaggios. It is thought the paintings were probably bought by a French ambassador to Rome, and friend of Caravaggio.

The works were kept under the organ loft in the church of Saint Anthony in Loches, until in 1999 a curator expressed an interest in a coat of arms on the works. It turned out to belong to Philippe de Bethune, a minister of France's King Henry IV, an enthusiastic art collector who befriended Caravaggio in Rome. Caravaggio specialist Jose Freches spent seven years investigating the paintings.

“A whole series of technical clues plus the pictorial quality of the works were enough to convince me without any doubt that these are originals,” said Mr. Freches. “Scientific tests have shown that the linen canvasses are identical to those used by Caravaggio, and the same goes for the pigments,” he told the French AFP news agency.

“Scientists Disagree over Feasibility of Raising Venice by Pumping Water,” *The Art Newspaper*, 01/26/06

Scientists are about to test a theory to raise Venice 30 cms by pumping water back into the soil. The idea is to pump water down 700 metres. “We have calculated that if we pump in 18 million cubic metres of clean sea water 24 hours a day for 10 years, we will raise Venice 30 cms.” Critics aren't so sure: “This is science fiction. It is too difficult and expensive to find out what the layers of the subsoil are really like at that depth, and raising the city would not be the same as the city subsiding; it would behave quite differently and could rise unevenly, doing untold damage.”

“Amid Flap, van Gogh back on Display at the DIA,” *Detroit Free Press*, 01/27/06

The Vincent van Gogh masterpiece at the heart of a brewing controversy at the Detroit Institute of Arts will be back on view starting this weekend. But the fight over the painting's rightful ownership, with its charged accusations of Nazi-era plunder, is far from over. The DIA filed a lawsuit in federal court Tuesday to argue that van Gogh's *The Diggers*, worth an estimated \$15 million and willed to the museum by a Detroit collector in 1970, should remain in the museum's collection. But heirs of a Nazi-era Jewish collector, Martha Nathan, claim that the painting should be returned to them because Nathan sold the work as a result of Nazi persecution and did not receive a fair-market price.

“Prehistoric Cave Art Discovered,” *The Guardian*, (UK) 02/08/06

An amateur caver has discovered prehistoric human remains and cave art in western France believed to date back 27,000 years, several thousand years older than the world-famous paintings at Lascaux. As well as wall markings including that of a hand in cobalt blue, Gerard Jourdy, 63, said he had found animal and human remains in the cave in the Vilhonneur forest, 12 miles east of Angoulême. The discovery was made in November but kept secret while the site was sealed and the find examined and verified. Mr. Jourdy said he also saw a sculpture of a face made from a stalactite, though experts are still verifying this claim.

“Welcome to the Machine,” *The Guardian*, (UK) 02/08/06

Moscow has been tearing down much of its Soviet-era architecture. But now Moscow is seeing a rash of cool industrial conversions that draw inspiration from projects like London's Tate Modern. It has yet to turn the tide of destruction but embattled preservationists believe it's a sign of hope for the future. The idea is to transform the shells of dilapidated industrial buildings that are dotted across the capital into galleries, arts centers, and design bureaus. Pre-eminent among them is the magnificent new State Centre for Contemporary Art, a former theater-lamp factory tucked on a side street near the city zoo.

“Rocked to our Foundations,” *The Times* (UK), 02/22/06

The wanton destruction of culturally important buildings is now a war crime.

Genocide, crimes against humanity, religious persecution: Slobodan Milosovic isn't short of charges to face at his trial in The Hague. But one charge in particular is intriguing: “The intentional and wanton destruction of religious and cultural buildings of the Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Croat communities.”

“Computer Analysis Suggests Paintings Are Not Pollocks,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2/10/06

A physicist who is broadly experienced in using computers to identify consistent patterns in the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock has determined that half a dozen small paintings recently discovered and claimed by their owner to be original Pollocks do not exhibit the same patterns.

The finding, by Richard P. Taylor, a physics professor at the University of Oregon, does not prove that Pollock did not paint the works, among a cache of 24 paintings found in 2003 in Wainscott, N.Y., by Alex Matter, whose father, Herbert, and mother, Mercedes, were friends of Pollock. In previous years Dr. Taylor examined 14 indisputably authentic Pollock paintings by using what is known as fractal geometry, or looking for patterns that recur on finer and finer magnifications, like those in snowflakes.

He found that despite the seemingly chaotic nature of the drip paintings, they exhibited remarkably consistent

fractal patterns, both in the fluidity of the paint and in the way Pollock applied it as he stalked around a canvas on the ground.

“Villagers Claim Church Fresco is Lost Michelangelo,” *The Guardian* (UK), 02/25/06

That the residents of the Italian town of Marcialla have long believed that a fresco in their local church was painted by a young Michelangelo would come as no surprise to many scholars in the art world. That the villagers may be right, however, is a shock of the highest order. At the end of last year, a stone slab forming part of the altar was heaved aside to reveal the first visible evidence for the claim: a monogram with the letters M, B, and F intertwined.

“RDA to Buy Mural Plot,” *Los Angeles Times*, 02/28/2006

A mural on The Promenade in Long Beach, California that preservationists have been fighting to keep public will not become part of a condominium project as planned. The 1938 Works Progress Administration mosaic at Third Street and The Promenade took center stage in a debate among preservationist Ana Maria McGuan, developer Urban Pacific Design and the RDA. It was commissioned by the federal government and Long Beach in 1936.

At 38 feet tall and 23 feet wide, it is the largest art of its kind and has since been named a historical landmark. The piece, which contains 460,000 separate tiles, depicts Long Beach in the 1930s and portrays a variety of beach activities. When it was built in 1938, the mosaic required 40 artists to assemble.

“Destroyed: The Untold Story of the Grozny Museum of Fine Art,” *The Art Newspaper*, 02/23/06

In 1994 in Grozny, Chechnya, the city's Museum of Fine Art was obliterated during the war. The destruction has gone unreported, despite the fact that it is the first museum in Europe to be destroyed since 1945. A delegation found that about 90% of buildings in the city, once home to 500,000, have been partially or totally destroyed, mostly as a result of Russian bombing. The Museum of Fine Arts, which housed a collection of more than 500,000 artifacts and works of art, was one of them.

Susanne Friend, column editor

“Boy, 12, Gums Up Pricey DIA Art-work,” *Detroit Free Press*, 02/28/06

At the Detroit Institute of Arts on Friday, a mischievous 12-year-old boy visiting the museum with a school group took a piece of barely chewed Wrigley’s Extra Polar Ice out of his mouth and stuck it on Helen Frankenthaler’s 1963 abstract painting *The Bay*, damaging one of the most important modern paintings in the museum’s collection and a landmark picture in the artist’s output.

Completed in 1963, *The Bay* is a landmark Frankenthaler because it was her first stained picture done with acrylic paint, a new medium at the time. Luckily, the gum stuck to the painting’s lower left-hand corner and had not adhered to the fiber of the canvas. But it did leave a chemical residue about the size of a quarter. The conservation department was researching the exact chemicals in the gum to determine which solvent should be used to clean the painting. Once a solvent is chosen, the picture would be placed on a vacuum table that would pull the solvent through the canvas, removing the stain.

“Valley of the Queens Gets a Getty Assist,” *Los Times*, 03/08/06

Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities and the Getty Conservation Institute have entered into a six-year partnership for the conservation and management of the Valley of the Queens, one of the world’s most important archeological sites. Building on an earlier collaborative effort — which conserved wall paintings in the tomb of Nefertari — the new project calls for a methodical approach to long-term preservation of a broader area on the west bank of the Nile at Luxor.

“Boy’s Gum is Plucked from Valuable Art,” *Detroit Free Press*, 03/11/06

The saga of the \$1.5-million abstract Helen Frankenthaler painting defaced two weeks ago at the Detroit Institute of Arts by a 12-year-old boy who stuck gum on it during a school outing is heading for a happy ending.

After intensive research, experimentation, and surgical work with high-performance tweezers, hand-rolled Q-tips, and a fast-evaporating solvent — plus some purposeful fooling around with gum — the quarter-sized residue on Helen Frankenthaler’s *The Bay* is gone.

It’s not often you see a 53-year-old professional play with his gum, but on Friday morning at the Detroit Institute of Arts, paintings conservator Alfred Ackerman picked up a wad of chewed Wrigley’s Extra Polar Ice and stretched it like taffy, flipping it around his finger to create a second disgusting strand.

“I chewed it to get a sense of what this was like in terms of stickiness and tackiness and the amount of moisture we would be dealing with when we lifted it off,” said Ackerman.

“LACMA to Show Klimts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 03/16/06

Five multimillion-dollar paintings by Austrian artist Gustav Klimt — looted by the Nazis and recently returned by the Austrian government to the family of Maria Altmann in Los Angeles — will go on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art [this April]... The exhibition was initiated by Stephanie Barron, LACMA’s senior curator of modern art, in January after an Austrian arbitration court ordered its government to turn over the paintings to Altmann, whose family fled Vienna in 1938.

“Picasso’s Daughter Says Drawing Is a Fake,” *The New York Times*, 03/18/06

Maya Widmaier-Picasso, the artist’s daughter, who authenticates his work, says that drawings sold by Costco are not by him. Those two works, photographs of which were shown to her by *The New York Times*, were offered by the dealer with certificates in French saying that Ms. Widmaier-Picasso had authenticated them. Pointing to anomalies in the certificates — grammatical errors, wording that departed from her style, handwriting that did not match hers and the placement of words on the page — the artist’s daughter said both documents were forgeries.

“After the Wisdom Moment, Time to Tape over the Cracks,” *The Guardian (UK)*, 03/30/06

Conservators at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge are working restore Qing vases that were shattered when a museum visitor tripped and smashed into them. What will happen when they’re glued back together? They’ll go back on display. “These vases were given to us in the 1940s and have been in the same place for 50 years. Some 9 million

people have walked past them and this is the first time they have been damaged. We have to look at the risk in perspective.”

“No Flattery Is Found in an Imitation of a Rockwell,” *The New York Times*, 04/06/06

For years, art experts have noted that the original copy of Norman Rockwell’s painting, *Breaking Home Ties*, appears to be lighter in color than the prints that appeared in the Saturday Evening Post in 1954. The discrepancy has long been blamed on an overly aggressive cleaning of the work. But now, the truth has come out: cartoonist Don Trachte, who owned the painting for years, apparently made a sophisticated copy in the 1970s and hid the original in a secret compartment in his Vermont home, in an effort to avoid losing the Rockwell in a bitter divorce. It wasn’t until last month that Trachte’s sons discovered the genuine article, right where their father had left it.

“Italy’s Special Carabinieri Unit Fights Art Looting,” *OpinionJournal.com (Wall Street Journal)*, 04/10/06

Italy has a huge antiquities theft problem. In an average week, carabinieri fly helicopters over archaeological sites taking aerial photographs to reveal illegal diggings. They go on offshore dives to prevent unauthorized underwater excavations. Still other officers in their stylish black-and-red uniforms show up unannounced at antique shops, auction houses, and outdoor markets, to videotape items for sale to match against the more than 2.5 million missing objects cataloged in the art squad’s vast database.

“Babylon Awaits an Iraq Without Fighting,” *The New York Times*, 04/18/06

Babylon, the mud-brick city with the million-dollar name, has paid the price of war. It has been ransacked, looted, torn up, paved over, neglected, and roughly occupied. Archaeologists said American soldiers even used soil thick with priceless artifacts to stuff sandbags. But Iraqi leaders and United Nations officials are not giving up on it. They are working assiduously to restore Babylon, home to one of the Seven Wonders of the World, and turn it into a cultural center and possibly even an Iraqi theme park.