
Articles You May Have Missed

“Gold Buddhas in Cambodian Jungle,” *Arizona Republic*, August 27, 2002.

New restoration work on Cambodian sites of 1970s Khmer Rouge destruction is unearthing more than political memories. Twenty-seven solid gold Buddha statues, as well as more of silver and bronze were found buried under a ruined pagoda: “The workmen were supposed to be rebuilding the temple which was smashed up by the Khmer Rouge, but then they found these golden Buddhas and the whole construction work has had to stop.”

“Old Master Bargains - Two for the Price of One,” by Tim Radford, *The Guardian*, August 26, 2002.

Renaissance art hidden for 500 years has been retrieved for the public gaze with computer technology and the kind of vision used by an owl or a fox.

Underdrawings - the outlines of the pictures-to-be, often in charcoal or ink on a white surface - will make up the body of *Art in the Making: Underdrawings in Renaissance Paintings*, an exhibition at the London National Gallery in October. Since the drawings lie concealed under thick oils and tempera works by giants such as Raphael, Breugel, Cranach the Elder, Altdorfer, and so on, their discovery through a technique called infrared reflectography represents the ultimate bargain in the Old Master market: buy one, get one free.

A Flight into Egypt, by someone known only as The Master of 1518, reveals a touch of production line approach. The underdrawing reveals the separate hands of a figure expert who did the foreground figures and a landscape expert who supplied the trees and the distant landscape. In the finished work, the original landscape design was ignored, and a different view painted on top, suggesting a third hand at work.

“A Rude Awakening,” by Richard Morison, *The Times* (UK) August 30, 2002.

Starting in the mid-18th century, museums began holding back items in their collections deemed too...shall we say...startling...for visitors of refinement. For example, a long, slimy, yellow, cling filmy tube, with two little pink ribbons at the open end. Could it be? An absolutely

genuine 18th-century condom, made out of very finely stretched sheep gut. And it's reusable!

This and other curiosities are housed in Cupboard 55 in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities at the British Museum. Cupboard 55, otherwise known as the Secretum, is the most notorious corner of the entire museum world.

By the 1830s the British Museum had started hiding away items considered potentially too corrupting to be perused by ordinary mortals - particularly women and the lower classes. Such material, it was felt, would lead to moral degeneracy, which in turn would lead to the collapse of social and economic values.

However, by the early 20th century the BM was feeling more relaxed about its penises. Many of the most interesting Roman and Greek items were transferred into the general galleries by the 1930s, and over the years many more have followed.

“What's left in the Secretum now is fairly pathetic,” admits curator Andrew Hamilton. “It's kept here because it's second-rate and not worthy of display anywhere else.”

“D.C. Throws Art Party, Gets Bashed as Unfair,” by Connie Cass, *Chicago Tribune*, Aug 29, 2002.

The Animals-on-Parade public art project has been adopted (without incident) by dozens of cities around the world. But Washington DC has found itself in court this summer over that city's version of the painted animals. First, the Green Party sued to get its party symbol (a sunflower) included alongside the elephants and donkeys. Then People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals convinced another judge that the city violated their First Amendment right to protest the treatment of circus animals when it rejected the group's portrayal of a weeping, shackled elephant.

“Bamiyan Buddha Niches AT RISK,” by Martin Bailey, *The Art Newspaper*, August 23, 2002.

The niches which once housed the Buddhas of Bamiyan will be “gone within a decade” unless urgent conservation work is undertaken, according to Paul Bucherer, director of the Afghani-

stan museum in exile in Switzerland.

He reports that explosions caused by the Taliban have weakened the cliff face, causing cracks and allowing rain water to percolate into the decorated caves. The water then freezes at night, enlarging the cracks.

Mr. Bucherer proposes to drill deep holes up to 100 meters into the cliff at an angle. Metal rods would be inserted, with cement added, and this would secure the cliff face to the mountain side. Costs for the hundreds of these supports could amount to \$40 million.

A Unesco meeting of experts in Kabul has backed the call for urgent action on the Bamiyan cliffs. The Kabul resolution, released on 11 June, states that “the first emergency priority is the stabilization of the cliff face and niches and caves carved into it which are in a serious state of conservation and a matter of grave immediate concern.” Specialists are to begin work on a feasibility study after the Japanese government pledged an initial \$700,000.

The Kabul meeting decided against the immediate reconstruction of the Buddhas, although this might be done at a later stage. This decision was taken after a passionate debate, and Mr Bucherer was among those pressing for rebuilding of the statues, both as a symbol and as an attraction for tourists, who represent an important potential source of income for the valley.

The meeting eventually determined to pass sole responsibility for the decision to the Afghan government, although the balance of opinion was against rebuilding the Buddhas. The final resolution agreed that the concept of reconstruction was not a priority when humanitarian aid for the Afghan people was urgently needed today.

“A Self-Inflicted Restoration Problem,” by Lidia Panzeri, *The Art Newspaper.com*, November 21, 2002.

Giorgione's altarpiece of about 1505 in the Castelfranco cathedral depicting the Madonna and Child between Saints Liberale and Francis, is being restored. The painting has deteriorated over recent years because of the extremely dry climate, which in fact is jeopardizing all the paintings in the cathedral.

In addition, for many years it

has hung on a wall behind which the central heating boiler had been sited. This had been pointed out more than once by AIDA, the Italian association for art law, and a question was even asked about it in parliament. Once it has been restored, the altarpiece, which is one of the few paintings confidently attributed to Giorgione, will be returned to its usual position — only, however, after the infamous central heating boiler has been removed and the chapel adequately air conditioned.

“Laser Treatment for the Alhambra Lions,” *The Art Newspaper.com*, November 21, 2002.

The famous marble lions that surround the fountain in the central patio of the Alhambra in Granada are being restored. After 700 years, the lions were showing signs of wear from water erosion, exposure to the elements, and pollution. The lions are of white marble from Maceal, at present hidden by a thick crust of dark carbonated calcium. They have been lifted out of the patio by crane and are being cleaned by laser.

“A Fight to Save a Time Capsule from the Early Age of Electricity,” by Winnie Hu, *New York Times*, November 18, 2002.

A fight is underway to preserve the Mechanicville Hydroelectric Station on the Hudson River north of Albany. The power plant once lighted the entire region and operated serenely for 100 years, from 1897 to 1997. Before the station was closed, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the oldest continuously operated hydroelectric plant in the state. A coalition of engineers, historians, and preservation groups from the Northeast are proposing to restore the station and turn it into a working museum of the region’s industrial past.

“A Miracle at Assisi,” *New York Times*, October, 19, 2002.

The great basilicas of Italy house some of the most important sculpture, painting, and craft work in Western art. One of the most prized holdings — a series of 13th-century ceiling frescoes by the ground-breaking painters Giotto and Cimabue — was thought to be for-

ever lost when an earthquake ravaged the basilica of St. Francis in the town of Assisi five years ago. Those who have visited this soaring structure since the restoration was unveiled last month are relieved to see that the pessimists were wrong.

When the quake settled, the ceiling frescoes lay shattered on the floor in tens of thousands of puzzle-like pieces that were mixed in with general debris. The restoration was carried out by a team of professionals, students, and volunteers who were willing to sift through the rubble endlessly, often going for days at a time without finding a single fragment of an artwork.

The saints emerged gradually with the discovery of an eye, a nose, or a few wisps of hair. Though somewhat diminished, frescoes of several of the figures in the chapel’s ceiling have now been put back into recognizable form. St. Jerome has lost most of his beard; his cloak is eaten with holes, but it is nonetheless inspiring to see that he has risen from the rubble.

“‘Miraculous’ Image of Guadalupe Painted,” by Joe Nickell, *Skeptical Inquirer*, Sept-Oct, 2002.

Mexico City’s *Image of Guadalupe*—a sixteenth-century portrait of the Virgin Mary supposedly imprinted miraculously on an Aztec convert’s cloak—has been confirmed as merely a painting. Nevertheless Pope John Paul II is scheduled to confer sainthood on the Aztec, Juan Diego, despite the pleas of some Catholic scholars. These include the former curator of the Basilica of Guadalupe, who doubts the historical existence of Juan Diego and said such a canonization would be “recognition of a cult.”

Now a ubiquitous symbol of Mexican Catholicism, the image, say critics, was painted by a native artist named Marcos Cipac de Aquino. It was probably utilized by Spanish conquerors to convert the Indians to Catholicism. (Recently, the results of a secret 1982 scientific study of the image were reported by the Spanish-language magazine *Proceso* in its May 12 and 19, 2002 issues).

Art restoration expert Jose Sol Rosales examined the cloth with a stereomicroscope and determined it did not

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originate supernaturally but was instead the work of an artist who used materials and methods of the sixteenth century.

“Met’s 15th Century ‘Adam’ Shatters as Pedestal Collapses,” By Celestine Bohlen, *New York Times*, October 9, 2002.

A 15th-century marble statue of Adam by the Venetian sculptor Tullio Lombardo crashed to the ground in the Velez Blanco Patio at the Metropolitan Museum of Art sometime Sunday evening, scattering its arms, legs, and an ornamental tree trunk into dozens of pieces.

The statue’s fall — a museum’s nightmare — was confirmed yesterday morning by museum officials, who said they had delayed an announcement for a day while a preliminary investigation took place. The indoor patio, originally located in a castle in Spain, was screened off to the public yesterday as curators combed the tile floor for fragments. The museum barred news photographers from taking pictures, even from the balconies above.