

“Greek satyr on show in Rome,”

Kathimerini, April 2, 2003.

Romans flocked to see a 2,400-year-old bronze Greek satyr that went on public display in the Italian Parliament yesterday, five years after it emerged from the bottom of the sea in a Sicilian fisherman’s net. One of the most important archaeological finds in Italy in recent years, the 2-meter-high, 108-kilo statue was placed on display after a painstaking four-and-a-half year restoration by experts in Rome who added an internal steel frame to help it stand upright.

Some historians think it could be a work by Praxiteles. Italian antiquities officials believe the satyr came from an ancient shipwreck containing other Greek artworks, several of which could still be lying on the seabed, 500 meters deep.

It will remain on display until June 2 at the Montecitorio building, which houses the Italian Chamber of Deputies. It will then go on permanent display in the Sicilian fishing port of Mazara del Vallo, close to where it was caught in the nets of a local trawler in March 1998.

“Cosa Nostra wanted to kidnap the Dancing Satyr,” *La Repubblica*, May 7, 2003.

Now restored and on exhibition at Palazzo Montecitorio in Rome, putting it on the black market would be practically impossible. But five years ago, a few days after its fortunate recovery from the bottom of the Channel of Sicily, the *Dancing Satyr* had entered into the sights of the Cosa Nostra.

Boss Matteo Messina Denaro, number two on the most wanted list, had ordered and planned the theft to sell it for its weight in gold to a foreign collector. In 1998, still immersed in a tub of water in the town of Mazara, Sicily, the statue would have ended up in the hands of a foreign collector had it not been for last minute security reinforcements and the contrition of a former Mafioso who had been in charge of procuring the keys to the room where the statue was kept.

The keys never showed up, and Boss Denaro ordered an armed assault on the town. “He let us know that we would not have received a penny and that if we blabbed we would end up in a canal,” recounted the repentant informer.

But a few days before the planned attack, surveillance around the statue was increased, and it was transferred to the Istituto Centrale del Restauro in Rome where it has remained until it was transferred to Palazzo Montecitorio.

“Stolen frescoes recovered,” *La Repubblica*, April 8, 2003.

Two stolen archaeological fragments were recovered Friday night in the excavations of Pompei. Police found them in a construction site near the excavations, already packed and ready to be sent abroad.

The thieves had badly damaged the frescoes, and it is still not known if pieces are missing and whether they will be able to be reassembled and replaced into the frescoed walls where they came from.

The pieces were found a few hours after the theft was reported, thanks to the police as well as retired military, who thanks to their profound knowledge of Pompeian and Vesuvian lowlife, were able to help their younger colleagues.

The two pieces date from between 45 and 79AD and come from the House of the Chaste Lovers, a building that has never been open to the public. The frescoes in the house depict lovers who are exchanging sweet effusions during a banquet. The stolen pieces, each measuring approximately 60cm x 60cm, represent a rooster with a pomegranate and a cherub.

“Auschwitz: The Battle over Preservation,” *La Repubblica*, January 24, 2003.

The hundreds of wooden barracks and walls that between 1941 and 1945 hosted thousands of people destined for the crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau were never intended to last.

Neither were the objects found scattered over the 60 square kilometers of the most famous concentration camp in the world. Thousands of shoes, toothbrushes, combs, and eyeglasses were never intended to last sixty years but are now the only witnesses to the fate of the people who left them behind.

A few days after January 27th, the fifty-eighth anniversary of the liberation of the camp, Auschwitz is fighting against the ravages of time. “Everything that is standing has been consolidated or

reconstructed,” explained Witold Smrek, responsible for preservation of the camp. “The rest, if we do not intervene soon, risks complete loss,” including the tons of human hair that the Russians found after the liberation.

Preservation concerns are complicated by the fact that Auschwitz is the burial site of more than one million people, and each object has special meaning.

In June a meeting of experts will take place to decide what to do with the crematoria of Birkenau, which were destroyed by the Nazis in retreat and are today just piles of rubble. Equally delicate is the question of what to do with the objects preserved in the Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

First of all the hair: “until the 1980’s,” explains Smrek, “we cleaned it regularly, but now just touching it turns it to dust.” The shoes are also problematic as they are piled behind a vitrine and are covered in dust – these had been cleaned in a machine with lanolin and chemicals but are now falling apart.

23 million dollars has already been spent on the restoration of the camp and its objects, and according to cosmetics giant Ronald Lauder, who has gathered the majority of the funds to restore the camp, another 40 million are necessary. There are those who oppose the camps’ preservation. Among them are the citizens of Oswiecim and some Jewish scholarly groups, who maintain that it is time to let go and bury the dead.

“How to put the shine back on 70’s plastic,” *The Art Newspaper*, September, 2003.

One of French artist César’s *Expansions*, the plastic sculptures he made in the 1970s that resemble oozing pools of soft foam, has recently been restored; raising questions as to how experimental plastic sculptures of this type can be conserved.

Conservation was carried out by Antonio Rava, one of the few restorers in Italy who has experience in working in plastic. The piece was in a deplorable state of repair: cracks, bubbles in the surface layer of paint, hemispherical bumps with the texture of orange skin, gaps in the paint—some of them very large—and shrinkage of the plastic skin.

The constituent materials, polyurethane, resin, fiberglass, and acrylic

varnish, had reacted with each other and were unstable. On top of this, the sculpture had already been restored in the 1980s with highly invasive materials.

Once the layer of dirt dulling the whole surface had been removed, the final layer of paint was also taken off. Gaps filled during the previous restoration had to be re-filled as the earlier ones stood proud of the original material.

These were removed and the painted layer replaced where it had bubbled or come off. The holes were filled in a reversible manner, in one color only; no attempt to replace the original colors was made because this would have altered the piece's impact too much. At the end of the operation a final coat of transparent microcrystalline wax was applied to protect the piece.

“Should a Stalinist hotel be saved?”
The Art Newspaper, August 16, 2002.

Moscow Mayor Yuri M. Luzhkov and his government have announced plans to tear down the Moskva Hotel, a massive, Stalin-era building that stands just a few feet away from the Kremlin and is described as oppressively totalitarian by some and as an important architectural monument by others.

The city's plan is to build a new hotel and congress center with the same Stalin-era architecture, but equipped with expensive boutiques, functioning plumbing, and underground parking.

The hotel was completed in 1935 to show that the Soviet Union could build a world-class hotel. The hotel boasted huge, elaborate halls and restaurants decorated with handcrafted woodwork and plaster detail and soon became a favorite haunt of the elite and a symbol of the Soviet high life, hosting actors, cosmonauts, Red Army marshals, and spies over the decades.

In recent years the hotel has degenerated into seediness, with a discount shoe outlet on one end, a restaurant called Wild Horse in another, and prostitutes convening at night in the shadows of the huge building.

Various half-hearted efforts have been made to restore it. In 1996 city officials even tried to lure American real estate magnate Donald Trump as an investor.

“The hotel will be reborn in its former appearance, but new in content,”

said Mr. Luzhkov speaking at a press conference on 19 July where he announced construction plans. His deputy said the hotel's original construction is shoddy and unstable and that tearing the building down and rebuilding one that looks like it is cheaper than trying to restore the original.

While most Russians are still too distracted by daily problems to start grass roots cultural preservation campaigns, scholars and journalists have sounded the alarm. A few say the Moskva is a “dark fortress” that it is best to demolish. But most say rash, profit-driven construction projects are turning Moscow into a city of architectural “fakes” posing as historical buildings or simply razing everything in their path, transforming the city as heartlessly as Stalin did in his day.

“The cleansing of David: the debate rages on,” *The Art Newspaper*, July 25 2003.

The last two months have seen a press-fuelled furor over the proposed restoration of Michelangelo's David, highlighting fissures and rivalries in the conservation world as well as the iconic nature of the world famous statue.

Restoration work was due to start in September of last year but was stalled as arguments erupted over how the restoration should be carried out or whether it should happen at all.

The restoration is planned to mark the 500th anniversary of the statue's inauguration in front of the Palazzo Vecchio in Piazza della Signoria, Florence on 8 September, 1504.

The Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, which has housed David since 1873, hired conservator Agnese Parronchi for the task of cleaning the statue. She concluded that the cleaning should be done using a “dry” technique involving hair brushes, cotton swabs, rubber erasers, and chamois leather.

However, Ms. Parronchi's plan did not find favor with her superior, Dr Franca Falletti, director of the Accademia, who preferred a different method of cleaning involving poultices soaked in distilled water. This position was also supported by Cristina Acidini, superintendent of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence.

In April of this year Agnese Parronchi resigned from her post, sending

the debate raging between the polarized camps.

The statue was last cleaned in 1843 using hydrochloric acid and shows traces of external agents on the marble including gypsum, beeswax, calcium oxalate, and various salts. In the making of plaster casts of the statue in the 19th century, separating agents were employed to prevent the plaster sticking to the surface.

In an open letter published in the *Corriere Della Sera* newspaper on 19 July, Cristina Acidini vigorously defended the decision to employ the “wet” technique. Most dangerous to the surface of the statue, stated Acidini, are the accretions of gesso that over time and with the effect of humidity may crystallize and expand causing the marble to crumble.

Ms Parronchi's “dry” cleaning would in fact be abrasive and at the same time push this gesso further into the pores of the marble.

“Warka Vase returned to Baghdad museum - while Nimrud gold is unpacked in bank vault,” *The Art Newspaper*, June 13, 2003.

The Warka Vase, the greatest loss from the National Museum in Baghdad, has been recovered. Three men unexpectedly turned up at the museum on 12 June, with the sacred vessel of 3200 BC in the back seat of their car.

Ancient breaks in the fragile limestone were reported to have been broken again. The vase had been among 42 key objects, which had been left on display in the museum galleries and were looted between 11-13 April. Nine other pieces have been recovered since then.

The hope now is that the recovery of the Warka Vase may lead investigators to some of the remaining lost masterpieces.

Meanwhile Iraqi specialists and British Museum conservators are this week opening the crates of the Nimrud gold, which were stored in the vaults of the central bank.

These vaults had been flooded with sewage (not clean water as was reported), but most of the gold is undamaged. So far only a handful of the objects unpacked will require conservation - a bronze mirror, a silver mirror and bowl, and carbonized wood with gold inlays.

This same vault also contains

other precious objects from Ur and Nimrud (including ivories), but these crates have not yet been examined.

The latest reports from Baghdad confirm that the scale of the looting at the National Museum was not nearly as serious as initially feared, although it did include a number of masterpieces. The best estimates are that around 3,000 objects are still missing, including 32 major artifacts from the galleries.

“Feds seize colonial masterpiece,” *The Art Newspaper*, July 25, 2003.

A polychrome altarpiece from 16th-century Peru is currently sitting in a US government warehouse in El Paso, Texas. Scholars say it is a masterpiece carved by Pedro de Vargas and painted by Bernardo Bitti, an Italian Jesuit called the Michelangelo of Latin America.

The altarpiece was being sold by Ron Messick, a dealer in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Peruvian government officials say that it was stolen more than a year ago from a church undergoing renovation in Challapampa, a remote village near Lake Titicaca.

The work in question (about 1575-95) is *El Retablo de Los Angeles*, a polychrome wooden carving of SS Michael and Gabriel beneath a crucifixion surrounded by putti. The altarpiece stands more than 10 feet high and weighs more than 1000 pounds—not something one could carry in a suitcase.

“It’s the most important work to come out of Latin American in my 30-year career,” said the New York dealer Valerie Taylor, who sells Spanish colonial paintings.

On 1 May, agents of the Immigration and Customs Service searched the Santa Fe home of Ron Messick, a partner in Ron Messick Fine Art, and found the altar installed there.

Scholars say the seized work is the altar familiar to them from photographs in standard histories of Spanish colonial art. Robert Simon, a private dealer specializing in Italian Mannerism visited Santa Fe last summer with a museum curator and went to Ron Messick’s home, where he saw the altar, in parts, on sawhorses outdoors. A man seemed to be preparing the work for conservation.

Whatever the outcome, the Messick case is unlikely to slow Santa Fe’s

rise as a center for the trade in colonial works. With a growing market comes an expanded threat of fakes. Buyers with wall space to cover in their new houses may lack the expertise to evaluate colonial works, and New Mexico is overpopulated with artists.

NY dealers now call the city “Santa Fake.” Their rivals in Santa Fe call those sour grapes, a begrudging recognition of a competing market.

“The new Ground Zero,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 2003.

At the food court beneath Grand Central Terminal, four radicals are gathered around a table plotting a revolution.

Andrew Oliff is 35, lives in Bayside, Queens, and is a neuropathologist. Marcy Mellos is 48, lives in Murray Hill and works as a legal assistant. Joe Wright is 58, a Kentucky native who lives near Gramercy Park and designs voice mail systems. Louis Epstein is 42, lives in Rockland County and runs a small Internet service provider.

These four unlikely comrades are the leaders of the World Trade Center Restoration Movement. In opposition to the city’s political establishment, business leaders, academics and civic groups, the W.T.C.R.M. demands that the World Trade Center towers be rebuilt.

Not replaced by something new and supposedly better. Rebuilt, hewing as closely as possible to the design of the buildings that were lost on Sept. 11.

For the Restoration Movement, any decision to do anything other than rebuild the towers is the wrong thing to do. And the decision to adopt Daniel Libeskind’s plan for a faceted glass tower is the most wrong thing of all.

Lately, the group has been fixated on the slurry wall, a part of the twin towers’ original foundation that Mr. Libeskind proposes to leave intact and exposed. The Restoration Movement regards that move as structurally unsound and symbolically inappropriate — a way, Mr. Epstein said, of “setting the terrorists’ act in stone and forcing us to live with the emptiness they imposed on us.”

The Restoration Movement is trying to organize its own renegade architectural competition. But before a call for submissions can be issued, a jury must be chosen, and that has proved dif-

ficult. Mr. Epstein said he has received commitments from two architects and an architectural historian, but he won’t name them because “they haven’t given me authorization yet.”

“Stars and Stripes Forever; Smithsonian works to preserve that special flag,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 2003.

The three-year effort to preserve the 190-year-old Star Spangled Banner is nearing completion at the Smithsonian Institution.

The 30-by-34-foot American flag flew over Fort McHenry during the War of 1812 and inspired Francis Scott Key’s 1814 verse, which later became our national anthem. Conservators at the Smithsonian Institution are not only examining and preserving the frail flag but are also trying to figure out how to encase it in way that allows access for continued conservation and maintenance as well as public viewing.

“Paint misbehavin’: the graffiti removal industry’s killer crew,” *Los Angeles Magazine*, May 2003.

Graffiti removal has developed into an art form of surprising precision and craft. The Los Angeles Department of Public Works last year spent \$8 million on the city’s zero-tolerance anti-graffiti program. Its crews removed 30,926,446 square feet of graffiti, which is about the same as repainting the Hollywood sign, every day, four times.

Much of the squad’s creative flair is owed to Alberto Rodriguez, who graduated in 1987 from the Otis Parsons School of Design. After running an art restoration business, he turned to defaced walls, discovering that just a bit of extra care with the paint could eliminate not merely the graffiti but any evidence of its intrusion.

To that end, he has invested more than \$20,000 in color-matching equipment. That gadgetry includes a spectrodensitometer, a laptop computer, and the anchor of it all, a paint dispenser, which is calibrated to release as little as 1/384th of a fluid ounce from any of the tints in its mixing bank. The technology allows any of the seven painters on Rodriguez’s staff to concoct a customized mix at the push of a button.