
Articles You May have Missed

“Those Ancient Romans Traveled In Style,” *Discovery*, Dec. 2, 2004.

Underneath a German bus terminal, archaeologists have found the remains of a 2,000-year-old Roman roadside rest stop that included a chariot service station, gourmet restaurant, and hotel with central heating. The building complex indicates that citizens of the Roman Empire traveled in relative comfort.

“Carvings Damaged By Taliban Go Back On Display,” *WebIndia (ANI)*, Dec. 9, 2004.

A collection of pre-Islamic wooden idols chopped up by the Taliban in 2001 in their drive for a pure Muslim state is back on display in Afghanistan after being restored in a project financed by the Austrian government.

The near life-sized idols, some bearing at least a passing resemblance to the mysterious stone statues of Easter Island, went on display this week at the Kabul Museum, which was badly ravaged in Afghanistan’s civil war and Taliban rule until 2001.

“Bringing Twin Artworks Together Again,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Dec. 9, 2004.

A pair of rare multimillion-dollar paintings by the Russian-born artist Wassily Kandinsky were reunited Wednesday at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts after being separated in a crude artistic surgery more than 70 years ago in Munich, Germany.

The Minneapolis museum has owned one of the colorful abstractions since 1967, but the other, which was originally painted on the back of the Minneapolis image, fell through the cracks of Europe’s war-torn history and was all but forgotten for nearly a century. Preserved by the family of a Kandinsky friend, the second painting recently resurfaced in Munich and is now on loan to the Minneapolis museum.

“Expert: Parthenon Marbles Would Have Been Fine in Greece,” *Discovery*, Dec. 4, 2004.

One of the biggest British arguments for keeping the Parthenon Marbles in London has been that keeping them there has protected them better than if

they had been left in Greece. But a distinguished Cambridge scholar says the sculptures would have been just fine if Lord Elgin had left them in Athens.

Following a sophisticated 11-year conservation program in Athens, the 14 slabs that Lord Elgin did not manage to remove are now showing surprisingly bright original details.

“LA City Audit Reveals Missing Art,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, Dec. 4, 2004.

An audit of artwork owned by city agencies in Los Angeles suggests that hundreds of pieces of art are missing. The city has maintained its own art collection since at least the 1920s. There was a person who was supposed to be the curator of this collection, and he allowed city entities to borrow pieces to decorate city buildings. The problem was that over the years, the artwork that had been checked out was not really followed up on.

“Canadian Attacks Koons Sculpture In Berlin,” *The Globe & Mail (Canada)*, Dec. 2, 2004.

Istvan Kantor, best known as the man who was banned from the National Gallery of Canada in the 1990s for tossing a vial of his own blood on the walls, has turned up in Berlin where he sprayed more of his bodily fluids at a statue of Michael Jackson yesterday.

Also known as Monty Cantsin, Kantor was banned from the Art Gallery of Ontario for vomiting on a painting in 1996. Six months later he repeated the performance at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. At the time he said he was protesting the “oppressively trite and painfully banal” nature of the works in question.

“Man vs. Machine, no Faking,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 4, 2004.

A computer program has been written to help authenticate art work. Its conclusions about who painted *Madonna and Child With Saints* by Perugino are already in dispute.

The technique involves wavelet statistics which offers a mathematical means of detecting patterns within images. The combination of broad patterns as well as almost invisible ones can add up to a particular artist’s unique style.

The technique has been applied to determining whether digital images have been tampered with.

When the program was used to determine who painted the Perugino, the results offered a different perspective from generally accepted art historical views. Art historians are intrigued but remain skeptical.

“Italy Returning Obelisk To Ethiopia,” *Discovery*, Nov. 22, 2004.

Italy is finally sending a stolen obelisk back to Ethiopia. The monument is one of a group of six obelisks erected at Axum when Ethiopia adopted Christianity in the 4th century A.D.

It was stolen by the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in 1937 and turned into a symbol of fascist power during his short-lived efforts to revive the grandeur of imperial Rome.

Despite signing various agreements that promised to return the 1,700-year-old monument, the Italian government showed no signs of doing so until the obelisk was badly damaged by lightning in a thunderstorm in 2003.

“Colorizing The Classics (Like They Were Meant),” *The Guardian (UK)*, Nov. 22, 2004.

It has long been known that classical statues were painted. Indeed, their creators sometimes chose different kinds of stone for different parts of their statues according to the way they reacted to paint and wax, using types that could be highly polished for the fleshy parts and coarser varieties that would absorb paint for the drapery.

Some art history books have included colored photographs to give an idea of how the statues of the Greeks and Romans would have looked to contemporaries. But *I Colori del Bianco* (The Colours of White) is the first show to confront us with three-dimensional copies created with the help of meticulous scientific investigation.

“Afghan Treasures Surface,” *MSNBC (Reuters)*, Nov. 21, 2004.

Much of the Afghan art missing after the American invasion has been surfacing. The bulk of the newly inventoried items were found in April 2003 when a presidential palace vault in Kabul was

cracked open to reveal a trove of famed, intact Bactrian gold pieces.

But many more artifacts, including giant Buddhist sculptures and ancient ivory statues, have been found in recent months in unmarked boxes and safes stashed for safekeeping during the Soviet-led coup and then during the years of hard-line Taliban rule.

“Let’s Save Taliesin (We Need It),” *Boston Globe*, Nov. 21, 2004.

What’s America’s best building? Robert Campbell suggests that Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin ought to be considered. But it’s in bad repair. “Wright is arguably the greatest American artist in any field of the visual arts, and Taliesin is perhaps his masterpiece. If we don’t save it, we have no claim to call ourselves a culture.” The cost of restoration has been estimated at \$60 million.

“Atlantis Discovered?” *CNN.com*, Nov. 15, 2004.

An American archaeologist says he’s found the long lost city of Atlantis. Robert Sarmast said sonar scanning of the seabed between east Cyprus and Syria revealed man-made walls, one as long as 3 kilometers (2 miles), and trenches at a depth of 1,500 meters (1,640 yards). “It is a miracle we found these walls as their location, and lengths match exactly the description of the acropolis of Atlantis provided by Plato in his writings.”

“Biotech In The Service Of Art Preservation,” *Wired*, Nov. 3, 2004.

Biochemists at the United Nations University in Caracas, Venezuela, are using DNA sampling to identify materials from which artifacts are made and the pests that are feeding on them. They then use biotechnology techniques to create weapons that target the pests specifically, without damaging the artwork.

“Needed: A Plan To Save Egyptian Tombs From Tourists,” *The Guardian (UK)*, Nov. 1, 2004.

Tourist traffic is destroying Egypt’s Valley of the Kings. Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities has asked the archaeologists, architects, and engineers of the Theban Mapping Project -

launched 25 years ago simply to make a detailed map of the 62 tombs and temples of the pharaohs and nobles buried more than 3,000 years ago - to complete a plan for the conservation of the valley by the end of 2005.

“Iraq Explosions Causing Damage To Ancient Site,” *The Art Newspaper*, Oct. 25, 2004.

Contractors exploding ordinance at an ammo dump in Iraq are causing damage to an important ancient site that is on Unesco’s World Heritage list. Since May, controlled explosions of recovered munitions and mines are conducted at a nearby US military base. These are believed to take place twice daily. This constant seismic activity is damaging the stone arches of the main temple and the outer wall of the ancient city, which could lead to collapses.

“Degas’s 40-Year Painting,” *The Guardian (UK)*, Oct. 25, 2004.

X-rays show that Degas worked and reworked a painting over the course of 40 years as his ideas changed. The x-ray shows flurries of reworking, as figures become more and less distinct, the teenagers turn towards one another and then look away, the detailed background landscape is softened into a blur. At one point, Degas scrubbed out their classically handsome faces and replaced them with Parisian urchins.

“The Earthquake That Rebuilt San Francisco’s Museums,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 21, 2004.

The 1989 Bay Area earthquake was the best thing to happen to the area’s museums in a long time. Many museums were damaged in the quake and had to address plans to rebuild. In the mid-1980s, nothing had happened to any of the museums in 50 years. The scene felt very retarded. Now, all these museums have reinvented themselves with new buildings and new initiatives that make people feel differently.

“Getty Museum Director Resigns,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 19, 2004.

Deborah Gribbon has resigned as director of the Getty Museum, citing differences with Getty president Barry

Munitz. “Barry and I have differences on a range of things. They are real differences. I think this is a very important moment for the Getty. Perhaps to a fault, I believe in the good of the institution. I think it’s better to resign than let differences become a distraction.”

“Overpainted Raphael Discovered In Italy,” *The Guardian (UK)*, Oct. 15, 2004.

A previously unknown painting by Raphael has been discovered in a church in Umbria, where it had been hidden behind another work. The work’s authenticity has been verified beyond doubt, and London’s National Gallery is considering making a request to display it alongside a similar work it currently has on view.

The painting was only re-examined in the course of a survey of diocesan art works ordered by the present bishop of Gubbio, Pietro Bottaccioli. Restorers discovered the banner had been painted over and decided to remove the later work, millimeter by millimeter, with scalpels.

“Is A Harvard Rembrandt A Fake?” *Boston Globe*, Oct. 14, 2004.

In a forthcoming biography of the colorful Hollywood artist, bon vivant, and art forger John Decker, Stephen Jordan includes an account of how Decker and his friend Will Fowler forged a Rembrandt *Bust of Christ* for actor (*Stagecoach*, *Gone With the Wind*, *Lost Horizon*) Thomas Mitchell, an amateur art collector.

“Not long after Mitchell passed away,” Jordan writes, “the painting fetched \$35,000 as an early Rembrandt. Today, the painting hangs at Harvard University’s prestigious Fogg Art Museum -- hailed as a true Rembrandt.”

“It’s Kind Of Like Watching Paint Dry,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 13, 2004.

The world of art restoration is a mysterious one to even the most frequent of museumgoers, but a new program launched by the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts is giving non-experts a glimpse of the processes involved in caring for great and aging artwork.

On two occasions now, the Institute has performed its magic in a public gallery, so that visitors could witness the techniques in progress and in person - and for those who may have been prevented by time or geography from following the exhibit first-hand... the entire process is archived for public viewing on the web.

“Are de Boers Famous Fakes Actually Legit?” *Philadelphia Inquirer (AP)*, Oct. 3, 2004.

In 1992, a group of investors paid a modest sum for the Jelle de Boer art collection, which consisted of works the Dutch collector had judged to be lost creations of van Gogh, Matisse, and Renoir. The sale didn't exactly set the art world ablaze, since de Boer's stack of paintings had long since been judged to be fakes. But now, the current owners are asking experts to reexamine the collection, saying that they believe there may be a few authentic diamonds amidst the mass of imitations.

“The Real Story Of The Iraq Museum Looting,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, Nov. 4, 2004.

Everyone knows about the looting of Iraq's museums during last year's war. What almost no one knows is that most of the museums' holdings had been stolen and sold years before — and not by mobs of Iraqis off the street.

The earlier looting was carried out so systematically, and on such a large scale, that it dwarfs the thefts that occurred after the fall of Baghdad. Moreover, the April looting may have occurred in part because it would provide cover for the prior thefts.

“Nazi Art Exhibit Attacked By Amateur Gymnast,” *International Herald-Tribune (AP)*, Sept. 24, 2004.

The controversial Flick family art exhibit in Berlin has suffered its first casualty at the hands of an unusually limber protester. Yelling loudly, the 35-year-old woman attacked *Office Baroque*, a cutout section of wall by American artist Gordon Matta-Clark, doing a series of head-over-heels flips before landing on the work in a handstand, punching both her arms through the drywall.

She then ran across the large room, pushing over a section of a spray-

painted truck called *Graffiti Truck*, also by Matta-Clark. There is some question as to whether the woman was actually motivated by anti-Nazi fervor: she is apparently well-known to the Berlin police.

“Please Look After These Paintings,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 24, 2004.

A day after the brazen daylight robbery of *The Scream* and a second Expressionist masterpiece by the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, museum officials begged the robbers on Monday to show greater care for the treasures than they did while wrenching them free from the wall and smashing their frames.

“Fighting To Keep Stone Henge From The Cars,” *CNN*, Aug. 18, 2004.

Preservationists are opposing a plan to put a car tunnel under Stone Henge. For them, the proposals prove the government cares more about motorists than preserving the integrity of a centuries old landmark. “Stonehenge has been there 5,000 years and the car was only invented 100 years ago. To cater to something that's been there for such a short time is patently absurd.”

“Art That Goes on the Blink,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 4, 2004.

At the Los Angeles County Museum of Art the 6-foot-high grid of 84 white Quasar monitors of *Video Flag Z* that together formed an American flag are dark, victims of the very modernity to which they paid tribute.

Museums all over the world face similar problems. The film world has faced a similar conundrum as reels of celluloid crumble in their canisters. Many museums are investigating options for capturing the artwork in a way that would allow it to be displayed on future technology. Jeff Rothenberg, a senior computer scientist at Rand Corp. in Santa Monica proposed another technique: emulation. The idea is to write a single program that coaxes a current computer to mimic the original computer.

For John Hirx, senior objects conservator at LACMA, the key to resurrecting *Video Flag Z* lies in a manila folder filed in his office. In the folder is a letter signed by Paik giving LACMA the authority to re-create the work using currently manufactured television sets and a new armature with wheels and doors.

“Our goal is to create a new armature and acquire monitors that are aesthetically equivalent to the originals,” Hirx said. “When I get the requisite funding, I will replicate it as closely as I can. That's my goal.”

“A Move for Art's Sake Stirs Debate on Bequests,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 14, 2004.

In a case watched for its possible effect on philanthropy, a Pennsylvania judge Monday ruled that art intended to stay put — the treasured, highly idiosyncratic but deficit-ridden Barnes Foundation collection — can be uprooted despite the terms of the donor's bequest.

The decision opens the way for the cloistered collection amassed by pharmaceutical tycoon Albert C. Barnes to be moved from suburban Merion, Pa., and housed in a more conventional, \$100-million showplace in downtown Philadelphia. There, attendance and revenue are expected to soar.

“It's very sad,” said Bruce J. Altshuler, director of New York University's museum studies program. “Museums, as a whole, are becoming less and less ‘different.’”

“They've Barely Scratched the Surface,” by Suzanne Muchnic, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 9 2005.

Under layers of paint and structural work, a 1932 mural by David Alfaro Siqueiros is found. Will it ever see the light of day?

Street Meeting, 24-by-19-feet, was painted in 1932 by Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros at a now-defunct art school. It's one of Los Angeles' most important public artworks, and it vanished soon after it was created.

Some artists who assisted Siqueiros have told historians that faulty materials were to blame. Others have said that the painting was obliterated because of objections to the subject matter. As time passed and memories dimmed, the school, established as Chouinard School of Art, evolved into CalArts in Valencia. The old building became the home of one Korean church, followed by another, and the mural was all but forgotten.

Until now. A small group of Siqueiros and Chouinard enthusiasts, bolstered by a team of professional paintings conservators, has discovered that the

two-story work is at least partly intact. Its condition is unknown, and large areas may have been lost or damaged.

But preliminary tests indicate that *Street Meeting* did not flake off or wash away, as often reported. It is buried under several layers of paint, on a wall that has been divided by a roof, partly tiled and roughly patched. Indented lines in the upper wall conform to contours of images in the mural. Nail holes and small excavations reveal vivid color.

“This is mind-blowing,” said Dave Tourjé, an artist and executive director of Chouinard School of Art, a 2-year-old re-creation of the original institution. He discovered the location of the mural last summer but didn’t go public with the news until he had discussed the situation with current owners of the building and engaged conservators who could verify the existence of the painting and assess its condition.

Siqueiros painted three murals in Los Angeles during a six-month sojourn. His only outdoor wall paintings in the United States, they mark a turning point in his development, said Los Angeles-based art historian Shifra M. Goldman, a Latin America specialist who has written extensively about his work.

The Chouinard mural is a seminal piece, Goldman said, representing his search for an expressive style attuned to revolutionary ideals and illuminating his experiments with airbrush painting on cement.

Conservator Leslie Rainer, a veteran of the Olvera Street mural project working with conservators Chris Stavroudis and Aneta Zebala, called it “a great find” for the city and the art community. “If we are able to recover it. We are cautiously optimistic,” said Rainer, whose team will prepare a report of their findings and make recommendations.

“We do feel that something is there. We can see traces of the design through paint and plaster layers. We can see incisions that match the historic images. And we do see color, but some of it may have been scraped before the wall was repainted.

“We also see big patches of plaster on that upper exterior wall, and we have heard that large pieces of plaster fell off in an earthquake in the 1990s. But we can’t know how much has sheeted off or what condition the mural is in until the whole thing is uncovered.”