

### **“Egypt’s Colossi of Memnon to be Reunited with their Twins,”** *Agence France Presse*, 04/17/2008

Towering like sentries above the necropolis of Ancient Thebes in southern Egypt, the world-famous Colossi of Memnon will see their number double from two to four next year. The painstaking work of twelve archaeologists and hundreds of workers is about to redefine the way visitors see and understand this mysterious site that has cast its spell over travellers for more than 2,000 years.

Next year two giant statues of the pharaoh Amenhotep III will begin to rise again, just a hundred metres behind his two existing colossi that mark the entrance to the temple. Another two statues, still half-buried, will also be returned to their former upright position in the years to come.

The statues are all that remains of the funerary temple of 18th dynasty Amenhotep who ruled from 1391 to 1353 BC. He was the father of the iconoclastic pharaoh Akhenaton. Rises in the water level of the River Nile, pillaging of the stone by other pharaohs, and a 27 BC earthquake all took their toll of the temple at Kom el-Hitan whose builders meant it to last a million years.

### **“Artist Kent Twitchell Settles Suit over Mural,”** *Los Angeles Times*, 05/01/2008

Los Angeles artist Kent Twitchell has settled his lawsuit against the U.S. government and 11 other defendants for painting over his six-story mural *Ed Ruscha Monument*, painted on the side of a federal government-owned downtown building, for \$1.1 million.

The settlement, disclosed Wednesday, is believed to be the largest awarded under the federal Visual Artists Rights Act or the California Art Preservation Act, both of which prohibit desecration, alteration, or destruction of certain works of public art without giving the artist 90 days’ notice to allow the artist the option of removing the artwork.

Art consultants have said it still may be possible to restore the mural, a portrait of artist Ed Ruscha that was created between 1978 and 1987 and painted over in June 2006. However, both Twitchell and his attorney said that restoring the artwork at its current location is not a viable option.

“I could conceivably go up and repaint it, and they could say, ‘Guess what, you’ve got three months to remove it,’” Twitchell said. Twitchell has mixed feelings about creating murals in Los Angeles. “What’s really discouraging about most public art is the way that, in this city of ours, spray paint vandalism has kind of taken over the streets,” he said.

“What was once the mural capital is now the graffiti capital -- although I don’t call it graffiti, I call it spray paint vandalism. We cannot coexist.” Added Twitchell, “Ironically, the city was actually in the process of cleaning spray paint off the Ed Ruscha mural when it was destroyed.”

### **“Corporate Jollies to Oust ‘Cultural Fuddy-duddies’ from Pompeii Ruins,”** *The Independent (London)*, 05/03/2008

It is perhaps the most remarkable archaeological site in the world and more than 3 million visitors stampede through it every year. But if the new tourism councilor for Campania has his way, the numbers visiting Pompeii will be drastically cut, and the site will be thrown open to multinationals for private events to rake in the money needed to maintain the ruins.

“If we cap the number of visitors it will be easier to allow businessmen within the ruins to make money and hold events without being hampered by cultural fuddy-duddies,” Claudio Velardi told a press briefing. Mr. Velardi is a powerful political fixer from Rome and former right-hand man of the former prime minister Massimo D’Alema, but his vision of Pompeii’s future was dismissed out of hand by experts.

Piero Guzzo, the archaeological superintendent for Pompeii and Herculaneum, responded stonily: “I have not yet had a talk with the new councilor. I hope to meet him as soon as possible so we can discuss all issues of common interest.”

### **“Ancient Site of Pompeii Declared a Disaster Zone,”** *CBC News*, 07/5/2008

The Italian government has been forced to declare a state of emergency at the archeological site of Pompeii because of its severe state of disrepair. Archaeologists and art historians have been decrying the decay at Pompeii for many years.

Its upkeep has been strangled by a lack of funds, litter, looting, mismanagement as well as illegal tour guides and stray dogs. The state of emergency would last for a year and allows for extra funds and special measures to be taken to protect the site.

“Every year at least 150 square meters of fresco and plaster work are lost for lack of maintenance,” said Antonio Irlando, a regional councilor responsible for artistic heritage.

Pompeii is one of Italy’s most-visited tourist sites, hosting some 2.5 million visitors a year. Two-thirds of the 66-hectare town, which was home to about 13,000 people in the Roman era, have been uncovered since excavations began 260 years ago. The remaining third is still buried. Adding to the decay is the trash crisis in the nearby city of Naples. The ancient site is now being used as a garbage dump and is littered with tires, old fridges, and mattresses.

### **“Experts Fall out over Van Gogh’s ‘Last Painting,’”** *The Guardian*, 05/19/2008

A portrait stashed in a bank vault in Athens could be the last painting Vincent van Gogh produced, according to art experts and collectors who are attempting to determine the authenticity of the picture found among the possessions of a Greek world war two resistance fighter.

The discovery of the work, along with a notebook of sketches also purportedly drawn by Van Gogh, has raised the prospect of the post-impressionist artist having painted a third portrait of his physician, Dr. Gachet, perhaps only days before a bout of insanity induced him to commit suicide at the age of 37. For art historians it would add to the controversy that has surrounded the famous painting by one of the fathers of modern art.

### **“Sirens’ Beauty Restored,”** *Manchester Evening News*, 05/29/2008

A painting that outraged many Victorian critics has been restored thanks to six years of painstaking conservation work by Manchester Art Gallery. The picture’s nudes and fierce figures outraged some Victorians and the artist’s ‘unlucky’ mix of paints meant pieces of his masterpiece cracked and fell away.

Last displayed in 1857 as part of the Art Treasures of the United Kingdom

exhibition at Old Trafford, Etty’s homage to Homer’s *Odyssey* was put into storage shortly afterwards. But attention returned to the work in 2002, ahead of the re-opening of Manchester Art Gallery, when staff realized that the painting would soon degrade beyond repair. A major restoration project began that year, ahead of the 150th anniversary of the Art Treasures exhibition.

### **“Looted Artifacts Returned to Iraq,”** *CBC News*, 06/10/2008

Iraqi officials have welcomed back a collection of 11 ancient artifacts stolen from the country’s National Museum during the US-led invasion in 2003.

A set of 11 agate and alabaster seals, which date from between 3,000 B.C. and 2,000 B.C., was returned after having been snatched during the widespread looting at the museum in 2003. The cylinder-shaped seals were turned over to Iraq’s antiquities ministry at a ceremony in Baghdad on Monday. U.S. customs officers discovered the seals in Philadelphia last month and transferred the pieces to the Iraqi embassy in Washington, officials said.

Following the looting of thousands of artifacts from the National Museum in 2003, the facility was closed because of lack of security and poor building conditions. The ministry is in the midst of a worldwide campaign to retrieve the stolen items, with more than 700 pieces — including gold necklaces, daggers, and clay pots — recently returned to Iraq by Syrian authorities. Other artifacts have turned up elsewhere in Iraq and the U.S. as well as in Italy, the Netherlands, and the U.K.

### **“Run-down Heritage Sites Embarrass the Greeks,”** *The Guardian*, 06/23/2008

Extra staff have been dispatched to guard the great cultural gems of Greece as the government in Athens tries to deflect growing criticism of its handling of national treasures. Amid unprecedented protests from tour guides, travel companies, and tourists irritated by conditions at prime archaeological sites, the ruling conservatives last week rushed hundreds of additional personnel to staff museums and open-air antiquities.

### **“Archaeological Sites in South Iraq have not been Looted, say Experts,”** *The Art Newspaper*, 07/01/2008

An international team of archaeologists which made an unpublicized visit to southern Iraq last month found no evidence of recent looting — contrary to long-expressed claims about sustained illegal digging at major sites.

Despite the good news on looting, some military damage was found. With two exceptions none of the sites seen last month had been inspected by international specialists since 2003, although they are monitored periodically by Iraqi archaeologists. The international team which visited southern Iraq last month had been expecting to find considerable evidence of looting after 2003, but to their astonishment and relief there was none.

A number of explanations for why the feared looting had not taken place were offered: the watchtowers erected with Italian assistance in late 2003, roving police teams which supplement site guards, efforts by local antiquities staff, and the drying up of the international market for Iraqi antiquities. The final issue investigated by the international team was neglect at sites. This was particularly bad at Ur, where ancient buildings reconstructed in the 1960s and 70s are beginning to collapse from weathering.

### **“How Victorian Restorers Faked the Clothes that Seemed to Show Hadrian’s Softer Side,”** *The Guardian*, 06/09/2008

Acherished image of the Roman emperor Hadrian as a gentle, philosophical man wearing the robes of a Greek citizen has been shattered with one blow of a conservator’s chisel at the British Museum.

The head, with its neatly trimmed beard and fringe of exquisitely crimped curls, is certainly Hadrian but it seems the body it has been attached to for almost 150 years belongs to somebody else. The statue, a piece that has been cited in many biographies of Hadrian as proof of his love for Greek culture and customs, and illustrated countless times, is an ingenious Victorian confection.

Thorsten Opper, curator of the exhibition on Hadrian which opens at the British Museum next month, said he initially felt “gutted” as Tracey Sweek,

a stone conservator, delicately removed the layer of Victorian plaster masking the join of head and body. The statue was excavated by two British naval officers in 1861 from the ruins of a temple to Apollo in Cyrene, in what is now Libya. It was broken in several places, with the head of a goddess tucked between its feet. The Hadrian head was found nearby. All the fragments were shipped to London and reassembled.

“As a sculptor, once I looked at it properly the proportions were all wrong, the head was the wrong size for the body,” Sweek said. In the exhibition the statue will be displayed with the head in place, and an explanation about Hadrian’s borrowed robes.

**“Sculpture Falls at Met,”** *ArtDaily.com*, 02/07/2008

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is saddened to report that late last night or early this morning, a late 15th-century glazed terracotta relief sculpture of Saint Michael the Archangel by Andrea della Robbia (1435-1525), came loose from metal mounts that have long held the framed lunette securely to the wall above a doorway in its European Paintings and Decorative Arts Galleries.

The 62-x-32-inch relief, which has been on view in its current location since 1996, fell to a stone floor and suffered some damage. Preliminary inspection indicates that the relief has not been irrevocably harmed and that it can be repaired and again presented to the public.

While the Metropolitan routinely and thoroughly inspects its pedestals and wall mounts to reconfirm their structural integrity, it will initiate a re-invigorated museum-wide examination as expeditiously as possible in the days that follow this unfortunate accident.

**“Buddha’s Caves,”** *New York Times*, 07/06/2008

Sand is implacable here in far western China. It blows and shifts and eats away at everything, erasing boundaries, scouring graves, leaving farmers in despair. It’s one of many threats to the major tourist draw of this oasis city on the lip of the Gobi desert: the hundreds of rock-cut Buddhist grottoes that pepper a cliff face outside town.

Known as Mogaoku — “peer-

less caves” — and filled with paradisiacal frescos and hand-molded clay sculptures of savior-gods and saints, they are, in size and historical breadth, like nothing else in the Chinese Buddhist world. And Mogaoku is in trouble.

Thrown open to visitors in recent decades, the site has been swamped by tourists in the past few years. The caves now suffer from high levels of carbon dioxide and humidity, which are severely undermining conservation efforts. The short-term solution has been to limit the number of caves that can be visited and to admit people only on timed tours, but the deterioration continues.

Plans are under way to recast the entire Dunhuang experience in a way that will both intensify and distance it. Digital technology will give visitors a kind of total immersion encounter with the caves impossible before now, but that immersion will take place 15 miles from the site.

A once-bare-bones staff has grown to around 300 full-time conservators, researchers, groundskeepers, and guards, supplemented since the late 1980s by training teams from the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles, led by Neville Agnew. The ever-encroaching tide of sand has been slowed by a system of wind-breaking nets. Plans for drastic remedial action are in place.

Under Dr. Fan and the vice director, Wang Xudong, the academy will build a new visitor reception center several miles from the caves, near the airport and railroad station. All Mogaoku-bound travelers will be required to go to the center first, where they will be given an immersive introduction to the caves’ history, digital tours of interiors, and simulated restorations on film of damaged images. They will then be shuttled to the site itself, where they will take in the ambiance of its desert-edge locale and see the insides of one or two caves before returning to where they started.

**“American Discovers a Da Vinci,”** *ArtDaily.org*, 06/07/2008

A new addition to the very rare works of the Master Leonardo Da Vinci has come to light. The painting, a nuptial portrait of a young woman in profile, dates from Leonardo’s first Lombard period, ca.1485. The finding is one of the most amazing recent examples of

intuition, detective work, technical innovation, and connoisseurship.

An American collector discovered the masterpiece in a private Swiss collection. The portrait, actually a mixed-media of white, red and black chalks with additions of watercolor, is executed on vellum and measures approximately 24X33 centimeters. This is the first known Da Vinci work executed on vellum, a factor that probably led experts to believe that it was painted by a 19th-century German “Nazarene” artist. Moreover, the portrait appears to have been somewhat painted over in the 19th century during a restoration.

The first to have fully understood the importance of this work was Dr. Nicholas Turner, former Curator of Drawings for the British and Getty Museums. The attribution has been subsequently confirmed by a number of experts, including Dr. Mina Gregori and Dr. Cristina Geddo.

**“Six Months to Save Lascaux,”** *The Independent*, 07/12/2008

Unesco, the world cultural body, has threatened to humiliate France by placing the Lascaux caves – known as the “Sistine Chapel of prehistory” – on its list of endangered sites.

The Unesco world heritage committee has given the French government six months to report on the success of its efforts to save the Lascaux cave paintings in Dordogne from an ugly, and potentially destructive, invasion of grey and black fungi. At the same time, a scientific committee appointed by the French government has conceded that an elaborate treatment with a new fungicide in January failed to stop the mould advancing through one part of the caves.

An independent pressure group of scientists and historians claims that up to half of the startlingly beautiful, 17,000-year-old images of bison, horses, wild cattle, and ibex are now threatened by the fungal invasion – the second of its kind in eight years.

Officials from the French government’s department of historic monuments and experts from all over the world have been quarreling for years over the best way to preserve the Lascaux paintings. Some experts have accused the French authorities of a series of blunders, including a change in the air-condition-

ing system in 2000, the use of high-powered lights in the caves, and allowing too many “special” visits.

**“Archaeologists Find Painful Curse at Ancient Cyprus Ruins,”** *The Daily Star*, 07/12/2008

An unexpected sexual curse has been uncovered by archaeologists at Cyprus’ old city-state of Amathus, on the south coast near Limassol, a newspaper said Friday.

“A curse is inscribed in Greek on a lead tablet and part of it reads: ‘May your penis hurt when you make love,’” Pierre Aubert, head of Athens Archaeological School, told the Cyprus Weekly. He said the tablet showed a man standing holding something in his right hand that looks like an hour glass.

The inscription dates back to the 7th century AD, when Christianity was well established on the island, leading the French professor to surmise that it referred to the activity of witchcraft or shamans surviving from the pagan era.

The ancient city of Amathus was founded by the Phoenicians around 1,500 BC and derived its wealth from grain and copper mines. The city, a regional capital under the Romans, flourished in the 7thc. AD but was abandoned by the 12<sup>th</sup>-c.

**“Dropped, Smashed, Shredded,”** *The Guardian*, 07/30/2008

For one woman visiting the Royal Academy’s summer exhibition last Saturday, the afternoon did not end well. While in a room containing works curated by Tracey Emin, she slipped and fell across a cordon, sending Christina – a 9ft-tall sculpture by the Costa Rican artist Tatiana Echeverri Fernandez, worth £6,000 and described by Emin as a star of her show – crashing to the ground.

Incidents of damage involving gallery visitors are, however, few and far between; works of art stand a far greater chance of being destroyed at the hands of curators, picture handlers, or cleaners.

Most of the major galleries have had to issue shame-faced apologies for breakages at one time or another. According to Robert Read, a fine art underwriter at the specialist insurers Hiscox, accidental damage accounts for between 50% and 60% of the claims the company handles each year. The vast majority of

these arise from damage incurred while works are being moved or transported.

**“Gravestone Restoration Honors Sudbury’s Founding Residents,”** *Sudbury Town Crier*, 07/24/2008

The tilting gravestones in the old burying ground in Sudbury Center may evoke rural charm for some passersby, but for those who value their town’s history the slow destruction of those markers is a loss for future generations.

On July 7, Kai Nalenz, an expert in gravestone repair and conservation with Gravestone Services of New England, began a project to preserve the markers in the Revolutionary War Cemetery located behind the Town Hall and the Presbyterian Church on Concord Road. Nalenz expects to complete the conservation of 88 stones this summer.

Many of those gravestones are damaged, cracked, or toppled by nearly 300 years of weather, and more recently, by lawnmowers which have scratched and loosened the markers. Nalenz uses a high-strength epoxy and is certified in the application of Jahn Restoration Mortar, a mortar similar in constitution to the gravestones, to restore broken stones.

Nalenz has never found a human bone, which would require calling the police to investigate, but he did have a strange experience at the gravesite of Ann Moore who died in 1856 at the age of 92. “When I was digging the dirt started moving. Something was trying to come out of the ground,” said Nalenz. “It was just a toad, but it got my heart rate up.”

**“X-rays Reveal Van Gogh Portrait,”** *BBC News*, 07/31/2008

A new X-ray technique has revealed a previously unknown portrait of a woman by Vincent van Gogh, which was painted over by the artist. The peasant woman’s face was hidden behind the work *Patch of Grass*, completed by Van Gogh in Paris in 1887.

Scientists Joris Dik and Koen Janssens used high-intensity X-rays from a particle accelerator to scan the painting and reveal the face beneath. Van Gogh is known to have often reused canvases to save money. The identity of the peasant woman in the painting is not known. The powerful X-ray bombardment caused atoms in the picture’s layers of paint to emit

“fluorescent” X-rays of their own, which indicated the chemicals they originated from. That enabled a color map of the hidden picture to be produced.

The portrait fills a square area measuring 17.5cm by 17.5cm (6.8 by 6.8 inches). Mr.Dik, a materials scientist from Delft University, and Mr. Janssens, a chemist from the University of Antwerp in Belgium, published their scientific paper online in the journal *Analytical Chemistry*.

**“Little Angel Was Here: A Keith Haring Collaborator Makes His Mark,”** *The New York Times*, 08/05/2008

In the summer of 1982 the artist Keith Haring painted a mural of his signature figures, flanked by atoms and three-eyed smiling faces, on the remains of a handball court near Houston Street and the Bowery on the Lower East Side.

Rendered in Day-Glo orange, neon green, yellow and hot pink, the work took about two days to finish. After only a few months Haring covered over the images, which had begun to fade.

Haring died of AIDS in 1990. To celebrate what would have been his 50th birthday, his mural was recreated by admirers in May on the original 50-foot-long free-standing slab of concrete.

The mural has now taken on a second new life. On July 22 a graffiti artist and onetime protégé of Haring’s seriously altered it by filling in the negative space with an intricate black interlocking pattern and spray-painting it with the repeated tag LA II. The tagger was a former collaborator of Haring, who was impressed by his graffiti.

An unusual pair, Haring, a gay art-school dropout from Kutztown, Pa., and Mr. Ortiz, a street-smart and straight Puerto Rican from the Baruch housing project, formed a strong creative bond. Mr. Ortiz never worked on the 1982 mural, although he had tagged the wall

*Most evocative book title:*

How Beautiful It Is  
and How Easily It Can Be Broken

*a book of critical essays  
by Daniel Mendelsohn*

*(which actually doesn't deal with the visual arts)*