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Art History

Lost Art

The Stories of Missing Masterpieces

Guidebook

Noah Charney

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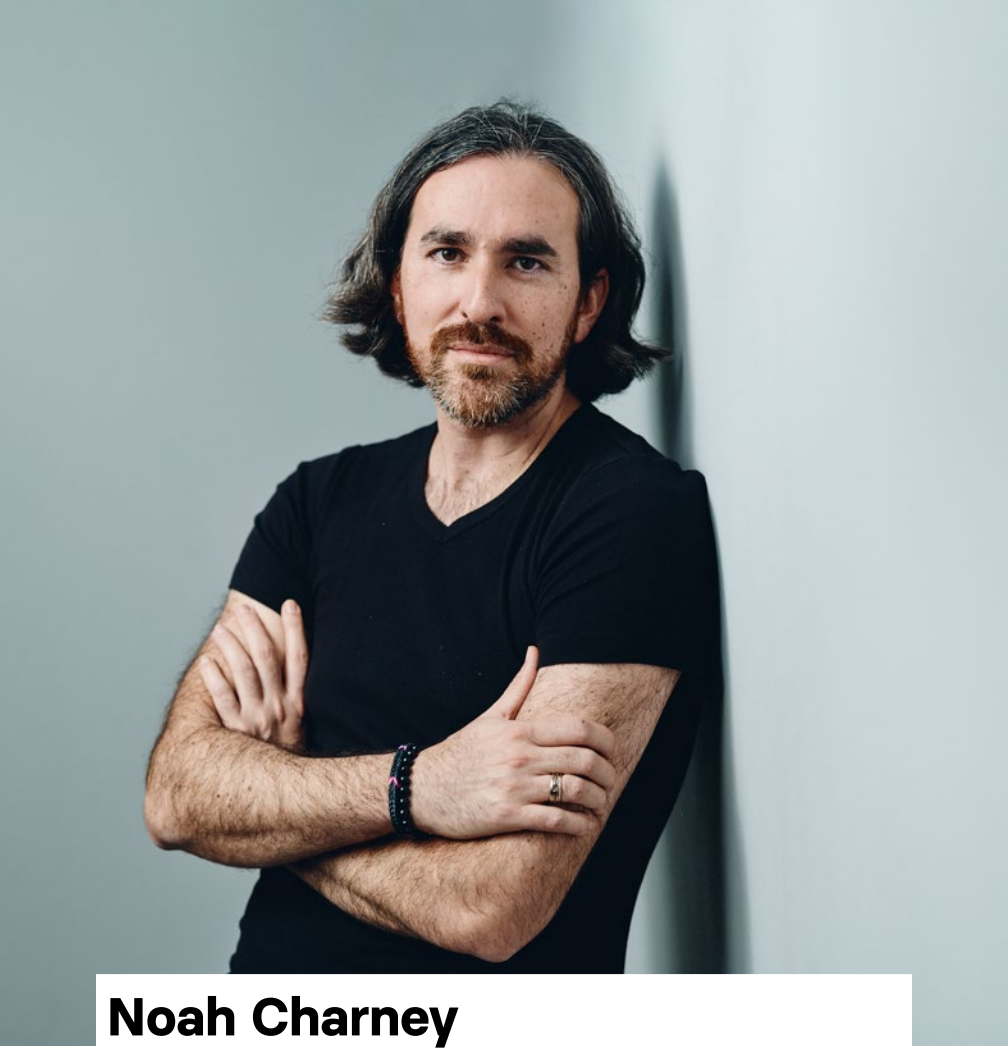

Noah Charney

Noah Charney is a writer and art historian who specializes in the study of art crime and forgeries. He has taught at Yale University, Brown University, the American University of Rome, and the University of Ljubljana. He is the best-selling author of more than 20 books, and his works have been translated into 14 languages. He founded the Association for Research into Crimes against Art and is a teacher in its Postgraduate Certificate Program in Art Crime and Cultural Heritage Protection.

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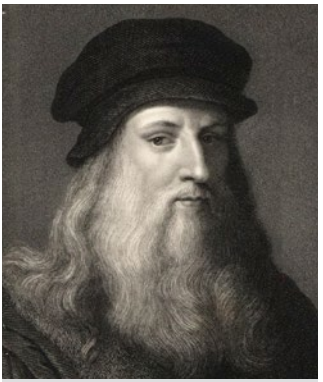
Lecture 1

Welcome to the Museum of Lost Art

Many of humanity's greatest artworks have been lost to the ages, and only a sliver of what's missing has ever been found or recovered. The concept of a Museum of Lost Art provides a cutting reminder of how fragile the world's treasures are. Over 12 lectures, you'll explore the many ways in which masterpieces have been lost to us—and are still being lost, every day, around the world. Although stolen art is the most obvious example, this course covers all ways in which art can be lost: fire, war, iconoclasm, accidents, disasters, or even destruction at the hands of an artist themselves. Then there's a whole class of art that never was to begin with: unrealized, unfinished, or sometimes merely a myth.

Lost Art and Subsequent Fame



Leonardo da Vinci

Despite Leonardo da Vinci being one of the most famous artists to ever live, it is unknown how many works he created and how many survive. For instance, there are around only 15 paintings widely accepted to have been completed by him, and at least 8 of those are believed to be lost. That's to say nothing of the many paintings, both lost and extant, whose attribution to da Vinci is unclear or disputed. Likely, more lost works with no historical record at all exist. For most artists who lived and worked prior to the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, only a fraction of their known works are extent and their locations known.

Moreover, there are many works known to be lost but that were renowned in their time. In fact, for some artists, their lost works were arguably more important and celebrated than those that have survived. However, our understanding of art is skewed, inevitably, toward works we can see. For instance, take Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*, now at the Prado in Madrid. It depicts Christ being lowered from the cross and held by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus while Mary swoons and collapses beneath her son. With grief and heartbreak so vividly depicted, its style and composition were widely imitated. Art historians today see it has one of the most influential of the Netherlandish masterpieces, with one even arguing that it could be most important painting of the 15th century.

However, van der Weyden's *The Justice of Trajan and Herkinbald* was more famous during his lifetime and arguably even more influential. This series of four panels, which he painted to decorate Brussels Town Hall, took him several years to complete. It was destroyed in 1695 when Brussels was bombarded by France, and we only know of it today thanks to a tapestry that was made of the painting. As most of van der Weyden's surviving corpus comprises other works from churches and altarpieces, the modern understanding of him is largely as a painter of religious scenes. However, his *Justice* was a secular painting on civic virtues that was greatly admired by contemporaries.

Introducing the *Ghent Altarpiece*

There are some works that have gone on loan to the Museum of Lost Art several times but have always made it back home. Perhaps no art has done this more frequently than the *Ghent Altarpiece*, or *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, by Jan van Eyck. It has been stolen, all or in part, on six different occasions—seven if you consider a sneaky sale of parts of the painting to be a sort of theft. Begun by Jan van Eyck's older brother Hubert, this masterpiece of 15th-century Flemish painting was the most famous artwork in Europe upon its completion in 1432 and an object of pilgrimage for artists and thinkers. However, it was also the object of some 13 different crimes over its 600-plus-year existence. It was nearly destroyed in a fire, almost burned by rioting Calvinists, forged, pillaged, hidden, dismembered, censored, stolen by Napoleon, hunted in the First World War, sold on the sly by a renegade vicar, maimed while on display in Berlin, and then stolen multiple times during the Second World War.

Treasures stolen by Nazis

The *Ghent Altarpiece* consists of 12 panels that depict scenes of the life, death, and rebirth of Jesus. It was commissioned by local patrons to be the centerpiece of a cathedral now known as St. Bavo's in Ghent, Belgium. As soon as it was displayed, it was immediately considered to be the best painting in Europe. In one multifaceted work, van Eyck aimed to show the entire biblical story. In the central panel, crowds converge around a sacrificial lamb, its blood spilling into a chalice upon an altar in the midst of a great heavenly field, which represents Christ's sacrifice—the Holy Grail.

Ghent Altarpiece, or *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*

The *Ghent Altarpiece* was the first work to showcase the unique ability of oil paint. Oil paint is somewhat transparent, allowing for complex layering of colors and details. Van Eyck used this property to capture light and movement—from glinting jewels to the reflection in a horse's eye—with exquisite detail. Moreover, although the tradition at the time was to use generic faces in religious paintings, every face depicted in the altarpiece is unique. Amid its holy scenes, the altarpiece also incorporates snapshots of everyday life in this time, such as landmarks of Ghent's city streets. With these true-to-life details, the work pioneered a new artistic mode that would come to be known as realism.

A seven-year restoration that culminated in 2019 found that, for many decades, viewers had been looking at a dramatically altered version of the painting. Over its life span, it's been restored dozens of times. Due to heavy-handed restorations in the past, it was revealed that as much as 70% of the original work had been painted over. As the most recent restoration team removed these layers of paint, varnish, and grime, vibrant colors and details, such as painted spiderwebs and whole buildings, that had long been invisible were uncovered. However, some of these rediscovered details were a bit more unsettling.

Restoration of the *Ghent Altarpiece*

For years, people had wondered why the mystic lamb had four ears. It was now revealed that the second pair were pentimenti (the ghost of underlayers that emerged as the newer ones faded). As the restorers removed this overpainting, they discovered the original lamb to be bizarrely humanoid—an incarnation of Christ that looks right back at the viewer. Moreover, a long-debated inscription signed by Jan van Eyck was recently deemed authentic. In the note, Jan praises his older brother, Hubert, and credits him with having started the piece before dying. The inscription ends with a plea to take care of the work.

The Adventures of the *Ghent Altarpiece*

Jan van Eyck's aforementioned pleas fell on deaf ears pretty quickly. By 1550, there was already a partial restoration undertaken of the altarpiece, seemingly because it had been improperly cleaned and damage had been done to the original. Particular attention was paid to the predella, a sort of step or mount on which the altarpiece was originally situated. It consisted of a strip of fine square panels, depicting hell or purgatory and Christ redeeming the saved and the worthy from a grim fate. The panels were done in water-based paint, susceptible to damage from poor cleaning techniques. The 1550 restoration was much praised, but the predella was destroyed by a fire not long afterward.

In 1815, a renegade vicar sold the wings of the altarpiece to an unscrupulous Brussels art dealer to raise money for the cash-strapped diocese. The Brussels dealer then sold the wings to King Frederick William III of Prussia. It wouldn't be until after World War I that the wings were returned to war-torn Belgium by way of reparations.

Then there are the thieves, who have long sought to privately profit from the altarpiece. The most notorious of the six thefts remains unsolved. On the night of April 10, 1934, one of the 12 altarpiece panels was burgled from the cathedral of St. Bavo. The panel was sliced in half, separating the front and back parts. The recto, or back half, containing a grisaille painting of Saint John the Baptist, was recovered at the luggage check of a Ghent train station, returned as a show of good faith on the part of the thief, who then embarked on a campaign to extract a million francs' ransom from the bishopric in exchange for the return of the other side of the panel, which depicted the so-called Righteous Judges. This side of the panel showed a group of men on horseback, including a portrait of Jan himself and of Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy, patron of the work.

The man who sent the letters and devised the theft of the panel was almost certainly Arsène Goedertier. He was a stockbroker who was heavily involved with the social life of the cathedral. His motivations have never been clear, though. Whatever his reason, Goedertier was an unlikely thief. He had an eyesight problem, which meant that he would have been unable to perpetrate the theft at night. Thus, he almost certainly had an accomplice, as an eyewitness spotted two people leaving the cathedral that night with a panel-sized package wrapped in a black sheet under an arm.

Arsène Goedertier

Over several months, a dozen ransom letters were exchanged between the thief and the bishop of Ghent. Then, in November of that year, Goedertier collapsed, and he summoned his lawyer to settle his affairs. With his dying words, he revealed his crimes to his lawyer and directed him to a hiding place where carbon copies of all 12 ransom letters were found, plus a 13th letter that had never been sent, which indicated that the panel was hidden somewhere where no one could access it without attracting public attention. To this day, the panel has never been found. It appears certain that the initial theft involved simply hiding the panels somewhere on the premises of the same cathedral where they had always been displayed. This was to facilitate the return of the panels without risking exposure of the thief if a ransom demand was met since they could simply direct the authorities to the hiding place.

During the 16th century, religious upheaval as a result of the Protestant Reformation and the spread of Calvinism gripped the Low Countries. Angry mobs of religious dissenters, often poor and economically disenfranchised, directed their ire against the sumptuousness of the Catholic Church. Their call for a more simplified and pure form of worship motivated the destruction of religious icons and elaborate church decorations. Depictions of the supernatural were particular targets, which put the *Ghent Altarpiece*, which features two hosts of angels singing angelically and playing musical

instruments, in the likely crosshairs of the purists. The altarpiece was quickly whisked into the church attic and then to the town hall and kept under lock and key for years.

Finally, after the Germans captured Ghent in 1914 during World War I, it was disassembled and hidden beneath walls and floorboards throughout the city. The Germans scoured the city and eventually threatened to raze it to the ground were it not handed over, but the situation was saved when an armistice was signed in 1918. That the *Ghent Altarpiece* survives at all today is almost as great a miracle as its creation in the first place.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read *Stealing the Mystic Lamb* by Noah Charney.
- Watch Noah Charney's TED-Ed video about the *Ghent Altarpiece*: https://www.ted.com/talks/noah_charney_the_strange_history_of_the_world_s_most_stolen_painting.
- Watch Noah Charney in the BBC documentary *The World's Most Expensive Stolen Paintings* (available on BBC iPlayer and YouTube).

Lecture 2

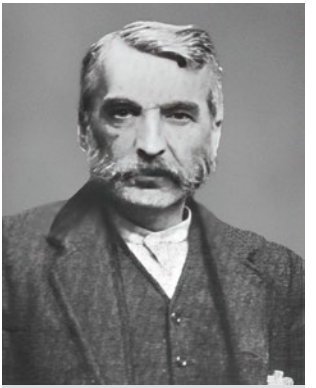
Hall of Heists: Thieves and the Art They Steal

For as long as art has been made, there have been thieves eager to steal it. The skyrocketing prices art can command has only intensified the allure of getting rich quick through art heists. In Italy alone, there are 20,000–30,000 artworks reported stolen annually, and many more go undocumented. You could wander the theft wing of the Museum of Lost Art forever. This lecture will focus on the classic heist—where one or two thieves hatch and execute a cunning plan to steal a high-profile object. You will learn about some of the diverse motivations, interesting methods, and surprising outcomes of these thefts.

Adam Worth

Midnight, London, May 1876. Through the dark, two men walk down Old Bond Street and stop in front of number 39, the office of Agnew's Art Gallery. Agnew's was in the newspaper headlines, having purchased a famous painting—Thomas Gainsborough's *Portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*—for what was then the highest price ever paid for a work of art at auction: 10,000 guineas. Junius Morgan, the American banker, had decided to purchase the Gainsborough as a princely gift for his son, John Pierpont Morgan. The sale was agreed in principle, but the painting would remain on display at Agnew's first—good publicity for the gallery. A little too good, unfortunately.

On that warm May night, the smaller of the thieves was hoisted up by his colleagueto the first floor of Agnew's gallery and gained entry using a crowbar on a window. He cut the flesh of the Gainsborough canvas off its support, rolled it up, and, helped down by his colleague, vanished into the darkness. The portrait of Georgiana vanished without a trace for the next 25 years.



Adam Worth

The police were baffled. The trail quickly went cold, and it remained a popular mystery for many years. The main culprit, as is now known, was Adam Worth, widely considered the most successful criminal in history and the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes's nemesis, Professor Moriarty. Worth had dragged himself up from a homeless pickpocket to become one of the wealthiest men in London society. What led him to personally break into Agnew's and steal the Gainsborough painting?

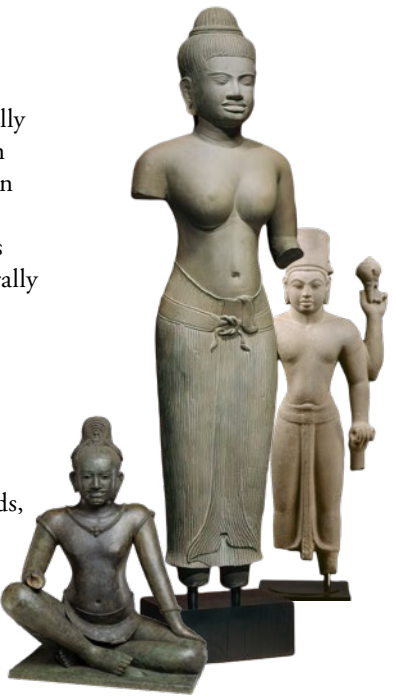
Worth had a criminally inept brother, John, who had managed to get himself thrown in jail in Paris. Worth was living under the alias Henry J. Raymond and could not bail out his brother himself without their association becoming known. Thus, he planned to steal the famous Gainsborough and ransom it back to the Agnew gallery in exchange for Agnew bailing John out of jail. Then, something unexpected happened: The lawyer Worth had hired to defend his brother won his case, and John was released.

Worth decided to hide the painting away as a future bargaining chip. He began covert negotiations with Agnew for the ransomed return of the painting, but they could not agree on a price or a method of transaction that would not endanger Worth. After a while, Worth simply decided to keep the painting. His criminal enterprise caught up with him eventually, and he was imprisoned in Belgium in 1893. When he was released four years later, all he had left was the Gainsborough painting, which had been stored in a Brooklyn warehouse. He had become a penniless convict, his only possession a stolen painting, the most valuable work of art in the world.

Now, he had to broker a deal somehow to return the painting in exchange for desperately needed cash. He approached the famous Pinkerton Detective Agency to act as an intermediary to reach out to Agnew's Gallery. There, he struck up an unusual friendship with William Pinkerton himself. William helped broker the final deal in 1901, in which Worth received $25,000 for the return of the Gainsborough. Worth died the next year, but not before telling his life story to Pinkerton, who went on to publish a book on Worth's career.

The Mechanics of Art Theft

Stolen art that is easily recognizable has essentially no market at all. No gallery or public institution would touch a stolen van Gogh or Vermeer. Even thieves who think they are stealing art that is unrecognizable enough to sell will often find it's not so. What market there is for stolen art generally consists of mid- to low-level works, which can sometimes be sold because they are not iconic or recognizable. This is particularly the case for ancient art and sculpture, which is difficult to identify, catalog, and track. The ancient Khmer city of Angkor in Cambodia, for example, is thought to be missing hundreds, if not thousands, of sculptural pieces that once graced this magnificent archaeological complex. It's now

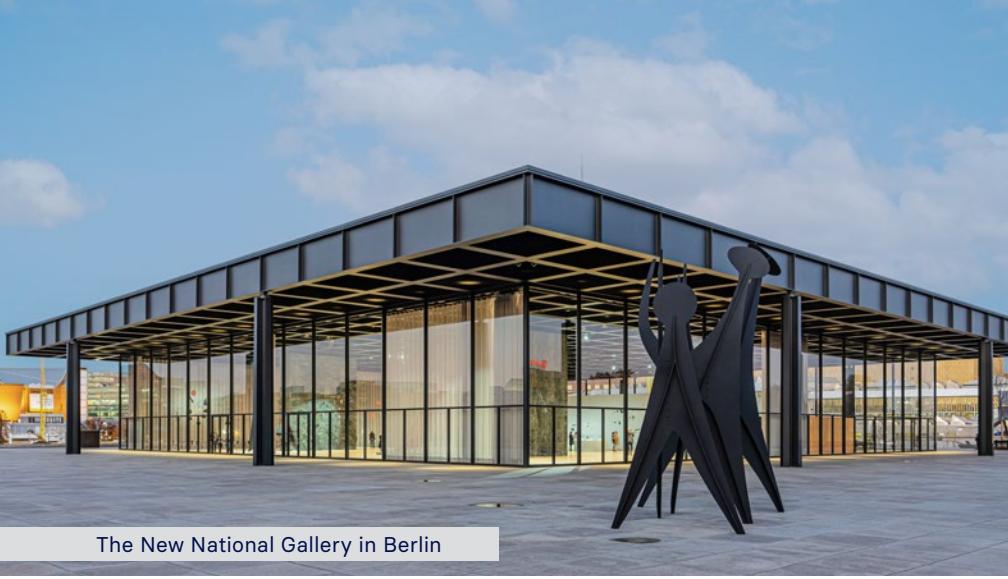


believed that dozens of Khmer sculptures in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, thought to have been legitimately acquired, were stolen from the site.

Online auction sites often have either forged or looted antiquities for sale. Listing an object online, with a doctored provenance or documented history that does not suggest the item is illegal, is often enough to find a buyer, as long as the work is not iconic. Ancient sites, especially in the developing world, are almost impossible to secure. Thieves need little more than the nerve to rob an ancient site and a connection to a legitimate-looking antiquities dealer who has contacts abroad. Indeed, art theft endures because there are just enough buyers who are willing to look the other way on works that are hard to trace.

However, art theft isn't motivated only by a desire for profit. For example, Stéphane Breitwieser, a Swiss waiter who suffered from kleptomania, stole paintings worth more than a billion dollars, often in plain sight. He never tried to sell them and seemed unsure what to do with them all. He'd walk into a museum with calm confidence, go up to a painting, lift it off the wall, and walk slowly out with it. He projected such self-assurance that those who saw him do this assumed he was a staff member performing his normal duties. He usually struck smaller local museums where security was lax. His most valuable heist was *Portrait of Princess Sybille of Cleves* by Lucas Cranach, the Elder—a painting worth millions but hanging in a small castle museum in Germany. It was only after 239 paintings

Portrait of Princess Sybille of Cleves by Lucas Cranach



The New National Gallery in Berlin

were stolen that the police finally caught up with him and he was jailed. His mother, Mireille, hoping to hide evidence linking her son to the thefts, destroyed many of the stolen paintings. When Breitweiser learned of this in prison, he tried to kill himself: He loved the art he had stolen.

The Poor Poet

Art heists can sometimes be political statements. Such was the case of a famous burglary at the New National Gallery in Berlin on December 12, 1976. A van pulled up opposite the gallery and was left running. A tall, slender man in a gray raincoat emerged from it. He walked down to the basement and stood before three small Romantic German paintings by Carl Spitzweg, including one that was an icon to all mid-20th-century Germans: *The Poor Poet*.

A guard lingered nearby. The slender man had to get rid of him. On the wall opposite *The Poor Poet* was a painting of chess players. He crossed to it and started laughing theatrically. The guard approached him and asked, "What's so funny?" The slender man spun and dashed to *The Poor Poet*, pulled out wire cutters from his pocket, snipped the wire on which it hung, and tore it off the wall. He then sprinted back to the van, hopped inside, and locked the door behind him.

This is a firsthand account by Frank Uwe Laysiepen, a famous conceptual artist better known as Ulay, of what he calls "the Berlin lifting." It was a theft as artistic performance. He targeted *The Poor Poet* because it was well known

The Poor Poet by Carl Spitzweg

as Hitler's favorite painting. His longtime companion and collaborator, Marina Abramović, was planted in the New National Gallery before he entered, with Ulay's Super 8 camera, to shoot from inside as the event unfolded. Another reluctant cameraman was recruited to shoot the action from the street and follow the getaway van.

After the getaway from the museum, Ulay drove toward a working-class neighborhood called Kreuzberg. His plan was to hang the stolen painting in the apartment of an immigrant Turkish family. However, before Ulay went into the family's apartment, he stopped at a phone booth and called the museum, reassuring the director that the painting was fine and telling him where they should come retrieve it. Then, he went and hung the painting up in the Turkish family's apartment. Eventually, the authorities arrived as the museum director confirmed that the painting was unharmed, and Ulay was

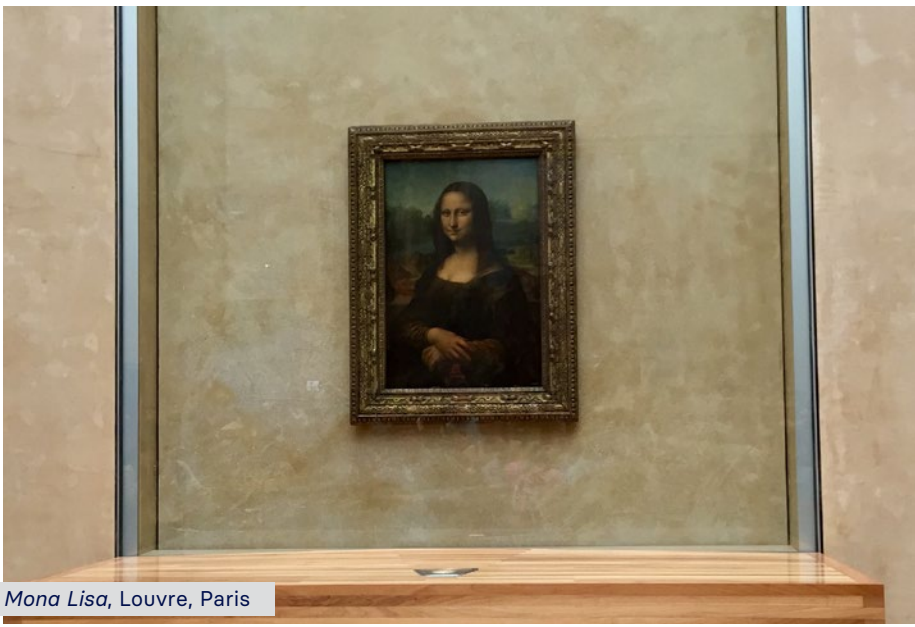
driven back to the museum. He made a statement that this was a "protest action, first of all against the institutionalization of art, secondarily about discrimination against foreign workers."

The Poor Poet was stolen again in 1989 and has never been recovered.

Vincenzo Peruggia

The publicity that goes with art heists can turn a work into the most famous piece of a museum's collection. No case demonstrates this more than that of Vincenzo Peruggia, whose theft of the *Mona Lisa* in 1911 made art stealing a modern sensation and indeed helped make the *Mona Lisa* one of the most iconic paintings in the world.

Peruggia worked for a firm that the Louvre had hired to build protective cases for some of its treasures, including *Mona Lisa*. He hid himself in a closet overnight, wearing a white smock like all the other Louvre workers. Early on August 21, 1911, he made his way to where the *Mona Lisa* was displayed. He hoisted the painting off the four iron pegs that held it to the wall and hurried



Mona Lisa, Louvre, Paris

over to a nearby service staircase. There, he removed the painting from the frame, wrapped it in a white sheet, and made a beeline for the exit. When he got to the bottom of a service staircase, he was surprised to find the door locked from the inside. Then, he heard footsteps approaching—a janitor, who opened the door with his key and let Peruggia out.

The *Mona Lisa* is one of a handful of top-level Renaissance portraits, but there is nothing truly unique about it. Rather, it was the 1911 theft that made the portrait a household name, as media frenzy quickly ensued. The investigation was botched: Peruggia was twice interviewed, along with all Louvre workers, and was never considered a suspect.

Peruggia kept the *Mona Lisa* for two years in the false bottom of a suitcase. Then, in 1913, he smuggled it to Florence and began reaching out to have it returned to the Uffizi museum—for a reward. He was quickly arrested. At his subsequent trial, Peruggia claimed patriotic intent. He asserted that the *Mona Lisa* had been looted from Italy by Napoleon—a reasonable guess, although untrue. However, his patriotism defense swayed the court and public opinion. He was sentenced to only a year in prison, which was later reduced to seven months. The *Mona Lisa* went on display at the Uffizi before returning to the Louvre with great fanfare, where it has remained ever since.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read Noah Charney's articles "Does Technological Analysis Destroy the Romance of Art History?" and "Is It Really a Leonardo?" in *Aeon*: https://aeon.co/ideas/does-technological-analysis-destroy-the-romance-of-art-history and https://aeon.co/essays/why-the-expert-eye-still-rules-the-game-of-art-authenticity.

Lecture 3

The Mob Wing: Organized Crime in Stolen Art

This lecture will introduce you to an entirely new and much more sinister wing of the Museum of Lost Art. Organized crime has its own shadow economy, with closed and largely untraceable black markets forming between criminal groups. In a profession where bank accounts and electronic transfers are too easy to trace, stolen art can be a surprisingly useful asset to trade with. Most art theft involves organized crime at some step along the route, whether you're talking about the thieves themselves, middlemen, fences, smugglers, or those ultimately acquiring the stolen art.

Types of Criminal Collectors

Authorities are used to following money trails, transactions that can link criminals to various organizations. However, in recent decades, there's been a trend where criminals prefer to pay in goods or services rather than cash, which is far more difficult to trace. Stolen art is well suited for this. The tricky part is that, at least in theory, one must be able to find a buyer for the art to have any true value. Undercover police officers pretending to be criminal collectors have reported that criminal dealers will usually ask around 7%–10% of the likely auction price for stolen art.

Organized criminals and gangs may be able to smuggle art further afield than your ordinary thief could. Even so, few criminal collectors have ever been identified, which suggests that either they are extremely good at escaping detection or they don't exist in the numbers they once did—if they ever did at all. However, occasionally, evidence of real criminal collectors does surface. For example, in 2008, a painting known as the Odessa *Taking of Christ*, which was a copy of Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ* that was painted shortly after the original, was stolen from a museum in Odessa, Ukraine. The Odessa version had been identified as a Caravaggio by Soviet art historians in the 1950s but was definitively shown to be a good contemporary copy in 1993. The thieves likely thought that they were stealing an original.

Taking of Christ

The motivations behind the theft have not been established, but Nikolai Ponomarenko, a wealthy Ukrainian art collector, is considered to be central to the case. Not long after the painting was stolen, Ponomarenko was found murdered. In searching his home, the police found valuable paintings of questionable origin. A popular theory is that the original Odessa copy theft plan went sour somehow and the painting was used in another deal afterward, as it was eventually recovered in Germany. This case suggests that there may indeed be semi-criminal private collectors out there, perhaps parading as legitimate collectors who fastidiously cover their tracks.

Occasionally, though, organized criminals themselves are the collectors. Mafias have a long and prominent history in art thefts, including perhaps one of the most notorious and longest-running unsolved thefts: the disappearance of *Nativity* by Caravaggio from the Oratory of Saint Lawrence in Palermo, Sicily in October 1969. The trail almost immediately went cold despite a new unit of the Italian police being established to investigate it and other art crimes. Periodic evidence over the years has everyone generally agreeing that the Sicilian mafia, the Cosa Nostra, was behind the theft and likely still has possession of it.

Ransom

Demanding ransom from a gallery or collector is sometimes the strategy for thieves. In 1994, in Oslo, Norway, a brazen theft took place. Security footage showed a man walking up to the National Gallery carrying a ladder. He leaned the ladder against the façade and climbed up it toward an upstairs window. Then, he climbed down again, with one of the world's most famous paintings under his arm. He had stolen Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, leaving behind a note that read, "Thanks for the poor security."

The Scream by Edvard Munch

The criminals behind the theft demanded $1 million for its safe return. The gallery refused to pay, though. The police set up a sting operation in which a Scotland Yard detective pretended to be a criminal art collector and tricked the thieves into offering him the artwork. The police were lying in wait and arrested four men, one of whom had previously been convicted of stealing a different Munch painting, *Vampire*, in 1988. However, the thieves were released on appeal because the Scotland Yard detective had entered Norway using a false identity.

Vampire by Edvard Munch

Looted Antiquities

The vast majority of art crime involves looting antiquities directly from illicit excavations. These items have never been seen by modern eyes and will never appear on any stolen art database. This means that with a doctored provenance—a fake paper trail making them appear to have been legally excavated and exported—they can be sold openly at full value, often on auction websites or sometimes through high-end galleries. Combined with the power and reach of organized criminals, the antiquities trade can get sinister quickly.

Mohammed Atta, one of the organizers of al-Qaeda's attacks on 9/11, is a case in point. In 1999, he flew to Germany and showed a professor Polaroids of Afghani antiquities, inquiring as to what they might be worth and how he might find a buyer for them. She asked him why he wanted to sell them, and he was straightforward: to buy a plane. It seems that an earlier version of the 9/11 plan was to have al-Qaeda sell looted antiquities to buy airplanes to crash into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

It wasn't until 2015, when ISIS made it clear that it was funding terrorist operations partly through the sale of looted antiquities, that world authorities woke up to the connection between art crime and terrorism. Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Hezbollah have all trafficked in looted antiquities. The case of Atta and the Taliban suggests there are deeply problematic elements within the international antiquities trade. Western collectors and museums may be unknowingly (or, even worse, knowingly) helping to fund fuel conflicts, totalitarian regimes, and international terrorism.

Rewards

One of the most famous unsolved art thefts today involves the 13 works stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston in 1990. In the hours after the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations of March 1990, two men posing as police officers responding to a disturbance call were admitted by the two security guards into the closed museum. Once inside, the disguised thieves subdued and restrained the guards and then set about the museum.

Isabella Steward Gardner Museum

Eighty-one minutes after they first entered, they left with an incredible haul, including Rembrandt's *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* and Édouard Manet's *Chez Tortoni*. Details suggest that the thieves targeted specific works, ignoring some art of greater value that would have been easier to carry away.

A variety of theories have been put forth about who was responsible for the Gardner theft. In recent years, however, consensus has suggested that it was orchestrated by members of the Boston mafia and/or associates of mob boss Carmello Merlino. Subsequent investigations have revealed other links to local organized crime figures.

The Storm on the Sea of Galilee by Rembrandt

At around half a billion dollars, this may be the single highest-value burglary of all time. Johannes Vermeer's *The Concert* makes up nearly half the value of the heist, at $250 million. However, the motivations for the theft remain unclear. The allure of a reward and the glory of solving such a famous case mean that the Gardner theft remains a holy grail for art detectives.

Rewards can be a doubled-edged sword when it comes to art crime. In 2008, a dozen works by the Haida artist Bill Reid were stolen from the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology. Because they were cast from gold, fears arose that the statues would simply be melted down. However, the posting of a reward worth much more than the market value of the melted-down gold seems to have stayed in the hands of the thieves long enough for the police to apprehend them and recover most of the objects taken.

However, rewards can also motivate crime. In 1975, 28 paintings were stolen from Milan's Museum of Modern Art. They were returned by associates of the thieves when a reward was offered. A few months later, the museum was burgled again, this time with 35 works taken, including some of the same paintings. It is probable that the same thieves double-dipped. The works stolen in this second heist have never been recovered.

In the Gardner case, it's hard to see how, at this point, a $10 million reward will shake out the critical lead, when a previous reward of $5 million couldn't—particularly as there is a consensus that the thieves, as well as the people who knew where the art was being stashed, are now dead.

The Difficulty of Solving Art Crime

Interpol has ranked art crime as the fourth-highest-grossing criminal trade, behind only drugs, arms, and human trafficking. Yet according to an article published in the *Journal of Art Crime*, as little as 1.5% of art reported as stolen is recovered and the perpetrators prosecuted.

A major problem is that much art crime is never reported to begin with. As mentioned, the vast majority of art crime involves trade in illicitly looted antiquities removed from unexcavated archaeological sites. Even if there is something to report, recordkeeping on art theft is often quite poor and incomplete, and often national and international authorities lack the information they need.

Perhaps the largest factor is simply priorities. Most countries have no art police at all, meaning there are relatively few specialist experts in art theft who can tackle these cases. Despite its obvious links to organized crime and even terrorism, art crime suffers from its public reputation as the domain of the elite. What other multimillion-dollar market relies so heavily on the unscientific assurance of connoisseurs to determine authenticity and value, with fortunes in the balance, and so rarely leaves a paper trail of transactions?

Effectively fighting art theft requires detectives with connections and insight into the art world, but such expertise is expensive and resources are hard to secure. The little attention there is on art crime also tends to be lopsided. For example, the Gardner art heist investigation has, by now, had millions plowed into it from public and private sources, thanks to its ongoing press interest and documentaries about it, whereas countless other thefts have not even had case files opened on them.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read *The Napoleon of Crime* by Ben Macintyre about Adam Worth and Gainsborough's *Duchess of Devonshire*.
- Read *The Duke of Wellington, Kidnapped!* by Alan Hirsch (with an introduction by Noah Charney).
- Watch Noah Charney's TED-Ed video on the *Mona Lisa* theft: https://www.ted.com/talks/noah_charney_why_is_the_mona_lisa_so_famous.
- Read *The Thefts of the Mona Lisa* by Noah Charney.
- Watch the documentary film *The Picasso of Thieves*, in which Noah Charney appears.

Lecture 4

Gallery of Fakes: Forgeries and Attribution

In 2016, a long-lost drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, was discovered in Paris. The French government quickly declared the drawing a "national treasure" and "a precious testimony to the genius of da Vinci." However, when you uncover a sketch like this one, how can you be sure, nearly 500 years after da Vinci's death, that it's the real deal? In this lecture, as you continue your tour of the Museum of Lost Art, you will duck your head into the research department, where experts try to separate fact from fiction.

Connoisseurship and the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*

The *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* was first discovered when it was brought in to Paris's Tajan auction house in 2016 and examined by Patrick de Bayser, a local art expert. When he came across the drawing in question, he was shocked. Though the mounting on the drawing indicated that it was a Michelangelo, de Bayser's first thought was that it was in fact a da Vinci. In his words, "The technique was one I knew, the pen and ink from the first period of Leonardo. I remarked that it was a left-handed work, which I could tell from way the shadows were made."

The flip side of the drawing contains some sketches, including optical studies, as well as handwriting that looks extremely similar to da Vinci's. Critically, that handwriting is also left-handed, a vital clue, as da Vinci was left-handed. This served to confirm what de Bayser had immediately felt in his gut when he first looked upon it. This instinctive expertise is called connoisseurship, which is often just as much about whether an artwork "feels" authentic. In the absence of definitive proof, whether a work is the genuine article often comes down to the opinion of the most respected connoisseurs.

Da Vinci's sketches of *Sforza Horse*

The stakes are high here because da Vinci drawings are hard to authenticate and easily confused with those of others. Artists often make preparatory sketches for their paintings and other works, but just as often they draw or copy paintings as a learning exercise. There are also paintings created not by an artist but by an artist's studio, which consists of those in his employ—assistants and apprentices. A particularly talented student can get to a point where they can closely emulate their teacher's style. You can even find apprentices who outdid their masters.

Naturally, when Patrick de Bayser suspected that a lost Leonardo drawing might have come his way, he contacted a world-famous da Vinci expert: Carmen C. Bambach, curator of Italian and Spanish drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. There are three aspects that experts consider when determining a work's authenticity: connoisseurship, provenance, and forensics. Connoisseurship is an intimate knowledge of artistic style, but it is extremely opinion driven. Provenance is the documented history of an artwork. Unhelpfully, provenance is rarely complete, especially when it comes to art or antiquities that may be hundreds of years old. Today, people tend to think of forensic testing as the most definitive determinator; however, even such testing can't rule out forgery completely.

Despite being the least exact of the tools, connoisseurship is the most critical: A painting is a da Vinci only when there is expert consensus that it's one. In cases where that consensus is lacking, provenance and forensics are usually sufficiently open to interpretation to keep the debate alive and prevent conclusive attribution. In the case of the *Saint Sebastian* drawing, the road to authentication proved less rocky because most connoisseurs, such as Bambach, were quickly convinced.

Forensic Testing

Forensic testing is rare in the art trade, even with multimillion-dollar works. If experts think an artwork looks correct and if the provenance looks reasonable, that is usually enough to consider it genuine and sell it. Forensic testing takes place when something smells fishy in the provenance or connoisseurship, or if a new owner suddenly becomes suspicious that his acquisition isn't what he thought it was.

Forensic tests are most useful for flagging anachronisms. Carbon dating can identify the rough age of organic material, such as paper, wood, or organically derived pigments. There are also chemical tests to identify materials, which can be compared with materials known to have been used by the artist in question.

However, such testing is usually only capable of placing artworks in a broad period of time or region. Rarely can it prove by itself that object X is by artist Y. Thus, connoisseurship is nearly always needed to fill the gaps between provenance and forensics. This reliance on connoisseurship comes with significant risks because the group of relevant experts is small and the confident opinion of one can heavily influence the others.

Han van Meegeren


Han van Meegeren

During World War II, a Dutch painter named Han van Meegeren began forging works that were meant to be by Johannes Vermeer. They didn't look anything like Vermeer's work, but Meegeren was clever. The world's leading Vermeer specialist, Abraham Bredius, had published articles postulating that Vermeer had an early period working in a different style and subject matter, but no work from this period had ever been found. Thus, van Meegeren created works that appeared to fulfill Bredius's theory. Naturally, Bredius got excited and authenticated the forged Vermeers. His reputation was such that other scholars decided to agree with him. Van Meegeren was able to peddle his "Vermeers" and even sold one to Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe and Hitler's second in command. However, according to Dutch law, selling cultural heritage to the enemy was a crime punishable by execution.

Now, van Meegeren had to prove that the "Vermeer" he sold to Göring was a forgery. No one believed him because Bredius, the great expert, said it was a Vermeer. To save his life, van Meegeren had to paint another "Vermeer" while in prison. Only then was he acquitted—and Bredius made a laughingstock.

One of van Meegren's fake Vermeers

Ironically, van Meegeren's paintings can now exceed the value of what they would have been if authentic. In 2011, a version of the painting known as *The Procuress* by Dirck van Baburen at the Courtauld Institute was determined through forensic analysis to be a van Meegeren forgery that had slipped through the cracks. Van Baburen was a contemporary of Vermeer, and this work was probably only meant to be a prop for his Vermeer forgeries, as it appears in the background of another of Vermeer's paintings of a lady sitting at a virginal. As a work of the now legendary van Meegeren, the painting is estimated to be worth more at auction than if it were, in fact, the van Baburen it purported to be.

The Power of Subjectivity

It's incredible to think how complex and fraught the process of authenticating art is and yet how often it still comes down to subjective conclusions of specialists. Opinions can shift the value from millions to thousands and back again—particularly since there is little recourse to challenge the calls of the connoisseur. In 2011, the British television show *Fake or Fortune?*, in which investigators attempt to solve disputed art attributions, gathered extensive evidence that a painting known as *Bords de la Seine à Argenteuil* was a lost work by Claude Monet. New documentation of its chain of sales and provenance as well as extensive forensic analysis convinced several experts that the painting was genuine. However, for many galleries and auction houses, the primary authority for determining the authenticity of a Monet is the catalog raisonné of his work, published by the Wildenstein Institute in Paris.

Its founder, Daniel Wildenstein, was considered one of the most influential collectors and connoisseurs of French art—so much so that his conclusions are still considered definitive even decades after his death.

Despite the significant new evidence and expert testimony collected, the Wildenstein Institute has refused to overrule the judgment of its former director, who had looked at the work only once before his death and determined that it simply didn't feel like a true Monet. Without the institute's blessing or its inclusion in Monet's official catalog, no reputable auction house or gallery will be willing to list it as authentic. Yet, the Wildenstein Institute is not a public institution. Its discussions and proceedings are not matters of public record, and its decisions are not subject to higher review. With authentication decisions potentially worth hundreds of millions of dollars, it feels like the twilight zone sometimes—especially when you consider that experts themselves are often unsure about how to judge a work's authenticity.

For example, a painting called *Judith and Holofernes* was found in someone's attic in Toulouse, France. It looked like a Caravaggio of the same subject that is on display at Palazzo Barberini in Rome. An archival record confirms that Caravaggio made a copy of his own *Judith and Holofernes* and that the copy was lost. This might indeed be it. That's an example of the provenance checking out. The historical record does not contradict that this could be a Caravaggio. Still, experts remain divided. Is it a Caravaggio and therefore worth north of $100 million? Or is it by a follower of Caravaggio, such as Louis Finson, and perhaps worth $1 million? That's a significant difference hinging on arguing professors.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read *The Rescue Artist* by Edward Dolnick.
- Listen to Noah Charney's BBC series *China's Stolen Treasures*: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00159z4.

Lecture 5

The War Wing: Art Plundered through Conflict

Art has long been a prominent casualty of war. As you will see in this lecture, the war and violence wing of the Museum of Lost Art is a chilling reminder that conflicts deprive people of not only their homes, countries, or lives but also their history, identity, and culture. Yet, art can also be a rallying cry—a symbol of hope. You can destroy a work of art, but you cannot destroy the hearts of the artist and those who love their creations.

The Targeting of Art

War and art have a long and troubled relationship. In 212 BC, the Roman Republican army captured the Greek city of Siracusa, in Sicily, after a lengthy siege. Roman soldiers furiously rampaged through the defeated city, carrying off a treasure trove of art, from sculptures to vases, back to Italy. The sack sparked a Roman enthusiasm for collecting Hellenistic antiquities and resulted in the proactive shift in military strategy to acquire more art through looting. The mere fact that the Romans plundered art established a sort of precedent for later empires. Indeed, in nearly every subsequent war and conflict, art has found itself a prominent victim of the fighting.

Some looted works become so prominently associated with their captors that their gruesome provenance is almost forgotten. For example, standing on Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice is one of the most famous symbols of the city, known today as the *Horses of Saint Mark*. Yet for centuries, these horses stood guarding a different building, the Hippodrome of Constantinople in what is today Istanbul, as treasures of the Byzantine Empire. They were removed from the city in 1204 by the Venetians during the Fourth Crusade in perhaps one of the most egregious episodes of artistic looting in history.

Codex Gigas

Religion was at the center of the sack of Prague by Swedish troops in 1648. During the peace negotiations to end this devastating conflict, the Swedes saw their chance to loot the phenomenally rich artistic and scientific collections collected by the Habsburg emperor Rudolf II in Prague Castle. The majority of these treasures, including priceless manuscripts such as the Codex Gigas and Codex Argenteus, were taken back to Sweden, where they were absorbed into the collection of Queen Christina. Christina would ultimately abdicate the throne and go into exile in Rome, but she took with her some of the best of the royal collection and at least 50 paintings that had been stolen from Prague.

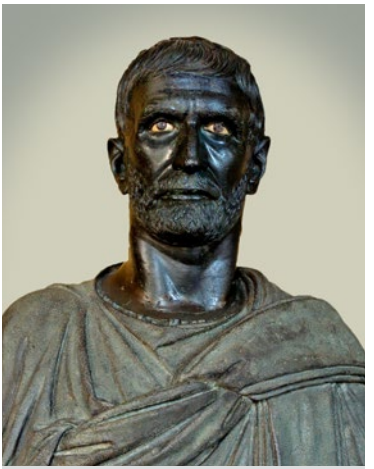
This would be important to the history of legal art collecting since the best works from her catalog were passed to the Duke of Orleans after her death. The duke added many more priceless works to what would become the legendary Orleans Collection, which was sold off during the French Revolution to cover the gambling debts of his descendant Louis Philippe d'Orleans. Dozens of paintings that had been pillaged from Prague more than a century earlier found their way into national collections worldwide.

Napoleon's Looting

During the Napoleonic era, art looting was taken to new heights, funding the war effort and raising morale back at home. Napoleon established the first official division of an army dedicated to seizing and transporting captured artworks. Specially trained officials would follow behind the army to confiscate, pack, and ship art back to Paris. There, they would be received by the newly converted Louvre Museum. Some works were irreparably damaged and transformed by the process.

Napoleon

Napoleon expunged the most loot from the Papal States through the Treaty of Tolentino in June 1796. The papacy had to pay Napoleon 21 million livres, and Article 8 of the treaty stated that the pope was to give Napoleon "a hundred pictures, busts, vases, or statues to be selected by the commissioners and sent to Rome, including in particular the bronze bust of Junius Brutus and the marble bust of Marcus Brutus, both on the Capitol, [and] also five hundred manuscripts at the choice of the said commissions." Eighty-three sculptures were also taken, including the *Apollo Belvedere*; among the paintings taken was Raphael's *Transfiguration*.



Junius Brutus

"Degenerate" Art

Where Napoleon was concerned with scooping up as much of the world's art as he could for France, the Nazis took a much more sinister view. The National Socialists sought a "purification" of art. The Nazis approved only of naturalistic art by Scandinavian or Teutonic artists, or art that illustrated Germanic subject matter and nationalistic themes. Abstract art or art promoting alternative worldviews, even if produced by Germans, was considered "degenerate," as was art by Jews, communists, or other non-Aryan artists.

Apollo Belvedere

In 1937, Hitler commissioned Adolf Ziegler to take examples of "degenerate" art found within Germany. What resulted was the traveling Exhibition of Depraved Art. Its 730 works were shown in the least flattering way possible and framed as morally abhorrent. The show, having determined what was unacceptable in terms of art, was quickly followed by Ziegler's theft of such art from German citizens. However, the Nazis soon proved they were willing to profit from this so-called degeneracy by selling seized works to foreign collectors. The largest sale was at the Galerie Fischer in Lucerne, Switzerland in 1939. Any works that had not sold at the end were burned in Berlin: 3,825 works on paper and 1,004 oil paintings and sculptures.

Before the war began, Hitler concocted a scheme to acquire every important artwork in Europe to be displayed in a *kulturhaupstadt*, a cultural capital featuring a "super museum" that he would build in his native town of Linz, Austria. An estimated 13 miles of galleries were included in the plan. The centerpiece of this mammoth collection was to be the *Ghent Altarpiece*. To fill this collection, Hitler established special task forces charged with seizing art from Jewish collections.

Artwork stolen and stored in a salt mine

At the war's end, dozens of secret caches of stolen art were discovered, including the motherlode at Altaussee, Austria. This was a salt mine that had been converted into a high-tech storage depot, holding the thousands of masterpieces destined for Linz. In that mine alone, Allied soldiers, led by the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives officers, found 6,577 oil paintings, 2,030 works on paper, 954 prints, 137 statues, 128 pieces of arms and armor, 79 containers full of decorative arts, 78 pieces of furniture, 122 tapestries, and 1,500 cases of rare books.

The Amber Room

Of all of the artistic casualties of World War II, few have attracted the enduring attention of the Amber Room. Amber, since antiquity, has been highly regarded as a material of exceptional beauty. In the early 1700s, Sophia Charlotte, second wife of Frederick I of Prussia, encouraged her husband to order a room for their palace paneled exclusively in thinly sliced amber veneer. However, it was never completed, and their son, Frederick William I, lost interest in the project and gave it to Peter the Great of Russia in 1716 as a diplomatic gift.

The Amber Room

Eighteen purpose-built crates were built to transport the enormous amber panels to St. Petersburg. In 1743, Empress Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, finally ordered the panels installed at her new winter palace. On six different occasions over the course of the next 12 years, she would have the Amber Room disassembled, enlarged, and installed in a new location within the palace. In 1755, she had it relocated to the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo, south of St. Petersburg.

Catherine the Great undertook another renovation of the Amber Room, which by this point was an imperial status symbol. She purchased some 900 pounds of additional amber at high expense and summoned craftsmen from Italy to work it. When the Second World War began, the room was so famous that it could not avoid being a target for the oncoming Nazis. When the Nazis swept into Tsarskoye Selo in September 1941, the palace staff had created a false room inside the Amber Room, hoping to hide it. The ruse failed, however, and the Nazis quickly packed the panels into 27 crates and shipped them to Königsberg Castle in Prussia. There, only a part of the room was assembled and displayed. Königsberg was heavily bombed by the Allies in August 1944, and the Red Army besieged the city for three months in early 1945. When the city surrendered in April, fire, artillery shelling, and bombing had reduced the castle to ruins.

A Small Ray of Hope

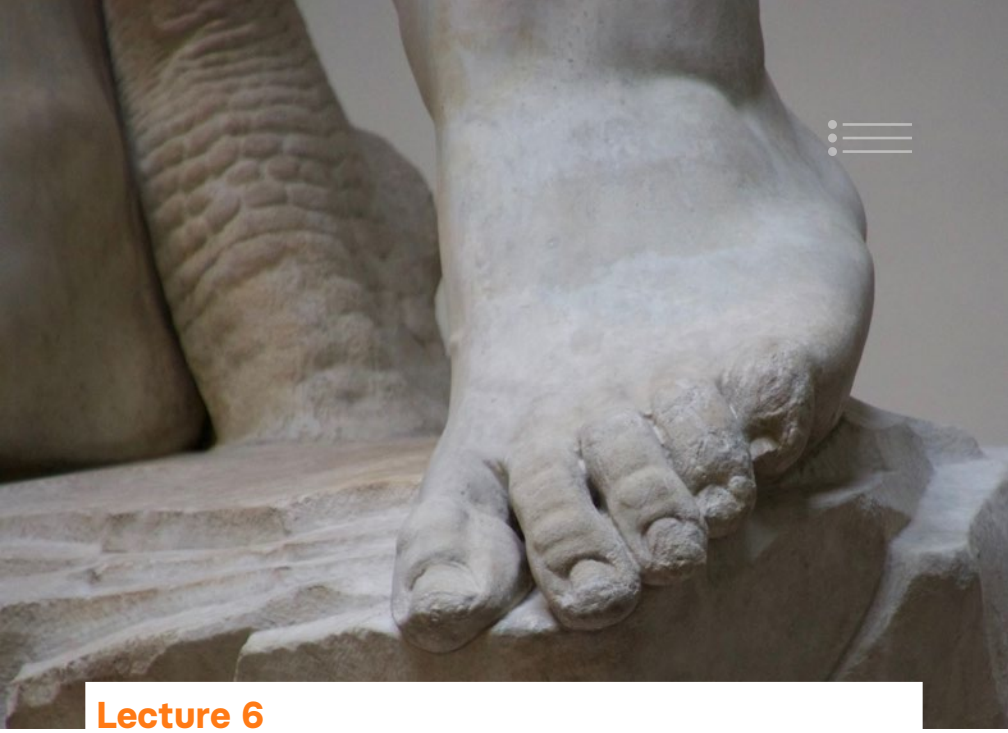
Sadly, even if not looted or destroyed, art often becomes a casualty amid the chaos created by war. During the anarchy of the early months of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, an estimated 15,000 objects disappeared in a matter of days from the Baghdad Museum of Art. It was first thought that this had been a crime of opportunity on a massive scale. However, there was also

much more organized looting, as some groups had taken some larger works and broken or sawed them into smaller, more portable parts for movement in actions that showed advanced planning and required insider knowledge.

However, simultaneously, extraordinary efforts are often made by ordinary people to preserve their cultural heritage during times of conflict, risking their safety and even their lives to save their common past. During the Malian civil war, fundamentalist Islamic forces captured the ancient African oasis of Timbuktu and soon set about destroying its ancient landmarks in the name of religious cleansing. Amid the occupation, hundreds of locals and families risked arrest or worse to smuggle Timbuktu's collection of ancient manuscripts to safe houses or out of the city. These extraordinary efforts saved thousands of works of immeasurable value to world heritage.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read *The Monuments Men* by Robert Edsel and Bret Witter.
- Read *The Rape of Europa* by Lynn Nicholas.
- Read *The Fate of the Masterpiece* by Noah Charney.
- Read Noah's article "A Few Good Monuments Men" in *Salon*: https://www.salon.com/2016/12/11/a-few-good-monuments-men-saving-art-from-looting-and-destruction-especially-in-the-middle-east-is-a-military-matter/.
- Watch Noah Charney in The National Geographic Channel's documentary *Hunting Hitler's Stolen Treasures: The Monuments Men* about the Altaussee art hoard.
- Watch Discovery's *Forbidden History* episode "Hitler's Treasure and the Monuments Men" about the Altaussee art hoard.



Lecture 6

The Hall of Vandals: Wreckers and Iconoclasts

The most contentious galleries of the Museum of Lost Art are those lined with paintings and artworks that were deliberately ruined or destroyed. As you will see in this lecture, art is often caught in the crossfire of religious, social, and political conflict. Wanton violence against art can be broadly categorized in two ways: iconoclasm or vandalism. Iconoclasm is the targeting of objects for destruction based on what they symbolically represent. Vandalism refers to defacing, mutilating, or destroying objects or buildings without a particular ideological agenda. The line between iconoclasm and vandalism can be contentious because there are mixed feelings about the legitimacy of art as targets for ideological agendas.

Religious Iconoclasm

Acts of iconoclasm are often justified because the perpetrators do not believe what they are destroying can be classified as art or that their creators are true artists. The term *iconoclasm* comes from the Greek words *eikon*, meaning "image," and *klan*, meaning "break." It arose during a period of religiously motivated art destruction in the Byzantine Empire in the 8th and 9th centuries AD. The preceding centuries had seen a rapid growth in religious art—images of Christ, Mary, saints, and angels, some of which were thought to be miraculously inspired and venerated in their own right. This provoked growing concern from conservative church authorities, who believed such art to be "graven images" and thus prohibited by the Ten Commandments.

A ban on religious images was first instituted under Emperor Leo III around AD 726 and continued until 787. During this period, existing images in churches were painted over or destroyed. There was a lull between AD 787 and 813 and then another wave between AD 814 and 842. It was a tumultuous and often violent time. It is unknown how much early Christian art was destroyed in the process. It ended with Empress Theodora, the wife of Theophilos, who was an iconophile. She served as regent for her son Michael III during the first 13 years of his rule. She had the iconoclastic patriarch of Constantinople deposed in AD 843 and replaced with one sympathetic to the veneration of icons. From then on, images of the members of the Holy Family and saints remained a vital part of Byzantine, and subsequently Orthodox Christian, religion.

Empress Theodora

Holy family and saints images during the Byzantine period

Since then, waves of religious iconoclasm have periodically swept across countries and continents. For example, tragic incidents were wrought by 15th-century Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola. A charismatic public speaker, he rose in prominence during the Florentine High Renaissance and persuasively preached against corruption in the Catholic Church, exploitation of the poor, and what he saw as the immorality of secular art and culture. He announced prophecies and then interpreted their fulfillment. This was a time of intense dissatisfaction with the ruling Medici family, who were forcibly expelled from Florence that year. Savonarola won legions of followers in the city and was installed as leader of the Florentine Republic, which he proclaimed a "New Jerusalem."

Part of Savonarola's mission was to destroy any art that did not conform to puritanical religious standards. He encouraged gangs to roam Florence, even breaking into private homes to drag out any artworks with subject matter not considered sufficiently religious, along with objects associated with personal vanity and frivolity, such as mirrors and books. Great piles of these "vanities" were burned in enormous bonfires.

Pope Alexander VI was not amused at the Florentine rebellion, particularly when Savonarola refused to join his new Holy League against the French threat. Savonarola was summoned to Rome but declined the invitation. In 1497, Alexander excommunicated the monk. The next year, a rival Florentine preacher demanded Savonarola undergo a trial by fire to prove that he was chosen by God: If he could walk unharmed through a bonfire, it would show that he truly was what he claimed. Savonarola didn't like this plan. However, when he demurred, public opinion quickly shifted against him. He was arrested and forced to confess to having invented his prophecies. On May 23, 1498, he was hanged, and his body was burned in Piazza della Signoria, on the exact same spot where so much art of the Florentine Renaissance had been put to the torch.

Hanging of Savonarola

A much more extreme strain of Islamic iconoclasm has become prominent among certain sects in recent decades, ruthlessly applied even to pre-Islamic and ancient art. For instance, ISIS destroyed the ancient city of Nimrūd in Iraq in 2015. Nimrūd thrived at the crook of the Tigris and Great Zab Rivers, in the heart of Mesopotamia, for six centuries after its construction around 1250 BC. By the end of the 7th century BC, the Assyrian empire was in steep decline, beset by waves of invaders, and Nimrūd was abandoned. Among its most notable remnants were the *lamassu*, colossal statues of mythical creatures with the head of a bearded man, wings, and the torso and legs of a lion. It was one of these statues that ISIS videoed themselves destroying when they set about systematically destroying Nimrūd's remains. In January 2017, after ISIS was driven out of Nimrūd, the site was completely in ruins.

Political Iconoclasm

Political iconoclasm can strike in waves as suddenly and violently as religious iconoclasm. Symbols and statues of political regimes are popular targets. Yet often, in periods of intense religious or political iconoclasm, the motivations of those destroying art can often verge into something more akin to vandalism. Mobs that assemble with outwardly religious or political motivations inevitably attract individuals who are angry or disaffected and often seek vengeance or profit as much as anything else.

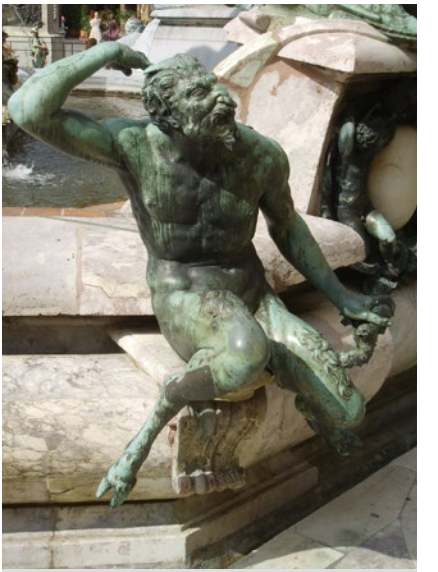
Acts of singular iconoclasm are sometimes the most infuriating to understand and the hardest to predict and, thus, protect against. The most prominent cases do tend to have a political streak behind them. For example, in 1914, during the height of the struggle for women's suffrage in the United Kingdom, activist Mary Richardson walked into London's National Gallery and attacked *The Rokeby Venus* by Diego Velázquez with a cleaver, slashing the painting seven times. She explained the act as one of political protest against traditional depictions of women as objects for the male gaze.

Vandalism

There are also acts whose ideological foundations are more questionable. Canadian artist Jubal Brown made headlines in 1996 when he deliberately projectile vomited onto two paintings, most famously Piet Mondrian's *Composition with Red and Blue*, after consuming large amounts of blue gelatin.

His official explanation was that the paintings he targeted were oppressively boring and needed color. In reality, this was merely a stunt designed to bring him greater public attention and commercial exposure.

Then there are acts of vandalism that arise from random outbursts of mental instability. In 1972, a Hungarian-Austrian geologist named Lazlo Toth famously entered the Vatican Chapel of Santa Petronilla wielding a geologist's hammer and attacked Michelangelo's *Pietà*, crying out, "I am Jesus Christ; I have risen from the dead!" He managed to knock off part of Mary's nose, elbow, and eyelids before stunned onlookers mustered the strength to pull him down off the statue and subdue him.



A satyr from the Fountain of Neptune

Particularly famous works of art, such as the *Pietà*, must be protected not only from art thieves wanting to steal them but also from vandals and protestors seeking attention. Art in public spaces naturally attracts the most vandalism and, though rarely destroyed, often requires repeated restoration and repair. Though people tend to think of the random vandalism of public monuments as a fairly new phenomenon, it, too, is as old as the hills. A prime example is the Fountain of Neptune, sculpted in 1565 by Bartolommeo Ammannati, which stands prominently in Florence's main square, Piazza della Signoria. The fountain has been damaged on numerous occasions ever since its completion. It was extensively vandalized and several parts of it were stolen as early as January 25, 1580, and it has been repeatedly defiled since then. For example, during Carnival in February 1830, thieves stole a bronze satyr from the fountain, which was later replaced with a version sculpted by Giovanni Pazzi.

Most acts of art vandalism are isolated, but some target art with great determination. For instance, in 1991, the Italian vandal Piero Cannata smuggled a hammer into the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence and used it to smash a toe off Michelangelo's *David* before he was tackled by museum visitors. He was judged mentally ill after a trial and hospitalized, but he continued to attack artworks after his release. In 1993, he was arrested after he defaced a 15th-century fresco by Filippo Lippi at Prato Cathedral. Despite being repeatedly committed to psychiatric hospitals, he continued to periodically attack art. In his last public act in 2005, he spray-painted a black X on the bronze plaque at the center of Piazza della Signoria in Florence, which marks the spot where Girolamo Savonarola was burned.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read Noah Charney's articles "Art Attack" and "The Renaissance Origin of Porn" in *Salon*: https://www.salon.com/2017/03/26/art-attack-why-do-people-try-to-destroy-museum-masterpieces/ and https://www.salon.com/2017/02/12/the-renaissance-origin-of-porn-inside-i-modi-the-16th-century-sex-manual-masterpiece/.
- Read the opening chapter of Noah Charney's *Museum of Lost Art* about Dürer versus Raimondi.
- Read Lisa Pon's book *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi*.

Lecture 7

Gallery of Misfortune: Art Lost by Accident

This lecture concerns the galleries of the Museum of Lost Art where works lost to accidents can be found. Artworks are fragile things that can be shattered in the blink of an eye. The unpredictable heartbreaks of life that cause so much human suffering can just as easily destroy art as well. For many of the works in this part of the museum, there's little rhyme or reason to their presence. Random accidents are part of the life of art just as much as the life of humans.

Fire and *The Handmaidens*


Diego Velázquez

Fire has long been one of the deadliest threats to both human life and works of art. It is not certain exactly how many artworks burned in the conflagration of the Royal Alcázar in 1734, but overall more than 500 paintings were lost in the blaze. One work that did survive has gone on to be considered among the most important in the story of art: Velázquez's 1656 self-conscious masterpiece *Las Meninas*, or *The Handmaidens*.

The setting is the Alcázar Palace, specifically Velázquez's studio. The Infanta Margarita, the only surviving child of Philip IV and Mariana of Austria, who appear together in the background of the composition, deserves special recognition. Isabel de Velasco and Maria Augustina Sarmiento de Sotomayor, the Infanta's two maids of honor, stand on either side of her. There are two dwarves present: the thin Italian Nicolasito Pertusato and the stocky German Maria Barbola. Velázquez makes an appearance holding a paintbrush and a palette. Representing an artist while also portraying other, far more significant people was revolutionary at the time. The king and queen are depicted in a mirror at the back of the space.

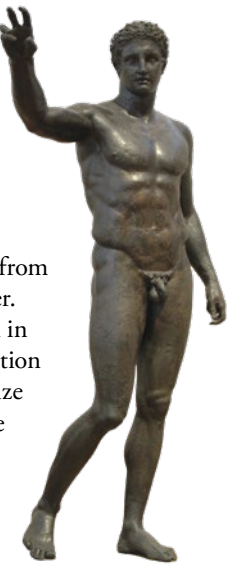
The front of the painting is a mirror that reflects the scene depicted inside it back into Velázquez's eyes as the viewers stare at it. You can see through it, like a pane of one-way glass, but Velázquez and those who are inside the painting can only see their own reflections. On the opposite side of the one-way glass, however, they make eye contact with the viewers by gazing at their reflections. They break the fourth wall by letting you know that they are aware of the fact that they are objects within a piece of art and that you are looking in at them. The philosopher Michel Foucault said that it was the first postmodernist piece of art because it was self-aware of its status as a work of art and a painting about the act of painting.

Fires in which known, cataloged works were wiped out are relatively few. Many of history's greatest fires have been so destructive and widespread that the full extent of the losses is unfathomable. The Great Fire of Rome, for instance,

which decimated the center of the city under the emperor Nero in AD 64, took countless works of art with it. However, because the works are not enumerated, their loss feels more generically tragic than if you knew of individual pieces you might wish had survived. There are also older works whose loss has been attributed to fire but for which the evidence is unclear. As fires often befall places or items that have become dilapidated or abandoned, they may not be the only cause of loss.

One well-known conflagration was the great fires at Whitehall Palace in London at the end of the 17th century. The primary London residence of English kings from 1530 until 1698, Whitehall Palace had more than 1,500 rooms. It was a showcase for the collected artistic talent and architectural ingenuity of the English realm. On April 10, 1694, a fire swallowed an apartment recently occupied by Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth and mistress of Charles II. The blaze damaged some of the older palace buildings but did not reach the state apartments. This was followed on January 4, 1698, by a much worse fire that gutted most of Whitehall, residential and governmental. Lost were Michelangelo's *Sleeping Eros*, Hans Holbein's *Portrait of Henry VIII*, and Bernini's *Portrait Bust of King Charles I*.

A more recent instance of art being destroyed by fire took place on May 24, 2004, in Leyton, London, at the Momart storage warehouse, which was being used by many galleries and artists to store artwork and historical documents. Nearly all of the warehouse's contents, which had a market value of about 50 million pounds sterling, were destroyed. These included works by William Redgrave, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Gavin Turk, Damien Hirst, and Tracey Emin.



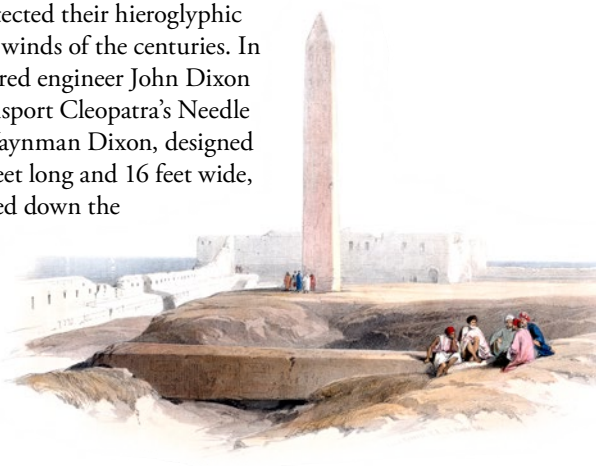
Nearly Lost at Sea

Water can both destroy and preserve art. Numerous sculptures from the ancient world have been saved and preserved thanks to water. Bronze sculptures in particular that are lost at sea or submerged in shipwrecks usually survive and are frequently in excellent condition when recovered. In fact, the majority of large-scale ancient bronze sculptures still in existence today were fortunate enough to have been shipwrecked, including the *Croatian Apoxyomenos*, which was discovered in 1996 close to Lošinj in the northern Adriatic.

Works of stone are also largely unharmed by centuries or even millennia submerged on the seafloor. A fixture of London's riverfront embankment, Cleopatra's Needle is a monumental work of stone that survives despite a shipwreck. A towering obelisk carved with hieroglyphics, this and a companion obelisk that stands in New York City's Central Park were both carved during the reign of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut. Carved out of red granite, Cleopatra's Needle weighs in at 224 tons and towers some 70 feet into the sky. It was first cut around 1450 BC. Cleopatra VII built a new temple in Alexandria called the Caesareum, dedicated to the cult of Rome. Inscriptions on the bronze crabs that once supported the two obelisks record that they were moved from Heliopolis to Alexandria around 13 BC.

Cleopatra's Needle in New York

Some 1,300 years later, the obelisks fell and were partially buried in the sands, which protected their hieroglyphic inscriptions from the battering winds of the centuries. In 1877, a wealthy benefactor offered engineer John Dixon £10,000 to devise a way to transport Cleopatra's Needle to London. Dixon's brother, Waynman Dixon, designed a watertight iron cylinder, 92 feet long and 16 feet wide, into which the obelisk was rolled down the beach. The cylinder was fitted out with twin keels, a rudder, a mast, and a deckhouse and was surrounded by a floating pontoon. The plan was to have it towed to London by the steamship *Olga*.



Obelisk being transported to London in a sea storm

The transport ended in disaster. On October 14, 1877, a storm raged over the Bay of Biscay, and the cylinder began to roll. A dinghy sent out from the *Olga* to secure it was lost with all six crew members. The decision was taken to abandon the obelisk. After the storm passed, the *Olga*'s captain searched in vain for the cylinder pontoon, but it appeared to have been lost, sunk to the bottom of the sea. However, Waynman Dixon's design kept the obelisk afloat, and it was rescued and towed to the port of Ferrol by the steamer *Fitzmaurice*, out of Glasgow. On January 21, 1878, the cylinder arrived in England. It was erected in London, at Victoria Embankment, on September 12, 1878.

In contrast to works nearly lost but salvaged, innumerable works are still missing. The *Vrouw Maria*, a wooden Dutch merchant ship, sank off the coast of Finland on October 9, 1771. She was loaded with cargo that included cloth, coffee, sugar, dye, and foodstuffs. There were also the paintings *Large Herd of Oxen* by Paulus Potter and *Woman at Her Toilette* by Gerard Ter Borch. The ship had set out from Amsterdam on September 5, 1771, intending to sail to St. Petersburg, but a storm blew her onto rocks off the island of Jurmo, Finland. Waves eventually pushed the ship into deeper seas. It began to sink despite the crew's efforts to pump out the water.

For more than 200 years, the *Vrouw Maria* lay on the seafloor, until it was rediscovered in 1999. The low salinity of the Baltic waters helped to preserve the ship and the cargo. Divers brought six items from the deck to the surface, but the contents of the ship's cargo hold remain immersed. The holds still appear to be secure, and there is a chance that the paintings, though damaged, still physically exist and have not disintegrated. If they had been rolled and stored in watertight lead boxes, as some valuables at the time were, they might even be restorable.

Human Negligence

Human recklessness and negligence also remain one of the greatest threats to art. For instance, on February 7, 1845, William Mulcahy, an impoverished student tottering from a week of heavy drinking, found himself in the British Museum. When an attendant was out of the room, he threw a lump of loose basalt from an exhibit at a glass case containing the *Portland Vase*, smashing both case and vase completely. The *Portland Vase*, a rare work of Roman cameo glass, had managed to survive the fall of the Roman Empire and countless other disasters, only to be shattered at the hands of a drunkard. Fortunately, the vase was painstakingly reassembled and repaired, although the damage is still visible today.

The *Portland Vase*

Children, of course, are another source of accidental damage. Kids in school groups touching, bumping, elbowing, and even knocking over art happens all the time. In 2015, a 12-year-old boy tripped and fell while visiting the Huashan Creative Park in Taiwan, puncturing Paolo Porpora's *Flowers*. Though the canvas was ripped, restorationists quickly put the painting right again.

Negligent acts of artistic destruction can often come despite the sincere efforts of their perpetrators to do good. There's probably an interesting corridor in the Museum of Lost Art paved with good intentions. Amateur restorations have produced some of the most poignant of art losses. No incident is more famous in recent years than the attempt in 2012 by Cecilia Giménez, an octogenarian parishioner of the Sanctuary of Mercy church in Borja, Spain, to restore a fresco by the Spanish painter Elías García Martínez depicting Jesus crowned with thorns, known as *Ecce Homo* (*Behold the Man*). Lacking the skill or experience to complete the job, the resulting restoration by Giménez obscured most of Christ's features. It resulted in a vaguely simian-looking nightmare that was dubbed by some as *Ecce Mono*, or "behold the monkey."

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read Michel Foucault's book *The Order of Things*.
- Read the chapter about *Las Meninas* in *The 12-Hour Art Expert* by Noah Charney.

Lecture 8

Disaster Wing: Art against the Forces of Nature

On August 24, AD 79, the volcano called Mount Vesuvius began a two-day eruption. A geyser shot 20 miles into the sky, spewing out lava and ash at a rate of around 1.5 million tons per second. In addition to people and animals, the eruption smothered whole towns' worth of art beneath layers of ash and pumice. As you will learn in this lecture, even the most cataclysmic of natural disasters can be a double-edged sword. The wonders of ancient Pompeii would never have been preserved as well as they are had they not been encased in ash and lava and buried for so long. Some works lost to natural disaster may again be found, all or in part. Welcome to the Museum of Lost Art's wing of forces of nature.

Earthquakes and Ancient Wonders

Many great wonders have been lost to seismic activity, including three of the seven great wonders of the ancient world. Perhaps the most iconic of the three was the Colossus of Rhodes. Portraying the sun god Helios, the bronze statue stood at the entrance to the Mandraki Harbor on the island of Rhodes. It was made to commemorate the victorious resistance of the people of Rhodes against a siege by Antigonus I, ruler of Macedon, in 305 BC. Begun in 292 BC and completed 12 years later, the statue was designed by Chares of Lindos.

The monumental statue stood on a 50-foot-high marble plinth for 54 years before a violent earthquake struck Rhodes in 226 BC. The colossus broke at the knees, toppling over and crashing backward to the ground. The Greek historian and geographer Strabo wrote that in his day, the broken body of the statue and the stone feet and plinth still lay exactly where they had fallen. In its broken state, the colossus was a destination site for curious travelers. It was only in AD 653 that an Arab army under Muawiyah I captured the island of Rhodes and, according to Theophanes the Confessor, melted down the bronze in the statue. A Jewish merchant from Edessa is said to have bought the metal, requiring 900 camels to carry it off.

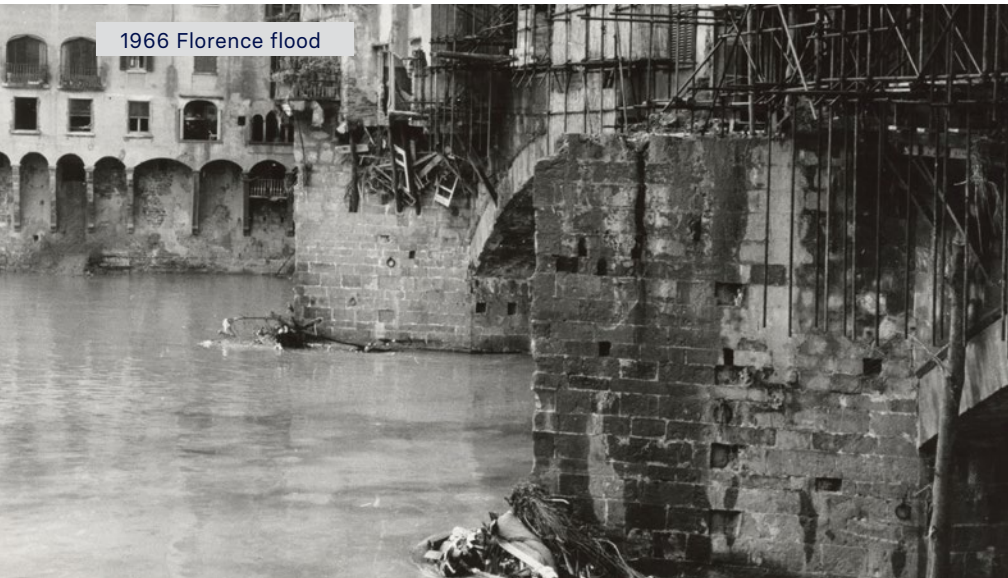
Only a few days' sail from Rhodes, at the port of Alexandria, Ptolomy I Soter ordered the construction of a lighthouse, or Pharos, upon the Nile delta between around 286 and 246 BC. The lighthouse was a limestone tower with a furnace at its peak. It was an aesthetic accomplishment as much as an engineering one. Large blocks of lightly colored stone were laid down in three tapering tiers—the bottom square, the middle octagonal, and the uppermost circular, topped by a statue of Poseidon. Yet, its height left it vulnerable, and it was damaged in a series of earthquakes beginning in AD 956. A final tremor in 1323 left it in ruins.

The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus was an elaborate tomb that was built for Mausolus of Caria by his widow and sister, Artemisia. Mausolus was a satrap, or regional governor, of the Persian imperial outpost of Halicarnassus, on the southwest coast of what is now Turkey. He lends his name to all later mausoleums. A roughly square structure up to 130 feet high, his tomb was decorated all around with freestanding statues and sculptural reliefs. The latter depicted battles between the Lapiths and the centaurs and between the Greeks and the Amazons. The mausoleum survived numerous attacks on the city and stood watch over the port for 1,600 years. Sadly, it was destroyed by earthquakes from the 12th to the 15th centuries, and by 1404 only the base remained standing. The Knights of Saint John of Rhodes constructed Bodrum Castle in 1494 using some of the mausoleum's debris. The remainder was used in 1522 to increase the city's fortifications in preparation for an Ottoman invasion.

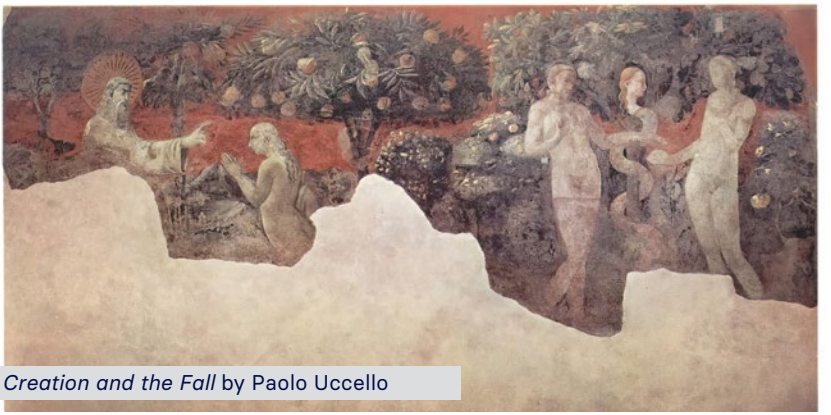
Even today's admirable technology, which can sometimes predict earthquakes, cannot protect monuments. For instance, a 1997 earthquake wrought havoc that might have been reversible had not the restorers botched the job—a sort of artistic manslaughter, at least according to some. The famous frescoes by Giotto and other luminaries at the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi were damaged when an earthquake struck the area around the Umbrian town of Assisi. A team of conservators was tasked with saving the frescoes and restoring them to their pre-quake state. The project was initially deemed a success when the conservators finished their work and the frescoes in the Chapel of St. Nicholas were once again on display. However, it soon became apparent that the chiaroscuro, the dramatic contrast of light and shadow of the original work, was lost.

Floods and Salvaging

Many areas of Italy are already prone to flooding, and her cultural treasures have often been threatened by them. In Florence, for example, 8 serious floods had been recorded since 1333. By far the worst, though, was the flood of November 4–5, 1966. An estimated 8 feet of rain fell over 2 days. The banks of the normally tranquil Arno River burst, and the tightly grouped wonders of the Renaissance that cluster in the small city center were simultaneously endangered. The Basilica of Santa Croce, dating from 1296, was the worst affected, standing almost 10 feet deep in river water.



1966 Florence flood



Creation and the Fall by Paolo Uccello

Volunteers flew in from around the world to carefully excavate books, manuscripts, artworks, and masonry from layers of thick mud mixed with oil and sewage. By some estimates, millions of cultural objects were lost: around 3 million books and manuscripts and some 14,000 movable art objects, of which 1,500 or so were significant artworks. Masterpieces ruined include Paolo Uccello's fresco *Creation and the Fall* and the mighty wooden *Crucifix* by Cimabue, forefather of Renaissance Florentine painting.

From the tragedy emerged some important positives, however. The Opificio delle Pietre Dure—literally "Workshop of Semi-Precious Stones"—was established in Florence and is now one of the world's foremost institutes of art restoration and conservation. In the wake of the flood, new techniques for preserving manuscripts and detaching frescoes from walls were developed.

Restoration technology had advanced around this time in terms of analyzing art with various light spectra, such as X-rays. However, the physical manipulation of damaged art, including cleaning, restoration, and prevention of further deterioration, had seen relatively little major improvement before 1966.

Suddenly, the world's attention was focused on salvaging art that often was not portable. For instance, Giorgio Vasari's monumental five-panel *Last Supper* was caked in the mud that engulfed Santa Croce. Conservators now had to deal with cleaning works of mud and debris. Reattaching flaking paint and keeping the supports from contorting too much in the humidity changes were the primary concerns.

One technique used in the immediate aftermath of the flood on water-damaged works on panel was to apply strips of Japanese mulberry paper to the painted surface, brushed with a layer of methacrylate resin to make them stick. This method was used to reattach bits of paint that had flaked loose when the underlayer of gesso grew unstable due to moisture. Works were allowed to dry slowly, but changes in humidity inevitably led to curvature of the wooden supports, the painted panels, or the wooden framework behind the canvas and caused the paint to crack. Ciro Castelli came up with a technique to prevent the panels from contracting too much by stuffing a filler of poplar wood into incisions made on the back of the panel.

Then, there was the issue of getting damaged frescoes off of walls. A fresco is a painting in which pigment is applied directly to wet plaster on a wall or ceiling. The strappo technique—used to transfer frescoes, with their plaster intact, onto a portable support—was developed in Florence after the 1966 flood. A linen cloth is applied to the fresco and painted with a diluted bone glue. This attaches the paint to the linen in a way that is reversible, without damaging the paint itself. The final coat of plaster onto which the fresco is painted is then cut away from the rest of the wall with a scalpel. The result is a "sandwich" of linen, paint, and plaster. The back of the plaster is then pumiced to smoothness and covered with canvas, and the linen front is moistened. Once wet, the bone glue in the linen releases its grip on the paint, and the fabric can be peeled away. Thus, what was once an integral part of an immobile plastered wall becomes a painting still attached to a thin layer of plaster but now affixed to a fresh canvas for display in a museum.

The Danger of Nature

All but the hardiest of artworks must be protected against the damage of natural forces if they are to survive for future generations. One city that has been fighting and often losing the battle against nature is Venice. The humidity of Venice is such that frescoes fade and the plaster on which they are painted begins to flake off within only a few decades of their completion. One need look no further for examples than the frescoes that once adorned the exterior of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi on the Grand Canal near the Rialto Bridge. In 1508, the year it was completed, a dazzling series of frescoes was unveiled on the facade facing the Grand Canal, painted by a pair of young Venetian artists, Titian and Giorgione. However, thanks to the relentless Venetian humidity, little remains of the frescoes, which were transferred to the Ca' d'Oro in 1966.

The ancient works that remain to us today are usually a product of protection of the elements and unusually hardy mediums. Yet, the art that survives the forces of time is often transformed nonetheless. The image of ancient Greek and Roman cities and statuary in the public memory is of pure white marble and ivory-hued travertine. However, in fact, they were explosions of color, with gaudily painted temples and the walls of buildings from baths to brothels decorated in fresco or jeweled with mosaic. Classical sculptures were often luridly painted, too.

Excavations on the Athenian acropolis around 1832 contributed to what became known as the polychromy debate. Residual pigments were found on the ancient buildings, suggesting that they had been brightly painted. The excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum ended the argument, showing the painted ancient cities in their original glory. Many centuries of weathering have caused nearly all traces of pigments to vanish from these works.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Watch Noah Charney's TED-Ed video on restoration: https://www.ted.com/talks/noah_charney_can_you_guess_what_s_wrong_with_these_paintings.
- Read Noah Charney's article "Are Replicas Changing the Way We Experience Art?" in *Slate*: https://slate.com/technology/2016/08/are-digital-replicas-sucking-the-soul-out-of-the-art-world.html.
- Read Noah Charney's article "How We Lost the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World" in *Salon*: https://www.salon.com/2017/08/20/how-we-lost-the-seven-wonders-of-the-ancient-world/.

Lecture 9

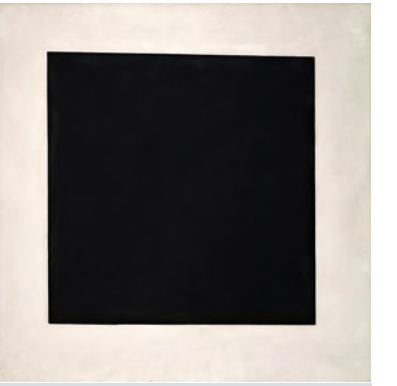
No Bequest: Art Destroyed by Artists and Owners

You've now reached one of the more unusual wings of the Museum of Lost Art—where you find the art that has been destroyed by its creators and patrons. The act of artists destroying their own creations is largely a modern-day phenomenon. Apart from rare occurrences, artists prior to the modern era were either unable to afford to destroy their work or didn't possess it to do so. However, as shown in this lecture, this did not preclude artists from destroying their studies, drawings, and other works that went into the preparation of their masterpieces.

Recycling

One historical form of artistic destruction by artists themselves involved acts of recycling. Vellum and drawing paper were pricey during the Renaissance. As a result, sketches were frequently drawn on both the front and back of paper and vellum. Canvases and boards might also be reused, with layers of paint concealing previous work. Overpainting that conceals mistakes or makes changes to compositions is not unusual, and many famous works were altered at some stage of their development. Occasionally, artists decided to paint over a work entirely and start afresh, and these willful acts of erasure can reveal much about an artist and their processes.

For example, in 2019, X-ray and ultraviolet analysis showed that the portrait *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* by Artemisia Gentileschi had two previous works beneath its surface. The first seems to have been in preparation for a work that was never realized and thus completely painted over. The second was a self-portrait of the artist herself, from which art historians have concluded that Gentileschi used herself as a model for her paintings of historical figures, erasing her own visage as she built up one of others.

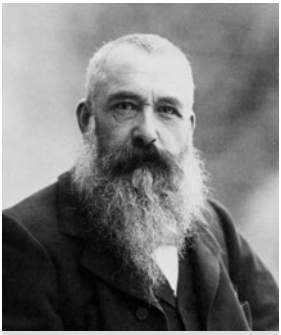


Black Square by Kazimir Malevich

Overpainting can also be part of the artistic statement of a work. In 2015, X-rays of Kazimir Malevich's famous *Black Square* showed that there were two hidden paintings there. According to the description, the lowest original image on the canvas is a vibrant Cubo-Futurist piece that Malevich experimented with around 1910. The aesthetic fused Futurist ideas of breaking free from the past and aiming for completely new aesthetic vocabularies with the Cubist technique of fragmenting an image into geometric forms seen from various points of view. A proto-Suprematist composition was visible underneath *Black Square* and above that painting. Malevich was the leader of the Suprematism movement, which rejected representational art in favor of rigid geometric forms.

For Malevich, the rejection of traditional art was a statement of independence in keeping with the revolutionary mood of the time: *Black Square* was a deliberate act of destroying what had come before.

At the Hands of the Artist



Claude Monet

There are also cases of artists outright destroying their artistic works. Often, the motivation comes from a deep sense of dissatisfaction with a work and perhaps a touch of perfectionism. For instance, in 1908, shortly before their scheduled exhibition at Galerie Durand-Ruel in Paris, Claude Monet decided he was sufficiently unhappy with what he had produced in his famous *Water Lilies* series that he destroyed at least 15 of the canvases. Monet long suffered from depression, and his water lilies came late in his artistic career, when his vision and art were being affected by the development of cataracts in his eyes. Many accounts attest that he frequently destroyed his own works when he felt they did not live up to his standards.

Water Lilies series by Monet

Although the majority of instances of artist-destroyed art can be attributed to a certain degree of conceit or perfectionism, there have been cases where other reasons were at play. After a scuffle with his fiancé Tulla Larsen in which shots ended up being fired, the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch famously sawed his portrait of the two of them in half. However, in the end, Tulla's half was not destroyed and was eventually reunited by the Munch estate with its original pairing, now a diptych.

Fits of Pique

Venus by Girodet

Throughout the history of portraiture, wise artists have flattered their sitters. Whatever the artist may think of the sitter, it is they who have to be pleased for the artist to be paid. Thus, clever artists worked around aesthetic imperfections to provide reasonable likenesses in which the objectionable bits were "airbrushed." Problems could certainly arise, though. The French painter Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson was commissioned in 1798 to make a portrait of actress Anne Françoise Elisabeth Lange as a gift to her newlywed husband. Girodet painted Lange as the Roman goddess Venus. However, Lange disliked the painting intensely, offering only half of the originally agreed price and penning a sharp critique of the work and Girodet's artistic talents.

Furious, Girodet cut up his original portrait and immediately began a new version. This time, he depicted Lange as the mythological figure Danae—traditionally depicted at the moment of her insemination by Zeus, who had taken the guise of a shower of golden rain to steal her virginity. Lange is depicted as though greedily seizing upon the coins, helped in her task by a winged child—a coded reference to a daughter she had through an affair with a banker. Peacock feathers, representing vanity, are to be found everywhere, while the turkey, with a ring around a toe, is a none-too-flattering representation of Lange's new husband, for whom the portrait was originally intended. Humiliated when the new portrait was put on public display, Lange went into self-imposed exile to Italy for the rest of her life. For his part, Girodet seems to have regretted taking their argument so far and later refused to show his painting to anyone.

Man at the Crossroads by Diego Rivera

Patron-Destroyed Art

Mexican painter and muralist Diego Rivera's unyielding politics allowed him to get his art rejected on a far grander scale than a lone portrait. His *Man at the Crossroads* was a mural created in 1934 and the star attraction at the Rockefeller Center in New York—until the Rockefeller family had it destroyed. Politically conservative John D. Rockefeller Jr. perhaps chose poorly when he decided to work with Rivera, a member of the Mexican Communist Party.

The original preparatory sketch showed a soldier, a peasant, and a worker holding hands at the center of a vast, multi-figure design. When Rivera began to paint the final work on the wall, he and his assistants changed some of the composition without getting approval. Recent scholarship suggests that Rivera was scorned and teased by his left-wing colleagues and the communist groups with which he sympathized for having "sold out" to an exemplar of conservative capitalism. The artist thus allegedly instructed an assistant to find a picture of Lenin from which he could work, saying, "If you want communism, I will paint communism." Adding insult to injury, Rivera included a portrait of Rockefeller drinking martinis with a harlot.

The orientation was such that Lenin was on one side and Rockefeller on the other, and Lenin came out looking the better of the two. Soon, the press got ahold of the story, which made headlines amid the anti-communist climate of 1930s America. In the end, the mural was chiseled off the wall.

Sometimes, a patron's motivation for destroying art simply defies classification. On May 15, 1990, Japanese businessman Ryoei Saito bought van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* for $82.5 million. Later, he declared that he wanted the van Gogh painting to be cremated alongside him. The art world was concerned that one of van Gogh's masterpieces would be lost despite efforts by coworkers to reassure them that this was merely a figure of speech expressing the owner's love for the artwork. Although Saito later said he would think about leaving the painting to a museum in his will, the painting hasn't been seen since he passed away in 1996.

Saito had also paid $78.1 million for the smaller of two Renoir paintings, *Bal du moulin de la Galette*. It ended up being used as collateral for loans to Saito's businesses and was eventually sold by the banks when those businesses experienced financial difficulties. It is believed to be in a private Swiss collection but has not been seen either since 1990.

Bal du moulin de la Galette by Renoir

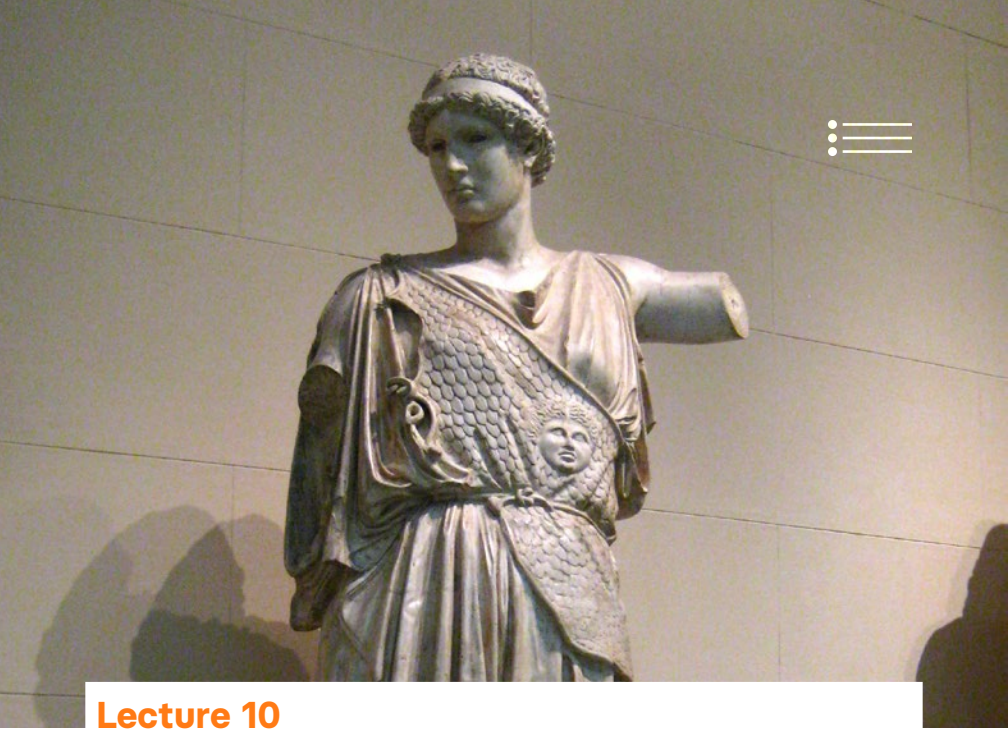
Vision of Destruction

There is a small category of cases where the destruction of the art was conceived as part of the artistic vision from the first. In 2018, in an infamous viral incident, the Sotheby's auction house in London auctioned off British street artist Banksy's *Girl with Balloon* for a little more than £1 million. *Girl with Balloon* was one of the murals that had brought Banksy to widespread attention since it debuted in 2002. The version under auction was rare, as it had been uniquely created for a friend of the artist in 2006 and mounted in an elaborate frame that included a built-in lighting system.

However, Banksy had also secretly installed a shredder within the frame, powered by the same system that powered the built-in lighting, intended to be remotely activated and destroy the work should it ever go up for auction. When the hammer fell, a siren within the painting whirred, and *Girl with Balloon* began shredding itself. In an apparent fault, the shredding was only half completed when the mechanism stopped. Banksy soon revealed his hand in the event. The partially destroyed work was renamed *Love Is in the Bin*.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read Noah Charney's article "The Portrait that Churchill Couldn't Face" in *The Spectator*: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-portrait-that-churchill-couldn-t-face/.
- Read the chapter about Michelangelo in Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives of the Artists*.
- Read *The Devil in the Gallery: How Scandal, Shock and Rivalry Shaped the Art World* by Noah Charney, which is about Graham Sutherland and Kazimir Malevich.
- Read Noah Charney's article "Banksy's Self-Destructing 'Girl with Balloon' Is Worth Even More Shredded" in *Salon*: https://www.salon.com/2018/10/13/why-banksy-shredded-self-destruct-girl-with-balloon/.



Lecture 10

The Basement: Strange and Unsolved Cases

In this lecture, you will tiptoe down the back stairs and go down to the Museum of Lost Art's basement. Here, you will find the countless works of art that have fallen through the cracks, lost under unusual circumstances or in unorthodox ways. Many artworks down here are no more than vague descriptions in the history books or for which there are only supposed copies and reconstructions. Often, there is little information about their ultimate fate.

The Rescue by Horatio Greenough

Trails Gone Cold

Public sculpture often finds itself vulnerable to changing political whims. The vandalism wing contains thousands of former political leaders in stone and bronze. However, few have found their destruction proposed by Congress, as Horatio Greenough's *The Rescue* was in 1939. A joint resolution to the House of Representatives recommended that the statue "be ground into dust, and scattered to the four winds, that no more remembrance may be perpetuated of our barbaric past." The declaration was understandable. Greenough's work, completed in 1850, depicts a Native American with a tomahawk threatening a family of white settlers but being forcibly restrained by a heroic frontiersman. The statue sat at the steps of the east flank of the US Capitol building, where more than a dozen presidents would be inaugurated in its shadow.

In 1958, *The Rescue* and its sister statue, *The Discovery of America*, by Luigi Persico were hauled off their plinths and put into storage—nominally in preparation for the extension of the US Capitol building. However, they were never restored to their former positions. In 1976, while being moved to a new storage area by crane, *The Rescue* was dropped, allegedly by accident, breaking into several fragments. It hasn't been seen in public since.

The Discovery of America by Luigi Persico

Although the fate of *The Rescue* is thoroughly documented in government reports and court transcripts, the trail goes completely cold for many works. One such case of loss involves a famous samurai sword, or katana, made by the great Japanese swordsmith Gorō Nyūdō Masamune. Masamune's swords are legendary pieces of art and craftsmanship in Japan. However, one sword, the Honjō Masamune, is missing. According to legend, the sword got its name from the samurai general Honjō Shigenaga, who gained it after a battle in 1561. He took it as a trophy and carried it until around 1595, when he sold it to Toyotomi Hidetsugu. From there, the blade passed through numerous hands. Its last known owner was Tokugawa Iemasa. It was classified as a national treasure of Japan in 1939.

A fragmented and suspect story of its fate states that in December 1945, following the defeat of Japan and the end of World War II, Tokugawa Iemasa brought the Honjō Masamune and the rest of his sword collection to the police station in Mejiro, a district in Tokyo. They remained there until January 1946, when the police handed over the swords to someone who appeared to be an Allied officer, identified as "Sgt. Coldy Bimore." He was ostensibly from the Foreign Liquidations Commission of the Army Forces of the Western Pacific, but there was no reason to believe that this was the man's real identity. Furthermore, it is not clear why the police would hand over such treasures. Nevertheless, none of the swords taken have been seen again.

The Mystery of *The Battle of Anghiari*

The Battle of Anghiari is one of Leonardo da Vinci's most intriguing lost works because there is an air of mystery and debate as to whether it truly ever was lost or simply never was. The mystery lies within the Palazzo Vecchio, specifically the magnificent Sala dei Cinquecento. The soaring walls of this vast meeting hall are painted with larger-than-life-size frescoes of riding and ranting warriors. Four enormous battle scenes show the military triumphs of the Medici family, painted in 1563 by Giorgio Vasari. These frescoes are considered masterworks of 16th-century painting. They are also intriguing for another reason: Hiding behind one of Vasari's frescoes could be a lost painting by da Vinci.

Vasari's battle-scene fresco in the Sala dei Cinquecento

Of the lost Leonardo, the known facts are these: In the 14th century, the Sala dei Cinquecento functioned as the reception room used by the Medicis when hosting visiting dignitaries. In 1505, during a brief period when the Medici family was expelled from Florence, Leonardo began a monumental wall painting in the sala, *The Battle of Anghiari*: a torqued melee of riders and swordsmen. However, he never finished it. His partial fresco is known only by a number of copies and an engraving. It seems that Leonardo painted merely a small portion of one wall. Some 50 years after the Medici family's return to power, Duke Cosimo de' Medici commissioned Giorgio Vasari to repaint the sala with battle scenes of great Florentine (that is, Medici) victories. Vasari fulfilled his commission, but the question remains: What happened to Leonardo's *The Battle of Anghiari*?

In 1975, Maurizio Seracini, now a leading expert in Italian art, discovered what he believed to be a clue to the work's whereabouts: a tiny bit of text hidden within Vasari's frescoes in the Sala dei Cinquecento. Throughout the entire room, on one 177-foot-long frescoed wall, Vasari had painted exactly two words: "*Cerca trova*" ("Seek and you shall find"). Seracini believes this to be a clue. Vasari's fresco, he says, is covering up the lost Leonardo.

In 2006, Seracini announced that he had discovered a 1.5-inch hollow gap behind Vasari's frescoed wall and the outer wall of the sala. This double wall, which Vasari must have built when he painted his frescoes, is unheard of and has no architectural or structural rationale. Further, the gap is only behind the wall with the words "*Cerca trova*" written on it. With this evidence in hand, it was announced in 2011 that National Geographic would co-fund the search for the lost fresco, and permission was granted to begin in 2012. Within a few months, Seracini and his team announced that they had located a paint sample on the hidden wall by drilling through the Vasari fresco. The black paint sample matched the chemical composition of paints used in other known Leonardo paintings. However, in August 2012, the project was put on hold due to protests from art historians, aghast at the prospect of damaging the Vasari frescoes.

To find the Leonardo, you need to understand Giorgio Vasari, who was nothing if not reverent of his fellow artists. An elaborate act to preserve a fellow artist's work would not be unprecedented. Duke Cosimo de' Medici asked Vasari to renovate the interior of the venerable Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella in 1568. Part of this included sacrificing Masaccio's fresco of the *Holy Trinity* to replace it with Vasari's new *Madonna of the Rosary* painting. On that occasion, Giorgio protected the old fresco by building a new wall in front of it with only a small gap, preserving the prior fresco.

Holy Trinity fresco by Masaccio

Madonna of the Rosary by Vasari

That Vasari took such pains to preserve Masaccio's fresco speaks volumes about his respect for fellow artists. As such, Seracini argues that there has never been any danger of "destroying" the Vasari, who might have used a similar technique to preserve the Leonardo. Several techniques exist to wholly remove a fresco from the wall to check what lies beneath and to either replace it as it was or transfer it elsewhere for display.

That said, no one seems to have considered that "*Cerca trova*" might refer to something other than the lost Leonardo. At the very least, the architectural dimensions of the sala were radically changed with Vasari's remodeling: Its walls and ceilings soar far higher than was the case when Leonardo began his work there. It's almost impossible that Leonardo's work lies behind where "*Cerca trova*" is written, as it would have to be much lower down on the wall.


"Cerca trova"

Lost on Purpose

In Los Angeles, Bas Jan Ader, a Dutch conceptual artist, left Cape Cod, Massachusetts, by himself in a small sailboat in July 1975 with the intention of sailing across the Atlantic from New England to England. His final performance would be a play titled *In Search of the Miraculous*. His boat, a 12.5-foot Guppy 13, which he had named *Ocean Wave*, was the smallest ever used to attempt to cross the Atlantic and was not designed for transoceanic travel.

A choir singing sea shanties around a piano in the gallery of his Los Angeles dealer marked the beginning of the performance, which was set to conclude with another sing-along in Falmouth, England. The journey served as the performance's focal point.

Three weeks later, radio communication with Ader was lost. Ten months later, in April 1976, *Ocean Wave* was discovered empty and bobbing vertically in the waves 150 miles off the coast of Ireland. It was found by a Spanish fishing vessel, which towed it to the town of A Coruña. Ader is assumed to have drowned. However, he was an experienced sailor. Was he that convinced he could make the crossing yet overcome by the sea? Or did he perhaps intend this voyage to be suicide-as-performance art? Did he create the most literal work of lost art?

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read Noah Charney's articles "Lost Art: The Mysterious Allure of Japan's Three Sacred Treasures" and "Lost Art: To Save, or Not to Save, When Works Are in Peril" in *The Art Newspaper*: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/07/15/lost-art-the-mysterious-allure-of-japans-three-sacred-treasures and https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/10/18/lost-art-to-save-or-not-to-save-when-works-are-in-peril.
- Read "Searching for the Honjo Masamune, Lost Samurai Sword of Power" on the Honjo Masamune: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/07/15/lost-art-the-mysterious-allure-of-japans-three-sacred-treasures.
- Watch the TED Talk by Noah Charney's colleague, Maurizio Seracini, about *The Battle of Anghiari*: https://www.ted.com/speakers/maurizio_seracini.
- Read *The Collector of Lives: Giorgio Vasari and the Invention of Art* by Noah Charney, about Vasari and Leonardo's lost *Battle of Anghiari*.

Lecture 11

Not in the Vault: Fabled Art That Never Was

This lecture concerns the library of the Museum of Lost Art, where stories of myths and mysteries line the shelves. El Dorado, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and the Three Sacred Treasures of Japan, which you will learn about in this lecture, may be some of the most important art ever to be lost, or they may never have existed to begin with. In a way, all lost art, given enough time, becomes little more than a thing of legend.

Lost Cities

Were cities such as El Dorado and Atlantis purely imaginary, or were they part real, part legend? The legend of El Dorado, the city made of gold, sounds like an expansion of the tales told by the Spanish conquistadors of ancient cities merely rich in gold and silver, not made of it. The story began as that of El Hombre Dorado, "The Golden Man"—the descriptive used by Spanish observers who described the initiation ceremonies of a chieftain carried out by the Muisca people in what is now Colombia. The rites involved the new chieftain covering himself in gold dust.

This story and name were conflated with a search during the late 16th century for a city of gold called Manoa, which was said to be on the shores of the legendary Lake Parime. On his deathbed, a captain called Juan Martinez described how, in 1520, he'd come upon Manoa while lost and spent seven months there. His account prompted Sir Walter Raleigh to become one of many adventurers to search for this mythical city. There was gold in great quantities in Central and South America, and these stories, written in letters or passed orally from man to man until they returned to Spain, helped to encourage the funding of further expeditions. It is not difficult to see how such stories might have been embellished and augmented until explorers imagined an entire city paved with gold bricks.

Map of Manoa and Lake Parime

Another famous lost city, Atlantis, began its existence as an allegory in Plato's dialogues, *Timaeus* and the unfinished *Critias*, about the hubris of nation-states. The fuller description is in the *Timaeus*, in which the story is told of the island nation that lost its godlike element over many generations and eventually fought a war with Athens, whose people refused to accept being enslaved by the Atlanteans. Athens won, and after a day and night of earthquakes and floods, the island of Atlantis sunk into the sea.

This story has captured the imagination of many writers. A 19th-century scholar, Ignatius L. Donnelly, helped to popularize the myth in his *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* of 1882, which misconstrued Plato's writing as a literal historical account. The public had already been encouraged to believe that Atlantis was a real lost city when it featured in Jules Verne's popular 1870 novel, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*.

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

Some ancient monuments were revered for eons as the pinnacles of artistic achievement, yet their existence is unclear. Take, for example, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar II was meant to have built the gardens in the ancient city of Babylon for his wife, Queen Amytis, who missed the green landscape of her home in Media, today's northern Iran.


Hanging Gardens of Babylon

The gardens were meant to have been a series of tiers planted with all manner of greenery at each level and also lined with colonnades. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus stated the walls were 22 feet thick, with walkways 10 feet wide. He described the structure, meant to hold soil and moisture, as made initially of brick bonded with cement, a layer of bitumen, and then a layer of lead. All of this was then piled with soil and "thickly planted with trees of every kind that, by their great size or other charm, could give pleasure to the beholder."

Since the classical era, the lost Hanging Gardens have captivated the imagination of poets, writers, and artists as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. However, no known Babylonian texts refer to gardens at all. Recent scholarship suggests that the Babylonian gardens might have been conflated with gardens built by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in Nineveh, some 100 miles to the north of Babylon. Archaeologists have found a 50-mile network of waterways, comprising aqueducts, canals, and dams, along with a series of water-raising screws that could have raised the water uphill to irrigate the gardens. If there was a similar garden in Babylon, it might have been damaged, destroyed, or its materials reused over the millennia of invaders, including the Assyrians.

The Labyrinth of the Minotaur

Archaeological remains can sometimes give tangible clues that can provide at least suggestions as to where various legendary stories might have sprung from. For instance, the Greek myths tell of the Minotaur, half-man, half-bull, who was imprisoned by King Minos in a labyrinth designed by the inventor Daedalus. The myth of the labyrinth has loomed so large in our historical memory that the word has entered the common lexicon. Various depictions of it can be found throughout the history of art. Could there be any truth to a structure as fantastic as described?

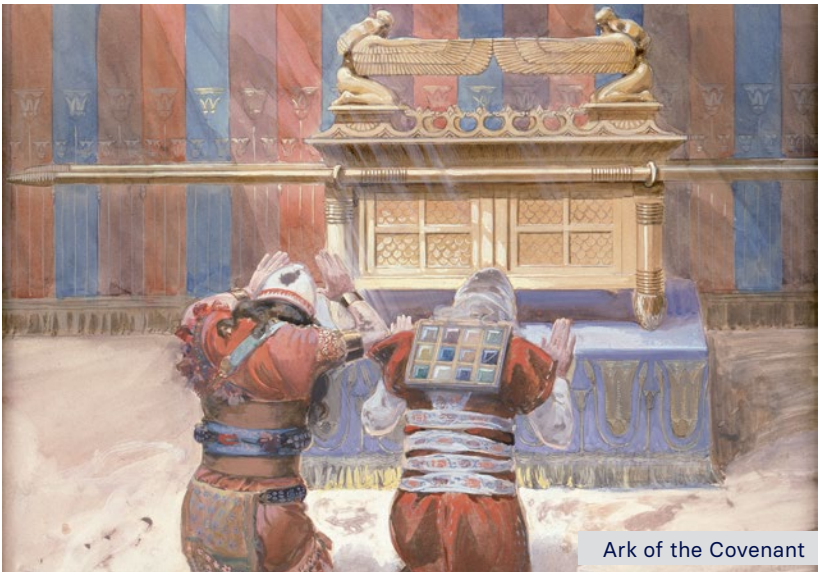
Remains of some of the presumed seven wonders of the ancient world

When the Bronze Age palace at Knossos on Crete was discovered at the end of the 19th century, British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans found an elaborate warren of corridors and rooms. It led him to conclude that the palace itself was the labyrinth of legend. However, it is not the only candidate for the Minotaur's lair.

In 2009, a team of archaeologists began to explore an ancient stone quarry on the south side of Crete, near Gortyn, the ancient Roman capital of the island. The quarry is riddled with 2.5 miles of tunnels, which some think make up a more compelling site for the mythical labyrinth than the Bronze Age palace. Long called the Labyrinthos Caves, they were believed by tourists from the 12th to the 19th centuries to be the site of the Minotaur legend. This was before the discovery of the ruins of Knossos. Gortyn or Knossos? Each claims association with a place of legend that may have indeed been lost and now found—or which may never have existed at all.

Religious Relics

The Holy Grail, the cup from which Christ is believed to have drunk at the Last Supper and/or which was used to catch some of his blood as he hung upon the cross, is an invention of medieval romances. The first known written reference comes as late as 1190, in the fictional epic *Perceval, ou Le Conte du Graal* by Chrétien de Troyes. Indeed, the Grail is more of a presence in pagan Celtic mythology than in anything Christian. There is no mention of it in biblical source material.



Ark of the Covenant

Similarly, the Ark of the Covenant was supposedly a wooden chest in which the two stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments were stored. According to the book of Exodus, God instructed Moses to build the Ark out of acacia wood to exact specifications during his 40-day stay upon Mount Sinai. It was to be covered in gold, adorned with rings, and topped by a golden lid on top of which two golden cherubs were to sit. Though there are numerous references to the Ark in both biblical and Rabbinic accounts, there is no agreement on what became of it or whether it truly ever existed.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has, for many centuries, maintained that the Ark is both real and that it was saved and taken to the city of Aksum by Menelik, son of King Solomon, who founded there the Ethiopian empire. There the ark remains, supposedly under lock and key at the Church of St. Mary of Zion. No one may even enter the Ark's chamber, save a virgin monk who is its sole custodian. The nature of its protection means that its existence has not been independently verified there. Most historians believe that if the Ark ever did exist as a wooden box, it's most likely to have disintegrated over its 3,000-year history.

The Three Sacred Treasures of Japan

What of relics the provenance and evidence of which are intentionally kept from view? This is the case with the Imperial Regalia of Japan, or the Three Sacred Treasures of Japan. They are said to include a mirror called Yata no Kagami, representing the virtue of wisdom; a sword called Kusanagi, representing valor; and a jewel called Yasakani no Magatama, representing benevolence. Whether these treasures exist is an open question and possibly a matter of faith.

Amaterasu emerging from a cave

Dating back to AD 690, these items are traditionally presented to the emperors of Japan by priests during coronation ceremonies. Tradition says that they were brought down to Earth by the ancestor of the Japanese imperial line, Ninigi-no-Mikoto. They were given to him by his grandmother, goddess of the sun, Amaterasu, who sent him down from the heavens to bring peace to warring Japan.

Amaterasu was said to have hidden from her brother, Susanoo-no-Mikoto, taking shelter in a cave and causing the world to grow dark. The goddess Ame-no-Uzume-no-Mikoto hung the mirror and the jewel outside the cave's entrance as a trick to draw her out. Amaterasu saw her reflection in the mirror and was startled long enough for the gods to pull her from the cave. To apologize for having driven his sister into hiding, Susanoo presented her with the sword, which he had acquired from an eight-headed serpent called Yamata no Orochi. The first emperor of Japan, Jimmu, Ninigi's great-grandson, was said to have inherited the Treasures from him.

There are shifting stories of the Treasures having been lost and found. A battle was fought on the Kanmom Straits in 1185, when the emperor at the time, Antoku, was only eight. To avoid capture, his grandmother threw the emperor, the Sacred Treasures, and herself out of the boat and into the sea. The mirror was recovered, and the jewel was later found by divers; however, the sword remained lost. Some say that a new sword was forged, others that a decoy had been thrown into the water. Yet others believe that the sword rose out of the sea and returned to its shrine through supernatural means.

Whatever the fate of the original or subsequently rendered versions of the Sacred Treasures, they have retained their symbolic power. It is forbidden for the public to see them; thus, their existence cannot be proven. They are revealed only to the emperor and selected priests. Popular belief holds that they are safeguarded in separate shrines: Ise Grand Shrine in the Mie Prefecture holds the mirror, Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya holds the sword (or its replica), and the Three Palace Sanctuaries in Tokyo keep the jewel.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read Noah Charney's articles "What You Don't Know about the Holy Grail" and "Did ISIS Accidentally Find the "Lost" Hanging Gardens of Babylon?" and "Relic Hunter" in *Salon*: https://www.salon.com/2017/04/23/what-you-do-not-know-about-the-holy-grail/, https://www.salon.com/2017/03/12/did-isis-inadvertently-uncover-the-secret-to-the-lost-hanging-gardens-of-babylon/, and https://www.salon.com/2016/03/04/relic_hunter_a_missing_christian_relic_the_fall_of_nazi_germany_and_a_mystery_that_flummoxed_historians_for_centuries/.

Lecture 12

Lost and Found: Preserving and Restoring Art

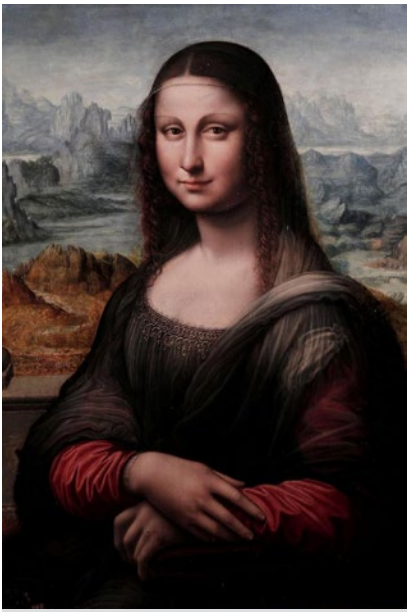
As you will see in this lecture, technology today is such that in many cases, a new version of what has otherwise irreparably been lost can be created. Art history has always been an inexact science, and there is an element of mysticism behind the theories of some of the most prominent art historians. However, many protagonists in the field of digital art history come from scientific backgrounds and have applied advanced technology to art historical puzzles and mysteries. They have made progress where hundreds of more traditional researchers have failed because they have stepped outside of the box and approached problems from new angles.

The Impact of Digital Photography

Since the late '90s, in the era of inexpensive, high-quality digital photography and universal access to images via the internet, the most dramatic breakthroughs have come through forensics. For example, digital photography has had an enormous impact on helping to preserve and share art as well as analyze it. For instance, on April 25, 2015, the Caverne du Pont d'Arc, a precise, full-size replica of the Chauvet cave, which contains the world's oldest paintings, opened to the public in the Ardèche region of France. Having employed powerful cameras to effectively scan every contour of the original cave and then reproduce it, this replica allows visitors to admire a high-tech recreation of an original work that cannot be viewed in person.

High-quality digital images are also a portal to the discovery of details that are not easily visible to the human eye. Ultra-high-quality digital photographs, and the ease of producing and disseminating other methods of digital imaging, have promoted the study of art and facilitated breakthroughs that had never been noted by even the most meticulous art historians examining with the naked eye or magnifying glasses. Many digital explorations begin with simple, naked-eye detective work. Something about a painting "doesn't look right," which prompts an art historian to investigate further. When Caravaggio expert Roberto Longhi glimpsed a shadowy painting, caked with grime, hanging in a dark corner of a Jesuit seminary in Dublin, he thought that it might be a decent 17th-century copy of Caravaggio's famous, lost *Taking of Christ*, perhaps by one of the Dutch Caravaggisti. He arranged for it to be restored and, upon viewing the cleaned painting in proper light, had that eureka moment of which all scholars dream, seeing that he had found the lost Caravaggio original.

Multispectral photography, using light beyond the visible spectrum, has been an incredible tool in the hands of art detectives. With infrared reflectography, beams of infrared light pass through paint but bounce off of any underdrawings that remain invisible beneath, allowing you to see beneath layers of paint. Ultraviolet light is particularly helpful in illuminating layers of different ages on a painting, allowing conservators to better see overpainting or substances that may have been layered over the painting with time. X-ray imaging can be incredibly useful in isolating specific properties of a painting, such as where a certain pigment was used.



Madrid's Museo del Prado's version of the *Mona Lisa*

The original *Mona Lisa*

In 2012, these new methods prompted an amazing discovery at Madrid's Museo del Prado. The museum was in possession of what appeared to be a so-so 17th-century copy of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*. However, it had an odd background that looked, upon closer inspection, to be an overpainting. An investigation with infrared reflectography revealed that there was indeed a painting beneath the blacked-over background. Cleaning off the top black layer, conservators were amazed to find a delicate painted background, nearly identical to the background of the original *Mona Lisa* painting. In the Louvre original, Lisa Gherardini, or "Mona Lisa," appears quite a bit older than she was at the time her portrait was done—possibly due to the varnish, which makes her skin appear middle-aged. However, in the Prado version, she looks fresher, in her early twenties, which was her actual age at the time. She also has eyebrows, which do not appear in the Louvre original because they simply faded over time.

Advanced Imaging

A painting that shows off the evolution of restoration techniques beautifully is Raphael's famous *Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn* portrait. It's only been known as this since the 1930s. Prior to that, it was thought to be merely an unattributed portrait of Saint Catherine of Alexandria because at some point at least a few hundred years ago, the composition was painted over with a Catherine wheel—a hagiographic symbol associated with the saint.

Roberto Longhi had a legendary reputation for correctly identifying unattributed works. He believed from his close viewing of the Saint Catherine portrait that it was, in fact, a Raphael that had been heavily modified. He was right, and a painstaking two-year restoration to remove the overpainting revealed *Portrait of a Lady with a Unicorn*. However, in 1959, using early X-ray imaging, scientists revealed that the restoration might not have gone far enough. Underneath the unicorn, a small lapdog was revealed, the ears of which you can make out as pentimenti on the sleeves of the lady's dress. Thus, it was originally a lady with a lapdog—or perhaps not. Further modern imaging techniques and scans have cast doubt on whether Raphael painted this dog either. Art historian Hasan Niyazi theorized that the lapdog was added by another hand prior to its transformation into a unicorn by still another painter.

Imaging continues to get better, and new discoveries are being made all the time. In 2022, the National Gallery of Scotland x-rayed *Head of a Peasant Woman*, an 1885 work by Vincent van Gogh. The X-rays revealed a surprise: On the back of the canvas, there was another painting, which appears to be a self-portrait of van Gogh himself. His first known self-portrait did not appear until 1886, making this ghostly image the earliest yet found. The image is not visible from the back because, at some point, van Gogh reinforced the canvas by gluing a cardboard backing to it, covering up the self-portrait.

High-tech methods are also increasingly being used to authenticate paintings that have been circulating for some time but for which connoisseurship and provenance have been unable to establish authenticity. In some cases, multispectral analysis can even turn up the provenance itself. A painting known as *Rejected* from 1883 was thought by its buyers to be by the Australian impressionist Tom Roberts. However, experts could not agree on its authenticity. Infrared examination provided an unusual definitive clue: Tom Roberts's name was hidden on the back, as was a London address that investigation confirmed was where the artist had lived while he was a young student at the Royal Academy of Arts. The lead allowed investigators to track down sketchbooks from the right period, which additionally contained what appeared to be studies for the work.

Miscellaneous Applications

A Dutch conservator and his team have come up with a way to examine art at such a microscopic level that the method has a good chance of eliminating forgery altogether. Dr. Bill Wei is the man behind so-called art fingerprinting. The principle is to use a high-powered zoom lens camera that functions like a microscope to take an extreme close-up of a portion of an artwork or other object, as small as one square millimeter. Software then maps the topography of that square millimeter, turning the photograph into what looks like a heart rate monitor, showing the peaks and crevices in the surfaces of even smooth objects. The idea is that only the owner of an artwork will know the location of the square millimeter thus "fingerprinted." As such, this is a way to identify a work as your own by matching the topography of the fingerprinted portion of the object in question with the fingerprint photograph that you keep on file. No forgery technique is sufficiently detailed to reproduce the microscopic topography of an individual millimeter of surface area.

Perhaps the most sensational recovery of a lost masterpiece in recent years is that of Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi*. It depicts Christ in blue Renaissance garb and holding a crystal ball. It was likely done as a work for private devotion. However, the provenance trail is weak and unclear after 1530, and a consensus emerged that the painting had been destroyed or lost, perhaps around 1600. This might have consigned it to obscurity were it not for the sheer number of copies that are circulating. At least 30 by various pupils and followers have been identified—a clear demonstration that the painting was highly regarded during

the artist's life and that there was an original from which they could copy. Some art historians have posited that perhaps one of these copies is, in fact, the original.

High-tech methods can also create what might have been but never was. The Next Rembrandt project is a high-tech collaboration to create a digitally printed painting in the style of Rembrandt. The portrait's face is fictional, based on a facial recognition algorithm and computer hybridization of real Rembrandt subjects. The result was unveiled in Amsterdam in April 2016. With AI art applications available on phones and over browsers, this kind of technology is just starting to reach the public.

Examples of different variations of the *Salvator Mundi*

This act of creating imaginary artwork could also easily be applied to works that are lost. For instance, in 2017, Iranian American artist Morehshin Allahyari exhibited 12 3D-printed artifacts destroyed by ISIS, including a Roman-period statue of King Uthal of Hatra, in a show called *She Who Sees the Unknown*. The previous year, a 3D-printed, two-thirds-scale replica of the Arch of Triumph at Palmyra, also destroyed by ISIS, was raised in London's Trafalgar Square before traveling to cities around the world.

Resources

- Read *The Museum of Lost Art* by Noah Charney.
- Read "The Copiale Cipher Broken at Last" on NPR: https://www.npr.org/2011/11/13/142284553/copiale-cipher-mysterious-code-broken-at-last.
- Read Noah Charney's articles "The Ghent Altarpiece: The Truth about the Most Stolen Artwork of All Time" and "Restored and Ravishing" in *The Guardian*: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/dec/20/ghent-altarpiece-most-stolen-artwork-of-all-time and https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/oct/12/ghent-altarpiece-restoration.
- Read Noah Charney's article "The Ghent Altarpiece as Never Before" in the *Los Angeles Times*: https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-xpm-2012-mar-11-la-oe-charney-ghent-20120311-story.html.
- Watch the BBC documentary *The Secrets of the Mona Lisa*.
- Read Martin Kemp and Giuseppe Pallanti's book *Mona Lisa: The People and the Painting*.

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Printed in the United States of America

4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 400

Chantilly, VA 20151-2299

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