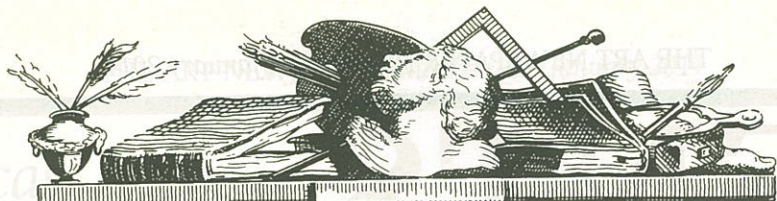


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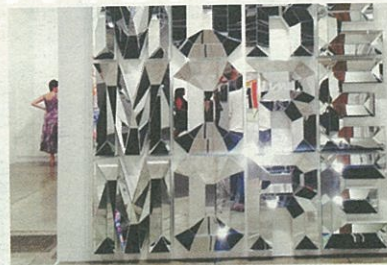
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Italy threatens to sue UK firm over ancient 'loot'

Government's liquidator rumoured to be selling disgraced dealer Robin Symes's antiquities

ANTIQUITIES

London. Italy is demanding the immediate return of a cache of antiquities stored in London and warning that if it does not receive information about the status of the collection within 30 days, it may sue the firm responsible for the objects.

As we went to press, Italy's state legal counsel was planning to send, this month, a final warning to the liquidator responsible for the assets of the disgraced antiquities dealer Robin Symes, who was declared bankrupt in 2003. Italy's letter includes a detailed list of around 700 ancient objects, including sculptures

Italy was first made aware of the rumours in 2011

and jewellery, that Italy is claiming because it believes they were taken from its territory illegally. The action is taking place amid rumours that the liquidator, the British firm BDO, is selling the material in the Middle East on behalf of Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC), which is attempting to recoup tax owed by Symes's firm, Robin Symes Ltd, which is now in liquidation. If BDO fails to respond to Italy's warning by the end of the month with detailed information on the status of each item on the list, Maurizio Fiorilli, Italy's state



After reclaiming antiquities from the Swiss in 2010 (above), the long arm of the Carabinieri is reaching towards the UK

legal counsel on the Symes case, will notify the public prosecutor at the Criminal Tribunal in Rome.

The prosecutor would then evaluate the situation and could choose to sue BDO in the UK under the Dealing in Cultural Offences Act, passed in 2003. This introduced the criminal offence of dealing in cultural objects that are "tainted" if the person or firm doing so knows the status of the artefacts in question. The maximum penalty is seven years in prison and an unlimited fine.

Italy's move follows rumours circulating in the trade and among archaeologists that BDO is attempting to sell the Symes antiquities in the Middle East, specifically to Abu Dhabi, which is building collections for numerous museums that are scheduled to open in the next few years. Italy was first made aware of these rumours in 2011, when the state legal counsel warned in a letter to a London law firm representing BDO that, should the rumours prove to be true, this would prompt

an immediate reaction from Italy and put the country's ongoing negotiations with the liquidator under severe strain.

BDO declined to comment. In a statement, a representative of HMRC said: "For confidentiality reasons, HMRC does not discuss the affairs of individual businesses. Our aim is... to collect, as efficiently as we can, the debts that are due and to prevent any situation deteriorating further, using the range of powers available to us."

Angry archaeologists

The case has angered archaeologists. "It's a scandal for the British government; they're selling [the Symes antiquities] gram by gram for unpaid taxes," says Christos Tsirogiannis, a British-based Greek archaeologist who has assisted the Greek government with its own investigation of the antiquities in the Symes collection. Tsirogiannis says that he requested access to the collection as part of his research for his PhD at the University of Cambridge but that BDO failed to respond to his queries. "It would be good to have official announcements from all the governments concerned about the Symes case, so that everyone can learn the whole truth about the key questions: why are the objects identified by the Italian state not being sent to Italy? Are the other governments concerned claiming any objects too? If so, how many and which are they?"

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Get your art kicks on Route 66



Billboards across America could feature art from the country's leading museums this year, if a scheme that was successfully trialled in the UK gets the go-ahead in the US. Richard Reeds, the co-founder of Innocent Drinks, is keen to bring Art Everywhere to America. Last year, reproductions of 57 works were displayed on 22,000 advertising sites across the UK (above, Winifred Margaret Knight's *Portrait of a Young Woman*, 1920, in Wigan). A spokeswoman for the Art Everywhere project says that the Outdoor Advertising Association of America is "bringing together a group of people to meet in early January to take this forward". Watch this space. L.R.

Ingres's other odalisque revealed



A gallery in Paris says it has discovered a small-scale version of *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814, by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. A spokeswoman for the Galerie Hubert Duchemin believes that the rediscovered work was created by the artist in around 1830. "This scaled-down version [above] is set within a series of autograph variations performed by the artist [throughout] his career," writes Lilas Sharifzadeh, a paintings expert, in a gallery catalogue. "The work comes from a French private collection. [It] was attributed by us and then accepted by each of the Ingres scholars we consulted," she says. The definitive version of the work is in the Louvre in Paris. G.H.

St Paul's and Peter Blake part ways

RELIGIOUS ART

London. St Paul's Cathedral in London has cancelled its commission for a major new work by one of the founding fathers of British Pop art, Peter Blake. The octogenarian artist (right) had been asked to make a large-scale painting for the Knights Bachelor Chapel, funded

by a charity, the Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor.

"The Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor is no longer expecting Sir Peter Blake to complete a work for its chapel in St Paul's. The cathedral is aware of this and is in discussions with the society about other potential artists and designs," says Nicholas Cottam, the cathedral's registrar.

The painting reportedly measured 4ft by 4ft. The magazine *Metropolitan* reported in 2012 that Blake had "already missed three deadlines... [the artist] decided to paint out the figures and start again".

Blake has, meanwhile, been commissioned to create a large-scale piece for the Royal Albert Hall in London. A



was unavailable for comment. Gareth Harris

spokeswoman for the venue confirmed that "we will be doing a mural with Peter Blake" but declined to provide further details. The artist



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NEWS Artists

Barney and Büchel to go Down Under

David Walsh in talks to stage shows by two major contemporary artists at his museum in Tasmania

AUSTRALIA

Tasmania. The gambling multi-millionaire David Walsh is in talks to hold major exhibitions devoted to Christoph Büchel and Matthew Barney at the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona), his private museum in Tasmania, which opened in Hobart in 2011.

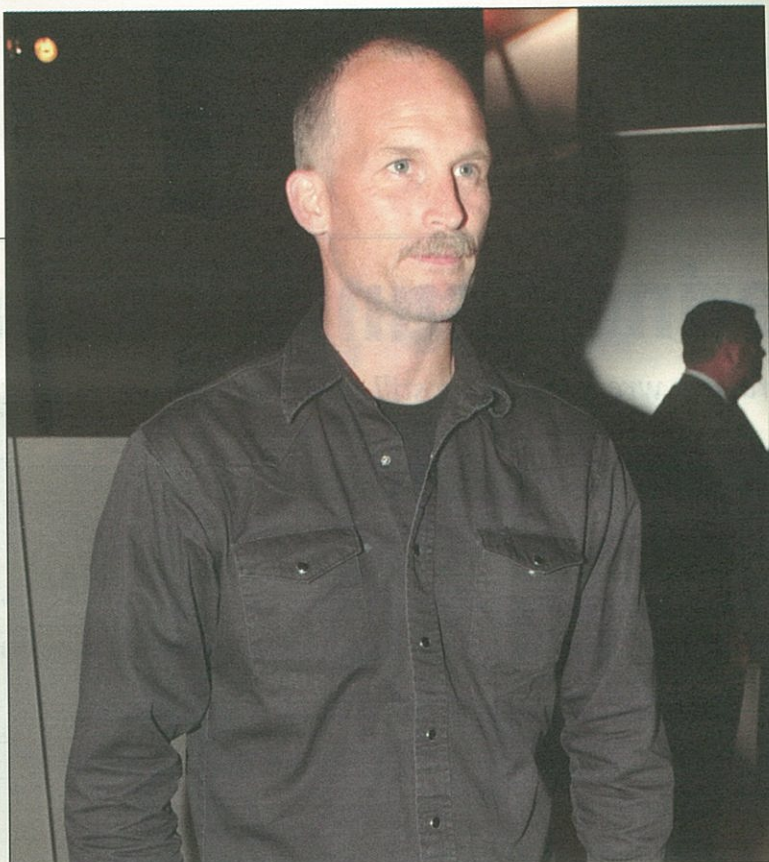
Barney, 46, shot to fame in the early 1990s and is best known for his five epic "Cremaster" films, 1994-2002. Born in San Francisco, he works mostly in New York and is represented by the Barbara Gladstone Gallery. The gallery was unable to confirm the exhibition or to provide any further information.

Büchel, 47, is represented by the London- and Zurich-based Hauser & Wirth gallery. The dealer's website previously stated that an exhibition of the Swiss artist's work is scheduled to open at Mona this year. Büchel is known for

his sprawling installations, such as *Training Ground for Training Ground for Democracy*, 2007, which incorporates Florida voting booths, toy hand grenades and half-eaten pizzas.

Walsh is expanding his art empire internationally. An exhibition of works partly drawn from his collection, by artists such as Berlinde De Bruyckere, Wim Delvoye and Sidney Nolan, opened in October at La Maison Rouge in Paris ("Théâtre du Monde", until 12 January).

Meanwhile, "Beam in Thine Own Eye", a show co-organised by Walsh last year as part of Mona's public art programme, is currently on display in various venues across Sharjah. The exhibition initially launched at MAC 1, a former quarantine warehouse on Hobart's waterfront. The show in Sharjah, entitled "I Look to You and I See Nothing" (until 16 February), has been organised by Olivier Varenne and Nicole Durling, both curators at Mona. **Gareth Harris**



The US artist Matthew Barney is ready for a busy year

Munich debut for Barney's work of past six years

Matthew Barney will also be the subject of a major exhibition at Munich's Haus der Kunst this year (17 March-15 August). It marks the culmination of almost six years of work, phases of which have previously been shown at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York, and in Los Angeles and Detroit as public performances. The Munich show, however, "is the conclusion of the cycle. It is the first place and time where it will be shown in full," says the German institution's director, Okwui Enwezor, who will be the director of the Venice Biennale in 2015. The exhibition will span two venues. Barney and the composer Jonathan Bepler have created a symphonic film, *River of Fundament*, that lasts almost six hours and which will be shown at the Bavarian State Opera. The museum, meanwhile, will show 80 drawings and 13 new large-scale sculptures (plus two that have previously been shown at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery) formed of amalgams of bronze, copper, steel, iron, cast sulphur, salt blocks and old car parts, including a mould of a Pontiac Trans Am that was submerged in the Brooklyn Navy Yard as part of a performance last summer. "It's been a very complicated and complex process of fabrication," Enwezor says, "and is an amazing feat on the part of Matthew." R.C.

Show cancelled for artist on murder charge

SPAIN

Madrid. The Fundación Mapfre in Madrid has cancelled an exhibition by the South African photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa, who has been charged with murder. Mthethwa, whose work is in the collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art, appeared before a magistrate's court in Cape Town late last year.

Mthethwa was arrested last May after 23-year-old Nokuphila Kumalo was beaten to death in the Woodstock area in the east of Cape Town. According to the Cape Argus newspaper, Mthethwa's car has been linked to the crime via video footage. The artist denies all the charges.

"After his last appearance, the state advised that they wanted the matter to be dealt with in the High Court," says Mthethwa's lawyer, William Booth. "The case has now been postponed until 31 January, awaiting a High Court date." A spokeswoman for the Spanish gallery said that it had decided to postpone the exhibition with Zwelethu Mthethwa for an indefinite time.

The show, the first major international retrospective dedicated to the artist, was due to include more than 70 large-format photographs and was planned to run until 26 February.

Mthethwa is represented by the Johannesburg gallery Everard Read, its director, Mark Read, told *The Art Newspaper* last year: "Mthethwa is emphatic that this crime is not to do with him. It's a case of mistaken identity."

The New York institution owns three of the artist's works, including the screenprint *Being Cop*, 2004.

Italy threatens to sue UK firm over 'loot'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Italy has surveyed the Symes collection as part of its ongoing negotiations with BDO. With the assistance of officials from the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the two parties reached an agreement in September 2007 to collaborate on the investigation of the material. Italian archaeologists then travelled to London to inspect the artefacts held in storage in London warehouses. Their assessment enabled the Italian authorities to draw up a list of items they believe were looted from Italy.

On Italy's list

The list includes jewellery, dozens of Greek-style vessels, marble portrait heads, a large terracotta statue of a seated goddess holding a dove and a pomegranate, a bronze bust of Alexander the Great and several bronze statuettes, including one of Zeus and another of Aphrodite.

Italy submitted a full list of the items it was claiming to BDO on 3 August 2012, but has not yet had a response. Although BDO declined to discuss the case, the firm is known to have requested additional information



The late Christo Michaelides (left) and Robin Symes

from Italy proving that the claimed objects were removed from the country illegally. Sources close to the Italian investigators say that Italy has provided ample evidence to substantiate its claim and that it is up to the liquidator to prove that the material is not looted.

Greece is also investigating the Symes collection but is not believed to have submitted a formal claim for the return of any items. Meanwhile, the family of the late Christo Michaelides, Symes's former business partner, is also one of the creditors of Robin Symes Ltd (see box). The Michaelides family's lawyer, Ludovic de Walden of the London firm Bird & Bird, says that his clients would not object to the return of objects to Italy provided the Italian claim is based on solid evidence. **Cristina Ruiz and Javier Pes**

The fall of Robin Symes

Robin Symes and his late business associate Christo Michaelides were among the world's leading dealers in antiquities until Michaelides died after a fall in an Italian villa at a dinner hosted in 1999 by the US antiquities collectors Shelby White and the late Leon Levy. Peter Watson and Cecilia Todeschini devote a chapter to Symes in their book *The Medici Conspiracy* (2006).

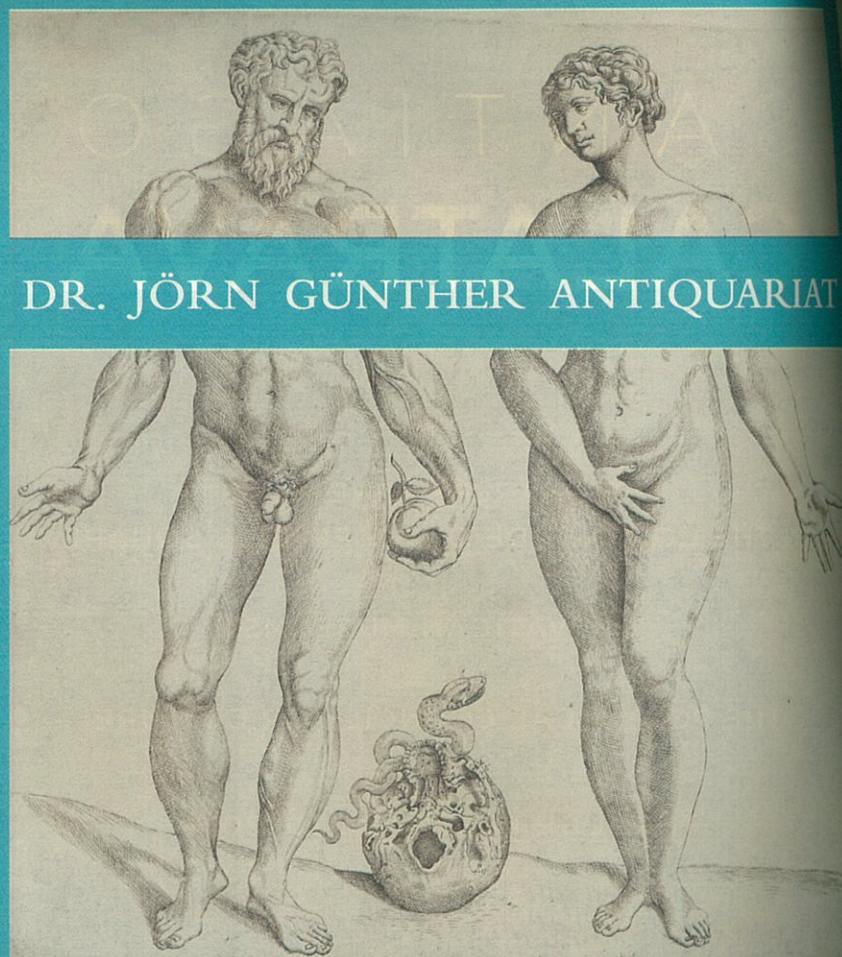
Watson and Todeschini describe how Symes argued with Michaelides's family over how Robin Symes Ltd should be divided. Symes sued the family in an Athens court in 2001, claiming that they were interfering in his business. He later dropped the action.

Meanwhile, the Michaelides family hired the lawyer Ludovic de Walden, who obtained an injunction in London to gain access to Symes's 30 or so warehouses and freeze his assets. Symes was found

to have an antiquities collection of around 17,000 items, with an estimated value of more than £125m. The Michaelides family then sued Symes in the UK, seeking to recover 50% of the assets of Robin Symes Ltd.

In 2003, Symes was declared bankrupt after he failed to pay a firm of lawyers. In January 2005, he was found guilty of contempt of court in London for lying under oath and trading in antiquities when the court had forbidden him to do so without disclosing his activities. For example, while the case was ongoing, Symes sold an Egyptian statue of Apollo for \$4.5m and a statue of Akhenaten for \$8m, both to Sheikh Saud Al-Thani of Qatar.

Symes received a prison sentence of two years. He was released after nine months for good behaviour. His current whereabouts are unknown. **J.P.**



Andreas Vesalius, *Anatomia Deutscha*, Nuremberg: Fabricius, 1551

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