

UNESCO
Director-General of UNESCO
Audrey Azoulay
7 place de Fontenoy
75007 Paris
France

13 November 2020

Formal Complaint- *The Real Price of Art* advertisement campaign is fraudulent

Dear Director General Azoulay,

We wish to lodge a formal complaint about the UNESCO advertising campaign *The Real Price of Art*, produced in partnership with the Paris-based DDB agency and broadcast on the internet internationally, including in France. It is also listed as *The True Price of Art* on the UNESCO Website. The campaign was launched on October 20, 2020, it has now led to media coverage on a number of websites.

See <https://www.thedrum.com/creative-works/project/ddb-paris-unesco-the-true-price-art>


The nature of our complaint is that the campaign is fraudulent, with the desired intention to mislead the public on the provenance of works of art and to damage the credible reputation of the art trade and collectors. It features posters showing a number of artworks in elegant contemporary home settings presented as looted from their source countries and sold via the art market to collectors. However, the images have been taken from The Metropolitan Museum of New York or, in one case from Alamy stock images, and the images and false narratives actually show The Met pieces that have been in the museum's collection legally for decades or longer and the Alamy stock image as being illicit works. In the attached annex we provide the specific content of the advertisements and the actual corresponding facts regarding the provenance.

This campaign is particularly iniquitous because it sets out to damage the legitimate international art market, not by using evidence to show that it is at fault, as claimed, but by deception. The fact that such deception was deemed necessary or even desirable could be interpreted as another demonstration UNESCO lacks the evidence and examples to support its claims.

Over the years, CINOA has been vocal about the bogus claims promoted by UNESCO. Most recently, these bogus claims have been highlighted and addressed in CINOA's Open Letter to you dated 10 November 2020 "*CINOA congratulates UNESCO for their 50-year anniversary of the 1970 Convention and pleads for better representation of the facts and better cooperation with the art trade*".


We are not aware of how personally involved you are in this advertising campaign but have noted that both Lazare Eloundou and Ernesto Ottone were two out of the five Advertiser Supervisors. **CINOA requests a clear explanation and a public correction of any misleading information regarding the false figures and deceptive advertising campaign.** We urge you to look into this matter as soon as possible and wait for your response.

Sincerely,



Clinton R Howell
President of CINOA

Annex indicating the specific content of the advertisements and the actual corresponding facts regarding the provenance




Supporting an armed conflict has never been so decorative.

Funerary relief
Palmyra, 50-150 A.D.
This priceless antiquity was stolen in the National Museum of Palmyra by Islamic State militants during their occupation of the city, before being smuggled into the European market. The trade in antiquities is one of the terror group's main sources of funding.


Know the real price of art.

50 YEARS OF FIGHT
AGAINST ILLICIT TRAFFICKING
OF CULTURAL PROPERTY.



This UNESCO image shows a funerary relief from Palmyra, dated 50-150 AD. Under the headline 'Supporting an armed conflict has never been so decorative', the accompanying description reads: *This priceless antiquity was stolen in the National Museum of Palmyra by Islamic State militants during their occupation of the city, before being smuggled into the European art market. The trade in antiquities is one of the terror group's main sources of funding.*

However, the relief is actually in the Met Collection, where it can be seen clearly on the museum's website. It was acquired by the museum in 1901, as its provenance states. (See below)



< Browse the Collection


Funerary relief

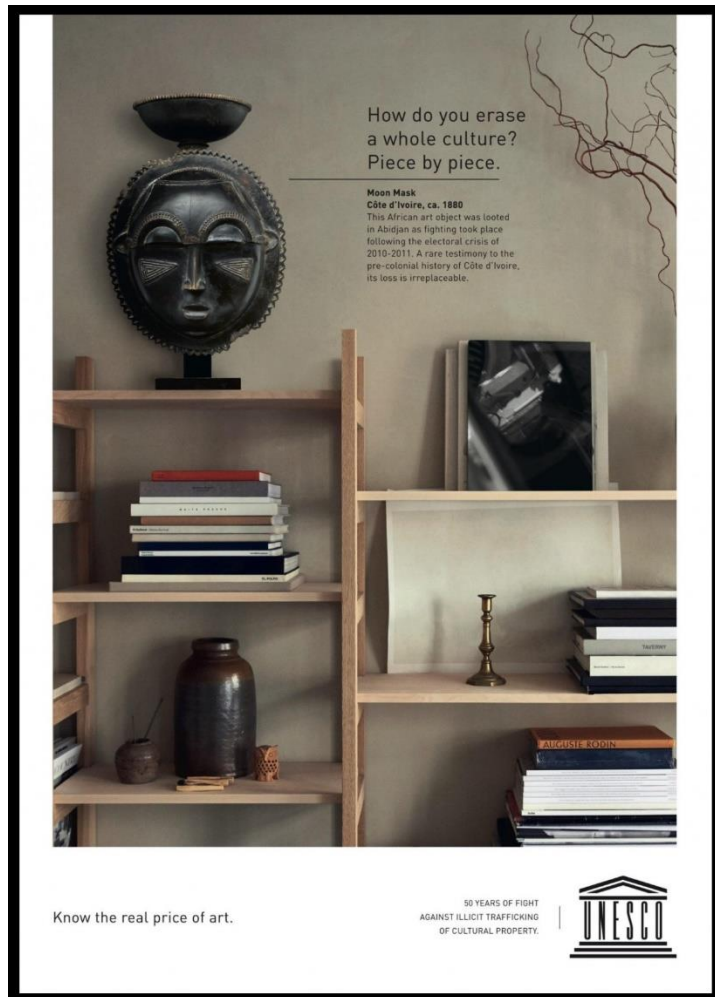
ca. 50-150

📍 On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 405

This relief is a type of funerary monument characteristic of the prosperous caravan city of Palmyra during the first three centuries A.D. Reliefs with a representation of the deceased and a short identifying inscription were used to seal burial niches in elaborately decorated communal tombs; those with a half-length or bust format became prevalent sometime after A.D. 65.

The relief depicts the upper body of a woman dressed in a draped garment, pinned at the left shoulder with an elaborate brooch, who faces directly towards the viewer. Her hair is covered by a turban-like headdress, made up of a wrapped cloth with a twisted border, worn over a diadem that covers her forehead. Long, wavy locks of hair fall behind her ears to her shoulders. Tiny plain rings cover the outer rims of her ears. She wears a long veil over her head which covers both arms, leaving only the hands exposed. The left hand holds a spindle and distaff, tools for spinning wool into yarn, which are associated with women's domestic work. The right hand is held raised with the palm facing out, a gesture which may have been protective and is frequently seen on women's funerary portraits from Palmyra. Her expression is serene, and her gaze does not meet the viewer's but looks far into the distance. The iris and pupil of the eye are marked by incised concentric circles, and the eyebrows are indicated by modeled ridges. Her small mouth is framed by delicately modeled cheeks and chin, with the horizontal lines across the throat adding to the impression of fleshy softness. The relief can be stylistically dated to about 50-150 A.D. because of the hairstyle, and the patterned folds of the garment. An inscription which appears over her right shoulder, difficult to decipher, may have been added later.





A Côte d'Ivoire Moon mask dating to around 1880 also features in the UNESCO campaign. Again presented in a contemporary interior, it is captioned 'How do you erase a whole culture? Piece by piece' and is described as follows: *Moon Mask Côte d'Ivoire, ca 1880 – This African art object was looted in Abidjan as fighting took place following the electoral crisis of 2010-2011. A rare testimony to the pre-colonial history of Côte d'Ivoire, its loss is irreplaceable.*

This mask actually appears in The Met's current collection, where it is described as Moon Mask ca. 1880 of the Baule peoples. The listed provenance dates back to 1954, giving the names of various owners through whose hands it passed in Paris and New York. Sold at Christie's in April 2003, it remained in a private New York collection until 2015, when it passed to The Met. (See below)

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Moon Mask

ca. 1880

Baule peoples

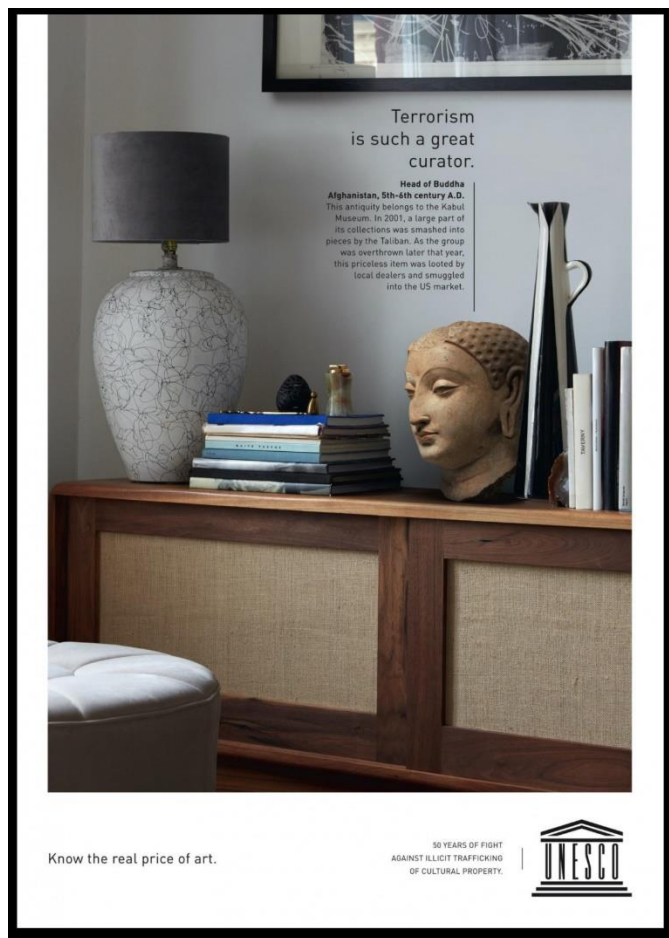
On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 352

This Baule mask features a perfectly round, domed face framed by a flat rim bordered with a pierced serrated decoration, echoing the zigzag border of a cup delicately balanced at the summit. The crescent eyes, slender nose, naturalistic mouth, and a panel of concentric triangles carved in relief on each cheek contribute to the refined composition. The mask's surface has a dark, glossy patina.

Among the Baule peoples of Central Côte d'Ivoire, masks are divided into three distinct groups: first, the most widespread, the goli mask; then the sacred masks, bonu amin, reserved for adult males only; and finally, entertainment masks. Moon masks such as this example fall in the last category.

Together with other representations of natural phenomena such as a rainbow and the setting sun, the masks are worn to "warm the dance space" at the beginning of a sequence known as gbagba or mblo. Appearing during daytime and open to all, gbagba performances feature masked dancers who impersonate familiar subjects such as spirits of nature, animals, and human caricatures. The Baule master carver who modelled this mask has depicted in a smooth, poised style a face in a perfect circle, echoed by the semi-circles of the eyes and eyebrows and reinforced by the pierced serrated decoration of the circular border.

Public Domain



The head of a Buddha from Afghanistan, dating to the 5th-6th century AD, also features in the advertising campaign. Shown resting on a sideboard among books, it is featured under the headline *Terrorism is such a great curator* and captioned as follows: *This antiquity belongs to the Kabul Museum. In 2001, a large part of its collections was smashed into pieces by the Taliban. As the group was overthrown later that year, this priceless item was looted by local dealers and smuggled into the US market.*

It is in The Met Collection. In this case, not only does the listed provenance show that it was excavated in Tibet or Turkestan during the 1927-28 Trinkler expedition and that it was sold to The Met in 1930, it also cites four Met exhibitions in which it has appeared, in 1940, 1971, 2007 and 2012-13. (see below)

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Head of Buddha

5th–6th century

Afghanistan (probably Hadda)

📍 On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in [Gallery 236](#)

The well-preserved surface and traces of paint provide an idea of what this head looked like when it was being used in worship. The abstracted treatment of the eyes and the intersecting plains defining forehead, eyebrows, and nose are stylistic features shared with imagery produced in north India during the Gupta period. The fact that this north Indian way of presenting the Buddha had penetrated into Afghanistan suggests a shared Buddhist tradition.

Public Domain

Additional view 3 of 6

Art knows no frontiers. Neither does organized crime.

Vessel with Head Neck Peru, 4th–6th century A.D.
Before standing here, this piece of pre-Columbian art was looted in an illegal excavation by 'subsistence diggers'. It passed through two middlemen, crossed Costa Rica and Florida before being sold to an art dealer in Europe, who sold it himself through an auction house.



Know the real price of art.


50 YEARS OF FIGHT AGAINST ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF CULTURAL PROPERTY.



Under the headline 'Art knows no frontiers. Neither does organized crime', it pictures what is described as a *Vessel with head Neck Peru, 4th-6th century A.D.* – Before standing here, this piece of pre-Columbian art was looted in an illegal excavation by 'subsistence diggers'. It passed through two middlemen, crossed Costa Rica and Florida before being sold to an art dealer in Europe, who sold it himself through an auction house.

The Met is not the only source for images falsely represented in the UNESCO campaign. (see below from Alamy Stock images)

Vessel with Head Neck. Date: 4th-6th century; Geography: Peru; Culture: Moche; Medium: Ceramic; Dimensions: Height 12-1/8 in; Classification: - Image ID: KNX30G






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