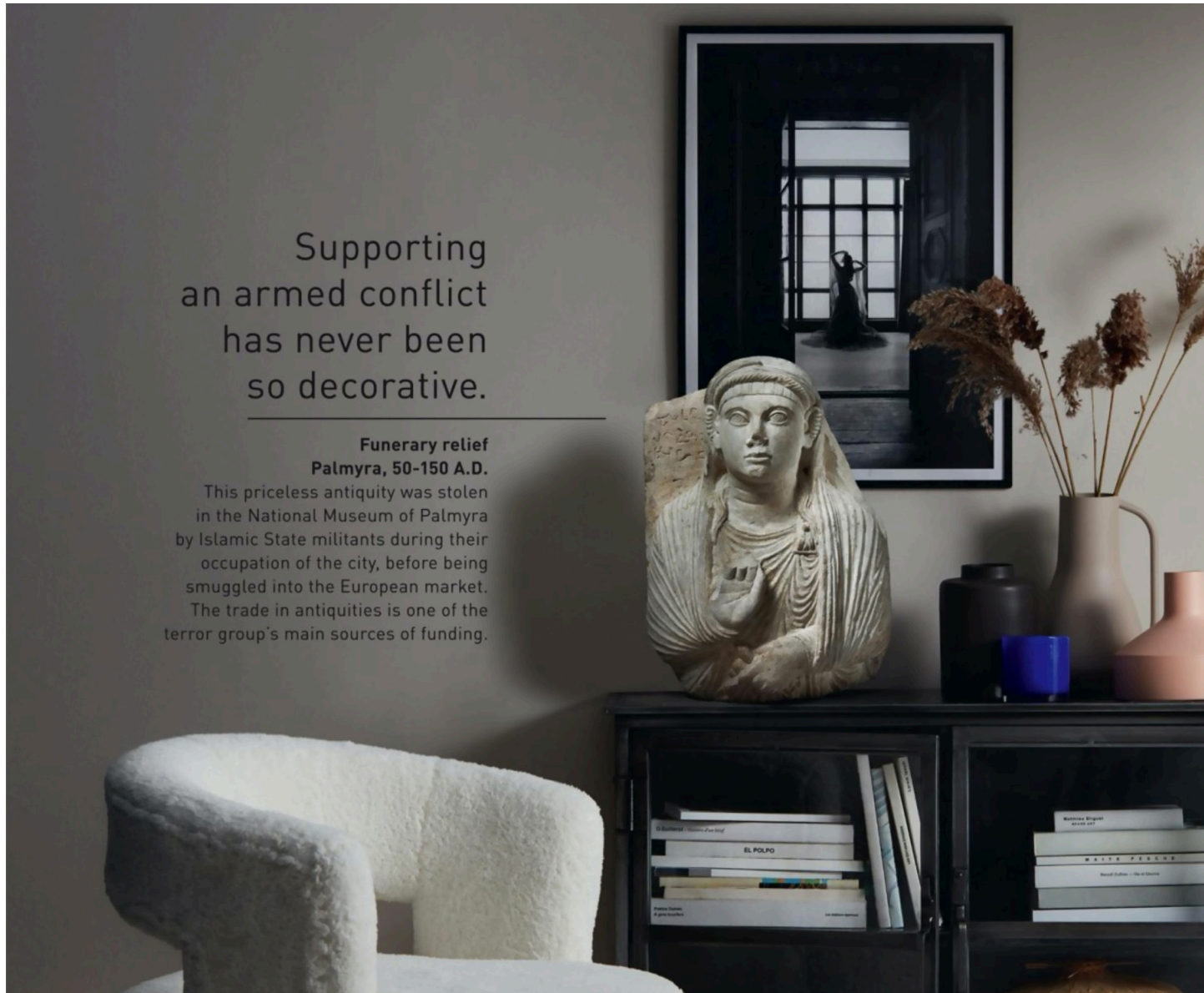


Compare and contrast: UNESCO's fraudulent campaign against the international art market launched in October 2020



Left: The image of the funerary relief as used in the UNESCO campaign.

[< Browse the Collection](#)

Funerary relief

ca. 50–150

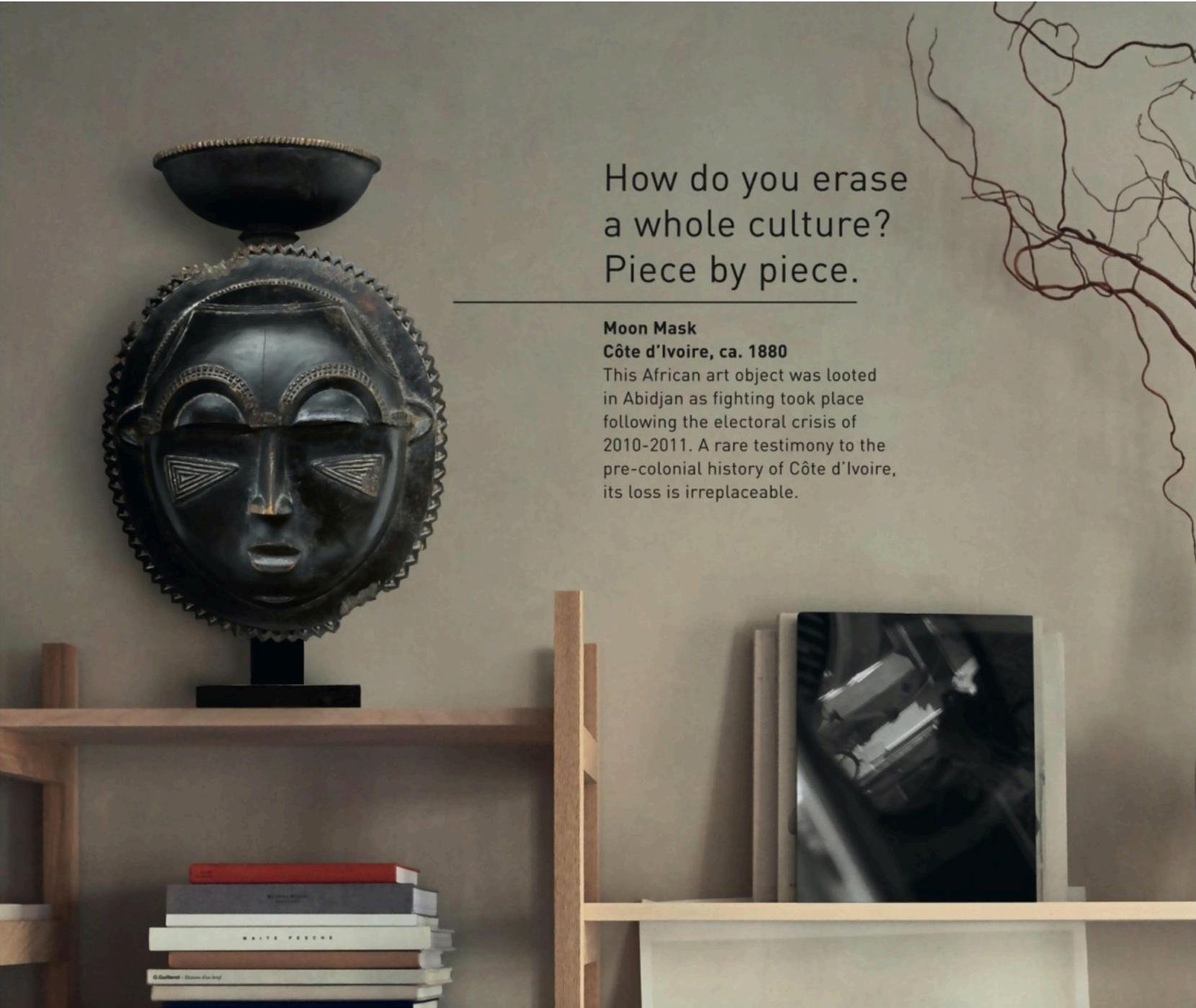
📍 On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in [Gallery 405](#)

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.



Left: The real story behind the image – it has been legally in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of New York since 1901.



How do you erase
a whole culture?
Piece by piece.

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.

Left: The image of the Moon Mask as used in the UNESCO campaign.

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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 amuin, 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



Left: The real story behind the image – it has been legally in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of New York since 2015, with a detailed provenance dating back to 1954, giving the names of various owners through whose hands it passed in Paris and New York. It previously sold at Christie's in April 2003.

Terrorism is such a great curator.

Head of Buddha Afghanistan, 5th-6th century A.D.

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.

Left: The image of the Buddha head as used in the UNESCO campaign.



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Head of Buddha

5th–6th century

Afghanistan (probably Hadda)

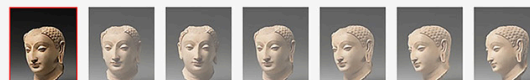
On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in [Gallery 236](#)

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



Left: The real story behind the image – it has been legally in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of New York since 1930. The listed provenance shows that it was excavated in Tibet or Turkestan during the 1927-28 Trinkler expedition. It also cites four Met exhibitions in which it has since appeared, in 1940, 1971, 2007 and 2012-13.

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.



Left: The image of the Peruvian pottery as used in the UNESCO campaign.

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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Left: The real story behind the image – as it appears on the Alamy website.

Having been caught out, UNESCO substituted the images with two others that proved equally fraudulent



Left: The replacement African mask, described as looted from Abidjan following the crisis in 2010. The museum director has confirmed that it was not looted and remains in the collection.

Supporting
an armed conflict
has never been
so decorative.

Woman with polos
2650-2350 B.C.

This priceless antiquity was stolen from the National Museum of Aleppo when the fighting was at its peak in 2014, before being smuggled into the European market. Illicit trade in antiquities is one of the main sources of funding of armed groups.



Left: The Sumerian alabaster figure of a woman wearing polos as shown in the replacement UNESCO campaign.



