



**Michael Petropoulos RIP**

We just received the sad news that our long time member **Michael Petropoulos** passed away on January 28 at the age of 83.

Michael, pictured here, was a born-and-bred Athenian, and as a child, he was living and playing amid the ruins of ancient Athens and Rhodes.

In Switzerland, he was initiated into the art trade by working in the legendary Galerie Nefer in Zurich in the 1980s. In 1990, the time was finally right to open the doors of Galerie Rhéa. Besides being a member of IADAA since its creation, the gallery was also a member of the Swiss Syndicate of Antiquaries and Art Dealers (VSAK).

Galerie Rhéa exhibited at TEFAF Maastricht for 23 years, participated in the Brussels Ancient Art Fair from the beginning as well as in the Basel Ancient Art Fair, followed by Antike in Basel. Michael was so dedicated to his trade that even after he had passed the age of 80, he decided to participate in the young Parisian fair Opus in 2023.

Galerie Rhéa always thought of new digital ways to surprise his customers, last year with Gallery Rhéa's 2023 Advent Calendar.

Michael will be missed as a keen promoter of our trade.

We wish his children strength in coping with their loss.



**EU High-level event, Dialogue with the Art Market. Brussels, January 30:  
Special report by IADAA chairman Vincent Geerling**

The European Commission organised this event to strengthen collaboration between actors in the art market, EU institutions and international organisations in the quest to protect cultural heritage and combat illicit trade of cultural goods.

In his opening speech, Margaritis Schinas, European Commission Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, elaborated on the importance of the art market for cultural life in Europe. He declared



that the Commission wants to have a *real dialogue* with the art market, something that had been missing till now, and had led to misunderstandings.

After Mr Schinas left, Ernesto Ottone Ramirez, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture, took the stand and also talked about cooperation with the art market etc, but participants knew that until now this has only seldomly resulted in a real cooperation. Keynote speaker Dr Donna Yates spoke about “the complexity of the cooperative networks through which art is created protected defined and appreciated”.

She talked about the real threats that could undermine the market, such as trafficking and money laundering – twin crimes that nobody wants to be involved with – and stressed the need for a cooperative network, with *real* cooperation and a *real* dialogue, moving beyond the rhetoric of the sort of box-ticking “consultation” we have seen in the recent past.

Dr Yates also agreed that accurate data rather than wild and unreliable statistics should be the basis for policy development, strengthening and not harming the art trade.

Her speech was followed by a panel discussion and by a brief Q&A, well moderated by Claire Doole. On the panel with her were:

- Georg Häusler, Director for Culture, Creativity and Sport at the European Commission
- Krista Pikkat, Director for Culture and Emergencies at UNESCO
- James Ratcliffe, General Counsel & Director of Recoveries at the Art
- Petra Youngová, Vice President of CINOA and art dealer

Unfortunately, UNESCO’s Mr Ramirez had more urgent matters on his agenda than the complete EU High level event and therefore missed out on Dr Yates’ speech as well as the educational panel discussion.

Director Georg Häusler, on the other hand, showed great insight in noting that the art market was different from the big industries that spend millions on lobbying, as it consists of thousands of micro businesses. He acknowledged that the EU had failed to consult with art market representatives BEFORE introducing new legislation, resulting in legislation that is proving to be a real challenge for the market. Vice President Schinas strongly agreed with Director Häusler, saying we need a *real dialogue* to get a better understanding of what the art market wants.

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### ***From Antiquities to Artificial Intelligence: How to Navigate Today’s Art Market – Future Art Market Issues – A View from the Ground Floor***

As keynote speaker at this January 25 RAM conference in Geneva, Paris Tribal Art dealer Anthony J.P. Meyer championed the professionalism and dedication of the trade, presenting



a robust defence of its actions and traditions in the face of increasing scrutiny, regulation and criticism.

“We are loaded down with often ‘Kafkaesque’ and time consuming administrative and legal responsibilities many of which we are not capable of implementing without detracting from our main purpose which is buying and selling art,” he told delegates.

As leading stakeholders in the market, he argued that the trade’s voice might be heard by the authorities, but “they do not listen to what we are saying”.

Nonetheless, the trade has been proactive in the past decade through trade bodies like CINOA and other initiatives such as RAM and the Art Law Foundation, he countered.

“Dealers have always been major contributors to the understanding, preservation, and transmission of cultural property,” he reminded his audience. “On the outside we may be seen only as commercial entities buying and selling art for profit, but the truth is we are often the first vector and interactive interface, opening up an introduction to other cultures through the objects we offer.”

The trade and collectors are also proactive in their support for the sector, he noted, citing examples of how private investment paid for museums and other institutions in Africa. Looking to the future, Meyer addressed regulation, provenance, transparency, orphan objects and patrimony.

“The exchange of cultural property is paramount in our understanding and respect of other people,” he argued, noting that New Caledonia in the Pacific does not ask for pieces to be returned but for them to be used as ‘ambassadors’ of the Kanak culture across the world. On the subject of provenance, he highlighted the challenge of being transparent while protecting commercially sensitive information: “Knowledge is the backbone of our business. Putting this information on the table for all to see and use does not make very good business sense.”

He also raised as yet unanswered questions regarding provenance: Who would be responsible for verifying research? How will auction houses respond? Will national authorities accept foreign research? What about the cost of this research? “And most importantly we need to accept the fact that an art object without provenance is not illicit until proven so.”

With Artificial Intelligence being a central theme of the conference, Meyer asked how it would tackle the blight of fake news that so damages the legitimate market: “My big question is how will AI cull the good from the bad and who will and how will we interpret the results?”

A more detailed provenance will still need independent verification, he pointed out: “The eye, the accumulated knowledge, and analytic and inspirational capacity of the human is as yet unparalleled.” As he concluded, HI (Human Intelligence) is at least as important.

***RAM’s Eight Annual Conference: From Antiquities to Artificial Intelligence: How to Navigate Today’s Art Market***: January 25: In an hour-long presentation titled *Antiquities in the Art Market*, chaired by cultural property specialist lawyer Nicholas O’Donnell, panellists debated the challenges of provenance, identifying illicit and stolen items, and what the future holds.

Much of the debate turned round the issue of attitudes among professionals within the art market when it comes to provenance. Some dealers are still too cavalier about due diligence and providing proper provenance to buyers, it was argued.

O’Donnell talked about the situation in New York, with what he described as the “very aggressive” approach by the District Attorney’s office and the increasingly public form of prosecution that was high stakes because it involved criminal rather than civil proceedings.

The lack of evidence of wrongdoing did not mean that we should dismiss concerns, according to Will Korner, Head of Fairs at TEFAF, who previously worked with the Art Loss Register.

The panellists agreed that the culture was changing, with buyers demanding more evidence of sound provenance from dealers, and dealers beginning to ask for more information from collectors they bought from.

Korner predicted that transactions would increasingly rely on independent provenance research – costly but necessary – with customers refusing to buy if they felt due diligence was not good enough.

Jean-Bernard Schmid a lawyer and former public prosecutor in Geneva, said the courts were overwhelmed, which meant relying on plea bargains much of the time, while also recognising that if regulation became too burdensome, smaller players might go underground with their activities.

Paris Tribal Art dealer Anthony Meyer, who had earlier given the keynote speech for the conference (*see report of speech above*), provided a robust defence of the trade at the end of the session, arguing that there was already too much official monitoring and interference with the public's lives.

When asked why fewer antiquities dealers now exhibited at BRAFA and TEFAF, he responded as follows: At BRAFA, almost none remained, having withdrawn following extremely aggressive and unreasonable investigations related to the Finance Ministry in Belgium, who raided the fair on the opening day in 2021. The ministry's officers did not understand what they were looking at, demanded to see artworks that had vetted off the fair and insisted that anything vetted off must be fake, which is not true.

Dwindling antiquities exhibitors at TEFAF came from fear of the future, he said.

TEFAF has extraordinarily experienced and expert dealers, he said, especially those in IADAA: dealers extremely careful about what they do. There is a general anguish in the market among the dealers, he added. No matter how hard they work to provide due diligence evidence, they are accused of being guilty of dealing in stolen items without any evidence being provided to show this. Tribal art dealers will soon face the same problems, he said, adding that with so much legal material on the market, it made no sense to promote illicit material.

### **James Richards Joins Charles Ede Ltd as Director**

Charles Ede Ltd have announced the appointment of James Richards as Director. He comes with five years' experience as Gallery Manager and Head of Research at the Daniel Katz Gallery and has previously worked as Head of British and European Pictures at Christie's South Kensington. He brings to the gallery extensive expertise in the fields of Paintings and Drawings, complemented by knowledge in Western European Sculpture and Ancient Art.

Pictured here, James can be contacted at [James@charlesede.com](mailto:James@charlesede.com)



### **How Museums Acquire Antiquities Is Changing**

Observer (NY): January 9: For some time now, museums have found themselves in the eye of the storm when it comes to legal seizures and challenges over the provenance of their holdings, particularly antiquities. Keen to avoid censure or other actions that might be damaging to reputations, they are now tightening their acquisitions policies, as this article

points out. Research now extends beyond the history of the items themselves to encompass the reputations of people through whose hands those items have passed.

As has long been noted with compromised dealers such as Medici and Becchina, any object in which they traded has effectively become tainted, even if no evidence exists to show that it is illicit in any way.

This also now affects donations, which while gifted free to institutions will make them incur costs as they carry out due diligence on them. Considering that collectors are already being discouraged from making such donations for fear of trouble down the line, with their gifts being seized and shipped back to their countries of origin, the future for philanthropy in this field looks bleak.

The USA did not pass the UNESCO Convention into domestic law until 1983, meaning its provisions only apply to imports and acquisitions made after that time. However, pressure is being put on US museums to apply 1970 as a cut-off date for heightened scrutiny under the terms of the Convention.

### *International scrap over treasure-laden Spanish galleon that sunk off the Colombian coast in 1708*

Art Newspaper: January 10: A fascinating article that sets out the competing legal and moral claims on what is considered the most valuable shipwreck ever found. The debate is a microcosm of developing cultural policy absolutism as it tackles colonial exploitation, salvage rights, conflicting patrimony claims and tribal heritage, as this passage illustrates:

*“The Colombian president Gustavo Petro wants to surface the ship before his term ends in 2026, while Spain seeks ownership of the galleon as part of its cultural heritage and a US-based company is demanding its share for ‘discovering’ the wreck in the first place. At the same time, at least one local Indigenous group would like part of the ship’s haul to be used towards*

*reparations, as it was their ancestors who were forced to mine the precious metals in the first place. All the while, underwater archaeologists around the world fear that attempting to remove the ship from its resting place of more than 300 years could destroy it and the history it contains.”*



*Samuel Scott's painting Wager's Action off Cartagena, 28 May 1708 (around 1743-47), shows the San José sinking* [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Politics, cultural heritage and money rarely clash as obviously as this, but the tale is useful in casting the spotlight on the competing motives in play, allowing public debate on which are ultimately the most important. Should Colombia’s national laws on underwater heritage outrank Spain’s clear patrimony claim over the ship, for instance?

### ***The Guardian view on archaeology and writing: the world-building power of small thoughts***

Guardian: January 7: A well-written and timely reminder that some of the most fascinating and useful ancient objects may be found beyond the history of pharaohs and kings. *The Guardian* focuses on the Vindolanda letters from 2,000 years ago, when the Romans were guarding this outpost of empire on Hadrian's Wall.

As with the Rosetta Stone, one of the great paradoxes of these early texts is often their banal content: in the case of Vindolanda one is an invitation to a birthday party, the other a letter to a soldier "promising socks, sandals and underpants to protect him from the Northumberland cold". However, it is the simple communications of ordinary folk that often give us the best insights to history and can recreate a moment in time most effectively. All this leads up to the recent discovery of a cuneiform tablet in a previously unknown language from the rule of the Hittites around 3,000 years ago. "It appears that, far from suppressing their subject peoples, the Hittites – who ruled the area between 1650 and 1200BC – had a civil service of scribes dedicated to researching and recording their traditions and beliefs," the article concludes.

A follow-up letter to *The Guardian* from a museum and heritage consultant notes how the "seemingly mundane" can bring to life the past. The finds she is working on in South West England reveal the tastes, habits and interests of the people who lived in nearby Wells over a 500-year period, including "how fashion, the expanding empire, the impact of slavery and the growth of the consumer economy at home touched real people in Wells".

This is important, the consultant writes, because "We are all the poorer if small, largely volunteer-funded museums such as Wells, as well as our larger public institutions, are starved of the support received from local and national government. Funding from charitable trusts and the agencies that distribute Lottery funding is ever more oversubscribed. It is the nuances of life, past and present, that foster understanding and compassion."

This is a timely reminder of the roles archaeology, antiquities and the tradition of collecting play in enlightening the future about the past, especially under the shadow cast by the British Museum scandal and the global assault on museum collections in the current political climate.

### ***Huge ancient lost city found in the Amazon***

BBC News: January 11: Proof that major discoveries are still possible comes with the announcement that a city system with connecting highways has been found in an area of the Ecuadorian Amazon where previously it was thought that settlements were very small or nomadic.

Comprising at least 6,000 mounds, the 2,500-year-old complex promises to reset Amazonian history: "This is older than any other site we know in the Amazon. We have a Eurocentric view of civilisation, but this shows we have to change our idea about what is culture and civilisation," says Prof Stephen Rostain, Director of Investigation at the National Centre for Scientific Research in France, who led the research.

"It changes the way we see Amazonian cultures. Most people picture small groups, probably naked, living in huts and clearing land – this shows ancient people lived in complicated urban societies," says co-author Antoine Dorison.

### ***Rome opens new archaeological park and museum in shadow of Colosseum***

Toronto City News: January 11: Most notable about the opening of this archaeological park is the decision to position the remnants of an 18 x 13 metre marble map of Rome on the ground rather than upright – it was originally located on the wall of the Forum.

“We decided to place it horizontally to give the chance to have the feeling to walk in the ancient city of Rome,” said Claudio Parisi Presicce, Rome’s cultural heritage superintendent. It does not say how the city will protect the map from wear and tear under these conditions.

### **China, US extend key agreement on fighting cultural relic theft, illegal trade**

China Daily: January 12: Notification of the renewal (for another five years) of the USA/China bilateral agreement on cultural heritage. The Memorandum of Understanding concerns US import restrictions on “archaeological materials ... representing China’s cultural heritage from the Paleolithic period (c.75,000 BC) through the end of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and monumental sculpture and wall art at least 250 years old”.

As with other announcements of this type, what is not explained is that the MoU effectively gives China a veto on US imports in this field, allowing it to claim the private property of US citizens without providing any evidence that the items in question are illicit. This arguably sets the MoU against the terms of Human Rights conventions and the US Constitution whose amendments guard against the arbitrary interference of property rights.

### **The EU risks own goal with money laundering rules**

Daniel’s Substack: January 19: Subscribers will recall Daniel Dalton, the former British MEP and rapporteur for the import legislation (EU Reg 2019/880). Dalton proved to be open-minded in listening to the art market’s concerns over the import proposals and made prescient interventions in the European Parliament as the legislation came under scrutiny. His new substack focuses on developments in the EU, including anti-money laundering proposals. In this example he focuses on how proposals could significantly damage European football, but his arguments could just as well apply to the art market. If imposed, AML checks would apply to player transfers, sponsorship deals and investors trying to buy stakes in clubs, he explains.

“The impact could be massive and given the huge money involved in football, and the nature of AML checks (which include having to identify the source of funds) this legislation could choke off a lot of the funding which currently goes into Continental European football clubs.”

While acknowledging that dirty money should be kept out of football, Dalton continues: “...these rules are likely to go way beyond the intentions of MEPs and block or delay many legal transactions. The nature of the AML regime means that many legal transactions get blocked. Ask any Politically Exposed Person (PEP) how difficult the AML checks make it to even do basic things like opening a bank account and the scale of the problem soon becomes apparent.”

As has already happened elsewhere when it comes to the art market, including the UK, Dalton notes that financial institutions may refuse to offer services to clubs coming under the rules. He argues that the likely damage probably explains why the European Commission did not include football in its original proposals; it was the European Parliament who brought it into the legislation.

If even the European Commission can appreciate the inherent dangers with this legislation, perhaps it should review them in light of their application to the art market as well.

### **...and while we’re on AML proposals**

January 30 also saw the publication of the latest piece of analysis by the Antiquities Forum, IADAA’s joint venture with the Antiquities Dealers’ Association.

The two-part article, titled [\*\*\*Fake's progress – how misinformation gains traction over time\*\*\*](#), looks in detail at claims made by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in two reports, published in 2011 and 2016. It shows how false data that appears in those reports went unchecked and spread into the general debate – including via



the media – regarding illicit antiquities. In particular, groundless statistics in the 2011 UNODC report have been used as a central plank in the Financial Action Task Force's 2023 report to promote tighter AML regulations within the EU, [\*\*\*Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing in the Art and Antiquities Market\*\*\*](#) (See Introduction, Background, 3, page 5).

### [\*\*\*British Museum reveals bumper haul of treasures found by the public\*\*\*](#)

The Guardian: January 23: The latest figures from the Portable Antiquities Scheme reveal that 53,490 finds were recorded in 2022, of which 1,378 met the legal definition of Treasure.

### [\*\*\*'An exciting new model for repatriation': rotating display of Cycladic treasures, on loan from Greece, debuts at the Met\*\*\*](#)

Art Newspaper: January 25: Further evidence of cultural repatriation mission creep as the Metropolitan Museum of Art unveils its vast display of Cycladic antiquities from the Stern collection as part of a 50-year agreement with Greece seen as “an innovative solution to repatriation”.

[News of the mooted deal](#) first arose in September 2022 when reportedly unspecified provenances “leading experts to believe that they were likely illegally excavated at some point during the 20th century when illegal archaeological digs were rampant in the Cyclades islands”.

Almost 18 months on, the deal has been ratified. This means that Greece now owns the collection, while the partnership with museum declares the arrangement as “an exciting new model for repatriation”.

The handing over of title to Greece of a major private collection left to a United States institution is rightly acknowledged as big news – and it might even prove to be a pragmatic solution to a diplomatically embarrassing situation where such a collection had been shown to be filled with looted objects. However, as the *Art Newspaper* points out, “The Greek prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, and the minister of culture, Lina Mendoni, addressed the urgency of repatriation in remarks made at the opening of the Met display on Wednesday (24 January), emphasising that there is no evidence that the artefacts were illegally excavated or acquired.”

In which case, why do the deal?

### [\*\*\*Cyprus stirs controversy with Sweden in heritage pact\*\*\*](#)

Kathimerini News: January 25: The Technological University of Cyprus (TEPAK) and Sweden's State Museums, represented by Ann Follin from Medelhavsmuseet, have formally agreed to collaborate in digitizing the entire collection of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern



Antiquities Museum, with the ultimate goal of making the results openly accessible worldwide.

“The collaboration not only marks a digital repatriation of artifacts but also reunites them with Cyprus’s collections. This initiative, a century after the Swedish Archaeological Mission to Cyprus and two decades into Cyprus’s EU membership, signifies a new era of cultural diplomacy,” the article claims.

### *Manufacturing giant develops revolutionary system to detect counterfeit art*

The Guardian: January 27: A new optical recognition system called Origify is expected to be a breakthrough in the identification of fake artworks, according to its inventor Oliver Steinbis who first developed it to target counterfeit car parts.

The technology involves “tamper-proof digital fingerprints” of paintings and sculptures. “A special camera system captures selected unique details that are not normally visible to the human eye, storing data in a ‘tamper-proof cloud’ and enabling authentication with a smartphone app. “It’s really like looking at the fingerprint of someone, a unique fingerprint that cannot be copied,” said Steinbis.

### *Pakistan, US sign agreement on cultural property protection*

Business Recorder: January 30: A newly inked pact paving the way for the return of cultural property to Pakistan from the United States, this joins a list of more than 30 such agreements.

### *Egypt is renovating one of its ancient pyramids using granite, and some experts are horrified*



A screenshot from a video shared by Mostafa Waziri, head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Activities, on January 29, 2024, showing the base of the Mankahre pyramid at Giza partially clad in granite. Dr Mostafa Waziri

Business Insider: January 30: “A restoration project to cover one of Egypt’s most iconic pyramids with granite cladding has produced a decidedly mixed reaction among heritage experts and social media users,” this report begins.

Criticism includes the view that the works transgresses the rules of conservation: “When are we going to stop the absurdity in the management of Egyptian heritage?” Egyptologist

Monica Hanna said, [according to \*The Telegraph\*](#). “Interfering with the nature of the monument can cause visible problems and major damage.”

Other experts fear the introduction of new materials rather than ancient ones found on site will also compromise the monument.

As this report explains, Social media commenters poured scorn on the project. “When will the project to straighten the Tower of Pisa be planned?” one wrote, [according to \*France 24\*](#). Another said, per *The Guardian*: “Rather than tiles, why not wallpaper the pyramids?”

### **Dates for your calendar**

***Obligation de restitution? Du traitement des biens culturels issus de contextes problématiques, The Art Law Foundation, University of Geneva, February 15, 1.15-6pm.***

***Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in a Changing World, TEFAF Summit, MECC, Maastricht March 11, 9am-2pm***

***UNESCO workshops on Code of Ethics for art dealers set for May 15***