

**INCLUDING
THE YEAR
AHEAD
MAGAZINE**



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Economic crisis

Europe-wide national debts are leading to swingeing cuts in culture budgets

Museums and other cultural bodies may have to downsize after years of investment

LONDON. Inevitably, following the decision by leading credit agencies to downgrade the ratings of Greece and Spain last month, European museums and other art bodies are finally facing up to the scale of budget cuts before them—after several years of growth and investment. Mark Jones, the director of London's Victoria and Albert Museum, which has just unveiled its new, £31.75m Medieval and Renaissance galleries (p18), warned: "There will obviously be significant cuts in spending to deal with the large [UK] deficit. Museums need to be worried about this possibility."

In fact there is evidence already of museum workers and supporters who are more than worried: in France, some of the world's greatest institutions have been closed by a series of strikes, as trade unions take action over civil service staff cutbacks (p13). In Germany, there have been protests in the streets of cities such as Stuttgart, with the arts sector expecting cuts of between 5% and 10% on its €169m budget—a reduction



Everybody out: a striking worker explains why the Louvre was shut last month

of between €8.5m and €17m in a city with a population of only 60,000.

The underlying problem is similar across Europe: spiralling national debts incurred in an

effort to bale out the banks and stave off the recession. According to the latest European Economic Forecast, produced by the European Commission on 3 November (and based on a "no-

policy change assumption"), the debts of leading nations are set to increase sharply over the next two years. Its predictions are as follows (% of debt compared with GDP): France, up from 79.7% last year to 85.2% this year—and 90% next; Germany, 73.4%, 78% and 80% respectively; Greece, 112%, 120% and 135%; Italy, 113%, 116.7% and 118%; and Spain, 50.8%, 66.3% and 74%. Britain's debt is forecast to be 80.3% this year: when the Labour Party came to power in 1997, the national debt was 43.6% of GDP.

The figures resulted in a downgrading of Greece's credit rating from A- to BBB+ by Fitch, and Spain's from AA+ to AA- by Standard & Poor's. Britain was warned that its AAA rating was also at risk unless the government takes swift action. While culture budgets are hardly at the forefront of potential savings in comparison with departments such as health, education and defence, it is clear that museums and other institutions across Europe—with large proportions of their overheads tied up in staff costs—could be hard

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Repatriation

China pays to get looted art back

But also asks "patriotic overseas Chinese" to help return national treasures

BEIJING. China has given financial compensation to two US-based collectors who handed back nine bronzes reportedly looted from Chinese tombs in the 1990s, then sold at auction abroad. An official from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) said that payments for the return of relics are set by "bargaining" with a fund from the ministry of finance. Experts in SACH evaluate each piece internally, taking into account international prices, but if there is no auction benchmark the "internal valuation" takes precedence.

The "national treasures" were handed back by George Fan (Fan Jirong) and his wife Katherine Hu (Hu Yingying). Three bronzes are from the Western Zhou period (around 1046-771BC) and six from the Spring and Autumn period (around 770-476BC). The donation marks a period of intense activity by Chinese

authorities to secure the return of Chinese relics from abroad (see p4), many of which were lost during tumultuous periods in the 20th century.

State media reported that Fan and Hu were also given the Contribution to Chinese Culture award at a ceremony attended by Shan Jixiang, head of the SACH, along with Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference official Lin Wenyi and culture minister Cai Wu. Fan and Hu have a long history of donations and connections with mainland China's museums, and they set up the foundation American Friends of the Shanghai Museum in 1995.

In his speech, Shan said he encouraged "patriotic overseas Chinese" to assist in the return of cultural relics, and also invited friendly overseas organisations to assist in the process. **Chris Gill**

Exclusive

Why Van Gogh cut his ear: new clue

LONDON. An envelope depicted in a Van Gogh painting provides a clue that could help to explain why the artist slashed his ear. The envelope, in *Still Life: Drawing Board with Onions*, 1889, is addressed to Vincent from his brother Theo. Until now, no one has considered whether the artist was illustrating a specific letter.

The letter in the painting probably arrived in Arles on 23 December 1888, the fateful day when Vincent mutilated his ear in the late evening. It almost certainly contained news that Theo had fallen in love with Johanna (Jo) Bongers, and Vincent was fearful that he might lose his



The fateful letter, to the right

brother's emotional and financial support.

In the still-life, the handwriting on the envelope is clearly Theo's, and the letter is addressed to Vincent in Arles. Although the postmarks lack a legible date, one contains the number "67",

enclosed in a circle. This was used by the post office in Place des Abbesses, close to Theo's Montmartre apartment.

The postmark directly over the two postage stamps reads "Jour de l'An" (New Year's Day). This was spotted by Dutch specialists working on the new edition of Van Gogh's letters, which was published in October. They concluded that the letter had been posted during "the busy period around New Year" and it had possibly arrived on 23 December, the date Vincent received his 100 francs financial allowance from Theo by post. The letter was

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The first ten years: definitely not alright



Ten years ago, *The Art Newspaper* carried this work on its front page. The dreaded Year 2000 millennium bug never happened, but in every other respect the reassuring message from British artist Martin Creed turned out to be in vain: 9/11, the Iraq war and international paranoia, financial glut followed by financial famine etc. Tate Britain has decided to give the message another chance and has mounted the work on its facade.

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Belle Époque gold mounted rock crystal, enamel and diamond clock by Cartier, c.1905
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Conservation

The two Van Dycks

...ing help scholars determine which is the copy



...e with an Angel in Rotterdam (left) is earlier than Stockholm's version (right)

...samples
...works using
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...ation showed
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...t Jerome's
...the cloak.
...to the angel

This evidence, combined with the freer brushstroke on the Rotterdam painting, led the researchers to conclude that it is the original and that the Stockholm work is a copy. Analysis of the paint samples revealed that identical pigments were used for both works, ruling out the possibility that the Stockholm painting could have been an 18th-century copy.

What remains to be seen is how much of the Stockholm piece can be attributed to Van Dyck versus how much was painted by his studio using the Rotterdam work as a model. According to Boijmans curator Friso Lammertse, more research and comparisons of Van Dyck's early work is needed before this question can be answered. The fact that Van Dyck employed several assistants, and that there

are at least two versions of his major early works, makes it difficult to assign a work's complete authorship to the master.

"If you buy an early Van Dyck you should be aware that there is likely to be a second or third version," says Lammertse, adding: "It's more about the quality of the piece, rather than simply a matter of which was first."

The Art Newspaper has learned that the Prado in Madrid is planning an exhibition devoted to the early work of Van Dyck in 2012.

Both works can be seen in the show "Masterpiece and Copy? Anthony van Dyck" on view at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen until 14 February. The pieces will then travel to Stockholm's Nationalmuseum for "Rubens & Van Dyck" (25 February-23 May). **Emily Sharpe**

United States

menagerie soon to be reunited

...artist's lectures to aid the work's restoration



...presence of an initial size layer, which shows that Oudry contradicted his own advice. According to Getty conservator Tiarna Doherty: "It's wonderful when we have the artist's own testimony, but it doesn't always jibe."

New paper lab for Abu Dhabi

The facility will add to the emirate's conservation infrastructure

LONDON. The Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (Adach) has established a new paper and book conservation laboratory. Located within the former National Archive building in Abu Dhabi, the facility will be responsible for the conservation and restoration of Adach's paper-based collection of manuscripts, books, photographs, prints, drawings and painted miniatures on paper.

The new laboratory is part of the five-year old authority's five-year strategic plan to establish an infrastructure for conservation within the emirate. This will eventually include a new earthen buildings conservation laboratory, located 160km east of the capital Abu Dhabi in Al Ain, and a new central object conservation facility, adding to its existing paper and material laboratories.

Among the many projects planned for the new facility is the establishment of a database of Islamic book bind-

ings, which, according to paper conservation specialist Fabienne Meyer, will be the first of its kind anywhere. "When dealing with manuscripts and historic books, we have to keep in mind that a book consists of much more information than the written or printed text. By closely looking at papers, writing inks, pigments and binding structures, much knowledge can be gained about the origin, age and history of a book," said Meyer.

Although the binding structures and materials used in European manuscripts have been studied and documented, very little is known on the subject in relation to Islamic manuscripts. Adach intends to model its database on a pilot project for western bindings launched by professors at the University of the Arts in London. This new resource will be available online and usable in both Arabic and English. **E.S.**

Italy

Byzantine cross restored

19th-century additions removed



Crux Vaticana: pre- (left) and post-restoration (right)