

300th
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theartnewspaper.com

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

THE ART NEWSPAPER

U. ALLEMANDI & CO. PUBLISHING LTD. EVENTS, POLITICS AND ECONOMICS MONTHLY. EST. 1983, VOL. XXVII, NO. 300 APRIL 2018

UK £8.50/US \$14.99/RoW £10.50

ATTENDANCE

What were 2017's most visited shows and museums?

SPECIAL REPORT INSIDE REVIEW

ART'S MOST POPULAR

Exhibition and museum visitor figures 2017

300th ISSUE

We look back on some of our biggest scoops and most influential campaigns

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MERDA!

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Is the UK museum boom over?

Analysis of government data and our own figures reveals a steady decline in visitors since 2014

LONDON. Visitor figures at England's nationally funded museums have slumped, revealing a disturbing trend. Although recent newspaper reports have focused on the performance of individual London museums, from the sharp decline at the National Portrait Gallery to the booming figures at the Victoria and Albert Museum, a much more pertinent issue is emerging that should cause concern.

In 2008/09, the number of visitors to 15 museums funded by the central government was 39.7 million. This increased every year to a high point of 50.8 million in 2014/15. The numbers have dropped consistently since and will be around 46.5 million in 2017/18, the financial year that ended on 31 March.

The upward and then downward trend is also reflected in data collated by The Art Newspaper for our annual attendance survey, which is done by calendar (not financial) year. The Art Newspaper's totals for the six main national art museums rose from 20.8 million in 2008 to 25.5 million in 2014 and then fell to 23.6 million in 2017.

What is striking is that both sets of figures – those provided by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The Art Newspaper's own survey – show a continuous

Both sets of figures show an increase and then a decrease

increase and then a decrease in visitors.

The data for national museums covers those in England that are funded by the DCMS. There are 15 such institutions, some of which have several venues. The advantage of using data for so many museums is that it minimises the temporary effects of blockbuster exhibitions or building closures and openings, which can have an impact on figures for individual institutions.

The fall

What lies behind the recent decline in numbers? The change is partly due to the exclusion of Tyne & Wear Museums, which received around 1.8 million visitors, from the DCMS data from 2015/16, when its funding arrangements changed. And yet, even stripping out Tyne & Wear, there has been a loss of 2.5 million visitors over the past three financial years, representing a total reduction of 5%.

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CRANACH'S LOST MASTERPIECE SURFACES IN US

Lucas Cranach the Elder's portrait of John Frederick I was the one painting stolen from his grandparents that Simon Goodman thought he might never recover.

"It had completely disappeared," says Goodman, who has spent 23 years searching for objects looted by the Nazis in 1940 from his grandfather Fritz Gutmann, an illustrious Jewish banker with a vast art collection.

But, miraculously, the portrait recently surfaced in a US private collection and will be offered for sale on 19 April at Christie's New York. The auction house negotiated a confidential settlement between the current holders and Goodman's family.

John Frederick (1503-54) was Elector of Saxony, a friend of Martin Luther, a fervent advocate of the Reformation and Cranach's patron. For almost eight decades, this portrait of him was known to the art world only from black-and-white photographs. **C.H.**

The portrait is expected to sell for between \$1m and \$2m



Louvre says 'non' to minister's Mona Lisa grand tour

PARIS. Françoise Nyssen, France's culture minister, made headlines when she suggested that the Louvre might send its best-known painting, Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, on a "grand tour". The museum, however, has politely rebuffed the proposal. The painting is going nowhere, it says; not even downstairs into the big Leonardo exhibition it plans for next year, in which *Salvator Mundi*—which sold in November for \$450m—will be the guest star.

Nyssen first mooted the idea for a Mona Lisa tour at her New Year meet-and-greet with the media on 23 January. The mayor of Lens quickly declared that he would be honoured to welcome La Gioconda to his small northern city, where the Louvre has a satellite.

Jeff Koons's *Masters* collection for Louis Vuitton, advertised in New York

On 1 March, Nyssen confirmed that she would like the painting to travel as a way to fight "cultural segregation". She then met the Louvre's director, Jean-Luc Martinez. According to sources at the museum, it fell to Martinez to inform her that the Mona Lisa is one of the works that can no longer be moved because of their fragility. "Doing so could cause irreversible damage," he told the minister.

The last time the painting travelled was for a tour to Japan in 1974. Twelve years earlier, it left the Louvre for a show in Washington, DC, and New York at the request of Charles de Gaulle, who wanted to please President John F. Kennedy. But since 2005, the work has hung on a concrete wall inside a sealed, temperature-controlled box behind bulletproof glass at the Louvre. Experts say it would be impossible to build a similar safe box that could travel with the painting.

Then there is the crack on the upper side of the poplar panel, almost reaching the sitter's hair. In 2006, a thorough examination highlighted the risk of "degradation of the paint layer through repeated expansion and contraction" of the panel, which would occur with changes in temperature. Scientists fear that the crack might lead to the loss of paint layers on the Mona Lisa's face.

Each year, the box is opened for a ritual survey in front of the director, staff and scholars (the waiting list to participate is long). Vincent Pomarède, who led the Louvre's paintings department from 2003 to 2014, says: "Every year, we notice that the crack is widening slightly, before going back to normal when the panel is put back in its box. So, travelling is really out of the question."

Curators fear that lending the work to Lens could lead to requests from

other cities in France and abroad. This would, in turn, open the door for loans of other treasures, no less fragile. Many argue further that experiencing the painting with huge crowds straining to get a glimpse of it is the worst way to be introduced to the Italian Renaissance.

"The Louvre is already a victim of the Mona Lisa," France's former culture minister Jean-Jacques Aillagon tells The Art Newspaper. "It is quite absurd to encourage this sort of cultural consumption."

The culture ministry at first claimed that the Louvre "was not opposed to the idea". It now says that the idea "is still under consideration" and that "a technical examination has started" (museum staff have no knowledge of this). Suggesting that other masterpieces could tour France, Nyssen is clearly looking for a way out of a publicity stunt gone wrong.

Vincent Noce



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Art Market

BRAZILIAN DEALERS BAND TOGETHER
São Paulo galleries hope recession is in rear view
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THE QUOTE

“Picasso is a bubble”

So said one prominent member of the **National Art Collections Fund** (now the Art Fund) committee in 1933 when it declined to support the Tate's purchase of Picasso's *La Belle Hollandaise* (1905). The painting was bought in 1959 by the Queensland Art Gallery from Sotheby's in London for £55,000.



Picasso was seen as a flash in the pan

THE HORSE RACE

With the final numbers all tallied, **Christie's** dominated the auction market in 2017, notching up \$6.6bn in sales, followed by **Sotheby's** with \$5.5bn and **Phillips** with \$708.8m. Overall the auction market surged around 25% last year.

THE SALES

After **Andy Warhol** died in 1987, the photographer **David Gamble** spent more than a week in his New York flat, building a composite portrait of the Pop artist from studies of his personal possessions. Two of the most famous shots—a glimpse into Warhol's medicine cabinet and an homage to his famous wig—will be offered at Sotheby's New York on 10 April, 30 years after the firm sold off Warhol's effects. Gamble describes this portrait in absentia as “Andy surrounded by the gods he lived by”.

Andy Warhol's Wig, Glasses and Longines 1930 watch in his house, NYC 1987 (est \$6,000-\$9,000)



THE STATISTIC

87%

The rate by which the **number of new galleries opening** dropped between 2007 and 2017, according to the 2018 Art Basel/UBS Art Market Report. For more from the survey, see page 44.

Piero Manzoni Foundation criticised for destruction

Foundation denies allegations that it manipulates the authentication process to inflate the value of its holdings

LAW

MILAN. The Piero Manzoni Foundation in Milan has come under fire after it revealed that it destroyed 39 works – mostly paintings, purportedly by the late artist – in December.

Piero Manzoni, who died at the age of 29 in 1963, is among the most sought-after Italian post-war artists, known for serial monochromes made by dipping canvas in liquid kaolin, a clay used to make porcelain. These works, which he called *Achromes*, have fetched up to \$20m at auction. He is also known for canning and selling his own excrement at the same price, per gram, as gold.

The foundation's action was the culmination of a long-running dispute with the owner of the works, which resulted in conflicting court orders. Now the organisation is facing accusations, from a lawyer involved in a separate dispute with it, that it “deceives works to be fake at its pleasure, rewriting bits of the artist's life to suit its purposes”. The lawyer in question, Lionel Ceresi, has suggested in court that the foundation manipulates the authentication process to inflate the value of its own holdings, allegations the foundation strenuously denies.

The cases, among at least 20 that the Manzoni Foundation has fought in court, highlight the powerful role the judiciary plays in matters of authentication in Italy.

Zecchillo dispute

In 1963 the Italian opera singer Giuseppe Zecchillo moved into the space in Milan that Manzoni had used as his final studio. Zecchillo was a collector who described himself as a friend of the late artist. He said he obtained works directly from Manzoni and bought others from friends of the artist and dealers. The foundation disputes that he was close to Manzoni.

Starting in 2000 and up to 2002, Zecchillo presented his collection of Manzoni works, which included many *Achromes*, to the Piero Manzoni Archive, which became the Piero Manzoni Foundation in 2009.

Zecchillo asked the archive to authenticate his works and include them in the catalogue raisonné that was then being put together by the Italian



curator Germano Celant (it was published in 2004). However, 39 of Zecchillo's pieces were rejected as fakes, and the archive sued the collector, seeking court approval for destruction of the contested works.

In court

The case was considered first by a civil tribunal in Milan, which focused on analysis of the artist's signature and his name written in block capitals on the back of the disputed canvases. The judge's ruling, issued in October 2006, noted that the court had relied on graphological analysis because the scientific examination of the paintings'

A representative of the Piero Manzoni Foundation destroys a work that it says is fake (photographs of the destruction of Giuseppe Zecchillo's works were not released). Above, the opera singer

constituent materials was not “reliable”, as these were easy to obtain and forgers were well versed in the techniques used by the artist. The graphologist believed the writing on Zecchillo's paintings to be fake; the judge concluded that the paintings were forgeries and ordered their destruction at the end of the civil appeal process.

Meanwhile, in a separate criminal trial, Giuseppe Zecchillo stood accused

The Piero Manzoni Foundation says that, to date, it has destroyed 65 works

of hiring forgers to create the disputed works with a view to selling them. A ruling in this case was issued in January 2009. This judge dismissed graphological evidence as “problematic” and “not scientific”. Like the civil judge before her, the criminal judge noted that technical analysis of materials in Manzoni's paintings was useless in determining the authenticity of his work because it was easy to obtain the same everyday materials as those used by the artist and dating from the same period. She also dismissed the stylistic evaluation of the disputed paintings by art historians, including Celant, because of the “extreme subjectivity” of those assessments.

The judge concluded that there was not enough evidence to determine whether the paintings were real or fake and that there was no proof that Zecchillo had hired forgers to make them. She acquitted the collector on all charges, “because the action the defendant was alleged to have committed never took place”, and ordered the paintings to be returned to him.

Both the civil and the criminal rulings were appealed. However, Giuseppe Zecchillo died in 2011 and the disputed works passed to his son Graziano, which brought the criminal appeal process to an immediate end. Graziano Zecchillo and the Manzoni Foundation then made a joint application to the civil court for the civil verdict of 2006 to be passed into judgment, thereby ending the civil appeal process as well.

What do the verdicts mean?

The civil judge's order that the works be destroyed and the criminal judge's ruling that the paintings should be returned to their owner appear to be irreconcilable. In general, the civil and criminal systems in Italy run in parallel with no verdict superseding any other.

The Manzoni Foundation says it destroyed the works because it was ordered to do so by the civil judgment. “The criminal verdict does not prevail over the civil one,” says Rosalia Pasqualino di Marineo, Piero Manzoni's niece, who serves as director of the organisation. Her view is reiterated by the foundation's lawyer Alessandro Castellano.

However, Lionel Ceresi, who is involved in a separate, ongoing legal battle with the foundation, disputes this. “The criminal judgment in this case overrules the civil one,” he says, noting that the principle has been affirmed by Italy's highest court, the Corte di Cassazione.

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