

Should museum art and antiquities be returned to their country of origin? Who is the rightful owner of an art work?

Introduction

Across the world art is stolen, bought and smuggled but in the end who is the real owner? Provenance from the French word *provenir* means ‘to come from’ But the provenance of art especially is endlessly debated. It is about the worth or overall value that the object is held at for one person it may be their personal heritage but for another it may be worth lots of money that they spend on it. These ideas and debates over provenance can be seen in works like *Nefertiti’s bust*, the *Elgin marbles* and the painting *Rue St honore, Apres-midi, effete de pluie* by Camille Pissaro in 1897. I personally feel that if a famous work was made in a country with a lot of history behind it, it should stay in the country of origin for all to be able to see. But I also feel that if a single family wants a famous work back from a museum they should be declined for masterpieces are meant to be shared and not owned by one person,

1

Queen Nefertiti’s Bust

I feel that this work has such deep roots in Egyptian history and is strongly provenant to them. It should go back to being there’s as it is clearly part of their culture, Furthermore the Germans wrongfully obtained it and held onto it even Hitler said he would keep it and put it at the centre piece to his Egyptian museum, no doubt to be part of his fueher museums.

2

Nefertiti means the “beautiful one has come” Nefertiti’s bust is a 3,300 year old painted limestone bust in good condition and is the most realistic sculpture of a human from the era. It was discovered by a German archaeologist called Ludwig Borchardt in 1912 in a ancient settlement called Tell-el-arna which is 150 km south of Cairo. He claimed that the piece was of a unknown princess in order to keep his greatest find.

Former head of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) said

“According to Law 14 for the year 1912 concerning antiquities, findings during legal excavations are equally shared between the excavator and the antiquities authority”. (1). This is why Borchardt chose to falsify his findings by taking poor photos in bad lighting.

4



To the Egyptians this is one of the most famous pieces of art they have due to its historical importance in connection with Nefertiti who was the wife of pharaoh Akhenaten the ‘heretic pharaoh’ (who was the first recorded monotheist on earth). It has been stayed buried in a Egyptian tomb for thousands of years before it was disturbed. Their argument is that Borchardt mislead the SCA meaning that he got away with one of Egypt’s most famous pieces. They have been trying to get it back for almost 100 years, in 1925 they threatened to ban German excavations unless it was returned and in 1929 they offered a trade of other artefacts for it back but still the Germans declined.

It was put on display in 1924 in Berlin’s Neues Museum where the Germans currently have possession of it and Americans say “possession is nine-tenths of the law”. They also feel they have obtained it legally as Borchardt did acquire it through a legal dig and he did show his findings to the SCA. The Germans feel that it is now theirs and that they are taking good care of it so wish not to give it back.

Idea of glorifying the human as perfect beings, but these mere stones also hold some of Greece’s legendary history and beliefs. These sculptures are also important as Greek art is

the foundation of modernism in the western world this is because Greece's empire spread all across modern-day Europe leaving their techniques, art forms and culture everywhere. The Marbles currently reside in the British museum in London after an architect called Thomas Bruce, 7th earl Elgin and 11th Earl of Kincardine asked the Ottoman conquerors of Greece if he could take them back to England where the British government paid him less than it cost to get them there.

The Greeks wish for them to be returned because they are a great example of the inspiration that has changed art through their foundation in modernism and their expression of Greek humanism art. **They not only hold their past, mythology and history, but also hold the ideal that as humans we have limitless potential held within the cameo and figures.** They wish for the Parthenon and all its original pieces to be located close together so that event though it may not be rebuilt it can still be viewed as a whole in the designed climate, instead of puzzle pieces that don't fit any logical order. They also feel that the Earl of Elgin had wrongfully taken them, as grateful as they were to see them clear of the battles field, once they had retaken Athens they wanted them back where they belonged, and that just because the Ottoman Sultan had allowed him to take them it did not make them his. Greece has only asked for the return of the sculptures of this building they've accepted the losses of other works but they want this one building to have its works back to be admired as a whole in roughly one place. The Greeks have also built a 'state of the art' museum specially for holding the Elgin marbles the way they would be arranged in the Parthenon so that the story can be followed from start to end. **Even those in England wish for the pieces to be returned the polls are in favour of reuniting the Greek work together in its home country where they belong.**

The brits in charge of the British museum feel that the Earl had them removed legally with the Sultan's consent from 1801 to 1812. Elgin was trying to save the works from the war between he ottomans and the Greeks and the museum feels that they are safe where they are in England though the war has ended. They also feel that giving them back will just mean that they will be transferred from one museum to another in Athens which makes them feel that they just want to get viewers for the museum for money not just for the innocent ideal of seeing the whole thing together. But another feeling they have is that if every art work was transferred to its country of origin museums would become less colourful or empty as they would only have one country's culture not a mix of each or a few.

Conclusion

I feel as though no one can truly own a piece of culture for only a culture can own a culture, people may have possession of it but it is only truly their's if it is their own culture and heritage and that masterpieces should never be hidden or owned but put on display and shared for what good is art if you can't see it?

