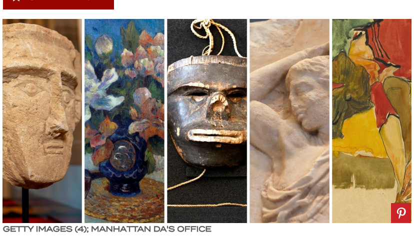
Was 2023 the Year Looted Art Returned Home?

A timeline of all the artwork repatriated this year.

BY EMILY BURACK PUBLISHED: DEC 15, 2023 11:12 AM EST

SAVE ARTICLE



GETTY IMAGES (4); MANHATTAN DA'S OFFICE

Repatriation, and restitution, was the big headline in the art world in 2023.

"Unless there is clear evidence an artifact was acquired illegally, repatriation is largely at the discretion of museums," Sean Elder writes in *Town & Country*'s February 2023 issue. "Even then, they may not have the final word. Members of the British government, for example, were quick to point out this winter that, under current statute, it is forbidden for the British Museum to break up its collection of Greek antiquities. But the movement for returning appropriated antiquities is having a moment at big institutions."

"I hope 2023 will be a year of decisive progress for restitutions," French culture minister Rima Abdul Malak said in a speech in January. (One law passed in France in June, allowing institutions to return Nazi-looted art.)

And around the world, restitution efforts continued. In Poland, culture minister Piotr Gliński continued their "Empty Frames" campaign, to bring attention to stolen artwork from the country, and it remains a priority this year. In Mexico, the government continued to emphasize their #MiPatrimoniaNoSeVende campaign (translates to "My Heritage Is Not for Sale"), which launched five years ago. In Greece, there were renewed calls for the return of the the Parthenon Sculptures (also known as the Elgin Marbles) from the British Museum, and in Nigeria, there's the ongoing campaigns for the return of the Benin Bronzes, artifacts mainly connected to a a British raid on Benin City in 1897.

At a speech at the United Nations in May discussing reparatory justice, Sonita Alleyne, Master of Jesus College at the University Cambridge (the first institution to return a Benin Bronze), said, "The tone has shifted and the implication is that the time of Africa bargaining for, begging for, and buying back its stolen loot is over. It expects its cultural property to be returned."

It is not just art getting repatriated from museums, however—it's also the remains of people. In the United States, Native American communities are bringing increased attention on the remains of their ancestors still held in museums around the country. An investigation by *ProPublica* published in January 2023 found institutions in America that still hold Native American remains that have not been returned to tribes, despite the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act that was passed in 1990.

In addition, repatriation isn't just for political entities, or nation-states; the descendants of Holocaust survivors and victims have continued to sue for the ownership of art stolen from their ancestors. In September 2023, it was major news when seven Egon Schiele drawings were returned to the descendants of a Jewish cabaret singer murdered in the Holocaust.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

In this timeline, which was first published in January and updated throughout the year, Town & Country documented repatriation news in 2023—covering stolen antiquities, war crimes, and disputed archeological finds. Repatriated objects and artwork can originate from a wide variety of sources, ranging from private collections to national museums. In addition, repatriation doesn't just mean returning to a country—it can be artwork returning to families, or remains returning to ancestral burial grounds.

January

- // GETTY IMAGES

Mostafa Waziri, the head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, uses a magnifying glass to inspect an ancient Egyptian wooden sarcophagus being handed over from the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences, in Cairo, January 2, 2023.

January 2: A wooden sarcophagus, featured at the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences, was returned to Egypt (*pictured above*) after U.S. authorities determined it was looted from Abu Sir Necropolis (near Cairo) and smuggled into the United States in 2008.

January 5: An Iron Age ivory cosmetic spoon, found in the collection of billionaire antiquities collector Michael Steinhardt, was repatriated to the Palestinian Authority. The spoon was reportedly looted from the Khirbet al-Koum area in Hebron, a Palestinian city in the West Bank. "It is the first ever event of such repatriation from the United States to the Palestinian Authority in history," the U.S. Office of Palestinian Affairs said in a statement.

January 23: New York County district attorney's office returned 60 antiquities from Italy in a repatriation valued around $20 million. The statues, vases, bronzes, and other pieces of art—including a fresco depicting Hercules—were found in museums and the homes of private collectors. They will go on display at the Museo dell'Arte Salvata (Museum of Rescued Art) in Rome.

January 24: Harvard University's Peabody Museum and Warren Anatomical Museum finished repatriated the remains of 313 Indigenous people from eastern Massachusetts to Wampanoag communities.

January 25: Spain repatriated two Flemish paintings created in the Dieric Bouts shop to Poland. The paintings were looted by the Nazis from a Polish noble family during World War II, ad found in a museum in western Spain in 2019.

January 25: The Peabody Museum shipped a 12-foot tall house post, depicting a grizzly bear and her cubs, belonging to the Gitxaala Nation in British Columbia. It had been in storage for decades. "This one coming back is symbolic of reclaiming our belongings, but also asserting our place back in the world. It's like the nation standing up again as a symbol of pride, as a symbol of decolonization in bringing back something that was taken so dramatically," Dustin Johnson of the Gitxaala Nation said.

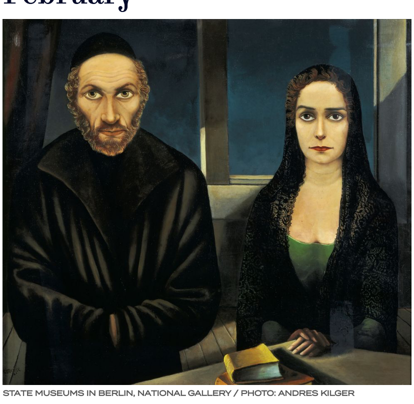
Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

January 26: An Australian citizen returned nine Buddha statues to Thailand that had been in his family since 1911. According to the *Bangkok Post*, the return is part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Fine Arts Department's mission to repatriate Thai antiquities.

EXPLORE LIGHTING FIXTURES
Get 20% Off Select Lighting
Shop Now

January 30: The Berlin-based Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation restituted "Statuette of Maria Lactans" to the heirs of Jewish banker Jakob Goldschmidt.

February



STATE MUSEUMS IN BERLIN, NATIONAL GALLERY / PHOTO: ANDRES KILGER

"Double Portrait (Rabbi S. and Daughter)" by Carlo Mense, 1925

February 6: The Quai Branly Museum in Paris is set to return the Djidji Ayôkwé drum, also known as the "talking drum" to the Ivory Coast, where it will go on display in the Museum of Civilizations of Côte d'Ivoire. A date for the drum's return has not been set yet.

February 10: Ronald S. Lauder agreed to the restitution—and repurchase—of "The Black Feather Hat" by Gustav Klimt. The painting was owned by Irene Beran until at least 1934, and Lauder and the Beran family heirs began reviewing the provenance of the Klimt work in 2018. "Having been an ardent advocate for the restitution of artworks stolen and dispossessed" during World War II," Lauder said in a statement, "I felt it was critical to recognize the family's previous history with this work despite the lack of concrete documentation regarding how this painting left the Beran collection."

February 12: The National Gallery Prague returned four paintings and ten 18th century chasubles the heirs of Johann Bloch. The restitution was facilitated by the Holocaust Claims Processing Office in New York State.

February 13: The Royal B.C. Museum returned a totem pole to the Nuxalk Nation, after the tribe filed a lawsuit against the museum. (The pole began its journey back to Bella Coola in British Columbia on February 13.) "The repatriation of cultural property is an important way of acknowledging and reconciling the unjust treatment First Nations people have endured since contact," Nuxalk Nation chief Samuel Schooner said. "Thousands of Nuxalk objects are housed in museums and private collections around the world, and it's time they all made their way home."

February 15: Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, returned three paintings to the heirs of Dr. Ismar Littmann, who died by suicide in 1933 in the face of the Nazi rise to power. Littmann's descendants donated one of the three paintings, "Double Portrait (Rabbi S. and Daughter)" by Carlo Mense (*above*) back to the SPK, where it will be on view at the Neue Nationalgalerie.

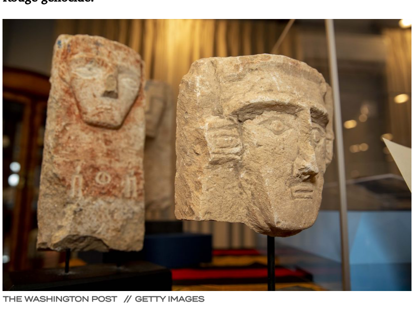
Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

PHOTO JOSSE/LEEMAGE // GETTY IMAGES

Still life with mandolin by Paul Gauguin (1885)

February 16: The Musée d'Orsay in Paris will restitute four works by Renoir, Cézanne and Gauguin stolen during World War II to the heirs of Ambroise Vollard. The restitution was ordered by a French court, after Vollard's heirs launched a campaign in 2013. The paintings are a "Marine Gurnsey" and a study for "Judgement of Paris" by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, "Still life with mandolin" by Paul Gauguin (above), and "Undergrowth" by Paul Cézanne.

February 20: Cambodia's Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts announced that 77 pieces of Cambodian jewelry were returned from the estate of antiquities collector and dealer Douglas Latchford. "The repatriation of these national treasures opens a new era of understanding and scholarship about the Angkorian empire and its significance to the world," Dr. Phoeurng Sackona said in a statement. "We consider such returns as a noble act, which not only demonstrates important contributions to a nation's culture, but also contributes to the reconciliation and healing of Cambodians who went through decades of civil war and suffered tremendously from the tragedy of the Khmer Rouge genocide."



THE WASHINGTON POST // GETTY IMAGES

Relief carved heads of Yemeni origin are displayed during a ceremony to mark the repatriation of artifacts from the United States the Republic of Yemen at the residence of the Ambassador from the Republic of Yemen in Washington, D.C. on February 21, 2023.

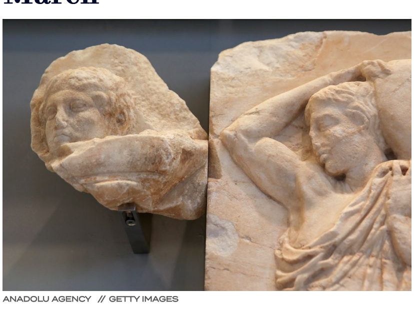
Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

February 21: The Smithsonian announced that it entered a partnership with Yemen to provide safe storage and care for 77 looted artifacts that the U.S. government was repatriating, but could not physically return for at least two years due to the ongoing civil war. "With the current situation in Yemen, it is not the right time to bring the objects back into the country," Mohammed Al-Hadhrami, Yemen's ambassador to the United States, said in a statement. The objects will be housed at the National Museum of Asian Art.

February 24: The Royal Ontario Museum returned objects—a saddle and a ceremonial pipe—belonging to Pîhtokahanapiwiyin (also known as Poundmaker), a Cree leader, to his descendants. "To share this day, and for this day to happen, it's incredible. It's a spiritual journey, and sometimes you feel overwhelmed," Pauline Poundmaker, Brown Bear Woman, great-great-granddaughter of the historic chief, told *CTV News*. "It's such a huge honour we've been given to be able to be the one, the generation, to bring back his artifacts."

February 24: A stolen idol of Lord Hanuman, from Tamil Nadu's Ariyalur district, was repatriated to India.

March



ANADOLU AGENCY // GETTY IMAGES

Reunification ceremony for three Parthenon fragments from the Vatican Museum, at the Acropolis Museum in Athens Greece on March 24, 2023.

March 7: The Vatican and Greece finalized a deal for the return of three pieces of the Parthenon, which include the head of a horse, the head of a young boy, and a bearded male head. A ceremony took place on March 24 (*above*).

March 8: The FBI announced they returned an artifact looted from the Iraq Museum in Baghdad in 2003 to the Iraqi government. The artifact, named "Furniture Fitting with Sphinx Trampling a Youth," had been on display at the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University in Atlanta.

March 21: The Manhattan D.A.'s office returned 29 looted antiquities to Greece, collectively valued over $20 million. One piece is the rare Eid Mar Coin, minted in 42 B.C.E., which commemorates the murder of Julius Caesar.

March 22: A day later, the Manhattan D.A.'s office announced the return of 12 antiquities to Turkey, including a bronze statue of a Roman emperor that dates back to 225 C.E. "Many of these pieces, which come from archaeological sites that have been the persistent target of looting, have been circulating across the globe for decades. Now, they are finally being returned to Türkiye, where they rightfully belong," District Attorney Bragg said in a statement.

March 28: Italy repatriated 43 archeological pieces to Mexico. "Italy, like Mexico, is deeply convinced that cultural heritage constitutes an integral part of the identity of every nation. We perfectly recognize ourselves in the slogan coined by your government: My heritage is not sold, it is loved and defended," Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs of Italy and International Cooperation, Giorgio Silli, said.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

March 30: The Metropolitan Museum of Art announced it will return 15 sculptures to India that were illegally looted from the country by art deal Subhash Kapoor.

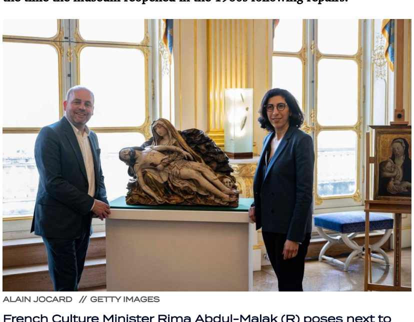
March 31: The Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge will return "La Ronde Enfantine" by Gustave Courbet to the heirs of Jewish engineer Robert Bing. The painting was stolen by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) in May 1941, and will be returned upon the recommendations of the British government's Spoliation Advisory Panel.

March 31: The Manhattan D.A.'s office announced the return of the Khmer Lintel, an antiquity dating to the 11th century, to Cambodia. "This is a beautiful piece that has been sitting in a private collection and hidden from the public view due to the actions of selfish looters," District Attorney Bragg said in a statement. "We will continue to make clear that stolen antiquities passing through Manhattan will be tracked down and returned to their countries of origin."

April

April 1: Mexican authorities will repatriate Monument 9 of Chalcatzingo, a statue that dates to the Olmec civilization that represents a "monster of the earth." "Our Consul Jorge Islas in New York confirms to me that Mexico's most sought Olmec piece has been recovered and is about to return home, from where it never should have been taken," Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard tweeted.

April 18: An ancient Roman marble bust, discovered in a Goodwill in Austin, Texas, will be repatriated to Germany. It was last on view in the Pompejanum, a replica Roman Villa in Aschaffenburg, Germany, which was bombed heavily during World War II; the bust had disappeared by the time the museum reopened in the 1960s following repairs.



ALAIN JOCARD // GETTY IMAGES

French Culture Minister Rima Abdul-Malak (R) poses next to Chief Executive of the Magen David Adom UK, Daniel Burger, during a ceremony for the restitution of three works of art looted from German Jews.

April 18: The French culture minister returned two paintings and a sculpture looted by the Nazis to the heirs of Agathe and Ernst Saulmann. (*See above image.*)

April 20: Düsseldorf decided to restitute the painting "Portrait of the Artist's Children" (1830) by Wilhelm von Schadow to the heirs of Max and Iris Stern, but the work will remain in the German city through a repurchase. "I am pleased that the significant 'Portrait of the Artist's Children' will remain in Düsseldorf with the fair and just solution that has now been found. As an exhibition piece in the Kunstpalast, it will be accessible to the public again from mid-August," Mayor Dr. Stephan Keller said in a statement.

April 21: The U.S. repatriated several Peruvian antiquities, including *khipus*, knotwork artifacts, at a ceremony at the Los Angeles consulate of the Peruvian embassy.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

April 26: Munich's Bavarian National Museum returned a 19th century goblet, presumed to be a kiddush cup, to Roger Avedon. The cup was

owned by his grandmother, who surrendered it when she escaped Germany in 1939. "The restitutions come very late and are very small steps, but it is important that they are taken," museum curator Matthias Weniger said. "In many cases, the objects are the only material remains of an existence wiped out in the Shoah."

May

STÄDEL MUSEUM, FRANKFURT AM MAIN

Portrait of a Lady (Portrait of Therese Karl), 1890, by Fritz von Uhde.

May 4: Austria will return two pieces of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece, Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg announced. "I am very pleased that technical discussions are taking place between the Kunsthistorische Museum and the Acropolis Museum on mutual loans of the Parthenon frieze," he said in a news conference. "I am very hopeful that the talks can move on very quickly and the marbles will be on display in Athens."

May 5: 16th and 17th century texts looted from a Greek monastery (the Theotokos Eikosiphoinissa Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery) in Kosinitza, Greece during World War I were returned by Swann Auction Galleries to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Archbishop Elpidophoros will then return them to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Eastern Orthodox Church, who will bring them back to Kosinitza. "It is a blessing for the monastic sisterhood at the monastery of Theotokos Eikosiphoinissa to see the contents of their former library slowly being returned to them," Archbishop Elpidophoros said, per the *New York Times*.

May 8: The City of Frankfurt and Städelsches Kunstinstitut Museum restituted "Portrait of Lady" by Fritz von Uhde (*above*) to the heirs of Gustav Rüdenberg. It was repurchased by the museum following the restitution, and a plaque near the art will memorialize the murder of Gustav and Elsbeth Therese Rüdenberg in the Riga Ghetto.

May 9: The Manhattan District Attorney's office once again returned looted antiquities: This time, two 7th-century stone carvings from a funerary platform are being returned to China. From 1998 until the DA seized them in 2023, they were on loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They were returned during a repatriation ceremony at the Chinese Consulate.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

May 16: San Diego residents and art collectors Norm Werthman and Pete Mechalas returned 65 archeological pieces to the government of Mexico. "I thank these citizens of San Diego for the generous and selfless gesture of returning these pieces to the people of Mexico," Consul General Carlos González Gutiérrez said. "This is part of the permanent effort of the Mexican government to reintegrate pieces of historical and archaeological value that they are part of the nation's heritage." The objects will be repatriated to Mexico shortly.

CONSULATE OF MEXICO IN SAN DIEGO

Pre-Hispanic pieces recovered in San Diego.

In the news, the Mexican government referenced their #MiPatrimoniaNoSeVende campaign (translates to "My Heritage Is Not for Sale"), launched by First Lady Beatriz Gutiérrez Müller.

May 19: Manhattan District Attorney Alvin L. Bragg, Jr. announced the repatriation of two ancient stone antiquities, a Mesopotamian limestone elephant and a Sumerian alabaster bull, to Iraq. Both were stolen during the Gulf War. "We will not allow New York City to be a safe harbor for stolen cultural artifacts," Bragg said in a statement.

May 19: 351 objects from disgraced British antiquities dealer Robin Symes are set to be repatriated to Greece, Greek Culture Minister Lina Mendoni announced, following a 17-year legal battle.

The same day, around 750 objects from his collection were repatriated to Italy. They will be on display at Castel Sant'Angelo Museum in Rome. Minister of Culture Gennaro Sangiuliano later said at a press conference, "The recovery of illicitly stolen cultural heritage is one of the priorities of my program; protecting it also means preventing our heritage from being plundered by unscrupulous traffickers."

May 23: "The Drawing Lesson" by Jan Maurtis Quinkhardt, stolen from Wawel Royal Castle during World War II, was returned after being discovered at a Krakow auction house.

May 31: "Madonna with Child" by Alessandro Turchi, which was looted by Nazis during World War II, has been returned to Poland, according to Culture Minister Piotr Glinski. It was discovered at an auction house in Tokyo last year.

June

CLARA TREUDE/CITY OF HAGEN

Dr. Birgit Schulte, Lord Mayor Erik O. Schulz and Dr. Stephanie Tasch with "View of the Sea from Haut Cagnes" by the French impressionist Pierre Auguste Renoir.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

June 1: A stolen Roble marble head, the Head of Hydrophora, was returned to Villa Albani Torlonia in Rome, and reattached to its torso. The head was stolen in 1978 and discovered in Zurich in 2015, and repatriated last year. It was restored and remounted this year.

June 5: The city of Hagen, Germany restituted "View of the Sea from Haut Cagnes" by Auguste Renoir to the heirs of Jakob Goldschmidt, a Jewish banker persecuted by the Nazis. The city then repurchased it (*see image above*), so it can stay on view in the Osthaus Museum. "The heirs of Jakob Goldschmidt are happy to have reached a satisfactory agreement for both sides in this matter after more than 15 years of intensive discussions," their lawyer, Sabine Rudolph, said in a statement. "The restitution of the painting is a recognition of the fact that their grandfather suffered great wrongs under the Nazi regime, including huge financial losses." This is the second piece of art restituted to Goldschmidt's heirs this year; the first occurred in January (*see above in this timeline*).

BRAZIL MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

The Ubirajara jubatus fossil.

June 5: A 120 million year old dinosaur fossil (*above*) was returned to Brazil by Germany, after a campaign to get the fossil back trended under the hashtag #UbirajaraBelongstoBR. The fossil, Ubirajara jubatus, was discovered in Ceará but removed to Germany in the 1990s. "We spared no effort to make Ubirajara's return possible," Inácio Arruda, the secretary of Brazil's Science and Technology for Social Development, said in a statement. "Without the mobilization of the Brazilian scientific community, we would not have been successful. The German government was sensitive to our request and, all together, we achieved this victory."

June 11: Boston's Museum of Fine Arts reached an agreement with the heirs of two Jewish art dealers, Paul Grape and Arthur Goldschmidt, over "Customers Conversing in a Tavern," a 1671 painting by Adriaen van Ostade. Collectors Susan and Matthew Weatherbie, who purchased the painting in the 90s, have retained ownership over the work after an unspecified cash payment to the heirs, and it will remain on display at the MFA.

OLIVER LANG // GETTY IMAGES

"The Colorful Life" by Wassily Kandinsky, on view in 2009.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

June 13: A German commission recommended BayernLB, the Bavarian state bank, return "The Colorful Life" by Wassily Kandinsky (1907) to the heirs of Hedwig Lewenstein and Irma Lewenstein Klein. The commission is not legally binding, but has historically been followed.

PICTURE ALLIANCE // GETTY IMAGES

Two masks of the indigenous Kogi community lie in a hall in Bellevue Palace before the start of the handover ceremony.

June 16: Germany returned two wooden masks (*above*) to the indigenous Kogi community in Colombia, but warned that they were sprayed with pesticides, making them a health risk. "The *Kalguakala* [masks] are of total importance to us as they are sacred," Arregocés Conchacala Zalabata, a representative of the Kogi, said. "They are not a historical artefact, they are alive. With the masks we perform ceremonies to connect and work with the spirit of the sun, the waters, the mountains and the world's many species."

Want all the royal news, with none of the malicious gossip?
Sign up for all the latest updates from our inside sources.
Your email address gets you access. SIGN ME UP
By signing up, I agree to the Terms of Use (including the dispute resolution procedures) and have reviewed the Privacy Notice.

June 20: Eleven works of art stolen during World War II were returned to Poland's National Museum in Warsaw.

June 28: Austria restituted an ancient stone yoke, likely used during a Mesoamerican ritual ball games, to Mexico. "The return of this archaeological asset is a sample of the work of the Government of Mexico in the fight against the trafficking of cultural assets and the restitution of the nation's heritage that is abroad," Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia said in a statement.

July

DINGENA MOL // GETTY IMAGES

Diamonds from the "Lombok treasure," displayed during a repatriation ceremony in Leiden, set to return to Indonesia.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

July 3: Switzerland repatriated a 3,400-year-old fragment of a statue of Ramses II to Egypt.

July 6: The Netherlands announced they will return 478 cultural artifacts (*see above*) to Indonesia on July 10, and six objects to Sri Lanka later this year. "This is a historic moment," Dutch State Secretary for Culture and Media Gunay Uslu, said. "It's the first time we're following recommendations of the committee to give back objects that should never have been brought to the Netherlands." The works are currently in the collections of the National Museum of World Cultures and the Rijksmuseum.

July 6: The Chrysler Museum of Art repatriated an ancient basalt monolith to Nigeria.

July 11: The Illinois State Museum returned vigango, sacred wooden memorial statues, to Kenya.

July 14: Manhattan D.A. Bragg announced the repatriation of two antiquities to Libya, looted by Robin Symes from Cyrene. The items, "Marble Face of a Ptolemaic Queen" and "Female Bust," are valued at $1.26 million.

July 19: A manuscript signed by Hernán Cortés in 1527 was repatriated to Mexico, the FBI Boston Division announced. "We are incredibly honored to be able to assist in the return of this national treasure to the people of Mexico. This manuscript, which is nearly five centuries old, preserves an important part of Mexico's history, and reflects the FBI's ongoing commitment to protect cultural heritage, not only in the United States but around the world," Christopher DiMenna, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Boston Division, said.

July 24: A stolen Christopher Columbus letter was returned to Italy, according to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). "This is the fourth original edition of this letter stolen over the past decades and we could not be happier to return it," ICE Deputy Director Patrick J. Lechleitner said in a statement. The letter was stolen from the Marciana National Library in Venice.

August

THE WASHINGTON POST // GETTY IMAGES

The Wounded Indian sculpture by Peter Stephenson, completed in 1850, at the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virgina.

August 2: The Oneida Indian Nation and Rochester Museum and Science Center held a repatriation ceremony for the remains of 19 Oneida ancestors. "Events like this allow us to move past these failures with a chance for cultural institutions to take accountability and make amends. They are a path to a future we can all take pride in, where Native people and their cultures are respected, our inclusion is valued and our dignity is unquestioned," Oneida Indian Nation Representative Ray Halbritter said. "Today's repatriation is so much more than the simple return of remains and cultural artifacts. It is an acknowledgment of these ancestors' status as real people who lived rich lives and deserved dignity in life and death."

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

August 9: Australia returned three looted statues to Cambodia. "It is an opportunity to put right a historical wrong but also to strengthen our ties and deepen our understanding," Susan Templeman, Australia's special envoy for the arts, said.

August 9: While not the return of anything, the National Park service announced $3.4 million worth of grants "to provide support for activities related to consultation, documentation, and the repatriation of ancestral remains and cultural artifacts, all in accordance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)." The funds will, in part, "support the transportation and repatriation of human remains, which include a significant number—11,354 ancestors—along with more than 10,400 funerary objects and 39 cultural items."

August 10: The Chrysler Museum of Art will return "The Wounded Indian," a marble sculpture by Peter Stephenson (*above*), to the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association (MCMA), a charity Paul revere founded. As *The Art Newspaper* notes, "The dispute over *The Wounded Indian* is a twist on battles over provenance. The statue is not a Nazi-looted work, an object of colonial plunder or an illegally excavated ancient sculpture, but a work that passed from a US institution into the American art trade without any evidence (until Walter Chrysler got it) of a legal sale or acquisition."

August 11: More than 250 antiquities, seized in New York from British antiquities dealer Robin Symes, were returned to Italy.

August 24: A private American citizen, artist Crystal Orlando, returned an incense burner to Mexico that dates between 500 and 700 C.E.

ANDREW MILLIGAN - PA IMAGES // GETTY IMAGES

Earl Stephens with Pamela Brown, part of the delegation from the Nisga'a nation, beside the 11-metre tall memorial pole during a visit to the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, ahead of the return pole to what is now British Columbia.

August 28: The National Museum of Scotland returned a totem pole to the Nisga'a Nation (*above*). "In Nisga'a culture, we believe that this pole is alive with the spirit of our ancestors. After nearly 100 years, we are finally able to bring our dear relative home to rest on Nisga'a lands," Chief Earl Stephens said. Per the *Associated Press*, it marks "one of the first times a British museum has returned artifacts to any of North America's Indigenous peoples."

September

September 4: The Worcester Art Museum turned over "Portrait of a Lady (A Daughter of Marcus Aurelius?)," a bronze bust, to the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. The recovery is part of "an active criminal investigation into a smuggling network involving antiquities looted from Turkey and trafficked through Manhattan," per the office.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

September 7: New York state and federal authorities repatriated 12 looted antiquities to Lebanon, including three removed from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "When you steal a nation's cultural heritage, you are stealing its memory, its history and its identity," Lebanon's consul general in New York, Abir Taha Audi, told the *New York Times*.

September 12: The Netherlands announced they will begin the process for returning dozens of Nazi looted works of art to the rightful owners. "We will never be able to undo that suffering, but we can do as much as possible about it by returning as many objects as possible to them," Simone van Wijk, an origin researcher with the Cultural Heritage Agency said.

September 12: The Denver Art Museum returned five sculptures to Cambodia and Burma after discovering they were sourced illegally. "The

Denver Art Museum continues its commitment to ethical collection practices and engages in detailed provenance research for acquisitions as well as objects currently in its collection," they said in a statement.

September 12: The family of George Lindemann return 33 ancient statues to the Cambodian government. "It pleases the Cambodian government that the Lindemann family, in possession of these national treasures, knowing they were wrongfully possessed, have duly and voluntarily returned them to their rightful owners," Phoeurng Sackona, Cambodia's minister of culture and fine arts, said, per the *New York Times*.

September 13: The U.S. District Attorney's Office repatriated 33 antiquities looted from the Koh Ker and Angkor Wat to Cambodia. "For decades, Cambodia suffered at the hands of unscrupulous art dealers and looters who trafficked cultural treasures to the American art market," Damian Williams, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a statement. "This historic agreement sets a framework for the return of cultural patrimony in support of the memorandum of understanding between the US and Cambodia."

September 14: "The Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Spring" by Vincent Van Gogh, stolen from a Dutch museum in 2020, was mysteriously returned in an Ikea bag.

September 15: The San Bernardino County Museum returned 1,294 pre-Columbian artifacts to Mexico in a repatriation ceremony. "Working with the Consulate of Mexico has been an incredible example of what a successful partnership looks like in that most items of cultural and spiritual importance are returning to Mexico while others, mainly replicas, will stay here in Redlands, so that this community can see itself reflected in the museum," Tamara Serrao-Leiva, Museum Chief Deputy and curator of Anthropology, said in a statement. "While matters of return can be difficult and weighty, in this case working with the Consulate of Mexico and INAH [National Institute of Anthropology and History] has been one of collaboration, support and trust; one that we look forward to nurturing."

September 18: Miami County Historical Society and Museum in Paola, Kansas repatriated a thousand years old artifact to Peru. "Although this is a wonderful collection, it really doesn't have anything to do with Miami county," executive board member Gordan Geldhof told the *Kansas Reflector* of the museum's efforts to return 38 pieces of their pre-Columbian artifact collection. "Really, the right thing to do was repatriate them."

September 19: A seventh-century C.E. bronze statue, looted from Vietnam's Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary, was repatriated to Vietnam in a ceremony in London overseen by Ambassador Nguyễn Hoàng Long.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

VIA THE MANHATTAN DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
"Girl Putting on Shoe" by Schiele

September 20: Seven works by Egon Schiele (including "Girl Putting on Shoe," above) were returned to the heirs of Fritz Grünbaum, who was murdered in the Dachau concentration camp in 1941. The works were from the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), The Ronald Lauder Collection, The Morgan Library, The Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA), and the Vally Sabarsky Trust in Manhattan. Six of the works will be put up for auction later this year by Christie's to fund the newly formed Grünbaum Fischer Foundation. A seventh was sold privately.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said in a statement, "Fritz Grünbaum was a man of incredible depth and spirit, and his memory lives on through the artworks that are finally being returned to his relatives. I hope this moment can serve as a reminder that despite the horrific death and destruction caused by the Nazis, it is never too late to recover some of what was lost."

CHRIS DELMAS // GETTY IMAGES
US authorities seized three artworks (pictured) by Schiele, sought by the heirs of a Jewish art collector who died in the Holocaust.

In addition, earlier this week, the office seized three other Schiele works from museums around the country: "Russian Prisoner of War" at the Chicago Institute of Art; "Portrait of a Man" at Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, and "Girl with Black Hair" at the Allen Memorial Art Museum.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

September 23: Three Croatian museums have returned artworks to the grandson of Dane Reichsmann, who was murdered in Auschwitz. The works include "Still Life with a Bottle" by André Derain and "Landscape by the Water" by Maurice de Vlaminck. "I thought that our chances would be one in a million. They never had any interest in giving anything back to Jews," Andy Reichsman told the *New York Times*.

September 26: "Portrait of an Older Man in a Wig with a Cane" by Godfried Schalcken was returned to the National Museum of Poland in Warsaw. It was stolen by Germans during World War II.

September 27: The land of the Bornplatz Synagogue, destroyed in Kristallnacht in 1938, was returned to Hamburg's Jewish community by the Hamburg Parliament, according to *Jewish News*.

DAN KITWOOD // GETTY IMAGES
A sacred Tabot, dressed in a gold-fringed ornate gown, with a silver parasol is paraded through the Ethiopian Orthodox Church St Mary during a joint celebration of Meskel and the restitution of the sacred Tabot.

September 30: A sacred Ethiopian tabot, looted at the battle of Maqdala, was returned in a ceremony (*see above*) at the church of St Mary of Debre Tsion in Battersea.

October

October 4: The Metropolitan Museum of Art initiated the return of two artifacts to Nepal.

October 5: A candle holder, looted from the Palace on the Isle in Royal Łazienki Park in Poland during World War II, was returned to Poland's Minister of Culture Piotr Gliński by Christie's auction house in London.

October 5: Two more Egon Schiele works were returned to the family of Fritz Grünbaum: "Portrait of a Man" from the Carnegie Museum of Art, and "Girl With Black Hair" from the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College. Both were the result of seized warrants last month.

October 10: The Manhattan District Attorney's office announced the return of 19 antiquities to Italy, and a repatriation ceremony was held at the Italian Consulate in New York City. "Cultural heritage is the soul of a Nation. We are grateful to American authorities for their support in our efforts to bring illicitly traded Italian art back home," Gennaro Sangiuliano, Italy's Minister of Culture said in a statement.

October 17: A Dutch art dealer, Willem Jan Hoogsteder, will return "Campagna Landscape" by Jan Baptsit Weenix to Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, which was looted during World War II. He identified the work as a looted work and purchased it to give it back, according to *The Art Newspaper*. Hoogsteder said, "It's a difficult situation for the current owners, who bought it at auction perfectly legally. But it's difficult to sell because it was stolen by the Soviets in the war. I said to them – 'I will buy it and give it to Dresden'"

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

COURTESY FBI CHICAGO
"Landschaft italienischen Charakters" (Landscape of Italian Character) by Johann Franz Nepomuk Lauterer

October 19: "Landscape of Italian Character" by Johann Franz Nepomuk Lauterer (above), stolen by an American solider during World War II, was repatriated to Germany thanks to Christopher Marinello, the founder of Art Recovery International, and the FBI's Art Crime Team in Chicago. "On occasion, we come across cases, such as this, where Allied soldiers may have taken objects home as souvenirs or as trophies of war," Marinello said in a statement. "Being on the winning side doesn't make it right. We expect everyone to do the right thing and return stolen artwork wherever it may be located."

October 20: "Children Wading" by Robert Gemmell Hutchison, stolen from the now-closed Haggs Castle Museum of Childhood in 1989, was returned to Glasgow Museums.

November

November 1: Emory University's Michael C. Carlos Museum returned five antiquities to Italy that were "looted and illegally exported," after an investigation by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

November 2: *ProPublica* reported that the "University of California, Berkeley, took a significant step this week toward repatriating nearly half of the 9,000 Native American remains it holds in its anthropology museum."

November 3: Skulls of Paiwan tribesmen, held in the collections of University of Edinburgh, were repatriated to Taiwan. Per the *BBC*, "The skulls were presented to dignitaries from the Mudan community—also known as the Botan tribe—in a formal handover ceremony at the University of Edinburgh's St. Cecilia's Hall."

November 3: Hilda Graetz fled Nazi Germany in 1935, and sold "Still Life With a Cup" by Max Pechstein after learning her father died in a concentration camp in 1942. Known as a "flight asset," Germany's advisory panel on Nazi-looted art recommends these works be restituted because the sales are "so closely connected with National Socialist persecution that the location of the event becomes secondary in comparison," per *The Art Newspaper*. After reaching a deal with the heirs, Christie's will sell the painting at auction.

November 6: Poland's Culture and National Heritage Minister, Piotr Gliński, announced the recovery of nearly 700 objects. "The Polish state is constantly searching for a huge number of works of art and other museum objects lost both during the war and in the second half of the 20th century," Gliński said.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

HETJENS - GERMAN CERAMICS MUSEUM
Düsseldorf restitutes two "fish basins" (China, around 1700) to the heirs of the partners in the art dealer AS Drey.

November 9: The city of Düsseldorf restituted two porcelain "fish tanks" (*see above*) to the heirs of Jewish art dealer Aron Schmay Drey. Per a news release, "The art shop was closed under pressure from the Reich Chamber of Fine Arts in 1935 due to Nazi persecution. In addition, in the course of Nazi persecution, high additional demands and penalties were due as part of a tax audit. The inventory then had to be sold in 1936. The family members of the company owners were forced to pay discriminatory taxes and were only able to emigrate at the risk of further loss of their property. The fish tanks with the collection of Ernst Georg Schneider (1900-1977) were added to the art holdings of the state capital Düsseldorf."

November 14: The German Center for Losses of Cultural Property returned a crucifix to the heirs of German Jewish entrepreneur Ottmar Strauss.

November 15: The remains of Chung Doo-ok, who died in Hawaii in 1972, were repatriated to South Korea. According to *The Korea Times*, "The Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs held a ceremony for the repatriation and burial of Chung and his wife Lee Bong-ah's remains at Daejeon National Cemetery, after they arrived in Seoul through Incheon International Airport the previous day."

November 23: Germany returned 75 archaeological artifacts to Mexico, in a ceremony held at the Mexican Embassy in Berlin. "Taking these archaeological pieces as souvenirs or decorative items is an affront to the native peoples," Ambassador Francisco José Quiroga Fernández said. "Their restitution not only guarantees their preservation and study, but also returns a fundamental part of their historical memory to our Indigenous communities."

November 28: The Berkshire Museum are repatriating the remains of two Native ancestors to the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians. "Because we have standing, and it is part of our history in that area and we have kinship ties," Bonney Hartley, the tribal historic preservation officer for the tribe, told *The Berkshire Eagle*. "We are trying to step in and respectfully care for the ancestors and provide a dignified reburial for them, so they don't remain on shelves at the museum and disturbed in their journey."

December

December 4: Manhattan D.A. Alvin Bragg announced the return of four antiquities to Nepal, including a pair of gilt bronze Bhairava masks.

December 5: A day later, Bragg announced the return of 41 antiquities valued at more than $8 million to the people of Türkiye (Turkey). They were repatriated in a ceremony with Gökhan Yazgi, the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

MUSÉE ROLIN
Adam and Eve by Cornelis van Haarlem.

December 6: "Adam and Eve," attributed to Cornelis van Haarlem (*above*), was returned to Marei von Saher, the heir of Jacques Goudstikker, a prominent Dutch Jewish art dealer, art law firm Kaye Spiegler announced. The painting, looted by the Nazis during World War II, was recently offered for donation to Musée Rolin. "I am deeply appreciative of the efforts that led to the recovery of this piece of our family's history. It is so gratifying to see justice achieved and have this painting returned to its rightful owners," von Saher said in a statement.

Decembr 6: The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts announced it would be returning 44 pieces of ancient art to Italy, Egypt, and Turkey. The evidence "left no doubt that the museum does not hold clear title for these 44 works of ancient art," Michael R. Taylor, the VMFA's chief curator, said in a statement. "Stolen or looted art has no place in our galleries or collection, so we are delighted to return these works to their countries of origin."

December 7: India's Minister for Culture and Tourism, G. Kishan Reddy announced 115 antiquities were repatriated to the country this year.

December 15: The Metropolitan Museum of Art announced it would return 16 Khmer era artworks to Cambodia and Thailand. The works were all associated with Douglas A.J. Latchford, who was convicted of illegally trafficking ancient artifacts. "The act of return is an act of healing for our nation," Cambodia's minister of culture and fine arts Phoeurng Sackona, said in a statement. "We have many more treasures at the Met whose return we eagerly await."

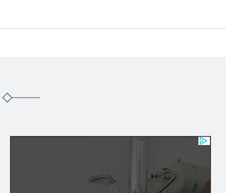
EMILY BURACK
Senior News Editor
Emily Burack (she/her) is the Senior News Editor for Town & Country, where she covers entertainment, culture, the royals, and a range of other subjects. Before joining T&C, she was the deputy managing editor at Hey Alma, a Jewish culture site. Follow her @emburack on Twitter and Instagram.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

POLITICS IN 2024

Biden Welcomes Abdullah & Rania to White House

Bobby Shriver Speaks Out Against RFK Jr. Ad



Harry & Meghan on Online Child Safety Hearing

Charles Sends Message of Condolence to Japan

Dr. Jill Biden's First Lady Fashion

First Ladies Attend Rosalynn Carter Memorial

Jimmy Carter's Grandson Gives Health Update

A Timeline of White House Christmas Decorations

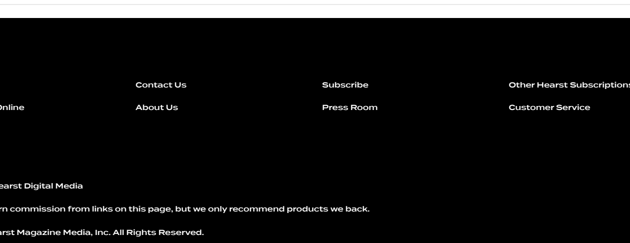
5 Enduring Kennedy Conspiracy Theories

Joe Biden's Life in Photos

First Ladies Pay Tribute to Rosalynn Carter

Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter's Love Story

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below



Newsletter
Contact Us
Subscribe
Other Hearst Subscriptions
Advertise Online
About Us
Press Room
Customer Service

A Part of Hearst Digital Media
We may earn commission from links on this page, but we only recommend products we back.
©2024 Hearst Magazine Media, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Privacy Notice CA Notice at Collection Your CA Privacy Rights/Shine the Light DAA Industry Opt Out Terms of Use Site Map
Your Privacy Choices: Opt Out Of Sale/Targeted Ads