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# Los Angeles Times

Sunday September 25, 2005

## Getty Had Signs It Was Acquiring Possibly Looted Art, Documents Show

**\* Museum attorneys say half the masterpieces in its antiquities collection can be traced to suspect dealers. Italy seeks return of 42 items.**

*Home Edition, Main News, Page A-1*

*Metro Desk*

*143 inches; 5221 words*

*Type of Material: Chronology; Infobox (text included here); Infographic*

### SEE CORRECTION APPENDED

--- START OF CORRECTION ---

For The Record

Los Angeles Times Sunday October 09, 2005

Home Edition Main News Part A Page 2 National Desk

5 inches; 199 words

Type of Material: Correction

Getty antiquities -- A Page 1 article on Sept. 25 reported on allegations by Italian officials that some items in the antiquities collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum had been looted from Italian archeological sites. The article quoted from notes made in 1996 by the museum's then-general counsel, summarizing a conversation she had with Deborah Gribbon about the acquisition of antiquities. The article identified Gribbon as the museum's director, but she was deputy director at the time. The article also said Gribbon had no comment on the notes. Gribbon says she was not asked to comment on that aspect of the article and that she has no memory of the conversation. Gribbon has also taken issue with The Times' account of how the Getty acquired three antiquities now identified by Italian officials as having been looted. The article said Getty officials learned from a 1985 memo that three objects they were acquiring might have been illegally excavated in Italy but went ahead with the \$10.2-million acquisition anyway. Gribbon maintains that the acquisition had been completed before receipt of the memo. She said Getty officials had no indication before the acquisition that the items might have been illegally excavated.

--- END OF CORRECTION ---

**By Jason Felch and Ralph Frammolino, Times Staff Writers**

Attorneys for the J. Paul Getty Museum have determined that half the masterpieces in its antiquities collection were purchased from dealers now under investigation for allegedly selling artifacts looted from ruins in Italy.

Italian authorities have identified dozens of objects in the Getty collection as looted, including ancient urns, vases and a 5-foot marble statue of Apollo.

The Italians have Polaroid photographs seized from a dealer's warehouse in Switzerland that show Getty artifacts in an unrestored state, some encrusted with dirt -- soon after they were dug from the ground, Italians officials say.

In response to the Italian investigation, Getty lawyers combed through the museum's files and questioned staff members over several months in 2001, trying to assess the legal exposure of the world's richest art institution.

The Times recently obtained hundreds of pages of Getty records, some of them related to the museum's internal review.

Those documents show that Getty officials had information as early as 1985 that three of their principal suppliers were selling objects that probably had been looted and that the museum continued to buy from them anyway.

In correspondence with the Getty, the dealers made frank, almost casual references to ancient sites from which artifacts had been excavated, apparently in violation of Italian law, the records show. The Getty's outside attorney considered the letters "troublesome" and advised the museum not to turn them over to Italian authorities.

Although Italy is seeking the return of 42 objects, the Getty's lawyers did their own assessment and determined that the museum had purchased 82 artworks from dealers and galleries under investigation by the Italians.

They include 54 of the 104 ancient artworks that the Getty has identified as masterpieces.

The internal Getty documents include memos, purchase agreements, correspondence and other records going back 20 years. They paint a picture of a young, aggressive institution determined to build a world-class collection as governments were placing tight restrictions on the antiquities trade.

Among the findings:

- \* A 1985 memo shows that Getty officials learned from dealer Giacomo Medici that three objects the museum was acquiring had been taken from ruins near Naples decades after Italian law made it illegal. The Getty completed the \$10.2-million acquisition anyway.

- \* An acting curator accused the Getty in a 1986 resignation letter of turning a blind eye to problems in the antiquities department. With eerie prescience, he said the museum's "curatorial avarice" would someday lead to an external investigation and demands from a foreign government for the return of looted artifacts.

- \* In 1987, Harold Williams, then chief executive of the Getty Trust, and John Walsh, then director of the museum, discussed the "prevailing assumption" that antiquities with no documented ownership had probably been looted, according to Walsh's handwritten notes. Williams referred to one of the Getty's main dealers, Robin Symes, as a "fence," according to the notes, and asked his staff: "Are we willing to buy stolen property for some higher aim?"

Williams and Walsh say they were speaking hypothetically and that the museum never knowingly bought looted artworks.

- \* In correspondence with Marion True, the Getty's curator of antiquities, Medici and another dealer, Robert E. Hecht Jr., described artifacts they were offering for sale in terms that suggested they were illegally excavated. In one letter, Hecht told True that an ancient urn was being sought by Italian police. The Getty later purchased the object.

- \* In 1993, the Getty bought an ancient gold funerary wreath despite True's initial misgivings that the piece was "too dangerous" to acquire. The Getty later received a copy of an Interpol cable describing the item as having an "illicit origin."

Italian authorities have charged True, Hecht and Medici with conspiring to traffic in looted antiquities. Medici was convicted last year and sentenced to 10 years in prison. He has remained free while he appeals.

The trial for True and Hecht began in July and is scheduled to resume in November in Rome.

Medici, Hecht and Symes deny knowingly selling looted art.

The Italian legal offensive poses a threat to one of the Getty's most important collections as the museum prepares to reopen the Getty Villa in Malibu as a showcase for antiquities after a six-year, \$275-million renovation.

True and her attorneys declined to comment for this article, beyond asserting her innocence.

In a statement, the Getty said Friday that it had "never knowingly acquired an object that had been illegally excavated or exported.... "

Although dealers under investigation "have been discredited," the Getty statement said, that "does not mean that any object acquired from one of them was illegally excavated or exported."

The Getty said it could not comment further on issues raised by "privileged and confidential information" from the Getty's files without jeopardizing True's right to a fair trial.

"Based upon the information and evidence that it has seen, the Getty continues to believe that Dr. True's trial should result in her exoneration," the statement said.

In a separate statement, Williams, the former chief executive, said that it "had been common practice for decades for reputable museums and collectors to acquire" artifacts with no documented ownership history, particularly when "possible countries of origin were doing nothing to protect their sites or enforce their laws."

Walsh, the former museum director, said: "We all agreed -- and the acquisition policy is clear -- that nothing would justify buying an object that we knew or strongly suspected was stolen."

### Countries Outlaw the Plundering of Antiquities

For centuries, the Mediterranean's ancient ruins had been plundered by invading armies and touring colonialists, amateur collectors and farmers-turned-tomb raiders. When oil magnate John Paul Getty began buying antiquities in the 1930s, collectors were more interested in whether artifacts were authentic than in whether they had been legally excavated and exported.

In 1939, the Italian government declared that all ancient objects uncovered from Italian soil after 1902 were state property and could not be sold or exported without government permission. But the restriction, like other so-called patrimony laws, was not widely recognized by other countries, and illegal trafficking continued.

That was changing by the time Getty died in 1976, leaving his fledgling museum \$700 million to build on his collection.

In 1970, a UNESCO convention called on governments to make it illegal to "import, export or transfer ownership" of cultural property without permission from the country of origin. Italy ratified the convention in 1979. The U.S. Congress followed in 1983.

By then, American criminal law was already getting tough on antiquities trafficking.

In 1977, five American dealers were convicted in Texas of conspiring to sell looted artifacts from Mexico. The case recognized the foreign government's ownership claim and established that the artifacts were stolen property under U.S. law.

By the early 1980s, "people were on notice that if they knowingly dealt in archeological artifacts illegally removed from a country with a national ownership law, they were committing a crime in the United States," said Patty Gerstenblith, a law professor at DePaul University in Chicago and co-chairwoman of the American Bar Assn.'s international cultural property committee.

The Getty and other museums faced a dilemma. One choice was to limit their purchases to antiquities held by established collections and accompanied by documents showing they had been legally excavated and exported. But the pool of such objects was small.

The alternative was to take a chance on objects without documented ownership history, or provenance. Although it is difficult to prove that such objects have been looted, the consensus today among archeologists and legal experts is that most were probably removed without the source country's permission.

In recent years, court rulings have demolished what had been a common defense among curators and collectors: that they did not know artworks had been looted.

In 1999, the U.S. government reclaimed a golden libation bowl and returned it to Italy at the request of Italian authorities. A wealthy New York collector who paid \$1.2 million for the item said he didn't know it had been smuggled. A federal appeals court upheld the seizure.

In 2002, a New York jury convicted a prominent dealer of conspiring to sell a stolen sculpture of an Egyptian pharaoh. The defendant claimed he didn't know it had been stolen. The judge told jurors that they could consider the dealer's deliberate avoidance of knowledge the equivalent of knowing it had been stolen. Higher courts upheld the conviction.

Despite the changing legal environment, looters have remained active. They descend on archeological sites, searching for buried objects with long metal probes. In Italy, they have been known to dig up tombs with backhoes.

The looters work in concert with smugglers who spirit items out of the country, usually to Switzerland, where lax laws have until recently allowed smugglers to flourish.

Publicly, the Getty and True have decried looting.

In a 2000 speech in Denver to the Assn. of Art Museum Directors, True argued against the practice of presuming that antiquities without provenance are "innocent until proven guilty."

"Experience has taught me that in reality, if serious efforts to establish a clear pedigree for the object's recent past prove futile, it is most likely -- if not certain -- that it is the product of the illicit trade, and we must accept responsibility for this fact," she said.

Four months after the speech, Italian officials informed the Getty that True was a target of their investigation.

The case stemmed from a breakthrough in Italy's long-running effort to curb trafficking, a 1995 raid by Swiss police on a warehouse in Geneva used by Medici, the Italian who supplied many of the Getty's dealers.

Authorities found nearly 4,000 artifacts in various stages of restoration, as well as neatly organized albums with Polaroid photos of thousands of other objects already sold.

The photos depicted what appeared to be freshly excavated objects: ancient pots still in pieces, marble statues covered in dirt. The Italians were very eager to know what had become of them.

#### Acting Curator Investigates Provenance of 3 Objects

On learning of the Italian investigation in 2000, the Getty hired a New York criminal defense attorney, Richard Martin, to conduct an internal review.

Among the documents Martin and his colleagues found was a memo showing that the Getty had purchased items excavated from an Italian site long after Italian law prohibited it.

In the confidential October 1985 memo, Arthur Houghton, acting curator of antiquities, told Deborah Gribbon, then deputy director of the museum and later its director, that he had looked into the origins of three objects the Getty was acquiring from New York businessman Maurice Tempelsman, a private collector.

They were a ceremonial marble basin with a painted scene from Homer's "Iliad," a sculpture of two mythical griffons attacking a fallen deer and a marble statue of Apollo. The Getty paid \$10.2 million for the objects, which date back 2,300 years.

Houghton had been asked to comment on another expert's theory that the artworks were found together. In the memo, he wrote that he had contacted Medici and learned that the dealer "had bought all three objects from the excavators."

According to the memo, Medici told Houghton that two of the artifacts had been unearthed from a tomb in Southern Italy in 1976 or 1977 and the third from the ruins of a villa nearby.

"The fact that the dealer is asserting that he got them from excavators -- that is important," Ricardo Elia, a Boston University associate professor of archeology and an expert on the antiquities trade, said in an interview. "It means that the buyers at the Getty would be knowingly buying looted and smuggled antiquities."

The Houghton memo identified Hecht and Symes as middlemen in the sale of the artworks to Tempelsman.

The records contain no indication that Houghton or Gribbon reconsidered the purchase based on what Medici

had revealed. All three objects remain in the collection.

Years later, the Polaroid photos found in Medici's Swiss warehouse revealed more about their origin. One of the photos shows the Apollo lying on a board, unrestored and dirty.

The Italian Carabinieri, or paramilitary police, later posted the picture on its website, calling it an example of "looted art that needs to be returned."

Asked for comment earlier this month, Gribbon sent an e-mail denying that she or anyone else at the Getty engaged in illegal behavior, adding that patrimony laws "were little known and seldom enforced" at that time.

The information in the Houghton memo was "unverified" and did not prove that the artworks had been illegally excavated, said Gribbon, who resigned last year as director of the Getty Museum.

Houghton, who declined to comment, resigned from the Getty in 1986. His resignation letter said he was fed up that his attempts to investigate a predecessor's conduct had been stifled.

That was the letter in which Houghton criticized the museum for "curatorial avarice" and said Getty leadership had chosen "a path of self-enforced ignorance of fact." He predicted that the Getty could face "the demand by another country or institution for the return of material in the museum's collection."

Failing to deal with these issues, he warned, would be "catastrophic" for the Getty's reputation.

'Troublesome' Letters About 'Illegal Excavations' Cited

On April 30, 1986 -- the date of Houghton's resignation -- True was named curator of antiquities.

True had held positions at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum and a London antiquities dealership. She was completing her doctorate at Harvard, where she specialized in ancient Greek vases.

True had met Hecht in 1972 or 1973, when she was a curatorial assistant at the Boston museum. Hecht is the scion of an East Coast department store family who has lived in Europe for decades, nursing a passion for coins and antiquities.

In 1972, Hecht sold New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art an urn painted by Euphronios, the master painter of ancient Greece. Allegations that the artifact had been recently looted from Italy sparked an international controversy. The allegations were not proved, and the Metropolitan kept the urn.

True also knew Medici. She was introduced to him at an auction in Switzerland around 1984, she has told Italian officials. Medici used four Geneva warehouses with showrooms.

In letters to True uncovered during the Getty's internal review, Hecht and Medici made little effort to hide their involvement in selling items of suspicious origin.

In one undated, handwritten letter, Hecht informed True that an ancient vase, or pelike, he had offered to the Getty might not be available because Italian authorities were looking for it.

"Yesterday my friend called me [and] said that since the Carabinieri were looking for the pelike with the arms of Achilles he abandoned negotiations. So I will not have it," Hecht wrote. "Perhaps others may acquire it. Sorry. Best wishes, Bob."

The Getty purchased the pelike for \$42,000 in July 1986.

Museum files list the seller as Fritz Burki, Hecht's Swiss antiquities restorer. Italian court records say Burki has admitted that he frequently "possessed, restored and transferred as dummy -- in particular to the J. Paul Getty Museum -- various objects of illegal provenance received by Medici and Hecht."

In 1991, True wrote to Medici asking for information about the origins of three pottery fragments in the Getty's collection on behalf of a staff member who was studying them.

In handwritten Italian, Medici replied that the fragments came from a "chamber-type tomb" at Cerveteri, one of

the most heavily looted sites in Italy.

Martin, the Getty's attorney, wrote a memo to Getty chief executive Barry Munitz in 2001 describing the letters as "troublesome" because they "support the conclusion that Medici and Hecht were involved in dealing with objects which appeared to be from illegal excavations in Italy."

Although the dealers' letters do not amount to proof, Martin wrote, True's responses do not address the "questionable provenance of the items" or "raise any objections to the plain suggestion that the Getty would be interested in such items."

In a recent interview, Hecht denied that his letters implied the objects were looted. Asked if he ever sold looted art, he said: "It depends on what you call looted. I will believe it's looted when I see the documents that prove it's looted."

The Getty's 'Single Greatest Piece of Ancient Art'

In June 1986, True visited Symes at his London office and learned that he was selling a remarkably preserved statue of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love.

The towering sculpture depicts the goddess draped in a wet, windblown gown, her right arm extended toward her worshippers. Part limestone and part marble, the piece probably dates to 400 BC and was the centerpiece of a Greek temple in south Italy or Sicily.

True later told the Getty's acquisition committee that the Aphrodite could become "the single greatest piece of ancient art in our collection. It would be the greatest piece of classical sculpture in this country and any country outside of Greece and Great Britain."

Symes said the statue came from an unnamed collector in Switzerland. He offered little else to establish a legitimate provenance, records show.

The statue was unknown to the academic world, leading some scholars and Italian authorities to conclude it almost certainly had been recently looted and smuggled out of Italy.

The Getty had outside attorneys send a notice to foreign governments, including Italy, that an unnamed "major American institution" was considering buying the statue and asking for any information about its provenance.

While the Getty waited to see if the Italians would respond, Williams, then the chief executive, met with Walsh, then museum director. Walsh took handwritten notes of the conversation and a subsequent meeting.

"We are saying we won't look into the provenance," Williams said, according to Walsh's notes of a meeting on Sept. 2, 1987.

"We know it's stolen," the notes quote Williams as saying. "Symes a fence."

The notes also indicate that the men anticipated that a foreign government would demand the return of antiquities in the Getty's collection. Williams is quoted as suggesting that the museum ask Symes about the origin of other items he was offering for sale.

Williams then posed a question: "If he doesn't defend, do we surrender to the government?"

The Times reviewed the notes separately with Walsh and Williams, who confirmed their authenticity.

Both men said their remarks were strictly about a new acquisition policy, not about the Aphrodite. Williams said he used Symes as an example because he was a prominent dealer.

"I was going through various hypothetical situations: What if we receive a stolen object? What if it turns out one of our dealers -- say someone like Symes -- turns out to be a fence?" said Williams, a lawyer who has served as chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, dean of the UCLA business law school and board member of Times Mirror Corp., former parent company of the Los Angeles Times.

Walsh said: "He was not talking about a specific object. Neither he nor any of us had information that any work we were considering buying was stolen."

Two days after their Sept. 2, 1987, meeting, Williams and Walsh met with True and Bruce Bevan, then a Getty lawyer, to discuss "antiquities ethics," Walsh's notes show.

Williams told the group that the "prevailing assumption" about artifacts with no documented ownership was the "likelihood that they are stolen -- in violation of laws," the notes say.

He left the group with this question:

"Are we willing to buy stolen property for some higher aim?"

In a recent interview, Williams said he "probably" overstated the question to provoke his staff to reflect on the implications of the Getty's acquisitions.

With Williams' question in mind, Walsh said, he went back to his office and jotted the outlines of a new policy. First, he described the ethical challenge facing the Getty, as Williams had summed it up:

"1. We knowingly buy stolen goods.

"2. We knowingly deal with liars by accepting their warranties."

Walsh then sketched what would become the museum's first formal antiquities policy in 1987. It called for the museum to ask for information from dealers about objects they were selling and, before making a purchase, to ask the country of origin whether there was proof an item had been stolen.

The Getty would also publicize an acquisition quickly and return it if shown evidence that it was looted, Walsh wrote.

Asking foreign governments for evidence is unlikely to elicit information about an object's origin because illegally excavated artifacts are by definition undocumented, experts say.

In the case of the Aphrodite, Italian officials informed the Getty's attorneys that they had "no information as to the origin and authenticity."

Records show the Getty bought the statue in 1988 for \$18 million, a sum not previously disclosed. It was the most the museum had ever paid for an antiquity. In keeping with its practice, the Getty also did not reveal the source of the statue: Symes.

But Getty officials built stringent safeguards into the museum's contract with Symes in case evidence surfaced that the statue had been looted. The museum paid \$9 million upfront with the balance paid after four years, when the dealer's warranty that the piece was authentic and legitimately acquired had expired.

As a precaution, Williams insisted that Symes store more than \$9 million in art at the Getty as collateral.

The acquisition prompted an international furor. Italian officials launched a formal investigation into rumors that the statue had been illegally excavated in the Sicilian city of Morgantina. But the Italians could not find proof, and the controversy subsided.

Then in 2001, a Swiss resident was convicted in an Italian court of trafficking the Aphrodite, based in part on statements by local residents that the statue was illegally dug up in Morgantina three months before Symes offered it to True.

A court later overturned the conviction, ruling that the statute of limitations for the offense had expired. But Italian officials say the evidence of looting remains unchallenged. They are citing it in their request for the return of the Aphrodite.

'Something Too Dangerous for Us to Be Involved With'

In 1993, with the Getty's initial antiquities policy in place, True pursued another problematic acquisition: a gold Greek funerary wreath.

An explosion of thin gold leaves and blooms accented by inlaid colored glass, the piece is featured on the cover of the museum's 2002 antiquities handbook. The object is of Greek origin and not a part of the Italian case.

During their internal review, Getty attorneys found an Interpol cable in museum files indicating that the piece had been looted and another document in which True expressed misgivings about the wreath when it was first offered to the Getty in 1992.

During a trip to Switzerland that year, True arranged to view the wreath and meet its owner, identified as a Dr. Preis from Munich. But the man she met was an impostor, True wrote soon after, and the unnerved curator decided to wash her hands of the deal.

"I am afraid that in our case it is something that is too dangerous for us to be involved with," True wrote in June 1992 to art dealer Christoph F. Leon, the intermediary in the deal, in Basel, Switzerland.

Six months later, True apparently changed her mind. She asked to borrow the wreath from Leon for study, then won approval from the Getty board to purchase it for \$1.15 million in 1993. The purchase agreement lists the source of the wreath as a "private collection, Switzerland."

In 1998, Interpol sent a query to the FBI, asking the agency to interview True about her relationship with Leon, among other things. Getty lawyers found the inquiry in museum files.

"It should be noted," the document states, "that subject Dr. Leon has previously come to the attention of our organization in regard to a Greek gold funerary wreath of illegal origin."

It could not be determined what, if anything, resulted from the Interpol inquiry.

Leon, contacted by phone, said he had known True "for a very long time" and confirmed that he was the "in-between man" on the sale of the wreath. He declined to comment further.

#### Getty Revises Its Antiquities Acquisitions Policy in 1995

In November 1995, the Getty unveiled a revised policy that appeared to raise the bar for the acquisition of antiquities.

The museum pledged to buy only antiquities that had been published in catalogs and scholarly journals before 1995 or were part of "established and well-documented" collections.

Eight months later, the Getty acquired more than 300 antiquities from Lawrence and Barbara Fleischman, New York art patrons whose collection was considered one of the finest private holdings in the world.

Known for its quality and variety, the collection included an abundance of rare objects, including statuettes and doorknockers dating as far back as 2600 BC.

Records show the Getty paid \$20 million for 33 pieces, then received the rest as a donation valued at \$40 million.

Most of the objects had no documented ownership history. Many had been acquired from Medici, Hecht and Symes. The acquisition appeared to violate the museum's policy requiring clear documentation. Responding to critics in the art world, the Getty insisted that its own publication and exhibition of the collection two years earlier had brought it in line with the policy.

Getty staffers were "well aware of the risks of acquiring a large number of largely unprovenanced antiquities," according to a memo written by Getty attorney Penny Cobey.

The review also turned up notes of a phone conversation about the Fleischman collection. The notes were made by Christine Steiner, then general counsel to the Getty Trust, summarizing a conversation with Gribbon, museum director at the time.

The notes include this cryptic exchange:

"How clean is this stuff?"

"Not very dirty."

Steiner, who left the Getty in 1999, declined to comment, as did Gribbon and Cobey.



In 1999, the museum sent three items, including a marble bust of an athlete, to Italy after an archeological publication identified it as coming from an excavation in Southern Italy.

Documents show that the Getty didn't seek restitution from the Fleischmans, as provided in its contract with the couple, but went to Symes, who had sold the bust to the Fleischmans. Symes agreed to compensate the museum with other artworks.

Based on the seized Polaroid photos, the Italians have identified 11 other objects from the Fleischman collection as having been looted and are seeking their return.

Barbara Fleischman, a Getty board member since 2000, denied that the museum had laundered objects through her and her late husband's collection and said they never thought the items they were buying could have been looted.

Provenance, she added, was "not an issue at the time."

"We were absolute innocents," she said. "We thought we were buying it from legitimate dealers. Looking back at it, maybe it was naive."

Symes' Guarantees About Statue Called 'Worthless'

In 2001, Italian prosecutor Paolo Ferri flew to California to question True under oath about the Getty's acquisitions and her dealings with Medici, Hecht and Symes.

Afterward, True sparked a debate among Getty attorneys and top officials when she drafted a proposal to acquire a Hellenic bronze statute of the sea god Poseidon. The Italians had long claimed the piece was looted.

The British Railway Pension Fund had bought the statue from Symes in 1976. A controversy erupted when it was exhibited two years later: A leading Italian scholar said it had been dredged from the Bay of Naples and smuggled out of the country.

Symes had told the British pension fund that he legally acquired the statue from a Greek woman who, with her late husband, had bought it in 1938 and kept it in Switzerland.

Getty attorneys learned that the woman was actually the aunt of Symes' former business partner and of such limited means that she probably never owned valuable art.

The discovery fueled worries that True's attempt to buy the controversial statue would provoke Italian authorities, who had already put the Getty on notice they were investigating Symes.

Italian authorities have interviewed Symes for a total of 24 hours about the antiquities trade, he acknowledged in a recent interview.

Cobey, the Getty's in-house attorney, argued that True faced "substantial risks ... by allowing herself to be associated with this acquisition, given the object's history and her own unresolved status with Prosecutor Ferri," records show.

She characterized Symes' guarantees about the statue's background as "worthless."

Cobey declined to comment. The Getty eventually abandoned the purchase.

"Even in the absence of absolute proof of theft," Cobey wrote in one e-mail, "when should a reasonable person see that the sirens are going off, the red lights flashing?"

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Safeguarding treasures

Timeline tracks reforms and legal developments in the world of antiquities.

1939: Italy passes a cultural patrimony law declaring all archeological artifacts to be government property unless the items were in private hands before 1902.

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1970: A UNESCO convention calls for tighter international import-export restrictions on cultural property.

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1977: Several art dealers are convicted of conspiring to sell stolen artifacts in the first American criminal case to recognize a foreign country's ownership of archeological items under U.S. law.

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1979: Italy ratifies the UNESCO accord.

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1983: Congress ratifies the UNESCO accord, committing the U.S. to greater import controls on antiquities.

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1987: The Getty Museum announces its first antiquities acquisition policy, which relies on the guarantees of dealers and puts the burden on foreign governments to prove an artifact has been looted.

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1995: In September, Swiss authorities raid Geneva warehouses, seizing thousands of illicit antiquities and photos of thousands more. Items shown in 42 of the photos were later identified by Italian police as being in the Getty's collection.

In November, the Getty announces a tougher acquisition policy that allows the museum to purchase only those antiquities held in private collections before 1995 or with written documentation.

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1999: Getty antiquities curator Marion True testifies on Italy's behalf in favor of tighter U.S. imports of antiquities. The Getty returns three items to Italy after discovering they had been stolen or looted.

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2000: Italian authorities notify the Getty that True is a target of their investigation into the looting of antiquities.

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2001: The Getty's outside counsel advises Trust chief executive Barry Munitz not to give Italian authorities several "troublesome" documents that show True had close relationships with two art dealers, both of whom have since been named her co-defendants.

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2005: True trial is to resume in Rome in November.

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Source: Times reporting

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Italian authorities seek return of artifacts

J. Paul Getty Museum attorneys discovered that photos seized in a raid and posted as "looted items" on the Italian Carabinieri website (left) matched objects in the museum's antiquities collection (right). Italian authorities say a 1995 raid netted photos of 42 Getty objects, some then still encrusted with dirt, suggesting that they were photographed soon after they were unearthed.

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**STATUE OF APOLLO:** The Getty purchased this marble statue in 1985 from New York businessman Maurice Tempelsman for \$2.9 million.

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**KANTHAROS:** Two-handed cup, or kantharos, was bought in 1985 from Fritz Burki, a Swiss restorer, for \$200,000.

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**KRATER:** Two-handed bowl, or krater, was part of the Fleischman Collection. The Getty bought it in 1996 for \$185,000.

**Descriptors:** J PAUL GETTY MUSEUM; STOLEN PROPERTY; ARTIFACTS; ITALY; TRIALS; TRUE, MARION

**NOTE: Photos are uncropped archival versions and may differ from published versions.**

[Information on missing images.](#)



GRAPHIC: A dealer's note to Marion True  
ID NUMBER:20050925UR1J8C4I  
CREDIT: Los Angeles Times



GRAPHIC: Italian authorities seek return of artifacts (Statue of Apollo; krater; kantharos)  
ID NUMBER:200509250A1J83RM  
CREDIT: Los Angeles Times



PHOTO: Museum officials dealt with questions about looted antiquities: **POSED QUESTIONS:** Harold Williams, former chief executive of the Getty Trust, said he was speaking hypothetically when, according to a colleague's notes, he called one Getty dealer a "fence" and asked staff, "Are we willing to buy stolen property for some higher aim?"  
ID NUMBER:20050925e17o2pgw  
PHOTOGRAPHER: Amy Etra Reuters

PHOTO: **WROTE FORMAL POLICIES:** John Walsh, former director of the Getty Museum, said: "We all agreed -- and the acquisition policy is clear -- that nothing would justify buying an object that we knew or strongly suspected was stolen."



ID NUMBER:20050925fylhlqke  
PHOTOGRAPHER: Lawrence K. Ho Los Angeles Times



PHOTO: LAWS 'SELDOM ENFORCED': Deborah Gribbon resigned last year as director of the Getty Museum. Asked for comment, she told The Times that patrimony laws "were little known and seldom enforced" when the contested Italian antiquities were acquired.

ID NUMBER:20050925fye4k1ke  
PHOTOGRAPHER: Lawrence K. Ho Los Angeles Times



PHOTO: ASSERTS INNOCENCE: Marion True, the Getty's curator of antiquities, is charged with conspiring to traffic in looted antiquities. Her trial is to resume in November. "Experience has taught me that in reality, if serious efforts to establish a clear pedigree for the object's recent past prove futile, it is most likely -- if not certain -- that it is the product of the illicit trade," she said in a 2000 speech.

ID NUMBER:20050925eohqpgy  
PHOTOGRAPHER: Wally Skali Los Angeles Times



PHOTO: STATUE OF APOLLO: The Getty purchased this marble statue in 1985 from New York businessman Maurice Tempelman for \$2.9 million.  
ID NUMBER:20050925ind1qync



PHOTO: STATUE OF APOLLO: (posted as "looted items" on the Italian Carabinieri website)  
ID NUMBER:20050925ind1pnnc



PHOTO: KRATER: Two-handled bowl, or krater, was part of the Fleischman Collection. The Getty bought it in 1996 for \$185,000.  
ID NUMBER:20050925ind24tnc



PHOTO: KRATER: (posted as "looted items" on the Italian Carabinieri website)  
ID NUMBER:20050925ind256nc



PHOTO: KANTHAROS: Two-handled cup, or kantharos, was bought in 1985 from Fritz Burki, a Swiss restorer, for \$200,000.  
ID NUMBER:20050925ind25knc



PHOTO: KANTHAROS:(posted as "looted items" on the Italian Carabinieri website)  
ID NUMBER:20050925ind25snc



[A01](#)



[A36](#)



[A37](#)