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## Getty to Return Artworks to Italy

**\* In a breakthrough deal, the museum would turn over some allegedly looted antiquities. Rome is to lend pieces of comparable quality.**

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

ROME -- Moving to end a long and embarrassing dispute over scores of allegedly looted antiquities, the J. Paul Getty Trust reached a deal Wednesday to return to Italy "a number of very significant" pieces, including several masterworks, representatives for both sides said.

A joint statement released by the Getty and Italian officials did not say how many objects would be returned, nor which ones. But it did say that Italy would lend Roman and Etruscan objects to the Los Angeles-based Getty that are "of comparable visual beauty and historical importance."

The Italians have been demanding that the Getty return 52 items, including a prized 2,400-year-old limestone and marble statue of the goddess Aphrodite. Getty officials have recently acknowledged that there was evidence that some items in the museum were probably looted from Italian sites and should be returned, but have appeared less willing to relinquish the Aphrodite statue.

A final agreement "which will include mutual collaboration, research and the exchange of important antiquities" is expected to be concluded early in the summer, the statement added. Although the statement did not specify how the collaboration would work, the Getty, which is the world's wealthiest art institution, could be of substantial help to the Italians on art conservation and research.

A deal with the Getty would be the capstone in a campaign by Italy to end the smuggling of its vast trove of antiquities to the world's top museums and private collections, a clandestine operation that has spanned generations and continents.

Until recently, officials here acknowledge, Italy had turned a blind eye to such plunder. This year, the Italians reached a similar deal with New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art that involved the return of one of the Met's best-known antiquities. The Culture Ministry is in discussions with Boston's Museum of Fine Arts and the Princeton University museum for the return of suspect antiquities, and Italian authorities say they will be approaching other major American institutions.

The agreement with the Getty came on the third day of often-tense talks here. On Tuesday, discussions had seemed bogged down amid serious disagreements, but they shifted Wednesday, participants said.

The agreement must be ratified by the Getty's board of trustees. It also lacks the imprimatur of a key member of the Italian negotiating team, Maurizio Fiorilli, who has maintained the most hard-line, all-or-nothing stance among the Italian negotiators.

Fiorilli, an attorney for the Italian Culture Ministry, had said this week that 33 items would be added to the list of Italy's demands. Other participants said Wednesday, however, that the original 52 was the number under negotiation.

The deal Wednesday was reached only after Fiorilli left the negotiations for a medical appointment. It was not clear whether he would support the agreement or whether he could attempt to block it.

By contrast, Fiorilli's boss, new Culture Minister Francesco Rutelli, has been keen to reach an accord as a political victory early in his tenure.

"For us, the most important thing is that the Getty for the first time recognizes our demands," said a Rutelli spokesman, Filippo Sensi.

The broad outlines of the proposed deal hew to the terms of the accord between Italy and the Metropolitan, which in February agreed to return 21 pieces in exchange for loans.

As was true with the Metropolitan's agreement, the Getty's deal leaves many details unresolved. Among the "major issues" that remain, one source involved in the talks said, are the mechanism for exchanging items and how to determine which pieces Italy would lend to the Getty.

"We are not just arguing over objects, but we are working on a long-term relationship between the Getty and its natural partner, Italy, with respect to antiquities. That's really what the proposed agreement is about," Luis Li, an attorney negotiating on behalf of the museum, said Wednesday evening.

"It is not just about the exchange of objects, but the exchange and development of knowledge."

The statement said that Italy and the Getty would collaborate on joint exhibitions "which will maximize the potential of the newly renovated Getty Villa, the only art museum in the United States dedicated to the art and culture of ancient Italy and Greece."

The Italian promise to lend equivalent items to the Getty drew praise from outside experts.

"We are evidently going to be able to see the same number and quality of objects that we saw before," said Selma Holo, director of the International Museum Institute and the Fisher Gallery at USC.

"I think that Michael Brand is making a powerful mark for himself," Holo said, referring to the Getty Museum's recently appointed director. "The mark that he is making is cleaning up this mess.

"The second part of the agreement, which we will not hear the details of until later, is going to be the most intriguing part of the deal," Holo added. "What the Getty has to offer is a depth of expertise in conservation, education and research, and that's what makes all of this sing -- and maybe makes this sing a little more sweetly" than the deal between Italy and the Metropolitan.

The agreement marked a sharp turnaround in the talks. Negotiations had ended Tuesday, their second day, on what appeared to be a negative note. No agreement was announced, and the Italian side reiterated its insistence that all disputed items be returned.

Talks resumed Wednesday, but on a more technical level with smaller teams involved, and the Italians indicated it could be months before an agreement was reached.

But the smaller meetings seemed to allow for better give-and-take and for overcoming key differences, sources said. And Fiorilli's absence apparently removed an obstacle and eased the way to agreement.

The Italians had been especially taken aback by recent reports in the Los Angeles Times that indicated the Getty had identified 350 Roman, Etruscan and Greek objects of questionable provenance. Another report in The Times said the Getty's board had authorized the return of 21 items.

Both reports made several members of the Italian delegation, including Fiorilli, skeptical about the Getty representatives' motives and agendas, sources said. In the meeting Wednesday, which lasted about six hours, Getty representatives were apparently able to allay some of those fears.

For the Getty, resolving the dispute has been urgent and tricky, in part because of the large number of items Italy has claimed and also because of the criminal prosecution of the museum's former antiquities curator, Marion True.

True is standing trial on charges of conspiring to acquire illegally excavated works of ancient art. She has pleaded not guilty but last year was forced to step down from her job on accusations of violating the Getty's conflict-of-interest rules.

It is unclear what impact the deal might have on the True case. Officially, the two matters are separate. However, before leaving Italy on Wednesday morning, the Getty's lead negotiator, attorney Ronald Olson, met with the lead prosecutor in True's case.

Olson, reached shortly after his return to Los Angeles on Wednesday night, said the 45-minute meeting was a "courtesy call." The prosecutor requested additional Getty documentation related to the case, and Olson agreed to consider the request but gave no commitment, Olson said.

A source familiar with the discussion gave a different account, saying Olson had agreed to provide documents involving items in the museum's collection, many of which the Italians accuse True of acquiring illegally.

The documents, which could include photos from the Getty's files showing antiquities in their pre-restored, presumably recently looted state, might increase pressure on True to confess, the source said.

The prosecutor in the case, Paolo Ferri, has previously signaled his willingness to recommend a suspended sentence for True if she confesses or cooperates with the prosecution.

True's Los Angeles attorney, Harry Stang, initially said he was unaware of conversations between Olson and Ferri. In a later interview, he said the account provided by the source was misleading.

Stang praised the "meaningful dialogue" between Italy and the Getty. "A decision to have such dialogue, or to transfer objects, does not reflect a judgment that there is any culpability on the part of Dr. True," he said.

"There is no evidence that Dr. True participated in a conspiracy to obtain looted or stolen objects, or that she failed to comply with the acquisition policies adopted by the Getty board of trustees. Dr. True should be exonerated," Stang said.

A hearing in True's trial, now nearly a year old, was scheduled for Wednesday but canceled because of a lawyers strike. Her Italian attorney, Francesca Coppi, appeared at court anyway. Speaking before Wednesday's agreement was announced, Coppi said that if the Getty would return the Aphrodite to Italy, criminal pressure on True would be eased.

The Aphrodite "was the first item we asked the Getty to return," she said.

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Wilkinson reported from Rome and Felch and Frammolino from Los Angeles. Times staff writer Christopher Reynolds in Los Angeles and Livia Borghese of The Times' Rome Bureau contributed to this report.

**Descriptors:** J PAUL GETTY TRUST; ITALY; STOLEN PROPERTY; ANTIQUES; ARTIFACTS; J PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

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PHOTO: UNRESOLVED: It is not clear whether the agreement with Italy will have any effect on the smuggling-conspiracy trial in Rome of the Getty's former antiquities curator, Marion True.

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