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THE STATE

Getty's List of Doubts Multiplies

*** A museum review finds 350 works bought from dealers suspected of trafficking in looted art. Italian authorities have not been given details.**

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An internal review by the J. Paul Getty Trust has found that 350 Greek, Roman and Etruscan artifacts in its museum's prized antiquities collection were purchased from dealers identified by foreign authorities as being suspected or convicted of dealing in looted artifacts.

The review, conducted last year to gauge the Getty's exposure to claims against objects in its collection, shows that the trust purchased far more pieces from suspect dealers than has been previously disclosed.

The assessment valued the 350 vases, urns, statues and other sculptures at close to \$100 million. That is in addition to 52 items in the Getty collection that Italy has demanded back, contending they were illegally excavated and exported.

The assessment does not address the question of whether any of the 350 objects were purchased illegally, nor does it evaluate their artistic significance. But Getty records show that they include 35 of the museum's 104 masterpieces.

The Getty has not provided Italian authorities with its review of the 350 pieces, a fact that could complicate talks set to resume Monday in Rome between the trust and representatives of Italy's Ministry of Culture over the 52 contested items.

Maurizio Fiorilli, a state attorney and the lead negotiator for the ministry, expressed surprise late last week when told of the Getty's findings about the 350 objects.

Fiorilli said he had asked the trust to collaborate on identifying other possibly tainted items in the collection, "and they have not spoken about these." He added that the Getty's failure to disclose the questionable origin of additional objects raises concerns about the trust's sincerity in the upcoming talks.

Getty spokesman Ron Hartwig on Friday declined to discuss the review.

"During our meeting with the Italian government in January, both sides agreed we would limit our public comments with the media to a joint statement," he said. "We have tried diligently to abide by that agreement, and therefore we have no further comment. The parties have agreed the place for negotiations is at the table, not in the press."

Getty officials have been eager to put the antiquities scandal behind them and find a mutually agreeable solution with Italian authorities, but the magnitude of the case continues to grow. Since negotiations over the 52 objects started in January, Italian authorities say they have identified 15 additional items in the Getty's collection that they believe were looted and should be returned.

Efforts to reach an agreement have also been complicated by the continuing criminal trial of the Getty's former antiquities curator, Marion True, on charges that she conspired to purchase looted art for the museum. Prosecutors have presented evidence of her business dealings with a network of dealers they allege are at the center of the illicit antiquities trade.

The Getty review does not identify specific dealers responsible for selling the 350 items. But other Getty records

indicate some of the works were supplied by Giacomo Medici and Robert Hecht, True's co-defendants. Medici was convicted last year in that case and has appealed.

Italian and Getty reviews have found evidence suggesting that the two dealers maintained close ties with illegal excavators and trafficked in looted art. True's own defense concedes that many of the objects at issue in her trial may have been looted. But she says she had no knowledge of that fact when she bought them.

The Getty has conceded publicly that it purchased items from dealers who have since been "discredited." The museum's internal review concluded, however, that most of the 350 pieces it bought from suspect dealers are unlikely to have to be returned to their countries of origin

New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art agreed in February to return 21 contested pieces. In exchange, Italy agreed to lend the Met objects of comparable beauty and importance, as well as objects for restoration or from excavations funded by the museum.

The agreement has been seen as a blueprint for how to resolve the numerous disputes between Italy and American museums. Since it was struck, three other U.S. museums have met with Italian authorities about contested antiquities in their collections.

The Getty's talks are expected to culminate in an agreement similar to the Met's.

On Friday, Italy's new culture minister, Francesco Rutelli, told reporters that his government's position will be "friendly but tough."

"This is a question of turning the page, away from the time when we used to close an eye, two eyes actually," to the problem of looted antiquities, he said.

But in many ways, the stakes are far higher for the Getty than for any other U.S. museum.

Not only have the Italians asked that a greater number of objects be returned, but many of the 52 initially contested artifacts, valued at more than \$48 million, are prominently displayed at the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades, the nation's only museum dedicated to ancient art.

One, a towering marble and limestone statue of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, dominates the Gods and Goddesses room on the villa's first floor.

Another, a sculpture of two mythic griffins, greets visitors as they walk out of the elevators on the villa's second floor. A third, a lekane, or marble basin, is delicately painted with the only known example of ancient yellow pigment and is the centerpiece of the Trojan War room.

A fourth, a sculpture of Apollo, is the focal point of a long first-floor room called the Basilica. Another, the bronze Victorious Youth, stands in a specially designed room of its own, where humidity is carefully kept at 21%.

The villa reopened in January after a nine-year, \$275-million renovation.

It currently exhibits 1,200 of the 2,500 antiquities it considers to be of display quality.

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Times correspondent Livia Borghese contributed to this report.

Descriptors: J PAUL GETTY TRUST; J PAUL GETTY MUSEUM; ARTIFACTS; STOLEN PROPERTY; INVESTIGATIONS

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PHOTO: SCULPTURE: The statue of Apollo in the Getty collection, at right, is shown in a Polaroid seized in a 1995 raid on a Geneva warehouse owned by a convicted trafficker in looted artifacts.



ID NUMBER:20060618j0x6sqnc
PHOTOGRAPHER: "Masterpieces of the J. Paul Getty Museum: Antiquities"



PHOTO: RESTORED: Italy gave the Getty the photo at left to show that the Greek drinking mug was found in pieces and patched up by dealers, a sign it was recently unearthed. At right, the mug at the Getty.
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PHOTO: MYTHICAL: A Polaroid seized in the same raid shows a griffin, seen at right restored and assembled into one work with its companion. The impressive item greets visitors as they walk out of second-floor elevators at the recently reopened Getty Villa.
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