

CONSERVATION



France

Show will go on during revamp of Théâtre National de Chaillot

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Italy

Vatican Museums ready to work on Pinturicchio's papal frescoes

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Greece

It's a girl! X-rays reveal portrait under this work from Titian's studio

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Bottoms up in Boston

Museum restores 17th-century drinking game for new Kunstkammer gallery

SCULPTURE

Boston. Dining with Prince Heinrich the Younger of Reuss (1572-1635) must have been an altogether extravagant and jovial affair, judging by one of the German's favourite party pieces: a silver-gilt automaton of Diana, the goddess of the hunt, riding a stag with two loyal hounds at her feet. But this wind-up sculpture was more than a mere table decoration; it was a *Trinkspiel* or drinking game, a 17th-century motorised version of spin the bottle, with wine as the reward instead of kisses. It would zigzag across the table and the person it stopped in front of would remove the stag's head and drink the contents of the animal's belly. The sculpture, one of the



The wind-up sculpture is a motorised version of spin the bottle, with wine instead of kisses

highlights of the new Kunstkammer gallery in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, whizzed back to life recently, thanks to the efforts of conservators based in Germany and the US.

Automata (or mechanical moving figures) were popular among aristocrats, and the town of Augsburg in Southern Germany was a major centre for production of the pieces, especially those of the drinking-game variety. This work, made by the Augsburg goldsmith Joachim Fries between 1610 and 1620, is likely to have been modelled on a *Diana and the Stag* composition by the local goldsmith Matthias Walbaum. It remained in the collection of Prince

Wind her up, watch her go: Diana and the Stag can zigzag across a table

Heinrich's heirs until 1945, when it was presumed lost after the bombing of the family home, Osterstein Castle in Zwickau. The piece resurfaced in a private collection in 1985 and was restituted to Heinrich's heirs, who decided to sell it. The Boston museum bought the work in 2004.

Susanne Gänicke, who is the museum's objects conservator and a trained

goldsmith, says that restoring the piece to full working order has been on her agenda for the past decade, and that the opening of the new gallery in June provided the impetus and budget for the project. She asked the Dresden-based watchmaker and conservator Rolf Lang, who conserved the work in the mid-1980s, for help. "He is one of only a few people with the expertise to get the piece working again," she says.

Scholars believe that the piece was buried during the Second World War, and Gänicke estimates that it remained in the ground for around 40 years. Although this did not harm the gold and silver, it wreaked havoc with the steel and iron mechanism that drove the sculpture. Lang was tasked with creating a working replica of the original mechanism using original materials, including animal gut to wind the internal springs.

Gänicke says that while the automaton is "an acquired taste", it was "wondrous and fascinating" to see it come back to life and noisily zigzag across a 3.5m-long table. "We're lucky to be able to resurrect it," she says. Sadly, there will not be a repeat performance, as the internal mechanism has been removed and put into storage for safekeeping. "We don't have room in the gallery for a table large enough [to let it run], so we decided that, at least for the time being, it's best not to hold regular demonstrations," Gänicke says. But visitors can watch a video of *Diana and the Stag* in action on an iPad displayed near the work.

Emily Sharpe

Spain limits Church's powers after Córdoba cathedral row

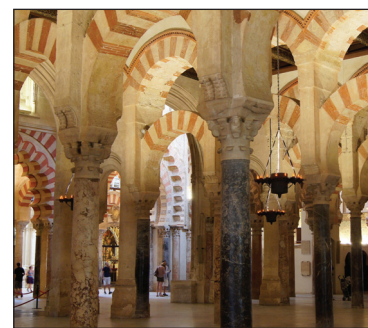
New law makes it harder to register religious sites

LEGISLATION

Córdoba. A row over the ownership of the Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba has led Spain to pass a law changing the way in which the Catholic Church can register religious properties. The new legislation, which is due to come into force next year, is not retroactive, so the Unesco World Heritage site will remain an asset of the Church.

The new law removes a 1998 amendment to Spain's mortgage law that meant properties without titles could be registered by the Church without a public notary being present. This led to the Church registering hundreds of assets across the country, including the cathedral, which it registered in 2006.

We reported in April that secular and multicultural leftists were challenging the legality of the Church's ownership, management and use of the historic site. A local campaign criticised the Church for removing "Mezquita" from the cathedral's name and for attempting to erase its history as a mosque – an accusation that the local diocese denies, citing efforts to uncover



One careful owner?

the site's sacred *mihrab*, as well as various conservation projects. In April, the debate reached the Spanish parliament, which rejected a radical proposal for the State to take over the site.

Despite the controversy, the Church is going ahead with celebrations marking the cathedral's 775th anniversary. At an event in June, the Bishop of Córdoba, Demetrio Fernández, said: "It is a time not to discuss its name, but to join forces so the temple can remain... in the service of all those who want to visit the pride of all Córdoba."

Laurie Rojas

Oldenburg's stamp of approval

A gigantic rubber stamp by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen is receiving some much-needed care. The City of Cleveland and the Sculpture Center have employed the art conservation centre ICA Cleveland to restore *Free Stamp*, 1991 (right), an 8m-high sculpture in Willard Park. Oldenburg has advised on the restoration, and a documentary about the artists and the work is planned. The painted steel and aluminium piece was commissioned in 1982 by Standard Oil of Ohio for its new headquarters in Cleveland's city centre, but the commission was cancelled when British Petroleum acquired the US company. Following protests, work on the sculpture resumed, and the park was selected as the new site. The change in location meant that the work, which was originally planned to be installed upright, could be placed on its side. E.S.



A-list to fundraise after Glasgow blaze



An appeal for funds to restore the Glasgow School of Art's Charles Rennie Mackintosh-designed building, which was ravaged by fire in May, is attract-

ing celebrity supporters. The actors Brad Pitt and Peter Capaldi have signed on as trustees of the Mackintosh Appeal, which aims to raise £20m towards the restoration. The fire destroyed 10% of the building, including its library. Within 24 hours, around 100 conservators had answered the Institute for Conservation's call for volunteers. The Scottish government has contributed £750,000 and offered £5m in matching funds, and the UK government has given £5m. E.S.

Unesco sets sail for Haiti after claims that wreck is Columbus's ship

SHIPWRECK

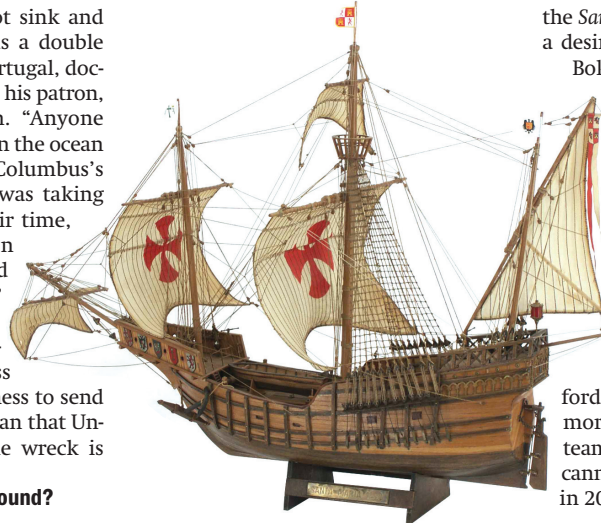
Cap-Haïtien, Haiti. The Haitian government has asked Unesco to send an expert mission to examine the site of what may be the wreck of the *Santa Maria*, the largest of the three ships used by Christopher Columbus during his first expedition to America in 1492. The wreck was discovered in May off the coast of Cap-Haïtien, in northern Haiti, by a team led by the US explorer Bill Clifford.

Although Clifford remains steadfast in his belief that he has found Columbus's lost ship, some experts are reserving judgement for now. Others, including the historian Manuel Rosa, say that it cannot be the *Santa Maria*. Rosa

says that the vessel did not sink and that Columbus, working as a double agent for King John II of Portugal, doctored his journals to deceive his patron, Queen Isabella I of Spain. "Anyone looking for the *Santa Maria* in the ocean has not fully understood Columbus's ship log, nor the ruse he was taking part in, and is wasting their time, since the ship was left on land and was later burned to ashes by the natives," Rosa says.

A spokeswoman for Unesco told the Associated Press that the UN agency's readiness to send a team to Haiti does not mean that Unesco is confirming that the wreck is

Has the *Santa Maria* been found?



the *Santa Maria*. It does, however, show a desire to safeguard the wreck. Irina Bokova, Unesco's director-general,

has expressed concern about the risk "of looting of underwater heritage sites off the shores of Haiti. We stand by the authorities in fighting illicit trafficking in underwater cultural heritage objects, and urge states to join Haiti's efforts to find artefacts stolen from these sites, notably the one that will be visited by Unesco's mission."

Unesco's fears are justified: Clifford has worked in the region for more than a decade and one of his team's key discoveries, a 15th-century cannon found at the site of the wreck in 2003, has been looted. E.S.

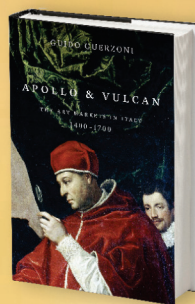
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