# Shared Stewardship: Cultural Heritage, Provenance, and Repatriation in Mainland Southeast Asia

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**Abstract**—Discussions of cultural heritage and repatriation often center on what has been lost—artifacts, archeological contexts, or museum collections. This Special Edition instead explores evolving perspectives on the cultural heritage of mainland Southeast Asia through contributions by scholars, museum professionals, and conservation scientists. This introduction surveys key international conventions and recent developments shaping heritage policy, museum practice, and academic debate. Together, these contributions emphasize collaboration, provenance research, and shared stewardship while addressing the complexities of returning ancient objects to modern nation-states with intertwined histories. The Edition advocates a nuanced and constructive dialogue on heritage protection and care.

**Keywords:** Archeology; Cultural Heritage; Museum Studies; Provenance; Repatriation; Shared Stewardship

## International Conventions and National Laws

If one looks to the past for watershed moments that have impacted the preservation of tangible cultural heritage, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict likely comes to mind first. The convention was established in reaction to the atrocities of World War II; specifically, the destruction and displacement of cultural property throughout much of Europe. As defined by the 1954 Hague Convention, cultural property is:

> moveable or immoveable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above (14 May 1954, Article 1).[2]

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[2] See: https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-cultural-property-event-armed-conflict-regulations-execution-convention (accessed 28 July 2026).


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The 1954 Hague Convention was not the first treaty of its kind, but it was the first international agreement that exclusively focused on the protection of cultural heritage during wartime.[3] Specifically, it sought to establish the rule that damage of cultural property of any people was damage to the cultural heritage of all humanity. This shifted the legal focus from one of property rights to one of historical preservation (Keane 2004). Moreover, it acknowledged that all world art was worthy of preservation, a sentiment that today seems obvious but at the time was not universally shared.

In principle, the 1954 Hague Convention was noble in its pursuits; however, in practice, it failed and continues to fail to safeguard cultural heritage during wartime. One need only look at recent wars that have resulted in the devastation of our shared cultural patrimony.[4] Such failure is due, in part, to the very premise of international conventions which are not laws, but agreements made by voluntary parties and therefore not enforceable. While international agreements do not have the toothsome repercussions of laws, some conventions have resulted in legislation by ratifying nations. One such example is the 1970 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.[5]

The 1970 UNESCO Convention is the most significant international agreement protecting cultural heritage.[6] It was established in reaction to increased looting and movement of cultural property from newly independent countries in the Global South into international art markets fueled by the demands of collectors and institutions in the Global North. The 1970 UNESCO Convention sought to regulate the international movement of art by encouraging signatory nations to establish rules to prevent the illicit import and export of cultural property. As stated:

[3] The Leiber Code, adopted in 1863, was a military law that governed the Union Army during the American Civil War (1861–1865). The Leiber Code explicitly states that works of art, libraries, scientific collections, and hospitals must be protected during wartime; however, it did allow for victorying parties to confiscate property belonging to hostile nations. See, Articles 34–36, General Orders no. 100, Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field (Leiber Code), Correspondence, Orders, Reports, and Returns of the Union Authorities from 1 January to 31 December 1863, 7, O.R., series III, vol. III [S 124]. The Leiber Code went on to influence the Declaration of Brussels of 1874, which in turn laid the groundwork for the Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land (1907). Subsequent treaties and conventions followed, especially post-World War II, which include the 1954 Hague Convention (see note 2). UNESCO considers the 1954 Hague Convention a sequel to the 1907 Hague Convention.

[4] For example, according to the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications of Ukraine, over 1,600 cultural heritage monuments have been destroyed or damaged since escalating Russian aggression in March 2022. See: https://mincult.gov.ua/news/1612-pamyatok-kulturnoyi-spadshhyny-ta-2427-ob/ (accessed 28 July 2026).

[5] In 1983, the U.S. passed the Convention on Property Implementation Act that enacts the 1970 UNESCO Convention for this country. Australia also enacted this landmark convention through the Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act in 1986; Cambodia established the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in 1996.

[6] The Convention was established in 1970, but it was not enforced until 1972.

> The States Parties to this Convention also undertake, consistent with the laws of each State: a) To prevent by all appropriate means transfers of owner-ship of cultural property likely to promote the illicit import or export of such property; b) To ensure that their competent services co-operate in facilitating the earliest possible restitution of illicitly exported cultural property to its rightful owner; c) To admit to actions for recovery of lost or stolen items of cultural property bought by or on behalf of the rightful owners; d) To recognize the indefeasible right of each State Party to this Covention to classify and declare certain cultural property as inalienable which should therefore *ipso facto* not be exported, and to facilitate recovery of such property by the State concerned in cases where it has been exported (14 November 1970, Article 13).[7]

The 1970 UNESCO Convention provides guidelines on how to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural property, including rules to establish laws and regulations that address the protection and ownership of cultural objects; the establishment and upkeep of national inventories; the development of scientific and technical institutions (museums, libraries, archives, etc.); and the organization of archeological excavations. However, as with the 1954 Hague Convention, its goals were not fully realized for some of the same reasons. While some nations such as the U.S. (1983), Australia (1986), and Cambodia (1996) ratified the 1970 UNESCO Convention into law, other signatories such as China have not; thus, making its implementation uneven. Continued clandestine excavations, trafficking of illicit objects, and burgeoning black markets resulted in the adoption of subsequent agreements such as the 1995 Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects established by the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law.

The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention was enacted as a supplement to the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Specifically, it sought to address shortcomings of the previous convention by including explicit language regarding the restitution and repatriation of stolen or illegally exported cultural property. This included all illicitly traded cultural property, not only those objects that were part of inventories or those declared by state parties. It also provided provisions to allow claims to be processed directly through national courts. The intent was to modify the behaviors of those directly involved in the trade of illicit objects: looters, dealers, and buyers who could be tried in the courts from which looted or stolen objects were seized. Moreover, it closed loopholes that existed in the 1970 UNESCO Convention. First, it allowed buyers of illicit cultural property to be held responsible even if they purchased the objects in "good faith". Second, it extended or removed the statute of

[7] See: https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-means-prohibiting-and-preventing-illicit-import-export-and-transfer-ownership-cultural (accessed 28 July 2026).

limitations for claims. Specifically, the general three-year window to bring a claim to court was extended to 50 years for most cultural property. Furthermore it removed the statute of limitations for objects recovered from monuments, archeological sites, or public collections.[8] While the language and guidelines put forth by the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention have the most potential to preserve and protect cultural property, the Convention's stringent requirements for action left many nations unwilling to become signatories (Fitz-Gibbon 2005).[9] Cambodia became a signatory in 1995 and ratified the convention into law in 2003.[10] Thailand, the U.S., and Australia have not signed the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention.

These landmark conventions reflect the sentiment and realities of the time period when they were written and adopted, which were focused on the real and immediate loss of cultural heritage to war, conflict, and looting. In turn, government officials as well as museum professionals and scholars took on retentionist positions to protect and preserve their cultural heritage, particularly source countries whose monuments were most at risk. Examples of this can be seen in Cambodia and Italy.[11] While countries may have simultaneous bilateral agreements with other nations, for the purposes of this article, focus is placed on agreements with the U.S. as repatriation cases discussed in this Special Edition primarily examine U.S. institutions with the exception of three Cham bronze statues once housed in the National Gallery of Australia, discussed in Campbell's article.[12]

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia Concerning the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Khmer Archaeological Material, first enacted in 1999, defines Khmer cultural property as objects comprised of stone, metal (mainly gold, silver, and bronze), and ceramic dated approximately from the 6th to the 16th centuries.[13] This represents nearly all artistic production covering the span of one millennium. In 2023, the MoU was updated: archeological materials included the above along with wood and bone, covering

[8] UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, 24 June 1995, Chapter II, Article 3: https://www.unidroit.org/instruments/cultural-property/1995-convention/ (accessed 18 July 2026).

[9] As of the publication of this Special Edition, 56 nations have signed the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention; 149 nations have signed the 1970 UNESCO Convention.

[10] A signatory to a convention refers to a country that has signed it in agreement, but the agreement is not legally binding. Conversely, a country that has ratified the convention has approved it and legislated it into their local laws.

[11] Italy's bilateral agreement with the U.S. defines Italian cultural property as objects dated from the 9th century BCE to the 4th century CE including sculpture made of stone, metal, or ceramic; vessels made of ceramic and metal; glass; inscribed or decorated sheet metal; architectural elements and sculpture, and wall paintings. See Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the Italian Republic and the Government of the United States of America Concerning the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Categories of Archaeological Material of Italy: https://2017-2021.state.gov/united-states-and-italy-sign-cultural-property-agreement/ (accessed 18 July 2026).

[12] Neither Cambodia nor Thailand have bilateral agreements concerning cultural property with Australia.

[13] The MoU was renewed on 19 September 2003, with amendments on 14 August 2008 and 26 August 2008. See: https://www.unesco.org/en/cultnatlaws/memorandum-understanding-between-government-united-states-america-and-government-kingdom-cambodia-0 (accessed 28 July 2026).

a date range of 2500 BCE to 1750 CE; ethnographic material was defined as architectural materials, manuscripts, and religious objects dated 1400–1891 CE.[14] This bilateral agreement has resulted in many recent high-level repatriations to Cambodia which are discussed in several articles in this Edition (Carter & Chhay; Campbell; Edelstein & Morasco).

Thailand does not have an import restrictions agreement with the U.S.[15] It also has not signed or ratified the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Instead, Thailand relies on its own legislation, including the 1961 Act on Ancient Monuments, Antiques, Objects of Art and National Museums.[16] It defines antiques as any archaic moveable property made by man or in nature that is part of an ancient monument and human/animal remains that have artistic, historic, or archeological value; furthermore, objects of art are defined as a "thing produced by craftsmanship which is appreciated as being valuable in the field of art".[17] While Thailand's reliance on its own legislation provides the country independence from legally binding bilateral treaties, such reliance can result in less stringent protections of its cultural property in foreign courts. This can be seen in the case of looted and stolen prehistoric artifacts, particularly Ban Chiang-related material, collected mainly by California museums and further discussed in the co-authored article by Joyce C. White et al. in this Special Edition. Because of this lacunae, the U.S. Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (CPIA), which ratified the 1970 UNESCO Convention into law, could not be used to protect or repatriate the objects. Even though the Act of 1961 considered the artifacts as stolen, the CPIA does not recognize foreign governments' export restrictions unless there exists a bilateral agreement (Vitale 2009). Thus, prosecutors had to rely on the U.S. Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA) to facilitate in their repatriation; under this law objects over 100 years old and representative of the remains of past human life with archeological interest are protected (Vitale 2009).[18] Although Thailand may not have a formal bilateral agreement with the U.S., it has successfully repatriated a variety of cultural property which includes archeological objects and ceramics (White et al.), architectural

[14] See Extension and Amendment of Import Restrictions on Archeological and Ethnological Material of Cambodia, A Rule by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Treasury Department on 19 August 2023: https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mhm001/usa_cambodia_mou03_enorof_0.pdf.

[15] Although Thailand does not have a bilateral agreement with the U.S., it does have an agreement with the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia that was signed in 2015. See Agreement between the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand to Combat Against Illicit Trafficking and Cross-border Smuggling of Movable Cultural Property and to Restitute It to the Country of Origin, Bangkok, Thailand, 11 July 2015, https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mhm001/cambodia_agreement_thailand_engtno.pdf (accessed on 28 July 2026). There was an earlier MoU signed in 2000 also tackling these issues. See: https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mhm001/cambodia_agreement_thailand_engtno.pdf.

[16] The Act of 1961 is not the first law intended to preserve and protect Thai cultural property and was written as an amendment to the Act of 1934 and the Act of 1943 (Rawadee 2012).

[17] See: https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mhm001/thailande_act_1961_engl_orof.pdf (accessed 28 July 2026).

[18] See: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2013-title16/html/USCODE-2013-title16-chap1B.htm (accessed 7 August 2026).

fragments from Prasat Phnom Rung (Revire) as well as Angkor period statuary (Vincent et al.).

These 20th-century conventions and laws had in common a goal to preserve cultural heritage and to protect cultural property by limiting its destruction and thus its illicit trade. They no doubt had some impact on reducing the pillaging and trafficking of cultural property. However, these conventions and laws could not stop the market forces that fueled the art market. Collectors and museums desired prized objects; looters, middlemen, dealers and auction houses were willing to make profits to facilitate this desire.

## The Marketplace and Changing Behaviors

One way to curtail the illicit market for cultural property is to create a licit or legal market. Legal scholar John Henry Merryman has long argued that an anti-market bias in UNESCO and an excessive source-nation retention of cultural property has helped to fuel the black market because this anti-market bias prevents a legal market from existing. In "A Licit Trade in Cultural Objects", Merryman (2005) argues that the organized sale of surplus cultural objects by source countries can prevent looting and displace the black market while providing the government and its citizens an additional source of income. Such a licit market did exist in Cambodia in a colonial context. In 1923, the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) authorized the sale of fragments and surplus objects to help fund their research and conservation efforts of Khmer cultural heritage (Abbe 2021). Ironically, through their efforts, buyers became more knowledgeable about Khmer art and began demanding more important pieces. This resulted in the sale of significant cultural property, thereby counteracting the very premise of selling redundant or less important objects. In 1945, the EFEO stopped facilitating the sale of Khmer art. This example demonstrates that buyers want what they want and a marketplace will evolve to meet such demands. Thus, perhaps the most effective way to preserve and protect cultural heritage is to change the behaviors of those involved. We have seen this with recent high-profile restitution and repatriation cases that have directly led to the debasement of dealers, collectors, and museum staff. Public outcries and damaging publicity have drastically reduced museums' interests in collecting non-contemporary Southeast Asian art. In turn, collectors are deterred from buying objects they know will not be accepted for future donations. Finally, without buyers, looters and dealers must find other viable markets.

Notably, this Special Edition includes several articles discussing Douglas A.J. Latchford, also known as Pakpong Kriangsak (ภัคพงษ์ เกรียงศักดิ์; 1931–2020), a controversial collector of Khmer antiquities. Within his lifetime, Latchford was considered both a champion and an enemy of Southeast Asian cultural heritage. He bought, collected, consigned, and sold some of the finest objects of art from the region and donated others to important institutions including the National Museum of Cambodia (NMC) in Phnom Penh and the Metropolitan

Museum of Art (Met) in New York City. One can argue that his connection to the 2011 Sotheby's auction of a 10th-century stone statue from Prasat Chen at Koh Ker and its eventual return to Cambodia marked a watershed in the repatriation of Southeast Asian cultural property, fundamentally changing both the antiquities market and perceptions of his own legacy.

In the spring of 2011, Sotheby's advertised this star offering on the cover of its catalog **[Figure 1]**, described as a "spectacular 10th-century Khmer Koh Ker period Athlete from a European private collection (est. US$2/3 million). Acquired from the original owner over 40 years ago, the figure is the mate to the Koh Ker athlete at the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena that is almost identical in posture and appearance". At the time, I was the curator of Asian art at the Norton Simon Museum and was bombarded with calls and emails from scholars, museum colleagues, and journalists. Some wanted to know who sold the statue to the Norton Simon Museum. As a staff member representing the Museum, I did not have the academic freedom that I do now as a university professor and was unable to respond or engage with these pressing inquiries. However, I was struck by the immediacy with which news outlets sought to uncover the provenance of the Sotheby's statue and by the calls from scholars, government officials, and the public to halt its sale. This auction came in the wake of the 2008 case involving prehistoric Southeast Asian and Ban Chiang artifacts that embroiled California museums (Rod-Ari 2019),[19] as well as the arrest of Indian art dealers Vaman Ghiya (2003) and Subhash Kapoor (2011) who facilitated the looting, creation of false provenances, and sale of South Asian art.

Sotheby's auction was supposed to take place in New York City on 24 March 2011; however, Éric Bordonneau, French historian and archeologist, and then director of a research program at Koh Ker under the EFEO, sent a report to the UNESCO office in Phnom Penh explaining that the statue, which he identified as Duryodhana, was illegally removed in 1972 and that its feet were still *in situ* at Koh Ker (Chea, Muong & Tythacott 2021: 72–73). One day before the auction was to take place, Sotheby's—at the request of UNESCO and the Cambodian government—removed Duryodhana from sale (Hauser-Schäublin 2016). Soon after, facilitated by longstanding bilateral agreements between the U.S. and Cambodia, "federal prosecutors sought the forfeiture of the statue from Sotheby's claiming that it had been stolen from Cambodia and illegally imported into the US" (Burns 2014). In the months that followed, the owner of the statue was revealed: a Belgian collector named Decia Ruspoli di Poggio Suasa whose husband had purchased the statue in 1975 from the British auction house Spink & Son, who in turn had come into its possession through Douglas Latchford (Mashberg & Blumenthal 2012). News outlets such as the *New York Times* turned their attention to the legal battle that ensued between Sotheby's and the governments of Cambodia and the U.S., and began to scrutinize museum collec-

[19] I was an intern at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) at the time of the 2008 case and met with both the dealer, Robert Olson, and the undercover agent, Todd Swain, who sought to donate artifacts to the museum.

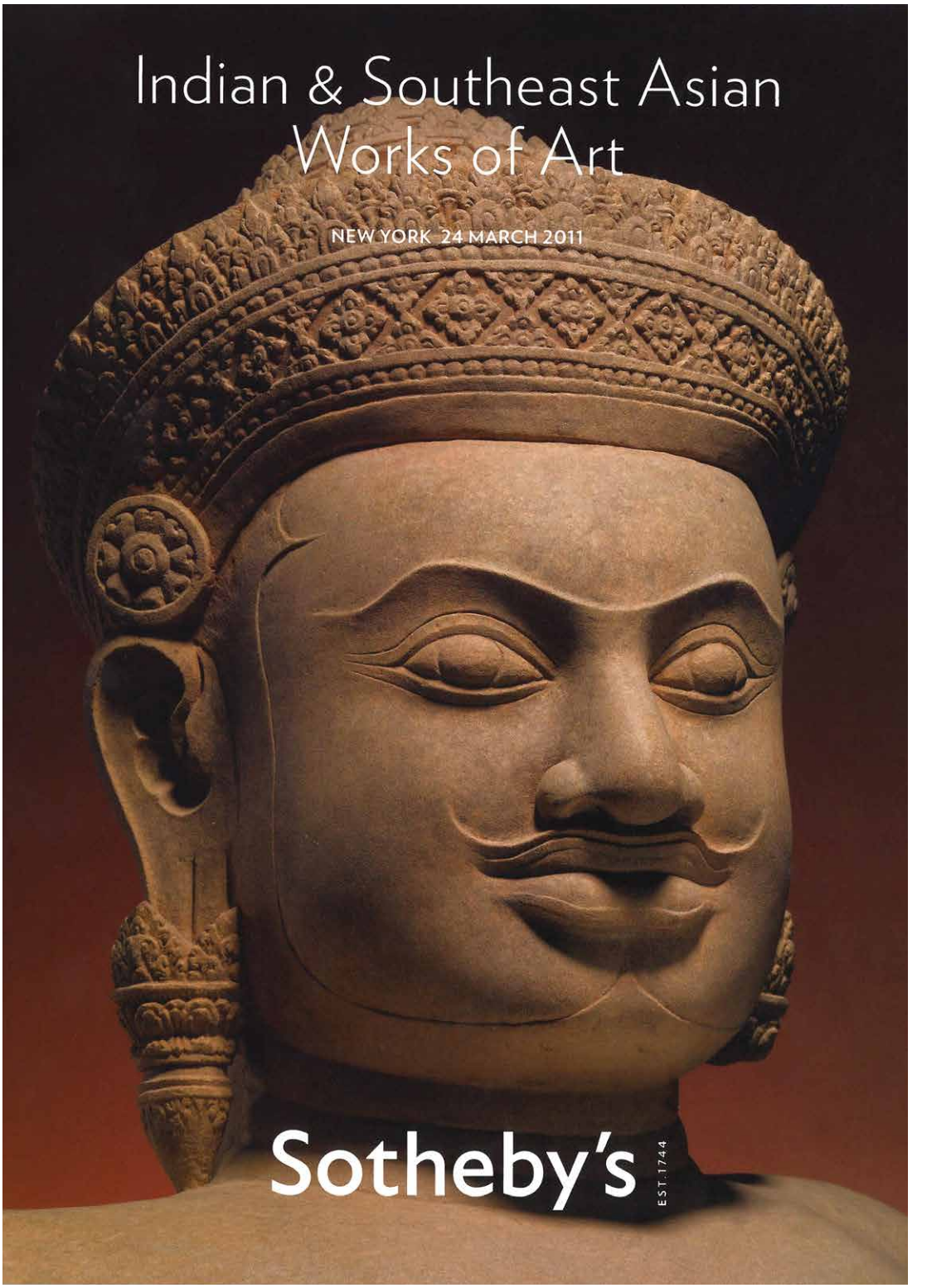



**Figure 1: Catalog cover for the New York auction of 24 March 2011, depicting Duryodhana from Koh Ker, Cambodia © Sotheby's**

tions that included works from Prasat Chen or others associated with Latchford (Mashberg 2012). In response to such negative publicity and mounting calls by the public to return cultural property to their places of origins, museums and curators, including myself, were under pressure to reexamine our collections for questionable provenance histories and any associations with Latchford. In 2013, the Met was the first museum to return objects from their permanent collection associated with Latchford and believed to be from Prasat Chen to Cambodia—two kneeling figures of the Pandava brothers Sahadeva and Nakula (Chea, Muong & Tythacott 2021: 73–74). In 2014, after much dispute, Sotheby's returned Duryodhana, avoiding a public hearing that would have set a legal precedent for the sale of objects with unclear provenance (Burns 2014). This return was followed by the Norton Simon Museum repatriating Duryodhana's pendant statue, Bhīma, from its collection, which was followed by the return of other statues from Christie's in 2014, the Cleveland Museum of Art in 2015, and the Denver Art Museum in 2016 (Rod-Ari 2019). This has led to ever stricter conduct by museums to collect objects with irrefutable and clear provenance so as to not be in a similar position in the future.

This case also changed the behavior of some collectors. As no surprise, one such example is Latchford's extensive collection of Southeast Asian art. In 2020, he died at the age of 88 in Bangkok. His personal collection, which included stone and bronze statues and gold jewelry from the Angkor and pre-Angkor period, had been documented in lavishly photographed books such as *Adoration and Glory: The Golden Age of Khmer Art* and *Khmer Gold: Gift for the Gods* (Bunker & Latchford 2004, 2008). These books were co-authored with Emma Bunker, a specialist of Asian art and member of the board of trustees at the Denver Art Museum. While many objects were attributed to a "private collection", it was known that that they belonged to Latchford. The collection is said to have been worth upwards of US$50 million; he bequeathed it to his daughter Julia Ellen Latchford Copleston (Thai name, Nawapan Kriangsak; นวพรรณ เกรียงศักดิ์). One imagines that in an earlier time, when her father's illegal dealings were unknown and when museums were not as reluctant to accept donations with questionable provenance, Ms Latchford Copleston may have been able to sell parts of the collection or donate them to museums around the world. However, by 2020 policies and behaviors had changed. In 2021, she donated her father's collection, along with his records and computer laptop, to the government of Cambodia (Mashberg 2021). The data in the files may be the real "treasure" because they have given Cambodian authorities greater knowledge of the provenience and provenance of looted works in foreign collections. Without such information, the histories of many objects from Latchford's collection or those sold and consigned by him that are scattered all over the world would likely remain unknown. Enabled with such valuable information, the Cambodian government has successfully identified and repatriated dozens of objects, including some described in this Special Edition.

## Synopsis of Articles

This Special Edition represents the experiences, research, and writings of archeologists, law enforcement personnel, art historians, provenance specialists, conservation scientists, and museum curators and directors. Every article represents an important contribution to the authors' field of expertise. They are presented here in order of appearance.

"Quantifying Archeological Damage: The Operation Antiquity Seizures from Thailand", co-authored by Joyce C. White, David J. Welch, Judith R. McNeill & Todd Swain, provides an insider's view of a U.S. criminal investigation into the illegal movements of mainland Southeast Asian antiquities between 2002 and 2014, which resulted in the 2008 raids on four California museums.[20] Many of these objects came from Thailand's Ban Chiang cultural tradition, which were the most highly publicized. For the first time, this article provides a quantitative figure for the archeological damage of tens of thousands of looted artifacts related to Operation Antiquity. Importantly, the authors provide a monetary amount as a result of this damage by devising a data-based methodology to determine the archeological valuation for each item; they outline this method in detail in their appendices.[21] This contribution is important for many reasons; I highlight one here: As previously discussed, Thailand does not have a bilateral agreement with the U.S., nor has it signed or ratified the 1970 UNESCO Convention, making it impossible to argue that the objects were protected under CPIA. Similarly, the U.S. National Stolen Properties Act of 1934 (NSPA), typically employed in cases involving internationally trafficked cultural property, could not be used because many of the looted artifacts were not commercially valued at over US$5,000. By formulating a methodology to attach an archeological valuation to each object, the authors create a standard that can be used for other archeological material that may have little commercial but enormous historical and archeological value. This furthers the case for the protection and preservation of archeological sites and the importance of scientific excavation not only for Thailand, but also for all vulnerable source countries.

In "Small Things Forgotten? Repatriating Small, Utilitarian Cambodian Artifacts", Alison Kyra Carter & Chhay Visoth continue to examine the question of "value" by making a case for repatriating not only highly sought after stone and bronze religious statuary, but also utilitarian artifacts such as ceramics and prehistoric adzes. They chronicle an attempted donation to the University of Oregon's (UO) Museum of Natural and Cultural History where Carter is a faculty member. With little to no documentation related to the objects' proveniences and their pro-

[20] The California raids affected the LACMA, the Pacific Asia Museum (now under the supervision of the University of Southern California) in Pasadena, the Bowers Museum of Art in Santa Ana, and the Mingei International Museum in San Diego. Although the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive was also part of the Operation Antiquity probe, it was not part of the 2008 raids. In the Midwest, the MacLean Collection near Chicago was also raided in 2008.

[21] The extensive appendices that accompany the article could not be included in the print version of the Special Edition but are available separately in a digital format.

venances beyond the collector's purchase, all parties agreed that the donation could not move forward and that the objects should be repatriated. Understanding the items' educational and historical importance, Carter negotiated an agreement by which they would be transferred to the UO's Southeast Asian Archeology Lab so that her students could research and document the objects before they were returned to the NMC in Phnom Penh. This was facilitated by Chhay Visoth, NMC Director. This article is an important study for any university museum or museum studies program with works of art in their collections of questionable provenance. It outlines the challenges and pedagogical value of hands-on research for students as well as the very real and tedious administrative realities of trying to repatriate works to their place of origin, even when the receiving institution is involved.

Joint efforts and shared stewardship among institutions and colleagues is also at the center of Beth Edelstein & Alyssa Morasco's article, "Stewards Beyond Ownership: A Continuing Partnership between the Cleveland Museum of Art [CMA] and the National Museum of Cambodia". Their article highlights how important discoveries can be made when institutions cooperate and share intellectual and material resources. In 2015, the CMA returned a 10th-century stone statue of Hanuman originally from Prasat Chen in Koh Ker to Cambodia. Although this return could have been viewed as the end of a multi-year provenance research project, it led to the beginning of a wide range of collaborative possibilities formalized by an on-going, evolving series of Memoranda of Understanding and Cultural Cooperation Agreements between the CMA and Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of the Kingdom of Cambodia. The article chronicles important international loans and special exhibitions that resulted from the MoU, such as *Beyond Angkor: Cambodian Sculpture from Banteay Chhmar* that opened in 2017. It also describes fascinating efforts to reunite misattributed limbs and fragments from two Phnom Da statues of Lord Kṛṣṇa: one housed at the CMA, the other at the NMC. The discoveries from this collaboration resulted in *Revealing Krishna: A Journey to Cambodia's Mountain* which exhibited both statues side-by-side with correct limbs and fragments in 2021. While publications for both *Beyond Angkor* and *Revealing Krishna* were produced, this article provides readers with the CMA's conservation team's perspective. Moreover, it outlines the important work they and NMC colleagues did and continue to do to further our collective knowledge of Khmer art history. This artistic and conservation *tour de force* was made possible because of the concerted efforts of curators, conservation scientists, and museum leadership to continue rather than sever a relationship after repatriation.

The routes by which an object is repatriated vary just as much as the journey to a gallery or auction house, a collector's home, or to a museum. Nicolas Revire's article, "The Tale of Two Stones: Reuniting Khmer Fragments from Prasat Phanom Rung", demonstrates how the efforts of the author, then at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), resulted in the reassessment and deaccession

of a Kṛṣṇa pilaster in June 2024. In this "tale", Revire's linguistic and art historical knowledge, along with his access to AIC's object files as a Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Research Fellow in the Departments of Arts of Asia and Curatorial Documentation and Research at the time, allowed him to weave together a more nearly complete provenance for the Kṛṣṇa pilaster; this resulted in codifying knowledge of the pilaster's identity, provenience, and its eventual repatriation, still pending at the time of writing. The article juxtaposes the journey of the pilaster with that of the well-known Viṣṇu lintel that had been returned in 1988 from the same temple sanctuary, Prasat Phanom Rung. Unlike the Kṛṣṇa pilaster, the return of the Viṣṇu lintel resulted from public and diplomatic pressure. Here, we again see how museums have changed from a stance of protective defiance to proactive research and shared stewardship. The article also addresses two related issues. First, when objects and fragments are treated as isolated reliefs in a museum setting, their original function, religious meanings, and cultural origins are lost, leading researchers astray. In both cases, the Viṣṇu lintel and the Kṛṣṇa pilaster were initially identified as objects from Cambodia dated to the 10th–12th century. This leads to the second issue, the continuing habit in academia and museums to conflate monuments and objects with Khmer artistic influence with an Angkorian or Cambodian origin. Revire's article shows that the museum's identification of the Kṛṣṇa pilaster as a Cambodian object prevented it from examination on its own terms for over 50 years. It was only after a dedicated provenance position had been established that its provenience became known. This article therefore underscores the need for museums to establish more dedicated provenance research positions.[22]

Once an object's place of origin is determined, it is naïve to believe that the "hard" part of returning that object is complete. This is particularly true in mainland Southeast Asia where the Khmer Empire's artistic influence was widespread. Modern laws and cultural nationalism over the fate of ancient objects often take precedence. Two articles in this Special Edition discuss such objects. Their purpose is not to debate the appropriateness of the locations to which the objects were returned; however, both give the reader ample information to consider and formulate their own thoughts on modern geopolitics and its impact on cultural heritage.

"Reassessing an Angkorian Bronze Masterpiece: The Male Deity from Ban Yang Pong Sadao, Buriram", authored by Brice Vincent, Donna Strahan, Federico Carò, David Bourgarit & Yvan Coquinot, brings together interdisciplinary expertise to examine an 11th-century Khmer bronze statue of a male deity, widely known as "Golden Boy". The statue was part of the Met's collection in New York City from 1988 to 2023 before being repatriated to Thailand. The study is an

[22] Revire's article also identifies two additional architectural fragments at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and another at the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena that once belonged to the same architectural ensemble of Prasat Phnom Rung. As of the publication of this Special Edition, these sculptures remain in California.

important revision to our knowledge of this artistically significant statue, given different attributions by experts, including identification as a *devarāja* or the Hindu deity Śiva. Not wanting to divulge the authors' impressive scientific and art historical findings here, their article provides not only a reattribution of the statue's identity, but also a more precise date of its production and place of manufacture. In addition, it provides possible clues to the statue's patronage and place of worship. Importantly, these claims are buttressed by the authors' technical studies, presenting their combined expertise in materials science across the multiple institutions where they are either employed or associated.[23] While technical studies may be difficult for general readers, this piece is written in an engaging fashion presenting findings as if the article were a movie played backwards. Part of this is owed to the authors' knowledge of the statue's provenience, which required them to work backwards from Ban Yang Pong Sadao where it was looted in order to trace its movements and reconstruct its history over space and time.

A similar story, although told in reverse, unfolds in Bronwyn Campbell's article, "From Canberra to Phnom Penh: Collaborative Research and the Repatriation of Three Cham Bronzes", which examines the National Gallery of Australia's (NGA) acquisition and subsequent transfer of three Cham statues to the Kingdom of Cambodia in 2023. Campbell provides a fascinating reconstruction of the statues' provenance history that involves some of the most well-known figures in the South and Southeast Asian artworld, including Douglas Latchford who sold the statues to the NGA in 2011. By this time, Latchford was still a respected figure in the Southeast Asian art world and his testimony concerning the statues' provenance along with their publication history by well-known scholars made them an attractive addition to the NGA's collection. However, in 2014, the NGA established the Asian Art Provenance Project in response to the Australian government's seizure and repatriation of a Chola-period Śiva-Naṭarāja to India. The high-profile case of this statue resulted in the NGA's reexamination of the entire Asian art collection, which consequently led to the unraveling of Latchford's falsified provenance claims. During the intervening nine years the NGA sought resolution on how and to whom to return these Cham statues. They remained at an impasse until 2021 when NGA representatives were introduced by Latchford's daughter to the Cambodian government's research and repatriation team, including Bradley Gordon of the Phnom Penh-based legal firm Edenbridge Asia. This meeting provided the missing "link" to the looters who sold the statues and who also, ironically, were the only ones that could establish the statues' provenience. The NGA continues to house the statues as the NMC galleries currently undergo renovation and expansion. As with the CMA example, the NGA did not see the repatriation of the statues as the loss of an asset, but instead an occasion to forge

[23] An extensive catalog of contemporaneous statues along with technical investigations could not be included in the print version of the Special Edition but is accessible in a digital format.

new relationships with Cambodian colleagues. Importantly, the NGA also used the repatriation as an opportunity to engage with the Cham and Cambodian diaspora in Canberra.

Often, diasporic communities are left out from conversations regarding cultural heritage even while having ancestral ties to the very same objects being repatriated. They are a demographic that museums, governments, and academics need to give greater attention to in our ever transnational and multihyphenate environments. Rebecca S. Hall's article "A Welcome Reunion: Cambodian Heritage, Diaspora, and the Ethics of Return in the Art of Phung Huynh" does this by interviewing the Los Angeles-based, Vietnamese–Cambodian American artist Phung Huynh. Born in Vietnam to a Vietnamese mother and a Cambodian father, her family fled Vietnam in 1978, making their way from a refugee camp in Thailand to various U.S. cities before resettling in Los Angeles. Her artistic oeuvre focuses on her identity as a refugee and a member of the Vietnamese–Cambodian diaspora. Her most recent work, *Return Home*, was inspired by a visit to the Angkor Archeological Park in 2012. During her visit she was struck by the many headless bodies that graced temples and were exhibited inside museums. As a professor of art at California State University, Los Angeles, she was familiar with the many bodiless heads that filled her local museums. Detailed pencil drawings on paper and screen-printed photography on translucent cloth banners represent the bodiless heads and headless bodies in U.S. museums and at monuments in Cambodia, respectively. Exhibited together in galleries and museums, they are a critical and much needed dialogue on the historical circumstances that led to the destruction and removal of cultural property as well as the role museums continue to play as stewards of these dismembered objects. Much of the article is told in the artist's own words, which is an important intervention in cultural heritage studies. By including Huynh's work, we acknowledge that culture and cultural heritage is not created in a vacuum and importantly, it is regenerative. Objects, even fragments of the past, can inspire new art.

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This Special Edition is envisioned as a collection of studies to be used in upper-level undergraduate and graduate-level coursework while at the same time peaking the interests of specialist and general readers. The authors and editors hope that each contribution solicits engaging discussions and questions that help move cultural heritage studies further with nuance and purpose. Moreover, as seen in the work of Phung Huynh, new ideas and art can evolve from the past—however imperfect or fragmented our knowledge of it.

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