

Roxanna Brown, art expert, dies in custody

The director of the Southeast Asian Ceramics Museum in Bangkok, Roxanna Brown, passed away in May after being taken into US police custody, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

A well-known expert on Asian art, Brown was implicated in a scheme to smuggle looted antiquities from Thailand to museums in the area of Los Angeles. She died at a detention centre in Seattle.

Federal investigations and raids on four Southern California museums took place in January. Brown had been indicted on a federal wire fraud charge before she was arrested at a Seattle hotel. She was alleged to have been involved in the fraudulent valuation of smuggled antiquities. Federal investigators said that her electronic signature was found on fake appraisal forms which inflated the value of artefacts from the Ban Chiang archaeological site in Thailand.

Associated Press said that the American-born Brown, who was trained in art history at UCLA, died of peritonitis (an infection caused by a perforated gastric ulcer), according to the King County medical examiner in Washington state.

Marble Roman sculpture excavated in Turkey

Archaeologists have unearthed the massive head of a Roman empress statue and parts of a marble sculpture depicting a Roman emperor.

It was found at the ancient site of Sagalassos, Turkey, in a building filled with rubble, and where pieces of a colossal statue of emperor Hadrian had been excavated last year.



Most of the facial features led experts to identify the marble head as that of depicting Faustina

The marble head of Faustina the Elder, wife of emperor Antoninus Pius, and parts of a sculpture of emperor Marcus Aurelius were discovered in an area that was once a vital urban centre but abandoned after being struck by many devastating earthquakes.



Emperor Marcus Aurelius' reign lasted 19 years



The emperor wore army boots decorated with lion skins

Faustina was married to Antoninus, Hadrian's adopted son, for 31 years until she died in AD 141. She was involved in charity work and well respected.

Marcus Aurelius ruled between 161 AD and 180 AD, and is remembered for his writings, and as one of the outstanding Stoic philosophers.

Folk music of Vietnam

In a project sponsored by SIDA (Sweden), the Vietnamese Institute for Musicology have carried out fieldwork and survey of folk music in Dak Nong province of Vietnam.

The fieldwork involved tapping on the knowledge in history and culture of minority groups; observing musical performances; and holding dialogue with folk artists on issues such as repertoires, instruments, performance space and festivities.

In collaboration with the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival (Norway), the institute also organised a conference on intellectual property rights and copyrights in music last year.

One of the key questions raised was related to copyrights on folk music, and which organisation should be responsible for preserving it.

Vietnam intends to draft a detailed code on intellectual property rights and copyrights in music.

Caesar's bust found

The oldest known bust of Roman ruler Julius Caesar has been discovered at the bottom of the River Rhone in France.

Divers found the marble bust near Arles in an archaeological excavation. Arles was founded by Caesar, and dated 46 BC. The culture ministry of France said that the bust was from that time.

Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC by a group of republican senators, and it is believed that this bust was thrown into the river after the assassination.

'Indiana Jones' crystal skulls

The latest installment of the 'Indiana Jones' movie series is based on an ancient Maya legend of crystal skulls, which are still being sought by hunters.

However, there has been no documentation of a crystal skull that was excavated from an archaeological site.

Today, the beliefs that the skulls can emit and focus light, project visions and evoke other powers persist in the jungles of southern Mexico, reports *AP*.

Among the Lacandon tribe, the "last unassimilated Mayas", some still worship the skulls.

In July, the British Museum and the Smithsonian Institution discovered that they had been victims of skull-duggery after the Quai Branly Museum in Paris had found that a crystal skull proclaimed as a mystical Aztec masterpiece was a hoax.

Experts said that the objects were made with industrial tools and not by Meso-american craftsmen. The Quai Branly uncovered grooves and perforations in the skull that revealed the use of modern tools.

Machu Picchu ruin 'discovered earlier'

Historians reported that Machu Picchu was found earlier than it was previously known.

The lost city of the Incas, Peru's major tourist attraction today, was thought to have been discovered by American adventurer Hiram Bingham in 1911.

Machu Picchu was founded in about 1450 by one of the last Inca emperors, Pachacutec, and Spanish conquerors, who arrived some hundred years later, were kept in the dark about the city.

Augusto Berns, who was a trader of gold and wood, ransacked the citadel's tombs in 1867, and sold precious artefacts to galleries and museums in Europe. His activities were traced in a map found in the national museum of Peru.

*Machu Picchu was
discovered before 1911*



Fossil fish with embryo discovered

A fossil fish uncovered in Australia was determined to have been preserved with an embryo still attached by its umbilical cord.

Published in the journal, *Nature*, the discovery of the 380-million-year-old fossil has compelled scientists to reconsider the timeline and reproductive strategy of creatures developing their young inside eggs.

Previously, the earliest evidence for the form of reproduction as found in the latest discovery was attributed to reptiles during the Mesozoic Era (248 to 65 million years ago).

Scientists reported that the exceptionally well-preserved fossil belongs to a new species of 'placoderm' fish, which dominated seas, rivers and lakes during the Devonian Period (420-360 million years ago).

Marine fossils found in jungle cave, Thailand

Fossils of sea creatures discovered in southern Thailand recently have been dated to 250-400 million years ago.

Geologists discovered the fossils in the Pakarang limestone cave in the middle of a jungle in the Surat Thani Province.

It is believed that the cave was created undersea between 250 and 400 million years ago, and its unique natural conditions caused the rare coral-like stalactites that are found there.

Picasso works stolen in Brazil

In June, thieves raided an art gallery in Sao Paulo, and made off with works of Picasso and well-known Brazilian artists.

The unmasked robbers were captured in images on closed-circuit television as they entered the Estacao Pinaroteca gallery during the day.

Two Picasso engravings were taken: The Painter and the Model series, and 'Minotaur, drinker and women'. The art pieces were worth US\$600,000.

The two oil paintings included in the heist by the armed men were by Brazilian artists Emiliano Di Cavalcanti and Lasar Sagall.

Police have recovered one of the Picasso engraving, with the help of an arrested suspect. It was hidden in an attic and in perfect condition.

This is the second robbery of Picasso's art work in Sao Paulo within 6 months. The pieces of the previous heist were later recovered, propped against the wall of a house.

Tools of Neanderthal unearthed

Tools believed to have belonged to Neanderthals have been excavated at West Sussex, England.

Dozens of tools, which could have been used to hunt animals such as rhinoceros, mammoth

and horses, were unearthed at an archaeological site known as Beedings.

Since it was found in 1900, this was the first modern scientific investigation of the site.



The Beedings archaeological site was first discovered in 1900



The discovery is regarded as a rare and valuable resource

When it was first excavated, the site yielded 2,300 stone tools which were determined to be unauthentic. Most were disposed of in a well, and vanished.

The latest study verifies that the discovery at the beginning of the 20th Century was genuine.

Archaeologists are now investigating other sites in the south-east region of England.

Inca surgeons 'highly skilled'

A new study suggests that Inca surgeons in ancient Peru were highly skilled.

The study finds that Inca surgeons had developed a "detailed knowledge of cranial anatomy," and commonly and successfully performed trepanation, a surgical procedure removing small portions of patients' skulls to treat head injuries.

Remains dating back to 1000 AD excavated around the ancient Inca capital of Cuzco reveal that the surgical techniques used were standardized and developed to a sophisticated level over time.

The new findings, based on study of remains from 11 burial sites, show that trepanation was often performed, and a great number of those who had undergone it survived.

Archaeologists have debated over a long time on whether the skull perforations found on remains were due to medical, ritual or cultural practices – trepanation was practised in South America as early as 400 BC – and the new study may conclude the debate.

Oldest parrot fossil uncovered

The fossil of a bird discovered on the Isle of Mors, Denmark, is believed to be the oldest parrot ever found.

As the bones of a parrot are fragile, and easily destroyed before they fossilized, parrot fossils are scarce.

The 54-million-year-old find suggests that parrots existed in the Northern Hemisphere before evolving into diverse species in the southern tropical regions.

In northern Europe today, there are no native parrots, which are mainly found in the southern tropics.

However, there have been skepticism about the identification of the fossil as belonging to that of a parrot. Several paleontologists have questioned the findings, and expressed the lack of convincing evidence.

Bangkok museum goes on tour

The National Museum in Bangkok has been taking its collections on tour to schools, department stores and communities.

Using a bright-blue 6-wheel truck, the museum mobile unit features a 42-inch LCD television screen on its side, and exhibits replicas of ancient artefacts, including the Ban Chiang pottery. The objects are designed for the visually-impaired to touch and study.

With the success, the National Museum Office hopes to receive financial support to roll out another unit to reach a wider group, particularly the poor ones who have not been to a museum.

'Moving' Skyscraper

An 80-storey tower whose shape is ever-changing will become the world's first moving building.

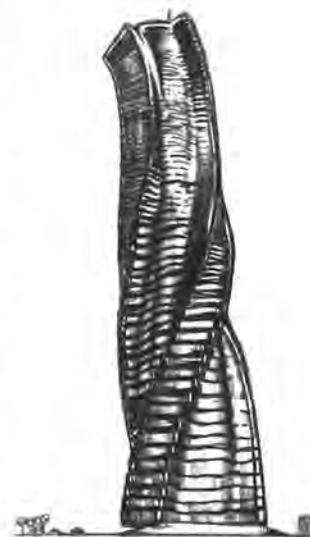
The Dynamic Tower, to be constructed in Dubai, will consist of revolving floors, and prefabricated apartments that rotate, shift, and spin independently of one another.

At voice command, the apartments will rotate 360 degrees between 1 and 3 hours around a

central column by means of 79 giant power-generating wind turbines located between floors.

The building is estimated to cost US\$700m to build, and is expected to be opened in 2010.

A similar project, 70-storey skyscraper, is also underway in Moscow.



Dubai's 'living' tower

Young guides lead museum tours

A community museum in Bangkok has been recruiting youths as volunteer guides.

The Wat Chansen museum in the Takhli district offers young people in its community the opportunity to participate as tour guides and sharing with visitors, who number about 400 per month.

Young student volunteer guides are taught the history, origins and culture of the community in a project that is popular with many parents who sent their children for the training conducted by the Fine Arts Department.

The community museum is involved in community development to help the younger generation appreciate and value their environment.

Historical and archaeological evidence suggest that Chansen had ties with India and was an ancient settlement which became the first archaeological site excavated by the Fine Arts Department in 1966.

Shipwreck artefact linked to Olympics

A 2,100-year-old device recovered from a Roman shipwreck may have been used as a calendar for the ancient Olympic Games.

Discovered in 1901, the clockwork object known as the Antikythera Mechanism, which has puzzled experts since, has long been suspected to have been used to display astronomical cycles.

Researchers have now determined that one of the dials records the dates of the Olympiad, and may have been an indicator to provide a benchmark for the passage of time. Inscriptions on it were deciphered and the 4-year Olympiad cycle displayed.

The artefact is made of bronze gearwheels and dials, and scientists only know of such devices produced at least 1,000 years later. It was discovered among other treasures by a Greek sponge diver on a wreck near the island of Antikythera, and is now exhibited at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

Smuggled fossils return to Argentina

Dinosaur fossils and bones stolen from Argentina have now been returned to the South American country.

The relics were recovered by US police following a tip-off and raid on the black market in America.

Considered to be the largest amount of fossils trafficked in the history of the fossil black market, they were sold at a mineral fair in Tucson, Arizona two years ago.

The four tonnes of dinosaur bones and fossils were taken to the Bernardino Rivadavia natural history museum in Buenos Aires upon arrival in Argentina, and will eventually be returned to the provinces in which they were discovered originally.

Row over naked children art

The issue of depiction of children in the media has come into sharp focus in Australia after a photograph of a naked 6-year-old girl appeared on the magazine cover of *Art Monthly Australia*.

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd responded by saying that children could not choose for themselves whether they wanted to be portrayed in the nude.

Art Monthly editor said that the cover was a protest against the closing of a photo exhibition of nude children recently.

Government officials have stated that public funding for the magazine will be reviewed.

Arguments in the current nationwide debate censorship include the validation of nudity and childhood as appropriate subjects for art.

An exhibition of images depicting nude children was closed in May, with police confiscating the photographs before the show opens.

Stone tablet link to messiah

An ancient tablet has set off a debate on the messiah and resurrection.

The 1-metre-tall tablet contains 87 lines of Hebrew that experts believe dates from the decades before Jesus' birth.

Within the archaeological circle, the artefact has provoked an interest in the evidence of a messiah who will resurrect after 3 days.

According to some researchers, the tablet may have been recovered close to the Dead Sea in Jordan.

The stone, however, is broken and part of the ink writings has faded, making interpretation difficult.

Nevertheless, the authenticity of the artefact has not been challenged. Experts are assessing its contribution, and it will take some time due to the highly-charged atmosphere in the academic community and general public with regard to artefacts and writings said to have come from the era of Jesus.

Fossils for roads

Plant fossils, spread over the Rajmahal Hills in Jharkhand, India, are being fed into crusher

machines that turn them into stone chips for constructing road.

The rare fossils have been preserved for millions of years, and represent a treasure trove that is now threatened with extinction.

Home to the plant fossils, dating back to between 68 and 145 million years, the Rajmahal Hills in eastern India cover an area of about 2,600 sq km.

Jharkhand state government has granted private companies a mining lease, and they are exploding the hills to obtain rocks for making stone chips.

When the state of Jharkhand was established in 2000, the government announced that the fossils would be preserved in their natural habitat, but the project seems to be shelved now.

Experts warned that authorities need to act immediately to prevent the loss of evidence of a world which existed millions of years ago.

Angkor Museum gets flak

The new Angkor National Museum has been criticized for exploiting the heritage of Cambodia.

Officially opened in 2007 and costing US\$15 million, the museum is divided into 8 themed zones, covers some 20,000 sq m, with gift shops, restaurants and a spa adjacent to it.



Modern facilities of the museum include interactive presentations, an 80-seat briefing hall, and a gallery displaying a thousand Buddha images (from the 1st to the present century).

Private investors of the museum project have been accused of placing profit above preservation, but they insist that their intentions are honourable, and that the Cambodian government will eventually be the owner of the museum after the 30-year lease agreement expires.

Frog crucifix condemned

Pope Benedict's condemnation of an art sculpture has caused a museum in Bolzano, Italy, to reconsider its choice to display the statue on its foyer.

A letter from the Vatican described a wooden sculpture of a crucified green frog as a

blasphemy and insult to the religious feelings of many people.

The art work was created by the late German artist Martin Kippenberger, and shows a frog nailed to a cross, holding a beer mug in one hand and an egg in the other. It has a loincloth covering the crotch, and has a green tongue sticking out of its mouth.

Titled "Zuerst die Fuesse" (Feet First), the piece has been displayed at the Tate Modern and the Saatchi Gallery in London, and at the Venice Biennale, with plans for it to be shown in Los Angeles and New York.

It has been reported that Kippenberger's sculpture is a self-portrait reflecting human angst, and artists and experts have been defending the work as a freedom of expression.

Preah Vihear temple dispute

Along with Malacca and George Town (historic cities in Southeast Asia), the Preah Vihear temple has been included as Unesco World Heritage Sites in 2008.

The nomination and selection of the Preah Vihear temple as a World Heritage Site in Unesco list has deepen a controversy between Cambodia and Thailand.

For a long time, the two neighbouring countries hold claims over the ancient site, but the row has been further aggravated by the World Heritage Committee's recent decision to proceed with bestowing World Heritage status

on the site despite the intensifying conflict over ownership.

Preah Vihear was established during the reign of Khmer king Yasovarman (889-900) on the Peuy Ta Di cliff of the Phra Viharn Mountain.

Forty-six years ago, in 1962, the Cambodian government sought a decision from the World Court on the sovereignty of Preah Vihear, and obtained a ruling in its favour.



Preah Vihear awarded heritage site status in acrimonious circumstances

Thailand subsequently withdrew from the mountain, but the sovereignty issue remains unsettled.

In 2007, Cambodia applied for Preah Vihear to be listed as a World Heritage Site.

Thai authorities say that Cambodia has included disputed territory surrounding the monument in its submission to Unesco.

Preah Vihear has been officially listed as a World Heritage Site now, and a number of alarming incidents have consequently occurred on the border between the two neighbours, prompting calls for both countries to negotiate and resolve the conflict by peaceful means on an urgent basis.

Cambodia and Thailand are currently in the negotiating process to seek a resolution to the decades-long dispute.

Illustration by Sakulchat Chatrakul Na Ayudhdhaya