



Stuart Miles O'Hara
@ohasm1



Robert Jenrick in the Telegraph talking about museums, cultural traffic, & restitution. Can't let this one slide, i'm afraid - he's really showing himself up: 📖



From theartnewspaper.com

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First off, the Parthenon marbles (RJ calls them 'Elgin' but not even the British Museum calls them that these days) "would not have survived if they remained in-situ". You simply cannot prove that, and you'd expect less specious an argument from a former lawyer.



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He says that their return would be a "slippery slope" and that "one unpicking...opens the floodgates". Mixed metaphor aside, these are clichés (lovingly cared for by Oliver Dowden et al) which @BCRPM has spent 40 years refuting.



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The BM's stance on retention *for these particular sculptures* is increasingly isolated in the field of museology. They're a unique - holistic - case, and though I personally have sympathy with cases such as the Benin bronzes, neither I nor @BCRPM want to see museums "denuded".



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Which brings me onto the most worrying part of RJ's piece: the claim that "Today's collectors seem intent on denuding [their collections]" First of all, we need Occam's razor. The v well-paid executives at the top of these huge organisations with massive tourist income...



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want to slaughter the golden goose that brings in the £££? Really? Obv not. Unless RJ's suggesting that the BM's curators/trustees/director(s) are sleeper agents who have stealthily infiltrated the top of the tree to fulfil their heart's desire - breaking up the collection.



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Again? Really? V childish and simplistic view of the world, if so. But we'll come back to that one.



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RJ refers to "progressive elites" who run UK museums. Dog whistle! But it makes a stupid argument for a tory. So museums are run by liberal elites who act counter to... the idea of museums as a public good, the autodidact's cathedral, the cultural inheritance of ordinary people?



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Dunno about you mate, but that sounds like a v 20th-century Labour kind of idea. Was that what you were going for?



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Speaking of cultural inheritance (my term, prob not a real one tbf), he cites "The adage that family businesses only last 3 generations: rich father; noble son; poor grandson. Those special trusts created by our forebears... have fallen into the hands of a careless generation"



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My first thought is: if you were to take this argument (i wouldn't, it's petty), it'd work exactly in reverse as justification for returning the sculptures to the Greeks, who were very much the poor (occupied!) grandsons in 1810.



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He says "we must rescue" museums' collections from themselves and that foreign govts "calculate that... the UK... lacks the self-confidence to fight back". Pure jingoism. Another example of over-estimating the importance of UK abroad.



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As a slight aside: IF UK museums were substantially cleaned out, I'm not sure it'd be an entire disaster. Niche museums do quite well, and you can pretty much curate (it's what it means!!) any collection to have some kind of appeal.

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As this amazing billboard implies (there's one in Brockley atm and I've gotten a lot of enjoyment from it), a lot of art's "importance" wasn't self-evident, and people needed it hammered home. A lot of good art never sees the light of day (like much of the BM's collection, btw)



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I mean, there's heaps of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic stuff in the BM. That substantial collection's not going anywhere. But it's the Mediterranean stuff that really matters to our reputation? Who's doing Britain down now, RJ?

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This brings me to my final point, which we all know: by saying "liberal elites" are "intent on denuding" British museums, RJ is playing at being an American anti-establishment rw-but-libertarian-too agitator. It's pure Fox News, and I know it doesn't represent the US...

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but it's so embarrassing when Brit politicians try it. It's like someone at school who comes back from a holiday to the US faking the accent. We ain't wired the same, and it doesn't work here.

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Not saying we're immune, we've got our own illogical petit-autochthonie hangups. But this idea that there's hieratic entryism conspiracy in something as (relatively) obscure as British museums, to undermine regular Brits is just... don't you think they'd do it a simpler way?

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Anyway. I've written prob more words than he has on this, which it doesn't deserve. And i've called him RJ throughout for space-saving reasons, GOD that's annoying. If you wanna read Jenrick's empty Telegraph bloviation piece w/out paywall, here you go:



robertjenrick.com

Our museums have fallen into the hands of a careless generation. We must rescue them from ...

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