Time for Italy to reverse its art export laws?

International access to post-war Italian art threatened as 50-year restrictions kick in

Shopping the art market

London. This month’s auctions in London are packed with an unprecedented number of works by Italian artists from the 1950s and 1960s; the combined number of lots in the Italian sales alone at Sotheby’s and Christie’s is up by 52% against 2013. Prominently featured are works of Arte Povera (literally “poor art”). The movement, which used everyday materials, is considered one of the 20th century’s most significant and has been cited as an influence by artists as diverse as Paul McCarthy, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra and the YBAs. The term “Arte Povera” was coined by the curator and critic Germano Celant in the magazine Heliak Art in 1967. But many works predate this, and due to Italy’s strict 50-year export rules, many are also about to be caught up in legal restrictions. The law says that any work of art that is more than 50 years old and made by an artist who has died requires a licence if it is to be exported (temporarily or permanently), even if it has been in Italy for only a short time. The law was passed in 1939 mainly to prevent masterpieces of ancient and Renaissance art from leaving the country, but it now applies to works made before 1964, whether by Italian or foreign artists. Cfr Teomini, who is well-represented in Italian collections, is an artist whose works will be affected.

Art market

Dealers and collectors are rushing to export works from Italy before they fall under the restrictions. “That’s why a lot of Italians have been selling now,” says Philip Hoffman, the chief executive of the Fine Art Fund, an art investment firm. The number of works by Arte Povera artists (such as Alberto Burri, Alighiero Boetti, Mario Merz and Michelaungelo Pistoletto) sold at auction has grown from 35 in 1997 to nearly 300 in 2013. The rules can also present obstacles for scholars and curators, who are often unable to secure loans or even locate works. “There are plenty of Italian collectors who won’t lend their best works for fear of them being ‘marked’ [as needing a licence] forever,” says the collector and art historian Luis Mattei, who founded the Center for Italian Modern Art in New York last year. The Modern and post-war Italian art collection assembled by her father, Ganni Mattei, was famously barred from export in 1973 and is now held by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. Even if a collector is willing to lend, the government can prevent important works from Italy from being displayed abroad.

Kensington, we have a problem: launch of cosmonaut show delayed

London. Political tensions between Russia and the UK have led to the postponement of ‘Cosmonauts: Birth of the Space Age’, an exhibition at London’s Science Museum. Earlier this year, a statement released by the museum described the show as “the principal attraction of the UK-Russia Year of Culture”. It was due to open on 18 November and run until 17 May 2015. The postponement has not been officially announced, but a spokeswoman for the Science Museum told us: “Due to some logistical challenges involved in borrowing 350 objects from 18 lenders, we have decided to move the opening date for the ‘Cosmonauts’ exhibition’.” In fact, the delay is over key loans from Russia. These include the Veston-6 module that brought Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, back to earth in 1963. After Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the introduction of Western sanctions over the country’s support for rebel forces in Ukraine, the Moscow authorities have increased bureaucratic obstacles over loans to London. The "Cosmonauts" show is now expected to open next year.
“Devonshire” as she was known to her family and friends, was, until her death in 1959, the last surviving of the six remarkable Mitford sisters, who were in the public eye in the 1930s and 1940s, often for their political views.

The Dowager Duchess of Devonshire died on 30 November, 85 years old, according to the 2014 Times obituary. She was buried in the Anglican Churchyard at St Saviour’s, Harley Street, in London, where she had been a member of the congregation for many years. The service was held in the presence of religious figures and members of the family. That Chatsworth survives and was preserved for future generations is due in part to the efforts of the Dowager Duchess.

Back to England as plunder by Edward Gregory, the naval chaplain on HMS Trincomalee, which took part in the battle of Cape Cadiz. The works later passed to the son of a captain at Durham Cathedral, whose widow sold them to the dean and chapter for 24 guldenes in 1753. The set was then hung in the cathedral’s library.

In the early 19th century, the Apostles were moved to Durham Castle, which is now the cathedral and was then owned by the bishop of Durham. Lord Andrew Cavendish, who, after the deaths of his brother and father, inherited the estate. In 1957, Lucian Freud was commissioned to paint the 12th Duke, shares. In 1957, Livingstone, who worked as a chilled and fresh, then painted the cathedral, and says it took staff several weeks to clean the paintings.

Gathering dust
“We found the ten Apostles lurking behind a bookcase, where they had been progressively gathering dust,” Birtwistle says. A team including Gabriel Sewell (head of collections at Durham Cathedral), Gemma Lewis (deputy curator at Durham Castle) and Christopher Ferguson and Clare Baird (curatorial assistant at Auckland Castle) put together to research the 17th-century Spanish works. The paintings appear to have been student accommodation, and the donation included some of its contents. The great hall became the rectory with generations of students eating under the Apostles. Smoke from the heating fires and the nearby kitchen must explain why the paintings are now so darkened by soot and grease.

In 1949, the Apostles were moved out of the cathedral because they were stolen. It is unclear who owns the pictures, but there is no evidence that they have been stolen. A spokeswoman for the cathedral explains that it has not conceded its rights. It is possible that the ownership of the pictures is still being challenged, which suggests that it has not conceded its rights. One option that has been discussed is that the ownership of the paintings, and there is no dispute between the cathedral and the university about this. A few hours later, a spokesman for the university says that “the ownership of the pictures is still being challenged”, which suggests that it has not conceded its rights.

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Time running out

Smoke from the castle’s kitchen must explain why the paintings are so darkened by soot and grease. The paintings, they hung on the back of a long run of metal storage shelving in the archivist’s office. The works were not visible—and were almost forgotten. A spokeswoman for the cathedral told us that they had not been “gathering dust”, but were “securely stored”, and that the delay in showing them to the art historians was because staff were busy on other projects. The paintings, each 1.8m high, have not been properly studied, and colour photographs are not available. The works are very dirty and badly need cleaning.

Although the works were probably lost in Spain, possibly from a church in St. Peter’s de Santa Clara, in the cathedral. There would be little legal basis for a claim after more than 300 years. But does ownership lie with the dean and chapter of Durham Cathedral, which bought them in 1753, or does it lie with the property of Durham University, which took over the cathedral and its contents in 1837? (Durham Castle owns a set of eight Apostles, but this is separate from the rediscovered works.)

The Devonshires bought contemporary art, collecting works by artists such as William Nicholson and Jacob Epstein, an interest that their son, the 12th Duke, shared. In 1957, Livingstone, who worked as a chilled and fresh, then painted the cathedral, and says it took staff several weeks to clean the paintings.

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